

## 12. (Dis)placing Pride in Copenhagen, or the socio-spatial lives of queer/trans migrant critique

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### INTRODUCTION

Queer geographies and the geographies of sexualities have been animated in recent years by compelling discussions about the relationships between normativities, critique, and the dynamics and specificities of *place*. In part, these discussions have centred on how to understand the partial and uneven extension of LGBTQI+ inclusion in some contexts beyond the overarching narratives of queer progress through which these normative shifts are often embedded (Brown, 2015b; Browne & Bakshi, 2013b). They have also been about how to mobilize (or not) critical concepts that have emerged to diagnose contemporary normativities, including concerns about decontextualizing uses of the concept of homonormativity (Brown, 2012; Gorman-Murray, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Thus, against both all-encompassing narratives of increasing LGBTQI+ inclusion and a-contextual mobilizations of critical frameworks, many geographers have turned to the dynamics and specificities of place as a promising avenue for understanding the dynamics of queer and trans lives, spaces, and politics beyond decontextualizing narratives (Bain & Podmore, 2021c; Di Feliciano, 2023; Podmore, 2016).

At the same time, queer of colour, queer migrant, and other minoritized forms of queer and trans study have offered vital accounts that have highlighted the racialized nature of homonormative and other “one-dimensional” queer spaces while situating their emergence within broader analytics of

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<sup>1</sup> As developed by Lisa Duggan (2002, p. 179), homonormativity names 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.”

racial-colonial capitalism (Ferguson, 2018; Haritaworn, 2015; Puar, 2007; Rao, 2020). These analytics are not necessarily any less attuned to place, but they do tend to stretch in more explicitly transnational and translocal directions, emphasizing the relations, mobilities, and (dis)connections constituting places, normativities, and resistance (Açıköz et al., 2024; Bacchetta et al., 2015). They also highlight how places are produced through differential inclusion and exclusion, as well as how minoritized queer and trans people make places of their own (Boussaleh, 2023a; DasGupta & Dasgupta, 2018; Rosenberg, 2021a; 2021b). Critical work on queer and trans migrations has specifically brought the translocal character of LGBTQI+ spaces and communities to the fore, including attention to the trajectories of queer and trans people on the move, as well as to the racial-colonial geographies shaping their experiences (Camminga & Marnell, 2022; Luibhéid, 2008; Manalansan, 2003, 2015; Sandoval, 2018).

Across these conversations, Pride events have held an important place, as they have across the broader sweep of queer geographic scholarship (Payne, 2021). As important moments in which queer and trans political claims are made, and emplaced assemblages of queer and trans organizations and communities come together (or apart), they have been approached both as variegated sites of emplaced normativities and as spaces of racializing homonormativity, embedded in and enabling racial-colonial geographies (e.g., Luibhéid, 2023; McCartan, 2024). In this chapter, as represented in the opening artwork *Solomon's Pride*, I contribute to these conversations by bringing together ideas about place-specific and variegated (homo)normativities with the translocal politics of queer migration in Copenhagen, amidst the ongoing aftermath of the region's so-called "refugee crisis," the tightening of Danish asylum, migration, and border policies, and the shifting landscapes of LGBTQI+ recognition as meanings of Nordic sexual and gender progress are contested by "anti-gender," trans-exclusionary movements. Against this backdrop, this chapter draws attention to the socio-spatial life of queer and trans migrant *critique* of normativities, in all of its own variegation, as it emerges in, against, and beyond Pride week activities in Copenhagen in 2023–2024. Beyond critical common-sense understandings about the depoliticization of Pride events—or indeed of Pride events as depoliticized iterations of a relatively encompassing homonormative condition (as critiqued by Di Feliciano, 2016; and McCartan, 2024)—this chapter shows how Pride events in Copenhagen are contested and re-politicized by the claims and critiques of queer and trans people who have migrated. These claims and critiques complicate imagined geographies of Nordic queer progress and point toward the socio-spatial life of ordinary critique as a contribution to ongoing conversations about normativity and place among queer geographers.

## DISLOCATING PLACE AND NORMATIVITY AT PRIDE

Pride (as protest, festival, memorial, demonstration, parade, tourist attraction, party, politics, and more) has long been an important and contested part of LGBTQI+ movements and communities in many contexts, and the study of Pride has been a recurring focal point for queer geographic scholarship more broadly (e.g., Browne, 2007; Johnston, 2007; Johnston & Waitt, 2016; McCartan & Nash, 2023). Within the varied histories and geographies of Pride events, one can trace the emergence and consolidation of different political orientations within queer communities, as well as find evidence of the changing relationships between queer and trans communities and broader societies (Payne, 2021; Turesky & Crisman, 2023). Thus, not surprisingly, Pride events have been central to discussions about place and normativity among queer geographers.

