1 Queering the migrant

Being beyond borders

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The queer turn in European migratory film

Since a European Union directive in 2011 made persecution for sexual orientation and gender identity valid legal grounds for asylum in Europe – the so-called SOGI non-discrimination laws (SO = sexual orientation, GI = gender identity) – the long-overlooked phenomenon of alternatively gendered migrants and refugees escaping persecution due to sexual orientation has come urgently to the fore in European society and culture.¹ Refugees identifying as LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, non-binary, queer or questioning) have been attempting to cross the border into Europe and claim sexual asylum, fleeing countries where homosexuality is not just maligned but also attacked, maimed, and obliterated (14 countries worldwide, including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Syria, impose violent physical and psychological punishments and/or the death penalty for homosexuality).² These refugees form part of the recent European migrant and humanitarian crisis – one that began in earnest in the summer of 2011 following the Arab Spring and exploded in 2015 when rising numbers of people arrived in the European Union, travelling across the Mediterranean Sea or overland through southeast Europe (at its peak, an unprecedented 1.2 million people crossed European borders in both 2015 and 2016 and applied to EU member-states for asylum (Eurostat 2017)).

Only a small number of migrants and refugees seeking asylum in Europe on grounds of sexual orientation and/or gender identity have been successful, although reliable official statistics are hard to obtain due to a general lack of scientific research.³ To take the case of one (now former) member-state, the UK: ‘experimental’ statistics published by the Home Office in September 2018 containing data referring to SOGI applications reveal that from 2015 to 2017 a total of 5,916 asylum applications were officially lodged where a sexual orientation basis was recorded (lesbian, gay or bisexual, but not transgender or intersex), representing 6.6% of all asylum applications received during that period. More recent information provided by the Home Office indicates, however, that, as of September 2019, the UK has refused at least 3,100 asylum claims from LGBTIQ+ nationals from countries where

consensual same-sex acts are criminalised, notably Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria.⁴

In response to the growing numbers of queer migrants and refugees attempting to cross both into and within the EU, contemporary European cinema has witnessed a profusion of innovative and pivotal films addressing themes of sexual migration while seeking to convey queer migrant lives in Europe and at its borders. This process had already begun in the early 2000s with works like *Princesa* (2001, Italy/Spain/France/UK/Germany, dir. Henrique Goldman), an amalgam of gritty social document and emotive melodrama telling the story of Fernanda, a 19-year-old Brazilian transsexual who goes to Milan and works as a prostitute ('Princesa') in order to raise money for her sex-change operation. It has since developed into a dazzling array of films in all forms and formats, from commercial feature films to small-budget video works, shorts and installations, and covering the full spectrum of genres and styles. They range from narrative fictions – powerful, taut, emotional dramas like *Unveiled/Fremde Haut* (2005, Germany/Austria, dir. Angelina Maccarone), about an Iranian lesbian interpreter assuming a dead man's identity in order to escape to Germany and avoid capital punishment for homosexual acts, and romantic dramas like *A Moment in the Reeds* (2017, Finland/UK, dir. Mikko Makela) tracing the intimate emotional and erotic bonds that form between a young (white) Finnish man and a Syrian refugee in rural Finland – to stirring documentaries of grassroots advocacy such as *Refugees under the Rainbow* (2018, Germany, dir. Stella Traub), where three queer Ugandan refugees tell direct to camera the story of their gruelling attempts to find safe refuge and happiness in Germany, and *Re-naissances/Re-births: The Journey of the Soul* (2018, France/Russia/China/Peru dir. Santi Zegarra), comprising intimate and affirmative portraits of queer and trans refugees in France (including a transwoman from Columbia, a transman from Russia, a lesbian from Uganda, and a gay man from China).⁵ Other more hybrid works include the docu-fiction *Refugee's Welcome* (2017, Spain/Germany), a self-styled porn short by well-known queer *auteur* Bruce La Bruce focusing on the adventures of a young Syrian man (Moonif) who wanders the streets of Berlin after leaving the refugee camp to which he has been assigned, and the freewheeling queer road movie *Xenia* (2014, Greece, dir. Panos H. Koutras), which employs comedy and fantasy sequences to chart the quest for Greek citizenship undertaken by a flamboyantly styled, Greek-Albanian, adolescent boy and his older brother in the face of homophobic violence. In a still relatively rare instance of migrants recording their journey to Europe as it is taking place,⁶ *Shelter: Farewell to Eden* (2019, France/Italy, 2019, dir. Enrico Masi) provides a first-person portrait documentary portrait of Filipino transsexual Pepsi, a former resistance fighter in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and nurse in Gadaffi's Libya, now seeking asylum in Italy, France, and the UK. Never directly photographed at her insistence, Pepsi speaks on the soundtrack about the in-between, transitional places of her restless journey and the

realities of the queer, Muslim, migrant everyday, complemented formally by Masi's kaleidoscopic editing style incorporating raw found footage.

The portrayal of queer refugees and migrants has also become increasingly prominent on European television, most strikingly in the genre of Nordic Noir, for example, the Swedish series *Bron/The Bridge* (2011–18, SVT) which, in its fourth season, centred on the character of a gay Iranian refugee in his late 20s living illegally in Copenhagen. Alongside this remarkable proliferation of original and often radical work on queer migration, and serving directly to stimulate it, has been the emergence of queer migrant film festivals, most notably the annual International Queer and Migrant Film Festival in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities (inaugurated in 2015), and the International Queer Minorities Film Festival: Transition in Vienna.

While occasional articles and (part-)chapters have been devoted to queer migration in European films (Loshitzky 2010; Williams 2010; Ballesteros 2015; Guha 2015; Bayraktar 2016), there has, as yet, been no sustained engagement with the complex and pressing themes of queer migration in contemporary European cinema. This is partly because the specific issue of migration (queer or otherwise) has often been conflated with those of immigration and the post-migrant experience of integration, assimilation, and diasporic identity.⁷ In order to appreciate fully how the migrant figure has been *queered* in European film and, in the process, grasp the extraordinary thematic range and significance of this rapidly expanding field within European cinema, we need first to establish the cultural and political contexts of sexual migration,

Figure 1.1 Director Santi Zegarra (second from right) with (left to right) Cate Naluwoza, Roman Sorokine and Giovanna Rincon in *Re-naissances/Re-births: The Journey of the Soul* (2018)

Source: *Re-naissances/Re-births: The Journey of the Soul* (2018), directed by Santi Zegarra © Sunkku Producciones.

starting with what exactly is meant in legal and political terms by queer asylum, and the particular obstacles placed in its path.

Queer migration to Europe: asylum, rights, homonationalism

Although SOGI-related rights have been recognised both at an international and domestic level, forming part of the EU's increasingly sophisticated body of asylum laws and policies for migrants and refugees known as the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), there have been major problems in their implementation.⁸ A primary concern has been the burden of queer proof. In an asylum system which still presumes refugees to be heterosexual, LGBTIQ+ refugees must provide conclusive evidence that they are gay, lesbian or trans, or else find themselves deemed 'not gay enough', or not to have the expected gay 'demeanour' and 'dress code', to qualify for SOGI recognition.⁹ 'Not gay enough', like 'too gay', is, of course, an entirely subjective and culturally relative criterion. As Rachel A. Lewis incisively puts it, in order to be considered credible and worthy candidates for asylum, alternatively gendered applicants are compelled to 'perform' a visible identity in the country to which they migrate while at the same time conform to Western stereotypes of (male) homosexual behaviour based on visibility, consumption, and an identity in the public sphere (Lewis 2013). To take just a few among the countless examples of this double bind reported by Human Rights Watch in Austria: in August 2018 the authorities rejected the asylum application of a 27-year-old Iraqi on the grounds that he was behaving 'like a girl' and 'faking' his homosexuality. One week earlier, an 18-year-old Afghan asylum seeker was denied refugee status because, according to the adjudicating official, '[n]either your walk nor behaviour nor clothing indicate in any way you might be homosexual' (Austrian authorities subsequently distanced themselves from this decision and disciplined the official). In addition, while EU member-states are entitled to investigate the validity of individual claims, asylum officers in the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Cyprus (among others) have been especially suspicious of Muslim applicants, as if one could not possibly be both gay and Muslim. The result of this highly inconsistent and ambiguous processing of sexual and gender asylum across Europe is a fundamentally homophobic mispractice of credibility and assessment. Intrusive and sometimes outlandish methods have been employed: applicants to the UK, for example, have been pressured to provide sexually explicit photographic and video evidence, while Czech authorities have attempted to measure degrees of sexual arousal. Some asylum claims have even been rejected on the basis that applicants can 'behave discreetly' and hence avoid persecution in their countries of origin, although this is expressly condemned by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which provides parameters that immigration officers in EU countries must respect.

