

QUEER ENOUGH: Methodological Perspectives on the Dramaturgy of Queer Refugee Narratives and Identity Performance

Vera Boitcova

ABSTRACT

This article is part of a doctoral artistic research project investigating the notions of “home” and “belonging” in performance dramaturgy through the lens of queer refugee and migrant experiences. During the course of this research — conducted in England, Luxembourg, France, and Finland in 2022–2024 — its main focus shifted from the exploration of meaning of home toward examining how queerness must be performed to be recognized as legitimate within institutional frameworks such as Western asylum systems.

Focusing on this transformation, the article consists of a personal reflection on the research experience, and methodological and dramaturgical strategies emerging from the process. Structured around three phases — fieldwork, artistic production, and analysis and reflection — it discusses artistic research methodologies, research ethical challenges, and dramaturgical decisions. The aim of the article is to explore the potential of performance dramaturgy as a medium for theorizing, embodied knowledge, and resistance, as well as to offer methodological insights and strategies for representing queer refugee narratives on stage.

Keywords: queer refugees, artistic research methods, ethics of representation, counter epistemology

Introduction

The idea of home has been central in my artistic practice for many years. When I decided to pursue a doctoral degree, I knew that my research would start with a question: What does “home” and “belonging” mean for queer refugee and migrant communities in the EU? I am a queer migrant myself, so the question was important on a personal level as well as professional. However, through the research process the question gradually transformed into another one, namely: How to perform “the right kind of queer” to fit into this home and belong there? This shift was influenced by my realizations and findings regarding the ways in which institutions, especially Western asylum systems, shape and control how queer identities must be presented.

It is important to note that my doctoral research, which explores the notions of “home” and “belonging” in performance dramaturgy through the lens of queer refugee and migrant experiences in the EU, is still ongoing and much

broader in scope than this article. Therefore, here, I choose a more specific focus: rather than examining the aforementioned research questions in all their complexity, in this article, I aim to reflect more specifically on what influenced the transformation process from one question to another, and on what kind of artistic research emerged from the process. In particular, I examine methodological and dramaturgical strategies that emerged during the project, asking: How can dramaturgical methodologies expose, resist, and reconfigure the pressures on queer refugees to perform recognizable forms of identity and legitimacy?

The article is divided into three parts: 1) the fieldwork phase, 2) the artistic work production phase, and 3) the reflection on the process. In the first part, I focus on the methodologies used during the fieldwork phase, as well as the theoretical background informing those methodologies. I also address various challenges and complications that arose during the process. In the second part, I examine the artistic process of creating a performance based on the material, interviews and research findings that were gathered during the project. In this section, I address some of the most prominent questions and problems that emerged during the performance-making process and reflect on the practical solutions implemented. In the third part, I discuss the outcomes of the project by addressing key feedback points from the audience and offer reflections on the methodologies used and the decisions made.

The central claim of this article is that queer artistic research through its focus on affect, precarity, and vulnerability can challenge normative epistemologies, which are understood here as established, conventional frameworks of knowledge that promote universality, rationality, and coherence. It recognizes that dominant systems often erase or misrepresent the experiences of marginalized groups, and seeks to validate ways of knowing that do not fit into those systems. I further argue that performance

dramaturgy can serve not only as a means of expression but as a practice of situated, embodied knowing. To support this claim, throughout the article, I discuss specific dramaturgical examples and situate them within broader theoretical and artistic traditions that resist normative modes of storytelling. This article's contribution lies less in providing sociological answers and perspectives on queer asylum and more in offering methodological insights and artistic strategies for working with queer refugee narratives in performance. In doing so, the article also seeks to advance contemporary discussions on queer performance art and its thematic and aesthetic development.

Part 1: Fieldwork Phase

During artistic research residency in France in 2024, I conducted an interview with a recently legalized refugee, here named D. That encounter significantly shifted the direction of my work. What happened in that meeting was more than just an interview — it was a moment of unexpected connection that came to reshape the entire focus of my research.

The conversation took place while I was in Strasbourg, taking part in a residency at the National Theatre of France through the EU-funded Future Laboratory program. The research I was working on was a part of my ongoing doctoral project, focusing on the ideas of “home” and “belonging” among queer migrant and refugee communities in the area. Through a local organization helping queer refugees prepare for their court hearings, I was introduced to D., who, unconventionally, insisted that I interviewed her at her apartment. When I arrived there, I was greeted with incredible hospitality. Although I was a complete stranger D. welcomed me not as a researcher, but as a guest, offering kindness and generosity. This moment challenged the usual distance between researcher

and participant I had experienced before. Most of my earlier interviews had taken place in formal or public spaces, marked by my constant wariness about uneven power dynamics. In contrast, the intimacy of D.'s home, her interest in my personal story as a queer migrant, the subsequent acceptance of me as someone with similar experience, and her decision to sing and share her art, created a space of connection and belonging. Even though the setting for an interview was more intimate than I was used to, the feeling of belonging was not tied to a physical place, but to an emotional and artistic moment of sharing and recognition.

Our encounter was reminiscent of Sara Ahmed's concept of "homing processes", in which the feeling of home is created through embodied experiences, often mixed with the geographical spaces in which they take place. Ahmed argues that "the question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to 'feel at home'" (Ahmed 2006, 7). In my meeting with D., this reframing of home as an affective, rather than purely spatial, experience suddenly shifted the way I was viewing the focus of my overall research. "Home" was no longer an abstract concept or a purely geographical reality but a relational experience. In D.'s apartment, the table covered with food and the details of an unfamiliar space were mixed with the sound of her singing, her stories, her gestures of hospitality. Everything was saturated with emotion, and, thus, an unfamiliar setting was suddenly transformed into a place of intimacy and belonging. In that moment, as Ahmed describes, my sense of belonging emerged through this mix of spatial arrangements and affect.

During our meeting, D. shared the story of her seeking asylum and obtaining residence permit, which turned out to be not just a bureaucratic procedure but an act of identity construction. I had always thought of asylum seeking as a process based on facts, documents, and concrete proof. However, queer asylum cases (where people apply for asylum based on

their queerness) are cases that present two major challenges: proving a person's queerness, and proving that they are in enough danger in their home country because of it. The first challenge, in particular, is complex — how does one prove queerness? There is often no official documentation or factual evidence of queerness, making the process heavily reliant on storytelling, which in turn relies on normatively scripted narratives of queerness from a heteronormative perspective. The volunteer who helped D. prepare for her asylum hearings in France described the procedure as "creating a story," and not just any story, but one that would be believable within the Western legal and administrative/governmental systems.

