

## Claiming Home: Migration Biographies and Everyday Lives of Queer Migrant Women in Switzerland

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Dissertation / phd thesis

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### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Büchler, T. (2022). *Claiming Home: Migration Biographies and Everyday Lives of Queer Migrant Women in Switzerland*. (Kultur und soziale Praxis). Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839456910>

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TINA BÜCHLER

# CLAIMING HOME

MIGRATION BIOGRAPHIES  
AND EVERYDAY LIVES  
OF QUEER MIGRANT WOMEN  
IN SWITZERLAND

[transcript] Culture and Social Practice

Tina Büchler  
Claiming Home

**Culture and Social Practice**

*Dedicated to my parents*

**Tina Büchler** (Dr.) is a member of the academic staff at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Bern. Trained as a social and queer geographer, she is currently a project leader in several research projects focusing on migration, asylum, economic precariousness, intersectionality, and human rights. She is also Co-director of the Graduate School Gender Studies, which brings together doctoral students from different disciplines and faculties who adopt a feminist perspective in their dissertations.

Tina Büchler

## **Claiming Home**

Migration Biographies and Everyday Lives of Queer Migrant Women  
in Switzerland

**[transcript]**

This publication is based on a dissertation of the Faculty of Science of the University of Bern entitled “Claiming Home: Migration Biographies and Everyday Lives of Queer Migrant Women in Switzerland,” supervised by Prof. Dr. Doris Wastl-Walter of the University of Bern and co-supervised by Prof. Dr. Sallie A. Marston, University of Arizona/USA.

Published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.



### **Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>



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Cover layout: Maria Arndt, Bielefeld

Foreign-language editing and proofread: Clay Johnson

Printed by Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar

Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-5691-6

PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-5691-0

EPUB-ISBN 978-3-7328-5691-6

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839456910>

ISSN of series: 2703-0024

eISSN of series: 2703-0032

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

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# 1. Introduction

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In September 2006, the Swiss Socialist Party hosted a round-table discussion about an upcoming national vote on yet another bill aimed at aggravating the conditions required to obtain asylum in Switzerland. At the event, the bill was debated specifically from the perspective of homosexual asylum seekers. Among other things, the new bill (which passed comfortably ten days later) reinforced the principle of *Glaubhaftigkeit* (credibility) in Swiss asylum procedure. This principle requires asylum seekers to present their case convincingly and free of contradictions immediately after arrival in Switzerland. If inconsistencies emerge during the interrogations – especially in regard to the basis of the asylum claim – the chances of being granted asylum are considerably diminished. At the round-table discussion, several practitioners and human rights advocates warned of the disadvantages this principle would create for people who fled to Switzerland based on their sexual orientation, especially in cases in which asylum seekers have been exposed to violence by the authorities in their home country.

At the event, the president of the largest Swiss lesbian organization remarked: *“Viele, die das Wort ‘schwul’ das Leben lang noch nicht in den Mund genommen haben, weil sie sich nicht getraut haben, und dann sollten sie plötzlich Klartext sprechen, oder? Wir wissen alle, die sich selber mal geoutet haben, wie schwierig das ist”* – “Many who have not uttered the word ‘gay’ ever before in their lives because they did not dare to, and then they are suddenly supposed to speak plainly, isn’t that right? All of us who have come out ourselves know how difficult this is.”

This short statement quietly delimits the parameters of this study. “Quietly,” because it does so mainly in terms of absences. The most obvious absence at the round-table was that of queer people who had personally passed through the Swiss asylum procedure. Instead, stories were told *about* them, sometimes based on professional experiences with, but more often grounded in stereotypical assumptions about ‘them.’<sup>1</sup> In the quote above, sexually non-conforming asylum seekers are, for instance, assumed to harbor a “gay” identity ready to be released from the closet as soon as a liberal enough social

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1 Single quotation marks are used to mark commonly used terms, or commonly used terms the author views critically (scare quotes). Double quotation marks are used where specific speakers or authors are quoted verbatim.

context is given. The statement moreover establishes the asylum seeker as a member of a postulated “us”: a global queer community sharing a sexual identity and associated experiences of discrimination. From this, a paradoxical image of Switzerland emerges: On the one hand, Switzerland is implicitly portrayed as an open and liberal country, an ideal home for the global queer family, a place where queer people from outside Western countries naturally desire to live. On the other hand, Switzerland emerges as a xeno- and homophobic place that is not only characterized by asylum practices that are hostile to queer asylum seekers but moreover also by the difficulties that even non-migrant queer people face in the process of ‘coming out.’

The concerns debated in the round-table discussion (and the assumptions expressed therein) are paradigmatic examples of the prevailing discourses around queer migration in Switzerland. Asylum has remained virtually the only arena in which queer migrants seemingly gain visibility. Indeed, there is a growing number of people claiming asylum in Switzerland based on their dissident sexuality who have fled to Europe in the hope of escaping prosecution, incarceration, or even the death penalty in their home countries (Bär 2014). In this regard, I fully agree that there is a pressing need for a revised asylum procedure that takes these threats seriously. At the same time, lesbian and gay activism and scholarship in Switzerland to date has largely failed to critically reflect on the effects and implications of this preoccupation with queer asylum.

The implications of this are multiple and far-reaching. First, tempted by the promise of scandalizing human rights news, gay and lesbian rights advocates often tend to describe queer migrants’ home countries and compatriots in exceedingly stereotypical ways, pitting a modern gay-friendly ‘West’ against a backward homophobic ‘Rest.’<sup>2</sup> Such narratives, though well-intended in favor of queer asylum seekers, represent “strategic shortcuts” (Miller 2005) that problematically situate all sexually non-conforming people within a growing international global gay and lesbian movement jointly working towards liberating lesbians and gays around the world. Second, the preoccupation with asylum automatically leads to a preoccupation with *male* immigrants. For instance, between 1993 and 2007, of fifty-two immigrants who sought asylum in Switzerland based on their homosexuality, only four were women, a bias that has since persisted (Bär 2014, Bertschi 2007). Third, the fixation on queer asylum renders invisible the (significantly

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2 Throughout this study I use the term ‘West’ to refer to dominant discourses around ‘culture’ and development that cut the globe in half, sometimes horizontally into North and South, sometimes vertically into West and Orient (I use ‘Orient’ rather than ‘East’ as a tribute to Edward Said’s work (1978)), and sometimes conflating the two, resulting in a ‘West’-and-‘Rest’ logic. All of these discursive divisions work to maintain the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of Northern America, Western Europe, and Australia/New Zealand over the South and Orient. Queer postcolonial scholars are increasingly discussing discourses juxtaposing in opposition to each other a gay-friendly ‘West’ and a homophobic ‘Rest’ under the term ‘homonationalism’ (see Chapter 3.4.3). Jasbir Puar (2006), who coined the term, chiefly refers to state-related actors deploying such discourses to justify imperialist moves and a politics of exclusion against certain countries and their (migrant) people. Paola Bacchetta and Jin Haritaworn (2011:134) have distinguished three types of homonationalist discourses: (1) Homonationalism as performed by state-related actors; (2) homonationalism as performed by non-state actors (as under discussion here); and (3) *homonationalist* discourses, which the authors understand as transnationally produced and globally circulating neocolonial, orientalist, sexist, and queerphobic discourses.

larger number) of queer migrants who enter the country as 'regular' immigrants. At the same time, the discourses around asylum only *seem* to make queer asylum seekers visible. As Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and María do Mar Castro Varela remark:

In publications or public debates about lesbians and gay men, everyday lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual migrants and refugees almost exclusively appear as multicultural accessories or as problem cases. It is problematic when refugees and migrant women are only mentioned in the context of issues like asylum but remain unmentioned in discussions about other issues such as sexuality, relationship, education or general politics. CSD<sup>3</sup> posters often refer to the 'multicultural' character of the community. But where in the queer movement is the theoretical engagement with black feminism and the writings of queer migrants? Engagements with concepts like Gloria Anzaldúa's or Cherrie Moraga's 'Queer of Color,' which frame racism, colonialism and anti-Semitism as constitutive elements of Western society, have hardly received any attention to date. In this way, lesbian women living in exile or in the diaspora are objectified. They are represented as transporters of ethnicized collectives. The complexity of their individual lives remains unacknowledged. (Castro Varela and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2000:103-104, my translation)

The present study addresses this persisting discursive absence of queer migrants' lives and concerns by engaging with biographical narratives of queer migrant women in Switzerland. More specifically, it addresses queer women who, as adults, have moved their everyday lives to Switzerland wholly or partially, permanently or only for a certain period of time, and who are perceived as racialized Others, or *Ausländer/Ausländerinnen* (literally 'outlanders,' foreigners), based on social markers such as language, surname, skin color, body language, clothing, and so on. Seeking to avoid framing sexualities or sexual identities as ahistorical or universal, the term 'queer' is thereby employed analytically to address women who explicitly identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer; women who identify themselves with non-Western sexual identities such as *tomboy* in Indonesia or *pengkid* in Malaysia; women whose sexual practices do not align with their sexual identities (such as women who entertain same-sex relationships but identify as heterosexual); or women who do not frame their sexualities in terms of an identity at all. In terms of gender identity, this study focuses on self-identified women, but in the process of seeking interviewees deliberately left the concept of 'woman' fuzzy at its edges. While eventually all research participants explicitly self-identified as women (rather than trans people, for instance, a term that was not used as a self-descriptor in the sample discussed here), many participants navigated both femininities and femaleness as well as masculinities and maleness.

The questions guiding this research address both individual and structural aspects of queer migrations: How does sexuality shape queer women's migrations, considering different phases of migrating such as taking the decision to leave; taking the actual journey to the new place (and maybe journeying back again, or back and forth at varying

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3 CSD = *Christopher Street Day*, the annual commemoration of the Stonewall riots in New York that are purported to have triggered the global gay movement (but see e.g. Massad 2007).

intervals); and creating one's place in the new surroundings? How do these migrations in turn shift queer migrant women's perceptions of their sexualities? How do they negotiate hegemonic sexualities in Western Europe such as normative heterosexuality or the figure of the 'lesbian'? How do imaginations of migrant and hegemonic sexualities interplay in the discursive delimitation of dominant and 'other' sexualities? How are these discourses implicated in nationalist and exclusionary moves, and what are the effects of such discourses and moves on queer migrant women's lives? Within this area of interest, the study pursues three main objectives:

*Differentiating the image of immigrant women in Switzerland by making visible queer migrant women.* Due to recent shifts in immigration and asylum policies and procedures, a growing number of queer migrant women have been entering Switzerland. However, there is scant knowledge about this 'group' of immigrants. In Switzerland there are few designated spaces for queer immigrant women (such as organizations or events specifically addressing this subject position), and this was even more the case when this research was started in 2005. Both lesbian and diasporic communities are marked by mechanisms of exclusion, which often render queer migrant women absent from, or invisible in, these spaces. Further, political debates, media reports, as well as migration research in Switzerland are invariably organized around the assumption that migrant women are heterosexual. This manifests for instance in the persistence of stereotypical images that victimize migrant women as dependent housewives, oppressed daughters, or trafficked prostitutes. By engaging with queer migrant women's narratives, this study complicates the image of immigrant women in Switzerland and raises awareness about their realities and concerns. The guiding question with regard to this objective is: How do migration biographies, perspectives, and everyday experiences and practices of queer migrant women in Switzerland (re)produce and/or disrupt existing discourses around migrant women in Switzerland?

*Gaining an understanding of transnational configurations of sexuality and processes of identification.* The multi-layered discursive absence of queer migrant women stands in paradoxical contrast to their corporeal presence in Switzerland. This forces them to negotiate multiple landscapes of exclusion and to reappropriate and reinscribe real and imagined spaces and places in order to create a sense of belonging. This study analyzes these complex processes of identification and appropriation, focusing particularly on how queer migrant women navigate conflicting loyalties in the daily 'doing' of their identities and in their efforts to create and reconfigure the space called 'home.' The guiding question with regard to this objective is: What is 'home' to queer migrant women, and how do they create belonging? Within this field, further guiding questions are: How do queer migrant women perceive their sexuality to have been implicated in, and shifted through, their migration? What strategies do they devise to manage the exclusions they face based on their multiply marginalized positionality, especially as queers, immigrants, and women? What do these marginalizations mean in terms of their membership in their families of origin, in their diasporic communities, in the Swiss lesbian community, in their workplace, in their sports team, in their reading group, or in their home?

*Analyzing the production and disruption of sexual norms.* At the same time, this is not so much a study about 'them' as it is an examination of configurations of 'us and them.' Western sexual norms and identities are as much a result of postcolonial and transnational configurations of desire as are non-Western sexualities; indeed, the two must be understood as mutually constitutive (Stoler 1995). My interest lies, on the one hand, in analyzing the mechanisms of these co-constructions and examining the ways in which these interdependencies shape and regulate queer migrant women's biographies, self-conceptions, and everyday experiences and practices. On the other hand, I am interested in how queer migrant women's presence and practices necessarily disrupt normative ideas about same-sex sexuality – and, more concretely, about 'lesbians' – in Switzerland. This is not to suggest that there has ever been such a thing as a discrete Swiss context with a 'pure' Swiss concept of female same-sex sexuality or lesbianism growing from within which is now being upset by queer migrants. Rather, following Doreen Massey's concept of space (2005) as "simultaneity of stories-so-far," my analyses are guided by the idea that the ways people in Switzerland have thought about and practiced sexuality have always already been entangled with global relations of power and transnational circuits of desire. The guiding question concerning my objective here is: How are queer migrant women's self-conceptualizations and practices enabled and disciplined by dominant discourses around sexuality in Switzerland, and how do their self-conceptualizations and practices in turn reiterate or subvert these discourses?

In engaging with the subject position and experiences of queer migrant women in Switzerland, this study has mainly drawn on three bodies of scholarship. At the same time, it has also extended these literatures by addressing some of their knowledge gaps. The first is geographies of sexualities, which examine the spatialities of sexualities and the sexualization of space. Here, however, queer geographies have often disregarded cross-cultural and transnational formations of same-sex intimacy and heteronormativity, which continues to hold true especially for German-speaking geography. Second, this research engages with and contributes to queer migration studies. This emerging scholarship explores the interlinkages between migration and sexuality, but has produced scant ethnographies addressing queer migrant women, and none in Switzerland. Lastly, this study converses with feminist migration research in Switzerland, which has largely remained organized around the assumption that migrants are heterosexual. This study enriches this scholarship by applying a queer perspective on migration, demonstrating how sexuality structures the migration experience (of *all* migrants), and how, in turn, migration shapes sexual norms.

My motivation for undertaking this research was twofold. One motivation was my perception of the Swiss lesbian community as an exceedingly white space and 'invisibilization machine' of non-white queer women. This invisibility made me wonder about the situation and experiences of queer migrant women in Switzerland, particularly of women who have come to Switzerland as adults and do not have access to the social networks of people who have grown up in Switzerland, and who often do not speak any local language at first. I suspected that upon closer inspection, the purported global 'rainbow family' was not going to turn out to be as inclusive and safe as its idealized image might suggest. This unease met with my horror at the intensifying systematiza-

tion of the exclusion of ‘foreigners’ in Switzerland. Over the few years leading up to this study in 2005, exclusionary laws, policies, and practices in the realms of immigration, asylum, civil law, social welfare, health insurance, and specifically anti-Muslim laws had been implemented with increasing speed and severity. This development was further fueled by undifferentiated migration and social scientific scholarship, media reports, and everyday conversations, which all easily passed under the radar of what was commonly understood as (blatant) ‘racism.’ Amidst all this, I began to wonder how queer migrant women experience and negotiate these everyday racisms and the stereotypical, heterosexist images of migrant women upon which they are based.

Yet when I started this research in 2005, I was unable to locate any self-declared queer migrant women activists or activist groups in Switzerland who were explicitly conducting an identity politics from this intersectional subject position. I interpreted this perceived scarcity of such activism not in terms of an absence of issues worth politicizing (or, as some early critics of this project would have it, in terms of an absence of a significant enough number of queer migrant women in Switzerland for such activism to come into being), but instead suspected it to be a result of structural exclusionary processes that work to invisibilize this intersectional positionality.<sup>4,5</sup> While this conclusion reinforced my decision to work on the topic, it at the same time raised major ethical questions. I was facing the feminist dilemma: On the one hand, I wanted to raise attention to a possible problem zone, a blind spot of intersectional discrimination, a process of invisibilization. On the other hand, in the almost-absence of an identity politics being performed from this subject position, my investigations threatened to create the very ‘group’ they sought to portray, with the attendant problems of defining a political subject and identity. These ethical concerns were aggravated by the outsider perspective I was about to take on this ‘group’ from my own positionality as

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4 As recent Swiss critical race scholarship has shown, queer women of color have been part of the queer/feminist movement and of Black/migrant activism for a long time. However, in the years leading up to this study, their intersectional positionalities tended to be invisibilized within these movements. This mechanism persists to this date: As Romeo Koyote Rosen, who identifies as Afro-German queergender Transform, describes a point in their biography: “*In der Schweiz bin ich eine lesbische Aktivistin. In den Vereinigten Staaten bin ich eine Schwarze lesbische Aktivistin*” – “In Switzerland I’m a lesbian activist. In the U.S. I’m a Black lesbian activist”. And later: “*Ich werde von binären Transpersonen, die sich auch politisch, sozial und rechtlich für Transthemen engagieren, nicht als Schwarze Transform wahrgenommen*” – “Binary trans persons who also engage in trans issues politically, socially, and legally do not perceive me as Black Transform” (Rosen 2019:295,301). In 2004, Rosen founded the activist platform *sündikat*, together with other queergender persons of color. I became aware of this group due to their event *off\_pride* in 2009, an alternative event to the commercialized Zürich Gay Pride. However, it was not until later that I came to know *sündikat* as an intersectional queergender platform that specifically also addresses people/queers of color. Prior to this, I had perceived *sündikat* as a platform mainly addressing genderqueerness (albeit with an explicitly intersectional and inclusive policy).

5 A related example for the invisibilization of people of color is the case of Black women who were public figures in Switzerland in the past, but who were subsequently ‘forgotten’ in an act of collective amnesia and hence erased from the history of women in the Swiss public sphere (dos Santos Pinto 2013).

a white Swiss ethnographer. Furthermore, the scarcity of an according activism rendered it impossible for me to follow some critical postcolonial scholars' proposition to closely collaborate with advocate groups when researching marginalized subject positions (Essed 1991, Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics<sup>6</sup>).

I hence wanted to 'make visible' queer migrant women's experiences while at the same time acknowledging that, given the persistently colonial order of things, this would eventually remain impossible in many ways. As Sara Ahmed (2000:55-56) argues, white feminist ethnographers cannot simply 'give voice' by including quotes of 'other' women in a text or by simply declaring them to be 'research partners' or 'co-authors' rather than 'research objects.' This would mean to conceal the existing power relations and attendant privileges that eventually often allow the white ethnographer to gather together the ethnographic document, perform the analyses, and earn its merits. At the same time, Jasbir Puar (2002a:125-126) argues that for privileged feminist ethnographers to 'stay home' – that is, deciding against conducting research on marginalized positionalities – is not a neutral decision, either.

Against the backdrop of this representational dilemma, I attempted to put to use methodological and analytical instruments that promised to enable me to "welcome those voices that refuse to speak 'with' the one who knows," (that is, with the white ethnographer), as Sara Ahmed (2000:64) suggests. In the following excerpt, Ahmed refers to a letter that Huggins et al. wrote to Diane Bell, in which the authors criticized Bell, a white feminist, for falsely declaring Topsy Napurrula Nelson, an indigenous woman, as her alleged 'co-author' of an article, falsely creating the impression that the two women had authored the article on a level playing field:

Such a welcoming of those who refuse assimilation would be about opening up the possibility of a knowledge which does not belong to the privileged community, and hence which contests the boundaries by which that community is formed. It would mean accepting the limits of the knowledge that one has already claimed. It would mean unlearning the response to those dissenting voices which can hear those voices only as hostile. It would also mean reading the letter by *Huggins et al.* as a gift to white feminism. If white feminism could begin to receive that gift, and speak to those others who will not be assimilated into an epistemic community, then a dialogue may yet take place. (Ahmed 2000:64, emphasis original)

When designing the study, I thus sought methodologies and methods that I believed may be put to work against the colonial practice of framing racialized people as research objects, at least to a certain extent, through making room for subaltern counter discourses (see Chapter 4). As I was writing, I tried – certainly not always with success – to reflect on and address the problems arising from representing the Other, for instance by including lengthy interview passages in the original language in order to allow for alternative interpretation; by including my own questions in the transcripts where applicable; or by explicitly reflecting on how the fact that biographical narratives are always co-productions of two very specifically positioned interlocutors can

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6 Decoloniality Europe: Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics, <https://decolonialityeurope.wixsite.com/decoloniality/charter-of-decolonial-research-ethics>, downloaded on May 22, 2020.

be considered in the analysis of interviews. This latter reflection importantly included thinking about the effects of my own being a woman and lesbian within my field of study. While this fact frequently opened doors and created a sense of mutual interest and understanding between myself and my interlocutors, it also bore the risk for these alleged commonalities to remain unquestioned and hence to become automatically interpreted from the white researcher's perspective. Indeed, a lack of a critical perspective on alleged commonalities may result in a 'whitening out' of the vastly different ways in which people do, or do not, understand themselves as gendered and sexualized beings. Further, a lack of reflection on assumed commonalities in terms of gender and sexual identities and practices may hinder insights on how the experience of racialization (or lack thereof, on the part of the white ethnographer) represents a crucial limit to the assumed intersubjective understanding between 'lesbians' (see Chapter 4).

This book is structured as follows: The first part, which comprises Chapters 2 to 4, establishes the historical, theoretical, and methodological context of the study. Chapter 2 describes the social, political, and economic context and hence the discursive field the interviewed queer migrant women entered when arriving in Switzerland. Specifically, it traces the development of discourses, policies, and practices in Switzerland around immigration on the one hand and female same-sex sexuality on the other. Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of the (scant) existing research on queer migration to Switzerland. Chapter 3 lays the study's theoretical foundation. First, it expounds the understanding of space that has both guided the conceptualization of this study and emerged through it. This is followed by an introduction to the research fields of queer migration studies and geographies of sexualities respectively, focusing on the contributions within these research areas that this study has drawn on and extended. Chapter 4 offers methodological reflections and describes the sampling process.

The second part of the study, Chapters 5 to 10, comprises the data analysis. Chapter 5 explores how queer migrant women perceive their sexualities to have shifted through their migration to Switzerland and examines the ways in which these processes of identification are tied into dominant discourses around sexuality in Switzerland. Chapter 6 is concerned with family matters. It first analyzes queer migrant women's relationships with their families of origin and then explores how sexualities and national, ethnic, and cultural identity become co-constructed within the space of the family. The second part of the chapter engages with queer migrant women's discourses and practices around reproduction and queer family foundation. Chapter 7 examines queer migrant women's ways of relating to their diasporic communities and compatriots, exploring how sexualities are negotiated in these spaces. Chapter 8 addresses the issue of sexual citizenship. Specifically, it engages with queer migrant women's experiences with state legislations, policies, and practices and scrutinizes how these mechanisms produce and discipline migrant sexualities. Chapter 9 explores the role of work in queer migrant women's migration biographies and examines work and the workplace as sites of identification. Finally, Chapter 10 reflects on the urban and the rural as scales of identification, examining how queer migrant women imagine the urban and the rural, and how they experience urban and rural lives.



## Postscript: Raceless Racism in Switzerland

When I set out to research the situation of queer migrant women in Switzerland in 2005, race as a relevant historical building block of the Swiss nation and racism as its persisting manifestation were difficult issues to raise in Swiss public discourse, and scholarly literature on contemporary racism and on the histories and effects of Switzerland's implication in the colonial project was insular. 'Race' and 'racism' commonly tended to be framed as something that had once happened in Germany but was now overcome, and as something that now only existed in places outside Europe, such as particularly in the U.S. or in South Africa (Purtschert 2011). In 2014, when I was finishing up my PhD thesis – which this book is based upon –, these narratives were beginning to reveal cracks. Swiss anti-racist movements were strengthening and diversifying due to the foundation of new organizations like *Bla\*Sh*, *Berner Rassismusstammtisch*, *INES*, *Afrolitt*, or *Collectif Afro-Swiss*, who explicitly address racism in Switzerland in the context of its connectivities to Swiss coloniality. Further, scholarly publications mapping racism in Switzerland and its impacts on racialized people targeted by it were about to be published (e.g. Boulila 2019a and 2019b, Efonayi-Mäder et al. 2017, Espahangizi 2015 and 2016, Lavanchy 2015, Michel 2015, 2016, and 2019, Naguib 2016, Wa Baile et al. 2019). These investigations into contemporary racisms in Switzerland are in an intense conversation with the equally emerging Swiss postcolonial scholarship (e.g. Purtschert 2019, Purtschert et al. 2012, Purtschert et al. 2016, Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné 2015, Schär 2015). This field of study was originally mainly dedicated to retracing the Swiss history of 'colonialism without colonies' by excavating Switzerland's manifold implications in slavery and colonial trade (e.g. David et al. 2005, Fässler 2004, Zangger 2011). More recently, postcolonial scholars have also begun to analyze the historical discursive construction, consumption, and exclusion of the exoticized, racialized colonial Other. Indeed, it is against this figure of the exotic Other that the figure of the Swiss white, autonomous, enlightened Self emerged that then became the subject of exclusionary Swiss nationalisms. Postcolonial scholars also analyze contemporary continuities of Swiss coloniality, examining "how colonial and postcolonial constellations are currently negotiated, reproduced and re-encoded, and how these are related to contemporary forms of racism" (Purtschert et al. 2016:287).

This critical perspective sits uneasy with the dominant Swiss self-perception of always having been a 'colonial outsider' (Purtschert et al. 2016:293). As Noémi Michel argues, this self-perception

has nurtured discourses of 'exceptionalism,' particularly of a conviction that the history of race has been – and still is – extraneous to Switzerland. [...] It is also the root of the current 'restrained recognition of Swiss forms of racism' in which racism is reduced to individual intentions and refers to explicitly violent or verbal acts that are disconnected from broader structures and histories. (Michel 2015:422, quoting Purtschert 2012:112)

In other words, Switzerland has a tendency to "understand itself as a place *where 'race' has no history*" (Michel 2019:96-97, emphasis original, my translation). As Michel writes elsewhere, the Swiss politics of postcoloniality hence continue to privilege the conviction that there has never been a colonial past in Swiss history, concluding that "[s]uch a denial facilitates the production of raceless racism and hinders the public voice of

individuals whose bodies and names are visibly marked by the long history of the construction of race as a category of difference” (Michel 2015:411).

This emerging perspective on ‘race’ and ‘racism’ in Switzerland allows for a retrospective reading of the context within which the research discussed here was undertaken as a space-time of ‘racism without race,’ in which racism is normalized but denied. This critique is part of a larger line of argument in European critical race studies, postcolonial studies, and the queer/people of color critique that exposes contemporary Western Europe as colorblind (e.g. Balibar 2004, Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, El-Tayeb 2011, Essed 1991, Goldberg 2006 and 2009). For instance, in her analysis of ethnicity in postnational Europe, Fatima El-Tayeb analyzes dominant narratives that frame Europe as “a space free of ‘race’” (El-Tayeb 2001:xv). She argues that this figure of raceless Europe “is not only central to the way Europeans [or, we may specify, the Swiss] perceive themselves, but has also gained near-global acceptance” (ibid). This is remarkable, considering that the very concept of race originated in Europe; that race-based politics permeated the colonial and fascist eras; and that the ghosts from these eras continue to haunt contemporary European politics to this date.<sup>7</sup> Instead, these discourses firmly locate contemporary racism, and resistance to it, in the U.S.

The absence of discourses around race, or discourses geographically ‘displacing’ race, do not, however, signify an actual absence of racism in Europe (or Switzerland). Instead, “the ideology of ‘racelessness’ is the process by which racial thinking and its effects are made invisible.” It is an “active process of ‘forgetting’” that precludes the possibility of addressing racism (El-Tayeb 2011:xvii,xxiv). Within this framework of ‘forgetting,’ migrants, especially including native speakers of European (or local Swiss) languages who are perceived as non-white, remain eternal newcomers. They are forever ‘just arriving’ (and hence forever potentially leaving soon again), and subject to constant defamiliarization within European nations. This dynamic persists regardless of the period of time that has passed since these migrants (or their ancestors) have actually ‘arrived,’ which in the case of an immigrant’s (grand)children spans generations, or in the case of European Roma, several centuries. As El-Tayeb sums up:

‘[P]olitical racelessness’ does not equate experiential or social racelessness, that is, the absence of racial thinking, rather, it creates a form of racialization that can be defined as specifically European both in its enforced silence and in its explicit categorization as not European of all those who violate Europe’s implicit, but normative whiteness, allowing to forever consider the ‘race question’ as externally [...] imposed. The result is an image of a self-contained and homogenous Europe in which racialized minorities remain outside permanently. (El-Tayeb 2011:xxviii)

The context of this study hence has to be understood as one in which racism is openly condemned and the terms ‘race’ and ‘racism’ are avoided,<sup>8</sup> while at the same time racial-

7 Note, for instance, that in Switzerland the German term for ‘race’ (*Rasse*) was widely used until the 1970s (Germann 2016), in contrast to other European countries, where the term was tabooed in the post-war era.

8 Noémi Michel (2015) provides a powerful example for the avoidance of the term ‘racism’ in Switzerland. She argues that in the wake of the vehement debates around the infamous poster by the

ization is in fact systematically exerted. Or as Noémi Michel writes specifically for the Swiss context: “Despite the fact that ‘race’ is tabooed, it continues to be effective, which means that social meaning and hierarchization continue to be produced through racializations” (Michel 2019:91, my translation). This taboo encompasses “institutional spaces, public debates and interpersonal relationships” and effectively nips an open discussion about racism in Switzerland in the bud. The context of the fieldwork of this study is a space-time, then, in which members of the white Swiss mainstream society commonly deny the existence of racism in Switzerland or being racist while at the same time acting in racist ways and establishing and executing laws, policies, and practices that are exclusionary of racialized people. It is a space-time of structural and subliminal rather than open racism (although blatant racism exists, too, and might in fact be strengthening again), which, however, intervenes in all areas of racialized peoples’ lives, such as housing, education, work, mobility, immigration, asylum, culture, political participation, social welfare, health, friendship, relationship, family, and reproduction. In short, it is a space-time in which race and racism are denied but actually normalized.

The notions of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ also do not figure prominently in Swiss migration studies, either. This scarcity of critical engagements with the concepts of ‘race,’ ‘racism,’ and Swiss coloniality in Swiss migration scholarship again ties into the larger context of mainstream Western European migration scholarship. As Alana Lentin contends in her comprehensive analysis of European sociological migration studies, this field of research “elides, neglects, or denies the role of race in the construction of the boundaries of Europeanness” (Lentin 2014:69). She criticizes the current mainstream “minority research” as being preoccupied with “ethnicity, migration, assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, transnationalism, diversity” (ibid:80, see also de Genova 2010). Yet it is this kind of “minority research” that receives the lion’s share of institutional and financial support as well as public and academic recognition in Europe.<sup>9</sup> Lentin argues that in this line of scholarship,

discussions of more suitable terminology, such as ethnicity, construed as more descriptive, less divisive and hence more constructive, is a strategy that neglects the continuing significance of race. Precisely because the preferred terms are presented as neutral and universal, race is implicitly neglected while, dissociated from their racialized roots, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture’ are ahistorically constituted. (Lentin 2014:89)

The same tendency prevails in much of Swiss mainstream migration scholarship. Here the concept of ‘racism,’ if mentioned or reflected on at all, tends to be considered not to fit the Swiss context and is hence often – mostly silently – replaced by the notions of ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture,’ which implicitly evoke ideas of racialized difference without explicitly applying biologicistic categories (Michel 2019:93). In other instances, ‘race’ is

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right-wing party *Schweizerische Volkspartei SVP* showing a bunch of white sheep standing on a Swiss flag kicking out a black sheep, “the sheep has now become a trendy signifier for race: it allows anyone to evoke issues related to race without explicitly mentioning it” (ibid:422).

9 Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako, who have scrutinized the Dutch “minority research industry,” confirm Lentin’s finding that this field of study features “limited perceptions or the denial of racism,” and indeed “lack[s] a comprehensive understanding of racism” (Essed and Nimako 2006, quoted in Lentin 2014:80-81).

implicitly understood in narrow terms, as mainly addressing people visually marked as Black (although what comprises this Blackness mostly fails to be defined). Lentin takes issue with this alleged color-codedness and reminds scholars who promote this perspective that race under Nazism was not purely color-coded, either. At the same time, Lentin (2014:91) rejects the frequent reduction of the notion of 'race' in Europe to the Nazi Shoah, which is used as the allegedly 'obvious' (hence unquestioned) reason to justify the discontinuation of the use of the term. She instead calls for "a race critical approach that is attentive to the persistence of coloniality in contemporary raciologies," within which race functions as a "fundamental theoretical frame through which to historicize and decode the effects of migration in Western European societies" (Lentin 2014:69-70).<sup>10</sup>

In Switzerland, the recent upsurge of exactly this kind of activism and scholarly work on racism is indeed beginning to demonstrate the usefulness and significance of the concept of 'race' for the Swiss context. This work frames racism as the production and subsequent exclusion of racialized or, as I sometimes write in this book, ethnized, or 'othered,' subjects. Racialized Others are, however, not the only product of processes of racialization. The main intended effect of 'othering' people is instead the production of the *Self* (the fiction of the autochthonous Swiss), which can only come into being through its delimitation from, and simultaneous exclusion of, the racialized Other. Racism in this sense signifies "any practice that, intentionally or not, excludes a 'racial' or 'ethnic' minority from enjoying the full rights, opportunities and responsibilities available to the majority population" (Richards 2003:xiv, referring to Goldberg 1993). Hence, critical race critique addresses varied mechanisms of discrimination against a wide range of people who become identified as 'foreigners' in Switzerland, including, for instance, people of African descent, Tamils, Kosovo Albanians, Roma, or people perceived as Muslims.

I have included this postscript on the connectivities between the notion of 'race' and Swiss nation-building because the emerging Swiss critical race scholarship powerfully pinpoints queer migrant women's experiences in Switzerland. Indeed, the impact of racism on racialized people, who become constructed and excluded as 'foreigners,' and especially the way in which discrimination based on race and ethnicity intertwines with exclusions based on heterosexism and sexism, were at the very core of the narratives of the queer migrant women I interviewed. The critical race perspective has hence brought more clarity and analytical power to the analysis of the data generated in the context of this study. At the outset of this research, I had been caught up in vain attempts to somehow discern between people who were 'ethnized' and people who were 'racialized,' as this was what many European migration researchers seemed to be doing at the time – implying that the first exclusionary move (to 'ethnize' someone) is not quite as

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10 Alana Lentin (2014) directs her critique explicitly at *sociological* migration research, juxtaposing it with *anthropological* inquiries into migration. The latter she assumes to have been forced to redress its role as the "handmaiden of colonialism" (ibid:70) and hence to be more aware of colonial persistencies today. I am doubtful about this clear demarcation but understand it as an analytical move by the author.

bad as the second (to 'racialize' someone) because it 'only' concerns people's 'culture' and not their 'phenotype' or 'genes,' and so on, and because it allegedly affects different people. (But in what ways exactly are 'racialized' people different from 'ethnicized' people? (How) do their experiences differ? How can visibilities, phenotypes, or genes be delimited from one another? Etc.) The insight that Switzerland self-identifies, and becomes identified, as a space without racism has further clarified why Swiss migration scholarship tends to locate 'ethnicized' people in Switzerland, while the presence of 'racialized people' seems almost an impossibility.

In light of the critical race perspective, Swiss and more generally European migration research will hence have to engage more thoroughly with the concepts of 'race' and 'racism,' focusing on the perspective of the people affected, and reflecting on the mechanisms, histories, and persistences of postracial silences in Switzerland and in Europe. As critical migration scholars, we also need to become more self-reflective with respect to our usage – or avoidance – of the notion of 'race.' And we especially also need to keep examining the ways in which race continues to be othered in Swiss and European migration scholarship and ask about the origins and effects of this erasure.



## 2. Immigration and Sexuality: Policies and Practices in Switzerland

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This chapter aims to establish an understanding of the social, political, and economic context and hence the discursive field the participants in this study entered when they came to Switzerland. Chapter 2.1 gives a brief history of immigration to Switzerland, focusing on the interlinkages between the economic development in and immigration to Switzerland on the one hand and the rise of the discourses around *Überfremdung* (literally 'over-foreignization') on the other. These developments are then differentiated from a feminist perspective. Here, the discussion focuses on dominant ideas about migrant women, which queer migrant women are confronted with as much as their heterosexual counterparts. They are, however, not only targeted by prejudices about *migrant women*, but also face stereotypical ideas about *lesbians*. Chapter 2.2 accordingly addresses discourses around lesbians in Switzerland. It outlines the history of same-sex relationships and the lesbian movement and discusses recent shifts in the legal and social situation of lesbians and gays in Switzerland.

The combined focus of this chapter (on discourses around migrant women on the one hand and lesbians on the other) is not to suggest that the experiences and positionalities of queer migrant women are 'close to,' 'almost like,' or 'a combination of' the experiences and positionalities of heterosexual migrant women or non-migrant lesbians in Switzerland. Instead, the discussion of these two discursive fields points to the very crux of the matter under discussion, which is that these two histories and identities are generally *seen* as separate: While to date migrant women have almost exclusively been conceptualized as heterosexual, lesbians have hardly ever been thought of as migrants. Thus, Chapter 2.3 discusses the (limited) discourses, policies, and practices that *do* specifically address the queer migrant subject position, and summarizes the state of scholarly knowledge about queer migration to Switzerland.

## 2.1 Migration to Switzerland

Looking at the circumstances during different periods of intensified immigration throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century exposes two dominant aspects of immigration to Switzerland. The first is that Swiss immigration policies, regulations, and practices have chiefly represented instruments to regulate and flexibilize the Swiss labor market (Wicker 2003). Second, the images of immigrants that have emerged from the debates around immigration policies have increasingly revolved around the concept of *Überfremdung*. In other words, in the past hundred years, immigrants to Switzerland have been welcome as flexible workers, but as people they have predominantly been perceived as a threat to 'traditional' Swiss culture and values (Arlettaz and Burkart 1988, Espahangizi 2019, Jost 1998, Kury 2003, Tanner 1998). This sub-chapter focuses on the rise and consequences of discourses of *Überfremdung* in Switzerland – as intertwined with economic and political developments in Switzerland and Europe – and the shifts they have been subject to across time and space.

### 2.1.1 Migration to Switzerland: Some Basic Facts and Figures

For several centuries, due to its scarce agricultural and natural resources, Switzerland was a nation of emigrants. It was only in the course of industrialization starting in 1850 that it became a sought-after destination for European immigrants. However, it was not until the late 1880s that the number of people entering the country began to outnumber the people leaving it (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1995). Although the immigrant population in Switzerland has not developed in a linear fashion, it has continually increased since the 1980s. In 2007, when the fieldwork of this study was ongoing, 1.7 million foreign nationals lived in Switzerland (of a total population of 7.6 million). Among these, the most sizeable diasporas were from Ex-Yugoslavian countries (19%; the majority of these were from Serbia and Montenegro), Italians (18%), Germans (14%), and Portuguese (12%), followed by French nationals (5%), Turks, and Spaniards (4% each). Overall, 85.3 percent of all immigrants were citizens of European countries (two thirds of whom were nationals of EU-17 countries, not including Eastern or Southeastern European countries); 6.4 percent had immigrated from Asia, 3.9 percent from Africa, and 4 percent from the Americas (BFS<sup>1</sup> 2009).

In 2013, towards the end of the field phase of this study, the immigrant population amounted to 23.3 percent of the overall population in Switzerland (BFS online 2014). This rate, among the highest in Europe, was foremost the consequence of several periods of intensified immigration triggered by political and economic developments, in particular the rise of industrialization, post-war economic growth, and the establishment of the EU (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). High birth and low mortality rates among immigrants and family reunification further increased the number of immigrants: In 2006 about 43 percent of all immigrants in Switzerland had migrated in the context of family reunification, and 26 percent had entered for employment. The reason for this

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1 BFS = *Bundesamt für Statistik* (Federal Office for Statistics). "BFS online" references (see below) indicate that the figures for the mentioned year(s) were researched on the BFS online database.



development was that immigration related to family reunification was controlled much less strictly than employment-related migration (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007). However, importantly, the high rate of non-Swiss citizens in Switzerland was also a consequence of Switzerland's exceptionally restrictive naturalization practices. Of the 1.7 million immigrants or non-Swiss nationals respectively residing in Switzerland, half had either been born and raised here or had been living in the country for over fifteen years. The low naturalization rate is also a consequence of the *ius sanguinis* principle practiced in Swiss immigration policy. This means that people who are born to non-naturalized immigrants in Switzerland do not automatically obtain Swiss citizenship, and neither do *their* children. Immigrants in Switzerland are in principle required to have resided in Switzerland for twelve years before becoming eligible for Swiss citizenship, which represents the longest period in Europe (De Carli 2014). While, in 1998, the Swiss naturalization quota of 1.4 percent was the lowest in Europe, it reached more than 3 percent in 2006 and hence moved close to the average in the European Union (EKM 2012, Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). Such low naturalization rates are generally typical for countries with 'guest worker' traditions such as Switzerland, Germany, or Austria, which have prioritized the flexibilization of the workforce over assimilation, forming a purposive relationship between immigration and economic development (IUED 2008). Indeed, in contrast to classical immigration nations such as the U.S. or Canada, Swiss policies have worked to discourage rather than encourage the naturalization of its immigrant population. Immigrants tend to be endured as a necessary evil to secure domestic economic standards rather than being encouraged to become fully contributing members of Swiss society (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). Correspondingly, discourses around immigrants have been marked by prejudices and stereotypes, which in turn have been deployed to legitimize restrictive immigration policies and successfully established immigrants as 'different from the Swiss.' This anti-immigrant stance has fueled a sense of a unique and separate Swiss national identity (Tabin 2004). However, as the Swiss writer Max Frisch famously remarked with regard to guest workers in the 1960s, "*Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kamen Menschen*" – "Workers were called, and human beings came." This fact has continued to haunt debates around immigration legislation and practices in Switzerland in the late 2010s.

### 2.1.2 The Rise of the Discourse around 'Überfremdung' in Switzerland

The first significant period of immigration, which started in the late 1870s, brought highly qualified immigrants from the neighboring countries Germany, France, and Austria to Switzerland, who primarily came to support the growing Swiss construction industry. At the same time, there was also a rapidly growing number of less-qualified immigrants, mainly Italian nationals, who also worked predominantly in construction (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1995). At the time, the image of immigrants was positive; they, or their labor respectively, were perceived as indispensable for economic growth and prosperity. Bilateral recruiting agreements with twenty-one countries were established to enable the free movement of labor. Foreign nationals were granted almost equal rights to Swiss citizens (excluding the right to vote), and they could apply for citizenship after only two years of residence (D'Amato 2001, Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). This liberal

policy further fueled the inflow of immigrants, which reached its peak in 1914. In that year, foreign nationals made up 15.4 percent of the total population, the highest rate in Europe at the time (Arletta and Burkart 1988, Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). In the face of the onslaught of World War I, nationalists and Swiss trade unions started to oppose the liberal immigration policy and began to frame immigrants as a threat to Swiss traditional values, morale, culture, way of life, and, especially, jobs. It is in this changing political climate that the term *Überfremdung* ('over-foreignization') gained importance, and it proceeded to dominate decades of Swiss policy-making (Arletta and Burkart 1988, Jost 1998, Tanner 1998).

The world wars, coupled with the strengthening discourse of *Überfremdung*, diminished the foreign population by two thirds. During and between the wars, right-wing politicians heated the debate by grounding their arguments in statistical extrapolations rather than facts: While they decried the increase in immigration, the immigrant population was in fact rapidly *decreasing* due to the economic crisis (Arletta and Burkart 1988, Espahangizi 2019, Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). This phase is exemplary for Swiss migration scholars' finding that, overall, the actual historical percentages of immigrants hardly correlate with the levels of xenophobia in Switzerland (Skenderovic 2020, quoted in Binswanger 2020).

In 1934, the *Bundesgesetz über Aufenthalt und Niederlassung (ANAG)* (Federal Law on Residence and Settlement) came into force. It was to remain in effect until 2006 and hence still provided the main legal framework for immigrants when many of the participants in this study entered Switzerland. The new law introduced three categories of immigrant permits: The *Saisonnier* status, which allowed for a temporary stay of the duration of a working 'season' of nine months and enabled family reunification only after a *Saisonnier* had worked in Switzerland for three consecutive seasons (this status ceased to exist after the bilateral agreements with the EU came into force in 2002); the *Jahresaufenthaltsbewilligung*, an annual permit, the extension of which was made contingent on the overall economic situation in Switzerland; and the *Niederlassungsbewilligung*, allowing for permanent residency in Switzerland. The ANAG marked a paradigm shift on several levels. First, the concept of *Überfremdung* had now found its way into official language. Article 16 of the ANAG stated: "Officials granting foreigner permits need to take into account the intellectual and economic interests of the country as well as the degree of *Überfremdung*" (quoted in Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006:1698). Second, the new legal framework addressed the perceived threat by restricting permanent settlement and by installing legal instruments allowing for a regulation of immigration according to the economic situation in Switzerland. Third, an additional law, the *Bürgerrechtsgesetz (BüG)* (Citizenship Law), in effect until 2018, moreover significantly restricted access to naturalization; now a minimum of twelve years of residency was required before an immigrant became eligible for Swiss citizenship. In sum, the focus of Swiss immigration policy had shifted from inclusion to exclusion and control (Piguet 2006, Wicker 2003). Crucially, the *BüG* installed *assimilation* as a legal requirement for naturalization. Immigrants who were eventually formally eligible for citizenship had to prove that they were "integrated into Swiss society," "familiar with the Swiss lifestyle, morals, and customs," "obedient to the Swiss legal system," and did "not represent a danger to Switzerland's security" (Art. 14 *BüG*, quoted in Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006:1699). These vague formu-

lations opened the door to arbitrariness and discrimination of (changing) stigmatized immigrant groups.

When the economy began to recover after World War II, a fresh need of unskilled and semi-skilled workers arose, triggering a new period of immigration. The new legal framework allowed the government to balance fears of *Überfremdung* and Swiss employers' need for labor by framing immigration as a *temporary* phenomenon. A new agreement with Italy, for instance, determined that Italian nationals would need to obtain temporary permits for ten consecutive years or 'seasons' before becoming eligible for permanent residency. From this context, the figure of the *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) emerged, who was conceptualized as a *Wanderer* ('traveler') rather than an *Ein-Wanderer* (immigrant, literally 'in-traveler') (Baghdadi 2011, Wicker 2003).

Between 1963 and 1967, rising inflation and growing numbers of immigrants prompted the government to issue a number of decrees instructing the private sector to reduce their immigrant workforce. At the same time, Switzerland officially acknowledged for the first time that immigrant workers had become an integral part of the Swiss economy and that established workers should be assimilated. This resulted in measures facilitating permanent residence and family reunification for Italian immigrants (Piguet 2006). However, due to the lack of collaboration of the private sector with the governmental regulations, increasing migration related to family reunification, and high birth rates among immigrants, this package of measures failed to reduce the immigrant population. In the ensuing revival of the myth of an impending *Überfremdung*, the issue of family reunification was a particularly contested issue. As in many other European countries, family reunification was subsequently subjected to a number of limitations, first in the 1970s and then in the 1990s (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006).

Since in the eyes of many citizens the government had failed to address immigration and its associated perceived threats adequately, starting in 1965 a series of *Volksinitiativen* against *Überfremdung* were launched to force the government into action (such 'peoples' initiatives' are initiated by interest groups and are directly voted on by the general public). Among these, the *Schwarzenbach-Initiative* of 1970, launched by James Schwarzenbach, was the most radical. It demanded a reduction of the immigrant population to ten percent in each single Swiss canton, which, if successful, would have entailed the deportation of 300'000 immigrants residing in Switzerland at the time. The initiative generated a record turnout of 75 percent and was rejected by only 54 percent of the voters. The threat emanating from this initiative and the debate it generated in the media affected immigrants and their families deeply. Indeed, the psychological pressure and sense of being unwelcome that these debates generated still found expression in several family stories told by some of the women who took part in this study, forty years later.

It can even be said that during this post-war period, Switzerland spearheaded the development of modern right-wing populism. As Swiss migration scholar Damir Skenderovic noted in an interview with the online magazine *Republik*:

Schwarzenbach as a right-wing populist leader figure, as well as the *Nationale Aktion*, the *Republikanische Bewegung*, and all the other small parties in their ideological envi-

ronment indisputably played a leading role in European if not global right-wing populism. Switzerland formed the avant-garde of right-wing populism [...]. (Skenderovic 2020, quoted in Binswanger 2020, my translation)

Skenderovic identifies two crucial ingredients of these historical right-wing discourses in Switzerland that continue to shape right-wing populism internationally to this date: The first is making immigration the absolute center of the political agenda and taking a xenophobic stance; the second is taking an (allegedly) anti-establishment stance. Skenderovic argues that Switzerland was able to take on this leading role in European right-wing populism because it was seemingly less fraught with a fascist past, which allowed “blood and soil” ideas to spread quite unresisted within Switzerland. This stood in contrast to other European countries, where racism and xenophobia were much more strongly tabooed in the years after World War II. This discrepancy becomes particularly evident in the differing degrees of usage of the term *Überfremdung* post-war: While the term was tabooed in post-war Germany, it continued to be used and strengthened in Switzerland (Skenderovic 2020, quoted in Binswanger 2020).

Following the *Schwarzenbach* initiative, a number of ‘stabilization policies’ were introduced that built on quotas and temporary permits. These (and many more policies to be introduced up to the 1990s) were largely a concession to the 46 percent of the population who had voted for the *Schwarzenbach* initiative. Taking into account the *Schwarzenbach* supporters seemed to be rewarded by the clear rejection of another anti-immigrant initiative against *Überfremdung* in 1972. At this time, xenophobia was generally on the decrease, which may be connected to the fact that due to the recession, Switzerland had stopped guest worker recruitment and discontinued temporary permits, effectively exporting unemployment to the workers’ countries of origin (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006, Wicker 2003). For the first time, pro-immigrant initiatives were launched, advocating facilitated naturalization and the abandonment of the *Saisonnier* status, but they were massively rejected. When the economy grew stronger in the 1980s, the quotas were raised again. Since Italy and Spain had strengthened their own economies, workers were now chiefly recruited from Portugal, Turkey, and Ex-Yugoslavia, who mainly found employment in construction, the hotel industry, and gastronomy. Migrant women were mainly employed in the latter two sectors, but were moreover engaged in cleaning and care work, where flexible and low-cost workers were increasingly in demand due to the rising number of Swiss women entering the labor market (Han 2003, Karrer et al. 1996, Sassen 1991, Tschannen 2003).

In the 1990s, a number of political developments had incisive effects on immigration to Switzerland and Swiss immigration policies. Italy, Spain, and Portugal had negotiated that their citizens be granted permanent residence after five instead of ten years of temporary work. Further, immigration related to family reunification or education, both of which operated outside quotas and established control mechanisms, was increasing and by the early 2000s outnumbered work-related immigration (Baghdadi 2011). Third, war broke out in then Yugoslavia, bringing an unforeseen number of asylum seekers to Switzerland. And fourth, voices grew louder in demanding that Switzerland enter bilateral agreements with the EU to establish freedom of movement for EU (and vice versa Swiss) citizens in order to secure the future stability and integra-

tion of the Swiss economy into the European labor market. The ‘stabilization policies’ of the 1970s and 1980s built on flexibility, temporary work permits, and seasonal work were therefore no longer fit to address contemporary challenges (Piguet 2006, Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006).

The governmental commission entrusted with the task of redesigning a new policy had to bridge the gap between the continued fear of *Überfremdung* on the one hand and perceived economic necessity on the other. This dilemma was ‘resolved’ by the introduction of the so-called *Drei-Kreise-Modell* (Three Circles Model). This model was based on the principle of ‘cultural proximity’ and discriminated between immigrants who were allegedly ‘culturally close’ to Switzerland and hence assumed to integrate into Swiss society easily, as opposed to those who were allegedly ‘culturally distant’ and hence expected to have difficulties assimilating (see also next sub-chapter).

In the mentioned Three Circles Model, the innermost circle, whose members were to enjoy first priority in immigration, was reserved for EU and EFTA citizens. The intermediate circle regulated immigration for citizens from the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Citizens from all other countries (including many Eastern European and the Balkan countries) were relegated to the outer circle and were allowed into the country in highly exceptional cases only. Although heavily criticized by human rights organizations and also the Parliamentary Anti-Racism Commission, the Three Circles Model came into effect in 1991. However, the new policy was soon abandoned again in favor of a *Zwei-Kreise-Modell* (Two Circles Model), which was based on the principle of ‘geographical’ rather than ‘cultural’ proximity or distance/difference (although cultural difference remains implicit). This policy further facilitated entry and integration of EU citizens, as well as that of non-EU citizens with skills that were in demand, for instance Indian IT specialists (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006). At this time – again fueled by an economic low – political and media discourses arose that revolved around the “integration problem” of immigrants, highlighting perceived problems such as *Scheinehe* (fictitious marriage), high rates of delinquency, and abuse of the welfare system among immigrants (Piguet 2006).<sup>2</sup>

The Two Circles policy became further cemented in 2002 when the bilateral agreements with the EU came into effect. These granted EU citizens extensive rights in terms of mobility, work, and residency (excluding the right to vote). The *Ausländergesetz AuG* (‘Foreigner Law’), which replaced the outdated ANAG in 2008, further cemented the

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2 The definition of integration was thereby increasingly narrowed down and eventually established as an allegedly measurable state. In the new ‘Foreigner Law’ *AuG* that replaced the ANAG (see below), the “degree of integration” became a criterion for the issuance or prolongation of residence permits (Kälin 2002). This law conceptualized the “potential to integrate” as including professional qualification, adaptability, language skills, and so on (Art. 23 Abs. 2 / Art. 54 Abs. 2bis *AuG*). As the Parliamentary Anti-Racism Commission wrote: “Admission is made contingent on the potential to integrate [...]. The capacity to integrate is, however, not a provable entity; it is a political criterion. As such, it involves the danger of arbitrary interpretations” (EKR 2003a:2). The EKR saw in the *AuG* and the Two Circles Model it was based on a continuation of the discrimination between ‘good’ and ‘problematic’ immigrants, which continued to rely on notions of cultural proximity and distance (EKR 2003b:16). The *AuG* was replaced by the *Ausländer- und Integrationsgesetz AIG* (‘Foreigner and Integration Law’) in 2019.

discrimination between citizens of EU countries and the ‘rest of the world.’ EU citizens were now no longer defined as foreigners, while entry for immigrants from so-called *Drittstaaten* (third nations) remained restricted to highly qualified individuals, who were moreover only allowed into the country if neither a Swiss nor an EU citizen could be found for the vacant job (Piguet 2006). Immigration of citizens of ‘third nations’ remained possible in the context of family reunification or education, however, the latter only under specific conditions such as proof of sufficient financial means. This policy was further consolidated when Switzerland joined the Schengen and Dublin agreement.<sup>3</sup> These two agreements were conceptualized as crucial pillars of the construction of the EU as a common “Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” (*“Raum der Freiheit, der Sicherheit und des Rechts RFSR”*).<sup>4</sup> Switzerland had hence become an integral part of what human rights advocates have termed *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe) (El-Tayeb 2003).

In 2014, shortly after the field phase of this study, the cage of Swiss immigration policy was rattled once more. By accepting the *Masseinwanderungsinitiative (MEI)* (Mass Immigration Initiative), Swiss voters, led by the right-wing *Schweizerische Volkspartei SVP*, mandated the government to reduce and control *all* immigration. In practice, this necessarily also entails a restriction of the immigration of EU citizens. Since quotas on EU citizens are not compatible with the free movement of persons within the EU/Switzerland, the bilateral agreements with the EU will now either have to be renegotiated or abolished. The *MEI* has destabilized the geography of Swiss immigration by abruptly interrupting the trend towards integrating Switzerland into the EU as propagated by the Swiss government. This reassessment of immigration from the EU not only distances Switzerland from the EU, but at the same time also entails a reassessment of immigration from ‘third nations.’ Some proponents of the initiative argued that should it become difficult to satisfy the demands for qualified personnel from within the EU – for instance due to restrictions with respect to family reunification – the required skills could easily be obtained from professionals from ‘third nations.’ The success of the *MEI* is but the latest demonstration of the longstanding distrust of conservative Swiss voters toward the EU and its *fremde Richter* (‘foreign judges’) and is moreover another episode in the dialectic between the government and right-wing forces. In other words, even if official language would have it otherwise, in the eyes of the majority of Swiss voters, EU citizens have remained foreigners. Despite Switzerland’s long history of immigration, the refusal to acknowledge Switzerland as an immigration country continues to govern debates around immigrants.

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3 The Schengen agreement removed border controls between EU countries while reinforcing border controls at the outside borders of the EU. The Dublin agreement coordinates asylum application processes, rendering it impossible for asylum seekers to apply for asylum in more than one EU country.

4 The aim to create the EU as a common “Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” was first established in the *Treaty of Amsterdam* in 1997 and specified in the *Treaty of Lisbon* in 2007 (*Treaty of Lisbon*, Article 3 Section 2 EUV and Title V AEUV – Section 67 to 89).

### 2.1.3 A Migrant is not a Migrant: Shifting Geographies of the (Un)desired

As this brief history of Swiss immigration demonstrates, the symbolic boundary as to who is perceived as what kind of foreigner has been subject to constant shifts, generating ever-new social geographies of immigration. Discourses discriminating between different groups of immigrants have produced a variety of ethnicized/racialized Others that are pitted against the 'Swiss' as well as against each other. As Damir Skenderovic states in the above-mentioned interview:

Of course, the targets change. In the twenties and the thirties it was the Eastern European Jews, in the Sixties the Italians, in the Eighties the Tamils, in the Nineties the Yugoslavians or Ex-Yugoslavians respectively, and since 2001 it has been the Muslims. [...] I do not think it is crucial against which specific group xenophobia is aimed. The focus is always on people who are represented as foreign, as others. (Skenderovic 2020, quoted in Binswanger 2020, my translation)

While the Italians were seen as 'bad' immigrants during the period they were called to Switzerland in great numbers as guest workers in the 1960s (though North Italians were considered to be better 'assimilable' than South Italians), they have since become the 'good' immigrants capable of assimilation.<sup>5</sup> As such, Italians are now pitted against new categories of 'bad' immigrants, which especially include nationals from countries from the Global South or Orient (such as 'Muslims' or 'Africans'), as well as nationals from Ex-Yugoslavian countries (who paradoxically were 'good' immigrants at the height of Italian immigration) and Eastern European countries (Wicker 2003, Jain 2018:81-82). Another prominent example for these shifts is the change in the perception of the Sri Lankan diaspora. Although comparatively small in size, the Sri Lankan diaspora has always been highly visible in the media and public discourse. The first (mostly young, male, Tamil) Sri Lankan refugees who escaped the escalating conflict in Sri Lanka in the 1980s were confronted with highly racialized stereotypes, which associated them with drug dealing and delinquency. As one participant in this study of African descent stated, the arrival of Tamils fundamentally changed her life as a person of color in Switzerland, which she ascribed to this group's higher visibility in comparison to earlier immigrant groups. However, the image of the Tamil diaspora has since become more positive. They are now perceived to be successfully integrated into the Swiss economy and to have a 'polite and reserved' behavior (Moret et al. 2007, Herzig 2014). In terms of cultural 'integration' however, the Tamil community continues to be perceived as almost hermeneutically sealed off from the Swiss way of life.

At the same time and in contrast to discourses pitting different groups of immigrants against each other, popular discourses lump *Ausländer* (literally 'outlanders,' that is, the 'bad,' 'unassimilable' immigrants) together, attributing to 'them' the same negative characteristics no matter their cultural background or biography. *Ausländer* – usually

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5 However, as the reactivated discourses on Italy, Italians, and Italian 'mentality,' 'culture,' and politics in Switzerland during the Corona crisis in 2020/2021 testify, stereotypical images of Italians persist (see also Soom 2011).

this generic masculine form is used – are summarily portrayed as unskilled and insufficiently integrated individuals with high criminal energy for whom Switzerland represents the only escape from the dire economic or political situation in their perishing home countries. From these discourses Switzerland emerges as an intact place now becoming threatened by ‘floods’ of these immigrants with their irrevocably differing cultural values, as well as by their expected exploitation and abuse of the Swiss immigration, asylum and welfare systems.

These examples point to the importance of considering the linkages between the historical emergence of the concepts of assimilation, *Überfremdung*, and racism. As Rohit Jain (2018) argues based on Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, the imagination, legitimation, and material production of European nation-states as they emerged in the 19th century and especially as they developed in the 20th century crucially rests on a racial and cultural homogenization of its ‘people’ (*Volk*). This homogenization can, however, only be achieved through the production and regulation of a non-national Other that remains situated outside nationality and citizenship. The concept of ‘assimilation’ and of the ‘(un)assimilability’ of certain categories of people respectively thereby functions as an arbitrary gatekeeping criterion regulating who can stay in Switzerland and who cannot, who can be a citizen and who cannot, which lives are, eventually, legitimate and which dispensable. Within this discursive framework, the invocation of an impending *Überfremdung* in the case of failed assimilation or negligent regulation works as the seemingly objective yardstick against which the success of past, current, or future immigration policies and practices are measured. In other words, “the assimilation logic allowed the state’s will – and at the same time forced it – to continuously define, form and protect the national body” (Jain 2018:69, my translation).

In Switzerland, this culturalized understanding of assimilation began to gain importance in the early 20th century. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *naturalization* was still propagated as the chief means to preempt the allegedly threatening ‘colonization’ of Switzerland through immigrants. Assimilation first and foremost meant immigrants’ inclusion into the polity and much less their assimilation to alleged ‘Swiss’ cultural values or mores; such an adaptation was deemed to follow necessarily from political inclusion. However, after the turn of the century, culture, ethnicity, and race became increasingly central to the concept of assimilation. The trope of the Swiss *Volk* gained importance, and this was attributed a specific character and ‘spiritual strength’ (*geistige Stärke*). The exceptionalism of this *Volk* was used to justify its very existence and hence its defense against influence from foreign elements stemming from immigration. The ensuing discourses around ‘spiritual over-foreignization’ (*geistige Überfremdung*) marked a crucial shift in how assimilation was conceptualized, moving away from the idea of assimilating immigrants through political participation to the requirement for immigrants to adapt culturally to alleged Swiss values and mores – to the ‘national character’ of Switzerland.<sup>6</sup> Assimilation now became organized around a discourse of an impending “denationalization” due to “incoming elements’ influence on the morals and spirit [*Geist*] of the population,” which allegedly threatened to “gradually lose its national

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6 This spiritual dimension of the Swiss national identity became epitomized in the concept of the *geistige Landesverteidigung* (‘spiritual national defense’) between the wars.



character, its originality, its own ideal, and finally the right to exist as an independent and autonomous people.” Thus noted Edmond Boissier, politician and advocate of a stricter Swiss immigration policy in the early 20th century (Boissier 1909:4, quoted in Jain 2018:80, my translation).

This shift from a political to a culturalized understanding of assimilation divided immigrants into those who – allegedly – can, and those who cannot, become assimilated, advantaging “elements” who “can be good Swiss citizens and can entirely assimilate to our customs, mores, and principles” (Boissier 1909:5-6, quoted in Jain 2018:81, my translation). Who is assigned to the former and who to the latter category of immigrants has since remained a matter of political contestation, leaving those in control to decide who can be granted refugee status, what constitutes a legitimate reason to migrate, who can be included into the polity, and so on (Espahangizi 2015:8-9).

In the 1910s and 1920s, politicians moreover successfully linked the idea of assimilability to the notion of race, which was deployed to differentiate between spiritually and geographically neighboring versus more distant and allegedly hence less assimilable peoples. After World War II, when *völkisch*/racist idioms had fallen into disrepute, these discursive practices were replaced by a “racism without race” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, see Chapter 1), within the framework of which racist notions of assimilation were replaced by culturalist approaches resting on the assumption of a gradual (in)compatibility between cultures. Although in contrast to racial boundaries these cultural boundaries were held to be negotiable through assimilation at least to a certain extent, ‘culture’ within this logic remained a highly monolithic concept that to this date continues to be rooted in essentialist ideas about national character (Jain 2018:85-94).

Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, assimilation began to focus intently on the surveillance and disciplining of the *individual* immigrant and each immigrant’s personal process of assimilation. In this period, assimilation as a biotechnology moved immigrant subjects’ everyday practices, their feelings, even their ‘souls’ to the center of immigration control, with officials grappling with the question of how an individual’s grade of ‘inner assimilation’ could be measured when only outward behavior could be observed. Against the backdrop of these attempted delineations, there emerged an image of Switzerland that was firmly rooted in monolithic, patriarchal, and heterosexual bourgeois values and ideals (Jain 2018:88ff).

In the mid-1970s, political activities led by immigrant organizations, worker unions, the church, and radical left political parties and organizations marked the beginning of a more multiculturalist counter discourse based on Christian morals and Marxist ideals. This tendency was reinforced by political multiculturalist approaches emerging in the Anglo-Saxon world in the 1980s and again by the strengthening international debate around minority rights and cultural diversity in the 1990s. However, these efforts evaporated again with the onset of a fresh wave of *Überfremdung* rhetoric driven by the right-wing party SVP in the 1990s. At least in the bigger Swiss cities, the developments towards a more multiculturalist understanding of coexistence, importantly coupled with the growing commodification of exoticized ethnicities in Western countries, nevertheless allowed for a complication in the assimilation logic, which shifted from a purely assimilationist regime to a regime that to a certain extent also included a multicultural subjectivation logic. Today this allows for a certain degree of visibility of difference for

some immigrant subjects, at least in some areas of their lives. At the same time, essentialist notions of culture (as the main obstacle to assimilation) continue to dominate debates, laws, and practices around immigration (Jain 2018:148ff).

Jain suggests that in sum the debates around *Überfremdung* and assimilation have led to the establishment of an “assimilationist subjectivation regime” (“*assimilatorisches Subjektivierungsregime*”) (Jain 2018:66). This regime was, and continues to be, productive of subjects who are then targeted by the state’s and civil society’s imagination, control, and intervention, and it differentiates between subjects who are willing and able to assimilate and subjects who are held to be ‘unassimilable.’ *Überfremdung* and the logics of assimilation outlined in this sub-chapter hence crucially shaped and shape the context the participants in this study entered when coming to Switzerland. As will be discussed throughout this book, legislation, policies, and state and everyday practices grounded in these logics were and continue to be discriminatory of immigrant subjects with respect to many levels of existence including citizenship, political rights, civil rights, criminal law, national security, the job and real estate markets, education, health, family life, identity, and love, to name just a few.

#### 2.1.4 (Skilled) Migrant Women in Switzerland

Perceptions of immigrants in Switzerland have not only been classed, culturalized, and racialized but especially also gendered and sexualized. The prototypical image of the male immigrant worker/asylum seeker leaving his homeland to work in Switzerland still persists to date (even though the types of men associated with this image have changed). For a long time, migrant women were only seen as appendices to these men, as their wives and their children’s mothers (Morokvasic 1984). Such gendered and sexualized imaginations also manifested themselves in Swiss immigration policy, thereby (re)producing and materializing their very own preconceptions. For instance, for a time, women who entered the country in the context of a family reunification did not obtain a work permit but only a permit to ‘reside with their husbands,’ and until the late 1970s, only Swiss men were able to pass Swiss citizenship on to their non-Swiss spouses and children, while Swiss women lost their Swiss citizenship when they married a foreigner (Studer et al. 2008). Immigration schemes have, in other words, not only been based on normative assumptions about gender but also about sexuality, reproducing normative ideas about couplehood, marriage, the nuclear family, and reproduction.

In the media and political debates, the figure of the unskilled, financially dependent, ill-integrated migrant wife caught up in traditional gender roles has only been contrasted by a limited range of other victimizing stereotypes of female immigrants such as the *Heiratmigrantin* (migrant woman marrying a Swiss citizen), the unskilled exploited female laborer engaged in cleaning or care work, the trafficked prostitute, or the immigrant daughter forced into unwanted arranged marriage or subject to other modes of repression by her family. Within these narrow discourses, in the past years Muslim women in particular have faced the prejudice that they are being oppressed and relegated to traditional gender roles – the antipode to the liberated Western woman (Baghdadi 2011, Gutiérrez Rodríguez 1999, Kofler and Fankhauser 2009, Parini et al. 2012). As is the case for most stereotypes, there is some truth to them: Over the past

few decades, female immigration to Switzerland has indeed significantly been made up of women entering the country to join their Swiss or emigrated husbands (BFS online 2017<sup>7</sup>), and many migrant women are indeed subject to precarious work conditions (Dahinden and Stants 2006, Joris 1995, Tschannen 2003) and gender-based violence (Riaño and Dahinden 2010, Neubauer and Dahinden 2012). Among the less known facts about female immigration, however, is that guest worker migration has by no means been exclusively male. Even in the early 1900s, migrant women were already present in the country in considerable numbers, for instance servicing Alpine tunnel construction sites (Joris et al. 2006). After both wars, women migrating to Switzerland from Austria and other European countries outnumbered male guest workers for over a decade, finding employment in the textile and food industries, as well as in private households (Baghdadi 2011). In other words, the women who came to Switzerland in the guest worker era did not only come here to join their husbands but also migrated by themselves to build a better future for themselves. Among them are also some of the participants in this study.

Another lesser-known fact is that male and female immigration to Switzerland has been more or less balanced over the past few decades. At the same time, the proportion of women has varied significantly across different regions of origin: While at the time this research was launched more male than female EU citizens resided in Switzerland, migration from non-EU (especially Asian and Latin American) and Eastern European countries – on which the present study chiefly focuses – had become increasingly feminized. While in 1980 48 percent of all Latin American immigrants in Switzerland had been women, it was 65 percent in 2005. During the same period the percentage of women among Asian immigrants rose from 46 percent to 55 percent (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007, BFS 2008a).<sup>8</sup>

Swiss migration research has been slow to pick up on these developments and their implications. Indeed, it long conceptualized migration as a male or a gender-neutral phenomenon, and in German-speaking countries in general it was not until the mid-1980s and early 1990s that feminist perspectives on migration started to take hold in migration studies. This research has made two important contributions to the field: On the one hand, it has salvaged women from Swiss migration history and mapped past and contemporary geographies of women's migrations to Switzerland. On the other hand, more recent feminist migration scholarship has raised the more fundamental question of how gender structures *all* migration to and from Switzerland (Aufhauser 2000).<sup>9</sup>

Within Swiss feminist migration research, analyses of work conditions, labor division, and the Swiss employment market have been a particularly dominant theme.

7 Source: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/migration-integration/internationale-wanderung/migrationsgruende.html>, downloaded on March 30, 2021.

8 Since the conclusion of this study, this distribution has persisted. In 2019, women made up 45 percent of EU immigrants, 63 percent of Latin American immigrants, and 54 percent of Asian immigrants permanently residing in Switzerland (BFS online 2019).

9 For international foundational work – both Anglo- and Germanophone – applying a feminist perspective to migration studies, see e.g. Brettell and Simon 1986, Buijs 1996, Han 2003, Karrer et al. 1996, Le Breton Baumgartner 1998, Morokvasic 1983 and 1984, and Morokvasic et al. 2003.

As already indicated, this research has exposed the precarious work conditions many migrant women (many of them highly skilled) continue to face in unskilled areas of employment such as in the cleaning sector or in factories, in care work, or in sex work. Several participants in the present study, too, were subjected to deskilling and exploitative work conditions. However, the focus of feminist migration scholarship on precarious work conditions came under pressure when it was recognized that this bias unwittingly contributed to the perpetuation of the image of migrant women as passive victims. Subsequently, theoretical perspectives focusing on migrant women's agency and strategies or processes of subjectivation and identification on the one hand and research engaging with hitherto invisibilized migrant women such as for instance highly skilled women on the other has allowed for a more differentiated account of the lives and realities of migrant women in Switzerland.

Seeing that the sample analyzed in this study has unwittingly been strongly biased towards qualified women, the growing body of literature on skilled female migration to Switzerland has been of particular relevance in forging an understanding of the research participants' migration biographies and everyday lives in Switzerland. This research has uncovered that in contrast to prevailing stereotypes about migrant women from 'third states,' the educational level of this particular group of immigrants is, on average, very high. In 2006, 40 percent of the female non-EU nationals working in Switzerland had completed tertiary education, compared to 18 percent among their Swiss counterparts (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007, Pecoraro 2005). The bias in the sample towards qualified migrant women can therefore also (but not only!) be interpreted as a manifestation of a more general trend. Yet, it should not be forgotten that this high proportion of qualified women among 'third state' immigrants is partly a direct consequence of recent Swiss immigration policy as described above, which strictly limits migration from 'third states' to highly qualified migrants.<sup>10</sup>

As Yvonne Riaño and Nadia Baghdadi (2006 and 2008) show, the assumption underlying these policies – namely that highly skilled migrant women from non-EU countries will rapidly integrate into the Swiss labor market – is largely unjustified. Many qualified immigrant women, especially those from non-EU countries, face great difficulties when attempting to transfer their professional diplomas to Switzerland and often have considerable trouble finding employment that is equivalent to their training, experience, and skills. This phenomenon is mirrored in other Western countries that have long promoted skilled migration, in particular Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. Structural hurdles result in deskilling and an above-average rate of unemployment: In 2007, 9.4 percent of all migrant women in Switzerland were unemployed, versus 5.5 percent among their male counterparts (Baghdadi 2011, BFS 2008a, Gutiérrez Rodríguez 1999, Riaño and Baghdadi 2006 and 2007).<sup>11</sup>

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10 In addition to women who apply for a work permit based on their professional qualifications, many women who enter the country in the context of a family reunification are highly skilled as well. This fact further undermines the stereotype of the unskilled and dependent immigrant wife.

11 Riaño and Baghdadi's work focuses on migrant women from Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe. Their sample hence greatly overlaps with mine in terms of interviewees' region of origin.

Due to all of this, feminist migration scholarship is in the process of differentiating stereotypical ideas about migrant women. This work has shown that women who have migrated to Switzerland have different professional qualifications; work in various sectors; are employed, unemployed, or self-employed; migrated alone or with their families; have children or do not; belong to different age groups; are religious or not; and are oriented towards more traditional or more modern role models and labor divisions. However, given German-speaking feminist migration scholars' unanimously constructivist view on gender and their growing engagement with the intersectionality of processes of identification, it is surprising that to date Swiss feminist migration research has hardly engaged with migrant sexualities. The present study therefore is also meant as a contribution to, and extension of, Swiss feminist migration scholarship.

### 2.1.5 Asylum

The upheld 'humanitarian tradition' and especially the accommodation of refugees have been an integral part of the construction of Swiss national identity since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was famously the Swiss citizen Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross, who initiated the process leading to the Geneva Conventions, which have crucially shaped the modern understanding of a refugee. At the same time, in the past decades, asylum and especially the fear of its 'abuse' have been among the most intensely and controversially debated issues in Switzerland. Since Switzerland signed the Geneva Convention relating to refugees in 1955, Swiss law had addressed the refugee as an individual. This means that whether a person is to be classified as a refugee or not depends on the "justified fear of persecution."<sup>12</sup> Only people who are, or 'rightly' fear to be, prosecuted as individuals by the state or non-state actors are hence eligible for refugee status.

Refugees of the Cold War marked the period between 1945 and the late 1970s. First Hungarians (after 1956) and then Czechs (after 1968) fleeing communist regimes were admitted into Switzerland, as were Tibetans and 'Boat People' from a variety of South-east Asian countries. Particularly European refugees were welcomed in thousands and immediately offered permanent residency. This openness was grounded in the massive anti-communist/USSR solidarity, the need for skilled labor to strengthen the Swiss economy, as well as in the moral obligation to compensate for the rejection of Jewish refugees during World War II (Efionayi-Mäder 2003, Piguet 2006).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, this period of liberal refugee practice is remarkable in the context of the 1960s, as this was when the first initiatives against *Überfremdung* were launched.

The political crisis in Uganda triggered by President Idi Amin in 1972 and Pinochet's coup d'état in Chile in 1973 marked the beginning of a new era in Swiss asylum history. The call of the UNHCR to admit Ugandan and Chilean refugees triggered vehement debates in Switzerland. These situations departed from the crises created by the Cold

12 UNO Convention of July 28, 1951, Article 1, Section A.2.

13 A policy (appendix to the *Bericht Ludwig*) that had been formulated by the Swiss government in answer to a critical report exposing Swiss human rights violations during the war stated that "the [vast majority of] Swiss people will expect and require that the government grant refugees protection" (quoted in Efionayi-Mäder 2003:3, my translation).

War and as such did not generate the same level of solidarity as before. Correspondingly, xenophobia soon began to find its way into discourses around refugees. In 1981 the first law specifically addressing asylum came into effect, establishing asylum and immigration legislation as two separate systems of admission/exclusion of immigrants. This separation persists to date. A linguistic transition moreover marked a shift in the perception of refugees: In popular discourse, the term *Flüchtling* (refugee) was replaced by the term pair *Asylbewerber/-suchender* (asylum claimant/seeker) and *Asylanten* (person seeking or having been granted asylum), signaling that not all people *asking* for asylum in fact *'merited'* asylum. The asylum law itself established an individual admission procedure, and in the following years, an increasing number of asylum claims resulted in a negative decision (Efnayî-Mäder 2003).

The establishment of the new asylum law was accompanied by intense debates. Since coming into effect, it has been subjected to numerous revisions, establishing asylum as one of the most dynamic and most heatedly contested domestic issues in Switzerland. These revisions have also rendered Swiss asylum policy and practices as one of the most restrictive within Europe, as manifest for instance in the very limited chances to obtain a permanent permit of residence or citizenship, in scarce welfare benefits for asylum seekers, as well as in asylum seekers' heavily restricted access to the labor market. The debates around asylum intensified as between 1980 and 1990 outbreaks of conflicts in Zaire, Turkey, Sri Lanka, and Lebanon brought large numbers of refugees from these countries to Switzerland. In this period, for the first time more than 40'000 refugees claimed asylum in Switzerland within one year. When, on top of this, the conflict in Croatia broke out in 1991, the increasing number of asylum seekers fueled critical voices, which now increasingly portrayed asylum seekers as simulants without a 'real' – or 'only' an economically motivated – reason to claim asylum. Although the new law drastically reduced the number of asylum claims, the further escalation of the conflict in Ex-Yugoslavia in 1999 once again led to a record number of asylum seekers in Switzerland. For the first time, refugees were only granted a temporary right to stay ("*vorläufig aufgenommen*" – "provisionally accepted"). Tens of thousands of people from the Balkans had to leave Switzerland again as soon as the Swiss government deemed the situation in Kosovo and elsewhere in Ex-Yugoslavia safe enough for return. This temporary status has since gained importance in Swiss asylum practice and in some years has been granted more often than the full refugee status, which comes with a permit of residence. This diversification of asylum statuses is also owed to the increasingly complex structure of the refugee population. The number of reasons for granting asylum has increased (now for instance including gender-based persecution), as has the number of countries from which applicants reach Switzerland. This renders it difficult for the Swiss government to assess each individual case in context, which has caused asylum procedures of many asylum seekers to last several years and has moreover left the system prone to misjudgment (Piguet 2006).

Over the past few decades, the Swiss asylum system has become increasingly embedded in EU policies. During the early 1990s European countries were essentially engaged in a downward competition as to who could lower their 'attractiveness' for asylum seekers the most in order to redirect asylum seekers to other Western European countries. With the Schengen/Dublin agreements, which Switzerland has also joined,

EU countries have established a common EU asylum policy and practice. The Schengen agreement, as mentioned before, eliminated border controls within the EU; at the same time, it set up a more rigid and coordinated control of the exterior EU borders, implemented by a common border control agency, Frontex. The Dublin agreement regulates which state is responsible for processing the asylum claim of incoming seekers. This is to ensure that an application is actually examined and that asylum seekers cannot be pushed from one state to another without a proper asylum procedure. Yet the agreement further aims at preventing asylum seekers from applying for asylum in several European countries (Efionayi-Mäder 2003). The Schengen/Dublin agreements hence form crucial building blocks of the strengthening 'Fortress Europe.'

This sub-chapter has traced the historical developments that have led to the current immigration laws, policies, discourses, and practices in Switzerland. These have been critically shaped by increasing discourses around *Überfremdung* in Switzerland, which have constructed immigrants and asylum seekers as Others threatening Swiss values, mores, and national identity. These discourses have discriminated between 'good' assimilable immigrants and 'bad' immigrants who are thought to be unwilling or unable to assimilate, but the perception of desirable and undesirable immigrant groups has shifted drastically over time. In the context of this study, this means that the date of a research participant's migration to Switzerland has been pivotal with respect to how strongly they were, and have since been, subject to certain stereotypes and mechanisms of discrimination. These positionalities vary depending on the imaginations circulating about research participants' specific national or ethnic 'group' at the time of their entry and thereafter. Further, it has been shown that discourses around *Ausländer* in Switzerland continue to be grounded in stereotypical images of the immigrant as male and unskilled, though these images have been contested by feminist migration scholars. For the purpose of this study, feminist research engaging with skilled female migration to Switzerland has been shown to be of particular importance, as its analyses contribute to understanding the structures of the migration biographies and everyday lives of the many skilled research participants.

Queer migrant women in Switzerland are not only forced to negotiate dominant ideas about *Ausländer* but are at the same time confronted with stereotypical ideas about homosexual women. The next sub-chapter accordingly outlines the development and current state of laws, policies, practices, and discourses around lesbians in Switzerland.

## 2.2 Lesbians in Switzerland

### 2.2.1 The Emergence of the Homosexual in Europe and North America<sup>14</sup>

Little is known about relationships among women in Western Europe before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Both religious and secular legal texts reaching back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century suggest that all non-reproductive sexual practices such as same-sex sexual practices, onanism,

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14 This sub-chapter chiefly draws on Caprez and Nay 2008 and Gerodetti 2005.

anal practices, or bestiality were sanctioned with penalties including the death penalty. These references were highly gendered – as Judith C. Brown notes: “Compared to the frequency with which male homosexuality is mentioned, in canon and civil law, in penitentials and confessional manuals, and in popular sermons and literature, especially after the thirteenth century, the handful of documents which cite the love of women for one another is truly scant” (1989:70, quoted in Caprez and Nay 2008:297).

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, different forms of same-sex relationships among women emerged across Europe. Some women resorted to family terminology to describe the intimate nature of their same-sex relationships. For instance, there were young women who called their much older lovers “mother.” These were relationships in which more mature women supported, protected, and taught their younger lovers, who were in turn expected to adore and respect their older partner. Other women who lived together, often their entire lives, would refer to each other as “wife” and “husband,” the latter usually more masculine in appearance, the former more feminine. At the same time, romantic same-sex relationships also flowered in more aristocratic circles. The protagonists of these bonds saw these as affinities that involved the exchange of love declarations, kisses, and other physical tenderness but not necessarily sexual acts; the desire involved was seen as more emotional than sexual, and therefore as purer. What most distinguished this era from the following was that same-sex sexuality was generally seen as a matter of personal behavior rather than as a fixed identity. People were not understood to be born as homosexuals but to enter relationships with members of the same or the opposite sex by choice.

The emergence of sexology in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century radically changed this understanding. Same-sex sexuality was now given a name, homosexuality, which was seen as an innate disorder of sexual drives. This perception turned people desiring the same sex into a *type* of people and homosexuality into a (pathologized) *identity* that determined what kind of person a homosexual is. As Michel Foucault famously stated in his seminal analysis, *The History of Sexuality*: “The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality [...] the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault 1978:43).

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sexologists observed, described, distinguished, categorized, and systematized a range of sexual ‘deviations.’ Within this discourse, Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), a German doctor and sexologist and founder of the first committee to fight for the de-criminalization of sexual acts between men, was the first to argue for a de-pathologization of homosexuality. Like his colleagues, he saw same-sex desire as innate and as an integral part of a homosexual’s personality, but unlike them, he conceptualized homosexuality as a natural variety of humankind rather than a disorder. Hirschfeld’s views were shared by some of his contemporary psychologists and psychiatrists, who were in the process of formulating more general theories of human sexuality instead of focusing on the homosexual variation only. Within this literature, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his successors’ psychoanalytical theory remains the most influential body of theory on human sexuality to date. Freud’s theory postulated



that all children possess a bisexual sexual drive that later develops into a heterosexual drive that serves reproduction. Freud's conceptualization of women desiring the same sex as having remained 'stuck' at an immature stage of sexual development and as having failed to develop reproductive sexual drives has since triggered much debate among lesbian and queer theorists, who have attempted to reconfigure female same-sex desire positively (see e.g. Grosz 1994 and 1995). However, overall, surprisingly little has been said about lesbian desire to date.

In the 1940s a further branch of thinking about sexuality emerged: empirical sexology. Its best-known product is the Kinsey Report authored by Alfred Ch. Kinsey (1894-1956), which was a comprehensive survey about the sexual behavior of 20'000 men and women in the U.S. In contrast to psychoanalytical theorists, Kinsey and his colleagues assumed that sexual drives were not innate or natural but rather shaped by social norms. Kinsey argued that the hitherto postulated discernibility between homosexual and heterosexual people could not persist in the face of the empirical evidence yielded by his vast survey, which suggested bisexual rather than heterosexual behavior to be the norm in the U.S. Although in Kinsey's own time the consequences drawn from his report in the scientific and political arenas were rather tentative, the study prepared the ground for a change in perspective on human sexuality. Based on Kinsey's insights, empirical sexologists proposed to replace reproductive sexual drives with the ability to have an orgasm as the measure for a healthy sexual life. This development helped to eventually propel the homosexual outside the realm of perversion (at least to a certain extent), which now became primarily reserved for individuals displaying sexual behavior that was tied to sexual violence or unequal power relations, such as pedophilia.

In the 1970s, Second Wave feminists rose against both psychoanalysts' theorization of lesbian desire as immature and empirical sexologists' primacy of the orgasm. Their political project was to wrest the power of defining female sexuality from the overwhelmingly male sexologists. For some women's rights activists, lesbianism came to represent a radical instrument of liberation from patriarchal (i.e. heterosexual) power relations, rather than just a variation in sexual behavior. It was in this context that the term *Lesbe/lesbienne/lesbica* (lesbian) was first used as a self-conscious and positively connoted political self-definition in Switzerland. To date, this term remains the most common (self-)description for women desirous of the same sex in Switzerland.<sup>15</sup> Its valuation, however, remains ambiguous and contested as it is used both derogatively in homophobic statements and assertively by many women-loving women. However, since the 1990s, queer theorists and activists have criticized the dominant meaning of the term 'lesbian' for designating a fixed and specific identity that excludes many other forms of female same-sex as well as genderqueer desires, practices, and relationships. As such, they contend that the term 'lesbian' perpetuates the discrimination between normal and abnormal sexualities (and oftentimes the masculine/feminine and male/female dichotomy, as well). These critics have instead called for the development of an

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15 Since the completion of the fieldwork for this study, the term 'queer' has gained in importance among sexual dissidents in Switzerland. Current research is analyzing the meaning and usage of the term 'queer' and its relationship to the term 'lesbian' and other self-descriptors related to sexual identity in Switzerland, see e.g. Naef 2020.

understanding of sexuality that can accommodate its complexity, fluidity, and contradictory nature while also providing leverage for deconstructing the processes that normalize certain hetero- and homosexual sexual identities.

### 2.2.2 Same-Sex Policies and Lesbian Spaces in Switzerland

For a long time, policies addressing 'homosexuals' in Switzerland were a matter of cantonal law, and indeed in many cantons same-sex acts (vaguely named "unnatural indecency") were illegal.<sup>16</sup> However, even in the cantons where laws explicitly prohibited both male and female homosexual acts, it was almost exclusively men who were prosecuted and convicted on the basis of these laws. The argument for this gender bias brought forth by state agents was that a sexual act necessarily involved penetration, which relegated female desire in general and female homosexual acts in particular to the realm of the impossible. As Christina Caprez and Eveline Y. Nay note: "That women could be sexually active lay outside the imagination of the members of parliament, which is why the figure of the homosexual always had a male connotation. If at all, female sexuality was only debated as passive sexuality in the form of seduction. The law was to ensure that women were to lead 'normal heterosexuality within marriage'" (Caprez and Nay 2008:243). Natalia Gerodetti confirms this analysis in her history of sexuality in Switzerland, arguing that to some extent discourses around female same-sex desire always remained disconnected from the notion of sexual acts and the figure of the homosexual (Gerodetti 2005:98, quoted in Caprez and Nay:300). This rhetoric tied into the history of a broader discourse in Europe starting in the mid-19th century which tended to deny women's sexual drive, constructing female frigidity as the norm rather than the exception.

After a parliamentary debate spanning several decades, homosexuality eventually became decriminalized on the federal level in 1942.<sup>17</sup> The two factors that propelled this relatively early liberalization, however, were not necessarily indicative of a liberal attitude. One driving force in these debates was the medical discourse led by virulently political scientists such as Auguste Forel (1848-1931). In accordance with the then-emerging idea of homosexuality-as-identity, these scientists successfully argued that homosexuality should not be criminalized because it was an *innate* disorder. This 'fact' was not completely absorbed by society as a whole, however. The scientists' arguments were countered by conservative Catholics who saw "same-sex relations as *the* essential 'grave danger' to public morality, *the* ultimate corruption of youth and a substantial threat to the 'nation's health' [*Volksgesundheit*]" (Gerodetti 2005:63, emphasis original). This argument was organized around spatial metaphors depicting the Swiss nation as having "a

16 The Swiss landscape of homophobia was highly structured. While homosexuality was allowed in most French-speaking cantons (which based their legislation on the more liberal *Code Napoleon*), most German-speaking cantons grounded their legislation on the Germanic *Constitutio Criminalis*, which was more restrictive and punished homosexual acts with up to several years of prison (Gerodetti 2005). For a history and discussion of same-sex partnership formalization in Switzerland see also Mesquita 2011, Mesquita and Nay 2013, and Nay 2013.

17 Though homosexual acts with people aged under 20 (heterosexuals: 16) continued to be prosecuted. It was only in 1992 that homosexual acts became fully decriminalized.

'center' whose 'periphery' was being threatened by aberrant sexual practices. If these were allowed to 'spread,' the 'center' would also be 'damaged,' thus higher 'dams' and 'barriers' were needed" (ibid:68). This imaginary of pollution, contagion, and flooding suggests a conceptualization of homosexuality as an acquired disease rather than a congenital disposition. In parliament, these contradictory views – of homosexuality as an innate disorder and as a disease threatening the nation's health respectively – led to a consensual position embracing both stances:

By 1931, homosexuality was still seen as different from same-sex relations, in that homosexuals were exclusively those who had a disposition while, at the same time, the perception was maintained that people could also engage in same-sex practices for other reasons, such as depravity, licentious conduct and too much debauchery. (Gerodetti 2005:97)

Gerodetti therefore identifies a need to complicate the view that the last hundred and fifty years saw a linear shift from homosexuality-as-act to homosexuality-as-identity, arguing that, to this date, this shift has never been entirely successful, neither in Switzerland nor more generally in Europe. The second factor leading to the relatively early liberal Swiss legislation was parliamentarians' anxiety to prevent a development of the kind that had just taken place in Germany, where criminalization of homosexuality had led to a visible and active gay movement. Politicians took this threat very seriously and were anxious not to drag homosexuality as an issue into the daylight unnecessarily.

Once more, female same-sex sexuality hardly figured in this debate. Sexual acts were understood in terms of an active sexual agent, which by implication was male, while women were perceived as unable to perform 'acts similar to intercourse.' As Gerodetti argues, "the men debating female homosexuality simply could not imagine its existence for it fundamentally challenged their perception of female sexuality as passive per se" (ibid:79). As the German criminologist Franz Meixner articulated as late as 1961: "The sexual drive of woman generally awakens only in relations with men and does not unfold, as with men, naturally with elementary force" (Meixner 1961:49, quoted in Gerodetti 2005:80). Indeed, *if* female same-sex sexuality figured in the parliamentary debate, it was mainly in votes requesting to *exempt* female same-sex acts from the planned regulation. In other words, female same-sex sexuality was never perceived as threatening as male same-sex intimacy. To the contrary in fact: Parliamentarians saw it as an *advisable* strategy, be it as a legitimate backup in case of a lack of a man (conceding at least *some* sort of female sexual drive and agency), or to protect young women from premarital heterosexual contacts, which would damage their most precious and fragile asset: their reputation.

Until the 1970s, in contrast to male homosexuality, female homosexuality was hence hardly an issue discussed in the Swiss public arena. Women living together were not readily perceived as couples, and many women-loving women did not explicitly self-identify as lesbians or as homosexuals, were often married to men, and were frequently anxious to lead a life as inconspicuous as possible (Rufli 2015, Stefan 1975). They moreover generally faced severe financial restrictions due to conservative role models and

discriminatory legislation that complicated women's ability to establish a financially independent life. Women-loving women thus often only had the choice between marrying or staying with their parents, which further added to the invisibilization of lesbian love (Baur 2007).<sup>18</sup>

It was only with the sexual revolution and the rise of the homosexual movement in the U.S. following the New York Stonewall riots in 1969 that Switzerland witnessed the formation of a lesbian movement and a broader presence of lesbians in the media throughout the 1970s and the 1980s (although to this date media reports remain strongly biased towards male homosexuals). The TV broadcast *Telearena* on homosexuality in 1978 was a milestone in this development and bleakly exposed the state of the discussion. Several gay discussants chose to wear a mask. They were supported by their parents and an angry crowd of homosexual supporters, who shouted down the small group of religious conservatives, yet were disturbed themselves by a group of lesbians arguing that the emission was only telling gay men's stories. After the broadcast, one discussant took his life, and several others lost their jobs. However, the broadcast generated a hitherto unknown visibility for homosexual people's concerns, which in the following years eventually led to the abolition of the '*rosa Liste*' (pink list – police files on gay men updated on systematic gay club raids) and further decriminalization of homosexual acts in the 1980s (Baur 2007, Fontana 2014).

In 1989, the *Lesbenorganisation Schweiz LOS* (Swiss Lesbian Organization) was founded, followed by other specifically lesbian organizations and helplines throughout Switzerland. These organizations were instrumental in promoting the then-emerging call for same-sex marriage.<sup>19</sup> After a number of – mainly French Swiss and urban – cantons had introduced regional legislation allowing for a formalization of same-sex partnerships, the federal Partnership Act enabling same-sex couples to register their partnerships came into effect in 2007. Again, the most outspoken opponents of the law were religious conservatives and Christian political parties defending the institution of the heteronormative family.<sup>20</sup> The pressure exerted from

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18 This is not to imply that, until the 1970s, women-loving women were not politically active. The first known association in Switzerland dates from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and involved bourgeois women's rights activists who lived together in same-sex relationships but did not necessarily self-identify as homosexual. The first women's club, *Amicitia*, was founded in Zürich in 1931 and mainly addressed a working and middle class audience. Drastic repercussions from the state and negative media reports soon thwarted the strong political drive of the club, and the place transformed into a men-only meeting circle. This process is representative of the invisibilization of homosexual women within coalitions of homosexual men and women before the 1970s (Caprez and Nay 2008, Kokula and Böhmer 1991).

19 Between the late 1960s and the 1980s, the dominant view in many gay and lesbian circles had been that to call for equal rights with respect to marriage and childrearing was equal to buying into the bourgeois ideal, which would necessarily lead to an ambivalent normalization of homosexual relationships according to the heterosexual nuclear family model (Caprez and Nay 2005:243). This discussion remains salient to this date and is now chiefly discussed under the term *homonormativity*, which illuminates these developments from an anticapitalist perspective (see Chapter 3.2.1).

20 Today, while the Catholic Church in Switzerland abides by its position that homosexual people should be respected but homosexual acts condemned, Protestant perspectives are more varied and often include liberal views (Caprez and Nay 2008:244-246).

these groups led the committee of the initiative to strategically exclude all matters regarding reproduction from the planned Act to improve its chances of being accepted by Swiss voters. In contrast to fully equalizing marriage acts in many other countries, Swiss legislation still excludes the possibility of joint adoption (but has allowed for second child adoption since 2018) and prevents access to reproduction technologies. In contrast to heterosexual spouses, it also excludes foreign same-sex partners from facilitated naturalization. It was not until 2021 that the Swiss people voted for the introduction of 'full' same-sex marriage, which will be introduced in 2022 and will eliminate many of the remaining disadvantages for same-sex couples. At the same time, some queer activists and scholars have targeted the increasing normalization of (certain kinds of) same-sex partnerships, as propelled by the Partnership Act and same-sex marriage, for producing further exclusions (Mesquita 2011). For instance, seeking to disturb the proliferating stereotypical representations of homosexuals, a Zürich-based platform for queer feminist activism called *sündikat* bundles activities that embrace sexual multiplicity and complexity and fosters differentiated discussions around themes like intersexuality, trans, or polyamory.

Despite these developments towards more legal equality and social recognition, queer people continue to be discriminated against in everyday life. Persisting prejudices against homosexuals continue to manifest in certain conservative-religious political discourses, in the many variations of subtle processes of social exclusion, but especially also in the continued infliction of violence against queer people. In the summer months of 2019 alone, 40 hate crimes against queer people were reported to LGBT NGOs in Switzerland, whereas the number of unreported cases is estimated to be high (Pink Cross et al. 2020).<sup>21</sup> The continued denegation of non-normative sexualities and gender identities further exerts tremendous psychological pressure on queer people, which for instance manifests in a heightened suicide rate especially among young men, and in queer people fearing exposure in their workplace (Schneeberger et al. 2002).

Throughout their history, lesbians in Switzerland have been struggling to carve out spaces for themselves, not only in society at large but also within the political coalitions they entered. Although lesbians had originally been key drivers and integral to both the homosexual and the women's movement in Switzerland, lesbians' needs and concerns were often disregarded both in their political collaborations with homosexual men and with other women as well (Kokula and Böhmer 1991, Lenzin 2000). These struggles were also always about *spaces*, and accordingly the histories and geographies of lesbian organizations' office spaces, hotlines, meeting venues, cafés, clubs, and websites have been highly agitated and marked by discontinuities, ruptures, dislocations, and displacements. To date, most lesbian venues and cafés often only open sporadically, change locations frequently or discontinue their activities after a relatively short time. This is

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21 LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans. I use the acronym LGBT throughout this book instead of the more recent, more comprehensive acronym LGBTIQ+ (... , intersex, questioning/queer, and more) as it was the acronym that was prevalently used at the time of the fieldwork for this study. Further, in this book the acronym is often used in the context of Swiss LGBT activism in the early 2000s, which was often based on normative ideas about L, G, B, and T 'identities.'

also reflected in the narratives of queer migrant women who came to Switzerland a long time ago and now reminisce about some of the lesbian spaces – cafés, clubs, and discos – that no longer exist, but which have remained crucial points of reference for them in the story of how they forged their sexual identities. Among the lesbian spaces that still existed at the time the interviews were conducted, the ones that emerged as the most relevant in the narratives were the *Frauenraum* (women's room) in the autonomous cultural center *Reitschule* in Bern (one of the very few permanent women's spaces with up to two cultural events a week); the women's disco in the same place; the monthly disco *Tanzlelia* (which has relocated recently) and *Le Bal* (which does not exist anymore) in Zürich; and the monthly disco *Colours* in Basel (ditto). There was generally a great degree of mobility discernible, with interviewees frequently traveling to other cities for these events. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this is a general phenomenon among clubbing lesbians, which is effectively reflective of an all-Swiss lesbian (clubbing) community in the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland respectively. Yet, the efforts to establish such venues testifies to the continued demand for women-only spaces, which calls into question the allegedly growing incorporation and recognition of lesbians in mainstream society.

### 2.2.3 Swiss Same-Sex Policies in an International Context

In the past two decades, on a global scale, the changes in terms of sexual citizenship have been dramatic. While some countries have fully opened up the institution of marriage to homosexual couples, others have banned gay marriage, have further criminalized homosexuality, and increasingly prosecute homosexuals. The trend towards legal equalization of homosexual couples was initiated by Denmark, which was the first country in the world to introduce homosexual partnership registration in 1989. Today, most Western European countries have introduced same-sex marriage, others some form of partnership formalization that defines same-sex partners' rights and obligations. In the context of queer migration, these laws have been of particular significance because they also enable citizens or settled immigrants to bring their foreign partners into the country, which in many cases had not been possible before (Binnie 1997). As of 2019, sixteen European countries had introduced same-sex marriage; twenty-one European countries, among them Switzerland, have created possibilities to 'register' same-sex partnerships;<sup>22</sup> joint adoption by same-sex couples is possible in seventeen European countries; and second parent adoption is available in twenty-one European countries, including Switzerland. Outside Europe, same-sex marriage or partnership registration on a federal level are possible in many Central and South American countries as well as in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

In the context of this study, it should be noted that that Europe has undergone a very rapid transformation in this realm: In the time the interviews for this research were conducted, many of these countries did not yet know such legislation. In many cases, partnership formalizations continue to perpetuate significant discriminations,

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22 Note that some countries that have introduced same-sex marriage simultaneously uphold partnership registration, e.g. in the Netherlands.

which, like in Switzerland, mainly concern immigration, adoption rights, and access to reproductive technologies (see also Chapter 6). Moreover, in ten European countries in Southeastern and Eastern Europe there continues to be no possibility for a formalization of same-sex relationships. What is more, in many countries around the world, homosexual acts are prohibited, predominantly in parts of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean, with penalties ranging from forced therapy to lifelong incarceration and the death penalty.<sup>23</sup>

The histories of these geographies of homosexualities have neither been linear, nor have they neatly followed the alleged 'West'/'Rest' divide established by homonationalist discourses (see Chapter 3.4). It is telling that some of the figures and facts related to these trajectories will come as a surprise to many readers: Which European reader is aware that South Africa was the first country to unconditionally grant gays and lesbians equal citizenship in its constitution in 1996, followed by Ecuador, Fiji, and Portugal (Oswin 2005a)? Who would have guessed Catholic Spain would be among the first European countries to grant homosexuals full access to marriage? And who is aware that the U.S. has only very recently installed the formalization of homosexual relationships on a federal level, notably long after its neighbor Mexico, which homonationalist discourses in the U.S. notoriously position as underdeveloped?

Against the backdrop of this sexual world map and history, I am critical of the proliferating opinion, also among queer postcolonial scholars, that "there is an unmistakable trend towards greater recognition of human rights for sexual minorities worldwide" (Oswin 2007b:94). I moreover contend that geographies of homosexualities are hard to 'map' in the cartographic sense. While legislation can be mapped, these maps obfuscate the persisting – sometimes extreme – discrimination of homosexuals even in countries where homosexuality is legal or homosexual partnership formalized (see e.g. FRA 2013 for an EU survey on homophobia in Europe; or the current Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's fueling of anti-LGBT sentiments). Also, these maps and the texts describing and interpreting them (often unwittingly) contribute to the construction of the dichotomy between the gay-friendly 'West' and the homophobic 'Rest.' As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.4 – and indeed throughout this book –, this is furthermore an often-undifferentiated discourse that particularly fails to take into consideration that the policies and practices around non-normative sexualities have always also been co-structured by postcolonial and neoliberal discourses and practices. Such discourses are (increasingly) serving to legitimize Western states' claims to moral superiority over states in the South and Orient and eventually to vindicate imperialist moves. Thus, although I do not advocate the abolition of such maps, I would like to call for their problematization and better contextualization.

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23 Source: [www.ilga.org](http://www.ilga.org), downloaded on December 22, 2019. The *International Association of Gays and Lesbians ILGA* regularly provides interactive, comprehensive and well-updated world maps with information about various issues related to sexual citizenship.

## 2.3 Queer Migration to Switzerland

So far, this chapter has engaged with dominant discourses around migrant women on the one hand and lesbians on the other. This last sub-chapter is concerned with discourses that directly address *queer migrants*. Chapters 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 offer a synopsis of the legal policies and practices of central concern to ‘regular’ queer immigrants and queer asylum seekers respectively. Chapter 2.3.3 describes the landscapes of LGBT organizations in Switzerland and discusses the lack of expertise on queer migration that results from this field’s structuration.

### 2.3.1 Legal Frameworks and Practices I: From ‘Härtefall’ to ‘Partnerschaftsgesetz’

Although most participants in this study entered the country as ‘regular’ immigrants – for instance, as holders of a student or work visa –, these permits often expired at some point and required them to pursue alternative strategies in order to be able to stay in the country. For those who had Swiss partners or partners permanently residing in Switzerland, one strategy was to attempt to effectuate family reunification. Accordingly, family reunification emerged as a salient issue in several biographical narratives. Before the Partnership Act came into effect in 2007, the only legal possibility for a Swiss citizen or a permanent resident in Switzerland to bring a non-Swiss (and later non-EU) same-sex partner to Switzerland was the so-called *Härtefallregelung*, literally ‘hardship case regulation’ as defined in the *ANAG* and later the *AuG*, which allowed for an individual case assessment.<sup>24</sup> As the president of the organization *Schwule und Lesben mit ausländischen PartnerInnen SLAP* (Gays and Lesbians with Foreign Partners) pointed out in our interview, this procedure required perseverance, excellent writing skills in one of the official Swiss languages, and access to considerable social, cultural, and economic capital in Switzerland. Even then, the procedure rarely met with success.<sup>25</sup> This expert described ‘hardship case’ practice in the late 1990s and the early 2000s as generally being highly contingent on the responsible cantonal authorities and individual officer. After it became clear that a national Partnership Act was going to be established, the restrictive practices began to loosen. The Partnership Act practically equated the rights of same-sex couples with those of heterosexual couples in terms of immigration (including work and permits of residence), with the important exception that to this date the foreign partner is not eligible for facilitated naturalization like heterosexual married foreign partners are.

Most of the participants in this study who applied for family reunification before the Partnership Act came into effect applied for a permit of residence for themselves or their partners briefly before the Act came into force, when case-by-case assessments had already become more lenient. However, some interlocutors had needed a permit of residence earlier, and, in want of a viable alternative strategy, some resorted to fictitious

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24 Art. 30, Abs. 1 lit b *AuG*.

25 Interview with the president of *SLAP*, August 29, 2007.



heterosexual marriage.<sup>26</sup> One of the major problems with the ‘hardship case’ regulation was that it was a high-risk strategy: Once chosen, the door to fictitious marriage was closed. Against the backdrop of the hurdles connected to ‘hardship case’ procedures, it was often only informed and politicized people like the president of *SLAP* himself who chose this path. For singles, for people who are not in a relationship with a Swiss citizen or someone with a permanent permit of residence, and for people who are not able to obtain an independent work permit, the practice of fictitious heterosexual marriage, and now also fictitious same-sex partnership registration was, and continues to be, one of the few possible, though illegal strategies to obtain residency in Switzerland.

While the president of *SLAP* and lawyers who represent same-sex couples in immigration procedures criticized the arbitrariness with which the ‘hardship cases’ were handled in the past, the former noted that since the Partnership Act came into effect in 2007, case-by-case assessment – though still a theoretical possibility – has virtually been abandoned in practice.<sup>27</sup> For the sake of economizing immigration procedure, immigration authorities tend to request that same-sex couples register their partnerships. The president of *SLAP* considered this a highly problematic development, as it often forces international couples to formalize their partnership after only a short time of knowing each other. As such, immigration procedure in fact often *creates* the instable relationships it penalizes. Indeed, many accounts generated in this research confirmed this assessment that the Partnership Act does not alleviate all previous concerns, and also raises many new questions, which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

### 2.3.2 Legal Frameworks and Practices II: Homosexuality in Swiss Asylum Procedure

Three interviewees in this study had claimed asylum in Switzerland, and two of them, a couple, did so explicitly on grounds of their homosexuality. In order to contextualize these cases and to provide a more differentiated understanding of the structuration of the definition of homosexuality in Swiss immigration procedure at large, this sub-chapter outlines the main principles and practices of Swiss asylum procedure with regard to people claiming asylum based on their homosexuality.<sup>28</sup>

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26 For reasons of anonymity, the concerned interlocutors did not wish to discuss this issue in a formal interview, see Chapter 8.

27 An immigration lawyer specializing in the immigration of queer people confirmed in our interview that since the introduction of the Partnership Act in 2007, the ‘hardship case’ procedure has mostly been restricted to cases in which a partner cannot legally divorce in their country of origin, or in cases in which a divorce is not reasonable, for instance due to a common business with a spouse. As a consequence, *SLAP* virtually closed down its operation after the Partnership Act came into effect, since non-European partners now usually ‘just’ need to register their partnerships in order to be able to join their partners in Switzerland.

28 I use the terms ‘homosexuality’ and ‘homosexual’ in this sub-chapter because queer migrants need to be legible as such by Swiss asylum authorities in order to fall under the laws discussed here; it does not imply that these individuals identify themselves as homosexuals, or should be identified by others as such.

Three shifts in Swiss asylum policy and practice have been particularly relevant to the legal positionality of people claiming asylum based on their sexual orientation. The first is the inclusion of gender-based persecution in the current Swiss asylum legislation, the *Asylgesetz (AsylG)*. This law came into effect in 1999 and was based on the UNHCR definition of a refugee:<sup>29</sup>

1. Kapitel, Art. 3 AsylG, “Flüchtlingsbegriff”:

<sup>1</sup> *Flüchtlinge sind Personen, die in ihrem Heimatstaat oder im Land, in dem sie zuletzt wohnten, wegen ihrer Rasse, Religion, Nationalität, Zugehörigkeit zu einer bestimmten sozialen Gruppe oder wegen ihrer politischen Anschauungen ernsthaften Nachteilen ausgesetzt sind oder begründete Furcht haben, solchen Nachteilen ausgesetzt zu werden.*

<sup>2</sup> *Als ernsthafte Nachteile gelten namentlich die Gefährdung des Leibes, des Lebens oder der Freiheit sowie Massnahmen, die einen unerträglichen psychischen Druck bewirken. Den frauenspezifischen Fluchtgründen ist Rechnung zu tragen.*

1<sup>st</sup> Chapter, Art. 3 AsylG, “Definition of the term refugee”:

<sup>1</sup> Refugees are persons who in their native country or in their country of last residence are subject to serious disadvantages or have a well-founded fear of being exposed to such disadvantages for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or due to their political opinions.

<sup>2</sup> Serious disadvantages include a threat to life, physical integrity or freedom as well as measures that exert intolerable psychological pressure. Motives for seeking asylum specific to women must be taken into account.

As the 2008 *Handbuch Asylverfahren* (Handbook Asylum Procedure) by the *Bundesamt für Migration BFM* (Federal Office for Migration, today *Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM*) specifies, the term “women-specific reasons to flee” more broadly addresses “gender-based persecution” and has been included in the law in order to raise awareness of the specific threats women are exposed to due to their subordinate position in most societies around the world.<sup>30</sup> The Handbook defines women’s positions as typically being shaped by narrow gender roles; relegation to the private sphere; restrictions with respect to self-development in terms of education, work, and financial independence; and legal discriminations. From these disadvantages, a variety of threats emerge, such as sexual violence (BFM 2008:4). In asylum practice, “women-specific reasons to flee” encompass impending female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honor killings, or other experienced or impending violations of the integrity of the body due to social norms, domestic violence, legislation discriminating one or the other gender, one-child policies, or forced sterilization or abortion (BFM 2008, *Queeramnesty* 2014). The law also explicitly applies to men (though much more rarely in practice), for instance, in cases of sexual abuse, restricted fertility, or social pressure (BFM 2008).

29 This law has undergone recent changes, the last time in 2021, see <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995092/index.html>. The articles cited above have remained the same to date.

30 *Handbuch Asylverfahren* § 2 “Gender-based persecution” (BFM 2008).

The 2008 Handbook explicitly *excludes* homosexuality (“persecution based on sexual conduct”) from the definition of gender-based persecution, based on the argument that it is not the membership of a specific gender that motivates persecution of homosexuals but rather their sexual conduct. At the same time, persecution of homosexuality is considered to be formative of a “social group” as defined in Art. 1 of the *AsylG* cited above. In principle, homosexual asylum seekers are thus entitled to obtain asylum, if they can make their *individual* persecution based on their homosexuality or homosexual acts – or a justified fear of such persecution – ‘credible,’ and if moving within their country of origin (“*innerstaatliche Fluchtalternative*”) is not feasible (BFM 2008:5 (§2,1.3), Kälin 1990).<sup>31</sup>

Due to fears of ‘floodgate effects,’ Swiss asylum practice has tended to frame persecution based on sexual orientation in very narrow terms, nearly conflating it with political persecution (Bertschi 2007). This has led to a low proportion of positive rulings. Although the *BFM/SEM* did and does not monitor applicants’ reasons to apply for asylum statistically (claims based on sexual or gender identity are subsumed under the category ‘gender-based persecution’), there is some information available from other sources. The jurist Martin Bertschi, for instance, analyzed all asylum claims grounded in homosexuality between 1993 and 2005. Of the 90 cases he found, only four asylum seekers were granted asylum (Bertschi 2007). Of another 50 asylum claims based on homosexuality that the human rights organization *Queeramnesty* supervised up to 2010, only four were accepted. As is true for asylum cases in Switzerland in general, the resulting proportion of positive decrees has been significantly below the European average over the past twenty years (Bär 2014b, Ott and Navarra 2019).<sup>32</sup>

The explicit mention of gender-based persecution in the *AsylG* and the specifications that guide the law’s implementation have clearly led to an increased awareness about social issues related to gender *and* sexuality both in- and outside the government. Attempting to capitalize on this trend, LGBT rights advocates have called for the explicit inclusion of persecutions based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the *AsylG*. To date, these efforts have been in vain. The same advocates have further argued that, thus far, the “psychological pressure” mentioned in Art. 2 of the *AsylG* as cited above has been applied inconsistently in the context of asylum claims grounded in sexual orientation (Bertschi 2007, Queeramnesty 2014).

The second shift in Swiss asylum practice that has particularly affected homosexual asylum seekers was the transition from the *Zurechenbarkeitstheorie* (Accountability

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31 The entries in the Handbook addressing persecution based on gender and sexual identity have since been reformulated (see <https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/asyl/verfahren/hb/d/hb-d2.d.pdf>, downloaded on December 22, 2019). However, while in the past few years the understanding of sexuality- and gender identity-based persecution has been refined and asylum officials and legal representatives have become more sensitized towards the challenges sexually dissident asylum seekers face during asylum procedure, refugee status granted on the basis of sexual or gender identity has remained rare (Queeramnesty 2014, Ott and Navarra 2019).

32 For a brief review on the legal situation of lesbian asylum seekers in Switzerland, see also Stichelbaut 2008.

Theory) to the *Schutztheorie* (Protection Theory).<sup>33</sup> Before the latter principle came into effect in 2006, persecution of an individual had to be carried out by the state or a quasi-state institution in order to qualify. Under the new Protection Theory, the right to asylum in Switzerland extends to persons persecuted by non-state actors. As a result, a central question asked in asylum procedure today is whether a person experiencing or fearing persecution can receive protection from the state in which the persecution is taking place or impending. In other words, instead of a state's lack of *willingness*, it is now also a state's *inability* to grant a persecuted homosexual person protection that makes that person, in theory, eligible for asylum in Switzerland (BFM 2008). This new principle improves the chances of admittance for homosexuals who are persecuted by non-state actors such as family members or religious groups in states where homosexuality is not outlawed. However, Bertschi points out that the Protection Theory has sometimes led to a paradoxical practice. In some decrees, for example, certain states have been deemed willing and able to grant homosexuals protection from persecution even though the laws within that same state explicitly prohibit homosexual acts. In another case, the credibility of a claimant was questioned because he claimed to have denounced homophobic acts of abuse by plainclothes police officers to the police in his home country; Swiss authorities considered this story unlikely as in doing so he would have exposed himself to criminal prosecution (Bertschi 2007:7). Narratives such as the latter may result from the requirement that asylum seekers prove that they sought, but failed to find, protection from authorities. This is a particularly problematic requirement in countries where homosexuals are highly vulnerable to the homophobia of state actors (Queeramnesty 2014).

As these cases demonstrate, to date, the prohibition of homosexuality or homosexual acts in an asylum seeker's country of origin alone does not provide sufficient grounds for obtaining asylum in itself. This means that claimants must prove individually that the state actually also *enforces* these laws against them personally (just as they must prove being endangered personally in states in which homosexuality is *not* officially outlawed). Aware that laws against homosexuals are often abused to persecute political dissidents – as, conversely, other criminal laws are abused in order to persecute homosexuals –, it has been notoriously difficult for the Swiss government to assess these situations. Hence, homosexuality-related asylum decrees have been highly susceptible to misjudgment (Bertschi 2007). One frequent argument in negative asylum decrees has been to point to the existence of flourishing gay communities in certain urban centers despite the country's legal and/or social norms that discriminate against homosexuality. According to Swiss authorities, this enables 'inconspicuous' queer people to live their homosexuality without persecution. As Simone Preiswerk (2008) contends, this argument fails to account for the pressure resulting from having to keep one's dissident sexuality a secret. Preiswerk further argues that his pressure is aggra-

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33 Bertschi contends that, contrary to the opinions of some politicians and activists, the effect of this change for homosexual asylum seekers has in fact remained rather limited (Bertschi 2007:7).

vated in the case of same-sex loving *women*, who are often even more restricted in their mobility and self-development than men (Preiswerk 2008:31).<sup>34</sup>

The third recent development in Swiss asylum procedure affecting the position of homosexual asylum seekers has resulted from a ruling by the High Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in 2013. The decree contains the general statement that somebody fearing persecution based on homosexuality has a right to asylum. But the decree was mainly groundbreaking because it explicitly stated for the first time that the authorities of a receiving European country *are not allowed to expect claimants to live their homosexuality in secret in their home country*. While the Swiss Justice Minister confirmed that the EU court decree is compatible with Swiss asylum practice, in some cases asylum authorities have still continued to use this so-called 'discretion argument,' that is the argument that certain homosexual people can be sent back to their home countries because no harm will be done to them as long as they keep their sexual identity secret (Queeramnesty 2014). Nonetheless, human rights advocates have recently attested that overall, the asylum procedure for homosexual claimants has improved significantly over the past few years (Schindler 2014).

That being said, the CJEU decree confirmed that prohibitive legislation in the claimant's country of origin does not qualify a priori as persecution. Persecution only counts as such if the laws are enforced, *and* if this enforcement has targeted the specific individual seeking asylum. This high standard of proof of individual persecution emphasizes the importance of the *credibility* of a claimant's *story*, which in the case of homosexuality-based claims often represents the only 'proof of persecution' a claimant can provide. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this story must be credible and free of contradictions. This represents a difficult precondition, especially in cases in which dissident sexualities had been felt and experienced but not necessarily identified with prior to migration. In this context, another central principle guiding Swiss asylum practice comes into focus. As the *BFM* officer responsible for gender-based persecution stated in our interview in 2008, assessments were, in theory, solely to be guided by the question of whether claimants could credibly prove they were persecuted as individuals based on homosexual acts or homosexual identity, rather than by the question of whether they were actually homosexual or not. Nevertheless, Bertschi shows in his case analyses that the question of whether someone was really homosexual or not still often played a role in case assessments. For example, the 'credibility' of one claimant was questioned because he did not know of the gay community in his country of origin. In other cases, the lack of knowledge about the laws and penalties for homosexual acts in the home country was interpreted to the disadvantage of claimants. Conversely, 'effeminate' men were automatically deemed more 'credible,' exemplifying a visual economics that continues to guide asylum procedure to date (Bertschi 2007:5, Queeramnesty 2014).<sup>35</sup> Arguing against this practice, Bertschi suggests that in case

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34 In her Bachelor thesis Simone Preiswerk develops guidelines for social workers professionally involved with homosexual asylum seekers. The thesis notably includes a comprehensive documentation of one specific asylum case.

35 Proof of the homosexuality of 'allegedly' homosexual asylum seekers was and continues to be required in asylum procedures throughout Europe (Gartner 2015, Ciametta 2017). In the Czech

assessments, the guiding question should not be whether persecution happens because of homosexual acts or a homosexual identity, or whether an individual asylum claimant identifies as homosexual or not (Bertschi 2007:7). A revised asylum procedure should instead create a solution to the problem that among asylum claimants, people who flee their countries due to persecution for engaging in same-sex practices or for failing to conform to normative gender roles, sexual identities, or sexual practices generally outnumber people who find themselves in a position to explicitly name homosexuality as the reason why they fled (see also Dudek et al. 2007:24).

The question that remains is why asylum seekers applying for asylum based on their homosexuality in Switzerland have almost exclusively been male. This absence is a complex issue to which the present study cannot deliver a comprehensive answer. The data produced in the course of this research seem to confirm the earlier surmise that across many places and cultures same-sex oriented men seem to be more visible and hence more publicly exposed than women (see e.g. Marouf 2008). On the one hand, this may be explained by the almost global relegation of women to the realm of the private. On the other hand, it may be a result of the way female (same-sex) sexuality has been conceptualized. Across time and space, doubts have persisted that women have a sexual drive at all (see Chapter 2.2.2 for the Swiss example in this matter), and consequently that female same-sex sexuality (if considered sex at all) continues to be perceived as less threatening to the patriarchal order than male homosexuality. In many places around the world, one result of such gendered distinctions has been that where legal restrictions apply to homosexual acts, these laws often only address men, or are primarily enforced against men.<sup>36</sup> Men are hence more often targets of 'formal' and public homophobic persecution. In addition, women generally have considerably less economic, cultural, and social capital at their disposal to migrate. If women *do* migrate, the spatialities that emerge from conceptualizations of female (same-sex) sexuality work to the disadvantage of female asylum claimants: As a comparative study of refugee decisions from Canada and Australia found, same-sex loving women had difficulties in bringing through their asylum claims since their experiences of sexuality-based violence were seen as "too private." The harm considered "too private" included physical

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Republic, for instance, homosexual asylum seekers were shown pornographic films as part of an 'arousal test,' which was only stopped in 2009 (Bär 2014b). In the UK, for a certain period of time, the use of home-made porn as proof for homosexuality became a quasi-standard requirement in asylum claims by self-declared homosexual asylum seekers. A ruling by the High Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in 2014 banned such practices, stating that queer asylum seekers in Europe are no longer allowed to be subjected to homosexuality tests based on stereotypes, or to be forced to provide images to prove their sexual orientation. However, a series of incidences in Austria in 2018 demonstrated that proof of homosexuality guided by heterosexist norms continues to exist in Western Europe. In this case, several queer asylum seekers (men) were turned down for either looking/acting 'too girlish' (which was considered 'fake') or 'too masculine' (hence impossible 'gay') (see e.g. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/austria-gay-man-asylum-application-denied-girlish-lgbt-iraq-a8506091.html>, downloaded on May 23, 2020; <https://www.tage-sanzeiger.ch/ausland/keine-schwulenpornos-kein-asyl/story/10373223>, downloaded on January 18, 2020).

36 See <https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws>, downloaded on September 1, 2018.

and sexual abuse by family members or other private actors, forced marriage, coercive medical or psychological treatment, family isolation, or eviction from the home (Millbank 2002:725). An equivalent gender-sensitive analysis of such asylum claims in Switzerland is yet to be undertaken.

### 2.3.3 The Swiss Organizational Landscape: Looking for Experts on Queer Migration<sup>37</sup>

The subject position of queer migrant women marks a typical field of “interlocking systems of oppression” (Collins 1990). The affiliated concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) has its origins in the intervention of U.S.-American women of color against the dominance of white heterosexual middle class women in the feminist movement. In the *Black Feminist Statement*, the publication generally considered responsible for breaking the ground for the theorization of the intersectionality of identity, the Combahee River Collective (1982 [1977]) analyzed that women of color are discriminated against in fundamentally different ways than white women. The collective argued that the multiple mechanisms of discrimination they are subject to as women and as Black people cannot be thought of as additional but rather must be understood as interlacing. The concept of intersectionality that emerged from this thinking frames identities more generally as a result of multiple processes of social differentiation and calls for an analysis of their mutual constitution.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of intersectionality is also highly useful for grasping the *discursive field* inhabited by queer migrant women in Switzerland. The participants in this study were simultaneously marginalized as women, as foreigners, and as sexual dissidents. While other stratifying principles of the social were of course also constitutive of individual interviewees' identifications and experiences, it was primarily their gender, sexuality, and ‘migrant’ positionalities that were addressed in the formal calls for this research. As such, these three identity categories represented important filters through which this particular field of research was approached, or rather constituted.

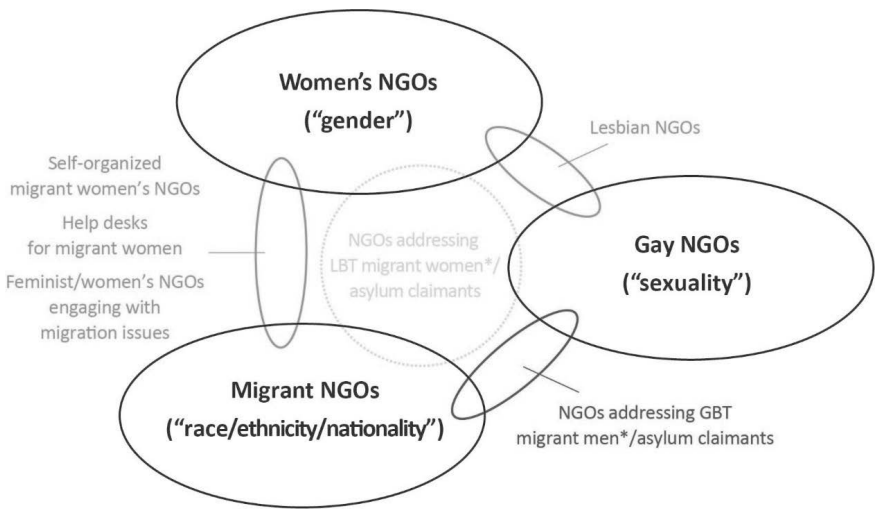
As emerges from the two brief histories and geographies of migrant women and lesbians outlined above, the migrant and the lesbian positionality tend to be constructed as separate. This separateness importantly also manifests in the structure of the organizational landscape of organizations engaging with the subject position of migrant women and lesbians respectively. At the beginning of the interview phase for this study in 2005, this landscape could easily be organized around these three categories – gender, sexuality, and migrant identity respectively (see Figure 1). As these organizations largely emerged from social movements whose proclaimed aim was to *name* these categories in the first place in order to call attention to the fact that certain social groups are

37 A variation of a part of this sub-chapter was published in the book section “Alltagsräume queerer Migrantinnen in der Schweiz – Ein Plädoyer für eine räumliche Perspektive auf Intersektionalität” in Binswanger et al.'s collection of essays *Gender Scripts* (Büchler 2009a).

38 Many further contributions to the concept of intersectionality have inspired this study, including Anthias 2001, Anzaldúa 1987, Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981, Collins 1990, 1993, and 1999, Haschemi Yekani et al. 2006, Hull et al. 1982, Klinger 2003, Knapp 2005a and 2005b, Lorde 1982, Lutz 2001, Lutz and Davis 2005, Lutz and Leiprecht 2009, and McCall 2005.

systematically discriminated against, this categorical structure is not surprising. This structure is also not limited to non-governmental organizations, as these social movements have also fundamentally influenced the organization of the federal government, the political and cultural landscape, cultural spaces, as well as scientific knowledge production in Switzerland.

Figure 1: The Swiss organizational landscape during the research period (2005-2013) mirrors the segregation of identity politics conducted on the basis of gender, sexuality, and race or migrant identity respectively. The lighter the coloring, the smaller the number of organizations or projects addressing the respective intersectional subject positions. L, G, B, T = lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans.



There were only a handful of organizations, mostly short-lived or only sporadically active, that addressed homosexual migrants in Switzerland. Among these, most implicitly or explicitly predominantly address(ed) men. There were some 'migrant groups' initiated by (usually white, non-migrant members) of larger LGBT organizations, such as *GayMigs*, an initiative by the *Homosexuelle Arbeitsgruppe Zürich HAZ*, which had closed down shortly before the field phase of this research started. Further, several organizations that in theory addressed both men and women in fact almost exclusively supported men. *Queeramnesty* and *SLAP* were two examples in this case. Mostly engaging in activities to improve the situation of LGBT people outside the West, the Swiss branch of *Queeramnesty* also supported people who seek asylum in Switzerland on grounds of their homosexuality – mostly men.<sup>39</sup> Among the organizations that engaged with people of all genders and sexualities was the queergender platform *sündikat*, which in the following couple of years organized some (if few) events specifically addressing queer

39 This latter activity has since become more central to the activities of *Queeramnesty* (see e.g. *Queeramnesty* 2014, Ott and Navarra 2019).



people of color in Switzerland. Under the slogan “The privilege to imagine more,” the group stated that “queers resist (*stellen sich queer zu*,” literally “put themselves queer to”) disciplining -> normalization -> programming -> systematization -> regulation -> reduction.”<sup>40, 41</sup>

SLAP, too, overwhelmingly supported Swiss *gay men* seeking to bring their foreign partners to Switzerland. Its president estimated in 2007 that 80 percent of their incoming requests were from men.<sup>42</sup> The likely explanation for this gender bias can be found in the statistics that have since emerged following the introduction of the Partnership Act in 2007: Generally, there were roughly double as many men as women who registered their partnerships, annually about 1’000 men and 500 women. Of these, on average 75 percent of the women but only 58 percent of the men were Swiss citizens. Of these non-Swiss citizens, 60 percent of the women but only 40 percent of the men were European citizens, for whom immigration into Switzerland is mostly uncomplicated thanks to Switzerland’s participation in the European agreements concerning the free movement of people. Swiss men hence much more often registered partnerships with non-European citizens of so-called *Drittstaaten*, whose immigration was, and especially *had been* before the Act, considerably more complicated, particularly if they were not from Western countries such as the U.S. A representative example illustrates these numbers: In 2014, 102 male but only 22 female citizens from African, Latin American and Caribbean, Asian, and Oceanian countries registered their same-sex partnership in Switzerland. Among them were 56 men and 17 women from Latin American and Caribbean countries; and 38 men and two women from South East Asian countries (BFS online 2007-2018).

To return to the organizational landscape in Switzerland: At the outset of this research I was unable to locate self-organized groups by queer migrant women in Switzerland who practiced an identity politics explicitly grounded in the experience of queer migrant women (i.e. as women simultaneously targeted by racism, heterosexism, and sexism);

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40 Source: <http://www.suendikat.ch>, downloaded on August 13, 2013 (my translation).