Certainly, European asylum officers are now officially required to be knowledgeable about issues facing sexual and gender minorities, and put aside their preconceived notions of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

people should behave.¹⁰ For Johannes Lukas Gartner, however, this process should go much further: instead of demanding queer refugees to account for their sexual conduct, it would be more appropriate to question them on their feelings about being (perceived as) ‘different’ in their respective societies, the stigma that arises out of this, the potential isolation that follows, and the related harm they have experienced. Yet the brute reality remains that by presupposing limited notions of supposedly European homosexuality as part of asylum processes, the asylum systems of European countries are ‘moulding’ queer petitioners into a particular Western characterisation of queer identity (Gartner 2015: 136). Queer asylum seekers are required to act their identities in a way that shows they are “‘in place” among the receiving state’s good gay and lesbian citizenry’ (Gartner 2015: 137) – a demand that usually equates to embodying the expectations immigration officials have of their own local and culturally specific queer communities.

The systemic failings and misunderstandings in the provision for queer asylum in Europe are further compounded by the politicisation of its aims and ideals. In a trenchant and well-informed analysis of LGBTIQ+ asylum in the UK entitled *Discourses on LGBT Asylum in the UK: Constructing a Queer Haven* (2017), which examines the relationship between liberalism, nationhood, and hospitality, Thibaut Raboin dissects both the neoliberal management of asylum for LGBTIQ+ seekers and the effects of persisting colonial imaginaries on the representation of sexual freedom. He reveals that the prospect of a safe haven works as an exhortation as much as a promise in asylum, and that the queer futurism offered by current neoliberal discourses on asylum perpetuates the dream of a good life – albeit a homonormative conception of it – where happiness, individual freedom, and autonomy on the market are closely entwined. Such futurism may be summed up by the notion of ‘happy queer futures’ in the UK – one that draws on the model narrative of what Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), has called the ‘happy migrant’, that is, someone who espouses national ideals couched in terms of Empire, the twist here being that sexual diversity is now held aloft as a justification of Empire’s liberation from abjection (by contrast, according to Ahmed, postcolonial ‘melancholic migrants’ exist in a state of discontent due to their refusal of the imperial formula of ‘liberation from abjection’) (see Ahmed 2010a). Moreover, the narratives of asylum cases create a specific temporality whereby ‘queer futures’ are deemed impossible outside the UK. The tropes of the domestic homophobic past and the homophobic ‘elsewhere’ interact in discourses to produce a unique type of politicisation of asylum – one where British liberal queers become personally invested in defending the rights of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers. However, as Raboin convincingly argues, political emotions such as sympathy can constitute both a basis for solidarity and a means of dispossessing claimants of their very agency.

The ideological discourses and ‘queer-migration-to-liberation’ rhetoric and narrative deconstructed and denounced by Raboin are fundamentally ‘homonationalist’ in nature, in that they suggest a favourable association

between a nationalist ideology and LGBTIQ+ people or their rights. A term originally proposed by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), homonationalism has proved crucial for accounting for the exclusionary and normalising effects of queer migration and asylum policies in the global North, and also for understanding the general construction of Western European nations as exceptional in terms of attitudes towards sexual and gender equality vis-à-vis an uncivilised, racialised Other. Indeed, the concept of homonationalism has profoundly influenced the development of queer migration studies, a transdisciplinary and transnational critical field that, since its emergence in the early 2000s in the groundbreaking work of Eithne Luibhéid (Luibhéid 2002) and Lionel Cantú Jr., who proposed a ‘queer political economy of migration’ (Cantú Jr. 2009), has sought to foreground the experiences of queer and nonheteronormative migrants while attending to the ways in which sexuality as a regime of power effectively shapes all migration processes.¹¹ As Lewis writes, recent queer migration scholarship has shown not only how nation-states seek to incorporate queer migrants as a measure of their exceptionalism within neoliberal narratives of modernity, but also how homonationalism (re)produces the norms of sexual citizenship grounded in heteronormative reproductive futurism and able-normativity (Lewis 2019a: 654).

The political critique of the forces of homonationalism in Europe is becoming ever more urgent with the rise in nationalism and xenophobia across the continent and the wave of populist, far-right, and anti-immigrant groups (from Italy’s *Fratelli d’Italia* and *Forza Nuova* to Finland’s *Blue Reform*, the *Danish People’s Party*, and *Alternative for Germany*). Even when not targeting specifically the LGBTIQ+ community, such movements – part of the ‘retribalisation’ affecting Europe’s post-nation states in their attempt to push back against the multitudes (Elsaesser 2018: 127) – have fuelled a toxic and divisive social climate leading to an increase in anti-gay violence and hate crimes across Europe. In such a virulent political environment, homonationalism poses an immanent threat. *Alternative for Germany*, for example, is led by an openly gay woman, Alice Weidel, who, while backing ‘other lifestyles’ including civil partnership for gay and lesbian couples, has expressed her opposition to the legalisation of same-sex marriage and her firm support for the protection of the traditional family. Whether in certain Dutch gay rights discourses,¹² or in the campaign for the minaret ban in Switzerland, or in the aftermath of the 2015–16 New Year’s Eve events in Cologne and other German cities when large numbers of women were allegedly subjected to sexual assault by migrants en masse,¹³ the New Right and European Alt-Right have successfully joined forces with some feminist and LGBTIQ+ voices claiming that women and queers need to be protected from migrants. One of the primary objectives of queer migrant studies is precisely to establish how queer migrants have the potential to resist such state ideologies and practices of homonationalism, and, further, how queer migrant precarity and vulnerability may actually be mobilised as

direct political critique. Examples include the special 2017 issue of *Sexualities* (vol. 20, issue 5–6) entitled ‘Homonationalism: Resisting nationalist co-optation of sexual diversity’ (edited by Richard C.M. Mole), and Hila Amit’s study of queer Israeli emigrants as ‘vulnerable agents’ escaping from – and refusing the narratives of – heteronormative reproductive futurism at the heart of the Israeli nation-state (see Amit 2018).¹⁴

Figuring the queer migrant

In view of the current, highly pernicious, political and cultural discourses around migration, and the fact that queer migrants and refugees still remain for the reasons given a largely hidden and untraceable presence, how is European cinema to represent and figure specifically queer migrants and refugees, whether those actively seeking legal asylum on SOGI grounds or those living illegally in Europe as undocumented migrants, and for whom being queer is just one facet of their marginalised identity? For if the migrant figure is still projected within Western visual and media culture as essentially anonymous and indistinct, caught in the lethal binary of the dangerous foreign invader vs. powerless victim (viz., the stereotypical portrayals of the stateless migrant as a lowly, suffering, traumatised body, effectively invisible because excluded from political representation even if made sporadically hypervisible in breaking news reports), the queer migrant appears altogether more uncertain and undecidable, at times abject, even monstrous. Indeed, queer refugees find themselves doubly ‘other’ and invisible because they are perceived ideologically within the European imaginary as an instance of the demonised ‘bad’ migrant, as opposed to the palatable ‘good’, straight (predominantly male) migrant fleeing on account of poverty, war, famine, and economic deprivation.

Michael Haneke has brilliantly interrogated the positioning of the migrant in European society and culture as a suspect, marginal, and destabilising nonfigure in *Happy End* (2017, France/Austria/Germany), a seething ‘black comedy’ set in Calais where migrants appear to be for rent. In the climactic family reception scene they are presented by the delinquent son Pierre as ‘my friends’ and identified by name and where they came from (‘Mohamed from Nigeria’, etc.), yet they are confined to the far-flung shadows of the frame and denied the right to speak. Rendered effectively faceless and indiscriminate, they are manipulated cynically by indigenous white Europeans (here upper-middle class) to resolve their own murky private scores and petty disputes. Yet the denigrated figure of the mute, undifferentiated migrant as object of racialised Western suspicion and objectification is, in fact, just one of the many highly problematic and charged tropes of the ‘migrant to Europe’ figure that have evolved in European narrative fiction films over the last 20 years. These include the migrant as symptom (implicit or explicit) of European social malaise and crisis;¹⁵ the migrant as spectre;¹⁶ the migrant as unwelcome other beyond recuperation by the state;¹⁷ the migrant as saviour

(usually a nonwhite foreigner arriving to humanise a sad, lonely, white European through natural kindness);¹⁸ and the concomitant trope of the European as white saviour of migrants.¹⁹ This typology of (straight) migrant characters is far from exhaustive and does not, of course, reflect the work of political and humanitarian documentaries attempting to give authentic voice to refugees and asylum seekers.²⁰ But what happens to such tropes when the migrant in question is nonnormative and queer? Are they contested and rewired by the figure of the queer migrant, or further extended and consolidated?