The challenges in legalization processes have been widely explored by scholars writing on the topic of queer asylum. Sociologist Aurora Perego (2021), writing about Latin American queer asylum seekers in Spain, shows how credibility assessments depend on producing consistent and prescribed normative stories that are most familiar in Western circumstances and media, and that follow certain expectations of sexual awakening, repression by family or society, and eventual pursuit of queer relationships. Applicants, whose stories do not follow this normative arc, risk being considered less credible. Building on this, scholars Deniz Akin and Stine Helena Bang Svendsen (2017), highlight how asylum seekers in Norway are trained to deliver life stories that demonstrate a clear trajectory of queer self-realization and hardship. They note that applicants are expected to focus on romantic feelings and emotional struggles rather than sexual practices, since immigration officials associate authentic queerness with particular emotional expressions and a coherent linear life story. Adding a racialized dimension to these findings, scholars Salla Peltonen and Katarina Jungar (2018) analyze how whiteness functions as an invisible normative baseline in queer refugee evaluation - asylum seekers are evaluated not only on the coherence of their personal narratives but also on how closely their expressions align with dominant Western,

white, homonormative ideals of queerness and credibility. Researcher Ali Ali (2023) further emphasizes the radical nature of these institutional narrative frameworks: queer refugees in Europe often experience pressure, emergency, and urgency to frame their lives within simplified tropes of exile and belonging, aligning their stories with what the bureaucratic system deems legible. These works show how the asylum process enforces a rigid Western narrative of queerness, requiring applicants to adhere to certain expected narrative templates in order to be recognized as authentic.

The entire asylum process, as it was described to me by my interviewees and as it is presented in the aforementioned studies, in many ways resembles preparing for a performance. Asylum seekers must craft and deliver their personal narratives in ways that align with Western expectations of queerness, effectively performing their identity for the legal system. From the interviews with queer rights organizations in Luxembourg and France, I also received information about cases where asylum claims were rejected because the applicant's story was deemed "not credible enough", essentially meaning they had failed to perform their identity convincingly within the Western framework of being "the right kind of queer."

This demand for conformity recalls Judith Butler's theory of "gender performativity" (Butler 1990), a foundational concept in queer studies. Butler argues that "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990, 33). Yet in the asylum context, these performative acts are not simply gestures of self-expression, as Butler emphasizes, but are subject to external evaluation. Under legal scrutiny, the asylum seeker's sense of self can become entangled with how well it can be rendered legible to authorities, exposing and highlighting a tension between lived experience and the performance demanded for recognition.

I have heard a reflection of that many times during my interviews.

One volunteer assisting queer asylum seekers explained that refugees, particularly those from Middle Eastern and African countries, are sometimes denied asylum because they fail to meet Western expectations of how queerness should be expressed. In these cases, their applications essentially get rejected because they are deemed unsuccessful in "performing" queerness in a way that aligns with the legal and cultural norms of the host country. Here, again, the performance is not just the ongoing, unconscious process Butler describes as the performativity of gender, but a more conscious and often directly policed act of proving identity under more straightforward scrutiny. Trauma makes this demand even harder to meet, as many applicants cannot recount their experiences in the detailed or emotionally demonstrative manner that asylum officers expect, further complicating their ability to satisfy these imposed criteria.

Michel Foucault's (1978) theories of "biopower" and "governmentality" offer important insight into the power structures that shape the asylum process for queer refugees. Biopower governs which queer bodies are deemed worthy of protection, favoring those who conform to Western, homonormative ideals of queerness. As Foucault (1978, 140) explains, biopower operates through "the subjugation of bodies and [...] control of populations", which becomes evident in the way the asylum system demands refugees to present their identities in institutionally legible ways. Biopower intersects with Judith Butler's concept of performativity, but while Butler points to how selfhood emerges through expression, the asylum process translates this into a more technical and administrative requirement: queerness must be staged as evidence to satisfy bureaucratic criteria. In this sense, the asylum system does not only observe identity but intrusively regulates it, exemplifying what Foucault terms governmentality, "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power" (Foucault 1991, 102). The

asylum process thus functions as a network of institutions that regulate and categorize queer refugees, forcing them to self-regulate their identities in line with institutional expectations.

Jasbir Puar (2007, xii), through the concept of “homonationalism”, further critiques this selective inclusion, arguing that “certain — but certainly not most — homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the ‘measures of benevolence’ that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity”. This inclusion is conditional, and Puar (2007, xii) notes that it is “contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity”. In the context of my research, this conditionality becomes visible both on the administrative level, where queer asylum seekers must frame their lives within narratives that conform to Western expectations of queerness, and on the everyday life level, where legal recognition does not protect them from racism, transphobia, or economic exclusion. “Homonationalism” thus operates simultaneously at the level of policy, bureaucracy, and everyday life, shaping how queer refugees navigate the tension between being recognized as “legible” queer subjects and being persistently positioned as “other” to the nation. Among my interviewees, non-white trans persons are subjected to particularly harsh conditions. While they may have encountered less resistance from migration authorities in terms of providing legal proof of their queerness, they faced significant challenges in navigating belonging after obtaining legal status, especially in securing employment. One interviewee, a trans woman currently residing in France, reflected on the process of performing identity to obtain asylum, comparing it to the acquisition of medical treatments necessary for trans persons. She stated that “in both cases you would have to pretend to be what they want to see, just as long as you want to be allowed to stay who you actually are and survive.” This highlights a distinction within queer migrant communities,

where some people face more intense challenges, oppression, and scrutiny than others. The need to “prove” one’s worthiness and right extends beyond the legal system — it also manifests within the social sphere, where the pressure to conform may result in long-term difficulties and marginalization for queer migrants.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1990) work on the “epistemology of the closet” provides an additional lens for understanding how queer refugees navigate disclosure. Sedgwick (1990, 71) argues that “the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century”, which is something many queer refugees experience both in their home countries and within asylum procedures. Yet the dynamics of silence and disclosure extend well beyond the asylum-seeking process. Even after gaining legal status, many queer refugees remain cautious about visibility, not only because of the surveillance of state institutions but also because of the fragility of their support networks. Scholar Rieke Schröder (2023) describes this condition as the “continuous closet,” a state that re-emerges in different spaces and at different times, demonstrating the ongoing regulation and self-regulation that shape queer refugees’ lives. These pressures do not mean that diasporic or national communities are inherently homophobic, but rather that the stakes of negotiating gender and sexual politics within them are uniquely high. Similarly, Thomas Wimark (2021) describes queer refugees as living in “perpetual liminality,” where homemaking and belonging are always precarious and contingent.

Seen in this light, silence functions on multiple levels: as a response to institutional demands and as a strategy of survival in both European host societies and diasporic networks. The risk of disclosure is intensified by the possibility of asylum rejection, which could force queer refugees back to countries where they face persecution. Silence thus becomes an active stance, resisting demands for legibility and protecting individuals who

navigate precarious legal and social conditions. One refugee I interviewed, now legalized and living in Strasbourg, explained why he refused to let me record or take notes: “You never know, you’re never guaranteed anything, I don’t think I live here and I probably never will, everything is temporary.” His words illustrate how disclosure is never a straightforward act of self-expression, but always entangled with instability, distrust, and survival. In this sense, Sedgwick’s notion of ‘the closet’ is not limited to sexuality but extends to the broader condition of refugee life, where silence becomes a way to preserve control and safety in a world that continually demands exposure.

Building on the issues of precarity and non-linearity, Sara Ahmed’s (2006) concept of “queer phenomenology” illuminates how queer refugees navigate spaces that may not feel like home due to both their queerness and refugee status. Ahmed (2006, 1) suggests that “if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with”. This is important for understanding how queer refugees navigate disorienting experiences, as they are constantly adjusting to unfamiliar environments while seeking safety. When discussing queer phenomenology, Ahmed (2006, 4) further writes that it “reveals how social relations are arranged spatially, how queerness disrupts and reorders these relations by not following the accepted paths, and how a politics of disorientation puts other objects within reach”. This disruption is not simply a journey from oppression to freedom but a complex navigation of spaces that often do not offer the sense of belonging queer refugees might seek.