41 As discussed in the introduction, a number of groups have emerged since that address the positionality of queer migrant people, such as for example *Bla<sup>a</sup>Sh* or *Queer Migs*. *Bla<sup>a</sup>Sh – Black She* describe themselves as a “network of Black women living in German-speaking Switzerland. We live straight or queer, with or without children, some of us have grown up exclusively in Europe, others have lived on other continents, and what binds us together is the experience of being perceived as ‘Black’ and the Afro hyphen: All of us have at least one Black parent, we are, in other words, all ‘of African Descent’ in the broadest sense of the word. We aim for social, cultural and political empowerment and are looking forward to your message and participation!” (Source: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/NetzwerkBlackShe/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/NetzwerkBlackShe/about/?ref=page_internal), downloaded on December 26, 2019, my translation). *QueerMigs*, founded by two queer migrant women in 2013, is “a project for LGBT people who migrated to Switzerland and for local people that want to meet the newbies. Come in, sit down, enjoy time together with us.” In collaboration with *Queeramnesty*, *QueerMigs* has also established a regular “Welcome Café for LGBT refugees.” Source: <http://queermigs.tumblr.com/>, downloaded on September 18, 2013; [www.queermigs.ch](http://www.queermigs.ch), downloaded on December 26, 2019.

42 As discussed above, SLAP virtually closed down operation after the introduction of the Partnership Act, which facilitated the immigration of registered non-Swiss citizens.

nor did there appear to be websites, helplines, or regular cultural events that specifically addressed this subject position.<sup>43</sup> This absence stood in contrast to other – also small – European countries where organizations already existed by and for queer migrant women.<sup>44</sup> The disparity was even more glaring when comparing the situation in Switzerland to the organizing in many North American cities. For example, in 2005, in the city of Toronto alone there were twenty-four LGBT groups addressing members of a specific ethnicity; six addressing members of specific linguistic communities; and eleven addressing followers of specific religions (Smith 2005).<sup>45</sup> The recent flurry of publications on racism in Switzerland is now beginning to identify the reasons for the relative dearth of such activisms – and generally anti-racist activism – in Switzerland at the time. These analyses suggest that until recently the political and social landscape in Switzerland rendered it almost impossible for immigrant people to address racism. As the longtime anti-racism activist, Halua Pinto de Magalhães, stated in an interview with the newspaper *Der Bund* about anti-racist activism a few years ago: “*Wer damals öffentlich über Rassismus sprechen wollte, nahm dieses Wort kaum in den Mund. Er sprach von Integration*” – “Whoever wanted to speak about racism at the time refrained from using this term. He spoke of integration.”<sup>46</sup> His statement supports critical race scholars’ and activists’ diagnosis that Switzerland continues to identify, and become identified, as a space free of racism, which creates a space in which racism exists but is not addressable (see Chapter 1). However, Pinto de Magalhães and other activists and scholars have initiated a change in the past few years by addressing racism in Switzerland increasingly openly and loudly. These voices were further strengthened by the arrival of the “Black Lives Matter” movement in Switzerland in 2020. The reasons as to why such a change has become possible are diverse and include: The ‘second generation’ – the children of immigrants – has grown up and claims citizenship with more ownership than their parents, who were often strictly disciplined into ‘assimilating’ and ‘integrating’; Switzerland has become more diverse; the internet and social media allow for more access to alternative representations and anti-discriminatory contents; the continuous strengthening of the far right has triggered reactions from the other side of the political spectrum; and the “Black Lives Matter” movement has increased sensitivity for racist cultures. As Walter Leimgruber, the president of the *Eidgenössische Migrationskommission* (Federal Migration Commission), stated in an interview published in the 2018 biannual report by the *Fachstelle für Rassismusbekämpfung* (Federal Service for Combating Racism): “We can see now that criticism of racism and discrimination has really arrived in society, and that migrant men and women and their descendants are demanding their place in society” (*Fachstelle für Rassismusbekämpfung* 2018:173, my translation). At any

43 An exception was the lesbian community site [www.shoe.org](http://www.shoe.org), which used to offer chat channels in many European languages. However, shortly after the beginning of the interview phase, the language choice was reduced to English and German.

44 E.g. *ViennaMix* and *MiGay* (Vienna), *LesMAus* (Linz), *LesMigraS* (Berlin), the *SAFRA Project* (London).

45 While groups addressing certain nationalities, ethnicities, or religions do not exclusively address people who have immigrated as adults (who this study focuses on), these activities generally established a very visible and diverse landscape of intersectional LGBT/migration identity politics.

46 See e.g. <https://www.derbund.ch/bern/integration-ist-ihnen-nicht-genug/story/20511595>, downloaded on June 4, 2020.

rate: At no time was there any validity in the argument I was often told at the outset of this research project that there were probably simply not enough queer migrant women to form such groups, seeing that Switzerland was such a small country.<sup>47</sup>

In the process of looking for informants, I focused on organizations addressing lesbians, organizations addressing migrant women, and, where existent, organizations addressing queer migrants. This search exposed a profound lack of experience with, and knowledge about the experiences of queer migrant women in *all* of these organizations (see also Büchler 2009a, and Chapter 7 in this book). In the following, I use the case of lesbian organizations to exemplify this lack of expertise.

As the president of the *LOS* – the largest lesbian organization in Switzerland – stated in our interview in 2006, migration was not planned to become a priority in Swiss lesbian identity politics in the following years. Instead, most of the limited resources were going to be allocated toward advancing the legalization of adoption and artificial insemination for lesbian couples.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the *LOS* positioned itself as an advocate for queer migrant women, as for example manifests in the fact that its representatives repeatedly participated in round-table discussions addressing queer asylum, where they spoke as experts on the issue. This expertise was, however, not grounded in experience with or knowledge about the realities of queer migrant women (be they asylum seekers, regular immigrants, or *Sans Papiers*). The president of the *LOS*, who had herself acted as a discussant on such podiums, admitted in the interview to not knowing any queer migrant women personally.

As outlined in the introduction to this study, political debates on queer migration have largely focused on queer asylum, which has remained the discursive space in which queer migrants in Switzerland have become most visible (men, mostly). However, these discourses may unintentionally turn against and invisibilize the queer migrant subject. Revisiting the statement discussed in the introduction (quoted below in a slightly more extensive version) reveals how queer migrants are inadvertently instrumentalized to promote domestic LGBT issues while at the same time projecting homophobia onto an alien Other:

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47 One common reaction to this research project had been that it was ‘too specific,’ addressing a very small group of people only. To be clear, I do not believe that the number of people a research project addresses in any way correlates with its significance, particularly seeing how dominant discourses often project core social issues onto the bodies of sometimes very small minorities, at the same time producing and excluding these minoritarian subjects. Nevertheless, I suspect that the number of queer migrant women in Switzerland is being grossly underestimated (by those who even think of estimating it). Evidently, any attempt at an estimate is based on several highly contestable assumptions, such as assuming a ‘homosexuality rate’ of five to ten percent, or the representation of this percentage in diasporic communities, especially among female immigrants. However, even a most conservative estimate places a five-digit number of queer migrant women in Switzerland.

48 Interview with the president of the *LOS*, October 20, 2006. Until very recently the *LOS* has largely remained true to its announced negligence of migration-related issues.

*Das Thema Homosexualität muss [beim Asylverfahren] in den ersten achtundvierzig Stunden auf den Tisch. Viele, die das Wort 'schwul' das Leben lang noch nicht in den Mund genommen haben, weil sie sich nicht getraut haben, und dann sollten sie plötzlich Klartext sprechen, oder? Wir wissen alle, die sich selber mal geoutet haben, wie schwierig das ist.*

[During the asylum procedure], the issue of homosexuality has to be laid out within forty-eight hours.<sup>49</sup> Many of those who have not uttered the word 'gay' ever before in their lives because they were afraid to do so, and then they are suddenly expected to speak [about it] plainly, is that right? All of us who have come out ourselves know how difficult this is.

—President of a lesbian organization on a podium on queer asylum hosted by the Swiss Socialist Party in Bern in September 2006

Asylum seekers – as the term “gay” (in German “*schwul*” has a distinctly male connotation) indicates, they are presumed to be male – are assumed to be ‘gay but closeted.’ They are depicted as already being aware of their gay identity internally, but not having communicated it yet. The only thing keeping them from “speaking plainly” is their homophobic cultural (ex)context, from which they are simultaneously separated by their clandestine homosexuality. Assuming a collective global gay identity and experience (“us”), the Western trope of ‘coming out’ is projected onto the Other, who in reality may or may not think of (homo)sexuality as an identity, and who may or may not be aware that the speech act of ‘coming out’ is a requirement for becoming legible as a homosexual and hence as a potentially persecuted person by Swiss asylum officials. Queer postcolonial social anthropologist Martin Manalansan has identified the trope of the ‘coming out’ as central to processes of racializing, gendering and hence disciplining queer people of color: “Non-Western practices are marginalized and cast as ‘premodern’ or unliberated. Practices that do not conform with Western narratives of development of individual political subjects [such as especially the ‘coming out’] are dismissed as unliberated or coded as ‘homophobic’” (Manalansan 1997:486). In consequence, the ‘real’ queer migrant subject (whether asylum seeker or regular immigrant), disappears vis-à-vis the construct of the paradigmatic (male) homosexual asylum seeker. Equating “our” experiences with the imaginary asylum seekers’ moreover overlooks the discrimination specifically aimed at migrants and asylum seekers.

As discussed in detail later (see Chapters 3.4.4 and 8.2.3), it is the promise of highly scandalized human rights news that lures some LGBT rights organizations to resort to such victimizing stereotypes of queer migrants. As Alice Miller states, “asylum claims

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49 In order to establish ‘credibility,’ it is vital that asylum seekers establish their *Asylgrund* (the reason why they are claiming asylum) within the first forty-eight hours of their arrival in Switzerland. If the *Asylgrund* is changed after this period of time, this crucially diminishes the chances of obtaining asylum. The 2008 *Handbook Asylum Procedure* of the BFM acknowledges the possibility that seekers may withhold the reason for their persecution at first in cases in which they have been raped or otherwise traumatized or have been subject to considerable psychological pressure in the context of gender-specific persecution. Accordingly, it states that the contradictions in narratives arising from such experiences should not be read as infringing credibility per se (BFM 2008:20 (§2.4.4)). How to handle this question effectively in practice remains a contested issue (Queeramnesty 2014).

are visible victories, rare in the human rights world” (Miller 2005:162, see also Berger 2009 and Espahangizi 2015).<sup>50</sup> More recent campaigns by Swiss LGBT organizations have furthermore located the problem of homophobia in Switzerland as residing within immigrant communities themselves (Mesquita 2011:222-231, Mesquita and Purtschert 2016). Homophobia is thus transferred to an external Other, rendering it difficult to sustain criticism against the continued homophobia and structural discrimination within Switzerland.

Swiss LGBT organizations hence play a highly ambivalent role in debates around migration. This observation is not meant to berate the hugely important work done by these organizations in any way. Rather, it is to point to the importance of reflecting on the effects of discourses and practices that project Swiss/Western homosexual subjects' topoi onto non-Western sexual Others and homophobia onto non-Western cultures.

To conclude this reflection on the intersectionality of the 'field' of this study: Entering the 'field' via organizations that were seemingly situated 'close' to the intersectional subject position that I was interested in, queer migrant women, in fact resulted in a demonstration of intersectionality theorists' argument that social categories cannot be thought of as *additional*. The lack of organizations, projects, and institutions addressing queer migrant women resulted in a lacuna of knowledge about queer migrant women's biographies, social networks, familial situations, work situations, living conditions, experiences, concerns, and everyday lives in Switzerland. Although the situation has since seen change due to the recent foundation of groups explicitly addressing queer people of color (see Chapter 1), their multiple discriminations and, tied to these, their continued far-reaching invisibility persist. The present study addresses this gap in knowledge, at the same time heeding Natalie Oswin's cautionary note that “[t]hrough looking intently at the other, we may nonetheless learn nothing about ‘them.’ At the same time, we learn nothing about ‘us.’ [...] If we continue to look only outward, we will focus on the ways in which the western queer model fails to fit in the non-West at the expense of exploring the ways in which it also fails to fit in the West” (Oswin 2006:788).

In sum, this chapter has shown that while there exists extensive literature on immigration to Switzerland; while there is a quickly growing field of research engaging with women-specific issues in the context of migration; and while there is some, although still scant, scientific knowledge on the history and lives of lesbians and people of color in Switzerland, queer migration, and especially *female* queer migration, to Switzerland remains a very open research field. Although scholarly engagements with postcolonial configurations of sexuality and migrant sexualities are beginning to emerge, these discussions have remained side remarks rather than central concerns (Caprez and Nay 2008, Mesquita 2011, but see Huotelin 2013). Also, in contrast to other European countries (e.g. *LesMigraS* 2012 in Germany or the *Safra Project* 2002 in the U.K.), there have, to my knowledge, been no studies commissioned or carried out by non-governmental organizations that have illuminated queer migrants' lives and needs in Switzerland. For the conceptualization and theorization of this research I thus now turn to Anglophone queer migration and queer geographical scholarship.

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50 For examples in the Swiss media see e.g. Bär 2014b, Schindler 2014.



### 3. Sexuality, Migration, Space

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Migration refers to the movement of people through space. People exchange one context of their everyday lives with another, sometimes going through a chain of places, sometimes moving in circles. They not only take with them notions about the place(s) they have left behind but also bring along imaginations about the place they are going to, shaped by the media or reports by other travelers. But the places they arrive at (or return to) will not likely be what they have imagined. Thus, for migrants, a process of decoding begins. Based on their previous experiences, they try to make sense of the social rules governing the new place and attempt to create a meaningful space for themselves within it. In this process, their perceptions of themselves and of the new place begins to shift, just as their perception of the place(s) they have come from begins to change, too. This is not a one-way process, with 'locals' coding and 'migrants' decoding. Upon closer inspection, many 'locals' turn out to have a migration background of sorts, be it that they have immigrant spouses or grandparents. Moreover, the presence of migrant people in the new place in itself produces effects. Their perception of the new place not only shapes the ways they *experience* their new social environment but also the way they *act* within it. These material practices in turn both confirm and subvert the hegemonic social inscriptions of these places.

These social constructions of space are highly stratified. That is, they work along the lines of categories that structure the social such as gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality. In other words: Identities and space constitute each other. Sexual identity, for example, shapes people's perceptions and experiences of a place and their practices within that place, be it a lesbian bar, the workplace, or the family home. These perceptions and practices and their representations produce collective spatial imaginaries, such as the myth of the urban gay community or the notion of the paradigmatic heterosexual nuclear family home. Such collective imaginations are always manifested materially as well, be it in the form of brick and mortar,<sup>1</sup> in moving bodies, in social networks, or in flows of goods and capital. At the same time, precisely because they are organized around defined social positions, such imagined geographies also generate *exclusions* of certain

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1 For example, in Switzerland, the bedrooms on apartment floor plans often continue to be labeled with "Parents," "Child 1," "Child 2," expressing and reproducing the nuclear family norm.

people, who can be physically excluded from particular places, rendered invisible within them, or seen as not belonging.

With its focus on queer migrant women in Switzerland, this study is concerned with people who inhabit an intersectional social position for which hardly any designated spaces exist. Yet queer migrant women are *corporeally present*, incorporating this allegedly ‘impossible’ subject position, meaning that in most places, not all aspects of queer migrant women’s Selves are visible or acknowledged. This discrepancy raises the question of how queer migrant women negotiate the dominant meanings inscribed in their everyday (and not-so-everyday) spaces, and how their perceptions of these spaces and their practices in them reproduce or disrupt their hegemonic inscriptions.

In order to address these questions, this study integrates approaches from two bodies of scholarship that approach these issues from different perspectives: *queer migration scholarship* and *geographies of sexualities* (or *queer geographies* – I use these terms interchangeably). The chapter is organized as follows: First, Chapter 3.1 outlines the understanding of *space* that has both guided the conceptualization of this research and re-emerged through it. Second, while the two bodies of literature of queer migration scholarship and geographies of sexualities have recently begun to intersect, they have each developed their own genealogies, foci, and concerns. Hence Chapters 3.2 and 3.3 introduce these two fields of research separately, notably identifying the research gaps within them that this study addresses. Chapter 3.4 introduces foundational concepts that have emerged from thinking sexuality, migration, and space together, focusing on the contributions this study draws on and extends. Finally, Chapter 3.5 raises the question of who ‘queer migrant women’ are and how they are addressed within this study.

### 3.1 Embodied Geographies

“Is it really not possible to kiss spaces?” (“*Kann man Räume wirklich nicht küssen?*”) Peter Weichhart asks in the title of his provocative essay about rivaling concepts of space in geography (Weichhart 1998). Weichhart argues that the most basic question in geography, “What is space?” is not answerable as such, but it can be injected with potential if reformulated as: “What *specific meaning* of the word ‘space’ is used by *whom* and *to what end?*” (ibid:3, emphasis original, my translation). This sub-chapter engages with these questions, aiming to embed this research within two theorizations of the spatial – one by Doreen Massey and another by Sallie A. Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward. Both have guided the conceptualization of this study and the analyses it offers.

This study is an embodied geography. It is about the ways in which we (re)make ourselves and our environment in our everyday (and not-so-everyday) lives by what we say, wear, eat, touch, desire, build; by where we choose to go or stay away from; by whose company we seek or avoid; by what fascinates or repulses us; and by what we feel is the right or logical thing to do. It is equally a geography of exclusions. It is about the ways our very choices and actions are restricted, our access to places barred depending on who we are perceived to be, and about how not only our thinking but also our innermost



desires, feelings, emotions, and affects are channeled and disciplined by discourses of globalization, capitalism, nation, human rights, and others.

This is also an embodied geography because it refuses to treat these discourses as amorphous, ubiquitous conglomerates that ‘somehow,’ on the ‘large scale,’ determine the world and how it works, as many theories would have it. It is a geography that fundamentally rejects grand theories of a structured and organized space which can be fully known and understood, but instead frames the workings of the world as a flurry of mundane deliberate and non-intentional actions that constantly assemble and disassemble bodies and things. Such a geography conceives of discourses as necessarily embodied and repetitive social practices – mostly everyday, ordinary practices, but often also not-so-everyday practices – without which hegemonies would cease to exist. It is in banal acts that discourses are perpetuated but also *fail* to be perpetuated, and that is what interests me here: how everyday and not-so-everyday social practices, as well as the bodies, objects, and landscapes they produce, are shaped *but never entirely determined* by hegemonic discourses, and how these resistances, failures, and slippages drive social change. In other words, this is a geography about how the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses depends on their repeated and necessarily embodied performance, which is always necessarily flawed, different, changing, and ultimately unpredictable. In focusing on the material movement of bodies and objects across space, this study is also about the *stickiness* and materiality of space, which speaks against simplistic ideas about placelessness, mobility, and flows that often pervade writings about migration and globalization.

This sub-chapter introduces some of the geographical thinking that enables such a conceptualization of space, and which has inspired my attempt to consider the migration biographies and everyday spaces and practices of queer migrant women in Switzerland beyond simplistic binary models of structure and agency. A purely structural view would necessarily highlight absence and exclusion. At the same time, framing queer migrant women as gloriously unruly protagonists in a queer theory would mean to ignore the discursive frameworks queer migrants are forced to navigate in the Swiss context. Therefore, a theory is needed that can address *both* the fact that there are no designated spaces for queer migrant women in Switzerland *and* the fact that these subjects’ corporeal presence and practices are always accommodating, embracing, refusing, adopting, and upsetting what is ‘normal’ in Switzerland. An embodied geography with a focus on the (re)production of space through repetitive re-enactments of social relations seems to enable just that.

### 3.1.1 Doreen Massey’s Three Propositions about Space

Some geographers have begun to question the spatialities that have been brought to ‘globalization’ by globalization theorists. These authors have particularly criticized the conceptual separation of the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ which pervades academic literature about globalization, framing the concepts in terms of a binary that privileges an all-encompassing, powerful, abstract ‘global’ over a specific, material, powerless ‘local.’ Taking issue with the implications such views have for conceptualizations of the formation of subjectivity, space, and place, these authors have instead suggested framing ‘globaliza-

tion' as a flurry of embedded, embodied, and often very banal interactions (Amin 2002, Gibson-Graham 2002, Marston et al. 2005, Marston et al. 2007, Massey 1994 and 2005).

Doreen Massey suggests we think of space as "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey 2005:9, see also Massey 1998 and 2004). She writes against what she sees as three common failures in the imagination of space, each of which has been serving specific political ends. The first common failure is to imagine space as a *surface* to cross or a territory to conquer – a notion that has led people in the West to think of other places and societies as being defined social entities fixed 'on' that surface, passively awaiting the arrival of their active counterparts – the colonizer, or global capital, for instance. Second, Massey writes against the narrative of the alleged *inevitability* of (a very specific neoliberal, technology-driven) *globalization*. Third, she takes issue with the common division between *space* as the abstract, the general, the global, and *place* as the specific, the local (Massey 2005:4-5).

Massey formulates her tentative alternative approach to space in the form of three propositions about space:<sup>2</sup>

First, that we recognize space as the *product of interrelations*; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny.

Second, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of *multiplicity* in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space.

Third, that we recognize space as *always under construction*. Precisely because space [...] is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. (Massey 2005:9, emphasis added)

Massey's project is decidedly political. She argues that "thinking the spatial in a particular way can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are formulated" (ibid:9). She demonstrates this by linking her three propositions about space with three recent shifts towards what she calls a "progressive politics":

The first proposition – that space is a product of interrelations – Massey sees as resonating with the emergence of an *anti-essentialist politics*, which replaces an individualistic-liberalist identity politics conceiving of identities as always already formed with a politics that exposes the very *process* of constituting and naturalizing identities as a crucial stake of the political. Such a politics "lays its stress upon the relational constructiveness of things" and is "wary therefore about claims to authenticity based in notions of unchanging identity." In other words, just as identities are always multiple and in the process of becoming, so is space, which does not preexist identities or the relations between them (ibid:10).

Massey aligns her second proposition – to think of space as the sphere of coexistence – with the emphasis certain progressive political discourses place on *difference* and

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2 Massey insists that her propositions are not about finally having found the truth about space but rather seek to "stress just how genuinely difficult it is not to resort to an a priori politics of topographies" (Massey 2005:172).

*heterogeneity*. She particularly refers to theorists' and activists' insistence that the story of the world cannot be told as the story of the West alone (or as the story of its dominant figure, the white heterosexual male), but that this story has to be framed as one particular story among many other – *coexisting* – stories. Massey's insistence on coexistence and multiplicity may seem banal and self-evident, but the concepts have far-reaching consequences. For instance, this proposition precludes the notion of a "pre-contact society" inherent to colonialist narratives. Such conceptualizations of place represent an "essentialist, billiard-ball view" of place in which *first* a difference between bounded places is established, and *then* these already-different places come into contact with each other. By contrast, Massey argues that societies have always been in contact with each other, exactly because place is necessarily always a meeting point of different trajectories. Hence the specificity of place is always derived from relations with the beyond, and these relations may span the globe (ibid:66ff.).

In this context Massey also addresses the ubiquitous dichotomy established between *space* and *place*. Place, she says, has come to signify the "geographical source of meaning," 'home,' the local, the everyday, the bounded, the coherent, the authentic, the traditional, and the *grounded* – the latter a term with which many geographers are particularly enamored since it is exactly in this 'groundedness' that many see geography as differing from other, more 'abstract' or 'large-scale' social sciences. This 'place' is pitted against either the 'global' – associated with power, alienation, and instant connectivity – or 'space' – of which Massey asks: "As what? the outside? the abstract? the meaningless?" (ibid:6, emphasis original). She asks provocatively: "Where would you draw the line around the lived reality of your daily life? In such approaches words such as 'real,' 'everyday,' 'lived,' 'grounded' are constantly deployed and bound together; [...] they counterpose themselves to a wider 'space' which must be abstract, ungrounded, universal, even threatening. [...] If we really think space relationally, then it is the sum of all our connections, and in that sense utterly grounded, and those connections may go round the world" (ibid:184-185).

Additionally, the failure to think of space as the sphere of coexistence not only frames places as already-divided-up and bounded but also organizes space along *one* temporal sequence, with coexisting places paradoxically being interpreted as different stages on a single timeline. In this ubiquitous narrative, the U.S. figures as the spearhead of modernism and progress, with all other places lagging more or less 'behind.' In such a rendering, "Africa is not *different* from Western Europe, it is (just) behind" (ibid:68, emphasis original). Such discourses of 'backwardness' are entangled with discourses of development, which continue to be organized around the assumption of unidirectional flows of knowledge, capital, and values (such as what, for instance, represents a 'proper' gay identity) from the 'developed' to the 'developing' world. This formulation denies certain regions of the world their own particular trajectories, histories, temporalities, and, especially, their own *presents* and *futures*. In these renderings, as Massey says, "the future is already foretold," which contradicts her third proposition: to think of space as always in the process of emerging (ibid:68, see also Fabian 1983).

Massey aligns her third proposition to think of space as always under construction with "an increasingly vocal insistence within political discourses on the genuine *openness of the future*." This openness acts against the determinism pervading grand nar-

natives of Progress, Development and Modernization (ibid:11, emphasis added). Here, Massey draws on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's notion of radical democracy, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of active experimentation, as well as on the work of queer theorist William Haver to illustrate this emerging politics of a radically open future. "In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections are established), relations which may or may not be accomplished" – it is also a space of "loose ends and missing links" (ibid:11-12).

Extending this argument, Massey insists that space has an intrinsic element of *unpredictability*, which she calls "the chance of space." She uses the figure of the accidental neighbor to exemplify this element of chance, only to warn us immediately of simplistic dichotomies about what may represent order (e.g. 'the state'), and chaos respectively (e.g. 'the street market') (ibid:111-112). She also cautions against valuing either openness or closure as 'good' or 'bad' per se: "The decision on whether or not to argue for openness, or for closure, must be an *outcome*, the result of an assessment of the specific power-relations and politics" (ibid:167, emphasis original). From a leftist stance, for instance, free flow can be considered 'bad' if it concerns the free flow of capital; from the same stance, closure can be considered 'good' if it is performed by locals attempting to protect their territory. Massey concludes that "both openness and closure, and both classic territory and rhizomatic flow can be the outcome of sedimented and unequal power-relations" (ibid:174).

Massey also applies her third proposition to the *non-human* world. Indeed, one very persistent kind of fixing identity of place she locates is in the frozen imaginations of *nature*. Mountains, the sea, landscapes are seen as 'having always been there,' and consequently as spaces in which we humans can 'ground ourselves' again. However, as Massey points out, 'natural' places are just as dynamic as 'cultural' places: "The nonhuman has its trajectories also and the event of place demands, no less than with the human, a politics of negotiation" (ibid:160). Such a view of the non-human world raises the question: "And yet, if everything is moving, where is here?" (ibid:138).

According to the proposition to think of space as always in the process of becoming, Massey imagines place, 'here,' as an event:

What is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or of the eternity of the hills [but] precisely that thrown-togetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman. (Massey 2005:140)

By emphasizing that all social relations have to be renegotiated and re-enacted continually in and through space, Massey's three propositions about space open up the future. These negotiations do not 'take place' on a neutral stage, but rather each place has its own story-so-far; represents both resource and evidence for social practice; and is a setting imbued with power, against the backdrop of which negotiations between trajectories cross each other, be it intentionally or by chance. Vice versa, these embedded practices again (re)produce the meaning of place, and it is this intersection of place, objects and bodies that constitute the driving force behind how we think about a place

and about the people and objects in it. Massey's is hence a geography that "uproot[s] 'space' from that constellation of concepts in which it has so unquestioningly so often been embedded (stasis; closure; representation)" and settles it "among another set of ideas (heterogeneity; relationality; coevalness... liveliness indeed) where it releases a more challenging political landscape" (ibid.:13).

As will become evident in Chapter 3.4 and the interview analyses, Massey's three propositions about space have provided a powerful lens through which to view the context of this study, the interview settings and the narratives generated within them. However, these concepts do less to explain how exactly these "events of place" happen in interactions among Massey's stories-so-far. Despite its focus on the processual character of space, Massey's theory still remains an epistemology rather than an ontology, explaining how we come to *know* the world rather than how the world actually *works*. To address the latter question, theorists of the spatial have begun to think about space as a material event, triggering an *affective turn* that redirects the focus of interest to the material, the ontological and the sensual (see e.g. Baier et al. 2014, Clough 2007).<sup>3</sup> Among these theorists, Sallie A. Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward (2005, hereafter referred to as Marston et al., see also Jones III et al. 2007) have developed a theory that does not converse directly with Massey but which usefully extends Massey's critique through its shared intention to create room for a progressive politics by disrupting dominant ways of thinking about space.

### 3.1.2 A Flat Ontology

Marston et al. envision a theory that is close to life:

Theory should not ignore the diverse intermesh of languages and desires, the making of connections between bits of bodies and parts of objects; sentences half-caught, laws enforced prejudicially and broken accidentally: for it is here, in the middle of the event – at the sites of singular composition rarely resembling discrete and unitary objects – that one finds the production of social space. (Marston et al. 2005:423)

Marston et al.'s argument is embedded in a different debate than Massey's. The authors mainly write to challenge the ubiquitous and politically momentous epistemological segmentation of space into *scales* in human geography (and in migration research, as I have argued elsewhere, see Büchler and Richter 2010). At the heart of this 'scale debate' has been the insight that geographical scales – ranging from the body to the home, the neighborhood, the city, the rural, the nation, and the globe (to name but a few of the most adamantly contested scales within the discipline) – do not in any way mirror a material reality but are *produced* through power-saturated representational practices (Marston 2000). As has been shown widely, the social construction of geographical scale

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3 Among these theories are notably also Bruno Latour's *Actor Network Theory* (Latour 2005), Nigel Thrift's non-representational theory (Thrift 2007), Brian Massumi's theorization of affect (Massumi 2002), and Gilles Deleuze's notion of assemblage, as adopted for instance by Jasbir Puar (Puar 2005 and 2007).

works to organize, segregate, inscribe, and control space, and, in the process, it subjugates, disciplines, and excludes certain bodies. Today the debate exposing the social construction of scale has become so central to geography that it has sometimes been proclaimed to represent geography's single most important contribution to social theory in the context of the so-called *spatial turn* (e.g. Jonas 2006).

The *spatial turn* refers to the growing interest of scholars from broader social and cultural sciences in the spatial, triggered by the proliferation of discourses around globalization. *Spatial turn* proponents argue that due to the global intensification of social relations (faster, over longer distances, more often, etc.), new questions have to be asked regarding the relationship between society and space. In the wake of this discussion some geographers have argued, as I do here, that this new enthusiasm for spatial theory is accompanied by a multiplication of often under-theorized spatial terms and metaphors. The uncritical use of such metaphors frequently falls into a 'territorial trap' (Lossau and Lippuner 2004) as they tend to conceptualize space as exactly the preexisting, static container of social actions Massey takes issue with.

The ensuing *ontological turn* or *affective turn*, which has begun to engage more deeply with all things 'everyday' and 'material,' is arguably in the process of 'overtaking' scale as geography's heralded unique contribution to social theory. Marston et al.'s paper is representative of the kind of work associated with the ontological turn. These authors demonstrate that there is no agreement among scale theorists as to what 'scale' actually means or how it could be operationalized, even after several decades of theorizing the concept. At the same time, they discern a trend towards a complication of the term, and especially a destabilization of strictly hierarchical conceptualizations of scale. This undoing is represented by scholarship that seeks to locate social processes and agency by combining hierarchical versions of scale with horizontal – network – theorizing, as exemplified by Eric Swyngedouw's concept of 'glocalization' (Swyngedouw 1997) or by work like Massey's (to whom Marston et al. also refer to in this context), which frames the local and the global as *inter-penetrated*.

By contrast, Marston et al. bluntly propose to "eliminate scale as a concept in human geography" altogether and install a *flat* alternative in its stead (Marston et al. 2005:416). Their proposition is motivated by four critiques of the current scale debate, which they consider to have hit a dead-end: First, scale theorists' failure to convincingly theorize the difference between *horizontal* scale (size, networks, extensiveness) and *vertical* scale (level, hierarchy). Second, the impossibility of disentangling scalar *hierarchies* from the distinction made between micro and macro. Third, the trend (both in the critical scale debate and in broader human geography) to assume that scales and their hierarchies are *conceptual givens* (here the authors enumerate the body, the neighborhood, the urban, the regional, the national, and the global as the 'usual-suspect' scales). This, the authors argue, predetermines structure and content of research endeavors rather than inviting serious reflection on social practices. And lastly, they critique the inherence of an 'objective' or *God's Eye perspective* in hierarchical scale thinking (ibid:422).

Marston et al.'s radical proposal to extirpate scale as a concept from human geography is not to deny the existence of *epistemologies* organizing space into scales (or the continued need to analyze the power dynamics inherent in the production of scales). However, they also note:

Acknowledging the existence of scale as an epistemological ordering frame, however, is not the same as claiming it to exist as a nesting of 'legal, juridical and organizational structures' [quoting Kearns 2004 pers. comm.]. For one encounters these 'structures' not at some level once removed, 'up there' in a vertical imaginary, but on the ground, in practice, the result of marking territories horizontally through boundaries and enclosures, documents and rules, enforcing agents and their authoritative resources. (Marston et al. 2005:420, square brackets original)

With their proposal to abandon the concept of scale in human geography the authors seek to undermine the "army of affiliated binaries" that has attached themselves to the local/global binary, such as place/space, concrete/abstract, agency/structure, empirical/theoretical, culture/economy, responsible/detached, static/dynamic, and subjectivity/objectivity, among others (ibid:421). They criticize that terms such as 'larger scale forces' ignore "the everydayness of even the most privileged social actors who, though favorably anointed by class, race and gender, and while typically more efficacious in spatial *reach*, are no less situated than the workers they seek to command." The use of such large-scale descriptors tends to shift the blame to "up there" and somewhere else (the 'global economy'), rather than on to the corporate managers who sign pink slips" (ibid:421,427, emphasis original).<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Marston et al. critique the figures of "flowsters and globetrotters" that increasingly replace notions of fixity and categorization. Drawing on a language of flow, fluidity, and movement, these concepts often create an impression of absolute deterritorialization (for instance by negating the impact of cultural context) and openness. Marston et al. decidedly reject the voluntarist trajectories often transported through such work, which, they argue, ignore coagulations, blockages, and assemblages only to eventually reassert the scalar scaffold as a 'context' of the allegedly unfettered flows (ibid:423).

Not in order to deconstruct scale, but in order to bypass the four problems they associate with current theorizations of scale, Marston et al. present a possible avenue of un-thinking scale that builds on thinking of space in terms of a *flat ontology*. A flat ontology discards local-to-global and center-to-margin continua and instead designates "an ontology composed of complex, emergent spatial relations" (ibid:422). It consists of self-organized systems in which "dynamic properties of matter produce a multiplicity of complex relations and singularities that sometimes lead to the creation of new, unique events and entities, but more often to relatively redundant orders and practices" (ibid:424). In other words, through repetition and variation in the practices of its – like in Massey's work both human and non-human – agents, these systems are productive of both systematic orders and creative events. The systematizing events are thereby more frequent than the creative events due to the "tendency for variations to cluster and become generally repetitive," and because creative events are "seldom the actualizations of a genuinely open newness." A flat ontology is hence a *geography of the banal*.

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4 With "spatial reach" Marston et al. mean that the social site of corporate boardrooms "depend[s] upon a vast distribution of resonating social sites" (ibid:427 – the concept of the social site will be explained in a moment). In other words, the decisions of a corporate executive are spatially more expansive than those of people who are endowed with less power.

In this approach, to overcome globalizing ontologies, sustained attention is required to grasp “the intimate and divergent relations between bodies, objects, orders and spaces. Given these, we propose that it is necessary to invent – perhaps endlessly – new spatial concepts that linger upon the materialities and singularities of space” (ibid:424).

Marston et al. draw on Theodore R. Schatzki’s concept of *social sites* to elaborate on their flat ontology. Social sites are dynamic self-organizing event-spaces composed of bodies, doings and sayings:

Schatzki’s conceptualization of social sites illuminates dynamic contexts that allow various inhabitants to hang together in event-relations by virtue of their activities. He situates this in contextual *milieux* of tendencies composing practices and orders, noting that ‘Things tend not to form random aggregates of continuously metamorphosing matters, but instead hang together as clusters of interrelated determinate stuff’ (Schatzki 2002:1). (Marston et al. 2005:425)

In other words, rather than rejecting any notion of order, Marston et al. use the social site in their line of argument to incorporate and explain the effects such orders may have on localized practices. At the same time, they retain the social site as an emergent property of interacting agents:

Leaving room for systemic orders avoids the problems attendant to imagining a world of utter openness and fluidity that inevitably dissolves into problematic idealism. Further, this approach allows us to avoid falling into the trap of naïve voluntarism by embedding individuals within *milieux* of force relations unfolding within the context of orders that constrict and practices that normativize. (Marston et al. 2005:424, emphasis original)

As an example, Marston et al. refer to the layout of the built environment, a collection of objects that – in relation to a human lifespan – changes rather slowly and can therefore have a structuring effect on the social practices in relation with it.

Marston et al. further draw on Gilles Deleuze’s concepts of the virtual and the actual. The virtual may be circumscribed as the field of potentialities of what *might* happen in any space-time, or, alternatively, looking at an event that has already happened, the field of what *might have* happened (which could be likened to Massey’s connections-not-made, loose ends). It is out of this vast multiplicity of possibilities that something actually happens, is actualized. The actual, then, is a selection of the virtual, a process by which the virtual is repeated but ultimately *differs* from itself. Marston et al. frame this dynamic between the virtual and the actual as “an animation of the ways that a site might be considered a conduit for both repetitions of similar orders and practices *and* the emergence of new, creative relations of singularities” (ibid:425). As in Massey’s conceptualization of space, the future is radically open.

Importantly, in a flat ontology the space of the site emerges materially within its event-relations. In other words, a social site does not have a clear border but rather inhabits a ‘neighborhood’ of emerging practices, events, and orders, which leaves “the emergence of space folded into its own intimate relationalities” (ibid:426). At the same time, emerging practices, events, and orders in social sites are also busy interacting with emerging practices, events, and orders inhabiting *other* contemporary sites. Marston



et al. argue that these two aspects – the emergence from the *within* and from the *between* – help to resist predetermining a site's contents, as the concept of scale tends to do. "In contrast, a flat ontology problematizes a world in which 'all contemporaneous lives' (Schatzki 2002:149) are linked through the unfolding of intermeshed sites" (ibid).

Using the example of discourses around globalization, Marston et al. discuss potential political implications of their flat alternative. They argue that a flat ontology precludes the "macro-mystifications" that situates blame in 'the structure' rather than holding responsible actual, embodied people, such as immigration officials, politicians, and so on, who enact their functions from within the social sites of interview rooms, corporate boardrooms, governmental offices, and other power-imbued sites. Structural talk, the authors contend, leads researchers, policymakers, and you-and-me-people to believe that the world is helplessly subjected to globalization and dictated by the global capitalist economy. Attaching globalization to social sites works against this assumption and infuses 'the local' with possibilities for upsetting hegemonic narratives of globalization.

In sum, Marston et al.'s reflections reveal the ways in which conceptualizations of the world as being organized into bounded scales from the local to the global significantly limit our field of vision as to *how the world works*, and especially our visions of how it could work *differently*. Instead, thinking of the world as flat – as void of any verticality, a mesh of a multiplicity of interactions and emerging social sites – makes room for a progressive politics to emerge. As Marston et al. conclude:

And if [...] we lose the beauty of the 'whole thing' when we downcast our eyes to the 'dirt and rocks,' at least we have the place – the only place – where social things happen, things that are contingent, fragmented and changeable. (Marston et al. 2005:427)

To conclude, the aim of this sub-chapter has been to expound upon the notion of space that has both directed the conceptualization of this study and arisen from working on it. Drawing on Doreen Massey's and Sallie A. Marston et al.'s theories of space as two "trans-communicating conceptual zones" (Marston et al. 2005:423), this study is framed as an embodied geography. More specifically, it is an embodied geography that conceptualizes space as crossings of bodies and their ongoing stories; it treats space as both a *resource for* and *evidence of* the negotiations among these bodies and stories. It is a rigorously performative and processual notion of space, in which inheres an element of possibility and creativity that radically opens the future. At the same time, it rejects both over-enthusiastic notions of mobility and flow and preemptive condemnations of closure. As a flat geography, it frames case studies not as an illustration of the effects of an order 'up there' (the global, space, structure, and so on) but as an – and indeed the *only* – opportunity to study the very production and deployment of such orders.

## 3.2 Traveling Concepts of Sexualities: Queer Migration Studies

### 3.2.1 Queer Theory

This sub-chapter offers a brief introduction to basic principles of queer theory that have been central to the formulation of the objectives of both queer migration studies and geographies of sexualities. Based on the insight that sexualities and sexual identities<sup>5</sup> are complex and fluid rather than classifiable in a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, the queer perspective emerged in contrast to gay and lesbian studies, which tend(ed) to be organized around essentialist notions of homosexual identities (De Lauretis 1991, Sedgwick Kosofsky 1994). Queer theorists instead work towards developing a decidedly anti-identity stance. From their perspective, identities are not neatly delimitable but understood as effects of ongoing and intersectional processes of identification (Somerville 2007:189). ‘Queer’ is about “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning (that occur) when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (Sedgwick Kosofsky 1993:8).

Some queer theorists argue that due to its explicit rupture with lesbian and gay studies and their conceptualization of identity, queer theory occupies a unique position within the landscape of social theories that have emerged from social movements. Unlike queer theory, these other movements and theories – such as the women’s or the gay and lesbian movement – were originally preoccupied with establishing, naming, and policing one specific social category and subject/identity. However, I argue that such an exceptionalist view of queer theory sustains a rather artificial gap between queer theory and, for instance, postcolonial feminist analyses or critical race studies. Moreover, it tends to overlook the fact that queer scholars often continue to build on earlier work from gay and lesbian studies, often rendering queer research a continuation of, rather than a radical rupture with, lesbian and gay studies. At the same time, queer theorists have no doubt been among the most creative contributors to conceptualizations of the social that are radically open to additional othernesses (Soja 1996) as also envisioned by postfeminist and postcolonial critics.

Among the foundational work that has enabled the development of queer theory is Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. In it, Foucault (1978) traces the establishment of homosexuality as an *identity* back to late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and the subsequent deployment of the figure of the homosexual in order to police the line between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexualities. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* is another groundbreaking queer theoretical text. In it, Butler elaborates on the mechanisms of the *heterosexual matrix*. This matrix is based on the constructed binary between sex and gender (‘male/masculine’ and ‘female/feminine’) and, importantly, heterosexuality as the ‘inevitable’ relation

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5 Throughout this study, ‘sexuality’ refers to sexual/erotic/romantic desires/attractions or sexual acts (none of which need to be tied to the notion of a sexual identity), while ‘sexual identity’ designates the social identities some cultures establish around same-sex sexual/erotic/romantic desires/attractions or sexual acts; such identities are, for instance, ‘heterosexual,’ ‘tomboy,’ ‘lesbian,’ and others. The border between sexualities and sexual identities is contingent and instable.

between the two. Butler argues that these are not ‘natural’ constellations, but cultural constructions normalized by stylized, repetitive performances. These performances are disciplined by discourses molding subjects strictly into either one of these two articulations (heterosexual masculine male, heterosexual feminine female).<sup>6</sup>

Queer theory thus not only disrupts ahistorical, universalist, and monolithic conceptualizations of *non-heterosexual sexualities and sexual identities* but particularly also queries the (*hetero*)sexual norm. This critique has been enabled by the formulation of the concept of *heteronormativity*, which refers to “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1998:548; see also Warner 1991). These authors hence reject the pervasive idea that desire lies outside the discursive and with Foucault treat desire as a “dense transfer point for relations of power” rather than a natural drive (Foucault 1978:103). This means that studies examining sexualities must always also address the geometries of power underlying the perpetuation of heterosexual primacy, by asking *who* deploys *what concept* of sexuality or sexual identity *to what end*. In this sense, ‘queer’ is not a catch-all term for all those who are not (normatively) heterosexual but instead more fundamentally frames queerness as that which is positioned outside the ‘normal,’ the dominant, the legitimate.

In the past two decades, queer scholars have begun to discern a shift in the parting line between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexualities. This is related to the increasing commodification of white middle class gays (and, though to a considerably lesser extent, white middle class lesbians) in Western countries. Far removed from his former image as a harbinger of perversion and death in the early AIDS era, the gay has been uplifted to the status of the wooed consumer. Gay (and lesbian) spaces have become commodified and spectacularized. Especially in the U.S., but also in Western Europe, city marketing strategies heavily capitalize on urban gay (and lesbian) neighborhoods. Today lively gay neighborhoods not only attract cosmopolitan tourists/voyeurs seeking to consume the exotic, but on a more symbolic level have also become predictors for the wellbeing of high-tech industries in U.S. cities; this is known as the ‘gay index’ (Rushbrook 2002). This process is further related to the civil rights that gays and lesbians have gained throughout the Western world, especially the right to formalize same-sex partnerships and to adopt children or stepchildren. Many gays and lesbians, queer theorists argue, can now lead a quasi-heteronormal life, as consumers, spouses, and parents, in complicity with capitalism and the nation-state.

In this context, Lisa Duggan speaks of *homonormativity*, which addresses queer complicity with neoliberalism as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2003:50). Following up on this argument, many queer activists contend that such complicit politics aspired by lesbian and gay rights activists thwart the political potential of queerness, since it fails to

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6 Other groundbreaking queer theoretical work includes in particular the writings of (in chronological order) Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981, Anzaldúa 1987), Adrienne Rich (1986), Teresa DeLauretis (1991), and Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky (1993).

fundamentally question the existence of heteronormative bastions such as marriage, the nuclear family and childrearing as sites of legal and social privilege (Somerville 2007:189, Warner 1999).

Yet, the concept of homonormativity has also met with criticism. Importantly for this study, some scholars have pointed to the lack of attention to the fact that only *certain* homosexual subjects have access to homonormal lives, and that these subjects are overwhelmingly white, urban, and middle or upper class males in possession of the proper citizenship. This further marginalizes groups such as queer people of color, trans people, people engaging in polyamorous relationships, people creating alternative family forms, or queer working class women. This critique is now becoming subsumed under the term *homonationalism*, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.4.3. Other critics have stressed that even people whose lives may become labeled as homonormative are still far from either formal or actual inclusion. As detailed in Chapters 2.2 and 6.2.1, in Switzerland violence against non-heterosexual people persists, as does legal discrimination, although the latter will be diminished – if not entirely eradicated – by the introduction of gay marriage in 2022. Persisting discrimination becomes particularly evident in public debates around gay marriage, reproductive technologies, and adoption. Current policies and practices around adoption, for instance, are marked by their continuous (re)establishment of difference, which inter alia results in a deep-set culture of humiliation of same-sex parents effectuated through attendant administrative processes. Some queer critics therefore argue that the discourse of inclusion is in fact a “fiction of inclusion” that stands in contrast to legally secured and actually performed inequalities.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, ‘queer’ is increasingly being used to designate sexual positionalities that not only contest *hetero-* but also *homo-*normativity (Browne et al. 2007:12). It is exactly this engagement with the (shifting) lines of that which is naturalized as ‘normal’ and that which is constructed as its necessary ‘abnormal’ counterpart that puts queer theory in a position to potentially destabilize *all* identity claims, not just those based on sexuality. This transforms queer theory into a *methodology* rather than just a ‘theory about gay men and lesbians.’ In this sense, ‘queer’ defines itself “against the normal rather than [merely] the heterosexual” (Warner 1993:xxvii). Because queer theory postulates that sexuality permeates *all* areas of the social, sexuality must always be part of a queer analysis; as such, a queer perspective is always necessarily *also* about sexuality. At the same time, a queer analysis is never *only* about sexuality, since queer theory frames sexualities as always already, for instance, gendered (Butler 1990), classed (Cohen 2005, Taylor 2009), racialized and ethnicized (Anzaldúa 1987, Stoler 1995), or entrenched in neoliberal conceptualizations of the subject (Duggan 2003).<sup>8</sup>

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7 Pers. comm. with Patricia Purtschert, March 5, 2020 (emphasis added).

8 This proposition places queer theory in close proximity to theorizations of *intersectionality* as discussed in Chapter 3.2.2, a theoretical affinity that has, surprisingly, largely remained unexplored to date. This may be connected to the fact that intersectionality, somewhat in contrast to its emergence from a *queer* women of color critique, has largely been appropriated by gender studies, which, as some queer theorists have argued, sometimes fail to engage with sexuality (Boellstorff

However: Despite queer scholars' love of all things fluid, instable, intersectional, and complex, until recently queer scholarship has rarely engaged with the implications of international migration on conceptualizations of sexuality (Manalansan 2006, Somerville 2007), and has only of late begun to view sexuality through the lens of the postcolonial critique in order to address the fact that "sexuality is not only not essence, not timeless, it is also not fixed in place; sexuality is on the move" (Sánchez Eppler and Patton 2002:2). Departing from this insight, scholars from various disciplines have begun to engage with how sexualities move, and what this means. It is to this body of work that I turn next.

### 3.2.2 Queer Migration Studies: An Introduction

Queer migration scholarship que(e)ries both migration studies and queer theory. On the one hand, queer migration scholars have worked towards inserting postcolonial and transnational configurations of sexuality into theorizations of 'queer.' On the other hand, they have sought to salvage sexuality from migration studies, where sexuality has often been problematically conflated with other realms of the social, especially with gender-related issues such as reproduction, motherhood, and family life (Manalansan 2006). This work has demonstrated the significance of unpacking how and to what effect most non-queer migration scholarship continues to configure migrants as always already heterosexual, reifying heteronormative framings of subjects, institutions, social practices, cultural production, economies, consumption, political activism, and research (Luibhéid 2004, 2005, 2008a, and 2019, Manalansan 2006).

It is worth noting that the emergence of queer migration scholarship has been enabled by a broader shift in migration research away from predominantly economic explanations for flows of migration and 'macro' theories based on simplistic push-pull models and a *homo oeconomicus* (i.e. the assumption that people act solely on the basis of logical cost-benefit calculations). Feminist and postcolonial migration scholars have been instrumental in realigning the focus of migration studies with analyses addressing issues such as identity and identification, agency, and transnational networks on the one hand; and a radical critique of globalizing economies and neoimperialisms and resulting social inequalities on the other. Importantly, this new migration scholarship has *not* been about *either* conducting 'micro' analyses (of processes of identification, for instance) *or* a critique of 'macro' structures (such as 'economy'), but both at the same time, effectively disrupting the micro/macro binary. Lionel Cantú (2002), for instance, used oral histories by people working in the Mexican gay tourism industry to analyze the interconnections between global economies and the commodification of gays. Here, sexuality, which is popularly conceived of as the 'intimate' or the 'private' does not represent the 'micro' nor the tourism industry the 'macro' level, but rather exposes the two as mutually constitutive.

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2007). Dietze et al. (2007) offer a rare discussion of the theoretical parallels and differences between the ways queer theory and intersectionality frame the interlacing of social categories.

In an introduction to queer migration studies, Eithne Luibhéid frames this emerging body of scholarship as engaging in a “double movement,” which echoes these two objectives of broader critical migration studies:

On the one hand, [queer migration] scholars have contributed to understanding the experiences of migrants who identify, or become identified by others, as LGBTQ (or, as discussed by the authors in this volume, tomboys, queens, malungos, novios, and amigos, among others). Thus queer migration scholarship insists on recovering, theorizing, and valorizing histories and subjects that have been largely rendered invisible, unintelligible, and unspeakable in both queer and migration studies [...]. On the other hand, much of the scholarship also makes clear that ‘queer migrants’ in many ways comprise ‘impossible subjects’ with unrepresentable histories that exceed existing categories. This leads scholars to foreground and challenge regimes of power and knowledge that generate structures of impossibility where particular groups are concerned, and to examine how individuals negotiate them. (Luibhéid 2008a:171)

The present study seeks to perform such a “double movement.” On the one hand, it engages with migration biographies and everyday lives of queer migrant women in Switzerland, producing original empirical data on a subject position about which not much academic knowledge exists, and this pertains to both Swiss and international literatures. In general, queer migration scholars have quite rarely relied on ethnographic data to date. More work has employed a cultural studies perspective to analyze queer diasporic positionalities (e.g. Fortier 1999, Gopinath 2005, Muñoz 1999) or has worked towards deconstructing dominant narratives around the intersections of queerness, racism, sexism, the War on Terror, nationalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, and imperialism from a discourse analytical perspective (e.g. El-Tayeb 2011, Haritaworn et al. 2008, Luibhéid 2002, Miller 2005). Among the existing ethnographic case studies, most have focused on gay men in Northern American diasporas (see especially Cantú 2009, Decena 2012, Manalansan 2003 and 2014, and Peña 2013; all on queer diasporas in the U.S., but see e.g. Thielen 2009 on queer Iranian refugees in Germany). The focus on Northern American contexts also persists throughout the handful of works addressing queer immigrant *women*. This work has mainly portrayed the lives of queer immigrant women from Latin America, though also, if to a much lesser extent, from other world regions.<sup>9</sup> Further, there has been some research addressing LGBT migrants in general (e.g. Chávez 2011, Lee and Brotman 2011). Outside Northern America, ethnographies on queer migrant women are even scarcer (exceptions include Avrahami 2007, Kuntsman 2003, 2005, and 2009, and Peumans 2018). In Switzerland, contributions addressing queer migrant women are limited to a handful of publications focusing on methodological and theoretical questions and a Master Thesis discussing the biographical narratives of five migrant lesbians (Büchler 2009a, Büchler and Richter 2010, Huotelin 2013).

In addition to queer migration scholarship, this study has been crucially informed by the Queer of Color critique (particularly by work focusing on the German context),

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9 See e.g. Acosta 2008 and 2013, Asencio 2012, Argüelles and Rivero 1993, Barbosa and Lenoir 2003, Espín 1996, 1997, and 1999, Hidalgo and Hidalgo-Christensen 1976-1977, Leyva Chávez 2000, Luibhéid and Chávez 2020, Mogrojevo 2005, or Poore 1996.

which does not specifically address sexual dissidents who have themselves migrated as adults but more generally queer people who inhabit, and are assigned, subject positions that are marginalized in mainstream society in terms of gender, gender identity, sexuality, and race/ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> In this context, some empirical studies specifically addressing diasporic queer people have been commissioned or carried out by human rights organizations, for instance in the U.K. (Safra Project 2002) or in Germany (LesMigraS 2012, Steffens, Bergert, and Heinecke 2010).<sup>11</sup>

That being said, imitating Luibhéid's "double movement," the aim of this study has not only been to acknowledge and make visible the experiences, self-conceptions and practices of queer migrant women, but especially to critically engage with sexuality as a "dense transfer point for relations of power" (Foucault 1978:103). Here, the first concern is to trace how queer migrant women negotiate the multiple mechanisms of exclusion to which they are exposed. In the interviews, these negotiations were not only expressed in narratives about events or places but also in the form of hesitations, a loss of words, refusals, half-sentences, and outbursts. These are the interstices that expose queer women's migrant subject positions as unspeakable and 'impossible,' as normative ideas about sexuality that clash with normative ideas about gender, ethnicity, race, or class are mapped onto one and the same body. The second concern is to gain a deeper understanding of how postcolonial and transnational configurations of sexualities are formative of *both* non-Western *and* Western sexualities. Indeed, only once the fixation on the Other is abandoned can postcolonial and transnational circuits of desire and their coagulation with colonialism, neoimperialism, globalization, and neoliberalism be addressed in their full complexity.

### 3.3 What's Space Got to Do with It? Geographies of Sexualities

#### 3.3.1 Sexuality and Space: An Introduction

The analysis of the ways in which space and sexuality constitute each other through the material everyday enactment of social relations lies at the heart of the field of *geographies of sexualities* (or *queer geographies*) and of this study as well. Drawing on prominent strands of thinking in broader social, political and cultural geography concerned with

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10 See e.g. Ani 1999, Castro Varela and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2000, Gutiérrez Rodríguez 1999:117ff, El-Tayeb 2003, 2011, and 2016, Haritaworn 2003, 2005, and 2007, Heidenreich 2005, Ipekçioğlu 1992, 1997, 2000, and 2005, or Oguntoya et al. 1986. For the Anglophone context see e.g. Eng et al. 2005, Johnson and Henderson 2005, or Muñoz 1999.

11 The *Safra Project* report focuses on LBT who identify as Muslim. The two studies in Germany more broadly address the multiple discriminations to which diasporic LBT people are exposed in Germany. These latter studies are partly or fully quantitative. As María do Mar Castro Varela, leading scientist of the *LesMigraS* study rightly points out, statistical analyses are hard to align with the differentiated queer postcolonial debates around intersectionality and the deconstruction of stable (sexual and other) identities as they necessarily rely on predefined identity categories (*LesMigraS* 2012:10).

the ways in which the social production of space and identity are interlaced, geographies of sexualities are specifically concerned with the spatialities of sexuality and the sexualization of space.

Early engagements with sexuality and space worked specifically towards putting sexual minorities on the disciplinary map, drawing on and contributing to *lesbian and gay studies* to direct attention to geographers' failure to include gays' and lesbians' experiences in theorizations of the spatial, as well as to point out homophobia within geographical institutions.<sup>12</sup> While a number of these early works date back to the late 1970s, there seems to be a common understanding among queer geographers<sup>13</sup> that geographies of sexualities became established as a sub-discipline with the publication of David Bell and Gill Valentine's seminal collection of essays *Mapping Desire* in 1995 (Bell and Valentine 1995b). In the introduction, the editors critically reviewed some of the earlier literature about sexuality and space, taking issue with essentialist ideas about 'gays and lesbians' and 'their spaces' permeating much of this work; the almost exclusive focus on Western and urban contexts in geographical scholarship addressing sexuality; the failure of this work to theorize queer space and the queering of space; and the shortage of work on the spatialities of *heterosexualities* (Bell and Valentine 1995a). Paralleling the broader transition from gay and lesbian studies to queer theory, geographies of sexualities, too, have undergone a 'queer turn.' Although the insertion of LGBT experiences into geographical thought has remained an important focus of queer geographies, this change of paradigm has catapulted geographies of sexualities from its existence as a 'minority geography' onto the agenda of broader social, political, and cultural geography, as a growing body of work engaged with the mutual constitution of sexuality, space, and identity, fruitfully complicating the literature focusing on processes of identification.

Despite its emphasis on its departure from gay and lesbian geographies, much queer geographical scholarship continues to draw on gay and lesbian studies, risking becoming complicit in perpetuating the very exclusions criticized in earlier geographical engagements with sexuality: First, despite the fact that 'queer' provides the theoretical tools to study a broad range of sexualities, geographies of sexualities have often remained preoccupied with examining specifically *gay* and *lesbian* experiences and spaces; still relatively few studies engage with, for instance, bisexuality (Wood 2010), transgender (but see e.g. Doan 2007), sex work (but see e.g. Hubbard et al. 2008), or dissident heterosexualities such as polyamory. Second, considering queer geographers'

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12 For contributions about homophobia in geographical institutions, see e.g. Bell 2007 or Valentine 2000 (1998).

13 I use the term 'queer geographer' throughout this study to indicate an embodiment of the researcher. While it remains a fact that many who research the spatialities of sexualities identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer, there is a growing number of geographers who do not. This, the widening of the field to include analyses of heterosexualities and the (albeit slow) incorporation of queer theory into broader geography is turning the 'queer geographer' into an increasingly ambiguous figure. *Can the Straight Guy have a Queer Eye?*, asks Phil Hubbard (2007), voicing the uneasiness of many queer theorists with where 'our' theory is heading, which had originally been sparked by the desire to shock-expose the inherent heteronormativity of social practices, theories, spaces, and geographical institutions.



emphasis on the importance of the *contextualization* of the sexual, and, more surprisingly, seeing geography's deep implication in, and engagement with, colonialism and globalization, it is curious indeed that until quite recently queer geographies have only rarely engaged with postcolonial critiques and related fields such as queer anthropology, queer diaspora studies, or queer migration studies.<sup>14</sup>

After a brief note on the state of Germanophone queer geographies, this sub-chapter continues to highlight those debates within queer geographies that step into conversation with this study's objectives, such as how to map lesbians (Chapter 3.3.3), and how spaces and sexualities are mutually constructive (Chapter 3.3.4). It then traces migration and postcolonial research within geographies of sexualities and situates this study within this body of work (Chapters 3.3.5 and 3.3.6).

### 3.3.2 A Note on Germanophone Geographies of Sexualities

Queer geographers based in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. seem to consider their area of research a "consolidated" sub-discipline (Oswin 2010b).<sup>15</sup> Already in 1999, Jon Binnie referred to the field as a "rapidly expanding area of publication" (Binnie 1999:175). More recently, queer geographers have referred to geographies of sexualities as "a strong and vibrant part of urban, cultural, political, and feminist geographies" (Brown 2004) and as a "proliferating field of study" (Browne et al. 2007:1), with Phil Hubbard suggesting that "one could [...] suggest that [...] queer theory has attained the status of a normalized discourse within the discipline" (Hubbard 2007:151). The extent to which queer theory has been mainstreamed in the discipline of geography seems to be such that it has caused queer geographers to begin to fear the effects of its normalization (Oswin 2005b).

While I am not convinced that queer theory has reached all the places where it can make a difference even within Anglophone geography (see also Oswin 2010b), it is beyond doubt accurate to describe Anglophone queer geographies as thriving vis-à-vis Germanophone geography, where studies about the spatiality of sexuality have remained insular. The first time I ever heard the words 'lesbian' and 'sexuality' uttered in a classroom at the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern was towards the very end of my Masters studies in the year 2000. A group of German, Swiss and Austrian feminist geography students to which I belonged had invited Doreen Massey to Switzerland for a lecture and a reading weekend. It was one in a series of what turned out to be six annually held *Doreen Massey Reading Weekends* and lectures, which this group organized in different locations throughout Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands between 1999 and 2004. These events were explicitly designed to create a space to "discuss issues (beginning with queer theory) that could not be discussed within the German academy and to do so in a way which was open, questioning, cooperative and based

14 For more comprehensive overviews of geographies of sexualities see e.g. Bell and Valentine 1995a, Binnie and Valentine 1999, Brown et al. 2007, Oswin 2008, and Johnston and Longhurst 2009.

15 Further below I describe these geographies as 'Anglophone,' meaning queer geographies written in English and originating in research institutions in North America, the U.K., and 'Down Under.' While there are differences in the geographies produced in these loci (Knopp 1998), this is not the place to discuss these, or the fact that there are few recognized Anglophone geographies of sexualities originating from other regions, such as Africa or the Caribbean.

on friendship” (BASSDA 2006a:173).<sup>16</sup> However, these meetings have remained among the most important efforts to introduce queer theory in Germanophone geography and have not been followed up by the establishment of queer investigations within the discipline.

Hence, the dearth of Germanophone queer geographical research leads Swiss, German, and Austrian queer geographers to turn to Anglophone scholars, theory, methodology, and institutions to approach our fields of interest.<sup>17</sup> But, as this study attests, queer theories do not travel lightly. This project has been a balancing act between attempts at translating concepts I deemed powerful analytical tools that spoke to the data generated in this project (yet still often refused to fit in many ways) and others I chose to reject or challenge for their – often implicit – reference to predominantly U.S. and British contexts and literature. The pitfalls have been obvious: How can we draw on Anglophone queer geography without situating Germanophone geography as ‘backward’ in relation to it? How can we avoid naturalizing Anglophone theory as the overarching, abstract and superior framework while relegating Swiss research to a lesser-valued status of the contextual, empirical, local, exemplary? Time and again, I found myself ‘waking up’ amidst the literature I was immersed in, wondering how to extract leverage for the Swiss diasporic context. The desire to put my cross-cultural theoretical and methodological considerations and the findings of this research into conversation with Anglophone queer geographers was pivotal to my decision to write this book in English. At the same time, this was a paradoxical move, as it has made this study complicit in the very dearth of German contributions to queer geography and queer migration scholarship that I criticize here.<sup>18</sup>

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16 We have recounted the story of these reading weekends in BASSDA 2006a and 2006b.

17 As does, for instance, French queer geography, as anecdotal evidence suggests: In June 2010, a workshop was held in Paris entitled “15 ans après *Mapping Desire*, où en sont les géographies des sexualités?” – “*Mapping Desire*, where are the geographies of sexualities?”. The flyer featured the by now paradigmatic golden belly button adorning the cover of *Mapping Desire*, and the program boasted many of the ‘usual suspects’ of Anglophone geographies of sexualities as participants, including a range of authors that had contributed to the anthology *Mapping Desire*.

18 I have, however, juxtaposed this study with a number of publications and contributions in German (Büchler 2009a and 2009b, Büchler and Jakob 2009, Büchler and Richter 2010, Büchler et al. 2007). Also, I find the accusation of complicity that I have been confronted with repeatedly easy to offer from an Anglophone perspective and dismissive of the very pragmatic problems queer geographers in German-speaking countries face. To my knowledge, this study was the first explicitly queer geographical or queer migration research project ever funded by the *Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF*. The lack of a Switzerland-based research community resulted in very concrete issues, such as a dearth of books in the field and a lack of access to specific journals in Swiss libraries. At times, this has led to absurd situations in which I found myself trying to craft an argument based on a certain book section by using the haphazardly published teaser pages on *Google Books* and *Amazon* (which, thankfully, sometimes published a different set of pages of a specific book).

### 3.3.3 (The Problem of Mapping) Lesbian Spaces and Communities

Based on the assumption that the lifestyles of gay men differ systematically from those of heterosexual people and hence also have their distinct social, cultural, and political spatial patterns, early work on sexuality and space focused on mapping gay residential and commercial spaces in U.S. cities (Lauria and Knopp 1985). These geographies were soon criticized for being inherently *male* geographies that rendered lesbians invisible. While early commentators reduced the relative invisibility of lesbians in public space to lesbians' lesser access to economic and social capital due to their double oppression as women and lesbians (Castells 1983, Wolfe 1992),<sup>19</sup> feminist queer geographers more fundamentally called into question the very way of understanding queer urban space in gay geographies, which precluded an analysis of the spatialities of lesbian lives other than in terms of a lack/absence. These scholars particularly criticized geographers' invocation of a public/private divide in which the public is privileged over the private and their narrow definition of gay communities as spatially bounded, publicly visible concentrations of gay people, bars, clubs, and so on (Rothenberg 1995).

By looking differently, lesbian geographies started to emerge. This work not only falsified the assumption that there are no spatial concentrations of lesbians in (U.S.) urban spaces<sup>20</sup> but also, more importantly, sought to develop alternative ways of thinking about communities, spatialities, and visibilities. For instance, lesbian communities were shown to hinge less on public visibility than on informal and plural networks and institutions, rendering them communities mainly to those "in the know" (Rothenberg 1995). Others argued that lesbian communities had a "quasi-underground character" and were "enfolded in a broader countercultural milieu" that do not necessarily have their own public subculture or territories. This was explained by the historical involvement of lesbians in the women's movement. It was, in other words, shown that lesbians tended to be more politicized than gay men and therefore, at least partly, also *chose* not to make their communities manifest in a commercialized subculture (Adler and Brenner 1992:31, quoted in Bell and Valentine 1995b:6). Subsequent work in North America, Britain, and France confirmed these findings, and in Switzerland, too, such countercultural milieus have been documented (Amlinger 2005, Kokula and Böhmer 1991, Moser 2001).

Tamara Rothenberg and Gill Valentine have therefore suggested to frame lesbian communities as 'imagined communities,' whose existence hinges less on their visibility in the urban landscape than on a collective imaginary of its members as to what constitutes this community. The term was coined by Benedict Anderson (1991) and has been described as follows: "As 'members' of an imagined community, people feel an attachment to a necessarily fictional group, be it nation, race, gender, class, or sexuality.

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19 Seeing the persistent and significant discrimination of women in Switzerland in term of salaries; labor division; and access to the job market, careers, and pension funds, this argument has retained a lot of explanatory power in the Swiss context.

20 In contrast to some places in the U.S., in Switzerland there are no urban neighborhoods that are known as distinctly lesbian. However, through private networks, sometimes clusters of lesbians living in the same house or area are created.

In the process they interpret themselves *through* that attachment, so that their subjectivity becomes inseparable from constructions of ‘we-ness’ (Weston 1995:257, see also Anderson 1991, Rothenberg 1995, Valentine 1995a).

However, despite this increasing sophistication of lesbian geographies, queer geographers still largely failed to address that lesbian spaces and communities – and the geographies about them – are mostly and implicitly configured as middle class (Taylor 2007 and 2008) and white (Held and Leach 2008, Held 2009, Oswin 2008, Thomas 2010). Building on the notion of the imagined community, Kath Browne, Jason Lim, and Gavin Brown suggest investigating lesbian spaces in the following way in order to bypass the conceptual dead-end of ‘mapping lesbians’:

Geographies of lesbian space can only be advanced through an attention to women’s social networks and their daily circulation through quotidian urban space. We believe that such a project would not just enable a better understanding of lesbian space, but would also reveal the complexities of the everyday geographies of queers of color, gay men who do not participate in the commercial gay scene, and others who are rendered invisible through the focus on fixed territories. (Browne et al. 2007:8)

Browne et al.’s approach is indicative of the ‘queer turn’ in queer geographies, and also of the intersectional perspective I have attempted to bring to this study. Enabled by the anti-essentialist views on identity as for instance theorized by Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, queer geographers have become less focused on locating gays and lesbians and instead have begun to examine the mutual performative and discursive production of sexuality and space. It is to this work that I turn next.

### 3.3.4 Queer Bodies and the Performativity of Space

Judith Butler theorizes gender and sexuality not as an essence of what one *is*, but as a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 1990:33). Feminist and queer geographers have taken performativity a step further, arguing that not only *identities* but also *spaces* need to be understood as coming into being through their repetitive performance (Gregson and Rose 2000, Nash 2000, Rose 1999, Valentine 2002). Performances cannot take place in already existing locations, because these locations themselves do not exist prior to their performance. Such a view understands space as both an enabling and disciplining resource and outcome of the performance of identities, “brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power” (Gregson and Rose 2000:434). From this, it follows that the production of identities and space are mutually constitutive, rendering both necessarily unstable, relational, partial, and provisional.

This perspective has provided theoretical leverage to address the ways in which spaces are sexualized. “This understanding of space is important,” Gill Valentine emphasizes, “because it denaturalizes the presumed heterosexuality of everyday spaces. The straight street or office environment do not preexist their performance, rather, specific performances bring these places into being and these places are themselves performative of particular power relations” (Valentine 2002:154). In other words, spaces

become inscribed as heterosexual only through the repetitive performance of heterosexuality in them – couples holding hands, advertisements selling products to parents, men whistling after women, and so on. Through their excessive repetition over time, these performances lead people to *expect* heterosexual performances in said spaces. It is at this point that heterosexuality becomes normalized. In order to secure this semblance of the heterosexual as the ‘natural,’ regulatory discourses discipline bodies to play out the ‘proper’ performance. These regimes work through a host of articulations such as laws, social norms and sanctions, ‘cultural traditions,’ and taboos.

However, since the straightness of spaces is contingent on its repetitive performance, it is also unstable. As Lawrence Knopp and Michael Brown note, “heterosexism is an *incomplete, incongruous, nonhegemonic, and spatially diffuse set of social relations and practices full of possibilities for subversion and reconfiguration, rather than [...] a coherent, complete, spatially fixed, and hegemonic one*” (Knopp and Brown 2003:413, emphasis original). Since the straightness of space is always in the process of becoming, it can also be *queered*, for instance by non-heterosexual people, who have a number of according strategies at their disposal. For instance, queering space can be avoided by performing a heterosexual identity; or it can involve non-heterosexual performances addressing only those ‘in the know’ by employing specific subcultural objects, body language, or practices, such as wearing a single earring in the right ear, playing a certain piece of music in public, or exchanging that knowing glance on the streets. It can also be effectuated by more obvious strategies, such as openly carrying a rainbow pendant on a key chain, or holding hands or kissing in public; or it can consist of politically motivated in-your-face tactics like gay parades, kiss-ins, and so on. (Which is not at all to insinuate that all of these strategies can be freely chosen or performed at all times by all non-heterosexual people.) The queering of space thereby performs a double movement: On the one hand, it effectuates visibility and acknowledgement of the existence of the diversity of sexualities and sexual identities that are otherwise suppressed. On the other hand, it shock-exposes the hegemonic heterosexuality of space.

The practice of queering space is closely linked to the notion of the *closet*, the spatial metaphor that signifies concealment/invisibility of non-heterosexual people and sexualities. Queer geographers who have examined the space of the closet have addressed its unstable and often contradictory meanings and the complexities of its workings. Diane Fuss (1991, in Valentine 2002), for instance, points out that, paradoxically, to come out means to simultaneously call into being a closet. Similarly, Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky notes:

The presumption of heterosexuality in everyday life is so strong that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a lesbian and gay man to come out, because new closets are continually springing up around them every time they meet a new person and must once again make the decision about whether to disclose or conceal their sexuality. (Sedgwick Kosofsky 1990:157, paraphrased in Valentine 2002:157)

What has largely failed to be addressed by these authors is that because the closet and the attendant practice of queering space are closely tied to the notion of homosexuality-as-identity and the homosexual as a figure, it is an inherently Western concept that does not necessarily translate easily to non-Western and transnational configurations

of sexuality. For instance, as has emerged in this study, the ‘closet’ is sometimes also *positively* connoted, not as a confinement but as a place of safety and privacy (see Chapter 5.3.1). At the same time, David A. B. Murray warns against romanticizing such seeming absences or positive reconfigurations of closets as they often remain, at the end of the day, related to homophobias, which he frames as diversely configured as sexualities themselves (Murray 2011, see Chapter 3.4). In diasporic contexts such as the one examined in this study, this raises the question of how queer migrants negotiate such multiple understandings of in/visibility in their everyday lives. However, the concept also needs problematizing from within a Western perspective, for instance in terms of its applicability or meaning for different generations of same-sex loving women in Switzerland, or for women living in the country versus the city. The sexualization of the country versus the city is the focus of the next sub-chapter.

### 3.3.5 Migration in Geographies of Sexualities (The Gay Metropolis I)

Migration has been at the heart of geographies of sexualities from their very beginnings. Writing in the early 1980s, John D’Emilio already established a link between the development of gay communities and the turn-of-the-century migration to urban areas (D’Emilio 1983, see also Rubin 1993 [1984]). This work was significantly bolstered by the landmark essay *Get Thee to a Big City* by social anthropologist Kath Weston, in which Weston discusses what she terms the “Great Gay Migration” of lesbians and gays from rural areas in the U.S. to the big cities in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Weston 1995). Weston frames the city as an imaginary, collectively conjured “homeland” that not only fuels lesbian and gay migration, but also and more fundamentally functions as a crucial constituent of homosexual *identity*. Given “the peculiarly western construction of homosexuality as an identity capable of providing a basis for community,” Weston argues, the act of going away from home to forge a liberated, outspoken homosexual Self in urban gay (and lesbian) communities is bound up with what it means to be a homosexual today (ibid.:255).

Weston’s argument particularly resonated with queer geographers, many of whom have since agreed that “non-normative sexuality is often tantamount to spatial displacement” (Puar et al. 2003:386).<sup>21</sup> Others have gone a step further, arguing that displacement is a *prerequisite* to know oneself as gay, and that “it [...] isn’t enough to just open the closet door; one had to leave its interior for a different location,” either figuratively or physically (Brown 2000:50).

References to Weston seldom mention that she ends her article by complicating matters. In her conclusion she addresses the mismatch that freshly arrived migrants

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21 Caren Kaplan (1996:8, as quoted in Puar 2002a:125) has generalized this argument, contending that experiences of location and displacement are central to the constitution of the modern subject overall. This raises the question of how queers are different. Addressing this question, Puar suggests that “travel, in its metaphorization, history, and facticity, [might be] more important to the development of certain queer (cosmopolitan?) identities than of other subjects, perhaps because of the mandate to disrupt heteronormative space” (ibid.:125).

often experience between the city of their imaginations and the city they actually encounter upon their arrival, often resulting in estrangement and disappointment. As one of Weston's respondents soberly assessed, "gay people weren't like me much at all" (ibid.:269). Weston convincingly argues that while such counter-narratives effectively work against the establishment of simplistic grand theories of rural-to-urban gay migrations, they do not destabilize the imaginary of the gay homeland per se:

In their very departures from the conventional narrative of gay migration, these counterexamples illustrate the ways that rural/urban contrasts are bound up with the creation of an imagined community peopled with gay subjects. Even at their most dispirited, migration tales tend to be framed by an account of what the narrator originally expected to find. Whether introduced by words of surprise, satisfaction, disillusionment or disappointment, the stories confirm the power of participation in a sexual imaginary at the very moments they dispute its existence. (Weston 1995:269)

Such disruptions between the imaginary gay metropolis and its realities, further fueled by the onset of investigations into rural queer sexualities, have led geographers to differentiate the model of rural-to-urban gay migrations. Ethnographic work bearing witness to lively queer rural communities or lesbians happily living in the countryside unsettled the notion of gay migrations as unidirectional movements from the homophobic-rural to the tolerant-urban, while other writings more fundamentally took issue with the conceptualization of the coming out as a 'once-and-for-all emergence' from the rural-closet to the urban-gay-homeland. As alternatives, these scholars have formulated multidirectional models of queer migration and framed the coming out as a continuous process of negotiation rather than a one-time event (Raimondo 2003).

Taking the proposition that displacement is constitutive of homosexual identity a step further, Larry Knopp examines ontologies of place, placelessness, and movement in what he terms queer people's "quests for identity" (Knopp 2004). In his view, displacement of the queer subject from the family home is required no matter whether queer people are rejected by their families or voluntarily leave their childhood homes to 'find themselves,' and no matter whether they were raised in supportive or homophobic families or social environments. Exactly *because* the utopian spatial imaginaries Weston describes are bound to lead to disappointment (and sometimes nostalgia for the place left behind), Knopp locates many queer people's comfort, pleasure, and "ontological and emotional security" in movement, as well as displacement and placelessness *themselves*, framing placelessness per se as a "queer practice" (ibid.:124). Intrinsic to this practice is self-reflection:

Queers are actively engaged in processes of personal reinvention that intrinsically entail examinations of ourselves and our surroundings. We are keenly aware of the hybrid nature of our existence, and of the highly contingent nature of both our power and the constraints on it. Hence our ambivalent relationship to place and identity, and our affection for placelessness and movement. (Knopp 2004:129)

But the subject of Knopp's analysis remains vague. His references range from "gay and lesbian people" and "queer people" to "especially gay men," and no indication is given as to these subjects' class, race, ethnicity, or country of origin. It moreover remains

unclear what kind of migration is addressed. Knopp states that “rural to urban migrations of gay men, for example, are particularly common. But so are international, interregional, and intra-urban migrations and movements, as well as a general embracing of cosmopolitanism” (ibid:123). Overall, Knopp’s claims arouse the impression that the theory of “affection for placelessness and movement” he postulates for white, middle class, cosmopolitan American gay men’s rural-to-urban migration experiences is sweepingly transposed onto all queer migrants and migrations around the globe. By contrast, as will be discussed, the present study based on narratives by queer migrant women suggests that concepts like home, connectedness, and the ability to create a (transnational) sense of belonging are crucial to wellbeing.

Within geographical debates around sexuality, migration and the notion of home, the bias exposed in Knopp’s article has remained symptomatic. Deeper analyses of international migration or of postcolonial and transnational configurations of sexuality have long been conspicuously absent from queer geographical analysis. This is the case even despite the discipline’s longstanding occupation with the migrations of (Western) queer subjects on the one hand and – looking at geography in general – globalization and colonialism on the other. In the attempt to define what ‘home’ is to queer people, it was too often forgotten to ask who the queer migrants were that were deployed as models to formulate these theories, and where they were located before and after migration. It is only under conditions of such normalized whiteness and maleness that sexuality emerges as an aspect of identity that can be analyzed in isolation, when in fact sexuality should be framed as always already nationalized, ethnicized, racialized, classed, and gendered.

As Farhang Rouhani points out, while broad discussions of gender and feminist approaches have since found their way into key textbooks and conference sessions in geographies of migration, sexuality and queer approaches are still hardly mentioned (Rouhani 2016:229). To date, a dearth of work on *international* and *female* queer migration in particular persists. There is hence still validity to Andrew Gorman-Murray’s earlier statement that within geography “the nature of queer migration – individual migrants’ motivations and destinations, and paths, patterns and scales of relocation – remains little studied and inadequately conceptualized” (Gorman-Murray 2007:106). It is in the interest of addressing this research gap in the field of geographies of sexualities that I present this study.

### 3.3.6 A Postcolonial Perspective (The Gay Metropolis II)

Queer geographers’ preoccupation with Western contexts is not limited to work on migration. Generally, what has been termed the “de-centering” of geographies of sexualities has long remained focused on the dichotomy between the rural and the urban (Phillips et al. 2000). Pushing against the metropolitan bias in queer geographies, until recently this work has largely failed to recognize that the concept of ‘metropolis’ is polysemantic; that the metropolis, as a ‘center,’ is in fact defined against multiple ‘margins’; and that, consequently, there is more than one bias to push against. In particular, it is only recently that attention has been paid to the fact that the construction of the gay metropolis not only hinges on a *rural* but also on a *colonial* counterpart, a curious



silence within a discipline that has been deeply entrenched in mapping the world, charting migrations, and analyzing global development. As Natalie Oswin diagnoses, “queer geographers have been surprisingly slow to engage with the global turn that has existed for some time in queer studies outside the discipline” (Oswin 2006:777).

At the outset of this research in 2005, work combining queer geographical and post-colonial perspectives was scarce within the discipline and mostly remained limited to North American and Western European contexts.<sup>22</sup> While the past years have seen a surge of publications on these topics in Anglophone geography, in German-speaking geography, such work has remained insular.<sup>23</sup> But even for Anglophone geography, Robert Kulpa and Joseli Maria Silva state in the recent *Routledge Research Companion to Geographies of Sex and Sexualities* (Brown and Browne 2016):

[D]are we play the devil's advocate role and say that the queer and feminist epistemologies we represent across many disciplines have yet to face their colonial legacy and their mostly (Northern) American and Eurocentric and anglophone squint? [...] As editors and authors of this section [on decolonizing sexualities], we feel that as geographers, feminists, queer scholars and all in/out-betweeners, we need not only look for 'non-Western' examples of the worldwide diversity. Rather, and perhaps foremost, we must reconceptualize our own practices and 'doing knowledge.' (Kulpa and Silva 2016:141)

Working from theoretical perspectives foregrounding self-reflection and positionality like ‘standpoint theory’ and ‘politics of location,’ emerging post- and decolonial perspectives in Anglophone geographies of sexualities call for a postcolonial critique of the power geometries of knowledge production in geography, asking whose knowledge is acknowledged as such in the discipline, and whose knowledge is canonized, cited, translated, and taught in the discipline – and whose is not (Kulpa and Silva 2016). Queer/postcolonial geographers further interrogate how processes of globalization, the coloniality of power, and the social construction of space and sexuality constitute each other, and generally work to undermine the persistent implicit assumption in geographies of sexualities that queer people are white.

Geographers have thus been called to engage with the work done in other disciplines like queer migration scholarship, which over the past two decades have produced a rich literature on non-Western, postcolonial, transnational, and diasporic formations, as well as on circulations of desire, sexualities, and sexual identities (see Chapter 3.2). At the same time, queer/postcolonial geographers are seeking to develop a *specifically geographical* perspective. As Jasbir Puar, Dereka Rushbrook, and Louisa Schein write, “ge-

22 Among geographers who had already engaged with the spatialities of non-normative sexualities outside the West or in transnational contexts before were notably Elder 1995 and 1998, Gaetano 2008, Kulpa 2014, Legg 2010, Livermon 2013, Oswin 2005a, 2007, and 2010a, Puar 2001, Skelton 1995, and Williams 2013.

23 Indicative of the recent developments of postcolonial perspectives in Anglophone geography is the *Routledge Research Companion to Geographies of Sex and Sexuality*, which contains two entire sections on *Decolonization of Sexualities* and on *Mobile Sexualities* respectively (Brown and Browne 2016). Earlier compendiums on geographies of sexualities had treated postcolonial perspectives on geographies of sexuality only marginally (Browne et al. 2012 [2007]).

ographers' rich understandings of place, space, and scale offer queer studies the possibility of grounding theorizations of sexual politics and identities in material and everyday landscapes." This, the authors argue, usefully extends existing bodies of knowledge around "queer diasporas, racialized sexualities, and transnationalism; nationalism and the policing of borders; global capitalism and gay subjectivities; and the heteronormative foundations of development ideologies and imperialism" (Puar et al. 2003:387,384).

Queer/postcolonial geographers hence critically review the field of geographies of sexualities, and generally the discipline of geography, through the combined lens of queer and postcolonial theory. They further work to develop a body of literature engaging with the mutual constitution of scales (the home, the nation, the West, the Orient, the South, the globe), concepts related to these scales (like nationalisms, citizenship, belonging, globalization, migration, or colonialism) and social categories (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, and others). In doing so, queer/postcolonial geographers also seek to contribute to, and extend, queer/postcolonial work outside geography. The next sub-chapter explores such theoretical concepts from a range of disciplines that have emerged from thinking sexuality, migration, and space together.

### 3.4 Thinking Sexuality, Migration, and Space Together

This sub-chapter engages with concepts of sexuality, migration, and space which are situated at the intersection between queer migration studies and queer geographies. Such concepts have not only been instrumental in the conceptualization and implementation of this research, but have also been extended by the analysis of the biographical narratives generated in its course.

#### 3.4.1 Sexual Citizenship and the Carceral Archipelago of Immigration

In one of the early articles on sexual citizenship, queer geographer Jon Binnie simply defines *sexual citizenship* as follows: "Sexual citizenship' means the relationship between the state and sexualized citizens. It is a useful term since it makes clear that sexual identities are regulated by the state; that sexual dissidents do, for instance, not enjoy full citizenship in most states" (Binnie 1997:238). Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the trilogy of heterosexuality-marriage-parenthood has been maintained as the bourgeois ideal and building block of the nation in capitalist societies.<sup>24</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that the relationship between states and sexually dissident citizens has typically been vexed. This relationship has come under scrutiny by a rapidly growing interdisciplinary body of queer research, so that the nation-state is today one of the most diversely theorized, contested, and re-enacted geographical scales in queer scholarship. Literature in this field has, for instance, exposed how the state polices sexuality through immigration legislation and other state institutions and practices (e.g. Luibhéid 2002, Miller 2005); how gay and lesbian identities become commodified by nationalized economies,

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24 In German, the triad of heterosexuality-marriage-parenthood is referred to as *Zelle der Gesellschaft* (cell of society).

cultures, and politics (e.g. Cohen 2005, Duggan 2002, Richardson 2005); how the formation of sexualities and sexual identities is entangled with colonialism and neoimperialism (e.g. Massad 2002 and 2007, Puar 2007, Stoler 1995); and how these relations of power are negotiated, reproduced, and resisted by marginalized queer subjects (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987, Chávez 2013, Manalansan 2003, Muñoz 1999).

In its variety and scope, this research has shown that sexual citizenship does not only play out in the realm of the legal but also in the realm of the social, the political, and the cultural. Importantly, it has also demonstrated that the policing of normative sexual citizenship is often achieved through the establishment and maintenance of an uneven border between the *private* and the *public*, as regulated through systems of welfare, immigration legislation, taxation, and so on. The notion of 'public space' is closely connected to the notion of democracy and equal rights for all citizens. Per definition, 'public' spaces should be inclusive spaces accessible to all and should provide an "unconstrained space within which political movements can organize and expand into wider areas" (Mitchell 1995:110, quoted in Duncan 1996). But public space has never been accessible to all, as for example exemplified in the exclusion of women from the right to vote in Switzerland until 1971 (see also Massey 2005:152-153). Today's growing (semi-)privatization of many formerly public spaces (e.g. shopping malls, train stations, etc.) has accentuated and facilitated such processes of exclusion and fueled attendant contestations. In addition, the definition of what is 'public' crucially depends on the definition of its counterpart, the 'private,' creating a dichotomy that is pointedly gendered and sexualized. As Nancy Duncan argues: "The public/private dichotomy (both the political and the spatial dimensions) is frequently employed to construct, control, discipline, confine, exclude and suppress gender and sexual difference preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist power structures" (Duncan 1996:128). Epistemologically, the public space thereby represents the (male) space of policy-making, production, mind, culture, while the private sphere signifies the (female) space of home-making, reproduction, body, nature.

State regulators interfere with the private sphere in ways that read as wildly paradoxical if not viewed through the underlying logic of heteropatriarchy. While in some instances, such as domestic violence, state interference continues to be conservative and protective of the private space *as private*, it has been relentless in invading the bedrooms of sexual dissidents and other minoritized groups, particularly racialized and working class Others. As further confirmed in this study, the state's treatment of homosexuality demonstrates that "the intimate is a *coproduction* with the public," and that "intimate relations cannot be considered synonymous with the [scale of the] body or the household" but rather must be read as "a site for ordering population" (Oswin and Olund 2010:60,62, emphasis added; see also Richardson 2000). Accordingly, the queer geographical debate on sexual citizenship has centered around issues such as the policing of public sex; the outlawing of homosexual acts even in the private space; and queer activists' 'in-your-face tactics,' which 'queer' space through a queer 'figure of critique' that exposes the heterosexism inherent in normative citizenship (Califa 1994). However, this work has not only been overwhelmingly about men (but see e.g. Nash and Bain 2007): it has also predominantly been about British and U.S. contexts. Also, it has almost exclusively focused on assumed *already-citizens*, thereby giving little consideration to those

who are not (yet) citizens (but see Binnie 1997). This is particularly deplorable given queer geographers' engagement with the ways in which the nation-state and sexuality are constitutive of each other. One would expect this consideration to be an especially needed intervention within migration scholarship, where research designs based on national identities continue to constitute the norm (e.g. "Turkish migrant women in Munich," etc.).

Within the debates around sexual citizenship, Eithne Luibhéid's work on the definition and regulation of migrant populations has been particularly influential, and in the context of the present study provides a powerful tool to analyze the power-saturated *structuring* of queer migrant women's experiences and self-conceptualizations.<sup>25</sup> In her pioneering book, *Entry Denied* (2002), Luibhéid draws on the shifting U.S. immigration policies, laws, and practices as archived in court documents and decisions, congressional hearings, immigration-service manuals, exclusionist writings, and newspaper articles to trace the history of the definition and exclusion of specific bodies from legal residence and citizenship in the U.S. according to normative ideas about sexuality. National heteronormativity, she writes, is "a regime of power that *all* migrants must negotiate" (Luibhéid 2008a:174, emphasis original), no matter whether heterosexual or not. For instance, certain migrant women were excluded from the U.S. because they were subject to a generic suspicion of unrestrained childbearing (as was the case with Japanese 'picture brides' in the early 1900s), while others were barred admission because they were assumed to be involved in 'unmoral' sexual practices, such as prostitution (as was the case with Chinese women in the late 1800s).<sup>26</sup>

Luibhéid applies Foucault's notion of the *carceral archipelago* to analyze how immigrants are tied into a *system of surveillance*. Rather than being located in one single institution (immigration control), the carceral archipelago works across institutions, procedures, laws, and dominant social groups, for instance in the form of immigration and welfare legislation, asylum procedure, labor market regulations, professional associations, and so on, linking together "bureaucrats, experts, politicians, and the public in new ways, around preoccupations with sexuality, immigration, and nation" (ibid:xv). For instance, Luibhéid analyzes how the former Immigration Naturalization Service, the Public Health Service, and the American Psychiatric Association in the U.S. interacted to establish a visual economics which enabled immigration officers to categorize 'masculine-looking' women migrants as homosexuals and consequently pathologize them as mentally defective, rendering such women deportable until this law was repealed in 1990 (!). As Luibhéid notes, "it was not lesbians and gay men who initially sought to be recognized by the immigration service. On the contrary, it was the immigration

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25 In German-speaking queer migration scholarship, Marc Thielen has made a similar argument, see Thielen 2009.

26 Apart from her groundbreaking analysis of nation-states' stake in defining/controlling migrant sexualities, Luibhéid's work is also remarkable because it remains one of the still rare works to date following calls by queer theorists to apply a queer perspective – i.e. an analysis of the ways in which sexuality is mediated through relations of power – to *heterosexualities*, too, instead of focusing exclusively on LGBT sexualities (see also Hubbard 2007).

service that sought, in sometimes bizarre and frightening ways, to identify and penalize lesbians and gay men who tried to enter the country” (ibid:ix). In other words, rather than ‘discovering’ preexisting sexual identities of immigrants, “the immigration service [and other governmental institutions] centrally contributed to *constructing* the very sexual categories and identities through which women’s immigration possibilities were then regulated” (ibid:xi, emphasis added). These are not only tales from the past. “Female sexuality in particular remains bound by socially ‘acceptable’ notions of femininity,” Rutvica Andrijasevic diagnoses in the context of her discussion of the anti-trafficking campaigns several Western EU countries have been conducting in Eastern Europe to deter Eastern European women from migrating to Western Europe (Andrijasevic 2009:390). These campaigns equate informal labor migration with forced prostitution, juxtaposed in opposition to home as a safe haven. “By portraying the ‘home’ as being a place devoid of danger and thus also of prostitution, these campaigns attempt to regulate women’s sexuality by placing women within the space of heterosexual domesticity,” Andrijasevic concludes (ibid).

These systems of surveillance discipline migrant bodies beyond ‘dressing up’ for the brief moment of crossing the border (such as cutting or growing your hair, wearing clean and adequate clothes, preparing a normative narrative, assuming a collaborative attitude, etc.): “Foucault’s image of the carceral archipelago makes clear that even when the processing of immigrants resulted in their admission, it also situated them within larger relations of power to which they remained subjected *after* entry” (Luibhéid 2002:xv, emphasis added). Luibhéid draws on Robert Chang saying that marginalized groups in the U.S. “carry a figurative border with us,” which continues to regulate migrants’ everyday lives ever after entry (Chang 1997:249, quoted in Luibhéid 2002:xviii). For instance, migrants must not become dependent on social welfare for a certain period of time after arrival; undocumented migrants live in constant fear of discovery and deportation (rendering them an exploitable work force); and so on.

The carceral archipelago hence organizes sexuality in ways that intersect gender, race, and class to reinforce white, heteropatriarchal supremacy while at the same time relegating multiple marginalized subjects to paradoxical places (see also Luibhéid 2002, Chapter 3). From the biographical narratives generated in this study, several institutions and organizations have emerged as sites where migrant sexualities are defined, disciplined, regulated, and controlled in Switzerland as well. Two of the most dynamic and contested legal frameworks in contemporary Switzerland (discussed in Chapter 2) have become visible as particularly momentous: immigration/asylum legislation and same-sex partnership legislation. Other discourses and practices equally tie into the system of surveillance regulating migrant sexualities, such as regulations, discourses, and practices dominating in integration offices and political parties, the welfare system, psychoanalytical practice, research, and even migrant and LGBT rights organizations.

As Luibhéid stresses, this production and simultaneous policing of sexual identities is often tied to a particular logic of *development*. Luibhéid argues “evolutionary narratives persistently frame immigrant women’s lives and sexualities within models of movement from ‘tradition to modernity’ and ‘repression to liberation’ [...]. These models recirculate ahistorical images of immigrant women as backward, passive, and dependent victims of third-world patriarchy” (2002:140). Thus, at physical and imagined national borders,

sexuality – and female sexuality in particular – becomes a site for drawing and monitoring the lines between who is backward and ‘traditional’ versus who is ‘modern’; who is sick and who is healthy; and who is sexually deviant and who is sexually ‘normal.’ Ideas about sexuality thereby intersect with ideas about gender, race, ethnicity, and class. These delimitations are productive of exclusionary nationalisms, eventually resulting in the question of who is eligible as a potential future citizen and who is not. The developmental narrative represented here is linked to a larger colonial narrative that is coming under increasing scrutiny by queer scholars. This is the topic of the next sub-chapter.

### 3.4.2 Queer Theory Meets Postcolonial Studies: Gay-Friendly ‘West,’ Homophobic ‘Rest’?

Based on the now commonsensical insight that “physically sexual acts may have varying social significance and subjective meaning depending on how they are understood in different cultures and different historical periods” (Vance 1991:878, quoted in Miller 2005:146), queer anthropologists have been compiling a body of literature about same-sex practices and identities across cultures beyond the Western notion of ‘gay and lesbian.’<sup>27</sup> However, research on men has dominated this field. As Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa hold, this predominance is related to same-sex intimacy among women being regarded as “less developed, less common and less visible than male homosexuality” (Blackwood and Wieringa 1999:44). Although female same-sex intimacies have received increasing attention in recent years, these studies remain very unevenly distributed in terms of the geographical contexts they are examining.

The approach that has long prevailed in anthropological research aims to ‘excavate’ what are conceptualized as ‘local,’ ‘traditional,’ or ‘precolonial’ non-conforming sexualities. As David A. B. Murray contends, such research has taken “a (Margaret) Meadian ‘look how open-minded they are’ approach, emphasizing how sexual diversity is accepted in certain non-western societies and that ‘we’ westerners could learn something from ‘them’” (Murray 2009:2). This, Murray continues, creates “a significant lacuna in understanding how and why certain sexuality and gender categories and practices come to be taboo, excluded, and/or repellant” (ibid).<sup>28</sup> Queer postcolonial scholars have since begun to engage with the sometimes highly paradoxical ways in which geopolitical trajectories of power as played out in colonial, neoimperial, and neoliberal times have been implicated in shaping the contexts in which same-sex sexualities are negotiated globally today.

Within this field, there is a trending discourse which pits a progressive, modern, and *gay-friendly* West against a backward, traditional, heteropatriarchal, and *homophobic* South and Orient, or ‘Rest,’ respectively. The foundation for this sexualized ‘West’/‘Rest’

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27 See e.g. Allen 2011, Alexander and Mohanty 1997, Blackwood and Wieringa 1999, Blackwood 2010, Boellstorff 2005 and 2007a, Chalmers 2002, Dankwa 2014 and 2021, Griffin and Mulholland 1997, Gunkel 2010, Jackson and Sullivan 2001, Murray and Roscoe 1998, Sinnott 2004, and Wekker 1997.

28 Murray summarizes Don Kulick (2011) here.

binary was laid during 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism. Scholars que(e)rying sexualities in this period have demonstrated that the formation of sexual norms in the West during that time “cannot be charted in Europe alone” (Stoler 1995:7). The installation and maintenance of heteronormativity in this era did not only depend on its demarcation from the figure of the white/‘Western’ homosexual but was importantly also defined against an exoticized, sexualized colonial ‘savage’ (Stoler 1995).<sup>29</sup> This construction of the colonial subaltern as a sexual Other was not only instrumental in legitimizing the endeavor to civilize ‘savage’ and ‘backward’ subjects, but also in facilitating the systematic exploitation of enslaved women’s and men’s labor and bodies (Stoler 2002). In other words: The colonial ‘savage’ was always also defined in sexual terms – without race, no sex, without sex, no race. As Laura Ann Stoler notes, “colonialism is that quintessential project in which desire was always about sex, that sex was always about racial power, and that both were contingent upon a particular representation of nonwhite women’s bodies” (Stoler 1997:43). This cornerstone of colonialism – the co-constitution of race and sex – has persisted into the postcolonial era (e.g. Cohen 2005, JanMohamed 1992, Somerville 2000). It manifests in the persevering stereotypes conveyed by currently strengthening nationalist discourses, which for instance frame male racialized migrants as sexually aggressive and threatening to (especially white) women, or which depict Asian women alternately as sexually compliant or aggressive. Such racialized sexualizations and their effect on queer migrant women’s lives will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.1.4.

But what has recently led Western nationalisms to include (certain) homosexual subjects in their folds? And, vice versa, what is pushing leading political and religious figures and media in many countries such as for example in India, Malaysia, Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, and Jamaica<sup>30</sup> to condemn homosexuality as a manifestation of Western decadence and hence as inherently ‘unnatural’ to Indian, Malaysian, etc., ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’? Unpacking these questions is complex and still very much ongoing in queer postcolonial scholarship, and this introductory chapter cannot provide a full discussion of this issue. What follows is instead a handful of examples and considerations on (post)colonial configurations of sexualities which aim to qualify and complicate the claim currently proliferating in Switzerland that many non-Western ‘cultures’ (especially allegedly the African, Muslim, Balkan, and Eastern European ‘cultures,’ but also South European ‘culture’) are homophobic in essence.

I take the global negotiation of ‘African’ genders, gender relations, and sexualities as an example (aware, of course, that there is no such thing as a unified African understanding of gender or sexuality). For this context, queer postcolonial scholars have exposed the deep implications of colonial continuities in the current rise of homophobias in many African countries. In particular, it has been demonstrated that these homophobias also have to be read as a result of persistent homophobic colonial Christian morale and legislation; the quickly increasing visibility of gay and lesbian activism

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29 Complicating this argument, Siobhan Somerville argues that the Western figure of the homosexual emerged not only parallel to but in fact crucially also *through* discourses of racialized bodies (Somerville 2000).

30 Result of a web search on January 28, 2018.

around the world and the global circulation of the figure of the homosexual through the media, the internet, tourism, and migration; and of the current virulent anti-gay activism propagated by U.S. evangelical churches in various African countries (e.g. Binnie 2004, Gupta 2008, Murray and Roscoe 1998). Further, these homophobias must be understood as effects of global cultural, economic, political, and military power geometries that have framed, and continue to frame, 'Africa' and 'Africans' (like, especially, 'Muslims') as backward and inferior. It is also against such persisting denigration and very real global inequalities that masculinist nationalists in former colonies and other countries outside the West have established the figure of the homosexual as an example of Western decadence while simultaneously framing homosexuals as essentially 'Un-African' (or 'Un-Indian,' 'Un-Bosnian,' etc.).

It is well researched at this point that nationalisms are highly *gendered* (e.g. Yuval-Davis 1997, and see especially Purtschert 2019 for a recent account of Swiss gendered and racialized nationalisms). However, to date, far fewer scholars have investigated how nationalisms and national identities are always also *sexualized*. Among them is Gayatri Gopinath, who in her work on queer diasporas specifically aims to "dissect the ways in which discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration" (Gopinath 2005:3). Gopinath acknowledges the existing feminist postcolonial body of work on gender and nation showing how "female sexuality under nationalism is a crucial site of surveillance, as it is through women's bodies that the borders and boundaries of communal identities are formed." Such sexualizations of the nation are valid for *all* nationalisms. Equally, all nationalisms are racialized as the notion of nation and race (and culture) are intimately connected (see e.g. Jain 2018 and Purtschert 2019 for the case of Switzerland). In more concrete terms, gendered and racialized nationalisms – or, as deconstructivist thinkers have framed nationalisms, *imaginings* or *fictions* of the nation<sup>31</sup> – are crucially established through the figure of the pure, chaste 'national woman' (e.g. the 'Indian' woman, the 'Swiss' woman, etc.). This 'national woman' is depicted as being in need of protection, especially from 'foreign' men (Dietze 2019), and, importantly, is pitted against an inferior 'other' woman – e.g. the 'Muslim' woman.

At the same time, Gopinath criticizes the work of many postcolonial feminists working on gender and nation for failing to fully address "the ways in which dominant na-

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31 Thinkers on nation and ethnicity like Benedict Anderson (1991) and Etienne Balibar (1991) have exposed the nation-state not as a *product of* but instead as *productive of* ethnicities and nationalities. In this view, nationalities and ethnicities emerge from nation-states, not vice versa, because nation-state formation happens through the *imagination* of national communities. As Balibar writes about his notion of "fictive ethnicity": "No nation possesses an ethnic basis naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized – that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture, and interests, which transcends individual and social condition" (Balibar 1991:96). Nation-states are hence imagined spaces and material territories mutually constituting each other. The national space also becomes "a cultural cipher of an obligatory full inclusion," which works on the principles 'all or nothing' and 'either or.' This renders culturally hybrid positionalities impossible (Nassehi 1990:270, quoted in Mecheril 2003:25).



tionalism institutes *heterosexuality* as a key disciplinary regime,” while remaining “curiously silent about how alternative sexualities may constitute a powerful challenge to patriarchal nationalism” (ibid.:9, emphasis added). In other words, an explicitly queer perspective on nationalisms is needed to expose how the ‘national woman’ is constructed as always already *heterosexual*. The naming of this seemingly obvious fact is crucial precisely because of its perceived banality, since it demonstrates how the heterosexuality of the ‘national woman’ is naturalized to the point of invisibility. This catapults the queer female citizen into the realm of the impossible: It is not possible to be both ‘lesbian’ and ‘Bosnian,’ for instance. While it has – arguably – become possible for certain white lesbians who (can) live up to homonormative ideals to be both ‘lesbian’ and ‘Swiss,’ many queer women in Switzerland – such as queer migrant women, trans people, or queer women living in non-monogamous relationships – remain excluded from this homonormative Swissness and its attendant privileges.<sup>32</sup> What this impossibility means for the self-conceptions and experiences of queer migrant women in Switzerland, and how queer migrant women’s presence in Switzerland as queer and ethnicized/racialized women affect the global negotiation of sexual norms, will be discussed throughout this book.

For now, I want to return to the example of ‘African’ sexualities, and specifically Murray’s warning not to romanticize precolonial African societies as communities in which variant genders and sexualities were practiced and acknowledged throughout. If we *do* look at investigations into precolonial African sexualities, these reveal a vast array of patterns of understanding and doing genders, gender relations, and sexualities. In many cases, these did, and sometimes still do, include the acknowledgement of variant genders, gender roles, and sexualities (Murray and Roscoe 1998). While this work certainly effectively debunks the myth that same-sex sexuality in Africa has foreign origins, it (particularly) also exposes the sheer difficulty to think and write about precolonial understandings of gender and sexuality within the framework of ‘modern’ Western science with its specific understandings of these concepts. Nevertheless, this ample evidence of precolonial alternative understandings of gender and sexuality further testifies to the immense effects of the colonizers’ attempts to force the European bi-gendered heteropatriarchal system, the attendant categorization and pathologization of differently gendered and sexualized people as sexual Others, and the equally attendant subjugation of women onto colonial communities (Oyěwùmí 1997; similar processes have also been described for other contexts, see e.g. Lugones 2007 for the example of Native American communities). This heteropatriarchal system was again also intrinsically racialized, as it established vastly different arrangements for colonized males and females (as located both in- and outside the colonies, for example in slavery or indentured worker contexts) on the one hand, and for male and female white bourgeois colonizers on the other (Lugones 2007:186).

But things are even more complicated. Heteropatriarchal anti-colonialists and nationalists in (ex-)colonies often collude(d) with and maintain the establishment of such

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32 As discussed above (Chapter 3.2.1), some queer critics argue that in the face of persisting discrimination and violence against homosexuals in Switzerland, it is more apt to speak of a *fiction* of homonormative inclusion here.

European heteropatriarchal orders (Gopinath 2005, Lugones 2007). This perspective on the agency of subjugated populations connects to another concern voiced by scholars who have criticized some queer postcolonial work for its replacement of homosexuality with *homophobia* as ‘Evil of the West.’ Postulating that *homophobia* in the South or in the Orient is an import from the West once more reconfigures the West as the actor and the colony as the passive surface upon which the colonizers’ scripts are written. Critics of such a view have unmasked this as a multiple misconception. First, such a perspective effaces differences *within* the (ex-)colony. As Gayatri Spivak points out speaking on the context of colonialism in India: “The Indian Aboriginal did not flourish in pre-British India [...] there is something Eurocentric about assuming that imperialism began with Europe” (Spivak 1999:37, quoted in Castro Varela and Dhawan 2003:273). Second, both in the colonial and in the postcolonial era, same-sex practices or identities in the (ex-)colonies have not resulted from a unidirectional diffusion of ideas about sexuality from the metropolis to the colony, but have instead emerged from a process of contestation and negotiation between colonizers and native populations on the one hand and different perspectives on sexuality within each of these groups on the other (e.g. Jackson 2001, Manalansan 2003).

In order to clarify and illustrate my point on the complexities of (post)colonial configurations and global negotiations of sexualities, I turn to Serena Dankwa’s examination (2014 and 2021) of female same-sex intimacy in urban Ghana. Over the past few years, LGBT organizations have grown stronger in urban Ghana, not least through financial and ideological support from Western organizations. As in other African countries, the increased visibility of gay and lesbian rights advocacy has been accompanied by a marked rise in homophobia decrying homosexuality as a Western import. At the same time, Dankwa found that Ghanaian LGBT activism and activists – mostly males – have remained rather disconnected from urban working class women living female same-sex intimacies. These women sometimes use the term ‘doing supɪ’ to refer to their same-sex intimacies, which are framed as a practice rather than a sexual identity. However, these intimate concepts and formations of female same-sex intimacy are not ‘local,’ ‘genuine,’ or ‘untouched by colonial rule.’ For instance, Dankwa describes that same-sex practices operate on the basis of discretion rather than confession. This is related to *both* the historical respectability of discretion in Ghanaian culture as well as to women’s fear of growing homophobia. Also, while the ways in which these women conceptualize their same-sex practices and relationships indeed partly refer to older West African cultural figures and terms of kinship (such as the figure of *Mami Wata* or the figure of the sister), historically the term ‘doing supɪ’ probably has its roots in the ways in which female same-sex bonds were enacted at Christian boarding schools.<sup>33</sup> Dankwa further views these intimacies through an economic lens. To working class women in Ghana, same-sex relationships, just like opposite-sex relationships, are always also a matter of bare necessity. To ‘make do,’ all relationships, including intimate ones, are a crucial

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33 Incidentally, the Swiss *Basler Mission* ran such schools. This and other only recently told tales, for instance of Swiss colonial trade businesses, configures Switzerland as highly complicit in the colonial project, see Chapter 1.

means for socio-economic survival. This is one of the reasons why many women entertain (sexual and non-sexual) relationships with more than one partner, often including both male and female persons, at a time. Just as much as they are rooted in 'tradition,' the same-sex intimacies of these urban working class women are hence closely tied into (post)colonial economies and politics.

Dankwa's work also points to the importance of *contextualizing* the multiplicity of homophobias, in plural, around the globe (Murray 2011). While most of this work is yet to be done, it has already been shown that there are political configurations that do not reiterate the gay-friendly West/homophobic 'Rest' dichotomy. As Tom Boellstorff (2011) shows in his analysis of the perception of sexually non-normative men in Indonesia, violence against such men was extremely rare until the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, which Boellstorff frames as an example of a postcolonial society that had developed heterosexism without homophobia.

As Dankwa and an increasing number of other queer postcolonial scholars emphasize, the growing 'lesbian' and 'gay' activism in countries outside the West has complicated discourses around a variety of same-sex intimacies. Lesbian and gay organizations both in- and outside the West – among them especially those Western LGBT organizations that have declared it their aim to fight homophobia in developing countries and accordingly support lesbian and gay organizations in these countries – privilege Western definitions of same-sex practices, inserting all sexual dissidents into a developmental narrative in which sexually non-normative people start out as preidentitarian sexual practitioners who are subsequently liberated to become 'out,' politicized, self-identified homosexuals (Altman 1996, Manalansan 1997).<sup>34</sup> As Joseph Massad argues, this figure of the "Gay International" is "destroying social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of reproducing a world in its own image, one wherein its sexual categories and desires are safe from being questioned" (Massad 2007:189 and Massad 2002). Massad accordingly associates such politics with a cultural imperialism that projects homophobia on the non-Western Other.

Queer anthropologists have joined this contestation of simplistic models postulating a unilateral globalization of the gay and lesbian identity. As Peter A. Jackson points out in his work on Thailand, while it is true that Western gay and lesbian styles and terminologies are often appropriated to resist local heteronormativity, this strategy does not represent a "wholesale recreation of western sexual cultures in Asian contexts" (Jackson 2001:6). Instead, Jackson postulates a "selective and strategic use of foreign forms to create new ways of being Asian *and* homosexual" (ibid, see also Binnie 2004). On another note, Martin F. Manalansan (2003) documents how linguistic trends in the queer Filipino diaspora in New York 'paradoxically' make their way from the Philippines to New York and hence flow from the alleged 'margins' to the alleged 'center' rather than vice versa. Still other research is beginning to focus on queer diffusions and contestations *within* the global South and Orient.

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34 At the same time there are, paradoxically, Christian organizations from the U.S. who have declared it their aim to strengthen the anti-gay politics in African countries, so that the entire U.S. pro- and anti-gay debate has now become copy-pasted onto African territory (Koama 2012; see also <http://prospect.org/article/exporting-anti-gay-movement#main-content>, downloaded on October 11, 2014).

The origin and rise of heteropatriarchal nationalisms in former colonies in general and *homophobic* nationalisms in particular must hence be read in their full complexity: as legacies of colonialism; as the ongoing work of neoimperialism and globalizing neoliberalism; and as the work of heteropatriarchy and nationalism, which were sometimes, though not always, forged in the context of anti-colonial movements. In other words, homophobias are far from being 'essential' to, for instance, 'Muslim' or 'African' cultures, as increasingly popular discourses in Western Europe suggest (see next subchapter). Nor are homophobias outside the West as omnipresent as these popular discourses would have it; as discussed earlier, many cultural norms and practices that are affirmative of variant genders and sexualities continue to exist around the globe. Furthermore, 'modern' homophobias do not permeate the entire 'non-West.' In Chapter 2.2.3, evidence to the contrary was provided, such as for example the fact that South Africa was the first country in the world to grant homosexual subjects fully equal rights (which is not to state that there is no homophobia in South Africa – there is); or that for years Mexico was much more progressive in terms of granting homosexual people equal rights than the U.S., contrary to dominant discourses in the U.S. persistently framing Mexico as culturally backward and 'developing.' Many findings of the present study, too, undercut the model 'gay-friendly West' – 'homophobic Rest.'

It is important to note that this juxtaposition does not only affect former colonies and their subjects, but instead encompasses all places and people that become defined as 'not the West.' As Fatima El-Tayeb writes in the context of the invisibilization of racism she diagnoses for Europe:

The European ideology of racelessness creates a double bind for racialized populations: an internalist perspective claims European exceptionalism by defining the continent's identity as both entirely self-generated and self-contained, *while a universalist narrative simultaneously presents the European condition as paradigmatically human and other, non-Western parts of the world as inevitably deviating from this norm.* (El-Tayeb 2011:81, emphasis added)

El-Tayeb argues that "across the political spectrum, the relationship between the West and human rights is more often than not presented as a necessary, natural one," yet "there is no inquiry whatsoever into why those non-western nations do not support human rights; instead, it is implied that they simply have different values" (ibid:87). One the other hand, no questions are asked about the *Western* commitment to human rights, such as:

How much is the international human rights system undermined by centuries of exploitation in the name of a humanitarian 'civilizing mission' and how much is this memory kept alive by the open creation of 'extralegal' zones through extraordinary rendition, secret prisons, 'harsh interrogation techniques,' and antiterrorism laws in the West? How important are successes in institutionalizing international human rights regulations when the very concept of 'rights' is becoming increasingly irrelevant within a neoliberal globalization that privatizes everything from wars to health care to prisons – and from which the Western nations profit more than anyone else? (El-Tayeb 2011:88-89)

In other words, it is *not* the case that Human Rights are an intrinsic characteristic of Europeanness, which *then*, as a consequence, necessarily generates a 'culture clash' when Western European culture, constructed as the 'normal,' baseline culture, comes into contact with other, 'particular,' differing cultures because these latter cultures are inherently averse to Human Rights. The problem is instead that 'Europe' constantly violates Human Rights and perpetuates global social injustice, while at the same time managing to maintain moral superiority over societies it positions in opposition to these allegedly essentially European values. In the context of Switzerland, especially Black people, people perceived as Muslims, and people identified as originating from the 'Balkans' and Eastern and Southern Europe become located outside Swiss citizenship through such processes of racialization.

### 3.4.3 Homonationalism

European nations have increasingly come to identify with homosexuality or homosexuals' rights respectively, which over the past two decades has led to the at least partial inclusion of certain homosexual subjects into the folds of Swiss citizenship. But how exactly did this normalization come about, seeing that the 'homosexual' had historically been constructed as the nation's internal sexual Other, and seeing how early European imaginations of the Orient especially also located sexual licentiousness and deviation in the same Orient which has since become framed as essentially homophobic (Haritaworn and Petzen 2014:115, Said 1978)?

While it is certainly true that the past two decades have seen a growing inclusion of homosexual subjects in Western European citizenship, queer postcolonial and queer of color critics are increasingly raising their voices against the fact that this inclusion is not accessible to all sexually non-conforming people. Instead, the inclusion of *certain* homonormative gays and lesbians into the folds of social normativity and Western European nationalism coincides with an exclusion of other non-conforming queer subjects (Castro Varela and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2000, Dietze 2019, El-Tayeb 2011). This exclusionary mechanism is part of a larger discourse Jasbir Puar has termed *homonationalism* (Puar 2005 and 2007), a powerful concept that speaks to how the increasing integration of certain (white, predominantly male, middle class, monogamous) homosexual subjects in Western consumerism and nationalism produces hierarchies related to race, class, gender, and nation-state. The concept of homonationalism builds on and extends Edward Said's notion of *Orientalism* (1978), which describes the ways in which Western cultural products, academic knowledge, and other discourses construct the 'Orient.' Like Orientalism, homonationalism addresses how Western nations circulate ideas about other cultures, such as especially the 'Islamic world,' 'Russia,' 'Africa,' or 'Eastern Europe' or 'the Balkans,' which establish the West as morally and culturally superior to these other places. Homonationalism also extends the concept of Orientalism by particularly addressing how *lesbian and gay rights discourses* are increasingly becoming central to the construction of contemporary Western hegemony. The concept of homonationalism is further in dialogue with feminist postcolonial work, which has long made a similar argument in terms of gender. This argument, sometimes referred to as *femonationalism*, is famously summarized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's remark

that colonizers' discourses around the colonies have to be understood as a case of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1994 [1988]:93).<sup>35</sup>

The history of the image that the Western world has been crafting of sex in the Orient is a point in the case of how the way in which the Other is constructed changes to serve the delineation of the Western Self against an inferior Other. As Jin Haritaworn points out, "if Said's Orientals brimmed with a rampant queerness and promiscuity that clearly needed restraining, today 'Muslims' are imagined as repressed and not free enough" (Haritaworn and Petzen 2014:115, referring to Puar 2005:125-126).

Puar specifically describes how discourses in the U.S. highlight gay rights and sexual liberalism and deploy these discourses as moral justifications for the War on Terror. Within this logic, gay and lesbian rights serve as a legitimation for the fight against allegedly homophobic Muslim countries and groups, disguising imperialist moves as acts of liberation of homosexual people (and also women) in these countries while at the same time rendering invisible domestic homophobia (along with sexism/heteropatriarchy). In an "insistent and frantic manufacturing of 'homosexuality' and 'Muslim' as mutually exclusive and discrete categories," the terrorist subject becomes a trope for the (re)production of U.S. exceptionalism (Puar 2005:126).

The entrenchment of Puar's discussion of homonationalism in U.S. discourses and practices around the War on Terror and the specific position of the U.S. in the global geometry of power renders homonationalism in Puar's terms only partially applicable to the European or Swiss context (Mesquita 2011). Correspondingly, European scholars have begun to translate the potential of the concept to European contexts. This work has, on the one hand, specifically addressed *migration* and European diasporic contexts in the U.K., Germany, The Netherlands, and other Western European countries (e.g. Butler 2009, Dietze 2019, Fassin 2010, Gunkel and Pitcher 2008, Haritaworn 2008, Haritaworn et al. 2008, Jivraj and De Jong 2011, Kulpa 2014, Kuntsman and Miyake 2008, Mepschen et al. 2010, Mesquita 2011, Mesquita and Purtschert 2016). These authors have for instance examined naturalization procedures in Western European countries in which immigrants from Turkey and generally from Muslim countries (and *only* those) are confronted with photographs of homosexual couples or questionnaires featuring questions such as "Imagine that your son comes to you and declares that he's a homosexual and would like to live with another man. How do you react?" (quoted in Gunkel and Pitcher 2008; see also Mesquita 2011:225). Such practices articulate gay rights within the frame of the West/Europe as a space of modernity that needs to be protected against the putative orthodoxies of Muslim immigrants. As Henriette Gunkel and Ben Pitcher argue:

Puar's work has shown that the sexual politics of the War on Terror not only provide a tool for underwriting the moral superiority of its antagonists, but have served a wider function in organizing and shaping a diverse range of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, as the terrorist subject is directly linked to the figuration of 'non-integrated' citizens, migrants and their families. In this process, Islam has come to be constituted as one of the main obstacles to successful 'integration' within the West and for the implementation of democracy outside of it. Through this discursive formation, 'the Muslim' is

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35 Spivak's remark was made in the context of the abolition of sari rites by the British in India.

constituted as an 'impossible subject' within contemporary nationalist discourses [...]. (Gunkel and Pitcher 2008)

These discourses frame homosexuality as essentially European and the Orient as essentially homophobic. In such framings, not only the Muslim European, but especially also the *queer Muslim* becomes an impossible subject. Interestingly, as Fatima El-Tayeb observes, the difference between Western Europeans and Muslims is thereby less framed as a conflict between Christians and Muslims – that is, as a religious conflict – than as a conflict “between European humanism, committed to the protection of rights, namely those of gender equality and sexual freedom, and a hostile, intolerant foreign culture” (El-Tayeb 2011:81-82).

Other work within the flurry of queer postcolonial body of literature by Europe-based scholars engaging with homonationalism has revealed that not one but many Others are being produced by these discourses. Beyond the Islamic world, these also include Africa, Russia, and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Kulpa 2014, LeBlanc 2013). Since some participants in this study migrated from CEE and Ex-Soviet contexts, a glance at Robert Kulpa's work is useful. Kulpa (2014) demonstrates in his analysis of discourses within the European Parliament about CEE that CEE “is often framed as the European (homophobic) Other in the emerging discourses of ‘homoinclusive European Nationhood’” (ibid:431). However:

Not able to reject CEE as the absolute Other (as it does with Islam) due to the geographical, religious, and cultural proximity, and in the face of the EU enlargement, it is sexuality that provides a new arena for the revival of the West/European orientalism towards the CEE. [...] I argue that gay (human) rights became ostensibly marked as a litmus test of CEE progress towards the West/Europe. (Kulpa 2014:440)

Homophobia in CEE is hence seen as a malady slowing down (rather than threatening as in the case of Islam) the Western European self-proclaimed modernity, but there is “hope on the horizon” for this malady to be cured:

In a leveraged pedagogical gesture of the one who knows better, West/Europe reprimands CEE first, but then also promises to help in erasing ‘the issue.’ But the help comes as a strongly conditioned, and an undisputable process that has little respect or interest in the local circumstances of why ‘the issue’ has arisen in the first place. (Kulpa 2014:440)

Homonationalisms have, in other words, been shown to come in many guises and to be operative across a range of geographical loci in terms of who produces such homonationalisms. Femo- and homonationalist ideas also importantly structure dominant discourses in Switzerland. Anti-Islamic discourses have generally been of an increasing virulence in Switzerland, infamously culminating in the ban of the construction of minarets in the country in 2007 and the national ban on veils in 2021, with both decisions taken by Swiss voters in the context of a people's initiative. As the campaign poster for the anti-minaret initiative in Figure 2 shows, the campaign leading up to the ban of minarets was highly gendered and sexualized. This poster was one of the most

widespread campaign posters and could be seen in public spaces all over Switzerland. In the form of black missile-like minaret symbols on the Swiss flag, it depicts Islam as threatening, aggressive, expansive, and territory-grabbing. The main threat, however, is placed in the foreground and comes in the form of the veiled Muslim woman. The figure insinuates that the arrival of Muslim women poses a threat to women's rights in Switzerland, erasing home-made misogyny and fueling generalizing notions of Muslim women as powerless victims of their heteropatriarchal societies.

Figure 2: Campaign poster for banning minarets in Switzerland:  
 “Stopp – Ja zum Minarett-Verbot” – “Stop – Yes to the ban on minarets”



(Source: Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv / Sozarch\_F\_5123-Pe-157)

Both anti-Islamic discourses and discourses around ‘Africans’ are frequently also homonationalist. Two examples I would like to cite here are symposia organized by the gay organization NETWORK I attended in the context of the fieldwork. These were entitled “*Immigrantenkultur versus Menschenrechte – Homosexuelle im Kul-*



*turkampff?*” – “Immigrant culture versus human rights – homosexuals caught up in cultural clash?”<sup>36</sup> and “*Das Tabu Homosexualität in der Integrationsarbeit – Respekt fördern oder fordern?*” – “The taboo of homosexuality in integration work – to foster or to demand respect?”. From these titles the immigrant communities in Switzerland emerge as inherently homophobic, and ‘Swiss’ homosexuals in need of protection from ‘them.’ Figure 3 shows the flyer of the latter event. The event description starts out with the sentence: “In many immigrant cultures, patriarchy is still as rooted as it was the case with us 100 years ago, and homosexuality is as deeply tabooed as was the case with us 50 years ago.” From this as well as the remainder of the flyer text, “immigrant cultures” emerge as backward in relation to Swiss culture (which remains unnamed or only referred to as ‘us,’ a discursive move that automatically excludes ‘immigrants’ from this very ‘us’). “Immigrant cultures” appear as fixed and monolithic, stuck in patriarchal structures, and essentially homophobic. No part of the text opens the possibility of the existence of liberal attitudes among “immigrants,” rendering ‘their’ homophobia a given. Such a framing of “immigrant cultures,” renders queer immigrant subjects impossible subjects: queers cannot exist within such “cultures.” Instead of addressing diversity among “immigrants,” the flyer contrasts “immigrant cultures” to school children using the word *schwul* (‘gay,’ used derogatively, similar to ‘faggot’) as a swear word in the school yard on the one hand and to the “Catholic church,” “evangelical churches,” and “Jewish orthodoxy” on the other. It asks whether “we” can morally “ask more” of “immigrant kids” and “immigrant cultures” in terms of respect towards homosexuality, than of these other groups (i.e. the school children and the named religious groups). This comparison simultaneously in- and excludes these other groups. Referring to the homophobia of these other groups, the text asks: “Should we sweep in front of our own door before teaching immigrant kids?” School children and the named religious groups hence seem included in ‘our house,’ the front of which wants cleaning, while “immigrants” are, by contrast, evidently not even residents of this ‘house.’ Also, “immigrants” do not appear to be either school children or members of any of the named religious communities. At the same time, these other ‘groups’ appear as fixed and monolithic as the “immigrant cultures” themselves, as homophobia is externalized onto Others (school children, religious groups) once more. In the text homophobia hence never appears as a problem among (the unnamed) ‘us,’ the white and allegedly gay-friendly Swiss Self. This underlying assumption stands in stark contrast to the persisting violence and structural discriminations against homosexuals in Switzerland. Also interesting is the fact that the list of invited guests reveals that “immigrants” actually means ‘Muslims’: Besides the integration officer of Basel city and a (neo)liberal politician from Basel, only the vice president of the *Vereinigung islamischer Organisationen in Zürich* VIOZ (Association of Islamic Organizations in Zurich), Hasan Taner, and a representative of a Muslim organization from the canton of Basel Stadt were invited to discuss on the podium.

The mechanisms of homonationalism can hence be summarized as follows: In the interest of reproducing a border between the ‘Swiss’ and its Other within the context of such nationalisms, the nation-state has been forced to make space for a normalized

Figure 3: Flyer for the event “Das Tabu Homosexualität in der Integrationsarbeit – Respekt fördern oder fordern?” – “The taboo of homosexuality in integration work – to foster or to demand respect?” organized by the gay organization NETWORK, Basel, August 25, 2008.

## Das Tabu Homosexualität in der Integrationsarbeit – Respekt fördern oder fordern?

Eine Veranstaltung von  
**NETWORK**



Integration ist ein zweiseitiger Prozess. Anerkennen der Spielregeln, Lernen der Sprache, Anpassen an noch fremde Sitten auf der einen Seite; Respekt für die fremde Kultur, Offenheit zum Umgang auf der andern Seite. Wo die Bereitschaft zum Aufeinanderzugehen da ist, wird vieles einfach. Was aber, wenn auf dem Weg der Integration grosse Felsbrocken liegen?

Auf dem **öffentlichen Podium** diskutieren unter der Leitung von Roger Ehret, Journalist:

- Thomas Kessler, «Integration Basel», Delegierter für Migrations- und Integrationsfragen des Kantons Basel-Stadt, Leiter kantonale Stelle für Integration und Antidiskriminierung SID
- Dr. Rolf Stürm, FDP, Grossrat, Basel-Stadt
- Dr. Hasan Taner Hatipoglu, VIOZ, Vizepräsident der Vereinigung der islamischen Organisationen in Zürich
- und ein Vertreter einer muslimischen Organisation im Kanton Basel-Stadt (angefragt)

**Montag, 25. August 2008,**  
Beginn 18.45, Ende 21.00 Uhr  
Bürgergemeinderatssaal, Stadthaus 1. Stock,  
Stadthausgasse 13, Basel

Co-Sponsoren:  **FDP RADIGAL**  
Ihre Stimme. die schweizerische Fotografin der FDP

In vielen Immigrantenkulturen ist das Patriarchat noch so fest verwurzelt wie bei uns vor 100 Jahren und Homosexualität so tief tabuisiert wie bei uns noch vor 50 Jahren.

Die in der professionellen Integrationsarbeit tätigen SozialarbeiterInnen, LehrerInnen und ErzieherInnen, aber auch die Eltern sind mit dieser Frage auf einer alltäglichen Basis konfrontiert. Die Politik und die Integrationsfachstellen sind grundsätzlich gefordert.

Die einfachste aber zugleich hilfloseste Antwort ist Schweigen, sei es aus eigener Unsicherheit, Unkenntnis oder aus Konfliktscheu.

Diesem Schweigen stellen wir uns entgegen. Dieses Podiumsgespräch soll die Herausforderung für die Integrationsarbeit präziser umschreiben und Lösungsansätze diskutieren.

**Wie z.B. zu folgenden Fragen:**

- Information zur gleichgeschlechtlichen Veranlagung und zur schwulesbischen Kultur, zur Rechtslage in der Schweiz also, ist ein Fundament der Integrationsarbeit. Wie steht es um die Qualität dieser Information in Schule und Erwachsenenbildung, wie um Dispensationen vom Sexualunterricht?
- Gibt es innovative Konzepte, um das Recht der Schwulen und Lesben auf Entfaltung ihrer Persönlichkeit ohne Diskriminierung zu sichern? Wie kann fordern mit fördern verbunden werden?
- «Schwul» ist eines der beliebtesten Schimpfwörter auf dem Pausenhof. Was verbirgt sich dahinter? Dürfen wir von Immigrantenkindern mehr verlangen als von den länger Ansässigen?
- Die katholische und evangelikale Kirche sowie die jüdische Orthodoxie unterscheiden sich in ihrer Haltung nur graduell von Immigrantenkulturen. So belegen sie z.B. offen schwule Priester, Pfarrer und Rabbiner mit Berufsverbot. Sollten wir vor der eigenen Tür kehren bevor wir Immigranten befehlen?