Indeed, Pride events, especially in large global north cities, often circulate as emblematic examples of homonormativity (Saleh, 2023). There are compelling reasons for this, and critical work interrogating homonormativities productively illuminate much about Pride events and their alignment with urban development agendas, national imaginaries, and state projects in some contexts (e.g., Ammaturo, 2016; Lamusse, 2016). Frequently, the figure of the sexual citizen claiming recognition, rights, or visibility at Pride events is often implicitly understood to represent “citizens”—albeit perhaps second-class ones, but indeed citizens whose legal status, residence, and mobilities are not in question (Luibhéid, 2023). Whatever else Pride events might be, they are normative spaces embedded in regimes of racialization (Lewis et al., 2024; Rosenberg, 2021b).

At the same time, Pride events are clearly not the same everywhere, and scholars and activists often geographically delimit their critical claims about Pride and normativities as I did in the previous paragraph when mentioning “large global north cities.” There are a range of such geographical delimitations—some that are more focused on differences across an unequal world and others that operate within or against a metronormative framing of urban and rural, or of suburbs and smaller cities. What they share is a tendency to set up a category of places/times where Pride events are large celebrations in relative alignment with the relevant powers that be, and, on the other hand, places/times where Pride events are more marginal or more contested and more likely to be out of sync with or resistant to prevailing norms or state power.

These delimitations are understandable, and to the extent that making them can help to provincialize approaches that tend to theorize generally from a limited set of coordinates, then they can be very valuable indeed. Yet they also present some challenges. To begin with, they can themselves get caught

up in a colonial geography of “here” and “there” that is not entirely unlike what Lalor and Browne (2018) have described in British LGBTQ+ activism and in Brighton Pride, where “here” is imagined as the place where LGBTQ+ issues had been largely addressed and “there” is the place where the problems remain. The danger is that the differences that persist within those places categorized as either “here” and “there,” as well as connections and relations across those categories, can all be occluded—in both hegemonic framings and critiques thereof. To illuminate these occlusions, we might think how Julie Podmore’s (2016) writing on lesbian urbanism disaggregates the “here/there” of metronormativity and its critique in order to open up attention to the possibilities of inhabiting and theorizing the city otherwise, or how Gavin Brown’s (2015b) work on the diverse economies of queer lives offers alternative genealogies that relocate the geographies of homonormativity beyond global gay centres, or how Evren Savci’s (2021) account of translation pushes beyond the binaries of West and non-West that persist in hegemonic understandings of sexual politics, as well as their critique.

These examples show the importance of a broader pattern in queer geographies and the geographies of sexualities in recent years where a focus on place, specificity, and contextual variegation has been developed to counter, simultaneously, overarching narratives of queer progress and the mobilization of critical conceptual frameworks in ways that sideline spatial context and place-specificity. Important here has been Brown’s (2012) influential critique of theorizations of homonormativity questioning top-down styles of reading for hegemony (set against reading for difference) and a broadly encompassing imagination of a singular homonormativity, despite the reliance of such accounts on a relatively circumscribed sets of metropolitan contexts. Against such top-down theorizations, queer geographies of place-specificity have proliferated, from accounts of ordinary activism and lives beyond dichotomies of assimilation and radicalism in Brighton (Browne & Bakshi, 2013b), to attention to the diversity of situated practices emerging from research with Italian and French gay migrants in Barcelona living with HIV which complicate assumed boundaries of homonormative inclusion and exclusion (Di Feliciano, 2019), to productive conceptualizations of the *place* of urban LGBTQ2S activists (Bain & Podmore, 2021c). This emphasis on the contingencies and specificities of place has been crucial for understanding the complicated landscape of LGBTQI+ spaces, lives, and politics.

Similar tendencies are noticeable also in research more specifically on Pride events. For example, Di Feliciano (2016) highlights the contestation in Pride events in Italy against narratives of mainstreaming and depoliticization. Kenttamaa Squires (2019) highlights the a-spatial essentialism of certain forms of homonormativity critique through research on Pride events in Miami Beach, where minoritized Prides take partial and contradictory part in

broader homonormative logics in ways that are enabled by the specificities of Miami Beach and its place within the geographies of migration and tourism. McCartan (2024) develops a conceptualization of variegated homonormativities to understand the normativities at work in Glasgow Pride in ways that avoid posing homonormativity as “monolithic,” while directing attention to the importance of place-specific context.