Anne-Marie Fortier’s (2001, 4) work on home offers another critical perspective on how queer refugees can experience belonging. She critiques the idealized narrative of queer migration, suggesting that “the movement

away from home-as-origins becomes a vector for producing ‘queerness’ as an original stranger, who is always already not-at-home in the childhood home”. This understanding complicates the notion of “home” for queer migrants, as it is not only about seeking physical safety but also about negotiating feelings of estrangement from their original homes and families. Fortier’s (2011, 11) critique highlights how “home is not a necessary space of comfort”, challenging the idea that a fixed place of origin can be a space of stability for queer refugees. For many, “home” becomes a future-oriented aspiration, a destination that is never fully attained. In almost every interview I took, the answer to the question of “missing home”, by which I always implied “childhood home”, or “the home of origin”, was very resounding: “I don’t miss anything”, or “I’ve never had a home”, which was one of the things that most queer migrants, especially refugees, I have met agreed on. There was no home in the past. There was no home of origin. The word “home” itself was often perceived as a pure and romanticized concept, and equating it with the conditions in which the majority of my respondents grew up, would mean to somehow spoil, tarnish this perfect, almost utopian idea of “home” that always felt close but never exactly there. As one of queer refugee women seeking asylum in the UK told me: “Home? I haven’t found it. Yet. I think “yet” is a very optimistic word.”

Various scholars highlight how this estrangement is intrinsic to queer migration. Critical geographer David K. Seitz (2017) analyzes how asylum systems in Canada force queer asylum seekers into prolonged states of waiting, producing what he calls “limbo life.” Seitz argues that asylum itself is a queer condition, since the asylum-seeker exists in a state of uncertainty, constantly seeking but never fully arriving at belonging. Similarly, Dina Georgis (2006) argues that queer migrants experience displacement not only in a geographic sense but also emotionally, as memory and longing separate them from the promise of stable belonging. Georgis describes how queer diasporic lives are both close to and far from

the idea of “home,” creating a “queer space of diaspora” that challenges fixed notions of origin and place. These perspectives reflect what I encountered during my fieldwork: for many queer refugees, “home” is not a place left behind, but an idea somewhere on the horizon that remains precarious and ever-changing.

All these findings and realizations reshaped the trajectory of my overall doctoral research, leading me to reconsider not only the dramaturgical implications of queer migrant narratives but also the broader sociopolitical frameworks in which they exist. Thus, my initial question was reframed from “What does “home” mean for queer refugees?” to “What must a queer refugee become in order to fit into this home?” What does it mean to perform as “the right kind of queer” in the European Union, to perform the kind of queer identity that will be granted permission to stay, the kind that will fit into both the legal system and the social one? The reframing of the question led me to rethinking of dramaturgical strategies that I later implemented in the artistic work. Those strategies were further shaped by the institutional and logistical context of my fieldwork — namely, the framework of the Future Laboratory program.

1.1 Context: Future Laboratory

The Future Laboratory program, a trans-European artistic research initiative funded through the European Union’s Creative Europe program (2021-2027) and structured as a network of twelve European partners, allows emerging artists to undertake research residencies in three different cities and to benefit from mentoring, masterclasses, and support for developing a new artistic production. Working within this program allowed me to use methods of artistic research to explore and reframe my research questions, working with queer migrant communities in different countries. Following Henk Borgdorff’s (2012) ideas, I understand artistic research as rooted in creative practice and material experimentation,

articulating knowledge through artistic experience and processes - an approach that enables producing knowledge that is embodied, affective, and relational. This approach has shaped the entire research process: the interviews, conversations, and workshops are treated not as data collection in a traditional sense, but as performative, knowledge-producing opportunities.

From 2022 to 2024, I attended artistic residencies, conducted interviews with queer refugees, LGBTQ+ artists and curators, queer activists, and institutional representatives. I also facilitated workshops with local residents, exploring the notions of “home” and “belonging” through participatory performance practices. Throughout these residencies, I positioned myself not only as an artist-in-residence but as a queer migrant engaging other migrants through what I understood as a shared condition of precarity. In my case, precarity means the instability of my legal status, and the effects of displacement from Russia after its increasing criminalization of queer existence. As an activist and a queer person, I cannot return to my country of birth. As a migrant, I have never been confident that I would continue to have strong enough legal and financial reasons to be allowed to stay in the EU. Yet for the refugees I have worked with, precarity takes far more acute forms: the constant threat of deportation, the demand to prove their queerness to state institutions, and the daily negotiation of safety in hostile environments. While there are similarities between our experiences of migration, the differences in intensity are decisive. My presence in each location was further shaped by the mediating role of local mentors and institutional representatives, who facilitated connections with queer communities, human rights organizations, and cultural institutions. These mediations enabled access to places and people I would not have been able to access otherwise, but also introduced dynamics of power, expectations, and authority that require critical reflection. Participation in the Future Laboratory project allowed me to test and refine methodologies

under these conditions, while also continually negotiating the ethical complexities of working with queer refugees.

1.2 Methodology: Narrative Inquiry, Phenomenology, and Embodied Ethnography

The methodological framework I used during my fieldwork phase is primarily based on narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), phenomenological research (van Manen 2014), and embodied ethnography (Conquergood 1985). What connects these approaches is a shared focus on lived experience — not as information to extract, but as knowledge created through relationships and shared encounters.

In practice, I base my work on interviews and conversations, which function both as material and as method. In using interview as method, I focus on the complexity of meaning that emerges during meeting with my interviewees, instead of factual or statistical data. Through various methodological frameworks, these complexities emerge in different ways. In narrative inquiry, which D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000, 20) define as “a way of understanding experience”, stories take shape in the act of conversation itself, co-created by speaker and listener. Within a phenomenological framework the main question is “What is that experience like?” (van Manen 2014, 35), and, thus, my aim turns into understanding experience as a whole, where affect, silence, and hesitation become especially meaningful. In embodied ethnography, which Dwight Conquergood (1985) calls the practice of co-performative witnessing, dialogue is inseparable from bodily presence: gestures and pauses also become a part of the shared knowledge. All these frameworks directly shape my dramaturgical work: they inform not only the content but also the form and temporality of the artistic work that emerges from the research.

However, using interview as method when working with queer refugees

presents some particular challenges. Recording interviews with queer refugees is rarely possible due to the high stakes of constructing a “credible” asylum narrative, where any deviation can jeopardize protection — a challenge well documented in studies showing how credibility assessments force queer asylum seekers to conform to Western stereotypes of queerness (Lewis 2014; Dugan 2015; Akin 2017; Mole 2021). Recorded interviews also sound more official and more orchestrated. This leads to association with authoritarian and intrusive interviewing, which might trigger the injuries that happen in (immediate and prolonged) relations with official and state authorities. As Ali (2024) notes, these procedures often inflict long-term emotional injuries by demanding repeated disclosure of intimate details under the guise of proof. For many, even the format of interview, or the word ‘interview’ itself can remind of these state procedures, making the experience distressing. Suspicion adds another layer: as anthropologist Mert Koçak (2020) demonstrates in the context of Turkey, asylum systems foster competitive dynamics in which applicants are judged against one another in terms of “queerness” and authenticity. Within such conditions, even exchanges between queer-identifying people can be marked by the fear that one’s identity may be perceived as staged.