Let us take the example of the low-key, sombre, social realist drama *And Breathe Normally* (2018, Iceland/Sweden/Belgium, dir. Isold Uggadóttir), which begins with an African migrant called Adja (Babetida Sadjo) from Guinea-Bissau travelling with her daughter and sister to Canada where she intends to seek asylum. During a stopover at Keflavík airport in Iceland, and still in acute mourning for her girlfriend who was killed for her sexuality, she is required to provide proof of her sexual orientation or face deportation. Peculiarly, Adja's own sexuality is presented so subtly, even subliminally, that the viewer could easily miss her allusion to her 'angel'. The narrative focuses instead on the odd relationship she forms with the (white) border control officer Lara (Kristín Thóra Haraldsdóttir) who denies her passage through immigration for using a fake French passport. Lara is a struggling single mother and recovering addict living in poverty, and Adja will end up forming a maternal bond with her and her young son Eldar, whom she looks after while Lara is at work, even sneaking the two of them into the run-down refugee centre where she has been consigned after a short prison term so they may enjoy a warm bed for the night. Despite its exemplary feminist and pro-immigration stance, the film thus succumbs rather sentimentally to the ready trope of the (black) migrant as saviour for the troubled (white) European.²¹

Figure 1.2 Adja (Babetida Sadjo) sharing a lighter moment with Eldar (Patrik Nökvi Pétursson) in *And Breathe Normally* (2018)

Source: *And Breathe Normally* (2018), directed by Isold Uggadótti © Zik Zak Filmworks, Entre Chien et Loup, Cinetic Films, Pegasus Pictures, Skot Prods, and Netflix (2019).

Another film offering a queer spin on established migrant stereotypes, although very different in style and register, is the mainstream Norwegian comedy *Welcome to Norway!* (2015, dir. Rune Denstad Langlo), the tale of a jovial racist and xenophobe (Primus) cynically converting his defunct hotel into a shelter in order to profit from public funding for refugees in a country that has been a longstanding haven for migrants. Moving uneasily between caricature and drama as it presents Primus struggling to instal the most basic amenities in order to secure approval from the government, the film lampoons the recently emerging European culture of charitable giving. Yet towards the end, two young women suddenly ride a snowmobile to church for a shotgun wedding. The first is Primus's daughter Oda, the second is her new Lebanese friend Mona, a teenage orphan and asylum seeker who is at risk of deportation. Mona acknowledges she may go to hell for marrying a woman, but she decides this cannot be worse than deportation. Their marriage offers a wry, queer take on the expectation that every comedy film contain a happy ending, and it suggests that real generosity, however desperate and convoluted, may yet cut through the tangle of nationalist sentiment and red tape. Yet is this queering of the European feel-good migrant movie, where the European capacity for feeling and self-transformation is reactivated and authenticated by the migrant other, offering anything more than a neat, crowning, comic twist?

Another standard migrant film trope, that of the spectre, is given a more tangential – yet potentially more propitious – queer treatment in *A Bigger Splash* (2015, Italy/France) by gay director Luca Guadagnino. The film is set on the small Mediterranean island of Pantelleria, the title directly referencing David Hockney's 1967 painting *A Bigger Splash* (as well as Jack Hazan's 1973 biopic of Hockney of the same name). African migrants are glimpsed only intermittently here, notably in one encounter with two of the principal white European and American characters, Pen and Paul, who are visiting the island's wild landscape. During this scene, the viewer is twice offered privileged, subjective point-of-view access to the two white characters, while the migrants themselves are conveyed only objectively in medium-to-long shot as they look back at the Western couple in excited curiosity. Moreover, they remain out of direct earshot; it is not even clear what language they are speaking since their barely audible speech is left untranslated. The couple carry on their conversation about love affairs as if nothing had happened, seemingly impervious to this incomprehensible alien entity. Thereafter, the muted migrants are marooned in the rear of the frame or in the *hors-champ*. Later, as the white protagonists enter the local police station to surrender their passports following the death of one their party (Harry), young black and Arab men and women are shown briefly outside, confined behind a perimeter fence. While registering their presence as they go past, the Europeans immediately look away, though Pen is moved to throw a football back over the fence for them. However, during the same sequence the migrants are directly acknowledged by one disconnected voice-off ('we put them in

an enclosure, it's inhuman – it's shameful – there's twelve of them – they're human beings, theoretically'), as well as by the slightly camp, dreamlike, celebrity-obsessed Marshal (played by noted Italian satirical actor and comic, Corrado Guzzanti), who, despite the pressure exerted by Harry's grieving former lover Marianne, refuses to link the migrants to the scene of one European man's death and thereby incriminate them. Indeed, he remains focused on the tragic drowning overnight of seven migrants from North Africa.

One might justifiably argue here that the Marshal, alone compassionate towards the fate of the migrants, embodies a positive, humanist, queer sensibility. Certainly, a loose, queer/migrant alignment is being tentatively suggested, although it is not elaborated and constitutes only a vague promise. Moreover, as in *Happy End*, the minimally present migrant figures do not even feature in the final credits of the film, which thus potentially stands accused of being complicit with the behaviour of its main characters towards the migrants which it only implicitly critiques.²² For these various reasons, *A Bigger Splash* presents a particular critical challenge, one that underlies many films about queer migration, namely how to read *queerly* for migrant signs and traces in European films where they often remain peripheral and evanescent, yet are still obliquely *felt*.

Queering 'Europe'

The films just discussed call attention to the operative terms of our analysis of European queer migrant cinema, and specifically to what is really meant by 'queer' and 'Europe'. Queer is, of course, an eminently fluid term, usually deployed in its current, affirmative, sexual sense, inspired by Queer Theory, of disturbing and exploding all heteronormative understandings of the 'natural' relation between biological sex, cultural notions of gender, and sexual desire. By breaking the 'compulsory' heteronormative contract binding sex and gender, queer scholarship has called into question the logics of sexual practice and identification rooted in stable formations of gender difference. Indeed, the term 'queer' may be used to describe any sexuality not defined as heterosexual procreative monogamy while emphasising that sexuality is intersectional, that is, a mode of difference contextualised in, and intersected by, a nexus of other differences such as race and ethnicity, class and location. Yet 'queer' is not merely a noun but also a verb or process, and queer-ness is not limited merely to sexual identities – it may be understood in the more general theoretical and political sense of queering and subverting fixed notions of identity such as the family and nation. Dislodging queer from a too-rigid association with same-sex desire thus returns the term to its earlier oppositional force with the capacity to challenge normalising mechanisms of power, including that of the state.

Films like *A Bigger Splash*, where queer migrants (or migrants figured as queer) are not present, but where an inchoate, indefinable relation between

migrant and queer is intimated, raise questions of 'Europeanness' precisely by disputing the idea of Europe as a pristine Eden of enlightened, benevolent thinking. The 'New Europe', which incorporates countries of the former Eastern Bloc as well as border countries like Greece and Hungary, is now a mutable, contested site of post-nation states and deterritorialised national identities continually frustrated by unprecedented waves of migrants from the South and East. As Anne-Marie Fortier suggests, migration, insofar as it 'impacts directly on how individuals, communities, nations or multi/international formations such as the European Union imagine themselves and their (co)inhabitants, encourages the New Europe to be fruitfully analysed and (re)theorised' (see Fortier 2006). With this in mind, might one argue that European films about migration (whether gay or straight), which undermine ideologically fixed and objectifying notions (e.g. the migrant as Europe's negative other), serve also to *queer* the very notion of Europe? We need to return again to the core term, 'migrant'.

In her contribution to *What's Queer About Europe?: Productive Encounters and Re-enchanting Paradigms* (2014), a transdisciplinary volume examining how Queer Theory can help initiate disorienting and counterintuitive encounters for imagining contemporary Europe and probe the blind spots that continue to structure the long and discrepant process of Europeanisation, Nacira Guénif interrogates the central paradox that, to (white) Western, straight minds, migrants are both 'queer' and 'straight'. They are queer on account of 'a series of mythic equations' ('Migrants equal Muslim, Muslim equals fundamentalist aliens, and fundamentalist aliens equal potential terrorists' (Guénif 2014: 75)), but also 'straight' (that is, assumed to be straight), 'while the queerness of their behaviour and mindset is condemned' (Guénif 2014: 75). She notes the perpetuation of 'a "queer" discourse of the strangeness of migrants' (Guénif 2014: 75), for if migrants embody otherness, 'they also represent queer potentialities and configurations, which include among other things food, religion, dress-code, gender, sexuality, and language' (Guénif 2014: 74) – what Guénif suggestively calls 'the flux of complex, embodied, migrant realities' (Guénif 2014: 74). The displaced, lone, migrant, floating (male) body often has nonreproductive sexual relations (however productive he may prove in the workplace), and experiences a distance from the heteronormative family, thus allowing for the creation of new kinds of homosociality. For Guénif, '[t]his queer other threatens the enforcers of biopolitics by making alternative forms of being, becoming, and belonging possible' (Guénif 2014: 76). Yet if '[s]uch queer assemblages expose the fiction of European universalism' (Guénif 2014: 74), they often go unnoticed, not simply because '[t]he State apparatus seeks to convert informal human mobility into a fixed nationalisation process, transforming experience into a governmental frame' (Guénif 2014: 74), but also because 'their invisibility is not discernible within the more recognisable modes of identity politics through which migrant national issues are publicly staged' (Guénif 2014: 74). Nevertheless, as Guénif rightly claims,

these forms stimulate a queer spatio-historical imagination that resists the vertical history of the Nation while also insisting on the incompleteness of the European project of social integration.