This attention to place-specificity should not be understood as a turn toward places as self-contained and, indeed, at their best, resisting such a tendency is precisely one of the strengths of these literatures. Bain and Podmore (2021c, p. 1314) remind that “to queer theorisations of place is to explicitly engage with spatio-temporal unboundedness, resisting neat distinctions between insides and outsides as well as pasts and presents” (e.g., Di Feliciano, 2023; Ruez, 2021). Further, in relation to Pride events, Khyree Davis’s (2021) work on Black Lives Matter disruptions of Toronto Pride stands as an important example of the necessity of combining attention to the specificities of the Toronto and Canadian context with a focus on international anti-Blackness and diasporic Black queerness.

Without denying the increased alignment between Pride events and prevailing normativities in some contexts, I would suggest that attention to the unbounded dynamics of place in queer geographies can enrich our understandings of prevailing normativities and the contestations and alternatives that emerge against or despite them. And if we wish to push beyond “analytical segregations wrought by North/South, urban/rural, everyday/theoretical binaries” (Bain & Podmore, 2021c, p. 1312), then it is crucial that we bring these analytics not only to Pride events outside or on the periphery of urban/global north/Western queer centres—as vital as that is—but also to those that might be imagined as more central (e.g., Di Feliciano, 2016; Oswin, 2006). Of course, the perceived centrality of Copenhagen could be debated, but Copenhagen, Denmark, and the broader Nordic region have often been understood to be at the forefront of equalities gains in relation to sexuality and gender. Indeed, a sense of Nordic exceptionalism circulates—within and beyond the Nordic countries—that locates Nordic contexts as the site of achieved rights and welfare, set against others who are expected to either follow in their footsteps or to pose a threat to their progressive achievements (Jensen & Loftsdóttir, 2021; Liinason, 2023; Stoltz, 2021). Writing against both a relatively place-less common sense of Pride as depoliticized and the more specific normativities of Nordic exceptionalism, this chapter examines moments where migrant queer and trans critiques in/of Pride complicate imagined geographies of Nordic LGBTQI+ progress. Understanding the emplacements and displacements involved, then, becomes central to understanding the normativities and the critiques that are shaping queer and trans spaces in Copenhagen and

beyond, as well as a provisional point of departure for understanding the *place* of Pride events beyond constraining geographic imaginaries.

## RESEARCHING THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION AT PRIDE EVENTS IN COPENHAGEN

For one week every August in Copenhagen, Rådhuspladsen (City Hall Square) is bedecked in rainbow flags and Pride banners and becomes “Pride Square,” where a regular line-up of musicians, drag artists, and others entertain throughout the week, alongside arts exhibits, community organization tents, and vendors. A wide range of panels, parties, and film screenings take place in and beyond the square, and the square is also the destination point for the headlining Pride parade that takes place on the Saturday of Pride Week and a frequent starting point for partying that spreads out through the historic city centre after the parade. Throughout the week, there is an official program curated by the Copenhagen Pride organization, as well as a range of other events unaffiliated with the Copenhagen Pride organization.

This chapter draws on fieldwork conducted during these events in 2023 and 2024. This fieldwork consisted largely of participant observation at events throughout the week, including occasions where I would go along with others to events, as well as those I would attend on my own. I spent time at the central Pride Square and participated in the main Copenhagen Pride parade in 2023, as well as an alternative QTBIPOC-led march called Nørrebro Pride in 2023 and 2024, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. I attended a broad range of events, many of which were part of the official program curated by the Copenhagen Pride organization, but others were not, either by virtue of being relatively informal or, especially in 2024, due to several events being organized independently due to conflicts over the relationship between the official Copenhagen Pride and its corporate sponsors with ties to the ongoing genocide and occupation in Palestine. As there were often many competing events ongoing at any given time, my choices were generally guided by my research interests in the politics of migration, as well as, to some extent, by my limited Danish skills.<sup>2</sup> In practice, this meant that I spent

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<sup>2</sup> As navigating Copenhagen generally, and Copenhagen Pride events specifically, in English is quite common for many people who have recently migrated to Denmark, as well as for visitors attending the event from elsewhere, I would suggest that, in addition to real and obvious disadvantages, this situation also offered glimpses into partially shared experiences with a range of other participants in Pride events, even as my position as a native English speaker carries along with it privileges that may diverge significantly from many other speakers of English in the city.