In response to this, I often abandon pre-prepared questions when sensing discomfort, even though my interviewees rarely explicitly object. As a result, our interactions frequently resemble more genuine real life conversations. Occasionally, we simply sit in silence. These moments echo Édouard Glissant’s (1997) concept of the “right to opacity”, which asserts that marginalized people should not be required to make themselves fully knowable within dominant frameworks. Here, silence and ambiguity function not as absences but as resistance and self-protection. Ali (2023) extends this idea by emphasizing the generative potential of ambiguity, where refusing clarity can open solidarities beyond fixed identity categories. Similarly, scholar Reiko Shindo (2021) shows that belonging is

shaped not only through visibility but also through the ability to withhold aspects of the self. Together, these perspectives highlight that silence and ambiguity are not gaps in knowledge but vital expressions of agency, where relations of support and solidarity partly mean the responsibility and care for working through the very uncertainty and ambiguity in a given community, collective or group.

1.3 Ethical Considerations and Challenges

Despite the opportunities that a framework such as Future Laboratory program provides, there are challenges that are unavoidable, especially regarding research ethical issues and time constraints. Despite following official research ethical guidelines such as receiving formal written consent for all interviews and anonymizing the material, other kinds of ethical challenges arise in this kind of research. Vulnerability is one aspect, which here does not refer to an inherent quality of the participants themselves, but to the structural and situational conditions they navigate, such as: insecure legal status, exposure to racism and homophobia, dependence on asylum systems, or the ongoing precarity of displacement. Within the research relation, vulnerability also emerges from the asymmetry between researcher and participant: while I have institutional support, my interviewees might risk further misrepresentation or retraumatization when sharing their stories. Regardless of the researcher's intent, there is a valid concern that the researcher may inadvertently engage in an extractive model of research in which scholars enter communities, collect data, and leave without offering anything in return. This has been a significant concern when interviewing queer refugees, many of whom share deeply personal and often traumatic stories in the hope that my research might lead to some form of institutional support.

In the article "Practical Engagements in Legal Geography: Collaborative Feminist Approaches to Immigration Advocacy in Denmark" (2021),

Malene H. Jacobsen argues that both migration research and advocacy risk reproducing asymmetrical power dynamics if they do not develop collaborative practices that return value to, and share authority with, the communities involved. Jacobsen emphasizes that moving beyond extractivism requires not only strong ethical protocols but also ongoing, practical engagements that actively recognize and work to redistribute power within the research process. Jacobsen's concerns echo those raised by Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck in her essay "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities" (2009), where she critiques research that treats marginalized communities as data sources for institutional advancement. Tuck argues that when research repeatedly asks communities to "show their wounds", it is not only reductive but also harmful. This approach, which she calls "damage-centered research" (Tuck 2009, 409), consistently frames communities as broken or depleted, reinforcing a one-dimensional view. Tuck's critique prompts reflection on how researcher's presence, even with ethical intentions, might risk reinforcing those extractive patterns.

Related to the topic of "showing wounds" is the issue of untrained engagement with trauma, which frequently surfaces in interviews. While I value the trust my interviewees place in me, I often feel unprepared for the emotional weight of their stories. I find myself caught between two ethical issues: the relational labor of witnessing suffering (Das 2007) and the political stakes of representing pain (Fassin 2011). Veena Das's concept of the "everydayness of suffering" examines how trauma is not confined to catastrophic events but continues through daily life visible in smaller details and mundane routines. This framework demands that researchers attend to the fragility of language when representing pain, as trauma often exists in the "in-between moments" of people's stories, where their experiences do not fit neatly into the categories society tries to impose. Moreover, as anthropologist Didier Fassin argues, humanitarian narratives of suffering are never neutral. His analysis of "humanitarian reason" exposes how

trauma testimonies become entangled with institutional agendas, often getting mixed up with politics and being used by power-organizations to push their own goals, while the people sharing their trauma become stuck in a system that treats them as victims instead of addressing deeper inequalities. Das's approach encourages attentiveness to the subtle forms in which trauma appears, while Fassin's critique foregrounds the institutional uses of suffering. Both frameworks inform a more cautious and reflexive approach to trauma in research.

Another big challenge when it comes to research done within artistic residencies, is time. In case of The Future Laboratory, each residency lasts approximately two weeks, which is far too short to build meaningful relationships or conduct deep research. With such a tight schedule, many conversations can feel rushed and superficial.

I believe that this time pressure is not merely logistical — it is epistemological. Geographer and social scientist Doreen Massey's concept of "power geometries" (Massey 1994) reveals how time-space compression is shaped by unequal access to mobility and resources. Those who live with precarity, whether because of bureaucracy, displacement, or trauma, often struggle to move or adapt to the accelerated pace demanded by institutions. Similarly, I see how artistic research conducted at institutional speed risks replicating these exclusions by overlooking those in crisis, or those whose survival depends on slow negotiation with bureaucracy and trauma.

While programs like Future Laboratory provide access to spaces and people difficult to access otherwise, the limited timeframe makes it difficult to establish the kind of trust needed for in-depth discussions, especially when dealing with sensitive topics. This issue highlights a broader challenge in artistic and ethnographic research: the conflict between long-term engagement necessary for meaningful inquiry and the practical constraints of temporary residencies.

Overall, this fieldwork phase illuminates issues concerning queer refugees within both migration studies and LGBTQ+ advocacy. My findings not only underline these problems but also prompt to reflect on how to approach storytelling, representation, and ethical responsibility in such a framework. These reflections serve as a base for the creation of artistic work, underlining the ways in which the ethical tensions influence dramaturgical choices and performance strategies.

Part 2: Artistic Work

In the process of translating my research findings into artistic work, I kept coming back to my meeting with D. I found myself repeatedly asking why that moment became so important in my research journey. While it gave me more information about the asylum process, what stayed with me was a feeling. It was as if the answers to my central research questions were not just in the facts, but somewhere in the space of D's apartment — around her table, in the way she spoke, in her songs.

The core question that I ask in every interview is: "What does "belonging" mean to you as a queer person?" D's reply was simple: "It's right here, with my girls." She meant the community of other refugee women she lived with. When I ask myself the same question, the answer is less straightforward. My sense of belonging is not tied to a place or person — it is a synthesis of every sensory and emotional aspect of my meeting with D. — something that has typically been missing in much of my research process: joy and freedom of expression. Most of my research centers on trauma and survival, often treating these as distinct from moments of shared joy or creativity. Yet, as Silvia Federici argues (2018, 2020), survival is not only about endurance - it is also about the practices of care, joy, and collective imagination that make survival possible in the first place. This realization leads me to a critical question: How can I replicate the feeling of joy in a

performance, and how can performance incorporate the narratives of loss and survival, but also include practices of joy, care, and collective presence?