This notion of queering Europe via a 'horizontal', post-national perspective (i.e., across nations and ethnic groups) is also explored by Fatima El-Tayeb in *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (2011), which pursues the links between queerness, race, ethnicity and 'Europe' by examining how racialised communities are positioned in the European Union. El-Tayeb argues that the tension between a nonwhite, non-Christian population and persistent essentialist definitions of Europeaness produces new forms of identity and activism (from drag performances to feminist Muslim activism and Euro hip-hop), despite the fact that Europe still stubbornly professes its innocence and disingenuously contains debates on race as being beyond or post-race. In the same vein, filmmaker Nish Gera has spoken similarly of how queer migrants to Europe offer the means of new, positive kinds of intersection and interconnection. This is because, he contends:

LGBT refugees who come to Europe are seen as being more European than perhaps other refugees making the trek across the Mediterranean. LGBT refugees, with a foot both in Europe and in their home culture, can serve as bridges between Europeans and the refugee community.
(Gera 2017)

Such cultural and ethnic queering of Europe, which has led Russian conservatives to castigate the continent as 'Gayropa', forms, of course, part of a larger theoretical project of deconstructing postcolonial Europe, whose definition is contested both internally (through the proliferation of ethnic, religious, regional differences that also transform the family as the fundamental social, emotional, and economic unit – see Simpson 2013) and externally (Europe expanding its boundaries while closing its borders).²³ Yet how the specifically queer reframing of the social, cultural, and political contours of European identity and the European imaginary proposed by Guénif and El-Tayeb work might work in specifically filmic terms, and how fixed, 'straight' notions of Europeaness may be 'queered' in the extended sense of queer, is one of the key questions explored in *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema*. It builds thus on the work notably of transnational film theorist Daniela Berghahn who, in a study of key European diasporic films such as *Lola+Bilidikid/Lola and Billy the Kid* (1998, Germany, dir. Kutluğ Ataman), has proposed 'queering the family of nation' (see Berghahn 2011), as well as of Derek Duncan, a contributor to the volume, who has examined male migration to Italy from Eastern Europe in some recent Italian films where the men featured are not gay, but where their representation constructs a nonnormative heterosexual subject whose presence in Italy depends precisely on their productivity while excluding any kind of

reproductive function. The films' catastrophic plots hinging on the unsuccessful relationship between a migrant man and an Italian woman introduce the spectator to what Duncan terms 'a pedagogy of the non-national body' by queering the heterosexual romance narrative. In the process, Italy itself is queered by the insinuation of the foreign worker into a medium (film) that has long been seen as the privileged cultural vehicle for the construction of Italian national identity. Such queering is only temporary, however, as these films ultimately envisage the eradication of the foreign body from the national landscape.²⁴

Queer migrant relationality and affect

Let us return to the primary question of the asylum process, for migrants and refugees are, of course, never disembodied actors, and, as Fortier well states, at border crossings they *feel* the border materially as well as existentially (see Fortier 2006). The global detention and deportation regimes inflict upon LGBTIQ+ migrants in particular a permanent state of crisis. In a study of the socio-legal production of queer migrant deportability and crisis in the context of political asylum, Lewis has shown how gender and sexuality, along with race, class, nationality, and geopolitical location, produce particular migrants as deportable subjects, and how the historically specific asylum regimes transform LGBTIQ+ migrants into detainable and deportable (and ultimately disposable) subjects. State immigration controls, she forcefully argues, are sites of legalised structural violence by which queer migrants of colour in particular are differentially deprived of the resources needed to make credible asylum claims (see Lewis 2019b). The psychic forms of violence and dispossession that repeated exposure to deportability produces condemn LGBTIQ+ migrants to a state of psychic and emotional crisis and lack of mental well-being, leaving them permanently vulnerable to detention (indefinite in the case of the UK where over 1,000 queer migrants are placed in detention every year) and deportation (at any moment), even in some cases death.²⁵ As Pepsi puts it dramatically in *Shelter: Farewell to Eden*, 'You have to flow, you have to follow the wave, because if you don't, you die'.

Yet if queer migrants are clearly objectified and victimised by European detention and asylum processes, they may also be regarded as agentic subjects with a measure of influence over the border spaces through which they move and the processes of their reception. Sudeep Dasgupta has explored how global space is itself *queered* when sexual asylum law intersects with the testimony of LGBTIQ+ applicants. Analysing the legal interpretation (or reading) of asylum seekers' speech in specific court cases in different countries, Dasgupta argues that while heteronormative understandings of the tripartite relation between biological sex, cultural notions of gender, and sexual desire restrict access to refuge in sexual and gendered asylum cases, the application of the law also destabilises these heteronormative understandings and opens up such restrictive definitions of sexuality and gender

(see Dasgupta 2019b). That is, ‘the hetero/homo and male/female oppositions that undergird sexual asylum cases are both reinforced *and* reworked’ (Dasgupta 2019b: 99; original emphasis). Dasgupta elucidates this double movement:

The dialectic of sexual normalisation and deregulation in cases of sexual and gender asylum is exacerbated by the protocols of reading (by the law) which demand a *linear narrative* of sexual identity from the asylum seeker. An exposition of sexual identity assumes an essential and stable form of gender identity and sexual desire whose gradual realisation is narrativised teleologically, such that at the time of demanding sexual asylum a clear, non-contradictory and fully realised sexual and gender identity has been formed. . . . By reading *for* such narrative evidence of sexual identity, the law is unable to countenance the decentred, ambivalent and contradictory forms through which sexual desire is *lived* by asylum seekers.

(Dasgupta 2019b: 87; original emphasis)²⁶

Hence, the stability of sexual identity is precisely queered when the renderings of unstable sexual desire in asylum seekers’ speech intersect with the reading strategies by the law which attempt to convert them into clear, ‘straightforward’ narratives of sexual identity. Moreover, if, in such cases, gays, lesbians and transpersons become the objects of law, they also become agents in the transformation of law, since the writing of the sexual subject into case judgements striates the global space produced by bodies on the move.

What Dasgupta is ultimately suggesting here is that the unconventional trajectories of individual sexual desire narrativised by mobile bodies produce global space queerly through the experience of forced displacement. Sexual asylum cases, he concludes persuasively,

demonstrate that asylum seekers are individuals who are both subject to the state while also capable of exposing the limitations of the law and altering their relation to the state in transformative ways. . . . The asylum seeker’s body configures the global into the national through international law and *deranges* conventional understandings of both sexual identity and cultural difference.

(Dasgupta 2019b: 99–100) (my emphasis)

For these reasons, queer asylum seekers need also to be viewed as at once receptive and dynamic global agents, with the potential to reframe and transform the official script of European migration. Put differently, every attempted legal queer crossing of the border into Europe may serve to queer the border itself in subtle yet profound and far-reaching ways.

Such an exciting material and theoretical extension of the ‘sensuous economy of migration’ (Fortier 2006) requires us to attend more urgently to the concrete lived realities of queer migrants and the inherently relational nature of migration and mobility. In fact, despite recent media interest in the displacement of Syrian LGBTIQ+ migrants in Turkey,²⁷ the embodied experience of queer migration to Europe has rarely been figured in terms of the specific challenges LGBTIQ+ migrants encounter when navigating state immigration and asylum bureaucracies linked to gendered, racial, and class-based norms of sexual citizenship. Cinema, however, as a medium for tracking at micro-level, and in graphic close-up, the voluntary and involuntary visual, aural, haptic traces of emotion and affect in and through time, offers a unique means for conveying the deep scars (physical, psychological, emotional) of queer migrant lives under the permanent strains of credibility and deportability.