a lot of time in the “debate tent” as part of the human rights program, watching panel discussions about queer and trans migration and asylum issues, as well as many discussions of “international” LGBTQI+ issues—both of which tended to be organized in English. Ethical considerations led to prioritizing *relatively* less intrusive research methods in the context of heavily scrutinized communities, emphasizing participation in publicly accessible events and in the kinds of spaces to which I as a queer person would also access in my ordinary life. After attending events, and where practical during the event, I prepared fieldnotes—some of which are directly excerpted in this chapter and some which more generally form the basis of the analysis I present. I also analysed event programs, statements, and other textual materials circulated or referenced at the events. This fieldwork is part of a broader project on the politics of migration within queer spaces, and the chapter also draws on a broader set of interviews with participants in LGBTQI+ spaces in Copenhagen conducted between 2022 and 2024, especially where those conversations turned toward Pride. I do not include anyone’s real name, relying instead on either pseudonyms or other anonymous descriptors.

### “LET’S GET CRITICAL, PRIDE IS POLITICAL”: QUEER MIGRANT CRITIQUE AT NØRREBRO PRIDE

Drawing on this research, I highlight in the following sections moments where queer and trans migrant critiques emerge, from both within mainstream Pride events, as well as from more explicitly alternative or critical spaces. In doing so, I describe how Pride in the current moment is being politicized in important ways by the claims and contributions of migrant and minoritized queer and trans people. Rather than seeing the politics of Pride primarily in the ways that it may disrupt a generic heteronormative urban-national fabric—or in diagnosing an absence of politics to the extent that it fails to do so—I argue that these critiques contribute to refocusing conversations on the politics of Pride around the translocal, place-specific geographies of differential inclusion and precarity, in which Pride events may be implicated in a broad range of ways.

This is, perhaps, most clearly seen in Nørrebro Pride, an alternative march led by queer and trans people of colour that emphasizes, among other questions, racism, housing, gentrification, disability justice, migration, borders, asylum, and Palestine solidarity. The Nørrebro neighbourhood is itself a key part of the march, as the site where the march takes place and the context for many of its demands. Nørrebro is a gentrifying district that has been described simultaneously as “the world’s coolest neighborhood” by place promoters and, by Islamophobic commentators, as the site of a “parallel society” of insufficiently integrated Muslim immigrants (Time Out PR, 2021, para. 1; Lundsteen, 2023). It is also a place with an important history of radical activism as a centre

of squatting movements and an area with significant concentrations of social housing, including areas that have been subjected to forced redevelopment due to the Danish government's racist ghetto law targeting areas with higher concentrations of residents with "non-Western" ancestry (Risager, 2022; Schmidt, 2016).

Nørrebro Pride is implicitly and explicitly organized as a critique of the mainstream Copenhagen Pride event and organization, as well as of racism and other exclusions within LGBTQI+ communities in Copenhagen more broadly (Burø et al., 2024). According to the description of Nørrebro Pride published on their Instagram page, "Nørrebro Pride was made for those of us who are LGBTQ+ and Black/Indigenous/People of Colour to reclaim Pride itself—therefore we will always be at the front" (Nørrebro Pride, 2024a, para. 2). Each year, the march is divided into blocks representing different communities, organizations, or themes, but it is always led by a separatist QTBIPOC block at the front and an open block at the end of the march which anyone is welcome to join. In between, each block sets its own criteria for participation.<sup>3</sup> In addition to being QTBIPOC-led, Nørrebro Pride materials emphasize the locally oriented nature of the march in Nørrebro, arguing that "gentrification is an lgbtq+ issue too" and emphasizing the importance of accessibility, opposition to commercial sponsorship, the necessity of combating anti-Blackness and Islamophobia, the refusal of pinkwashing, and the importance of organizing against nationalism and borders (Nørrebro Pride, 2024a, para. 6).

The routing of the march through Nørrebro is itself also meant as a political statement in relation to Copenhagen Pride and the broader city of Copenhagen. In interviews I conducted with participants in queer spaces in the city, including participants in both Nørrebro Pride and Copenhagen Pride events, I often encountered narratives about how the Copenhagen Pride march used to pass by Nørrebro before its route was changed, ostensibly after some homophobic incident(s) where rocks and/or food were thrown at marchers (often vaguely recalled or explained as something that one had heard about but did not know the details of). The identities of those throwing the items, the timing of the incident, and, indeed, whether it was a singular event or a recurring phenomenon were often unclear or contradictory. Some invoked these stories to explain why the Copenhagen Pride parade no longer passes by Nørrebro. Others pointed to these stories as examples of the kind of racializing narratives through which immigrants or Muslims (and in xenophobic imaginaries in Denmark these have often been subsumed) are set against a progressive Copenhagen/

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2024, the other advertised blocks included Dykes Against the Machine, LGBT Asylum, Boba Queens, Queer Crips and Spoonies, Forum for Prison Abolition, Queer Kids for Revolution, and Solidarity with Queer Palestinians (Nørrebro Pride, 2024b).