Thinking that the feeling was tied to a person, I considered inviting D. to perform, but practical limitations made that impossible. Her absence, however, became a new focal point. I was faced with the question: Should I try to recreate that moment without her, or highlight the impossibility of doing so? If joy of this wonderful queer refugee artist presenting her art live on stage could not be achieved (the way she presented it to me in her own home), how might its absence be made visible? These questions ultimately shaped the performance I made based on over 50 hours of interview materials, creative contributions from the workshops, and reports from human rights organizations — the same performance that I will be using as my methodological example in this article.

The performance called *Queer Enough*, split into a number of non-linear episodes. In each episode, the protagonist, V., adopts a certain persona in response to external pressures — ranging from the strict expectations of asylum authorities and cultural institutions to the more subtle, internalized demands of legibility and credibility. She becomes *Serious Researcher Enough*, *Russian Refugee Enough*, *Nomad Enough*, etc. Each episode compels V. to perform a different version of herself, exaggerating traits she believes will secure recognition, even when these pressures are not fully visible or consciously acknowledged. Alongside her, K. (a second central character who embodies institutional authority) constantly interrupts, critiques, and reshapes V.'s performances, pushing her into an endless cycle of self-adjustment. There are some similarities between this approach and the famous Bertolt Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt" (alienation effect) (Brecht 1964). While not using Brechtian techniques in the traditional sense, I employ interruptions and metatheatrical commentary to draw attention to the production mechanisms, both theatrical and bureaucratic.

What follows is a discussion of dramaturgical problems that emerged during the performance-making process: the ethics of extractive storytelling; the narrative coercion of asylum processes; and the challenge of representing queer migrant narratives outside of linear Western temporalities. In sharing them, I aim to reflect on how such challenges may shape dramaturgical structures, and to propose correlating staging strategies.

2.1 The Problem of Extractive Storytelling: Who gets to tell the story?

I acknowledge that making a performance based on queer refugee stories may involve the artist in a politics of extraction, even when participants give consent. I would further argue that authorship should not be understood only in terms of narrative but also in terms of presence, mediation, and power. To address these concerns, I used two dramaturgical strategies: making the absence of those being represented explicit, and situating the artist-researcher's own narrative within the same systems of precarity and storytelling.

The first major ethical issue I encountered in my own performance-making process was the question of authorship and authority: Why was I the one telling these stories, and under what conditions? As a dramaturge working within the documentary genre, I have long advocated that people, especially the ones that often get silenced, should tell their own stories on stage rather than having them reenacted by actors or third parties. However, in this project, my interviewees either could not or did not want to perform themselves. While all participants gave formal consent, the imbalance remained.

The risk of sliding into extractive storytelling draws parallels with the work of performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood. In his essay "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance", Conquergood (1985) critiques traditional academic

research for being overly extractive and detached from lived experience. He warns against the dangers of either exploiting marginalized communities for personal or institutional gain, romanticizing them without critical engagement, or turning their experiences into a spectacle. His work challenges the assumption that simply “giving voice” to marginalized individuals is inherently ethical, instead urging researchers and artists to critically reflect on their roles and the power imbalances inherent in representation. Similar questions have been explored in feminist, postcolonial, and queer artistic practices. In *When the Moon Waxes Red*, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991) discusses the artist’s tendency to “speak about others” under the guise of giving voice, when in fact they often retain narrative control. She emphasizes the participatory nature of representation, stating that reality is not simply something to be represented, but something in which one participates. Following Conquergood and Minh-ha, I have been very skeptical of the “giving voice” strategy, especially if the one giving this voice somehow possesses more privilege in life. The strategies I developed based on this critique are to highlight the absence of those represented, and to incorporate my own narrative as a queer immigrant and potential refugee. The absence of those being represented can be seen throughout my performance, but it is particularly evident in the episode about D., who I invited to perform live at the National Theatre in Strasbourg. D. performed, and I included a recording of that performance in every subsequent performance of her story. By playing a recording from a previous performance in each new location, I create a recursive loop, amplifying her presence while drawing attention to her physical absence.

The second strategy was to include my own story alongside those of my interviewees. By incorporating my experience as a queer migrant, I aimed to avoid detached storytelling and to bring forward the aspect of shared vulnerability, positioning myself not as an objective narrator, but as one of

the voices in the narrative performed, along the lines of Donna Haraway’s (1998) concept of “situated knowledges”, which challenges the idea of objective researchers and instead encourages us to acknowledge that all knowledge is situated, expressive of specific perspectives. Haraway critiques what she calls the “god trick” — an illusion of disembodied objectivity, and argues for transparency of researcher’s position. By making my own position visible and showing the ethical discomfort I felt throughout the process, I aimed to emphasize this issue within the performance itself and to ask the audience to question not just whose stories are told, but how, and by whom. I do not claim that these strategies fully resolve the problem of extractive storytelling. But by integrating them into the dramaturgical structure, through absence, presence, recursion, and embodied subjectivity, they attempt to make the ethics of representation a problem to be staged, rather than being disregarded completely.

2.2 The Problem of Narrative Coercion: What Story Must Be Told?

If the first problem concerns who gets to tell the story, the second addresses the question of what stories are being told. Or more precisely, what stories are *allowed* to be told. Queer asylum narratives are shaped by coercive legibility, where queer refugees must shape their experiences into recognizable trauma stories to be granted protection. This often results in a loss of agency, as personal histories are rewritten to conform to institutional demands. I argue that artists working with such stories must carefully consider how dramaturgical form can either reproduce or resist that coercion.

In my dramaturgical practice, I see two dilemmas with regards to this problem: how to thematize coercion without replicating it, and how to account for my own curatorial power in selecting, editing, and staging these narratives. These dilemmas bring to mind Indigenous scholar Linda

Tuhiwai Smith's critique of scripted narratives in colonial and institutional contexts. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith (1999) argues that research has often been used as a tool of colonial control, misrepresentation, and extraction, shaping the stories of marginalized communities to fit dominant narratives. She states, "the word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (Smith 1999, 1). This critique resonates with my concerns about potentially re-writing queer refugee stories, conforming to audience expectations or my own dramaturgical logic. The broader implications of this issue are also addressed by Sara Ahmed, who examines how certain bodies become legible within institutions by their capacity to produce politically and affectively "appropriate" narratives. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004) writes about how stories of pain are seen as credible only when expressed in ways recognizable to dominant audiences, particularly in legal and humanitarian contexts. Pain must be expressed in a certain way, and so does queerness.

Following these critiques, and realizing my incapability to fully solve the coercion dilemma, I choose instead to address it openly. In the final episode of the performance, I staged my own speculative asylum hearing. As someone from a country where open expression of queerness is criminalized, I present my own story as if applying for protection. A character named K., acting as the judge, interrupts my narrative repeatedly. When I describe growing up in a loving family, K. proposes: "Your dad was probably an alcoholic. Maybe he beat you?" With each intervention, my story is edited and re-written to fit the formal criteria of credibility. This device literalizes Ahmed's and Smith's critiques: storytelling becomes a form of regulation, and I become both subject and object of that regulation.