**Die Platzzahl ist beschränkt**  
Für reservierte Plätze melden Sie sich bitte beim Network Sekretariat, Postfach 417, 8027 Zürich, 044 918 30 31 (Tel), 044 918 18 84 (Fax), info@network.ch, schriftlich, per Fax, per E-Mail oder telefonisch so früh wie möglich an. Die übrigen Plätze werden am Abend nach dem Prinzip «first come – first served» vergeben.

homosexual citizen; this allows the Swiss Self's nation(al)ity to uphold its appearance of enlightenment and tolerance. In turn, Swiss homonationalism not only legitimizes aggravated immigration control and discriminatory moves against immigrant people but at the same time effectively effaces the fact that there is continued discrimination and violence against homosexual people *within* Switzerland – also against those privileged white middle class gays and lesbians who might be eligible for inclusion within the homonational imagination (see Chapter 2.2.2). It is therefore paradoxical that it has specifically also been lesbian and gay rights advocates who have been reproducing homonational discourses, rendering it all the more difficult to sustain critique against structural homophobia among the 'Swiss.' At the same time, such homonationalist discursive maneuvers exclude *queer migrants* from participating in the ongoing process of normalizing homosexuality in Switzerland, since, as will be shown here, subjects how are both migrant *and* queer are rendered 'impossible subjects.'

The past few years have seen the appearance of some critical scientific work about homonationalist discourses in Switzerland. Already in 2011, Sushila Mesquita postulated that the current tendency in Western Europe, including Switzerland, to further fortify the borders against what is constructed as the extra-European Other might have constituted one condition to enable the present acceleration of the recognition of certain normalized gay and lesbian identities within Western Europe. In a critical reading of two poster campaigns, one launched by *Amnesty International Switzerland* and one by the LGBT rights NGOs *Queeramnesty*, *Homosexuelle Arbeitsgruppe Bern HAB*, *Pink Cross*, *LOS*, *Amnesty International*, and *NETWORK*, Mesquita shows how the poster series frame homophobia as something which takes place ‘elsewhere’ but not in Switzerland, or something performed by people who have migrated to Switzerland from these ‘elsewheres’ (Mesquita 2011:222-231). Mesquita extends this argument together with Patricia Purtschert. The authors introduce the notion of *gay governance* in order to point to how “specific relations of governance, education, salvation and patronaging between queer actors are set up along racialized lines, especially in the context of NGO work” (Mesquita and Purtschert 2016:141-142). In their meticulous reading of a number of LGBT organizations’ events, publications, and campaigns in Switzerland, the authors demonstrate the production of a narrative that postulates that homophobia is currently being imported into Switzerland by immigrants, particularly African and ‘Muslim’ immigrants. Again, through locating homophobia outside Switzerland (but now arriving here through immigrating bodies), these discourses erase Swiss-made histories and geographies of homophobia while at the same time fueling racist notions of certain immigrant populations. As such, these NGO discourses are, often inadvertently, complicit in legitimizing right-wing anti-immigration discourses and ever stricter immigration and asylum policies. These homonationalist developments in Switzerland can hence be summed up in the words of a group of German queer and postcolonial authors, who state that “racism is the vehicle that transports White Gays and Feminists into the political mainstream. The questionable amnesia in which the sudden claim of a European ‘tradition’ of anti-homophobic and anti-sexist ‘values’ is grounded is less a result of gendered progress than of a racist backlash” (Haritaworn et al. 2007:188, quoted in Mesquita 2011:227, my translation).

#### 3.4.4 “Your country has failed you”: Queer Asylum

Within the scholarship engaging with homonationalism or more broadly with the constitution of nation and sexuality in a postcolonial context, *asylum* has drawn increasing attention as a technique of nation-state power that defines, marks, allocates, and disciplines queer bodies (e.g. Lewis 2010 and 2013, Miller 2005). This sub-chapter outlines how queer migration scholars address the ways state politics and LGBT rights organizations are obsessed with and – often unwittingly – instrumentalize queer asylum and the figure of the queer asylum seeker in order to propagate the Western notion of the liberated homosexual Self.

First, state politics: Asylum procedure engages in a paradoxical double move. On the one hand, it requires queer asylum seekers (and their advocates) to forge a ‘credible’ and extremely clear-cut – in this case *sexual* – identity in the attempt to situate them-

selves as members of a clearly defined, prosecuted 'social group.'<sup>37</sup> Like immigration control at large as described above in terms of the carceral archipelago, asylum thus *brings into being* and *reproduces* specific bounded subjects and groups, which need to be rooted in Western normative ideas about sexuality and gender to be legible for asylum officials of the receiving nation-state. Moreover, and much in contrast to queer theorists' insistence that sexuality and desire have to be understood as changing, multiple, and contradictory, the demonstrated identities need to be conceptualized as *immutable*, essential, fixed, and intrinsic to the person and their biography. On the other hand, while an asylum seeker needs to be permanently allocable to a prosecuted social group in order to be granted asylum, asylum simultaneously and paradoxically seeks to individualize and *single out* the asylum seeker from this social group to prevent alleged floodgate effects.

What is more, through a narrative of "Your country has failed you, you are safe here" (Miller 2005:143, see also Lewis 2010 and 2013), asylum emerges as a self-serving stance of receiving countries in the West. Alice Miller identifies this as a "violent gift" for the individual asylum seeker, who is required to dissociate from, and speak extremely ill of their country in order to receive asylum; they are thereby forced to re-enact once more the dichotomy of a humanitarian and enlightened West versus a repressive and backward South or Orient. Within this logic, the story of how one has become aware of one's homosexuality in one's homeland, and how extremely badly one fared *as* a homosexual in the homeland, is central to the process of establishing a 'credible' asylum case – and credibility is all-important, as one's story often represents the sole or most important 'proof' of persecution someone can present.<sup>38</sup> This forced narrative veils several mechanisms of state power. First, it obliterates the ways in which the West engages in flight-inducing practices through processes of (neo)colonialism, economic globalization, and other techniques of cultural, political, and military imperialism. Second, it renders invisible the fact that it is actually non-Western countries that host the vast majority of the world's refugees. Third, by restricting the granting of sexuality-based asylum to sexually non-conforming asylum seekers, flight based on *heterosexual* violence is expunged or conflated with gender-based 'cases.' Finally, this forced narrative once again obfuscates domestic homophobia in Western countries (ibid.:143-146).<sup>39</sup>

Second, activism: As already demonstrated repeatedly, LGBT rights organizations in Switzerland and elsewhere unwittingly often contribute to their states' self-congratulatory deportment. Successful (but especially also unsuccessful) queer asylum claims

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37 In her powerful analysis of asylum practices in the U.S., Alice Miller more generally remarks with regard to the relationship between asylum procedure and identity that "asylum tends to favor identity as the touchstone of what is essential to protect about the human, and deems only some forms of conduct or behaviors as fitting that identity" (Miller 2005:167, see also Reddy 2005).

38 Besides these narratives, Swiss asylum procedure and practices in queer migrants' asylum cases also hinge on a *visual economics* that favors feminine men and masculine women, see Chapter 2.3.2.

39 Karma Chávez elaborates on a paradox in her examination of the U.S. government's increasing refusal of asylum to queer asylum seekers from Mexico. These refusals (which often not even made it to court) are based on references to Mexico's 2006 liberal legislation with respect to homosexuality as well as on the argument that "There is now a Gay Pride Parade in Mexico City," suggesting that Mexico is 'catching up' with the U.S. with respect to human rights (Chávez 2010).

make concrete, quick, and simple to communicate positive (or scandalous) human rights news with a human face. This promise lures activists into “strategic shortcuts” and thus into complicity with discriminatory state procedures (Miller 2005:160).<sup>40</sup> Writing against such shortcuts, Miller calls for asylum and human rights practices to “become more aware of the implications of contemporary theories of sexuality,” that is, to *contextualize* sexualities and sexual identities rather than to oversimplify and stereotype them; to view sexuality as interacting with other realms of the social (ibid.:137,162). The tricky task for activists and advocates is to “minimize the complicity of asylum storytelling with the *imperial project*, while still being successful in ensuring that those who seek to cross the border can still cross” (ibid.:165, emphasis in the original). Of course, the problem is that with the welfare and sometimes life of *real people* at stake, this is not an apt field for playful experimentation.

To conclude this discussion of citizenship, homonationalism, and asylum: Working through these mechanisms of nation-state power, we need to remain aware that the nation-state is, above all, an epistemological construct, a discourse, a way in which the world is structured to enforce and territorialize certain relations of power whose materializations also have their own effects. As such, the nation-state, just like any other scale, depends on our everyday re-enactment of it; as Sallie A. Marston and her colleagues have pointed out (see Chapter 3.1.2), there is no nation-state ‘up there,’ beyond our everyday performance of it. And in the ‘dirt and rocks’ of everyday social practices these re-enactments are, more often than not, flawed, especially (but not only) when performed by ‘impossible subjects’ such as queer migrant women. As such, non-conforming practices necessarily feed back into how we might change our thinking about nation-states.

While Michel Foucault and Judith Butler and the queer migration scholars who have drawn on their work provide theoretical leverage for the analysis of the role state-based power circuits play in the construction and policing of sexualities and sexual identities, this theoretical framework also presents difficulties for conceptualizing agency and resistance (Luibhéid 2002:162n). As Rutvica Andrijasevic aptly points out, “the overwhelming emphasis in the feminist and queer migration literature on control has led scholars to privilege the analytic framework centered on exclusion in which states enforce migrants’ exclusion through refusal of entry at the border, removal through deportation or denial of citizenship” (Andrijasevic 2009:389). However, while all queer migrants are disciplined by, and must negotiate, state power and hegemonic discourses, queer immigrant bodies are not merely passive pawns played by agents of the nation-state or other circuits of power; rather, they are in dialogue with these agents, actively (dis)obeying, appropriating, choosing, and strategizing – and these practices feed back into the system. Unfortunately, scant attention has been paid to the processes that constitute national sexualities in *everyday practices* as well as to the *lived realities* of those situated

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40 Some Swiss LGBT organizations have since become more sensitive to the danger of outsourcing homophobia to the Other. See e.g. <https://www.neuewege.ch/queere-asylsuchende-der-schweiz?search=Schweiz>, downloaded on January 7, 2020, for a contribution by two *Queeramnesty* activists who reflect on these pitfalls (Ott and Navarra 2019).

at the deprived end of the uneven distribution of economic, cultural, and political power both within and among countries (Oswin 2006). As this is one of the main gaps this study seeks to address, the following sub-chapters engage with more embodied concepts from queer migration scholarship and geographies of sexualities, which focus on subjectivities, self-conceptualizations, identifications, strategies, experiences, and everyday lives.

### 3.4.5 A Transnational Approach to Migration Studies

One perspective that has been particularly foundational for the formulation of the queer perspective on migration has been *critical transnationalism*. Countering narratives of globalization organized around notions of unfettered flows of capital, goods, and services enabled by ‘shrinking distances,’ increasing speed, and decreasing costs of transportation and data flows, critical transnational scholarship seeks to examine the *experiences and transcultural practices* of people crossing borders. Yet it also engages with the *conditions* shaping migrant experiences (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992).<sup>41</sup> This dual objective has not only effectively upset enthusiastic notions of a de-borderized, de-territorialized and de-nationalized world but has also countered the common reduction of the migrant-laborer to a mere victim of a globalizing economy. The work of critical transnationalism scholars has moreover convincingly challenged larger transnationalism theory’s perhaps most foundational assumption: that our networked present is to be juxtaposed in opposition to a more settled, simple, and bounded past (Featherstone 2007).

Studies employing a critical transnationalism perspective expose that the concepts of ‘integration’/‘assimilation’ and ‘segregation’/‘multiculturalism’ respectively provide apt models to explain the *host society’s* expectations towards, and representations of, migrants, rather than models descriptive of migrants’ understandings of themselves and their place in the world. By contrast, critical transnationalism studies portray *migrants’* self-understandings, which are often framed in terms of “split loyalties” (Abu-Lughod 1991), of cross-national and polycentric group memberships and citizenships, and multifarious cross-border connectivities. Particular attention is paid to the role of structures that enable the formation and maintenance of such transnational networks and ties, such as cellphones, the internet, telephone calling outlets, satellite dishes, ‘ethnic’ food stores, Western Union bureaus, and so on (Ley 2004:155, Richter 2006). Martin Manalansan succinctly summarizes the transnational perspective as follows:

No longer prone to ‘permanent rupture’ from the homeland or total subservience to the hegemonic practices of the adopted nations, these ‘transmigrants’ are living lives that

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41 Some critical transnationalism scholars distinguish between critical transnationalism scholarship and transnationalism literature ‘at large.’ These scholars set out to write against what they see as ‘at large’-transnationalism literature, which they portray as a distinguishable body of economic-, techno-, urban-, and Western-centric literature heralding borderless flows of goods, culture, capital, information, and bodies. It is particularly within such sweeping legitimizing moves opening many a text about transnationalism that I find the relationship between discourses around *transnationalism* and *globalization* respectively not sufficiently clarified.

span and transgress borders and specific localities with new means of transportation and communication in what is now called a 'global ethnoscapes.' (Manalansan 2000:184)

Although the transnationalist perspective frames migrants as agents in their own biographies and transgressors of material and symbolic borders, authors writing from this perspective do still address restrictive structural factors. Critical transnationalism theory therefore acknowledges not only that propinquity is not a necessity to the maintenance of meaningful social ties but also that this tying of ties is not unconditioned but rather highly structured and unevenly distributed depending on *who* does, or *can* do, the tying to *whom*, *where*, *when*, *through what means*, and *to what end*.

Contrary to what its name suggests, 'transnationalism' does *not* herald the end of the nation and its borders. Most transnationalism scholars agree that transnational formations not only *depend on* national identifications and systems of meaning but also are particularly *productive of* specific national imaginations and belongings (e.g. Jackson et al. 2004, Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006, Ley and Waters 2004, Mitchell 2004, Pratt and Yeoh 2003, Staeheli and Nagel 2006). As emerges from the interviews conducted in this study, the proliferating and persistent hegemonic discourses around nation and nationality supply a crucial terminology through which interviewees (have to) make sense of their Selves and their place in the world.

That being said, one critique of transnationalism scholarship has been particularly central to my understanding of the 'field' with which this study is engaged. In their collection of essays, *Transnational Spaces*, geographers Peter Jackson, Philip Crang, and Claire Dwyer conclude a review of recent work in the field that

studies of the economic, political and cultural dimensions of transnationalism have characteristically underplayed the transformation of space that is involved in the evolution of transnational social forms. Rather than taking space as a passive backdrop to transnational social relations, we argue that space is constitutive of transnationality in all its different forms. (Jackson et al. 2004:1)

Writing against notions of space-as-container, the authors call for work demonstrating that transnationalisms, in plural, vary over space and time. One of Jackson et al.'s claims stands out in particular: that "increasing numbers of people participate in transnational space, *irrespective of their own migrant histories or 'ethnic' identities*" (Jackson et al. 2004:2, emphasis added). The authors base their argument on Avtar Brah's concept of 'diaspora space,' which she sees as inhabited not only by diasporic subjects but also by those represented and perceived as non-diasporic:

The concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put.' The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native. (Brah 1996:209, quoted in Jackson et al. 2004:3)

This means that *both* the figure of the 'native,' 'local,' or 'indigenous' (in the case of this study 'Switzerland' or 'Swiss') and the figure of the 'migrant' (in this case 'Bosnian,' 'German,' 'Asian,' or 'Muslim,' for example) are constantly renegotiated through the convergence of embodied trajectories in space, whereas these spaces (and bodies) are always

already transnational. To take the seemingly 'native' trajectories out of the equation would otherwise mean to fail to account for what makes identities, objects, and practices always *both* 'Bosnian' and 'Swiss,' for example. In other words, these transnational and intersectional configurations and meetings-up are productive of a *third* kind of space (Bhabha 1994, Soja 1996).

With Jackson et al. (and, again, Massey and Marston et al.), I therefore advocate shifting the focus from notions of already-cultured subjects towards an understanding of 'cultures' and 'cultural identities' – and indeed 'identities' in general – as ongoing processes of identification within a transnational space. This is, however, *not* to direct the focus away from migrants' lives, their self-conceptualizations, their sense of place in the world, their desires and nostalgias for a border-crossing multitude of places, their participations in or resistances against multiple projects of nation-building, or their everyday strategies to navigate a transnational life – indeed, much of this study is about this very issue. The aim is rather to "push the transnational gaze deeper into the 'stuff' of everyday life" (Mahler 1999:713, quoted in Pratt and Yeoh 2003:160), shifting the focus away from *essentialized* notions of migrant subjectivities towards an understanding of how both migrant and non-migrant subjectivities are forged through the confluence of trajectories in a necessarily transnational space that is inhabited by migrants as much as it is inhabited by non-migrants and things non-human.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.4.6 Sexuality – Migration – Home, Revisited

Queer diasporic subjects, particularly those from the Third World, who are confronted with multiple displacements, are faced with the monumental task of creating and re-figuring home. (Manalansan 2003:13-14)

How queer migrant women negotiate home and belonging, both 'here' and 'there,' has emerged as a central question from working with queer migrant women's biographical accounts. The significance of home-making is also addressed by other queer migration scholars who have equally identified 'sexuality – migration – home' as a triad of concepts in need of analysis.

'Home' can be many things. It can refer, for instance, to specific scales such as one's family home, one's apartment, or one's home town or home country. It can carry the notion of abode, hearth, privacy, roots, or paradise. Home-making can designate a matrix of social relations and practices aimed at creating a sense of belonging, for instance, negotiations of membership in families, partnerships, or communities. Further, a sense

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42 With such a view, we can also begin to track transnational *things* (see e.g. Cook 2004, Woodward et al. 2008). Moreover, this extended notion of transnationalism can serve to disrupt the *West-centrism* inherent in the vast bulk of transnationalism literature (in which the present study is admittedly complicit), directing attention to migrations among or within 'developing' countries. As Audrey Kobayashi and Sarah de Leeuw note: "It makes a difference whether Otherness occurs *at a distance* from the metropolis within a colonial context, as shown in Said's original work; *in place* in colonial contexts, as has occurred in the subordination of most indigenous peoples; or through the creation of *diasporic* or transnational communities of difference, as represented by most of the large non-white migrant groups today" (Kobayashi and de Leeuw, 2010:130-131, emphasis original).



of home is always also an intrinsically affective and sensual affair; it can be triggered through touch, sound, smell, taste, or images, which link remembered past places or imagined and desired spaces to present places. Finally (but not conclusively), whether 'here' or 'there,' homes are both the real and imagined locations where everyday lives are played out (Valentine 1995a, 2001:65ff).

As discussed above, early queer geographies engaged with two kinds of homes. The first was the family home left behind by sexual dissidents. The stories of queer people who left their heterosexual family home in order to live a liberated homosexual life in the city disrupt heteronormal conceptualizations of the home, which frame the space of the home as a place of regeneration and as a safe haven protected from the public eye. The queer geographical perspective on the home has shown that 'home' can have different meanings for people with dissident sexualities. For them, 'home' may be connected to surveillance, contestation, fear, and exclusion, for example.

The second kind of 'home' earlier queer geographical work addressed was the home queer people seek to forge as members of the 'queer family' in urban gay communities. This 'Great Gay Migration' narrative has rendered queer migration a curious kind of migration: For queer subjects there is "no locale from which to wander" since there is no homeland to validate a group identity (Warner 1993:xvii, quoted in Fortier 2001:408-409). The homosexual subject's home is hence framed in terms of a *destination* rather than an *origin*; "instead of dispersing, we assemble" (Sinfield 2000:103, quoted in Fortier 2002:183).

As emerged from the empirical data generated in the context of this study, while for both internal and international queer migrants there often continues to be some truth in the 'move out to come out' narrative, the understanding of home in queer migration research has become more complex by engaging with the home-work of multiple marginalized queer subjects such as rural dwellers or international migrants. This work can be divided into two strands of thinking. The first considers queerness and queer migration in terms of borderline spaces and identities. Emphasizing the paradoxical and elusive aspects of queer migrant subject positions, this view situates queer migrant subjects' home in "placelessness" (Knopp 2004) or in liminal spaces such as a "third space," a "space between," or an "interstitial passage" (Bhabha 1994, quoted in Mai and King 2009:298). The second view on home in queer migration studies places more emphasis on articulations of processes of uprooting/re-grounding (Ahmed et al. 2003), and on more complex understandings of queer migration as entailing both estrangement from, and reproduction of, home (Ahmed 1999, quoted in Mai and King 2009:298, see also Ahmed et al. 2003, Fortier 2003, Kuntsman 2009). Through this perspective, homes, both 'here' and 'there,' are understood as being continually renegotiated and re-configured. Here, home emerges as "a site of attachment which engages us in complex multidimensional relations, encompassing multiple returns to the past and renegotiations in the future" (Mai and King 2009:298).<sup>43</sup> This home-making is driven by what Avtar Brah (1996) has termed 'homing desires,' which are "desires to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration" (Fortier 2003:115). Hence, here, home does

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43 Mai and King are discussing Pain (2001) here.

not necessarily have to be located in the family home or the country of origin. Rather 'homing desires' are distinct from the desire for a homeland, undermining the ideology of 'return' inscribed in hegemonic ideas about diaspora (Brah 1996:16). Nor is home necessarily a positively connoted space; instead, home-making is exposed as an often ambivalent and contradictory process. For instance, although queer people's parents often do not accept their children's homosexuality, the family home often still remains a home to the queer family member in many ways, as observed, for instance, in the continued sending of remittances (Cantú 2009). This study draws from and extends both these lines of thinking about the conceptual triad of 'sexuality – migration – home.'

### 3.4.7 Identification: Intersectionality, Disidentification

Questions of home and belonging are closely tied to processes of *identification*. Hence, this last sub-chapter reviews two theories about identity that have been advanced by queer migration scholarship, and which have inspired this study. The first is the concept of *intersectionality*, which is here extended by rethinking it from a spatial perspective. The second is the concept of *disidentification* formulated by José Esteban Muñoz (1999), which theorizes processes of identification in the context of the stratification, proliferation, and complication of subject positions.

As already touched on in Chapter 2, the concept of *intersectionality* frames identities as a result of multiple processes of social differentiation based on, for instance, race, class, gender, or sexuality and specifically calls for an analysis of the interlacing and mutual constitution of these systems of oppression. Scholars of numerous disciplines and continents have worked with this concept as part of a framework to understand the ways people are assigned positions (and position themselves) in a world in which questions of identity, identification, and belonging have gained overarching significance. However, intersectionality theorists grapple with a number of dilemmas, which especially, but not conclusively, include the following:

First and most prominently, the term 'intersectionality' in itself precludes an unthinking of delimited social categorizations since it evokes the image of a crossroads of preestablished, bounded categories – as does alternative terminology encountered in intersectionality literature such as 'interlacing,' 'interlocking,' 'interdependent,' 'multiple,' and so on. In some ways, the inescapable terminology used in research applying an intersectionality perspective therefore paradoxically works against its own core argument, which is that gendered, classed, sexualized, racialized, ethnic, and so on, identities are *mutually constitutive*, with the formulation of one category necessarily depending on the simultaneous formulation of others. One example is the mutual constitution of race, gender, and sexuality. The figure of the *Jezebel*, for instance, is a stereotypical representation of Black women that originated under slavery and signified a sexually aggressive wet nurse. This depiction of Black enslaved women as having excessive sexual appetites served to legitimize white men's sexual exploitation of them as well as the suppression and appropriation of Black women's alleged heightened fertility (Collins 2000:82, quoted in Lugones 2007:204). Another set of stereotypes casts Asian women as either superfeminine (the "China Doll") or castrating (the "Dragon Lady") (Espiritu 1997:135, quoted in Lugones 2007:205; see also Haritaworn 2007). Anne McClintock de-

scribes the colonial scene in general as a “porno tropic tradition,” in which “women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess.” Against this backdrop, “[Western] sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power” (McClintock 1995:22,47). Hence, there is no non-sexualized or non-gendered colonial Other; instead, the sexuality and gender of the Other is an *integral* part of her definition. At the same time, the colonial Other is constituted as that against which European sexuality and gender, and the colonial Self in general, becomes defined as ‘normal.’ As María Lugones writes, “it should be clear by now that the colonial, modern, gender system cannot exist without the coloniality of power, since the classification of the population in terms of race is a necessary condition of its possibility” (Lugones 2007:202).<sup>44</sup> As the biographical narratives of queer migrant women generated in the context of this study testify to, these historical racialized, gendered, and sexualized figures and transformations continue to shape Western perceptions of non-Western cultures and people in many ways (see Chapters 5 to 10).

Hence the formulation of ethnicity and gender always already implies an actualization of sexuality, and vice versa. Intersectionality scholarship thus paradoxically attempts to theorize mutual constitution while at the same time failing to unimagine the boundedness of the various ‘parts’ feeding into these emerging multiple identities as already preexisting. As Jasbir K. Puar summarizes: “Intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative of *identification*” (Puar 2005:128, emphasis added).

Second – and this parallels the problems inherent in the scale literature as criticized by Marston et al. – the practice of organizing research around a very limited range of usual-suspect identity categories (race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sometimes sexuality, age, religion, or bodily ability) has become so common that these categories, like scales, begin to appear as conceptual givens, threatening to undermine their originally intended epistemological and heuristic status.

The third problem is methodological. As Leslie McCall remarks, “despite the emergence of intersectionality as a major paradigm of research in women’s studies and elsewhere, there has been little discussion of *how* to study intersectionality; that is, of its methodology” (McCall 2005:1771; see also Büchler 2009a, Tuider 2011). This question is particularly relevant within the Germanophone debate where some of the most prominent intersectionality scholars, especially Gudrun-Axeli Knapp and Cornelia Klinger (Klinger 2003, Klinger and Knapp 2005, Knapp 2005a), have diagnosed an unhealthy predominance of ‘micro studies’ in intersectionality research. They argue that such ‘micro’ approaches can merely map *effects* of societal structures on individual lives, resources, and identity formation. Accordingly, these critics call for the formulation of a ‘broader’ social theory (“*Gesellschaftstheorie*”) on the ‘macro level’ to develop an analytical

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44 Lugones uses the term “gender systems” broadly, but especially in reference to heterosexuality or, as she calls it, “heterosexualism.” Under this she subsumes for instance sexual acts and violence, the (depiction of the) anatomy of sexual(ized) body parts or notions of family organization, gender roles, and the division of labor. This corresponds to what I understand by ‘sexuality’ here.

tool to address power structures working on the level of society 'at large' (*"Herrschaftskritik"*). These texts typically hierarchize categories, foregrounding the categories of *race*, *class*, and *gender* as 'core categories' (ibid).<sup>45</sup> Contrasting this, other authors (more in tune, as it seems, with the more recent Anglophone debate) have emphasized the importance of analyzing the intimate mechanisms of the interlacing of social categorizations in case studies, using qualitative methodologies such as biographical interviews in particular (Lutz 2001, Lutz and Davis 2005).

Unfortunately, there is no solution to these dilemmas from *within* intersectional thinking. Moreover, these questions are intimately tied to scholars' and activists' efforts to usefully complicate what many continue to see as the most effective politics to achieving social justice, which is a politics based on essentialized identities.<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding these persistent dilemmas, there is no question that intersectionality theory has made our thinking about identity more sophisticated. The conception, design, and methodology of the present project, too, have been crucially shaped by the concept, especially in its early phases. I therefore want to frame my following deliberations, in which I put the concept of space as elaborated in Chapter 3.1, in conversation with the concept of intersectionality, as attempts to think beyond intersectionality that will certainly be in need of future elaboration and corrective.

Jasbir K. Puar argued in an interview with two colleagues of mine and myself that intersectionality, like hybridity or multiculturalism, needs to be thought of, and taught, as one of many conceptual tools that emerged in a very specific historical moment in U.S. feminist theorizing, and calls for abandoning the attempt to install the concept as an abstract theoretical frame capable of explaining *all* differences *anywhere, anytime*. She observes that in Anglophone scholarship (as in Germanophone literature), intersectionality is frequently used as a "buzzword," a "sound bite," a "shortcut to signal difference" casually invoking: "Well, everyone's got these different identities, and they play out differently in different space and time," rendering the concept "disvacuous, dehistoricized and untheorized" (Puar in Büchler et al. 2007:9). Puar problematizes a thus stripped intersectionality:

Maybe the main thing is that I am concerned about the ways in which intersectionality still freezes both space and time. The intersectionality of the identity is located in some kind of timeless and aspatial body. It's a way in which the identity can be multiple, and you've got your race-class-gender, and you add to that sexuality, nation, religion and so on. So you've got the *components*, but identity as a temporal and spatial process doesn't necessarily get addressed in addressing these components. Identification is a

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45 In addition to my fundamental critique of such an approach as laid out below, I would like to note that the authors do not deliver evidence to support their claim that case studies were at the time predominant in Germanophone intersectionality research. I am only aware of a relatively small number of Germanophone case studies explicitly applying an intersectional perspective at the time Klinger and Knapp write, although it is true that since then, the use of the concept has exploded in Germanophone ethnographic migration research.

46 The political strategy, strategic essentialism, involves a conscious 'glossing over' of internal differences to represent one's group as bounded and unified in order to reach political goals forwarding social justice for (the actually internally much more differing) members of this group (Spivak 1993).

*process*, it's a continuing modality of identification, it's not something that just freezes and then you can start talking about these various things. And I don't think that even sophisticated analyses of intersectionality have really been able to address that. (Puar in Büchler et al. 2007:9-10, emphasis original)

In an attempt to bypass these failures of intersectional thinking, Puar draws on Gilles Deleuze's concept of *assemblage* to theorize the production and mobilization of the terrorist body. She argues that while intersectionality still privileges the *subject* and subject formation, assemblage is "a way of thinking about bodies as opposed to subjects, [a]nd the matter of bodies as opposed to the consciousness of a subject identity," which usefully addresses that:

Identity is a kind of retrospective formation, it's always retroactively that you decide on an identity because you're constantly moving. [There] are different ways of disaggregating or rematerializing bodies that do not fit into these race-class-gender categories, and this is a whole other way of codifying the body. (Puar in Büchler et al. 2007:10)

Puar particularly explores the ways in which such new ways of thinking about the body may invigorate Queer Theory, which, while claiming to be 'anti-identity,' has hardly ever been 'anti-*subject*,' but rather has been entrenched in subject formation (ibid:10).

In her paper "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages," Puar details her understanding of assemblage, which I render here to echo Marston et al.'s flat ontology as discussed above:

The Deleuzian assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect. As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes components – race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion – are separable analytics and can be thus disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space and body against linearity, coherency and permanency. [...] Displacing queerness as an identity or modality that is visibly, audibly, legibly, or tangibly evident, assemblages allow us to attune to intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities. Intersectionality privileges naming, visibility, epistemology, representation, and meaning, while assemblage underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information. (Puar 2005:127-128)

The notion of assemblage and its conceptualization of spaces and identities as mutually constitutive and ever-emerging hurls itself at the hegemony of the 'race-class-gender' triad in a debate in which other social categories are occasionally referred to as "playful differences" (Klinger 2003:26).<sup>47</sup>

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47 Klinger draws on Donna Haraway to conceptualize *physical work* as the division line between "playful differences" and "world historic power systems." "World historic power systems" are class, race, gender; she does not understand sexuality to be organized around productive work (Klinger 2003:26, my translation). Moreover, Klinger assigns the three "world historic power systems" to scales: *Klasse* is assigned to the space "within the nation-state," *Rasse* to the space "without the nation-state" and *Geschlecht* to the space "within the nation-state, the society, the family" (ibid:31). This contradicts various strands of critical geographical scholarship, which has shown that all

What this means in practice is that instead of naming the research subject in advance, identities should be allowed to *emerge* from research participants' accounts. Identities and spaces are not viewed as conceptual givens but are rather understood as processes of identification that are products of the coming-together of bodies, objects, rules, practices, and so on, in assemblage. This enables an examination of the conditions in which identity categories and places are mobilized during the telling of the story; further, it allows for a consideration of the bodies and relations making up the interview setting. Such a perspective therefore also creates knowledge about the performativity of spaces and identities – that is, the repetitive practices which produce and subvert dominant discourses around identities and spaces, and by which subjects are at the same time enabled and disciplined. Framing identity as an ongoing process of identification opens up conceptual space for this performance to deviate from the norm.<sup>48</sup>

In sum, such a view of identity formation accommodates that there is always more to an individual than the meeting-up of different bounded identities determined by a pre-selection of knowable trajectories of power. As Audre Lorde succinctly put it in her biomythography:

Being women together was not enough. We were different.  
 Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different.  
 Being Black together was not enough. We were different.  
 Being Black women together was not enough. We were different.  
 Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different.  
 (Lorde 1982)

“We are different,” no matter how many components of identities are shared – and yet we strive for a ‘we.’ Concepts are therefore needed that allow for imagining alternative ways of (de)composing spaces and identities to escape the beaten path of some intersectional thinking.

José Esteban Muñoz equally proposes thinking of identity as processes of identification. While intersectionality provides a powerful tool to examine how certain subjects *are assigned* multiple marginalized positions in society, *disidentification* describes ‘intersectional’ subjects’ *strategies* of identification. The concept of disidentification (which is based on an analysis of performances of queer artists of color in the U.S.) is “a mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it” (Muñoz 1999:11). It articulates the ambivalent, complex, and contradictory relationship between minority subjects and mainstream society, which

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categories of social differentiation are intimately implicated in the production of, and produced through, *all* geographical scales.

48 As Sallie A. Marston points out, according to Gilles Deleuze, it is not exact repetitions that order the world but rather slightly varying ones, and these might ultimately make a significant difference (pers. comm.). Judith Butler’s notion of *slippage*, especially as extended by geographers Gillian Rose and Nicky Gregson, equally speaks to this possibility of failures and subversions of the norm in the stylized, repetitive performances that (re)produce identities and spaces (Butler 1990, Gregson and Rose 2000).

Muñoz situates beyond the binary assimilation/rejection. The term was forged by the French linguist Michel Pêcheux, who extrapolated the theory of disidentification from Louis Althusser's notion of subject formation as interpellation.<sup>49</sup> Pêcheux formulates three modes in which a subject is produced by ideological practices: The first is 'identification,' in which the 'Good Subject' acts in accordance with the ideological system. The second is 'counteridentification' in which the 'Bad Subject' attempts to resist the assigned subject position by rebelling against the system but remains defined by the ideological structure. The third is 'disidentification,' which is neither a complete identification with, nor a rejection of, the assigned place, but rather works simultaneously on, with, and against dominant ideological structures (ibid:11).

"Disidentification," Muñoz writes, "is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (ibid:4). Such strategies necessarily entail a destabilization of hegemonic meanings, working towards materializing and making visible alternative ways of being that can no longer be framed in terms of repeating, or failing to repeat, hegemonic positions alone. As Muñoz writes: "Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. [...] Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (ibid:31).

Muñoz' concept is a useful complement to the extended notion of intersectionality discussed above as it builds on, and specifies, the notion of identities as always emerging and hence as open to difference, subversion, and slippage of identitarian norms. Although the concept emerged from an analysis of cultural productions in which performances are staged (such performative strategies are arguably often more conscious and more deliberately political than banal everyday life performances), the concept certainly resounds in participants' narratives in this research. An important caveat is that, as Muñoz himself also points out, disidentification is not always an adequate strategy for all minority subjects at all times. "At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color [...] need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive in a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (ibid:5). I have engaged with the concept of disidentification here precisely because it enables positive and productive formulations of otherwise 'impossible' subject positions, and places queer migrant subjects in a privileged position to both reflect ideological systems and to act as drivers of social change.

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49 Drawing on Jacques Lacan's concept of the Mirror Stage, Louis Althusser (1971) theorized ideology as interpellation, i.e. as productive of subjects. He famously likened ideology to a policeman calling out "Hey, you there!" to a person in the street. In the moment the person turns around, she is transformed into a subject assuming her place in the Symbolic Order. Althusser calls this recognition a 'misrecognition' as it works retroactively: An individual is always already interpellated, even before she is born.

### 3.5 Who Are 'Queer Migrant Women'? Approaching the Research Subject

After these theoretical deliberations, the question remains: Who are 'queer migrant women'? In other words: Who is the subject of this study? As Tom Boellstorff points out in the introductory remarks to a review on queer anthropologies, in which he addresses the problem of naming the subject in anthropologies of sexualities:

There is no more symptomatic, productive, and vexing starting point for this discussion than the impossibility of naming the very subject of study this review addresses. This impossibility constitutes not a problem to be solved but a kind of syntax error or event horizon reflecting the complexity of the subject under consideration. (Boellstorff 2007b:18)

Defining the subject of this research has been equally vexing, elusive and productive, as the remainder of this chapter attests. The following paragraphs are thereby as much a description of whom I have *called* to participate in this study as a portrait of those who *came*. I had established the search criteria for research participants at the outset of this project to include participants' sexuality (queer), migration 'generation' (first 'generation'), and their positionality in Switzerland as ethnicized/racialized 'Others.' The following sub-chapters present these criteria, but importantly also discuss how these criteria were transformed based on the progression of the search process, fieldwork, and continuous data analysis. This discussion does not include the factors according to which the sample was *differentiated*. These factors (which for instance included age, class, education, and status of residence) were, in contrast to the above three search criteria, consciously *not* fixed from the outset of the research but allowed to emerge from working on the data already generated.<sup>50</sup> In other words, this final sub-chapter both serves to explain who this study originally sought to address while at the same time demonstrating the elusiveness of the attempt to name its subject.

#### 3.5.1 On Sexualities

To start off, 'queer' was *not* how the research participants self-identify. Rather, I have used 'queer' as a conceptual umbrella that creates space for the twenty-eight conceptualizations of sexuality as represented by the twenty-eight queer migrant women who eventually took part in this study.<sup>51</sup> This is not to atomize research participants, but quite to the contrary to acknowledge that "all identity categories are burdened by legacies that must be interrogated, do not map neatly across time and space, and become transformed through circulation within specific, unequally situated local, regional, national, and transnational circuits" (Luibhéid 2008a:170). Some, especially Anglophone, readers may be inclined to read such a usage of 'queer' as a neocolonialist move. Jasbir K. Puar, for instance, chose *not* to use 'queer' to describe non-heterosexual people in Trinidad "because *queer* does not yet circulate as a descriptor in Trinidad" (Puar

50 This procedure is based on the principles of *Theoretical Sampling*, see Chapter 4.

51 My thanks to Eithne Luibhéid for enabling this formulation (pers. comm.). Gayatri Gopinath uses a similar strategy in her book *Queer Diasporas* (Gopinath 2005).



2001:1062). It is exactly for this reason that I *do* use the term here (though not in the process of looking for research participants, see below). Both in Switzerland and in most research participants' countries of origin, 'queer' was rarely used as a self-signifier when I was looking for study participants.<sup>52</sup> Because of this, the term is, or was at the time, less fraught with the implications of the practices of an identity politics around 'queer,' as was happening in the U.S. or the U.K. where 'queer' as an identity category seems to have become another trope for exclusion (Shannahan 2010:674-675). Finally, 'queer' also serves to point to the (limits of the) theoretical framework upon which this project is based: As soon as I begin to think and write, I am confined to the concepts that are available at this point. In this sense I believe the concept of 'queer,' in its intention as an open, anti-identitarian, and intrinsically intersectional concept, continues to be the best we have.<sup>53</sup> 'Queer' as a *methodology* particularly also seemed supportive of "welcoming those who refuse assimilation," that is, of the unlearning, on my part, of my preconceived ideas about sexuality (Ahmed 2000:64, see Chapter 1).

More concretely, in this study the term 'queer' addressed woman-identified women who desire women and/or engage in sexual relationships with other women. First, these are women who explicitly identify with Western same-sex sexual identities such as lesbian or bisexual, or who identify with non-Western same-sex identities, like *lesbi*, *tomboy*, *pengkid*, *mati*, and so on. These identities are always also deeply *gendered*, that is, productive of distinct femininities and masculinities. For instance, Southeast Asian *tomboys* usually see themselves as "women in some fashion," but can understand themselves as women with men's souls, as was the case for one interviewee, or as social men in some respects, and may or may not like being described as 'lesbians' or even 'women' (Boellstorff 2007a:202). In other words, the biographies and self-conceptualizations in this study push against the limits of the concept of 'woman.' However, since eventually all participants explicitly self-identified as women (and not e.g. as men, or trans), I have decided to stick to the term 'woman' throughout this study.<sup>54</sup> Second, 'queer' creates space for migrant women whose sexual practices do not align with their sexual identities (such as women who identify as heterosexual but engage in same-sex practices and/or relationships), as well as for women who frame their sexuality in terms of a practice rather than an identity.

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52 At the outset of this research, in Switzerland 'queer' was mostly used to designate 'homosexual' cultural events or organizations, such as the *Queersicht Festival* in Bern or the Zurich *Institut für Queer Studies*. Since then, the term has become more frequently used in the sense of self-identification; it remains to be analyzed what people who identify as 'queer' understand by it (but see Naef 2020).

53 Note that some queer scholars have rightly warned that exactly this 'openness' of queerness can operate as the "modality through which 'freedom from norms' becomes a regulatory queer ideal that demarcates the ideal queer" (Puar 2007:22, quoted in Shannahan 2010:675). This concern is related to my critique of queerness-as-placelessness as discussed below (see Chapter 3.3.5).

54 It has been pointed out to me that I paradoxically insist on an emic term here ('woman') while I opt for the etic term 'queer' as the designator for all the sexualities scrutinized here. However, while 'woman' was the common explicit self-identification of all research participants, there was no such commonality in terms of sexual self-description. As laid out before, I was further operating with a notion of 'woman' that was kept fuzzy at its edges, including positionalities which would likely be termed 'trans' in the Western world (a term that was never used emically).

While 'queer' is the term I have used in the theoretical framing and analyses, it was not the signifier I used in the process of looking for participants for this research. Seeing that the potential participants in this study were unlikely to identify as 'queer,' addressing potential interviewees was problematic and necessarily a bit of a circular argument: It was exactly the differences in how people conceptualize their sexual Selves that I was interested in, but at the same time I paradoxically had to hail participants using one terminology or the other in order to create a sample at all. As mentioned above, the potential participants were not necessarily going to identify as 'lesbian' or might indeed actively reject this descriptor; they might not frame their sexuality in terms of an identity at all; or they might have assumed other same-sex sexual subject positions in their countries of origin. With respect to the latter, since I had refrained from narrowing down my search to a specific country or region of origin (see below), I was barred from using emic terminologies in my call referring to sexual subject positions in potential participants' countries of origin.

Based on a number of explorative interviews I eventually settled on the term 'women-loving women'/'*frauenliebende Frauen*'/'*femmes aimant les femmes*' in the calls I issued. This seemed a term less ideologically burdened and less stigmatized than 'lesbian' or 'homosexual,' and more accessible than 'queer.' It moreover seemed more open to personal connotation, sounded positively valued, and could be read as inclusive of bisexual women; as one interlocutor said assertively: "*C'est plus doux*" – "It's softer." The fact that the term is unusual and hence causes a slight irritation at the same time meant it was usefully less fraught with meaning. I thought it an encouraging sign that some participants told me they had not been sure if they fit in this category. Overall, I believe this deliberately fuzzy wording has been pivotal in extending and disrupting the categories this research has sought to destabilize. This, I think, has outweighed the term's obvious drawbacks, especially its romanticization and potential invisibilization of female-to-female *sexual* desire. It seemed, however, that women who explicitly self-identified as 'lesbian' were not deterred from participation in the research by this alternative terminology, which was also true for interlocutors with a distinctly masculine gender positionality. However, even this term eventually did not solve the basic problem that to look for 'women-loving women' also meant to *hail* female women-loving *subjects*.<sup>55</sup>

Reflecting on the process of looking for research participants, the importance of the wording in the call has to be qualified for two reasons. First, the call triggered some responses that offered insights into perspectives that I had not expected to be able to include in this study. Women like Efra Mahmoud, Suki Schäuble, and Irena Pupovac (all names are anonymized) took part in the study despite the fact that they were very reluctant to identify as 'women-loving' – not to speak of 'lesbian' – and were generally

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55 *Hailing* is once more Althusser's term (1971). In the moment they answer a call looking for "women-loving women," participants *become* "women-loving women." The evident reluctance that sometimes accompanied this recognition was indicative of the discomfort some participants felt in assuming this subject position. It is exactly these fissures and resistances that I attempted to move to the center of this study.

extremely hesitant to speak about issues related to their sexual orientation. I had expected to be able to address this perspective only in retrospect, that is, through the narratives of women who see themselves as woman-loving today, speaking about former times in which they had not perceived themselves as such. I had, however, failed to account for the complexity and messiness of the 'field.' Efra Mahmoud, for example, seems to have felt obliged to respond since it was the lawyer who had generously supported her through her tedious immigration procedure that transmitted my call to her. Her motivation was further fueled by her identification as a social scientist and her consequent empathy for the methodological problems I was facing: "*Ich kenne das weil ich habe schon mit Forschung und Sachen – ich kenne das einfach bis man jemand findet und die ganze Geschichte,*" – "I know this because I already have [done] research and things – I know how this is just until you find someone [to participate] and the whole story."

The second qualification for the wording of the call is that the call was only one of various ways in which participants were sought for this study (see Chapter 4). With the contacts established through my personal network I was often able to leave definitions much more open as the person establishing the link between myself and the participant helped to establish trust in me in advance. In addition, because these participants were doing a common friend or acquaintance a favor, they were more likely to participate even if they were skeptical about 'fitting' the categories I had provided. In other words, participants were obviously never only sexual but always complex subjects who, in the cases mentioned here, lent certain aspects of their Selves – loyalty to a friend, empathy for a fellow scientist, and so on – more significance than their (discomfort to speak about their) sexual practices or identity.

### 3.5.2 On Generations

In this study, 'migrant women' refers to women who have moved the focus of their everyday lives from another country to Switzerland, whether wholly or partially, permanently or intermittently, provisionally or definitely. Since I was especially interested in how participants' understandings of themselves and their place in the world had *shifted* through migration, this study primarily focused on women who had come to Switzerland as adults. However, since it proved very challenging to find and gain access to research participants, I eventually expanded my call to hail more generally women "with a migration background" – "*mit Migrationshintergrund*,"<sup>56</sup> resulting in a sample including some participants who had come to Switzerland as children or were born here.<sup>57</sup> At the

56 French: "*femmes immigrées*." Note that the German term '*mit Migrationshintergrund*' ('with a migration background') has since come under attack for drawing yet another line between 'us' and 'them' (LesMigraS 2012). Today, the terms 'with a migration foreground' ('*mit Migrationsvordergrund*') or 'with a migration biography' ('*mit Migrationsbiographie*') tend to be used emically instead.

57 In Germanophone Swiss migration research, the term 'zweite Migrationsgeneration' – 'second migration generation' – is often used to designate this latter subject position (but see Jain 2018). Who exactly is to be counted among the first and second migration generation respectively continues to be a contested issue within Swiss migration literature (Richter 2014). A popular yet blurred demarcation line is that only those who have taken the decision to migrate themselves are to be counted among 'first generation' immigrants.

same time, attempting to draw a line between the first and the second ‘migration generation’ has proved largely futile as these categories overlap. This is for instance evident in the case of participants who migrated as teenagers, participants who have migrated back and forth between Switzerland and their home country over the course of several years, or participants who have one Swiss parent but did not grow up in Switzerland. Such biographical trajectories and constellations crucially shape the migration experience and play a central role in the place someone claims, can claim, and is assigned in Swiss mainstream society. For this reason, I have been transparent in the case analyses about the specific generational perspective of each participant, carving out the significance they ascribe to certain aspects of their ‘migration generation’ in their biographical narratives.

That said, both the sample and its analysis have clearly and deliberately remained biased towards participants who migrated to Switzerland as adults. In this sense, reflections about differences between participants of different migration generations have to be understood as casual observations or pointers to future research rather than a systematic comparative analysis. With respect to age at the time of migration, the sample was eventually structured as follows (again, these categories overlap): 21 participants migrated to Switzerland as adults (between the ages of 18 and 38, most in their early twenties); five as children (four at the age of ten, one at the age of six); three were Swiss-born; and five had one Swiss or one German parent (two of whom were Swiss-born and three who had migrated to Switzerland as adults). Also, two participants were Swiss citizens from birth, one who had grown up abroad with one Swiss parent and one of the ‘second generation’ participants, who also had one Swiss parent and was born and raised in Switzerland.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.5.3 On ‘Culture’

It is a truism to say that most qualitative migration studies examine diasporas that are predefined based on ethnicity, culture, religion (e.g. “Muslims in Berlin”), nationality (e.g. “Italians in Switzerland”), or region of origin (e.g. “South Americans in Germany”). Seeing the importance attributed to national, ethnic, and cultural identity in the making of modern Selves, such approaches are certainly justified to a certain extent. Unfortunately, these choices often fail to be problematized, with the national, ethnic, cultural, or religious identity, or the nation or region of origin studied being treated as self-explanatory, monolithic givens. As such, migration scholarship regularly falls into the trap of assuming scales such as the nation or the region as conceptual facts. As critical geographers like Sallie A. Marston and her colleagues have demonstrated (see Chapter 3.1.2), such a lack of reflection unusefully predetermines aspects of a research project rather than inviting reflection on the research design and sampling.

In this study, I eventually refrained from predefining the sample by defining a specific country or region of origin. This decision emerged from work on the project and is not only based in the difficulty experienced in finding research participants. First, given the lack of a visible identity politics among queer immigrant groups in Switzerland,

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58 A more comprehensive overview of the research participants is given in Annex I.

there was no 'natural' place to start the investigation or to perform participant observation. This meant that hailing, say, 'Kosovo-Albanian lesbians in Switzerland' would call into being an identity, a 'we,' that did not exist as such prior to the study. I therefore decided to conduct a broad initial search, thinking this would lead me to informal networks of queer migrant groups (however self-defined) by means of snowball sampling, which would then allow me to focus on a more 'culturally' or however specified group. This in turn would then enable me to provide a thick description of these communities and spaces. However, as discussed later, the participants in this study did not necessarily forge social networks along their national, ethnic, or cultural identity. If the snowball effect came into effect, it tended to point to other queer migrants who did not necessarily share the national, ethnic, or cultural background with the participant providing the contact. Cases in which participants were acquainted with queer compatriots were in fact very rare.<sup>59</sup> This preliminary result was one reason why I decided *not* to narrow the focus to a specific nationality, ethnicity, or region of origin. These initial explorations also clarified that a restriction based on nationality, ethnicity, or region of origin would not generate a sufficient sample.<sup>60</sup>

A further reason against specifying the sample according to country or region of origin was the fact that at the outset of this study, queer immigrant activism in neighboring German-speaking countries was often organized around the collective term *Migrantinnen* (migrant women) rather than people of specific cultural backgrounds. This was – and in many cases still continues to be – evident in the names of these organizations, for instance *ViennaMix* and *MiGaY* in Vienna; *Lesbische Migrantinnen* and *LesMAus* in Linz; *LesMigraS* in Berlin; or *QueerMigs* in Zürich. These organizations worked and work towards connecting, empowering, and advising queer migrant people and queer people of color as they navigate the multiple mechanisms of discrimination in German-speaking countries. (*LesMigraS*, for instance, at the time focused on “*Ressourcen, Bedürfnisse und Mehrfachdiskriminierungen von lesbischen und bisexuellen Frauen und Trans\* Menschen (LBT\*) of Color, LBT\* mit Migrationshintergrund und Schwarzen LBT\**” – “resources, needs, and multiple discriminations of lesbian and bisexual women and trans\*people (LBT\*) of Color, LBT\* with a migration background, and Black LBT\*” in Germany.)<sup>61</sup> In other words, when I was looking for study participants, queer migrant identity politics in German-speaking countries tended to focus on the shared queer/migrant/people of color identity and the attendant experiences of exclusion rather than on shared nationalities, ethnicities, or cultural backgrounds, which additionally seemed to justify my choice of keeping the sample inclusive.

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59 The two small networks that I came across that were organized along the lines of national identity were not substantial enough to justify an exclusive focus on them (see Chapter 7).

60 On the other hand, sticking to a predefined specific nationality or ethnicity might have given the project another, no doubt also highly informative dynamic, and I hope other scholars will attempt this path. I have pursued it to some extent by distributing postcards that hailed 'women-loving women' of certain nationalities or ethnicities ('Tamil' and 'Albanian,' for instance) after realizing in the middle of my fieldwork that there was a dearth of representatives of these significant diasporas in my sample.

61 Source: <http://www.lesmigras.de/selbstverstaendnis.html>, downloaded on August 26, 2014.

Under the term ‘migrant,’ this research has thus subsumed immigrants who are perceived as *Ausländerinnen* (foreigners) in Switzerland and hence become defined as ethnicized/racialized Others based on social markers such as name, skin color, language, food, clothing, religion, body language, way of life, and so on. As described in the outline of Swiss immigration history in Chapter 2, the descriptor of *Ausländerinnen*, too, remains fuzzy: Who has been perceived as what kind of *Ausländerin*, to what extent, and during what period of time has been subject to significant shifts over the past decades. For instance, when one of the participants in this study came to Switzerland from Spain in the early 1980s, Southern European nationals were still met with a high degree of prejudice and mistrust. This has since shifted to Kosovo Albanians, people perceived as Muslims, and people of African descent, for instance. At the same time, the prejudices against earlier immigrant groups, especially Southern Europeans, have not simply vanished. As Fatima El-Tayeb points out, while “all parts of Europe are arguably invested in ‘whiteness’ as the norm against which ethnicization is read as a tool of differentiation between insiders and outsiders [in/from Europe],” it is “obvious nonetheless that both Eastern and Southern Europe’s claim to this whiteness is more ambiguous than that of the Northwest of the continent” (El-Tayeb 2011:xiv). I agree with El-Tayeb that today Eastern Europeans “certainly constitute ethnicized labor” in Western Europe, but that Southern Europeans who migrated North in the context of the post-war guest worker binational contracts, too, “are still often suffering the effects of racialization” (ibid, see also Soom 2011). Following El-Tayeb’s argument, I hence explicitly included Eastern and Southern Europeans in the group of “racialized minorities” in Europe (taking into consideration that the perceptions of and ascriptions to these different ‘groups’ of immigrants differ significantly).

In the end, study participants originated from six different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean; three Arab countries; seven Asian countries; three Southern European countries; and two former Yugoslavian countries (see Annex I). The cultural breadth of this sample has rendered it beyond the scope of this study to engage with the history of concepts of same-sex sexualities, socio-political positionings, and everyday realities of woman-loving women in these vastly different contexts (an endeavor that is moreover rendered impossible by the marked dearth of literature on female same-sex desire, sexuality, and relationships in many of these contexts), but then again this has never been the goal of this study. Instead, the objective has been to understand the ways in which queer migrant women in Switzerland make sense of their former and current sexual Selves in retrospective, and particularly in light of their migration, as contemplated from their present standpoint. Explorations of how queer migrant women retrospectively perceive the places they grew up represent *one specific perspective* on these places, that is, the perspective of queer women (who may or may not have understood themselves as same-sex loving before emigration) who have moved to another country and are now looking back at their former Selves, lives, and home places and countries.

This study does *not*, in other words, treat participants as representatives of their nation, ethnicity, or culture – this would mean to gloss over the differences within, say, an ‘ethnicity’ as formed by gender, sexuality, class, language, and other aspects of the social (see, for example, Weston 1997 [1991]:12). It is also decidedly *not* about what it

'is like' to live as a homosexual in Bosnia, Egypt, or Peru, but instead about what it is like to live in Switzerland as a queer migrant woman who emigrated from one of these places. The focus is on the effects of research participants' shared experience of migration, (sometimes) of historical European colonization, and of multiple displacements based on their gender, non-conforming sexuality, and positionality as *Ausländerinnen* in Switzerland. These shared experiences and other linkages, such as for instance a shared religion, also open up possibilities for transnational connectivities and resistances that exceed ethnic and national borders; these are particularly in focus here as well.

### 3.5.4 On Immigration Status

Besides 'regular' immigrants, in this study the term 'migrant' has also addressed *Sans Papiers* – undocumented immigrants – (who were eventually not represented in the sample), asylum seekers, and naturalized immigrants. The latter were considered because they remain marked as *Ausländerinnen* in their everyday lives even after they become Swiss citizens. As one informant phrased it: "Here, I will always be a foreigner." Asylum seekers and *Sans Papiers* have been included because, while most migration scholarship continues to frame 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration as entirely different spheres of experience by radically separating 'trafficked' people and refugees from 'regular' immigrants, I argue with Eithne Luibhéid that this distinction "urgently needs to be rethought to account for how most migrations in fact straddle choice and coercion" (Luibhéid 2008a:178 and 2008b). Luibhéid further notes:

Such distinctions are less reflections of empirically verifiable differences among queer migrants, who often shift from one category to another, than techniques of nation-state power that remain centrally implicated in neocolonial hierarchies and that classify migrants in order to delimit the rights that they will have or be denied, and the forms of surveillance, discipline, normalization, and exploitation to which they will be subjected. (Luibhéid 2008a:186n)

The *spatialities* of migration further destabilize the logic of such a separation. Just like other migrants, asylum seekers and *Sans Papiers*, too, have traveled from one place to another, and they, too, have an everyday life in Switzerland, albeit a specifically structured one. Their lives rather center on waiting for refugee status, sometimes for several years, and on the fear of becoming exposed as undocumented or expelled from the country. Since it was these everyday lives and spaces in particular that were under scrutiny here, as well as how participants' perceptions of their sexual Selves shifted through these experiences, an a priori exclusion of asylum seekers and *Sans Papiers* did not seem justified.

### 3.5.5 On Language

The call for research participants was provided in German, French, and English (and later also Albanian). Eventually, all interviews were held in German, Swiss German, French, and English. In many cases, research participants did not speak their mother tongues in the interviews (and neither did I, my mother tongue being Swiss German), which emphasized the already sensitive issue of researchers doing research in, and translating data from, a 'foreign' language (Müller 2007, Smith 1996).<sup>62</sup> In the call, I offered the possibility of bringing one's own interpreter, but nobody made use of this option. I ascribe this to two facts: First, the snowball system worked rather poorly in this project. I had hoped that people who had participated in the research or had seen the flyer would refer the information to friends, family members, or community members who did not speak any of the languages used in the call, but this only happened in one instance (which eventually did not result in an interview). Second, many research participants were more than capable of speaking in one of the offered languages. This was partly also owed to the fact that most participants were well-educated. Usually, everyday use of one of the interview languages was normal, and it was sometimes also the language used by binational couples to communicate. This is not to deny but perhaps to qualify the often-lamented loss of nuance and detail when speaking in a foreign language.

A few cautionary notes on the definition of the subject(s) of this study to conclude. Like any other, this definition of the research subject – 'queer migrant women' – includes certain subjects and subject positions while excluding others. Marking *mati*, *lesbian*, *tomboy*, *supi*, *bisexual*, and other sexual identities as 'queer' may be a noble gesture to demonstrate open-mindedness and resistance to closure. However, it also glosses over the fact that we as researchers simply cannot include the things in our study concepts that we cannot think because we don't know them. With the theoretical tools we have available in queer postcolonial theory to date, we can always only think as far as we can name *specific* sexualities, and maybe we can analyze some interactions between them, or suspect the limitations of their conceptualization. However, even today, we cannot know what next letter will be attached to the acronym LGBTIQ<sup>+</sup>, or what alternative conceptualizations of sexuality may further transform queer theory in the future.

At the same time, an open mind – as the concept of 'queer' requests – may help us to look actively for ways in which analyses conducted in the 'dirt and rock' of everyday lives and spaces may change our thinking about sexuality. Indeed, at the outset of this

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62 However, Fiona Smith warns against binarizing doing research in the 'home' language versus doing research in a 'foreign' language, seeing that even within one linguistic community language is never transparent or directly representative of a reality outside of it. Smith therefore advocates a productive approach to doing research in foreign languages, arguing that reflections on the translation of key terms can open spaces in between languages that in turn can create new spaces of insight which are not inhabitable when working from within the 'home' language – and which simultaneously effectively de-center the assumed transparency of the 'home' language, too (Smith 1996:162-163).



research, I could certainly not have come up with the definition of the research subject I have just written; it was not forged at the outset, but rather at the close of this project, and thus was a result rather than an axiom, betraying the text's seemingly linear logic. Time and again, what I thought were the subjects of my research and the field of research escaped my grasp, just as I already feel my latest attempt slip through my fingers now. At this point, therefore, I can do no better than to tell some of the tales from the field in which all of this slipping occurred, emphasize the provisional nature of the above outline, and invite suggestions for its enhancement, extension, or productive dissolution.



## 4. Methodology: Doing Research in an Intersectional Field

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### 4.1 Applied Methods

#### 4.1.1 Introduction: A Mixed Methods Approach in a 'Field without Sites'

Developing a methodology for this project has been a challenging task, and its evolution was more often pressed upon me by 'the field' rather than chosen based upon methodological literature. It needed to be geared towards the question of how discursive gaps can be addressed that are produced through multilayered systems of discrimination. How – and where and when – can queer migrant women in Switzerland be addressed in terms of a self-representation rather than in terms of a mere deconstruction of the multiple mechanisms of exclusion through which intersectional subjects become othered? Given that analyses of dominant discourses in Switzerland only allow for insights as to how queer migrant women are systematically *absent* from both discourses around lesbians and migrants, and given that there were hardly any designated spaces for queer migrant women in Switzerland such as organizations, events, websites, and so on, the research unfolded in a 'field without sites' (see Chapter 2.3.3). This rendered dissipated personal interactions between queer migrant women and myself the only sites where queer migrant women's self-conceptions, experiences, and everyday practices – and the ways in which these are constrained – could be addressed.

As Jacqui Gabb writes: "Case study analysis is a useful starting point [to illustrate] how biography, experience, social processes and normalizing discourses shape, and are shaped by, everyday interactions" (Gabb 2009:49). But exactly on what kind of empirical data should such a case study rest? Following Gabb's 'qualitative mixed methods approach,' the methodological design for this study was conceptualized as a toolbox.<sup>1</sup> Which tools ended up being used hinged upon on-the-spot choices and adaptations both on the part of the research participants and myself. Mixing qualitative methods

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1 In an argument similar to Gabb's, Keith Woodward, John Paul Jones III, and Sallie A. Marston suggest using "methodological bricolage" and to "work with what it is hand" to address methodological problems that arise from working with ontological frameworks (Woodward et al. 2010).

in this way served two aims in particular: First, methodological flexibility was meant to accommodate interviewees' preferences and reservations, which proved critical in generating a sufficient sample size. Second, mixing methods meant looking at cases from different perspectives, thereby attempting to prevent automatic reiteration of knowable identities. As Gabb points out, "subjectivity [of the research subject] cannot be readily reconstructed from the fragments of Self that are presented in research. Our interpretations remain partial and are grounded in the ways that *we* know ourselves" (ibid:48, emphasis original, see also Rose 1997). Gabb accordingly cautions against "tidying up all the empirical loose ends" in case studies; instead, she calls for retaining "some of the 'messiness' that comprises connected lives" (ibid:37). Indeed, a mixed methods approach generates productive juxtapositions that emphasize this partiality and messiness:

Pulling together the threads [of a research participant's] data does not create a single picture so much as many constitutive interdependent pictures: a family, a father, a son, a man and so on. Thematic analysis [gender, generation, etc.] can freeze the frame, conjuring up series of analytical snapshots but these comprise momentary meanings that disappear as quickly as they emerge, as the patterning of relational threads take on new formations. Throwing a whole bundle of methods at a subject does not decipher hitherto opaque processes, it is not new methods *per se* or novel combinations of methods which generate insight, greater understanding is instead afforded through attentiveness to the *subtle interplay of threads* which criss-cross the breadth and depth of data. Patterns among threads are sometimes readily apparent and at other times fleeting and intangible, focusing on the different ways that they are woven together evinces the *contingency of lived lives*. (Gabb 2009:49, emphasis original)

I was, on the one hand, interested in such a "thematic analysis," for as Gabb rightly contends, "tracing themes [...] remains an analytical imperative if studies are to add to knowledge of social phenomena." On the other hand, I wanted to work towards an understanding of the "living of lived lives" and the attendant "emotional messiness, uncertainties and fluidity that constitute relational experience" (ibid:49). I contend that the latter is particularly prominent in the narrations of interlocutors who inhabit intersectional subject positions targeted by multiple mechanisms of exclusion.

In her research on family relationships, Gabb uses seven different qualitative methods, giving research participants the choice which activities they wanted to engage in. It is especially this openness – leaving the choice of method to the participant, and with no ambition for all participants to complete all 'tasks' – that distinguishes Gabb's from other method triangulations. In my own study, openness was generated in a slightly different way. Originally, the toolbox I put together to address these issues contained two main methods, but more were in store. Although I formulated a 'standard procedure' (see below), I never meant to adhere to it strictly but rather intended to accommodate sensitivities, preferences, reservations, or simply a lack of time on the participant's part. Such concerns materialized aplenty in the course of the research. One interviewee insisted on being interviewed with her partner; another suggested taking a walk together to the places she had been talking about instead of taking pictures of these places autonomously as I had asked her to do; others did not find the time to take pic-

tures but instead described to me what pictures they had intended to take; still others were generally reluctant to take pictures; and so on.

In the end, the triangulation of four qualitative research methods generated the data for this project. A combination of *narrative biographical interviews* and *reflexive photography* constituted the ‘standard procedure,’ while *site visitation* and *participant observation* were applied as additional methods. In alignment with the broader objectives of this project, the main focus was placed on generating a multilayered data set in collaboration with queer migrant women. These were contextualized by means of *expert interviews* with representatives from LGBT and immigrant organizations, immigration authorities and lawyers, as well as by *attendance* at (the few) panels held on issues of migration and homosexuality in this time. In sum, the ‘field’ here designated scattered spaces of interaction, not only with queer migrant women as primary research participants, but also with representatives from NGOs and the government, other ‘experts,’ potential door openers, and – not least – with colleagues working from different disciplinary perspectives, notably social anthropology, sociology, and history.

The ‘standard procedure’ envisaged two interviews per research participant. The first was a *biographical narrative interview* focusing on the participant’s migration biography and everyday life in Switzerland. The second interview was based on *reflexive photography*. At the end of the first interview, participants were asked to “take pictures of places that are important to you in your everyday life” (this was the standard formulation of the ‘task’). These pictures formed the basis of the second interview, which focused on why participants had taken pictures of these specific places and what these places meant to them. *Participant observation* was applied in a necessarily unsystematic way. Since there was a lack of public or semi-public spaces in which queer migrant women could be met *as such*, I could not simply ‘hang out where they did,’ as one might do when researching, say, the organizing of South American migrant women in Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> In other words, participant observation could mostly be pursued only *after* meeting with research participants for the first time, and necessarily remained uncertain since the extent of further meetings hinged upon mutual sympathies, interests, time resources, and opportunity. Sometimes there were upcoming events that could be attended together or to which I was invited – for example, gay pride parades or birthday parties. In other instances, I was able to visit interviewees at their public workplaces, for instance in restaurants. In contrast to fieldwork ‘out there,’ my ‘field’ was moreover entangled with my everyday routine; consequently, the possibility of meeting was also restricted by my own everyday obligations (meeting interviewees most of the time meant traveling to another city). Finally, *site visitation* was a method that was not envisaged in the original design but simply ‘happened’ as research participants sometimes spontaneously suggested we visit places they were talking about in the interviews or that they had photographed or intended to photograph.

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2 Nevertheless, I did frequent places in which there was an increased likelihood of meeting queer migrant women (or people who might know queer migrant women), especially lesbian clubs and events, see Chapter 4.2.

### 4.1.2 Biographical Interviews

The main condition of how people in the West are supposed to understand themselves is the obligation to construct a *coherent identity*, also a biography, a curriculum vitae; this is, so to speak, *the* ultimate condition for the existence of modern subjects. Even if structuralism has completely annulled exactly this requirement – the consistent/autonomous construction of identity – it is by far not dispelled in everyday perceptions, knowledge and actions. You are dealing with a group [of study participants] which is, so to speak, a *prime example of fragmented identities* – the discontinuities lay open, and are probably more determinative of identity than any search for ‘coherence.’ (Sabin Bieri, pers. comm. (e-mail), emphasis original, my translation)

My colleague Sabin Bieri’s pointed comment above was in response to an early proposal for this research. It signposts the paradox of the position research participants with ‘fragmented identities’ occupy vis-à-vis the concept of biography. In accordance with Bieri, biography researchers Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal and Gabriele Rosenthal contend that biographical competence is compulsory for *all* members of a society and is a “central means by which we orient ourselves and interact in many social situations in modern societies” (Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997:405, my translation). The authors define biography as a cultural concept that performs a double act pivotal to the negotiation between individual and society: “Societies of modern times have developed biographical structuration to *individualize* and *integrate* their members” (ibid, emphasis added). Biographical work is requested in a myriad of social interactions: job interviews, small-talk at cocktail parties, therapy sessions, asylum procedure, and so on. Depending on the context, the biographer reconstructs her own past selectively, thereby positioning her present Self in relation to others. At the same time, the structure of the narration is crucially guided by the schemes predefined by institutions and other collectivities. Biographies are therefore by no means fixed narratives about a frozen past but, as Bettina Dausien argues, active self-positionings in which “things past and future, experience and expectation, retrospection and prospection constantly intertwine” (Dausien 2000:102, my translation). Biography researchers accordingly analyze biographical narratives as a “social construction suspended between structure and practice, which, with respect to the conditions of its emergence and in its concrete forms, is always tied to a specific historical-social context” (ibid:100). The biographical narrative is, on the one hand, an expression of subjectivity: a momentary, situated, and situational story of the Self, grounded in reconstructed memories of the past, contingencies of the present, and visions of the future, and represents a process of positioning the Self in relation to others. On the other hand, the biographical narrative is always also an expression of the multi-dimensional social conditions from which it emerges. Since the biography is always a simultaneously individual and social product, its analysis allows for a reconstruction of the interlinkages between individual, subjective storytelling and collective processes:

By means of biographical narratives it becomes possible to analyze the intersections of individual and society and to point to the significance of collective [...] pasts. In this

context, it has to be emphasized that the individual story of a person as well as the interpretative retrospection of the past constitutes itself from the dialectics between the individual and the social. (Rosenthal 2005:61, my translation)

Located at the nexus of individual and society, biographical narratives always perform 'identity work'; their analysis, therefore, allows for an examination of processes of (dis)identification (see Chapter 3.4.7). In her call for more ethnographic approaches in intersectionality research, Gill Valentine (2007) analyzes interviews in order to understand the dynamics of the moments in which certain social categories become relevant in biographical narratives, and how a biographer's different identities – such as being a lesbian, a woman, and so on – may reinforce, weaken, or be in conflict with one another across time and space (see also Dausien 1996). Valentine argues that “we may think of class, race, and gender as different social structures, but individual people experience them *simultaneously*” (Valentine 2007:13, emphasis added). She identifies the biographical interview as one instance in which this simultaneity becomes manifest. Having said that, in the quoted article Valentine's categories do seem predefined and quite fixed. In terms of analyzing the ways in which social categories play out in narratives, I rather adopt Kath Weston's perspective, stating that “I am not interested in these categories [class, gender, language, and others] as demographic variables, or as reified pigeonholes for people, but rather as identities meaningful to participants themselves. I concentrate here on the interpretive links participants made (or did not make) between sexual identity and other aspects of who they considered themselves to be [...]” (Weston 1997 [1991]:11-12). In general, we need, first, to strive to be rigorously reflective about bringing already-known identity categories to analyses of processes of identification, especially if so-called 'intersectional' subject positions are involved. Second, we need to expect to be told a completely different story featuring other 'variables' and logics than we would have imagined.

Third, we need to consider Jasbir Puar's radical critique of how we have been theorizing identities. Race-class-gender (and so on), she contends, are *components*, but identification a spatio-temporal *process* (see Chapter 3.4.7). Translated to the interview context, this means that the biographical narrative not only exposes but also presently *performs* the interpretive frame through which the speakers perceive themselves, the world, and their place and actions in it. In other words, identities do not preexist their performance. Interviews are therefore never mere reifications of already existing identities, and neither are interviews as processes of identification only about 'pulling stops' (race! class! gender!). Instead, they always also intervene in the constant reconfiguration of identitarian *stories-so-far* (see Chapter 3.1.1).

As Geraldine Pratt argues, such interventions are particularly prone to emerge from the movement of bodies through space, as for instance happens when people migrate from one place to another: “Managing [...] contradictions, or bringing one discourse into relation with another, can open points of resistance. [...] Moving through places may involve moving between discursive formations and be one way that individuals become aware of the contradictions between discourses” (Pratt 2004:20). Narratives by migrant subjects and generally by individuals who inhabit intersectional subject positions are hence particularly likely to be marked by representational crises and discontinuities

that fail to be described by the ‘sum’ of their ‘identity components.’ In addition to examining the ways in which identities emerge as relevant to biographical analyses, the subsequent analysis accordingly places a particular emphasis on analyzing exactly such contradictions, hesitations, ruptures, and slippages that mark resistances against, and failures to reproduce, dominant formulations of identity categories.

As Bieri and Rosenthal point out, doing biography as done here is a cultural concept of “the West” (Bieri) and “modern society” (Rosenthal), which raises questions about the usefulness and justification of the method in intercultural interview settings. Although different societies are productive of different conditions of existence that may or may not include the Western requirement of ceaseless biographical performance and biographical coherence, I assumed – possibly problematically so – that, as immigrants, interlocutors would necessarily have had to develop such a biographical competence through their migration. At the same time, the generally high level of education in the sample may indicate reservations on the part of less-educated potential research participants to tell their story (moreover in a foreign language and with a declared focus on intimate issues). Generally, participants – especially highly educated professionals and members of the middle and upper classes – mostly (but not always!) felt reasonably comfortable to talk about their life stories in the sense of a biographical narratives.

However, it is important to remember that in many cases this competence has been shaped by immigration or asylum procedures. In these procedures, the rule of biographical consistency becomes particularly salient and sometimes existential as immigrants and asylum seekers (particularly those from non-Western countries) are forced to present themselves as appropriately unthreatening, subservient, and assiduous to obtain the desired visa/asylum in Switzerland. Here, the presentation of a Self that is both biographically *consistent* and *legible* to the raster of one of the few narrowly defined subject categories in Swiss immigration and asylum legislation can be a matter of life and death. While this rule of consistency and legibility applies to ‘regular’ immigrants to a much lesser extent than it does to asylum seekers, the requirement of coherence remains in essence the same. And it persists after crossing the border, for instance in job application processes, social services, the welfare system, residence permit renewals, and so on.

Bearing all this in mind, in conducting the narrative-biographical interviews, I have largely followed Gabriele Rosenthal’s suggestion (1995) to structure the procedure in four parts: an open invitation to narrate, a main biographical narration, internal follow-up questions based on notes taken during the narration and external follow-up questions, and a conclusion. Following this design, a broad initial question was used to elicit the narrative (“Can you tell me the story of how you came to Switzerland – from the moment when you first started considering leaving your country?”).<sup>3</sup> The ensuing

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3 This question differed in the few cases in which I interviewed women who were born and grew up in Switzerland or who came to Switzerland as children. This question was not standardized but depending on the specific positionality of the interviewee for instance included “First I would like to ask you to just tell me a little about who you are and what you do.”



narrative was interrupted only by questions aimed at clarification. In a second phase, follow-up questions asked for more detail concerning some issues mentioned in the first part. Departing from Rosenthal's script, the third phase of the interview then drew on an interview guideline in order to address issues that had not been brought up in the conversation-so-far. To conclude the interview, interviewees completed two forms asking about objective data (date of birth, education, status of residence, date of arrival in Switzerland, marital status, etc.) and habitus (family members' and partners' education, profession, place of residence, religion, etc.).

### 4.1.3 Reflexive Photography

Visual methodologies are, astonishingly, a latecomer to ethnographic research in social geography. This despite cultural geographers' early insight that "the very heart of geography – the search for our sense of place and Self in the world – is constituted by the practice of looking and is, in effect, a study of images" (Aitken and Zonn 1994:7, see also Cosgrove 1985, Rose 2003). While the study of visual representations of the world has long been established in the field of critical cultural geography (Barnes and Duncan 1992, Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, Duncan and Ley 1993, Rose 2001, Said 1978), visual *ethnographic* geographical research only found its way into the mainstream of the discipline in the course of the 'visual turn' propelled by more easily accessible technologies such as the smartphone – which had only just started to feature cameras when this research began – and the internet (Crang 2003, 2005, and 2010, Dodman 2003, Dirksmeier 2007:2, Hörschelmann 2007, Kondon 2003, Rose 2003, Thomas 2005). In ethnographic migration studies, on the other hand, the absence of visual methods remains pronounced. This is particularly surprising in *queer* migration studies considering that queer diaspora studies have established a rich tradition of analyzing visual material (Gopinath 2005, Muñoz 1999).

In this study, I have applied *reflexive photography* in order to gain an understanding of the imaginative geographies by which queer migrant women define themselves and their place in the world, and by which they live their everyday lives. In reflexive photography, participants are asked to autonomously take pictures in relation to a certain aspect of their lives and are subsequently requested to interpret their photographs in an interview (Dirksmeier 2007:1). Peter Dirksmeier argues that it is the specific characteristics of photography as an image-producing practice and the photograph as an image that make photography particularly interesting for social scientific methodologies. After all, photography is a widely distributed, low-threshold, and therefore relatively democratic practice in industrialized regions around the world, with virtually every portable electronic device now featuring a camera. Second, photography is unique in its function as a "visibility isolation machine" ("*Sichtbarkeitsisoliermaschine*") which detaches the visibility of a material object from its physical substance. A photograph is thereby characterized by exactness, that is an exceptionally far-reaching similarity between the object as depicted on the image carrier (image object – i.e. the photograph of a person) and the physical object it represents (image subject – i.e. the person). In

other words, a photograph creates a particularly *predictable* rendering of an image subject (ibid:5, quoting Wiesing 2005:162).<sup>4</sup>

Dirksmeier frames the photo and photography as a thoroughly *structured* system of meaning and practice, arguing that “reflexive photography takes advantage of the evaluative and classificatory relationship subjects have to their environment, which is intricately linked to the act of taking pictures.” He accordingly describes the taking of a photograph as a highly *selective* process. Who photographs what, when, where, and how is highly contingent on the “principle of the before-known image.” This means that the photographer effectively looks for a pre-conceived image in reality; the photograph thus represents a physical realization of a mental image and thus an objectivization of the subjective gaze when the image is viewed, since the image object can be related back to the image subject (Dirksmeier:5-6, referring to Wiegand 1981:8).

Dirksmeier does not imply that the researcher can read the image ‘for what it is’ in any transcendent way, which is why the method of reflexive photography emphasizes *participants’* interpretation of the image and the researcher’s subsequent analysis of the *narrative about the image* (rather than of the image itself). Nor does Dirksmeier insinuate that taking a picture can ever be a fully controlled or known process: “Photographic images owe their characteristics to the fact that actors are not permanently conscious about the full meaning of their practices, while their practices are at the same time inhabited by more meaning than they know or want to know,” he notes (Dirksmeier 2005:6). In other words: First, taking a picture can never be a fully controlled process, as the photographer can never fully know her intentions behind taking a specific picture. Also, it is not only the “before-known image” that determines where and when the shutter is pressed. The world often presses images onto the photographer, too – a butterfly sailing through an open window; or think of the first seemingly haphazardly cropped photographs a small child takes of something which has just caught her eye in the spur of the moment. This immediacy is facilitated by the fact that taking photographs is an exceptionally *fast*, almost instant, way of producing images. Second, photography always produces an *excess of image objects*. While the photographer decides, more or less consciously, what picture is taken, the resulting image will always also depict things that were not part of the “before-known image.” These excess things carry the potential to gain significance in the later viewing in the context of the research interview.

A further reason that Dirksmeier does not mention but which was instrumental in my decision to apply reflexive photography (instead of mental maps, for instance, see Jackson 1995 [1989], Tuan 1975), was that, unlike other forms of image production, photography mostly requires the photographer to be *materially present* at the site, in view of (but necessarily also distanced from) the image object. In accordance with an ontological approach to space, my interest lay in research participants mapping their everyday spaces and practices in Switzerland *while being caught up in them*, rather than obtaining retrospective and therefore necessarily more distanced, organized, and reflected maps from memory. (However, as discussed below, this partly failed.)

In sum, taking a photograph is informed, but never entirely determined, by the photographer’s “before-known” image. The meaning of the picture remains contingent

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4 All of Dirksmeier’s quotes in this sub-chapter are my translations.

on its viewing and necessarily shifts, as “photography is the contextualized re-enactment of seeing [the past], rather than a means of freezing it” (Meinhof and Galasinski 2000:327, quoted in Felber Rufer 2006:67). As such, viewing images is always also a process of *identification*. Both taking and viewing photographs are as much expressions of a structured system of meaning as they are a messy and embodied set of practices (the speed of the technology; the photographer’s eventual lack of control over a photo’s contents; her physical entanglement in the sites photographed; the emotional charge of an image; the lack of words to describe what was meant to be conveyed in an image). It is precisely this meeting-up of planned and unplanned, structured and messy, representational and non-representational that renders reflexive photography an interesting tool to research imagined geographies and the lives lived based on them. From this view, the practice of photographing – taking, developing or uploading, distributing, and showcasing or viewing photos, in secret, at an interview, at a family gathering, among friends, on the desk at work, on social media platforms, and so on – is not a freezing of time and space but rather a dynamic process of identification in the ‘thrown-togetherness’ (Massey 2005) of real and imagined spaces and places.

Beyond these fundamental aspects of taking and viewing photographs, four specific characteristics of the method of reflexive photography have informed my choice of the method. First and foremost, the autonomy that reflexive photography grants participants marks a *change of perspective* that promised to be particularly valuable in the context of a project addressing ‘impossible subjects.’ In reflexive photography, this change of perspective is particularly far-reaching as the participant not only controls the process of *taking* the photograph but also, at least to a certain extent, its *interpretation* as facilitated in the follow-up interview on the pictures taken. Reflexive photography therefore “allows for a great deal of contingency rather than rediscovering predefined orders by means of controlled methods. In this sense it is suited to at least partially avoid the weaknesses of ‘conventional’ [textual] quantitative and qualitative methods” (Dirksmeier 2007:8). Researchers applying other self-directed visual methodologies such as photo novella/diary or participatory video have equally defined this change of perspective as the main strength of such methods. David Dodman frames this type of method as “a direct method of empowerment, as the act of photographing requires ‘putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power’” (Dodman 2003:294, quoting Sontag 1973:4). Sarah Kindon sees in this change of perspective a suitable method for working towards a feminist practice of looking ‘alongside’ rather than ‘at’ research subjects, which “challenge[s] conventional relationships of power associated with the [masculinist, ageist, colonialist, etc.] gaze in geographic research, and results in more equitable outcomes and/or transformation for research partners” (Kindon 2003:143). As such, these methods differ significantly from other visual methodologies such as *photo elicitation* where it is the researcher who provides the photos to elicit narratives (Felber Rufer 2006, Gabb 2009).

There is, however, a caveat to the use of reflexive photography as a change of perspective. Dirksmeier sees a particular strength in changing perspectives because the photographer’s autonomy allows for the scientific observation of spaces that the researcher is otherwise excluded from. Lorraine Young and Hazel Barrett (2001) note in

this context that self-directed photography yields images of situations that would have *changed* in the presence of the researcher-as-outsider. While all three authors evaluate this as one of the strengths of the method and as a possible answer to researchers' restricted access to certain spaces (Young and Barrett for instance research the life-worlds of Kampala street children), I remain ambiguous about this specific aspect. Given the spontaneity and exactness of photography, I agree that reflexive photography grants an intimate visual access to the spaces the photos depict. However, the camera might also be more pessimistically framed as an *invisibilization machine* which makes the researcher invisible. As such, it can grant the researcher 'access' to spaces inhabited by underprivileged subjects, some of whom may not welcome such visibility. As postcolonial scholars' critiques of photography in anthropology and geography have widely shown, visibility to researchers has all too often led to unfavorable readings of 'who they are.' It is, in my eyes, ethically less problematic to take advantage of the method to gain 'access' to exclusive, privileged social sites such as corporate boardrooms or luxury resorts, or to no-go sites, such as prisons or war zones. However, such research has remained rare, not only because the visual methods discussed here have been developed explicitly in the context of research focusing on deprived social groups but also because the former, privileged, spaces are also the ones where visual 'access' is much more controlled and successfully restricted. In short, in contrast to its explicit aim of 'giving a gaze' to underprivileged research participants, reflexive photography in some ways eventually remains complicit in the project of making visible and legible the Other while rendering invisible those in power. Despite the unquestioned strengths of the method – especially in comparison to other qualitative and quantitative methods – this caveat should not be neglected (as it often is) when doing research that involves deprived research subjects.

A second strength of reflexive photography is its supportive function in interview settings in which not the mother tongue, but a foreign tongue was spoken, which was often the case here. Although the focus was eventually on the verbal narrative participants offered *about* the photos, the pictures represented an additional, non-verbal means of expression that facilitated communication about the issues that interviewees tried to convey (Dodman 2003, Thomas 2009). The fact that the accounts about the photos sometimes contradicted narratives provided in the biographical interviews points to the effectiveness of the diversification of perspectives this method usefully enables (Thomas 2009:5).

The third aspect that rendered reflexive photography particularly useful in this research is that it enabled a discourse about spaces and places. Biographical interviews focus on the telling of *life stories*. Since these events necessarily 'take place,' an examination of biographical narratives always also allows for an analysis of the meanings of spaces and places these stories both draw on and produce. However, biographical interviews rarely yield explicit reflections about spaces and places, or about the mundane (Felber Rufer 2006). While it is usually not difficult to elicit (life) stories, it is much harder to direct an interview towards actions carried out in everyday spaces and places, or to speak directly about these spaces and places. Such narratives are often 'thin' and short, be it because interviewees think them too banal or because these practices are naturalized to an extent that their reflection is rendered impossible. Photographs of everyday places

encourage participants to take a step back in order to reflect on these places and their practices in them, and in this way to indulge in narratives of the banal. As Dirksmeier notes: “The photos enable a deeper, more reflected thinking about the issues in question on the participants’ part, which generates information which would not have surfaced without the preceding process of taking the photos” (Dirksmeier 2007:8).

The fourth and final advantage of reflexive photography is the simple fact that research participants usually consider it unconventional as a research method. As discussed below, especially in the context of migration studies involving immigrant interviewees who have undergone, or are still undergoing, arduous immigration or asylum procedures, biographical interviews can be saturated with ambivalence or even trauma. Beyond this, there is a risk of reproducing biographies geared towards immigration authorities in the research context. And while analyzing such ‘rehearsed’ biographies (which are not easily discernible as such) has been highly informative in this study in itself (see especially Chapter 8), it has been equally insightful to *disrupt* their flow by means of reflexive photography. Indeed, reflexive photography allowed participants to tell and frame things *differently*, and maybe less coherently, enabling deviations from reiterating normative or even coerced narratives of subjectivization.

The procedure of reflexive photography as it was used in this project was designed as follows: After the biographical interview, participants were provided with a one-way camera (if they could not provide their own camera or smartphone, which at the time rarely featured cameras), and were asked to take a minimum of one and a maximum of thirty-six pictures of “places that are important to you in your everyday life.” These pictures were to be taken within a certain timeframe, usually two to four weeks, depending on the participant’s time availabilities. The pictures then served as a basis for a second interview, which focused on why participants had taken pictures of these specific places and what they meant to them. In order to secure participants’ anonymity and, related to this, in order to ensure the greatest possible spontaneity for the process of taking the pictures, I informed the research participants prior to taking the pictures that I would not publish any pictures without their explicit consent, and that I would not show them to anyone except the four colleagues I worked on the interview analyses with. I further assured them that I would mainly use their narratives *about* the images for my analysis and only occasionally provide a description of an image. This proved a worthwhile approach. Many of the submitted pictures were of an extraordinary intimacy, and in fact it was usually exactly this intimacy that made this space or place ‘important.’

The remainder of this sub-chapter offers some preemptive considerations about the use of reflective photography in this project, which I believe are useful to be aware of before entering the interview discussions. When I started working with reflexive photography at the outset of the research, it quickly became evident that the method was not always going to work in the ways I had intended. Although participants had been provided cameras if needed and had been instructed according to a standardized set of instructions that had been defined on the basis of other research using this method, many interviewees selected pictures from their *digital photo archives* instead of actually *taking* pictures within the agreed timeframe. What worked smoothly in the fieldwork

of a colleague of mine, whose work ran parallel to my own in a project concerned with the use of public parks by youths (Landolt 2011), did not seem to work as well in this project. Even considering that factors such as age or technological skills and affinities may have played a role in some cases in which interviewees were reluctant to take pictures, the pattern of selecting images from archives rather than taking them in material everyday spaces was too prevalent to be explained by these reservations alone. At first, I doubted my communication skills, but upon closer inspection, the narratives delivered about the images suggested that the alleged misinterpretations of the task were in fact deliberate. The original task was overruled by the relevance of *imagined spaces* in interviewees' everyday lives – distant places and people, and past times –, which could not be photographed in the given framework of the research. The urgency to include these imagined spaces in a collection of pictures showing “places important to you in your everyday life” became particularly evident in cases in which pictures of pictures, or pictures of computers (representing cyberspace, especially Skype) were taken. In other words: Participants worked against the grain of the method in order to represent what needed to be represented despite its literal physical absence.

*Figure 4: The picture on the left was explicitly taken for the research with the research participant's smartphone. The picture on the right is from another research participant's photo archive. (Publication permitted by research participants.)*



The point here is not to draw a demarcation between real (here: taken pictures) and imagined (here: pictures selected from archives) geographies. As Dirksmeier's conceptualization of the photo as a “before-known image” points out, *all* images are eventually realizations of imagined geographies, and the aim of applying the method of reflexive photography was to research these very imagined geographies. On the other hand, there remains a difference between the home-making performed by presenting pictures taken in everyday life and the home-making performed by presenting pictures from archives. The proliferation of pictures of (geographically and temporally) distant places and people that could not be photographed in everyday life signposts the relevance of

these places and people as resources in everyday life or as sites of attachment for multi-faceted homing desires that often could not be fully realized in 'material' everyday life.

Yet, in its very failure, reflexive photography eventually succeeded. The original proposed method of photographing 'real' places was revealed to be too constrictive for this transnational and intersectional context. Instead, interviewees' non-compliances emphasized the significant role that geographically and temporally distant people and spaces play in their lives, thereby providing insights that other methods would not have brought forth with such force. As such, the method indirectly but very effectively addressed the questions I had posed earlier, such as to what places interviewees attach a sense of home, given the absence of designated spaces for queer migrant women in Switzerland.

Similar insights could be gained from cases in which interviewees *refused* to take pictures. The arguments on which these refusals were based (which will be addressed in the discussion of each case) and what activities sometimes replaced the original method – sometimes a walk together to an interviewee's favorite places, sometimes detailed descriptions of the pictures interviewees *would* have taken – arguably yielded a better understanding of the case stories than the original method would have done. Perhaps a more general lesson from this outcome, then, is that the subject will tell her story (almost) no matter the method; and that the most important stories are in fact often told through the very deviation from a given method.

Beyond these unexpected but productive findings, the strengths of reflexive photography played out as expected. The unfamiliarity of the method – both for the interviewer and the interviewee – often resulted in hesitation, silence, and helplessness ("What else can I say?") in the interviews. In contrast to the biographical interviews, this produced conversations rather than one-way narratives, and the images themselves offered useful guides for both interviewer and interviewee. Letting both interlocutors talk to the printed photographs instead of to each other also to a certain extent removed the gulf between interviewer and interviewee. Interviewees' accounts of their pictures especially exposed the "emotional charge" images can carry and moreover pointed to the importance of the photograph as a tangible *object* with its own materiality (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7).

The photographs and the accounts on them proved highly useful as 'keys' to the biographical narratives. It sometimes even seemed as if the photos and the attendant narratives were like a fluorescent marker highlighting the core concerns expressed in the biographical interviews. But sometimes they also contradicted earlier statements or suddenly made something visible that had been completely absent from the biographical interviews.

In sum, while the use of reflexive photography in this study has offered a glimpse of the still rarely tapped potential of visual ethnographic methods for migration research and other research addressing intersectional subject positions, it has also exposed that these very perspectives also challenge and extend the method.

## 4.2 The Sampling Process

### 4.2.1 Theoretical Sampling

The search for participants was guided by the principle of *Theoretical Sampling* (Glaser and Strauss 1998 [1967], Strauss and Corbin 1998). This principle designs the sampling as an ongoing process. In practice this means that already transcribed interviews are subject to a preliminary analysis to determine what the characteristic of the next cases should be, whereby the next case can either aim to extend or contrast a specific finding. The procedure supports the understanding of all relevant aspects of an examined topic and research subject. For instance, in this study the theoretical sampling process yielded age, length of stay in Switzerland, age at migration, type of residence permit, educational level, employment, identification as 'lesbian' or not, and sexual self-definition prior to migration as some of the most salient factors structuring research participants' self-conceptions and migration biographies as well as their social positionalities, their everyday lives, and their wellbeing in Switzerland.

At the same time, the challenges faced in the search process pushed the limits of *Theoretical Sampling* so that, oftentimes, it remained just that – theoretical. Finding queer migrant women who were willing to take part in this study was a demanding endeavor. As discussed in Chapter 3.5, the problems started with the question of how to circumscribe the research subject, complicating the question of what terminologies should be applied to hail research participants. Another perplexing question was where to look for queer migrant women, seeing that there were hardly any designated spaces for them in Switzerland and indeed only scarce expertise about this subject position in general (see Chapter 2.3.3). The fact that certain kinds of people – such as members of the working class – remained largely absent from the research (despite efforts to establish a balanced sample in this respect) is arguably one result of these challenges and indicates areas for future research.

### 4.2.2 Search Channels

In accordance with the above, the sampling process could not always be carried out as planned and was often 'deviated' by the field. As this was a 'field without sites,' the search was necessarily guided by casual comments, chance encounters with door openers, leads pursued impulsively, participation in eclectic events, activities on virtual bulletin boards, unexpected snowball effects, remote personal contacts, and sympathies and affinities. The following list provides an overview of the places where I looked, and where the search was successful. As can be read in between the lines, the search process was arduous and halting because by no means did all search channels yield results. This was importantly owed to the fact that the organizations and institutions through which the search needed to take place did not address queer-*and*-migrant-*and*-women, and on part of these organizations and institutions often resulted in a denial of knowledge or expertise about, or a lack of interest in, the issue (see Chapter 2.3.3).

Search channels and loci included (with the number of participants found through each channel listed in parentheses):



- *My personal network* – this mainly included Swiss queer/feminist academic and activist circles, the Swiss lesbian grapevine, and the eclectic mix of further acquaintances made throughout a life lived in three Swiss cities (six participants were found through this channel).
- *News sections on NGO websites* – mostly sites run by Swiss lesbian NGOs (five participants found) and two sites run by migrant NGOs (no participant found).
- *Door openers* – research participants themselves (snowball effect) (five participants found), representatives of lesbian and migrant NGOs (no participant found), and a journalist who had investigated queer Muslim women in Switzerland (one participant found).
- A brief article about my research, which also included a call for research participants, appeared in the Bern edition of *20minuten*, a low-prestige but very widely read commuter newspaper (three participants found).
- *LGBT events and spaces* – this included attendance at LGBT events on migration and homosexuality (two participants found), placement of the flyer at the *Queeramnesty* information stand at the gay pride event (no participant found), in lesbian clubs (no participant found), and in the offices of lesbian and other LGBT organizations (no participant found).
- *Integration offices (Integrationsstellen)* of all 26 Swiss cantons (e-mail) (two participants found).
- *Immigration lawyers* specializing in homosexuality and migration, one of whom mailed out the call to former clients in an anonymous mailing (one participant found).
- *Lesbian chat sites* with sizeable Switzerland-based communities (especially [www.herzher.ch](http://www.herzher.ch), [www.purplemoon.ch](http://www.purplemoon.ch), and [www.shoe.org](http://www.shoe.org)) (two participants found).
- *Internet search* of publicly visible queer migrant women (two participants found).
- *Migrant NGOs* in Switzerland, many of which specifically focused on women (e.g. *NOSOTRAS – Wir Frauen*, *Forum für einen fortschrittlichen Islam*, and many others). These organizations were contacted by e-mail, followed up by a round of telephone calls and a mailing of multilingual flyers (German, French, English, Tamil, Albanian) and postcards (no participant found).
- *Fachstelle Frauenhandel und Migration FIZ* – a help desk advising trafficked migrant women. This collaboration failed due to concerns about anonymity and a self-declared lack of experience with queer women (no participant found).
- *Civil registry offices (Standesämter)* of Bern and Zürich – this collaboration eventually failed as well. My idea had been to have these offices send out an anonymous mailing to all non-Swiss or binational couples who had registered their partnership since this had become possible in 2007 (no participant found).

In order to contextualize the data generated in collaboration with queer migrant women, the following people, organizations, and governmental institutions were moreover contacted in search of experts on the issue of homosexuality and migration in Switzerland (as well as in search of potential door openers to further research participants):

- Representatives of lesbian NGOs (*LOS, L'Estime, Lilith*, and others) and the few LGBT NGOs with the double focus on homosexuality and migration (e.g. *Queeramnesty* and *SLAP*).
- *Immigration lawyers* specializing in the issue of homosexuality and immigration.
- The officer responsible for gender-based persecution in the context of asylum at the *Bundesamt für Migration BFM* (Federal Office for Migration).
- Help desks for migrants, such as the *Fachstelle Frauenhandel und Migration FIZ*.
- Representatives of migrant associations and NGOs, with a focus on organizations run by immigrant women (*Forum für einen fortschrittlichen Islam*, etc.).

While some of these organizations and institutions reacted by rejecting any expertise on the issue, others were willing to collaborate, which sometimes also included granting at-length interviews. Such a multi-sited search renders the ex-post question of how these search sites, channels, and methods were structured (and hence the ways in which the sample may be biased) all the more important. This issue will be discussed throughout the data analyses.

### 4.2.3 Interview Location

Research participants were free to choose the location for the interview, which most often took place in their homes, but sometimes also at the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern, and on rare occasions in a restaurant. In order to both contextualize the interviews and to create a 'home advantage' for research participants, I found interviews at participants' homes most rewarding. Research participants were not recompensed monetarily. Interviews were held throughout German- and French-speaking Switzerland, including Zürich, Bern, Basel, Lausanne, and Luzern, and some smaller cities and villages.

## 4.3 Data Corpus, Data Analysis, and Writing Process

The data corpus generated by this study ultimately included audio recordings of 47 interviews with 28 queer migrant women from 22 different countries (biographical and reflexive photography interviews); case-based memos; field notes from participant observation; minutes taken in explorative interviews with a number of queer migrant women at the outset of the research; audio recordings and/or minutes from eight expert interviews, and from three podium discussions and symposia on the issue of homosexuality and asylum/immigration. Most interviews were conducted between autumn 2005 and spring 2009, with some additional interviews conducted in autumn 2013. Five research participants lived in French-speaking Switzerland, all others in German-speaking Switzerland; the study is hence biased towards the latter part of the country. (A detailed overview of the data corpus can be found in Annex I-II.)

The data analysis combined two methodological approaches. Rather than formulating and (dis)proving hypotheses, these approaches both sought to "gain empirically substantiated new insights and theoretical concepts about biographical processes and

lived experiences in a specific field” (Dausien 1994:138-139). In explorative studies like this, such conceptual openness has proven to be of particular significance. The two approaches used here were the coding techniques of *Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1998 [1967], Strauss and Corbin 1996) and *reconstructive sequential analyses* as formulated and applied by biography researchers.<sup>5</sup> The data analysis was conducted according to the method developed in the course of a number of methodological workshops at the graduate school “Gender Scripts and Prescripts” at the University of Bern, which were taught by Bettina Dausien (see Dausien 1994 and 2007), Ulrich Oevermann (Oevermann 2002, Wernet 2000), Günter Mey and Katja Mruck (Mey and Mruck 1997), and Gabriele Rosenthal (Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997). The triangulation of *Grounded Theory* and *reconstructive sequential analyses* respectively allowed for both horizontal analyses, that is, for tracing themes across cases, as well as for vertical, in-depth analyses of single cases.

The data analysis was carried out in a four-step procedure. In the *first step*, the generated material – interview transcripts, field note entries, notes made while re-listening to the interviews repeatedly, photographs, and memos – were posted on a large wall. This resulted in a visual matrix, organized according to research participants’ contributions as well as to rough categories structuring the contents of the interviews. These were 1) representations of country of origin/family; 2) migration experience; 3) sexuality/relationships; 4) work; and 5) interview interaction (these categories were made visible by using color-coded sticky notes). This wall provided a visual synopsis that yielded initial insights into the structurations of the interviews and visualized conversations and disjunctures within and between cases.

The *second step* aimed to gain a more detailed overview and understanding of the individual cases and their interconnections, enabling a more systematic comparison of themes across cases and a foundation upon which cases could then be selected for more detailed case reconstructions. This stage was guided by the *coding techniques of Grounded Theory*, which work precisely to extract similarities and differences within and among cases. Originally, *Grounded Theory* described both the research process (that is, the formulation of a research question, the sampling process, and the coding of the generated or collected data) and the ‘grounded theory’ emerging from the systematic analysis of the data. Here, I primarily made use of the sampling and coding principles of *Grounded Theory*, which I used to generate a meaningful sample, to organize the data, and to compare and interpret them. It has not, however, been my aim to systematically develop a ‘grounded theory’ organized around one single ‘core category’ as *Grounded Theory* suggests (Strauss and Corbin 1996: Chapter 8).

In their effort to develop a method that effectively works towards an understanding of the basic processes triggering social change and of the interactions between structure and agency, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1996) suggest coding empirical data in several steps including *open*, *axial*, and *selective* coding. The distinction between these steps (especially between the first two) often remains conceptual rather than actual.

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5 Note that these methodologies are not discrete; for instance, Günther Mey and Katja Mruck understand sequential analyses to be an integral part of analyses working with *Grounded Theory* (workshop with Günter Mey and Katja Mruck, University of Bern, October 23-24, 2007).

In *open* coding, the text is broken down into segments (words, or short or long text sequences). A set of questions is thrown at the text (What? Who? How? When? Why? With what?), and comparisons are drawn among text segments (Böhm 2000). From this process, *codes* emerge; these are ‘tagged’ to the respective text segments and described in code memos. Next, in *axial* coding, these codes are differentiated, put into relation to each other, adapted and renamed, thereby becoming *categories*. The categories that are perceived to be of central importance are then intensely developed. At this stage, a *coding paradigm* is applied, which consists of four items: “conditions” (what conditions influence a phenomenon?); “interaction among the actors”; “strategies and tactics” (what interaction strategies are devised to address or deal with this phenomenon?); and “consequences” (what are the consequences of these interaction strategies, and how do they co-shape the phenomenon?). This paradigm can also be used to structure the data and to clarify relations between codes linked to this category (Strauss and Corbin 1996:78–92, Kelle 2005, Strauss 1987). In order to create an understanding of their hangings-together, in this stage, codes and categories that appeared to be central were also printed out and physically set into relation with each other in differing combinations. Finally, *selective* coding leads to a central phenomenon that represents a core category or variable, upon which the actual ‘grounded theory’ is then formulated. As indicated above, in this phase of the analysis, I focused on open and axial coding; selective coding was omitted since no single central phenomenon could be established, nor was one attempted to be formulated. Most data generated in this project was coded with *Atlas.ti*, mainly interview transcripts but also case-based memos and field notes (the first more comprehensively, the latter two only selectively).

In a *third step* (which was actually a going back and forth between steps two and three), sequences of selected cases were then analyzed in-depth using reconstructive sequential analysis techniques. Cases and sequences were once more selected using *Theoretical Sampling*, guided by the question of which data needed to be analyzed and presented in order to include all of the aspects relevant to the investigation. A simple but effective method I used was to select a case that seemed particularly rich and relevant and then work outwards from it, systematically adding cases to complement or contrast the previous cases according to emerging criteria. This procedure eventually met ‘theoretical saturation,’ a point reached when all salient aspects of an object of investigation seemed to have been addressed.

Reconstructive sequential analyses are neither an inductive nor a deductive but rather are an *abductive* procedure. What this meant in practice is shown in the following brief description of the sequential analysis process. Whenever possible, the sequential analyses were conducted collectively in our *Materialgruppe* (material group), which consisted of five graduate students from Social Anthropology and Geography (all from the Graduate School Gender Studies) who met weekly. At the outset of each session, we undertook an extremely rigorous reading of one word, of a very brief text sequence, or of a paralinguistic element (pause, laughter, hesitation, etc.). All discussion participants offered a range of readings of this word or sequence. These readings were generated by means of ‘wild’ associations and the free imagination of a variety of contexts – for instance, of the interviewee’s social, political, or familial context, or considerations about the interview setting – that might have led to the utterance of this specific word or se-

quence. Each participant of the reading group then pleaded for the reading she thought was most plausible. The group's task was to contest and disprove readings, until the group agreed on one or – very rarely – multiple valid readings. Still working on the same sequence, the same procedure was repeated with considerations of possible continuations of the text. Subsequently, the analysis was applied to the next word or brief sequence, now taking into account what had already been read and considered. After a while, the reading became quicker, and it was typically after reading an entire sequence (usually between ten and twenty lines) in such a way that the 'key' to a case, or 'case structure' (*Fallstruktur*) would emerge.

This extremely rigorous reading technique was inspired by the methodology of *Objective Hermeneutics* as formulated by Ulrich Oevermann (2002). We used a method close to *Objective Hermeneutics* in our group because in our experience it was not only the most painstaking but also the most productive method of analyzing and interpreting text. We became truly fascinated with the method after several instances in which we 'predicted' key issues and turns of an entire several-hour interview with accuracy after analyzing only the first ten lines of the interview transcript in a one-and-a-half-hour discussion session. At the same time, we also deviated from *Objective Hermeneutics* in several respects. The first divergence concerned the selection of the text sequence. *Objective Hermeneutics* requires the researcher to "take the bull by the horns" ("*den Stier an den Hörnern packen*"), as Oevermann likes to say, in the very first interview question. For instance, if researching mountain guides' professional self-conceptions, the first question in an interview should be something like "How did you come to be a mountain guide?" (Hungerbühler 2013). It is therefore fitting that Oevermann is adamant about the all-importance of the introductory interview sequence, and his analyses almost exclusively focus on this sequence. However, in research about sexuality, grabbing the bull by the horns is often not a valid option, and it was certainly not advisable in the context of this study. As a result, sexuality was rarely an explicit issue in the introductory sequence, so that a close reading of other sequences was conducted in addition to the first one. Second, Oevermann's method requires strict adherence to the semantics of words. By contrast, we found that strict adherence to the meaning of words can be problematic in a foreign language setting. We therefore placed less emphasis on the meaning of single words if we felt translation issues were at work. Third, Oevermann insists that all members of an analysis group must, without exception, agree on *one* interpretation of any given text. All of us being feminist scholars, we felt that feminist literature – as well as migration research, queer theory, and other perspectives – has amply documented that ambivalence, contradictions, and paradoxes are all part and parcel of what it means, for instance, to be woman *and* migrant *and* queer. In our group, therefore, we allowed more readily for multiple readings.

Such reconstructive social scientific approaches are distinguished by their "interpretative paradigm" (Blumer 1973). From this view, empirical data cannot speak for itself but always requires interpretation exceeding a merely descriptive level. Beyond recounting subjective experiences and self-interpretations ('first degree' constructions), a *case reconstruction* is performed that is a "reflexive, critical-analytical reconstruction of 'first degree' construction processes" (Dausien 2000:97, my translation). In other words, reconstructive methods frame the biographical narrative as a subjective construction,

which is then reconstructed by the researcher from the point of view of specific research questions and theoretical perspectives. The reconstruction of a 'case' is thus a creative process of interpretation from which 'first degree' theoretical constructions emerge and reach beyond the 'first degree' constructions within the narratives.

Reconstructive methods are based on the assumption that the social world is structured and, as such, also structures experiences and narratives. Case reconstructions accordingly aim to analyze the principles structuring 'first degree' constructions as narrated by participants. On the one hand, this allows an understanding of the structuration of the biographers' subjective self-conceptions and actions; on the other hand, insights can be gained about the structurations of the conditions and social context within which these self-conceptions and actions take shape (Dausien 1994). This context is comprised of social, political, historical, economic, cultural, and other aspects of life as organized by dominant discourses. The structuration of biographers' narratives is highly contingent on the narrators' place within this context.

Following Bettina Dausien's suggestion (2007), the biographical narratives were thus considered on three levels: First, on the level of *context*, which means to acknowledge that the production of a narration is immersed in a broader socio-cultural framing that also features specific institutionalized narrative prescripts. Second, on the level of the multidimensional *positionalities* of individuals within this context, as well as the shifts and ruptures inherent in self-positionings (in other words: what stories were told and how). Third, on the level of the space-time of the *interview interaction*, taking into account the interests of both interviewer and interviewee and the relations of power between them. As Dausien writes: "With questions and theoretical guidelines, with the choice of the interview method, the 'setting' and their own communicative behavior in the interview situation, researchers are actively implicated in the construction of the 'gathered' life story" (Dausien 2000:105, my translation, see also Dausien 2005). This raises the question of the researcher's positionality, to which I turn in the next subchapter.

Finally, sequential analyses resulted in written analysis protocols. In the *fourth and last step* of the data analysis, these were merged with the code memos that resulted from the coding process according to *Grounded Theory* and condensed into a final text. Specific attention was given to anonymizing the material, which in this project was of particular importance given the intimate issues it addressed, the small size of Switzerland, and the attendant close-knit communities. This was achieved by changing interviewees' first and last names and sometimes additional information like place names. When quoting interviewees directly, small changes in language were sometimes made to make the text more understandable and to avoid the impression of linguistic inadequacy. Such an impression of inadequacy is created very quickly when transcribing oral text, even when speaking in one's mother tongue.

#### 4.4 Some Thoughts on Positionality

Inspired by feminist standpoint theory (Collins 1990, Haraway 1988, Harding 1991, Rose 1997), attention to the power relations between the researcher and the research subject have been at the heart of this study. Contending that knowledges are always partial and situated, feminist scholars have emphasized the role the positionality of the researcher plays in the process of producing knowledge. In the context of ethnographic work, this debate has addressed the question of the researcher's in- or outsider position with respect to the researched social group in particular, which, in line with feminist standpoint theory, is often a marginalized or deprived group.

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I wrote in my field book: "I throw myself into this queer transnational space, forever separated from it by the deep-seated knowledge that if worse comes to worse I can retreat into my safe white Swiss middle class world at any point in time."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, there was no such 'exit' (Hannerz 2006:7) for me in terms of my sexuality; as a self-identified lesbian I am, like my interviewees, sexually non-conforming and, as such, subject to stereotypization and exclusions. There are thus, among others, two major contesting issues at stake here: the problem of the Western gaze on a colonial other, and the problems inherent to researching a social group from an insider position.

In terms of the first, I followed David Butz and Kathryn Besio's suggestion to analyze the generated empirical data in view of Mary Louise Pratt's notion of *autoethnography*. Autoethnography challenges the position from which privileged researchers situated in metropolitan academic institutions can "imagine ourselves as transcultural knowers and our subjects merely as 'Native informants'" (Butz and Besio 2004:351).<sup>7</sup> Pratt uses autoethnography "to refer to those instances where members of colonized groups strive to represent themselves to their colonizers in ways that engage with colonizers' terms while also remaining faithful to their own self-understandings." As such, autoethnography describes "a particular mode of transcultural interaction by members of subordinate groups whose subjectivities are forged in the context of cross-cultural relations of domination" (ibid). The authors quote Mary Louise Pratt:

If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations [...] autoethnography involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror. (Pratt 1992:7, quoted in Butz and Besio 2004:353)

As Pratt specifies in a later article:

Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous or 'authentic' forms of self-representation [...] Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are

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6 Fieldbook entry July 14, 2005.

7 'Native informant' is a term Butz and Besio borrow from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999).

merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to *intervene* in metropolitan modes of understanding.

(Pratt 1994:28, emphasis in the original, quoted in Butz and Besio 2004:353)

From this, Butz and Besio conclude that “autoethnography is not something researchers do, but something their research subjects do that they may want to study” (ibid:353). In other words, while there is no such thing as ‘direct access’ to ‘native knowledge’ gained by a transcultural knower-researcher, researchers have the possibility to analyze the ways in which Others represent themselves to the Same/researcher, appropriating, but also intervening in, the latter’s definitions and discourses.

With Butz and Besio (2004:357), I argue that such transcultural interactions not only occur between colonizer and colonized but also when social scientists study historically subordinate groups within their Western societies, in this case immigrants in Switzerland. Applying an autoethnographic perspective to this study means that instead of framing research interviews as a conversation between a ‘Native informant’ and a ‘transcultural knower-researcher,’ interviews are conceptualized as conversations between a metropolitan researcher and a transcultural knower-informant performing autoethnographic acts. Indeed, in the interviews it became very apparent that the interviewees were “transcultural knowers.” As migrants, they were knowledgeable in at least two cultural settings. This bestowed upon them an epistemic advantage of a ‘double vision,’ that is, the self-reflexivity inherent in such insider/outsider positions. Black feminist critic bell hooks describes this point of view as follows: “Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out [...] we understood both” (hooks 1994:vii, see also Collins 1990).<sup>8</sup> The interviews were, crucially, structured by interviewees’ attempts to translate ‘their cultures’ to me. Hence, an autoethnographic perspective opens up the text on the level of the interaction happening between interviewer and interviewee and the power relations inherent in this encounter. As such, it enables the detection and naming of colonial effects, which is a prerequisite for postcolonial inquiries that seek to “go beyond understanding the continuing effects of colonialism and engage actively in processes that work to create a post-colonial future (one in which the archetypal moment of transcultural relations is no longer colonialism)” (Butz and Besio 2004:355).

The queer sexuality which I ‘shared’ with research participants raised different methodological issues altogether. As discussed earlier, definitions of sexuality are always already implicated in definitions of nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures. However, they

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8 In his analysis of the Indian ‘second migration generation’ in Switzerland, Rohit Jain problematizes this metaphor of “living between two worlds” as a *subjectivation logic* rooted in the biopolitical assimilation project of the modern Swiss nation (see also Chapter 6.1.4). “In the dominant narrative of the ‘culture conflict,’” Jain writes, “members of the ‘second generation’ were naturalized as existences in crisis torn between cultural essentialist entities of the national ‘own’ and the assimilationist ‘other’ [...]” (Jain 2018:96, my translation). While this subjectivation logic of the ‘second generation’ certainly differs from that of ‘first generation’ immigrants in important ways, the figure of ‘existences in crisis’ as torn between cultures can equally be found in discourses around first generation immigrants.



are also co-constructive and co-constructions of other aspects of the social, such as gender, class, and others. This eventually renders sexual positionalities difficult to 'share.' At the same time, it is an indisputable fact that my identification as a lesbian opened doors, increased the willingness of potential interviewees to participate, established pre-emptive trust, and triggered curiosities. There was often a sense of 'us' established in research interactions, coproduced by myself and the interviewee, enabled perhaps by the myth of the global queer family. Such a "tacit assumption of sameness" (Hurd and McIntyre 1996:78), however, risks distancing both interviewer and interviewee from self-reflection. Consider research participant Augusta Wakari's following statement: "Ah for me it's- it's the same with you right? I mean somebody starts talking to me about their husbands and you know- I'm just like 'Okay this is just not my world, I can't *relate*, I just can't.'" Instead of asking why, exactly, a relation cannot be established to heterosexual women speaking about their husbands, I left this comment unquestioned. No doubt I was thinking, "Yes, I know exactly what you mean," which precluded an examination of the differences between my own and the interviewee's view on the issue.

Another effect of this assumed sameness with regard to sexuality was interviewees' interest in my own story. This interest was especially marked in the case of interviewees who had not talked much about their homosexuality before the research interview. In these interactions, our roles would typically be reversed towards the end of the interview, with interviewees asking about my 'coming out' (especially how my parents had reacted), my relationship (where mainly its duration and its character (monogamous?) were of interest), and occasionally about how my German partner dealt with certain immigration issues. These questions made me as vulnerable as my interviewees had been a moment ago when I was doing the asking. At the same time, I often emerged as a sort of 'expert' on lesbianism in these conversations. Interviewees who had not had much contact with Swiss lesbians before were particularly interested in hearing how Swiss lesbians 'are,' and my perspective was subsequently sometimes referred to as the norm against which interviewees then defined their own stories and relationships, sometimes from a somewhat defensive stance. I was moreover addressed as an 'expert' on legal aspects of queer migration. However, while the "tacit assumption of sameness" obstructed access to answers to questions never asked, the mechanisms addressed here – the reversal of roles and its implications on the power relations during the interview – can be exposed and analyzed.

The question of 'shared' queer positionality was further complicated by the flirtations and the negotiations of personal relationships before, during and after the interviews, which raises the issue of sexuality and erotic subjectivity in ethnographic fieldwork. The significance of this matter is of course not limited to queer researchers but concerns *any* ethnographer in the field, no matter their sexual preference. Nevertheless, this issue has largely been neglected, or actively ignored, by social anthropologists (Kulick and Wilson 1995, Lewin and Leap 1996) and geographers (Cupples 2002), who have both preferred to look at the "sex lives of others" while remaining "very tight-lipped about their own sexuality" (Kulick 1995:3). However, Julie Cupples contends that if it is true that, as queer geographers have suggested, "sexuality both produces space and permeates social life, then the fieldwork experience is no different" (Cupples 2002:382). In her article about sex and sexuality in geographical fieldwork, she highlights the im-

portance of considering sexuality and erotic subjectivity, especially in cross-cultural settings. For this she names three reasons. First, since a researcher cannot shed her sexuality when entering the field, sexuality should be acknowledged as a (often crucial) factor that influences the co-production of the social field in which empirical data is generated. Engaging with the issue of sexuality and erotic subjectivity in research encounters enables conceptualizations of positionalities that go beyond essentializing attributes (ethnicity, gender, and so on), which can moreover “challenge the distance between us and them” (ibid:383). In a similar vein, Don Kulick argues that addressing desire in the field is epistemologically productive, since an erotic relationship between the ethnographer and her subject(s), whether consummated sexually or not, represents “one especially poignant means through which anthropologists become aware of themselves as positioned, partial, knowing selves” (Kulick 1995:18). This especially also includes being aware of the “racist and colonialist conditions which make possible the unidirectional discourse about the sexuality of the people we study” (ibid:4). Second, Cupples argues that acknowledging that the *field itself* can be seductive allows for a conscious instrumentalization of this very seductiveness, which enables more powerful insights about it.<sup>9</sup> A third reason to engage with erotic subjectivity in the field, according to Cupples, is the fact that “we do not only position ourselves in the field, we are also positioned by those whom we research.” Even when as researchers we attempt to put aside our sexualities, we will always also be perceived as sexualized subjects (Cupples 2002:383). The data generated in this project provided ample evidence of this. It has been my intention to reflect on these dynamics throughout the analyses, but often felt that I have failed to exploit the full potential of this perspective.

In sum, the in/outsider position has to be understood as a complex and dynamic process rather than a fixed status (Naples 2003). I contend with Kulick that “individual relationships in the field are obviously the ongoing outcomes of dynamics that cannot be reduced to global political inequalities” (Kulick 1995:24). An ethnographer’s positionality is contingent on the meeting-up of two or more subjects (researcher and researched) with different stories-so-far and multiple identities, which in the context of fieldwork experience as a *lived experience* cannot be reduced to a dualistic opposition of Self and Other. ‘Lived experience’ thereby exceeds the notion of multiple identities since neither the researchers nor the researched can ever fully understand or know their own Selves and positionalities (Rose 1997).

Within the debate around the ethical problems inherent in ‘representing the Other,’ a recurring question has been whether it would be better for the feminist ethnographer

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9 This, however, calls for a high degree of self-reflexivity. As Cupples asks: “How do we know whether our sexual desire for the other constitutes a transcendence of self and other or is a result of racist fantasies, of wanting to possess the other?” (Cupples 2002:385). In this context, Kulick cautions that “it would be unfortunate if readers [of his edited book] were left with the impression that the purpose of this book is to encourage anthropologists to rush off into the field and have sex with their informants.” Asserting that the structural conditions that make an encounter (sexual or not) between an ethnographer and their subjects possible in the first place are highly unequal, Kulick reiterates that his point is “precisely that sexuality seems to have the potential of bringing into theoretical and political focus exactly those asymmetrically ordered conditions” (Kulick 1995:22).

to stay home. Queer theorists in particular have remained very reluctant to ‘get dirty’ in the field and continue to tend towards cultural studies approaches. Queer ethnography is a latecomer to queer studies exactly because it has been marginalized, and has marginalized itself, by framing ethnographic work focused on issues of sexuality as a “voyeuristic fantasy of the anthropologist as empiricist” (Weiss 2011:650). Drawing on Kath Weston, Margot Weiss argues that such a view “consolidates a data–theory divide that maps on to the social sciences–humanities divide in terms of academic labor,” which is reproductive of “the fantasy of data as ‘raw’ data, with no attention to the ways data are used, derived, or produced” (ibid). With Weiss and other queer scholars (e.g. Boellstorff 2007b, Dankwa 2014), in contrast, I advocate the inclusion of ethnographic studies in the production of queer theoretical knowledge. As Jasbir Puar points out, “given the figure of the ‘discerning gay traveler,’ queers of color returning to the homeland, and activist–tourist collaborations, the relationships among cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and modernity, as routed through sexual politics and pleasure, are clearly not as convenient as a distinction between staying home or not” (Puar 2002a:125–126).

In addition to my attempt to reflect on my own positionality in the field, I have aimed to apply research methods and writing techniques that work to ‘give a voice.’ Literally giving a voice is particularly difficult in a context in which interviews are not given in the mother language. This was one determining factor in the decision to apply reflexive photography, which works towards giving a *gaze* instead (see above). Indeed, the significance of creating a visual representation of one’s life-world as a *creative process* was positively reflected in many interviewees’ comments about the task. As to writing techniques, I strove to make this an open and transparent text (Decena 2012:4). Interviews are deliberately quoted at some length and are included in both the original language and my translation into English. This renders the translations and interpretations more transparent, and thus contestable, for those readers proficient in both languages. While the interpretations are ultimately my own, these techniques have been applied with the intention of working towards “ways of writing about lives so as to constitute them as less other” (Abu-Lughod 1991:149) and to produce ‘traitorous knowledges’ (Harding 1991) as a non-migrant ally.

I now proceed to the interview analyses.



## 5. Shifting Positions of the Sexual Self

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This chapter examines how queer migrant women perceive their sexuality to have changed through migration. In order to make sense of the development of their sexual Self, in their narratives, interviewees revisit the places they have inhabited in the past, renegotiating what they perceive to have been prevailing ideas about sexuality in these places, and their own position in relation to these norms both before and after migration. These revisitations are mutually constitutive with interviewees' shifting positionalities vis-à-vis the figure of the *lesbian*. From the narratives of queer migrant women, the lesbian appears as a central figure in dominant discourses around female same-sex sexuality in Switzerland, which forces them to position themselves in relation to it. This chapter focuses on these fractured processes of disidentification, also examining the ways in which these negotiations in themselves reproduce and subvert the figure of the lesbian.

The following discussion centers on what I call different 'biographical trajectories' that I have derived from the generated data. These trajectories represent polythetic or 'natural' types of certain aspects of participants' biographies, so called because they are based on empirical data rather than for instance theoretical reflection only. The aim of generating types is to reduce the complexity of real life by ordering the data in a specific way. Individual cases, or in this case, stories, are grouped together in such a way that within a group or 'type' these stories are as homogenous as possible with respect to one or several given aspects. At the same time, types should differ among each other as much as possible with respect to these same aspects. Polythetic types are never clear-cut in the sense that individuals or individual stories assigned to a type do not exhibit the exact same characteristics. Some stories fit more, some less into the defined type pattern (Kukartz 2006:4052-4023). In this chapter, the aspect ordering the data into types was the way in which interviewees' perception of their sexual Selves shifted through migration, as well as the conditions and effects of these shifts. Since they are about a dynamic rather than a fixed characteristic, I name these types 'biographical trajectories.'

Three such biographical trajectories were derived from the interviews. The first trajectory, "*Now I can say: I'm a lesbian,*" represents narratives of participants who have come to identify as lesbians while living in Switzerland. This includes participants who did

not engage in same-sex relationships before emigrating as well as participants who entertained same-sex relationships but were not embedded in a sexual minority subculture. The central focus is on the story of Teresa Ruiz, who never felt attracted to women before emigrating from Cuba, but who has since developed a lesbian identity in Switzerland. The second trajectory, *"I was totally shocked,"* engages with Siti Mohd Amin's narrative. Siti Mohd Amin had been a member of a Malaysian sexual minority community before leaving for Switzerland. While she has maintained connections to women-loving Malaysian women via transnational technologies after migration, in Switzerland she finds herself unable to create a place for herself in the local lesbian community. The third trajectory, *"It's like a stamp,"* discusses Efra Mahmoud's account. Efra Mahmoud felt attracted to women before emigrating from Egypt but had never acted on those feelings. Now she lives in a same-sex partnership in Switzerland, but she does not identify as a lesbian. Each of these sub-chapters draws on material from other biographies to complement the analysis of the themes around the shifting sexual positionalities that dominate these three 'lead' biographies.

It has to be noted that the boundary between those who did and did not engage in same-sex relationships before migration needs to be framed in terms of a continuum rather than a clear-cut line. Some had not been attracted to other women at all before migrating; others did not entertain same-sex relationships but retrospectively diagnose that they felt 'different' or like they 'did not fit in' all along; some did engage in intimacies with women but did not think of these acts and relationships as a valid alternative to the heteronormative biographies earmarked for them; and some identified as lesbian or another same-sex identity before migration and had circulated in these subcultures. Moreover, these trajectories are to be understood as ongoing developments rather than completed tales. A participant who did not identify as a lesbian at the time of the interview may have done so three years later.

### **5.1 "Now I can say I'm a lesbian": Becoming a Lesbian in Switzerland**

Many participants in this study had not thought of themselves in terms of same-sex desire or had not engaged in same-sex relationships before emigrating but came to identify as lesbians after migrating to Europe. This sub-chapter is concerned with this biographical trajectory. Working outwards from the story of Teresa Ruiz, the analysis extends to a broader examination of narratives about the assumption of a lesbian identity in Switzerland. This notably also includes a discussion of the accounts of interviewees who had already entertained same-sex relationships before emigration but were not embedded in a sexual minority subculture and understood their sexuality in terms of a practice rather than a social identity. This examination exposes the process of becoming a lesbian in Switzerland as one of personal development, learning and 'integration' on the one hand; and as a disciplinary process on the other.

### 5.1.1 Deskilling and Social Isolation: Arriving in Switzerland

Teresa Ruiz, aged thirty-four, lives in a small, rented house with a garden in a quiet neighborhood in Basel. She rents the house with her much younger partner Angela Hieber, a Swiss citizen. The women plan to have children together; Teresa Ruiz is already working on insemination with a gay donor couple. Once the child is born, the couple plan for Teresa Ruiz to take on the role of breadwinner while her partner looks after the child.

Teresa Ruiz came to Switzerland eleven years prior to the interviews. Her friends, she says, are Swiss – “all of them” as she emphasizes – but she identifies as “95 Prozent Kubanerin und fünf Prozent Baslerin” – “95 percent Cuban and five percent Basler.” She says she has come to a point where she not only misses Cuba when she is in Switzerland but also misses Switzerland when she is in Cuba, where she visits her family twice a year. Still, she feels at home in both places – she has “found the middle.”

Teresa Ruiz was the fourth of her siblings to migrate from Cuba to Switzerland. It had not been her intention to stay in Switzerland permanently; she had merely wanted to come and help her sister with her newborn child for a few weeks. However, while planning her trip to Switzerland, the Cuban government announced a travel ban for Cuban citizens with an academic education. Even before leaving for Switzerland, Teresa Ruiz therefore had a premonition that her life was about to change radically. Indeed, once in Switzerland she had three months to decide whether she wanted to stay permanently or to return to Cuba and not be able to leave her country anymore.

*Und ja, dann habe ich mich müssen entscheiden, mir ist wirklich schwer gefallen weil ich eigentlich so eine sagen wir mal Vorzugsbehandlung bekommen habe von meiner Mutter und dort hatte ich alles eigentlich meine Freundinnen- alles also, ich hatte wirklich nicht vor da zu bleiben, es ist fast ein Druck gewesen weil, eben mir ist, ja, wichtiger gewesen damals meine Freiheit und deshalb-. Aber das war wirklich für mich ein Dilemma weil ich, eben, es ist das erste Mal, das ich von meiner Mutter getrennt gewesen bin und [ich] hätte nie gedacht, dass ich das eigentlich überhaupt kann so ohne meine Mutter zu leben [...]. Und als ich dann die Entscheidung getroffen habe [...] da habe ich einfach drei Monate lang nur brüelt und brüelt.*

And yes, then I had to decide, it was really difficult for me because I had, let's say, a preferential treatment by my mother and I had everything there really, my friends – everything, I really had not intended to stay, it was almost a kind of pressure because, well, my freedom was more important to me at the time, and that's why-. That really was a dilemma for me because, well, it was the first time I was separated from my mother and [I] would never have thought that I would be able at all to live like that, without my mother [...]. And when I had taken the decision [...] for three months I just cried and cried.

—Teresa Ruiz

While the prospect of being able to help her mother financially also played a crucial role in her decision to stay, “freedom” is the keyword by which Teresa Ruiz judges her life in Switzerland throughout the interview; at first the freedom to move about as she likes, and later, when she came to identify as a lesbian, her sexual freedom.

So, Teresa Ruiz applied for, and obtained, asylum in Switzerland. After months of grief, she resolved to “just look forward” and “integrate” – a path that was riddled with obstacles. As her professional qualifications from Cuba were only partially recognized in Switzerland, at the age of twenty-four she had to relaunch her professional career “von Null” – “from scratch.” She describes the initial months at her new workplace that followed as “hell.” She felt lost culturally and struggled with the loathsome German language. But she steadily worked her way up. Eleven years later, at the time of the interviews, she is the proud and highly appreciated leader of two teams in a health institution in Basel.

Teresa Ruiz’ lengthy professional catch-up was accompanied by a private life marked by homesickness, a far-reaching social isolation and a series of unsatisfying relationships with men. Not yet knowing German, she sought friendship and intimacy among the Spanish and Italian communities in Basel. Since she did not want to be a permanent burden to her sister, she soon moved to a one-room apartment, but being used to living in a big family house, she detested living alone and ended up spending most of her time in her Spanish friend María García’s home; as Teresa Ruiz says, María García’s family virtually “adopted” her during this period.