Danish/Nordic queerness (e.g., Shield, 2017a). While these stories are always located in the past, the Danish periodical *Weekendavisen* (known for publishing cartoons of Mohammed) published a pair of pieces in 2024 in relation to Copenhagen Pride Week, referencing the Nørrebro neighbourhood and the homophobia that the authors pin squarely on the “culture and religion” of its inhabitants. In both articles there is a reference to an imagined gay couple—“two men in Nørrebro who still can’t hold hands”—that ignores the reality of a large annual QTBIPOC-led march organized from within the neighbourhood (Kleit, 2024, para. 13; Sjørnsen, 2024).

I joined the Nørrebro Pride march in 2023 as part of the open block at the end, and in 2024 I marched with friends in the LGBT Asylum block. In field notes written after attending the march both years, I noted some of the political claims that were made audible through chants and visible in protest signs:

From 2023: One of the things that caught my attention were the chants, which highlighted some of the differences between the politics of this march and what was generally being articulated at the Copenhagen pride parade: “asylum for all, Frontex must fall”; “confront the cis-tem right away, more homes for trans and gay”; “no hierarchies in society, make refugees a priority”; “no hate, no bigotry, fight white supremacy”; “faggot cunts, spitting fire, burn down the empire”; “let’s get critical, Pride is political”; “Nørrebro is our home, Mjølnerparken is our home.”

From 2024: Marching alongside LGBT Asylum, the official message was clear, in signs printed, variously, in English, Danish, and Arabic: “Being trans isn’t temporary!”; “Being gay isn’t temporary!”; “Being bisexual isn’t temporary!”; “Fuck ‘paradigme skiftet!’” The signs weren’t new, and I had seen them before, and they represent continued opposition to the Danish government’s “paradigm shift” toward treating asylum as, in principle and practice, temporary.

Taken together, these chants and signs point toward the way the march is embedded in the specificities of its location in Nørrebro, including “local” struggles with displacement and gentrification, but reaching also to Danish state policy (on the paradigm shift, see Schröder 2023), EU border enforcement, and broader global orderings (e.g., the “burn down the empire” line in the above chant). Claims around Palestine took this focus further, especially in the 2024 march during the ongoing genocide in Gaza, where Palestinian flags and pro-Palestine chants emerged frequently in and beyond the Palestine solidarity block, including from the sidewalks and apartment windows on the sidelines of the march where support for Palestine seemed to create further possibilities for affinity and solidarity, across the world and within the neighbourhood.

As a response to being out of place and out of step with white queer spaces, Nørrebro Pride articulates a “claim to locality” beyond hegemonic narratives of sexual citizenship and against Islamophobic framings of the neighbourhood (Altay, 2024, p. 1; Boussalem, 2023b; DasGupta & Dasgupta, 2018). In this sense, understanding Nørrebro Pride requires specifically the conjunction of

analytics of place-specificity and translocality. Indeed, delving into the specifics of Nørrebro Pride also brought into view translocal connections when, for example, one participant I interviewed identified their experiences visiting QTBIPOC communities in Berlin as a key moment in developing their politics. For my part, I arrived at the Nørrebro Pride march due to my interest in the politics of migration within queer spaces, but of course, it is important to recognize racialized processes of “migrantisation” that shape whose mobilities, lives, and spaces are understood as out of place and whose are not (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022; Tudor, 2017). My point is not at all to render further the neighbourhood, the march, or its organizers as “foreign” others (e.g., El-Tayeb, 2011), but rather to engage with political claims around migration, border, and asylum that emerge from the march, as well as acknowledge the fact that “Nørrebro Pride is made up of different diaspora people that are affected by the border regime,” who are articulating important political claims and critiques that offer alternative pathways for queer and trans politics in and beyond Copenhagen (Nørrebro Pride, 2024a, para. 11).