By using my own story, I seek to critique the institutional mechanisms that dictate whose story is deemed credible and who is considered worthy

of protection. The performance here serves as a space where narrative coercion is not resolved, but dramatized, with my main aim being to expose the complex process of how personal histories are rewritten to satisfy bureaucratic imperatives without fully becoming complicit in that rewriting by using lived experiences of others instead of my own. As an artistic response, I frame the asylum process as dramaturgical and examine how performance can expose, rather than replicate, the mechanisms that render identities legible to the state.

2.3 The Problem of Linear Western Narratives: How to Arrange the Temporality of the Story?

I believe that dominant temporal frameworks, particularly those structuring asylum narratives, rely on linear, Western models of progression that do not fit queer and migrant experiences. Subsequently, I argue that non-linear dramaturgies offer a more appropriate mode for representing queer migrant narratives.

When it comes to queer refugees, linear Western models suggest that their stories must follow a straightforward trajectory from oppression to freedom, culminating in integration into the host society. Same happens with regards to asylum interview procedures, where the whole experience of queerness must follow a certain straightforward timeline, with particular stops along the way. Yet, as scholars of migration and queer theory have shown, such linearity rarely reflects lived realities. Jack Halberstam (2011) argues that normative temporalities are inadequate for understanding queer life, advocating instead for alternative rhythms, such as loops, pauses, and detours that resist "straight time." Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "chrononormativity" (Freeman 2010), or the ways institutions discipline bodies into socially legible temporalities, is visible in the demand for neat, continuous, and justified narratives of trauma. As the research literature shows, queer asylum seekers' lives rarely conform to these expectations.

Migration scholars further demonstrate these tensions. Malene H. Jacobsen (2022) highlights how legal systems impose artificial temporal frameworks, forcing refugees' lives into administratively legible sequences. Christine M. Jacobsen and Marry-Anne Karlsen, in their introduction to *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration* (2020), further show how migration is experienced through multiple, fragmented temporalities, shaped by waiting and uncertainty. Similarly, Kari Anne Drangslund (2020), argues that common migration research assumes migration stories have clear beginnings and ends, starting in one country, and ending in another, which Drangslund calls "methodological nationalism." However, migrants' experiences of waiting resist this assumption because their lives do not fit neatly into these timelines. Within the specific context of queer migration, these temporal disruptions become even more pronounced. Migration scholars Matti Dustin and Nina Held (2021), in their contribution to *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe*, argue that queer asylum seekers experience belonging and exclusion through fragmented and nonlinear processes, often influenced by such factors as religion, support networks, and bureaucratic waiting. In "The Queer Time of Death: Temporality, Geopolitics, and Refugee Rights", Sima Shakhsari (2014) further argues that queer refugees experience time differently from normative Western models: the temporality of asylum, danger, and survival produces what Shakhsari calls a "queer time of death," in which waiting, precarity, and uncertainty disrupt conventional narratives and linear life courses. Similarly, Ali Bhagat (2023), in "Queer Global Displacement: Social Reproduction, Refugee Survival, and Organized Abandonment in Nairobi, Cape Town, and Paris" shows how queer refugees' survival strategies unfold through disrupted and nonlinear temporalities shaped by precariousness and marginalization. Collectively, these studies illustrate how the fragmented experiences of queer refugees challenge dominant, linear models of integration and belonging.

In response to these realities, as both a queer migrant and a researcher, I reject these imposed chronologies. I believe that queerness and migration are never journeys from A to B; they unfold across multiple dimensions simultaneously, each carrying its own complexities and demands. Therefore, in my performance, I chose to constantly jump between timelines, countries, emotional and physical states to highlight the precarity of this journey and experience. This work was not supposed to be a journey in time, it was always meant to be a journey in identity, where timelines were deliberately distorted and confusing.

By constructing the performance as a temporal collage, I aim to resist the narrative forms that institutions require and audiences expect. Non-linearity becomes not only a formal choice but a political refusal, a way of asserting that queer migrant lives are not linear, not simple, and not for consumption on terms set by others.

• • •

Ultimately, I argue that queer refugee narratives are constrained by systems that enforce performativity and demand temporal coherence. Artistic research, in this context, does not seek to resolve these constraints but to position them as critical problems.

The performance I developed through this research and used here as an example cannot present solutions. However, it aims to discuss possible dramaturgical strategies, and, more importantly, openly address some key problems: the absence of queer refugees onstage, the impossibility of telling one's story "correctly," the violence of being asked to perform authenticity. Each of the problems: extractive storytelling, narrative coercion, and linear temporality, shapes the dramaturgical approach and makes dramaturgy a method of inquiry in itself.

Overall, I believe that queer migration is an ongoing negotiation of identity, legality, and survival. Artistic research frames this negotiation not only as inquiry but as a mode of knowing, rejecting the demand for a singular, linear story and creating a space for queer lives to appear as layered, recursive, and radically situated experiences.

Part 3. Reflections

The last thing I want to address in this article is how audience feedback, external responses, and personal critical analysis can inform understanding of the artistic and methodological outcomes. My reflections are specifically based on the aspects of storytelling, authenticity, extractivism, and self-representation, to highlight the ongoing methodological questions raised by working with vulnerable narratives through artistic research.

3.1 External Feedback

During my fieldwork phase, I discovered reports documenting the experiences of trans women refugees in France. The accounts reflect extremely harsh realities and stories of survival, but one particular comment stood out. A trans woman, concluding her report, expressed strong skepticism about the value of sharing her story. She referred to these repeated retellings as “horror stories,” questioning the purpose of sharing them. Despite being legalized in France for several years, she had been unable to find employment, and she felt exploited by the constant demand for her to recount her pain. Her statement reminds me of Ann Cvetkovich’s (2003) notion of the “archival burden of trauma,” which critiques how marginalized groups, particularly queer communities, face societal pressure to publicly perform their trauma to gain recognition or legitimacy within dominant cultural and political frameworks. It also resembles bell hooks’ (1990) writing on how marginalized voices are conditionally validated only

when they perform trauma, conform to dominant narratives, or serve the interests of the privileged. hooks argues that mainstream feminism and academia often demand marginalized people to “confess” their suffering in ways that align with the center’s expectations, reducing their experiences to commodified spectacle or tokenized representation. Knowing that and despite taking extensive precautions to avoid extractivist practices, I was anxious about how my work would be received. I questioned my right to tell these stories, knowing the performance would not provide actual tangible benefits to the queer refugee community. Throughout the process, I feared that my artistic engagement might inadvertently reinforce the structures of exploitation I tried to critique.

Throughout the performance-making process I strived to minimize this risk, whether by addressing ethical concerns directly within the work, acknowledging my own positionality, or emphasizing absence. For example, instead of retelling refugee stories in my own words, I emphasized moments of refusal and silence, or used mediated recordings that highlighted the limits of representation. By staging these absences and gaps, I made the ethical dilemma of speaking for others visible to the audience, turning it into a subject of critical reflection rather than a hidden condition of the work. But the questions remained: Who was I doing this for? Who would benefit from it? Why was I telling an audience what they already probably knew about the difficulties faced by refugees? These questions sounded even louder in my mind due to my background in activism. I use the past tense deliberately, as for me activism has always meant exactly that — being active, or more precisely, making active change. In my activist days, my responsibility was to secure money to fund safe spaces for vulnerable communities in my home town. It was work that provided clear, immediate benefits to those in need. But what can I offer through a performance? Why is it so important for me that artistic work helps in some way, and what would it even mean in this context?