I have introduced Teresa Ruiz’ work biography here for reasons beyond a mere contextualization of the case. On the one hand, Teresa Ruiz’ story underscores the critique by Swiss feminist migration scholars who have analyzed the impact deskilling has on immigrant women’s self-esteem and integration into the Swiss labor market (Baghdadi 2011, Riaño and Baghdadi 2007, Riaño et al. 2006). The bias of the sample analyzed in this study towards highly skilled women suggests that for many women interviewed here, this critique is particularly relevant and applicable. On the other hand, as will be shown in the following, the effects of discrimination against skilled migrant women in the labor market converges with issues the women face due to their sexual dissidence. This subjects them to a disproportionate risk of personal crises, especially in the first years after immigration.

### 5.1.2 “Now I can say: I’m a lesbian”: Coming Home to the Lesbian Identity

Upon arrival in Switzerland, Teresa Ruiz’ ideas about her future were still firmly anchored in the heteronormative ideal:

*Das Bild wo ich gehabt habe [in Kuba] ich täte meinen Ex-Freund heiraten, Kinder haben, wie meine Mutter einfach- leben [...] also so viele Vorstellungen hat man in Kuba nicht, einfach schaffen [=arbeiten] und, eben, Familie gründen, mehr gibt es wirklich nicht viel eben weil reisen kannst du ja nicht oder nur halt in Kuba und aber eben damals war ich mehr karriereorientiert, oder? Da wollte ich halt noch mehr mit den Karriere machen in Kuba. [Aber] das ist klar gewesen, Familie, Kinder, heiraten, ja das ist klar gewesen. Absolut.*

The image I had [in Cuba] was that I would marry my ex-boyfriend, have children, like my mother- just live [...] well you don’t have many ideas in Cuba, just work and, well, build a family, there’s not much more than that because you can’t travel or only within Cuba but at the time I was more career oriented, you know? I wanted to make more of



my career in Cuba. [But] that was clear, family, children, marrying, yes, that was clear. Absolutely.

—Teresa Ruiz

The possibility of marriage and children, two of the three central pillars in Teresa Ruiz' imagined future (the third being her career), became more and more remote as Teresa Ruiz went through a series of short and unhappy relationships with men in Switzerland. In a Spanish center in Basel, Teresa Ruiz eventually met a man with whom she started a relationship, but she told him from the start that he would have to accept the fact that her friend – “my María” – and her family come first. Although her relationship to María García was not sexual, Teresa Ruiz thus thought of this relationship in terms of a direct competition to her relationship with her male partner. However, at the time, she did not question her sexual preferences. When María García and her family returned to Spain, in her devastation, Teresa Ruiz made the rash decision to marry her boyfriend:

*Und dann später habe ich den Exmann kennen gelernt, und dann [...] sind wir zwei Jahre zusammen gewesen. [...] Und in diesen zwei Jahren ist auch meine María da gewesen. Habe dann nicht einmal was Bedeutendes gehabt mit meinem Freund einfach zusammen zu sein weil irgendwie ich habe gar kein Bock, mit ihm uhhh- und dann später als eben [Marías] Familie zurück nach Spanien gegangen sind, da habe ich gesagt 'Okay, gut, dann heirate ich halt.'*

And later I met the ex-husband and then [...] we were together for two years. [...] And in these two years my María was also here. I didn't even have something meaningful with my boyfriend, just being together because somehow- I have no desire with him to uhhh- and then later when [María's] family went back to Spain I said 'Okay, fine, I'll marry.'

—Teresa Ruiz

By marrying her boyfriend despite her obvious sexual disinterest and lack of devotion, she not only foreclosed her fear of another bout of social isolation but also gave in to the pressure exerted on her by her family: “*Und dann eben wahrscheinlich habe ich das gemacht was meine Familie wollte: (lahm) dass ich endlich heirate und Kinder habe und dann habe ich gesagt doch ist gut, dann machen wir halt.*” – “Probably I did what my family wanted: (lame) that I would finally marry and have kids and then I said fine, that's what we'll do.” However, soon after moving in together after the wedding, Teresa Ruiz' husband turned what she termed “primitive.” He showed vehement jealousy at his new wife's higher income and eventually attempted to forbid her from continuing school: “*Dann hat er mir wirklich wollen fast meine Freiheit rauben, da habe ich gedacht 'Spinnt du eigentlich?,' ich bin wirklich von Kuba weggegangen weil ich eben versucht [habe] meine Freiheit auch zu bekommen, also entschuldigung, nein, ohne mich. Ohne mich*” – “Then he really almost wanted to rob my freedom from me, then I thought ‘Are you out of your mind?’ I mean, I left Cuba because I was also trying to, well, get my freedom so excuse me, no, count me out. Count me out.”

The divorce lasted a year, during which Teresa Ruiz continued to look for intimacy: “*Und Teresa weiterhin auf der Jagd (lacht) – nach Männern, damals noch Männer. Und einer nach dem anderen [...] aber gar nicht mit Liebe zu tun [...] bis ich Angela kennen gelernt habe. Meine*

*Freundin.*” – “And Teresa was back on the prowl (laughs) – after men, back then, still men. And one after the other [...] but nothing at all to do with love [...] until I met Angela. My girlfriend.” Teresa Ruiz and Angela Hieber met at work: Angela, aged seventeen, was one of Teresa Ruiz’ trainees at a retirement home and soon developed a crush on her tutor. They became best friends: Angela Hieber supported Teresa Ruiz throughout her vicious divorce, and Teresa Ruiz told her friend everything about her various affairs with men. At this time women were still “out of the question” for Teresa Ruiz:

*Damals kamen für mich die Frauen nicht in Frage. Du kann dir nicht vorstellen die Einstellung die ich gehabt habe von Lesben. [...] Jetzt überleg ich mir das wirklich, echt krasse Vorstellungen die ich gehabt habe von- von- überhaupt von Homosexuelle weil eben das in Kuba ein Tabu ist. Immerhin von Schwulen wird noch geredet aber von Lesben? Die existieren gar nicht. Es gibt schon bestimmt Lesben in Kuba, Kubanerinnen, aber ich? Sicher nöd! Jesses näi! Das war meine Einstellung, wirklich krasse Einstellung. Also nicht mal ‘Okay...’, nää, nix rein gar nüt u nix.*

Back then women were out of the question for me. You cannot imagine the attitude I had towards lesbians. [...] Now I really think about it, really incredible ideas that I had about- about- about homosexuals in general because in Cuba this is a taboo. [A]t least, gay men are talked about, but lesbians? They don’t even exist. I’m sure there are probably lesbians in Cuba, Cubans, but me? Of course not! Jesus no! This was my attitude, really incredible attitude. Not even ‘Okay...’, nope, nothing at all whatsoever.  
—Teresa Ruiz

With respect to the visibility of queer people in her home city in Cuba, Teresa Ruiz was only aware of one gay (men’s) bar and the circulation of vulgar jokes and mischievous gossip about gay men. By contrast, there was a complete silence around lesbian desire, and lesbians and lesbian spaces were invisible. Lesbians did “not exist.” As Teresa Ruiz’ above statement exposes, however, this complete silence and invisibility was paradoxically coupled with a distinctly negative (non-)image of lesbians, a stigma that transpires from the interstices of the collective denial, substantiated in Teresa Ruiz’ own repulsion and dissociation from anything to do with same-sex desire among women. It is in this elusive but pervasive silence/repulsion that Teresa Ruiz later grounds her inability to identify as a lesbian when coming of age.

Such a deep silence around, and invisibility of, female same-sex desire, practices, relationships, and identities, paradoxically paired with a diffuse and negatively connoted knowledge of their existence, occurred across accounts. Several interviewees had to grapple with this “*tabuisierte Tabu*” – “tabooed taboo” (Ramiza Salakhova) when growing up in their home countries. Charlotta Sembiring’s following statement is a disturbing example of this paradoxical space that marks the taboo around female same-sex desire:

And I learned about sexuality more in Holland. Because in Indonesia, I didn’t have idea about ‘lesbian,’ right? Even the word lesbian – nobody talked to me about that. [...] That’s with my lesbianity as well, when I was in Indonesia, I [was] already married, I was falling in love with a girl from the church, I’m Catholic, officially here in Switzerland I pay [church taxes] (grins). So everybody knew actually, we were like, loving each other. We were acting like lovers but nobody was able to – or daring to – tell me. And

me I just didn't see it, I mean I was married, then she also had her boyfriend, I knew her family, I was visiting her family, staying with them, and even the mom was seeing us kissing. But [...] nobody just say 'Hey, what are you doing, are you lesbian?' No. It was really a shock for me, and you know, knowing that later, when I was in Holland like—because yeah, if someone was able to say that to me then I could act on that. You know because I was really comparing my marriage with this woman, but I didn't really have the chance and neither for her, because we were just like, everybody was accepting us like good friends, because in Indonesia it's common if you touch, holding hands, hugging, between women it's just normal.

—Charlotta Sembiring

The utterance “Nobody was able to – or daring to – tell me” crystallizes the paradox of the taboo around female same-sex desire: The term ‘daring’ carries with it Charlotta Sembiring’s reproach that the people around her *deliberately* kept information about her sexuality from her, be it for fear of offending her, of losing face, or of social sanctions. Quite differently, ‘not being able’ signifies that people effectively did not have the words or concepts for naming or even recognizing the nature of the two women’s connection. In either case, through her environment’s failure to call her attention to the possibility of considering same-sex desire as a fully valid alternative to heterosexuality, Charlotta Sembiring retrospectively feels bereft of the possibility to make a conscious choice with respect to her sexual orientation and her way of life. Her mimicry of the reaction she never got – “Hey, what are you doing, are you lesbian?” – indicates that in exchange for being presented with a concept to make sense of her feelings she would have accepted stigmatization, the evil twin attached to visibility in connection with discriminated minoritarian identities. Ironically, it is thereby exactly this broad social acceptance of very close and – within limits – also physical friendships among women that nips the visibility of ‘serious’ female same-sex desire, sexual acts, and relationships in the bud, and reinstates the heteronormative order.

Hence, looking back at their younger Selves from the perspective of now self-conscious lesbians, Teresa Ruiz and Charlotta Sembiring explain the fact that they did not recognize their same-sex desire earlier with the taboo around female same-sex desire in their families and circles, which rendered it impossible for them to understand their feelings in terms of same-sex desire.<sup>1</sup>

A few months into their friendship, on Angela Hieber’s initiative, she and Teresa Ruiz engaged with each other erotically one night. Overwhelmed and confused by her own desire, Teresa Ruiz rebuffed her friend: “*Es war wirklich ein Kampf. [...] Und dann habe ich gesagt ‘Nein. Ich bin nicht lesbisch. [...] Ich bin nicht lesbisch, ich stehe auf Männer.’ [...] Aber die körperliche Anziehung war waaahnsinnig, das habe ich wirklich noch nie so stark gefühlt, wirklich noch nie*” – “It was really a fight. [...] And then I said ‘No. I am not lesbian [...] I am not

1 As discussed in Chapter 3.3.4, and as emerges in interviewees’ narratives here, the invisibility and silence of female same-sex desire are ambivalent. While advocating for the acknowledgement of non-Western configurations of desire that are not organized around an identity and a coming out, David A. B. Murray (2011) warns against romanticizing silences and invisibilities around same-sex desires as they often remain related to homophobias.

lesbian, I fancy men.' [...] But the physical attraction was *iiimmense*, I have never felt this as strongly before, really never." Unable to ignore her awakened desire, Teresa Ruiz eventually yielded to Angela Hieber's prompts and agreed to become involved with her, under the strict condition that no one learn about the nature of their relationship. Nevertheless, they moved in together. One and a half years into their secret relationship, Teresa Ruiz realized that she wanted to have children. Despite Angela Hieber's pleas, it was beyond Teresa Ruiz' imagination to have children with a woman, and she left her partner – although from Teresa Ruiz' point of view they had never really been together in the first place.

*Und dann habe ich sie verlassen. Habe gesagt 'Nein, wirklich nicht.' Und es ist mir wirklich so schlecht gegangen wirklich schlecht schlecht schlecht, und dann habe ich müssen zum Psychologen gehen und das Ganze wirklich anzuschauen. [...] Und dann trotzdem habe ich halt dann mit einem Mann etwas angefangen, aber ich habe nicht mal können mit dem schlafen, he, das chasch vergässe, he? [...] Das mit dem Psychologen hat mir wirklich sehr viel geholfen, und jetzt kann ich auch sagen 'Ich bin Lesbe.' [...] also ich bin keine Männerhasserin, das überhaupt nicht, aber ich möchte wirklich nicht mehr eine Beziehung führen mit einem Mann. Deshalb fühle ich mich auch als Lesbe.*

And then I left her. I said 'No, definitely not.' And I felt so bad really bad bad bad and then I had to go to the psychologist and to really look at the whole thing. [...] And then in spite of that I started something with a man, but I couldn't even sleep with him, eh, you can forget about that, you know? [...] The thing with the psychologist really helped me a lot, and now I can also say 'I'm a lesbian.' [...] well I'm not a man-hater, not at all, but I really don't want to be in a relationship with a man anymore. This is why I also feel as a lesbian.

—Teresa Ruiz

In this key sequence, Teresa Ruiz moves from rejecting her same-sex desire to identifying as a lesbian. Her statement grounds the homophobia she has been directing at herself in the circulating stereotype of the man-hating lesbian, from which she explicitly distances herself. Facilitated by a psychiatrist, Teresa Ruiz learns to acknowledge her same-sex desire and to frame it in the context of a positively valued homosexual identity. The account conveys a sense of arrival and homecoming. As Teresa Ruiz later says to a friend: "*Jetzt weiss ich was gut ist*" – "Now I know what's good." Importantly, however, the formulation of the lesbian identity becomes possible through the facilitation of a psychologist. Teresa Ruiz' awakened desire for the same sex hence becomes forged into a 'Swiss' lesbian identity through the thoroughly Western institution of psychology (see below).

### 5.1.3 "I really am a lesbian of Switzerland!": Cultural and Sexual Identity

Just before our second interview, Teresa Ruiz had made a new acquaintance. Visibly agitated, she relates the story of Sophia Cruz, another Cuban woman who also lives in the Basel area. Sophia Cruz grew up in a city that has a reputation for being the most conservative city in Cuba, and yet from her early teens she had been a member of a

thriving underground lesbian community there. “She was really, in Cuba, a lesbian.” Teresa Ruiz is incredulous as she describes a coming of age that could not have been more different than her own, involving wild parties, promiscuity, and even a specifically Cuban lesbian chat site. “*Das wusste ich nicht dass es überhaupt so etwas gibt in Kuba. [...] Und wie sie sich einfach so, richtig, verhalten hat in Kuba und dass es auch Frauenpartys gibt, und es ist wirklich ein Weltbild das nicht geht in Kuba*” – “I didn’t know that there is such a thing in Cuba. [...] And the way she, really, behaved in Cuba and that there were women’s parties, and it is really a worldview that doesn’t work in Cuba.”

Teresa Ruiz is both fascinated and shocked by Sophia Cruz’ tales, which she explains in cultural terms:

*Aber die Geschichte die sie mir erzählt hat ist so- also ich sag- ich bin wirklich eine Lesbe von der Schweiz. Absolut. [...] Aber weisst du was ich am Ende gesagt habe? Da habe ich gesagt ‘Ich bin froh dass ich mich Lesbe gemacht habe da in der Schweiz’ (lächelt). Weil irgendwie - also so wie sie es mir erzählt hat, würde überhaupt nicht mit mir passen. [...] Weil eben, alles mit alle sind und ich weiss es nicht, gibt kein Konzept von Treue und ja, wenn dir etwas gefällt obwohl du eine Beziehung hast ja ho halloo?! Das würde überhaupt nicht mit mir passen. Und ja, sie ist eine, die ü.b.e.r fünfzehn Frauen gehabt hat! Also entschuldigung, kannst du dir das vorstellen?*

But the story she told me is so- well I say- I really am a lesbian of Switzerland. Absolutely. [...] But do you know what I said in the end? I said ‘I’m glad that I have made myself lesbian in Switzerland’ (smiles). Because somehow- well the way she told me, it would not be like me at all. [...] Because well, everyone is with everyone and I don’t know, no concept of fidelity and yes, if you like something even though you have a relationship, yes ho halloo?! That would not be like me at all. And yes, she is someone who had o.v.e.r fifteen women! Well excuse me, can you imagine that?

—Teresa Ruiz

Two dichotomous figures of the lesbian emerge here: the promiscuous and philandering ‘Cuban’ lesbian exploring her same-sex desires in rampant semi-legal underground parties (paradoxically oddly reminiscent of the earlier Teresa Ruiz on the “prowl” for men) whom Teresa Ruiz distances herself from; and, on the other hand, the contained, faithful ‘Swiss’ lesbian Teresa Ruiz identifies with now, who lives in a stable and monogamous relationship, who conforms to traditional gender roles by establishing a nuclear family with a clear-cut division of labor, and who generally leads an orderly, rather conservative life.

Sophia Cruz’ tales shatter the image Teresa Ruiz had constructed of her home city in the first interview, in which lesbians did “not exist.” As pointed out above, Teresa Ruiz’ explanation as to why she had not developed a lesbian identity in Cuba hinged on the seemingly objective ‘fact’ of the invisibility of lesbians there. Sophia Cruz’ tales expose this ‘fact’ as subjective experience, uncovering Teresa Ruiz’ inability to see lesbians in Cuba as an effect of her biography and social positioning instead: due to illness, Teresa Ruiz spent a great deal of time at home, embedded in a family in which female same-sex desire was silenced and therefore unavailable to her as a concept with which to frame her developing sexuality.

What is more, Teresa Ruiz' reaction to Sophia Cruz' revelations is highly ambivalent: In her incredulity, she spontaneously expresses regret about having "missed out" on something, wondering what could have been had she not been subject to long bouts of illness but instead attended one of the sports schools her sisters went to, which according to Sophia Cruz were veritable lesbian strongholds. Then she immediately corrects herself, repeating this would not have been "like her," concluding that exploring her same-sex desire in the lesbian underground in her city would have forced her into practices she does not feel would have been in line with her personality at the time. But her curiosity remains sorely piqued, and she is burning to go to Cuba and see with her own eyes the lesbian spaces described by Sophia Cruz, of which she was completely unaware when growing up, but which according to Sophia Cruz do in fact exist.

Sophia Cruz' narrative fundamentally destabilizes the way in which Teresa Ruiz had previously made sense of her sexual biography – namely, that she had not identified as a lesbian in Cuba because there were no (visible) lesbians in the social environment in which she grew up. This exposes how central a stringent account of how one has come to identify as a lesbian is to the lesbian identity. Moreover, it is not only Teresa Ruiz' conceptualization of the development of her sexual identity in the past that is called into question by the figure of the promiscuous 'Cuban' lesbian, but also its development in the *future*:

*'Das hast du im Blut! Das wird noch kommen!' [sagte Sophia] Da habe ich [Teresa] gesagt 'Nein' (streckt den Finger hoch und winkt ihn hin und her) 'Sicher nöd, ich bin seit fünf Jahren mit einer Frau, mit die Frau bin ich glücklich und die Frau bleib ich.'*

'You have this in your blood! It'll come!' [said Sophia] Then I [Teresa] said 'No' (lifts her finger and wags it left to right) 'Definitely not, I have been together with a woman, I am happy with this woman and I will stay with this woman.'

—Teresa Ruiz

Sophia Cruz' quip places a dormant Cuban (promiscuous) lesbian within Teresa Ruiz, an idea by which she feels threatened. No matter whether Sophia Cruz understands "blood" in terms of genetics or upbringing, her jibe exposes the assumption that an individual cannot escape the way she is shaped by the environment she grew up in, and that the kind of lesbianism Sophia Cruz herself lived in Cuba naturally grew from how Cubans essentially *are* and how Cuba *is* – there seems to be no other way in which a Cuban can be a lesbian. The insinuation renders Teresa Ruiz' adopted 'Swiss' lesbian identity – as ethnicized (i.e. white) as its Cuban counterpart – brittle and superficial because Teresa Ruiz assumed it in a culture that is here postulated as incompatible with her own cultural background (or genes). Instead of understanding their divergent sexual biographies in terms of personal circumstances (such as Teresa Ruiz' illness) or personal characters, choices, and preferences, the two women hence frame the meeting of their respective sexualities in terms of a cultural clash, reiterating essentializing ideas about how culture, ethnicity, and sexuality mutually constitute each other.

This juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory sexualities/cultures becomes even more complicated when adding the fact that despite Sophia Cruz' own non-ambiguous youth, her lesbian identity has remained precarious: According to Teresa Ruiz (Sophia

Cruz declined to participate in the study), Sophia Cruz has been living with a husband and children in Switzerland for a few years, but is now in the process of divorcing her husband after realizing that she does not want to live with a man anymore. This suggests that the two women's conditioning (such as e.g. the pressure to get married and have children) and biographies are in fact more closely related than their playful dispute might suggest.

#### 5.1.4 Learning to Be a 'Good Lesbian': Sexuality, Citizenship, and 'Integration'

The vehemence with which Teresa Ruiz both asserts her 'Swissness' and rejects the insinuated dormant 'Cubanness' of her lesbianism can be addressed by reading the narrative of how she came to identify as a (Swiss) lesbian through her *integration narrative*. At a specific point in her life, Teresa Ruiz explicitly resolved to "integrate" into Swiss society, and the strategies she devised to reach this end crucially structure her narrative, which is largely the story of a successful assimilation project. Her account associates the eventual success of her 'integration' with three particular developments: learning the Swiss language, re-launching her professional career, and becoming a lesbian. In other words, not only Teresa Ruiz' personal preferences are called into question in her discussions with Sophia Cruz, but also her *sexual citizenship* in Switzerland and thus the success of her migration project. For Teresa Ruiz, learning to be a 'good lesbian' is a component of becoming a 'good Swiss citizen.' This mutual constitution of normative sexual identity and citizenship is the focus of the following discussion.

I use the expression "*learning to be a 'good lesbian'*" with deliberation. As the analysis of the biographical material – also taken from stories other than Teresa Ruiz' – presented in the following suggests, assuming a 'Swiss' lesbian identity entails both an intellectual and an emotional effort that includes the negotiation of negative lesbian stereotypes, the positive reclamation of a lesbian identity, and the revision or dismissal of previous sexual practices and relationships. These negotiations expose the figure of the lesbian as a product of dominant discourses around sexuality in Switzerland – a set of ideas, practices, preferences, tastes, and beliefs regarding sexuality that systematically constructs the lesbian subject, her place in Swiss society, and the positions from which she can(not) speak.

Becoming a lesbian was often enabled by embodied 'catalysts' such as institutional and private facilitators/enforcers/teachers who drove interviewees' process of becoming a 'good lesbian,' as well as through the sexualization of everyday spaces and places. In Teresa Ruiz' case it was an institutional catalyst, her psychologist, who led her to acknowledge her same-sex desires and eventually to her identification as a lesbian – "the psychologist really helped me a lot, and now I can also say 'I'm a lesbian.'" This account reveals that psycho-therapeutic practice does not merely act as a vehicle for the homosexual patient to reach the point where she is able to acknowledge the 'fact' of a pre-existing lesbian identity, but instead emerges as the very site of production and perpetuation of bounded sexual identities. Teresa Ruiz' lesbian identity is therefore not pre-determined, but rather *comes into being* in the very moment she states "I'm a lesbian" on the couch.

Other interviewees themselves frame their experiences undergoing psychotherapy as a milestone in their process of integrating into Swiss society, because they perceive psychotherapy to be a fundamentally Western phenomenon and practice per se. As Charlotta Sembiring remarks, “we actually didn’t need any psychiatrist [in Indonesia], because we have our friends.” To her, having had to go to a professional to process her nervous breakdown is evidence of the advanced fragmentation, isolation, and individualization in European culture. Undergoing psychotherapy hence functions as a rite of passage in one’s transformation into a Europeanized subject that thinks of herself, her social environment and her place in it in highly specific ways.<sup>2</sup>

A second institutional site of production of the ‘good lesbian’ that has emerged from the narratives is social scientific research, with myself in the position of the researcher as its catalyst. Several interviewees pointed out that discussing their sexuality in the interviews had helped them to ‘clarify things.’ As Beatriz Kraiss said at the end of our first interview:

*BK: Ah, j’étais nerveuse [de l’entretien] pour rien.*

*TB: Tu étais nerveuse, oui c’est parfois les gens ils pensent qu’ils peuvent dire des choses qui sont fautes.*

*BK: Non non mais c’était même pas ça, c’était justement le fait peut-être de devoir parler de choses qui- ouais qui maintenant sont plus facile mais c’est pas- je suis pas encore- je suis bien dans ma vie tout ça, j’accepte tout, mais des fois c’est quand même difficile de parler, alors j’avais juste une petite appréhension de ce côté là (rit).*

BK: Ah, I was nervous [about the interview] for nothing.

TB: You were nervous, yes sometimes people think that they can say things that are wrong.

BK: No no but it was not even that, it was just maybe the fact to have to talk about things that- yes that are now easier but this is not- I’m not yet- I’m good in my life and everything, I accept everything, but it is sometimes still difficult to speak, this is why I was just a little bit apprehensive concerning that (laughs).

—Beatriz Kraiss

Beatriz Kraiss had not talked about her homosexuality openly before and consciously exposed herself to this interview situation to process her continued unease vis-à-vis her homosexuality. At the end of the second interview she explicitly framed her participation as therapeutic:

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2 A disturbing perspective on racialized Others undergoing psychotherapy in Switzerland is further the deep historical implication of the discipline and institution of psychology in the production, control, and destruction of these very racialized Others. As Graham Richards notes: “[How Psychology has historically engaged with the ‘race’ issue] is a central aspect of the history of ‘race’ and racism, for it has largely fallen within Psychology’s province to address such matters as whether ‘race differences’ of a psychological kind exist, the nature of racial attitudes and ‘race prejudice,’ and, more recently, the extent to which unacknowledged ethnocentrism distorts theory and practice in the human sciences” (Richards 2012:xiii). Psychology as a discipline and institution and psychoanalytical practice in Switzerland remain to be analyzed from a postcolonial/critical race perspective.



BK: [Concernant sa participation dans la recherche :] C'était un plaisir (rit). C'était une bonne thérapie.

TB: Une thérapie?

BK: De parler, ça fait du bien je trouve (rit)

TB: Tu pensais que c'est comme une thérapie?

BK: Non non non non, mais je dis ça fait du bien de parler [...], quand on parle que ce soit avec Josephine [son partenaire] ou avec ma famille ou avec les amis, je trouve qu'y a pas la même impartialité, je dis le fait de parler à quelqu'un qui tu ne connais pas, alors t'as pas d'attentes, t'as pas de jugement, comme ça alors ça fait du bien, ouais, de parler de tout ça comme ça. [...] Voilà quoi ça fait une bonne thérapie. Tu devrais faire psychologue (rit).

BK: [About participating in the research] It was a pleasure (laughs). It was a good therapy.

TB: A therapy?

BK: To speak, this feels good I think (laughs).

TB: You thought it's like a therapy?

BK: No no no no, but I'm saying it feels good to speak [...], if you speak be it to Josephine [her partner] or with my family or with friends, I think that there is not the same impartiality, I'm talking about speaking to someone you don't know, you don't have any expectations, you don't have any judgment, like that that feels good, yes, to speak about everything like that. [...] So this made a good therapy. You should become a psychologist (laughs).

—Beatriz Kraiz

This shows that the research interview setting also acts as a platform for participants to practice speaking about homosexuality, which Beatriz Kraiz still feels self-conscious about discussing in other contexts. Narrating her story serves her to further understand, express, and strengthen her self-conception as a lesbian, also actively working on what she perceives as a 'dent' in her lesbian identity, that is, her continued reticence to speak openly about her sexual orientation. From this, the 'coming out' once more emerges as a vital and integral part of what it means to be a 'good lesbian.' The effect of this research thus remains ambivalent: As a platform for self-reflection and acknowledgment, it sometimes seems to have had an empowering effect for some participants. At the same time, it also represented a site for the reproduction of sexual norms (and hence also processes of othering). This was clearly influenced by my own positionality as a white Swiss lesbian. Towards the end of the interviews, I was frequently asked questions about my own 'coming out' story and life situation, and my answers often served as a point of reference against which interviewees then positioned themselves.

That being said, becoming a 'good lesbian' was not solely tied to human catalysts but also occurred through the sexualization of everyday *spaces and places*. Charlotta Sembiring frames Amsterdam, the first place she lived after emigrating from Indonesia, as an all-encompassing homosexual *learning space*. In the following excerpt she explains why she believes she learned more about (homo)sexuality in Holland than in Indonesia:

So in Holland [...] I'd see people meeting: lesbian couples, gay couples, hetero people. There are so many books in the public libraries. You see movies. And cafés. [...] It was

just really great, even though at that time I didn't fall in love with a woman, but it's so much space for learning in this particular spot. [...] I learned really a lot there, also for myself, my sexuality, my life, and- also from the study, so that's how I think I fall in love with Holland.

—Charlotta Sembiring

A 'lesbian flâneur' (Munt 1995), Charlotta Sembiring absorbs images, texts, and places, and revels in the possibilities opening up before her. An excited traveler, she gazes at the cultural novelty, still reluctant to engage but already playing with the thought. The figure of the lesbian is conveyed by the assemblage of the spaces and places making up Amsterdam, saturated with sexual innuendo, which allow Charlotta to let herself be surprised by the sight of a women's café or a lesbian couple kissing in the streets or, alternatively, to actively look for lesbian books or movies.

These ways in which institutional spaces and practices, human catalysts, and sexualized inscriptions of public spaces and objects coagulate to produce the field that enables/pressures queer migrants to become 'good lesbians' will be revisited from different perspectives throughout this study. Notably, this mechanism will be viewed from the perspective of asylum procedure (Chapter 8), in which coercion is tied to the process of becoming a lesbian, and in Chapter 5.2.1, which shows that even for women who already identified as lesbians or with another same-sex sexual identity when coming to Switzerland, becoming a 'Swiss' lesbian is a prerequisite for social inclusion.

### 5.1.5 Incongruent Desires and Genders

In Cuba, Teresa Ruiz led an entirely heteronormative life. She lived and identified as a heterosexual and did not miss anything. By contrast, other interviewees who did not have a 'consolidated' same-sex sexual identity before they emigrated experienced a sense of incongruity and isolation up to the point of their departure, often without ever having engaged in sexual relationships with other women prior to migrating. Their narratives tie these feelings to a sense that their desires were 'wrong,' but also to a sense of confinement by narrow and poorly-fitting gender roles. The desire to explore these more or less vague feelings of alienation was sometimes one of the principal reasons why interviewees emigrated. From their current perspective, homosexuality serves as an explanation for this sense of difference, which is now understood to have been significantly aggravated by the lack of queer role models available to them when they were coming of age.

A close reading of how these interviewees explain their sense of difference allows us to develop an understanding of how they conceptualize their (homo)sexuality now and how they perceive their sexuality to have changed through migration.

As Beatriz Kraiss explains why she left Brazil as a young woman:

*Je me suis toujours sentie un peu différent de mes copines au Brésil, c'est vrai que j'étais jamais très à l'aise. [À] l'époque je pensais pas comme ça, [mais] maintenant je me dis que je suis partie du Brésil pour venir ici et vraiment découvrir mon homosexualité, pouvoir être à l'aise avec ça. Mais à l'époque je me sentais pas-justement j'aimais beaucoup le sport alors j'étais tout le temps en training et en baskets; mes copines elles préféraient apprendre à se maquiller à se coiffer*

*(petit rire) et ça c'est vrai que ça faisait vraiment un gros décalage. Et je pense que c'est aussi pour ça – pour essayer de me lâcher dans le sens de découvrir toutes ces choses – que je voulais partir du Brésil.*

I always felt a little different from my peers in Brazil, it's true that I never really felt at ease. Back then I didn't think like that, but now I'm telling myself that I went away from Brazil to come here and really discover my homosexuality, to be able to feel at ease with this. But at the time, I didn't feel- I just liked sports very much so I was training all the time and wearing sneakers; my [female] friends preferred to learn how to put on make-up and to do their hair (small laugh) and it's true that this really produced a big discrepancy. And I think that it's also because of that – to try and to cut myself loose in the sense of discovering all these things – that I wanted to leave Brazil.

—Beatriz Kraiss

It is through the lens of a self-conscious post-migration lesbian identity that Beatriz Kraiss makes sense of her feelings of misplacement and exclusion when growing up. It is only after falling in love with a woman in Switzerland (*“la première femme que je suis tombée amoureuse et que j'ai nommé ‘Je suis amoureuse’”* – “the first woman I fell in love with and labelled as ‘I'm in love’”) that things she had long felt *“commençaient à avoir des noms”* – “started to have names.”

Beatriz Kraiss' previous sense of unease is grounded in narrow gender roles and bodily visual norms and performances. As an adolescent, she liked sports, preferred to dress casually, and felt baffled by her peers' stereotypically feminine fashion interests. Her discomfort with these gendered expectations now serve Beatriz Kraiss as proof that she has in fact always been a lesbian but needed physical and cultural distance from Brazil to be able to “name” her inclination. In other words, in the European lesbian identity she has found a social home that allows her to align her desires, bodily needs and gendered performance with a bounded social identity. In other areas of life, her migration narrative is also framed as a story of *réussite* – achievement. In the face of the adversities and the racisms inherent in Swiss immigration procedure, Beatriz Kraiss has managed to establish a good life by studying, obtaining a respectable job as a sports instructor, establishing a fulfilling relationship with her Swiss partner, and installing herself in a spacious apartment. The enormous amount of work and energy that have gone into accomplishing these things are a great source of pride to her, and this is key to her narrative. She has arrived: *“C'est vrai que je me sens bien”* and *“c'est vrai que je me suis bien intégrée”* – “It's true that I feel good” and “it's true that I have integrated myself well,” she states. Within this integration story, coming to terms with her dissident sexuality and assuming a lesbian identity are framed as central milestones.

The process of acknowledging that her attraction to women is an integral part of who she is has been arduous. Rehearsing Diane Fuss' observation (1991) that to come out means to simultaneously call into being a closet, being able to give “names” to things long felt, was immediately paired with repulsion and shame:

*Au début c'était difficile, j'avais honte, bon je peux même pas dire honte de quoi, c'était honte de tout quoi, honte de moi, j'ai dit 'C'est pas normal je dois pas,' honte que- justement par rapport à ma famille j'ai dit 'Alors comment je fais,' honte par rapport à tout quoi- j'ai dit 'Comment si*

*les gens ils découvrent,' ouais c'était une honte générale. Oui j'avais honte, oui. J'ai mis du temps à être à l'aise et pouvoir dire 'Oui ma copine, ma compagne' ou quelque chose comme ça, j'ai mis du temps oui.*

In the beginning it was difficult, I was ashamed, okay I can't say ashamed of what, I was ashamed of everything, ashamed of myself, I said 'It's not normal I can't,' ashamed that- concerning my family I said 'Well how do I do this?' ashamed of everything, I said 'What if people find out,' yes it was a general feeling of shame. Yes, I was ashamed, yes. It took time to be at ease and to be able to say 'Yes my girlfriend, my partner' or something like that, it took time, yes.

—Beatriz Kraiss

Augusta Wakari's tale also accords a central place in her narrative to the extent to which migration has enabled her to reflect on and renegotiate her gender positionality, but offers a different perspective on the issue. When living in Indonesia, Augusta Wakari occupied the masculine role in the relationships she had with women. Although in Indonesia, like in all of Asia, a host of identities exist that are organized around female masculinities, Augusta Wakari was not aware of any of these descriptors when she came of age.<sup>3</sup> She states that generally "Indonesia neeeever gave you a lesbian thing, never! NEVER! see those kind of thing until I was I don't know how old but- big enough, I think yeah high school or something like that." This was despite the fact that she had her first serious sexual relationship at the age of ten with a woman twice her age. As she grew older she was increasingly pushed into the masculine role in relationships, while maintaining parallel "fake" relationships with men because "society wants me to be with men."

They couldn't picture two women- now they picture me as a man! The people. They even call me instead of sister a brother! So they really picture me as a man. And also instead of saying I'm beautiful they will say I'm handsome. [...] They just still don't know how to put two women together. [...] Instead of saying that I'm the wife they will say that I'm the husband you know those kind of thing. [...] They just don't know how to address that, you know?

—Augusta Wakari

Augusta Wakari retrospectively diagnoses the unthinkability of female same-sex desire in what she refers to as "Asian" contexts to have been so profound that it was easier for people to change a person's sex (sic) than to acknowledge female same-sex desire in its own right. Looking back, Augusta Wakari states that this distinctly masculine role had not come to her naturally:

It is quite tiring because I am not a man! If I have to be like man all the time, especially in Asian relationship, a man have to carry, a man have to do this, a man have to do the

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3 Female same-sex sexualities in Indonesia are comparatively well researched (e.g. Blackwood 2010, see also Blackwood 2005, Boellstorff 2005 and 2007, Murray 2001, Offord and Cantrell 2001, Sulandari 2009, Wieringa 2006). This body of work also describes a variety of identities related to female masculinities, which differ significantly across regions and class.

hard work man have to tatata- I need a pampering as well! I need to be taken care of as well you know? [...] In Asian way the man work and the women stay at home and do all the work, but I am not like that. I always cook, I always take care of the house so-. And in sex it's exactly like that. You know (laughs). At the end I ignore what I need. [...] But they [her girlfriends in Indonesia] just don't know, most of them they just don't know how to do it. And at the end they're not ready for that and I'm scared if I tell them what to do, see?

—Augusta Wakari

For Augusta Wakari, the masculine role she performed in same-sex relationships was hence assigned rather than chosen. The narrow interpretation of female masculinity she was expected to inhabit left her unable to articulate her more complex gender positionality and sexual desires and regulated her most intimate practices. This left her actual preferences, needs, and weaknesses unacknowledged beneath a shell of appointed masculinity.

Like the two other masculine Southeast Asian participants in this study, Augusta Wakari describes her Asian girlfriends as 'heterosexual': "And all my girlfriend are hetero. Normal in Asia. It's normal. You can only have hetero women as your girlfriend." According to these participants' accounts, girlfriends identifying as heterosexual ranked their relationships to masculine women inferior to relationships to 'real' men but accepted masculine women as makeshift lovers until the "right guy" turned up (Jasmine Sieto), or until they considered it time to transit to their designated role as heterosexual wives and mothers (Siti Mohd Amin). Augusta Wakari's statement that "you can only have hetero women as your girlfriend" at the same time raises the question who "you" is, and how "hetero" is to be defined. In her narration "you" points to women who assume – or are assigned – a masculine role, and, importantly, who conceptualize their same-sex desires as an intrinsic and immutable part of who they are. This is contrasted with the "heterosexual" girlfriends – feminine women who frame their same-sex relationships as a temporary arrangement before pivoting into the inevitable heteronormative biography assigned to them.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, designating feminine partners as "heterosexual" forecloses a full validation and originality of same-sex intimacy while at the same time emphasizing the masculine partner's commitment, which is rendered vulnerable and inferior.<sup>5</sup>

This is the backdrop against which Augusta Wakari frames her migration as a narrative of sexual *self-realization* and *recovery*, juxtaposing the 'Asian' hetero/homonormativity in which she grew up with 'European' queerness and liberalism. As an adolescent in Indonesia, she was the troublemaker in her family. The question of what she was going to do with her life if she was not allowed to express and act on the feelings she had for women nagged at her, and she wondered whether she was eventually going to have to

4 As Yuenmei Wong (2012) points out in reference to the Malaysian context, these women sometimes also identify as bisexual.

5 Augusta Wakari's experiences resonate with Alison Murray's observation that in Indonesia "in the simple terms of popular magazines, the butch (*sentul*) is more than 50 percent lesbian, or incurably *lesbi*, while the femme (*kantil*) is less than 50 percent lesbian, or potentially normal" (Murray 2001:169).

follow “what they want me to be.” In their helplessness, her parents blackmailed her girlfriends and at the age of twenty sent her to Switzerland to separate her from her girlfriend. After three years of professional training, Augusta Wakari decided to stay in Switzerland: “I love my freedom,” she assesses, while in Indonesia “you cannot be yourself.”

Augusta Wakari’s assertion that the masculinity she performed in Indonesia had been imposed upon her rather than freely chosen gains clarity in the context of her relationship with her Belgian partner, Joëlle Bregnard, who emerges as a catalyst in Augusta Wakari’s process of becoming a ‘good lesbian.’ The attendant process of (un)learning reaches into the most intimate spaces. In the following quote, Augusta Wakari speaks about sexual practices:

And I’m ignoring myself so long, what I need, what satisfied me, and I learned slooowly with Joëlle again. She’s very passionate and she keeps on te[[ling me] ‘Hey, we have the same right! Hey we have the same- in everything! You don’t have to do more than me!’ [...] And I start learning- start [at] the beginning again: okay. But still she has to remind me all the time.

—Augusta Wakari

This statement points to a shift in Augusta Wakari’s gender positionality from stereotypical masculinity to one that is more individual and complex. On the one hand, she continues to understand herself as masculine in many ways. As she says to her partner with regard to her participation in a drag king workshop: “Why should I pay eighty franks just to be like I already am?” On the other hand, she experiences it as a relief to be able to let go of the pressure to conform to gender and sexual practices that she has come to recognize as imposed and damaging.

Her process of unlearning does not remain restricted to sexual practices and gender roles but extends to other aspects of her relationship with her partner, especially *trust*. Having been left for men by several of her ‘heterosexual’ feminine partners in Indonesia, she finds it very hard to trust a partner:

Nobody ever show me before that ‘It is okay, you are safe, it is okay to trust.’ [...] It is still in a very early stage, but I also explain to her ‘Please, I am very sorry because I’m not really good in this kind of thing, you know?’ [...] And to trust people it takes really a long period of time for me.

—Augusta Wakari

Although a decade older than her partner, Augusta Wakari clearly positions herself as her partner’s disciple, learning from her how to build a stable monogamous relationship, how to trust a partner, how to claim one’s rights, and how to become aware of, acknowledge, and act on one’s sexual needs. Her narrative frames this as a process of physical and psychological *recovery*. Importantly, this recovery hinges on reflecting upon and gradually abandoning her former (Indonesian) sexuality. Indeed, the sum of her same-sex relationships in Indonesia are dismissed as unhealthy as Augusta Wakari wipes clean the whiteboard of her sexual experiences and emotional imprints in Indonesia: “I start [at] the beginning again.”

Looking back, the interviewees subsumed under the trajectory “Now I can say I am a lesbian” retrospectively tie their sense of difference and alienation to their sense of having ‘wrong’ feelings and desires and to the social pressure to adhere to confining gender roles. This sense of alienation is framed as a prominent reason to migrate. Explained by their homosexuality post-migration only, it was often the expectation to perform heteronormative femininities that triggered a sense of incongruity when growing up and coming of age. Some narratives are thereby organized around a rhetoric of discovery, implying that one’s homosexuality had always been present but could be “named” after emigration only. Others, like Augusta Wakari, assess that they were trapped in homonormative *female masculinities*,<sup>6</sup> which, while corresponding with their self-conceptualizations to some extent, they have experienced as lacking the complexity and flexibility to accommodate all aspects of their personalities.

It is important to note that the trope of retrospective interpretation of more or less vague feelings of misplacement connected to heteronormative gender roles is not unique to queer *migrant* biographies but has also been described in studies focusing on *non-migrant* lesbians in Switzerland (Caprez and Nay 2008, Moser 2001). Several of Christina Caprez and Eveline Nay’s interviewees relate that they left the rural canton of Graubünden for Zürich in order to explore the roots of their sense of isolation, which in retrospect many of them connect to a sense of confinement with regard to normative gender roles. These narratives of non-(international) migrant women preclude the conclusion that gender roles are necessarily more open and flexible in Switzerland than, for instance, in Asia. Rather, the act of migrating itself enables interviewees to reflect on their personalities and positionalities in terms of gender and sexuality.

### 5.1.6 Conclusion

In the biographical narratives discussed in this sub-chapter, becoming aware of, acknowledging, and naming one’s same-sex desires is inextricably linked to the migration process. “My coming out story is the story of my immigration,” Adi Kuntsman (2003:300) says, which is a fitting conclusion to draw from the accounts examined here. The “quest for identity” (Knopp 2004), though often confusing and painful initially, is eventually rewarded by a sense of arrival and “homecoming” in the lesbian identity (Fortier 2001, Kuntsman 2005 and 2003). The lesbian identity emerges as a social home that allows for naming one’s feelings and aligning one’s desires with an acknowledged – if stigmatized – social positionality, which also holds the promise of incorporation into the Swiss lesbian community. Assuming a lesbian identity moreover becomes an avenue to admission into Swiss society at large, leading to stories of achievement and *réussite*.

At the same time, these accounts show that becoming a lesbian entails certain things, such as the retrospective construction of a *stringent biography* that logically leads to the lesbian identity. As discussed earlier, Michel Foucault suggested that in

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6 Jack Halberstam presents *female masculinity* as an alternative to male masculinities. In her book of the same name, Halberstam (1998) portrays a wide variety of gender expressions by masculine women ranging from nineteenth century pre-lesbian performances and practices to contemporary drag king performances.

Western Europe sexuality is something one *is* rather than *does*, with the homosexual figure representing “a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (Foucault 1978:43). In the process of formulating this biography, interviewees revisit their home places, renegotiating dominant discourses around sexualities ‘there’ and their own position in relation to these discourses both before and after migration. One recurrent theme in these ruminations is the diagnosis of a profound silence around female same-sex desire and the invisibility of queer women in the social environments in which interviewees grew up, which, as they assess in hindsight, resulted in a lack of role models that rendered it impossible for them to think of their awakening feelings in terms of a valid and original alternative to heterosexual desires, relationships, and identity. As Teresa Ruiz’ encounter with Sophia Cruz exposes, this invisibility does not hinge on an effective absence of queer women in interviewees’ home countries but on a disciplined vision policed by a taboo around female same-sex sexuality. The narratives retrospectively construct this lack of role models as an explanation for a sense of alienation in adolescence and as a crucial reason why a lesbian identity had not been adopted earlier – implying that the homosexual identity had always been present but went ‘undiscovered’ until after migration.

Furthermore, identifying as a lesbian entails the adoption of Swiss homonormative values for the advantages that accrue to ‘Swiss’ lesbians to be realized. This process of becoming a ‘good lesbian’ is broadly and contradictorily conceived and calls for multiple readings. On the one hand, it is a process of personal development, discovery, recovery, empowerment, and homecoming, driven by subjects who take action in the face of a sense of alienation and discrimination. Queer migrants take on considerable risks and uncertainty by leaving their families and homes behind in order to reinvent themselves in a new and frequently adverse and racist environment. As such, these stories powerfully undercut the stereotype of the victimized and backward female migrant.

On the other hand, narratives about becoming a lesbian in Switzerland *also* need to be read as processes in which sexualities become disciplined. This is enforced by everyday and not-so-everyday interactions and spaces (such as the institution of psychology or asylum procedure) into which the figure of the ‘Swiss’ lesbian is inscribed, and which are productive of sexual subjects that are legible to the receiving state and society. This disciplining process not only produces subjects/citizens that are sexualized in specific ways but also racializes Others’ sexualities. Swiss and ‘other’ sexualities are thereby constructed as distinct and irreconcilably dichotomous. The consequence for queer migrant women is that the adoption of a ‘Swiss’ lesbian identity often requires a simultaneous denigration of, or distancing from, one’s pre-migration queer sexuality. Since sexualities are always already racialized and ethnicized, this dismissal also entails a dissociation from one’s cultural identity. At the same time, no matter what, the racialized and ethnicized identity assigned to queer migrant women eventually makes it impossible for them to fully embody and assume a normative lesbian identity; Teresa Ruiz’ postulated inner (dormant, promiscuous) ‘Cuban’ lesbianism continues to threaten the supposed (loyal, monogamous) ‘Swiss’ lesbian identity she is explicitly striving to establish. The image of the promiscuous, unleashed ‘Cuban’ lesbian is thereby reminiscent



of McClintock's "porno tropic tradition" (1995) figuring women as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess, against which the Swiss lesbian identity emerges as chaste, contained, and 'civilized.' Likewise, Augusta Wakari needs to shed her sexual past in Indonesia in order to be able to fully embrace the lesbian identity. These movements also mirror Adi Kuntsman's framing of her own immigration "as discovery of lesbian identity, detachment from Russianness, and re-grounding in the Israeli queer community" (Kuntsman 2003:301). Queer homecoming is hence always also reproductive of geometries of power attached to the makings and unmakings of Same and Other sexualities.

## 5.2 "I was totally shocked": Differing Sexual (Sub)cultures

Teresa Ruiz did not entertain same-sex relationships before migrating and understands herself to have become a lesbian in Switzerland. By contrast, Siti Mohd Amin was a member of the queer Malaysian community before emigrating, but has been unable to gain access to the Swiss lesbian community since immigrating. The following discussion focuses on how Siti Mohd Amin has experienced lesbian spaces in Switzerland, an encounter which her narrative frames in terms of (sub)cultural differences between Asian and European female same-sex communities. The analysis continues with an examination of Siti Mohd Amin's (mainly online) transnational ties to the queer Asian community, which paradoxically both propel and counteract her increasing social isolation in Switzerland. Working outwards from her account and considering other cases, the second part of this sub-chapter engages with cyberspace as an intimate technology composed of transnational circuits of queer desire. The sub-chapter concludes with critical reflections about the globally circulating idea of the universal queer family.

### 5.2.1 "I was totally shocked": Siti Mohd Amin

Siti Mohd Amin moved from Malaysia to Switzerland at the age of twenty-two, more than a decade before our meeting. "I just only come here to work," she states at the very beginning of the interview, having desired work experience as a cook and to learn the ropes of Swiss gastronomy. As a cook specialized in Asian cuisine, she was able to obtain a temporary residence permit for specialized cooks with relative ease. Once in Switzerland, she quickly immersed herself in her job in an Asian restaurant in Bern, where she swiftly advanced to the position of *chef de cuisine*, leading an international, largely Asian – and interestingly predominantly gay – crew of cooks. Despite her lack of proficiency in the German language and her limited knowledge of English, she acts as the link between cooks and management and fulfills a range of planning and administrative tasks. The immense work load that the position as chef entails have left her hovering on the edge of burnout for several years. Now, at the time of the interview, she has just accepted yet another position as chef, one that she had turned down twice before in order to prevent the impending burnout. Throughout the interview she keeps repeating how urgently she needs to "relax."

Despite the hard work, Siti Mohd Amin stresses how much professional experience she has been able to gather in Switzerland and the extent to which this has extended far

beyond learning the nuts and bolts of Swiss gastronomy: “The most important I learn here is to stand on my own [feet], you know, I cannot depend on the other person,” she states. According to her, gathering experience also encompasses learning the “Swiss mentality” as a whole, and “understanding their culture.” However, while Siti Mohd Amin was able to integrate into Swiss working life very quickly (to the point of becoming consumed by it), her attempts to immerse herself in Swiss society more broadly have resulted in partial and ambivalent success only. In part, this has been *because* of her successful career, the intensity and working hours of which generally leave little space for a fulfilling social life.

For Siti Mohd Amin, it has always been clear that she loved women and *only* women. She had already entertained relationships with women in Malaysia, and at a point late in the interview she explains that it had in fact mainly been an exceedingly painful separation from a girlfriend<sup>7</sup> that had driven her abroad:

When break I feel very sad, I stop working [...] for a few weeks. [...] Then I tried to get one new girlfriend, I still not happy. [...] I need to go out from this place to relaxing my mind. [...] That’s why I come to Switzerland, this is the main reason why I come to Swiss. So my heart is already broken when I come to Swiss, and I decide to myself to just come straight to job only, don’t think about the girl.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Siti Mohd Amin identifies as a *pengkid*, which, as she explains, originates from *gay punk kid* and is a self-designation for queer Malaysian women who are *aggressive* (as opposed to *feminine*) and entertain relationships with feminine women. Yuenmei Wong describes *pengkid* as a sexual identity that emerged from the pop culture among working class youth in major Malaysian cities in the 1970s. More recently, “while the Muslim-Malay sexual minorities are increasingly subjected to the threats of moral policing in Malaysia, *Pengkid* has become a new identity marker for the marginalized sexual subject framed by the Islamic discourse of this country.” In this context, *pengkid* designates “a localized synonym for a masculine-looking Malay-Muslim lesbian who is outlawed in Malaysia through Islamic discourses” (Wong 2012:435-436). The *pengkids* Wong interviewed in urban Malaysia were predominantly working class and worked in the entertainment industry. According to Wong, in recent years *pengkids* have become increasingly subjected to moral policing following a *fatwa* against *tomboys* (another identity organized around female masculinity), which has increased the visibility and hence the pressure on *pengkids* and other transgender identities and practices in Malaysia. At the same time, “seemingly rebellious upwardly mobile younger *Pengkids* nowadays are more empowered to affirm their sexuality and to reclaim the term ‘*Pengkid*,’ as lesbians did with ‘dykes’ in the west, although they are aware that the current political climate in Malaysia is not in favor of their sexual practices” (ibid:443). Siti Mohd Amin contrasts *pengkids* with *tomboys*, whom she defines as equally masculine in appearance but not (yet) engaged in a same-sex relationship, and to *lezzies*, feminine women seeking ‘aggressive’ female partners. Both in Malaysia and in Switzerland, many people perceive Siti Mohd

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7 I use Siti Mohd Amin’s term “girlfriend,” although it does not, from a Western perspective, reflect the sincerity and commitment Siti Mohd Amin relates to bringing into a partnership.

Amin as male at first sight, something she has gotten used to. She and two of her sisters have always been very boyish, Siti Mohd Amin says – her mother used to remark dryly that she had “a lot of boys in the house.” While same-sex intimacy was never talked about explicitly in the family, female visitors were silently accepted.

There were a number of misunderstandings in the interview that revealed a great deal not only about Siti Mohd Amin’s understanding of her sexuality, but my own contrasting expectations as well. For instance, when I asked Siti Mohd Amin whether she had had any negative experiences as a same-sex oriented woman in Malaysia, she did not answer on a political but on a personal level, recollecting hurtful break-ups. This and other instances indicated that Siti Mohd Amin does not primarily understand her sexual identity in terms of a discriminated positionality. As will be discussed below, it is rather that this marginalized positionality is becoming impressed on her now as younger queer women in Malaysia start to show their queerness more openly in public. In contrast to the narratives discussed in the previous sub-chapter, for Siti Mohd Amin, being masculine and loving women have instead always been obvious and natural. Her narrative reflects no point of realization, no phase of internal conflicts, no questions about communicating her sexuality to anyone or discussing it with anyone, no shame. Questions addressing her coming to awareness of her sexual dissidence seem odd to her. When asked how it was for her when she first realized that she had fallen in love with a woman, she answers: “Happy too much, you know, the smell, the touch, even as you’re working, still the memories there.” As such, Siti Mohd Amin’s story undermines Western homonational imaginations of Muslim societies as intrinsically and pervasively homophobic.

Having said that, when asked whether she or other women in the queer Malaysian community displayed their sexual orientation in public, Siti Mohd Amin assumes a critical stance vis-à-vis a “new generation” of queer women in Malaysia who exhibit their homosexuality more openly. She does not criticize the women themselves but explains that their increasingly demonstrative behavior has provoked increasing repression. “Now you cannot even sit with our own group [...] we are more scared now,” she says, “four or five people is okay, but if you more, then they think something.” She says that while it is not a state offense to display intimacy in public, it is against “the Muslim rule,” which is sanctioned by civil Muslim surveillance groups in collaboration with the police. She observes an increasing number of warnings by queer community members issued over the queer Malaysian chat she frequents. From this, it emerges that the silence and discretion Siti Mohd Amin herself has been practicing is giving way to an increasingly visible queer community as more and more young and urban Malaysian women follow the ‘in-your-face’ model of living out their queerness. As her statement “we are more scared now” indicates, Siti Mohd Amin continues to conceive of herself as a member of this community, which corresponds with how she is perceived by her Asian acquaintances in Switzerland. As the person who connected us said about Siti Mohd Amin: “I see that she got connection to all the lesbians in Malaysia. She’s really like Malaysian, Malaysian. The way she thinks is still Malaysian.”

When Siti Mohd Amin left her country, none of these issues were on her mind. However, once in Switzerland her hitherto unchallenged and unproblematic sexual orientation and gender positionality was called into question as several men tried to cajole

her into having sex with them. It remained unclear whether these were Asian, European or other men. In the case of European men, these advances must be read in the light of postcolonial sexual asymmetries and Western phantasies of the Asian woman as discussed above (see Chapter 3.4.2 and Haritaworn 2003). In either case (that is, whether these advances were made by Asian, European, or other men), it is paradoxically in the context of the European multicultural society that Siti Mohd Amin perceives as particularly “open” that her sexual orientation and her ambiguous gender identity first become seriously challenged. But she was adamant: “If I don’t have feeling, how can I make sex with a man?”

Instead, curious to explore the local lesbian community, she soon visited a lesbian club, “just to see how the lesbian is, you know. Their club. I never been here actually before. Even in Malaysia we don’t have a lesbian club, and I go see how they enjoy their life, no?” she explained.<sup>8</sup> But her first visit there took an unexpected turn:

So [that] was shock, total I’m shocked here for first time I going to the lesbian club, you know? It’s like different- formation, totally different. [...] The feminine [...] was with feminine. Do you understand what I mean? Asian, a [aggressive] person like me, my couple is feminine, but here it’s different, they are totally the same- feminine/feminine, and the aggressive one is with aggressive.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Siti Mohd Amin was disoriented by the gender pairings bringing together two feminine or two masculine women. Uncertain which women to approach, she concluded: “I do say forget it, you just come here and enjoy, you know. Listen to *Musik* [German pronunciation], enjoy ourselves.” This dismissal has proved terminal: In the eleven years since she has come to Switzerland, Siti Mohd Amin has never had a relationship with a Swiss woman or generally with women she met in Switzerland, but has instead sought relationships with Malaysian women in Malaysia and elsewhere, which she has established during her annual visits to Malaysia and over queer Malaysian internet and chat sites.

Her perplexity about her encounters in Swiss lesbian bars is thereby only one factor in her decision not to invest too much energy in finding access to the Swiss lesbian community, the other being her preference for Asian women and “culture”:

I mean I still like my culture, you know? [...] I like the Asians more cause it’s the sweet face, no? [...] Because they know how to respect also, this is what I like more to Asian. And I didn’t try anything with the Swiss people, [...] I want to try also with the Swiss people but I don’t get it, you know (laughs)?

—Siti Mohd Amin

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8 She adds that there had been (illegal) gay clubs in Malaysia, and that queer women would meet up in these clubs as well. However, especially for political dissidents or people that have been apprehended by the police before, it was not advisable to visit these clubs. Apprehended gay people were often sent to mental institutions where they were subjected to treatment for homosexuality. As Siti Mohd Amin observed, feminine women ran less of a risk of being caught because their queerness was not visible.

At the same time, Siti Mohd Amin's transnational relations are equally fraught with confusion. In her absence, the queer Malaysian lesbian subculture is developing and changing, and is starting to fail to provide Siti Mohd Amin with the comfort of familiarity and the sense of belonging she seeks: "Actually I quite shocked also because whenever I go back [to Malaysia or Malaysian chat sites] it was new names coming, you know," like *lezzie*, *PLU* (*People Like Us*). As she tells me this, she tears her hair in frustration.

In other words, Siti Mohd Amin's membership in both the Malaysian and the Swiss queer community remains precarious, with neither identity nor community offering her the social home she seeks. Her love life, too, is fraught with painful separations. Dissatisfied with long-distance situations, her Malaysian girlfriends never stay in the relationship long, either cheating on Siti Mohd Amin, leaving her for a man, or returning to their husbands. Siti Mohd Amin expresses understanding: "They cannot wait for me for the long year, so sure they are bored." At the same time, she feels grossly misjudged by her reputation as a "player" in the Malaysian community. She considers herself to be monogamous and faithful, always ending one relationship properly before beginning a new one. Her desire – and this is one of her uppermost goals in life – is to find a long-term partner with whom to share everyday life in Switzerland and later in Malaysia.

The obstacles to achieving this goal reach beyond the difficulties of a long-distance relationship. According to Siti Mohd Amin, the longevity of female same-sex relationships in Malaysia is highly gendered. In her experience, 80 percent of the women engaging in same-sex relationships in Malaysia, the "feminine" ones, will "change their life" after one or two years, in order to "follow the culture," that is, to marry a man and establish a family. "This is somehow still in their mind, you know?" She says it is what is normal for Asian women and is implemented "automatically." On the other hand, aggressive women like herself, "we already thinking far away, no? [...] So we [do not think] in a short year, not in five years, at least ten or twenty years, that's different. [...] That's why I say to you in ten years I change[d] four girlfriend because they change. Not me change." One could thus say that Siti Mohd Amin frames her girlfriends' same-sex desires as something these women *do* for a period of time, while for her it is something that is not changeable, that she *is*, and accordingly as something around which she organizes her future.

Siti Mohd Amin's discomfort with the Swiss lesbian community, her dissociation from the Malaysian expat community (which she considers heterocentrist and conservative and therefore only fit for a bout of small-talk in her mother tongue, see Chapter 7), her estrangement from the queer Malaysian community, and her working hours lead to a life marked by social isolation, interrupted only by video conferencing sessions with faraway girlfriends at odd hours, the occasional outing to the city with a friend, or a rare game of badminton. She suffers from the fact that she does not know any other queer Malaysian in Switzerland with whom she could "sharing problem together."

Her social isolation in Switzerland plays a key role in Siti Mohd Amin's deliberations about going back to Malaysia. When she came to Switzerland, she had sought to mend her broken heart, but she had also come here to learn about gastronomy and earn enough money to go back to Malaysia to open her own restaurant. This has remained

Siti Mohd Amin's professional plan throughout her eleven years in Switzerland, in contrast to many other interviewees who had also not come to stay but have since changed their mind. She intends to go back before turning forty because it is hard to get a job in Malaysia after that. Two main considerations propel her plans to return. First and foremost, Siti Mohd Amin strives to create a situation that enables her to forge the desired committed long-term relationship:

I like to go home. I like to stay in Malaysia actually – because I was missing something here, you know. There [is] no life, it [is] only working and working, working place and home, you know? [...] I do not have a girlfriend here, just only I go home [to Malaysia] then I'm with my girlfriend, so once a year, two times a year, it was nothing actually. Actually I wish to have my girlfriend also together so we can sharing the life here, but no? I cannot, [she is] actually also working in Malaysia.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Her immense workload renders it impossible for Siti Mohd Amin to forge new relationships in Switzerland or maintain her long-distance relationships in a meaningful way. Her second reason for going back is therefore to establish an everyday life that is more “relaxing”:

I open the restaurant [in Malaysia] but I just thinking to open a small thing, that is... I just only working one or two person enough, just to survive, you know? Cause for money also it's not important, you know. Don't mean anything. I just can alive the daily, the monthly, this is more than enough for me. Because I'm already tired, you know. Work in a hard place, the two place that I work [in Bern] is so bumping restaurants, you know. Soon I need to go relaxing also, I mean, relaxed place, and some money is enough.

—Siti Mohd Amin

In light of the material discussed so far, Siti Mohd Amin's account depicts her ongoing quest for a place in the world. Instead of a sense of homecoming, she conveys a sense of social isolation and frustration. The cause for this she locates, on the one hand, in her failure to understand Swiss lesbians' ways of pairing up and hence to find intimacy within the Swiss lesbian community, and generally her lack of a companion in her everyday life in Switzerland. The differences between Asian and European sexual minority (sub)cultural practices emerge as insurmountable, as do the language barriers presented by her lack of German and many Swiss lesbians' relative lack of English. On the other hand, Siti Mohd Amin understands her frustration and sense of isolation as results of her unsuccessful efforts to salvage her membership in the queer Malaysian community, from which she is largely absent. In other words, Siti Mohd Amin both refuses and is denied the positionality of the ‘good lesbian.’ This bars her from access to the Swiss lesbian community and to Swiss (sexual) citizenship.

At the end of the interview, when asked if there was anything else she wanted to say, Siti Mohd Amin swiftly returns to the issue of gender positionalities:

In the beginning I have girlfriend is all soft girlfriend, you know. Where it's soft character, sweet... and then, after a few years, I change a bit, I say it's better don't take a

partner is same character. [...] I'm not romantic, but [...] maybe I be a bit soft for my girlfriend, you know? So then I think it's better not to take same character. Better take some aggressive, I mean, aggressive from character [does] not mean... it's still feminine but aggressive, yeah? So I change a bit. [...] This is also good thing to learn, you know? [...] Some[times] your girlfriend [is] also right, you can sharing your idea. Before, my first girlfriend, whatever I said she just say yes yes yes yes. Also no good, also no good. [...] And before, just when beginning, I got always fresh girl, yeah? They don't know anything (laughs). So it's hard to teach a person just know about relationship, you know. How you have to teach how to kissing everything all, you know. How to make love. Then after a few girls then I change to the person who already have experience. [...] And I'm totally shocked, because her knowledge is more than me. [...] That's my first sex where I'm total surrender you know, because she is more experience.

—Siti Mohd Amin

In this passage, Siti Mohd Amin's most intimate space – her body, her character, her sexuality, her understanding of relationships – has begun to shift. The comment critically undermines the “aggressive” gender identification Siti Mohd Amin has been establishing so extensively throughout the interview. It confirms her preference for what she terms “Asian” women (whom she defines by their specific complexion and their “Asian” feminine comportment, such as “showing respect”) but adds the realization that the gender roles she has been enacting and sought in her relationships have become incongruent with what she seeks. She detects a “feminine” side to herself that she did not know or acknowledge before, and has developed a preference for stronger and more assertive partners rather than subservient and inexperienced ones. However, the heteronormative ideal stays intact despite this shift: Because she has become more feminine, Siti Mohd Amin now seeks out more masculine partners – which continues to foreclose the possibility of two distinctly feminine or masculine women engaging with each other. This development does not suspend Siti Mohd Amin's estrangement from the Swiss lesbian community, where she feels put off by equally gendered couples.

This is not to say that Siti Mohd Amin's attitude is generally closed towards what she terms “Swiss culture.” Quite to the contrary:

I just do it [the migration] for this culture shock, you know. And I go to Swiss, okay, I notice how the mentality here. And I go back Malaysia I used to do also with their culture and mentality, you know, so I can go to the different culture also. [...] Some is good things you take. Or it's not good, you don't save, but you just only take it in, remember this is something you better not follow, but take for your experience these things.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Asian and European “culture” appear as bounded and dichotomous here – “Swiss people mentality is like this, Malaysian like that,” as Siti Mohd Amin states elsewhere. At the same time, as a migrant she explicitly situates herself in a hybrid position that enables her to overcome cultural boundaries and to make choices. Siti Mohd Amin hence sees her position as in between, where the “cutting edge of translation and negotiation” occurs (Bhabha 1996). She sees herself as composing her individualized and optimized

mix of what she perceives to be Malaysianness and Swissness respectively. This per se may be read as an act of neoliberal self-realization and hence adaptation to Western ideals; but Siti Mohd Amin transgresses the boundaries of 'good' European citizenship, especially also through her refusal to discard her Malaysianness in order to become a 'good lesbian' (and hence her refusal of lesbian norms in Switzerland) and her decision to choose Malaysian women as partners instead. In Siti Mohd Amin's story, the drivers of her personal development are moreover situated outside Switzerland, which disrupts the dichotomy of a progressive West versus a passive, backward Orient: It is especially Siti Mohd Amin's new, sexually experienced Malaysian partner who induces the shift in her gender identification. This is, for instance, in contrast to Augusta Wakari's narrative, who locates the driving force behind the positive complication of her gender identity in her Belgian partner.

In sum, Siti Mohd Amin's migration biography demonstrates that social inclusion in general and access to the Swiss lesbian community in particular is neither obvious nor unproblematic for women who already assumed a queer sexual identity before migration, and who were members of a sexual minority community in their countries of origin. Her eventual failure to connect to the Swiss lesbian community is at once a process of being excluded and a process of self-exclusion: Siti Mohd Amin's efforts to connect to Swiss lesbians remain fruitless but are also depicted as half-hearted, which is reflected in her decision to invest her (limited) energy in long-distance relationships to fellow Malaysian women. Her narrative grounds this choice in the perceived inaccessibility of Swiss lesbians and the cultural gap between sexual subcultures, which eventually overrides her efforts to integrate Swiss and Malaysian 'culture.'

## 5.2.2 Transnational Intimacy in Cyberspace

In addition to her workplace, *cyberspace* emerges as the most important space in Siti Mohd Amin's everyday life. Since virtual space plays a significant role in many other interviewees' biographies as well, this sub-chapter elaborates on this aspect of Siti Mohd Amin's account, but then moves on to include material from other case stories to saturate the analysis of what cyberspace means to the interviewed queer migrant women.

From the narratives, the internet also emerges as a *queer space*, serving as a container for a vast collection of *information* about many aspects of queer life, and as a space that enables *social relations* with other queer people near and far. Interviewees appreciate and take advantage of the fact that information that could formerly be obtained only by exposing oneself personally in an office, library, bookstore, cinema, or club is now accessible from the private space of the home. Anonymously if desired, and usually in multiple languages, cyberspace provides access to queer films, literature, and music, to lists with homo-friendly psychotherapists or immigration lawyers, information on lesbian mothering in Switzerland, and so on. On the other hand, participants use the internet as a technology to establish and maintain relationships, queer and otherwise: video conferencing with relatives and friends back home, discussing issues of gay and lesbian parenthood on online forums, connecting to queer women back home via social media, looking for new friends or partners on chat and dating platforms, or



establishing and sustaining friendships and partnerships via video conferencing, social media platforms, chats, or e-mail. This sub-chapter focuses on these latter aspects of cyberspace: its role in the establishment and maintenance of social relations in general and romantic partnerships in particular.

It is hard to discern whether Siti Mohd Amin started dating Malaysian women on the internet because she found herself unable to gain access to the Swiss lesbian community, or because she did not devote a great deal of effort towards connecting to Swiss lesbians because she prefers Malaysian women as girlfriends. Over a social media site geared towards queer Malaysian women, Siti Mohd Amin remains connected to the queer Malaysian community by keeping up to date with political and subcultural developments in Malaysia, forging transnational friendships, and looking for a new girlfriend from time to time.

At the time of the interview, Siti Mohd Amin has two girlfriends. She has lost touch with the first to an extent, a Malaysian living in Malaysia, who has had a new boyfriend for a while and has neglected Siti Mohd Amin since:

I'm waiting here so for her message, for call, even for her mail. [...] But I was waiting and thinking myself, all the time I'm thinking about her, but she don't care. [...] And then, [I] just go back to Malaysia without her knowledge, and I find out [about the boyfriend], it's clear for me, I say okay, it's up to you, what you want to do, but I, for me, when I have another girl, you don't say it's my fault, it's also your fault, you know. So for one year I was suffering alone, I was waiting for you, your missed call, your voice, at least for your voice so we can feel good, you know? [...] Yeah, sometimes fact sad thing, in your life.  
—Siti Mohd Amin

This is a pattern Siti Mohd Amin is all too familiar with, having been left by “heterosexual” long-distance girlfriends in Malaysia three times before. “Ten years. No one can wait for you,” she states laconically. After this specific visit to Malaysia, she became active in the transnational Malaysian queer online community again and soon found a new girlfriend, a Malaysian living in the Middle East. Since Siti Mohd Amin has never broken up with her original girlfriend, she understands herself to be in two simultaneous relationships, but stresses that her two girlfriends are aware of each other and have consented to the situation.

While due to the time difference she usually only chats with her girlfriends in Malaysia on weekends, the location of her new girlfriend allows for more daily contact: “We are different two hours so we quite often chat every day, you know? [...] So most I come home twelve thirty at night then I will chat each other, so we see each other quite often,” she explains. The slight irritation the formulation “seeing each other” evokes is only partly resolved when thinking of these exchanges in the context of video conferencing. As Siti Mohd Amin describes the couple’s online habits:

From webcam. So I can see what she's doing, sometimes she went to sleep. She likes to sleep more. I say 'Okay, you go to sleep,' but webcam is still open (laughs). I can see her. How are you, sleepy. And I say 'Huh, you are too aggressive when you sleep, right?' (laughs) [...] And somehow we just open up our webcam until in the morning, and she can see also how I'm sleep, she says 'It's so cute, you sleep.' (Pause) Yeah, because from

the sleep you can see how the person is, no? Exactly. (Pause) One time I tried to say uh- 'It [does] not mean you can make love only in the bed. You can make love also in the webcam' and then I tried to say 'Ah, come baby let's go-' (laughs) and she was being shy about that.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Although the webcam works as a transnational technology of intimacy, it cannot replace “seeing each other” physically, but Siti Mohd Amin sees both of her girlfriends only once or twice a year, a situation far removed from her wish “to have my girlfriend also together so we can sharing the life here.” She has tried to convince her new girlfriend to find a job in Switzerland, but they did not succeed in finding a position due to language issues, so with the exception of a short period of time when one of Siti Mohd Amin’s girlfriends (and her baby) lived with her in Switzerland, Siti Mohd Amin has exclusively entertained long-distance relationships, which moved her computer and cellphone to the center of her everyday routines.

The same focus on cyberspace also emerges from Maria Borkovic’s account, who took a picture of her living room for this research, which is organized around the desk accommodating her computer. “This [is] my world,” she remarks upon the picture, “I mean I go on Skype and talk. Yeah, that’s my only connection with like social- really (laughs).” After failing to find any friends in Switzerland despite her persistent efforts to connect to other lesbians (she had already identified as a lesbian before she came to Switzerland from Hungary), cyberspace has become her only door to the social world:

This is really bad experience for me for these beginning of months I really was so depressed. I mean I have Skype you know, my computer, and I talk everyday with my girlfriend, with my friends, families and I think if I wouldn't have that I would be just really like depressed.

—Maria Borkovic

Maria Borkovic shares this experience with other interviewees, like Ayesha Umar, who sees writing e-mails and teleconferencing as “*Ersatz*” – replacement – for physical contact with people in her everyday life. In addition to cultivating relationships with loved ones back home and mitigating social isolation while in Switzerland, many interviewees also use the internet in their attempts to connect to people within Switzerland. Maria Borkovic is among them. In her efforts to find a friend she has been stood up by women she had made an appointment with. However, the reason she eventually abandoned these efforts is not her frustration at her lack of success but her long-distance partner’s jealousy:

I actually I did have problems with my girlfriend because I was on these sites (laughs), you know [...] she is really jealous, really, and she found me on this [Swiss Lesbian chat and dating site], it was really a big problem, and I was explaining her just because I really really want to find a friend like not a girlfriend but just, you know, a friend. [...] I usually use this always the same nickname and I had my picture there (laughs) so she find it and really had problem with that and I said ‘Oh come on, I’ll stop it you know, anyway I wanna stop that because [...] you know [I was at] this gay party it was really good, but just nobody cares about me you know they just don’t want to talk with me

so you don't have to, you know, panic, there is nothing to panic about, there cannot be anyway anyone so.' And I just, yeah, stopped, I didn't bother anymore the cyber friendship (laughs).

—Maria Borkovic

Maria Borkovic's failure to connect to lesbians in Switzerland both on- and offline demonstrate the shortcomings of a view of cyberspace as a boundless and democratic space for unlimited connectivity and self-invention. Social boundaries presented by cultural differences, language barriers, and other obstacles persist online, as do constraints like the jealousy of a partner.

There were moments in which the fragility of online social connections became unmasked and was replaced by a deep sense of disconnection and loneliness. This was the case for Siti Mohd Amin when she realized that she was no longer able to comprehend developments in her queer Malaysian online community, or for Charlotta Sembiring, who realized when her cellphone was stolen how heavily her sense of security and connectedness depended on having access to cyberspace. This theft happened on the very day her girlfriend, with whom she had just broken up, left her to go back to Indonesia. Charlotta Sembiring's account of this moment is of great urgency, and she describes it as the most incisive moment in her migration biography. Migrating to Switzerland had been a hard moment in Charlotta Sembiring's life. She had left Indonesia and her husband five years before the research interview on a Dutch scholarship for a PhD program in Holland. As soon as she had established herself in Holland – where she could fall back on an extensive Indonesian diaspora, and (after acknowledging her homosexuality) a vibrant queer community – her professor was appointed to a Swiss university, and Charlotta Sembiring had to follow her. She describes what this meant for her in terms of her social network:

Well okay when I was in Indonesia what I call close friends like, one hundred (pause). Sounds very strange but [...] I mean many people do the same, because there is so many space for people. For relationship, for friendship, for being with a lot of people. And then in Holland like, okay reducing, eh? from one hundred to like, okay then twenty. I started to adapt myself to get involved with less people, okay. And then I came to Bern it's like: one.

—Charlotta Sembiring

For Charlotta Sembiring the city of Bern felt “completely dry,” and two successive break-ups that coincided with her move to Switzerland accentuated her sense of loneliness:

Well anyway then I broke up with the second one and then I felt completely disconnected and dislocated. With the city, with the people, with everything, it was like I was really feeling like I needed to live anywhere. But. Not. Here. [...] Well, okay, I cannot say that it's because of Switzerland on first note. It has been also started when I was in Holland. I'd been leaving in my country for five years at the time, right? And I missed a lot of things. Actually I lost a lot of friends as well [...]. Now I need this more and more. It was kind of urgent need to be accepted to be part, to be known, to know more people, yeah, it's just like I'm still feeling isolated in the first year.

—Charlotta Sembiring

The decisive moment that crystallizes her losses and her sense of isolation immediately followed the moment her second girlfriend left Switzerland from Zürich airport to return to Indonesia. Charlotta Sembiring describes this moment as follows:

And then the second girl just left for Indonesia and as she left I was on Grosse Schanze [park in Bern] because I know I didn't dare to come home. I know nobody is at home. And I went to Grosse Schanze and like okay, I bought a book in Sudoku [...], it was Sunday I was just sitting and doing Sudoku, and then I got SMS [text message] from someone and I replied so I placed my hand phone somewhere on the top of my pack, and then after a couple of minutes I wanted to move because it's too hot. And I saw that my mobile was not there. Then okay, should be there I mean I read just an SMS and I never put it inside, just on top, so I just look around and then I realized that it was stolen. (Pause) And that's really the second time I felt completely disconnected and dislocated. It was like in the translation movie<sup>9</sup> (laughs). [...] It's like I was- so where should I go? Yeah? I didn't know where to call, I didn't know whom to call, I have no mobile, I don't remember the numbers. The last place I want to go is home. I mean home, this place yeah? [indicates her one-room apartment, where the interview is taking place] But this is the only place I could go to because I don't want to stay in Grosse Schanze anymore. I was just walking from the park to the bus stop it was just like ages (laughs) it was only one two minutes, it was like ages (breathes in) just like everything slow motion but it's not. I was completely aware of everything so I was taking care of the movement, so not cross the red light or hitting people or yeah. So, I was like reallyreallyreally, I was- my mind my spirit, only my body was there. My mind I sense that they are inside but the spirit was gone, the emotion, I didn't feel anything but I just wanted to disappear. Absolute disappear, didn't know where, but not here. I was really hurting everything. And I feel the breakdown. (Pause)

Then I'm talking to Julia who is a professor, [...] who was in my group [at university]. And she is lesbian (laughs). And she is Jewish (laughs). So you find like we have something in common, minority eh? (laughs) [...] And it was miles like bringing me up you know, like because I wanted to stop my PhD, I wanted to leave this city, this country, and the only place I could think of well- where else except Indonesia, even though I really don't want to go there but that's my home country. [...] Like because my passport's there. Whether I like it or not or they like me a lot but I have a right for it and in other place I don't, so at least a security feeling so to say, security for that you can go back there [...].

—Charlotta Sembiring

It is in the moment in which Charlotta Sembiring's access to the internet is barred that she "feels the breakdown," and realizes the fragility of cyber connections and the significance of the physical absence of her friends, family, and lost partner, while at the same time experiencing, in a very physical way, her disconnection from the place in which she is physically located. Eventually the physical presence of a person she can relate to on the basis of shared experiences helped her to overcome her crisis. The delicate sense of security she had been able to construct via cyberspace since emigrating from Indonesia

9 *Lost in Translation*, Sofia Coppola, 2003.

with partners, friends, and family was shattered physically and symbolically by the theft of her cellphone. In this crisis, it is her Indonesian citizenship that provides her with the last shred of a sense of security.

In these accounts, cyberspace emerges as a space that is simultaneously present and absent, both 'at home' and 'away' (Kuntsman 2004:6 and 2009). It is an intimate space because it is usually accessed from the private space of the home or from a personal device like a cellphone, through which a sense of connection to friends and family can be constructed and maintained. At the same time, cyberspace epitomizes travel, exploration, and, in the case of cybersex, physical transcendence. It is a site in which both connection and *disconnection* occur. Many interviewees use the internet on a regular basis to keep in touch with their family, partners, and friends living 'back home' or abroad (Gajjala 1996).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, cyberspace not only *bridges* but paradoxically simultaneously *highlights* physical absence, a contradiction that materializes in moments of crisis in which the virtuality of cyber connections is exposed, triggering a deep and very physical sense of isolation and loneliness.

For queer migrant women, cyberspace also enables the creation of imagined communities without physical equivalent: In its function as a communication platform and community building technology for socially marginalized and/or physically dispersed groups, for queer migrant women like Siti Mohd Amin, cyberspace can become the *only* everyday space where they can be open about their sexuality and where they may *at the same time* share their language, national identity, and cultural background with other online community members, enabling the interlocutors to tend to their 'homing desires' in both a sexual and cultural sense (Brah 1996).

In her analysis of a web platform for Russian LGBT people in Israel, Adi Kuntsman says (in relation to her own biography) that as a queer Russian in Israel "in the mid-1990s, lesbian identity was constituted through detaching from Russianness; the language, the appearance, and the identification with other Russian-speaking immigrants. In a way, the [web]site became my way back to Russian identity, or at least some parts of it" (Kuntsman 2004:5). The important difference between Kuntsman's and Siti Mohd Amin's narratives is that Siti Mohd Amin has never discarded her Malaysianness; and that Kuntsman's own physical location – Israel – corresponds to the physical location of many members of her online community, allowing her to maintain a dense mesh of on- and offline contacts that may provide her with a sense of full membership in this community. Siti Mohd Amin, on the other hand, is physically isolated from the members of her online group. Despite her active membership in an online community, she cannot fully comprehend the changes the community is undergoing offline and feels disoriented in the landscape of new homosexual identities springing up in on- and offline life in Malaysia and Malaysian diasporas. Instead of achieving the desired sense of home and belonging, Siti Mohd Amin consequently suffers from a growing sense of anxiety, insecurity, and exclusion.

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10 Note that internet usage was not equally distributed among interviewees and was especially contingent on *age* and *class*. Suki Schäuble, for instance, who is older than most other interviewees, prefers the telephone to keep in contact with her family and partner in Japan. She says she hates the internet and considers her rejection of it a "*Generationenfrage*" – a question of generation.

Nermina Petar's 'Swiss' online strategy, finally, calls attention to another peculiarity of cyberspace that ties the internet to the previously discussed processes of becoming a lesbian in Switzerland. On Swiss lesbian chat sites, Nermina Petar has come to mask her migrant identity by means of a nickname that does not reveal her migrant background:

*Und vor allem irgendwie Nermina kommt immer wieder die Frage ja, von wo bist du, bist ja keine Schweizerin oder? Und irgendwann ja, auf den Nerv gegangen, [...] 'Nermina die Ausländerin' in dem Sinne. Und dann habe ich einfach einen [online] Namen gewählt der einfach [...] normal ist. Nicht irgendwie auffällt in dem Sinne. Und seitdem bin ich Nora, im [Name einer lesbischen Chatseite] bin ich auch Nora und in der Szene bin ich Nora und sie [Partnerin] nennt mich Nora, irgendwie gehört der Name dazu, oder? Ich kann ihn gar nicht mehr ändern (lacht).*

And above all, somehow Nermina always gets the question where are you from, you aren't Swiss, are you? And at some point this annoyed me [...] 'Nermina the foreigner,' in this sense. And then I just chose a [online] name that is just [...] normal. That does not catch your eye in this sense. And ever since I have been Nora, on [name of lesbian chat site] I'm also Nora, and in lesbian circles I'm Nora and she [her partner] calls me Nora, somehow the name belongs to it, you know? I can't even change it anymore (laughs).

—Nermina Petar

In her need to establish an effective protective shield against the exclusion she has been experiencing online, Nermina Petar disguises her cultural difference. The possibilities of the internet hence allow queer migrant women to step into a social positionality that is often not possible to assume in physical spaces. At the same time, Nermina Petar's move perpetuates the imagination of Swiss lesbian spaces as homogenously 'Swiss.' By shedding what marks her as an *Ausländerin* online – her name –, Nermina Petar's strategy unwittingly re-enacts the invisibilization of migrant bodies in the Swiss lesbian community and hence whitewashes its spaces. In such ways, effectuated by racism and xenophobia aimed at queer migrant women, lesbian spaces perpetuate themselves as white. In Nermina Petar's case, this mechanism even extends to the real world as she starts using her online name in physical social interactions as well.

To sum up: For interviewees in this study, cyberspace is an ambivalent space of connection and disconnection, presence and absence, in- and exclusion. On the one hand, some online communities open up intersectional spaces that offer queer migrant women a space to accommodate multiple aspects of their Selves, where they can especially also share common experiences of social exclusion. As such, these online communities represent spaces which hardly ever have a flesh-and-blood equivalent in their everyday lives; there is no space where Siti Mohd Amin can be *at once* queer and Malaysian except for the queer Malaysian online community. Since it is exactly due to their intersectional subject positions that queer migrant women in Switzerland are at a higher risk of being exposed to social isolation and exclusion, the role of cyberspace in forging social connections is difficult to overestimate.

On the other hand, mechanisms of exclusion in the 'material' world also extend to cyberspace; for lack of physical presence, Siti Mohd Amin has failed to maintain full membership in the queer Malaysian online community, so that it has eventually re-

mained impossible for her to experience sexual, ethnic, and diasporic connectivity simultaneously. This has resulted in a lack of spaces, on- or offline, where she can “sharing problem together.” Participants in this study in general mostly have to ‘make do’ with partial identification: On the one hand, in Swiss lesbian cyberspace, they experience exclusion as non-German/French speakers, which complicates or even precludes their participation and membership in these spaces, not to speak of sharing their experiences as (queer) *Ausländerinnen* in Switzerland. On the other hand, on websites and social media platforms and chats based in queer communities in their home countries, they often cannot share their specific immigration experiences in Switzerland and like Siti Mohd Amin are barred from full access to membership due to their missing physical presence. Lastly, in cyberspaces addressing expat compatriots in Switzerland, interviewees often feel they cannot be open about their sexuality (see Chapter 7).

Online practices and strategies are closely linked to sexual self-conceptualization. Efforts to integrate into the Swiss lesbian community often include participation in the Swiss lesbian online community, while dissociation from this community is often coupled with an absence from these virtual spaces. Nevertheless, the relationship between on- and offline identification remains complex and contradictory. Efra Mahmoud, for instance, who does not identify as a lesbian, still resorts to this identity strategically when searching online for a lawyer specialized in immigration by homosexuals, as will be seen below.

Other questions remain as well, such as who is allowed a voice in cyberspace, who is able to create a sense of belonging in which online communities, and who is able to transform connections established online into physical connections and hence social and other types of capital. The accounts discussed here certainly call into question the perception of cyberspace as a site of unlimited participation and self-invention; but at the same time, they demonstrate that cyberspace is never a mere reflection of offline spaces or identities but can also extend or limit them. As Kuntsman writes:

‘Cyborg-Diaspora’ [...] is a space for creating migrant community through technology that can disrupt dominant discourses of nation, ethnicity and culture. It could also be a space where immigrants can resist the hegemony of language of their host society. For example, the website’s name, ‘The Pan-Israeli Portal of Russian speaking GLBTs,’ challenges the Zionist idea of Israeli identity as embedded in Hebrew language, and proposes instead a new kind of identity: a Russian-speaking Israeli. It thus creates a new home – in language and in cyberspace. (Kuntsman 2004:6)

By contrast, even though Siti Mohd Amin’s Malaysian online community is intrinsically transnational, she cannot integrate her specific experience as a queer Malaysian *in Switzerland*. This creates a sense of isolation and excludes Siti Mohd Amin from the ongoing transnational negotiation of Malaysian queerness.

### 5.2.3 We Are Family – Not

When Siti Mohd Amin arrived in Switzerland, she was curious to discover how Swiss lesbians “enjoy their life.” She was eager to find out what it feels like to be in a lesbian club, which she had never experienced before due to the lack of women-only clubs in

Malaysia. Siti Mohd Amin expected *something*, and this image was magnetic. However, what had been imagined as a homecoming ended in repulsion, exclusion, and disillusionment. Maria Borkovic shares Siti Mohd Amin's experience of disappointment in the Swiss lesbian community, having migrated to Switzerland from Hungary partly explicitly because of the lesbian community she imagined to thrive there. For her, moving to Switzerland was also moving *away from* what she experienced as increasing homophobia in Hungary to a "more liberal" political climate, and accordingly she expected lesbians to be situated differently in Swiss society than in the Hungarian context. However, as Kath Weston remarks, "homelands can be easier to desire from a distance than once you arrive on their figurative shores" (Weston 1995:275). Maria Borkovic's persistent and committed efforts to connect to Swiss lesbians fail, giving way to frustration and social isolation:

Actually I tried making friendships [with Swiss lesbians] on internet as well. And there was two girls, one was writing me back but because I said I can write a bit German but I would rather prefer she can talk English. Some didn't really respond and some we exchanged couple of letters but it was like- even exchange the mobile numbers so maybe we will meet and then it just like disappeared. [...] So this was actually the point when I was really really frustrated. [...] I was really frustrated that you come here, a foreigner, okay, I accepted that I'm foreigner I cannot really talk to Swiss people. Buy if you go to really like a gay society you also have this discrimination because you are a foreigner. So it's like really unexpected for me, I really thought it was gonna be a chance for me? That you know, gay people don't make difference whether they are from I don't know Peru or China or whatever. It's like more open society for me at least, more liberal and even there you just don't really get this perception of acceptance if you are gay. So it is really hard [...] for me when I kind of had this bad experience so far and this is when I saw your [research] topic and I was really interested, I really wanted to talk about.

—Maria Borkovic

Maria Borkovic understands herself as a member of the universal lesbian family, which she believed was going to offer mutual support and acceptance against the backdrop of shared experiences of discrimination. Accordingly, she expected Swiss lesbians to be 'better' people, open and welcoming towards international queer fellows. But what Maria Borkovic saw as a gateway to friendship and connection in Switzerland turned out to be another space of exclusion, only this time based upon her being an *Ausländerin*.

When Maria Borkovic first read the call for participants for this research on the website of the *Lesbenorganisation Schweiz* LOS, she became angry. Since the call placed there was written in German, she did not understand the research context in detail and thought it was an effort by Swiss lesbians to establish a queer migrant self-help group:

First I thought that (laughs) your topic is actually about a kind of gathering women club or something like that who are foreigners, and you can come and be friends here, but don't make friendship with Swiss women. [...] So saying that if you come from whatever Eastern Europe or Asia or whatever then you have to be part of one club, isolated, and not like you know, trying to assimilate with other Swiss women, this is how I took it.

—Maria Borkovic



Maria Borkovic was enraged at what she understood to be plans for a queer migrant group schemed by Swiss lesbians, which she interpreted as an effort to ghettoize immigrant lesbians instead of welcoming them into the folds of the Swiss lesbian community. When asked how she would have reacted to a group initiated by queer migrant women themselves, she replies that this would have changed her perspective on the project completely, and that she would appreciate such an effort.

Siti Mohd Amin's and Maria Borkovic's experiences indicate that queer migrant women in Switzerland cannot participate in the imagined community of the universal 'queer family' in the same ways as non-migrant lesbians. Their experiences of exclusion expose the specificity of the lesbian identity and subculture and the effect its implicit whiteness and 'Swissness' has on migrant queers who do not share the sexual biographies and other formative experiences of women who grew up in Switzerland. Queer migrant women's perspective hence counteracts the postulation of unity in a universal 'queer family' that continues to dominate the imaginaries constructed by queer women around the globe – including that of Siti Mohd Amin, Maria Borkovic, and many other participants in this study.

#### 5.2.4 Conclusion

Working outwards from Siti Mohd Amin's migration biography, this sub-chapter engaged with the question of how women who had been members of a sexual minority community and/or sexual (sub)culture before emigrating experienced their arrival in Switzerland and in the Swiss lesbian community in particular. Instead of the expected sense of homecoming to a universal 'queer family,' experiences of repulsion and exclusion in Swiss lesbian spaces put an end to the harmonious image some of the participants in this study had harbored about Western lesbian communities prior to immigration. Maria Borkovic has not been able to forge meaningful social relationships within the lesbian community despite persistent efforts. By contrast, Siti Mohd Amin has resigned in the face of (sub)cultural differences she perceives as insurmountable; refusing to discard her 'Malaysianness,' she has failed to become a 'good lesbian' and is hence barred from access to the lesbian community in Switzerland.

This disillusionment with and failure to access the Swiss lesbian community leads to frustration and social isolation – which is frequently aggravated by abusive work situations as well as by the absence of alternative spaces to establish social connections. Among the strategies employed by study participants to mitigate the experienced social isolation is an increased focus on cyberspace and transnational relationships and intimacies, which at once counteracts and propels social isolation. At the same time, membership in queer online communities based in the home country remains partial, and transnational long-distance relationships are frequently brittle and conflict-laden; neither can it replace membership in a physical queer diasporic community.

The 'culture shock' Siti Mohd Amin experienced in the Swiss lesbian community is mirrored in Marc Thielen's (2009) study, in which he analyzes the migration biographies of queer male Iranian refugees in Germany. The queer refugees' narratives Thielen discusses create a binary between gay men from the Orient (characterized as soft, ro-

mantic, and loving), and men in the German gay community (characterized as focusing on casual sex, lacking love, and reducing men to sexual objects). These imaginations and experiences complicate the biographers' access to the gay community in Germany. This result parallels the finding that non-Western sexual identities lived in queer subcultures in the home country prior to migration and (online) membership in transnational sexual minority communities based on these identities can end up snagging queer migrants' access to the gay or lesbian communities in the receiving societies. By refusing to shed their sexual identity and hence by refusing to become assimilated 'good lesbians' (or 'good gays'), they are at the same time excluded and exclude themselves from these spaces. From this, lesbian and gay communities emerge as bounded, closed spaces disciplining – or excluding – migrant sexualities.

### 5.3 “It’s like a stamp”: Rejecting the Lesbian Label

Some interviewees explicitly rejected the lesbian identity or any other same-sex ‘label.’ This sub-chapter engages with this last trajectory, first by tracing Efra Mahmoud's migration biography. The second part then juxtaposes Efra Mahmoud's positionality vis-à-vis the figure of the lesbian with those of non-migrant women, demonstrating that ambivalence regarding the lesbian identity does not hinge solely on being an international migrant. The final part addresses a prominent theme in Efra Mahmoud's account: intersections between religious identity and sexuality.

#### 5.3.1 “It’s like someone has a stamp on their forehead”: Efra Mahmoud

Having completed a Master's degree in Egypt, Efra Mahmoud toyed with the idea of continuing her social sciences studies abroad. She thought of going to America, but shied away from the language tests she would have had to take. One day she saw an ad by the Swiss embassy for a scholarship to study in Switzerland and spontaneously applied. One year later, she was told she had been accepted and that she could leave for Switzerland within the month. Efra Mahmoud had almost forgotten she had applied, but within four weeks quit her job, learned the Roman alphabet and a few words of German, and left her family and Egypt for Switzerland.

It was not her plan to stay; after her studies and professional training, she wanted to go back to Egypt. From the beginning, she experienced people in Switzerland as cold and distant, and the strict separation between work and private life felt strange and artificial to her. All she wanted – and wants – is “normal” contact with other people, which she finds herself unable to forge: *“Ich gehe einfach [...] unterrichten [an der Universität] und [dann] jede geht seinen Weg und [macht] sein Ding und nachher es gibt kein Kontakt mit Menschen”* – “I just go teach [at the university] and [then] everyone goes his way and does his thing and after that there is no contact with people,” is how she describes her everyday life in Switzerland. At the same time, when she returned to Egypt to visit her family during this first year, she realized that a gap had already opened between herself and her erstwhile home:

*Ich fühlte mich nicht mehr zuhause. Sie haben mich behandelt wie ein Gast und [...] etwas hat angefangen nicht zu stimmen dann. Ich war irgendwie in die Mitte, ich bin nicht dort zuhause und ich bin auch nicht hier zuhause, und ich habe hier [in der Schweiz] mich gewöhnt an alleine zu leben und meine Sachen selber bestimmen, was ich kochen will was ich machen will [...].*

I didn't feel at home anymore. They treated me like a guest and [...] something started to not feel right then. I was in the middle somehow, I'm not at home there and I'm not at home here either, and here [in Switzerland] I have gotten used to living alone and deciding on my own, what I want to cook, what I want to do [...].

—Efra Mahmoud

When in Switzerland, Efra Mahmoud misses her vibrant home city, and how people connect to each other there with easy jokes in everyday life. In an attempt to regain this sense of community, she has tried to connect to her compatriots in Switzerland, but it is a small community, and the only friend she made returned to Egypt. She has also sought to establish contact with people in Switzerland over the internet, via a not specifically lesbian chat site. While no friendships have come of this, it is where she eventually met her Swiss partner. She emphasizes that she was not looking for a partner, and she would never have imagined that she was eventually going to engage in a relationship with a Swiss woman who was moreover still married at the time: *“Ich wollte nur normal Leute kennen lernen”* – “I just wanted to get to know people normally.”

Before migrating, Efra Mahmoud had fallen in love with women in Egypt – never with men – but it had never occurred to her to act on her desires or to engage in a relationship with a woman: *“Es war für mich einfach nur Gefühle”* – “It was just feelings for me.” At first, she states that she had not felt as though she was in need of something, that being in love without acting on it felt “okay” and “normal,” and that she had not thought much about the implications of her inclinations since she entertained a multiplicity of fulfilling social contacts. However, later in the interview she remarks:

*Ich habe nie gedacht dass ich werde etwas eine Beziehung oder etwas machen aber ja. [...] Es war mir genug einfach nur gut Kontakt zu haben oder etwas zusammen machen, einfach normal, oder einfach Geschenke machen, also eher solche Sachen, einfach Liebe zeigen so aber nicht mit mehr. Es hat mir nicht soo gefehlt [...]. Es gab schon Frauen die haben mit mir etwas versucht oder so ausnahmsweise, aber ich weiss nicht warum- das ist nicht normal. Bei uns.*

I never thought I will start a relationship or something but yes. [...] It was enough for me just to have good contact or to do something together, just normally, or just give presents, rather things like that, just show love but not more. I didn't miss it sooo much [...]. Sometimes there were indeed women who tried to do something with me or so, but I don't know why- it's not normal. With us [=back home].

—Efra Mahmoud

Retrospectively Efra Mahmoud asserts that she did indeed miss intimacy (if not “sooo much”) when living in Egypt. When still living there, she had also been confronted with the option of acting on these desires but was too afraid of venturing outside of what she

considered “normal” and into the realm of that which she perceived to be stigmatized as abnormal.

It was only in Switzerland, where Efra Mahmoud fell in love with a professor at university, that she considered acting on her feelings for the first time. She emphasizes that without feelings she could never engage with another woman, but when mutual feelings do arise, this can cause a “problem,” as the desire to act can become too strong. Shortly afterward Efra Mahmoud engaged in a relationship with a woman she met online. “*Dann ist es schnell gegangen*” – “Then it went fast,” she says, grinning. At the time of the interview the couple had been together for a couple of years, and had just moved to their own little house in a small town.

Whenever Efra Mahmoud’s account touches on issues of same-sex intimacy and sexual identity or relationships, it is marked by hesitation, interruptions, distress, and refusal. At one point she suddenly stops speaking about a love story in Egypt, throwing a meaningful look at the thin wooden panel that separates her own garden (where we are sitting) from her neighbors’, who can be heard speaking on the other side of the panel. When asked whether her neighbors know about the nature of the relationship between Efra Mahmoud and her partner, she says that she believes they know but that she has never discussed it with them. In another instance, she explains that in Arabic the word for homosexual and “abnormal” are the same, but refuses to utter or write down the word:

TB: *Und wie heisst das Wort aufarabisch, dieses ‘abnormal’?*

EM: *(Fällt resolut ins Wort) Ich sage nicht diese Wort (lacht nervös, hört auf zu reden). [...] Ich kann das nicht weil es ist nur- ich kann das nicht diese Wörter sagen oder schreiben [...] Ich kanns nicht ich kanns nicht einfach, ich kann das nicht, ist nur- ist nicht das ich [nicht] will, ich kann das nicht ich- (hört auf zu reden).*

TB: And what’s the word in Arabic, this ‘abnormal’?

EM: *(Interrupts TB resolutely) I don’t say this word (laughs nervously, pauses). [...] I can’t do this because it’s just- I can’t say or write these words [...] I can’t, I just can’t, I can’t, it’s just- it’s not that I don’t want to, I can’t do it, I- (stops speaking).*

—Efra Mahmoud

When asked whether she identifies as a lesbian, Efra Mahmoud replies: “*Ich weiss nicht was kann ich mich bezeichnen eigentlich*” – “I actually don’t know how I can describe myself,” and continues:

*Das Problem ist dann die meisten denken die lesbische Frauen sie sind- ich interessiere mich nicht an andere Frauen, ich liebe schon jemand und dann das ist fertig, [...] ich habe nicht Interesse an Frauen so wie man das denken wenn man das Wort hört [...], das ist auch ein Grund dass ich will nicht immer dass die Leute denken das ist- ich bin nicht so.*

The problem is that most people think that lesbian women they are- I’m not interested in other women, I already love someone and that’s it, [...] I’m not interested in women the way you may think when you hear the word [...], that is also a reason that I don’t

want people to think all the time that's- I am not this way.

—Efra Mahmoud

Later in the interview Efra Mahmoud further clarifies what she means by “not being the way” lesbians are perceived to be in Switzerland:

*Aber ich kann das [=die sexuelle Orientierung] nicht sagen, ich muss immer aufpassen, und ich habe schon gemerkt zum Beispiel, dass manchmal die Frauen sie sind komisch [wenn] sie wissen dass gibt eine Frau so, [...] auch bei uns am Institut und so, wenn zum Beispiel eine hat Geburtstag und [eine] umarmt sie oder so, [dann] sagen [sie] 'Ja was will sie von ihr,' solche Sachen, ich will nicht dass die Leute immer denken es gibt etwas, [...] es ist wie ob jemand hat ein Stempel oder so.*

But I can't tell people that [=the sexual orientation], I always have to take care, and I have already noticed that sometimes women are strange [when] they know that there is a woman like that, [...] also at our institute, when for instance it's a woman's birthday and a woman embraces her or so, [then they] say 'What does she want from her,' things like that, I don't want people always to think that there is something, [...] it's like someone has a stamp on their forehead or something like that.

—Efra Mahmoud

Efra Mahmoud dissociates herself from stereotypes of lesbians as promiscuous and preying to establish an understanding of herself as monogamous, faithful, and settled, and as someone who only engages with women physically if she also has feelings for this person. The fear of being ‘misjudged’ as a lesbian critically determines the way Efra Mahmoud manages her sexual orientation in her everyday life. She avoids other lesbians, instead seeking “just normal” contacts, especially with Egyptian compatriots. She does not communicate about her relationship at work or in any other everyday context, especially for fear that an Egyptian might learn about her dissident sexuality, and that this news may spread among the close-knit Egyptian diaspora and eventually back to Egypt to her family. Efra Mahmoud's account attributes to Arab people an *exceptional* perception of homosexuals: When asked whether she would be interested in participating in a focus group discussion with other queer migrant women, she accepted under the condition that no other Arab participants be present: “*Vielleicht wenn sie [die Mitglieder der Fokusgruppe] nicht Arab- [...] weil das Problem ist dass bei uns- wenn jemand von die arabische Länder [...] das Bild für uns ist irgendwie anders, das ist das Problem*” – “Maybe if they [the members of the focus group] aren't Arab- [...] because the problem is that back home- if someone from Arab countries [...] the image for us is somehow different, that's the problem.” To Efra Mahmoud, the thought of being identified as woman-loving by another (even if also same-sex loving) Arab is unbearable for her.

Efra Mahmoud substantiates her anxiety about gossip by reference to her discovery that she and her doctor have a mutual acquaintance in the Egyptian community. “*Das wäre schon problematisch dann*” – “this would then be problematic,” she says, if this acquaintance were to learn about her sexual orientation. When asked about what she imagines the consequences to be, she answers:

*Das erste Ding dass er wird nie mit mir Kontakt haben für irgendwie ein etwas dann- es ist schlimm obwohl er ist nicht- er ist Christ und alles aber es ist trotzdem... es hat nichts zu tun mit Religion oder so, aber das Bild es für die ganze Ägypter – hat nichts zu tun mit Religion – das ist eigentlich etwas es ist nicht normal. Und ich bin nicht ganz dagegen dass es nicht normal ist, aber ich kann nichts dafür. Es ist- [ich] sage nicht ja zum Beispiel es ist normal und das alles. Okay, das ist schon nicht normal [...].*

The first thing is he [the mutual acquaintance] will never have contact with me for something then- it's bad although he's not- he's Christian and everything but in spite of that... it doesn't have anything to do with religion or anything but the image, for all Egyptians – doesn't have anything to do with religion – it's something that is not normal. And I'm not totally against the view that it's not normal, but it's not my fault. It's- for instance I don't say it's normal and everything. Okay, it's really not normal [...].  
—Efra Mahmoud

The statement constructs being a “normal” Arab and acting on same-sex desires as irreconcilable concepts. (However, it remains unclear whether Efra Mahmoud refers to same-sex love here, or to acting on same-sex desire, or to forging an identity based on same-sex desire; given her description of her past in Egypt where she felt but did not act on her same-sex desires, it transpires that it is mainly the sexual acts and the act of identification that she considers “not normal.”) This situates the speaker in a dilemma: As she identifies as a “normal” Arab, she is required to frame her same-sex desires in terms of abnormality, which pushes her into a defensive position: “It’s not normal, but it’s not my fault.”

At the same time Efra Mahmoud’s statement secularizes homophobia in Egypt, stressing that anti-gay attitudes are not connected to religion but are a matter of Egyptian ‘culture’ at large, which she substantiates by reference to the fact that the Egyptian expat from whom she anticipates a homophobic reaction is Christian and not Muslim. When asked what religion means to her, Efra Mahmoud expresses an intellectual interest in comparative religious studies. To her, religion mainly provides guidelines about right or wrong actions, and she is interested in how religions differ or converge regarding those questions. When asked whether she practices a religion, she reluctantly conveys that she is a practicing Muslim. “*Ist eigentlich nicht viel*” – “It’s actually not much” that you have to observe as a practicing Muslim:

*Beten oder kein Schweinefleisch, kein Wein, ja einfach dass man immer schaut dass- zum Beispiel ich kann nicht etwas stehlen [...] oder ich sollte nicht lügen, aber manchmal man muss, aber ich versuche immer das zu vermeiden, solche Sachen einfach [...]. Also (undeutlich) ich sollte nicht mit einer Frau zusammen sein (lacht etwas) also aber- (hört auf zu reden).*

Praying or no pork, no wine, yes just that you always see to it that- for instance I can't steal something [...] or I shouldn't lie, but sometimes you have to, but I always try to avoid that, just things like that [...]. Well (mumbling) I should not be with a woman (gives a little laugh), well but- (stops speaking).

—Efra Mahmoud

At the end of the interview, when asked what she would wish for if she had three wishes, her answer is:

*Das ist immer der Hauptwunsch eigentlich, dass wenn ich sterbe ich gehe in das Paradies dann und einfach nicht in die Hölle, dass [...] Gott mir vergibt. Und die zweite Wunsch dass ich bleibe mit meiner Freundin zusammen einfach immer in eine harmonische Beziehung. Und die dritte Wunsch, das ist kompliziert die dritte Wunsch. Ich hätte irgendwie ein Land wo es gibt die Vorteile von hier und von Ägypten in eine gleiche [...] Land beide zusammen. Ja.*

This is always the main wish really that when I die I go to paradise and not to hell, that [...] God forgives me. And the second wish is that I stay together with my partner always in a harmonious relationship. And the third wish, this is complicated the third wish. I would somehow like to have a country where there are the advantages of here and of Egypt in the same [...] country both together. Yes.

—Efra Mahmoud

Here Efra Mahmoud's ideal of a monogamous and long-term relationship reemerges but, as the first wish indicates, needs to be reread from her perspective as a practicing Muslim who feels she is doing wrong. While she has accepted that she loves women and has decided to live out her homosexuality in spite of her own religious beliefs, she attempts to salvage 'normality' by conforming to normative values in relationships.

In Efra Mahmoud's account, sexuality emerges as an intimate practice restricted to the space of the bedroom rather than an identity. To have her sexual orientation pushed to the forefront of a conversation, as is the case in our interview, assigns sexual preferences a relevance she rejects, repeating that she just wants to live a "decent" (*anständig*) and "normal" life (implying "...just like heterosexuals") – except for this one admittedly "abnormal" but deeply private thing that happens in the space of the bedroom.

Yet Efra Mahmoud's attempts to confine her queerness to the bedroom failed in the face of Swiss immigration procedure. The fact that at the time of the interview the same-sex Partnership Act was not in effect just yet complicated Efra Mahmoud's legal situation. Looking for legal strategies to enable her to stay in Switzerland, Efra Mahmoud and her partner fell victim to an impostor claiming to be able to support Efra Mahmoud in legal proceedings to attain a residence permit. Distressed when rising costs failed to materialize in palpable results, Efra Mahmoud eventually managed to obtain support from the Swiss LGBT community by contacting one of the 'homo-friendly' lawyers listed on the website of the *Schweizer Lesbenorganisation LOS*, who solved the matter swiftly, competently, and economically.

In other words, Efra Mahmoud's rejection of the lesbian identity is not absolute as she uses it strategically to access resources provided by activist organizations in Switzerland. Still, these necessary moments of identification are marked by reluctance and remain restricted to formal legal issues. Her collaboration with her lawyer has not, for instance, led to an extension of her social relations into the Swiss lesbian community. Instead, Efra Mahmoud has continued to focus her social energy on "normal" Swiss people and expat compatriots, albeit with very limited success.

Efra Mahmoud's narrative about how she and her partner have navigated complex situations such as Efra Mahmoud's immigration process, her partner's divorce, or buy-

ing and renovating a house confirm her resourcefulness, agency, and resistance in the face of perceived injustice. When things go wrong, it is she – with her limited German – rather than her Swiss partner who picks up the phone and makes the necessary calls to complain, demand, or defend. And yet Efra Mahmoud's palpable discomfort when talking about her sexual orientation made me question why she answered a call to participate in research that explicitly centered on sexuality and migration.<sup>11</sup> Efra Mahmoud's narrative provides two explanations: first, that she identified with me as a fellow social scientist, expressing empathy for the difficulty of finding research participants. Second, that she applied because my call was mailed to her by the Swiss lawyer who had helped her and to whom she felt obliged. In other words: Efra Mahmoud is not only a woman-loving woman, an Arab, and a practicing Muslim, but also a social scientist, a thankful client of a supportive lawyer, and someone who seeks connection to others.

Returning to Efra Mahmoud's third and final wish, to live in a country that merges the advantages of Egypt and Switzerland, finally directs the focus to her emotional oscillation between the two countries. At one point, when short on work and money, Efra Mahmoud and her partner had planned to move to Egypt:

*Ich habe Zeit lang einfach keine Arbeit gehabt und kein Geld einfach [...] und ich wollte schon nach Hause zurück und alles [...], wir [haben] schon mal gedacht [...] ich würde keine Bewilligung bekommen mehr. [...] Sie [Efra Mahmouds Partnerin] war schon bereit mit mir nach Ägypten zurück zu kommen. Aber wir sollten dann bei meinen Eltern wohnen, und sie einfach meine Kollegin oder einfach Freundin oder so. [...] Ich habe einfach gesagt sie hat keine Lust immer kalt und so, und sie wollte scheiden und so, und sie will einfach etwas anderes in ein warmes Land leben [...].*

For a while I was unemployed and just didn't have any money [...] and I was ready to go back home and everything [...], we already thought that [...] I wouldn't get a residence permit anymore. [...] She [Efra Mahmoud's partner] was ready to come back with me. But we were supposed to live with my parents, with her just my colleague or just friend or so. [...] I just said she doesn't fancy the cold and all that, and that she wanted to get divorced and all that, and that she simply wants something else, live in a warm country [...].

—Efra Mahmoud

Efra Mahmoud envisions the couples' life in the family house without revealing the nature of their partnership to her family, a strategy which is enabled by the profound silence around female same-sex desire in her family and Egyptian society more broadly. In contrast to the accounts of Augusta Wakari and others, this invisibility and silence around female same-sex desire is positively connoted here: For Efra Mahmoud, Egypt

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11 At the time that Efra Mahmoud applied, the call for participants was still explicitly addressed to "lesbians." Hence, her application for this research was another instance in which Efra Mahmoud identified as a lesbian. The wording was changed to "women-loving women" after the first interview.



holds the promise of a life void of the pressure to ‘come out’ and assume a (stigmatized) sexual identity. However, the couple abandoned the idea when they realized that it would be much more problematic for Efra Mahmoud’s partner to obtain a residence permit in Egypt than vice versa, and not much later Efra Mahmoud found a job in Switzerland, which ended the discussion for the time being.

In sum: Efra Mahmoud is torn between her religious and cultural identities on the one hand and her sexual orientation on the other. Her account grounds her configuration of her sexuality as “abnormal” in her interpretation of the commandments of her religion, which in her eyes leaves no space for doubt that her desire for other women is not normal and that to act on it is wrong. Efra Mahmoud generally refuses to frame her sexual preference and practices in terms of identity, and vehemently rejects the label ‘lesbian,’ which she perceives as being tied to stereotypical ideas about lesbians such as promiscuity and lechery. Instead, she frames her sexuality as a practice taking place in the private space of the bedroom, which in her eyes should not determine who one is, or keep a person from leading a “normal” life. Efra Mahmoud strives to salvage as much of the normalcy to which she aspires as possible by establishing a homonormative relationship and by connecting to “normal” – non-lesbian – people. However, these efforts are dwarfed by the constant pressure she feels to ‘come out’ and identify as a lesbian. Sometimes this pressure is explicit: Swiss immigration procedure, for instance, forces her to strategically assume the lesbian identity. At other times, the pressure is subtle and impalpable, little instances in everyday life.

A most crucial lens through which Efra Mahmoud’s account and our interaction specifically should be read is further that of *homonationalism*. Although Efra Mahmoud herself is highly critical of what she describes as an exceptional – that is, excessively negative – attitude many people and public discourses in Arab countries hold against people desiring the same sex, her defense of the Muslim religion and her emphasis on the positive aspects of the culture of silence around same-sex sexuality in Arab cultures are key to her account. As Dervla Sarah Shannahan points out with respect to religion and queerness:

Traditional cultures and perspectives, however they may be envisioned, are posited as necessarily incompatible with queer identity. [...] This modality often takes the atheism of the queer ideal(ized) subject as a foundational premise in such an off-hand manner that it often overlooks faith positions as possible lines of identity or difference. (Shannahan 2010:674)

Efra Mahmoud’s often defensive stance and reluctance with respect to topics related to sexuality, culture, and religion suggests that she connected my position as a white Swiss lesbian researcher to a critical, or even negative, attitude towards religion in general and towards Muslim people’s treatment of non-normative sexualities in particular. As a white Swiss citizen, I embodied Swiss mainstream culture, where an anti-Muslim racism that configures Muslim people as sexist and homophobic was on the rise in the early 2000s already (see Chapter 3.4). Efra Mahmoud’s narrative is clearly structured by her attempt to work against these prejudices. Her struggle to justify her position and her frequent lack of words thereby testify to the difficulty of reconciling seemingly

irreconcilable aspects of her Self, such as one's cultural or religious identity with one's sexuality, without being catapulted out of the realm of 'queer' and becoming labelled, once more, as a 'backward' sexual Other having failed to modernize (i.e. to 'come out' and become a 'good lesbian'). At the same time, Efra Mahmoud's narrative works against the implicit foundational atheism Shannah detects in the certain theorizations of 'queer,' as she indeed simultaneously embodies being a (practicing) Muslim and engaging in same-sex intimacies and relationships. As such, her narrative provides leverage to criticize constricted definitions of sexualities in the realm of 'queer,' and more generally concepts of 'queer' that frame sexuality solely as sexual identities rather than sexual practices or erotic feelings as well (see also Dankwa 2014 and 2021).

### 5.3.2 What about non-Migrant Swiss Lesbians?

*Non-migrant* queer women's processes of identification subvert a dichotomous understanding of migrant versus non-migrant positionalities with regard to identifying as a lesbian as well. As existing research about lesbians in Switzerland shows, the identification as 'lesbian' by queer Swiss women is not in any way natural or unproblematic (Caprez and Nay 2008, Moser 2001, Rufli 2015, Stefan 1975). Christina Caprez and Eveline Nay argue that many same-sex loving women in Switzerland are reluctant to identify as lesbians, especially those who have never been active in the women's or lesbian movement. Many perceive the term as "hard," as a "swear word," or as having "a negative touch." These connotations are tied to stereotypes that imagine lesbians as women who look and act in a masculine way, something many queer women dissociate themselves from. Lesbians, they feel, are generally perceived as women who are "in men's clothes," "machos," or "women who do not look after themselves, are overweight, do not cultivate themselves, and have a rough way" (Caprez and Nay 2008, my translation). Moreover, many queer women are critical of the sexual focus inherent in the term. As Ulrike Hänsch writes in her account of lesbian biographies in Germany:

Long before the individual woman possibly deals with the question of how to name her feelings or actions, the names for what she does – and therefore is – have long been defined. [...] In order to interpret the stigmatizing sign in a positive way, it first has to be accepted as belonging to oneself. This is why processes of identification are usually fraught with reluctance and contradictions, and these negotiations do not remain limited to the short phase commonly described as coming out. As long as lesbian identity is culturally marked as a corrupt identity, individual identification with it will be rife with contradictions. (Hänsch 2003:242, quoted in Caprez and Nay 2008:304, my translation)

Despite these inherent ambivalences, all of Caprez and Nay's interviewees eventually end up (also) using the term 'lesbian' to refer to themselves, if only for lack of a better alternative. However, many women resort to evasive formulations whenever possible, such as "*Ich lebe mit einer Frau zusammen*" – "I live with a woman" or "*Ich habe eine*

*Freundin/Partnerin* – “I have a girlfriend/partner”<sup>12</sup> (Caprez and Nay 2008:276). Some of the queer migrant women interviewed here (such as Teresa Ruiz) indeed seem to speak about themselves as *Lesben* with more ease than Caprez and Nay’s interviewees. But language is likely pivotal here: Even in the early 2000s most women growing up in Switzerland learnt to viscerally shrink away from the phoneme *Lesbe/lesbisch* or the French *lesbienne* respectively, while in the home countries of many migrant women who took part in this study this word and concept either did not circulate at all or was only phrased in a foreign language like the English *lesbian* or the French *lesbienne*.

In sum, while queer migrant women are positioned in different ways than non-migrant women with respect to the lesbian identity, these differing positionalities should not be interpreted as presenting a dichotomy between migrants and non-migrants in which we assume an unproblematic identification with the lesbian signifier on the part of non-migrants. Images of the ‘bad’ lesbian emerge from the narratives of both migrant and non-migrant lesbians. As has been shown, this ‘bad lesbian’ can be a *racialized lesbian Other*, but it can also be the *stereotypical white lesbian* inhabiting Swiss lesbian spaces, who is often imagined as promiscuous, masculine, and unable to engage in long-term relationships. This latter image is sometimes also reproduced by women (both migrant and non-migrant) who are no strangers to the lesbian community themselves. Beatriz Kraiss states that she would only visit the lesbian “ghettos” (=lesbian clubs, events) if she were left with no other choice, such as for instance if she were single; Nermina Petar, Laura Georg, Julia Morricone, and Natascha Schild, all more or less frequenters of lesbian events, frame the lesbian community as a *Kuchen* (literally ‘cake’) in which ‘everyone has been with everyone,’ and in which (according to their observations) relationships never last long. It is against this backdrop that the ‘good lesbian’ emerges, who commits to long-term monogamous relationships and strives for a normal, depoliticized life.

### 5.3.3 Religion and Sexuality

Efra Mahmoud’s account highlights the role of religiousness in the negotiation of same-sex desire. Her narrative chiefly grounds her struggle with her sexual orientation in her religious belief system. In her interpretation, this renders her sexuality ‘wrong,’ and she understands herself as dependent on her god’s grace for forgiveness for her behavior and choices. However, Efra Mahmoud’s positionality in terms of religion is unique among the narratives that this study examines. In fact, religion is not generally a dominant theme in these accounts of everyday spaces and practices in Switzerland. This may come as a surprise to some, given the tendency in popular discourse in Switzerland to connect non-Western cultures to homophobic orthodox religiosity, especially in the context of Muslim cultures (Puar 2007). It also contrasts with other research on migration conducted in Switzerland, such as Silvia Büchi and Martina Koch’s study on migration and health, which found that “almost all persons – no matter their religion – practice their belief, be it at home or through regular attendance at a house of prayer, a church,

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12 *‘Freundin’* has a somewhat more serious connotation than the English translation ‘girlfriend.’ Further, the grammatical gender of *‘Partnerin’* is feminine – in other words: Where the English term ‘partner’ covers/invisibilizes homosexuality, the German term exposes it.

or a mosque, [and] some are also actively engaged in their religious community” (Büchi and Koch 2014:119; my translation). By contrast, few interviewees in this study practice a religion and even fewer do so in an institutional context.

However, this does not imply that the interviewed women did not express any religious or spiritual beliefs, or that for them religion and sexuality co-exist unproblematically. For some of those who grew up in communist societies or were raised in atheist or only moderately religious families, religion was indeed not a predominant issue. However, in other cases the relative absence of religion as an explicit topic in the interviews requires a different reading. These latter life stories suggest that in many instances the silence on the subject of religion is a result of personal development in which interviewees have distanced themselves from and/or transformed their religious belief systems. These developments and transformations are the focus of this sub-chapter. Also, in many biographical accounts religion implicitly emerges as a prominent theme in its role as an intrinsic part of the ‘culture’ perpetuated by parents, siblings, friends, teachers, the media, and so on. Interviewees’ negotiation of these ‘cultures’ will, however, be discussed in later chapters, especially in Chapters 6 and 7. Lastly, Efra Mahmoud’s account further raises the question of who is absent from this study. Against the backdrop of her narrative and the findings of other studies examining the relationship between religiosity and anti-homosexual stances, it stands to reason that orthodox women desiring the same sex often struggle to acknowledge their dissident sexuality and are unlikely to participate in a study such as this.<sup>13</sup>

The religious diversity and complexity within this sample was considerable. A synopsis of parents’ denominations and the religious context that interviewees grew up in yields the following structuration: Nine interviewees had Catholic parents, two of whom grew up in a predominantly Muslim context; two had a Serbian/Greek Orthodox background; two grew up in a Christian Free Church context; five had Muslim parents, one (participant) of whom grew up in a communist context; five had parents of different faiths and denominations, including Catholic-Protestant (one of these families was embedded in a predominantly Muslim context), Catholic-Muslim, and atheist-Muslim. One interviewee grew up in a Catholic household but later converted to Mormonism (and also acted as a Mormon missionary in the U.S. for several years); and three had atheist or non-religious parents and grew up in a Muslim, Buddhist/Shinto and communist context respectively. The religious affiliation of participants’ parents varied widely, from “Muslim on paper” to “orthodox practicing Catholic.”

It is beyond the scope of this research to engage with the many ways in which religion and sexuality constitute each other in these contexts, an enterprise that would be complicated by questions of how religion and ‘culture’ interrelate, how these interrelations are negotiated in different diasporic contexts, and how these discourses

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13 The correlation between religiosity and anti-homosexual stances has been confirmed in international comparative quantitative studies, see e.g. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/>, downloaded July 15, 2014. As detailed in Chapters 3.4 and 7, such findings always need to be read against the backdrop of global circuits of power.

are tied into larger geometries of power in a postcolonial world (see Chapter 3.4). Instead, the following sub-chapter attempts to turn one of the major challenges of this research – the diversity of its sample – into a strength, tracing the different ways in which interviewees position themselves vis-à-vis religion, how they perceive this positionality to have shifted through migration and/or their emerging queer desires, and how they draw on religion and spirituality in their everyday lives. As mentioned above, I will focus on accounts concerning personal developments with regard to religion and spirituality. These findings are then considered in light of some insights from the recent flurry of research on religion, migration, and (queer) sexuality.

Frequently, religion was only elaborated on upon request. Interviewees would typically state that they believe in a god or another greater being, often framing their beliefs in terms of spirituality rather than religion. At the same time, these same interviewees would often assert that they do not consider themselves to be particularly religious, that they do not practice their religion – at least not on a regular basis – and/or that they do not practice their beliefs in an institutional context. Besides those for whom religion had never been a prominent issue, there were those whose religious beliefs and value systems had undergone significant shifts. Having grown up in moderately to very religious households, these interviewees later discarded or revised their religious beliefs and practices in the context of their travels and migration, as well as in the course of negotiating their emerging same-sex desires and identities. Vehement self-doubt, shame, isolation, and a sense of ‘wrongness’ often marked the starting point of such theological transformations. Although these crises should be understood as a result of homophobias as cultural phenomena rather than specifically religious ethics alone, interviewees frequently connected the adversities they had experienced as sexual dissidents to the religious beliefs of people in their home countries, especially their parents.

The periods of self-doubt were often followed by at least a partial rejection of religion. In many cases religious practices such as going to church or daily prayer were laid to rest. At the same time, core values were retained, although often framed in terms of spirituality rather than religion. Charlotta Sembiring, who grew up in a strictly Catholic household in Indonesia and was very actively engaged in her religious community as a young adult explains her belief as follows: “I certainly believe in something bigger, a bigger scheme or a bigger- something that sort of connects everything, people, the earth, the universe. So I believe in a connection- but I have a hard time with God.” This statement exemplifies the religious and spiritual attitudes expressed in many other accounts.

The emancipation from homophobic interpretations of religion, typically embodied by orthodox parents, happened either through an incorporation of other religions or spiritual worlds into one’s belief system, or through a rereading of a specific religion from a queer perspective. As Jimena Reyes, who grew up in a Catholic household in Peru, recounts the evolution of her religious beliefs:

*Moi je suis œcuméniste. Moi je prends le meilleur de tout. De l’Islam, du Catholicisme puisque ç’a été mon éducation primaire, après quand je suis arrivée en Inde et puis j’ai découvert l’Hin-*

*douisme, j'ai trouvé ça tellement sage, tellement, philosophique, d'une ouverture et d'une pureté exemplaire, et du Bouddhisme encore plus, tu vois. Et moi, je prends tout. Tout ce qui est possible, mais je ne suis pas une ligne. Donc je veux être libre avec ma religion.*

I'm an ecumenist. Me, I take the best of everything. From Islam, from Catholicism since this was my primary education, then when I arrived in India and discovered Hinduism, I found this so wise, so, philosophical, of an exemplary openness and pureness, and Buddhism even more, you see. And me, I take everything. Everything that is possible, but I'm not one line. So I want to be free with my religion.

—Jimena Reyes

Jimena Reyes' deliberations about religion constitute an intrinsic part of her reflections about how her relationship to the gay and lesbian community in Switzerland has changed. Before going to India, she had spent quite some time in gay and lesbian spaces, but after engaging with Hinduism and Buddhism she has increasingly come to perceive these spaces as confining "ghettos":

*C'est le voyage en Inde c'est cette philosophie différente, cette ouverture magnifique de l'Hindouisme et du Bouddhisme qui m'a permis à m'ouvrir plus quoi, ne pas rester sur des réseaux ou des ghettos ou des choses comme ça, moi j'aime tout le monde, les Noirs les Chinoises, les hétérosexuels les transsexuels enfin j'aime tout le monde, et j'ai pas du tout envie de me sentir uniquement dans un certain lieu.*

It's the trip to India, this different philosophy, this magnificent opening of Hinduism and Buddhism that has allowed me to open myself up more, not to stay within certain networks or ghettos or things like that, me I love everybody, the Blacks the Chinese the heterosexuals the transsexuals, I love everybody, and I don't feel like feeling at home in one specific place only.

—Jimena Reyes

Religion has remained an important part of Jimena Reyes' everyday life. Her values and beliefs directly manifest themselves in her social practices as well as in the way she positions herself within the lesbian community. In her everyday life she surrounds herself with religious objects and images: Among her pictures taken for this research is one featuring a poster of the Hindu god Ganesha, a figure that reappears on a picture of a poster she has put together herself, consisting of a collection with photos of the vast array of people – family and friends – who are important in her life: *"J'ai fait des photos aussi de Ganesh, donc le côté spirituel, pour moi est très important, ça fait partie de mon équilibre, [...] ces objets-là [les photos, Ganesh], je suis toujours avec"* – "I also took pictures of Ganesh, so the spiritual side, for me it's very important, it's part of my equilibrium, [...] these objects here [the photos, the Ganesha poster], I'm always with them."

Others, like Julia Morricone, literally *reread* their religion from a queer perspective in an effort to reappropriate their religious 'home' and to reconcile their religious and

sexual identities.<sup>14</sup> As a teenager, Julia Morricone met her future partner in their Free Church community, of which both of their parents were members.<sup>15</sup> After admitting their mutual affection to each other, the women went through a period of ‘we would like to but we shouldn’t,’ restricted by a sense of shame rooted in their religious upbringing. This period lasted over a year, but eventually the couple decided to commit to their relationship and leave their religious community. They considered initiating a situation in which they would be forcibly expelled in order to coerce the community members to openly discuss the issue of homosexuality, but eventually refrained from this strategy in order to spare Julia Morricone’s mother, who was a leading figure in this community. After this break, Julia Morricone lost interest in religion altogether for several years: *“Ich habe wie ein bisschen eine Funkstille gehabt”* – “There was like an absence of communication [“radio silence”] for a while.” Years later she realized that she was missing something, so she and her partner established a reading group to bring together queer people who shared their desire to engage with the Christian religion and discuss biblical texts from a queer perspective. However, it was in the context of this group that Julia Morricone understood that the religious ‘home’ she sought to re-establish in the end remains unattainable because it, importantly, had been the banal, daily rituals and routines of her specific Free Church that had provided her with a sense of familiarity and security. *“Es ist etwas verloren gegangen”* – “Something got lost,” she concludes with regret.