## HERE, THERE, AND WHO?

Important work in and beyond queer geographies has examined the constructions of “here and there.” Specifically, Lalor and Browne (2018, p. 206), working in the context of the UK and in relation to Brighton Pride, “draw attention to the extent to which the tendency to contrast victories at home with violence abroad has become a mainstay of British LGBTQI politics,” a tendency that “exports problems and violence ‘elsewhere’ and creates specific narratives of a progressive ‘here’” (see Browne et al., 2021b; Lalor & Browne, 2023). Similarly, the official Copenhagen Pride program and promotional material in both 2023 and 2024 included an emphasis on supporting “the LGBTI+ community... all around the world” (Figure 12.1).

The construction of “here” and “there” is visible in the program introducing Copenhagen Pride Week 2023 and its theme, “Come Together.” The text narrates a list of achieved LGBTQI+ rights/protections in Denmark, including “decriminalisation of homosexuality (90 years ago this year in Denmark), equal age of consent, registered partnerships, adoption rights, legal gender recognition, hate crime legislation,” before continuing, “but all have only been possible because we could come together. And now, in 2023, the need to come together has never been greater” (Copenhagen Pride, 2023, p. 2). Specifically, it argues:

Nationalists, the far right, evangelical Christian groups, and gender critical and “anti-woke” movements, and many others want to slow and reverse the progress we have made. To challenge these destructive and hateful narratives, and to support



Source: Author.

*Figure 12.1* Copenhagen Pride banner on the periphery of Pride Square, 2023

the LGBTI+ community globally, we must once again come together. (Copenhagen Pride, 2023, p. 2)

Here the need to “support the LGBTI+ community globally” is a significant feature, but the 2024 guidebook includes an even more direct aspiration toward activism beyond Denmark:

Our theme for 2024 is *with Pride* because frankly we should all be striving for everyone to live every aspect of their lives with Pride, and fighting to change the system in those countries where that’s not possible. (Copenhagen Pride, 2024, para. 10)

In addition to the now familiar framing of victories achieved “here” and changes needed “there,” the “with Pride” theme is also significant. The theme needs to be understood in the context of a controversy that began unfolding early in 2024, where the Copenhagen Pride organization had, in a series of contradictory statements, initially refused demands to take a stand against the genocide in Gaza by cutting ties with complicit sponsors, then changed course and made a commitment to consider the issue in its partnership decisions, before ultimately backtracking again after public criticism and several large sponsors dropped out. Clashing expectations and its own inconsistent statements regarding the relationship and responsibilities between here and there left the Copenhagen Pride organization in a somewhat beleaguered position as it had alienated both supporters and opponents of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Thus, Pride in 2024 was caught between opposition from Zionist critics who still resented the organization’s partial, halting (and ultimately effectively withdrawn) gesture of solidarity with Palestinians earlier in the year, aligned with a perhaps larger group who lamented the intrusion of what they saw as

‘unrelated’ issues into Pride festivities, and pro-Palestinian opponents of occupation and genocide who continued to demand that Copenhagen Pride cut ties with sponsors profiting from occupation and genocide in Palestine. In this context, it is difficult to not read “with Pride” as a call from organizers to people to be with Pride—the organization and the official event—in spite of it all.

Beyond this unexpected intrusion of “there,” the “here” (from the perspective of the official Pride organizers) offered many planned moments of the “there” (Table 12.1). The status of LGBTQI+ rights and activism in other parts of the world was the subject of many panels and presentations both years. Often these included invited activists from the places being discussed, while members of related diasporic communities living in Denmark were also often involved as organizers or panellists. There is much that could be said about how “there” and “here” were approached and understood during these events—and much, I should say, that seems continuous with the colonial framings that

Table 12.1 Titles of “here and there”-focused panels (and other events as noted) during 2023 and 2024 Copenhagen Pride Week events as identified by the author

2023	2024
Freedom rights under pressure	Conflict zones and queer
Organizing pride in hostile places	LGBTQA+ around the world
LGBTQI+ rights and diplomacy	In conversation with Beirut Pride
Repression in Uganda: Implications	Queer in neighbouring countries
Iran’s LGBTI+ struggle	Invisible identities in Islamic societies (Morocco)
Ghana and Uganda: LGBT under attack	“Where love is illegal” photography exhibit
Beyond the reel film screening: global QTBIPOC films	Pride/Care/Rage workshop [emphasis on Palestine]*
The Blue Kaftan film screening	Global QTBIPOC film screening*
Art market and concert to support LGBT rights in Ghana	Pride Bel Arabe*
Queer Asylum: An uncertain life in Denmark	LGBT+ refugees and housing rights
LGBT Asylum evening in community tent	Listening is Caring event on LGBTQ+ stories, including LGBT Asylum book presentation*

Note: \* Indicates events that were organized separately from the Copenhagen Pride program.