These questions resonate with Guillermo Gómez-Peña's (2005) critique of the artist's role as a self-appointed "savior" of marginalized communities. Co-founder of La Pocha Nostra (1993), Gómez-Peña (2005) rejects the colonial logic that positions the artist-researcher as an advocate for the oppressed. Instead, his work embraces performative ambiguity by blending satire, ritual, and hybrid identities (e.g., cyborgs, migrant saints, etc.) to expose how systemic violence operates through spectacle and complicity. This approach challenges my concerns about "helping" through art: Gómez-Peña argues that clarity often serves power, whereas sustained discomfort can dismantle the savior complex by making visible the paradoxes of representation.

After the premiere, I received feedback that was both thoughtful and supportive, but two responses became especially memorable. One came from a member of the queer community, who reassured me that authenticity, which in my case meant being among the subjects of my research rather than positioning myself above them, was what truly mattered. The second comment came from an audience member who reminded me that people already knew about harsh realities of being a queer refugee. However, they argued that the value of the performance laid in cultivating empathy. Queer refugees are often reduced to statistics, difficult for the public to relate to. By telling individual stories, the performance invited the audience into an emotional space where disengagement was made much more difficult.

These responses somewhat reframed my understanding of the work's significance. While I continue to struggle with the ethical dilemmas of representation, I have now begun to see the performance not as a solution to a problem, but as an act of witnessing. Performance, thus, becomes a tool to counter indifference and create a space where queer refugee narratives could be recognized in their full humanity. Having lived through the uncertainty of displacement and being often categorized solely through my nationality or my legal status, I believe that performance can allow me

and others in a similar position to be seen beyond bureaucratic labels — as complex beings whose lives cannot be reduced to statistics or stereotypes.

3.2 Personal Reflections: Dramaturgical Strategies for Queer Migrant Performance

Reflecting on the research, performance-making process, and audience feedback, I am proposing several dramaturgical principles for creating performances centered on queer refugee narratives based on my own practice. These principles emerge from both theoretical considerations and the practical challenges of representation, storytelling, and ethical engagement with marginalized people.

A) Evoking empathy through individuality

One of the most important dramaturgical considerations in staging queer refugee narratives is the cultivation of empathy. This requires moving beyond generalizations and statistics to focus on the lives of actual real people and the details of their stories. The goal is not simply to inform about problems and injustices but to create connection between performer and audience.

In practical dramaturgical terms, this means constructing narratives that highlight individuality rather than reducing people to symbols of suffering. The strategy that I employ for achieving this is to emphasize small, intimate details, like gestures, routines, personal objects, and cultural expressions, to make each individual experience feel tangible. Another strategy is to include audience involvement, moments when performers can share personal reflections with everyone who is being present. By breaking the fourth wall and acknowledging the constructed nature of the performance, the work can create a space where audiences could both empathize and critically reflect on their own positions as spectators.

B) Radical honesty and personal position: addressing extractivism

A major ethical challenge in working with queer refugee narratives is avoiding extractivist storytelling. One way to address this issue dramaturgically is through radical honesty — acknowledging the researcher's own positionality and complicity within the structures they critique, as well as open reflexivity and admitting that knowledge is a communal construction that is navigated and negotiated in unison rather than a work of single minds and investigators.

In my performance, this took the form of integrating my own story into the narrative, positioning myself not as an external observer but as a participant in the larger system of displacement. The presence of my own story does not serve to present a solution to an ethical problem, but to explicitly interrogate it. By staging moments where my own agency is questioned, such as scenes where my choices as a dramaturg are openly challenged, I attempt to problematize the act of representation.

The problem of potential extractivism in documentary dramaturgy can also be made visible through direct interruptions. In one scene of my work, the character of K. repeatedly stops the protagonist's testimony, questioning its credibility and sometimes completely reversing the original narrative. I choose to employ this strategy not only to expose the coercive mechanisms within asylum processes but also to function as a meta-commentary on theatre-making itself, on how stories are selected, shaped, and performed according to external expectations.

C) Promoting queer art forms and ensuring self-representation

In my practice, the core principle is to actively promote queer artistic forms and ensure that queer refugees and migrants have the agency to participate in their own representation. Queer artistic expression, in all

its performance traditions, allows for storytelling that transcends trauma to celebrate resilience, resistance, and joy.

This was reflected in my performance through casting and collaboration choices. The creative team, composed entirely of queer migrant artists, ensured multiple voices shaped the dramaturgy rather than a singular authorial perspective. Additionally, integrating performance forms like drag, improvisation, and direct audience engagement created a dynamic exploration of queer refugee experiences. These elements shaped a fluid, participatory space where identity could be expressed beyond legal or institutional constraints.

The absence of people who could not physically participate should not be ignored but rather become a dramaturgical device. For example, I used an iterative looping technique with D.'s recorded performance, which played at each new staging, turning absence into presence. This accumulation of absence highlights the mobility, visibility, and participation restrictions faced by queer refugees, making missing voices impossible to ignore.

• • •

Overall, I believe that developing an ethical approach to queer refugee performance requires ongoing negotiation between artistic, theoretical, and ethical concerns. Evoking empathy through highlighting individuality, practicing radical honesty, and ensuring that queer art forms and artists are centered in the production process are essential strategies for minimizing extractivist tendencies. However, as my work has demonstrated, these strategies do not provide absolute solutions. Instead, they function as critical frameworks for continuously questioning and reshaping the ethics of representation.

Conclusion

This article followed a process of transformation of the initial research question centered on the idea of home into an exploration of how queerness must be performed in order to be accepted within Western asylum and social systems. Across its three parts (fieldwork, artistic work, and reflection) I aimed to show how artistic research can challenge normative epistemologies. The fieldwork section explored how queer refugees navigate systems that demand specific performances of identity. The artistic work part showed how these insights shaped dramaturgical methodologies used to convey queer migrant narratives. The reflection part focused on how implementing such methodologies can create understanding, empathy, and solidarity while still questioning the ethics of representation. Overall, I argued that performance dramaturgy is not only a means of expression but a practice of situated, embodied knowing, creating spaces where alternative forms of knowledge and belonging can emerge.

Returning to where this article began, my first meeting with D., I am reminded of a turning point that ignited in me the desire to performatively recreate the sense of belonging I experienced that evening. Throughout this article, I have traced my attempts to capture and convey that feeling, as well as the inevitable recognition that it cannot be fully replicated. But the central question remained: why is sharing this feeling was so important to me?

The answer, while idealistic, is simple. At the time, I was considering ending my research, overwhelmed by the injustices of the world. Yet, listening to D.'s music and experiencing that shared moment of joy, I realized that joy, alongside solidarity and care, is itself an act of defiance. Since then, in my opinion, the world has not become safer, but it is precisely why I aim to continue. As a queer migrant, I want to be a part of community that

creates its own sense of unity and provides spaces of safety and belonging, no matter how fleeting, no matter in what form. For those who have been displaced, home has never been a fixed place — it has always existed in connections with one another. This is the one thing that every interviewee in my research agreed on. If we do not belong to the places we inhabit, we still belong with each other. Our stories matter — not just as grand narratives of survival, but in every detail, in every moment of joy, in every act of creation. And so, we must carry them forward, refusing to let them be lost.