Efforts to realign homosexuality with religious beliefs are often marked by a sense of confusion, ambivalence, anger towards god, or even self-hate. If god is good, why should god say *“Okay Nora, du bist lesbisch aber ich verbiete dir lesbisch zu sein, jetzt kämpfe du mal und ich hocke auf meinem Sessel und schaue dir zu wie du damit fertig wirst”* – “Okay Nora, you are a lesbian, but I forbid you to be a lesbian, now go and fight while I watch from my easy chair how you deal with it” (Nermina Petar)? This question also occupies Maria Borkovic:

I mean if it’s like God also made gay people you know (laughs), who are we coming from then? Like, we still exist and you know God loves everyone even you know big terrorists and killers, you know God forgives everyone. [...] It cannot be bad really if it comes from love, I think it’s really like how the Bible was read or maybe some sections were taken out, you know these things which are there and I think it’s more the church like Catholic Church made these big problems around gay people and around these relationships.  
—Maria Borkovic

Here the mystery of a god that created not only homosexuals but also homophobia is resolved in an interpretation of homophobia as a technology of power within the Catholic Church. At the same time, the alignment of homosexuality with terrorism and murder

14 I owe the concept of rereading religion to Andrew K.T. Yip’s analysis (2005) of how queer Muslims and Christians reread religious texts.

15 As a side note: Julia Morricone’s account of how she met her partner also highlights the often very circumstantial nature of religious membership: Many an interviewee joined a church group or activity simply because she had fallen in love with the priest’s daughter or another member of her religious community.

exposes this statement as a manifestation of the homophobia Maria Borkovic continues to direct at herself. As she asks later in the interview with regard to the fact that she cannot conceive a child for medical reasons: “Does that mean I’m really breaking the rules here”? Nermina Petar seems to summarize what many others experience when saying that: *“Ich glaube an Gott. Also ich habe immer irgendwie Angst zu sagen irgendwie es gibt kein Gott. Bist damit aufgewachsen und die Religion selber bedeutet dir etwas”* – “I believe in God. Well I’m always somehow afraid to say somehow that there is no God. You grew up with it and the religion means something to you.” Here religion emerges as a technology to discipline sexuality, drawing its efficacy from its intimacy (“You grew up with it”). It is precisely this familiarity, coupled with fear, which can render complete dissociation impossible.

The biographical narratives discussed here suggest that those who grew up in a religious context that condemned homosexuality have revised their belief systems in order to realign their theological or spiritual framework with their emerging same-sex sexuality. In the course of these developments, the personal significance of religion has often, but not always, decreased. These shifts are marked by an initial sense of shame and self-doubt, followed by a partial rejection of beliefs and practices, and eventually by the creation of a belief system that can accommodate same-sex sexuality in positive terms. At the same time, this process is often partial and selective, which exposes (certain restrictive interpretations of) religions as intimate technologies for disciplining sexuality that do not allow believers to discard homophobic beliefs easily, resulting in persistent internalized homophobia and a struggle to establish a positive view of one’s sexuality.

In this context, it is further important to note that homophobia is not contingent on religiosity alone: Many non-religious parents also reacted negatively to interviewees’ dissident sexuality. Nor are these instances of homophobia contingent upon ‘culture.’ As discussed in Chapter 3.4, accounts that ground homophobia in religion and/or culture, ethnicity, or nationality in essentialist ways need to be reread in the context of global geometries of power. Rather than situating homophobia in non-Western (notably Muslim and African) cultures, such a reading reframes modern homophobias as a result of the dichotomy between the Western Self and the colonial Other. Yet, at the same time, it must not be forgotten that queer people’s self-doubts, shame, and struggles with parents who try to discipline their queerness remain painful realities.

To conclude, I turn the focus back to queer migrant women’s reinventions and reappropriations of religion and spirituality. In line with Shannahan’s earlier argument that atheism seems to have become an implicit foundational premise for the queer ideal(ized) subject, Andrew K.T. Yip argues that Western discourses tend to render religion as something backward and sex-negative (and hence something that readily attaches itself to circulating imaginations of the colonial Other):

In the increasingly secularized West at least, religion is generally perceived as sex-constraining (i.e. it hegemonizes heterosexual marital-sexuality and constructs all other forms of expression as an unacceptable ‘Other’), if not sex-negative (i.e. it represses and oppresses believers as sexual beings, thus undermining their humanity). From



this point of view, religious understanding of sexuality is often incompatible with broader social and cultural developments that are moving towards greater liberalism and recognition of sexual diversity and pluralism, as well as individual embodied sexual rights and autonomy. Therefore, religion appears out-of-step with the times [...]. (Yip 2009:1-2)

Queer migrant women's revisions, reinterpretations, and recompositions of their religious and spiritual belief systems upset the logic Yip so aptly describes. Although often accompanied by persistent internalized homophobia, interviewees' reappropriations of religion and spirituality often establish perspectives on religion and spirituality that can accommodate queerness and as such are sex-positive. These recomposed belief systems often represent an intrinsic part of interviewees' everyday lives and provide them with a sense of orientation and belonging.

In this sense, queer migrants' reclamation of religion and spirituality as they emerge from the interstices of upbringing, queerness, and migration are productive of new ways of thinking about religion and sexuality. Yet Yip warns us that queer migrants' revisions of their belief systems should not be framed in terms of queerness and agency alone. He argues that individualizing religion from a queer perspective "generally reflects the contemporary western religious landscape that prioritizes the authority of the Self over that of religious institution" (Yip 2005:47). From this, the creation of an individualized, tolerant, and queer religious belief system emerges as another milestone in the neoliberal project of reinventing the Self in the context of a migration project:

Processes such as de-traditionalization and individualization have significantly undermined the basis of traditional authority, leading to the empowerment of the self. Life, therefore, has become increasingly a strategic trajectory in the construction of social biography [...]. Indeed, in the case of non-heterosexual Christians and Muslims, queering religious texts becomes one of the strategies to construct 'do-it-yourself' social biographies to achieve identity coherence and continuity. (Yip 2005:59, references omitted)

Correspondingly, queer migrant women's revisions of religion also have to be read alongside the process of developing a lesbian identity. While such 'do-it-yourself' belief systems provide a theological or spiritual sense of orientation and emancipation from parents' beliefs, they at the same time reflect a process of disciplining that may also be read as part and parcel of becoming a 'good lesbian.'

In her deliberations about Muslim faith and queerness, Shannahan contends that queer theorists' conceptualization of queer as a decidedly anti-identity stance also encodes ideal queer spaces, cultures, and identities as implicitly *secular* as the queer ideal of 'freedom of norms' becomes conflated with 'freedom from religion.' This problematizes the membership of faithful queer people in the queer community, in which "visible signs of religious observance are oft read as blotting out the very possibility of lesbian identity" (Shannahan 2010:674). Especially in the context of migration, sexual 'liberation' and membership in the queer community is often paired with the rejection of a traditional culture that is experienced as oppressive, and of which religion is seen to be an intrinsic part. Taking queer migrants' faith and spiritual positions seriously as

“possible lines of identity or difference” (ibid:675) by contrast offers the possibility to frame transnational configurations of sexuality and religion as a global circuit instead of a unilateral spreading of Western (secular) queer ideals.

### 5.3.4 Conclusion

Under the title *“It’s like a stamp”* this sub-chapter engaged with the migration biography of Efra Mahmoud, who does not identify as a lesbian and does not generally frame her sexuality in terms of an identity. Her account grounds her reluctance to identify as a lesbian in her religious beliefs and her consequent understanding of her sexuality as “abnormal.” Efra Mahmoud’s rejection of the lesbian label was then juxtaposed with non-migrant lesbians’ positionalities, for whom the lesbian identity is also problematic. From this, it was concluded that although migration necessarily triggers shifts in sexual positionalities, these are not to be understood in terms of a dichotomy between migrants who have a problem with the lesbian identity and non-migrants who do not. A second juxtaposition compared the trajectory of Efra Mahmoud’s religious identity with those of other interviewees’. While religion and spirituality often serve as points of reference in interviewees’ everyday lives, in the majority of the accounts, religion does not emerge as a dominant theme. Some of those accounts were shared by interviewees who had grown up in secular or only mildly religious contexts, but most had seen a shift in their faith and belief systems through migration and the emergence of their same-sex desires. A critical queer postcolonial perspective frames queer migrant women’s rejections, reappropriations, and reinterpretations of their faiths in terms of a secularization of queer migrant subjects in the process of becoming ‘good lesbians,’ that is, ideal individualized, secular queer subjects. Against such a purely structural view, it was argued that these reappropriations of faith also should be read as contributions to the transnational circuits of religion and desire, and in this sense as new perspectives on religion, spirituality, sexuality, and queerness.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter engaged with the question of how queer migrant women’s understanding of their sexual Selves has shifted through the experience of migration. From the discussion of their migration biographies, it was found that these shifts necessarily entail a renegotiation of sexuality in the home country on the one hand and situating oneself vis-à-vis the lesbian identity pervading dominant Swiss discourses on the other. The chapter highlighted three trajectories of shifting sexualities, with one case study serving as the principal example for each: Teresa Ruiz, who had not thought of her sexuality in terms of same-sex desire before she came to Switzerland but has developed a lesbian identity since; Siti Mohd Amin, who had been a member of a sexual minority community in Malaysia before emigrating; and Efra Mahmoud, who did not think of her same-sex desires in terms of an identity before leaving Egypt and continues to resist the lesbian “stamp” in the diaspora.

No matter whether the lesbian identity is rejected or adopted, these processes of disidentification remain partial, precarious, ambivalent, and contradictory. *Rejection* of the lesbian label is rendered incomplete as queer migrants are permanently confronted with the lesbian stereotypes pervading everyday and institutional spaces and places. Moreover, sometimes strategic identification can be required to gain access to resources, such as a lawyer specializing in homosexuality and immigration. *Identification* with the lesbian label equally remains partial through (sub)cultural difference and mechanisms of exclusion in lesbian spaces (including self-exclusion) that reveal that the seemingly neutral lesbian figure is always already Western and white.

Like migration narratives in general, accounts of shifting sexualities are always also stories of *personal development*. Sexuality emerges as a crucial site for constructing the Self, and as such represents a decisive factor in the success of the migration project as a whole. The analysis subjected this narrative pattern to a double and contradictory reading. First, these reinventions of the sexual Self were framed in terms of *agency*. Queer migrants make decisions, migrate, offer resistance, tackle negotiations, reject politics, instrumentalize identities, overcome repulsions, navigate new cultural contexts, forge contacts, reshape lives, heed traditions, yield to desires, make sexual choices, maintain transnational ties, manage everyday lives, and reflect sexualities. Their strategies to navigate the paradoxes of their corporeal presence as queer migrant women in an environment in which there are no designated spaces for queer migrant women is shown to be productive of understandings of the lesbian identity – and more generally sexualities – that expose, disturb, and undermine dominant ideas in Swiss discourse about the figure of the lesbian and sexuality.

Second, these sexual/migration biographies were read from a critical postcolonial perspective. As all three cases highlight, adoption or rejection of the lesbian identity is pivotal to social in- or exclusion in Swiss everyday life. While a rejection of the lesbian identity tends to result in social isolation and (sometimes partly self-inflicted) exclusion, identifying as a lesbian is a crucial milestone on the way to successful ‘integration’ into Swiss society. Such stories of *réussite* are often about becoming a ‘good lesbian,’ which entails the adoption of homonormative ideas about sexuality, relationships, and procreation as well as, importantly, the retrospective construction of a lesbian biography and coming-out story.

At the same time, narratives that describe migrations as ‘homecomings’ to the lesbian identity are paired with stories of social exclusion (deskilling, failure to gain access to the lesbian community, and so on), which unmask Switzerland as a space where migrants – and queer migrants in particular – continue to be discriminated against based on their being perceived as *Ausländerinnen*. Thus, the adoption of the lesbian identity by queer migrant women also needs to be read as a strategy to escape racial and ethnic markings. This reading resonates with Adi Kuntsman’s analysis (2003) of the migration biographies of Russian lesbians in Israel. Kuntsman shows how Russian lesbians in Israel adopt a lesbian identity to escape racial and ethnic Othering, since the subcultural codes of the Israeli lesbian identity – short hair, boyish clothes – allow Russian lesbians to pass as Israeli-born middle class lesbians. As Kuntsman comments on her own experience: “I am again marked as different – this time in terms of sexuality and gender

rather than race or ethnicity. The former difference is a result of my deliberate choice, and I like to narrate it as liberation of the body and consciousness" (ibid:300).

Although social markers such as skin color, name, or language denied the option of 'passing' like this to some interviewees, the desire to blend in was a recurrent and dominant theme across accounts. While the lesbian identity seems to offer such an opportunity to become a part of something bigger, inserting oneself into Swiss lesbian spaces space comes at a cost and eventually places queer migrants, as 'double impossible subjects,' in a paradoxical position: On the one hand, sexualized and racialized discursive formations render it impossible to be both a citizen of one's home country and a member of one's ethnic, religious, or cultural diasporic community *and* a (Swiss) lesbian; on the other hand, it is equally impossible to be a lesbian *and* an immigrant with a different cultural background and a different understanding of sexuality.

## 6. Family Matters

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This chapter is concerned with family affairs. Relationships to family members, especially parents, and starting a family of one's own were prominent themes in the biographical narratives, as were more general reflections about conceptualizations of partnership, family, and procreation. The following discussion approaches family and the space of the family home from two perspectives. The first part of this chapter analyzes interviewees' relationships to their *families of origin* and how they interpret and negotiate their role in them as sexually non-conforming family members. The second part focuses on interviewees' visions of creating their own *queer families*.

In this chapter, I draw on two theoretical perspectives on family, from feminist migration research and queer theory respectively. In migration research, the family is usually seen as a 'basic unit' of solidary networks and personal security. Since migrations are always accompanied by risks and insecurities, families are understood to be of particular importance in diasporic and transnational contexts (PASSAGEN 2014). While much migration research remains grounded in heteropatriarchal and biogenetic notions of family, feminist scholars have begun to formulate alternative perspectives that allow for differentiated interventions. The Swiss Working Group Migration and Gender, PASSAGEN, for instance, suggests conceptualizing family ties as three social practices: *inheriting*, *caring*, and *providing*. According to this view, family ties are typified by the fact that they persist beyond a single lifetime, which is implemented through the practice of *inheriting*. Not only goods and assets but also immaterial things like stories, traditions, and responsibilities can be passed on. The two other practices, *caring* and *providing*, are associated with the responsibilities of a family member. A typical characteristic of these practices is that they do not rely on immediate reciprocity but may change over the course of a lifetime – such as a child who later cares for her ageing parents. PASSAGEN (ibid:207) further argues that, while the responsibility to inherit, care, and provide within the family is mediated socially to a certain degree (such as through cultural values and laws), the exact determination of what a family obligation entails remains predominantly a matter of intra-familial negotiation, relegating family affairs largely to the private arena.

This notion of family usefully separates 'doing family' from biological kinship and normative gender roles. Nevertheless, feminist migration studies, too, have largely con-

tinued to work from the assumption that families are based on heterosexuality, biogenetics, and the nuclear family model. Queer theorists have taken issue with such essentialist perspectives on the family. Based on the insight that family lives in Western societies increasingly depart from normative models of the family (although these models have in reality never been as pervasive as generally suggested), queer critics have turned their focus to patchwork families, collective households, and 'rainbow families,' asking how these multiple forms of living together and procreating that reach beyond biogenetics, heterosexual couplehood, and the heteronormative ideal of the mother-father-child family disrupt previous conceptualizations of sexuality, kinship, and gender.

This body of work has been particularly influenced by Kath Weston's *Families We Choose* (1997 [1991]), in which the author examines the collective coming-out story circulating among gays and lesbians in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Coming out (collectively), lesbians and gays moved out of their family homes and cultural isolation into a new kind of kinship and solidarity. These 'families we choose' were based on a sense of social and emotional belonging rather than heteropatriarchy and biogenetics. These chosen families became of particular significance in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis, during which gay men could often not rely on their families of origin (nor the state) for support.

Weston herself likens such queer kinship ties to diasporic contexts:

The families I saw gay men and lesbians creating in the Bay Area tended to have extremely fluid boundaries, not unlike kinship organization among sectors of the African-American, American Indian, and white working class. David Schneider and Raymond Smith (1987:42) have characterized this type of organization as one that can 'create kinship ties out of relationships which are originally ties of friendship.'

—Kath Weston (1997 [1991]:108)

Such reflections eventually enabled the formulation of the concept of *queer diaspora* (Fortier 2002), which likens queer people's shared 'imagined communities' based on sexual identity to immigrants' shared imagined communities based on ethnicity or nationality (see also Chapter 3.4). However, despite the early establishment of this conceptual link between migration and sexuality, the proliferating body of literature about queer family formation long failed to view family from the perspective of international migrants (but see Cantú 2009, Manalansan 2006 and 2003, Chávez 2011, White 2013). That is, while queer people's realities are hardly considered in contributions focusing on family in migration studies, migrant experiences are rarely present in the queer critique of family.

This chapter inserts itself into this very gap. It takes up the suggestion by *PASSAGEN* to think of family ties as a result of the practices of inheriting, caring, and providing, but extends it by way of the queer critique. In other words, I use the conceptualization of family as a set of social practices (rather than biogenetics) in order to disrupt heteropatriarchal notions of kinship and lineage. Within this framework, I am mainly interested in two questions: How is queer migrant women's access to the social practices

1 See also the discussion of Weston's *Get Thee to a Big City* in Chapter 3.3.5.

that enable kinship ties regulated through dominant ideas about family and through normative or resistant family practices? And: What strategies do queer migrant women devise to gain access to these family practices, and under what circumstances do they dissociate themselves from them?

The first part of the chapter explores queer migrant women's relationships with their *families of origin*. Here I argue that queer migrant women are positioned in fundamentally different ways than their heterosexual counterparts vis-à-vis their families of origin. Rather than a frequent source of support and comfort, the family and the family home emerge as ambivalent sites of negotiation and disidentification, which for the women interviewed results in restricted access to the practices of inheriting, caring, and providing within the family of origin.

The second part of the chapter examines how queer migrant women envision and implement *their own queer families*. It discusses how the ways in which the women's access to 'doing family' are constrained by heteronormative legislation, discourses, and practices around partnership and reproduction that persist both in the country of origin and in Switzerland, and the transnational strategies they have developed to still implement their queer families. This discussion exposes that queer family matters are not private but rather are negotiated in a variety of political arenas.

## 6.1 Family Relations: The Family of Origin

### 6.1.1 National and Diasporic Sexualities Revisited

Because this study primarily focused on women of the first migration generation, the majority of interviewees' families of origin lived outside Switzerland, mostly in the countries where interviewees had been born and had grown up. Other families or family members lived in Switzerland, mainly, but not only, those of the few interviewees who were born in Switzerland. Before embarking on the discussion of interviewees' accounts of their relationships and negotiations with their families of origin – and especially with their parents –, I would like to put forward three considerations for contextualization.

The first consideration is to recall the discussion of the global negotiations of sexualities in Chapter 3 (see Chapters 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). There it was concluded that homophobias are not 'essential' to, for instance, 'Muslim,' 'African,' 'Eastern European,' or 'Balkan' cultures, as trending homonationalist discourses in Switzerland suggest. Instead, where homophobias occur in dominant discourses in certain countries outside the West, these must importantly also be read as legacies of colonialism and its continuities, and as results of heteropatriarchal nationalisms, which centrally define national identities through the juxtaposition of colonial versus precolonial and/or subaltern (female) sexualities. There is nothing 'essential' about these homophobias; on the other hand, they are not purely Western imports, either.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as also laid out

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2 As discussed in Chapter 3, to frame homophobias as a Western import in (ex-)colonies would be to deny the differences and contestations of genders, gender roles, and sexualities *within* (ex-)colonies and in their precolonial histories, and would furthermore fail to account for the fact

in Chapter 3, Western perceptions of homophobias outside the West often disregard progressive LGBT legislation in many non-Western countries and ignore differences of positionalities within non-Western societies; especially also *queer* positionalities. Particularly, these perceptions often fail to acknowledge same-sex cultures and practices that do not match the image of the “Gay International,” whose rapid globalization, as Joseph Massad (2002) contends, is endangering certain same-sex cultures and practices and the queer people practicing them (see also Chapters 3.4.2 and 3.4.3).

The second consideration concerns *diasporic* sexualities. As Gayatri Gopinath states in her analysis of South Asian diasporas, as of yet not much sustained attention has been paid “to the ways in which nationalist framing of women’s sexuality are translated into the diaspora, and how these renderings of diasporic women’s sexuality are in turn central to the production of nationalism in the home region” (Gopinath 2005:9). As an example, Gopinath refers to the work of Tejaswini Niranjana, who showed how *anticolonial nationalists* in India constructed Indian women in Trinidad (thousands of whom worked as indentured workers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) as amoral and licentious. This negatively connoted figure of the diasporic Indian woman was contrasted with the chaste, pure, ‘authentic’ Indian woman ‘at home’ in India, who in this way became the emblem of Indian national(ist) morality. Taking Niranjana’s argument beyond gender, Gopinath calls for including sexuality in the equation, that is, also to denaturalize *heterosexuality* as a central structuring principle of such national and diasporic female figures (ibid:9). Gopinath further discusses a number of instances demonstrating how *diasporic* male elites “attempted to counter nationalist framings of the diaspora as the inauthentic Other to the nation by positioning [diasporic] women’s bodies as the site of an imagined communal purity and authenticity” (ibid:167). Diasporic masculinists hence sought to counteract the negative depiction of the diaspora by homeland discourses by themselves constructing ‘their own’ diasporic woman as the epitome of ‘Indianness.’

However, diasporic communities not only come under moral pressure from such heteropatriarchal homeland nationalisms but are also targeted by racism in Western host societies, which stereotypes and marginalizes migrant communities. In her examination of negotiations of morale and sexuality between Filipino immigrant parents and their daughters in the U.S., Yen Le Espiritu argues that in general, diasporic evocations and reconfigurations of homeland culture are of particular significance in immigrant communities since “not only [do they] form a lifeline to the home country and a basis for group identity in a new country, [they] also serve as a base from which immigrants stake their political and sociocultural claims to their new country” (Espiritu 2003:157). Like Gopinath and other queer feminist migration scholars, Espiritu sees *gender* and especially the control of young women’s *sexuality* as “a key to immigrant identity and a vehicle for racialized immigrants to assert cultural superiority over the dominant group” (ibid). Again, this superiority is centrally established by locating national purity and authenticity in diasporic women’s bodies, pitted against the figure of the ‘Western’ woman, who is depicted as licentious and sexually corrupt. (Paradoxically this image of the ‘Western’

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that the definition of genders and sexualities must be understood as an ongoing negotiation between different groups, among them ex-colonizers and native populations.



woman mirrors the image of the diasporic woman as depicted by homeland nationalists discussed above – which demonstrates the relational nature of constructions of gender and sexuality.) Such evocations of home culture, Espiritu argues, represent a “‘politics of location’ – how immigrants use literal or symbolic ties to the homeland as a form of *resistance* to places and practices in the host country that are patently ‘not home’” (ibid, emphasis added; see also Holmes 2009). But these evocations of homeland culture come at a cost for women. As Espiritu points out, “the levation of Filipina chastity (especially that of young women) has the effect of reinforcing masculinist and patriarchal power in the name of a greater ideal of national and ethnic self-respect” (ibid:158). Espiritu continues:

Filipino families forge cultural resistance against racial oppression by stressing female chastity and sacrifice, yet they reinforce patriarchal power and gendered oppression by hinging ethnic and racial pride on the performance of gender subordination. This form of cultural resistance severely restricts women’s lives, particularly those of the second generation, and casts the family as a site of potentially the most intense conflict and oppressive demands in immigrant lives. (Espiritu 2003:178)

Such gendered and sexualized discursive politics of diasporic communities locating national culture and morale in women’s bodies must hence be viewed in light of two contexts: in the context of *heteropatriarchal homeland nationalisms* (sometimes, but not always, shaped in the context of anticolonial movements), which tend to denigrate diasporic women in particular; and in the context of *racism in the host society*, against which diasporic communities resist by discursively establishing cultural and moral superiority over mainstream society.

The effects of these discursive formations also became manifest in the search for participants for this study. In the course of this search, I contacted around two dozen NGOs addressing migrants, most of which were self-governed NGOs specifically addressing migrant women of a certain nationality, region, or ethnicity. In these interactions I encountered a far-reaching lack of knowledge of and about queer community members, but in several cases also implicit or explicit negative attitudes towards homosexuality. With one exception, none of the representatives I contacted knew of or about non-heterosexual women within their diasporic communities. (As detailed in the introduction to this book, I did not use the terms “queer” or “lesbian” in my communications but in this context rather spoke or wrote more vaguely of “women who are in relationships with other women.”) Also, with two exceptions, the representatives of these organizations refused to put up the call for the study in their bureaus or centers, at their events or on their websites. None of these organizations knew about any events, websites, or groups addressing queer community members, and only one representative knew any queer community members personally. On multiple occasions exponents of organizations self-governed by migrant women warned me emphatically of the profound taboos around homosexuality in their communities, and two explicitly expressed doubts that ‘such women’ existed in their communities at all.

When speaking to the organizations, on more than one occasion it transpired that the mere expression of the possibility of queer women existing within the folds of their community was perceived as a threat to the positive image these organizations at-

tempted to construct of their community vis-à-vis Swiss mainstream society (and me as its representative). These interactions hence confirmed Espiritu's theory that diasporic communities attempt to construct positive self-images in order to mitigate the negative effects of racism. One instance was particularly illustrative of this: When I asked a representative of a self-governed South Asian women's organization whether she knew of any members who were in a relationship with a woman, and with whom I could possibly speak in the context of this research, the representative initially confirmed that indeed there were always a lot of women present at the organization's center, and that they were all helpful and would surely be more than willing to talk to me anytime. Suspecting she had misunderstood I clarified the part about the women-to-women relationships. This changed the tone of my interlocutor, and she told me that no "such women" existed within their community. The female community members were hence initially represented stereotypically – feminine, nice, available – and, as it turned out when sexuality was directly addressed, implicitly always already heterosexual. Stereotypical femininity and heterosexuality hence emerged as crucial structuring principles of these female nationalized subjects. As the data discussed here testifies to, such images work to the detriment of 'real' diasporic women, girls, and daughters – queer or not – as they become subject to control and moral pressure. Within this discursive practice, queer community members become impossible subjects: Seeing that the clients targeted by these organizations are framed as always already heterosexual, this implicitly renders these spaces exclusive of (openly) queer community members. In the light of such representational strategies of resistance it was not surprising that this 'search channel' did not result in any interviews.<sup>3</sup>

The third and last preliminary consideration is to recall that many 'Swiss' families in Switzerland, too, react negatively to learning that their daughters are same-sex oriented (Caprez and Nay 2008, Stefan 1975, see Chapter 2.2). In sum, in light of the three considerations presented here, it is therefore not valid to outsource homophobia to racialized Others and their communities, as homonationalist discourses in Western Europe do. Taking these considerations as the backdrop against which interviewees' narratives of their relationships and negotiations with their parents and families (both in Switzerland and in their countries of origin) and with their diasporic communities (Chapter 7) must be read, I now continue to queer migrant women's accounts of 'doing family.'

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3 Note that longterm participant observation in these organizations (versus – mostly – phone calls and also e-mails as used here) is likely to have yielded different results, as the building of relationships within these organizations might have enabled access to interviewees.

### 6.1.2 Family Relations: Introduction

Many interviewees describe themselves as “family persons,” regardless of whether they grew up in a nuclear family or in a busy multi-generational house, sharing rooms with siblings. At the same time, most interviewees migrated by themselves, so that the connection to their family was disrupted, with no replacement; only few research participants joined family members abroad. Particularly those who grew up in busy family homes found it, or still find it, exceedingly difficult to adjust to the spatial and social isolation that accompanies the individualistic lifestyle in Western countries. This sense of solitude especially dominates narratives about the initial phase of the migration, but in some cases – aggravated by the multiple mechanisms of social exclusion faced in Switzerland – the original sense of isolation has increased rather than diminished over the years. Against this backdrop it is not surprising that participants almost never cut the ties to their family of origin in the long run in the face of negative reactions to their sexual orientation. Beyond the affective ties and the social capital entailed in family membership, they often depended on their families for financial support, at least in the initial stages of migration, but also in the longer term – only few interviewees sent remittances back home.

Especially parents reacted negatively to the news of their daughters’ dissident sexual orientation. This dynamic renders many queer migrants’ relationships to their families highly ambivalent: Caught between love for and the affective, social, or financial necessity to stay connected to their family on the one hand and rejection based on sexuality on the other, interviewees often moved intra-familial negotiations about family relationships and sexuality to the center of their biographical narratives. This sub-chapter discusses these negotiations and ambivalences. From these accounts, the family generally emerges as a locus of power through which both normative and dissident sexual identities are produced. In most cases, this means that the family home represented a site of production of normative gender roles and heterosexual prescriptions that have become normalized as undisputable ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ values against which the daughter’s, granddaughter’s, or sister’s emerging sexual dissidence is measured. The resulting sense of confinement, unbelonging, and rejection on the part of the sexually non-conforming family member fuelled plans to migrate. In some cases, however, family homes also represented a protected “queer island in a heterosexual sea” (Caprez and Nay 2008:264, my translation, see below), creating a space within which the queer family member is enabled to develop her dissident sexuality against the broader heteronormativity prevailing in the given social context.<sup>4</sup>

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4 I consider members of the ‘family of origin’ all those with whom interviewees grew up fully or in part sharing ‘family ties.’ In my sample this was mainly biological parents and siblings, but also grandparents, stepfathers or -mothers, and in one case foster parents.

### 6.1.3 “We are taught to be sacrificing ourselves for our families’ sake”: Family, Heteronormativity

Family members, and especially parents (biological or not), mostly exerted tremendous pressure on their daughters to follow a heteronormative prescript, that is, to marry a man and have children. “[*Mein Vater*] hat immer so gesagt, ‘Ja, solltest du nicht jemanden finden und heiraten und Kinder bekommen und so was?’ – “My father always said, like, ‘Shouldn’t you find someone and marry and have children and the like?’” Ayesha Umar reports about her otherwise very liberal father. In Augusta Wakari’s family everybody goes “gnagnagnagnagna,” nagging at her to eventually find a man and marry, despite her openly different inclinations. To reach this end, Augusta Wakari’s family blackmailed her lovers and eventually sent her to Europe in order to separate her from her girlfriend. “When will I see a grandchild?” used to be a recurrent question in Laura Georg’s conversations with her father before she came out to him, while her mother urged her to “*wieder mal einen Rock anziehen*” – “put on a skirt for a change,” enforcing heteronormativity indirectly via normative gender stereotypes. Other family members psychologically blackmailed their queer children and siblings: Leyla Haddad’s mother blamed her for not granting her old and sick father the grandchildren he desired, and Augusta Wakari’s sister associated their father’s heart problem with Augusta Wakari’s declaration that she intends to marry her female partner in Switzerland and have children with her.

None of the participants in this study were disowned by their family when they learned about their daughter’s dissident sexuality, but the family’s reactions were often extremely painful nonetheless. “*Ich kann dich dafür nicht hassen. Du bist immer noch meine Tochter*” – “I can’t hate you for this. You are still my daughter,” one father said. The most common reaction was refusing to acknowledge the information altogether and to increase the pressure to marry a man and procreate; ignoring the differing sexual orientation; declaring it a phase or a curable illness; or reminding the daughters that homosexuality was a religious sin in the expectation that this would induce a change in ‘attitude’ and an adjustment of ‘choices.’ Such temporary and anti-identitarian conceptualizations of homosexuality created pressure on the queer family members to ‘convert’ to a heterosexual life, sometimes over years or even decades – no matter whether the family lived close or far. This stands in stark contrast to most interviewees’ own perceptions of their sexualities, which they experienced as an unalterable fact rather than a choice.

The mechanisms productive of familial pressure to conform to a heteronormative prescript crystallize in Jasmine Sieto’s account. The following discussion of her narrative provides the starting point for a broader argument exposing the ‘family of origin’ as a crucial site of the everyday (re)production of a culturalized heteronormativity and the role this has played in the interviewees’ migration biographies.

Jasmine Sieto, who grew up in a wealthy family in urban Indonesia, tells me about her coming of age as a lesbian:

I know that I’m lesbian since I was ten years old [...]. Then, when I think it’s not really, really good if you know such an early stage, because I feel like my teenagerhood is

so like, fucked up, I don't know what, you know, it's like you're trying to find out what's wrong with you and strange thing happening to you, and, I realize it like five years later when I was almost in high school or something like that, ah so, this is why they call it *homosexuell* [German pronunciation]. Yeah. Because then they teach us [...] not only like men women, so, also gays and something like that, [...] also this homosexuality. Ahaaa, [I] see then, [when I was] fourteen, and that's why I need to go out from the country when, as soon as I finish my school, that's why I'm traveling to Europe, find the next place to stay.

—Jasmine Sieto

Jasmine Sieto depicts her younger Self as subjected to her own awakening feelings and desires, which confused her and isolated her from her social surroundings and “fucked up” her teenagerhood. Her sense of being different in a wrong way was grounded in the silence around female same-sex desire and the invisibility of other women-loving women in Indonesia. Only after being taught about homosexuality at school was Jasmine Sieto able to make sense of the feelings she had harbored since the age of ten. The belated explanation provoked a sense of betrayal, which, coupled with her imagination of Europe as a ‘queer homeland,’ materialized in her leaving her parents’ home for Europe (“that’s why I need to go out from the country when, as soon as I finish my school, that’s why I’m traveling to Europe”). Jasmine Sieto, funded by her wealthy parents, stayed in several European gay and lesbian capitals before eventually enrolling in professional training in Switzerland, after which she settled at the fringes of Basel. All of this happened much to her parents’ discontent:

I'm the eldest, right? In Indonesia you believe that the eldest must show the way. Yes. Until now my brother was always waiting for me until I come back, but then, now, I say, look, get married, make children, make your parents happy, okay, then I don't have to come back. Because they didn't [=don't] know that I'm lesbian, still, yet.

—Jasmine Sieto

Jasmine Sieto's sexual orientation and the choices she has made based upon it unsettle the logic of the family hierarchy. At the same time, as her instructions to her brother and her attempt to mitigate the damage demonstrate, she continues to be granted a superior position among siblings. This happens ‘despite’ her dissident sexuality: Later in the interview, Jasmine Sieto qualifies her earlier statement that her parents do not know about her being a lesbian. “We never discuss it, about that, though. Yeah. But they know that I was with a girl for ten years, but [...] we never discuss it openly asking yes or no.”

Recently her parents learned that their daughter broke up with her long-term Indonesian girlfriend:

And now they know that I'm not staying with her anymore, that's why they insisting me to go back last year- 'Look, girl, if you have nothing to do there. I mean, if nothing to hold you there anymore, uh, they saying like that- if there's nothing else for you to stay, well, no really reason, then why don't you go back home.' And then my girlfriend, my ex-girlfriend, is getting married next year, with a man, they know about it, because the parents, they know each other [...]. So it's like the transparent condition. Yeah. Ev-

erybody know, but we don't speak about it. Yes. That's the thing. [...] But of course they know [...]. Keep quiet, happy life, enjoy, don't speak about it, don't hurt me (laughs). Something like that, yeah, because my mother's really really Catholic (laughs).

—Jasmine Sieto

Jasmine Sieto assesses that her long-term girlfriend was “just waiting for the right guy to come,” but also just gave in to “the pressure of the family” when resorting to a heterosexual life. This in turn kindled Jasmine Sieto's own parents' hopes that their daughter might follow suit and eventually return home to lead a heteronormal life and reassume her position in her family. Her parents are either unaware of, or ignore, the difference between masculine same-sex oriented women like their daughter, who understand their sexual orientation as an irreversible fact, and their feminine “girlfriends,” who tend to identify as heterosexual or bisexual instead and typically eventually resort to heterosexual relationships (see Chapter 5). The Sietos' negotiations with their daughter eschew their very origin, namely Jasmine Sieto's sexual identity, silenced in the face of all the evidence in order to maintain the semblance of a “happy family life.” Despite their knowledge of Jasmine Sieto's inclinations and her brother's ongoing family-founding activities, her parents continue to expect their daughter to come back to Indonesia, to live with them under their roof, to marry and have children, and later to take care of them. “*Nachwuchs*” – “Offspring” (Jasmine Sieto uses the German word here although we speak in English) is the one-word concept which for Jasmine Sieto summarizes all family obligations and expectations. “So if I'll get married to a man, means [through] pressure from my family. We are teach to be sacrificing ourselves actually for our families' sake,” she concludes laconically.

The inner conflict between family obligations and a desire for personal freedom is key to Jasmine Sieto's narrative. Her continuing sense of obligation as her parent's eldest child and only daughter stands at odds with her tangible homosexuality as well as with her appreciation of Switzerland as a place to live. At great length she enumerates the advantages and “convenience” of life in Switzerland, the clean air, functioning transport system, easily accessible lesbian venues, and so on. This she contrasts to a life of basic survival in what she calls the “jungle” of urban Indonesia, despite her family's considerable wealth and comfort. Her own fear of returning emanates from tales of Indonesian expats with whom she is acquainted, whose return migration failed: “A lot of people get these trauma things,” no longer used to the harsh conditions of everyday life in Indonesia.

Jasmine Sieto also frames her own difficulties with the idea of going back as a question of mentality: “I was actually growing up here [in Switzerland], also my thinking and you know, [at] seventeen [when she came to Switzerland], you don't know anything. In Indonesia it's not like here. But then here you can see the world, I mean you can know a lot of thing that we don't know before” – for instance about homosexuality. Her account foregrounds homosexuality as a major factor discouraging her from going back.

This [homosexuality] is normal [German pronunciation] here [in Switzerland] [...]. And it's nice to be accepted. I think it's also [what] brought us here, that's why we don't want to go [back] too, and I don't know anybody that [is] lesbian that go back actually to Indonesia again. I know two people in Holland. They also don't want, can't go back

again to Indonesia, because they get married and then they not accepted in Indonesia so, you know you have your life here. Then why should you go back to Indonesia? [...] But for me it's still open because I don't have anybody [=a partner] here. I can still go back anytime I want. Yeah. Yeah. This is Vorteil [German pronunciation/=advantage] und Nachteil [=disadvantage] when you're single, no?

—Jasmine Sieto

The statement that “I think it's also what brought us here, that's why we don't want to go back” moves the lack of acceptance of homosexuality in Indonesia to the center of Jasmine Sieto's concerns about returning, which also qualifies the flexibility she ascribes to herself at the end of the quote (“But for me it's still open because I don't have anybody here. I can still go back anytime I want”). In light of the broad set of arguments she presents against a return to her home country, these assertions of unfettered personal freedom and mobility appear to be an act of self-conviction justifying *ex ante* her eventual return to Indonesia to reclaim her designated place in her family. Jasmine Sieto's account does not make reference to any ties she might have established to the homosexual community in her home city in Indonesia during her (rare) visits after establishing a lesbian identity in Europe, and her narrative fails to convey whether her changed perspective might enable her to recognize a homosexual community in Indonesia previously barred from her view.<sup>5</sup> When asked what she thinks it would be like to live as a lesbian in Indonesia Jasmine Sieto answers: “It depends on the family.” She elaborates that for her this would be a big issue, “because maybe they (the family) are still expecting me in other side, still.” In other words, the quality of her future (love) life in Indonesia would be dependent on whether her family would eventually acknowledge her sexual dissidence.

Nevertheless, throughout the interview Jasmine Sieto clearly expresses that her return to Indonesia is a question of *when* rather than *if*. She says she will indeed go back at some point in order to do “her job as a child,” but the timing of her return remains unclear:

TB: So are you planning to stay here?<sup>6</sup>

JS: Eh not really actually (smiles). Not really. Maybe another ten years? Or five years? Or two years? (smiles) I [was] planning to go back actually next year. Yes. But now I

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5 LGBT activism in Indonesia is growing (see e.g. <http://aruspelangi.or.id/>, downloaded on February 7, 2014), but the increasing visibility of homosexuals in Indonesia is paralleled by a general rise in homophobia (see e.g. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/10/22/homophobia-rise-survey-says.html>, downloaded on February 7, 2014). LGBT activist groups ascribe the growing hostility to media reports conveying negative stereotypes of homosexuals and describing homosexuality as a disease from the West as well as to the condemnation of homosexuality by radical Islamist groups.

6 At the time of the interview, I was aware of the delicacy of this question, which among other questions of a similar kind (such as “But where are you *really* from?”) denies immigrants the possibility of an unquestioned and normalized presence in Switzerland. In this case I brought the question forward because I had become confused by the expressed tensions between family expectations and personal freedom.

changed my plan I'm stay for another four years. That's for sure.

—Jasmine Sieto

Jasmine Sieto did indeed return to Indonesia some time after the interviews but re-returned to Switzerland sometime later.

Similar to her compatriot Charlotta Sembiring's view, Jasmine Sieto's view is that her social environment failed to inform her about the existence of homosexuality when she was growing up, denying her the opportunity to mitigate the feelings of difference and isolation she suffered during her adolescence. Accordingly, the sense of betrayal she felt when she was eventually introduced to a terminology that named her feelings for other women was instrumental in her decision to leave for Europe, which she imagined as sexually diverse and open (unaware of the fact that in Switzerland, too, it is not unusual for queer people not to learn about homosexuality until they are well in their teens, especially in rural areas).

Neither the fact that she continues to get involved with women in Switzerland nor her geographical distance stops her parents, who live in Indonesia, from exerting continued pressure on their daughter to return to Indonesia and follow a heteronormative prescript. At the same time, Jasmine Sieto continues to claim her position in her family, likely also owing to a need for financial security. Importantly, her parents' lack of acknowledgment of the fact that sexual desires can be formative of someone's identity frames the family as a site of (re)production of heteronormative ideals. Despite this, Jasmine Sieto and other interviewees related that they loved women long before they knew about any social concepts for same-sex love and long before knowing any queer people, and like Jasmine Sieto, Charlotta Sembiring, and Augusta Wakari, they feel deceived for having been left feeling wrong and alone.

By contrast, another interviewee, Siti Mohd Amin, does not attribute the enforcement of the heteronormative prescript to the institution of the family but instead describes heteronormativity as a cultural trait always already internalized by what she calls "Asian" women. When asked whether she thinks there is pressure on Asian women to marry and have children, she answers: "(Hesitates) Uh, not as pressure, but it's already used to it. They used to it. Just natural you know? This culture is already with you, so once you change your life [from a temporary homosexual to a permanent heterosexual relationship], automatically. No one is push you," she says in reference to the array of female lovers that have, like Jasmine Sieto's girlfriend, left her for men.

Siti Mohd Amin's analysis opens up a paradoxical space, for it situates queer Asian women like herself outside the Asian culture. The paradox is in part resolved when Siti Mohd Amin says later in the interview that "I know we are- the culture is no allowed to have partner same woman and woman, you know but I say, 'Okay my family is open.'" Here she positions herself less outside "the culture" or an Asian "we" than as a cultural dissident protected by her family. As mentioned earlier, Siti Mohd Amin's mother (her parents still live in Indonesia) views her three tomboyish daughters as her "boys," and Siti Mohd Amin herself does "not feel shy" about this attribution. Another reading of Siti Mohd Amin's perceived exemption from heteronormative Asian femininity may there-



fore be that she does not quite position herself as a *woman*, or not as a *typically Asian* woman, rendering the rules of normative Asian femininity inapplicable to her.

In sum, Siti Mohd Amin's and Jasmine Sieto's accounts both demonstrate that the concept of *Nachwuchs* (offspring) draws its power from the fact that family brings the concept forth as an integral and naturalized part of 'the culture' rather than as a private family matter. What 'culture' comprises remains vague, although religion is often mentioned. As Jasmine Sieto's says by way of explaining her family's silence about her homosexuality: "My mother's *really really* Catholic." However, the view that heteronormativity is situated in 'culture' masks the fact that the family *itself* represents a prime social site for the everyday (re)production and enforcement of, but also resistance against, these heteronormative cultural values.

In accordance with this 'culture' argument, interviewees like Siti Mohd Amin who have liberal parents tend to describe their families as exceptional. "*J'ai trouvé ça vraiment extraordinaire*" – "I found this really exceptional," Nour Saber says about her mother's affirmative reaction to her 'coming out.' She considers her parents' attitude not only to be exceptional for a country in the "*monde Arabo-Musulman*" (the "Arab-Muslim world") but also for a Western European context:

*Je trouve ça très fin de la part de ma famille. Ceci dit que c'est pas malheureusement le cas de tout le monde. J'ai beaucoup beaucoup de chance d'avoir des parents comme ça et une famille comme ça. Et je suis sûre moi je connais des gens ici en Suisse qui sont des Suissesses ou bien des Françaises, qu'elles étaient carrément reniées de leur famille parce qu'elles sont lesbiennes. Donc c'est en ce moment-là je me dis que j'ai beaucoup de chance d'avoir une famille comme ça.*

I think this is very fine of my family. The fact that I say so indicates that this is unfortunately not the case for everyone. I am very very lucky to have parents like this and a family like this. And I'm certain I know people here in Switzerland who are Swiss or French that were downright disowned by their families because they are lesbians. So this is the moment when I tell myself I am very lucky to have a family like this.

—Nour Saber

Exceptional family homes emerge here as "queer islands in a heterosexual sea," granting queer adolescents the space to become 'who they are.' Further, by situating a queer-friendly family in her home country while at the same time locating homophobic families in Switzerland, Nour Saber's statement explicitly works to undermine the homonationalist imaginary establishing a dichotomy between a homo-friendly West and a homophobic Orient. However, this effort ends up unwittingly reinforcing the very image it seeks to invalidate, since the insinuation that her family is liberal *even* for a Swiss context, *not to mention* in the context of her home country, eventually reiterates the homonationalist argument. Also, by framing families as exceptional in the homeland, these families become paradoxically placed outside the homeland culture, rendering this 'culture' permanently trapped in homophobia. In the past twenty years, such homonationalist imaginaries have been gaining momentum despite ample evidence of homophobia within Western societies. Indeed, queer theorists have also described such narratives of 'exceptional families' within non-migrant Western contexts: Andrew Gorman-Murray

describes supportive family homes in Australia as “sites of resistance to wider practices of heterosexism, and support for GLB youth” (Gorman-Murray 2008:31); and the fitting image of liberal families as “queer islands in a heterosexual sea” is in fact taken from the account of a Swiss lesbian interviewee in Caprez and Nay (2008:264, my translation). The ‘heterosexual sea,’ then, can also be Swiss. But like Efra Mahmoud’s proactive if implicit speaking against anti-Muslim racism, Nour Saber’s statement testifies to the power of such racist homonationalist imagination in our interview interaction and the role of my whiteness in it.

In another example of parental liberalism, Ayesha Umar portrays her family as exceptionally open for the context of the Pakistani diaspora in Scandinavia, which is one of the places where she grew up, and where her parents continue to live:

*Und ich bin auch dafür meinen Eltern dankbar. Okay, klar haben sie damit Mühe gehabt [...] wir [die Geschwister] müssen dafür kämpfen aber die haben das irgendwie weiterhin das akzeptiert können dass sie haben drei Kinder die sind alle extrem eigensinnig und extrem selbstständig im Vergleich zu anderen sagen wir pakistanischen Leuten die auch in Norwegen aufgewachsen sind. Weil in dem Sinn sind meine Eltern extrem also sind sehr untraditionell. Weil die haben nicht gesagt, ‘Du musst das tun oder das tun und das tun’ so die haben auch gesagt, also die muslimische Kultur die haben gesagt – weil bei uns in Pakistan und so ist so diese arrangierten Hochzeiten und so Leuten haben dann irgendwann mal angefangen meine Eltern zu fragen – und meine Eltern haben immer zu alle in die Grossfamilie und Verwandten gesagt, ‘Unsere Kinder entscheiden selber. Niemand wird jetzt irgendwo verheiratet oder so weggegeben.’*

And I am also thankful to my parents. Okay of course they struggled with it [...] we [the siblings] have to fight for it but somehow they have continued to accept this that they have three children they are all extremely headstrong and extremely independent in comparison to other let’s say Pakistani people who have also grown up in Norway. Because in this sense my parents are extremely, well very untraditional. Because they didn’t say: ‘You have to do this or you have to do that and do that,’ they also said, well the Muslim culture they said – because back home in Pakistan these arranged marriages and things like this, people started to ask my parents at some point – and my parents have always told everyone in the extended family and to relatives, ‘Our children decide for themselves. Nobody is going to be married or given away or the like.’

—Ayesha Umar

Ayesha Umar’s personal desire for self-determination is not only encouraged by her parents’ liberalism but also by the values she acquired in Scandinavia, such as the notion of people being equal and having equal rights. “*In den asiatischen Kulturen hast du mehr die Hierarchien, und ich folge dieser Hierarchie nicht. So in dem Sinn bin ich [...] respektlos*” – “In Asian cultures you rather have the hierarchies, and I don’t follow this hierarchy. So in this sense I [...] lack respect,” she circumscribes one arena of negotiation with her parents. This also indicates that Ayesha Umar’s parents’ liberal attitude does not imply that they reject all aspects of Pakistani culture. Ayesha Umar grew up practicing Islam (which she later stopped, while retaining certain religious and cultural elements such as not drinking much alcohol).

By contrast, some interviewees have attempted to live up to parental/cultural homonormative expectations, like Jasmine Sieto, who has plans to return to Indonesia. As Teresa Ruiz was quoted earlier: *“Und dann eben wahrscheinlich habe ich das gemacht was meine Familie wollte: (lahm) dass ich endlich [einen Mann] heirate und Kinder habe und dann habe ich gesagt doch ist gut, dann machen wir halt”* – “Probably I did what my family wanted: (lame) that I would finally marry [a man] and have kids and then I said fine, that’s what we do.” This marriage failed within months, but Teresa Ruiz’ mother only ceased pressuring her daughter after realizing the nature of her relationship with her partner:

*Seit ich mit Angela bin, seit drei Jahren, also seit ich wirklich das Ganze [Lesbischsein] verarbeitet habe, meine Mutter fragt mich nicht mal ‘Wann wann hast du wieder mal einen Freund? Wann heiratest du wieder?’ Nie. Nie mehr. Und das war immer, immmmer! wichtige Frage. Nie mehr.*

Ever since I’ve been with Angela, for three years, actually since I really processed the whole thing [about being a lesbian] my mother does not even ask me ‘When will you have a boyfriend again? When will you marry again?’ Never. Never again. And that was always, aaaaalways important question. Never again.

—Teresa Ruiz

It is the premonition of exactly such a failed heterosexual family life of the kind Teresa Ruiz experienced that Maria Borkovic attempts to instrumentalize in her arguments with her mother:

My mother didn’t really want to meet my girlfriend at this time. I said ‘Would you rather wanting me to have a man or husband and be unhappy for the rest of my life, just because you could come to Christmas, you know, to us, and, you know, play with your grandchildren, would you rather be happy I’m choosing that than seeing me with a woman that I’m happy with? And wanna live together?’ She just couldn’t answer. And I think I got her there.

—Maria Borkovic

This argument is mirrored in several other accounts, which additionally capitalize on the point that potential *children* of an unwanted heterosexual marriage are likely to become unhappy.

Heteronormative expectations from parents do not stop at the question of the sex of the partner but extend to the question of what *kind* of man is desirable as a match for the daughter.<sup>7</sup> Leyla Haddad recounts how her mother tried to pair her up with the son of Lebanese friends who lives in the U.S.: *“Du musst den unbedingt besuchen gehen, der hat dann Freude, die Eltern haben dann Freude, und natürlich am liebsten hätten sie gehabt, wenn wir zusammen gekommen wären”* – “You absolutely have to go and visit him, he will be

7 Especially ‘second generation’ *heterosexuals* are often also faced with such interference from parents in their choice of partners. Pascale Herzig (2014) analyzes according negotiations in Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan migrant families in Switzerland.

delighted, his parents will be delighted,' and of course they would have loved for us to get together.”

Where Leyla Haddad's parents emphasize a common cultural/diasporic background, other parents stress issues of gender and class. As Laura Georg relates about her father:

*Ein Jahr nachdem ich verheiratet gewesen bin [mit einem Mann] habe ich gemerkt: Das geht so nicht. Weil einfach auch mit dem Verheiratetsein die Erwartungen sehr viel grösser geworden sind an die Frauenposition, oder? Also du musst irgendwie Kinder haben, musst Teilzeit arbeiten, musst zu Hause den Haushalt schmeissen, und das ist eben eigentlich vor allem auch von meinem Vater gekommen. Also vorher hat er eigentlich immer gefunden seine Kinder, auch seine Tochter, sollen etwas werden im Gegensatz zu ihm [...]. Und nachher sobald ich geheiratet habe sind dann aber doch die sehr klassischen Erwartungen an mich gestellt worden.*

One year after I got married [to a man] I realized: This is not going to work. Because with marriage the expectations grew to take on a woman's position, you know? Like you somehow have to have children, have to work part-time, run the household, and this actually mainly came from my father, too. Before he actually always found that his children, including his daughter, should make something of themselves, in contrast to himself [...]. And then as soon as I got married the very classical expectations materialized nonetheless.

—Laura Georg

Laura Georg's father's traditional views on gender roles also fed his skepticism vis-à-vis her male partner and eventual husband. He was an artist, and her father doubted that he could “provide for her” (“*ernähren*”) and his future family, ignoring Laura Georg's objection that she can very well provide for herself. When later Laura Georg told her father that she divorced her husband, he was inconsolable and blamed it on her “feminism,” which he saw as the reason why her husband left her. For him, it was inconceivable that the separation could have been, as it indeed was, initiated by his daughter herself (who had realized she wanted to live with a woman, which, however, she did not tell her father at this point).

Beyond questions of ethnicity, common diasporic background, gender roles or economic status, heteronormative expectations also have a specific *temporality*. As Nermina Petar relates: “*Bei uns ist es halt natürlich so- als Bosnierin, neben dem noch Muslimin dazu, heiratest du mit zwanzig. Man ist eingeschränkt. Darum sage ich eigentlich bin ich froh bin ich lesbisch*” – “Back home [≈ with us] it's of course like- as a Bosnian, and moreover as a Muslim woman, you marry at the age of twenty. You are constrained. That's why I say I'm actually glad that I'm lesbian.” If women do not marry at a certain age in Bosnia and Herzegovina, “*versucht man sie mit irgendetwas zu entschuldigen*” – “one tries to provide some excuse for them,” like for instance that the woman in question has no time for a man because she is absorbed in her demanding career, or because her working hours are too irregular to entertain a relationship to a man and start a family.

For Nermina Petar, assuming a lesbian identity not only enables her to cut loose from having to marry a man but also from having to be subjected to an array of other constraints tied to the Bosnian diasporic heteronormative prescript represented and

enforced by her parents, such as its specific temporalities or the significance attached to the family in Bosnian culture: “*Die Familie ist das A und das O- du als Individuum hast nichts zu sagen*” – “The family is the be-all and end-all- you as an individual have nothing to say,” Nermina Petar summarizes. By contrast, her homosexuality enables her to live her own idea of a relationship:

*Klar habe ich eine Beziehung aber in dieser Beziehung habe ich extrem viel Freiheiten und ich kann sagen ‘Hör zu, Barbara [Partnerin], heute Abend gehe ich weg, [mit einer] Kollegin’ wie auch immer, das ist einfacher als man jetzt bosnische Heterobeziehung sage ich jetzt einfach ja? Du kannst als Frau nicht einfach sagen: ‘Heute Abend habe ich einen Tanzkurs’ oder weiss nicht was, oder? Man ist ingeschränkt. Darum sage ich eigentlich bin ich froh bin ich lesbisch.*

Of course I have a relationship but in this relationship I have a lot of liberties and I can say, ‘Listen up, Barbara [her partner], I’ll be going out today, [with a female] colleague,’ whatever, I say this is just easier than if you have let’s say a Bosnian hetero relationship, yes? As a woman you can’t just say: ‘Tonight I have a dancing course,’ or whatever, you know? You are restricted. This is why I say I’m actually glad I’m lesbian.

—Nermina Petar

In sum, the heteronormative biographies propagated by parents are often (re)productive not only of sexually dissident subjects but also of other subjects constructed as undesirable, such as single women over a certain age or men with an insecure income. In other words, the heteronormative prescript polices an entire conglomerate of (culturally and historically contingent) norms regarding gender, sexuality, age, class, or ethnicity, and many intimate aspects of life such as love, relationships, procreation, and division of labor. Against this backdrop, homosexuality emerges as a strategy to cut loose from such restrictions and sometimes becomes the epitome of freedom, self-determination, and self-invention. These narratives hence confirm one of queer theory’s central arguments, which is that sexual norms never exist ‘per se’ but are always already ethnicized, racialized, nationalized, gendered, classed, and so on.

What is more, the differentiations concerning desirable male partners, remarkably, does *not* extend to interviewees’ *female* partners. Nermina Petar explains why her parents refuse to meet her partner:

*Also es ist nichts in dem Sinn nichts gegen die Barbara [Partnerin] selbst, sie [Nermina Petars Eltern] kennen sie nicht, es könnte auch weiss nicht was für eine sein, auch eine Bosnierin, eine Muslima egal spielt keine Rolle, es geht darum dass einfach wenn sie da ist müssen sie [sich] damit auseinandersetzen [...].*

Well it’s not in the sense of them having anything against Barbara [partner] herself, they [Nermina Petar’s parents] don’t know her, she could be any woman whatsoever, also a Bosnian woman, a Muslim woman whatever it doesn’t matter a bit, it’s about them having to deal with it if she’s here [...].

—Nermina Petar

The primacy of the partner’s sex erases the importance of other qualities Nermina Petar’s parents would otherwise have an interest in in the context of a heterosexual

relationship. Indeed, across accounts, no reference is made to a parent who objected as to the female partner having the ‘wrong’ ethnicity, religion, age, gender identity, or profession.

In summary: Most parents, whether ‘here’ or ‘there,’ exert(ed) pressure on their daughters to follow a heteronormative biography, sometimes over long periods of time and despite implicit or explicit knowledge of their offspring’s homosexuality. This exposes the family as a crucial site for the production of heteronormativity; which in turn disrupts dominant ideas about the relationship between family and ‘culture’: The family is not the ‘location’ or ‘cell’ of a prefixed (heteronormative) ‘culture’ but instead emerges as a social site *productive* of these heteronormative cultural values and the mechanisms of their enforcement. At the same time, it is sometimes also a site of resistance to and disruption of these very norms.

Heteronormativity within the family not only serves to police the sex of the daughter’s prospective partner but simultaneously to secure ethnic/cultural lineage and social status as well as specific heteronormative biographies. Interestingly, requirements concerning potential male partners do not extend to female partners as the overwhelming importance of the sex of the partner nullifies other questions as to the female partner’s ethnicity, class, or age. The queer migrant women interviewed here reclaim this very vacuum as a space of freedom: Homosexuality emerges as a strategy to liberate oneself not only from heterosexuality but from the entire *amalgamation* of restrictions tied to the heteronormative prescript. As such, these findings are also manifestations of two central arguments of queer theory: first, that sexuality is never only about sexuality but is always already intersectional, and second, that sexuality significantly structures all aspects of the social, such as also parents’ restrictive ideas about their daughters’ future partners.

At the same time, this sub-chapter has also portrayed interviewees who grew up in liberal and supportive families. The view that one’s welfare as a queer subject “all depends on the family” therefore has multiple meanings, as families can *also* represent “queer islands in a heteronormative sea” that allow queer subjects to become ‘who they are.’ These family homes are described as exceptional and countercultural and can be viewed as strongholds against wider heterosexism, allowing the queer family member to explore her sexuality within the family home. Having said that, the portrayal of these families as exceptional within the homeland culture sometimes unwittingly rehearses homonationalist arguments trapping homeland culture in eternal homophobia, pitted against a liberal, gay-friendly West.

#### 6.1.4 “It’s simply not talked about”: Tacit Subjects

This sub-chapter, which centers on how dissident sexuality was negotiated in families, walks a fine line. In Western Europe, speech acts that communicate someone’s homosexuality are commonly termed ‘coming out.’<sup>8</sup> However, as discussed in Chapter 2.1.1,

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8 Udo Rauchfleisch (2002) suggests dividing the ‘coming out’ as a psychosocial process into three phases: The *pre-‘coming out’ phase* designates the time between birth and the first time a person

the functioning of 'coming out' is contingent on specific historically constructed ideas about sexuality that conceptualize homosexuality as an identity which already exists, or is formed, and then can be 'revealed.' In Europe today, queer subjects are perceived to be *homosexual persons* rather than persons *doing homosexual acts* (Foucault 1978, see Chapter 3.2.1). The act of sexual disclosure has accordingly become an imperative step both in being assigned and assuming a homosexual identity. This renders 'coming out' a paradoxical process: On the one hand, it is the speech act that *installs* the individual as a homosexual subject (rather than merely *reflecting* the subject's homosexuality); on the other hand, the subject already needs to have established a homosexual identity in order to perform this speech act (Butler 2009).

As discussed earlier, the figure of the homosexual and the 'coming out' narrative are instrumentalized by some queer migrant women who use the lesbian identity as a strategy to 'integrate' into Swiss society. However, not all interviewees think of their same-sex desires as formative of who they are, and reservations about identifying as a 'lesbian' are widespread. This raises questions as to the explanatory power of the concept of the 'coming out' narrative for the analysis of the interviews. Due to these caveats regarding the cultural and historical specificity of the term 'coming out,' I largely refrain from using this descriptor in the following discussion in an attempt to avoid a subsumption of differing concepts and practices around the (non-)communication of sexual orientation under its umbrella.

Yet it is important to bear in mind that avoiding the term has its own caveats, since it bears the risk of rendering invisible the geometries of power attached to it: First, the pervasiveness of the discourse around 'coming out' in Switzerland must not be underestimated. Regardless of whether queer migrant women living in Switzerland think of their same-sex desire in terms of an identity, and regardless of whether they identify with a same-sex sexual identity or not, *all* have been confronted with the question of whether and how to communicate their same-sex sexuality to other people in general and to their family in particular. Discourses around sexual identities are too dominant in Switzerland for sexually non-conforming migrant women not to have been exposed to them.

The second risk implied in avoiding the term 'coming out' is that this may demphasize the geopolitical 'range' of the globally circulating figure of the homosex-

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feels 'somehow different,' often without understanding why; the *actual 'coming out' phase* designates the process of becoming certain of one's dissident sexual orientation and of communicating it to others; lastly, in the *integrative 'coming out' phase*, self-acceptance has been reached and fulfilling relationships can be experienced. Simpler models only distinguish between an *inner* 'coming out' (realizing and acknowledging one's same-sex desire) and an *outer* 'coming out' (communicating one's sexual orientation to others), whereas the outer 'coming out' is described as a lifelong process rather than a singular act (Müller 2004). These developmental models have been contested from a range of perspectives (*ibid*). For example, feminist theorists have shown that such models are largely based on the experiences and psychological processes of men; and that they postulate linearity where there is often complexity and contradictoriness (Schneider 2001). Further, as discussed throughout this study, queer/postcolonial scholars have criticized these models as Eurocentric and have admonished the lack of theories taking non-Western sexual cultures seriously, which are sometimes configured in fundamentally different ways and not necessarily organized around the notion of the 'coming out' (Brown 1995).

ual and the developmental liberation narrative attached to it. As discussed in Chapter 3.4, queer/postcolonial scholars have criticized the theory that an international gay figure/movement is emerging, driven by the globally spreading gay and lesbian liberation movement, whose origin is specifically located in the U.S. Stonewall riots in 1969 (Altman 1996). These scholars have reminded us that emotions and affects are not universal biological facts but are shaped by spatio-temporal contexts and geometries of power, which is why sexual identities need to be seen as *transnationally negotiated* rather than as traveling unidirectionally from 'center' to 'margin.' Different concepts of same-sex sexualities have been traveling back and forth, and have merged and transformed, defining and citing each other. In other words, sexualities from the 'margins' have always co-shaped sexualities in the 'centers' (Manalansan 2006). At the same time, there is no denying that the (itself also transnationally formed) figure of the homosexual and the attendant 'coming out' narrative have gained influence in many parts of the world, a development which the avoidance of the term 'coming out' runs the risk of masking.

This, in brief, forms the backdrop against which interviewees and their families negotiate and manage interviewees' dissident sexual orientations. Indeed, their accounts certainly suggest that the question of whether to communicate/show or silence/hide one's same-sex desires bears significance in queer diasporic contexts.

Most parents of the interviewees 'know,' even if they have never been told directly. If and when individual family members were told primarily depended on the parents' perceived conservatism or liberalism, as well as on the quality of the individual relationship between the sexually non-conforming daughter and other family members. Still, overall gender, age, religion, and place significantly structure communication strategies: Mothers tend to be told earlier and more frequently than fathers, siblings earlier and more often than parents, who are in turn told more often than grandparents.<sup>9</sup> Orthodox family members are told less often and with more reluctance, and family members who live in Switzerland tend to be more comprehensively informed than family who live at a distance. Expectations of family members' reactions were not always accurate, and disclosure often rearranged the queer family member's inner family maps: A long lost uncle living on the Canary Islands becomes an unexpected ally against an indignant orthodox mother, a sibling surprisingly turns against her sister, a grandfather living in a remote rural village unpredictably expresses his approval of gay marriage.

Family members' initial reactions ranged from a prosaic "I knew it" to expressions of disbelief and rejection. These first reactions were not necessarily indicative of the way family members would process interviewees' homosexuality in the months and years after the news had been broken. As Julia Morricone recounts:

*Es ist gut gewesen wir haben eine Freundin gehabt damals die uns sagte wir sollen nicht die erste Reaktion der Eltern als die endgültige nehmen, wir sollen einfach das als das nehmen was es ist, gerade ihre spontane Reaktion, und sollen ihnen Zeit lassen zum verdauen und sich ihre Position auch überlegen, und das hat uns sehr geholfen weil- der Rahel [Partnerin] ihre*

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9 This finding is mirrored in Andrew K.T. Yip's study (2004) on kinship relationships of queer Muslims in Britain.



*Eltern haben sehr verständnisvoll reagiert und 'Wir haben dich immer noch lieb' und 'Das ist kein Problem' und tadadadada und sind jetzt aber eigentlich die wo fast etwas- mehr Mühe haben mit uns.*

It was good we had a friend back then who told us not to take the parents' first reaction as the definitive one but just to take it as what it is, just their spontaneous reaction, and to give them time to digest [the news] and also to consider their position, and that helped us a lot because- Rahel's [partner] parents reacted in a very sympathetic way and 'We still love you' and 'That's no problem' and tadadadada and now they are actually the ones who struggle almost a bit more regarding us.

—Julia Morricone

No interviewee was disowned, which had been the worst fear for most. However, due to some parents' vehemently negative reactions, some felt the need to break contact with their parents for a period of time. While there were (exceptional) cases in which these near or total breaks in contact have extended across years, Ayesha Umar's experience is more exemplary for how the relationships between parents and daughters developed after the daughters' homosexuality became known:

*Und dann habe ich ein paar Monate- ich glaube zwei Monaten, drei Monaten nicht mit dem [Vater] gesprochen. Ich war nicht dazu bereit ich habe einfach gesagt 'Boycott, jetzt müssen wir einfach sich ändern' und dann haben sie sich gemeldet und gesagt, 'Ja, es ist wichtig dass wir haben weiterhin dich als eine Tochter. Und möchte weiter- also quasi gegenseitig im Leben zu haben' und einfach nicht sagen, 'Ja, jetzt bist du nicht da.' So irgendwas, also das war das Schlimmste was passiert ist, aber danach ist besser gewesen.*

And then for a few months- I think two months, three months I did not talk to him [her father]. I was not willing to I just said, 'Boycott, now we really have to change this' and then they contacted me and said, 'Yes it's important that we continue to have you as our daughter. And would like to- well like to have each other in each other's lives' and not just to say, 'Well, now you're not there.' Something like that, well that was the worst that happened, but then it got better.

—Ayesha Umar

At the same time, the fact that no interviewee was disowned should not deflect from the reality of the sheer fear of losing kinship ties. Nor should it deflect from the fact that most families' reactions were either vehemently negative – or, just as painfully, failed to materialize altogether. The strategy of silencing daughters' sexual orientation has emerged as a particularly dominant theme in biographies and will be addressed next, based on Nermina Petar's account.

Nermina Petar came to Switzerland from Bosnia and Herzegovina at the age of ten. Her parents had already worked in Switzerland for a couple of years at the time, while Nermina Petar and her older brother had stayed in Bosnia and Herzegovina with their grandparents and a cousin. "Mit zwei Jungs bin ich aufgewachsen, kein Wunder bin ich lesbisch" – "I grew up with two boys, no wonder I'm lesbian," she laughs. She says she has

known that she is lesbian “heimlich von Geburt an” – “secretly ever since I was born,” but at the same time views her sexuality as an expression of her general rebelliousness: “Ich bin eigentlich immer ein wenig rebellisch gewesen [...] das Lesbischsein passt gerade dazu” – “In fact I’ve always been a little rebellious [...] being lesbian fits in well with that.” For her, telling her parents was a question of *when* rather than *if*:

*Eben gewusst habe ich es eigentlich schon immer. Und dann- ich habe- das ist ein bisschen ein Nachteil dass ich nicht unbedingt einen so guten Bezug zu meinen Eltern gehabt habe. [...] Und weißt du wenn eine gewisse Basis, ein gewisses Vertrauen fehlt, dann kommst du halt nicht gerade mit dem. Und dann irgendwann mit sechzehn [...] habe ich dann so einen Brief geschrieben, in dem habe ich geschrieben, ja eben es tut mir leid ich sei lesbisch- was alles noch dabei gewesen ist weiss ich nicht mehr- ich weiss ich habe geschrieben ich bin lesbisch- auf bosnisch- und habe den Brief am Morgen auf den Tisch gelegt, [...] Mittag nach Hause gekommen, normal gewesen alles. Am Abend nach Hause gekommen, nichts. Ich habe nie gewusst was mit diesem Brief passiert ist. Und irgendwie ein Jahr später bin ich beim Znacht gegessen mit dem Vater- habe ich- hat er dann gesagt er hat den Brief gefunden auf dem Tisch und er hat den gelesen und was auch immer damit gemacht. Also die Mutter hat es nie gewusst.*

[...]

*Ich habe irgendetwas erwartet weißt du? Und es ist einfach nichts-. Das finde ich eben hart also- [...]. Ich muss sagen im Nachhinein sind sie selber schuld, sie haben- spätestens mit sechzehn wo ich gewesen bin dann haben sie gewusst was mit mir los ist, sie haben mich nie in dem Sinn damit konfrontiert.*

As I’ve said, I’ve always known it. And then- I have- this is a bit of a disadvantage that I didn’t necessarily have such a good relationship with my parents. [...] And you know when a certain basis, a certain amount of trust is missing, then you don’t exactly tell them straight away. And then sometime at the age of sixteen [...] I wrote a letter, in it I wrote yeah well that I’m sorry, that I was lesbian- what else I wrote I don’t know anymore- I know I wrote I’m lesbian- in Bosnian- and laid the letter on the table in the morning, [...] came back at noon, everything was normal. Came back in the evening, nothing. I never knew what happened to that letter. And somehow a year later I sat eating dinner with my father- I have- he then said he had found the letter on the table and he read it and did whatever with it. So my mother never knew.

[...]

I expected anything you know? And just nothing- I really find that hard- [...] I have to say retrospectively it’s their own fault, they have- at the latest when I was sixteen- then they knew what was the matter with me, they’ve never confronted me with it in this way.

—Nermina Petar

After opening the conversation, Nermina Petar considers it her parents’ turn to pick up the dialogue, which they deny her. Her parents’ tenacious silence with respect to her homosexuality and their persistent refusal to meet her longtime partner are key themes in Nermina Petar’s account. She explains her parents’ silence about her homosexuality in terms of cultural differences between Bosnian and Swiss people:

*Und über das Lesbischsein selber kannst du mit den Schweizern super reden, du kannst fast eine fremde Person auf der Strasse auf das ansprechen und eine normale Reaktion erwarten. Aber du kannst, auch wenn es deine beste [bosnische] Kollegin ist, nicht damit konfrontieren, weil sie können nicht damit umgehen. Weil man redet nicht darüber. Ich denke ein Schweizer der sieht das noch in den Nachrichten oder in den Zeitungen oder sonst von irgendjemandem, vom Freundeskreis [...]. Man wird durch das damit konfrontiert und einfach allgemein bosnische-sagen wir im Gemeinde- man besucht sich untereinander man redet miteinander man hört die Nachrichten aber sobald etwas kommt wo- unsittlich ist oder so tut man umschalten, man tut es einfach ignorieren. Das sind nicht wir, das gehört nicht zu uns, das ist der Westen, das ist Schweiz, das ist das Böse. Aber wirklich- überspitzt gesagt aber so ist es wirklich. 'So sind wir nicht.' Oder sie ignorieren eigentlich dass es wirklich unter ihnen es Leute hat die so sind.*

And you can speak about being lesbian itself with Swiss people superbly, you can almost approach a stranger on the street about it and expect a normal reaction. But you cannot, even if it is your best [Bosnian] friend, confront her with that, because they cannot deal with that. Because one doesn't talk about it. I think a Swiss person sees that on the news or in the newspaper or from anybody, from friends [...]. Through this, one is confronted with it and just generally Bosnian- let's say community- you visit each other and speak to each other and you listen to the news but as soon as something comes along that- is indecent or something you switch the channel, you just ignore it. That's not us, that's the West, that's Switzerland, that's evil. But really- I say this in an exaggerated way but that's really how it is. 'We are not like this.' Or they in fact ignore that there are really people among them that are like this.

—Nermina Petar

Nermina Petar distances herself from the Bosnian community and the politics of looking away and their externalizing the issue of homosexuality by calling it a disease from the West. In order to emphasize her point about homophobia in Bosnian contexts, she postulates a contrasting normalization of homosexuality in Switzerland, effectively effacing homophobia from Swiss people (and not accounting for the possibility that the “stranger on the street” in Switzerland might be a Bosnian national, too).

Nermina Petar situates the difference between the two cultures in the politics of looking (away) and insists on the importance of the media in making visible and normalizing homosexuality. *“Ich würde das irgendwie als Pflicht einführen in jeder Serie muss es ein Homopärchen- dass sie einfach damit konfrontiert werden”* – “I would somehow make that obligatory in each TV series there has to be a homosexual couple- just so that they are confronted with it.” Once the winner of the Eurovision song contest was a Serbian lesbian (*“Die musst du nur anschauen dann weisst du es. Wirklich ich sag dir eine butch Lesbe”* – “You only have to take a look at her to know it. Really, a butch lesbian I tell you”). Nermina Petar’s family loves to watch the show, but that year when Nermina Petar called her mother the day after the finals to talk about the winner, her mother evaded the subject:

*Sie singt jugoslawisch, sie ist vom Balkan, sie ist lesbisch, das geht nicht auf, sofort Themawechsel. Weisst du, schon dort hat sie abgeblockt. Aber wenigstens ist sie ein bisschen konfrontiert geworden damit, quasi nicht nur meine Tochter aus dem Balkan ist lesbisch, oder? Das finde ich toll einfach. Dass sie wirklich auch gegen ihren Willen damit konfrontiert werden.*

She sings Yugoslavian, she is from the Balkans, she is lesbian, that doesn't add up, immediate change of topic. You know, already there she blocked. But at least she was confronted a little bit with it, like not only my daughter from the Balkans is a lesbian, you know? This I just find great. That they really are confronted with it even against their own will.

—Nermina Petar

Nermina Petar's analysis that "they in fact ignore that really there are people among them that are like this" and "she sings Yugoslavian, she is from the Balkans, she is lesbian, this doesn't add up" point to the paradoxical space she herself inhabits *both* as a (proud) Bosnian and a (proud) lesbian. In many Bosnian circles homosexuality is considered an inherently Western phenomenon, Bosnians cannot be homosexuals and vice versa, which renders Nermina Petar's subject positionality impossible. Gayatri Gopinath writes in her analysis of Indian queer diasporas that "[b]ecause the figure of 'woman' as a pure and unsullied sexual being is so central to dominant articulations of nation and diaspora, the radical disruption of 'home' [=home nation] that queer diasporic texts enact is particularly apparent in their representation of queer female subjectivity" (Gopinath 2005:15). She consequently uses the notion of *impossibility* "as a way of signaling the unthinkable of a queer female subject position within various mappings of nation and diaspora" (ibid). "Given the illegibility and unrepresentability of a non-heteronormative female subject within patriarchal and heterosexual configurations of both nation and the diaspora, the project of locating a 'queer South Asian diasporic subject' – and a queer female subject in particular – may begin to challenge the dominance of such configurations" (ibid:16). Indeed, Nermina Petar herself conceptualizes her claim to the paradoxical positionality of being *both* a Bosnian *and* a lesbian as a political act:

*Ich habe mit Barbara [Partnerin] schon viel darüber geredet was kann ich als Individuum eigentlich daran verbessern? (Feurig) Viel kannst du nicht machen, man müsste an die Öffentlichkeit gehen und sagen, 'Hört ich bin Bosnierin und ich bin lesbisch und Punkt. Uns gibt es noch mehr. Akzeptiert das endlich.'*

I have talked to Barbara [her partner] about it a lot already what I can do as an individual to improve this? (Fiery) There's not much you can do, you'd have to go public and say, 'Listen up, I am Bosnian and I am lesbian, period. There's more of us. Accept this already.'

—Nermina Petar

Accordingly, Nermina Petar enthusiastically applauds role models like the Serbian singer and every Bosnian that has "really confronted" his or her parents with their homosexuality.

Nermina Petar nevertheless suffers greatly from her parents' rejection. "*Sie würde es nicht glauben, meine Familie, aber ich bin eigentlich ein Familienmensch*" – "They would not believe it, my family, but I'm actually a family person." "*Du liebst deine Familie, möchtest dazu gehören und sie lieben dich, du weisst das selber, du gehörst ja glych [=trotzdem] mit dazu. Und es ist ja nicht so, dass ich mir das selber ausgewählt habe*" – "You love your family, would

like to be part of it and they love you, you know that yourself, you are still part of it. And it's not like I chose this for myself." Deep regret about the impossibility of being able to live the family person *and* the lesbian she is *at the same time* and *in the same place* (for instance by bringing her partner along when she visits her family), are accordingly pivotal to Nermina Petar's narrative.

Her belief that her family would accept her sexuality because family is so important to them turned out to be a miscalculation:

*Ich bin eine von denen die einfach meine Eltern wirklich damit konfrontiert habe, weil ich weiss dass ihnen Familie selber sehr wichtig ist. Da habe ich gedacht ja okay wenn Familie sehr wichtig bin ich als Mensch auch wichtig, also werden sie wissen wollen was ich mache, [mit wem dass ich zusammen bin etcetera. Das ist aber nicht so. Das geht gar nicht.*

I'm one of the few who has really confronted her parents with it because I know that for them themselves family is very important. So I thought okay if family very important then I am important as a person as well, so they will want to know what I am doing, who I am [with] etcetera. But that is not how it is. That does not work at all.

—Nermina Petar

Nermina Petar realized early that she felt too restricted in her family home: "*Ich habe nicht können rausgehen wenn ich möchte [...] einfach so wie ein goldener Käfig oder?*" – "I was not allowed to go out when I wanted [...] just like a golden cage, you know?" Like other interviewees she retrospectively grounds her sense of imprisonment in the narrow gender roles propagated by her parents, as well as in her dissident sexuality:

*Und da ich schon immer gewusst habe: Ich bin anders. Ich bin lesbisch. Ich möchte nicht heiraten. Ich möchte nicht das Leben, das sie leben- es ist nicht schlecht- [aber] das bin nicht ich. Das ist für mich nicht leben und das ist einfach funktionieren oder? Ich habe es versucht [mit Freunden]- ich finde es einfach als Bosnierin- du hast einen gewissen Kreis wo du dich drin darfst bewegen. Du darfst dich fürs Kochen faszinieren für das Kind zu erziehen für Bücher auch- kommt drauf an was für Bücher, für Familie- die Familie ist das A und das O- du als Individuum hast nichts zu sagen. [...] Und jetzt, wie ich jetzt lebe ich bestimme mein Leben jetzt selbst. [...] Wenn ich so würde leben wie meine Eltern das gerne hätten- auch den Kreis haben, das wäre der bosnische Kreis, wäre das nicht möglich. Und ich wäre unglücklich und die Beziehung wäre nicht gut und irgendwann wären auch die Kinder unglücklich und- es bringt es einfach nicht.*

And since I've always known: I'm different. I'm lesbian. I would not like to marry. I would not like to have the life they lead- it's not bad but [...] it's not me. That's not living for me and that's simply functioning, you know? I've tried it [with boyfriends]- I just think that as a Bosnian woman- you have certain circles within which you are allowed to move. You are allowed to be fascinated by cooking, childrearing, books, too- depending on what books-, family- the family is the be-all and end-all- you as an individual no say whatsoever [...] And now, the way I live now, I now make my own decisions. [...] If I lived like my parents would like me to- also have these circles, those would be the Bosnian circles, that would not be possible. And I would be unhappy and

the relationship would not be good and sometime in the future the children would be unhappy too and- it just doesn't work.

—Nermina Petar

This statement again points to the temporalities of the heteronormative ideal as well as to its linkages with questions of gender and ethnicity, and once more exposes the family home as a crucial site for the construction of normative sexuality. At the same time, Nermina Petar denies that her sexual identity is in any way tied to place: *“Ich denke auch wenn ich in Bosnien unten wäre dann wäre ich ja nicht anders, ich wäre auch unten lesbisch. [...] Ich wäre der gleiche Mensch, ob ich unten bin oder da bin”* – “I think even if I were down in Bosnia I wouldn't be different, I would be lesbian down there as well. [...] I would be the same person, no matter whether I'm down there or here.” In saying so, she positions a lesbian subject in Bosnia and Herzegovina, again working against the impossibility of a Bosnian-and-lesbian subject.

As a consequence of her discomfort in her family home, Nermina Petar moved out against her parents' will at a relatively early age. She did so in steps: First she moved only two kilometers away from her parents' home, and later she moved to a bigger city. She says that her relationship with her parents has gotten much better since moving further away, but when she first moved out both parties initiated a six-month break in contact. By moving out, Nermina Petar distanced herself not only from her family but also from her Bosnian circles more generally and from a social environment in which she feels gender roles are too narrow and homosexuality has no part. *“Das gehört nicht dazu, man möchte das nicht. Man möchte das nicht hören, das ist ein Tabuthema. Solange man nicht darüber redet existiert es einfach nicht”* – “This is not part of it, people don't want it. People don't want to hear this, this is a taboo issue. As long as one doesn't talk about it, it simply doesn't exist.”

Up to this point, I have read Nermina Petar's account mainly in terms of a legitimation of her dissociation from her family and her diasporic community, which she explains by reference to her dissident sexual orientation as well as with her desire to break free from traditional Bosnian gender roles. In other words, the discussion so far has shown Nermina Petar caught between being a “family person” and proud Bosnian on the one hand and her parents' politics of denial of her sexuality on the other. As I have argued, her statement “I'm a Bosnian and I'm lesbian” simultaneously points to and momentarily leverages the impossibility of her subject position as *both/and*.

However, Nermina Petar inhabits another paradoxical space. While in her Bosnian circles she feels unacknowledged as a lesbian, she also experiences exclusion as a Bosnian in Swiss circles. “I am what I am,” Nermina Petar insists, stating that she does not feel as though she has needed to ‘assimilate’ in lesbian circles in Switzerland in any way:

*Ob ich jetzt unten [in Bosnien] bin oder da bin, unterscheide ich mich nicht unbedingt grossartig viel von anderen lesbischen Schweizerinnen. Auch die haben mit dem Gleichen mehr oder weniger zu kämpfen. Klar ich denke schon, wenn du Ausländerin bist und dass du nebst dem dass du lesbisch bist dass du noch damit zu kämpfen hast dass du Ausländerin bist, merkst es am Namen und du wirst zum Teil ausgegrenzt [...].*

Whether I'm down there [in Bosnia and Herzegovina] or here, I don't differ a whole lot from other Swiss lesbians. They have to fight with the same things more or less, too. Of course, I do think that if you are a foreigner and that apart from being a lesbian that you additionally have to fight with the fact that you are a foreigner, you notice it from the name and it's a fact that you are sometimes excluded [...].

—Nermina Petar

In the beginning of this statement, Nermina Petar identifies as a “Swiss lesbian,” equating the “fights” that “other” Swiss lesbians have to engage in with her own (and thereby qualifying her earlier portrayal of Switzerland as pervasively homo-friendly). The second part of the statement, however, sets her apart from Swiss lesbians due to her positionality as a Bosnian in a Swiss nation-state structured by ethnicized hierarchies. In other words, just as it is impossible for Nermina Petar to inhabit the positionality of a Bosnian lesbian, it is also impossible for her to fully inhabit the positionality of a Swiss lesbian.

To conclude this discussion of Nermina Petar's account, I want to read it ‘against the grain’ from two different perspectives. My first argument is that contrary to Nermina Petar's dominant line of argument, in which she presents herself as a rebel and her parents as deniers, Nermina Petar is at the same time complicit in maintaining the silence around (her) homosexuality in her family. Soon after she had written her letter of disclosure (which her mother never saw because her father disposed of it), her mother nevertheless began to suspect something and asked her daughter “*einfach so in einem normalen Ton*” – “just like that, in a normal tone” whether she has something going on with women. “*Ich habe es dann bestritten, warum auch immer. Ich denke die Angst ist zu gross mit ihr darüber zu diskutieren, oder? Sie hat ein paar Mal probiert aber [jetzt] blockt sie heute noch ab [...]*” – “I denied it then, for whatever reason. I think the fear is too great to discuss it with her, you know? She tried a few times but ever since she has been blocking the issue.” This incident complicates the position of both parent and child, revealing effort and proactivity on the parent's side and fear and denial on the part of the queer daughter. Also, despite Nermina Petar's periodical efforts to confront her family with her homosexuality, she has to a certain extent accepted her parents' denial. She continues to visit her parents on a regular basis and in the context of these visits usually abides by their silence around the absence of her partner. The totality of Nermina Petar's account, which strongly emphasizes both her love for her family as well as her insistence on her individual freedom as a woman and a lesbian, suggests a reading of this acceptance as a temporary strategy in her ongoing effort to eventually conciliate the most important people in her life.

My second reading against the grain is that Nermina Petar's negotiations with her family also need to be viewed in the context of parent-child relationships in migration more generally. While the denial with which Nermina Petar's sexuality is met in her family and her diasporic community is severe, her negotiations with her parents resemble discussions heterosexual migrants of the ‘second generation’ have with their parents around contested issues such as their choices and preferences with regard to partners, relationships, spouses, procreation, or gender roles. Negotiating the traditional views of their parents and their own views co-shaped by exposure to Western traditions and

education, many participants in this study, ‘first’ and ‘second’ generation, set out to explore the limits of the negotiable, devising strategies to accommodate their parents’ expectations (and their own desire and need to salvage family ties), the cultural heritage of their homeland, and the simultaneous (if always necessarily contested) sense of belonging to ‘Swiss’ culture in a complex quest to determine their positionalities and personal boundaries (e.g. Espiritu 2003, Herzig 2014, Jain 2018).

In contrast to Nermina Petar’s claim that she would be the same person (and lesbian) had she continued to live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, her vehement vote for the public visibility of homosexuality should also be read as a manifestation of cross-cultural and cross-generational negotiations. In this context, age at the time of migration, as well as whether migration happened with or without parents, emerge as crucial variables setting the stage for intra-familial negotiations around issues of sexuality, procreation, gender roles, and sexual citizenship. Children of immigrants in particular are thereby caught up in colonial imaginations grounded in the idea of a ‘culture clash,’ which frame the ‘second generation’ (who in Switzerland are also referred to, and sometimes refer to themselves, as ‘*Secondos/Secondas*’) as eternally torn between two conflicting cultures, their ‘own’ culture (in majority society depicted as backward, traditional, constrained) and the ‘other’ culture (depicted as modern, liberal). Rohit Jain untangles the biopolitics behind the historical (and persisting) construction of this figure of the ‘crisis-ridden second generation’ in Switzerland, which he shows to have emerged from an assimilationist biopower that serves to produce and police Swiss nationalist ideals. This assimilation logic – which, as discussed in Chapter 2.1.3, is crucial to how migrant people and their children in Switzerland become categorized and marginalized – establishes the ‘second generation’ as potentially more easily assimilable (patronizable, disciplinable) into the mainstream society, while at the same time framing its subjects as “existences in crisis” (“*krisenhafte Existenzen*”) eternally trapped between two irreconcilable cultures (Jain 2018:96). As Fatima El-Tayeb points out for the Western European context, people of the ‘second generation’ thereby “remain defined through the paradigm of migration: the children (and grandchildren) of migrants of color, rather than becoming first- or second-generation *citizens*, are considered second- or third-generation *migrants*” (El-Tayeb 2011:180, emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> The conceptualization of the ‘second generation’ as ‘lost between cultures’ and hence eternally homeless is intimately tied to a perceived inability of its members to belong. This then becomes framed as an “individual and cultural failure rather than as the outcome of structural exclusions, [which] works to disempower and alienate groups who threaten the binary identification on which Europeanness continues to be built” (El-Tayeb 2011:xxx).

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10 El-Tayeb further raises attention to the paradox that the public and political debates around migrants’ contested abilities to adapt to European ‘values’ have remained the same over the last five decades, keeping the focus on the moment of arrival and on the question of what happens if all of these migrants stay. As El-Tayeb succinctly points out, “[h]alf a century later, it should seem fairly obvious that the vast majority of migrants did stay and that the face of Europe has changed accordingly. The logical conclusion however, that they are by now as European as those worrying about them, is rarely drawn, prevented by an often unspoken, but nonetheless seemingly very precise, racialized understanding of Europeanness that continues to exclude certain migrants and their descendants” (El-Tayeb 2011:xii).



On the one hand, the (few) accounts of members of the ‘second generation’ discussed here frequently rehearse aspects of this ‘in-between’ narrative, as is for instance manifest in interviewees’ frequent framing of their lives as a life ‘between worlds.’ These accounts also demonstrate the effects of such a positioning, such as internal and external struggles and conflicts with oneself and the families of origin regarding issues of sexuality, relationships, and reproduction (Herzig 2014, Jain 2018). On the other hand, these accounts powerfully testify to the ways the ‘second generation’ at the same time resists, complicates, and positively reappropriates the positionality allocated to its representatives.

Overall, Nermina Petar’s account exposes her as caught between being a ‘born’ rebel against the Bosnian heteronormative prescript propagated by her parents and being a “family person” at heart. Reflections about the origins of this dilemma and Nermina Petar’s efforts to reconcile the two roles dominate her narrative. Her account locates the origin of her struggle in a double paradox. On the one hand, Nermina Petar fails to claim the positionality of a Bosnian lesbian because her parents explicitly view homosexuality as a Western evil that is by definition situated outside the Bosnian culture and therefore cannot possibly affect their daughter. In response to this denial, Nermina Petar practices in-your-face-tactics to make Bosnian lesbians visible and establish them (and herself) as valid *Bosnian* subjects, both in the Bosnian diaspora in Switzerland and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her insistence on claiming this impossible subject position is not only grounded in her explicit pride about being Bosnian but is also tied to the impossibility of her claiming the subject position of a *Swiss* lesbian: As a ‘foreigner’ – and especially as a *proudly Bosnian* one – she is marked as always already different from “other Swiss lesbians.” This distinction remains in place even though Nermina Petar knows that ‘Swiss’ lesbians often share many of her experiences. In other words, family conflicts due to homosexuality are, in contradiction to homonationalist imaginations, not at all a distinctly ‘migrant’ phenomenon, and yet continue to be constructed as a line of difference between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

Another reason for families to silence their daughter’s homosexuality was parents’ fear of ‘people’s’ reactions and possible damage being done to the family reputation. Nermina Petar is hurt by her parents’ prioritization of ‘other people’s’ opinion over the wellbeing of their daughter. Speaking about “Bosnians,” she states:

*Und vor allem sobald sie ein bisschen wohlhabend sind oder sie meinen sie seien es- ja, ‘Was sagen die Leute? Meine Tochter ist lesbisch das geht doch nicht’ und es ist- ich weiss nicht, sie denken gar nicht so weit was mit ihren Kindern passiert. Sie denken automatisch, ‘Was denken Leute über mich was habe ich falsch gemacht?’ Sie denken völlig falsch irgendwie.*

Above all as soon as they are a bit well off or think they are- well, ‘What will people say? My daughter is lesbian, that is not possible’ and it is- I don’t know, they don’t think as far as what happens to their children. They automatically think, ‘What do people think about me what have I done wrong?’ They think completely wrong somehow.

—Nermina Petar

Leyla Haddad extends Nermina Petar’s point by arguing that in Lebanese family life, disagreeable topics are generally evaded, especially in external communication:

*Man redet nicht drüber, nie nie, also meine Eltern haben nie- obwohl mein Vater eine Tochter hat, die lesbisch ist, [...] man hat nie drüber geredet, man redet einfach nicht drüber, aber das ist auch so bezeichnend die libanesische Mentalität, man redet nie über schlechte Sachen, es geht immer einem bestens, auch wenn der Mann sich grad in der Küche am Erhängen ist, 'Ah oui, tout va bien, ououais, il te salut,' dabei ist er halb schon tot, nein also, es ist so ein bisschen so, dass Schein ist wichtiger als wie es wirklich ist, und es ist immer alles gut, alles ist in bester Ordnung, man hat immer alles im Griff und darum denke ich, dass man nicht über das redet ist ist nicht weil es um die Homosexualität sondern es ist einfach etwas, das unangenehm ist und darum tut man es wie ausblenden, dann existiert es wie nicht.*

It is never talked about, never never, well my parents never- even though my father has a daughter that is lesbian, [...] it was never talked about, it was simply not talked about, but this is also very characteristic of the Lebanese mentality, bad things are never talked about, everybody is always doing perfectly well, even though the husband might just be hanging himself in the kitchen, [in French] 'Ah yes, everything is fine, yesyes, he says hi,' and he is already half dead, no really, it's a bit like that, it's more important how things seem to be than how they really are, and everything is always fine, everything is completely fine, everything is under control and that's why I think that the fact that this is not talked about is not because it's about homosexuality but because it's just something that is disagreeable and therefore it's like eclipsed, then somehow it like does not exist.

—Leyla Haddad

Respect among family members plays a central role in acting out silences around same-sex orientation in families. Nour Saber, for instance, interprets her parents' *silence* about her homosexuality as a demonstration of mutual respect: "*Dans ma famille on se respecte tellement on parle pas de notre vie privée, c'est par respect c'est pas par autre chose*" – "In my family we respect each other so much that we don't speak of our private lives, it's out of respect, it's not because of anything else." More often, however, respect is critical in the *daughters'* decision not to communicate their sexual orientation to their parents, in an effort not to put family members or the family as a whole in a tight spot. For instance, whenever Leyla Haddad visited her father in Lebanon, she heeded the family silence in order not to harm her father's position as a renowned public figure and respected patriarch of his larger family "down there." Jimena Reyes, very much 'out and proud' in Switzerland, out of respect has never told her mother in Peru about her sexual orientation:

*Alors j'ai pas raconté à ma mère. Ni à mon père, moi j'ai pas beaucoup de contacts avec mon père, mais à ma mère je lui ai pas raconté parce qu'on vivait pas ensemble. Et je trouvais pas nécessaire. Je trouvais pas nécessaire, c'est une culture qui est différente, moi j'ai évolué, moi j'avais dix-sept ans [quand elle est venue en Suisse] donc je pouvais changer ma mentalité, et ça je l'ai changée et je me suis intégrée tellement en Suisse que pour moi, je te dis j'ai deux cultures, j'ai deux cultures très fortes, mais au niveau de ma liberté, c'est plutôt celle que je vis actuellement en Suisse. Donc pour ne pas choquer la culture à ma mère, j'ai pas eu besoin de lui raconter.*

Well I haven't told my mother. Or my father, I don't have a lot of contact with my father, but I haven't told my mother because we didn't live together. And I didn't find it necessary. I didn't find it necessary, it's a culture that is different, me I have evolved, I was seventeen [when she came to Switzerland] so I was able to change my mentality, and I have changed it and I have integrated in Switzerland to such an extent that for me, I told you I have two cultures, I have two very strong cultures, but regarding my freedom, it's more this one I live in Switzerland right now. So in order not to shock my mother's culture, I haven't needed to tell her.

—Jimena Reyes

Her mother embodies Jimena Reyes' first 'culture,' the Peruvian culture, in which dissident sexualities remain unexpressed within the family, and which Jimena Reyes clearly delimits from her other, Swiss culture, which she has acquired since migrating, and into which she has successfully integrated, among other things by coming to live openly as a lesbian. For her sexual independence, self-understanding, and self-assurance, 'coming out' to her mother is not a prerequisite. This fundamentally disturbs the common trope of 'coming out' as reproduced by the queer geographical literature discussed in Chapter 3.3, in which 'telling the parents' plays a central role. Jimena Reyes' position instead converses with Tom Boellstorff's observation (2011) in Indonesia, where same-sex loving men consider it important to 'come out' among the like-minded yet communicating one's sexual preferences to the family or broader society bears no significance.

At the same time, not telling one's parents is rarely only an issue of respect but is mostly coupled with fear of rejection and persistent inner struggles with one's sexuality. Teresa Ruiz proactively told everyone at work and in her circle of friends about her sexual orientation, but not her family, and especially not her mother in Cuba. She explains this as follows:

*Ich habe Angst- also ich habe nicht Angst zum meiner Mutter das zu erzählen dass sie würde sagen 'Hey, nöd,' das würde sie nie sagen, meine Mutter, ich glaube, meine Mutter vergott [vergöttert] mich, es ist einfach- es ist kein Problem aber ich habe einfach Mühe, ich kann es nicht sagen, kann wirklich nicht so mit meiner Mutter reden. Auf was ich Angst habe: keine Ahnung [...].*

I'm afraid- well I'm not afraid of telling this to my mother that she would say, 'Hey, no,' she would never say that, my mother, I think my mother idolizes me, it's just- it's not a problem but I just have trouble, I can't say it, I really can't talk to my mother like that. What I'm afraid of: no idea [...].

—Teresa Ruiz

For a range of reasons, many interviewees hence collaborate in maintaining their family's silence around their sexual orientation. Jimena Reyes' statement further directs attention to the significance of *geographical distance* in interviewees' family communication strategies. Across accounts, spatial distance allowed for *selective communication* to take place with the family much more easily. Emigration thus emerges as an effective strategy for exploring one's sexuality while at the same time maintaining respect for the family. This is contrasted by cases like Jasmine Sieto's (see Chapter 6.1.3), where parental

interference, financial dependence, and mutual expectations remain highly significant after migration, creating a transnational interdependence that transcends spatial distance.

Even if they have not been explicitly informed, most family members 'know': "*Für mich die wissen alle. Es wird einfach nicht darüber geredet*" – "In my view they all know. It is simply not talked about," as one interviewee put it. Even if the topic has never been made explicit, parents witnessed the close relationships their daughter maintained with other girls and women when they grew up; they have witnessed a lack of boyfriends and male partners; they have visited their daughters in their apartments and have seen the shared bedrooms or the lesbian posters on the walls; they have met their daughter's lesbian friends; and they have been introduced to their daughters' partners, who have more often than not become a part of the family at least in some ways.

This silence within the family can be interpreted in three partly contradictory ways. First, it often represents a family politics of *denial* and *lack of acknowledgment* of the sexually non-conforming family member's inclinations and choices, which on the part of the latter results in a sense of rejection by the family. Given the often precarious situation of the interviewed women and their continued emotional attachment to their families, this sense of exclusion often becomes key to their biographical narratives, as Nermina Petar's account demonstrates. These interviewees are torn between the seemingly 'open' discourse about homosexuality in Switzerland and the taboo/silence around same-sex desire and relationships within their families.

At the same time, the sexually dissident family members often collaborate in the establishment and maintenance of this silence around their sexualities. This is an ambivalent practice grounded both in cultural taboos and continued inner struggles as well as in showing respect for one's parents' perceived cultural sensitivities and the family reputation in particular and the 'home culture' more broadly. *Respect* hence emerges as the second notion through which the silence in the family needs to be read. Respect is not only an important reason for many interviewees not to verbalize their sexual orientation in their families; their accounts sometimes also establish the *parents'* silence as a cultural value, framing the family politics of silence as an active gesture of mutual respect rather than suppression. This is exemplified in Nour Saber's and Siti Mohd Amin's accounts.

A third line of argument circles around personal freedom and safety. Efra Mahmoud was planning to return to Egypt with her partner, where the couple wanted to live under the same roof as Efra Mahmoud's parents without telling them about the nature of their relationship. This act is framed as an act of liberation, which would effectively remove Efra Mahmoud from the constant confrontation with her sexuality she suffers from in Switzerland, and would place her in a safe environment in which she would be able to act out her inclinations without needing to verbalize them, hence steering her out of the way of stigmatization and homophobia (see Chapter 5.3).

These different ways of reading the silence around non-conforming sexuality within the family cannot be neatly delimited within narratives as they typically contain aspects of all perspectives. However, they usually exhibit a clear bias towards one of them.

Silences around same-sex sexualities within families thus remain highly ambivalent and complex. In his work on same-sex desire among Dominican immigrant men in the U.S., Carlos Ulises Decena (2012) refers to the theme of dissident sexuality as a “tacit subject” within diasporic Dominican families. Tacit subjects are matters that are not verbalized but are always understood. Family members are complicit in keeping the subjects of same-sex intimacies and relationships silenced in order to bind the family together. “What binds people to one another and what makes networks, solidarities, and resource sharing possible and sustainable,” Decena says, “are forms of connection that cannot be fully articulated but can be shared, intuited, and known” (ibid:3). Taking up Decena’s argument, Katie L. Acosta writes in her personal introduction to her study about how same-sex loving Latinas in the U.S. negotiate relationships with their families:

I thought about the tacit relationship my family had with my aunt: the ways they never acknowledged her lesbian existence while all the while accepting her partner as part of the family. I had been well trained in these tacit arrangements, never mentioning my own relationships with women to anyone in the family. For them, alternative sexualities was a tacit subject; even when it was understood, it was never discussed, and through the lack of verbalization we maintained family ties. (Acosta 2013:1)

Likewise, in the narratives discussed here, the family practice of keeping family members’ queer sexualities tacit effectuates a sense of exclusion from the family but at the same time serves the function of tying family members together. There are considerable differences in which of these aspects is experienced more strongly. In Nermina Petar’s case, a sense of exclusion prevails. Her desire to make her sexuality visible and for her parents to acknowledge her sexual orientation and her partner clashes with her parents’ persisting silence, obstructing Nermina Petar’s efforts to “do family” (Acosta 2013:12). By contrast, Teresa Ruiz is the key figure keeping the subject tacit in her family. It is her decision rather than her family’s to not verbalize her sexual orientation or the nature of her relationship with her partner. In Teresa Ruiz’ view, speaking about her sexuality would be to treat her mother disrespectfully and to violate Cuban family etiquette. At the same time, Teresa Ruiz also instrumentalizes this ‘cultural’ excuse to avoid troubling negotiations with her mother that would necessarily excavate painful experiences and cause shame on both sides, to no one’s benefit. However, for Teresa Ruiz these conditions are much more favorable than for Nermina Petar because Teresa Ruiz’ parents (whom she never told explicitly but who ‘knew’) silently accepted her partner into the family.

Both the practice of keeping certain subjects silenced in order to bind family members together as well as interviewees’ transnational strategies of (non-)communication disrupt the master narrative of the ‘coming out.’ This narrative assumes a development from a closeted individual embedded in a homophobic and backward social context to a liberated, outspoken, and self-assured queer Self. In many ways, migration narratives like Teresa Ruiz’ tell exactly such stories, instrumentalizing the ‘coming out’ as a means of integration into Swiss society (see Chapter 5). At the same time, her ‘coming out’ story becomes complicated by the silencing of her same-sex orientation within the family, which remains ambivalently valued. On the part of the sexually non-conforming

family member, the silence is upheld not only due to fear of negative reactions and a continued sense of shame, but also out of respect for the ‘culture’ in the home country – embodied by the parents – and the family’s reputation. On the part of the family, tacit subjects are maintained as such due to a lack of acknowledgment of the dissident family member’s inclinations and choices, but also in order to bind family members together. These motivations intermingle and are articulated to varying degrees across narratives. Such complex configurations of silence and articulation, shame and respect, denial and silent acceptance call into question the simplistic movement from silence/invisibility to verbalization/visibility that the dominant notions of the process of ‘coming out’ continue to propagate.

### 6.1.5 The Family Home

The space of the ‘home’ has been a frequent subject of scrutiny in feminist and queer geography. This body of work has shown how the family home is generally perceived as a space “where people are offstage, free from surveillance, in control of their immediate environment. It is their castle. It is where they feel they belong” (Saunders 1989:184, quoted in Valentine 2000 [1998]:98). It is “a place where inhabitants can escape disciplinary practices that regulate our bodies in everyday life” (Johnston and Valentine 1995:99), and a sphere of safety, of control over one’s body. However, the narratives discussed so far in this chapter validate the feminist/queer critique that this imagination of the home as an allegedly unregulated space of safety and recuperation is primarily constructed to secure the power of heteropatriarchal family heads, while for other inhabitants of the family home privacy is an unevenly distributed privilege. Heteronormative and neoliberal ideals continue to relegate women to the space of the home, for whom the private sphere often connotes domestic work rather than leisure, and all too often violence and oppression rather than safety (Valentine 2001:63). For sexually non-conforming people, the family home can be associated with a sense of social control, coercion, or exclusion, rendering the space highly ambivalent as familiarity, the love for the family, and the desire to belong clash with experiences of rejection and estrangement. This sub-chapter provides a more focused examination of these ambivalences, revisiting material discussed earlier but also drawing on further data.<sup>11</sup>

Nermina Petar describes her family home as a “golden cage.” At the age at which she sought to break out of the heterosexual prescript her parents represent and attempt to enforce, she connoted the space of her family home with overprotection and imprisonment. The trope ‘move out to come out,’ with which queer geographers have indicated the significance of leaving the family home in the process of becoming a homosexual subject (see Chapter 3.3) aptly describes Nermina Petar’s strategy: The further she has moved away from home, the more defined her lesbian sexual identity has become, and the more her general self-confidence has grown, which has in turn strengthened her position in her continued negotiations with her parents.

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11 The ‘family home’ here designates the household interviewees grew up in, or, alternatively, the place where their parents lived at the time of the interview.

Other interviewees not only moved out of their parents' homes but to another country altogether to escape their parents' expectations and explore their dissident sexualities. As Ayesha Umar recounts:

*Also ich habe zum Beispiel schon früher gewusst dass ich stehe- Frauen interessieren mich auch. Obwohl ich habe lange Zeit gedacht ich bin bisexuell, aber dass ich überhaupt sowas tun könnte, wenn ich habe zuhause gewohnt, oder irgendwie, weisst du Lesben, schwule Freunde suchen wolltest- ich wollte es wirklich, aber ich habe nicht den Mut gehabt und ich habe es nicht gewagt das zu tun gegen meinen eigenen Anstand. Konnte es nicht. Solche Dingen, oder? Also es hat es wirklich ein Abbruch gebraucht von zuhause umzuziehen irgendwo ganz weit weg damit ich Junge quasi meine eigene Leben anfangen zu leben könnte.*

Well for instance I already knew earlier that I'm attracted- that I am interested in women as well. Although for a long time I thought I'm bisexual, but the fact that I would be able to do such a thing at all when I lived at home, or somehow you know, you wanted to look for lesbians, gay friends- I really wanted to, but I did not have the courage and I did not dare to do this against my own decency. I couldn't. Such things, eh? So it really took a break, to move out to a place far away so that I, the youngster, could start to live my own life so to speak.

—Ayesha Umar

Although not clearly defined in terms of a sexual identity, Ayesha Umar is aware of her same-sex sexual desires and feels the need to move out in order to “dare” to explore these emotions, feeling that it would go against her own sense of “decency” to do so while living at home. This reservation mirrors the above discussion of interviewees' motivations not to tell parents: It is indicative of a sense of doing wrong and of the shame Ayesha Umar continues to feel. Yet, importantly for the context of this discussion, the notion of decency complicates the ‘move out to come out’ argument. It is not only the egocentric urge to explore and liberate the sexual Self but also respect for the family that motivates a move out of the family home before investigating one's sexuality. Geographical distance enables queer migrants to simultaneously establish self-conscious same-sex identities while heeding their respect for their families by refraining from exploring, verbalizing and demonstrating certain things within the space of the family home. (As discussed in Chapter 3.3, the ‘move out to come out’ strategy is also practiced among Swiss lesbians, see e.g. Nay and Caprez 2008.)

The sense of social control and lack of freedom to explore one's sexuality within the family home leads to a desire for a *room of one's own* (Woolf 1981 [1929]). The desire for such a room is a conspicuously prominent theme across accounts, as is for instance crystallized in Ariane Velusat's narrative. The first picture Ariane Velusat shows me in our reflexive photography interview is an image of the door to the little studio that was built for her in the garden of her urban family home in Venezuela when she was fifteen:

*Avant de changer ma chambre là, je dormais dans la chambre avec mon frère. On partageait une chambre, qui n'était pas vraiment une chambre. C'était comme une longue pièce ma grand-mère avait le bureau au fond, là où elle travaille, et mon frère et moi on était dans le large couloir mais du début. [...] Donc j'avais pas un espace où je pouvais fermer la porte, d'autant plus*

*qu'à la maison, on a toujours eu l'habitude de ne jamais fermer les portes des chambres. [...] Là du coup j'avais l'excuse que c'était le jardin et qu'il fallait fermer la porte.*

Before changing my room, I slept in the room with my brother. We shared a room, which was not really a room. It was like a long room at the back of which my grandmother had her desk where she works, and my brother and me we were in the large corridor, but at its beginning. [...] So I didn't have a space where I could close the door, the more so as in the house we always had the habit of never closing the doors to the rooms. [...] That's why here I had the excuse that it was the garden and that the door needed to be closed.

—Ariane Velusat

The desire to have a space of her own dominates Ariane Velusat's account of her youth. The lack of privacy in the multigenerational house, aggravated by her restricted mobility in the city outside the family compound, becomes crucial in her decision to leave for Switzerland at the age of eighteen:

*Je disais à une de mes tantes que j'avais besoin de partir, que je sentais qu'à la maison j'étouffais. Qu'on contrôlait toujours tout ce que je faisais, et je me disais, 'Mais je suis suffisamment sérieuse responsable et consciencieuse pour qu'on soit toujours derrière moi à voir ce que je suis en train de faire ou pas faire, ça m'énerve, donc j'ai besoin de, non, de respirer,' et c'est une des raisons pour lesquelles je suis partie aussi.*

I said to one of my aunts that I needed to leave, that I felt that at home I was suffocating. That someone always controlled everything I was doing, and I told myself: 'But I am too serious and responsible and conscientious for people to always be behind me and look what I am doing or not, this gets on my nerves, so I need to, no, to breathe,' and this was also one of the reasons why I left.

—Ariane Velusat

Ariane Velusat does not explicitly relate her sense of suffocation in her family home to her (homo)sexuality, which she only became aware of in Switzerland. However, her pressing desire "*de vivre moi seule*" – "to live alone" indicates her need for a space of self-reflection and exploration, which was needed to set the stage for her encounter with her eventual partner, a young woman who is, like Ariane Velusat, from Latin America. In the course of the two women's investigations into their awakening feelings for each other, they also discussed their uncertainties with their mothers and grandmothers back home. "*Et puis bon les deux ont mal réagi, donc ça n'a pas aidé, et en même temps ça nous a aidé, parce qu'on s'est dit: 'Mais oui. Mais elles sont pas là, c'est pas elles qui sont en train de le vivre, et on se sent tellement bien avec, que non, on vas pas le changer'*" – "And then well the two reacted badly [Ariane's favorite grandmother, with whom she had grown up in the same household, said to her, '*t'es complètement anormale*' – 'you are completely abnormal'], so that was not much help, and at the same time it was a help, because we told ourselves, 'But yes. But they are not here, it's not them who are living it, and we feel so good with it that no, we will not change it.'" The physical distance from the family home hence enabled the couple to make their own decision and live their own lives.



Other interviewees devised strategies to live their relationships *within* their family homes. This involved *temporal* strategies, such as taking advantage of the absence of parents and other family members, and *spatial* strategies, such as confining intimacies to the bedroom or evacuating siblings from shared rooms in order to spend the night with a lover. When in her teens, Jimena Reyes lived alone with her mother in their big family house; all her other family members had left Peru to seek work. Soon Jimena Reyes and her girlfriend had the idea of talking their mothers into moving in together in Jimena Reyes' family home:

*Donc ma copine et moi on avait discuté pour dire, 'Bon ma belle y faut qu'on fasse quelque chose, donc on essaie de vivre un truc,' et puis on dit 'Pressons nos mamans et puis on vous loue la maison quoi.' Et j'ai vécu avec ma copine, donc depuis l'âge de quinze ans à dix-sept ans, chez moi. Toujours avec une discrétion incroyable sous des clefs enfin, très discret parce qu'on n'aurait pas pu comprendre, et puis après je suis arrivée en Suisse, j'ai vu toutes mes sœurs avec des copains ou des maris etcetera et je me suis dit: Bon ils savent pas mon histoire, tout ce que j'ai vécu avec Cecilia, j'ai envie de vivre comme eux [les sœurs], et je vais essayer de vivre comme eux. Alors j'ai essayé une fois bien sûr et puis ça pas joué.*

So my girlfriend and I discussed and said, 'Okay beautiful we need to do something, so we'll try to live out a thing [a relationship]' and then we say, 'Let's pressure our moms to rent you the house.' And [so] I lived with my girlfriend between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, at my place. Always with an incredible discretion, kept under tight wraps, very discreet because we could not understand, and then after I came to Switzerland, I saw all my sisters with boyfriends or husbands etcetera and I told myself: Well they don't know my history, all I've experienced with Cecilia, I feel like living like them [the sisters], and I will try to live like them. And then I tried once and of course it didn't work.  
—Jimena Reyes

Jimena Reyes and her partner cleverly turned the family home into a space of opportunity, allowing them to explore their same-sex desires in a protected space without having to face the question of sexual identity. Jimena Reyes only became exposed to this question once she moved to Switzerland, where her attempt to reinvent herself sexually by establishing a heterosexual relationship failed. However, despite the possibilities it opened up, the teenagers' double family home remained a highly segmented and dangerous space: The girls' relationship remained confined to their respective rooms, and the girls had a distinct sense of 'doing wrong' and lived in constant fear of being found out:

*On avait une chambre pour nous avec deux clefs bien sûr pour chacune, pour toujours avoir une privacité stricte, pour justement, pas qu'on nous surprenne, mais une fois [...] je l'ai donné un bec sur la bouche, juste quand son père rentrait à la maison. Et ça a été le bordel. Mais comme son père il était un peu fou il était un peu misogyne un peu bizarre, Cecilia et moi on lui a tout de suite dit. 'Ecoute toi t'es complètement taré, t'hallucines, t'es déjà- tu faut mettre des lunettes parce que t'es en train de voir des choses horribles,' enfin bref on s'est tellement défendues que, c'était toute la famille, devait croire soit le vieux soit nous. Et ils nous ont cru nous.*

We had a room for ourselves with two keys of course for each of us, to always have strict privacy, exactly so that nobody would surprise us, but once [...] I gave her a kiss on the mouth just as her father returned home. And this was a mess. But because her dad was a little crazy, he was a little misogynist a little bizarre, Cecilia and me we told him immediately, 'Listen you're completely nuts, you're hallucinating, you are- you need to put on glasses because you are starting to see horrible things,' in a nutshell, we defended ourselves so vehemently that, it was the whole family, had to either believe him or us. And they believed us.

—Jimena Reyes

Although the girls succeeded in creating a queer space of opportunity within their family home, their shame and at the same time their inability to “understand” and integrate their actions rendered it a contested and unsafe place. When discovered, the girls were forced to denigrate their intimate feelings for each other in order to protect themselves from the negative reactions they anticipated in case their argument should fail.

Interestingly, it is exactly this kind of family home – a protected space where sexuality can be lived without being verbalized – Efra Mahmoud envisioned when she planned to return to Egypt with her Swiss partner, confident that within the family tacit subjects would be maintained as such. Her narrative largely frames her return to Egypt as a ‘return’ to the family home that would enable her to live “normally,” that is, without constant inquiries into her sexuality.

In some cases, the family home also represents an *unproblematic* space, earlier termed “queer islands in a heterosexual sea.” Siti Mohd Amin has always been able to live her same-sex relationships in her family home, both when growing up and now when she returns home to visit her Malaysian girlfriend. As Siti Mohd Amin relates about her visits to her family home:

SMA: My family know about my [?] and somehow when I bring my girlfriend, they a bit open-minded, it was okay. Only I tell my girlfriend to respect the old people you see, you know. I know we are- the culture is no allowed to have partner same woman and woman, you know but I say: Okay my family is open, just only talk to them and- okay if you make different. Just come and straight to my room, sure what is they are thinking you know. It's not so good. So I said, say hello, talk a little bit watching TV movie with them, is okay. And what we do in our room is private (smiles).

TB: And that's okay for your family?

SMA: Yeah, for my family it's okay.

TB: [...] What about her [girlfriend's] family, do they know?

SMA: Umm, in her family it's no. It's very- only the brothers sisters it's okay. But for parent no.

TB: Yeah. So she usually would come to your place and not the other way around?

SMA: I go to her place during her parents is out, when I knew it's- sisters brothers alright know.

TB: So where you live, your family home, [...] everybody is living in the same house, and when you go there you also stay in this place?

SMA: My room, I just stay with my younger sister so we turn by turn to stay in the room, you know. If I'm out, so she stay in the room. Sometimes we have the same- uh, when

I say I bring my girlfriend so she know she have to sleep outside.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Siti Mohd Amin hence shows more concern about her girlfriend showing respect for her parents than with her parents' reaction to her sexual orientation.

The family home – no matter whether it is located in Switzerland or 'back home' – remains an important point of reference even after moving out, regardless of whether the family accepts or rejects the daughter's, granddaughter's, or sibling's sexuality. One recurrent theme in these negotiations with the family is parents' acceptance of partners within the family home. Teresa Ruiz: *"Angela [Partnerin] gehört zu der Familie auch in Kuba [...] meine Mutter liebt sie. Momol. Also mit meine ganze Familie hat sie wirklich ein sehr gutes Verhältnis. Natürlich wir verstecken uns auch, klar"* – "Angela [partner] belongs to the family also in Cuba [...] my mother loves her. Yes. In fact with my entire family she really has a very good relationship. Of course we also hide, that's clear." Teresa Ruiz' partner is welcomed into the family home under the precondition that nothing is verbalized. There are cases, however, when partners are explicitly excluded from the family home. *"Nicht über diese Schwelle"* – "She won't cross this doorstep," Julia Morricone's father told her after she informed him of the true nature of her relationship with her 'friend.' Across accounts such strict verdicts have usually been temporary, but in some cases they have lasted for years.

In summary: While growing up, many interviewees associated their family homes with confinement, restriction and a sense of unbelonging, which some retrospectively ascribe to their sense of being unable to explore their awakening same-sex desires within the space of the family home, both out of shame and respect. Others describe a vague but no less pressing sense of having to leave the family home in order to create a space of their own in which to 'find themselves.' The strategy of 'moving out to come out' supports the suggestion brought forth by queer geographers that "non-normative sexuality is often tantamount to spatial displacement" (Puar, Rushbrook, and Schein 2003: 386), and that for queer people the family home is not as readily available as the protected, unregulated space that the private sphere is commonly believed to represent.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, queer migrant women's narratives disrupt this logic of displacement in multiple ways. First of all, in the context of queer international migration,

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12 Recent feminist, queer, and postcolonial work has taken the discussion around 'safe space' beyond the family home. For instance, Cindy Holmes (2009) exposes that discourses on domestic violence are largely organized around the experiences of white middle class heterosexual women and hence around violence in the private sphere. She argues that this definition of domestic violence erases the *public* forms of violence (welfare systems; immigration legislations; unequal work conditions; moral pressure; discrimination in public everyday encounters; etc.) that shape the intimate lives of, for instance, non-white-identified, working class or queer women, or single mothers (see also Chapter 8). Another vein of this work has shown how lesbian and gay rights activists' call for public 'safe spaces' in the U.S. is complicit in broader public security discourses based on policing and privatization, which has caused social exclusions along the lines of race and class (Hannhardt 2013). From this work, the global North/West emerges as a 'safe space' for citizens privileged by their race and class only.

family ties are not easily cut based on a host of reasons ranging from affective ties to financial dependence and the need for moral support (such as importantly in the face of exclusion and social isolation encountered in the diaspora). Second, for some interviewees the family home represents a protected space for sexual exploration or un verbalized sexual practice. Some sought to create 'queer bubbles' within the family home when growing up, devising temporal and spatial strategies in order not to be found out. By contrast, Efra Mahmoud intended to capitalize on the fact that in her family her sexuality was likely going to be treated as a tacit subject, accommodating her desire to keep private things private and to evade constant exposure to sexualized discourses. Finally, as the case of Siti Mohd Amin demonstrates, spatial displacement is not always a necessary precondition for the successful establishment of a same-sex sexual identity, for sometimes these desires can be explored and lived largely unproblematically within the family home. In sum, and partly in contradiction to existing queer geographical work, the family home emerges both as a crucial site of *exclusion* as well as a space of *opportunity* and *support*.

### 6.1.6 Conclusion

Swiss feminist migration scholarship has identified the family as a critical safety network in transnational and diasporic contexts. Restrictive immigration regimes, obstacles to entry into the Swiss labor market, limited access to the social security system, and social exclusion emphasize the significance of the family in addressing basic needs (PASSAGEN 2014:208, Soom Ammann 2011, Soom Ammann and van Holten 2014). However, biographical accounts by queer migrant women in Switzerland suggest that the family of origin cannot be to them what it is to their heterosexual counterparts. Persistent pressure from the family to follow a narrow heteronormative prescript, the silencing of same-sex desire in the family home and negative reactions to dissident sexualities often mark families as sites of rejection and exclusion rather than comfort and support. This critically restricts queer migrant women's access to practices of inheriting, caring, and providing in the context of their family of origin.

At the same time, mutual emotional and material dependencies persist even if the family is critical of the queer family member's 'choices.' Many interviewees who grew up in close-knit families understand themselves as "family persons" and despite conflicts with their parents are not about to cut family ties (and neither are, for that matter, their parents), especially since, as queer migrants, they find themselves exposed to a heightened risk of social isolation and exclusion in the host country. Despite families' often adverse attitudes, the family hence remains a crucial source of support and comfort, mitigating the negative effects of migration. Indeed, the social and structural exclusions that are often experienced in Switzerland, coupled with a distinct sense of 'missing the family,' often fuel considerations of returning to the home country. Due to these experienced exclusions, there is sometimes also a continued dependency on parents' financial support (while vice versa some families depend on remittances from the migrant; however, in this sample this was the exception).

Caught in these contradictory positionalities vis-à-vis the family, queer family members devise strategies that accommodate both their love and respect for their

family on the one hand and their love for the same sex on the other. One such strategy is leaving the family home for another country. Not corporeally being in each other's everyday lives minimizes potential sources of intra-familial friction while it facilitates sexual exploration and self-determination as well as selective communication with the family. This strategy of spatial segregation enables interviewees to show their parents and their 'culture' respect and to save their family's 'face' without betraying their own needs and desires. Other strategies are transparency, openness, and confrontation of the family with queer perspectives and realities. From queer migrant women's narratives, the family hence emerges as a locus of power through which 'culture' and the attendant heteronorms become defined, and through which both normalized and dissident sexual identities (which are always already ethnicized and racialized) are enforced and controlled.

At the same time, the family home does not always represent a site of exclusion. It can also emerge as a "queer island in a heterosexual sea," which offers the sexually non-conforming family member the chance to develop her dissident sexuality within the family home. In this sample such narratives have remained the exception, however.

In conclusion of this sub-chapter, I want to recall the three considerations put forward at the outset, which stressed the importance of reading parents' reactions to their daughters' queer sexualities from a critical postcolonial, feminist, and queer theoretical stance. This critique exposes homophobias outside the West and in diasporic communities also as legacies of colonialism and its contemporary persistences, and as results of heteropatriarchal nationalisms in the context of the global contestation of sexualities. Homophobias outside the West are hence not in any way 'essential' to such and such a homeland or diasporic culture – nor are they simply imports from the West. Furthermore, in the specific case of the negotiation of sexualities within diasporic communities, queer migration scholars have shown how racialized migrant communities and girls and women in particular come under twofold moral pressure. On the one hand, heteropatriarchal homeland nationalisms tend to denigrate diasporic women as licentious, while on the other hand racism in the host society produces a host of negative stereotypes of migrant subjects in general. In the face of such negative depiction and consequent exclusion, migrant communities work towards representing themselves as morally superior to the Western host culture. These representations epitomize 'our' (Filipino, Bosnian, etc.) girls/daughters as pure and chaste versus 'their' (Swiss, Western) girls/daughters as sexually corrupt. As queer postcolonial scholars emphasize, such imaginary female emblems of the nation are always already *heterosexual*, which implicitly establishes heterosexuality as the national sexual norm while simultaneously framing queer sexualities as its abnormal Western counterparts. Within this framework, queer migrant women are rendered impossible subjects – they can never attain the subject position of a lesbian *and* a Bosnian (for example) as embodied in one person.

At the same time, queer migrant women's subject positions are also rendered impossible by the increasing homonationalist discourses within Switzerland. Since these discourses frame migrant communities and their 'cultures' as essentially homophobic, they per definition exclude the possibility of the existence of queer migrant subjects. This invisibilizes migrant women in Swiss lesbian spaces and exposes these spaces as intrinsically white.

## 6.2 Queer Families

Interviewees' frequent ambivalence and precariousness of their relationships to their family of origin and their subjection to multiple discrimination in both home and host country are productive of "homing desires" (Brah 1996), which as defined earlier are "desires to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration" (Fortier 2003:115, see Chapter 3.4). This view on the space of the home distinguishes the desire for a homeland from the desire to create belonging independent of the location of the 'home.' In this sense, interviewees' negotiations with their families, too, are consequences of their 'homing desires.' The present sub-chapter is concerned with another avenue of 'making home,' namely the discussion of how homing desires are actualized in interviewees' visions and implementations of *queer families* and queer family homes. These 'queer homes' are safe spaces the women strive to create for themselves as bulwarks against heteronormativity and racism, and especially against multiple mechanisms of Othering that frame queer migrant subjects always as *either* a homosexual *or* as a 'foreigner.'

### 6.2.1 Introduction: Brief History of Two Questions

Forms of living together that depart from the heteronormative ideal of the father-mother-child-family have been among the most contested issues in Switzerland in recent years (Mesquita 2011, Nay 2013). This is crystallized in the continued debates raging around the legal regulation of forms of living together and procreation that reach beyond couplehood and/or heterosexuality, which queer scholars sometimes subsume under the term *queer families* (Bannwart et al. 2013:13). The political initiative with the most relevant and direct impact on interviewees' lives was the introduction of the national Partnership Act in 2007, which allows queer couples to register their partnership (see Chapters 2.2.2, 5, and 8). While the Act brought significant improvements in the possibilities of 'doing family' for both Swiss and non-Swiss women-loving women and men-loving men, it by no means installed equality between heteronormative and queer families. For instance, Swiss legislation still excluded the possibility of adoption by registered same-sex couples (but note that stepchild adoption became possible in 2018, and that same-sex couples will gain access to 'full' adoption with the introduction of gay marriage in 2022). Also, to this date the Act bars same-sex couples' access to reproductive medical treatment and technologies. (While in the future gay marriage will grant lesbian couples access to institutionalized sperm donation, legal inequalities between heterosexual and same-sex couples will persist: Lesbian couples have to declare the sperm donor to the state and have to seek medically assisted sperm donation for both partners to be formally acknowledged as mothers from the child's birth.) Finally, non-Swiss citizens in same-sex couples remain excluded from facilitated naturalization (which again will change with the introduction of gay marriage) (Nay 2013). Prior to the national vote on the Partnership Act, LGBT campaigners consciously avoided matters concerning procreation for fear that the Act as a whole would be threatened if these particularly controversial issues were included in the voting package. As it happened, Swiss

voters passed the Act. Ever since, LGBT rights activists have been working towards establishing equal rights for queer parents and their children, a campaign that has been gaining significant momentum over the past few years and has recently culminated in Swiss voters' consent to 'full' gay marriage.

The Partnership Act was introduced during my fieldwork, and when I started the interviews, the Act was under intense public discussion. The issue had been present in public discourse for quite some time already, as before the introduction of the federal Act several Swiss cantons had already passed cantonal acts, which had already brought improvements for the legal status of non-Swiss partners living in these cantons. The proliferation of these debates at the time of my fieldwork resulted in rich interview material on the topics of formalized partnership and queer families. What had been unthinkable just a few years before had become standard questions every openly homosexual woman found – and still finds – herself confronted with in Switzerland, both from in- and outside lesbian circles: “Are you going to marry?” and “Are you planning to have children?” “*Das ist eigentlich nicht das, was wir alte Lesben uns mal vorgestellt haben*” – “This is actually not what we old lesbians had in mind,” research participant Barbara Wiegand says. Barbara Wiegand wrote one of the first articles advocating gay marriage in a Swiss lesbian magazine in the 1980s, in which she argued that marriage should be made accessible to queer people as a ritual legitimizing homosexual partnerships.<sup>13</sup> However:

*Und heute bin ich eigentlich eher entnervt, dass sich die Homosexuellen objektiv Mann oder Frau einfach wieder Richtung Mainstream entwickeln und sich eigentlich fast überschlagen, jetzt auch noch mit Kindern haben und so, und ich finde ‘Hey Man, hey Woman, das ist es eigentlich nicht gewesen, was wir alte Lesben uns mal vorgestellt haben, dass man sich dermassen anpasst, dass man irgendwie vom Möbel Pfister nicht mehr zu unterscheiden ist’ (lacht). Und es geht mir dort nicht um den Unterschied per se, oder dass es radikal sein muss, sondern homosexuell sein ist einfach nicht heterosexuell sein, wieso soll man es imitieren? Es ist etwas anderes. Für mich, in meinem Denken, wieso muss ich jetzt da Mami Papi und Kinderspielen wie aus dem Lehrbuch. [...] Und dann wird man einfach genau auch wieder unsichtbar, [...] weil man dann genau wie Herr und Frau Müller tun auch Frau und Frau Müller und Herr und Herr Müller dann wieder ihr eigenes Balkönchen schützen, und das nervt eigentlich. [...] Also ich finde ja die Gesetze die die sollten einfach selbstverständlich sein wenn man eine Lebenspartnerschaft hat, ist doch völlig egal was man für Geschlechtsteile hat, jemand pflegen, ins Spital können [um eine\_n Partner\_in zu besuchen], also ich finds jenseitig. Ich finds gut dass sie jetzt dann anfangen, und die die dafür sind können sich auch wieder sehr gut dabei fühlen, sehr tolerant (lacht), aber mindestens hat man jetzt einen gewissen Fortschritt gemacht.*

And today I'm actually more unnerved that the homosexuals, whether man or woman, are just developing in the direction of the mainstream and actually almost outdo each other, now also with having kids and so on, and I'm thinking, 'Hey man, hey woman, this is actually not what we old lesbians had in mind, that you adapt to this extent, that you're somehow not discernible from Möbel Pfister'<sup>14</sup> anymore' (laughs). And for

13 The literature reference is not given here for reasons of anonymity.

14 Upright middle class furniture department store in Switzerland.

me it's not about the difference per se, or that it has to be radical, but to be homosexual is just not like being heterosexual, why imitate it? It is something different. For me, in my thinking, why do I have to play Mom Dad and Kids as if by the book. [...] And then you're exactly invisible again, [...] because then just do like Mr. and Mrs. Müller, also Mrs. and Mrs. Müller and Mr. and Mr. Müller protect their little balcony, and this actually gets on my nerves. [...] Well in my opinion the laws they should just be self-evident, if one has a committed partnership [literally 'life partnership'], who cares what genitals you have, to care for somebody, being able to go to the hospital [to visit a partner in the hospital], I think it's outrageous. I think it's good that they are starting now, and those who advocate it can feel good and tolerant (laughs), but at least a certain degree of progress has been made now.