Source: Author.

Lalor and Browne (2018) analysed from Brighton Pride, alongside more than a few moments of Nordic sexual and gender exceptionalism (e.g., Stoltz, 2021). There were also insightful and nuanced talks by activists from many of the contexts being discussed, and occasional comments from panellists and audience members that revealed a sensitivity to the dangers of setting up a colonial “here” and “there.” For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on how the critiques by queer and trans people who have migrated emerged in and around these events, to build on Lalor and Browne’s (2018, p. 211) suggestion that “there is a great deal of scope for further analysis of how ‘here’ and ‘there’ are created, including the complexities of who is ‘here’ and who are located ‘there,’ even when they are here.”

Some of these complexities can be illustrated in relation to one of the panels I attended in 2023. After a long day of sitting in the debate tent, a friend joined me for the panel on LGBT+ struggle in Iran. Keyvan is from Iran and at that point had a pending asylum claim lodged with the Danish state. Unlike some of the other panels that day, this discussion did not include anyone who had ever lived in Iran. The panellists included a queer woman of Iranian heritage who was born and has lived in Denmark, a gay man and drag performer from Beirut who had recently moved to Denmark, and a white Danish queer person who had been involved in local activism opposing the execution of queer people in Iran. The moderator explained that each were invited because they represented, respectively, perspectives from “Iran,” “the Middle East,” as well as a “Danish one,” immediately creating a confusing geography of here and there, and raising obvious questions about who is located where and why. As we listened to the panellists, it became clear that no one on the panel knew much about current LGBT+ experiences in Iran. Additionally, the moderator would veer uncomfortably between questions about being queer or trans in Iran that the panellists struggled to answer, and generalizing, stereotypical questions about the “Middle East” that anyone should be hesitant to answer. I could feel Keyvan tense up next to me, “they don’t actually know anything,” he whispered. It was uncomfortable to watch. The drag performer from Beirut, however, did productively punctuate the panel with moments of critical refusals and reflections, at several points pushing back against monolithic framings of the “Middle East” and pointing toward the diversity of experiences that exist there, and at another point questioning whether any of the panellists were positioned to actually answer the questions that were being asked—in that case about trans people’s experiences in Iran—to sounds of some relief and applause from the audience. At the end of the panel, he concluded with a plea to understand the “Middle East” as something more and other than a place where people are “not free” and, drawing from his life in Beirut, he highlighted the actions, choices, and risks that queer and trans people regularly and actively take to live their lives. Later in an interview with me, Keyvan

reiterated what he saw as the superficiality of many of the Pride events he had participated in, and specifically the panel on Iran, again mentioning that “no one on the panel was from Iran.” This, for Keyvan, was one more piece of evidence that many white LGBTQI+ community members did not actually care that much about these issues, but rather just wanted to “tick a box” and feel good that the issues from *there* were included *here* in the program, regardless of how useful or informed the sessions were.

Discussions about queer and trans asylum issues were another important place where the geographies of “here” and “there” were being constructed—and where the claims and critiques of queer and trans people who had migrated could, at times, emerge. The colonial narratives of “here” and “there” discussed above were by no means absent from these conversations, and indeed the whole process of seeking asylum as a queer or trans person in Denmark often relies on credibly reproducing a very similar kind of narrative (Lunau, 2019). Yet, the volunteers and refugees who spoke in these sessions largely kept the focus on problems *here* in Copenhagen or in Denmark. Indeed, these conversations also tended to shift the focus from LGBTQI+ rights achieved in Denmark to the violence of borders, to arbitrary asylum decisions and prolonged waiting in the asylum process, to punitive reception conditions, to insufficient social support, to the realities of discrimination in the job market and beyond, to restrictions on mobility, to housing problems, and to the difficulties of unemployment. Taken together, these critiques shift the normative valence and valuation of *here* considerably.