We see this process beautifully at work in a string of recent short dramas which establish queer, relational, ‘migratory settings’, a term for articulating the differentiated figuration of the migrant in shifting relation to others within an inclusive, replotted social space (see Dasgupta 2008). In *Mukwano* (2016, Denmark, dir. Cecile McNair), a Ugandan lesbian asylum seeker, Mary Kabufufu (Wankjiku Victoria Seest), facing her uncertain final interview at the Refugee Board, realises that she has overlooked a clue that might lead her to her girlfriend who disappeared during their escape from Africa to Denmark. Already in a highly precarious situation, desolate and bereft, Mary has to translate her sexuality in order to become ‘readable’ and ‘prove’ her cause (i.e., that she truly loved her girlfriend) while negotiating accepted Danish codes of femininity (not to appear weak, but also not too aggressive). The dreadful emotional pressure and cultural anxiety this creates for her is calmly and sensitively captured by an unflinching camera. The mental scars of queer migrant vulnerability are also movingly revealed in *Crypsis* (2019, UK, dir. Christopher McGill), based directly on accounts of African LGBTIQ+ refugees, where, during his asylum interview, Ayo (David Souk) is forced repeatedly to revisit in his mind the traumatic events that led to him flee his homeland for a new life in Scotland. The cold, clinical space of the interview room provides a contrast to the second part of the film where, later that evening, Ayo enters the queer underground scene of Glasgow in a bid to obtain the required ‘evidence’ of his sexuality, but where again, amidst the alienating chaos of strobe lights and dancing crowds, he relives his unremitting emotional pain etched in the very pores of his skin. Finally, in *Scar Tissue* (2017, Netherlands, dir. Nish Gera), a gay Syrian refugee, Sami (Noah Valentyn), housed in an ‘*asiel*’ in Amsterdam, meets a local white guy, Johan, at a bar and goes home with him. On the way, they encounter a homeless Syrian refugee (Bashir) who asks for a cigarette and then calls them ‘faggots’. Both refugees are homeless in their own ways – Sami culturally and emotionally, Bashir literally – and the film encapsulates

the status of LGBTIQ+ homeless people as internally displaced, voiceless and marginalised people within a larger social and national context where the gay community is generally well integrated. Yet at the same time, *Scar Tissue* also directly challenges what Fadi Saleh has caustically termed the figure of ‘the suffering Syrian gay refugee’ constructed and institutionalised by Western media and humanitarian agencies, which reduces the differences and complexities of Syrian queer and trans histories to a queer/humanitarian visibility paradigm.²⁸

Crossing the borders of relationality in the filmic present in order to explore the multiple physical and psychological stresses on the queer body during the asylum and detention processes, *Mukwano*, *Crypsis*, and *Scar Tissue* fit into a larger pattern of European films portraying the day-to-day transitional experience of migration, where the focus is directly on the physical body (fly-on-the-wall documentaries like *La Permanence/On Call* (2016, France, dir. Alice Diop) showing migrants receiving rare medical care, or visceral dramas such as *Une Saison en France/A Season in France* (2017, France, dir. Mahamat-Saleh Haroun) laying bare the effects of insecurity and enforced immobility). What distinguishes migration films exploring specifically queer physical and mental embodiment, however, is the attention given to self-representation and performativity as part of an individual migratory project combining desired and imagined subjectivities. *Samira* (2013, UK/France), a 28-minute two-screen installation by filmmaker and sociologist Nicola Mai, is a staged, ethnographic account (or ‘ethnofiction’) of the real life history of Karim, an Algerian man selling sex at night in Marseille as a glamorous transvestite (Samira) after having already obtained asylum in France as a transgender woman, yet who now wishes to return to Algeria as the male head of the family. Karim/Samira’s frank and uncompromising story, which Mai amplifies in parts in order to universalise it, is performed entirely by actors, with Mai himself present within the frame as ‘the anthropologist’ and gay witness. *Samira* highlights how, within the present neoliberal structures of sexual humanitarianism and protection which aim also to limit access to the labour market in the global North, migrants selling sex are obliged to represent their biographies and experiences in accordance with stereotypical canons of victimhood and suffering in order to have their rights recognised and avoid deportation. The film accurately illustrates how people’s capacity to act is expressed through decisions that are always embedded within a contextual and relational dynamics (including sociocultural, economic and historical factors) rather than according to abstract and ethnocentric notions of choice (Mai 2018: xiv).²⁹

Yet queer migrant embodiment and relationality may also be found in European feature films that are not ostensibly queer at all and do not even present queer characters, but where the migrant body in emotional turmoil is pictured in such intensive and animate close-up that it opens up masculinity to forms of homoeroticism that directly implicate the viewer. One such is *Charmøren/The Charmer* (2017, Denmark/Sweden), a subtly engrossing, psychologically charged drama about an Iranian refugee in Denmark, directed by Milad Alami, himself an Iranian former refugee to Denmark

now living in Sweden. Faced with deportation unless he can settle down with a Danish partner, the protagonist Esmail (Ardalan Esmaili), living in a hostel for immigrant men and working as a furniture mover, chances his luck for immigration status by seducing local women for sex and ultimately a visa. His courtships of convenience and cultivated performance of smooth, uncomplicated masculinity rely on his costume – one dark blazer and a white dress-shirt. Esmail becomes an object of acute scrutiny, both for those he meets and for the camera: there is an almost obsessive focus on his shirtless, hairy chest and nipples (he is described by an older rival Danish male seducer Lars at the high-class Copenhagen singles bar they both operate in as having ‘exotic’ good looks). Such visual fascination is increased by the sense of Esmail’s inner torment: a father with family in Iran and carrying unspoken knowledge and hidden secrets (in the film’s prologue he experiences at close hand the suicide of a disturbed ‘lover’, later disclosed as the wife of Lars who then becomes his stalker), he feels perpetually blocked from doing what he would most like. Weeping at times like a lost boy, his very body appears haunted and traumatised, the pressures of transactional intimacy pushing him eventually to a form of nervous breakdown. He remains to the end a mystery, always *elsewhere* and a stranger to everyone, even himself, in a morally elusive, fluid blur, figured by the blue swimming pool he plays at drowning in under the benign, amused gaze of his Danish co-worker.

Charmøren/The Charmer places the viewer in the ambivalent and sensuous realm of queer impressions, or what Jason Hartford has aptly called

Figure 1.3 Esmail (Ardalan Esmaili) weighing up his options in the bar in *Charmøren/The Charmer* (2017)

Source: *Charmøren/The Charmer* (2017), directed by Milad Alami © Good Company Films, and Blaq Out (2018).

the ‘implicitly queer’ to account for cinematic intimations of queerness (see Hartford 2017). Such is the film’s discreet, unavowed, even teasing use of bodily intimacy and physicality that when Esmail is told by an Iranian-Danish woman (Sara) to penetrate her anally, and his body is promptly displayed from behind for the viewer’s gaze, this act may even be construed as a sublimated form of gay sex. Indeed, in its stylised respatialising and homoeroticising of the desiring, ‘straight’, migrant figure performing in a foreign language and constantly code-switching, *Charmøren/The Charmer* offers a potential queering of standard perceptions about Danish society and culture, while at the same raising underlying issues about intentionality and spectatorial address. In short, like the uninhibitedly queer shorts mentioned, this more opaque and nebulous work poses vital aesthetic and ethical questions about embodied subjectivity and agency while also pointing to possible new queer migrant forms of homosociality and kinship.

For a transborder aesthetics

To bring together the various strands of this introductory chapter: *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* seeks to do critical justice to the rich panoply of recent European films and works of television capturing in compelling and often daring ways the present-day lives and experiences of LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees. Even if sometimes highly ambivalent or contentious, these impressively diverse representations of the embodied figure of the digitally connected queer migrant constitute a major, new repertoire of queer subjectivities and potentialities. At stake ethically and politically is the elaboration of a fully sentient and desiring queer migrant/refugee subject and the formulation of a new, queer, migrant consciousness that directly counters the homonationalist, xenophobic, and homo/trans-phobic representation of the ‘migrant to Europe’ figure rooted in the toxic binaries of othering (the good vs. bad migrant, host vs. guest, indigenous vs. foreigner). Queer migrants and refugees are to be celebrated as global *shifters* in a continuous, transcultural process with important ethical and political, aesthetic and philosophical, implications, ranging from issues of human rights and citizenship to more existential areas such as subjective identity and gender fluidity. To approach sexual migration as a *mise en scène* of the queer subject negotiating new forms of encounter and intimacy across race and gender, language and culture, class and generation, is also to conceive of new forms of human interrelations and exchange – not only new forms of masculinity, femininity, and queer and transsexual identity, but also new manifestations of sociality and receptivity, friendship and solidarity.

Yet as we have seen, the study of LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees in European cinema involves analysing not just their material depiction, but also how the migrant figure itself *queers* universals of identity like ‘Europe’ and ‘Europeanness’. Queer migrants and refugees on screen present new,

transformative configurations and relationalities (understood as sets of relations across real and imaginary borders between self and other, citizen and migrant), thus providing the basis for new forms of queer cosmopolitanism that serve to refigure straight, idealising notions of Europe and 'European man'. By revealing how European films about migrants and refugees can both disrupt the heteronormative temporality and presuppositions of migration while also denaturalising and dismantling fixed certainties and hierarchies (the patrolled borders of gender and sexuality, nationhood and citizenship), *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* will enable the reader to move decisively beyond standard European protocols, for example, of national belonging based on the model of the family.