—Barbara Wiegand

Barbara Wiegand advocates equal rights irrespective of whether a partnership is registered or a couple married or not. She is particularly worried about what she perceives as homonormative trends, that is, the growing tendency to create homosexual stereotypes that assimilate heteronormative ideals into homosexual culture. Alongside other critics of homonormativity, Barbara Wiegand hence formulates a critique of gay and lesbian politics and practices that do not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions such as monogamy, procreation and binary gender roles but instead reinforce them in an effort to lead a 'normal' life (Puar 2006, Duggan 2002, Oswin 2007a, see Chapter 3.2.1). She particularly worries that homosexuals' increasing efforts to establish such a 'normal life' and generally the practice of being "*brav*" (well-behaved, upright) furthers the marginalization of queer people that are more "*exaltiert*" (exalted) and "*unangepasst*" (non-conformist), such as herself.

Although she distances herself from lesbian circles and asserts that she has always felt more at ease in more eccentric mixed homosexual/gay circles, Barbara Wiegand could be counted among what Christina Caprez and Eveline Y. Nay (2008) have termed "*frauenbewegte Frauen*," women who are openly lesbian and politically active, and who view sexuality as a political issue.<sup>15</sup> Among the cases examined in this study, those few interviewees who were politically active were, like Barbara Wiegand, predominantly

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15 Barbara Wiegand is, however, very selective about communicating her sexual orientation: "*Ich finde ich muss meine Sexualität nicht öffentlich vor mir hertragen, das finde ich auch bei anderen Leuten irgendwie eher unangenehm, aber es gibt dann eine Schallgrenze wo ich denke du müsstest eigentlich etwas sagen*"—"I don't think I have to wear my sexuality out on my sleeve, I also consider it somehow disconcerting when other people do it, but there is a limit [literally: 'sound barrier'] where I think now you should actually say something." While she does not actively hide it, she does not display her homosexuality openly at work (which sometimes requires her to travel to countries in which homophobia is flagrant), nor in the conservative Swiss village where she lives. When asked about why she has decided not to come out at work she says that this had not even been a decision: "*Für mich ist meine Sexualität ja eigentlich kein Problem. Doof gesagt. [...] Und ich finde es auch nicht so ein super Thema dass ich denke- jeder hat eine [Sexualität], irgendeine, und ich teile das einfach nicht, die grassierende Sexualisierung, das ist etwas das mir extrem auf den Geist geht*"—"For me my sexuality is actually not a problem, is it? To put it in a silly way. [...] I don't consider [sexuality] such a great topic- everyone has one [a sexuality], any one [sexuality], and I just don't share that, the rampant sexualization, that is something that really gets on my nerves."



of the 'second generation' and have been politicized in the women's and lesbian and gay movement in Western Europe. By contrast, political activism in general and LGBT activism in particular was exceptional among those who migrated to Switzerland as adults, who rarely exposed themselves politically beyond the occasional participation in a Gay Pride parade. Questions such as whether commitment in a partnership should be tied to official registration or not, or whether or not (and how) to have children, tended to be considered private matters and were handled as such. However, despite the fact that the participants in this study mostly refrained from political activism, their insistence upon retaining control over their partnerships and procreation inadvertently turn these aspects of their lives into sites of resistance and civil disobedience.

The following discussion focuses on two aspects of the *queer family*: *procreation* and *partnership formalization*. Since considerations about *partnership formalization* was more often than not inextricably linked to issues of residency and citizenship, perspectives on and experiences with partnership registration will chiefly be examined in the next chapter (Chapter 7), which is concerned with sexual citizenship. The present sub-chapter discusses queer migrant women's perspectives on *procreation*, tied up as it is with cultural values, the division of labor within the family, and custody rights. The following analysis primarily focuses on "baby projects" (Maria Borkovic) rather than actual family lives since only three interviewees already had children: one couple had a child from one of the partners' earlier heterosexual marriage, and another interviewee continued to live with her husband and two children while maintaining a long-distance relationship to a woman in her home country. Both of these cases are presented in more detail in other chapters (see Chapters 5 and 8). This unequal distribution of interviewees with and without children is in part due to the structure of the sample, which is biased towards skilled women between the ages of thirty and forty. While women with a higher education and professional ambitions generally tend to bear children later, the fact that many interviewees who were in their thirties did not (yet) have children is *also* crucially tied to the effects of their migration. Some interviewees not only had to (re)launch their careers in Switzerland but sometimes also had to come to terms with their homosexuality and/or the cultural and technological possibilities of procreation in the context of a homosexual relationship (see below). Further, older queer women who grew up in Switzerland or other Western European countries are less likely to have children (who were planned together with their partners) than younger women. This is likely due to the broader social acceptance of lesbians having children, which in turn is the result of relentless LGBT activism in the past two decades on the one hand and the rapidly growing number of reproductive medical institutions and technologies accessible to homosexual couples on the other. Lastly, queer women who have chosen not to live a homosexual life but live with a husband and children instead were not likely to answer the call for participation in this research project, since many of them are not likely to have communicated their same-sex desires to their families (an exception to this is Suki Schäuble, see Chapter 7.2.4).

In other words, many participants were at a point in their lives at which the question of having children was potentially salient, and in fact, some interviewees had an imperative wish to become mothers. Yet even couples in which neither partner had an urgent wish for children gauged the advantages and disadvantages of procreating, dis-

cussed methods of conception, weighed models of labor division, assessed the role of the sperm donor, or considered different forms of living together as a family. Preferences regarding these issues varied widely and will not be discussed in detail here, as this has been done more extensively in other literature on queer families in German-speaking contexts (Gerlach 2010, Irle 2014, Schulze and Scheuss 2007, Streib-Brzic and Gerlach 2005). Instead, the following analysis focuses on the more specific question of how *migration* structures perceptions and strategies of queer procreation.

### 6.2.2 Baby Projects

Some participants in this study did not think of themselves as potential mothers (as one interviewee put on record: “I hate babies”). Others had decided against having children but satisfied their desire to mother through nieces and nephews, godchildren, or neighbors’ children. For others, having children was an option to be considered rather than an imperative. However, among the women interviewed for this study those with a clear desire to have children were the majority. Several described their desire to have children to be so imperative that at some points in their lives they had been on the verge of abandoning their homosexual lives in order to have children with a man, or leaving an unwilling female partner in order to look for one with the same wish. “*Familie, Kinder, heiraten, ja das ist klar gewesen. Absolut.*” – “Family, children, marrying, yes that was clear. Absolutely.” This is how Teresa Ruiz’ envisioned her future when she lived in Cuba and still considered herself heterosexual. Since then she has left her mother and brother in Cuba to come to Switzerland, has relaunched her professional career, had a sobering experience with a heterosexual marriage, has ‘come to terms’ with her homosexuality – and has acknowledged the possibility of raising a child with a female partner. Apart from her professional ambitions, the desire to start her own family has been the only element on her original map of life to persist over the years.

For Teresa Ruiz, accepting the possibility of having children with a woman as a valid alternative to having children with a man has been the ultimate but crucial step in assuming a lesbian identity:

*[Angela und ich haben eineinhalb Jahre zusammen gewohnt] bis ich eigentlich festgestellt habe dass ich halt auch noch ein Kind haben will, oder? Und dass das mit Angela nicht möglich wäre. Da habe ich gesagt ‘Ich möchte wirklich nichts mehr mit ihr zu tun haben, ich möchte gern ein Kind haben.’ [Angela sagte] ‘Dadada, das können wir auch zusammen’ ‘Nein das geht nur mit einem Mann,’ das ist wirklich meine Vorstellung, damals gewesen. Und dann habe ich sie verlassen. Habe gesagt ‘Nein, wirklich nicht.’ Und es ist mir wirklich so schlecht gegangen wirklich schlecht schlecht schlecht, und dann habe ich müssen hab ich zum Psychologen gehen und das Ganze wirklich anzuschauen. [...] Und jetzt kann ich auch sagen ‘Ich bin Lesbe.’*

[Angela and I had been living together for one and a half years] until I actually realized that I also want to have a child, you know? And that this would not be possible with Angela. Then I told myself ‘I really don’t want to have anything to do with her any longer, I would like to have a child.’ [Angela said] ‘Dadada, we can do that together, too’ ‘No, this only works with a man,’ this really was my conception at the time. And then I left

her. Said 'No, definitely not.' And I felt so bad really bad bad bad and then I had to go to a psychologist and to really look at the whole thing. [...] And now I can also say 'I'm a lesbian.'

—Teresa Ruiz

Only after psychotherapy and an unsatisfying interlude with a man does Teresa Ruiz overcome her heteronormative imaginary and acknowledge that she does indeed want to commit to a homosexual relationship with Angela Hieber *and* have children with her. Following the logic of her narrative, it is only the cultural possibility of lesbian motherhood that has eventually enabled her to fully step into the lesbian identity and to live a homosexual relationship.

At the same time, Teresa Ruiz' initial repulsion from engagement in the debate around queer procreation is indicative of the ambivalence she attaches to discourses of queer family foundation. Discussions around queer procreation are grounded in biological fact: Seeing that conception cannot 'happen' accidentally between two biological women, deliberate action is called for. Unless there is a child from a former heterosexual relationship, starting a queer family in Switzerland calls for explicit reflection, planning, and negotiation, for instance with partners, co-parents, sperm donors, or reproductive health institutions.

Moreover, wanting a child requires knowledge about the "*magouilles*" (Jimena Reyes), that is, the legal machinations necessary to bypass persistently prohibitive Swiss legislation – which at the time of the interviews explicitly did not foresee queer family foundation.<sup>16</sup> As one interviewee who has drawn up a fake relationship with a man in order to gain access to reproductive health services in her home country says: "Unfortunately [...] you just have to make these bypass routes just to make your dream come true." Because access of lesbian couples to reproductive technologies is barred in Switzerland, these services have to be obtained outside of the country. Still these obstacles usually cannot thwart the plan to have children, thus confirming Eveline E. Nay's finding that "law frames the family foundation of a lesbian couple [in Switzerland], but it does not prevent it" (Nay 2013:379, my translation), which points to the obsolescence of this prohibition in terms of its effect. However, in the face of persistent heteronormative ideals and legislation that explicitly work against queer family formation, artificial insemination at a reproductive health institution abroad or self-organized insemination with sperm from a male acquaintance involve a process of engagement and personal development that is challenging for migrant and non-migrant queer women alike.

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16 With respect to procreation, the Partnership Act and associated legislation remains grounded in heteronormative ideals: It explicitly states that registered partnerships are not families, and that a registered partnership does "not provide a basis for family foundation" (Botschaft zum Bundesgesetz über die eingetragene Partnerschaft gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare, BBl 1997 I 1, 1.6.2.) (Nay 2013:373). As mentioned above, the situation has since changed with the introduction of stepchild adoption for same-sex couples in 2018 and the imminent introduction of 'full' gay marriage in 2022. Inequalities and open questions with regard to rainbow family foundation remain, however, such as the prerequisite to register sperm donors or the ethically delicate question whether surrogacy should be legalized in Switzerland, and under what conditions.

Ariane Velusat's discussions with her partner are illustrative of the character of such a process. As introduced above, Ariane Velusat emigrated from Venezuela as an eighteen-year-old, seeking to break free from the confines of her family home. In Switzerland she soon met another young Latin American woman, and after a lengthy process of exploration and debate the two women acknowledged their mutual attraction. Their "drame" (drama) does not stop here, however. Ariane Velusat's partner faced residency issues, and both women were in critical economic situations – but the nascent relationship was put to its most serious test when the question of procreation arose:

TB: *[Vous avez dit que] vous voulez des enfants?*

AV: *Oui. Oui oui on aimerait bien. C'est quelque chose qu'on a parlé depuis le départ. Même avant qu'on se dise 'Oui on est un couple et on décide de construire quelque chose,' même avant ça on se disait 'Ah, comme on est bien ensemble on se sent bien. Et des enfants. Et c'est comment sans enfant?' C'était un drame. Clairement oui. Si moi je me souviens que les premiers mois je disais 'Mais, juste à cause de ça, pour moi c'est un poids suffisant pour réfléchir vraiment si je continue pas.' Et bon de ça aussi on a beaucoup parlé et puis après, moi j'ai regardé sur les forums sur internet et tout ça, j'ai dit 'Non, c'est possible, on peut faire des enfants en étant ensemble, donc c'est bon.' Et du moment que je-, Florencia parfois elle me disait 'Mais c'est bon tu me fais peur parce que t'as fait toutes les démarches et tout ça,' j'ai dit 'Mais non j'ai pas fait toutes les démarches mais, au moins savoir si c'est une possibilité qui rentre en ligne de compte, ou si ça coûte je sais pas combien de milliers d'euros et qu'on peut pas le faire. Mais j'ai besoin de le savoir maintenant.' Et du moment que j'ai su que c'était quelque chose qui était possible et réalisable pour nous, c'est bon. Ça y 'Pfiou.' Oui.*

TB: *[You said that] you wanted children?*

AV: Yes. Yes yes we would like that. This is something we have been talking about from the start. Even before we said 'Yes we are a couple and we are deciding to build something together,' even before that we told ourselves 'Ah, how good we are together, we feel good. And the children. And how is it without a child?' It was a drama. Clearly, yes. Yes, I remember that in the first months I said 'But, just because of that, for me this is weighty enough for really considering if I don't want to go on.' And yes we talked about it a lot as well and then after that I checked the forums on the internet and so on and I said 'No, it's possible, we can have children when we are together, so it's good.' And from this moment- Florencia sometimes told me 'But that's good, because you scare me because you took all those steps and everything,' I said 'But no I haven't taken all these steps but, at least to know if it is a possibility that we will have to take into consideration, or whether this costs I don't know how many thousand euros and we couldn't do it. But I need to know it now.' And from the moment I knew that it was something that was possible and feasible for us, it's good. That was 'Puuuh.' Yes.

—Ariane Velusat

Here Ariane Velusat and her partner's negotiations around having children emerge as a rational and objective process of collecting and juxtaposing seemingly 'hard' facts. But like Teresa Ruiz, Ariane Velusat fundamentally questions her budding homosexual relationship when the issue of reproduction surfaces. Her narrative constructs both the fact that there needs to be the possibility of having children as well as the specific method by

which they should be obtained as unalterable, external, almost objective factors rather than personal choices. And it is as such facts they enter Ariane Velusat's balance sheet of the pros and cons of committing to a serious relationship with a woman. Finding that there are ways to have a child and that the necessary funds can be raised brought her relief: "Puuuh," as in: That was a close shave. The basic assumptions – that there needs to be procreation, and the exact way it has to happen (via a sperm bank) – remain intact.

In Ayesha Umar's account, too, the issue of having children emerges as a potential motivation for separation. As she states about her current partner's lack of a wish to have children: "*Ich habe noch nicht entschieden ob es [eine Familie] notwendig ist oder nicht. Also wenn diese Entscheidung kommt dann ist für mich klar, vielleicht müssen wir dann getrennte Wege gehen. Und dann muss ich eine andere Partner suchen*" – "I have not yet decided if it [having a family] is necessary or not. When this decision comes then it is clear for me, maybe we will have to go separate ways then. And then I'll have to look for another partner."

These anecdotes are representative of the clear desire of the majority of the participants to have children. In this sense, queer immigrant women in Switzerland can be counted among the contributors to the 'Lesby-Boom,' which describes the significant increase of queer family foundation by lesbians over the past two decades (Nay 2013:360). For several research participants, the wish to have children was indeed so imperative that they stated they would have given up their same-sex relationship for a heterosexual way of life had it not been for the cultural, institutional and technical possibilities of founding a queer family. As exemplified by Ayesha Umar above, several interviewees equally considered, or had considered in the past, giving up relationships with partners who did not want to have children. However, the process of learning about and acknowledging these possibilities of queer family foundation and to seriously take them into consideration as one's own path was often lengthy and marked by alienation and intercultural negotiation. As will be discussed next, adopting a nuclear family model thereby emerged as one strategy for research participants to create the home they had been denied both as sexual dissidents and as migrants.

### 6.2.3 On Methods of Conception and Labor Division

Besides the question of whether to have children or not, and whether or not to have them together, debates about procreation primarily addressed the question of the *method of conception* and *labor division*. The negotiation of the appropriate method of conception is closely tied to the question of what criteria the sperm donor should fulfil and what role he is envisioned to assume in the future family, such as whether he should take on the role of a father – and how and to what extent – or whether an anonymous donation is preferred. Positions with respect to these questions varied widely across accounts: While some argued that the child was going to need a "masculine presence" and were hoping to find a sperm donor who wished to assume some responsibilities, others preferred artificial insemination at a reproductive health clinic, with or without the option for the children to learn the identity of their father at a certain age.

For more than a year prior to the interview, Teresa Ruiz and her partner had been working with a gay couple who provided them with sperm for self-administered artificial insemination – without success as of yet. They found the donors through a group of gay and lesbian people brought together by the common desire to have children, hosted by a local LGBT organization. Teresa Ruiz speaks about the role of the sperm donor only upon my request. She seems unconcerned about the exact definition of his role, even though the donor himself seems to envision a significant role for himself: “*Er möchte der Vater sein*” – “He would like to be the father.” It remains unclear what exactly this entails. Teresa Ruiz, for her part, asserts that she has “nothing against it,” and that once she is pregnant the couple are going to have to “protect ourselves against legal issues” (“*Mit den rechtlichen Sachen müssen wir uns halt absichern*”) – eliding the fact that this is a legal impossibility once the donor has officially acknowledged his fatherhood.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, Ariane Velusat and her partner spent a great deal of time debating the role of the sperm donor, which eventually brought the couple to the conclusion that an artificial insemination performed at a specialized clinic abroad was the only valid option for them. They initially wanted to ask a friend for assistance, saying “*Oui mais il faut un père*” – “Yes but there needs to be a father,” but this option was qualified upon further reflection. Above all, the couple want to remain flexible: “*Si on part au Venezuela, si on part à Argentine ou si on part à, je sais pas au Canada ou je sais pas où, oui, on peut pas faire ça a une autre personne. Lui dire ‘Non on va rester ici on part pas nanana’ et une fois qu’on les a, ‘Ciao!’ On peut pas.*” – “If we leave for Venezuela, or if we leave for Argentina, or if we leave for, I don’t know Canada or I don’t know where, yes, we can’t do this to another person. Tell him ‘No we will stay here we won’t leave nanana’ and then once we have them [the children], ‘Ciao!’ We can’t.” The couple find themselves caught in a dilemma: On the one hand, they want a father who is also prepared to assume the role of a father; on the other hand, they want to retain their mobility. Eventually Ariane Velusat and her partner revisit their previously unquestioned assumption that there needs to be a father in the child’s life: “*Peu à peu je me suis dit ‘Mais, non c’est pas indispensable’*” – “Little by little I told myself ‘But no, this [a social father] is not indispensable,’” finally admitting to themselves that in fact “*on n’a pas envie d’avoir une troisième personne*” – “we don’t feel like having a third person.”

While the envisioned role of the sperm donor varies, Ariane Velusat’s position is exemplary of the tendency across narratives towards *homonormative family models*. In the biographies generated in the context of this study, no visions appear of a common household with the father, or indeed any kind of enlarged family household. The family home and thus the nucleus of the family unit is understood to consist exclusively of the two mothers and the child(ren).

A further issue that emerges in the context of interviewees’ negotiations of the method of reproduction is race and ethnicity. For Ariane Velusat and her partner, the

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17 Generally, a gap was discernible in terms of knowledge about the legal restrictions imposed on lesbian couples with regard to issues of procreation. Some who were planning a family were for instance of the incorrect opinion that once a partnership is registered the non-biological mother automatically receives custody.

question of *visual similarity* between the child and the non-biological mother is as central to their decision to obtain the sperm from a sperm bank as their desire to retain their mobility. According to Ariane Velusat, the couple want there to be “*plus ou moins la même optique [...] une certaine harmonie dans, oui, dans le type physique ou comme ça*” – “more or less the same optics [...] a certain harmony in, yes, in the physique or something like that” between child and non-biological mother. Such visual politics are emphasized by interviewees living both in all-migrant and mixed couples. As the white partner of one of the interviewees told me, “*J’aimerais bien que ce soit un petit métizé. Donc le spermatozoïde soit asiatique par exemple*” – “I would like it to be a little métizé. That the sperm is Asian for example.” The strategy of creating visual similarity among family members heightens the illusion of biological kinship, reiterating the primacy of relation by blood.<sup>18</sup> Visual likeness is held to make the child more ‘one’s own,’ both to the individual partners as well as to the couple and family as systems of relations, and as such is seen to strengthen family ties. These ties are established not only by mimicry of genetic kinship but also function on the basis of socially constructed racial markers as a central source of identification for both partners, and by extension for the child. In other words, sharing the racial positionality of the child is identified as a crucial factor that binds family members together. In this study, not enough data was generated to analyze the question of race in the procreation strategies of same-sex partnerships in-depth, an issue that deserves further attention in queer and critical race studies (Steinbugler 2005). Further inquiries should specifically focus on how dominant discourses and practices around queer family formation in the West implicitly construct same-sex couples as monoracial and white, and how such procreation strategies among migrant or mixed same-sex couples at once reproduce and disrupt this hegemonic production of racialized and ethnicized sexualities.

In the context of this study, the concern with visual similarity and racial identification further raises the question of accessibility to specific kinds of sperm. Ariane Velusat and her partner explicitly chose to use a sperm bank because this offers them the required variety of sperm to effectuate the visual similarity that is desired between the non-biological mother and the child. This means that for queer members of immigrant minority groups in Switzerland the method of self-organized sperm can be problematic as it may not be possible for the couple to find a suitable private sperm donor. At the same time, insemination in an institution abroad requires considerable financial and social capital; a flexible availability; and a residence permit that allows for leaving and re-entering the country spontaneously, which not all queer migrant women possess. This leads to the question of how class shapes reproduction strategies among queer migrant women and specifically points to a social inequality that is produced by barring same-sex couples from access to sperm banks and reproductive health services in Switzerland, which is that not all queer migrant women have equal access to determining the visual similarity of their children.

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18 This is not to imply that ‘visual similarity’ is an objectively measurable fact, but is simply a description of how interviewees’ narratives (re)constructed such visual similarity.

Two further central issues of negotiation in the context of procreation have been which partner is going to bear the child, and how the couple's labor division is going to be organized once the child is born. Again, perspectives varied widely, though they did expose certain tendencies. When asked who will be bearing the child Teresa Ruiz replies:

*Im Moment nur ich. Aber sie [Partnerin] will auch Mutter werden. Ich glaube jetzt bis sie die Ausbildung fertig gemacht hat [...]. Also zwei Kinder wollen wir sowieso haben. [...] Und wenn es nicht klappt dann kann auch noch Angela, also bin ich auch nicht so fixiert.*

At the moment only me. But she [partner] also wants to become a mother. I think now until she has finished her professional training [...]. Well, we want to have two children anyway. [...] And if it doesn't work out then Angela can give it a try as well, so I'm not that fixated either.

—Teresa Ruiz

At the moment, Teresa Ruiz, who is considerably older than her partner, is both the main breadwinner and the future biological mother. In her statement these roles do not appear fixed but are expected to be adjusted as careers and fate dictate and as each partner goes through different life phases. However, a later comment by Teresa Ruiz indicates a more normative perspective on the envisioned division of labor: “*Wenn es soweit ist dann wird halt Angela da bleiben, also sie halt die Kinder aufpassen und- ja, ich werde halt weiterhin schaffen, klar ich verdiene ja mehr als sie, und so können wir uns schon arrangieren so*” – “When the time has come then Angela will stay here, will look after the children and- yes, I will continue working, of course, I earn more than she does after all, and that's how we can arrange it.” The couple hence plan to reverse roles once the child is born, picturing a traditional division of labor in which Angela Hieber takes on the role of the social mother with a significantly reduced paid workload while Teresa Ruiz resumes her role as the breadwinner. That being said, as Teresa Ruiz' case demonstrates, biological and social motherhood need not necessarily align, be it by free volition or coercion (Ramiza Salakhova, for instance, is forced to take on the role of the breadwinner against her and her partner's plans because as an asylum seeker her partner is not allowed to work, see Chapter 9.3).

Teresa Ruiz' vision reflects a more general tendency among interviewees towards the ‘breadwinner’ model in which one partner assumes primary responsibility for earning income, while the other is responsible for nurturing. While the roles (breadwinner/nurturer) are rarely questioned per se, in contrast to the heteronormative family they are considered to be more interchangeable, which allows professionally ambitious people like Teresa Ruiz or Maria Borkovic to act as biological mothers and slip into the role of the social mother for as long as they deem it necessary before resuming their careers.

In contrast, other interviewees cannot imagine such a crossover of biological and social roles. This becomes particularly evident in the accounts of more masculine Asian interviewees who, like Augusta Wakari, Siti Mohd Amin, and Jasmine Sieto, were used to assuming the ‘role of the man’ in what they themselves term “heterosexual” relationships with feminine women when still living in Asia. Even though their gender positionalities have undergone significant shifts in the diaspora (see Chapter 5), they cannot imagine their own body as pregnant. “I still can't picture myself getting pregnant,” Au-



gusta Wakari states. “I will love that child crazy but me, myself being pregnant, I don’t know, I mean it’s not impossible but it’s just never crossed my mind.” Estrangement from the image of her own pregnant body is also the reason why Ayesha Umar draws the line at bearing a child. Her position vis-à-vis procreation is particularly matter-of-fact: “*Ich möchte selber keine Kinder produzieren, ich kann mir in Zukunft vorstellen eine Familie zu haben, wäre mir auch ein Wunsch. Dann wäre die Frage entweder Adoption oder eine Frau finden die das Kind produzieren möchte. [...] Ich möchte mein Körper gut bewahren (lacht).*” – “I would not like to produce a child, I can imagine having a family in the future, it would also be a wish of mine. Then it would be between either adoption or finding a woman who would like to produce the child. [...] I would like to conserve my body well (laughs).” There were hence differences contingent on gender identities concerning the ways interviewees could or could not envision their bodies as pregnant and could imagine themselves to act as biological mothers.

To conclude: Across queer migrant women’s accounts tendencies were discernible in the choice of the method of reproduction as well as in the labor division model envisioned for the queer family. While the imagined queer families featured a certain flexibility as to biological and social motherhood and labor division, for the most part homonormative nuclear family models were favored, in which the biological father plays a limited role and the labor is divided according to a breadwinner/nurturer model. The adoption of this model can arguably also be read as an assimilationist move: The breadwinner/nurturer model clearly continues to represent the norm in Switzerland. The question of how migration is implicated in the formation of these preferences guides the next sub-chapter.

### 6.2.4 Restoring the Lost Family Home, Adopting Swiss Homonormativity

Family was the single most important reason why many interviewees considered returning to their homeland. The loss of family homes was a prominent theme and showed effects on at least three levels: First, the family home is lost as an *everyday space* through geographical distance, which was sometimes chosen and sometimes enforced. Second, in the context of international migration the loss of the family home also implies a loss of the ‘*culture*’ one grew up with, as the family home represents a main locus for the performance of the intimate everyday rituals that make up a sense of home and home ‘*culture*.’ Lastly, as discussed above, the family home is lost through the *dissident sexuality*. Despite interviewees’ ambiguous relationships to their families of origin, they devised strategies to maintain or re-establish contact with family members or attempted to compensate for the loss in other ways. Starting one’s own (queer) family was among the most prominent of these strategies.

At first it was utterly unthinkable for Teresa Ruiz to live without her mother (and her cooking!) in the long run. As a child she had been riddled by an illness, which tied mother and daughter together intimately. During her first few months in Switzerland Teresa Ruiz could not bear to be alone in her apartment (where she lived on mayonnaise and Coca Cola): “*Ich habe immer wieder Mühe gehabt mit allein zu wohnen*” – “I’ve always had difficulties living alone,” and therefore Teresa Ruiz initially spent most of her time in

the family home of a Spanish friend. When her surrogate family left, a quick marriage to her boyfriend presented itself as the only possibility to fill the renewed vacuum, even though Teresa Ruiz was completely unemotional about the relationship. Although the marriage failed quickly, the desire to create/restore a family home has persisted and is now materializing in her relationship with Angela Hieber.

Even interviewees who were initially explicit about not wanting children waver when considering the relevance of family ties and a family home. “Who will take care of you when you die?” ponders Jasmine Sieto, who otherwise “hates babies.” Her concern about care during old age adopts her own parents’ concept of *Nachwuchs*, which ties children into the practices of inheriting, caring, and providing in ways Jasmine Sieto herself experiences as exceedingly confining (see Chapter 6.1). Leyla Haddad, although explicitly not willing to expose herself to the social expectations directed at a mother in Switzerland, still wonders “*ob man denn dann vielleicht wie das Bedürfnis hat noch selber so etwas ein Nestlein zu bauen*” – “whether one will perhaps after all experience the want to build kind of a little nest” once her mother has died. In her experience, the love between a mother or a father and a child is unique in its depth, a source of “absolute love” that can never be matched by a romantic relationship or friends. In her view, only having one’s own children can secure continued access to and the passing on of this love.

Since the loss of the family is not only grounded in geographical distance but also in alienation from the family because of one’s sexual orientation and sometimes through cultural differences that develop between immigrant parents and their Switzerland-educated daughters, the topic of starting a family of one’s own to reinstate the lost family home also appeared in accounts by interviewees whose families lived in Switzerland. As Nermina Petar states: “*Das Einzige das ich einfach vermisse das ist das Familiensein, also ich habe vor allem momentan einen extremen Kinderwunsch*” – “The only thing I miss is being in the family [literally the ‘family-being’], above all I have an extreme desire to have children at the moment.” Her relationship with her parents suffered great damage when she told her parents about her sexual orientation. “*Du wirst alleine alt werden*” – “you will grow old alone” they predicted, without family or children, which for Nermina Petar was “*einer der Sätze der mich eigentlich getroffen hat*” – “one of the sentences that actually affected me.”

Against the backdrop of her own nostalgic wish for a child, Nermina Petar despairs over her female heterosexual relatives who threaten their potential to have children, for instance by indulging in smoking cigarettes. “*Du hast einen Mann, du hast die Möglichkeit, oder?, eine normale Familie zu haben, eine normale Beziehung und machst es ja doch durch gewisse viele Sachen kaputt.*” – “You have a man, you have the possibility, don’t you? To have a normal family, a normal relationship and you destroy it with certain many things.” This exposes her desire to live like ‘normal,’ heterosexual couples and families, which is coupled with the painful acknowledgment that as a lesbian one is by definition excluded from the possibility of establishing such normalcy. Laura Georg, though she does not have nor does she even plan to have any children, also describes this sense of exclusion as she speaks about her ventures with her goddaughter<sup>19</sup> with nostalgia:

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19 In Switzerland it is common for children to have both a godfather and a godmother. These can be aunts or uncles or can come from outside the family. Their imagined role is to provide an additional

*(Auf ein Foto von ihrem Patenkind zeigend) Das ist mein Gottenkind wo ich- also sie lädt mich immer auf so lustige Sachen ein wo ich dann das Gefühl habe: Ja, ich gehöre auch ein bisschen dazu. Zu der Familie, oder? Weil da triffst du immer Eltern und Lehrerinnen und Lehrer. Dann gehst du sagen, 'Ja, ich bin das Gotti,' und dann, 'Ah, freut mich,' und so. Und sonst habe ich das ja nicht so und das genieße ich dann manchmal zum einfach so ein bisschen in diesem recht-ja- (zögert) bürgerlichen Ambiente auch mal ein bisschen daheim zu sein durch sie.*

(Pointing at a picture of her goddaughter) This is my godchild where I- well she always invites me to these funny things where I feel like, yes, I also belong a little bit. To the family, you know? Because there you always meet parents and teachers. Then you say, 'Yes I'm the godmother' and then, 'Ah, nice to meet you,' and so on. And I don't normally have this in my life and then I enjoy that sometimes just to be a little bit at home in this quite- yes- (hesitates) bourgeois ambience, through her.

—Laura Georg

It is through her godchild that Laura Georg can, to a certain extent, experience a normalcy that is out of reach for her as a lesbian, and moreover as a brown-skinned lesbian in a society that is defined by a white norm and self-understanding (see Chapter 7).

Laura Georg's reference to "bourgeois ambience" points to what most other interviewees frame as a 'normal' family life grounded in a nuclear family structure and the breadwinner/nurturer model that continues to represent the norm in Switzerland. In a European context, the traditional nuclear family model, with a father working full-time and a mother concentrating on childrearing without pursuing paid work or only working part-time, has significantly receded over the past fifty years in favor of more gender-flexible and gender-egalitarian models. While this trend is also discernible in Switzerland, the transition has been significantly slower here: In 2008, this form of living together was still practiced in about 80 percent of all households with children (BFS 2008b:69ff.).<sup>20</sup> In Switzerland the nuclear family model hence persists not only as an ideal but also in terms of lived experiences. However, for families with same-sex parents this model is only representative to a certain extent. As queer scholars have shown, in these families the paid and unpaid workloads are generally distributed in more egalitarian ways and are generally more oriented towards personal preferences than in families with heterosexual parents (e.g. Copur 2008, FaFo 2013). As the discussion above about the division of labor in interviewees' imagined family models has shown, this finding is partly confirmed and partly questioned by this study.

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adult contact person for the child apart from mother and father, and typically to spend some time with the godchild on a more or less regular basis, to varying degrees. Laura Georg is not related to her goddaughter by blood.

20 In recent years, the percentage of households in which the mothers pursue no paid work at all has declined in favor of the model in which the mother works part-time, while the father continues to work full-time. Feminist scholars mainly locate the persistence of this gendered inequality in the fact that, culturally, men are still expected to work full-time in Switzerland to provide for their families while the housework and childrearing remains the mother's realm, no matter her paid workload.

In general, queer migrant women's homonormative imaginations of family can be read as one strategy to integrate into Swiss society in an effort to tame the disruption caused by their dissident sexuality on the one hand and to mitigate the negative effects of their positionality as perceived 'foreigners' in Switzerland on the other. Teresa Ruiz ascribes the success of her integration to three milestones: learning the language, being integrated in the labor force on an adequate level of qualification, and becoming a lesbian. The fissures created in these efforts manifest themselves in instances of resistance. For example, when asked whether the couple plan to register their partnership, Teresa Ruiz is quick to answer:

*Im Moment nöd [nicht]. Im Moment nöd. Ich habe so ein Trauma mit meine Scheidung und soweit, im Moment alles was auf Papier steht das macht mich wirklich Mühe. Ich meine es geht uns auch gut ohne Papier, ich weiss schon es gibt auch viele Vorteile, das weiss ich, ich habe mich schon mit das Ganze auseinandergesetzt. Aber wer weiss also-*

Not at the moment. Not at the moment. I have such a trauma with my divorce and so on, at the moment everything that is on paper really troubles me. I mean we're good also without paper, I know there are also many advantages, that I know, I have really looked at the whole thing, but who knows well-

—Teresa Ruiz

Against the backdrop of her own negative experiences, Teresa Ruiz (for the time being) rejects what remains a crucial pillar for building a homonormative family in Switzerland: marriage.

In this context it is important to note that the connection between the wish to have children and the desire to restore a lost family home is certainly not restricted to queer migrant women. As discussed above, queer geographers have argued that displacement (especially from the family home) is necessary to know oneself as homosexual. It can therefore be argued that many queer people suffer the loss of their family home. However, as demonstrated here, this postulation does not justify a conceptual amalgamation of the positionalities of immigrant and non-immigrant queers respectively, as these continue to differ in important ways. As queers and as migrants, queer migrant women 'lose' their family homes in multiple senses, a loss that becomes particularly momentous in the face of the intersecting mechanisms of exclusion queer migrant women face in the diaspora. This is also the backdrop against which interviewees' tendency to favor traditional(ly Swiss) family models has to be read. These choices are not only manifestations of larger homonormative trends in Switzerland but are at the same time bound up with discourses around 'integration' and sexual citizenship. Becoming a 'normal homosexual family' serves as a strategy to live 'normally,' that is, to integrate into Swiss society while simultaneously erasing the status of foreigner to a certain extent. Queer migrants' homonormative preferences therefore always also have to be read as expressions of home-making strategies that aim at mitigating their exposure as multiply marginalized subjects. In other words, in the case of queer migrant women, homonormativity paradoxically also becomes a strategy of resistance against racism and xenophobia.

### 6.2.5 Transnational Family Planning: Here or There?

“In migration contexts caring and providing receive a transnational aspect, [...] which manifests itself through an increase of options concerning care work in old age,” Eva Soom and Karin van Holten (2014:236, my translation) conclude in their study about migration and care for elderly people. The authors show how elderly Italian and Spanish immigrants in Switzerland seek to maximize the advantages from being tied into two social networks and two social security systems to ensure a good livelihood in their old age, here and there. However, this seeming “surplus of options” (“*Optionen-Mehr*”) is qualified by the fact that most of these options remain *deficient* due to mechanisms of discrimination, here *and* there, often resulting in an impenetrable “sea of options” (“*Optionen-Meer*”).

Queer migrant women pursue similar strategies. Most who emigrated as adults had not planned to stay in Switzerland but instead had wanted to return to their country of origin sooner or later (a finding that will come as no surprise to Swiss migration scholars, who have identified similar narratives, but which might be less expected by queer geographers, who have tended to frame queer people’s migration from their homes as a once-and-for-all movement). As time goes by, these intentions have shifted in some cases and persisted in others, but great importance is invariably attached to remaining flexible and retaining the possibility of living here *or* there in an attempt to capitalize on two sets of social and institutional resources.<sup>21</sup>

However, plans to have children radically intervene in deliberations about whether life is better here or there. Augusta Wakari associates her plans to start her own queer family with a significant loss of flexibility:

Oh yes! I really wanna go back, but then when I also have a baby, and then [...] how are my children going to be accepted there? Here, okay, it’s clear. Here it’s no problem, but we are planning also to go back to Indonesia but we don’t know how we are going to raise our children there. [...] About work about financial - it is not bothering me when I go back to Indonesia. But the most that’s really bothering me is just how the society accepting of my relation [...] and especially when we have children. That’s the only thing. Before, I know I’m going back, but then, when I want to get married, somehow in the back of my head, ‘It will never happen. It will never happen.’ Because the way I raise: how? Since when you see two women get married, since when? [...] But then, since I got married it’s getting real, it’s happening, to me, it’s happening, and, yeah, one day you will have children. And, how, how are we gonna- (interrupts herself)? [...] Having the thought that my children would have a difficulty because of my choice of life I couldn’t bear, because I know how difficult when- I’ve been through all this. I know how difficult, how painful it is, and- to see my children in that, I- pffff, I- don’t know if I can manage that. [...] I can’t face if- I will get crazy if someone’s hurting my children or my partner or- yeah.

—Augusta Wakari

21 This does not apply to interviewees who were in the process of seeking asylum. They did not have the intention or even the possibility of returning (see Chapter 8).

Based on her own experiences of exclusion as a queer juvenile in Indonesia, Augusta Wakari finds herself unable to imagine a life in Indonesia with her wife and future children. She is overwhelmed by recent developments in her life – partnership registration, plans to start a queer family – which she had not believed would ever be possible. At the same time, the realization of these desires undermines the implementation of her other desire – to return to her family and to Indonesia. The logic of a queer-family-friendly Switzerland versus a queer-family-adverse Indonesia is upset (but eventually reinstated) as Augusta Wakari reviews the option of returning from her new perspective as a future queer mother: “Maybe when you have a children your parents will just accept you because you know, people normally they melt when they see a newborn, there’s possibility, yes, but at the moment I just couldn’t see that.”

By contrast, Jimena Reyes does not see a problem with living in Peru with a queer family, a plan that has, however, been disturbed by falling in love with a much younger woman in Switzerland:

*Quand on s'est connu je disais, 'Merde, moi je voulais pas avoir de copine, je voulais partir au Pérou, faire un enfant là-bas et puis vivre avec mes chèvres, là t'es là dans ma vie, et tu bouscule tout quoi, parce que même le projet de faire un enfant, ça il me semble pas très adéquat pour toi [à ton âge] tu vois.' Donc voilà. Faut faire des concessions des fois (rire).*

When we got to know each other I said: ‘Shit, I didn’t want a girlfriend, I wanted to go to Peru, have a child there and then live with my goats, now there you are in my life, and you turn everything on its head, because even the project of making a child, it doesn’t seem very adequate for you [at your age], you know.’ Well, there it is. You need to make concessions sometimes (laughs).

—Jimena Reyes

However, positions like the one held by Jimena Reyes remain the exception. Those who connect their transnational and bicultural subject positions to imaginations of flexibility, mobility, and freedom of choice (to live here, or there, or everywhere) tend to perceive that their options become restricted in the context of their plans to start their own queer families, especially if they plan on moving back to the homeland. Raising children in the country of origin is contemplated but usually dismissed based on perceived or experienced homophobia and concerns about how a child would fare ‘there.’ This homophobic ‘there’ is juxtaposed to a queer-friendly ‘here,’ though concerns about the wellbeing of the child also extend to the Swiss context, if to a lesser extent. Whether a queer family life in the home country can be imagined or not hinges on whether interviewees had been targets of homophobia when growing up in their home countries, on the extent to which they have experienced social exclusion as queer foreigners in Switzerland – and on their family’s position vis-à-vis their sexual orientation and queer procreation.

### 6.2.6 Reactions to Queer Family Foundation Plans

Pressure from the family of origin to produce grandchildren does not extend to queer family formation, which is for instance expressed in family members' refusal to attend queer weddings or through negative reactions to the queer family member's plans to have children. Negotiating the issue of queer procreation within the family of origin is hence a source of great mutual pain, disappointment and friction:

When I get married [same-sex marriage], my parents screeeeam like crying like you know but my sister said 'If anything happen to our parents,' because my father have a heart problem, she said 'It's your fault.' 'Gee, thank you,' I said (smiles). 'I've been keeping this [wish] for twenty-five years at least as far as I can remember and in my happiest day this what you say?' I was really disappointed, my brother just get along with it, for my brother it's okay, my younger brother, for my sister she's just like- you know I said everybody in my family also don't take the best decisions. But at least when I see a smile in their face, taking their decision, I'm smiling with them. Even though it's just not my preference.

—Augusta Wakari

Partnership registration also emerges as an effective – but painful – practice against persistent anti-identitarian perspectives on same-sex desire on the part of the parents, who sometimes keep hoping that the queer family member might yet come to her (heterosexual) senses. As is the case for positions vis-à-vis homosexuality more generally, family positions concerning their daughter's family planning are not monolithic but diverse, with the younger sibling (typically) accepting the queer sister's 'choices.' Critical views on queer family foundation are chiefly grounded in worries about daughters' and also future children's wellbeing, as is expressed in Maria Borkovic's mother's reaction:

Actually that was worse to accept the plans about family and having a baby together, because she [the mother] is really afraid of [=for] the child, you know, how it's gonna be perceived in the- actually the same fears which I also have- in the society and she always said you know it can go a thousand hundred years in advance, perception of gay people will not change. It might change like this (holding up a little space between her fingers) but it will always be like different group. And you always will have to live with this issue. So yeah actually she knows that it's difficult for me.

—Maria Borkovic

Paradoxically, parents instrumentalize fears about homophobia to reinstall heteronormativity, which results in more discrimination. At the same time, homophobia appears as an unalterable fact rather than a perpetuated social practice. Parents' critical views on queer families nourish daughters' own worries about the welfare of unborn children, fundamentally calling into question "baby projects" in a queer context. At the same time, plans to start a queer family tend to aggravate queer daughters' relationships with their parents, which in turn refuels their desire to build a family according to their own imagination and sense of nostalgia.

Importantly, none of the children discussed in this chapter had yet been born, or even conceived. It therefore remains unclear how the parents will react once the babies

have arrived. Circumstantial evidence in my own queer circles suggest that the dynamic between queer offspring and their parents and especially the attitude of the grandparents towards their grandchildren can alter drastically once the children are born. Since this research was conducted at a time when “baby projects” among queer women had generally only just started to gain momentum, I did not have an opportunity to interview queer migrant women who had already given birth to children in a queer family context.

### 6.2.7 Being Whole at Home

Interviewees who had established or were in the process of establishing family homes in Switzerland with a partner or with children (I define both as ‘family homes’ here) represented these homes as the most important among those rare spaces where the irreconcilable can be reconciled. In the space of the home, the participant queer migrant women could be all they considered themselves to be within the same time-space – lesbians, Indonesians, passionate gardeners, daughters, writers, and so on – without judgment or justification. While the original family home often represented an ambivalent space rife with divergence and negotiation, the envisioned (and sometimes implemented) queer (family) home was conceptualized as a site of harmony, acceptance, security, unification, and wholeness, conveying a sense of belonging, identification, and self-assurance. As such, queer migrant women’s representations of their homes reflect existing studies about the homes of subjects inhabiting paradoxical social positionalities. In her research about lesbian parents’ negotiation of everyday public spaces, Jacqui Gabb contends that the home is “crucial in lesbian parents’ consolidation of self” (Gabb 2005:420), since home “represents one of the few places where the sexual and the maternal identities of lesbian parents may be reconciled” (ibid). Since the intersectional home reconciles the irreconcilable – being a Bosnian *and* a lesbian – it is always also a site of resistance to, and escape from, discrimination in those public, semi-public and private spaces that are organized around specific social identities and hence productive of social exclusions.

Indeed, within the collections of pictures produced or presented for this research, the queer family home emerged as one of the most represented spaces. Some of these pictures were wide-angle shots of apartments or houses. One of them showed Beatriz Kraus and her partner’s new apartment, upon which Beatriz Kraus commented:

*Ça c'est plutôt pour montrer la réussite dans le sens, ouais j'ai beaucoup ramé quand même, j'ai beaucoup bataillé pour arriver avoir ce que j'ai maintenant, dans le sens que maintenant je peux vivre tranquillement, sans pression d'argent, sans pression des permis de séjour tout ça, [...] j'ai eu habité dans des appartements qui tombaient en ruine, j'ai loué des chambres dans des maisons où c'était presque des galetas, des chose comme ça, alors ça c'est plutôt pour dire j'ai quand même réussi à, ouais à m'en sortir quoi.*

This is rather to show the success in the sense of, yes I've worked a lot after all, I've struggled to obtain what I have now, in the sense that now I can live peacefully, without financial pressure, without pressure from the residence permit, all that, [...] I've lived



in apartments that were falling apart, I've rented rooms in houses that were almost attics, things like that so, this is rather to say that I've succeeded after all, yes to get myself out of this.

—Beatriz Kraiss

Beatriz Kraiss' apartment is a source of pride, a marker of social status and a successful migration biography, a signifier of arrival, and a site of tranquility and security. The new home is also everything the old homes were not, which points to the importance of queer homes as *imaginary spaces*; the wish to establish a home representing the above qualities has been Beatriz Kraiss' main motivation for the hard work and tedious immigration procedure she has undergone to arrive at the place she has now reached.

Other pictures showed specific details of an apartment. "The bed" was a particularly recurrent answer to the question of what represented the most important place in everyday life, and several interviewees submitted very intimate pictures of their beds, sometimes with their partners in them. Augusta Wakari:

The bed- the bed I think is the most important place, the sleeping room is the most important place, cause at the end of the day we both really looking forward just to be in the bed and talk and forget everything what's happening, or talk about what's happening through the day or whatever, everything, it's just- and we next to each other again and we're quite relaxed next to each other and- yeah I think- it gives me- also energy for the next day. Or during the day (smiles), when I really bad day, I just think about that, I just think about, 'Aah tonight I'm going to be in bed with her and talk and hug,' and- and then the day gets easier. So I think that's very very very important for me, I think.

—Augusta Wakari

The bed not only represents an important material space from which everyday pressures and demands are absent but is also a source of strength as an imaginary space: Thinking about the bed mitigates the intensity of an arduous working day. This perspective on the bed is also reflected in Teresa Ruiz' account:

TB: *Wo fühlst du dich am wohlsten?*

TR: *Im Bett mit meinem Schatz (lacht). Nein weißt du, es geht wirklich nicht um Sex einfach- ich bin immer den ganzen Tag so beschäftigt hin und her und hier und dort [...]. Ja. Sage ich immer ja wirklich immer wieder, 'Oh, das ist wirklich das Beste was es gibt.'*

TB: Where do you feel most comfortable?

TR: In bed with my sweetheart (laughs). No you know, it's really not about sex just- I'm always busy the whole day back and forth and here and there [...]. Yes. I always say yes really always say again and again, 'Oh, this is really the best there is.'

—Teresa Ruiz

The bed is the home within the home, the most private space within the private space. It is a site of recreation, realignment, and of mutual love and desire. The bed and connecting to the body of the partner in conjunction signifies home. "Jetzt weiss ich was gut ist" – "Now I know what's good," Teresa Ruiz says more generally about the discovery

and acknowledgment of her same-sex desires. In this sense the (pictures of the) bed, and the partner in it, are realizations of sexual 'homecoming.' The bed more than any other space represents the choice to live a homosexual life as Beatriz Kraiss and Augusta Wakari find their choices confirmed (literally and figuratively) at the end of the day.

As already discussed from different perspectives, the choice to live in a same-sex relationship often entailed distance to the family of origin, both due to geographical distance and families' negative reactions to sexual choices. Interviewees regretted that they could not unite these two worlds, expressing that for them their ideal home would be a place that contains both their partner and their biological families unproblematically (although only few wish to actually have their families within their very house; most instead wish the family lived close by). "*Ich kann nicht mit beide zusammen*" – "I can't have both together," the homosexual life in Switzerland and family life back in Egypt, Efra Mahmoud assesses with bitterness, as she had eventually not been able to realize her plan to move back to Egypt. However, interviewees developed strategies to incorporate their families into their homes nevertheless, at least to a certain extent. While videoconferencing and telephone sessions bring the family into the home briefly and periodically, family presence within the home was also established by *family pictures*. I saw these pictures when I interviewed research participants in their homes, but they were often also included in the photo collections. They were either pictures from a digital archive showing family members, or *pictures taken of pictures* of family members, pinned to walls, fridges, or computers in Swiss homes. These pictures mark both an absence and a presence: They point to the loss of the family but at the same time restore the family to the home to a certain extent. This presence is not only created by what the picture represents (the signifier, i.e. the absent family) but also by the very materiality of the photo itself (paper, color, frame), which establishes a presence of the family that enables a physical contact of sorts.<sup>22</sup>

(The specific spatial arrangement of) pictures, posters, and objects is generally an important vehicle for reconciling the irreconcilable. Within the queer migrant home, lesbian posters are placed side by side with a giant Bosnian flag, and family pictures are placed next to images of interviewees with their partners, queer friends, and so on. As mentioned earlier, one of Jimena Reyes' walls is decorated with a poster-size collage of pictures showing friends, her mother in Peru, her family members in Switzerland, the Hindu god Ganesha, landscapes, former versions of herself, herself with her partner, neighbors, concert tickets, and so on, bringing together all the aspects of life that are important to her. Reconciliation is also performed acoustically, such as in the case of Nermina Petar, who regularly listens to Bosnian folk music at home.

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22 In her research about the significance of family photos for white middle class mothers with young children in the U.K., Gillian Rose found not only that family pictures were "indeed extraordinarily important, emotionally resonant objects" (Rose 2004:549,553-554) for her interviewees, but that they were also tactile objects to be handled – sorted, labelled, put in an album, framed, displayed, dusted, taken out and studied, showed around, and so on. The same desire was discernible among my own interviewees. I wonder how Rose's study would have to be revised in the age of smartphone photo albums, with everyone 'stroking' their family pictures.

As such, queer homes are also actualizations of the recurring statement “I lead *my life*” flung in parents’ faces, especially in connection to negotiations around sexual ‘choices.’ None of the narratives featured the stereotypical tale of the lesbian feverishly yanking unambiguous posters from the walls when parents arrive unexpectedly (although some *did* give up the common bedroom when parents visited, yet they refrained from going to great length to hide other evidence). By contrast, some homes are *meant* to make a statement when family visits. These homes also play a central role in rendering tacit subjects tacit. When her family visits, the lesbian poster in Teresa Ruiz’ bedroom stays up. “*Und eben, also in meinem Schlafzimmer oben sind schon so zwei Frauen, ich weiss nicht ob du den Poster schon gesehen hast, also zwei Frauen die sich küssen die sind ganz herzig. Und die [Familienmitglieder] gehen nach oben*” – “And well in my bedroom upstairs there are indeed these two women, I don’t know if you’ve seen the poster, well two women kissing and they are quite sweet. And they [the family members] go upstairs.”

Teresa Ruiz’ younger brother, who has just emigrated from Cuba, has been living with Teresa Ruiz and her partner for several weeks while looking for work and a place to stay. Despite the obviousness of what is going on (see the poster, the common bedroom, the lesbian friends, the leisure activities), the siblings never speak about the nature of Teresa Ruiz’ relationship to Angela Hieber. Recently the brother asked Angela Hieber (half-prompted by her, although she knew this was against Teresa Ruiz’ will), who told him. After that the brother still never discussed the issue with his sister but was aware that she knows about the conversation. Teresa Ruiz thus consciously deploys her home as a vehicle both for communicating her sexual identity to her family while at the same time keeping the subject un verbalized, enabling both parties to save face and evade shame. This constellation reflects the earlier finding that the silence around dissident sexuality is usually not unilaterally enforced by the family but also co-constructed by interviewees themselves. Teresa Ruiz is self-assured with her brother living in her home; this is her space, where she makes the rules, where she acts the way she likes, where she is all that she is, and it is from this strong position that *she* decides to keep the tacit subject tacit, which the brother acknowledges and respects. At the same time, the above incident demonstrates that the home as a ‘safe space’ remains an imagined space that becomes materialized partially only. Even in the space of her own home, in the end Teresa Ruiz cannot bring everything under control, as this is the place where she is forced out of the closet by her partner.

In sum, the significance of the home in the interviewed queer migrant women’s everyday lives is that of a space where one can be all one is within the same time-space without being called into question as a person or relegated to an identitarian category. The importance of this space can hence hardly be overestimated. For interviewees who feel they have succeeded in establishing such a home, it is a space of identification and belonging; a source of self-assurance and pride; a place marked by security, acceptance and love; and a place where their choices are materialized. Even when absent from it, the knowledge of its existence is a source of strength. As one of the few spaces capable of reconciling the irreconcilable, it allows interviewees to be whole persons. However, these reconciliations necessarily remain partial and marred, or eternally deferred: The

family picture on the refrigerator door marks the absence of the family as much as it invokes their presence, and the Indonesian food lovingly prepared by a Swiss partner can never quite live up to the soul food prepared by a mother, as one interviewee stated with a rueful smile.

Yet it is important to note that not all interviewees had such homes. Many feel alienated from the places in which they live. Nara Agayeva, Ramiza Salakhova, and their daughter are confined to a crammed apartment provided by the asylum authorities; they have not been able to furnish it themselves and hate the interior. Nour Saber misses her partner (who has left her), without whom she finds it difficult to maintain their shared apartment as a queer bubble within the conservative town in which she lives; Beatriz Kraus' earlier dwellings in Switzerland simply lacked dignity; and for Maria Borkovic being at home alone aggravates her sense of social isolation, and moves the computer (i.e. cyberspace) to the center of her apartment both literally and figuratively. However, for these interviewees the home as a place that conveys a sense of security and arrival still represents a crucial *imaginary* space. Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova, for instance, browse the local furniture stores, already putting together the home they dream of having in the city.

A final note: This sub-chapter has engaged with the home as a space of inscription for 'homing desires,' which most interviewees have materialized to a greater or lesser degree. In other words, it has been about the homes that interviewees imagine and desire, and how they perceive their queer family homes. However, this does not mean that these homes are spaces devoid of power. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 8, dominant discourses discipline and regulate the intimate – love, relationships, desires, preferences, tastes – even in the most private of spheres. Angela Hieber decides against her partner's will to tell her brother about the nature of her relationship with his sister, because it is important to *her*, Angela Hieber, to make this explicit. It is in the bed, which Augusta Wakari considers to be the most important place in her everyday life, that she positions herself as her partner's 'disciple' in the process of unlearning prior sexual practices that she now thinks have worked against her. But reading queer family homes as a locus of power is reading interviewees' accounts against the grain and is not how they experienced these places.

### 6.2.8 Conclusion

This sub-chapter addressed the question of how migration is implicated in queer migrant women's perspectives on queer procreation and their visions of a queer family and queer family home. Seeing that relationships to families of origin were often ambivalent, starting one's own queer family emerged as a way to reconcile loving the family with loving the same sex, as well as a strategy to restore the lost family home. However, entering the highly specific discourse around queer procreation in Switzerland was not

straightforward and often required considerable cultural 'learning' on the interviewees' part.<sup>23</sup>

The negotiation of methods of conception, forms of living together and the couple's (planned) labor division after the arrival of the children was mostly guided by an imaginary of family life firmly rooted in the dominant heterosexual breadwinner/nurturer nuclear family model prevailing in Switzerland.<sup>24</sup> A critical queer perspective could hence frame queer migrant women's imaginations and implementations of their queer family homes as drivers of homonormative tendencies in Switzerland, as they seem to reiterate the heteronormative primacy of couplehood, monogamy, marriage, reproduction, nuclear family, and consumerism (see Chapter 3.2.1 and 3.4).<sup>25</sup> However, such a framing of queer migrant women's family planning neglects the dimension of migration. 'Swiss' normative family ideals may also act as an 'assimilation machine' that promises to mitigate the negative effects of experienced exclusions in the host society, but also in the family in which they grew up and in the diasporic community. The envisioned families must hence also be read in terms of interviewees' expressed desire to create a 'safe haven,' which particularly includes its function as a safe space free of social pressures and discrimination. Therefore, queer migrant women's family planning grounded in normative family ideals must also be read both as a coping strategy and as an act of resistance against racist, sexist, and heterosexist exclusions they experience in different contexts. Family planning and the desire to establish a queer family home hence require an intersectional and partially contradictory reading: They are as much radical acts of separation from parents' heteronormative expectations as they are strategies to address nostalgia of the lost family home and to mitigate conflicts with the family. At the same time, they work to tame the disruptions caused by being perceived both as 'homosexuals' and as 'foreigners' in Switzerland.

### 6.3 Conclusion

Queer migrant women's access to 'doing family' and the family practices of inheriting, caring, and providing is often restricted both within their families of origin and within the queer families they strive to establish to address their 'homing desires.' Rather than the safety network postulated by Swiss and other migration scholars, the family of origin often emerges as a locus of power through which both normalized and dissident sexual identities are produced and policed. The family and more specifically the heterosexuality – marriage – procreation trinity is exposed as "the only possible reference to

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23 Again, this is not to insinuate that for Swiss-born lesbians entering this discourse is more 'natural' or easier in any way, but to point to the fact that queer migrants face specific additional obstacles in entering this discourse, which are tied up with their positionality as migrants.

24 Although note that research suggests that overall same-sex couples tend to divide labor in more egalitarian ways than heterosexual couples (Copus 2008, FaFo 2013).

25 Note again that some queer scholars problematize and differentiate the concept of homonormativity by stressing that the discourse of inclusion surrounding it is in fact a "fiction of inclusion" that stands in contrast to persisting legal and cultural discrimination of non-heterosexual people (see Chapter 3.2.1).

think culture or society” (Arán and Corrêa 2004:333, quoted in Simões Azevedo Brandão and Machado 2012:671) and as a crucial site of the everyday mutual production of ‘culture’ and normative sexuality. By contrast, the family can also form a countercultural milieu, a “queer island in a heterosexual sea,” though this was rare in the accounts analyzed here.

With the exception of temporary relationship breakdowns, all interviewees sustained ties to their family of origin, but in most cases have to renegotiate these relationships constantly. Negotiation strategies include in-your-face tactics but more often demonstrate respect for the family and family communication practices, which frequently require that the dissident sexuality be kept tacit in order to bind family members together: The dissident sexuality is known and understood, but not verbalized.

Within the discussion around the relationship between queer migrant women and their families I want to pick out one particular aspect that stands in contrast to earlier findings of queer migration scholarship. Several authors have described how part of the ambiguity of the relationship between queer migrants and their families is produced by the family’s rejection of the migrant’s dissident sexuality on the one hand and their dependence on remittances and other support from the queer family member on the other (Cantú 2009, Manalansan 2003 and 2006:236, Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé 2002). Among my own research participants, this was not a widespread dynamic. By contrast, not many interviewees needed to send home money on a regular basis, because their families were well situated. To the contrary, several interviewees depended on their families’ funds, at least in the initial stages of their migration. This financial dependency, combined with the promise of an elevated social status upon their return to the home country, creates different kinds of ties to the family as well as different views on return migration: Due to the higher level of dependency on the family, dependency on the family’s grace in terms of sexual ‘choices’ is also increased. In short, for queer family members receiving funds from home, something else is at stake in negotiating family ties than for queer migrants who send home remittances.

In the face of the ambiguous relationship to the family of origin on the one hand and the lack of designated spaces for queer migrants in Switzerland on the other, queer migrant women seek to establish queer families and family homes to ‘reground’ themselves and create a sense of belonging. Within these efforts queer family foundation promises to provide a surrogate for the family home that has been lost due to geographical distance and/or rejection, but also serves to mitigate the multiple displacements within Swiss society caused by sexual dissidence and foreignness.

Here I want to point to another finding that deviates from existing research. As feminist migration scholars Nadia Baghdadi and Yvonne Riaño (2014) point out in their research on how skilled migrant women in Switzerland balance family and career, starting a family offers skilled migrant women a strategy – though often only partially satisfactory – to escape professional disqualification and unemployment, promising social recognition on a different level as mothers. As the migration biographies of *queer* women expose, this strategy is not available to this ‘group’ in the same way, because queer family foundation often results in estrangement and further rejection from the family of origin rather than social recognition, at least at the outset of queer ‘baby projects.’ (However, it remains to be seen how families react once the children are here;

the findings presented here refer to the process of family *planning* only as none of the planned children were born yet.) As will be discussed in Chapter 9, the fact that motherhood does not offer the same kind of relief to queer migrant women that it offers to their heterosexual counterparts further heightens the pressure on queer women to succeed and be recognized professionally. On the other hand, the lack of a male significant other in interviewees' lives eventually releases many of them from the parental pressure to follow a heteronormative prescript. In contrast to heterosexual women, they are eventually often spared the parental expectation to be a mother, or to abandon a career to join a husband abroad. As shown in this chapter, this is not to insinuate that queer women do not make professional concessions or plan to assume typically female gender roles in relationships once children are present. But since this remains a matter of negotiation within the same-sex couple, queer women seem to enjoy more freedom in shaping their roles within their relationships as well as within their own queer families.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated the importance of including sexuality in examinations of family relationships in migration contexts, and of considering migrant experiences in queer critiques of the family. Beyond making visible queer migrant experiences, such an extended view allows for a critique of the ways in which 'culture' and sexuality are co-constructed through the trope of the family. Thinking family, migration, sexuality, and *home* together moreover enables a more differentiated view of concepts of home-making, which in the context of queer migration emerges as an ambivalent movement of estrangement from and simultaneous reproduction of home, performed through renegotiations and reimaginings of family ties both within the family of origin and the queer families and family homes.





## 7. Diasporic Spaces, Intersectional Homing Desires

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Besides the family, the diasporic community in Switzerland is another critical site where queer migrant women's national, cultural, and sexual identities are negotiated. As migration scholars have pointed out, the diasporic community not only represents an emblematic locus for homeland nostalgia but especially also a site of resistance against racism in the host country (Espiritu 2003, Holmes 2009). As such it promises to provide a sense of home, security, and solidarity for immigrants. However, this sense of belonging is often denied to, and complicated for, queer migrant women. Their accounts associate mainstream diasporic spaces with estrangement or experiences of exclusion due to sexual dissidence.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the diasporic community remains a vital site for queer women to renegotiate Indonesianness, Peruvianness, Bosnianness, and so on. Despite interviewees' often ambivalent relationships to their families and their diasporic community, their homeland culture, their fellow citizens, or other culturally hybrid people represent crucial points of reference and sources of identification for them. In the absence of designated spaces where queer migrant women can share *both* their migrant experience (and/or their homeland cultural identity) *and* their sexual identity within the same space-time, home-making often centers around the *creation* of such 'intersectional' spaces in which they can feel recognized in crucial aspects of their Selves simultaneously.

Chapter 7.1 addresses queer migrant women's experiences of racism and xenophobia in Swiss society, showing how these mechanisms of exclusion coagulate with homophobia to effectuate both exposure and invisibility. Chapter 7.2 is concerned with different ways in which interviewees relate to their diasporic communities in Switzerland. The remaining parts of the chapter engage with how, in the absence of designated queer/diasporic spaces, queer migrant women strive to create spaces in which crucial aspects of their Selves are reconciled. By 'queering' diasporic spaces, by 'diasporizing' lesbian spaces and by attaching 'homing desires' to the bodies of real or imagined partners and friends, sometimes fleeting, sometimes more permanent homes are established in which queer migrant women can be migrant-*and*-queer(-*and*-other-things).

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1 Under 'mainstream' diasporic spaces I subsume diasporic spaces that are not explicitly queer and hence inscribed by heterosexual norms.

## 7.1 Negotiating Racism and Xenophobia as an 'Ausländerin' in Switzerland

*Ich bin eine extrem extrovertierte Person im Vergleich zu vielen Leuten, und in Norwegen habe ich nie ein Problem gehabt Leute kennen zu lernen. Und wenn ich hier in die Schweiz gekommen bin habe ich so ein Gefühl gehabt von wirklich eine Fremde zu sein und niemand möchte mich anfassen und niemand sieht mich und niemand möchte mit mir sprechen. Und das hat mir dann extrem schlechten Selbstgefühl oder Selbstwert gegeben. Weil ich konnte es einfach nicht verstehen es war für mich eine total fremde Situation. Und ich habe keine Ahnung, dass man kann sich so alienmässig fühlen, oder? So wie eine kleine Insel.*

I am an extremely extroverted person in comparison to many people, and in Norway I never had a problem getting to know people.<sup>2</sup> And when I came here to Switzerland I had such a feeling of like really being a stranger and nobody would like to touch me and nobody looks at me and nobody would like to talk to me. And this gave me an extremely bad sense of Self or self-esteem. Because I could simply not understand it, it was a completely new situation for me. And I have no idea that one can feel so alien-like, you know? Like a small island.

—Ayesha Umar

Like non-queer immigrants (see Chapter 2.2), the queer migrant women I spoke to are acutely aware of their visibility and vulnerability as perceived 'foreigners' in Switzerland, and like Ayesha Umar often express feelings of social isolation. Being perceived as 'foreign' is generally experienced as a bigger social problem than being a lesbian. As Charlotta Sembiring points out when commenting on her social isolation at her workplace, "before talking about being lesbian I think really we are considered being foreigners." Being a foreigner is experienced as a status that can never be shed, exposed by interviewees' recurring utterances like "I will never be Swiss" – regardless of whether Swiss citizenship has been obtained or not. While not all interviewees have been confronted with blatant racism and xenophobia (the latter I use as a translation for the German term *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*, literally 'hostility to foreigners'<sup>3</sup>), there is generally a high level of sensitivity towards subtle exclusions, and these cause a deep sense of insecurity and unbelonging. This awareness also extends to interviewees who do not perceive themselves as targets of anti-immigrant animosities. These interviewees frame themselves as lucky exceptions, which they explain by reference to their individual 'advantages' such as having an atypically light skin (Beatriz Kraiss), being able

2 Ayesha Umar's family, originating in Pakistan, moved to Scandinavia when she was ten years old. She lived there until she came to Switzerland for the first time in her mid-twenties, see also Chapter 6.1.3.

3 Mutlu Ergün, German author, performer, and researcher, differentiates between racism (*Rassismus*) and xenophobia (*Ausländerfeindlichkeit*). He points to the paradox of applying the term *Ausländer* (and thus also *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*) to people of color who were born and raised in a Western country and/or hold the passport of this country. In his view hostile acts against people of color therefore clearly need to be conceptualized as racism (<https://reclaimingsociety.wordpress.com/2011/06/04/01-06-mutlu-ergun-wo-kommst-du-her%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-p-o-c-als-neo-kolonialer-widerstandsbegriff-in-deutschland/>, downloaded on May 10, 2020).

to rely on a tight network of relatives upon arrival in Switzerland (Jimena Reyes), or being a member of an ethnic group perceived to be less targeted by racism than others (Siti Mohd Amin).

Different strategies are devised to mitigate exposure as an *Ausländerin*. Self-portrayals often embrace the image of being a 'good immigrant' learning the language and incorporating 'Swiss values,' which, as discussed earlier, also involves becoming a 'good lesbian.' While such strategies of integration and assimilation serve to establish a sense of ontological security and a 'normal' life within Swiss mainstream society, they also effectively invisibilize cultural difference. At the same time, as Laura Georg, daughter of a Sri Lankan father and a Swiss mother born and raised in Switzerland, points out, the success of such strategies will always remain partial:

TB: *Was meinst du mit die Sprache rettet dich?*

LG: *Die Sprache [Schweizerdeutsch] rettet mich vor dem Auffallen. Und vor dem mich selber auch positionieren müssen vor anderen. Also ich glaube ich würde es wirklich vergleichen- so das Leben das du als Lesbe hast ist jeden Tag musst du dann so überlegen: Ja, soll ich es sagen oder nicht sagen? Ist es da wichtig oder ist es irrelevant? Und bei der Dunkelhäutigkeit ist es auch ein bisschen so, obwohl man die Dunkelhäutigkeit ja noch eher sieht, aber [...] viele sind eben doch zufrieden wenn ich [auf Schweizerdeutsch] sage: 'Ich bin Schweizerin.' Dann passt das, oder? [...] Aber einfach man kann beliebig immer wieder darauf zurückgeholt werden: 'Woher bist du?' Und: 'Bist du eine Lesbe oder bist du het?' oder wie auch immer. Einfach die Abweichung die- man ist nie sicher, oder? Man kann sich nie hinein blenden so ganz.*

TB: What do you mean the language saves you?

LG: The language [Swiss German] saves me from standing out. And also from having to position myself in front of others. Actually, I think I would really compare it- like the life you have as a lesbian is every day you have to like deliberate: Well, should I tell or not tell? Is it important here or is it irrelevant? And with having brown skin it's a bit like that as well, although this tends to be more visible, but [...] still many are satisfied when I say [in Swiss German]: 'I'm Swiss.' Then everything is okay, eh? [...] But it's just like you can be thrown back to it randomly again and again: 'Where are you from?' And: 'Are you a lesbian or are you hetero' or whatever. Just the deviance which- you're never safe, you know? You can never blend in entirely.

—Laura Georg<sup>4</sup>

Laura Georg addresses her vulnerability as a multiply deviant subject, and especially the (lack of) control she has over the 'visibility' of her differences. 'Visibility' in this context means an involuntary exposure and bringing up of one's perceived difference as inflicted from the outside. Personal strategies are pondered by which control can be regained in such instances of exposure. Especially native Swiss German is identified as a powerful instrument to minimize the visibility of having a brown skin. At the same time, having

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4 Laura Georg works with language professionally, and although here she refers to everyday interactions rather than her professional writing, from her narrative it transpires that her choice of profession stood in connection to her relationship to language as described here.

a brown skin is considered “more visible” than sexual orientation, the exposure of which can be held at bay – to a certain extent – by ‘not telling.’

Laura Georg expresses this statement in the context of her insight that there are no other women “who look different” in the Swiss lesbian community:

*Es gibt [in der Lesbenszene] tatsächlich keine- also keine Frauen, die anders aussehen. Also wie wenn etwas das man anders hat, nämlich das Land oder eben die kulturelle Zugehörigkeit, schon genug ist wo man sich damit befassen muss. Dann kann man sich nicht noch den Stress antun zum nochmals müssen etwas dazu nehmen.*

There are really no- well no women who look different [in the Swiss lesbian community]. Like as if something is different about you, namely the country or the cultural belonging, is already enough to deal with. Then you can't additionally burden yourself with the stress of taking on another thing.

—Laura Georg

In Laura Georg's eyes it is only her command of Swiss German and her half-Swiss heritage that enable her to “take on” being different ‘even’ within the lesbian community.

Laura Georg's perspective problematizes the negotiation of multiple displacements based on race/ethnicity and sexuality respectively. She draws a parallel with, yet differentiates between, the visibility of her brown skin and her sexual deviance. In the everyday reproduction of Otherness, both axes of social differentiation incessantly coerce this subject, marked as deviant, into ‘coming out’ and declaring herself, thus again confirming her positionality as a (doubly) deviant subject. In the case of the migrant identity, this crystallizes in the ever present if not always voiced questions “Where are you from?” or “Where are you *really* from?” respectively. As Barbara Wiegand points out, “*ich kommuniziere meine Gemischtrassigkeit nicht, die wird mir kommuniziert.*” – “I don't communicate my mixed race, it gets communicated to me.”

Still, as Laura Georg's statement testifies to, the visibility of both the migrant and queer positionality is not straightforward or objective but situational and dependent on the vision of the interlocutor and the space in which the interaction takes place. The exposure of deviance can be influenced to a certain degree by using strategies like the instrumentalization of language or the choice (not) to communicate sexual orientation. However, as both Laura Georg and Barbara Wiegand point out, the visibility of both the migrant and the queer positionality can never entirely be controlled. Native language skills may minimize the visibility of skin color; and homosexuality may be made more or less apparent by the choice of clothing, hairstyle, or body language, but as another interviewee noted, “even if I wanted to I could not completely hide my being a lesbian- my visibility as a lesbian is not something I can shed for the occasion just like that.” Being used to wearing sport clothes and short hair, and having formed the habit of speaking with a rather low voice, sometimes using a rough sort of vocabulary, and moving in a rather masculine manner render it impossible for her, she says, to just switch to main-

stream femininity (including “lipstick, high heels, or even only a skirt”) in a “credible manner.”<sup>5</sup>

Such a perspective works against two persistent assumptions in popular discourse: that non-white skin color is objectively visible to everybody, rendering people of color unproblematically identifiable as such; and that, by contrast, homosexuality can be hidden *ad libitum*.<sup>6</sup> Laura Georg’s statement discounts such views and reframes different forms of feeling both visible and invisible as continua contingent on the specific positionality and performance of a particular subject. The in/visibility of social markers vary. Whether one is visible as a ‘foreigner’ because of a name, an accent, a phenotype, communicative behavior, clothes, food, religious rituals, or other markers makes a difference since each of these markers (dis)allow different kinds of ‘passing.’ Laura Georg is “saved” from “standing out” to a certain extent by means of her accent-free Swiss German. Nermina Petar uses the name ‘Nora’ as her pseudonym on lesbian chat sites in order to erase her Bosnian background; Nora is hence also the name by which she is known in the lesbian community, which she describes as “her circles.” Confirming Laura Georg’s thesis that for intersectionally positioned subjects it can often be too much to take on multiple fights, Nermina Petar contends that “*wenn du Ausländer bist, und nebst dem dass du lesbisch bist, dass du noch damit zu kämpfen hast, dass du Ausländerin bist, hört man- merkst es am Namen und du wirst zum Teil ausgegrenzt*” – “if you are a foreigner, and apart from being lesbian you additionally have to fight with being a foreigner, one hears/notices it from the name, and you are sometimes excluded.” The argument here is not that queer migrant women always seek to hide their racial or ethnic difference – they do not – but to highlight their efforts to gain control over their exposure to multiple discriminations. Laura Georg’s point in her account about being saved by Swiss German is that it remains beyond her control when and where she is confronted with one or the other of her Otherness; “you can be thrown back to it randomly again and again.”<sup>7</sup>

As Barbara Wiegand points out, such multiple displacements intertwine (“*sich verschränken*”), coagulate (“*koagulieren*”) and ball (“*sich zusammenballen*”), which renders it

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5 These quotes are based on verbatim notes taken during an explorative interview which was not audio-recorded.

6 Until a few years ago Swiss asylum practice, too, worked from the assumption that homosexuality can be hidden. This resulted in queer asylum seekers being sent back to their home countries based on the argument that they will not encounter any problems as homosexuals if they live their homosexuality in secret. This logic often persists at least implicitly in Western European asylum systems, even though a European court verdict explicitly ruled such argumentation invalid in 2014. Paradoxically, throughout Europe asylum seekers are at the same time subject to processes aimed at (dis)proving their homosexuality, which are grounded in a visual economy implying that homosexuality is visible (e.g. men ‘looking too masculine to be gay,’ or ‘acting too girlish to be credible as gay,’ see Chapters 2.3.2 and 8).

7 The involuntary visibilities Laura Georg addresses here need to be delimited from the visibility of queer migrant subjects this study seeks to establish. While these involuntary visibilities are in fact less visibilities than repetitive acts of social boundary making and stereotyping that eventually *erase* rather than make visible queer migrant subjects and their realities, the aim of this study is to engage with, and hence make visible, these very realities shaped by processes of racialization. Still, ethical questions as to whether this intended kind of visibilization is possible at all, and/or useful and morally valid in the way attempted here, are of course justified and invited.

impossible for her to discern what exactly triggered a hostile act. In a rare window of opportunity, Barbara Wiegand entangles the “*Dorftrottel*” (village idiot) of her village in a conversation, based on the assumption that he might verbalize the subliminal thoughts other villagers only think to themselves or would never confront her with directly. He does:

*Ich versuche herauszufinden wo er mich festnagelt, weil er hat drei Kategorien gehabt, 'Frauen,' er ist ein Frauenhasser, dann hat er die Kategorie gehabt 'links.' Und das sind alle die, die Bücher lesen, oder? Und dann hat er noch die Kategorie 'Ausländer' gehabt. Und er hat immer 'ihr' gesagt, dann hat er so getan das sind sicher die Frauen [...].*

I try to figure out where he puts me [literally 'where he nails me down'], because he had three categories, 'women,' he is a woman-hater, then he had the category 'left-wing.' And that's all those that read books, eh? And then he had the category 'Ausländer.' And he always said 'you' [plural] then he acted as if for sure it was the women [in the sense that, at the end of the day, it was the *women* that were the (biggest) problem] [...].

—Barbara Wiegand

This is not to say that it all boils down to gender, or in fact to any singular social marker, but to point to queer migrant women's desire to identify what exactly triggered an animosity. While some hostilities are quite easily classifiable as either racist or homophobic, other incidents leave a nagging uncertainty as to what it was that caused the negative reaction. Note that sexuality does not emerge as a category in Barbara Wiegand's above negotiation; in her village she lives “very much in the closet,” which is why in this specific interaction sexuality can only work on a subliminal level.

Hence, although rarely confronted with blatant racism, queer migrant women are subjected to multiple mechanisms of exclusion that not only target them as 'foreigners' but also as queers and as women. Devising strategies to mitigate this exposure, they find that the in/visibilities of their deviances ultimately remain beyond their control. 'Blending in' by assimilation can always only be achieved to a certain extent and is problematic as it requires the denial of at least part of one's cultural identity. However, as will be discussed next, queer migrant women often seek to renegotiate and reappropriate rather than negate or erase this cultural identity. Especially interviewees who were born in Switzerland thereby often seek to become recognized both as a 'real' Swiss *and* as a 'Sri Lankan' (for instance) at the same time. While the impossibility of allocating specific instances of discrimination to one form of Otherness or the other – sexuality, gender, or race – creates a deep sense of insecurity, overall, in everyday life, interviewees tend to feel more exposed to discrimination as 'foreigners' than as queers or as women.

## 7.2 Ambivalent Diasporic Spaces

This sub-chapter is concerned with the relationships the women I interviewed entertained with their diasporic communities, and with the role diasporic spaces played in their everyday negotiations of 'home.' Like family relations, connections to diasporic

communities were diverse, complex, and marked by ambivalent feelings. No account conveyed a sense of deep immersion in a diasporic community, and unlike many heterosexual migrant women in Switzerland (Riaño 2003a), women who were active in their community and attended events organized by and for fellow countrypeople on a regular basis remained the exception. However, while many interviewees were relatively disengaged from their diasporic community, ties to the community were still never completely severed.<sup>8</sup> Within these limits, relationships to diasporic communities took a variety of forms that will be discussed in the following.

This sub-chapter distinguishes four intersecting ways of relating to diasporic communities that were discernible in interviewees' accounts, taking into consideration these different kinds of connectivities overlapped and changed in the course of biographies. The first way of relating to the diasporic community is represented by those interviewees who took a decidedly anti-identitarian stance with regard to their social network, refusing to organize or understand their networks along the lines of this or that minoritarian identity. Second, some felt they did not have much in common with other members of their diasporic community due to the perceived dominant heteronormativity in these circles. Consequently, these interviewees were not able to create a deep sense of belonging within its folds. Third, some associated their diasporic community with homophobia or a forbidding silence around same-sex sexuality and accordingly distanced themselves from these circles. And fourth, there were those who strove for full participation in their diasporic communities.

'Diasporic community' in this chapter specifically refers to what interviewees perceive as a 'mainstream' diasporic context (e.g. "*bosnische Kreise*" – "Bosnian circles"). These communities for instance manifest themselves in the form of community centers or migrant organizations addressing specific nationalities (e.g. 'Bosnian') or regions of origin (e.g. 'Galician' or 'Asian'). These institutions organize events on the occasion of holidays or other happenings in the home country, in addition to regular gatherings and events ("*spanische Festli*" – "Spanish parties").

### 7.2.1 "I don't need it every weekend": Resisting Relegation to Minoritarian Spaces

Interviewees who take a decidedly *anti-identitarian* stance with respect to their social network emphasize that their circle of friends includes "*Tout le monde!*" (Beatriz Kraiss, Jimena Reyes) rather than mainly lesbians or compatriots, for instance. To Jimena Reyes it is important "*[de] ne pas rester sur des réseaux ou des ghettos ou des choses comme ça, moi j'aime tout le monde, les Noirs, les Chinoises, les hétérosexuels, les transsexuels, enfin j'aime tout le monde, et j'ai pas du tout envie de me sentir uniquement dans un certain lieu*" – "not to stay confined to specific networks or ghettos or things like that, I like everyone, the Black, the Chinese, the heterosexuals, the transsexuals, in the end I like everyone, and I really

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8 An exception was the couple Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova, see below. The couple separated themselves from countrypeople because they had experienced their homeland society as deeply homophobic. Additionally, they feared that contact to countrypeople may allow Ramiza Salakhova's abusive husband, who still lived in their home country, to find his wife in Switzerland.

don't feel like thinking of myself as belonging to one specific place only." She and others feel especially alienated by what they term "lesbian ghettos" and by certain circles of their compatriots "*qui sont restée trop entre eux*" – "who have stayed too much among themselves," without making any efforts to connect to other people in Switzerland or to "integrate" (Beatriz Kraiss). This does not mean that these participants never visit lesbian and diasporic spaces – they do. Nevertheless, they do not represent a central site of identification for them.

While these interviewees typically welcome meeting up with compatriots once a year or so to celebrate an election, speak their mother tongue, or enjoy their favorite childhood foods, they would likely agree with Beatriz Kraiss' qualification that "*y a pas besoin que ce soit tous le week-ends ça quoi*" – "I don't need it every weekend." Although they know a lot of compatriots, "*je ne vis pas beaucoup avec eux*" – "I don't experience much with them," as Jimena Reyes states. There are not many compatriots who are close friends, yet nor are there many lesbians, although meeting lesbian friends remains meaningful because, as Beatriz Kraiss formulates, "*ça fait du bien de voir des gens qui vivent la même chose que nous*" – "it feels good to see people that experience the same thing we do."

Ariane Velusat's reflections on her relationship with other Venezuelans in Switzerland crystallizes this anti-identitarian perspective (I was asking her at the end of the interview whether there was anything she had wanted to say and I had not asked):

*Y a une question que j'ai pensé que vous allez poser, c'était si je faisais partie d'un groupe de personnes de mon pays, du Venezuela ou comme ça, et puis je m'étais dit que, non, que c'était pas le fait d'être avec des personnes du Venezuela qui me faisait sentir plus dans mon pays. Que, non, que c'est plus des valeurs ou des idées, ou des manières d'être ou des manières de vivre, que je peux partager avec d'autres personnes. Mais que c'est pas parce qu'une personne vient du Venezuela, que je vais sentir forcément l'envie d'être amie de cette personne, pour me sentir plus proche de chez moi. Non. Voilà. Si. Parce que je sais que souvent, oui souvent y a ce cette idée-là. Que si je connais un cercle d'amis du Venezuela [...] je vais ressentir le besoin de devenir ami. [...] Et j'ai connu pas mal de Vénézuéliens mais, non.*

There was a question I thought you would ask, it was whether I was part of a group of people from my country, from Venezuela or something, and then I told myself that, no, that it was not being with Venezuelan people that made me feel more in my country. That, no, it's rather values or ideas, or ways of being, of living, that I can share with other people. But that it's not necessarily because a person comes from Venezuela that I will feel like being friends with this person, in order to feel closer to home. No. *Voilà*. Yes. Because I know that often there is this idea. That if I know a circle of friends from Venezuela [...] I will feel the urge to become friends. And I've known quite a few Venezuelans but, no.

—Ariane Velusat

Ariane Velusat works towards feeling "more in my country," that is, at home, in Switzerland; but she finds herself incapable of forging a sense of connectivity over a shared nationality alone. For her, friendship needs to be based on shared values and ways of living. As she details later in the interview, these shared values are sometimes *also* grounded in homeland culture. But her connecting points are more differentiated and diverse and



include specific positions and approaches to homeland values (such as conservative versus liberal stances on political issues); cultural hybridity emerging from the diasporic experience; being sexually non-conforming; and sharing leisure activities like dancing or cooking together.

Such anti-identitarian stances occur in accounts by interviewees both from the first and the second ‘generation.’ Narratives of interviewees from the ‘second generation’ or of interviewees who came to Switzerland as children tend to construct the anti-identitarian perspective as ‘natural,’ invoking their diverse social network that has grown organically in Switzerland over the years at school, at work, in sports clubs, in their neighborhoods, and so on. By contrast, in the case of ‘first generation’ immigrants the anti-identitarian stance appears as an attitude that is consciously claimed. Closely reading Ariane Velusat’s statement, I also interpret the anti-identitarian stance as an *act of resistance* in the face of dominant discourses relegating Others to ‘other’ spaces. This is implicit in Ariane Velusat’s expectation that in the research interview she would be confronted with the assumption that Venezuelans want to be with other Venezuelans. Conversely, on other occasions that I did explicitly ask about social ties to the diasporic or the lesbian community, these questions were occasionally met with irritation, which I read as an expression of interviewees’ interpretation that I was assuming a natural connectivity among national or ethnic groups or among sexually non-conforming groups.

### 7.2.2 “It’s not my scene”: A Sense of Difference and Unbelonging

The *second way* of relating to diasporic communities is marked by estrangement and a lack of a sense of belonging. These interviewees do not feel connected to their diasporic community because they feel they do not share interest in the topics discussed and negotiated within mainstream diasporic circles. Augusta Wakari feels at a loss as to how to “bring myself in” to Indonesian groups, which she perceives to be dominated by Indonesian women married to Swiss men:

I don’t really be in that kind of circle. I don’t know what to say ‘Hm? Really? Äng ong ang ang’ (acts as if she is struggling for words, laughs). Really. Most are their husband. ‘Ah my husband.’ (Exasperated) Oh it’s typical women! Typical women! ‘Oh, my husband is this, oh my husband is that,’ I say, ‘Okay: No, it’s not my scene actually. It’s not my scene.’

—Augusta Wakari

The perceived dominant heteronormativity in diasporic circles, moreover dominated by women compatriots speaking about their Swiss husbands, establishes too great a distance to Augusta Wakari’s own experiences to allow for a sense of connection. This sense of exclusion experienced based on female compatriots’ ‘straightness’ is sometimes also tied to issues beyond gender and sexuality: “For sure this [=the Malaysian diasporic community in Switzerland] is more straight, with religion (and) everything,” Siti Mohd Amin states. Despite this perceived straightness and religious conservatism, she sometimes joins Malaysian events since they represent some of the very sparse points of social contact in her everyday life: “I don’t care. Just go, and wallawallawalla [=blahblah-

blah], and I go home.” For those who have partners, additional issues emerge regarding the heteronormativity inscribed in mainstream diasporic spaces: Ariane Velusat and her partner have stopped going to the “*boîtes latinos*” (Latino clubs) they used to go to after they had first met “*parce que on n’a pas écrit ici ‘On est ensemble’ (pointe sur son front) donc les hommes ils viennent draguer ils sont collants comme d’habitude quoi*” – “because we don’t have written ‘We are together’ here (indicates her forehead) so the men they come on to you, they stick to you as usual.”

Heteronormativity and attendant gender performances, normative biographies, conservative perspectives on religion, and issues of class coagulate to effectuate a sense of disconnection from mainstream diasporic circles. As discussed in Chapter 6, not being married and/or not having children is thereby seen as a particularly insurmountable difference in the life experience of oneself and female compatriots. As childless queers, interviewees do not feel they have many “common issues” with female compatriots – or indeed *any* women – who have married (possibly at a young age), have children, and chiefly act as housewives and mothers.

### 7.2.3 Negotiating Homophobia in the Diasporic Community

The perceived conservatism and heteronormativity of mainstream diasporic circles sometimes took the shape of a more critical perspective on these spaces as explicitly homophobic, which represents the *third way* of relating to diasporic communities that emerged from the interviews. Some interviewees avoid community events explicitly on grounds of the homophobia and/or profound and forbidding silence around same-sex sexuality they have experienced in these spaces. The social worlds of these interviewees tend to be particularly segregated. Nour Saber says that when she still lived in France, her circle of friends was “*essentiellement des femmes européennes, [...] mais jamais des femmes arabes ou bien des femmes musulmanes*” – “*mainly European women, [...] never Arab women or Muslim women.*” She did not tell the few Arab friends she did have that she was a lesbian “*parce que c’est un sujet tabou, parce qu’aussi c’est un sujet qui fâche. C’est un sujet les gens vous disent ‘Non, c’est une maladie’*” – “because it’s a taboo, because it’s also a subject that irritates people. It’s a subject [to which] people tell you ‘No, it’s a disease.’” Based on this experience Nour Saber continues to keep the subject silenced among compatriots and other Arabs in Switzerland, a compartmentalizing strategy that was mirrored in many other biographies. Nour Saber began to segregate her coming-out strategies and her social life along the lines of ethnicity/religion after losing her best (Arab) friend upon telling her about her sexual orientation. The woman, who like Nour Saber lived in France, never answered any of her queries again. In Nour Saber’s view this incident was not an individual occurrence, but a reaction rooted in the homophobia in Arab societies that is transported to Europe through migration:

*Parce que même un étudiant [arabe], qui fait un troisième cycle [en France] et tout aussi vraiment, ils ont du mal à comprendre ça, ils étaient tellement, farinés, dans cette société, et puis dans les préjugés de la société d’origine, ils sont tellement imprégnés de la société d’origine qu’après ils arrivent plus à enlever tous ces schémas sociaux de leur tête. Donc le préjugé il est toujours là, même s’ils sont à l’étranger.*

Because even a[n Arab] student, who is at university [in France] and everything, they really also have a hard time understanding this, they were so, immersed, in this society, and then in these prejudices of the society of origin, they are so impregnated by the society of origin that after this they can't manage to get rid of all these social schemes in their heads. So the prejudice is always there, even if they are abroad.

—Nour Saber

Nour Saber locates the origin of the homophobia she detects among Arab students in Paris in the “social schemes” they were “immersed in” when growing up in their countries of origin, which they carry with them to France, where they are conserved “in their heads.” These values and attitudes are depicted as being so pervasive and affective that it is not possible for migrants to “get rid” of them after migrating. Homophobia hence appears as something fixed and unchanging that is situated in the “society” of Arab countries and inscribed in the bodies of migrants from these countries.

The formulation that “*even* a student at university” (emphasis added) is unable to discard these deep-seated resentments against sexually non-normative people is related to Nour Saber’s view that in the Arab-Muslim world, the occurrence of homosexual identification per se and the realization of ‘sexual migrations’ (that is, migration projects that are directly motivated by the wish to lead a homosexual life in Europe) are highly contingent on social status, educational level, and religiosity. Nour Saber accordingly frames homosexuality and sexual migration as “*un phénomène élitiste*” – “an elitist phenomenon” – reserved for members of the elevated classes:

*C'est pas quelqu'un qui appartient à un milieu social modeste, qui va se dire 'Ok, moi j'ai envie de vivre mon homosexualité à l'étranger donc je vais émigrer.' Pourquoi il peut pas? Pour deux raisons. La première c'est que, il a pas les moyens intellectuels de lutter contre la société. Donc, il va se plier aux besoins de la société, et puis aux normes de la société. Et puis pour lui il va vraiment, il va pas s'écouter, il va se dire 'Ok. Même si moi, j'ai envie, et je sais que je suis homosexuel, mais je peux rien faire.' C'est-à-dire, intellectuellement c'est des gens qui ont pas les moyens de lutter et de tenir tête, à la société. Ça c'est une chose. La deuxième chose c'est une raison financière. Parce que, lorsque on arrive ici [en Europe], il faut beaucoup de moyens financiers [...] C'est pour ça qu'on considère que l'homosexualité est un phénomène élitiste, c'est-à-dire un phénomène de classe sociale, dans le monde arabo-musulman. Une femme d'une classe populaire, d'une classe modeste, elle va se marier et puis elle va avoir des enfants, et puis elle va rester toute leur vie comme ça, malheureuse, parce que elle a ni les moyens d'éviter, et puis de faire son choix et de trancher et puis de vivre son homosexualité, de vouloir la vivre elle a pas la force ni sociale ni intellectuelle et puis elle a pas les moyens.*

It's not like someone who belongs to a humble social milieu will tell himself 'Ok, I feel like living my homosexuality abroad, so I will emigrate.' Why can he not do it? For two reasons. The first is that he does not have the intellectual means to fight against society. So he will fold to the needs of society, and the norms of society. And then for him he will really, he will not listen to himself, he will tell himself 'Ok, even if I feel this desire, and know that I'm homosexual, I cannot do anything.' That means that intellectually these are people that don't have the means to fight, to resist society. That's one

thing. The other thing is a financial reason. Because when you arrive here [in Europe], you need a lot of financial means. [...] This is why homosexuality is considered an elitist phenomenon, that is, a phenomenon of social class, in the Arab-Muslim world. A woman of the working class, of a humble class, will marry and then she will have children, and then she will stay all her life like that, unhappy, because she has neither the means to avoid [that] nor [the chance] to make her choice and make a cut and then live out her homosexuality, she has neither the social nor the intellectual force to want to live it out, and then she also does not have the means.

—Nour Saber

Nour Saber's argument identifies two kinds of positionalities for sexually non-conforming people in Arab societies: The first is inhabited by people from the societal elite, who have the possibility to assume a homosexual identity and migrate to Europe in order to live a homosexual life or assume a homosexual identity in the diaspora. The second positionality is inhabited by people from the "humble" classes, who neither have the "intellectual force" to identify as homosexuals nor the financial means to migrate. Succumbing to social pressures they enter heterosexual marriages and live their same-sex desires in secret, if at all.

Such narratives reiterate homonationalist discourses juxtaposing a homophobic Orient or South against a gay-friendly West. As discussed in Chapters 3.4 and 6.1, not only does such a stance ignore the authorship of the colonizers and their successors in the construction of modern homophobias in the Orient or South, but it also erases the fact that the current trend to outsource homophobias to racialized and ethnicized Others importantly originates in global inequalities and imperialist moves that work towards legitimizing wars and excluding migrant people. In other words, to conclude from Nour Saber's and similar accounts – and from the incisive, very real, and painful experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and pathologization they often speak of – that non-Western societies and their diasporic communities are inherently dismissive of queer sexualities would mean to overlook the deeper and global layers of the structuration of modern homophobias.

Nour Saber's contentions converse with Joseph Massad's critique of the figure of the "Gay International" as discussed in Chapter 3.4 (Massad 2002, 2007, and 2009). Massad "charts the way through which social Darwinism, culturalism, civilizational thinking, Orientalism, western colonial medicine, and colonial law influenced Arab intellectuals since the nineteenth century on how they should think through sexual matters and their centrality to what Europe insisted were civilizational questions." This thinking "institutionalized [sexuality] as a major axis through which society can be normalized (as heterosexual), which in turn necessitated a deviant other (the homosexual)." Massad says that today it is international U.S. and Europe-based LGBT organizations that "incite discourse on sexuality in Arab countries [or in Latin America, India, or Iran etc., as he generalizes elsewhere] and claim that they are trying to push these societies to protect the rights of their homosexual populations, which these international organizations themselves are *creating*" in their own image (Massad 2009). Massad reiterates Nour Saber's argument that in the Arab world homosexuality is an elitist phenomenon; as he states, "there is a small number of upper class and upper middle class western-

ized Arabs who are seduced by gayness and the American example of it.” The notion of seduction exposes Massad’s conceptualization of this phenomenon as a result of Western cultural imperialism as promoted by what he terms the “Gay International,” who simultaneously outsources homophobia to the non-Western Other. In contrast to Nour Saber’s dichotomization of ‘homosexuals’ – people from the Arab elite identifying as gays or lesbians – versus ‘oppressed’ people – people from the “humble classes” who desire their own sex but remain unable to think and/or live it as an identity – Massad contends that the few self-identifying gays and lesbians in the Arab world “are not representative of, nor can speak for the majority of men and women who engage in same sex practices and do not identify themselves in accordance with these practices” (Massad 2009). As mentioned earlier, in Massad’s view the “Gay International” is “destroying social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of reproducing a world in its own image, one wherein its sexual categories and desires are safe from being questioned” (Massad 2007:189). While I consider questionable Massad’s move to reduce the sexualities of Arab people identifying as homosexuals to their having fallen for Western ideas about sexuality (see also Makarem 2009), his analysis usefully contextualizes and complicates Nour Saber’s argument, and once more points to the many ways in which “stories-so-far” about sexualities intermesh globally.

Nour Saber’s view that homophobia among Arabs in the European diaspora originates in the “social schemes” adopted in their home countries is not shared by all interviewees who experienced their diasporic communities as homophobic. A counterexample is Nermina Petar’s account. Rather than in the homeland, Nermina Petar locates her parents’ and other compatriots’ homophobia in the *diaspora* itself. Nermina Petar shares Nour Saber’s strategy of keeping her sexual orientation under wraps in the company of compatriots, and equally segregates her social worlds along the lines of her national and sexual identities. Having been socialized in “Bosnian circles” since she came to Switzerland at the age of ten, recently she has distanced herself from this community. As discussed earlier (Chapter 5), this rupture was based on what Nermina Petar experienced as exceedingly confining heteronormative gender roles and an associated pressure to follow the Bosnian diasporic heteronormative prescript (marry early, have children, and stay within the Bosnian community). While also perceived as omnipresent in the broader Bosnian diasporic community, this prescript was chiefly propagated by her parents. Nermina Petar suspects that the fixation of immigrant parents on “passing on” conservative heteronormative homeland values to their children effectuates even greater pressure on sexually non-conforming children who grow up in the diaspora than on queers who grow up in the home country. Nermina Petar thus attributes to the Bosnian circles *in Switzerland* an aggravated conservatism compared to Bosnian society *in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. She postulates that it may in fact be easier to live as a lesbian in Bosnia and Herzegovina than as a Bosnian lesbian in Switzerland:

*Das ist wirklich so, dass die, die ausgewandert sind, meine Eltern inklusive, dass sie [...] die Werte wirklich- auf das fixiert sind. Das weiterzugeben. Und wenn ich jetzt meine Tante [in Bosnien] erlebe- [...], die sind viel lockerer. [...] Also ich denke der Druck auf die Bosnier selber ist hier extremer. [...] Vielleicht wäre sogar also lockerer, also einfacher dort unten lesbisch zu*

*sein, ich weiss es nicht (lacht). Das bezweifle ich zwar, aber vielleicht würde die Familie anders darauf reagieren, weil sie nicht so auf die Kinder fixiert sind, oder?*

It's really like that, that those who have emigrated, including my parents, that they [...] the values really- that they are fixated on this. To pass this on. And if I see my aunt [in Bosnia and Herzegovina] [...], they are much more relaxed. [...] I think the pressure on Bosnians themselves is much greater here. [...] Maybe it would even be more relaxed, I mean easier to be a lesbian down there, I don't know (laughs). I doubt it, but maybe the family would react differently because they are not so fixated on the children, you know?

—Nermina Petar

This statement addresses the pressures theorists like Yen le Espiritu or Gayatri Gopinath diagnose diasporic communities to be exposed to (Espiritu 2003, Gopinath 2005, see Chapters 3 and 6): On the one hand, certain migrant communities (Gopinath discusses South Asian diasporic communities in the U.S.) can come under moral pressure from heteropatriarchal homeland nationalisms depicting diasporic female citizens as inferior, inauthentic, and tainted in comparison to the 'real,' pure national woman 'at home' (Gopinath 2005). In answer, these diasporic communities attempt to position themselves in a positive light vis-à-vis the homeland. As Nermina Petar's statement suggests, this counter discourse is driven by masculinist discourses inscribing alleged national values on the body of the diasporic child, and more particularly the diasporic *girl/daughter*, who in this way becomes emblem and heeder of national/homeland morale and culture. As Nermina Petar's statement testifies to, this puts diasporic daughters under increased control and pressure.

On the other hand, Espiritu identifies racism in mainstream society as a further crucial force in building moral pressure against diasporic girls/daughters. Espiritu argues that in the face of negative stereotyping and marginalization, migrant communities work towards representing themselves as morally superior to the Western host culture. Once more this dynamic is productive of a discourse of 'our' (e.g. Bosnian) girls/daughters as pure and chaste, who now become pitted against 'Swiss' or 'Western' girls/daughters, who are represented as amoral and sexually corrupt. This perspective is reflected in Nermina Petar's following statement: "*Die Bosnier selber meinen, dass die Schweizer selber eher Drogen nehmen, die Mädchen mit dreizehn schon mit Buben ins Bett gehen etcetera, eigentlich eine Art Negativ, wie die Schweizer selber von den Ausländern*" – "The Bosnians themselves think that the Swiss themselves tend to take drugs, that the girls sleep with boys at the age of thirteen already etcetera, in fact kind of a negative of what the Swiss themselves think about foreigners." Nermina Petar says that in her childhood, Bosnian children in Switzerland tended to be confined to Bosnian circles in order to separate them as much as possible from Swiss children, with a focus on keeping Bosnian girls away from Swiss boys. Within this logic the figure of the virtuous Bosnian girl is constructed as the morally superior counterpart to the drug abusing and sex-obsessed Swiss girl. As Espiritu points out in the context of her similar findings in the Filipino/U.S. context, "this juxtaposition underscores the fact that femininity is a relational category, one that is co-constructed with other racial and cultural categories." Only that in this instance it

is the 'margins' (in the case of Nermina Petar: the Bosnian diasporic community) that imagine and construct the 'mainstream' (here: Swiss mainstream society) rather than vice versa (Espiritu 2003:158). Such masculinist evocations of the homeland must hence also be read as forms of resistance against racism and exclusion. This function of the diasporic community as a bulwark against discrimination in the host country further contributes to the complexity of the relationships interviewees entertained to their diasporic communities: Despite their often ambivalent experiences in these spaces, these are not ties that can be severed lightly. These diasporic contestations of national cultures and values are moreover highly *sexualized*. Within their heteronormative logic, non-heterosexual migrant women are perceived as 'Westernized' by their conservative families or compatriots in the diaspora. Since homosexuality, like the lack of chastity in women, is intrinsically attached to the figure of the sexually immoral Western woman, queer migrant subjects are paradoxically catapulted out of their homeland cultural identity.

The homophobic reactions or silence around homosexuality many interviewees have experienced in certain conservative circles of their diasporic communities hence always also need to be read against the backdrop of heteropatriarchal homeland nationalisms on the one hand and exposure to racist ascriptions in Switzerland on the other. At the same time, trending dominant discourses framing diasporic communities in Switzerland as homophobic form part of a larger narrative attributing gay-friendliness to the West and homophobia to the global Orient or South. The pervasiveness of this narrative is exposed in Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova's account: In contrast to Nour Saber and Nermina Petar, who have themselves experienced exclusion on the basis of their dissident sexuality within their diasporic communities, the couple avoids not only their own diasporic community but other immigrants in general because they *imagine* them to be homophobic (see Chapter 8).

As mentioned above, disidentification with the diasporic community may lead to a segregation of social worlds, which includes a segregation of different aspects of the Self. Nermina Petar emphasizes the work involved in moving from one space and social positionality to another:

*Manchmal bin ich wie ein Chamäleon. Wenn ich bei den Bosniern dabei bin, was eigentlich selten ist aber ab und zu passiert es, dann passe ich mich ihnen an. Sei das an der Kleidung, also nichts extrem Weites. Normal so wie jetzt aber so gewisse T-Shirts gehen ein bisschen weiter runter, oder sei es [...] über das Thema reden oder einfach das Lesbischsein ja nicht erwähnen, ich weiss mit denen kann ich nicht darüber diskutieren und will ich gar nicht. [...] Ja in dem Kreis bin ich halt die Nermina, die Tochter von einem [...] wohlhabenden, religiösen Mann. Und in dem anderen Kreis, der eigentlich mein Kreis ist bin ich die Nora [Nerminas Kosenname], [dort] kann ich so sein wie ich bin. Weil sie akzeptieren mich so.*

Sometimes I'm like a chameleon. When I join the Bosnians, which is rare but sometimes it happens, then I adapt to them. Be this with respect to clothing, well nothing extremely loose. Normal like now but certain T-shirts reach a bit further down, or be it [...] talking about the issue you know, just under no circumstances mentioning being a lesbian, I know I can't discuss that with them and I don't want to. [...] Yes, it's a fact

that in these circles I'm Nermina's, the daughter of a [...] rich, religious man. And in the other circle, which is actually my circle, I'm Nora [Nermina's nickname], [there] I can be the way I am. Because they accept me like that.

—Nermina Petar

Here the negotiation of homosexuality in the diasporic community coagulates with a host of other areas of conflict. There are cross-cultural negotiations of gender and particularly female chastity, manifested in Nermina Petar's strategy of wearing a slightly longer T-shirt; and there are issues of respect between parent and child. Taken together, these conflicts generate complex and ambivalent loyalties on the part of Nermina Petar. She contrasts this ambivalent diasporic space with the sense of acceptance she experiences in "my circle," which mainly consists of Western European women, many of whom are lesbian.

*Comparing* spaces is a typical practice in accounts describing the segregation of life-worlds along multiple lines of social position and identity. These comparisons often pit family against friends, heterosexual circles against lesbian circles, or diasporic spaces against lesbian spaces. Teresa Ruiz performs a veritable comparative study of her birthday:

*Letztes Wochenende habe ich meinen Geburi gefeiert, oder? Dann habe ich so aufgeteilt, dass alle zufrieden sind: Am Freitag habe ich Hetero-Ausgang gehabt, gefeiert, am Samstag Lesben, am Sonntag Familie am Morgen. Und eben dort habe ich wirklich den Unterschied merken können. [...] Irgendwie unter Frauen [=Lesben] fühle ich mich viel wohler.*

Last weekend I celebrated my birthday, you know? Then I divided it so that everyone is satisfied: On Friday I was out with the heteros, celebrated, on Saturday lesbians, on Sunday family in the morning. And well, there I could really notice the difference. [...] Somehow among women [=lesbians] I feel much more comfortable.

—Teresa Ruiz

For both Nermina Petar and Teresa Ruiz the lesbian identity and being among lesbian friends evokes the strongest sense of home and connection. Being among lesbians means being closest to oneself. Interviewees state that among lesbians, "I can be the way I am" (Nermina Petar), "I feel much more comfortable" (Teresa Ruiz), "*kommt am meisten zum Ausdruck von mir, da bin ich am meisten ich*" – "most of myself finds expression, it's here that I am most me" (Laura Georg).

## 7.2.4 The Diasporic Community as a Site of Identification and Attachment

By contrast, Efra Mahmoud's and Suki Schäuble's 'homing desires' are guided by nostalgia for the homeland and cultural belonging rather than by sexual identity. Theirs is the *fourth way* of relating to diasporic communities introduced at the outset of this subchapter. These interviewees seek to participate in their diasporic communities, with varying success. Suki Schäuble, who lives in Zürich with her husband and children while maintaining a long-distance relationship to a woman in Japan, is in close contact with many fellow Japanese in Switzerland and was also involved in introducing courses in



the Japanese language and culture for Japanese children in Switzerland. She neither identifies as lesbian nor as bisexual, nor does she entertain any connections to the lesbian community in Switzerland or Japan. Efra Mahmoud, on the other hand, lives in Switzerland with her female partner but does not communicate her sexual orientation to the outside world. She does not frequent lesbian spaces mainly because she fears that if she were seen by the wrong people the news would travel quickly within the close-knit Egyptian community. She is also worried about being exposed as a homosexual in the Egyptian community because this is a space she very actively seeks access to. She longs to connect to someone who speaks her language, who shares her ideas of cooking and eating together, and with whom she can relive everyday Egyptian banter. However, up to the interview she has failed to forge friendships with other Egyptian women due to the lack of available candidates in her geographical vicinity.

To sum up: Queer migrant women's positionalities vis-à-vis their diasporic communities varied widely, as did the role these communities played in their everyday lives. This sub-chapter described four ways in which interviewees related to their diasporic community: Some generally refused to be relegated to diasporic (or lesbian) spaces or identities and took a decidedly anti-identitarian stance in the composition of their circles of friends. They explicitly refused to restrict their social horizons to 'ghettoized' social groups and spaces constructed on the basis of a specific sexual, national, ethnic, or cultural minoritarian identity. Others felt that they did not have much in common with other women in their diasporic community given their differing sexual orientation, biographies, lifestyles, and interests. This prevented them from creating rapport with members of these circles. Still others tended to avoid diasporic spaces because they expected, or had experienced, homophobia in these circles. They located these homophobias in their homeland cultures or in exceedingly conservative heteronormative reconfigurations of these homeland cultures in the diaspora. As pointed out before, such accounts also need to be read against the backdrop of homonationalist discourses in Switzerland, which pit allegedly homophobic 'immigrant cultures' against the allegedly gay-friendly 'Swiss culture' (see Chapters 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). In order to become a 'good lesbian,' which promises the promotion of inclusion in Swiss citizenship, queer migrant women are accordingly pressed to adopt a critical stance against their homeland culture. Finally, some interviewees actively sought, but were not always successful in finding, participation in their diasporic communities. They were notably interviewees who did not identify as lesbians and did not understand their sexuality to be formative of their identities.

The ambivalence towards the diasporic community often resulted in a segregation of social worlds. Typically, one of these worlds was the diasporic community – which in the case of 'second generation' interviewees importantly contained the family of origin – where sexual deviance was mostly kept tacit. This was contrasted with a "circle of friends" among whom same-sex desires can be expressed. The composition of these circles of friends ranged from "*Tout le monde!*" to almost exclusively lesbian. Pitting these spaces against each other, many interviewees felt that among lesbians they can be most "the way I am." Generally, if social networks were forged along the lines of one specific minoritarian identity, they were much more often forged along the lines of sexual

identity than the lines of national, ethnic, or cultural identity. At the same time, the sense of belonging evoked in lesbian spaces often remained troubled and incomplete. The following sub-chapter discusses this sense of lacking often expressed with regard to membership in the lesbian community, and the ways it is tied up with national, ethnic, or cultural identity on the one hand and being an immigrant in Switzerland on the other.

### 7.3 Queering the Diasporic, Diasporizing the Lesbian

Against the backdrop of a sense of unbelonging and experiences of exclusion both in diasporic and lesbian spaces, interviewees devise different strategies to *create* spaces in which they can simultaneously share their experiences as members of their diasporic community *and* as women-loving women. One of these strategies is to 'queer' diasporic spaces and vice versa to 'diasporize' lesbian spaces, that is, to create a sense of home in places that are hegemonially inscribed as *either* lesbian *or* diasporic. In such moments of attachment and identification, the hegemonic meanings attributed to diasporic or lesbian places become, at least momentarily, exposed, suspended, and challenged by the corporeal presence and visibility of the queer-*and*-migrant body, who is otherwise normally invisible as such.

One important site of queering the diasporic is the family. Both through in-your-face tactics as well as by more subtle or tacit methods relying on the silent agreement of Knowing that They Know, and Them Knowing that You Know They Know. These narratives of reappropriation and of (silent or not so silent) contestations with family echo the kind of dynamic home-making Anne-Marie Fortier describes below:

[Home] is lived in motions: The motions of journeying between homes, the motion of hailing ghosts from the past, the motions of leaving or staying put, of 'moving on' or 'going back,' the motions of cutting or adding, the motions of continual reprocessing of what home is/was/might have been. (Fortier 2003:130-131)

Fortier's refusal to reiterate notions of home as stasis, comfort, and security, and her suggestion to frame home in terms of movement and negotiation instead, speaks to the processes of disidentification that mark queer migrant women's negotiations with their parents. "But," Fortier continues, "'home' is also remembered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to make home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way" (ibid:131). For the women I interviewed, such 'sites of attachment' for homing desires were primarily places where they felt they were acknowledged as a *whole*, with all aspects they perceive to be relevant and defining of who they are, without having to fight for this acknowledgment. These 'aspects of the Self' are thereby not restricted to, but importantly include, their national, ethnic, or cultural identity; their cultural hybridity; their migration experience; and their dissident sexuality. Moreover, they importantly encompass issues of class, singlehood, and other aspects of life. As discussed earlier, the queer family home as a space reconciling the queer and the diasporic Self can be considered as such a site of 'intersectional home-making.' While the queer family home often represents a place

to which homing desires are attached relatively permanently, many other instances of attaching 'homing desires' to a space remain more fleeting and volatile. One such moment – an instance in which a lesbian space becomes 'diasporized' – is presented in the following.

When Teresa Ruiz still thought of herself as a heterosexual, she mainly socialized in Spanish-Italian circles in Switzerland. After meeting her partner at work and “becoming a lesbian,” she largely distanced herself from this community, instead immersing herself in the lesbian subculture. As a passionate dancer her outings focus on lesbian clubs, although here she only rarely finds dancing partners that match her proficiency. In order to increase her scope of action, she went back to her home country to learn how to lead her favorite dance (causing mystification among her male teachers: “*Das ist wirklich schon ein Tabu*” – “This is really a taboo”). Now, in lesbian clubs, “*wenn es Latino [Musik] kommt, dann fühle ich mich schon fast wie daheim (lacht), und vor allem wirklich [wenn ich] mit Frauen tanzen kann*” – “if there is Latin [music] then I almost feel at home (laughs), and above all really [when I] can dance with women.” Being moved by and moving to the music of her homeland together with other women-loving women transforms the lesbian space into a queer space, merging otherwise spatially segregated aspects of herself. The social fabric of the space evokes and organizes collective memories and present shared experiences and desires, which momentarily suspends categorical identities. (Dancing to) Latin music emerges as a site of affective connection rather than an assertion of difference. For Teresa Ruiz the club momentarily becomes part of an ‘urban formation’ marked by shifting affiliations and interactions rather than a place from which identity claims are made and social exclusions effectuated (Kosnick 2012, Boulila 2018). In other words, in this space-time, the social practice of dancing is not determined entirely by a hegemonic discourse, which allows Teresa Ruiz to feel acknowledged in the different aspects of herself for a moment, while at the same time, albeit fleetingly, her corporeal presence and performance in this space diasporizes the otherwise hegemonially white lesbian space.

#### 7.4 Desiring the Queer Compatriot

In the absence of public and semi-public *places* where intersecting homing desires can be attended to, queer migrant women also attach a sense of home to *people*. As discussed earlier, the body of the partner in the common bed represents one of the most recurring emblems of home (Chapter 6.2). Further, it is especially also the – assumed or experienced – ‘equally’ or ‘similarly’ intersectional and thus similarly exceptionally positioned ‘impossible subjects’ that emerge as crucial anchor points for homing desires. Real and imagined partners or friends provide such surfaces of inscription. For instance, in a telephone conversation in the context of this research, Charlotta Sembiring jokingly calculates her statistical chance of finding a partner that fits all of her criteria:

- a) It has to be a woman, ‘which already cuts the chance in half: 50 percent.’
- b) ‘Then, it has to be a lesbian: okay, five percent of 50 percent.’

c) She has to be 'available,' which places the probability 'I don't know how many places behind the comma.'

d) She has to come from an 'academic culture.'

e) Moreover, it would ideally be an Indonesian who has been living in Europe and 'loves the European culture.' You do the math.

—Field book note of phone conversation with Charlotta Sembiring, April 4, 2008

In Charlotta Sembiring's formulation, sexual identity, educational level, national identity, cultural hybridity, and shared cultural values merge into the perfect space of comfort and mutual understanding, pointing to the intersectionality of her homing desires as they become projected onto the body of an imagined partner. (Note that the criterion that the future partner be a compatriot was a recurrent but by no means imperative desideratum in other accounts as well.)

Not only lovers but also (imagined) friends serve as surfaces of inscription for homing desires. Siti Mohd Amin, who is uncomfortable in both homonormative Swiss lesbian and heteronormative Malaysian diasporic circles, bemoans that there seems to be no other queer Malaysian women in Switzerland:

But me I don't have a group of Malaysians here. I have but in Zürich, Basel, Geneva [i.e. not in her own city], that is, auntie, uncle, you know they are old generation, so to find Malaysian like me [that is, women-loving] is very difficult that I can sharing problem together, you know?

—Siti Mohd Amin

Not even a shared (homo)sexual-and-Asian-and-diasporic identity can establish the sense of connection Siti Mohd Amin believes is required to "sharing problem together" in a meaningful way. One of her few friends in Switzerland, a young lesbian Indonesian, is 'close' to Siti Mohd Amin linguistically, culturally, sexually, and in age, but in Siti Mohd Amin's eyes these many commonalities do not 'add up' to the degree of familiarity and comfort she seeks. It is also due to this lack of people and places to which she can attach her desire to connect to a queer compatriot in Switzerland that Siti Mohd Amin resorts to the queer transnational/Malaysian online community. As discussed earlier, this ambivalent strategy at the same time mitigates and aggravates her social isolation since there is no material context in which these social ties can be enacted and developed in everyday life. While this lack of a queer-and-diasporic community is not always felt as explicitly and strongly as in the case of Siti Mohd Amin, her sense of insularity is reflected in many other accounts.

Teresa Ruiz, for instance, was incredulous when she heard that there was another Cuban lesbian in her Swiss city (see Chapter 5.1): "*Ich dachte ich wäre die Einzige!*" – "I thought I was the only one!" Meeting a lesbian compatriot left a lasting impression on her: "*Ich glaub es ist eine von den Begegnungen, die mir da in Basel am meisten beeindruckt hat*" – "I think this is one of the encounters that impressed me most here in Basel," she stated emotionally in our interview shortly after her first meeting with her queer compatriot. The two women had been on the phone together for hours since they had first met a few days before.

A strong sense of connection among queer compatriots also finds confirmation in a little ‘group’ of lesbian Asians sharing the same nationality. Upon meeting in Switzerland, the three women quickly became good friends, dubbing their group “The [name of the country] Mafia.” As one member of this group relates: “Y’know, when you lesbian? (laughs) [...] especially with these Asians [...], so you’re trying to be, more together, eh? If you know, hey okay, we are on the same ship. All the same ship. Okay. Take the bus (laughs). Yeah.” The invitation to outsiders to “take the bus” points to the strength of the ‘natural’ connection that the speaker perceives among queer-and-migrant compatriots, united in their multiple separation.

However, the “Mafia” never becomes a segregated and exclusive locus of a queer/national identity politics. One of the women has a European partner, and when they met for the first time all of them already had a circle of friends, so that the three have come to form the core of a large transnational, diverse, and porous circle of friends including, among others, white Swiss people, immigrants from other European countries, compatriots, other Asians, and friends from all over Europe that the three “Mafia” members know from previous stays in other European countries. In this sense this ‘group’ differs from the only other ‘group’ of queer compatriots encountered in this research, which was a circle of exclusively Spanish-speaking (but not exclusively queer) friends surrounding two Spanish research participants.

In the absence of established groups of queer compatriots, interviewees often sought to connect to other queer migrant women, believing that they will be easier to meet than Swiss lesbians because they know how it is to arrive in a foreign place as a queer person. Such expectations were often disappointed, however. When Maria Borkovic heard two women speak Serbian in a lesbian club, she was delighted: “And then I heard that they speak Serbian so it was like ‘WOW! GREAT!’ Finally maybe I can talk with someone’ you know and then I met them and they didn’t ask me they didn’t even make talk with me just like ‘Hi, hi, whatever your name is.’” She was not able to forge a bond to other migrant queers in following attempts either.

To sum up: In the absence of queer communities and organizations that address migrants of a specific country, region of origin, ethnicity, or linguistic community, intersectional homing desires are attached to queer compatriots. Given the frequent absence of such compatriots in everyday life, these desires often remain confined to the realm of the imaginative, in which queer compatriots figure as ideal partners and friends. At the same time, the rare occasions on which interviewees meet queer compatriots are decisive moments that often lead to lasting friendships.<sup>9</sup> In the absence of queer compatriots, interviewees also attempt to forge connections to queer migrants from other countries sharing their cultural background or a language, with varying degrees of success. Still others do not (actively) seek contact to compatriots, queer or not.

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9 This is not to romanticize or essentialize these connections. For instance, as I write up this chapter, the “Mafia” has largely disintegrated. One of its members has returned to her country of origin while the other two have been alienated from each other.

## 7.5 “Des Suisses-Suisses on va laisser tomber”:<sup>10</sup> Being ‘Other Swiss’ Together

Research participants who have come to Switzerland as adults situate themselves in between cultures. This is sometimes regarded positively in terms of a double resource (“*Pour moi, je te dis j’ai deux cultures très fortes*” – “For me, I tell you I have two very strong cultures” (Jimena Reyes)) and sometimes negatively in terms of a ‘neither nor,’ mostly resulting from an estrangement from the homeland after living in Switzerland for some time while at the same time remaining unable to forge a meaningful social network, partnership, and/or work situation in the diaspora. However, even in cases in which ‘Swiss culture’ is portrayed as co-constitutive of personal values and attitudes, the resulting cultural hybridity ultimately does not destabilize beliefs such as “I will never be Swiss” or that “*Je suis quand même Brésilienne*” – “I’m still a Brazilian after all.”

As such, the ‘cultural in-between-ness’ formulated by interviewees who migrated to Switzerland as adults differs from the ways in which the (few) interviewees who were born in Switzerland, who were raised here from an early age, and/or who have one Swiss parent frame their cultural hybridity.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to first generation immigrants, the latter claim Switzerland as (one of) their homeland(s). However, because they are often perceived as *Ausländerinnen* in Switzerland, this homeland is ultimately denied to them. In his comprehensive study of self-conceptions of people with multiple national, ethnic, and cultural belongings living in Germany, Paul Mecheril uses the term ‘Other Germans’ (*Andere Deutsche*) to designate this specific positionality (Mecheril 2003). ‘Other Germans’ refers to people who have grown up and live in Germany, and for whom “a transnational migration background is significant with regard to their self-conception as well as with regard to their becoming othered” (Mecheril 2003:9, my translation). They are Germans who “deviate from the fictive, prototypical image of the standard German citizen to such an extent that they are perceived as deviating too much from this image, and who are consequently perceived and treated as not legitimately belonging [to the group of German citizens] [...]. The expression ‘Other Germans’ hence refers to a large part of the population of the children of immigrants in Germany (“*Migrationsfolgenerationen*”), to ‘Black Germans’ [...], and to people whose parents are of diverse ethnic-national origins” (Mecheril 2003:10, my translation).

To be an ‘Other German’ or, in this case, an ‘Other Swiss,’ results in a sense of “*Fremdsein in der eigenen Heimat*” – “being foreign in one’s own homeland” (Laura Georg).<sup>12</sup> “*Was*

10 “Let’s drop the Swiss-Swiss,” in the sense of “Forget about making friends with Swiss-Swiss people.”

11 Within the group of interviewees who came to Switzerland as children, the following analysis mainly applies to those who have one Swiss parent, which allows them to appropriate ‘Switzerland’ as a homeland in other ways than those whose parents are both non-Swiss.

12 Laura Georg’s terminology resonates with discourses and cultural productions by other Europeans of color. For instance, as Fatima El-Tayeb discusses in her analysis of discourses generated by ethnic Others in postnational Europe, the 1992 song *Fremd im eigenen Land* (Stranger in my Country) by the band Advanced Chemistry, whose members are Germans of color, became a milestone and a source of inspiration for other young German rappers of color, many of whom understood their music as a form of political activism. Similar raps triggered similar responses in other European countries (El-Tayeb 2011:32ff).

*macht man wenn einem Heimat [in Bezug auf die Schweiz] versagt wird? Oder wenn sie einem negiert wird: Du kannst gar nicht von der Schweiz kommen so eine wie du aussiehst kannst du nicht von der Schweiz kommen. Und man kommt ja auch nicht von dort. Man hat ja verschiedene Hintergründe*” – “What to do if Heimat [homeland/being at home] [in reference to Switzerland] is denied to you as such? Or if it is negated to you: You can't be from Switzerland someone like you the way you look you can't come from Switzerland. And one indeed doesn't come from there. One has different backgrounds,” Laura Georg elaborates on this experience.

It is mainly this disturbing sense of “being foreign in one's own homeland” that ‘Other Swiss’ sought to share with others. Leyla Haddad (who has a Swiss mother and a Lebanese father and came to Switzerland from Lebanon at the age of ten) explains her desire to connect to other ‘Other Swiss’ as follows:

TB: *Du hast gesagt du hättest so viel Freunde die so halb seien (lacht)?*

LH: *Also ja halb, einfach nicht Vollschweizer in dem Sinn, wobei was das immer auch heisst, ja-*

TB: *Also meinst du halb libanesisch oder grundsätzlich halb nicht schweizerisch einfach?*

LH: *Nein, grundsätzlich einfach, ja genau, [Leute] die irgendwie eine Mischung so entweder halbe [...], so die auch so ein bisschen Migrationshintergrund haben [...] ja wo man merkt es ist irgendwie nachher so wie ein Grundverständnis so das [...] wie Art Fremdkörper sein hier in der Kultur und vielleicht auch von- ja man ist wie ein bisschen, ja so das Lebendige das Spontane so das nicht immer Verhaltene [...], also ich habe nicht nur so Leute [im Freundeskreis], überhaupt nicht, aber ich merke es ist gleichwohl noch viel, wo ja man sucht halt sehr schnell Leute wo man ähnliche Vergangenheit hat oder eben gewisse Themen so das nicht nicht ganz hier daheim Fühlen, etwas das vermisst und gleichwohl sich versucht halt eine Identität gleichwohl halt aufzubauen und auch Ersatzfamilie [...].*

TB: You said that you have a lot of friends that are like half (laughs)?

LH: Well half, just not full Swiss in this sense, whatever that means, yes-

TB: Well do you mean half Lebanese or just basically half non-Swiss?

LH: No generally, yes, exactly, [people] who are somehow a mixture like half [...], like who also have a bit of a migration background [...] yes where one realizes there is like a basic mutual understanding like [...] [about] being kind of a foreign body in this culture and maybe also because- yes one is a bit like, yes the liveliness the spontaneity like the not always guarded [...], well I don't only have people like these [in her circle of friends], not at all, but I realize it's still quite a few, where yes one very quickly looks for people who have a similar past or as I said certain issues like the not feeling completely at home here, one misses something and at the same time tries to build an identity and also a replacement family [...].

—Leyla Haddad<sup>13</sup>

Connecting to other ‘Other Swiss’ allows Leyla Haddad to share her experience of being a “foreign body” in Swiss culture, to build a “replacement family” even, in order to miti-

13 Leyla Haddad's wording connects to the notion of the ‘halfie’ by Lila Abu-Lughod, which she applies to reflect on her own positionality as a feminist ethnographer of mixed Palestinian and American parentage (Abu-Lughod 1991).

gate her ambivalent relationship with her (Swiss) mother and the loss of her (Lebanese) father; and to tend to her desire to escape what she perceives to be an overly guarded and reserved Swiss way of interacting. Such dissociations from Swiss communication culture are echoed in other accounts (see also Chapter 9); as Ariane Velusat dryly notes about her circle of friends: “*Des Suisses-Suisses on va laisser tomber*” – “Let’s drop the Swiss-Swiss,” following the vein of Leyla Haddad’s concept of the “*Vollschweizer*” (full Swiss).