This work has also affirmed the central theoretical claim of the project — that queer artistic research can indeed function as a form of counter-epistemology, prioritizing affect and vulnerability over data-driven statistics. It does not exist to merely document experience but to engage with it and challenge normative narratives, to offer a stage on which other ways of being and knowing can appear. And if the work does not provide conclusive answers and solutions, it is because it was never meant to. What it offers instead is a method of asking, of listening, and of being with others in their difference. In that sense, the research (and artistic practice) continues in every moment of solidarity, in every act of refusal, and in every shared gesture that insists: we are still here. We are home.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 1999. "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (3): 329–47.

- Akin, Deniz. 2017. "Queer Asylum Seekers: Translating Sexuality in Norway." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (3): 458–474.
- Akin, Deniz, and Stine Helena Bang Svendsen. 2017. "Becoming Family: Orientalism, Homonormativity, and Queer Asylum in Norway." *National Politics and Sexuality in Transregional Perspective: The Homophobic Argument*, edited by A. Rohde, C. von Braun, and S. Schüler-Springorum, 39–54. London: Routledge.
- Ali, Ali. 2023. "On Purpose: Solidarity by Accident or Design and the Generative Ambiguity in Between." *Space and Polity* 28 (2): 171–187.
- Ali, Ali. 2023. "Warming up Narratives of Community: Queer Kinship and Emotional Exile." *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 8 (4): 10–24.
- Ali, Ali. 2024. "Queer Crisis: Turbulent Identity Journeys in Gender and Nation." *SQS – Suomen queer-tutkimuksen seuran lehti* 18 (3): 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.23980/sqs.154809>.
- Ali, Ali. 2024. "Chronic Pain of Race and Citizenship: Profound Subtleties of Injury and Redress in a Community of Queer Exile." *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 14 (2): 1–16.
- Bhagat, Ali. 2023. "Queer Global Displacement: Social Reproduction, Refugee Survival, and Organized Abandonment in Nairobi, Cape Town, and Paris." *Antipode* 55 (5): 1517–1537.
- Borgdorff, Henk. 2012. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.
- Brecht, Bertolt. 1964. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Edited and translated by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. Jean, and F. Michael Connelly. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Conquergood, Dwight. 1985. "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance." *Literature in Performance* 5 (2): 1–13.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Drangslund, Kari Anne. 2020. "Mo's Challenge: Waiting and the Question of Methodological Nationalism." *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration*, edited by C. M. Jacobsen, M.-A. Karlsen, and S. Khosravi, 75–95. London: Routledge.
- Dustin, Moira, and Nuno Held. 2021. "'They Sent Me to the Mountain': The Role Space, Religion and Support Groups Play for LGBTIQ+ Asylum Claimants." *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe*, edited by Richard Mole, 184–215. London: UCL Press.
- Dugan, Emily. 2015. "Nigerian Gay Rights Activist Has Her High Court Asylum Bid Rejected – Because Judge Doesn't Believe She Is Lesbian." *The Independent*, May 15. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/nigerian-gay-rights-activist-has-her-high-court-asylum-bid-rejected-because-judge-doesn-t-believe-she-is-lesbian-10155083.html>.
- Fassin, Didier. 2011. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. Translated by Rachel Gomme. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Federici, Silvia. 2018. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Federici, Silvia. 2020. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Iris Jain. London: Routledge.
- Fortier, Anne-Marie. 2020. *Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment*. Lancaster University: Department of Sociology. <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/resources/sociology-online-papers/papers/fortier-making-home.pdf>. Accessed February 9, 2025.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, 87–104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. 2010. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Georgis, Dina S. 2006. "Cultures of Expulsion: Memory, Longing and the Queer Space of Diaspora." *New Dawn: Journal of Black Canadian Studies* 1 (1): 101.
- Glissant, Édouard. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. 2005. *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism and Pedagogy*. London: Routledge.
- Halberstam, Jack. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Haraway, Donna J. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575–599.

- hooks, bell. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.
- Jacobsen, Christine M., and Marry-Anne Karlsen. 2020. "Introduction: Unpacking the Temporalities of Irregular Migration." *Waiting and the Temporalities of Irregular Migration*, edited by C. M. Jacobsen, M.-A. Karlsen, and S. Khosravi, 1–19. London: Routledge.
- Jacobsen, Malene H. 2021. "Practical Engagements in Legal Geography: Collaborative Feminist Approaches to Immigration Advocacy in Denmark." *Area* 53 (4): 595–602.
- Jacobsen, Malene H. 2022. "Precarious (Dis)Placement: Temporality and the Legal Rewriting of Refugee Protection in Denmark." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 112 (3): 819–827.
- Johnson, Laura, Malene H. Jacobsen, and Patricia Ehrkamp. 2024. "The Work of Fluid Metaphors in Migration Research: Geographical Imaginations and the Politics of Writing." *Progress in Human Geography* 48 (6): 843–860.
- Koçak, Mert. 2020. "Who Is 'Queerer' and Deserves Resettlement?: Queer Asylum Seekers and Their Deservingness of Refugee Status in Turkey." *Middle East Critique* 29 (1): 29–46.
- Lewis, Rachel A. 2014. "'Gay? Prove It': The Politics of Queer Anti-Deportation Activism." *Sexualities* 17 (8): 958–975.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994 *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. 1991. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Mole, Richard C. M. 2021. *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe*. London: UCL Press.
- Peltonen, Salla, and Anna Katarina Jungar. 2018. "The Ascendency of Whiteness: On Understanding Racialized Queerness in LGBTIQ Refugee Work." In *Activism, Research and Pedagogical Praxis: Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives on Gender, Sex, and Race*, edited by T. Shefer, J. Hearn, K. Ratele, and F. Boonzaier, 57–74. London: Routledge.
- Perego, Aurora. 2021. "(Des)haciendo Fronteras: Latin American LGBTIQ* Asylum Seekers in Spain in the Process of Credibility Assessment." In *Queer Migration and Asylum in Europe*, edited by Richard Mole, 132–161. London: UCL Press.
- Puar, Jasbir K. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1990. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Seitz, David K. 2017. "Limbo Life in Canada's Waiting Room: Asylum-Seeker as Queer Subject." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35 (3): 438–456.
- Shakhsari, Sima. 2014. "The queer time of death: Temporality, geopolitics, and refugee rights." *Sexualities* 17 (8), 998–1015.
- Shindo, Reiko. 2021. "Home, Sweet Home? Community and the Dilemma of Belonging." *Geopolitics* 26 (2): 425–443.
- Schröder, Rieke. 2023. "Scandinavian Design. The continuous closet and queer refugees in Denmark." *Sexualities* 28 (1–2): 435–449.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Spade, Dean. 2011. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. New York: South End Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271–313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Tuck, Eve. 2009. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (3): 409–428.
- Van Manen, Max. 2014. *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Wimark, Thomas. 2021. "Homemaking and perpetual liminality among queer refugees." *Social & Cultural Geography* 22 (5): 647–665.