The volume is organised thematically into three main parts that serve as a set of interrelated and overlapping critical tensions: 'Trans/migration of Bodies and Borders'; 'Refuge, (non-)hospitality, and (anti-)utopia'; 'Space, belonging, and (anti-)sociality'. These three distinct paths of enquiry correspond broadly to the key modalities of the queer migrant and refugee experience we have delineated: the physical movement across borders; the political request for refuge and asylum; and the existential search to belong while in limbo between migrant and immigrant status. A structural balance is struck between empirically based and more theoretical and speculative essays, and together the following 14 chapters by both new and established voices illustrate the immense range of critical approaches towards sexual migration. The relational, nonhierarchical composition of the collection is evident also in the fact that although some contributors may occasionally engage with the same primary material, they do so from often markedly different perspectives and with different theoretical objectives. Moreover, by engaging with all corners of the European region – from Ireland to Israel, Greece to Sweden, Spain to Hungary – *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* resolutely avoids the traditional focus on the 'prestige' Western European nation-states. It respects the fact that migration is, by its very nature, a mobile construct, and that many of the films discussed cross national borders by virtue not only of their location but also of their co-production and co-funding.

While the volume strives fully to contextualise individual works within the specific contexts of countries with different policies on queer migration and contrasting social, cultural, and political attitudes to homosexuality and LGBTIQ+ rights, it does not aspire to be an all-encompassing comparative survey. Indeed, while broadly located at the confluence of migration studies, gender and queer studies, European and transnational film studies, philosophy and aesthetics, it possesses no underlying ambition to establish a critical consensus. Rather, by drawing on the pioneering insights of scholars in migratory studies and aesthetics working not just in European but also in global migratory contexts (for example, Gorman-Murray 2007 and 2009 on 'intimate mobilities' and migrant masculinities, Al-Samman and El-Ariss 2013 on queer affects), *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European*

Cinema invites the reader to participate in new and original interdisciplinary debates and conversations about migration in contemporary European film and culture that both redefine our understanding of queer and migration cinema, and recalibrate the borders of migration studies in queer terms. Such breaching of strict disciplinary borders exemplifies the book's ethical imperative to problematise and undermine all notions of fixed borders and boundaries (national, aesthetic, formal, generic, sexual). By pursuing bold, migrant lines of theoretical flight, the collection will serve to showcase how European cinema is now redefining and reinventing itself as a 21st-century form of transnational cinema through a continuous queering and transmigration of forms, styles, and genres that encourage new mobilities of thought and consciousness, and, in turn, new types of enlightened critical viewer and reader.

The fifth and final section of the volume comprises an extended interview with the influential theorist and practitioner of queer European migratory cinema, Sudeep Dasgupta, whose work we have already referred to. As well as a leading figure in queer/migrant studies, Dasgupta is co-curator and programmer of the Dutch International Queer and Migrant Film Festival. In 'Curating queer migrant cinema', he talks in enlightening detail not only about the selection process and criteria for the annual festival, but also about the often fraught relations between lived, queer migrant experience and theoretical critique. Addressing some of the key themes running throughout the volume, notably the value of the aesthetic in rendering the relational experience of migration, he also considers his own personal journey and location and how these have informed his critical work and intellectual project, including the particular paradoxes of the Dutch situation – an ultra-progressive and gay-friendly territory with a proud self-image as a tolerant 'guiding nation' (*gidsland*), yet where the faultlines of homonationalism are now acutely visible.

Attending to the sounds and images of queer mobility and working the fertile seams of the queer/migrant relation, *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* aims ultimately to reveal how aesthetic movements and tensions within filmic texts are conducive to relational cinematic thinking that is arguably always *migrant*. A 'transborder' aesthetics is collectively proposed whereby films become transborder experiences stimulating new intersubjective contact zones between viewer and character, the work and the medium. Indeed, the volume will show how the screen can itself become a kind of borderspace, that is, a shifting site of experimentation and conceptual border-crossing (*trans*) at once open and fluid, porous and provisional, where change and identity may be continually negotiated and reconfigured and artificial boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (of visibility vs. invisibility, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them') directly contested. Queer migration reveals itself in such films as a radical state of 'migrancy', that is, a form of transnational, relational, queer being – or better: a 'becoming queer' *beyond borders* (geographical, political, cultural,

ideological, aesthetic, existential) – generating new, mobile, contingent, still-to-be-articulated and fleshed-out queer identities that resist precisely any simple notion of identity or selfhood. How the creation of these nascent, floating forms of ‘transmigratory’ being – glimpsed in exhilarating erotic detail in a film like the aforementioned *A Moment in the Reeds* – may be theorised, and whether they can, and even should be, mobilised politically as a tool of resistance in the neoliberal condition of increasing precarity and far-right nationalist and populist push-back, will be one of the book’s prime concerns. For at what point does the aesthetic, which assumes throughout these pages a preeminently queer, relational mode, keel over and become frozen as the political, hence potentially non- or anti-aesthetic? How, in short, is one critically to prevent a queer aesthetics of migration from congealing and cancelling itself out as a fixed, institutionalised, ‘straight’ form of political resistance? *Queering the Migrant in Contemporary European Cinema* starts and ends on this urgent note of critical enquiry.

Notes

- 1 There is no one simple definition of ‘migrant’. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), a ‘migrant’ is fundamentally different from a ‘refugee’, for whilst refugees are forced to flee to save their lives or preserve their freedom, ‘migrant’ describes any person who moves, usually across an international border, to join family members already abroad, to search for a livelihood, to escape a natural disaster, ‘or for a range of other purposes’ (see the definition of ‘migrant’ in the *UNHCR Emergency Handbook*: <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/250459/migrant-definition> (accessed 22 April 2019)). Moreover, refugees are defined and protected in international law, starting historically with the 1951 Refugee Convention where the term ‘refugee’ applies to anyone who, ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country’. Yet because refugees and migrants often employ the same routes, modes of transport, and networks, the movements of both refugees and migrants are commonly referred to as ‘mixed movements’. And just like ‘irregular’ migrants who have settled without authorisation, refugees also face well-founded fears of persecution and unprotected rights. Hence, if the UNHCR and other agencies have sought to distinguish the different categories of person in mixed migratory movements in order to apply the appropriate framework of rights, responsibilities and protection, they have done so on the basis that improved human rights protection for migrants will also have a positive effect on refugees who move in mixed migratory flows, and vice versa. It is precisely due to the blurring of such definitions that both terms will be used in this volume according to context and authorial intention, which may prove as much rhetorical as legal or political.
- 2 According to the 2016 report on state-sponsored homophobia by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), 78 countries in the world still criminalise people based on their sexual orientation, and five apply the death penalty to such cases. As of 2019, only 28 countries worldwide recognise same-sex marriages.
- 3 A major report published in March 2017 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights revealed that only a few EU member-states have specific

national guidelines for interviewing LGBTIQ+ persons and there is a general lack of adequate training and provision at all stages of the process. See <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/march-monthly-migration-focus-lgbti>.

- 4 See Grierson (2019). In 2018, the Home Office refused 970 claims from LGBTIQ+ nationals of countries where same-sex acts were criminalised, down from 1,096 in 2017 and 1,043 in 2016.
- 5 See also Carlos Motta's *The Crossing* (2017, Netherlands), an immersive film installation comprising 11 short, harrowing, video portraits and confessionals by LGBTIQ+ migrants, including a transgender woman living in Iraq, who speak devastatingly of the physical brutalities launched against queer refugees seeking asylum.
- 6 This first-person narrative mode – a virtual ethical 'ideal' within migration cinema – has been attempted in a number of ways. The television documentary *Exodus: Our Journey to Europe* (2016–17, UK), a participatory project produced by the BBC, assembles footage shot by refugees filming their journeys on mobile phones (see Bennett 2018). The controversial *Les Sauteurs/Those Who Jump* (2016, Denmark, co-dir. Abou Bakar Sidibé, Moritz Siebert and Estephan Wagner) presents African migration to Europe 'live' from the subjective point of view of a young Malian called Abou Bakar Sidibé, who documents with a video camera the extreme living conditions endured by himself and fellow migrants living hand-by-mouth in illegal, makeshift camps on Mount Guru in Morocco, on the border of the Spanish coastal enclave of Melilla (see Williams 2019: 211–13 for detailed analysis of the film and the issues of personal manipulation raised by its Danish producers who provided the equipment and edited it). Similar issues affect *Revenir* (2018, France), co-directed by David Fedele and Kumut Imesh, although this is a far more (self-)interrogative documentary that directly challenges the audience to consider who has the right to tell a migrant's story. Part road-trip, part memoir, part journalistic investigation, and presented by Fedele as a unique collaboration and experiment between filmmaker and refugee, *Revenir* follows a refugee from Ivory Coast now living in France (Imesh) as he returns alone to the African continent and attempts to retrace the same journey that he took ten years before when forced to flee civil war in his country. As with the set-up of *Les Sauteurs/Those Who Jump*, however, it is the non-white (re)migrant who risks danger here (including two weeks in jail and eventual arrest and deportation) in order to provide the precious footage.
- 7 The scholarship on European migratory and diasporic cinema is vast. See, for example, Berghahn and Sternberg 2010, a landmark volume focused mainly on themes of diaspora and assimilation; Donald (2018), a highly specific study of children addressing world cinema in general terms; Loshitzky (2010), an important collection on migration and immigration but with nothing specifically on queer issues; Guha (2015), focused on the urban (im)migrant experience and extremely selective in its choice of films (including 1960s cinema) with no exploration of queer themes; Bayraktar (2016), a crucial interdisciplinary study that offers an excellent springboard for exploring migration and cross-border mobilities in the New Europe in contemporary film and art since the 1990s, although it does not engage at all with queer migration or migrancy despite mention of certain gay-themed works by immigrant filmmakers such as Ayşe Polat and the openly queer Turkish-German director, Kutluğ Ataman; Rungis (2016), a study of otherness in general and primarily about immigrants already settled; Ballesteros (2015), a thematically arranged book that touches on migration, but whose main focus is on immigration and diaspora, with only one short chapter devoted to queer immigration cinema; Abderrezak (2016), a noteworthy volume on migration from North Africa to Europe in European film but lacking any coverage of gay/queer themes; Nathan (2017) specifically on Italian migration cinema; Guillén