While such experiences of multiple national, ethnic, or cultural belongings and the everyday strategies to navigate these belongings have been amply researched (see e.g. Mecheril 2003, Jain 2018), it has to be noted that taking a position in between different national, ethnic, or cultural belongings as well as the strategy to share cultural hybridity with similarly positioned subjects are not available to queer migrant women in the same way as they are to non-queer migrants. This surfaces in an account by Barbara Wiegand about a failed collaboration with a fellow artist sharing her father’s cultural background:

*Das [ein Künstlerkollege] ist mein Erzfeind, weil wir haben es mal zusammen probiert [mit arbeiten], und es ist die absolute Katastrophe gewesen, weil wir uns ohne Beaufsichtigung ins absolute Psychogebilde [=psychologisch sehr heikle Situation] hinein begeben haben. Und ich kann Ihnen sagen wie es geendet hat, ich bin die grosse böse Schwarze Lesbe gewesen wo dann Schuld gewesen ist, wirklich grosse böse Schwarze Frau (lacht). Und ich habe ihm per Verfügung dann eigentlich verboten das Material zu benutzen. [...] Ich hätte es hochinteressant gefunden. Weil er kommt auch aus [Heimatregion von BWs Vater] aber [seine Familie hat eine andere Herkunft], wir sind beide in der Schweiz aufgewachsen und sind knapp eine halbe Generation auseinander, also das wäre hochinteressant gewesen.*

He [a fellow artist] is my nemesis, because we once tried to work together, and it was an absolute disaster, because we went into an absolute psychoconstruction [=psychologically very delicate situation] without supervision. And I can tell you how it ended, I was the big evil Black lesbian whose fault it was, really the big evil Black woman (laughs). And then I actually I filed a court order to prevent him from using the material. [...] I would have found it highly interesting. Because he’s also from [BW’s father’s region of origin] but [his family has a different cultural background], we both grew up in Switzerland and are about half a generation apart from each other, so this would have been highly interesting.

—Barbara Wiegand

Again demonstrating the appeal of doing identity together with other ‘similarly’ positioned subjects, this account at the same time exposes once more that ‘similarities’ do not add up to sameness and connection. The collaboration between Barbara Wiegand and her colleague not only fails on grounds of their diverging sexual subject positions but on grounds of sexuality *as intertwined* with race and gender: Although Barbara Wiegand’s father and her colleague’s parents originate from the same region, they do not share a racial identity, which clears the way for stereotyping based on dominant images of the “Black woman” and the “Black lesbian.” This story indicates that the practice of connecting to people through the assumption of shared experiences of cultural hybridity are not available to queer ‘Other Swiss’ in the way they may be to ‘Other Swiss’ who conform to sexual and gender norms.



To conclude, interviewees who were born in Switzerland or who came to Switzerland as children often sought to connect to people who share the experience of a multiple national, ethnic, or cultural sense of belonging and in particular the experience of feeling like a foreigner in one's parents' homeland. These desires were materialized to varying degrees, yet if materialized, they sometimes failed to establish the desired sense of connection. While Leyla Haddad locates a significant number of "half" friends in her social environment, hardly any such 'Other Swiss' populate Laura Georg's social network: *"Ich bin jetzt gerade selber etwas perplex"* – "I'm actually a bit perplexed myself just now," she says when she realizes in the interview that her circle of friends *"wirklich nichts beinhaltet mit Sri Lanka und mit anderen Ausländerinnen oder so"* – "really doesn't have anything to do with Sri Lanka and with other foreigners or anything like that." However, she suspects that this eventually leads back to the very same concern about feeling foreign at home: *"Ja ich denke ich bin manchmal auch schweizerischer als vielleicht eine andere Schweizerin. Ja. Weil ich das noch ein bisschen mehr brauche zur Identität"* – "Yes I think I'm sometimes more Swiss than maybe the next Swiss [woman]. Yes. Because I need this a bit more for my identity."

Whether actualized or not, and whether successful or not, the very *desire* for sharing cultural hybridity and the troubling experience of feeling foreign in the homeland emerge as an important imaginary space throughout 'hybrid' narratives.

## 7.6 Imagining and Reclaiming the (Parents') Home Country

As Paul Mecheril emphasizes, cultural hybridity not only complicates relationships with the homeland (in this case: Switzerland) but is also productive of specific kinds of connectivities to the parents' (or one parent's) country of origin (Mecheril 2003). Maintaining the focus on the 'Other Swiss' among the interviewees, this sub-chapter engages with disidentification with and imaginations and reclamations of the parents' country of origin, specifically asking how sexuality is implicated in these connectivities.

Relationships to the parents' homeland vary widely. Natascha Schild's reflections about her connection to her homeland Kazakhstan, from which she emigrated with her family at the age of ten, is exemplary of a nostalgic inscription:

TB: *Was macht es mit dir wenn du russisch oder kasachisch hörst?*

NS: *Ja. Es ist schon wichtig für mich, hat so ein Gewicht weil (zögert) ja es ist so ein bisschen das widerspricht sich. Weil andererseits weiss ich dass ich von der russischen oder kasachischen Gesellschaft (zögert) ich jetzt mal behaupt- nicht so akzeptiert werden würde wie jetzt hier in Europa, sagen wir mal wirklich dass ich homosexuell bin oder- ja. Das nicht, aber andererseits fehlt mir das auch also diese- diese Familien[sache?] das ist was ganz unterschiedlich oder wenn man nur zu Besuch irgendwie kommt ne? wird der Tisch aufgetischt und 'Ja komm! Iss mal erstmal!' Und das ist so ein anderes Umgehen na? Und die teilen das letzte Brot mit dir. Und das hört man auch ganz oft dass eh- dass die russische oder diese Kulturen das mit sich bringen diese Warmherzigkeit und die fehlt wiederum [hier].*

TB: How do you feel when you hear Russian or Kazakh?

NS: Yes. It really is important to me, has like a weight because (hesitates) yes it's like a bit- this contradicts itself. Because on the other hand I know that I would not be accepted in the Russian or Kazakh society like that (hesitates) I would claim- that I would not be accepted [there] like here in Europe now, let's say as a homosexual or- yes. Not that, but on the other hand I miss this family [thing?] this is very different if you come for a visit you know?, the table is set and 'Yes, come on! Eat first!' And this is like a different way of interaction, you know? And they will share the last piece of bread with you. And you hear this often, too, that eh- that the Russian or these cultures bring that with them this warm-heartedness and this in turn is lacking [here].

—Natascha Schild

This statement is quoted at length and with all original repetitions and breaks because they seem to signify the contradictions and struggles implied in the relationship Natascha Schild has with her parents' home country. Not in direct answer to the question the speaker first asserts her awareness that it would likely be (more) difficult to live in Kazakhstan as a homosexual (although the hesitations in this section point to the assumptive character of this perspective). From this defensive stance the speaker justifies her sustained nostalgia for the homeland. The addition "You hear this often, too..." expresses her need to corroborate her status as an expert of Kazakh society, which through this very move is called into question. Overall, Kazakhstan emerges as an important point of reference in Natascha Schild's everyday life, representing certain kinds of interactions and values she misses in Switzerland. In her everyday life Natascha Schild tends to this homesickness through her membership in a close-knit group of five Kazakh girls she had met in Germany.

Other interviewees' connectivities to the parents' home country are more *ambivalent* or even *dystopic*, such as Laura Georg's experience of her father's country of origin:

*Ich habe dann- irgendwie ich muss kotzen wegen dem Essen und ich vertrage das Öl nicht und es ist mir zu heiss und ich vertrage die Armut nicht weil ich eben irgendwie auch so halb auch noch dazu, das Land will mich doch irgendwie packen aber- und das bedroht mich dann auch weil ich ich kann das- also ich kann es dann nicht (Pause) [...] Aber eben die Leila [ihre Partnerin] hat gesagt für mich sei eigentlich nicht Sri Lanka der Punkt sondern irgendetwas das dazwischen ist. [...] Es ist irgend einfach etwas nicht hier. Einfach fort. Aber dieses fort finde ich dann nirgends auf der Welt, und eben auch in Sri Lanka nicht. Und also Heimatgefühle habe ich tatsächlich keine. Oder ich lasse keine aufkommen.*

Then I have to- like somehow I have to puke because of the food and the oil doesn't sit well in my stomach and it's too hot for me and I can't bear the poverty because like somehow I half [belong] to it, the country still wants to grab me somehow but- and this then also threatens me because I can't- I can't do it then (pause) [...] But as I said, Leila [her partner] said that for me Sri Lanka is not the point but something that is in between. [...] It's just something not here. Just away from here. But I don't find this 'away' anywhere in the world, and not in Sri Lanka either. And, well, indeed I don't have a sense of home [anywhere]. Or I don't let it emerge.

—Laura Georg

Whether connected to a sense of home or a sense of rejection and unbelonging, from these two quotes the parents' country of origin emerges as a site through which home is necessarily negotiated and as such also represents a reclamation and reinscription of these places. As will be discussed next, sexuality plays a crucial role in these (dis)identifications.

In contrast to interviewees who migrated to Switzerland as adults, and in contrast to existing evidence of "roots migration"<sup>14</sup> of non-queer 'second generation' immigrants in Switzerland (Wessendorf 2007), none of the interviewees addressed here are considering a more permanent 'return' to their parents' country of origin. As exemplified by Natascha Schild's statement, these reflections foreground concerns about homophobia. Since they have not lived in their parents' country of origin as adults and have never lived same-sex relationships there, interviewees have to rely on their imaginations of the lives of same-sex loving women in these places. These imaginaries are formed on the basis of media reports and family stories on the one hand and childhood memories, personal experiences, and observations from holiday visits on the other. However, since actual acquaintances with women-loving women are rare, interviewees distrust their own imagination of these realities. The resulting insecurity – mostly expressed non-verbally in interviews in the form of hesitations and a search for words – can be read as grounded in an implicit awareness of, and reluctance to adopt, Western discursive formations constructing the homeland as homophobic. Yet it is felt that parents' and families' representations of their homelands and especially their conceptualizations of, or silence about, same-sex desire in these places cannot be trusted given their different positionalities as (frequently conservative) heterosexuals.

However, interviewees also seek to be *authors* rather than only readers of their parents' countries of origin and strive to wrest the definition of these places from the grip of dominant heteronormative discourses. These reinscriptions can happen through the establishment of contact to queer people in these countries. Laura Georg, Leyla Haddad, Natascha Schild, and Nermina Petar all find themselves wondering what it is *really* like to live 'there' as a queer person and try to imagine the lives they would be leading and the kinds of persons they would be if they lived in these countries. As discussed earlier, Nermina Petar is convinced she would not be another person if she lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina: "*Ich wäre auch unten lesbisch*" – "I would be lesbian down there as well." Her insistence on locating her same-sex desire within herself rather than in her social context can be read as a counter discourse to her parents' view that her homosexuality is a result of over-exposure to Swiss society. It is therefore not only the troubling lacuna of information about women-loving women in Bosnia and Herzegovina that eventually motivates Nermina Petar to establish contact to queer women "down there" but also her determination to make her parents accept that there are "more of us," following the logic that proving the existence of lesbianism in 'true Bosnians' who live in Bosnia and Herzegovina would automatically disrupt the myth that there are no lesbian Bosnians. Her effort to connect to lesbian compatriots in her homeland is further driven by her sense of isolation in her struggle against the conservative heteronormative values she

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14 Roots migration describes "the migration of the second generation to their parents' homeland" (Wessendorf 2007:1083).

perceives to prevail in her family and generally in the Bosnian diasporic community in Switzerland. *“Wie werden die [Lesben in Bosnien-Herzegowina] mit dem fertig? Familie, Kind haben, Kind nicht haben, einfach das typische Heteroleben und du bist lesbisch? [...] ich suche das Gespräch halt, zu den Landsleuten die das Gleiche erleben”* – “How do they [lesbians in Bosnia and Herzegovina] cope with it? Family, having kids, not having kids, just the typical hetero life and you are lesbian? [...] I’m just looking for exchange with compatriots who experience the same.” To emancipate her connections to Bosnia and Herzegovina from her family network, she uses the internet for her search. Sharing experiences over the internet proves difficult, however, as not many Bosnian women answer her queries. And while she has established regular text message conversations to one or two women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these are complicated by language issues: Nermina Petar has lost touch with the developments of the vernacular and generally lacks vocabulary. Marked by misunderstandings, these often laborious contacts have ultimately failed to deepen.

A self-declared Bosnian “patriot,” wresting the definition of what is Bosnia(n) from her parents’ grip and reclaiming a Bosnian identity as a lesbian is essential for Nermina Petar. Similarly, Laura Georg is irritated with her father’s quip (in the context of a discussion about Sri Lankan politics) that “You have no right to speak about Sri Lanka.” She perceives her father to be acting as a gatekeeper between her family and their relatives in Sri Lanka. Laura Georg asserts that this constellation is partly of her own making, since previously she had hardly made an effort to establish independent contact to her Sri Lankan relatives. However, she has become increasingly irritated by the resistance she has encountered while attempting to intensify her relationship with an aunt she perceives to be ‘different,’ and possibly attracted to women. Her emerging interest in queer women’s lives in Sri Lanka demonstrates her continued investment in this place despite the sense of rejection she has experienced there.

To conclude: For the ‘Other Swiss’ among the interviewees, the parents’ home countries, while not considered as places to live in the long term, represent an important surface of inscription for homing desires. They further represent a site of negotiation of national, ethnic, and cultural identities as intertwined with sexual identities. Aspiring to act as co-authors rather than only readers of these places, interviewees reclaim the parents’ home country by questioning images leavened by heteronormative discourses, and by locating women-loving women in these countries. This serves both to counteract the myth of there being no lesbians ‘there’ as well as to share experiences with these women-loving women. Establishing connections to these places that are located in the same country but separate from those of their parents’, they seek to reconfigure their imaginations of the parental homeland on their own terms.

## 7.7 Conclusion

Queer migrant women’s struggle to formulate the interstices they inhabit with respect to their sexual, national, and ethnic identities respectively testifies to the tendency of hegemonic discourses in Switzerland to separate immigrant and gay/lesbian spaces and lives. This separation is fostered both by discourses that locate homophobia in im-

migrants' homelands and diasporic communities (which were sometimes reiterated in the accounts analyzed here) and a persistent imaginary of the homosexual as implicitly white and non-migrant. As Anne-Marie Fortier contends with respect to the difficulty queer migrant subjects experience in overcoming this separation, "the unfeasible reconciliation is largely connected to the spatial metaphors which, much like languages of immigration, suggest that the meeting of the 'two cultures' would entail moving from one into another" (Fortier 1999:2).

This conceptual and actual segregation effectuates ambiguity vis-à-vis mainstream diasporic and lesbian circles, and moreover leads to a segregation of the life-worlds that tend to these different identities separately. It also feeds the desire to be whole in one place. This desire is met by means of strategies that aim to create 'intersectional' queer/diasporic spaces in which crucial aspects considered to be formative of the Self are recognized in one and the same time/space. One such strategy is resistance to identify with *any* minoritarian space by taking an anti-identitarian stance. In such a view, exclusionary 'ghettos,' lesbian and diasporic and others, are shunned and replaced with an inclusive philosophy when establishing social relations. A further strategy is to 'queer' spaces that are hegemonially inscribed as diasporic, and vice versa 'diasporize' spaces that are hegemonially inscribed as ("Swiss-Swiss"/non-migrant) lesbian. Such queerings/diasporizations, however fleeting, allow for a momentary sense of home by a sudden visibility of the queer-*and*-migrant body, who is otherwise invisible as such. In the absence of designated queer/diasporic spaces, intersectional homing desires are moreover attached to the bodies of queer compatriots both in Switzerland and in one's own/the parents' homeland, or to other queer immigrants or 'Other Swiss.' However, due to a lack of eligible candidates for such partnerships or friendships, these desires often remain confined to the realm of the imaginative, especially in the case of interviewees who migrated to Switzerland as adults.

Queer migrant women's relationships to 'mainstream' diasporic circles emerge as highly ambivalent and are marked by experiences of exclusion, which are mainly related to interviewees' sexual identification and their concomitant failure to adhere to the heteronormative prescript. This indicates that the protection diasporic communities offer as bulwarks against wider racism and xenophobia is not available to queer migrant women in the same way as it is to sexually conforming women. At the same time, it was shown that *the* diaspora is not homophobic as such. On the one hand, as the accounts discussed here testify to, homophobia *does exist* in certain diasporic spaces. In this context it was argued that negative attitudes towards homosexuality must be read against the backdrop of heteropatriarchal homeland nationalisms as well as in the context of racism in Switzerland. In order to mitigate the negative effects of racism, diasporic communities work towards constructing positive images of themselves. However, these images can be shaped by masculinist nationalist ideals framing the virtuous woman as heeder of national culture, which puts diasporic women and girls under increased control and pressure. Also, in this context I again drew attention to homonationalist discourses in Switzerland. These relegate homophobia to racialized and ethnicized Others, diverting from the fact that among the 'Swiss,' too, homophobia persists, and erasing differences *within* the allegedly essentially homophobic 'Muslim,' 'African,' 'Balkan,' etc. societies and communities.

On the other hand, there are also queer/diasporic linkages, more scattered, more informal, more transnational, more virtual, and more culturally and sexually hybrid, through which queer migrant women reconfigure home and a sense of connection. The existence of these queer/diasporic linkages debunks the conceptual and actual separation of diasporic and lesbian spaces effectuated through hegemonic heterosexist discourses around sexualities and cultures and allows queer migrant women to be feel more complete in one place. However, where there was no choice but to make a choice, the lesbian identity and lesbian spaces tended to be favored as the space where “I can be most the way I am.”

## 8. Sexual Citizenship

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The discussion in Chapter 5 of queer migrant women's positionality vis-à-vis the figure of the lesbian exposed that, for queer migrant women, successful 'integration' in Switzerland, in part, hinges on becoming a 'good lesbian' oriented towards the homonormative ideals prevailing in Switzerland. However, since discursive formations eventually render the positionality of a lesbian unattainable by a migrant, queer migrant subjects become trapped in a paradoxical space of (n)either/(n)or. This leaves them struggling for the definition and acknowledgment of their sexual-cum-national identities in everyday interactions with partners, friends, family, and work colleagues.

These are always also negotiations of *sexual citizenship*, which are crucially shaped by dominant discourses produced by the state and other institutions and organizations. In Chapter 3.4, I took up Eithne Luibhéid's suggestion to frame the ways in which migrant sexualities are regulated in terms of a *carceral archipelago* (Luibhéid 2002, Foucault 1977). This concept addresses how sexual normativity is produced and enforced by a system of surveillance that works across a number of institutions such as immigration and asylum procedures, welfare legislation, labor market regulations, professional associations, and so on, which together create "a regime of power that *all* migrants must negotiate" (Luibhéid 2008a:174, emphasis original). This chapter concentrates on how such state discourses, legislations, policies, and practices shape the lives of the queer migrant women interviewed for this study, as well as the strategies they devise to work through, with, around, or against these rules and regulations.

In the biographical accounts, two of the most dynamic and contested legal frameworks in contemporary Switzerland emerge as the most significant sites through which queer migrant sexualities are disciplined and controlled. The first regulates the formalization of same-sex partnerships, the other immigration and asylum procedure.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 8.1 discusses the different stances interviewees take toward *partnership formalization*

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1 Same-sex partnership registration and immigration/asylum procedure are both regulated by a set of laws, some of which touch upon both issues. The pertinent laws are located in the Swiss constitution (*Bundesverfassung* (BV)); the *Bundesgesetz über das internationale Privatrecht* (IPRG); the *Bürgerrechtsgesetz* (BüG), which regulates access to Swiss citizenship; the *Ausländergesetz* AuG (literally 'Foreigner Law'), which regulates regular immigration and family reunification; the *Asylgesetz* AsylG (asylum law), which regulates asylum procedure; and the *Partnerschaftsgesetz* (PartG),

and analyzes how they negotiate the regulations and practices tied up with it. Chapter 8.2 examines how Swiss state policies and practices *discipline migrant sexualities* by producing and enforcing normative sexualities before emigration, at the border, and after immigration. This discussion particularly focuses on how these policies and practices affect the self-conceptions, everyday lives, and migration biographies of queer migrant women, as well as the strategies they devise to mitigate the negative effects of these policies.

## 8.1 Partnership Registration: An Intimate Decision?

The federal Partnership Act came into effect shortly after the fieldwork for this research had started, replacing an uneven patchwork of earlier cantonal acts (see Chapter 2.2). Throughout the data gathering period, same-sex partnership formalization was extremely topical and dynamic, with old barriers and possibilities being removed and new ones being established continuously. The issue was on everyone's lips, and accordingly all interviewees had given the matter more or less thought, or were feeling the effects of these rapidly shifting legal frameworks and associated practices. This sub-chapter examines queer migrant women's perspectives on and experiences with partnership registration. The analysis, on the one hand, focuses on how transnational configurations of same-sex relationships are implicated in queer migrant women's views on, and practices with regard to, partnership registration. On the other hand, it engages with the question of how interviewees' considerations about registration are shaped by the fact that 'marrying' is often inextricably tied to the right to stay in the country.

While interviewees generally welcomed the new possibility of formalizing a partnership, it at the same time remained a highly ambivalent issue. Paradoxically, registering was tied to a sense of coercion, especially in those cases in which the Partnership Act had been intended to bring the most relief. This concerned cases in which partnership formalization represented the only means to obtain a residence permit in Switzerland, a situation that was recurrent in interviewees' accounts. Although most interviewees entered the country with student visas or work permits, these permits expired at some point, requiring them to come up with a different strategy if they wanted to stay in the country. The remaining possibilities were often limited to options presented in the context of regulations concerning family reunification. As discussed earlier (Chapter 2.3), before the Partnership Act became operative, the only legal possibility of effectuating family reunification for a same-sex partner lay in the 'hardship case regulation.' While this regulation allowed for an individual case assessment, at the same time it required considerable social, cultural, and economic capital to be successful. Accordingly, many queer migrants instead resorted to 'fictitious' heterosexual marriages to be able to stay in Switzerland. The federal Partnership Act significantly facilitated family reunification for homosexual partners and has almost completely replaced the 'hardship case regula-

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which regulates the marital status "*in eingetragener Partnerschaft*" / "in registered partnership" (see also Chapter 2).



tion.’ However, as will be explored in this sub-chapter, the Act has not solved all issues for queer migrants and has even created new ones.

This sub-chapter discusses the stances interviewees took toward partnership formalization, and the strategies they devised to negotiate attendant regulations, policies, and practices. These can be categorized as follows: First, partnership registration was always tied up with a complex *process of negotiation* among partners. These were always also contestations of what interviewees called homeland “mentality” or “culture,” by which interviewees mainly signified their struggles with internalized cultural values and norms that discourage same-sex partnership registration. As discussed previously, while non-migrant lesbians in Switzerland also have to negotiate conflicting values, racialized queer migrants additionally have to navigate discourses that pit their allegedly homophobic culture against an allegedly gay-friendly Western culture. This in turn converts the question of whether to register a partnership or not to a contestation of loyalties in terms of national and cultural identities. Against this backdrop, partnership registration usually only became a viable strategy after a lengthy process of ‘getting used to the idea.’ This personal development has a distinct air of coercion about it: As registration becomes a ‘must,’ being the only way that will allow one or both partners to stay in Switzerland, queer migrants are *forced* to accommodate same-sex partnership registration in their value systems. Second, some interviewees predominantly viewed partnership registration as a *transnational strategy* that enabled them to create options and possibilities and to improve their personal mobility and safety. This contrasts with the third stance toward partnership registration, which mainly frames “marriage” in terms of *romantic views* on couplehood and of lifelong dreams fulfilled. Lastly, there were those interviewees who had *decided against* registering their partnership, despite the sometimes precarious legal situations in which they found themselves. The reasons for not registering diverge, but most accounts at least also cite concerns that partnership formalization may restrict their ability to travel or move back to their home country.

### 8.1.1 Negotiating Partnership Formalization

Until recently, Ariane Velusat’s partner Florencia Díaz, an Argentinian citizen, lived in Switzerland as a *Sans Papier*.<sup>2</sup> When the Partnership Act became operative, the young couple were initially told that it was not possible for them to register, since Florencia Díaz was already in the country illegally.<sup>3</sup> They were at a loss as to what to do : “*On était mais constamment dans un drame, vraiment, elle se voyait repartir, moi je me voyais faire je sais pas quoi, je me disais ‘Bon au moins je finis ma formation et je pars. Ben je pars à Argentine voilà.’*” – “We were in constant drama, really, she saw herself returning, me I saw myself

2 Swiss term for undocumented immigrants or generally immigrants that stay in the country illegally.

3 While this information was incorrect at the time, this regulation did come into effect in 2011 (*Lex Brunner*), see <https://www.sans-papiers.ch> (downloaded on July 15, 2014). Today *Sans Papiers* have to leave the country to register their partnership abroad and apply for family reunion or have to reapply for a visa to return for registration. This regulation continues to be contested.

doing I don't know what, I told myself 'Okay I at least finish my professional training and I leave. Okay I leave for Argentina, that's it.'" To Ariane Velusat's relief a lawyer informed them that registration is possible nevertheless. "*Ah voilà c'est ça*" – "Okay that's decided," she thought, but her partner assessed the situation differently: "*Et Florencia elle m'a dit 'Non stop, moi je me marie pas pour les papiers.' J'ai dit 'Non mais tu peux pas dire ça.' Bon. Ça nous a pris un an et demi, pour nous dire 'Oui on le fait, et pas uniquement pour les papiers.' Et oui ça nous change la vie.*" – "And Florencia told me 'No, stop, I won't get married for the papers.' I said, 'No but you can't say that.' Well. It took us a year and a half to tell ourselves 'Yes we do it, and not just for the papers.' And yes, this changes our lives."

Although Ariane Velusat and her partner are aware that registration is their only means to ensure an unthreatened common life in Switzerland, and despite Florencia Díaz' precarious situation that not only carries the constant threat of deportation but moreover renders her unable to apply for an apprenticeship, a job, or a bank account in Switzerland, the couple refuse or are unable to view registration as a pure formality. Instead, they take their time to adopt the idea as their own and eventually manage to arrive at the conviction that they will not only register their partnership "for the papers."

While such issues have to be negotiated by heterosexual migrants as well, in the case of queer migrants the reluctance to register "just for the papers," even in the face of legal precariousness, is often additionally complicated by notions of heteronormative homeland 'culture.' When I asked Ramiza Salakhova and Nara Agayeva whether they were considering registration in order to finally terminate Nara Agayeva's asylum procedure – which at the time of the interview had extended over more than four years – the couple explained:

NA: *Weisst du, für Ramiza ist es immer noch sehr schwierig, ihre Homosexualität zu akzeptieren. Und wenn sie sich jetzt dann bewerben muss, dann müsste sie auf diesen Formularen das immer so ankreuzen (Ramiza nickt), und hier im konservativen Kanton Luzern- ich würde morgen den B-Ausweis [Aufenthaltsbewilligung] bekommen.*

RS: *Ja man muss das ankreuzen auf den Formularen.*

NA: *Weisst du wir haben kein Problem mit unserer Homosexualität, und wir wären schon 'out,' aber rein theoretisch, von unserer Mentalität aus der wir kommen- (hält inne)*

TB: *Aber so als Strategie im schlimmsten Fall?*

NA: *Ja, natürlich, als Strategie haben wir das. Ich habe bei [der Anwältin] angerufen um zu fragen wo meine Bewilligung bleibt von der ARK [Asylrekurs-Kommission] und dann hat sie gesagt übrigens könnt ihr euch ja jetzt eintragen lassen. Aber siehst du wenn sogar ich mir überlege, wann der richtige Zeitpunkt ist, um mich bei der Arbeit zu outen- und mich kennen sie dort als Mensch, aber wenn du da so kommst und sie kennen dich nicht-*

RS: *Aber wir wollen auch nicht einfach das machen wegen- es muss auch stimmen. Wir wollen nicht lügen. Wir wollen nicht so wie diese die das machen-*

TB: *Gegen innen.*

NA: *Ja wir wollen das nicht machen nur wegen der Bewilligung.*

NA: You know, for Ramiza it's still very difficult to accept her homosexuality. And when she has to apply for jobs now, then she would have to check this [box] on the forms

(Ramiza nods), and here in the conservative canton of Lucerne- I would get the B permit [residence permit] tomorrow.

RS: Yes you have to check that [box] on the forms.

NA: You know we don't have a problem with our homosexuality, and we would be 'out,' but strictly theoretically speaking, from the mentality we come from- (pauses)

TB: But like as a strategy in the worst case?

NA: Yes of course as a strategy we have that. I called [the lawyer] to ask where my permission from the ARK [asylum recourse commission] was and then she said by the way you can register your partnership now. But see, if even I think about when the right point in time has come to come out at work- and they know me as a person there, but if you come like that and they don't know you-

RS: But we also don't want to do that because of- it also has to be right. We don't want to lie. We don't want to do it like these-

TB: It has to be right on the inside?

RS: Yes we don't want to do this just because of the permit.

—Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova

The utterance, “You know we don't have a problem with our homosexuality, and we would be ‘out,’ but strictly theoretically speaking, from the mentality we come from,” crystallizes the origin of Nara Agayeva's ambivalence concerning partnership formalization. On the one hand, it expresses her awareness that to become a ‘good lesbian’ entails a ‘coming out,’ an assertive attitude about one's homosexuality, and ideally also partnership registration. On the other hand, this act is hindered by her own homeland “mentality,” which in itself remains ambivalent: “The mentality we come from” does not foresee formalization of same-sex partnerships, and yet it remains *hers*. In this moment, Nara Agayeva refuses to reject ownership of this “mentality” for the sake of fulfilling the Western lesbian norm; to allow herself to be coerced into partnership registration by Swiss asylum procedure would mean to betray her cultural identity. In the cracks of this moment of resistance the possibility of representing both a lesbian *and* a citizen of the homeland flashes through from between the interstices of Nara Agayeva's negotiation of Swiss homonormative ideals as coerced by Swiss asylum procedure on the one hand and what she identifies as her homeland “mentality” on the other.

Nara Agayeva's ‘culture’ argument is echoed in Siti Mohd Amin's account. For a short while, a Malaysian girlfriend and her child lived with Siti Mohd Amin in Switzerland. When this partner asked her to marry her, Siti Mohd Amin declined on the basis of their shared “culture”:

I say I never do married with the same- same- girl and girl, you know, I never have this experience, so even I don't think about that, you know? [...] It's very bad idea in how about our culture, I say our culture is not allowed to do that, ‘cause we are same culture, so she know that I also know and- we don't do it you know.

—Siti Mohd Amin

As Nara Agayeva invokes her and her partner's “mentality,” Siti Mohd Amin calls upon “our culture” to substantiate her declination to marry, and is moreover alienated by the fact that her girlfriend, who is of the “same culture,” even came up with the idea to begin

with, asserting that she should know better. Now, several years later, Siti Mohd Amin regrets her decision. Like others before, her girlfriend eventually left her for a man and returned to Malaysia, leaving her alone once more. Her increasing social isolation in her everyday life in Switzerland, coupled with her longstanding desire to find a committed partner, has caused a shift in Siti Mohd Amin's perspective on partnership registration:

SMA: And now, I thinking myself- (smiles) Okay, I don't do again the same mistake what I do before [...]

TB: So if another one asks you to marry you will think about it?

SMA: Yeah. I think, to keep long relationship, you know? I know it's quite boring every two, three years I change a new girlfriend, ugh, I hate it also.

—Siti Mohd Amin

Although in Siti Mohd Amin's case registration is less tied to a sense of coercion, the shift in her value system with respect to partnership registration is nevertheless grounded in a sense of urgency, which in her case is the desire to mitigate her increasing social isolation. But although such shifts in personal perspectives on partnership registration are tied to precarious situations and thus have a sense of coercion to them, a close reading of the above two cases suggests that these developments cannot be read in terms of subjugation to Swiss immigration procedure or adaptation to the Swiss/lesbian norm (alone). Instead, partnership registration emerges as a crucial arena in which sexual, national, and cultural identities are negotiated. Within these negotiations, the issue of partnership registration can also become a site of resistance to expected behavior, especially in cases in which partnership registration remains the only option to secure a residence permit. Both couples, Ariane Velusat and Florencia Díaz, and Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova, resist registration on grounds of their values and “culture” or “mentality” respectively, even in the face of legal precarity. However, as registration becomes a ‘must,’ queer migrants are required to accommodate this fact in their value systems.

By contrast, Nour Saber strategically uses registration of a relationship that no longer exists to secure her residence permit. She justifies this as follows:

*Tu t'installes avec quelqu'un, et tu viens en tant qu'étrangère et puis tu t'installes avec ta compagne ici en Suisse, tu te paces c'est quand même un symbole d'amour, tu passes trois ans c'est aussi une preuve que c'est pas vraiment une utilisation de pacs pour, pour euh, contourner les institutions quelque chose comme ça, mais je comprends que malheureusement bon des gens dans ce genre de situation y a des gens qui profitent du système aussi, pour avoir des permis de séjour, pour s'installer ici en Suisse ils font des pacs blancs ou quelque chose comme ça. Mais ce que je trouve injuste c'est que dans ma situation on- voilà moi j'ai tout laissé pour venir s'installer ici et puis juste maintenant je me retrouve prisonnière, et puis je dépends complètement de ma compagne. [...] C'est-à-dire en fait c'est la loi elle-même qui pousse les gens à la contourner. A faire des magouilles.*

You come here as a foreigner and then you settle down with your partner here in Switzerland, you register your partnership, this is a symbol of love after all, you spend three years together, this is also proof that it's not really utilization of partnership reg-

istration to, to eh, bypass the institutions or something like that, but I understand that unfortunately well people in this type of situation, there are people who profit from the system also, in order to have the residence permit, in order to be able to settle down in Switzerland they register fictitious partnerships or something like that. But what I find unjust is that in my situation they- well I've left everything behind to settle down here and now I find myself a prisoner, and so I completely depend on my partner. [...] In other words, it's in fact the law itself that pushes people to bypass it. To fiddle with it.

—Nour Saber

The “*magouilles*” (fiddling with the law) Nour Saber perceives herself to be engaging in refers to keeping her partnership registered even though the couple has already broken up. To unregister would mean she would have to leave the country. The fact that she engages in these *magouilles* is explained by the injustice of the law itself. At the same time, the above statement frames Nour Saber's situation as exceptional, to be distinguished from those of ‘other immigrants’ who really *do* abuse the system; in contrast to them, she really *does* love her partner, and she really *did* live with her, and she really *did* intend to stay with her for the years to come. To be suddenly rendered a criminal only because the relationship does not last as she was hoping in her view exposes the law as inadequate and out of touch with reality: “*Les gens se séparent, les gens font une pause, [...] on prend deux apparts*” – “People separate, people take a break, [...] people get different apartments,” which the law (which decrees that a couple needs to be registered for a certain number of years before a foreign partner can obtain an independent status of residence) does not factor in. By positioning herself in juxtaposition to the ‘bad’ immigrants that exploit Swiss immigration regulations by engaging in ‘fictitious’ marriages, and by framing her own actions as rightful in contrast, Nour Saber's statement asks for multiple readings. While the statement is complicit in racist discourses in Switzerland, which is here used to frame Nour Saber's position as exceptional, it at the same time represents a strategy of resistance against expulsion, and of saving face and dignity in the face of denigration and exclusion.

In sum, in cases in which the right to stay in the country hinges on partnership registration, partnership formalization emerges as a ‘must’ to a similar extent that it represents a redemptive option. This creates a condition in which interviewees are forced to accommodate the idea of same-sex marriage in their value systems. This is often a difficult and lengthy process, especially because affected interviewees did not see partnership formalization as a purely formal matter but instead perceived it as a practice that necessarily affects the internal qualities and character of a partnership. For instance, the couples were wary that binational partnership registration creates dependencies that inadvertently establish inequalities within the relationship, creating circumstances that contribute to what the Act purportedly seeks to prevent, such as unstable relationships and illegal registration. In other words, in these situations the Act itself creates the realities it seeks to foreclose.

Another kind of partnership formalization, which has lost some, but by no means all, of its topicality since, marked a crucial turning point in some accounts. In the face of

the administrative hurdles and risks involved in the 'hardship case procedure' prior to the introduction of the Partnership Act (see Chapter 2.3.1), *heterosexual* marriage was sometimes used strategically to secure a residence permit. The following paragraphs discussing this strategy are based on two interviews with queer migrant women who had married men in order to obtain a residence permit, as well as on two interviews with an LGBT rights activist (the president of *SLAP*) and an immigration lawyer specializing in immigration and homosexuality. For reasons of anonymity the concerned queer migrant women I interviewed myself did not wish to discuss this issue in a formal interview, hence they do not appear on the list of interviewees in the annex (Annex I).

The character of these strategic heterosexual marriages varied. In some cases, they involved the transfer of considerable amounts of money. Other cases were acts of solidarity and mutual support: Compatriots helping another, a gay and a lesbian couple marrying one another. However, this strategy sometimes only *seemed* to represent the "path of least resistance" (as the president of *SLAP* put it), as it established dependencies that in some cases led to abusive and exploitative situations akin to those heterosexual migrants and especially migrant women often find themselves exposed to. However, there were also reports of cases in which, from the point of view of the queer migrants, the strategy succeeded, sometimes with benefits that exceeded those of its original function. One case in particular demonstrated that these 'fictitious marriages' are not always as fictitious as their name might suggest. This lesbian woman – one of those I interviewed informally – reported that she had been living in the same household with her husband (a compatriot of hers) for ten years, in a relationship of mutual support and respect. During this time, she had had some relationships with women, but her husband remained the calm anchor in her life. "You need somebody, that's it," she summarizes the quality of their connection.

While today the Partnership Act renders the strategy of heterosexual marriage in theory obsolete for many queer migrants, the conversations with the women who used this strategy indicated that this strategy will continue to be used, for instance by women who are single; who do not understand themselves to be homosexual; or who cannot imagine formalizing a partnership with another woman. While the Partnership Act is likely to be used to obtain a residence permit in the future as well, in the course of this research I did not (yet?) encounter any women registering a partnership with another woman for this purpose. This is likely also due to the fact that the main interview phase for this project took place shortly before and not too long after the introduction of the Partnership Act in 2007. However, this (non-)finding may also be a first indication that marrying a man (instead of a woman) may carry advantages beyond a residence permit, such as upholding the pretense of a heteronormative life vis-à-vis the family or other people. At least in the case of one strategic heterosexual marriage I learnt of, this factor played a central role. In any case, binational same-sex partnerships with one Swiss partner or registered partnerships among non-Swiss citizens are certainly already met with as much suspicion by the authorities as corresponding heterosexual marriages. In the case of an LGBT activist I interviewed, one day the local police officer, whom this activist knew well personally as the latter was a member of the municipal council of this rural community, appeared at his door unannounced to check whether his Asian registered partner indeed did live with him.

### 8.1.2 Partnership Formalization as a Transnational Strategy

There were also research participants whose permits of residence did not hinge on partnership registration, and who conceptualized partnership formalization as a *transnational strategy* to extend personal options and mobility rather than (only) as a romantic act or a strategy to obtain the right to inherit from a partner or visit the partner in hospital, for instance. These women mainly undertook registration because it offered administrative advantages, like an improved status of residence allowing for more extended stays abroad. Still, registration was always *also* seen as a symbolic tie that reaches beyond administrative concerns. Ayesha Umar's following statement is exemplary of such considerations:

TB: *Was hat dazu geführt, zu diesem Entscheid euch registrieren zu lassen?*

AU: *Das war keine emotionelle Entscheidung, sondern mehr eine Kopfentscheidung, dass wir egal wie das Beziehung aussieht das einfach zu machen, miteinander zu wohnen und leben zu können. Ja. [...]*

TB: *Okay. Und ihr habt das einfach gemacht um einfach ohne weitere Bewilligungsprobleme und so weiter zusammen leben zu können?*

AU: *Ja. Also einfach dafür und ein bisschen schon eine Sicherheit zusammen, oder? Ein bisschen Commitment zueinander zu geben also wenn irgendwas passiert dann diese Sicherheit für uns gibt. Ja.*

TB: And what led to it, to this decision to register?

AU: This was not an emotional decision, but more of a rational decision, that we'll just do this no matter the state of our relationship, in order to be able to live together. Yes. [...]

TB: Okay. And you simply did this to just be able to live together without any further problems concerning permits of residence and so on?

AU: Yes. Just for that and a bit, a certain security together, you know? Give each other a bit of commitment in case anything happens then there is this security for us. Yes.

—Ayesha Umar

At the time of this interview, there was a great deal of motion in Ayesha Umar and her partner's relationship. They had moved apart, experimenting with new forms of relationships and probing whether they still want to be together. Despite these uncertainties, they decided to formalize their partnership in Switzerland, although they had already registered it in another Western European country. As Ayesha Umar's above statement illustrates, with their registration the couple intended to create a safe haven within which they can experiment with their relationship without having to fear interference from the state in their intimate decisions. As an avowed cosmopolitan, Ayesha Umar wants to be able to move freely, nationally and internationally, and to have the possibility *not* to live together, or *not* to live in Switzerland, while at the same time retaining the option of coming back. However, despite the fact that the decision to register was much more "rational" than "emotional," beyond formal arguments it is still clearly meant to install commitment and a sense of security *within* the partnership through its current turbulences. In other words, even where partnership registration was pre-

dominantly effectuated on the basis of strategic deliberations, it always also remained a symbol of love and commitment that reaches beyond rational arguments, and which as such has its own effects on a relationship.

### 8.1.3 Romantic Views on 'Marriage'

Such predominantly strategic perspectives on registration stand in stark contrast to Augusta Wakari's view on marriage. She views partnership formalization predominantly as an *act of romance*. However, even here partnership registration does not appear as unproblematic. The following statement exposes Augusta Wakari's perspective on her "marriage," which had taken place between our first and second interviews:

It's my dream actually since before. But before I got married I couldn't believe myself have to take medicine to calm me down. I was really like (tense) 'Hhu (tense) I'm getting married I'm getting married!' and then- 'How if eh- if she find another one? And we are married?' It's not like we are just girlfriends you know? [...] Until now for me it is not easy to trust people [...], because before I wanna trust but then along the way too many things happened, they play with another man while still in relationship with me, so it is very difficult for me to trust them, and now it's really really different, [...] she [her partner] really shows me that 'It is okay, you are safe, it is okay to trust.' [...] It sounds very simple but when one should master that, you have the sweetest life because everything is in pure heaven once you believe inside. But that's the most difficult thing. But I'm willing to learn that.

—Augusta Wakari

On the one hand, marriage promises the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, but on the other hand evokes negative experiences with previous partners. As discussed in Chapter 5, in retrospect Augusta Wakari assesses that she had been pushed into a masculine role in her relationships in Indonesia, which had exposed her to separations from feminine girlfriends who would often cheat on her with men. These experiences now render it difficult for her to trust a partner. At the same time, she sees the ability to trust as pivotal in reaching the "heaven" of marriage.

### 8.1.4 Reasons not to Register

Some interviewees had explicitly decided *not* to register their partnership. Some of these cases were mentioned before: Barbara Wiegand is repulsed by proliferating homonormativity, which she sees as increasingly marginalizing more "exalted" and "non-conformist" queer people like herself, who might choose to devise alternative forms of relationships beyond couple- and motherhood; Beatriz Kraus does not see a reason why she should obtain a certificate from the state telling her that she is together with her partner; and Marta López is concerned with the notion of ownership tied to partnership formalization, not seeing how such a concept could support her in implementing her emerging ideal of open relationships. While these views on partnership registration are also represented among non-migrant queer people (see Chapter 6), there are some rea-



sons *not* to register a partnership that are directly tied to interviewees' positionalities as migrants.

Decisions not to marry often hinge on the fear of not being able to return to the homeland again, or of being restricted in one's personal mobility. For Jasmine Sieto, registering a partnership is not an option because she sees this as threatening her ability to return to assume her role as the eldest in her family in Indonesia (see Chapter 6.1.3). Since she is single at the moment, the issue is not of particular urgency, but her account suggests that should she meet someone, she would view the question of registration primarily from the perspective of a prospective returnee. To make this case she draws on the situation of two Indonesian women in Holland who she is friends with: "I know two people in Holland, they also cannot go back again to Indonesia, yeah, because they get married and then they not accepted in Indonesia." Not marrying leaves open the door for a return more widely.

In sum, while the positionalities of participants in this study with regard to 'marrying' varied widely, they were always inextricably *also* tied to their positionalities as migrants. While there is no question that the Partnership Act has brought relief to many binational (with one Swiss partner) or non-Swiss same-sex couples and has significantly extended queer migrants' options and mobility, it by no means erases all issues queer migrants grappled with before the introduction of the Act. For those who are forced to register their partnership in order to obtain a residence permit, registration is always tied to a sense of coercion. This may result in paradoxical outcomes, in which the Act creates the realities it seeks to discourage, such as unstable relationships or 'fictitious' registration or marriage. The question of whether to register a partnership is further tied up with a renegotiation of value systems tied to national and cultural identities. Within these conflicting loyalties, partnership registration also emerges as a site of *resistance*, as some queer migrant women refuse to bow to the prescripts of immigration procedure (that is, to register) for 'cultural' reasons even in the face of severe legal precarity. Finally, it must not be forgotten that the Act only facilitates the entry of queer migrants who are in binational relationships or in relationships with non-Swiss citizen with a residence permit, while failing to engage with the plight of queer migrants who are single or in relationships with foreign nationals that are equally barred from access to a residence permit.

## 8.2 Producing and Controlling Sexualities at and within the Border

This sub-chapter is concerned with how Swiss state and non-state regulations, discourses, policies, and practices produce, control, and discipline migrant sexualities before emigration, at the point of entry, and even after immigration. The first part addresses the ways in which migrant sexualities are disciplined before migration, at the border itself, and in the initial controlling practices carried out by immigration and asylum authorities. It exposes the difficulties queer migrant women face if they lack a formal 'pretext' for entering the country, and furthermore raises the question of who is absent from this study. The second part analyzes how state policies and practices,

especially those related to the regulation of immigration and asylum procedure on the one hand and same-sex partnership registration on the other, continue to affect the self-conceptions, everyday lives, and biographies of queer migrant women even after immigration. A final part revisits asylum procedure, demonstrating how queer asylum seekers are forced to dissociate themselves from their homeland in order to be granted access to Switzerland.

### 8.2.1 “Il faut vraiment un ‘prétexte’”: Regulating Sexuality before Emigration and at the Border

As the example of the couple Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova shows, migrant sexualities are already disciplined and controlled *before* emigration. The couple fled from a post-Soviet state on the grounds of the pressure they faced because of their relationship and at the time of the interview were in the process of claiming asylum in Switzerland. As this sub-chapter engages with this case from different perspectives, the couple's account is laid out in some detail in the following paragraphs.

Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova met at their common workplace in their home country, and soon fell in love. To Nara Agayeva, this did not come as a surprise. She had long acknowledged, if not communicated, her same-sex desires. Not so for Ramiza Salakhova: When she met her future partner, she still understood herself as heterosexual and lived with her husband and daughter. The secrecy of the couple's budding relationship was hard-won. Although Nara Agayeva had been given her own apartment by her father, her mother unceremoniously moved in with her after she was told by one of Nara Agayeva's neighbors about 'women visitors.' As a result, this space became unavailable to the couple, with Ramiza Salakhova's family home out of bounds as well. The couple also had to be careful not to raise suspicion at work, and Ramiza Salakhova was supposed to return to her husband right after work; he did not like that she worked at all and checked on her regularly by phoning her workplace. Against this backdrop the couple had to devise complex strategies to carve out space and time for themselves. Nara Agayeva's car, in which she would drive her lover home and to go shopping, became their 'queer bubble' and the only place where they could talk and act freely. However, a work colleague eventually gave the couple away to Ramiza Salakhova's husband. When the husband, abusive to begin with, learned of his wife's involvement with another woman, his acts of violence against his wife and their child escalated. With no hope of support from the local authorities, Nara Agayeva, Ramiza Salakhova, and the latter's daughter soon found themselves exposed to “unbearable pressure” (Ramiza Salakhova) that turned everyday life into a matter of “life and death” (Nara Agayeva).

With Ramiza Salakhova homebound, Nara Agayeva started to plan their flight to the U.S., but was denied a tourist visa at the U.S. embassy on grounds of not being married. Their argument was that without husband and children, the risk was too high that Nara Agayeva would overstay or marry in the U.S., even though she presented ample proof of real estate holdings, financial resources, and a well-paid job in her home country. In other words, U.S. immigration refused Nara Agayeva a visa based on the absence of a stereotypically heterosexual biography. Throughout the visa application process Nara Agayeva's homosexuality was rendered invisible. She was complicit in this

invisibility, as she did not feel that she was in a position to clarify her sexual orientation or the couple's situation at the U.S. embassy. Through an acquaintance, Nara Agayeva eventually managed to organize tourist visas for Switzerland, and once there the newly formed Salakhova-Agayeva family applied for asylum on grounds of the persecution they suffered due to their sexual orientation. At the time of the interview, the women had been waiting to obtain refugee status in Switzerland for four years.

However, the way in which the U.S. state disciplined and controlled Nara Agayeva's sexuality *prior* to emigration was quite exceptional in the biographical accounts generated in the context of this study. As elaborated in Chapter 5, many interviewees did not understand themselves to be homosexuals before they left their countries, and those who did, did not come to Switzerland as refugees. As Nour Saber says about homosexuals emigrating to Western European countries from the "*monde arabo-musulman*" (the "Arab-Muslim world"): "*Pour émigrer [comme homosexuelle], il faut vraiment un, entre parenthèse, un 'prétexte'*" – "To emigrate [as a homosexual] you really need, quote unquote, a 'pretext,'" like academic studies or a job. Indeed, such 'pretexts' were typically what interviewees indicated as the reason for their migration at the outset of the interview, only to qualify this later in their narratives with motivations related to sexuality, such as a broken heart, their parents' efforts to separate them from a female partner, a vague feeling of having to explore something about themselves, and so on. Most interviewees in this study were able to present such a 'pretext' when they applied for a visa for Switzerland, and since most emigrated by themselves rather than with a dependent partner, they did not have to declare their sexual orientation when applying for a visa or arriving at the border, but could instead present valid, legally obtained papers permitting them to enter the country as students or employees. The fact that considerable economic, cultural, and social capital is required to obtain visas for Switzerland certainly goes a long way towards explaining the class bias in this sample and raises questions as to who was absent from this study.<sup>4</sup>

As asylum seekers, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova were not able to present such a 'pretext.' While still in their country of origin, the couple's plan to flee was driven by the prospect of living their homosexual relationship freely but also *privately* and *anonymously* in a metropolitan U.S. context:

RS: *Wir dachten, oh dort ist frei, wir können zusammen leben, und niemand wird es wissen!*

NA: *Und wir müssen uns nicht outen. [...] Ja, mit diesem Wunsch [nach Anonymität] sind wir auch hierher gekommen, wir wollten ja niemanden trauen.*

RS: We thought, oh, there it is free, we can live together, and nobody will know!

NA: And we don't have to come out. [...] Yes, we also came here with this wish [to live anonymously], we didn't want to trust anyone.

—Ramiza Salakhova and Nara Agayeva<sup>5</sup>

4 For instance, possession of tens of thousands of Swiss Francs has to be proven upon application for a student visa.

5 The interviews were conducted with both women present. Their account was accordingly a co-creation, one woman prompting the other to tell this or that story, and they commented and complemented each other's accounts. A strong "we" guided the narrative, suggesting that the women

However, in asylum procedure it was exactly this 'disclosure' of the true nature of their relationship that very quickly crystalized as the crux for admittance into the country on a more permanent basis. When Nara Agayeva realized this in a meeting with their prospective lawyer, she asked the translator to tell the lawyer that she and her partner were a couple. However, the translator, a woman originating from a country neighboring their own, refused to translate this information.

*Und ich schau aufAnwalt, der schaut aufmich, und ich kann ihm nicht erklären, und die Frau weigert sich, [...] und dann hab ich gesagt 'Hör zu, wir SIND ja kein Paar, wird sind Schwestern, aber wenn wir keinen Aufenthaltsgrund haben dann müssen [wir] LÜGEN,' und die Frau hat aufgeatmet (lacht) dann hat sie gesagt, 'Dann ja,' und [dass] also diese Wörter könnte sie ja nicht aussprechen, aber dort hat sie es [trotzdem] gemacht, und Anwalt war ja auch erleichtert und hat gesagt ja dann ist es ja keine Sache.*

And I look at the lawyer, and he looks at me, and I can't explain to him, and the woman refuses to cooperate, [...] and then I said 'Listen, we AREN'T a couple, we are sisters, but since we don't have an acknowledged reason to stay then [we] have to LIE,' and the woman was relieved (laughs) then she said, 'Then yes,' and she said [that] she could not utter these words, but there she did it [anyway], and the lawyer was relieved, too, and said in this case it's no problem.

—Nara Agayeva

This situation addresses, but does not reify, two concerns voiced by Swiss LGBT rights advocates as discussed at the outset of this book (see Chapter 1). The first is the observation that, unlike Nara Agayeva, many sexually non-conforming migrants arriving at the Swiss border as 'sexual refugees' do not find themselves in a position to 'disclose' their dissident sexual identity, be it because they do not understand their sexuality in terms of an identity and are hence not aware of the 'confession' required to establish themselves as homosexual and hence *legible* and *classifiable* subjects for Swiss asylum officials; or be it because they are not informed about the fact that they need to disclose their sexual dissidence to the authorities; or because they refrain from doing so due to experiences of violence from authorities in their home country. Activists and practitioners point out that the realities of sexually non-conforming refugees stand at odds with Swiss asylum legislation, which requires the reason for the asylum claim to be presented in a "credible manner" ("*glaubhaft*") within forty-eight hours of arriving at the border. If the claim is made later, the narration is likely to be deemed "implausible" ("*unglaubhaft*"), with chances of being granted asylum dwindling. The second concern is the role of the translator in interactions between queer asylum seekers and lawyers or asylum officials. Again in contrast to Nara Agayeva, many asylum seekers are particularly reluctant to speak about their homosexuality in the presence of compatriots, out of shame and for fear that they might spread the news in the diasporic community (Queeramnesty 2014).

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had forged a common history over time, likely especially also in the context of asylum procedure (see below).

In contrast to Nara Agayeva, Ramiza Salakhova still felt deeply ashamed of her same-sex desires when she arrived in Switzerland. She did not identify as a lesbian and had never ‘come out’ to anyone. She was utterly shocked when her partner told their lawyer that they are a couple, only to learn from him that their only possibility of obtaining asylum was to explain the intimate nature of their relationship to the asylum authorities. In the ensuing lengthy interviews with asylum officers, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova were forced in turn to disclose intimate details – such as since when their relationship became sexual – to substantiate their claims of being persecuted homosexuals. “*Solche Fragen man wird verrückt*” – “Such questions you go crazy,” Ramiza Salakhova states. The sense of public exposure continued to haunt her for months after the interview, during which Ramiza Salakhova found herself unable to speak the word ‘Lesbe.’ She felt literally branded. As the couple relate:

RS: *Das- das war so- ehm ich konnte nicht einfach ‘Lesbe’ aussprechen dieses Wort. Das war für mich-*

NA: *Sie hat gedacht dass hier auf dem Stirn geschrieben ‘Lesbe’ Wort geschrieben, so ein Gefühl hatte sie und- ja. Sie hatte sich draussen nackt gefühlt, also es wäre wahrscheinlich anders, wenn wir nicht gesagt hätten, dass wir ein Paar sind. Aber als wir uns geoutet haben, sie hat so sich Gefühl als ob irgendwie-*

RS: *Verstehst du Tina, coming out das ist gut, aber wenn das ist zwangsmässig, du MUSST [...] und ich musste alles erzählen und das ist nicht so einfach plötzlich du MUSST das erzählen, entweder oder... ja und das war- und ich denke ich habe Rückschritt gemacht- ich habe erzählt ich habe- aber es war so brutal ja und dann fühlte mich als ob ich nackt wäre so- ungemütlich, so ja. und dann nachher langsam haben wir Freundinnen gefunden-*

NA: *Wir haben uns langsam- [daran] gewöhnt.*

RS: *Ja.*

RS: This- this was so- ehm I just couldn't say 'lesbian' this word. For me this was-

NA: She thought that here on her forehead 'lesbian' word was written, this is the feeling she had and- yes. She had felt naked outside, well this would probably be different if we hadn't said that we were a couple. But when we came out, she had a feeling like somehow-

RS: You see, Tina, coming out is good, but if this is forced, you HAVE to [...] and I had to tell everything and that's not so easy, suddenly you HAVE to tell or else... yes and this was- I think I regressed- I told and I have- but it was so brutal yes and then I felt as if I was naked so- uncomfortable, so yes. And then slowly we found friends-

NA: We slowly- got used [to it].

RS: Yes.

—Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova

By stating that “We slowly got used [to it],” Nara Agayeva includes herself in Ramiza Salakhova's experience of shame and fear of exposure (also manifest in Nara Agayeva's own hesitation to expose her sexual orientation at work), which also complicates her own recurrent assertion that she has known that she is a lesbian “ever since I've been able to think” (see below).

After these initial interrogations the Salakhova-Agayeva family were catapulted into a space that is simultaneously situated *at* the Swiss border – they have not been admitted yet – as well as *within* it – they have an (albeit highly regulated and restricted) everyday life in the territory of Switzerland. After six months in a home for asylum seekers, with an everyday life marked by a lack of privacy, a fear of discovery, and worrying they would receive a negative decree by the asylum authorities, they were transferred to a small, furnished flat in a village, where they have since been staying for over four years while awaiting recognition. During this period, the couple have neither been allowed to work nor to move – the work Nara Agayeva has pursued in this time has been purely voluntary. As a result of the work restriction, they do not have the economic means to travel to the nearby city to take part in the lesbian community on a regular basis. For the same economic reasons, they cannot invite people to their ‘home,’ which they tend to refrain from doing anyway; not having had the chance to furnish their apartment themselves, they do not feel at home in it. Due to the work restriction they also do not meet many new people. The social isolation resulting from these enforced spatialities is further aggravated by the couple’s *imagined* geographies: They eschew contact with the local villagers (whom they assume to be homophobic based on their Catholicism) as well as with the neighbors in their house (whom they assume to harbor the same “mentality” as their compatriots because they suspect them of being Muslim immigrants). These imposed and imagined geographies amalgamate to isolate the couple in a profound way. Their desire to ‘come home’ to a place where they can live out their homosexuality unhindered (which originally did *not* mean ‘openly’) is thus not fulfilled but *deferred*. Window-shopping at local furniture shops, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova dream of their future apartment in the nearby city, its women’s café, and its promise of more anonymity. Accordingly, the notion their narratives convey of Switzerland is highly ambivalent, fluctuating between frustration about their current situation on the one hand and their imagined future in it on the other. They are in Switzerland, but they aren’t; they have arrived, but they haven’t.

### 8.2.2 “Je suis parachutée”: Regulating Migrant Sexuality within the Border

Between the first and second interview with the couple, Ramiza Salakhova finally obtained temporary asylum in Switzerland. Nara Agayeva’s permit has not arrived yet; her case seems less clear-cut. The permit requires Ramiza Salakhova to look for work immediately. When I arrived at their apartment for the second time, Ramiza Salakhova had just returned from the RAV.<sup>6</sup> She was in distress; for the third time in a row a clerk assumed that she had been married to a Swiss man when she told them she was divorced. She replied that no, she had been married to a foreigner. “*Aber Sie reden Deutsch*” – “But you speak German,” the clerk interjected. From this conversation, the border emerges as a continuous practice rather than a single event of admission or rejection, and as a ‘border within’ that continues to monitor migrant sexualities. Although she has a residence

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6 The *Regionale Arbeitsvermittlungszentren RAV* are the governmental regional employment agencies assisting people in looking for jobs and coordinating the payment of unemployment benefits.

permit now, Ramiza Salakhova continues to be confronted with stereotypical imaginations of immigrant women guiding governmental discourses and practices. Ideas about ‘the unemployed’ interlink with notions of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, coagulating with the assumption that migrant women are heterosexual, married to Swiss men, dependent, unskilled, and (unlike in Ramiza Salakhova’s case) not proficient in the local language.<sup>7</sup> These assumptions successfully mask the fact that the state *materializes* these very stereotypes through its own practices: Swiss immigration procedure *itself* has turned Ramiza Salakhova into a dependent, unemployed, and ‘unskilled’ migrant woman.

Such relegations of interviewees to stereotypical assumptions about female immigrants were systematic in the biographical material generated in the context of this study. These stereotypes, such as the figure of the dependent and oppressed Muslim woman or the figure of the Black woman as a ‘whore,’ are deeply rooted in colonial racial prejudice and as such represent manifestations of the persistent coloniality of power (Lugones 2007, see Chapter 3.4.7). Beatriz Kraus was suspected of being a prostitute at the immigration bureau when she applied for an extension of her residence permit: “*Deux trois fois au téléphone quand je disais que j’étais Brésilienne je sentais qu’il [se] disait ‘Mais celle-là c’est une pute, qui veut un permis pour aller faire le trottoir’ [...]. Après bon il me voyait, je ne suis pas- je suis pas typée Brésilienne quoi*” – “Two or three times on the phone when I said I was Brazilian I felt that he said [to himself] ‘But this one is a whore who wants a permit to go do the sidewalk’ [=prostitute herself] [...]. After that, well, he saw me, you know I’m not- I’m not the Brazilian type.” Beatriz Kraus experienced how the stereotype of the whore rests on a visual economics rooted in racial stereotypes that, in her case, work to her advantage since she is “*typée Européenne*” – “the European type,” that is, light-skinned. Based on such incidences, Beatriz Kraus has developed an acute awareness that had she been *typée Brésilienne*, she would likely not have obtained her Swiss citizenship a few years later, which was voted on by the general assembly of her municipality.<sup>8</sup> Such stereotyping also effectuates a sense of *permanent* exclusion that persists even after successful ‘naturalization’: “*Je suis toujours étrangère [...], je serais jamais Suisse*” – “I will always be a foreigner [...], I will never be Swiss,” Beatriz Kraus states, a

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7 For more extended analyses of the ways in which immigration and welfare systems interact to marginalize migrants see Cohen 2005, Fujiwara 2008.

8 In this practice it is the people present at the general assembly of a municipality rather than the municipal authorities who assess applications for citizenship. The application is voted on after a short CV is read to the assembly with the applicant present. While in 1990 90 percent of all Swiss municipalities handled naturalizations in this manner, as of 2013 it was still practiced in about 30 percent of all municipalities. Beatriz Kraus’ perception and fear of systematic discrimination based on negative stereotypes has been corroborated by political scientists: Naturalization by general assembly significantly promotes systematic discrimination based on national, ethnic, or racial stereotypes. In the case of citizens from Ex-Yugoslavian states, for instance, the rate of naturalizations rose by 75 percent (!) after the task was relegated to municipal authorities (as opposed to 6% in the case of Italian citizens). In such general assembly votes, no correlation could moreover be established between the decree and applicants’ language skills, the duration of their stay in Switzerland or other indicators of ‘integration.’ Negative decrees are highest in the rural municipalities where the right-wing *Schweizerische Volkspartei SVP* is dominant (Hainmüller and Hangartner 2012 and 2013).

sentiment echoed almost verbatim in several other accounts, such as for instance Augusta Wakari stating that “Here you know, I always be a foreigner, no matter if I have a Swiss pass, I’m still a foreigner, still!” These cumulated accounts demonstrate how in Switzerland, as is the case of Western Europe in general, racialized immigrant populations always remain newcomers. They are perceived as always having just arrived, no matter whether they have indeed just arrived or whether it had been their great-grandparents who had come to Switzerland (El-Tayeb 2011, see also Chapter 1). As Fatima El-Tayeb writes:

Migrants and their contested ability to adapt to European societies have been at the center of public and policy debates since their massive postwar arrival in the 1950s, but paradoxically these debates have seen little change over the last five decades – their focus often still is on the moment of arrival [...]. (El-Tayeb 2011:xii)

The logical conclusion that these immigrants are “by now as European as those worrying about them,” El-Tayeb continues, is prevented “by an often unspoken, but nonetheless seemingly precise, racialized understanding of proper Europeanness that continues to exclude certain migrants and their descendants” (ibid:xii).

By contrast, another interviewee was confronted with the stereotype of the *male* immigrant. Upon returning to Switzerland from Germany, Jasmine Sieto wanted to declare some goods to reclaim the VAT. It was quite late at night when she went looking for the customs officials in the train station, who were drinking coffee in their office. At first, they did not show any inclination to address her query or even acknowledge her presence, but when she insisted they suddenly jumped up and harshly ordered her to empty her entire suitcase. Their aggressive demeanor and the fact that she was about to miss her connecting train irritated her, and when she expressed this concern with some agitation, one of the officials shouted to his colleague: “*Hey du, mach die Tür zu, der ist gefährlich hier!*” – “Hey you, close the door, this guy here is dangerous!” Their hetero- and homonormative gaze did not allow these officers to recognize Jasmine Sieto as a lesbian. As a masculine-looking woman she is automatically assigned to the ‘group’ of male immigrants instead, who, as the officer’s reaction indicates, are assumed to be prone to aggression and physical violence. As the scene unfolded, the officer ripped Jasmine Sieto’s residence permit apart. They eventually allowed her to pass, but she missed her train.

The persisting attachment of stereotypes of immigrants to sexually non-conforming migrant women by the state and further powerful institutions, regulations, and practices not only renders invisible these women’s professional skills and independence from a husband but also their queer sexuality. This in turn blocks the state’s view on queer migrant women’s positionalities, realities, and vulnerabilities. Furthermore, these incidences reveal that migrant sexualities continue to be tied into a system of surveillance and discipline, even after admission into the country (or even if, as in the case of migrants’ descendants, migration has not even occurred), appearing as a ‘border within’ that not only renders queer migrants invisible but continuously calls their presence in the country into question. The remainder of this sub-chapter is concerned with a case that crystallizes the effects of this ‘border within,’ and concludes that the carceral



archipelago of Swiss state practices regulating migrant sexualities is especially also productive of specific spatialities.

Nour Saber, the daughter of two university professors, grew up in the capital of an Arab country. She highlights that her parents are people who carry “intellectual baggage” and have traveled widely, and she places particular emphasis on the fact that they are atheists and as such function based on “reason rather than religion.” Nour Saber is convinced that it is this specific combination of an intellectual background and secularity that has enabled her parents to grant her the space to unfold and live out her dissident sexuality. “*Je le savais*” – “I knew,” her mother simply replied, when in her twenties Nour Saber wrote her an e-mail from France, declaring that she loves, and lives with, another woman. “*Du moment où t’es heureuse, c’est tout ce qui m’intéresse*” – “All I’m interested in is that you’re happy,” her mother wrote, and promptly placed a double bed in Nour Saber’s old room for when she visits with her partner. As discussed in Chapter 6, Nour Saber is very specific about the family circumstances she grew up in, describing them as exceptionally liberal for the “*monde arabo-musulman*” (“Arab-Muslim world”). In retrospect, she identifies intellectual and artistic spaces as the only places in her city where homosexual people had a certain visibility and acceptance, while in all other realms of life she experienced homosexuality as strictly taboo. Upon discovery by the authorities, she says, “*c’est même pas un jugement hein? c’est directement la prison*” – “it’s not even a conviction, you know? It’s straight to prison.”<sup>9</sup>

In Nour Saber’s perspective, in her home country the possibility of identifying as a homosexual is highly contingent upon education and social status. She sees homosexuality in her home country as “*un phénomène élitiste*.” At the same time, Nour Saber considers it impossible to live a homosexual life in her home city, and frames emigration as the only solution for people who want to lead a homosexual life (see Chapter 7.2.3). This view is key to understanding Nour Saber’s migration narrative and her key concerns. Throughout her account the image drawn of the life of homosexuals in her country of origin functions as that which must be avoided at all cost and is consequently that which drives all of Nour Saber’s current decisions and actions in the diaspora.

Before coming to Switzerland, Nour Saber studied in France. There she fell in love with a Swiss woman, who she later followed to Switzerland. At the time of the interview, just a couple of years later, the couple has broken up. This leaves Nour Saber not only severely heartbroken but also in a precarious legal situation. In order to secure a residence permit for Nour Saber, the couple registered their partnership when they came to Switzerland. Now, Nour Saber’s ex-partner has consented to keeping the registration up, regardless of whether they get back together or not, in order to enable Nour Saber to

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9 In Nour Saber’s homeland, homosexual acts are punishable with up to several years in prison. At the time of the field phase for this research, reports by local LGBT activists indicated that while this law was applied relatively rarely, the situation of homosexuals in the country was deteriorating: Homosexuality was gaining a certain visibility, which in turn triggered a rise in homophobia. It has only been in the past few years that first political efforts have been taken to legalize homosexuality in the country – however, very recently a court sentenced several men on the basis of their assumed homosexuality, and forced medical testing continues to be used to determine whether men had been involved in homosexual acts.

stay in the country. Besides the emotional pressure this causes (for instance, the couple have to pretend that they still live together), the situation renders Nour Saber completely dependent on the goodwill of her ex-partner. She points out that others might not be so lucky as to have a supportive partner, and calls into question all the forms of permits of residence that are contingent on continuance in a partnership (which in Swiss immigration jargon is termed “*Aufenthaltsgrund: Verbleib beim Partner*” – “Reason of stay: remaining with partner”).

There is a specific spatiality to Nour Saber’s sexual citizenship: She cannot return to France because her papers there have expired, and the option of returning to her country of origin she dismisses as follows:

*Rentrer chez moi ça veut dire condamner mon choix sexuel. C’est-à-dire je vais plus pouvoir vivre mon homosexualité. Mon homosexualité c’est juste il faut faire un trait là-dessus. Je peux plus la vivre. Donc pour moi c’est un choix [...] très amer, c’est une option, voilà, très très amère, de rester ici en Suisse. Surtout après une séparation, et puis avec un très grand sentiment de déracinement, surtout c’est très très douloureux [...], parce que j’aurais plus retourner en France. Donc je suis, prisonnière aujourd’hui ici en Suisse. Je suis prisonnière, exactement, c’est le terme exacte.*

Going back home means to condemn my sexual choice. That means I will not be able to live out my homosexuality any more. My homosexuality, it’s true, I [would] need to put an end to that. I cannot live it out anymore. So for me it is a very bitter choice, yes, it’s a very very bitter option to stay in Switzerland. Moreover after a separation, and then with a very great feeling of uprooting, moreover it’s very very painful [...], because I could not return to France. So I’m a prisoner here in Switzerland today. I’m a prisoner, exactly, that’s the exact term.

—Nour Saber

Nour Saber’s temporary residence permit is tied to her partnership registration, the regulations of which render it impossible for her to move within Switzerland. She is currently unemployed and in the small industrial town where she lives has no professional prospects that dignify her qualifications as an academic, even more so because she lives in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and does not speak any German. The next city is too far away to commute to and is moreover situated in another administrative unit, which complicates job application procedures significantly for potential employers, diminishing her chances of success.

*“Je suis arrivée ici avec ma compagne où j’suis parachutée, j’ai pas de repères ici, j’ai pas de famille, j’ai pas d’amis, j’ai pas, j’ai rien. J’ai complètement déraciné ici”* – “I came here with my partner where I am parachuted, I don’t have any points of reference here, I don’t have family, I don’t have friends, I don’t have, I have nothing. I’m totally uprooted here,” Nour Saber establishes. She sees her sense of uprootedness as a result of the combined “administrative and social” difficulties that she faces as *both* an immigrant *and* a lesbian in Switzerland:

*Déjà les immigrés sont [...] pas toujours les bienvenus en Suisse. [...] En plus être un étranger homosexuel c’est encore plus difficile. [...] C’est une difficulté en fait administrative, en tant*

*qu'étrangère, et une difficulté sociale en tant que lesbienne. Donc on cumule, les femmes immigrées lesbiennes, on cumule, deux difficultés. Une sociale, et une administrative. C'est ça.*

Immigrants as such are [...] already not always welcome in Switzerland. [...] Moreover, to be a homosexual foreigner is even more difficult. [...] It's in fact an administrative difficulty with respect to being a foreigner, and a social difficulty with respect to being a lesbian. So immigrant lesbians cumulate two difficulties. One social, and one administrative. That's the way it is.

—Nour Saber

The web of regulations, institutions, and discourses controlling migrant sexualities relegates Nour Saber to a social position that does not reflect her cosmopolitanism and the social status she claims: *"C'est très difficile parce que passer d'une ville, très culturelle [en France] à une ville, entre parenthèses 'ouvrière,' industrielle, pour moi c'était vraiment très très très très difficile"* – "It's very difficult because coming from a very cultural city [in France] to a, quote unquote, 'working class' town, an industrial town, for me it was really very very very very very difficult." In her view, these difficulties emerge from multiple mechanisms resulting in a loss of status and exposure to experiences of exclusion based on her positionality as an Arab lesbian. It is because she is a *lesbian immigrant* that she is forced to stay in town; and it is because she is an *Arab* that she is relegated to the status of a second-class immigrant there. As she explains, Southern European immigrants who have been living and working in town since the 1950s now look down on the more recent Arab migrants. In her experience, this loss of status materializes at the local immigration office, which always takes several months to renew her residence permit, during which she cannot leave the country. Nour Saber contrasts these practices with those in France:

*Quand j'étais en France, moi mon permis de séjours je l'avais en trente minutes. Bon des étudiants de troisième cycle on avait un guichet spécial hein, on faisait même pas la queue avec monsieur et madame tout le monde, on avait un guichet spécial trente minutes, hop on avait notre carte de séjour.*

When I was in France, I had my residence permit within thirty minutes. Okay, university students we had a special desk you know, we didn't queue with Mr. and Mrs. Everybody, we had a special desk, and we had our residence permit in no time.

—Nour Saber

Nour Saber is robbed of her partner, home, and job, but above all she is deprived of her social status. But as established above, in her view the lesbian identity and especially the ability to live out one's homosexuality abroad is inextricably linked to an elevated social status. The cumulative acts of disqualification and loss of status she experiences thus directly threaten her sexual identity, since they always carry with them the threat of deportation to her country of origin. From Nour Saber's perspective, this would mean that she could not live out her homosexuality any longer: *"Il faut faire un trait là-dessus. Je peux plus la vivre"* – "I [would] need to put an end to that. I cannot live it out anymore."

From Nour Saber's account emerges a specific *geography* of the carceral archipelago that regulates migrant sexualities, one which is mirrored in Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova's accounts. Both narratives convey a sense of confinement perpetuated as much by real walls and borders as by a conglomerate of regulations, practices, and discourses into which queer migrants are tied. Personal experiences in the country of origin and in Switzerland combine with dominant discourses around lesbians and immigrants in both of these places to produce imaginations about spaces – such as the sense that the local villagers are homophobic and xenophobic – that contribute to a sense of confinement and subjection as much as the very real bans, regulations, and threats of deportation. Moreover, these geographies are productive of a dichotomy between the rural and the urban: The city signifies the desired future and promises jobs, culture, anonymity, freedom, queerness, and *arrival*, whereas the rural signifies the present and represents confinement, unemployment, homophobia, racism, religious fundamentalism, social control, coercion, and *deferral*. From this, Switzerland paradoxically emerges as both the desired home that enables queer migrants to live out their homosexuality in a supportive environment, as well as a space marked by a 'border within' that continuously calls the presence of queer migrants into question.<sup>10</sup> This 'border within' consists of an assemblage of spaces, institutions, practices, and discourses regulating migrant sexualities, among which interlocking state regulations and practices related to immigration and asylum procedure on the one hand and partnership registration on the other stand out as particularly dominant.

### 8.2.3 “A country that doesn't fit you”: The Violent Gift of Asylum

Revisiting her pre-migration Self, Nara Agayeva says about growing up and living in her homeland:

*Ich war eigentlich nie einverstanden mit diesen Gesellschaft [im Herkunftsland], mit mein Familie, mit Leben in unseren Gesellschaft, und die ganze Muslimität und so, [...] ich hatte mich immer unpassend zu diesen Gesellschaft gespürt und eigentlich war ja auch so, nach dem Sehen, also ich sah nicht wie alle anderen Menschen aus, nicht wie alle anderen muslimischen Frauen wahrscheinlich auch. Ich mochte Hosen zum Beispiel anziehen, was nicht typisch bei uns war und mit dreissig Jahr war ich nicht verheiratet, was auch, ja, [bedeutete] entweder man [ist] krank oder was noch Schlimmeres oder so. Ja, und dann aber ich hab mir gedacht, naja, man soll so sein [wie man sein] muss und, es ist ja ein Schicksal, würd ich sagen. Aber seitdem dass ich meine Freundin kennen gelernt habe, da sind wir eigentlich zusammen zum Gedanken gekommen dass wir homosexuell leben müssen, und darum eigentlich geflohen sind.*

In fact I never agreed with this society [in her homeland], with my family, with life in our society, and the whole Muslimity and all that, [...] I had always felt like I didn't fit in this society, and in fact that was the case, too, from looking at me, well I didn't look like other people, probably also not like all other Muslim women. For instance I liked to wear pants, which was not typical, and at thirty years of age I was not married,

10 These imaginations of the rural and the urban were disrupted in other accounts, see Chapter 10.

which also [meant] that, yes, you are either ill or something, something even worse or something like that. Yes, but then I thought, well you need to be how [you] need to be, it's fate, I would say. But ever since I got to know my partner, together we came to the thought that we need to live homosexually, and this is in fact also why we fled.

—Nara Agayeva

Here gender roles and sexual orientation emerge as pivotal to Nara Agayeva's sense of social unbelonging. Her increasing sense of entrapment is tied to the growing "Muslimity" of the post-Soviet society she grew up in, which she witnessed with great anxiety. A former member of a national sports team in Soviet times, Nara Agayeva was working as a sports teacher when her country became independent. In fury and with a great sense of impotence she had to watch as, step by step, girls were excluded from sports lessons, which not only dried out her source of income but also stripped her of her professional self-conception.

When asked about whether she had been interested in girls and women before coming to Switzerland, Nara Agayeva is quick to answer:

*Also seitdem dass ich denken kann wusste ich schon dass ich eine Lesbe bin. [...] Zuerst habe ich mich krank gefühlt (lacht) ich dachte stimmt was mit mir nicht, bin ich krank? Und dann habe ich mich anders überlegt, ich dachte das ganze Gesellschaft krank ist, ich nicht (lacht). Als Trotz. Also wahrscheinlich ist das ja sehr selbstsicher, aber je mehr ich dort gelebt habe, desto mehr war ich überzeugt, dass das Gesellschaft krank ist. Und ich hab da einfach gelernt, das zu verstecken, weil Zeit hatte ich genug von kleinem Alter, ich hatte noch nicht in der Schule gegangen dass ich wusste es schon und Kindergarten und so (lacht), also wenn ich den Spielfilmen angeschaut habe oder die Märchen angeschaut habe oder gelesen, dann hatte ich mich natürlich assoziiert mit mit männlichen Personage also [...] ich bin ein Prinz also anstatt Prinzessin oder irgendeine Soldat statt weiss ich nicht, Rote Kreuz so (lacht), naja, das wusste ich schon. Also geliebt hab ich ja natürlich damals niemanden oder (lacht)?*

Well ever since I've been able to think I've known that I'm a lesbian. [...] First I felt sick (laughs) I thought is there something wrong with me, am I sick? But then I came to the conclusion that the whole society is sick, not me (laughs). Out of spite. Well probably that is very self-assured, but the longer I lived there, the more I was convinced that the society is sick. And I simply learnt to hide that, because I had time enough from when I was little, I hadn't even gone to school yet and I already knew, and in Kindergarten and the like (laughs), I mean if I watched movies or watched or read fairy tales, of course I associated myself with the male personage, I mean [...] I'm a prince rather than a princess or some soldier instead of I don't know, Red Cross or something like that (laughs), that I already knew. Well of course I didn't love anybody back then, you know?

—Nara Agayeva

These two passages position Nara Agayeva not only as a rebel within her social environment but catapult her almost entirely out of her "society." Her resistance is thereby framed solely in terms of her inner knowledge about her lesbian identity, which she harbored "ever since I've been able to think." Having resisted gender and sexual social

norms as a child already emerges as a great source of pride to Nara Agayeva and depicts her as someone who found her center within herself rather than in external acceptance. Still, despite these early realizations and this inner sense of mooring, Nara Agayeva never spoke about her sexual orientation prior to her emigration – not even later when she had ‘women visitors’: “*Darüber [eine Lesbe zu sein] habe ich mit keinem Mensch geredet, als ob dieser Teil von mir nicht existiert*” – “I never spoke to anybody about this [being a lesbian], as if this part of me did not exist,” she states.

It is only at first glance that her utterance “Well of course I didn’t love anybody back then” and her silence about her sexual orientation prior to leaving her country contradicts her initial statement that she had always known she was a “lesbian.” In her deliberations, being a lesbian emerges as a subject position that does not only hinge on sexual desires or practices, on the act of ‘coming out,’ or even on being aware of the term “lesbian.” Instead, always already having been a “lesbian” especially also signifies living according to alternative role models in an act of rebellion against assigned gender roles and normalized heteronormativity, and refusing to allow the deep inner knowledge of one’s own queerness to be subjugated by social expectations, even in the face of isolation and disapproval.

To Nara Agayeva’s great relief and confirmation, in Switzerland things eventually seem to fall into place as she experiences a sense of being enfolded within a society where the subject position of the lesbian is available and visible:

*Wenn du in einem Land lebst und noch NIE irgendwo anders gewesen bist, und dann PLÖTZLICH kommst du in eine andere Kultur, weißt du dann werden dir viele Sachen klar. [Zum Beispiel] so meine Weltanschauung, mich haben fast alle meine – ausser Freunde – alle meine Bekannte haben mich für verrückt gehalten. Als ich dann da [in der Schweiz] gewesen bin da habe ich schon gesagt ‘Mann war ich progressiv für unser Land!’ (lachen). [...] Wahrscheinlich habe ich zu früh verstanden dass ich eine Lesbe bin.*

If you live in a country and have NEVER been to another place and then SUDDENLY you come into a different culture, you know, then a lot of things become clear. [For instance] my view of the world, almost everyone I knew – except for my friends – thought I was crazy. And then when I was here [in Switzerland] I said ‘Man, was I progressive for our country!’ (laughter) [...] Probably I understood too early that I was a lesbian.

—Nara Agayeva

Finally having found her ideological and emotional home, she also feels a strong pang of regret about what could have been. She was in her thirties when she came to Switzerland and has been waiting for her asylum application (and with it her work permit) to be approved for four years. As she states with a bitter undertone: “*Manchmal denke ich, schade dass wir nicht hier [in der Schweiz] geboren wurden, dann würden wir also nicht erst ab jetzt glücklich leben, sondern wie normale Menschen. Es ist nicht fair wenn man eigentlich in ein Land geboren wurde das nicht zu einem passt*” – “Sometimes I think it’s too bad we weren’t born here [in Switzerland]. Then we would not only live happily from now on, but like normal people. It’s not fair when you’re born into a country that doesn’t fit you.”

The parts of her account in which Nara Agayeva relives her sense of difference and exclusion in her home country and her sense of arrival and homecoming in Switzer-

land are clearly central to her biographical narrative and key to understanding how she frames her sexual and national Self. At the same time, this narrative should not only be read in terms of a story of self-assertion and liberation (which it is), but *also* as an account co-shaped by the context of asylum procedure. As discussed in Chapter 3.4, queer migration scholarship has shown how asylum practices in Western countries operate on the basis of a violent narrative regime that forces queer asylum seekers to retell the story of the gay-friendly West versus the homophobic South or Orient in order to obtain approval for their claim. This story must establish the claimant as an irreversibly and clearly defined homosexual subject that is legible as such to Swiss asylum authorities, and it must establish Switzerland as a safe haven for the claimant *as* a homosexual. By enforcing the reproduction of this logic of “Your country has failed you, you are safe here,” asylum thus also emerges as a “violent gift” (Miller 2005). It is hence also against the backdrop of the asylum process that we have to read Nara Agayeva’s almost excessive identification with the “lesbian” identity even in reference to times long before being able to name it as such, or Ramiza Salakhova’s repetitive assertions that to come out is a good thing, despite her persisting sense of shame. Nara Agayeva’s account furthermore ties into the same logic when she states that having been a lesbian in her home country above all meant to have been *progressive*: “Man, was I progressive for our country! [...] Probably I understood too early that I was a lesbian.” From this statement, the homeland emerges as backward, and Swiss society as modern exactly because the lesbian subject position is available within it. To fully adopt a lesbian identity in Switzerland hence – again – entails a break with homeland culture as, like Nermina Petar or Teresa Ruiz, Nara Agayeva finds herself unable to assume the subject position of being *both* a lesbian *and* a citizen of her homeland. At the same time, her statement does not reflect on the subversive paradox it creates by placing a definitive lesbian in a place where by definition none can exist.

In the context of asylum procedure the question further arises as to the relationship between research interviews and asylum hearings. Although these two kinds of stories cannot be equated, neither are they discrete. Migration scholar Rolf Haubl generally cautions against conducting biographical interviews with asylum seekers whose status as refugees has not been confirmed, as the possibility that the claimant perceives the researcher to be in a powerful position that might influence the asylum claim cannot be excluded. This may result in strategic-tactical narratives that, in Haubl’s eyes, must not be confused with biographical narratives conducted in research contexts (Haubl 2003, quoted in Thielen 2003:99). While I agree with Haubl to a certain extent, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova’s narrative also rehearses the more general point Lynn Fujiwara’s makes about immigration to the U.S.:

Immigrants are disciplined from their first initiation to demonstrate the ideas of American morality. [The] notion of citizenship as a self-constituting practice (a practice in which immigrants strategically utilize microstrategies to negotiate the systems of power within public domains) applies here, as immigrants have consciously shaped themselves into what is culturally and governmentally defined as worthy, to acquire the resources they need or desire. (Fujiwara 2008:120, references omitted)

From Fujiwara's argument emerges that there is no clear demarcation between what is strategic and what is felt, or between what one needs to *present* and what one is as an immigrant. Biographies asylum seekers narrate in a research context hence always allow for an analysis of what the narrators feel they have to "shape themselves into" in order to obtain the right to stay in the host country. At the same time, Nara Agayeva's acts of resistance (see also Chapter 8.2.1) demonstrate very clearly that biographies told in the context of asylum are never mere stories of victimization. Her account is above all a demonstration of her enormous resourcefulness, which enables her to organize visas for Switzerland and allows her to guide the family through the asylum procedure, to arrange for free professional education for herself, to organize a free car and computer by working as a volunteer, and so on. This powerfully works against theoretical stances on asylum that implicitly frame queer asylum seekers as mere victims of the machinery of homonationalist discourse production.

### 8.3 Conclusion

This chapter has exposed how a web of Swiss state regulations, policies, and practices produce national normative hetero- and homosexualities, which are deployed to discipline, regulate, and control migrant sexualities. It has further discussed the strategies queer migrant women devise to negotiate this process of disciplining, and how this affects their self-conceptions, everyday lives, and biographies. The 'sex work' of state policies and practices becomes particularly evident in regulations, policies, practices, and discourses related to same-sex partnership registration and to immigration/asylum procedure respectively. Queer migrant women's perspectives on, experiences with, and strategies to deal with these repetitive practices of disciplining and controlling expose that the border represents neither a line in space nor a one-time event in which entry is allowed or denied, but instead constitutes an assemblage of social sites and practices forcing queer migrants to always carry a 'border within,' which continuously calls into question their right to be in or stay in the country. In these processes of demarcation, dominant ideas about (homo)sexuality coalesce with dominant ideas about nationality, race, ethnicity, class, culture, and gender to draw and monitor the lines between who is modern, who is backward or 'traditional'; who is sexually 'normal' and who is sexually 'deviant'; and who can inhabit a 'normal' liberated (homo)sexual identity and who cannot – lines that are productive of exclusionary nationalisms that eventually lead to the question of who is assimilable as a potential (future) citizen, and who is not.

However, although all queer migrant women are subjected to these disciplinary processes, this does not mean that they are helpless victims of these mechanisms. This chapter exposed how women successfully negotiate and resist such normalizing discourses and practices or turn the very machinery productive of homonational norms to their favor.

Although the main focus of this chapter was on state regulations, policies, and practices around immigration/asylum procedure, it is worth remembering that these are not the only components of the carceral archipelago regulating migrant sexualities. As discussed throughout this study, other institutions, organizations, discourses, and



practices such as political parties, the welfare and healthcare system, psychoanalysis, research, and even migrant and LGBT rights organizations contribute to this system of surveillance as well. That being said, within this web of regulatory forces, it is important to uphold a conceptual distinction between coercion on the one hand and institutions and practices queer migrants engage with by their own volition on the other, although the two may sometimes be hard to discriminate between. It *does* make a difference whether one is forced to yield information about one's sexuality in the context of asylum procedure, or whether one volunteers to take part in a research project on transnational sexualities; and it does matter whether one is subject to a therapy aimed at exorcising one's homosexuality, or whether one seeks personal guidance to gain an understanding of one's desires and inclinations. The question of agency must hence be considered when analyzing the workings of the carceral archipelago of migrant sexualities.



## 9. Work

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Among the participants in this study, work was rarely the only reason for migration and was frequently, as Nour Saber would say, “*un prétexte*.” Despite this, most research participants *also* came to Switzerland in order to complete professional training, to gather work experience, to advance their careers, or – although in this sample this was the exception – simply to enhance their personal and their family’s financial situation. In the biographical accounts, the workplace plays a central role as a site of self-actualization and failure, of recognition and rejection, of integration and exclusion, of pressure and freedom, and of professional advancement and deskilling. Encountering and overcoming work-related obstacles in order to ‘make it’ and reinvent oneself successfully in a foreign country, is as much a source of pride and self-confidence as professional setbacks are a trigger for existential fears, self-doubt, insecurity, depression, and social isolation. This chapter engages with these different aspects of queer migrant women’s work biographies and exposes why they have to be read in conjunction with their sexual biographies.

Chapter 9.1 engages with the workplace as a site of self-realization and recognition. Tied to their mostly high levels of education and social status, interviewees expect their professional activities to promote self-development, rather than merely providing a regular income. Importantly, professional self-realization and sexual self-fulfillment are seen as interlocking factors in the process of establishing a ‘good life’ in the diaspora. Chapter 9.2 addresses experiences of exclusion in the workplace, which contrast imaginations of the workplace as a site in which to establish contact with other people, and as an arena in which to earn social recognition. Being excluded from work altogether because of deskilling and unemployment significantly aggravates feelings of alienation and isolation; this will be discussed in Chapter 9.3. Chapter 9.4 engages with interviewees’ strategies of communicating (or not) their sexual orientation at work. Finally, Chapter 9.5 illuminates work from a different perspective altogether. It examines work as a topic of intra-familial conflicts, and shows how interviewees frame concessions they make when negotiating their education and career with their parents as a ‘trade-off’ that enables them to assert another aspect of their Selves they consider to be much more imperative – their dissident sexualities and love lives.

## 9.1 Work as a Site of Recognition, Self-Realization, and Integration

Work represents an important arena of recognition – particularly so in the context of migration, where the overall success of a migration project is often contingent on employment and/or professional success (Baghdadi and Riaño 2014, Mecheril 2000). The importance of a positive work experience is clearly confirmed in the biographical narratives generated in the context of this study. Work is seen as a key site for ‘integrating’ and of achieving a ‘good life’ in the diaspora, which accordingly becomes threatened when work-related problems arise. In its significance for the migration project, the process of establishing oneself professionally is only paralleled by the processes of coming to terms with one’s non-conforming sexuality, building a fulfilling relationship, and succeeding in forging meaningful social ties in the new country. As the narratives suggest, these different areas of life are co-constructive and have to be read in conjunction.

Among the participants in this study, expectations towards work were generally high. Financial goals or career opportunities were thereby secondary to the importance of work as a site of personal development and fulfillment. This attitude towards work is tied to the elevated social status most research participants inhabited, or inhabited before migration, mirroring specific ideals of self-realization and social norms. The perspective on work expressed by Teresa Ruiz’ following statement is exemplary of many other interviewees’ professional self-perception:

*Vielleicht bin ich in der Phase gewesen jetzt in diesen ersten zehn Jahren, ich habe wirklich immer etwas machen müssen um mich weiter zu entwickeln. Vielleicht hört es mal auf jetzt, sag ich ja nach dieser Ausbildung höre ich auf, sage ich immer. Aber dann später ist mir wieder langweilig (lacht).*

Maybe I have been in this phase in these first ten years, I really always needed to do something to advance my personal development. Maybe it will stop at some point now, that’s what I keep saying, yes yes after this training I’ll stop, that’s what I always say. But then later I get bored again (laughs).

—Teresa Ruiz

As her diplomas were not recognized in Switzerland, and because she did not speak German, Teresa Ruiz had to start her career “from scratch” when she came here in her early twenties. It took the specialized nurse a decade and a divorce from a husband who wanted to forbid her to continue school to catch up and establish herself professionally. She communicates a sense of pride in having succeeded against all odds: Now Teresa Ruiz is a popular team leader in a health institution in Basel. Although she continues to suffer from bouts of homesickness, a sense of arrival is palpable in her narrative. Eleven years ago, she resolved “to integrate”; retrospectively, the central stepping stones in achieving success in this process were re-launching her career, assuming a lesbian identity, establishing a fulfilling relationship, and learning German (see Chapter 5.1).

Achieving a good ‘work-life balance’ was an important aspect of personal development. This priority is related to the exceptionally stressful work situations that many of the participants in this study were exposed to. Reflections on health issues related to their work were a recurrent theme across accounts, and apart from deskilling and

unemployment emerged as the most significant obstacle in interviewees' work biographies. Many interviewees suffered from stress, burnout, or depression due to experiences of social isolation at work or underemployment – for instance Siti Mohd Amin, Augusta Wakari, Pilar Gómez, Ayesha Umar, Charlotta Sembiring, Leyla Haddad, Nour Saber, Nara Agayeva, and Ramiza Salakhova.

Siti Mohd Amin, who like Teresa Ruiz has been living in Switzerland for eleven years, has spent most of her time working long shifts as a *chef de cuisine* in different “bumping” restaurants in the city of Bern. She says that often she does not get home before half past one in the morning, after helping the kitchen crew clean up and then finishing administrative tasks like planning menus and placing orders. Even though she does not record the many hours she works in the office each week on her time-keeping file (!), she always accumulates a considerable amount of overtime. While this allows her to go back to Malaysia for extended visits each year, her long and unusual working hours and her constant state of exhaustion crucially contribute to her acute social isolation. After work Siti Mohd Amin is too tired, or it is too late, to go out, and during the day she mostly sleeps until she has to go back to work. “There is no life, is only working and working, working place and home, you know?”, she says. Her strong desire to establish a common life with a partner in Switzerland has not been realized; as discussed in Chapter 5.2, Siti Mohd Amin's two Malaysian partners live in the Middle East and in Malaysia respectively, and neither are prepared to join her. The lack of a partner to share everyday life with is the main reason why she would like to return to Malaysia. However, this plan is also fueled by a need to “relax.” Siti Mohd Amin would like to open a small restaurant in Malaysia, not to make a lot of money but “just to survive [...] the daily, the monthly.” After an intense decade of working in Swiss restaurants she feels tired. Siti Mohd Amin's work experience in Switzerland has therefore been highly ambivalent. On the one hand, work has been a site of self-development. As she emphasizes, her professional activities have enabled her to develop her cooking, leadership, and administrative skills, and she says that beyond these practical things she has learned to “stand on my own leg.” At the same time, work also appears as a site of integration in the most negative sense. As a laborer, Siti Mohd Amin is ‘integrated’ to the point of becoming entirely consumed by her exploitative work conditions, which have rendered it impossible for her to establish a social life outside the work context.

Throughout this chapter, other cases will be touched upon in which work-related health issues played a role. What is common to these accounts with regard to work as a site of self-advancement is that the interviewed women consider the strategies they have developed to deal with health issues at work important learning processes. Interviewees who have been affected by burnout and other work-related problems assess their crises and the ensuing restructurings of their lives as integral and sometimes eventually positive parts of their personal growth, rather than as personal or professional failures. Respecting one's own needs and health to install not only a fulfilling but also a sustainable (work) life hence emerges as an important aspect of personal development and of a ‘good life’ in Switzerland.

Personal development on the one hand and unsatisfactory work conditions or unemployment on the other are also the main drivers of some interviewees' ambitions to become self-employed. As Augusta Wakari, cook in a university canteen, states: “If

I have my *own* business, I can be *much* more creative in this. [...] In the end since I have always someone above me, I'm not really growing, I'm not really creative, 'cause whatever they [=superiors] said, at the end I would do it." The lack of variety and self-determination aggravates the stress Augusta Wakari's job entails. She is not given enough employees to fulfill the tasks she is responsible for and feels that her inability to fight or say no – which she ascribes to her Asian culture – has caused her to disregard her personal needs for too long. When we met for the first interview, Augusta Wakari had just started taking anti-depressants and was suffering from severe burnout. When we met for the second time, she had quit her job.<sup>1</sup> Other interviewees had resorted to self-employment as well in order to become active entrepreneurs in the face of deskilling, lack of recognition and unemployment. The main driver of these projects – which in her study of migrant women's self-employment projects in Switzerland, Raphaëla Hettlage (2014) aptly terms "biographical projects" – is the desire for self-actualization and recognition. Due to the racialized mechanisms of exclusion structuring the Swiss labor market and work environments, this desire is often not met.

Especially interviewees who have come to identify as lesbians while living in Switzerland conceptualize the development of their professional and sexual identities as parallel and interdependent processes, which are both perceived to be central to achieving a 'good life' in Switzerland. Beatriz Kraus says that it was her success as a sports instructor in Switzerland that provided her with the self-assurance she needed to become more confident in other areas of life, such as, especially, her sexuality.

*Moi j'aime mon travail, et c'est vrai que je suis bien dans ce que je fais, et c'est vrai que ça m'a beaucoup aidé que je mûrisse plus, j'étais quand même pas mal timide [...]. Des gens qui me connaissent un peu ils disent 'C'est incroyable, comme tu changes par rapport à la sécurité à l'assurance' [en donnant des cours]. [...] Maintenant je me sens bien dans ma vie aussi privée quoi, et justement je pense qu'un influence l'autre parce que là je suis encore mieux au fitness qu'avant, même si avant j'étais bien dans ce que je faisais, mais parce que maintenant c'est plus facile au niveau privé, je parle de ma vie normalement, que ce soit avec mes collègues, que ce soit avec mes amis tout ça [...]; si on n'est pas bien d'un côté après ça va pas de l'autre (rire), tôt ou tard ça va pas de l'autre.*

I love my work, and it's true that I'm good at what I do in my job, and it's true that this helped me a lot to mature more. I was after all quite timid before [...]. People who know me a little they say 'It's incredible how you change with respect to self-assurance' [when teaching classes]. [...] Now I feel good in my private life, too, and I really think that one influences the other because now I'm even better in the fitness classes than before, even if before I was already good at what I was doing, but because now it's easier with respect to my private life, I speak about my life normally, be it with colleagues or friends and everything [...]; if you're not doing well on one side then the other will not work either (laughs), sooner or later the other will not work either.

—Beatriz Kraus

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1 Later she opened her own restaurant, which has been very successful since.

The sense of self-assurance she experiences when teaching classes has been fundamental for Beatriz Kraus in gaining self-confidence in the process of coming to terms with her same-sex desire and assuming a lesbian identity. She can now “speak normally” about her private life, having to a great extent conquered the sense of shame she experienced at first when she realized that she loved women. Vice versa, having acknowledged her homosexuality has bolstered her confidence in what she does professionally. Beatriz Kraus concludes the interview with the words “*C’est vrai que je me suis bien intégrée*” – “It’s true that I have integrated myself well.” As in the case of Teresa Ruiz, professional success and the establishment of a sustainable partnership have played an important role in this process. At the same time, the interdependencies between work and love life Beatriz Kraus addresses renders this ‘good life’ brittle: If one of these areas of life is dysfunctional, “the other will not work either.” Augusta Wakari confirms this perspective as she explains what pictures she envisions taking for this research project:

The first picture will be my home, where there’s Joëlle [her partner] in it (laughs), yeah. And my second one, it will be my working place. Those two just have to work, well ‘cause otherwise when one of that is not working, then I’m totally- how can I say? [...] Disrupted, exactly. I’m not function, actually (laughs), not function well at all when one of it is not working [...].

—Augusta Wakari

As with heterosexual migrant women (Baghdadi 2008), for the interviewed queer migrant women fulfilling work, professional recognition, and participation in society bear a significance that extends well beyond work life, affecting interviewees’ general self-esteem, their sense of belonging, and their health. However, as will be discussed in the next two sub-chapters, queer migrant women are particularly exposed to negative experiences at, or exclusion from, work. By implication, this also bears a heightened danger of destabilizing other aspects of their Selves and lives.

## 9.2 Failing to Connect at Work

Just as work represents an arena of recognition and personal development, it also appears as a site of exclusion. These exclusions take many forms. In this sub-chapter, experiences of exclusion *at* work are addressed; the next sub-chapter then addresses exclusion *from* work in the form of deskilling and unemployment.

As mentioned earlier, many interviewees migrated to Switzerland alone, without a partner or family members. Traveling alone, the workplace typically represented the first opportunity to get in contact with people in Switzerland. Especially in the period immediately after arrival, the social aspects of work were of particular importance. However, interviewees’ accounts demonstrate that even in the long run, contacts made at work mostly failed to develop into meaningful relationships. This is exemplified in Charlotta Sembiring’s case. She describes her arrival in her research group after her involuntary transfer from a Dutch university to the University of Bern as follows:

If foreigner you come here, who's the first people you meet, you come to the office, right? [...] So yeah, if you cannot talk about daily life with your colleagues and it's completely isolated, and we don't talk about daily life with our colleagues, 'cause they don't [...]. I don't know why, but it's just like, it's just the normal way for them because they talk about it at home. And when you're at work, you work, you talk about your work and that's quite, well of this particular culture of Switzerland. [...] You don't go to your colleagues' house, right? You don't meet their families, you don't meet even their partner, [...] it's just for many years you may have been working with some people but you have no idea how do their partners even look like, not to mention their daily life there.

—Charlotta Sembiring

The efforts Charlotta Sembiring has undertaken over the past two years to make friends with her team colleagues have largely failed:

I was really trying to embrace the situation and being part of it and okay just do it [...] and so I was inviting my colleagues to come over for dinner, and they liked it very much but nobody invited me back. [...] I mean, because we were always polite but I don't find the feeling of connection.

—Charlotta Sembiring

From these experiences Charlotta Sembiring concludes that “before talking about being lesbian I think really we are considered being foreigners.” Similar experiences of exclusion at work were a recurrent theme across accounts, as was often the attendant view that being a foreigner shapes work life in Switzerland in much more profound ways than being a lesbian. However, interviewees rarely attributed these failures to connect to work colleagues directly to racism or xenophobia in Swiss work environments, but instead predominantly ascribed these experiences to the specific characteristics of Swiss communication and work culture. Interviewees above all highlighted Swiss colleagues' general reserve, their pronounced avoidance of conflicts, and their strict distinction between work and private life. The latter further manifested itself in a perceived lack of interest in interviewees' wellbeing, which was a source of particular consternation and estrangement. Language issues were understood as a further prominent obstacle, as Swiss people were perceived to lack willingness to speak in a common language that was not their own.

After months of fruitless efforts, Charlotta Sembiring eventually turned away from her own to other research groups, where she was eventually able to forge some connections with other immigrant researchers. She shares this strategy of connecting to other 'foreigners' with other interviewees like Maria Borkovic, who works in the Marketing and Communications Department at the headquarters of a multinational firm in Basel. After several failed attempts to connect to Swiss lesbians at lesbian events in Basel, in her disappointment Maria Borkovic refocused her efforts to forge social contacts in her workplace:

The only place you know [in] which I can talk [to] and meet people, it's my working place you know. [...] There also it's easier for us because they are also foreigners, [...] so we all mix, we don't have barriers between us since we are all foreigners, I also know how do they feel, they live here like two years and they have none of Swiss friend. So



[the Swiss] all have you know these cliques between them and this [the workplace] is the only place which I can like have friends. Outside is just like impossible.

—Maria Borkovic

However, seeking social contact among fellow ‘foreigners’ rather than the ‘unapproachable Swiss’ is not a guarantee for success either. Maria Borkovic qualifies her own statement later in the interview, admitting that her relationships to her international work colleagues have remained distant: “It’s like we’re really good colleagues and really like sort of friends *in* the working place but everything beyond just doesn’t exist, they separate it, they have own families their own friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, whatever,” she says. Although Maria Borkovic does not make this explicit, her sense of unbelonging in these circles eventually also centrally hinges on her sexual orientation: She has begun to avoid the events her work colleagues regularly attend, because she perceives them to be populated by “creamy people,” who are characterized by an excessive display of heteronormativity.

Many interviewees had given up trying to forge friendships in the workplace. Maria Borkovic decided to abort her struggle to find friends in Switzerland altogether: “I don’t care, it’s just, if the life will bring, you know, somebody to get to know, it will bring, I will just not push it [any more].” Ayesha Umar, who in the interviews emerges as an extroverted, proactive, enterprising, and adventurous person that understands herself as someone who likes to be immersed in new cultures and learn new languages, concludes in the face of her prolonged yet futile attempts to connect to her work colleagues and other people in Switzerland: “*Die Schweiz ist wirklich nicht mein Land*” – “Switzerland is really not my country.” In an attempt to improve the quality of her social life, she recently moved to the French-speaking part of Switzerland, in the hope that the *Romands* will be more sociable and open since they are culturally more similar to the French.

In contrast to these accounts highlighting the problems that emerge for international workers in the face of Swiss communication and work culture, some interviewees explicitly link experiences of exclusion at work to their sexual orientation. Barbara Wiegand, for instance, attaches her sense of alienation at work to what she terms “*das heterosexuelle Spiel*” – “the heterosexual game.” As she assesses ironically:

*Ich bin ja so superschlau (selbstironisch) und analysiere alles, aber bis ich gewisse ganz banale Sachen merke da könnten Jahrhunderte verstreichen (schmunzelt), und ich bin [dann] völlig erstaunt. Was ICH eben nicht drauf habe ist das heterosexuelle Spiel [bei der Arbeit]. Das merke ich lange nicht dass es um das geht, ich bin meistens sachorientiert und personenbezogen. [...] Mir kommt es nicht sofort in den Sinn. Und dann wenn ich es merke bin ich mal enorm gelangweilt, und dann fange ich mir an zu überlegen ‘Oh Gott ja, es- gut sie finden mich komisch ja logisch (lacht), ich hab’s gecheckt.’*

I am so super smart (self-ironically) and analyze everything, but until I realize certain entirely banal things, centuries could pass (smirks), and then I am completely astonished. What I miss out on is the heterosexual game [at work]. It takes me a long time to figure out that this is what it’s about, I am mostly matter-of-fact and person-related. [...] It doesn’t occur to me immediately. And then when I realize it I am enormously bored, and then I start to think ‘Oh God yes it- okay they think I’m strange, yes that

makes sense (laughs), I got it.'

—Barbara Wiegand

This statement pointedly describes the sense of exclusion generated by the implicit heterosexuality of the workplace. Not realizing that the “heterosexual game” is in operation at work, or consciously opting out of it, excludes people with alternative sexualities from the social mechanisms that are the lubricants of a successful work life, such as flirtation, gossip, or certain work-related events. This not only causes queer people to be left out but may also represent a hindrance to satisfying teamwork and individual promotion (Valentine 1993). Hence, Barbara Wiegand’s analysis reifies queer geographers’ contention that ritualized workplace performances not only reflect the gendered division of labor but are also firmly rooted in a heterosexual matrix (Bell and Valentine 1995b, McDowell 1995).

The fact that few research participants directly related their experiences of exclusion at work to racism, xenophobia, sexism, or homophobia in Switzerland does not allow for the converse conclusion that these issues have been conquered, or that mechanisms of exclusion at the workplace are ‘merely’ based on differing communication and work cultures. Instead, the rather scarce explicit mention of racism, for example, in queer migrant women’s accounts must rather be understood in the context of Switzerland as a space of “raceless racism” (see Chapter 1), as well as in the context of persistent structural disadvantages in the kind of workplaces most participants in this study worked in. Similarly, homophobia is hard to address in a context in which Switzerland represents itself, and becomes represented, as a homo-friendly space, despite ongoing violence and structural discrimination against sexually dissident people (see Chapters 2.2, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3). In interview excerpts discussed earlier, interviewees struggled to uncover, name and categorize the reasons for their experiences of exclusion and their sense of alienation at work and in other areas of their everyday lives. At the same time, these diffuse discriminations are notoriously difficult to dissect. As shown by the earlier discussion of the instance in which Barbara Wiegand attempted to glean from the “village idiot” what it was about her that vexed her fellow villagers most – her identity as a woman, an intellectual, a ‘foreigner,’ or a lesbian (see Chapter 7.1) – for individuals who are marginalized in multiple ways, it is often a source of great insecurity not to know the exact reason why they are being discriminated against. Pilar Gómez had a similar experience at work. When we met for the first interview, she had been suspended from work for a month, and had already been notified that she was going to be dismissed from the telecommunication firm she had been working for as a secretary for twenty years. She became the target of serious bullying led by her new (young, male) superior. This dismissal was going to place Pilar Gómez in a highly precarious situation. She was single and could hence not count on a partner to support her financially in the long run; and as a woman of 44 it was not going to be easy for her to find a new job (she did eventually find a new job five years later, from which she has since been dismissed again). In the interviews, Pilar Gómez states that she believes that her much younger and “macho” superior could not endure that she was not laughing at his sexist and homophobic jokes, or, on a deeper level, that she was his senior, a woman, and a lesbian. Like Barbara Wiegand, it unsettles Pilar Gómez not to be able to pin down the exact source of

his hostility. While Pilar Gómez' experience shows that there is indeed also continued blatant sexism and homophobia in Swiss workplaces (the jokes), it also mirrors Barbara Wiegand's experience of not being able to definitively trace these experiences of exclusion back to any of these '-isms' – racism, sexism, or heterosexism.

Most of the time, discriminatory acts play out just below the surface and are therefore hard to pinpoint. Julia Nentwich (2007) analyzes discursive constructions of what has been termed 'new racism' and 'new sexism' in Swiss work environments. Nentwich argues that new discursive practices have grown from the context in which explicitly discriminatory statements – especially in the workplace – have become taboo in Switzerland. Since social differences must be upheld nonetheless, they are now being reproduced through a set of discursive maneuvers that render discrimination invisible while at the same time perpetuating it. 'New racist' discourses in everyday interactions are, for instance, characterized by disclaimers ("I'm not a racist, but..."), particularization ("X is a good guy, but generally..."), and by excuses ("This may sound a little politically incorrect, but let's face it..."), which seek to position the speaker as non-racist but are immediately followed by a discriminatory statement. Such moves of defensiveness, keeping face, and positive self-representation on the part of the speaker work towards mitigating the exposure of the speaker as a racist while reinstalling social difference. Nentwich's analysis has since been underscored and contextualized by emerging Swiss critical race scholarship, which identifies Switzerland as a space of "raceless racism" (see Chapter 1). 'New sexist' discursive practices work along similar lines. Here discursive strategies include denying inequality between the genders by presenting gender equality as already installed; describing instances of discrimination as isolated incidents; blaming others for persisting inequalities (school, family, the education system, etc.); or pleas to be 'realistic' about gender quotas within organizations given the 'objective' lack of qualified women (Nentwich 2007). Other scholars have made similar arguments with respect to homophobia at the workplace. While lesbians and gay men continue to be exposed to direct discrimination such as dismissal based on sexual orientation, subtle acts of exclusion performed by work colleagues or superiors are much more frequent (Schneeberger et al. 2002, see also Valentine 1993 and 2000 [1998], Waaldijk and Bonini-Baraldi 2006).

In sum, explicit discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity and sexuality has, to a certain extent, yielded to subtle discriminatory acts and structural discrimination that are hard to address as they operate underground. Affected interviewees were left with a vague sense of alienation and isolation that they were unable to pinpoint the source of, and which they rarely explicitly related to racism, xenophobia, sexism, or homophobia. Instead, the tendency was to ground this sense of estrangement in the Swiss culture of work and communication, which interviewees perceived as specifically adverse to foreigners because it for instance included the refusal to speak a common language (or, in German-speaking Switzerland, the refusal to speak high German instead of Swiss German dialect), or to address private matters at the workplace.

### 9.3 “Romeo and Juliet would have killed each other long ago”: Being Excluded from Work

Lack of professional recognition was a recurrent theme across accounts, as was *unemployment*, which many respondents had experienced at some point since coming to Switzerland. Nour Saber, Efra Mahmoud, Charlotta Sembiring, Nara Agayeva, and Ramiza Salakhova all suffer(ed) through extended periods of unemployment.<sup>2</sup> This subchapter revisits Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova’s account, which illustrates the ways in which exclusion from work fuels social isolation, and explores how exclusion from work is co-constitutive with other forms of marginalization.

Because their application process for asylum in Switzerland is ongoing, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova have not been allowed to work in Switzerland for over four years.<sup>3</sup> While their successful flight to Switzerland brought the couple great relief, the prolonged asylum application process, and especially the attendant work restriction proves to be a further touchstone for them, individually and as a couple. In the interviews, Nara Agayeva appears as a highly motivated, ambitious, entrepreneurial, resourceful, and active person. Not being allowed to work for such extended periods of time has had detrimental effects on the sports instructor. “*Man muss sehr starke Nerven haben und psychisch sehr stabil sein um das alles zu überleben*” – “You need to have strong nerves and be very stable psychologically to survive all this,” she states. She would like to “be among people” and “do something.” Instead, she and her partner mostly find themselves confined to their small apartment with a book or the TV, unable to go to places because there is no money to spend, and tired of the same walk along the local creek. As Ramiza Salakhova describes a typical rainy day in the Agayeva-Salakhova family home:

*Aber manchmal [...] das Wetter ist nicht gut und wir sitzen ganzen Tag zusammen, sie kann dort sitzen, ich kann hier sitzen, dann ich gehe ich sitze dort, sie sitzt hier, und Kind ist auch zu Hause [...] und ich denke das ist wirklich erstaunlich, und wir streiten nicht, sie nervt mich nicht [...].*

But sometimes [...] the weather is not good and we sit together the entire day, she can sit there, I can sit here, then I go and sit there, she sits here, and child is also at home [...] and I think this is really remarkable, and we don't fight, she doesn't get on my nerves [...].

—Ramiza Salakhova

This seemingly harmless story in which nothing happens once more unmasks the violent spatiality of the ‘borders within’ (see Chapter 8) that discipline queer migrant

2 Charlotta Sembiring’s period of unemployment started after the interviews and extended over several years. She eventually became partially self-employed, and has recently found part-time employment.

3 Note that this is an unusually long period of time, as asylum seekers are usually allowed to start working six months after entering Switzerland. I have not been able to establish the reason for this exceptional treatment.

bodies. The restrictions of asylum procedure and the attendant work ban exerts considerable pressure on Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova's relationship. "*Hätten Romeo und Julia Möglichkeit, zusammen vierundzwanzig Stunden in vier Jahren zusammen in einem Wohnung wohnen, würden sie sich schon längst umgebracht haben*" – "If Romeo and Juliet had had the possibility to live together in one apartment for twenty-four hours for four years, they would have killed each other long ago," Nara Agayeva laughs, adding in seriousness that she and her partner have created "*ein Denkmal der Liebe*" – "a monument of love" because they still love each other in the face of these adverse circumstances.

During these four years, the greatest challenge for Nara Agayeva has been "*nicht auf einen Platz zu stehen, einfach sich entwickeln*" – "not to stand still, just to keep on developing," as she repeatedly emphasizes. The couple taught themselves German within the first few months of arriving in Switzerland and immersed themselves in Swiss and European culture by reading European literature (especially the feminist classics) and by watching local TV news and documentaries.

When I visited the couple for the second time, Ramiza Salakhova had just obtained her temporary status as a refugee. Suddenly, she was not only *allowed* but *required* to work, and she was under a great deal of stress about having to organize the necessary documents to register at the local governmental employment office. These events upset the established family structure, as this is not how the couple had envisioned their roles. As Nara Agayeva states:

*Also ich meine jetzt ich muss das Geld verdienen. Ich habe eine Familie und ich muss das Geld verdienen. Und ja, ich bin ja doch nicht wie hundert [Jahre alt] und ja, nicht alt, und ich kann es machen und das Problem ist dass man mich [nicht] lässt. Machen lässt. Weil schon dass sie [die Familie] alle brauchen Unterstützung, und das Kind muss jetzt dann studieren. Ramiza braucht auch ihre Ausbildung [...]. Und dafür, hätte ich Möglichkeit arbeiten, dann könnte es funktionieren. Aber so muss sie jetzt laufen, Diplom [von Ramiza] anerkennen lassen, gleichzeitig irgendwo arbeiten ja weiss ich ja nicht, putzen oder so, weiss ich ja nicht.*

Well I mean now I have to earn the money. I have a family and I need to earn the money. And well, it's not like I'm a hundred years old and yes, I'm not old, and I can do it, the problem is that they [don't] let me. Let me do it. Because already that they [the family] all need support, and the child has to start her studies. Ramiza also needs her professional training [...]. And for that, if I had the possibility to work, then it could work. But as it is now she has to run, have her diplomas recognized, work somewhere at the same time I don't know, cleaning or something, who knows.

—Nara Agayeva

Not being able to work becomes a double legacy for Nara Agayeva: As someone who defines herself through what she does professionally, the work prohibition not only denies her access to a crucial source of identification and self-realization, but bars her from assuming her intended role in her family. She has been working tirelessly towards creating a space to make this family possible ever since she and her partner became a couple, organizing visas, planning their flight, supporting her partner who was abused by her husband, and she considers it natural to assume the position of the breadwinner, at least until her partner has completed her desired professional training.

In her efforts to enhance the family's situation, Nara Agayeva has in fact already started to work in Switzerland as a volunteer instructor for a local sports team. Her team has already celebrated a number of successes at local and international competitions; a local newspaper has published an article about her; and she has gleaned a free car and laptop from the sports club. "*Also ich habe schon ehrgeizige Ziele*" – "I mean, I have ambitious goals," she says about her plans with her team, proudly stating that the number of club members has increased since she started training the team. "*Und die kommen nicht einfach in Schule, sie kommen auf [meinen] Namen*" – "And they don't just come to the school, they come because of [my] name," she points out.

While Nara Agayeva relates these achievements with pride, she clearly classifies them as preparation rather than arrival. "*Aber jetzt möchten wir leben. Zu beginnen*" – "But now we would like to live. To start living," she says, "*wir sind nicht [mehr] zwanzigjährige Mädchen*" – "we are not twenty-year-old girls [anymore]." The voluntary work only occupies her for a couple of hours each week. She would like to start earning money to be able to support her partner's professional training and their daughter's education, and envisions completing an advanced vocational training. Before she can do this, however, she has to continue to wait for an answer from the Federal Migration Office; until then, her wishes continue to be deferred. As Ramiza Salakhova explains the importance of a positive asylum decree for her own professional life:

*Dieses Jahr habe ich ein Traum gesehen, dass ich eine Erlaubnis Aufenthalt hier in der Schweiz bekommen- Oooh! [...] Ich hab gestanden ich sagte 'Nara! Nara! Was habe ich gesehen!' (lacht) und ich denke es war das erste mal, als ich so einen Traum gesehen habe, ich habe irgendwelche Papier bekommen dass ich darf, dass ich kann und will helfen [...].*

This year I saw in a dream that I got a residence permit here in Switzerland- Oooh! [...] I stood I said 'Nara! Nara! What have I seen!' (laughs) and I think it was the first time that I saw a dream like this, I got some paper that I'm allowed to, that I can and want to help [...].

—Ramiza Salakhova

While in their home country, Ramiza Salakhova's husband had forbidden his wife from educating herself or working in her original profession, and Nara Agayeva's professional skills became dispensable as girls were gradually excluded from sports lessons. For both women, being able to stay in Switzerland is thus not about consumption and passivity – as commonly held prejudices against asylum seekers in Switzerland would have it – but about self-realization, social recognition, and *participation*. "To begin living" not only means to feel safe but to be of use and to become a full-fledged and contributing member of society, which is importantly also framed in terms of waged work.

The emotional and economic repercussions Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova have suffered due to their enforced unemployment parallels those experienced by other research participants who are, or have been, subject to unemployment. While no other research participant has experienced as radical and absolute an exclusion from the labor market as Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova, other situations are a more or less direct result of immigration procedure as well. This is the case for Nour Saber, who due to regulations attached to the Partnership Act is forced to continue living in a town

remote from any job opportunity that might do justice to her professional qualifications (see Chapter 8). Moreover, as discussed above in the context of the bullying Pilar Gómez was exposed to, unemployment can be a result of discrimination grounded in an opaque conglomerate of rejections based on different aspects of queer migrant women's identities.

Finally, the workplace appears as a site of exclusion in the sense that some interviewees have been excluded from *adequate* work. As discussed at the outset of this chapter, interviewees expect work to be meaningful and challenging, and to foster personal development. Accordingly, interviewees who are exposed to deskilling and find themselves in jobs lacking challenges find it hard to maintain their motivation. After an extended period of unemployment, Efra Mahmoud eventually found a job, albeit one that does not match her qualifications. While she appreciates that this employment enables her to live without debts for the first time in a long time, the tasks she has to perform are not satisfying:

*Ich mache nur die Sache auf die Datenbank [...], das ist kein Problem aber es ist langweilig, ich mache nix, ich denke nicht, ich muss einfach- ist alles tactac, und ich mache das nicht gerne. Ich hätte gerne zum Beispiel auch verstanden um was die Sache geht [...], ich bin nicht eine Maschine man sagt und es ist so du machst so und das ist fertig. Ich bin nicht so. [...] Ich habe gedacht es ist nur Arbeit zum Geld verdienen, aber zum Arbeit zum gerne machen oder so, das ist nicht mein Traumjob so.*

I only do stuff in the database [...], that's no problem but it's boring, I don't do anything, I don't think, I just have to- everything is tactactac and don't like doing that. I would for instance have liked to understand what the topic is [...], I'm not a machine you tell and it's like that and you do that and finished. That's not the way I am. [...] I thought it's only work to earn money, but in order to like doing the work or something, this is not the job of my dreams.

—Efra Mahmoud

As many accounts in which deskilling plays a role showed, like complete exclusion from the labor market and discrimination at work, deskilling significantly affects self-esteem and can induce health problems and destabilize other areas of life.

I would like to conclude this sub-chapter by embedding its findings in wider Swiss migration scholarship. Experiences of exclusion and isolation in the workplace, deskilling, and unemployment confirm the findings of the rapidly growing body of research investigating the work biographies of skilled migrant women in German-speaking countries incited by Encarnación Rodríguez Gutiérrez' groundbreaking *Intellektuelle Migrantinnen* (Rodríguez Gutiérrez 1999; for Swiss studies see e.g. Baghdadi 2008, Riaño 2003b, and Riaño and Baghdadi 2007, see Chapter 2.1.4). Since such mechanisms of exclusion have also been documented in heterosexual migrant women's work experiences, the question remains: In what ways do *queer* migrant women's experiences of exclusion at work differ from those of heterosexual immigrant women?

These differences are significant. First, for queer migrant women, experiences of exclusion at and from work may critically aggravate the sense of disconnection and so-

cial isolation they experience in other important areas of life, especially in the family of origin and in the lesbian or in their diasporic communities. In other words, queer migrant women do not have the same access to 'fallback' social networks as heterosexual migrant women often do. Such multiple exclusions increase the significance of the workplace as a site of social connectivity and financial security and aggravate repercussions if these connections fail to materialize or unemployment occurs.

The second point was already mentioned earlier (Chapter 6) and addresses the fact that the option of resorting to the role of wife and mother in case of professional failure is not available to queer migrant women to the same extent that it is to their heterosexual counterparts. While being relegated to the home is usually not an ideal option for skilled heterosexual migrant women either, at least the performance of stereotypical gender roles offers some social recognition. By contrast, queer women often face rejection when presenting their baby projects to their families (at least at first; again, no data could be gathered as to what happens after these children's births, see Chapter 6.2).

Third, queer migrant women's experiences of exclusion at and from work may, on first sight, seem unrelated to sexual identity, as skilled heterosexual migrant women, too, often experience difficulties in forging connections to their Swiss work colleagues, or to obtain employment in the first place. However, they do not additionally have to negotiate heteronormativity and homophobia at work, which has its own exclusionary effects.

Finally, on a side note: The experiences of exclusion discussed in this sub-chapter chiefly concern interviewees who did not have any social contacts in Switzerland when they came here. Others, who came to Switzerland quite early in their lives and have been living here with their families, or who migrated here for their bachelor studies already, were able to establish social networks before entering work life and are hence not as dependent on being able to forge social contacts at work. At the same time, while the (few) interviewees in this study who have joined a partner or family members in Switzerland have been able to fall back on these contacts, these connections remain fragile, and are never a guarantee of smooth 'integration.' Nour Saber, for instance, who was unexpectedly left by her partner soon after her arrival in Switzerland, now finds herself in a precarious emotional and legal situation.

## 9.4 'Coming out' at Work

'Coming out' at work is a recurrent theme across queer migrant women's biographies. Experiences and positions with regard to communicating one's sexual orientation at work vary widely: While for some sexuality and work is an exceedingly difficult issue, for others it bears hardly any significance. This continuum is the subject of this sub-chapter.

Work typically concludes the list of the spaces in which interviewees have communicated – or plan to communicate – their sexual orientation. Best friends are typically the first to be brought in to the loop, followed (if applicable) by friends in the lesbian community and elsewhere; only then does 'coming out' to work colleagues or superiors become an issue. (As discussed in Chapter 6, the placement of family in this imaginary



'sequence of communication' varies.) The position of the workplace on this list goes some way towards demonstrating the lack of trust in Swiss work environments to recognize sexually non-conforming co-workers and employees. As queer scholars' examinations of non-migrant lesbians' and gays' experiences of exclusion in Swiss workspaces have yielded, this sense of distrust remains justified (Rüttimann 2012, Schneeberger et al. 2002).

It should not come as a surprise that interviewees who did not identify as lesbians or who had not made their sexual preference known to friends or family did not communicate their sexual orientation at work either (see Chapter 5.3). Efra Mahmoud, who does not identify as lesbian, says that taking part in a lesbian event would, in theory, be possible for her, but the fear of being seen there by someone from her workplace or the Egyptian diasporic community keeps her away. In her workplace, subtly homophobic quips are frequent, and she is afraid to become the subject of such stereotypes at work.

Other interviewees have not come out at work but are planning to do so at some point in the future. In a twist on the negative perceptions of Swiss work and communication culture discussed above, these women frame Swiss colleagues' reservations and their tendency to separate the private from the professional in exceedingly *positive* terms, relating it to respect and decency rather than disinterest and distance. It is exactly this – here welcome – containment that allows them to determine the point in time in which to communicate their sexual orientation at work themselves, rather than having it extracted by colleagues' queries into their intimate spheres. As Nara Agayeva states when pondering her plans to come out to the colleagues at the sports club where she works as a volunteer, *“Die Menschen sind ja sehr anständig und stellen keine weiteren Fragen”* – “The people are very decent and don't continue asking questions.” She contrasts this to her and Ramiza Salakhova's experiences in their common workplace in their home city, where persistent questions about one's intimate sphere were daily fare (and where a colleague eventually intruded in their private sphere by telling Ramiza Salakhova's husband that he suspected his wife of entertaining a relationship with Nara Agayeva).

Further, there were interviewees who applied complex communication strategies in the workplace. In these cases, sexual orientation or same-sex partnerships were only selectively revealed to a trusted few, while other co-workers were given elusive answers or lied to if they asked direct questions. Ayesha Umar, Customer Relations manager in a multinational internet firm and living in a registered partnership, explains her communication strategy at work as follows:

*Also ich brauche etwas Zeit Leuten vertrauen zu können, etwas Persönliches sagen zu können [...], aber niemand hat mich direkt gefragt. Jemand hat gefragt: 'Bist du verheiratet?' Ich habe gesagt: 'Ja, irgendwie so.' Ich weiss nicht was ich sagen soll, aber ja, ich habe schon ein paar Dinge gesagt, wo die Leute können schon etwas heraus leiten irgendwie aber vielleicht nicht sicher sein. [...] Also weil Englisch sagst du sowieso 'partner,' oder? Das ist so geschlechtsneutral dass niemand weiss. [...] Wenn jemand ist von Ausland, zum Beispiel die Finnin, ich habe gewusst ich kann es erzählen mit ihr und ist kein Problem, oder? Deshalb habe ich es gleich am Anfang erzählt. Also weisst du, es gibt welche von denen ich weiss: Okay, diese Person kann damit umgehen. Mit den Schweizern habe ich immer das Gefühl: Nein, ich kann nicht sicher*

*sein, dass die damit umgehen können- als erstes, als zweites weil ich bin eine Frau, Ausländer und habe jetzt eine gute Position in meine Geschäft, oder? Das sind dann diese Faktoren worüber die dann einfach zu viel nachdenken.*

Well I need some time to be able to trust people, to say something personal [...], but nobody asked me directly. Somebody asked: 'Are you married?' I said: 'Yes, something like that.' I don't know what to say but yes, I've indeed said a few things that people could guess something from somehow but maybe not be sure. [...] Because in English you say 'partner' anyway, right? This is so neutral with respect to gender that nobody knows. [...] If someone is from abroad, for instance the Finnish woman, I knew I can tell it with her and is no problem, you know? This is why I told her straight from the beginning. Well you know, there are some who I know that: Okay, this person can deal with it. With the Swiss I always have the feeling: No, I can't be sure that they can deal with it- this being the first thing, the second thing being because I'm a woman, a foreigner, and now have a good position in my business, you know? Those are the factors then that they then think about too much.

—Ayesha Umar

The building blocks of Ayesha Umar's communication strategy are ideas about national mentalities (Finnish, Swiss), strategic thinking with respect to her position in the business, and trust. Her linguistic acrobatics (such as relying on English terms to conceal her partner's gender) are expressive of the energy and thought some interviewees invested in navigating their sexual orientation at work, be it out of fear of being targeted by people holding homophobic views or of jeopardizing promotions in highly competitive corporate environments.

Maria Borkovic follows a similar strategy. In contrast to Ayesha Umar, who tends towards a more masculine appearance, Maria Borkovic has carefully constructed a distinctly feminine work persona. She consciously instrumentalizes a feminine appearance and performance to enhance her air of professionalism at work. Stereotypical femininity does not come naturally to Maria Borkovic. She says that she was "really wild" in her adolescence and had to learn 'correct' feminine behavior and appearance when she first started working in "these serious working places," that is, in the corporate world: "Some people cannot sit in front of PC twelve hours and be on conferences calls and be you know very strict and very polite and good-looking, you know you really have to be like tiptop there," she explains.

Maria Borkovic's daily gender performance consolidates her position in the company not only because it abides by the required display of feminine professionalism, but also because it conceals her homosexuality. What is suppressed and hidden during the day requires release in her private life, where Maria Borkovic perceives herself to be a different person. "Strange things can come out of me," she laughs, "people [at work] wouldn't even believe how can I be in private life." She prefers to segregate these two Selves, and social worlds, strictly: "I lead like these two lives completely separate, and after work I don't want to kind of meet these people in my private life because from inside I'm not like really that," she states. As discussed above, she does not feel comfortable in the "snobbish" and reserved atmosphere that marks the spaces in which her

colleagues meet outside of work, preferring to go to lesbian or alternative parties to dance – even though she has not been able to forge meaningful social connections in these spaces either (see Chapter 5.2.3).