Marin (2018) on migrants in contemporary Spanish cinema, which analyses the extent to which Spanish films challenge forms of exclusion and represent ethnicity in a space that includes some and excludes others (she refers to 'contrasted masculinities'); Mendes and Sundholm (2018) featuring articles on documentaries dealing with borders to 'Fortress Europe' (specifically Ceuta, Melilla, and Barcelona) and mediating migration (by Josetxo Cerdán), film workshops, new cosmopolitan approaches to cinema, borderscapes and the cinematic imaginary (including Vicente Rodríguez-Ortega on digital technology), aesthetic imperfection, and political filmmaking in the current era of uneven globalisation. There have also been a host of important articles and chapters in other volumes and journals, including Castro (2019) on new refugee documentaries and carceral humanitarianism; Capussotti (2012) on migration cinema set in Spain and Italy; Betts (2009) on the aesthetics of European integration in migrant cinema; Hagener (2018) on migration and refugees in German cinema; Ponzanesi (2011) on migrant cinema in Europe and the politics of encounter (including reference to *Unveiled/Fremde Haut* in terms of transsexual and transnational politics); Celik Rappas and Phillis (2018) on encounters with undocumented migrants in contemporary European cinema; Previtali (2018) on representations of migratory space in contemporary Italian cinema; and Marciniak and Bennett (2018) on transnational encounters and foreignness in cinema. Finally, numerous articles on European cinema have been published in the major journal on migration, *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*.

- 8 A new set of proposals for the reform of the CEAS was put forward in 2016 by the European Commission, and they affect SOGI asylum claims in precise and acute ways. The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Claims of Asylum (SOGICA) project, funded by the European Research Council and based at the University of Sussex (UK), is currently calling for policymakers to implement these recommendations in order to render the CEAS fairer for SOGI asylum seekers. See SOGI guidelines (with links to country case laws by the UNHCR): www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/practitioners-guide-series-2016-eng.pdf (accessed 23 April 2019); www.refworld.org/sogi.html (accessed 23 April 2019).
- 9 The problems pertaining to SOGI refugee asylum have given rise to a growing host of studies and works of reference in the field of politics of queer migration and asylum studies, most notably Giametta (2017) on the sexual politics of asylum in the UK asylum system, Spijkerboer (2013) on the chief legal issues arising in relation to LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum (including the requirement they seek state protection against violence even when they originate from countries where sexual orientation or gender identity is criminalised or where the authorities are homophobic), and Stella et al. (2016) on sexuality, sexual citizenship and belonging, which engages with notions of sexual nationalism and the construction of Western European nations as exceptional in terms of attitudes towards sexual and gender equality vis-à-vis an uncivilised, racialised other. The proliferation of queer migration and asylum studies reflects also the rise in queer migration refugee and asylum projects and conferences in Europe, not only SOGICA but also the LGBTQ Migration and Asylum Project (based at University College London and led by Richard C.M. Mole); the EPSILON Project (co-founded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union); the EHRC-funded SEXHUM project (Sexual Humanitarianism: Migration, Sex Work and Trafficking) based at Kingston University (UK) and Aix-Marseille University (LAMES – Mediterranean Laboratory of Sociology); and, further afield, the global Queer Migration Network (<https://queermigration.com>) based at the University of Texas-Austin.
- 10 See www.bruu.org/news/2018/08/30/eu-should-follow-un-guidelines-lgbt-asylum-seekers. See also an important 2019 article in *The Guardian* about prejudiced questions and essentialist assumptions about gay people made by UK

immigration judges, resulting in some cases in the outright rejection of queer asylum claims: www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/21/judge-rejected-asylum-seeker-who-did-not-have-gay-demeanour (accessed 22 August 2019).

- 11 This fast-developing field includes Chávez (2013), which explores how queer-ness and immigration are linked in the nation-state's construction of political belonging and exclusion, with the coalitional possibility of radical interaction-ality and coalitional politics in the American context (especially in the case of the US-Mexico border); Cotten (2012), an edited volume exploring transsexual citizenship, radicalised bodies, and trans aesthetics, and which proposes new 'transectionalities' by mapping multiple migrations and queer (re)territorialisations beyond transgender-based identity politics; and Haritaworn and Posocco (2014), which attends to the symbiotic co-constitution of queer subjects folded into life, and queerly abjected, racialised populations marked for death. The latter develops ideas Kuntsman proposed about nationalism, on-line sociality, and queer migranthood in Kuntsman (2009), based on an ethnographic study of Russian-speaking queer immigrants in Israel/Palestine and also in cyberspace, which examines the complicity of queerness with violent regimes of colonialism and war, and the ambivalence of immigrant belonging at the intersection of marginality and privilege. Special journal issues devoted to queer migration include *GLQ* 14:2–3 (2008) ('Queer/Migration'); *Mobilities* 4:3 (2009) ('Love, Sexuality and Migration: Mapping the Issue(s)'); *Sexualities* 17:8 (2014) ('Queer Migration, Asylum, and Displacement'); and *New Cinemas* 6:3 (2009) ('Queering Migration on European Screen'). Among notable general comparative studies of migration, migrant protest, and migratory aesthetics are the following: Marciniak and Tyler (2014), an edited volume teasing out the relations between aesthetics and migrant/immigrant protest, political mobilisation by irregular migrants and pro-migrant activists, migrant life in the global North, and shifting practices of boundary making and boundary taking; Moslund et al. (2015), which addresses issues of history, memory and temporality in relation to migration, such as the influence of migration on historical narratives of national identity, the representation of memorials, and the problems of incorporating migrant stories and cultural memories into 'national heritage' and histories; and Bal and Hernández-Navarro (2011), which considers from multiple angles the spaces where art events occur as 'political spaces', and how such spaces host events of disagreements in migratory culture. For useful, wide-ranging, interdisciplinary introductions to migration theory and aesthetics, see Brettell and Hollifield (2015) and Dogramaci and Mersmann (2019).
- 12 Geert Wilders, leader of the nativist populist *Party for Freedom* (PVV), has championed the idea of an 'illiberal democracy' while pursuing fiercely anti-Islam and anti-migrant policies. Like most populist radical-right parties, the PVV is authoritarian, hostile to elites, and fiercely xenophobic, especially towards Muslims, while claiming to be defending certain liberal values from Islamic tyranny, notably freedom of speech, women's rights, gender equality, and gay rights. By defending the latter, Wilders (not gay himself) is not only depicting Islamic culture as intolerant, sexist, and homophobic, but also claiming the superiority of a Dutch national identity that is increasingly intertwined with secularism. He even offered a resolution in Parliament to allow gay soldiers to wear their military outfit in a gay parade – an embrace of progressive values that has become almost a requirement for the electoral success of conservative parties in the highly secularised Dutch context. The particular case of Dutch homonationalism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 16.
- 13 During the New Year's Eve celebrations there were 22 alleged rapes in Cologne, two alleged rapes in Hamburg, and numerous thefts throughout Germany, mainly in the centre of Cologne. For a discussion of these events, see Žižek (2016) which

argues that the refugee crisis also presents a unique opportunity for Europe to redefine itself by confronting difficult questions (notably the double ideological blackmail of opening 'our' doors as widely as possible, or trying to pull up the drawbridge) and by insisting on the global solidarity of the exploited and the oppressed.