Maria Borkovic has hence created a feminine professional Self that she feels partly alienated from, as it does not correspond to how she perceives herself to be “from inside.” This sense of estrangement is connected to the implicated heterosexuality of Maria Borkovic’s professional persona, which stands in contrast to her otherwise very self-assured lesbian identity. While Maria Borkovic actively conceals her homosexuality from colleagues, as a kind of private joke she carries her lesbian identity with her at all times: One of the pictures she has contributed to this research shows a rainbow-colored key pendant, attached to which is the key to her flat, but not the one to her office. During work, the former is hidden away in her handbag, and only when she returns home does she take it out. “It’s like every day in my hand you know when I open [the door to my apartment], and it really just puts a smile on me.” Coming home from work also means coming home to her ‘real’ gender and sexual identity.

Maria Borkovic’s strategy to manage her sexual identity resonates with Gill Valentine’s analyses of the spatialities of lesbians’ everyday lives. Some of Valentine’s interviewees share Maria Borkovic’s strategy of performing a lesbian identity in lesbian spaces and at home while performing normative femininity in the workplace, and of creating secret ‘queer bubbles’ or using secret signs in heterosexual environments, here represented by Maria Borkovic’s key pendant (Valentine 1993 and 1995b). Maria Borkovic’s account highlights how the heterosexual imperative in Swiss work environments normalizes the expectance of a (hetero)sexualized appearance and performance by women (Salzinger 2007) and demonstrates how queer women become complicit in the reproduction of this expectation by reconstructing stereotypical femininity. The question remains, then, how Maria Borkovic’s experiences might differ from those of non-migrant white lesbians. The imagined gay community that is called upon by Maria Borkovic’s key pendant strategy marks her desire for a queer home. However, in contrast to many ‘Swiss’ lesbians who desire lesbian spaces, this home has so far been denied to her. Contrary to her expectations prior to coming to Switzerland, she is not welcomed into the ‘lesbian family’ in Basel as she had hoped (see Chapter 5.2.3). This eventually renders her ‘real’ – that is, lesbian – Self just as unstable as the heterosexual identity she performs at work.

A last note on the subject of the fear some interviewees express about jeopardizing their position at work by revealing their sexual orientation: This fear was particularly pronounced in the accounts of those who work in a ‘sensitive’ line of work and especially concerns women like Maria Borkovic, Nara Agayeva, or Natascha Schild, who either work in competitive corporate work environments, or who are in charge of children as teachers or trainers and are hence concerned about parents’ reactions (see also Rüttimann 2012 on homosexual teachers in Switzerland). Furthermore, one interviewee who works in the field of human rights and has to travel widely is cautious about ‘coming out’ in her professional environment as her destinations include countries in which homosexuality is banned by law.

Other interviewees are irritated by the suggestion that their sexual orientation requires ‘disclosure’ at all. Some prefer to speak about their sexual orientation upon re-

quest only and then attempt to answer in an unexcited and “natural” way. As Leyla Haddad relates:

*Wenn mich jemand beim Schaffe [bei der Arbeit] fragt, ja und dann der Freund, und nachher sage ich, 'Nein, ich habe keinen Freund, ich habe eine Freundin,' und versuche sehr natürlich mit dem Thema, also wenn jemand fragt, 'Nein ich habe eine Freundin' und nachher es geht weiter, also nicht jetzt noch da noch gross erklären [...].*

If someone asks me at work, yes and what about the boyfriend, and then I say: ‘No, I don’t have a boyfriend, I have a girlfriend,’ and I try to be very natural about the topic, so if someone asks, ‘No I have a girlfriend,’ and then things move along, I don’t really start explaining a lot [...].

—Leyla Haddad

“*Du hast schon nachher so den Stempel vom Exoten*” – “Afterwards you are stamped as an exotic,” Leyla Haddad adds, but corrects herself and says that she is anyway already perceived as an exotic *before* exposing herself as a lesbian, “*aber irgendwie so als angenehme Exotin*” – “but somehow like an agreeable exotic.” Leyla Haddad grounds this agreeable sense of exoticism in “this kind of liveliness” – “*dieses Lebendige*” that she thinks people locate in her as a Lebanese, which she identifies as a quality that many Swiss people lack but miss. However, Leyla Haddad’s exoticism becomes too much to stomach once her lesbian identity is – ‘additionally’ – revealed. Barbara Wiegand relates a similar experience of ‘additive exoticism’ in her workplace: “[*Ich könnte*] zugeben dass ich einfach lesbisch bin, und was wär dann? Wenn sie mich JETZT schon komisch finden, undsoweiterundsofort. [...] Ich finds eine ZUMUTUNG dass ich so etwas überhaupt denken muss” – “[I could] admit to being lesbian, and then what? If they think I’m weird NOW, and so on. [...] I consider it an IMPOSITION that I have to think such a thing in the first place.” In contrast to Leyla Haddad, Barbara Wiegand refrains from communicating her sexual preferences at work: “Es GEHT sie nichts an” – “It IS none of their business.”

Generally, few of the interviewees who had come out at work had experienced explicitly negative reactions to their disclosure. Most interviewees did not even mention in their narratives how their ‘coming out’ was received, but merely stated that they communicated their homosexuality at work. After some time, Charlotta Sembiring’s colleagues did not even seem to remember that she was a lesbian – or did not register or take seriously her initial declaration. However, as discussed at the outset of this chapter, we cannot conclude from this relative absence of reports of negative reactions to coming outs that homophobia is absent from workspaces in Switzerland. Interviewees invest a great deal of energy and worry in deciding whether, when, and to whom to come out at work, and many are afraid of becoming subject to homophobia or of jeopardizing their professional position and career, and go to great lengths to conceal or ‘manage’ the revelation of their sexual orientation in the workplace. These fears are very real. To ascribe them to internalized homophobia or previous experiences with homophobia alone would fall short of a comprehensive analysis. As Efra Mahmoud, Pilar Gómez, and others report, homophobia is present in Swiss workplaces, even if it only surfaces quite rarely in its most blatant forms. Negotiating this persistent homophobia alongside

the other mechanisms of exclusion queer migrant women face based on their gender, ethnicity, and age poses a major challenge that prompts worry, consumes energy, and requires the development of multifarious strategies in order to protect one's personal needs and professional wellbeing.

### 9.5 "I'll just get the degree and then they'll leave me alone": Work as a 'Trade-off' in Intra-familial Negotiations

This last sub-chapter discusses work from an entirely different perspective. Like sexuality, work is negotiated through the *family of origin*. As I argue in the ensuing discussion of Leyla Haddad's narrative, these two areas of conflict within the family are highly contingent on one another. This is because daughters strive to establish an *overall* balance between following their own needs and desires and meeting their parents' expectations; between being independent adults and their parents' daughters; between feeling guilty and giving in; between breaking away and staying in touch. Within these negotiations, interviewees' 'choices' in terms of how to live out their homosexuality influences their communication strategies with their families. As interviewees tend to frame their same-sex desires as 'givens,' this generates pressure on them to 'at least' live up to their parents' expectations with respect to other areas of their lives, such as their education and career.

The character and urgency of families' and interviewees' expectations with regard to education and profession are closely tied to family habitus. Most interviewees' parents had an academic or entrepreneurial background, which exerted pressure on their daughters to establish and maintain meaningful and adequately prestigious professions and positions – although this pressure is often only implicit. As Leyla Haddad muses about her own former expectations regarding her professional life: "*Man weiss gar nicht mehr ist es von aussen [=Eltern] oder ist es doch das was ich von mir erwarte, es wird so ein Knäuel*" – "You don't know anymore is it from the outside [=parents] or is it what I expect from myself after all, it all gets balled up." Leyla Haddad's account exemplifies this process of balancing the relationship to one's parents, and the effects this pressure can have on career choices and work lives.

Growing up in Beirut in the 1970s, the noise of bombings was such an integral part of Leyla Haddad's everyday soundscape that when she first came to Switzerland, she experienced the silence – "in which you could hear ants snore" – as threatening. Leyla Haddad's mother is a Swiss citizen, and Leyla Haddad's family accordingly traveled to Switzerland from time to time to visit her parents. However, in three instances (all during Leyla Haddad's childhood), the Lebanese civil war escalated while the family was visiting Switzerland, preventing them from returning for a year or more each time. In one such instance, Leyla Haddad stayed in Switzerland at her grandparents' alone. When she returned to Lebanon a year later, she had forgotten how to speak French, English, and Arabic, and was not able to communicate with her father and brother. To catch up at school and relearn all the languages, she received extra attention after school, "*ein auf Leistung getrimmtes Kindlein*" – "a little child tailored to perform," is how she describes herself. Finally, Leyla Haddad's mother decided to stay in Switzerland

with the children while her father returned to Lebanon. As the director of a state institution, he was a distinguished member of society; Lebanon is where he had a career, a reputation, and status in his extended family (of which he was, according to Leyla Haddad, “a bit of a patriarch”). At the same time, as a man with an Arab background at the age of fifty, he was aware that it would be next to impossible for him to launch a second career in Switzerland.

For the next few years, everyday life at the Haddads' in Switzerland centered around the news on TV, where they would sometimes catch a glimpse of their father's apartment in central Beirut during reports about the latest bombings. Whenever Leyla Haddad and her brother could not bear to watch the news any more, her mother ‘guilt-tripped’ the siblings, telling them that they were obliged to watch, since it was thanks to their father working there that they were able to lead a life of comfort, safety, and peace. Leyla Haddad felt guilty, but her mother's reproaches stood in stark contrast to how Leyla Haddad felt: She was very unhappy, missed her father, and felt “extremely homesick.” The sense of guilt she felt in regard to her father was multiplied when she realized in her teens that she is attracted to women:

*Mein Vater der hat irgendwie sein Leben unter diesen Bomben und er ist auch entführt worden, [...] er hat das alles gemacht, dass wir hier in Frieden leben können, und ich habe mich so schuldig gefühlt, habe gedacht ja ich entspreche halt nicht dem was er erwartet hat.*

My father he somehow has this life under these bombs and he was also abducted, [...] he did everything for us to be able to live in peace here, and I felt so guilty, thought well I just don't live up to his expectations.

—Leyla Haddad

Accordingly, Leyla Haddad did not tell her parents about her homosexuality, but one day she accidentally left a letter on the table addressed to her parents. In it she wrote about her homosexuality, her sense of guilt, and also expressed suicidal thoughts. That same evening, Leyla Haddad's mother, uncharacteristically clad in jeans, turned up unexpectedly at the alternative women's bar where Leyla Haddad was tending bar that night. “*Sie habe sich nachher Sorgen gemacht, ich habe mir etwas angetan oder so, aber man hat dann nachher nie hingesessen, meine Mutter ist nicht jemand wo man nachher hinsitzt und nachher redet man über das, sie hat einfach das zur Kenntnis genommen*” – “She said she had been worried that I had hurt myself or something, but we never sat down afterwards, my mother is not someone you sit down with together afterwards and then you talk about it, she just acknowledged it.” However, Leyla Haddad's mother recurrently remarks on her daughter's dissident sexuality: “*Meine Mutter hat dann mehr so in Form von verletzenden Bemerkungen mir zu spüren gegeben, dass ich eigentlich nicht so rausgekommen bin, wie sie es sich gewünscht hätte*” – “My mother would then let me know more in the form of painful remarks that I hadn't turned out the way she had wished.” When Leyla Haddad's father fell ill, her mother blamed her for not meeting his wishes: “*Der Papi, der wäre so gern Grossvater geworden*” – “Dad, how much he would have liked to become a grandfather.”

Leyla Haddad is sure that her mother told her father about the letter and her homosexuality, but he never uttered a word about it for as long as he lived. Nevertheless, she remains grateful that he silently condoned her way of life:

*Und ich muss sagen ich bin heute recht froh dass mein Vater dort irgendwo grosszügig gewesen ist und mich das hat leben lassen, er hätte ja mich auch können- weiss auch nicht, er hat das mal einmal gesagt als ich noch so auf der Suche gewesen bin habe ich mich mit einem Typ eingelassen [...], und einmal war es mal noch ein Dealer gewesen, ein algerischer Dealer. Nein, als der [Vater] das gehört hat [...] hat er gesagt, (energisch) 'Tu vas arreter sinon je t'amenais au Liban,' hat wirklich so- darum habe ich immer Angst gehabt ihm zu sagen ich sei lesbisch, 'Hey hopp auf Libanon hä, heiraten gehen' (lacht), ist mir recht geblieben.*

And I must say I today I'm quite glad that my father was generous in a way and let me live this out, I mean he could have- I don't know, he said this once when I was still finding my way I got involved with a guy [...], and another time it was a drug dealer, an Algerian dealer. No, when he [her father] heard that [...] he said, (French, resolutely) 'If you don't stop this I'll bring you to Lebanon,' he really like- therefore I was always afraid to tell him I'm lesbian, 'Hey, off to Lebanon with you, eh, to marry' (laughs), this [incident] really made an impression on me.

—Leyla Haddad

Despite her fear and her deep sense of guilt it has never been an option for Leyla Haddad to concede to her parents' expectations with respect to her relationships. However, in order to be able to maintain her sexual freedom she felt she had to sacrifice her professional freedom:

*Was ich [...] habe durchziehen können ist wirklich das mit dem lesbisch, dort habe ich wie gemerkt, das will- das kann- meine Eltern die können noch so toben, ich lasse mich nicht irgendwie in ein Schema [...]. Dort ist für mich klar gewesen solange ich ihnen [beruflich] das mache was sie von mir erwarten können sie mir das wie nicht nehmen.*

What I [...] was really able to follow through with was the thing about being lesbian, there I realized that I don't want- can't- my parents can rant all they want, I won't let myself [be] put into a schema...]. There it was clear for me that as long as I do for them [professionally] what they expect they can't like take that from me.

—Leyla Haddad

Everybody in Leyla Haddad's family and their entire social environment in Lebanon has an academic background (except for her brother). *“Und darum hat man noch mehr Erwartungen in mich gesteckt”* – “and this is why they invested even more expectations in me,” Leyla Haddad surmises. Striving to win her parents' recognition, against adverse circumstances she fought her way into the gymnasium. Upon completing school, she discarded her desire to study art, convincing herself that, as her parents said, she would gain more independence by studying medicine.

Despite persistent doubts, she pushed through her studies. *“Komm, dann mache ich das Ticket und nachher lassen sie mich dann in Ruhe”* – “Come on, I'll just get the ticket [=degree] and then they'll leave me alone,” she told herself. However, the pressure failed to ease off when she entered the professional arena, and it is only when the time had come to decide whether to pursue a leading position years later that she realized that she had been working against herself, *“immer etwas gegen aussen zu sein versuchen, das nicht immer*

*dem entsprochen hat was ich innen bin*” – “always trying to be something outwardly that has not always corresponded to what I am on the inside.” At this point, she realized that she was not cut out for work that demands such a high level of competitiveness and performance: *“Ich bin nicht der Karrieretyp”* – “I’m not the career type.”

This eventually led to a severe burnout. Leyla Haddad’s ensuing process of acknowledging that a career change was inevitable (*“Ich muss meine Haut retten”* – “I have to save my skin”) was marked by more guilt and fear of being pushed away by her parents. *“Ich habe wirklich lange Angst gehabt ok, das mit dem Lesbischsein haben sie in Kauf genommen, aber [nur] solange ich als Ärztin [arbeite]”* – “For a long time I was really afraid okay, they accepted my being a lesbian, but [only] as long as I [work] as a doctor.” It was only after a long period of time that she eventually concluded: *“Irgendwie habe ich gemerkt, nein gut, sie haben mich auch noch als Lesbe gern gehabt und jetzt werden sie mich sicher auch noch gern haben”* – “Somehow I realized, well no, they still liked me as a lesbian and now they will surely still like me.”

When she eventually told her mother, her mother accepted the decision to abandon her career (her father, already ill at the time, did not get involved in these negotiations). Leyla Haddad felt liberated. When her father died, and due to the disappointment she perceived to have brought her parents, Leyla Haddad felt obliged to take on the responsibility of settling her father’s complex affairs in Lebanon. Overall, Leyla Haddad continues to be grateful to both her parents for not disowning her based on her sexual difference, and later her professional choices. *“Ob das jetzt das Libanesische ist oder nicht”* – “Whether this is now the Lebanese thing or not,” she considers the tie between parents and children to be unique. Despite the conflicts she has had with her parents, she perceives herself to be a person with a distinctive “sense of family” (*“Familiensinn”*): *“Meine Eltern, das ist für mich etwas vom Wichtigsten”* – “My parents are one of the most important things for me.” A statement that is substantiated by the fact that her relationship to her parents is undisputedly the key theme of her narrative.

In the context of this study, Leyla Haddad’s story is exceptional because it is shaped by wartime experiences. The constant fear for her life or the life of faraway parents and siblings and the sense of insecurity in her own home defies comparison. Despite (or perhaps because of) the extraordinariness of her biography, Leyla Haddad’s narrative crystalizes with a particular urgency how the sense of guilt towards parents with respect to one’s dissident sexuality is balanced by ‘trade-offs’ with respect to education and work. Like Leyla Haddad (“My parents can rant all they want, I can’t let myself [be] put in a schema”), other interviewees equally conceptualized their decision to live out their homosexuality less as a choice than as an inevitable fact which, in contrast to other parts of their lives, they experience as non-negotiable and imperative. In order to counterbalance filial disobedience with their love lives, in several cases efforts were made to accommodate parents’ expectations with respect to careers at least. However, as Leyla Haddad’s narrative testifies to, the underlying belief that concessions in professional life are easier to make than concessions in matters of love may turn out to be self-deceptive and eventually put one’s wellbeing at risk.



## 10. Scales of Identification: The City, the Rural

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The everyday geographies of the queer migrant women interviewed for this study are largely *urban* geographies. Most of the interviewees who had a choice lived in cities, and thus the everyday lives they described were predominantly urban. Their narratives for this reason tended to reproduce the myth of the gay metropolis, which constructs the city as *the* location of queer people and communities. As discussed earlier, this myth is a theory that travels globally. Some interviewees had explicitly (also) emigrated based on their preconceptions about gay life in the Western *metropolis*. From this perspective the Western metropolis signifies “the gay part so because of the tolerance and the liberalism of the country and the city, of that spirit and of that atmosphere which is very open and free” – this is how Maria Borkovic describes the city of her dreams, an amalgamation of Berlin, Amsterdam, and Barcelona. The vigor and reach of this imaginary is also manifest in the fact that many interviewees had initially not planned to come to Switzerland but had wanted to go to a more metropolitan area. Some women explicitly lamented the fact that Swiss cities do not classify as metropolises. Especially interviewees who experienced social exclusion in Switzerland viewed the discrepancy between the assumed openness and cosmopolitanism of the metropolis and the perceived small-mindedness of Swiss cities as an explanation for experiences of exclusion. At the same time, most interviewees had come to appreciate the small-town character of Swiss cities, pointing to advantages like low levels of environmental pollution, a more leisurely tempo, short travel distances, plentiful green spaces, and so on.

Interviewees generally strongly identified with the cities where they lived. The pictures they presented often featured themselves in their favorite spots within these urban landscapes (this boulevard, that café, this fountain, the house I live in), which they talked about with a great deal of affection. In contrast to the scale of the (Swiss) nation, which remained a vague concept with little palpable connection to everyday life, the city emerged as the most tangible scale of identification. This manifests in the picture of the self-designated “95 percent Cuban and five percent Basler” that Teresa Ruiz presents of herself, showing herself comfortably leaning against a banister on the shore of the Rhine with the Basel cathedral in the background. Both the picture and the accompanying narrative convey an air of comfort, familiarity, belonging, appropriation, affection: “*Ich liebe Stadt Basel*” – “I love the city of Basel.”

These perspectives on the urban strongly contrast with perspectives on, and experiences in, the *rural* as discussed in earlier chapters. Accounts such as Nour Saber's and Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova's largely portray the rural in negative terms, reiterating dominant discourses juxtaposing the gay metropolis in opposition to a backward homophobic rural. However, across accounts, views on the Swiss rural were more complicated. This ultimate chapter discusses more systematically how the women interviewed in this study perceive the rural; how these imaginaries become actualized in everyday life; and how these perceptions and actualizations reinforce or subvert dominant ideas about the rural and especially rural (homo)sexualities in Switzerland. The chapter approaches the rural from two distinct yet related perspectives: Chapters 10.1 and 10.2 engage with the rural as a *place to live*; Chapter 10.3 with imaginations of *nature* and *natural landscapes*.

The focus on the rural here inevitably catapults this chapter into the body of literature investigating rural sexualities. As discussed in Chapter 3.3, the discipline of geography itself has been instrumental in framing the rural as nothing more than a place that homosexuals strive to *leave* in order to join gay communities in the city (Aldrich 2004, D'Emilio 1989, Weston 1995). It was not until the mid- to late 1990s that the rural eventually became a designated object of interest in geographies of sexualities (Bell and Valentine 1995c, Gorman-Murray 2008, Knopp 2000, Knopp and Brown 2003, Kramer 1995, Valentine 1997, Wincapaw 2000). These queer studies of the rural have since worked to recover experiences of homosexual subjects who have grown up and/or live in rural areas, and have examined gay and lesbian utopic and dystopic imaginaries of the rural. While these perspectives have usefully complicated dominant views of the rural as intrinsically homophobic and have challenged prevailing dichotomizations of the city and the rural, they themselves have produced a fresh set of exclusions.

First, this predominantly Anglophone literature has largely concentrated on Western Anglophone contexts. These geographies document developments like the establishment of lesbian farms in the U.S. in the 1970s, a phenomenon which did not develop in other Western countries to the same extent. In this period a significant number of lesbians throughout the U.S. chose to move to the countryside, establishing community-based, women-only farms. These projects were framed in terms of an escape from heteropatriarchal civilization to an essentially feminine nature (Bell and Valentine 1995c, Valentine 1997). Beyond this, queer geographers (again predominantly in the U.S., but also in the U.K.) have documented lesbian communities in small towns, which functioned, and continue to function, on the basis of similar ideas. As Larry Knopp and Michael Brown write, "[the lesbian population] has been focused much more on creating a distinctly nonmetropolitan lesbian identity and politics, one governed by an alternative set of values that are often explicitly antiurban and antimaterialistic" (Knopp and Brown 2003:417). In other words, homosexuals' perspective on nature and the rural have been found to be highly gendered, with women identified as lesbians creating different kinds of communities tied to ideas about living in, and with, nature more than men identified as gay.

Second, like queer geographies overall, queer geographies of the rural have neglected to direct attention to non-Western and transnational configurations of sexualities, and have largely ignored international migration. This is surprising, seeing that

migration has been inextricably linked to studies of rural sexualities from the very start. However, in this literature, migration has almost exclusively been framed in terms of rural to urban migration and vice versa. Also, it has largely failed to address the ways in which the rural is not only sexualized but also racialized and ethnicized. This chapter contributes to the development of a more transnational and postcolonial perspective on geographies of the rural.

### 10.1 Living in the Swiss Countryside: Ambivalent Rural Closets

In terms of the rural as a *place to live*, the narratives of the women interviewed in this study tended to frame the rural as a site of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and social control. These views are grounded as much in hegemonic *imaginings* of the rural as in personal *experiences* – indeed, the two are constitutive of each other. As discussed earlier, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova's strict avoidance of their fellow villagers results from their adoption of stereotypical ideas about the rural dweller, which coincides with their personal experiences of homophobia among orthodox religious people in their home country. At the same time, their negative perception of the place they live is a consequence of the fact that the couple had originally planned to go to a Western metropolis. This renders it impossible for them to conceptualize their village in anything other than negative terms, as 'not the place we wanted to be.' Ironically, Nara Agayeva and Ramiza Salakhova's preemptive practice of avoidance and hiding reinforces the very imaginaries of the Swiss rural they are constrained by. As racialized rural queers, they might upset stereotypical ideas about the rural as orthodox and homophobic; but by choosing to – and being disciplined into – remaining invisible *as* queers, the dominant inscription remains in place.

The couple's lack of identification with their village also finds expression in the photos they contributed to the research. On a two-hour walk I took with them along the local creek and over open fields – a walk the couple had repeated countless times since coming to Switzerland – the women only instructed me to take one single picture: of the window of their small room in the local home for asylum seekers they had been relegated to live in for their first six months in Switzerland before they were moved into their own small apartment.<sup>1</sup> This is mirrored in Nour Saber's photo selection. Nour Saber, too, is forced to live in a small town due to immigration procedure, where she feels like a *prisonnière*. Although she lacks the economic resources to leave town on a regular basis, her imaginary<sup>2</sup> photo collection did not include a single shot of her town but consisted exclusively of pictures of her favorite spots in her favorite cities in Switzerland, such as her preferred cafés, music stores, and lake shore boulevards. The crucial common denominator of these urban places was that they were explicitly places Nour Saber had *not* frequented with her former partner. For Nour Saber the city specifically

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1 The couple had not wanted to take pictures themselves but instead offered to take a walk with me and tell me what to take pictures of.

2 Since she had not been able to travel to her favorite places, Nour Saber in the end did not take any pictures but instead told me in detail what pictures she *would* have taken.

represents the stage on which she attempts to reclaim her independent Self, as opposed to her town, which is actually her former partner's hometown, and which also signifies her lost life with her partner. These two examples show that negative perspectives on the rural are always multi-faceted and contingent on the specific biography, and grounded both in imaginaries of the rural as well as in personal experiences in rural places.

By contrast, there are also *voluntary* migrations from the urban to the rural, which complicate the image of the Swiss rural as a dwelling place. Jasmine Sieto at first appreciated the personal contact with the dwellers of a small Swiss town where she lived for the duration of a one-year internship in the course of her professional training. As an Asian she stood out in this place: "I'm the only Asian that time- no joke. I am the only Asian in Grandson. The only one." At first she appreciated this exposure and extra attention, which, having recently arrived from an Asian metropolis, was new to her. However, after a while she began to experience this singularity as burdensome, and so she was eventually glad to return to the city: "You feel totally alone, so I mean where I'm now [in the city], I survive all this villagey that's- hey no way, no way back there. It's enough now." For Ariane Velusat, too, the village in which she had started her apprenticeship as a social worker was a welcome reprieve from the busy multi-generational family home she had left behind in urban Venezuela, and she especially enjoyed having a 'room of her own' in a quiet place. It is moreover in this small village that she met the young Argentinian woman who later became her partner. The story of this rural encounter undermines the hegemonic inscription of the Swiss rural as intrinsically 'Swiss'/white and heterosexual (which will be engaged with in the next sub-chapter).

In contrast to these often temporary stays in the country (Ariane Velusat and her partner later also moved to the city), there are also interviewees who have moved there for good. As discussed earlier, Efra Mahmoud felt very pressured and exposed by the omnipresence of discourses around homosexuality in her urban everyday life. Having developed, post-migration, an "appreciation of what [s]he saw as the freedom associated with the absence of both labels and shame" when growing up in urban Egypt (Knopp and Brown 2003:418), the desire had emerged to return to Egypt, where she could strictly confine her homosexuality to the private space of the bedroom within her family home. I wrest Larry Knopp and Michael Brown's analysis from its original context on purpose: In the quote above the authors refer to the U.S. rural as pitted against the "flâneurie and gay gazing" and the proliferation of sexual discourses in the city (Bell et al. 2002:95). It is this perceived shared 'absence of labels and shame' in urban Egypt and in Western rural areas against which Efra Mahmoud's move from Zürich to a house she and her partner have purchased in a small Swiss town must be understood. Conflating the perceived discursive formations around sexualities in the Swiss rural and her home city, Efra Mahmoud's move seeks to reconcile what she loves and misses about Egypt (a family home, the privacy of sexuality) with what she loves about Switzerland (the punctuality, the cleanliness, the comfort). As Knopp and Brown argue in their discussion of narratives of gay men who had grown up in a rural area but later moved to the city:

Even while the city was viewed as a site of (in this case) gay identity, and small or non-metropolitan environments were viewed as sites of something more unnamed, interviewees frequently actually associated gay identity with closetedness and associated unnamed same-sex desire in small and nonmetropolitan environments with freedom! (Knopp and Brown 2003:416)

For Efra Mahmoud, their new house and neighborhood represent the inconspicuous “normal” life she seeks, surrounded by middle class heterosexual nuclear family life. Our interview took place in the garden of their house, separated from the neighbors’ only by a thin wooden panel. The neighbors were in their garden too, gearing up for a barbecue, and whenever I asked a question Efra Mahmoud felt uncomfortable answering, she nodded towards the wall suggestively to indicate her reluctance to speak in front of the neighbors (who she believes ‘know’ about the nature of her relationship although they have not been told explicitly). During our interview, the geography of her new home already served its designated function as a rural closet, shielding Efra Mahmoud from questions she was reluctant to answer.

Efra Mahmoud’s attempt to materialize a space in which both labels (‘homosexual’ or ‘lesbian’) and shame are absent converses with David Bell and Gill Valentine’s documentation of the lives of queer people living in (often very remote) rural areas:

A further issue that must be discussed here is that of identity and identification. Autobiographical accounts [...] show that many people who feel attracted to others of the same sex, and many who act on those feelings, often actively deny the label ‘homosexual,’ let alone ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian.’ In fact, due to the intense heteronormative pressures of rural life, many are married [...]. For some men and women, *any* kind of acknowledgement of their own same-sex activities, fantasies or attractions is unthinkable, rendering even the most sensitive program or helpline useless (and, of course, these people rarely if ever show up on any kind of surveys into sexual behavior). (Bell and Valentine 1995c:116)

Bell and Valentine draw on the Kinsey Report from 1948, in which Kinsey states that rural men, especially men working in homosocial contexts, such as cowboys or lumberjacks, live “on realities and a minimum of theory,” breeding the attitude that “sex is sex, irrespective of the nature of the partner with whom the relation is had” (Kinsey 1948:457, quoted in Bell and Valentine 1995c:117). The authors find “living on a minimum of theory” to be resonant with the lives of many men and women engaging in same-sex relationships in rural areas, and it is exactly this connotation of the rural with the absence of the notion of sexual identity (and thus the absence of the social rejection accompanying *dissident* sexual identities) that appeals to Efra Mahmoud. Of course, the small town Efra Mahmoud moved to cannot be compared to the living conditions described by Kinsey. In their study on women in the rural canton of Graubünden, Christina Caprez and Eveline Y. Nay describe the Swiss context in general as one “in which sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular” have become ubiquitous public issues, and these discourses have also reached the rural areas in Switzerland (Caprez and Nay 2008:295). In other words, both labels and shame are present in even the ‘remotest’ places of the Swiss rural. Hence, while Swiss rural – or small-town – realities will likely render it im-

possible for Efra Mahmoud to implement her ideal of a label and shame free life, within Switzerland her new dwelling place represents the closest she can get to what she desires.

Efra Mahmoud was not the only interviewee who was weary of the pervasive sexualization of discourses in urban Switzerland. As Barbara Wiegand states: *“Ich finde [Sexualität] nicht so ein super Thema- jeder hat eine [Sexualität], irgendeine, und ich teile das einfach nicht die grassierende Sexualisierung, das ist etwas das mir extrem auf den Geist geht”* – “I don’t consider [sexuality] such a great topic- everyone has one [a sexuality], any one [sexuality], and I just don’t share that, the rampant sexualization, that is something that really gets on my nerves.” She too has moved from the city to the rural. However, Barbara Wiegand’s motivation to move to a village in the mountains was grounded not only in her desire to escape the sexual discourses proliferating in the city but in a number of other reasons, too. These motivations, and the complex notion of the Swiss rural that emerges from her views on and experiences in her new rural dwelling place are the focus of the next sub-chapter.

## 10.2 Grabbing the Bull by its Horns: The Rural as the Epitome of Switzerland

When Barbara Wiegand went to look at an apartment in a remote mountain village situated in one of the ‘original cantons’ of Switzerland (*“Urschweiz”*) – this village hereafter called X – she thought to herself, *“X ist etwa das Absurdeste gewesen wo ich mir je habe vorstellen können, ich habe gefunden das gehe ich ankommen, und so in etwa bin ich dort gelandet, vielleicht weil ich gefunden habe das probiere ich jetzt aus, da bleibe ich jetzt”* – “X was about the most absurd thing I ever could have imagined, I thought I’ll go have a look at it, and that’s about how I ended up there, maybe because I thought I’ll try this out now, now I’ll stay here.”<sup>3</sup> She had not left the city completely voluntarily, but rather had, among other things, been driven out of it due to rapid gentrification and an attendant increase in rents; as an artist, she was exposed to these developments to an increased degree. However, reflecting on her decision to move to X, she realizes that there had been other motivations for this decisive change in her life:

*TB: Aber warum genau? Was hat so wie den Entscheid herbei geführt nachher ‘Ja, hier will ich wohnen?’*

*BW: Ehm- (Pause) die Wohnung hat mir gefallen, es ist sehr billig gewesen und es hat den Anschein auch etwas vom Abenteuer gehabt, das ist mir erst später so richtig bewusst gewesen, der Hausbesitzer hat mich eigentlich überführt weil am ersten Tag hat er gesagt ‘Sie finden es da wohl wildromantisch’ (lacht). Dann habe ich etwas aus der Wäsche herausgeschaut, es ist mir aber nichts darauf eingefallen, das ist meistens ein Zeichen, dass man etwas getroffen hat. Und dann habe ich gemerkt, das [ist ein (?)] kleines Dorf, und es hat sich dann auch bald erwiesen,*

3 *Urschweiz* refers to the three Swiss cantons of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden, which are geographically located in the heart of Switzerland, and which are commonly described as the first three cantons of what was later to become Switzerland. Barbara Wiegand’s village is not named for reasons of anonymity.

*dass das für mich so ein- eigentlich so wie, ich habe gefunden also entweder kapiere ich jetzt die Schweiz oder ich kapiere es nie mehr, entweder renne ich mir jetzt den Kopf in dem [Name des Hausbergs] ein (beide lachen), oder ich schaffe es einmal darüber zu kommen oder darüber zu stehen, es hat denn- als es mir bewusster geworden ist habe ich das dann gerade gemerkt dass es sehr um das gegangen ist weil- also ich meine schweizerischer als im Herz der Schweiz in der Urschweiz (lacht) in einer Gemeinde von vierhundertfünfzig Leuten da habe ich gefunden das geht- also das ist jetzt die Steigerung oder? (beide lachen) von irgendwie ziemlich- allem. Und wenn du das nicht checkst, dannnn- (bricht ab)*

TB: But why exactly? What, like, led to the decision ‘Yes, I want to live here?’

BW: Ehm- (pause) I liked the apartment, it was very cheap and it had- an air of adventure, too, I only really realized this later, the house owner actually caught me because on the first day he said ‘You probably think this is wildly romantic’ (laughs). I was left with egg on my face, but I didn’t know what to say, this is usually a sign that something has hit the mark. And then I realized, this [is a (?)] small village, and it also turned out soon, that this is for me- like, I found well either I figure Switzerland out now or I’ll never figure it out ever, either I bash my head on [name of local mountain] now (both laugh) or I manage someday to get over it or be above such things, there is- when I noticed this I realized immediately that it was very much about this because- well I mean more Swiss than in the heart of Switzerland within the ‘original cantons’ (laughs) in a village with four hundred and fifty inhabitants there I thought- well this is it, you know? (both laugh) of just about like- everything. And if you don’t get this, thennnnn- (breaks off)  
—Barbara Wiegand

While the prospect of living in X promised a welcome reprieve from the financial pressures of the city and provoked a sense of adventure and romanticism, X also represented the epitome of Switzerland. Barbara Wiegand’s complex positionality as a lesbian of color who grew up in an adoptive family has not allowed her to develop a sense of home in Switzerland, and X has become the emblem and materialization of everything that she has not been able to grasp about this country, providing her with a chance to ‘grab the bull by its horns’: “if you don’t get this, thennnnn-.” The Alps (and especially the ‘original cantons’) as the paradigmatic symbol for the white Swiss nation, and the small-scale organization of the social in the narrow Alpine valleys (in which, in Barbara Wiegand’s view, the primal fear of what waits behind the next pass crucially shapes people’s mindset), render X the perfect locus to actively study and challenge her relationship to Switzerland.

Over the many years she has been living in X, Barbara Wiegand’s relationship to the village has become complex and highly ambivalent and has defied any conclusive ‘getting it.’ At first she was regarded as some kind of “*Wundertier*” – a marvelous exotic animal. At the start she made a point of mingling with the locals, arguing with them at the regulars’ table in the local tavern. She engaged in community life by working with children but later withdrew from these activities, too depressed to witness the village dying out due to lack of work, emigration, and suicides. She constantly oscillated between feeling included and excluded from the community, but a turning point was when she won an artists’ scholarship. This was mentioned in the local newspaper, after

which many villagers expressed their pride in her, with some even thanking her for living in the village.

Despite her marked ambivalence towards X, Barbara Wiegand refuses to frame the city as a better place for non-white homosexuals but instead points to urban dwellers' own kinds of narrow-mindedness. "*Gibt es hinter Oerlikon eigentlich noch menschliche Wesen, die meiner Aufmerksamkeit würdig sind?*" – "Are there are any human beings beyond Oerlikon [a suburb of Zürich] that are worthy of my attention?," she mimics her friends in the city, who hardly ever visit her in the mountains. "*Ich sage jeweils das ist genau gleich weit oder?*" – "I always say it's the exact same distance, isn't it?" she states, and makes fun of these same friends' tales about 'hopping' to New York, London, and so on, boasting their mobility, open-mindedness, and cosmopolitanism.

In X, Barbara Wiegand lives "very much in the closet," which has triggered discussions with partners when they visited. On the one hand, Barbara Wiegand appreciates the rural closet since "it gets on my nerves anyway" to show, and be shown, intimacy in public. Not only that "*ich [und nicht die Partnerin] käme ja die Breitseite ab wenn jetzt wirklich jemand [im Dorf] findet das läge nicht drin*" – "it would be me [and not her partner] who would get the broadside if someone [in the village] couldn't come to terms with it." At the same time, she assumes that people 'know.' She perceives her closeted yet – as she perceives – visible lesbianism to coagulate with her "*Gemischtrassigkeit*" – "mixed race" and her gender to produce the sometimes vehement and blatant hostilities she has been repeatedly exposed to in the village:

*In X habe ich manchmal wirklich Angst gehabt. Also regelrecht ANGST (Pause). Und das ist aber denke ich etwas irrational Unterschwelliges gewesen, anderenteils richtig Angst zum Beispiel habe ich dann das letzte Jahr gehabt, das Asylgesetzgeschwafel rundherum, wirklich. [...] Ich habe Zeiten gehabt wo ich gedacht habe adoptiert bist du, ehm- rassistisch gemischt bist und lesbisch bist du auch noch- schlimmer kann es nicht mehr kommen, also gerade so klassische Marginalisierungs- Lieblingssachen zusammengefallen sind habe ich manchmal wieder gefunden uaaaaah-. Weil das ist ja- das geht ja in das Rassistische rein so Lesben gar- so Schwarze Lesben ist das allerletzte, das ist mir auch in New York von Schwarzen Lesben mitgeteilt worden. Und ich hab gefunden ich hab von allem so ein Bitzeli, das darf ja wohl nicht wahr sein. Und das verschränkt sich dann manchmal. Also völlig irrational halt.*

I have sometimes been really afraid in X. Downright AFRAID (pauses). And this was I think something irrationally subliminal, on the other hand I was downright afraid for instance last year, with the whole asylum legislation drivel all around, really. [...] At times I thought you're adopted, ehm- racially mixed and on top of that you're lesbian- it can't get worse, well these classical marginalization favorites coinciding I've been thinking uaaaaah-. Because that's- this blends into racism like lesbians- like Black lesbians that's the very last thing [imaginable], this I have also been told by Black lesbians in New York. And I thought I have a bit of all of that, this can't be true. And this intersects sometimes. Like totally irrationally.

—Barbara Wiegand

This reflection refers to the moment addressed in an earlier chapter, when Barbara Wiegand sits in the local pub with the "village idiot." Discussing the issue of asylum with



him, she attempts to provoke her interlocutor into bringing to the surface prejudices against her that the villagers usually keep under the lid (*“Eine Bierflasche in die Hand drücken und dann geht’s [los]”* – “Thrust a bottle of beer into his hand and there he goes”). As the increasingly heated argument threatens to derail she concludes it with the question: *“Du musst mir jetzt noch eins sagen: Muss ich von jetzt an Angst haben wenn ich dir im Dorf begegne wenns dunkel ist?”* – “Tell me one more thing now: Do I have to be afraid from now on when I meet you in the village at night?” In situations like these, Barbara Wiegand feels a limit has been reached, and that she should make explicit her lesbianism and fight for her position openly.

In contrast to her sexuality, of which nobody in the village speaks openly, she is regularly confronted with her racial identity: *“Die Leute können es nicht lassen [zu fragen woher ich komme]”* – “People cannot refrain from asking [where I am from].” She also ascribes this to being “mixed race,” which defies quick categorization and as such seems to trigger a particularly strong desire for clarification among her fellow villagers (but also among people in the city). At the same time, the villagers’ perception of her as a person of color fluctuates wildly. Sometimes she feels she has become incorporated into the community (*“eingemeindet”*) and has become invisible as *“ihr’ N-”* – ‘their’ n-’ as opposed to all other ‘N-s’/Ausländer.<sup>4</sup> This incorporation is, however, never conclusive but can become reversed at anyone’s discretion:

*Bei dieser ehm- Asylgesetzrevision ist es wieder soweit gewesen, dass ich aus meinem Haus komme- also meinem Haus wo ich drin wohne, und mich fragt die Nachbarin, so im Stil von ‘Hast du schon immer solche Haare gehabt?’ Dann habe ich gesagt ich wohne seit zehn Jahren neben dir und du fragst mich etwas dermassen- bin an der Decke geklebt, oder?*

When this revision of the asylum legislation was coming up, it reached a point again that I come out of my house- well the house I live in, and the neighbor asks me like ‘Have you always had hair like that?’ Then I said I’ve been living next to you for ten years and you ask me such a completely- I went through the roof, you know?

—Barbara Wiegand

Dealing with the sense of being at the mercy of her fellow villagers’ shifting perceptions remains one of the greatest challenges Barbara Wiegand faces in her everyday life in X, and she has developed a fine sense for these fluctuations: *“Ich gehe einkaufen- wenn sie mir wieder anfangen so Fragen stellen denke ich irgendwas haben die Schweizer wieder- Ah! Ah da ist die Asylgesetzrevision, okay”* – “I go shopping. When they start to ask questions like that again I think the Swiss have something going on again- Ah! Ah there’s the revision of the asylum legislation coming up, got it.” Racism in the village is sometimes also blatant. A Black woman who has also been living in the village for years was initially not allowed to work in the local nursing home because the clients there were afraid the color of her skin would “rub off” (*“abfärben”*), genuinely believing it was dirt. At the same time, it is when this racism comes to the surface that Barbara Wiegand has an opportunity to ‘grab the bull by its horns’ and openly discuss issues that in the city are not considered politically correct while persisting subliminally. What is more, she has observed that the

4 Barbara Wiegand uses the full N-word in this quote.

'tolerant' people in the city, "*die Weissen, die nicht Rassisten sind, NIEMALS begreifen, dass sie nach wie vor die Definitionsmacht beanspruchen*" – "the whites who are not racist NEVER understand that they continue to have the power of definition."

Barbara Wiegand's (shifting) visibility as a lesbian and/or a person of color unsettles the implicitly white, heterosexual, and patriotic self-understanding of X's inhabitants, as well as the hegemonic inscriptions of the 'definitive' Swiss landscape surrounding it. Indeed, her experiences and reflections mirror James Baldwin's experiences as an African-American in the mountain village Leukerbad, which he elaborates on in his essay *Stranger in a Village* (Baldwin 1955), and which expose Leukerbad as a virulently colonial space which continually establishes itself as white in opposition to the racialized colonial Other. Barbara Wiegand's account furthermore converses with the work of Black visual artists who challenge dominant ways of looking at allegorical landscapes. Photographer Ingrid Pollard, for instance, portrays Black people in an English rural landscape. Her images of Black people posing in a stereotypically English countryside immediately exposes that these landscapes are implicitly associated with white bodies. As the Women and Geography Study Group writes in their discussion of Pollard's work, the images featuring Black female figures "perhaps point towards the fear of lone women, particularly Black women, within English hill-walking country: '...feeling I don't belong. Walks through leafy glades with a baseball bat by my side....'" (Women and Geography Study Group 1997, quoting Pollard 1993:185). For Pollard, the baseball bat refers to the English countryside as a locus of killing (for instance shooting grouse or foxes), which unmasks this landscape as a locus where species that are not considered worthy of life are simply exterminated. Pollard's analysis is reflected in Barbara Wiegand's experiences and fears, as well as her lack of control over her visibility as a person of color and a lesbian.

To conclude: For Barbara Wiegand, X represents a highly ambivalent space where she oscillates between feeling incorporated into the community and exposed as a foreign body, which is contingent on her fellow villagers' shifting perspectives in terms of her race, sexuality, and gender. At the same time, it is exactly the blatancy of these recurring exclusions that enable her to observe and react to these attributions. In Barbara Wiegand's view, this renders it easier to address racism, sexism, and homophobia in X than in urban spaces, where these issues persist but remain more subliminal and hence impalpable. Her conscious choice to live in X and to proactively engage with her fellow villagers' perspectives on herself in itself shows that Barbara Wiegand's position in X is not that of a victim. Although repeatedly marginalized in the village based on being "mixed race," an artist, a woman, and a lesbian, she at the same time embodies the local intellectual and as such commands a sense of authority and local pride. Moreover, her reflective stance with regard to her positionality within the social fabric of X positions her as a sort of anthropologist studying her interlocutors' perspective on the world and on herself, providing a critical distance even in, or *especially* in, the worst moments of discrimination.

### 10.3 Rural Utopias

In contrast to interviewees' ambivalent experiences as rural dwellers and the predominantly negative imaginaries they harbor of the Swiss rural as a place to live, *nature* and *natural landscapes* are (often exceedingly) positively regarded. Among the pictures provided for this research, many show natural landscapes of Switzerland, of the home country, or of other rural places. As in the case of family photos (see Chapter 6.1), these pictures were often not taken during the research period but were retrieved from digital archives, which highlights the importance of these spaces as *imagined spaces* in everyday life. Other pictures were taken explicitly for the research, on walks or bike rides that were part of a daily or weekly routine.

Pitted against the urban, narratives construct natural landscapes as a site of reprieve from the pressures of everyday life exerted by multiple forms of discrimination, stressful situations at work or in the family, separation from loved ones, and so on. For Leyla Haddad, one of the most important everyday spaces is the sky. It reminds her of the openness of the Lebanese landscape, but in the past especially also signified connection to her family in Lebanon, from whom she was forcibly separated as a child during the civil war in the 1970s and 1980s: *“Eine Zeit lang als ich in der Schweiz gewesen bin und meine Eltern unten [im Libanon] gewesen sind habe ich einfach gewusst der Himmel ist so verbindend, kann ich in den Himmel schauen und sie, irgendwo verbindet das uns, oder?”* – “For a time when I was in Switzerland and my parents were down there [in Lebanon] I just knew the sky is so connecting, I can look into the sky and so can they, somewhere this connects us, you know?” For her the sky is a source of calmness, which she continues to seek on her daily walks along the local river. Like Leyla Haddad, many interviewees describe regular walks or bike rides in a natural environment as an intrinsic and crucial part of their daily or weekly routines. For Leyla Haddad, Beatriz Kraus, Charlotta Sembiring, Lorena Moreno, Jasmine Sieto, Ayesha Umar, Cristina Pérez, and Pilar Gómez, being in natural environments is an important moment of reflection and meditation, but more specifically it offers reprieve from a stressful everyday life marked by marginalization and social isolation. As one interviewee stated, *“der Natur ist es egal ob ich eine dunkle Haut habe oder lesbisch bin”* – “nature doesn't care whether I have brown skin or am lesbian.” As a space perceived to be free of language, nature also represents a space free of ‘labels’ and judgment.

Natural environments are also visited in the context of other recreational activities, such as hiking or biking holidays, or when showing visiting family members around Switzerland. Often, interviewees have only ‘discovered’ outdoor activities in Switzerland, not having hiked or biked before migrating. Some hope to find the sense of connection they are denied in their workplace through outdoor groups (with little success, however). As the sheer quantity of images shown to me featuring natural landscapes taken on holidays testifies to, experiences in these natural landscapes play an exceedingly important role in interviewees' everyday lives as *imagined spaces*. As Laura Georg explains, for her the *memory* of a holiday at the seaside or a moment on a hike continues to critically determine how she fares in everyday life long after returning from the trip. And while many non-migrant and non-queer people will likely offer similar reflections, in the light of queer migrant women's experiences of exclusion from family,

friendship, and partnership, nature and natural landscapes as sites of reprieve gain a specific importance.

## 10.4 Conclusion

Queer migrant women's perspectives on the rural confirm the findings of those critical geographers who have been challenging the popular binary which pits the gay city against the homophobic rural. Based on ethnographic studies of queer rural dwellers in Western countries, critical scholars instead suggest that the flows of queer people and ideas have to be understood as multidirectional, influencing both the urban and the rural in terms of the development of their cultures, subjectivities, and politics (Knopp and Brown 2003:417). While some biographical narratives generated in the context of this study reiterated the dominant discourse that constructs the rural as homophobic, other accounts upset this dominant dichotomy. These disruptions on the one hand find their expression in utopian imaginations of the rural and on the other arise from the accounts of those interviewees who have 'paradoxically' moved from the urban to the rural.

The examination of queer migrant women's perspectives on, and experiences in, rural areas in Switzerland expose that queer immigrant women are positioned in significantly different ways vis-à-vis the rural than non-immigrant lesbians. One such difference concerns migrant women's *imaginative* geographies of the rural and nature respectively. As existing research shows, for non-immigrant lesbians, natural landscapes often provide a surface for utopian, anti-urban inscriptions and as such signify a respite from homophobia and heteropatriarchy (Brown and Knopp 2003, Büchler 2003, Kramer 1995, Valentine 1997). By contrast, for queer migrant women nature specifically also signifies a space free of racism and xenophobia, from which nature emerges as a space devoid of the multiple exclusions and pressures they experience in different areas of their everyday life.

These notions of nature, which configure nature as a place to escape *to* rather than *from*, are contrasted by perspectives on rural areas as a place to *live*. Both in terms of the ideas the accounts convey about the rural as a dwelling place, as well as in terms of interviewees' personal experiences as rural dwellers, the accounts mostly reproduce the dominant discourse that pits a gay-friendly city against a homophobic rural. This perspective is particularly marked in accounts by interviewees who are condemned to live in the rural due to asylum or immigration procedures, and who mainly frame their rural experiences in terms of confinement and imprisonment.

There are, however, notable exceptions to this rule, represented by interviewees who have consciously moved to the countryside or to small towns. Their ambivalent or positive views on the rural defy a simplistic categorization of the rural as the locus of racism and homophobia. For these women, moving away from the city not only addressed their wish to be closer to nature but also held the promise of an everyday life removed from the perceived oversexualized discourses in the city and 'ghettoized' urban lesbian communities. At the same time, these accounts make clear that the option to *materialize* rural utopias by moving to the countryside is not available to queer migrant women in

the same way as it is to white and/or non-immigrant lesbians. Christina Caprez and Eveline Y. Nay (2008) have documented such experiences by non-immigrant lesbians who have moved (back) to the rural canton of Graubünden. Like Barbara Wiegand, the lesbians Caprez and Nay interviewed were able to gain a certain social status and acceptance in their villages based on their work, for instance as pastors, farmers, or nurses.<sup>5</sup> However, *unlike* Barbara Wiegand, “none have experienced open rejection” in their village (ibid:269-270, my translation). By contrast, as Barbara Wiegand’s account demonstrates, queer migrant women’s corporeal presence in the Swiss countryside deeply unsettles dominant imaginaries of Swiss rural life, which uncovers the implicit encoding of these landscapes as white and heterosexual.

Barbara Wiegand’s presence disturbs dominant imaginations of the *Swiss nation*, even more so as the particular mountain region she chose to inhabit symbolizes the myth of the Swiss nation *par excellence*, whose history and topography frequently continues to be invoked in contestations of ‘Swissness’ and Swiss history in the political and public arena. Populist discourses in particular claim the Alps as a nature-given emblem for Swissness, and Alpine dwellers as the archetypes of the ‘autochthonous’ Swiss people. Essentialist views on the Alps and its inhabitants persist despite the fact that the social history of the Alps is chiefly characterized by flows of trade and migration, from which the Alps emerge as a space of transit, connection, and meeting-up rather than the popularly evoked enclosed space organized into clear-cut spatial and social segments ‘naturally’ determined by mountains and valleys, which are moreover perceived to ‘naturally’ determine how Alpine dwellers ‘are’ (close-mouthed, hardworking, righteous, male, white). A historical moment crystallizes the degree to which the Swiss nation becomes equated with the Alps: In World War II, the Swiss military’s *Reduit* strategy envisioned a worst-case scenario in which the (densely populated) flatlands would simply be given up, while the government and the armed forces would entrench themselves in gargantuan bunkers blown into the (sparsely populated) Alps. Nationalisms figuring the Alps are moreover deeply rooted in *colonial* thought. Public discourses around the Swiss Himalaya expeditions from the 1950s onwards, for example (which aimed at ‘conquering’ the world’s highest mountains in first ascents in the name of the Swiss nation), expose the ways in which colonial masculinities and imaginations of mountains merged to produce Swiss national identity (Purtschert 2019).<sup>6</sup> Migrant subjects inhabiting the deeply white space of the Alps hence pose a threat to populist imaginations of Swissness

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- 5 For women who moved (back) to Graubünden, it was “less life in the social context of a village” that motivated their migrations but rather “a preference for mountain regions, the contact to nature, and the possibility to acquire a house with a garden or to start a farm” (Caprez and Nay 2008:268, my translation). Women typically migrated in couples, starting up a farm or acting as pastors in a community together. ‘Newcomers’ typically adapted more to the local ‘culture,’ that is, they did not display their sexual orientation in public, while the ‘returnees’ (who returned to Graubünden after living in the city) tended to put their foot down with a greater sense of ownership (ibid:271).
- 6 Doreen Massey effectively debunks the myth of the Alps as the purportedly solid bedrock of Swissness. Arguing from a geological perspective, she instead frames the Alps as “immigrant rocks” from Africa (Massey 2005). This is particularly ironic seeing that the people who insist on attaching Swissness to the Alps in deeply determinist ways tend to be the same people who use this very essentialized ‘Swissness’ to keep out (especially also ‘African’) immigrants.

and Switzerland. As Barbara Wiegand's account testifies to, these disruptions result in (often open) racism. At the same time, in Barbara Wiegand's rejection based on race and ethnicity coagulate with suspicions about her sexuality raised by fellow villagers due to the obvious absence of a heteronormative way of life, although these assumptions mostly remain subliminal. In the Swiss countryside, queer non-white women hence represent 'doubly paradoxical' bodies, whose presence unmasks the heterosexuality and whiteness of the Swiss mountains.

By engaging with queer migrant women's views on and experiences in the rural, this chapter has started to address the gap created by the fact that to date queer geographies have rarely addressed the implications of international migration on configurations of rural sexualities. Beyond this, it was suggested that rural geographies and postcolonial/transnational studies of sexualities be placed in a more engaged conversation with each other. David Bell and Gill Valentine's concept of how some rural queers live on "a minimum of theory" not only resonates with Efra Mahmoud's account of living with her parents in Egypt without 'telling,' but also reflects other interviewees' narratives about growing up in their home countries without role models – no matter whether these contexts were rural or not (see Chapter 5.3). In other words, like scholars analyzing rural sexualities, scholars engaging with postcolonial/transnational sexualities have been grappling with the implications of the "label and shame" tied to dissident sexualities. Both bodies of research engage with center-margin settings and are reproductive of dichotomies between allegedly modern (the city, the West) and allegedly backward places (the rural, the Orient, the South), aligning modern places with the concept of (sexual) identity and backward places with pre-identitarian stages of sexualities. The danger of unproblematically reproducing this hierarchized binary is especially present when discussing accounts of migrants who have moved from the rural to the urban and/or from the Orient/South to the West, as here the pressure to *retrospectively* frame pre-migration sexualities as pre-identitarian and thus inferior to post-migration "I am here and I am queer" sexualities and sexual identities is particularly marked. In this context both queer geographers and anthropologists have called for framing rural/postcolonial same-sex sexualities and intimacies as *non*-identitarian instead of *pre*-identitarian in a refusal to reinstate developmentalist narratives (Dankwa 2021). Stripping alternative sexualities of such temporalities opens up the conceptual possibility for positively connoted or neutral unnamed same-sex intimacies and relationships embedded in a context marked by the absence of both label and shame.

## 11. Conclusion and Outlook

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This study examined the multifarious ways in which sexuality and migration constitute each other by analyzing biographical narratives of queer migrant women in Switzerland. Although recent shifts in Swiss immigration and asylum policies and practices have significantly facilitated entry for (certain) queer people, this 'group' of immigrants has received little political or academic attention to date. Instead, public discourses including political debates, media reports, and research largely continue to be organized around the assumption that female migrants are heterosexual. Hence, one chief concern of this research has been to complicate stereotypical images of migrant women by making visible the experiences, self-conceptualizations, practices, and positionalities of queer migrant women living in Switzerland.

In engaging with the subject position of queer migrant women, this study has drawn on and extended three bodies of scholarship. First, *queer geographies*, which examine the spatialities of sexualities and the sexualization of space. This body of work has only recently begun to adopt postcolonial perspectives and to address transnational configurations of desire. Second, *queer migration studies*, which have as yet produced few ethnographies addressing the subject position of queer migrant women, and which have rarely engaged with contexts outside of North America. Third, *feminist migration research* in Switzerland, which has lacked a queer perspective.

The study addressed queer women who have migrated to Switzerland and are perceived as racialized *Ausländerinnen* based on social markers such as language, surname, clothing, or skin color. 'Queer' was not how research participants identified themselves. Rather, the term was deployed as a conceptual umbrella that aimed to create space for the different conceptualizations of sexuality as represented by the 28 queer migrant women who took part in this study. The sample ultimately included participants who identified as lesbian, bisexual, and homosexual; one participant who identified as a *pengkid* (a sexual identity adopted by some masculine women in Malaysia); participants whose sexual identities did not align with their sexual practices (for instance because they identified as heterosexual but still engaged in same-sex relationships); and participants who understood their sexuality in terms of a practice rather than an identity.

Finding research participants and experts was challenging as this was a 'field without sites.' Since at the outset of this research in 2005 the Swiss organizational and insti-

tutional landscape was organized *either* around sexuality *or* immigration, there was no 'natural' place from which to conduct the search. Eventually, participants were located through an eclectic multiplicity of channels, from web sites to immigration lawyers. With respect to expertise on queer migration to Switzerland, the knowledge excavated among LGBT and immigrant rights advocates, immigration authorities, and scholars was mostly restricted to queer male migrants (particularly asylum seekers).

Nevertheless, interviews were eventually conducted with 28 queer migrant women, originating from a total of 22 countries in Asia; Northern Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; and in Eastern, Southeastern, and Southern Europe. This cultural diversity was both a strength and challenge in the research: On the one hand, it allowed for the tracing of issues, patterns, networks, and values across otherwise diverse accounts and positionalities; on the other hand, in-depth contextualizations of transnational and postcolonial configurations of desire (both in the home countries and in specific diasporas in Switzerland) were impossible to complete. The interviews with queer migrant women were complemented by reflexive photography, participant observation, and site visits and were contextualized by expert interviews with representatives from LGBT and immigrant organizations, immigration attorneys, and government officials. Most interviews were conducted between autumn 2005 and spring 2009, with some additional interviews conducted in autumn 2013.

Apart from making visible the presence, experiences, and needs of queer migrant women in Switzerland, the objective of this study was twofold. First, it was an attempt to gain a better understanding of transnational configurations of sexualities, as well as of the individual processes of identification with which these are intertwined. Self-conceptions and ideas about sexuality become contested in the diaspora, forcing queer migrants to navigate conflicting loyalties, diverging perspectives on sexualities, and multiple mechanisms of exclusion in the daily 'doing' of their identities. These processes of (dis)identification and the attendant efforts to create a sense of home and belonging were a chief focus of this study. A second objective of this study concerned the production and disruption of normative sexualities, seeking to address the question of how queer migrant women's self-conceptualizations and practices are shaped by, reiterate, or subvert dominant discourses around sexuality.

This concluding chapter summarizes the central insights gained from the analysis of the interviews conducted in this study and considers their broader implications.

### **Transnational Trajectories of Desire**

Within the broader question of how migration shapes sexuality, a more specific point of interest has been how research participants perceive their sexualities and sexual identities to have *changed* through migration. This focus yielded rich insights into the complexity of transnational negotiations and configurations of sexualities, but also vehemently reinforced Michel Foucault's call to address sexuality as a "dense transfer point of power" (Foucault 1978:103).

The migrations of the interviewed queer women *always* entailed a shift in sexualities and/or sexual identities. These reconfigurations are characterized by two aspects in particular. The first is that *all* queer migrant women are forced to situate themselves



in relation to the *figure of the lesbian*, even if they reject the lesbian label. Furthermore, these reconfigurations of sexualities entail a juxtaposition of pre-migration with post-migration conceptualizations of the sexual Self, which often involves a distancing from and/or denigration of pre-migration sexual identities and practices.

Three overlapping types of biographical trajectories were crystallized with regard to how sexualities shifted through migration. The first comprised the accounts of women who did not engage in relationships with women and/or did not consider their same-sex practices in terms of an identity before migration, and who have come to explicitly identify as lesbians in Switzerland. This biographical trajectory is productive of narratives of self-discovery, liberation, and 'homecoming' to the lesbian identity. Moreover, these accounts framed the process of 'becoming a lesbian' as a crucial stepping stone to successful 'integration' into Swiss society. At the same time, it was shown that assuming a lesbian identity often entails denigration of one's sexual practices prior to migration. Since dominant discourses racialize non-Western queer sexualities as 'other,' queer migrant subjects often perceive their own queer pre-migration sexualities or other queer sexualities in their homeland as irreconcilable with the normative lesbian identity they now pursue.

The second biographical trajectory consisted of narratives by women who had already established a same-sex identity in their home country and were embedded in a sexual minority subculture prior to their migration. These participants attempted to gain access to the Swiss lesbian community after immigration, expecting the LGBT community to act as a gateway to their new social life. However, such integration efforts are impeded by experiences of rejection due to a culture of closure in the Swiss lesbian community, and sometimes by a sense of repulsion experienced due to cultural differences between the Swiss lesbian and the homeland queer subcultures.

The third biographical trajectory addressed the migration biographies of women who tended to understand their sexuality as a practice rather than an identity, and who continued to reject the lesbian label after migration. Defying Eurocentric valuations that equate silence/invisibility with being closeted, and being closeted with internalized homophobia, silence/invisibility is instead evaluated ambivalently. Frequently attributed to homeland culture, silence/invisibility is, on the one hand, seen as productive of a private sphere in which same-sex sexuality can be lived out without exposure to negative stereotyping. On the other hand, it is also seen as grounded in "tabooed taboos" around same-sex desire. For these interviewees, the proliferation of sexualized discourses and attendant stereotyping in Switzerland leads to a distinct sense of exposure of things they would rather keep private. Traces of this type of biographical trajectory were found in many accounts, especially in the context of some women's decision to keep tacit subjects tacit within their family as a sign of respect.

For the interviewed queer migrant women, both rejection and assumption of the lesbian identity hence remains partial, ambivalent, and contradictory. *Rejection* of the lesbian label necessarily remains contested because confrontation with sexual stereotypes persists in everyday life and because strategic identification is sometimes necessary to gain access to vital resources such as legal advice with regard to immigration or asylum procedure. *Identification* as a lesbian, although deployed as an 'integration'

strategy, necessarily remains partial since the figure of the lesbian is inherently white, rendering the lesbian migrant woman an 'impossible subject.'

### Claiming Home

A chief interest of this study has been to examine how queer migrant women create and reconfigure the space called 'home.' The absence of designated public or semi-public spaces for queer migrant women stands in contrast to their very presence. Consequently, queer migrant women are required to (re)negotiate and (re)appropriate real and imagined spaces and places in order to create a sense of belonging. The ambiguities that mark these processes of disidentification arise from queer migrant women's subject positions, which marginalize them on account of their gender, their national, ethnic, and cultural identity, and their sexual orientation (possibly among others). Seeking to draw an embodied geography, the focus of the analysis has been on how queer migrant women negotiate such conflicting loyalties in the everyday (and sometimes not-so-everyday) 'doing' of their identities, and on how these identifications and practices both reiterate and disrupt dominant ideas about sexuality, gender, and 'culture.'

A range of everyday spaces and places emerged as crucial sites for queer migrant women's negotiations of home and belonging. These were the family of origin, the diasporic community, the queer community in the homeland, the Swiss lesbian community, the workplace, and the 'queer home.' Yet in each of these spaces belonging remains brittle, partial, and contested.

The *family of origin* as a site in which sexual, national, and cultural identities are negotiated was a key theme in many narratives. The interviewed queer migrant women were mostly – if not always – caught between love and affection for the family and a social and/or economic necessity to stay connected to their family on the one hand and the rejection they experienced due to their sexual orientation on the other. What could be perceived as a general phenomenon in many queer biographies is aggravated by migration: Social isolation, unemployment, racism, and other exclusions faced in the diaspora connect queer migrant women to their families in different ways than is the case for their 'Swiss' lesbian counterparts. For the interviewed women this meant that the family often represented a site of continuous negotiation or conflict across time and space.

These negotiations expose interviewees' families as central loci for the enforcement of heteronormative prescripts in the name of 'culture.' These notions of 'culture' are deeply gendered and sexualized and were shown to be co-shaped by the persisting coloniality of power, by heteropatriarchal nationalisms, and, in the case of diasporic communities, especially also by collective experiences of racism in the host society.<sup>1</sup> Such culturalist discourses often epitomize (especially young) women as emblems of national culture, which subjects 'real' queer diasporic women to processes of disciplining. In many families this was especially also effectuated by *silencing* the queer family

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1 Discourses on Western 'culture' are also gendered and sexualized and are equally shaped by the persisting coloniality of power and heteropatriarchal nationalisms (see Chapters 2 and 6.1.1). This is not discussed here as the issue here is research participants' role within the families in which they grew up.

member's dissident sexuality. This ambivalent strategy defies easy alignment with the Western metaphor of the closet. On the one hand, silencing denied acknowledgment of what most interviewed women perceived to be an intrinsic part of their Selves, and many affected women accordingly suffered from this silence. On the other hand, as matters that are not verbalized but always understood, the narratives also confirmed that such "tacit subjects" (Decena 2012) also bind family members together in mutual respect. Due to this latter quality of silence (though mostly amalgamated with the fear of open rejection), queer family members are often complicit in keeping things tacit, especially if the family still lives in the country of origin. In this context migration emerges as a strategy to *both* explore one's sexuality *and* pay the family (and homeland 'culture') respect. Finally, in some contrasting cases families represented protected "queer islands in a heterosexual sea" (Siti Mohd Amin), enabling queer women to unfold their alternative sexualities. Women who grew up in such families frame these as exceptional within the societies of their homeland.

In conclusion, for the interviewed queer migrant women, the family as a 'basic unit' of solidarity and security in the diaspora, as the family has been described by feminist migration scholars (PASSAGEN 2014), is not available in the same way as it is to their heterosexual counterparts. Although none of the women were 'disowned' by their families (a fact which undermines popular discourses on exceedingly homophobic 'immigrant cultures' in Switzerland), as queer subjects their place in the family remained highly contested, restricting and complicating their access to this vital resource. At the same time, as the locus of the production and enforcement of 'culture' and 'tradition,' the family emerged as a crucial site of negotiation through which the interviewed women reclaimed their national and cultural identities *as* queer women.

Equally marked by ambivalence were the interviewed women's relationships to their *diasporic communities*. Four overlapping kinds of relationships to the diasporic communities were identified. The first was a fundamentally anti-identitarian stance characterized by resistance to be relegated to *any* minoritarian 'ghetto,' be it diasporic or lesbian. These interviewees consciously refrained from establishing their social contacts based on one or the other 'shared' identity. The second perspective on diasporic communities was marked by a sense of alienation and unbelonging in the face of dominant displays of heteronormativity in what was perceived as 'mainstream' diasporic spaces, which typically resulted in withdrawal from these very spaces. A third group of participants explicitly associated their diasporic communities with homophobia. This often led to a segregation of social worlds in which those 'in the know' (friends, lesbians) were separated from those 'not in the know' (diasporic community, often also family), and often equally entailed a withdrawal from diasporic circles. For the interviewed women, this sense of difference and unbelonging within the diasporic community caused disconnection from their national and cultural identity. One strategy with which this perceived lack was addressed was by seeking contact with queer compatriots and other culturally hybrid people, creating spaces in which national and cultural identities could be re-configured as queer. Finally, the last – but in the analyzed sample exceptional – way of relating to diasporic communities was their framing as unproblematic sites of identification and attachment. The participants who took such a stance actively sought access

to their diasporic community (with varying degrees of success). This perspective was mainly taken up by participants who did not identify as lesbian and/or did not understand their sexualities in terms of an identity.

In sum, the interviewed queer migrant women only had restricted access to the resources diasporic communities offer heterosexual migrants as a locus of homeland nostalgia and especially also as a bulwark against wider racism in the host society.

By contrast, for most interviewees the Swiss *lesbian community* represented a site of identification. As an *imagined community*, the lesbian community was sometimes – but by far not always – a ‘pull-factor’ in the decision to migrate. As an *everyday space*, although perceived by many as a ‘ghetto,’ it was often deemed the best of all wanting options considering the overall limited choice of spaces providing opportunities to socialize. Among the interviewed women, many felt that lesbian spaces were the spaces in which they could be “most the way I am.”

However, this only concerned women who had assumed a lesbian identity and had succeeded in establishing social ties within the lesbian community. From the interviews it became very clear that for migrant women, access to the lesbian community is exceedingly hard-won. Experiences of exclusion in lesbian spaces dominate narratives about early stages of migration in particular, belying the myth of the universal inclusive ‘queer family.’ These exclusions are effectuated less by open racism than by a general culture of disinterest and closure. One participant’s quip, “Lesbians in Bern? They are gorgeous, but they don’t talk” (Charlotta Sembiring) encapsulates this experience. Experiences of exclusion in lesbian spaces could also become long-term if interviewees failed to assimilate to subcultural norms. This for instance happened when non-Western same-sex identities were brought to lesbian spaces. Queer migrant women’s narratives hence expose lesbian spaces as a site of production and enforcement of a normative – white, Western – homosexuality. Such closure kept many queer migrant women at a (both imposed and self-chosen) distance to Swiss lesbian circles. Lastly, participants who did not identify as lesbians and/or did not understand their sexual orientation to be formative of their identity did not seek membership in the lesbian community.

The *workplace* was a further crucial site of ‘home-making.’ In the context of migration, overcoming work-related obstacles and ‘making it’ in a foreign context is a major source of self-assurance. Conversely, work-related problems trigger existential fears, self-doubts, and health issues. In queer migrant women’s narratives, the workplace accordingly emerged as a site of personal development and integration as much as a site of exclusion and personal crisis. Although work-related issues were rarely directly connected to issues related to sexuality, the two were intimately linked. Generally, the successful establishment of a ‘good life’ in Switzerland was considered to be contingent on both a fulfilling private and professional life. What may be seen as a general truth for all migrants is particularly momentous for queer migrant women. Early phases of migration in particular were often characterized by unemployment or deskilling, or by failure in forging social contacts at work. This sometimes coincided temporally with the process of realizing and acknowledging one’s same-sex desires. In concert with the above-mentioned struggles faced in other areas of life, this often led to social isolation,

severe personal crises, and health problems. Vice versa, participants who had ‘made it’ viewed the process of assuming a lesbian identity and establishing themselves professionally as intrinsically linked central stepping stones in establishing a ‘good life’ and achieving ‘integration’ in Switzerland.

Two other aspects distinguished queer migrant women’s position with respect to work from that of their heterosexual counterparts. First, in the face of deskilling and unemployment, the alternative of becoming a housewife and mother is not available to queer migrant women in the same way as it is to heterosexual migrant women; where the latter win social recognition, the former tend to receive more rejection, at least at the outset of their ‘baby projects.’ Further, in addition to exclusions based on their status as perceived *Ausländerinnen* in Switzerland, queer migrant women must negotiate the persistent ‘aggressive heterosexuality’ of work environments in Switzerland, which creates its own exclusionary effects for migrants and non-migrants alike.

For the interviewed queer migrant women, a sense of home and belonging is hence hard-won. As landscapes of marginalization, their everyday lives and spaces are sites of negotiation, contestation, and exclusion. Restricted and complicated access to several resources that migration scholars have identified as vital to people in the diaspora renders queer migrant women’s positionality within Swiss society more precarious than that of their heterosexual counterparts. The brittleness of this position results in numerous concerns and health problems, such as marked social isolation (which all participants who had traveled to Switzerland as adults were affected by at some point), deskilling, exploitative working conditions, unemployment, and bullying, factors which led many of the women interviewed to suffer from depression, stress, burnouts, or nervous breakdowns.

### Queer Homes

Queer migrant women’s struggles to create a sense of belonging testify to their ‘homing desires,’ that is “desires to feel home as achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration” (Fortier 2003:115). These homing desires become particularly apparent in the conceptualization and actualization of what I called ‘queer homes.’ These are safe and harmonious spaces which reconcile aspects of the Self that in most other spaces are experienced as irreconcilable, and as such enable queer migrant women to be ‘whole in one place.’

Such queer homes are, for instance, actualized in the women’s *private homes*. Here, lesbian posters are placed side by side with an oversize flag of the homeland, materializing the possibility of being both a lesbian *and* a Bosnian, for example. As a space governed by one’s own rules, the dwelling place also provides an arena for communication and – often silent – negotiation with family members: When the family visits, the lesbian posters stay on the wall, enabling the queer family member to silently confirm her sexual choices while showing respect for tacit subjects within the family. As such the queer home appears as a source of self-assurance and self-determination, assisting in the successful navigation of everyday struggles.

A further central strategy in establishing a queer home is *founding a queer family*. The majority of the women interviewed were planning to have children. This was above all grounded in their desire to restore the family home of their youths, which as an everyday space had been lost to them on account of geographical distance and/or experiences of rejection by their families. Several interviewees related that their desire to establish their own family had been so dominant that at some point in their lives they had considered adopting a heterosexual lifestyle for the sake of installing a family. This particularly concerned women who originally could not imagine starting a family or marrying in the context of a same-sex couple because they saw it as operating “against the culture” (Siti Mohd Amin). Establishing a queer home through reproduction hence requires reconfigurations of cultural, sexual, and gender identities and attendant family roles.

A sense of home was also mapped onto the *bodies of queer compatriots* and other *culturally hybrid people* to address the desire to “sharing problem together” (Siti Mohd Amin). As in most cases queer compatriots could not be found in Switzerland, the desire to establish such ties were sometimes sought and actualized online. However, physical distance from the people behind these online communities eventually rendered membership in these homeland queer communities partial and unfulfilling. In the absence of queer compatriots, contact was also sought to other queer migrants, although these connections did not always bring the desired sense of connection.

Similarly, the few participants who were born in or had come to Switzerland early in their lives expressed a desire to connect to other culturally hybrid people (not necessarily queer, and not necessarily compatriots) in order to share the paradoxical sense of “being foreign in one’s own homeland” (whereas “homeland” here refers to Switzerland). Furthermore, ‘second generation’ participants often sought to *reclaim the parents’ homeland* by que(e)rying it. In contrast to many heterosexual ‘second generation’ migrants, the (few) ‘second generation’ participants in this study were not considering their parents’ country of origin as a place to live, which was partly explained by fear of homophobia. Nevertheless, the parents’ homeland remained an important surface of inscription for homing desires. Aspiring to act as co-authors (rather than only readers of) these places, the parents’ homeland is reimagined and reclaimed by questioning the images conveyed in parents’ heteronormative discourses, as well as by locating women-loving women in its territories. Contact is sought to queer women ‘there,’ aiming to reconfigure imaginations of the parental homeland, as well as to allow for the sharing of common experiences.

As the example of que(e)rying the parents’ homeland shows, queer homes are sometimes carved out within spaces that are hegemonically inscribed as either lesbian or diasporic. In such moments of attachment, the hegemonic meanings attributed to these spaces become suspended. For instance, for Teresa Ruiz, moving to the music of her homeland with other lesbians in Switzerland transforms what was a lesbian space into a *queer* space, merging otherwise segregated aspects of her identity. Her corporeal presence and performance in this space momentarily diasporizes the otherwise intrinsically white lesbian space.

As spaces in which queer migrant women can be both migrant *and* queer in one place, queer homes cancel the otherwise obsessive segregation of space into *either* migrant or lesbian. In these alternative spaces – which are sometimes fleeting and sometimes more permanent – hegemonic sexual and cultural norms are replaced by transnational configurations of queer desire. At the same time, even within these ‘queer homes’ the reconciliation of the irreconcilable remains partial and deferred; the family picture on the refrigerator, even if placed next to the self-portrait with the partner, marks *both* the family’s presence *and* its absence.

In light of queer migrant women’s narratives, the importance of queer homes can hardly be overestimated. Those research participants who had succeeded in creating such spaces identified this achievement as a crucial stepping stone in establishing a ‘good life’ in Switzerland. Conversely, having failed to do so was productive of a sense of unbelonging, isolation, lack, and deferral. The centrality of homing desires in the interviewed women’s accounts fundamentally challenges Larry Knopp’s and other queer geographers’ localization of queer people’s ontological and emotional security in movement, displacement, and placelessness, framing these states *per se* as a “queer practice” (Knopp 2004:124). As discussed at the outset of this study, Knopp explains this by reference to the keen awareness queer people have of the “hybrid nature of [their] existence,” which leads to their “ambivalent relationship to place and identity” and their “affection for placelessness and movement” (ibid:129). By contrast, the biographical narratives of queer migrant women generated in this study testify to the central importance of location in the process of creating a sense of home.<sup>2</sup> This insight challenges the presumption that moving queer bodies necessarily become detached from their moorings, or do not desire such moorings. At the same time, however, queer migrant women’s queer homing practices fundamentally upset notions of ‘home as origin’ that continue to haunt much of mainstream migration scholarship.

### Controlling and Disciplining Queer Migrant Sexualities

Queer migrant women’s reinventions of their sexual Selves, their reconfigurations of their homelands, their everyday negotiations of multiple discrimination, and their actualizations of queer homes represent creative practices exposing and upsetting normative ideas about both ‘our’ (Western) and ‘their’ (non-Western) sexuality and culture. At the same time, these practices are closely tied to relations of power. From a critical queer postcolonial perspective, the process of ‘becoming a lesbian’ as narrated by queer migrant women emerges as a process of becoming a *good* lesbian, one who conforms to homonormative ideals prevailing in Switzerland that privilege specific ideas about and practices around gender, love, sexual practices, visibility, relationships, reproduction, community, citizenship, psychological configuration, clothing, housing, and so on. Becoming a ‘good lesbian’ is crucially enabled by private or institutional catalysts such as European partners or psychiatrists, who figure as teachers and facilitators of ‘good lesbianism,’ even in the intimate sphere of the bedroom.

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2 Other research engaging with the subject position of queer migrant women has come to similar conclusions, see e.g. Ahmed et al. 2003, Fortier 2003, and Kuntsman 2005.

The process of 'becoming a (good) lesbian' is not at all necessarily 'bad.' Women who came to identify as lesbians in Switzerland often described this process as one of personal learning, empowerment, and liberation. Assuming a lesbian identity also emerged as an effective strategy to 'integrate' into Swiss society: Because 'good lesbians' are assumed to be 'Swiss,' the performance of good lesbianism can (to a certain extent) 'save' one from being perceived as a 'foreigner.' In other words, from queer migrant women's perspectives, homonormativity can paradoxically also be reread as a strategy of resistance to mitigate exposure to racism and xenophobia in Switzerland.

However, since 'good lesbianism' is intrinsically marked as Western and white, integration necessarily remains partial and comes at a cost. As mentioned above, for queer migrant women becoming a 'good lesbian' often implies a devaluation of homeland cultures, sexualities, and experiences, which may lead to a sense of betrayal of, or disconnection from, one's national or cultural identity. This brings to the fore that queer migrant women's everyday negotiations of their sexual-cum-national identities with partners, friends, family, and so on are always also negotiations of their *sexual citizenship*. As such, these negotiations are shaped by discourses and practices of the state and other institutions and organizations that function as a *carceral archipelago* that disciplines, regulates, and controls migrant sexualities (Luibhéid 2002).

Tracing the effects of such regulatory discourses and practices, this study examined queer migrant women's experiences with legal frameworks that emerged as central to the disciplining of migrant sexualities in Switzerland. These frameworks define the formalization of same-sex partnerships and immigration/asylum procedure respectively. Interviewees' experiences with the same-sex *Partnership Act* were ambivalent. For many participants in this study, the Act had brought significant relief, had improved transnational mobility, and had even made dreams come true. At the same time, the Act continues to exclude many others, such as working class immigrants who cannot provide a "*prétexte*" (Nour Saber) like education or a job to enter the country; singles; or immigrants who do not happen to be in a relationship with a Swiss citizen or another legalized immigrant. However, even for interviewees who were eligible for registration, the Partnership Act by no means erased all concerns but instead raised new issues. Many research participants initially perceived that to 'marry' a woman would be to "go against our culture" (Siti Mohd Amin). Hence, to enable registration, a reconfiguration of homeland culture and a renegotiation of loyalties is required, but this was not always sought or achieved. Some participants had indeed refrained from registering for such cultural reasons, even in the face of legal precarity and threatening expulsion from the country. Consequently, in (the numerous) cases in which the right to stay in the country hinged on the implementation of same-sex partnership formalization, this process was tied to a distinct sense of *coercion*, which in some instances also threatened partnerships. Hence, in a paradoxical twist, the Partnership Act and attendant practices *create* the very realities they seek to discourage and penalize, such as unstable relationships or fictitious partnership registration. This mechanism becomes particularly evident in the dependency the Act forces upon the foreign partner, which creates inequalities within relationships.

These findings raise further questions from the point of view of Switzerland in its role as a receiving state and society. Interviewed immigration lawyers and activists sug-



gest that a partial solution addressing these issues could be found in the reintroduction of ‘hardship case’ procedure (running parallel to the Act), which would enable the individual assessment of the immigration of the foreign partner independent of registration. This may foreclose rash or fictitious registrations and accommodate concerns regarding cultural loyalties. More radical solutions are being debated by queer scholars concerned with the fundamental rethinking of family relations, parenthood, and sexual citizenship in Switzerland. These models are guided by the principle that “a legal system in a pluralistic society that values all families should meld as closely as possible the purposes of law with the relationships that that law covers. *Marriage* is not the right dividing line” (Law Commission of Canada 2001, quoted in Mesquita and Nay 2013:210). In other words, these scholars suggest that law should serve relationships and realities, and not vice versa. In their efforts to embrace and serve plurality, however, queer scholarship in Switzerland should also reflect on its models with regard to transnational configurations of desire; to date, migrant experiences are largely absent from queer critiques of sexual citizenship, as is the question of who is *absent from Switzerland* in the first place.

Further, the practices by which the state disciplines migrant sexualities in *asylum procedure* were examined. It was demonstrated that in order to present a ‘credible’ case, queer asylum seekers are forced to reproduce a narrative of “Your country has failed you, you are safe here,” hence becoming complicit in the perpetuation of the momentous dichotomy between an allegedly gay-friendly West and an allegedly homophobic South or Orient (Miller 2005). This entails the construction of a legible homosexual identity and biography that configures the asylum seeker as an individualized persecuted subject in her home country. As was shown in the example of Ramiza Salakhova, such an enforced ‘coming out’ can be exceedingly violent, harmful, and traumatizing.

In conclusion, I want to recall the disciplinary effect produced by the *combined* regulations of the Partnership Act and immigration/asylum procedure, which is that the state continues to discipline and control migrant sexualities *after* entry. This is not only directly effectuated (such as by ‘imposing’ partnership registration) but also, for example, by forcing immigrants and asylum seekers to live in rural areas remote from lesbian communities. Hence, queer migrants continue to carry a ‘border within’ ever after they have entered Switzerland.

### **“It’s always got to do with love”: Sexuality as a Reason to Migrate**

Within the question of how sexuality shapes processes of migration, one of the interests here was the role sexuality plays in queer migrant women’s decisions to migrate. At the outset of the biographical interviews I prompted research participants to tell me how they came to Switzerland. The beginning of their narratives would usually contain indications of why they had left their home countries, which were typically (analogously) “Because of work,” “I came here to study,” or “experience living abroad.” However, as the narratives unfolded, these reasons to migrate moved to the background, yielding to a conglomerate of motivations based upon a broad range of experiences, desires, struggles, and curiosities. In virtually all cases, sexuality thereby emerged as a central motivating factor. Some had left their countries because they were heartbroken; some to join a partner in Switzerland; others because they experienced a vague sense of un-

belonging and felt an urge to probe its causes (from a post-migration perspective, this sense of unbelonging was then often explained by the fact that one had ‘always been’ homosexual but had not been able to ‘think’ or ‘see’ it due to a lack of visible role models). One participant was sent abroad by her parents to separate her from her girlfriend; two left because they wanted to immerse themselves in the gay and lesbian subcultures of urban Western Europe; some sought to escape the pressure exerted by parents to marry and have children; two left explicitly because they felt discriminated against as homosexuals in their home country; and one couple fled their country to escape the domestic violence that one of the partners was subjected to after her husband had learnt about the women’s relationship. In many cases, these motivations replaced the ones mentioned at the outset of the interviews. The latter were relegated to being ‘pretexts,’ while motivations related to sexuality were presented as the ‘real’ reasons that migration had been undertaken, which was expressed in statements like “This is actually why I left” or “This was the real reason why I left.”

Hence, in the sample examined in this study, sexuality-related issues figure as a central driver for many (but not all) migrations. As one participant said, “*Hat immer mit der Liebe zu tun*” – “It’s always got to do with love.” However, for the women interviewed, sexuality was implicated in their motivation to migrate in different ways than proposed by some queer migration scholars. Particularly, the insights gained in this study with regard to research participants’ motivations to migrate invigorate the debate around the notion of *sexile*, or *sexual migration* within queer migration studies. This concept emerged from work focusing on Latina/o migration to the U.S. and was defined by Manolo Guzmán as “the exile of those who have had to leave their nation of origin on account of their sexual orientation” (Guzmán 1997:227, quoted in Peña 2010:194). Other queer migration scholars have adopted this concept, sometimes interpreting it in narrow terms.<sup>3</sup> As Andrew Gorman-Murray notes, “many [queer people] move simply for education and employment opportunities; this, in itself, I do not denote as queer migration” (Gorman-Murray 2009:443). In Murray’s account, migration has to be directly and explicitly related to sexuality and sexual orientation in order to qualify as a queer migration.<sup>4</sup>

However: If Gorman-Murray’s model holds true, what are we to do with one of his own informant’s statements: “So I moved to the city in order to come out. *Although I wouldn’t have said it so succinctly then*, I think that was the primary motivation” (Gorman-Murray 2009:448, emphasis added)? The insights gained in this study strongly suggest that meaningful theorizations of queer migration must be able to address such a lack of words. They must ask what ideas about sexuality emerge from these interstices, and what they entail for someone moving from one place to another. Moreover, singling out

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3 But see e.g. Carrillo 2004, Howe et al. 2008, and La Fountain-Stokes 2008 for more encompassing conceptualizations of *sexile* and *sexual migration*.

4 Gorman-Murray distinguishes three types of “queer migrations”: 1) The coming-out migration (i.e. “moving for self-reinvention as a non-heterosexual”); 2) the gravitational group migration (i.e. “moving to be near a neighborhood with a gay and lesbian presence”); and 3) the relationship migration (i.e. “moving with a partner” or “away after relationship breakdown”) (Gorman-Murray 2009:446).

sexuality as an aspect of identity that can be analyzed in isolation – which is precisely what Gorman-Murray’s definition of queer migration aims to do – fails to address that sexuality is always already *intersectional*, and that the motivations of queer people to migrate are complex and not always related to sexuality in easily discernible ways. Had my research participants been asked prior to being accepted into the sample whether they had migrated based on their sexual orientation, most would likely have answered in the negative. However, excluding these cases from the study would have robbed it of its most important insights about postcolonial and transnational configurations of desire and the motivations to migrate that these are productive of.

Furthermore, focusing investigations of queer migration on the reason to migrate does little to invite questions about the *mutual constitution* of sexuality and migration. For instance, such thinking does not encourage exploration of how ‘integration’ into the receiving society changes queer migrants’ conceptualizations of their sexuality; nor does it easily incorporate questions of how queer migrants’ sexualities inform ideas about sexuality prevailing in the receiving communities. Hence, in order to acknowledge the complexity of the ways in which sexuality and migration hang together, in contrast to Gorman-Murray I suggest including *all* queer people who migrate in analyses of “queer migration,” regardless of whether they migrated explicitly based on their sexuality or not. In this view, ‘queer migration’ is simply the migration(s) undertaken by queer people; taking seriously queer theorists’ insight that sexuality co-shapes all aspects of the social, these migrations are necessarily always also ‘sexual’ (and this is of course true for non-queer people as well).

### Switzerland: Promised Land for Queers from around the World?

What ‘love has to do with it’ as emerged from queer migrant women’s narratives in this study also contrasts with the ways in which dominant discourses in Switzerland and generally in Western European countries configure the queer migrant. “Immigration discourse,” Lauren Berlant writes about the U.S. context, “is a central technology for the reproduction of patriotic nationalism: not just because the immigrant is seen as without a nation or resources and thus as deserving of pity or contempt, but because the immigrant is defined as *someone who desires America*” (Berlant 1997:195, emphasis original). As shown in the introductory chapters of this study, in Switzerland the notion of the immigrant desiring Switzerland and attendant fears of ‘floodgate effects’ have been excessively productive of restrictive immigration and asylum policies and practices.

This notion of the desiring immigrant is reiterated and exemplified in the figure of the *queer* immigrant. The dominant idea about queer migrants circulating in Western Europe is, in simplified terms, that they are oppressed in their homeland and desire a liberated homosexual life in the West, which they attempt to materialize by migrating to the West. In the interviewed women’s narratives, this discourse emerged in contradictory versions. On the one hand, most accounts reiterated the imagination of a gay-friendly Switzerland. For some (few) women the image of the gay-friendly West was indeed an explicit motivation for migration, and generally most interviewees considered Switzerland to be a gay-friendly country (often: as opposed to their home countries). At the same time, this positive view of Switzerland was paralleled (frequently within the

same narrative) by accounts of persistent, multiple, and severe experiences of exclusion, some of which were also explicitly associated with homophobia. In other words, while the *imagination* of 'Switzerland' as a gay-friendly space continued to prompt a sense of identification for queer migrant women, their actual *experiences* in its territories exposed the image of Switzerland as a promised land for queer migrants as a self-serving stance erasing persistent homophobia – as interlocked with racism and sexism – in Switzerland. In other words, to frame Switzerland as welcoming of queer migrants clearly ignores racism and xenophobia in the country. This in turn unmasks that gay-friendliness is only available to non-migrant homosexuals – and even in their case remains partial, as persisting discriminatory legislation, policies, and practices testify to.

Queer migrant women's migration biographies debunk the notion of the 'desiring' queer immigrant in two additional ways. The first concerns the reason to migrate. As discussed above, although sexuality is often centrally implicated in the departure from the home country, the notion of the migrant explicitly desiring Switzerland as a gay-friendly place gains some explanatory power in a small minority of cases only (and even then remains problematic as it fails to acknowledge non-Western configurations of desire). However, most narratives push the notion of the desiring queer immigrant beyond its limits. For instance, one cannot migrate explicitly on the basis of one's same-sex desire if one cannot think or name this desire. This is an insight that, while simple, highlights blind spots in immigration, asylum, and 'integration' policies and procedures. For instance, the frequent inability of queer asylum seekers to 'name' their yet unnamed sexuality continues to insufficiently be taken into account in Swiss asylum procedure.

The second insight that challenges the figure of the queer immigrant desiring Switzerland is some interviewees' plans to return to the home country. Within the oppression-liberation narrative, the figure of the *queer returnee* inhabits a paradoxical space – why would someone want to return to oppression by her own volition? "I'm good here, but I'm better there," Charlotta Sembiring assessed, and a short while after the interviews she returned to her home country, as did at least one other research participant.<sup>5</sup> The motivations for these return migrations specifically included a sustained lack of social embeddedness in Switzerland; a sense of cultural unbelonging; the presence of a partner in the home country; the lack of a partner in Switzerland; deskilling and unemployment; immigration issues; work load; exposure to racism, xenophobia, and discrimination; a longing for family; or the need to reassume one's role in the family of origin or more broadly in one's country.

### **Towards a Progressive Politics: Some Thoughts for Human Rights Advocates**

The figure of the queer immigrant desiring Switzerland is also reproduced by LGBT rights discourses in Switzerland. As laid out in this study, queer migrants – and especially queer migrant *women* – have largely remained absent from public discourses in Switzerland. While LGBT organizations have mostly been complicit in this silence, some organizations have addressed the subject position of queer migrants, albeit mostly in

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5 These returns took place after the field phase and are hence not documented systematically. Charlotta Sembiring re-returned to Europe later.

the context of asylum claims and – before the Partnership Act came into effect – in the context of ‘hardship cases.’

However, with a few notable exceptions<sup>6</sup> the stories these organizations tell about queer migrants have largely remained stories about ‘us’ rather than ‘them.’ The identity politics they are based on largely frames immigrants as suppressed and closeted homosexual ‘brothers and sisters’ of an imagined universal queer family in need of being empowered to become ‘out and proud’ lesbians and gays. Through such discourses, LGBT rights advocates reproduce the world “in their own image,” effectively *creating* the (universal LGBT) population they seek to protect and liberate (Massad 2009).

This narrative is problematic because it subsumes all people who are desirous of the same sex under the labels of ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ or ‘homosexual.’ It erases – or dismisses as suppressed or not fully formed – alternative configurations of same-sex desire, which may not be organized around the narrative of the ‘coming out.’<sup>7</sup> In the context of migration, this means that individual queer immigrants’ sexual self-conceptions, practices, and experiences are eclipsed by the limelight that LGBT rights discourse directs at ‘queer immigrants,’ making them invisible in the very moment they should become visible. A further problem with the gay liberation narrative is that it reinforces homonationalist discourses by outsourcing homophobia to non-Western ‘cultures.’ This erases persistent homophobia within Switzerland and forecloses a political critique thereof. Such dichotomizations also serve homonationalist discourses because they sometimes deploy LGBT rights to vindicate a politics of disciplining and exclusion of undesired immigrants, as the discussed example of the podium discussions organized by *NETWORK* illustrates (Chapter 3.4.3).

In sum: There is no doubt a pressing need for revised asylum and immigration legislation and practice that addresses the problems of queer people who attempt to enter Switzerland. At the same time, as LGBT rights advocates, we should reflect on the effects of deploying “strategic shortcuts” (that is, relying on discourses that stereotype queer and other migrants) to create attention for our issues (Miller 2005). Such racialized images of queer immigrants created by human rights discourses is also the result of a fixation on asylum and immigration procedure. Among other things, this has led to an inadvertent preoccupation with *male* immigrants, as most ‘problematic’ asylum cases concern men. This focus on asylum and immigration procedure renders unaddressed the challenges female queer migrants face in their everyday lives in Switzerland, be it as asylum seekers or regular immigrants – such as how to learn the language, to find friends, to find a place to live, to find (satisfying) work, or how to negotiate sexuality with family members, and how, within all this, to negotiate the daily experiences of exclusion based on gender, sexuality, and the perceived status as racialized *Ausländer* or *Ausländerinnen* in Switzerland. In other words, the focus of LGBT rights discourses on

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6 Exceptions especially include the emerging activism by (queer) people of color in Switzerland, which started to take shape only after the field phase of this project (2005–2013) (see Chapters 1 and 2). Having said that, the analysis presented here continues to characterize much of mainstream LGBT activism in Switzerland.

7 This is not to imply that these ‘different’ cultures are in any way ‘local,’ ‘original,’ or ‘authentic,’ as I hope to have demonstrated throughout this book.

deficiencies in asylum and immigration procedure implicitly frames queer migrants as racialized 'problem cases' rather than as contributing and participating citizens with everyday lives and concerns.

At the same time, it is one of these classical immigration 'problems' that opens up an opportunity to forge a more progressive and differentiated queer politics that acknowledges sexuality as a social category that is always interlaced with other realms of the social. As noted above, the Partnership Act produces dependency on the part of the foreign partner, which may bring about precarious legal and personal situations, for instance in the case of domestic violence or separation. These are issues *heterosexual* migrants, and especially heterosexual migrant *women*, have long been struggling with. In terms of human rights activism, the Partnership Act hence opens up possibilities for new coalitions between organizations focusing on LGBT and immigrant rights. In Switzerland, these possibilities have not been seized upon to date, but they have been recognized and explored by some organizations in the U.S. As this book diagnoses for the Swiss NGO landscape, Karma R. Chávez (2010) assesses that in the U.S., immigrant and LGBT organizations have largely refrained from linking their issues. Chávez directs attention to alternative kinds of activism as implemented in the collaboration of *Wingspan*, a Southern Arizona LGBT Community Center (which has since closed operation), with the *Coalición de Derechos Humanos (CDH)*, a grassroots immigrant rights and advocacy organization. Identifying the need to fight anti-immigrant and anti-queer oppression in coalition, these two organizations worked together for years. As Chávez writes, "although each individual organization focuses primarily on its 'own' issue, the mission and constituency of the other group always remain present in the actions in which they each engage," and, when warranted, the organizations team up. Chávez argues that such activism creates what Aimee Carrillo Rowe has termed 'differential belongings,' that is "an alternative mode of cultural citizenship, which can challenge the national social imaginary that figures queers and migrants as threats to family values and the good citizen" (ibid:137, see also Carrillo Rowe 2005). It is only by these activists' and organizations' choice to belong to each other that they can demand that policy makers address the causes and effects of interlocking oppression, such as the fact that "the nation-as-white is always constituted in and by the nation-as-heterosexual" (Chávez 2010:137). Chávez admits that "differential belonging is not a mainstream form of political action because it is located outside most people's affective aspirations and it is, in a word, hard. [...] To long to belong otherwise is dangerous, threatening, and strange." Yet she sees much potential in "bringing people to coalitional subjectivities, where they cannot help but see their oppression and privilege as inextricably bound to others" (ibid:151).<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, in Switzerland (womens') immigrant and LGBT causes have mainly been treated separately. As mentioned above, while LGBT organizations do sometimes

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8 Cathy J. Cohen makes a similar argument for a coalitional leftist politics in which "one's relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades. I'm talking about a politics where the *non-normative* and *marginal* position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work" (Cohen 2005).

engage with migration-related issues, put in relation to the scope of the Swiss LGBT organizational landscape, these efforts have remained the exception. Conversely, among the numerous immigrant organizations in Switzerland, I am aware of only very few that actively addresses same-sex sexuality. By contrast, from the political stance Chávez proposes, common political concerns (such as the issues that arise from linking the residence permit to partnership formalization or work contracts) could be addressed more forcefully, as such a politics would unmask the interlocking of different mechanisms of marginalization. For at least some of the queer migrant women interviewed for this study, such coalitional activities could create a political space that disrupts the divide they experience between their sexual and migrant identities, creating an environment in which the meeting-up of these two aspects of the Self no longer requires movement from one space into another.

### What Space Has Got to Do with It

This brings us back to space. The present study has been inspired and guided by the work of scholars who have called for more embodied geographies that refuse to frame ‘discourses,’ ‘structures,’ or ‘nation-states’ as ubiquitous conglomerates that ‘somehow,’ on the ‘large scale,’ determine the world and how it works. Instead, these discourses, structures, and scales are understood to be contingent on their embodied performative (re)production; and these performances are always necessarily flawed, different, and unpredictable.

A ‘structure’ view on queer migrant women’s subject position in Switzerland would necessarily have emphasized their absence, exclusion, and victimization. At the same time, it would have been equally problematic to frame queer migrant women as unruly protagonists in a “queerer than queer” theory (Oswin 2006:788), as this would have downplayed the disciplining power of sexual norms, the effects of having to navigate multiple landscapes of exclusion, and desires for ‘normalcy’ und inconspicuousness. By contrast, taking the perspective of an embodied geography allowed addressing *both* the fact that there is a lack of designated spaces for queer migrant women in Switzerland *and* how their corporeal presence and everyday (and not-so-everyday) practices as queer-and-migrant subjects at once re-enact and upset what is ‘normal’ in Switzerland.

The accounts discussed in this study further extend the discussion of how space and sexuality are co-constitutive of each other. The ‘Same’ and the ‘Other’ space only come into being through imprinting dichotomized sexualities onto the according landscapes and bodies: The dichotomies of the colony versus the colonizers’ homeland; of the immigrant community versus the white mainstream society; of the ‘foreign’ versus one’s ‘own’ ‘culture’; and of the urban versus the rural all hinge on specific sexualizations of these spaces that work towards maintaining imperial and heteropatriarchal geometries of power.

### Research Outlook

In Switzerland, queer migration is still a very open research field, which to date has scarcely brought forth a handful of degree papers, less than a handful of scholarly publications, a few investigative newspaper articles, some reports by LGBT organizations

addressing the issue of queer asylum, and only marginal notes in broader queer scholarship. This lacuna of academic knowledge on queer migration is not restricted to a lack of investigation into queer migrants' experiences and practices but points to a broader gap in knowledge about the ways in which sexuality shapes *all* aspects of international migration, not just the migration of queers, and the ways in which migration shapes the ways in which we think about ('our' and 'their') sexualities and 'cultures.' My hope is for a proliferation of research illuminating this nexus from a variety of disciplines, including, for instance, social sciences, legal sciences, psychology, health sciences, and economic and political sciences.

This study represents but a point of departure, and the absences in the sample examined here are obvious indications of paths in future research. Above all, the scarcity of working class participants that could be included in this study raises a range of questions, such as whether unqualified women do not or cannot emigrate in the first place; whether their absence is simply a demonstration of the effectiveness of Swiss migration policies in keeping unqualified migrants from outside the EU from entering the country (thereby excluding all queer migrants who are not able to create a "pretext" of pursuing education or work in order to enable their entry into the country); whether unqualified queer women have immigrated using traffickers or fictitious marriages and were therefore reluctant to share their experiences and strategies (which is also pointed to by the absence of undocumented immigrants in this study); or whether they did not take part in the study due to language issues or alternative understandings of their sexualities. In future research on queer migration, an explicit focus on the ways in which class and immigration status structures sexualities and migrations is likely to yield results that differ substantially from the ones provided here.

Another issue that was not possible to address systematically in this study was the role childrearing plays in the configuration of queer migrants' self-conceptions, labor divisions within the family, or experiences in their children's educational institutions. Here follow-up interviews with the same or other participants after a decade of having children might yield interesting results. Further questions are raised by the relatively small number of participants from Ex-Yugoslavian countries. This was the case despite the fact that citizens from Ex-Yugoslavian states make up one of the most sizeable diasporas in the country, and despite explicit efforts to include representatives of these diasporas in later phases of the sampling process. Seeing the significance of this diaspora both in terms of size as well as in terms of the stereotypical images attached to Ex-Yugoslavian citizens by dominant discourses in Switzerland (among other things, prevalent homophobia), a project focusing specifically on these subject positions would seem justified.

Another scholarly engagement I consider urgent is a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the constitution and development of the increasing *homonationalist discourses* in Switzerland, of the implications of these discourses in current debates around asylum and immigration policies and practices, and of their effects on the lives of both queer and non-queer migrants in Switzerland. In the context of migration, these discourses, which pit a gay-friendly Western Europe against a homophobic Orient or South, manifest in the deployment of LGBT rights discourses to vindicate a politics of exclusion of allegedly homophobic immigrants (Gunkel and Pitcher 2008, Harita-



worn et al. 2007). As exposed by my conversations with representatives of certain LGBT organizations as well as by my participation at some of these organizations' events addressing issues of immigration, in Switzerland (as elsewhere), such discourses are sometimes also driven by LGBT rights organizations themselves (see also Purtschert and Mesquita 2016). Further material haphazardly gathered on the issue moreover indicates that homonationalist discourses are also reproduced by political discourses, in the media, in government discourses, in election campaigns, and in negotiations of immigration and asylum policies and practices, among others. In the current heated political climate with regard to asylum and migration issues and with regard to discourses around national security and terrorism, we need to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms of exclusion working towards increasing the rifts between 'us' and 'them.' The growing deployment of sexuality to secure cultural, economic, and political hegemony justifies this call for a systematic analysis of who produces what kind of homonationalist discourse in which context and to what end. An integral part of such an examination should not only be how such discourses affect the lives of queer migrants in Switzerland – a work this study has begun –, but also how these discourses become negotiated through and disrupted by queer migrants' presence, self-conceptualizations, and practices. It is the thinkings and doings of these 'impossible subjects' that most blatantly expose the incongruities of homonationalist narratives; revisiting them insistently promises a way to look at the world and how it works in different ways.



## Acknowledgments

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My first and foremost thanks go to the women who have participated in this study. Without your great investment of time and trust, and without your readiness to contribute your stories, pictures, and opinions to this book, it would not exist. I hope you find the discussion of your contributions worthy of your candor and trust.

My next thanks go to my PhD supervisor Doris Wastl-Walter at the University of Bern and my co-supervisor Sallie Marston at the University of Arizona – thank you for your patience, great inspiration, and spirited encouragement. Many thanks also to everyone at the *Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies* at the University of Bern and especially its two tireless co-directors, Patricia Purtschert and Michèle Amacker, for your great support. My deepest thanks also to Eithne Luibhéid, the late Doreen Massey, and Margo Okazawa-Rey, for so much inspiration and encouragement.

For your critical yet constructive comments on chapter drafts both of the doctoral thesis and this book, I am deeply indebted to Nadia Baghdadi, Serena Dankwa, Jana Häberlein, Larry Knopp, Eithne Luibhéid, Claudia Michel, Yv E. Nay, Tanja Rietmann, Dereka Rushbrook, Veronika Siegl, Eva Soom, and especially Patricia Purtschert. Very many thanks also to Clay Johnson, Conor Cash, and Anna Dätwyler for your meticulous editing and copy-editing, and to Johanna Tönsing and Mirjam Galley from *transcript* for your support.

My further thanks go to my peers from the *Materialgruppe* at the Graduate School *Gender Scripts and Prescripts* at the University of Bern, Anna Bally, Serena Dankwa, Jana Häberlein, Anja Sieber, and Eva Soom. Thanks also to all my other colleagues at the Graduate School, especially Nadia Baghdadi, Denis Hänzi, Sara Landolt, and Kathrin Zehnder, and the Graduate School's dedicated director, coordinator, and committee members, especially Christa Binswanger, Margret Bridges, the late Brigitte Schnegg, Brigitte Studer, and Heinzpeter Znoj. Many thanks also to all the members of the feminist migration scholars' group *PASSAGEN* for your inspirational perspectives, and to everybody at the international *Doreen Massey Reading Weekends* – it was with this extraordinary latter group of people that I first caught glimpse of what geography and queer theory could do together.

My next thanks go to our longstanding feminist geographers' group *Giub-à-Giub*: Sabin Bieri, Patricia Felber, Katharina Gfeller, Judith Häfliger, Claudia Michel, Barbara

Ringgenberg, Helene Sironi, and Pia Tschannen. This group was founded to bring a female professor and social geography to our institute at the University of Bern, a successful endeavor which made this study possible in the first place.

I also extend my deepest gratitude to my friends Sara Aebi, Sabin Bieri, Serena Dankwa, Anna Dätwyler, Linda Diener, Sapana Doshi, Magdalena Gantenbein, Jana Häberlein, Judith Häfliger, Lali Hofer, Andrea Hungerbühler, Ursula Maerz, Marianne Meier, Tracey Osborne, Tanja Rietmann, Barbara Ringgenberg, Isabelle Schläpfer, Anna Sommer, and Ruveni Wijesekera, for your tireless support.

I have withheld my ultimate thanks to the following people to the very last because I don't really know how to express my gratitude: my parents, my brother, my sister-in-law Sibel, their children Yven and Louis, my late grandmother Eusbi, and my friends Claudia, Kri, Nik, and Nadet. My thanks also go to Yaira and Sandra, for bearing with me during parts of this project. And finally, my most special thanks to Henriette, for creating the space to enable me to eventually conclude this book.

This project would not have been possible without two generous full-time scholarships from the Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF – a three-year *Pro\*Doc* Graduate School program and a one-year *Stipendium für angehende Forschende* for finalizing the thesis in the U.S. –, as well as a grant for this Open Access book publication.

## Résumé

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### Differentiating the image of the 'migrant woman' in Switzerland

This study examines the ways in which sexuality and migration constitute each other through an analysis of biographical narratives of queer migrant women in Switzerland. Although recent shifts in Swiss immigration and asylum policies and practices have facilitated entry for certain homosexual people, this 'group' of immigrants has received hardly any political or academic attention to date. Instead, political discourses, the media, and research continue to be organized around the assumption that migrants are heterosexual. One chief concern of this research is to differentiate dominant images of immigrant women by making visible the experiences, self-conceptualizations, everyday practices, and social positionings of queer immigrant women living in Switzerland.

The study specifically addresses migrant women who are same-sex oriented and who are perceived as racialized *Ausländerinnen* (foreigners) in Switzerland based on social markers such as language, surname, or skin color. Drawing on insights from the queer and postcolonial critique, the term 'queer' is deployed here as a conceptual umbrella term for the variety of same-sex sexualities research participants brought to this study. The sample included participants who identify as lesbians, bisexuals, or homosexuals; participants who identify with non-Western female same-sex identities (such as *pengkids* or *tomboys*); participants whose sexual identities do not align with their sexual practices (for instance because they identify as heterosexual while at the same time engaging in same-sex relationships); and participants who understand their sexualities in terms of a practice rather than an identity.

### Transnational configurations of desire

Apart from making visible the experiences of queer migrant women in Switzerland, the objective of this study is twofold. On the one hand, it establishes an understanding of transnational configurations of sexualities. Specifically, it examines how queer migrant women navigate diverging and often contradictory perspectives on sexualities, conflicting loyalties, and the multiple mechanisms of exclusions they face on account of their gender, sexuality, and immigrant status in their daily 'doing' of identities. Understanding these processes of identification and the attendant efforts to create a sense of home and belonging are a chief focus of the analysis. On the other hand, this study exam-

ines the production and disruption of normative sexualities. The key question in this regard has been how queer migrant women's self-conceptualizations and practices are enabled and disciplined by dominant discourses around sexuality, and how, in turn, queer migrant self-conceptualizations and practices reiterate or subvert these sexual norms.

By engaging with the subject position and experiences of queer migrant women in Switzerland, this study has drawn mainly on three bodies of scholarship and has extended these literatures by addressing some of their knowledge gaps. The first of these scholarships are the *geographies of sexualities*, which examine the spatialities of sexualities and the sexualization of space. Until very recently queer geographies have only rarely engaged with cross-cultural and transnational formations of same-sex intimacy and heteronormativity. Second, this research engages with and contributes to *queer migration studies*. This emerging scholarship explores the interlinkages between migration and sexuality but has produced scant ethnographies addressing queer migrant women. Both of these scholarships have moreover hardly engaged with contexts outside North America and the U.K. Lastly, this study converses with *feminist migration research* in Switzerland, which has largely remained organized around the assumption that migrants are heterosexual. This study enriches this scholarship by applying a queer/postcolonial perspective on migration, demonstrating how sexuality structures the migration experience (of *all* migrants), and how, in turn, migration shapes how we think about sexualities, and how we perceive ourselves as sexual beings.

### A 'field without sites'

The study is based on biographical interviews with 28 queer migrant women, conducted in Switzerland between 2005 and 2013. Seeing that in this period there were hardly any designated spaces for queer migrant women to be acknowledged in their being queer, migrant, and women all at the same time, this was a 'field without sites.' Accordingly, finding research participants and 'experts' on the issue was a challenge. To this date the Swiss organizational and institutional landscape is largely organized around *either* sexuality *or* immigration, and hence there was no obvious place in which to 'do' participant observation or look for expertise. In a lengthy sampling process, participants were eventually found through a multiplicity of channels. In terms of expertise, limited knowledge could be excavated especially among LGBT and immigrant rights advocates, immigration authorities, and scholars. When expert perspectives could be found, they were mostly restricted to queer asylum and (more rarely) immigration procedure.

The data corpus encompasses recordings and transcripts of 47 interviews with 28 self-identified women originating from a total of 22 countries in Asia, Northern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Eastern, Southeastern, and Southern Europe. This cultural diversity, impressed on the project by the 'field,' became both a source of strength and a challenge: On the one hand, it allowed, to a certain extent, for the acknowledgment of certain issues and patterns that occur across the postcolonial world, as well as for an assessment of commonalities within queer migrant women's experiences in Switzerland. On the other hand, the cultural diversity of research participants rendered impossible the completion of an in-depth contextualization of specific

transnational and postcolonial configurations of desires in research participants' home countries and in specific diasporic communities in Switzerland respectively.

Whenever possible, two interviews were held with each participant. The first was a semi-structured narrative interview that focused on research participants' migration biography. The second interview was inspired by the reflexive photography method and centered on photographs that participants had taken for the research of "places that are important to you in your everyday life." Interviews were often complemented by site visits and, whenever possible, participant observation, and were contextualized by expert interviews with representatives from LGBT and immigrant organizations, immigration attorneys, and government officials.

### Negotiating multiple exclusions

Interviewees' narratives reveal that queer migrant women's positionality and experiences within Swiss society differ significantly from those of their heterosexual counterparts. As landscapes of multiple marginalization, almost all of their everyday spaces and places represent sites of negotiation, contestation, and exclusion. This restricts access to many of the resources and spaces that feminist and queer migration scholars have identified as vital for a good life in the diaspora, such as the family of origin, the diasporic community, the lesbian community, meaningful work, or child rearing. This often leaves queer migrant women in precarious situations that produce a multifarious set of concerns, such as social isolation, deskilling, exploitative working conditions, unemployment, or bullying at work, all of which frequently cause health issues such as depression, stress, burnouts, or nervous breakdowns.

On the other hand, a range of everyday spaces and places emerge as crucial sites for the negotiation of home and belonging. With regard to the *family of origin*, it is shown that, to queer migrant women, the family as a 'basic unit' of solidarity and security in the diaspora (which is how the family has been described by feminist migration scholars) is not available in the same way as it is to their heterosexual counterparts. Although no interviewees had been 'disowned' by their families, as sexually non-conforming subjects, their sexual choices and hence their place in the family often remains contested, regardless of whether the family lives in Switzerland or in the country of origin. The family therefore emerges as a central locus in the production and enforcement of heteronormative 'culture' and 'tradition.' At the same time, due to affective dependencies, often grounded in precarious life situations in the diaspora, family ties are never fundamentally questioned. As a result, the family of origin emerges as a permanent transnational site of negotiation through which queer migrant women struggle to reclaim their national, ethnic, and cultural identities as queer women.

Relationships to the *diasporic community* in Switzerland are experienced as equally ambivalent. Parties and other events organized by diasporic communities are mostly perceived as markedly heteronormative or even homophobic. This frequently results in at least a partial withdrawal from these spaces, and this withdrawal in turn often creates a sense of lacking or detachment from 'home' culture. Hence, as in the case of the family, queer migrant women only have restricted access to the resources diasporic

communities offer heterosexual migrants both as an emblematic locus of homeland nostalgia and, importantly, as a bulwark against racism and xenophobia.

By contrast, the Swiss *lesbian community* predominantly represents a site of identification. As an *imagined community*, it was sometimes (if rarely) named as an explicit ‘pull-factor’ in the decision to migrate. However, as an *everyday space* and resource, it remains highly contradictory. Experiences of exclusion in lesbian spaces – especially in the initial stages of the stay in Switzerland – belie the myth of the universal ‘queer family’ and expose lesbian spaces as intrinsically white and Western. However, although perceived by many queer migrant women as ‘ghettos,’ lesbian spaces in Switzerland are often still deemed to be the best places to socialize among an overall deficit of options.

*Work* emerges as both a site of identification and integration and a site of exclusion and personal crisis. Deskilling and unemployment in the initial phases of migration are not always followed by professional catch-up and successful integration within the Swiss labor market. At the same time, becoming a housewife and mother as a strategy to evade work-related problems is not available to queer migrant women in the same way it is to heterosexual migrant women: Where the latter win social recognition within their families, their diasporic communities, and society at large, the former often harvest more rejection, at least in the early (planning) stage of their ‘baby projects.’ Lastly, the biographical narratives once more expose the ‘aggressive heterosexuality’ of work environments in Switzerland, which creates its own exclusionary effects in the form of both overt and covert rejection.

### Claiming home

Queer migrant women’s efforts to create a sense of belonging testify to their ‘*homing desires*’ – the desire to (re)appropriate spaces in order to gain a sense of ontological security within the migration context. These homing desires are manifested in the form of imaginations and actualizations of what I term ‘*queer homes*.’ Queer homes are conceptualized as spaces which reconcile aspects of the Self that in most other spaces are experienced as irreconcilable, and hence enable queer migrant women to be ‘whole in one place.’ Such homing desires are for instance mapped onto one’s dwelling place, onto the bodies of queer compatriots, or onto one’s own queer core family (by having children). At the same time, ‘queer homes’ can also be fleeting moments carved out in spaces that are hegemonically inscribed as *either* lesbian *or* migrant. The importance attached to queer homes as real and imagined spaces challenge the presumption that moving queer bodies become detached from their moorings, or do not desire such moorings. At the same time, queer migrant women’s homing desires and practices upset notions of ‘home as origin’ that continue to haunt much of migration scholarship.

### Negotiating sexualities transnationally

The migration biographies generated in the context of this project show that sexualities always become reconfigured through migration, in ways that, for the sake of analytical distinction, I divide into three (overlapping) trajectories: The first addresses women who did not engage in relationships with women or did not consider their same-sex practices in terms of an identity before migration, and who have only come to identify



as lesbians in Switzerland; the second addresses women who had established a same-sex identity and were embedded in a sexual minority subculture prior to migrating, and who in the diaspora face subcultural divergences that lead to a reconfiguration of their sexual self-conceptions; and the third addresses women who tend to understand their sexuality as a practice rather than an identity, and who continue to reject the lesbian label after migration, defying simplistic equations of silence/invisibility with 'being closeted.'

Queer migrant women's reinventions of their sexual Selves represent creative practices that expose and upset normative ideas about both 'our' and 'their' sexual and national/ethnic/cultural identities. At the same time, these personal developments are closely tied into relations of power. Successful integration in Swiss society as a woman-loving woman hinges upon adopting a normative lesbian identity organized around specific lookings, thinkings, and doings. In queer migrant women's narratives, this process of 'becoming a good lesbian' often figures as a narrative of self-realization and liberation. Assuming a lesbian identity also emerges as an effective strategy to integrate into Swiss society: Because 'good lesbians' are assumed to be 'Swiss,' the performance of good lesbianism veils to a certain extent the fact of being a 'foreigner,' thereby mitigating exposure to racism and xenophobia. However, since 'good lesbianism' is intrinsically Western and white, identification remains partial, and moreover often comes at the cost of dismissal or denigration of homeland culture, sexualities, and experiences, which are constructed as contradictory to the former.

### **Sexuality as a transfer point of state power**

With respect to the normativization of sexualities, the study furthermore examines how state discourses, regulations, policies, and practices combine in a *system of surveillance* that disciplines and controls migrant sexualities. Importantly, in the case of queer migrants, this disciplining happens through the legal frameworks and attendant practices regulating the formalization of same-sex partnerships and immigration/asylum. As is exemplified by the analysis of some participants' experiences with asylum procedure, these disciplining processes are productive of *homonationalist* discourses. Aiming to secure Western hegemony, these discourses pit a gay-friendly Switzerland/West against a homophobic Global South or Orient. Asylum procedure forces the migrant to construct a narrative that presents her country of origin as the place that has failed her as a homosexual, and Switzerland as the country which can now save her. Hence queer asylum claimants are tied to a Eurocentric logic that frames them as oppressed homosexuals desiring to live a liberated homosexual life in the West. Only claimants who reproduce this narrative can present a case that is considered 'credible.' As is shown, such homonationalist discourses erase non-Western sexual cultures and configurations of desire, while failure to produce the requested narrative effectively bars queer migrants from entry into the country. These discourses further outsource homophobia to non-Western countries, obliterating persistent homophobia within Switzerland (and hence also hindering a domestic critique thereof). As is furthermore shown, even LGBT rights discourses perpetuate such discourses, which is manifested for instance in the tendency of some LGBT organizations to frame immigrant cultures as homophobic.

Queer migrant women's narratives debunk this myth of the homosexual migrant desiring Switzerland. While sexuality-related reasons indeed figured centrally in many participants' motivations to migrate, they mostly did so in ways that the dominant narrative fails to address. One cannot, for instance, explicitly migrate on the basis of one's same-sex desire if one cannot think or name it. This simple insight raises fundamental questions regarding immigration, asylum, and 'integration' policies and practices from the point of view of Switzerland as a receiving nation-state.

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## Annex I: List of Research Participants

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About the following table:

- There were about ten more interlocutors who are not listed here but with whom informal conversations or interviews were held.
- Names changed for reasons of anonymity.
- Types of residence status in Switzerland:
  - B = Temporary permit of residence (includes a work permit, but additional administrative effort is required by employers to employ persons with a B permit; it usually requires annual renewal)
  - C = Permanent permit of residence (includes a work permit; usually issued after five or ten years of residence in Switzerland)
  - F = Provisionally accepted refugee
  - L = *Kurzaufenthaltsbewilligung* (short term permit)
  - N = Asylum claimant (may reside in Switzerland for the duration of the asylum application procedure)
- Exact professions and in some cases the country are not indicated for reasons of anonymity. Professions are sometimes mentioned in the main text.
- e.P. = *eingetragene Partnerschaft* (registered partnership)

Name	Age when interviewed	Country of origin	In Switzerland since	Status in Switzerland	Marital status	Education	Remarks
Nara Agayeva	36	Post-Soviet state	4 years	N	unmarried	university degree	In relationship with Ramiza Salakhova (see below). The couple has a daughter.
Siti Mohd Amin	32	Malaysia	11 years	B	unmarried	prof. training	
Maria Borkovic	32	Hungary	4 months	B	unmarried	university degree	Family has Serbian background / MB grew up in Hungary.
Marta López	–	Spain	–	–	unmarried	–	
Laura Georg	38	Switzerland	since birth	Swiss citizen	divorced	university degree	Swiss mother; Sri Lankan father / LG grew up in Switzerland.
Pilar Gómez	44	Spain	39 years	naturalized	unmarried	prof. training	
Leyla Haddad	39	Lebanon	28 years	naturalized	unmarried	university degree	Swiss mother, Lebanese father / LH migrated back and forth between Lebanon and Switzerland for several years during her childhood.
Sophie Kostopoulos	31	Greece	3 years	B	unmarried	university degree	
Beatriz Kraus	43	Brazil	20 years	naturalized	e.P.	university degree	
Efra Mahmoud	31	Egypt	4 years	B	e.P.	university degree	
Lorena Moreno	33	Colombia	6 years	B	unmarried	university degree	
Julia Morricone	34	Switzerland	since birth	naturalized	e.P.	university degree	Italian parents



Name	Age when interviewed	Country of origin	In Switzerland since	Status in Switzerland	Marital status	Education	Remarks
Cristina Pérez	22	Switzerland	since birth	C	e.P.	high school	Spanish parents
Nermína Petar	28	Bosnia	18 years	C	unmarried	in apprenticeship	Lived with grandparents in Bosnia for several years while parents worked in Switzerland.
Irena Pupovac	54	Serbia	34 years	naturalized	–	basic prof. training	
Jimena Reyes	38	Peru	21 years	naturalized	unmarried	university degree	
Teresa Ruiz	34	Cuba	11 years	C	divorced	prof. training	Obtained her residence permit by ways of an asylum application.
Olivia Russo	32	Italy	5 years	B	unmarried	university degree	
Nour Saber	37	Arab country	2 years	B	e.P.	university degree	
Ramiza Salakhova	42	Post-Soviet state	4 years	N / F	divorced	prof. training	In relationship with Nara Agayeva (see above). The couple has a daughter.
Suki Schäuble	60	Japan	32 years	C	married	university degree	
Natascha Schild	20	Kazakhstan	9 months	L	unmarried	in apprenticeship	Kazakh mother, Russian father, German step-father / Family left Kazakhstan for Germany when NS was ten years of age.

Name	Age when interviewed	Country of origin	In Switzerland since	Status in Switzerland	Marital status	Education	Remarks
Charlotta Sembiring	35	Indonesia	2 years	B	divorced	university degree	
Jasmine Sieto	31	Indonesia	13 years	C	unmarried	prof. training	
Ayesha Umar	34	Pakistan	1 (6) years	B	e.P.	university degree	Family moved to an African state when AU was four years old and then to Scandinavia when she was ten / AU had already spent 6 years in Switzerland between 2001 and 2006 (interviewed during her second stay in 2008).
Ariane Velusat	23	Venezuela	5 years	Swiss citizen	e.P.	in apprenticeship	Swiss mother, Venezuelan father / AV grew up in Venezuela.
Augusta Wakari	35	Indonesia	15 years	C	divorced	prof. training	
Barbara Wiegand	48	Great Britain / Switzerland	47 years	naturalized	divorced	freelance artist	German mother, Caribbean father / BW grew up in a foster family in Switzerland.

## Annex II: Overview of Collected Data

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The original data generated in the context of this study included:

- Audio recordings of 47 interviews with 28 queer migrant women (biographical narratives and reflexive photography interviews), and minutes from explorative interviews with four additional interlocutors. The length of the interviews varied between 17' and 4h15'. Biographical interviews typically lasted between 1h30' and 2h30', reflexive photography interviews around 45'. Most interviews were conducted between autumn 2005 and spring 2009, with some additional interviews conducted in autumn 2013.
- 119 photographs submitted by the research participants.
- Case-based memos, containing between 1 and 50 pages per case.
- Field notes documenting participant observations and site visits.
- Audio recordings and/or written minutes of expert interviews with:
  - Liselotte Barzé-Loosli from the *Bundesamt für Migration BFM* (Federal Office for Migration), officer responsible for 'gender-based prosecution,' under which prosecution on the basis of homosexuality is subsumed (October 21, 2008) – audio recording and minutes.
  - Eliane Blanc, chief executive of *L'Estime*, a French Swiss lesbian organization (September 16, 2008) – audio recording and minutes.
  - Rita Echarte Fuentes Kieffer from the *Informationsstelle für Ausländerinnen- und Ausländerfragen isa*, an organization that advises immigrants (June 7, 2007) – minutes.
  - Najah Larbi, *L'Estime* (September 10, 2007) – audio recording and minutes.
  - Ljilja Mucibabic, journalist (May 3, 2007) – minutes.
  - Brigitte Rösli, President of the *Lesbenorganisation Schweiz LOS* (Swiss Lesbian Organization) (October 12, 2006) – audio recording and minutes.
  - Markus Rudaz, President of *Schweizer Lesben und Schwule mit ausländischen Partnern SLAP* (Swiss Lesbians and Gays with Foreign Partners) (August 29, 2008) – audio recording and minutes.

- Daniel Weber, lawyer specializing in immigration and homosexuality (August 22, 2008) – minutes.
- The founding team of *Queer Migs* (September 6, 2013) – audio recording and minutes.
- Audio recordings and minutes of three podium discussions and symposia addressing asylum/migration and homosexuality:
  - “Homosexualität und Asyl”  
Bern, September 14, 2006  
Podium discussion organized by the Fachkommission Lesben und Schwule in der SP Schweiz  
(Lesbian and Gay Commission of the Swiss Socialist Party)
  - “Immigrantenkultur versus Menschenrechte – Homosexuelle im Kulturkampf?”  
Zürich, September 8, 2007  
Symposium organized by *NETWORK*, a gay professionals’ network
  - “Das Tabu Homosexualität in der Integrationsarbeit – Respekt fördern oder fordern?”  
Basel, August 25, 2008  
Symposium organized by *NETWORK*

## Annex III: Technical Notes

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### General

“X” Double quotation marks for literal quotes from interviews or literature

‘X’ Single quotation marks for commonly used terms, or commonly used terms the author views critically (scare quotes)

### Interview Transcriptions

This study treats transcribed conversations in the manner of dramatic dialogues. However, the transcription of the rhetorically complex and multi-lingual interview scenarios discussed here requires further definition for clarity:

(laughs), (shudders)	Paralinguistic elements are indicated in round brackets.
(pauses)	Longer pauses in speech. Brief pauses are marked by commas. Conventional comma rules do not apply.
[...]	Omitted words or sentences are marked with ellipses in square brackets.
[her sister]	Additions/explanations/replacements by the author are indicated in square brackets. Examples: She told [me] to go home. / And then Yasinta [her sister] told me to go home. / At the time she lived in [name of a Scandinavian country].

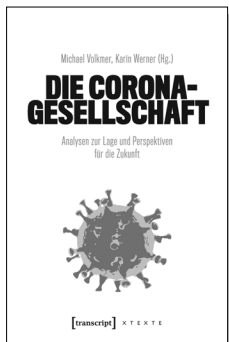
<u>Emphasis / EMPHASIS</u>	Emphasized words are underlined, strongly emphasized words are additionally capitalized.
I remem-	If an interviewee broke off a word or sentence, a short dash is added to the word Example: I remem- I don't remember what I said.
TB / XX	In a dialogue between the interviewee and the author, the author (TB) and the interviewee are identified by their initials.
"...you know?"	A question mark is added to sentences with a questioning intonation.

While I acknowledge that repetitions, hesitations, fill-ins ('ehm'), and stutters are significant elements of an interview and often essential for interpretation, in the interest of smoother legibility some of these elements have been removed from the original transcripts when quoted in the text, except in cases in which these very elements seemed to be of particular significance to the analysis.

### **Data Anonymization**

All data were anonymized. Besides names and first names, which were always anonymized, in some instances other information such as place names were omitted or changed to ensure anonymization.

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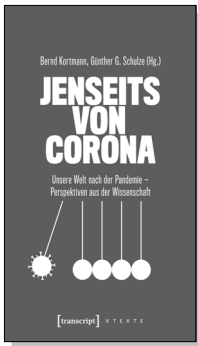
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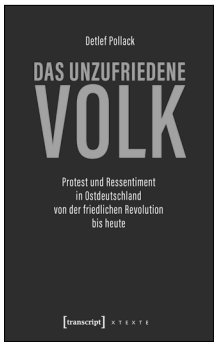
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