- 14 The pairing of homonationalism with 'pinkwashing', as observed in the way the State of Israel proclaims to defend and advocate gay rights in order to justify the occupation of Palestine, will be discussed in Chapter 9.
- 15 See, for instance, the 2015 French crime drama *Dheepan* (dir. Jacques Audiard), which presents three Sri Lankan refugees fleeing war-torn Sri Lanka in order to paint the migrant as a sign of national precarity and instrument of social disturbance.
- 16 See films like *Waaló Fendo/Where The Earth Freezes* (1997, Switzerland, dir. Mohammed Soudani), which portrays the experience of undocumented workers both in Senegal and Italy who are doomed to disappear from society (Hoffmann 2010: 56) while obligated to foster an image or illusion of success for family left behind; and Gianfranco Rosi's earnest art documentary *Fuocoammare/Fire at Sea* (2016, Italy/France), a hybrid of storytelling and captured raw footage of the rescue of African migrants, which records daily life on Lampedusa where the inhabitants live in the constant shadow of the processing of immigrants off and on its shores. The logic of the enforced disappearing act of the migrant figure is taken to its natural conclusion in *Cose dell'altro mondo/Things from Another World* (2011, Italy, dir. Francesco Patierno), a comedy where a racist, anti-immigrant firm manager, by dint of invoking the help of God to rid Veneto of its immigrants, sees the miracle finally happen: one morning they have all disappeared.
- 17 Dramas like *Manpower* (2014, Israel/France, dir. Noam Kaplan), where Israeli police strong-arm undesirable African refugees and assorted émigrés (played by actual local immigrants) to leave the country; *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns/Welcome to Germany* (2016, Germany, dir. Simon Verhoeven), a provocative mainstream comedy about a rich German family taking in a Nigerian refugee, which allows its domestic audience to chuckle at how racist, xenophobic and all-around inhospitable Germans can be; *Stranger in Paradise* (2016, Netherlands, dir. Guido Hendriks), a provocative, semi-staged documentary about how refugees are prepared for life in Europe, and how Europeans talk to, about, and down to, them; and *The Citizen* (2016, Hungary, dir. Roland Vranik), a descent into the Kafkaesque world of Hungarian bureaucracy through the eyes of a legally established, middle-aged refugee from Guinea-Bissau who is continually applying in vain for citizenship.
- 18 Film such as *De Nieuwe Wereld/The New World* (2013, Netherlands, dir. Jaap van Heusden), an instance of the subgenre of the airport migrant detention procedural, where a West African male asylum seeker enables an isolated, white, Dutch airport cleaner and single mother to rediscover her humanity and so 're-Europeanise' herself after first deriding and exoticising him in blatantly racist terms; and Laura Luchetti's *Fiore Gemello/Twin Flower* (2018, Italy), where a young male refugee and orphan from Côte d'Ivoire is on hand during his nomadic journey through Sardinia to help a white Italian girl, on the run from human traffickers and made literally mute by trauma, eventually regain her capacity for speech and love.
- 19 See, for instance, Philippe Lioret's earnest French drama *Welcome* (2009), about an Iraqi-Kurd teenager helped in Calais by a French swimming coach to swim to the UK – unsuccessfully as it turns out, although the Frenchman has at least done all he could while risking prosecution for helping migrants according to French immigration law L622–1 (the so-called 'Crime of Solidarity' which can

- entail imprisonment for five years and a fine of €30,000); and the magical realist comedy drama *Le Havre* (2011, Finland/France/Germany, dir. Aki Kaurismäki), where the port-side community of Le Havre rallies round to help a young clandestine African stowaway boy who suddenly arrives into Marcel Marx's simple life as a shoeshine. Other European narrative fiction films focusing on the moral and ethical questions raised by how Europeans receive and personally assist the migrant other, and how they prove their humanity in the process (often at a cost), include *Die Farbe des Ozeans/Color of The Ocean* (2011, Germany/Spain, dir. Maggie Peren), and *Terraferma* (2011, France/Italy, dir. Emanuele Crialese).
- 20 Works such as *La Forteresse/The Fortress* (2008, Switzerland, dir. Fernand Melgar), a fly-on-the-wall account of life for asylum seekers in a secluded Swiss detention centre; and *The Purple Field* (2015, Palestine, dir. Nasri Hajjaj), a short following a 14-year-old Palestinian-Syrian boy as he flees war-torn Syria and waits for the Austrian government's response to his asylum application.
 - 21 Contrast this with the 2015 short film, *Rats That Eat Men* (UK, dir. Isobel Mascarenhas-Whitman), where a Ugandan lesbian refugee (Ritah) (Anna-Maria Nabirye), forced to flee a marriage of convenience, finds herself squatting a dilapidated London townhouse with a young, white (straight) Polish labourer (Alojzy) (Joseph Olivennes) on the run from his family. Because both characters are displaced and vulnerable in an equally alien setting, the conditions for the trope of the black migrant saviour for the indigenous white European do not occur. After initial suspicion on both sides, the two forge a provisional (and short-lived) bond of friendship based on mutual respect and support, honesty and good humour (a trained physiotherapist she even kneads his back). Such mutuality is emphasised by the fact that they are both filmed frontally in objective POV fashion within a shared frame.
 - 22 Four Arab-sounding names feature in the final credits, but these are linked to differently named characters and so cannot refer to the migrants who remain nameless and all but invisible – unlike Hockney's painting which is formally thanked (the film also reworks Jacques Deray's resolutely straight psychological thriller *La Piscine/The Swimming Pool* (1969, France/Italy)).
 - 23 See, for example, Ponzanesi and Colpani (2016), which shows how the experiences of colonialism and imperialism continue to be constitutive of European space and the very idea of Europe; Ponzanesi and Blaagaard (2013), which traces alternative models for solidarity and conviviality within present-day Europe; and Robins and Aksoy (2015), which draws on extensive empirical work on the lives of migrant Turks to argue persuasively that the recent shift in the critical agenda regarding migration and belonging (including new work in migratory aesthetics such as Bennett (2011) on relationality as a response to the limitations of identity politics) runs counter to unchanging national positions and the supranational stance of 'official' European policies and approaches towards migration and identity.
 - 24 Duncan examines films such as *L'Italiano/The Italian* (2002, Italy, dir. Ennio De Domenicis), *Passo a due/Pas de deux* (2005, Italy, dir. Andrea Barzini), and *Sai-mir* (2004, Italy, dir. Francesco Munzi), which reveal 'the emphatically unproductive nature of the sexual relations' migrant men have in Italian cinema, and the 'distance they stand from the heteronormative family' (Duncan 2009: 170).
 - 25 See also Mulhall (2014) on queer temporalities and the deportation regime; Weston (2008) on state security, queer embodiment, and the environmental aspects of prison migration; and Luibhéid (2008a) on sexuality, migration, and the shifting line between legal and illegal status.
 - 26 The sociologist Dany Carnassale provides one example of this often impossible demand: four male refugees from West Africa (two from Nigeria, two from Gambia) who attempt to gain asylum in Italy by describing and legitimating

a narrative about their male gay identity that does not necessarily correspond to the actual or potential persecutions they have endured in their countries on account of their sexual behaviour. See Carnassale (2016a).

- 27 See Taylor (2019) on the case of 15 Syrian queer refugees detained in Turkey and dangerously caught up in the UK asylum system.
- 28 See Saleh (2020). According to Saleh, Syrian queer and trans people become intelligible within a 'hegemonic associative frame of queerness as *only* refugee-ness (and refugees who fled to the West, specifically)' (Saleh 2020: 60; original emphasis). Moreover, naming the figure of 'the suffering Syrian gay refugee'

has come to substitute for any real, contextual, and in-depth documentation and analysis of the historical, material, and socio-political conditions of queer and trans* life as well as the particularities of queer suffering in Syria prior to and during the ongoing conflict.

(Saleh 2020: 51)

'Ironically', Saleh argues, 'these prevailing narratives negatively affect LGBT refugees themselves because it benefits them only to the extent that they are able to reproduce very specific suffering narratives that decision-makers deem acceptable' (Saleh 2020: 60). Another film that powerfully contests the 'suffering Syrian gay refugee' figure is the documentary *Mr Gay Syria* (2017, Turkey/Germany/Malta/France, dir. Ayşe Toprak), which follows two gay Syrian refugees – Hussein, a barber in Istanbul closeted from his family, and Mahmoud, a refugee in Berlin and founder of Syria's LGBTIQ+ movement – as they attempt to rebuild their lives and organise together in Istanbul a Syrian heat of the Mr Gay World competition.

- 29 *Samira* forms part of the 'Emborders' art/science project about sexual humanitarianism, migrants and sex work and can be viewed on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/188230888>. Mai's acclaimed 2018 book, *Mobile Orientations: An Intimate Autoethnography of Migration, Sex Work, and Humanitarian Borders*, synthesises theoretically personal and scientific reflection on his 20 years of research with migrants working in the sex industry.