Nevertheless, there remained challenges in navigating the politics of here and there. The challenge of ensuring safe accommodations for queer and trans people seeking and receiving asylum emerged in conversations at Pride both years (e.g., Wimark, 2021a; 2021b). At least two issues were involved here. The first included harassment and discrimination that queer and trans people seeking asylum faced within reception centres, including from fellow asylum seekers, who were sometimes portrayed as reproducing *here* the conditions from *there* that queer and trans people were seeking to escape. Luna, an advocate for queer and trans people seeking asylum, discussed needing “to walk a fine line in terms of both advocating for the rights of our group, but also ensuring that the kind of unsafety that they can be feeling in an asylum camp doesn’t get weaponized into a more generalized kind of racist, Islamophobic, kind of homonationalist message of, like, kind of anti-refugee sentiment.” In response to this danger, she stressed the importance of staying “very much focused on the responsibilities of the state, or the responsibilities of the authorities... the deficiencies in the reception providers’ competencies and responsibilities, because if it lies there, it doesn’t lie with refugees as a group, and at the end of the day, it doesn’t benefit our group at all if the advocacy that we are doing gets

turned into something that becomes an argument for tightening the situation for refugees.”

The second challenge was the location of housing available for refugees whose asylum claims were accepted. When an asylum claim is accepted in Denmark, refugees are assigned to a specific municipality where they must live, unless they are willing to forego the limited state support available to refugees (Jacobsen, 2023). Through this process, they can be placed anywhere in the country, and it can result in queer and trans refugees being placed far away from queer- and trans-focused services and networks. As Luna explains it, “they don’t take into account whether a person is queer because they don’t accept the premise that there are places in Denmark where it is better or easier to be integrated into society, because there is actually a queer society.” Leaving aside for now the potential metronormativity of Luna’s response, it is not hard to see the advantages of queer and trans refugees being able to live in places with visible queer and trans networks and organizations. I asked if there were prospects to change this, and Luna responded, “I don’t think that that specifically will get changed, because that would require the politicians to admit the fact that there are places in Denmark that are inherently kind of queer phobic, and that would not be a good selling point as a politician, to say that anywhere outside of Copenhagen.” In this sense, the self-concept of Denmark as a queer-friendly place becomes an obstacle to actually doing the queer-friendly thing and responsibly responding to the needs of queer and trans refugees.

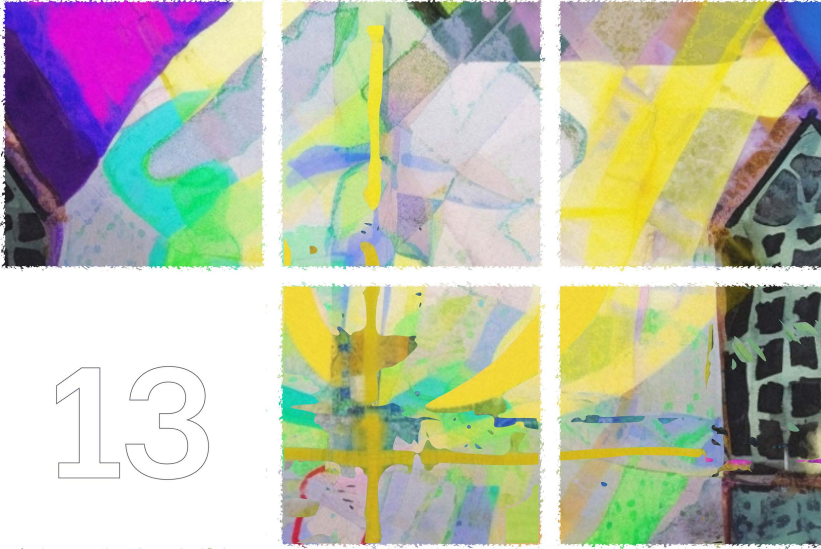
This focus on responsibilities and irresponsibilities *here* is one example of a politics that locates the problems less “out there” among “others” and more within, variously, Copenhagen, Denmark, Europe, and the international orders with which they are aligned. This perhaps emerged most clearly in alternative events like Nørrebro Pride, but, as this section has shown, it also emerged at moments within the official Pride events. As one trans refugee put it in a snippet captured in my notes from one of the human rights panels in the debate tent: “We also have to talk about responsibility, and how we all came to be where we came to be, like in the situations that we are or are not in, and why.” Yet, later gesturing back toward the festivities at Pride Square from our location in the debate tent, they go on to say, “Back behind us, people don’t really know. It’s a big party. They don’t have these kinds of problems.” This critique, coming from multiple senses of displacement, offers its own geography of here and there within the spaces of Copenhagen Pride itself, and raises a lingering critique that I also heard from others about the ways that the more critical perspectives that could emerge during, for example, a human rights panel would remain disconnected from the more broadly attended parts of Pride week.

## CONCLUSION

The existence of these queer and trans migrant critiques of colonial thinking, of racialization and whiteness, of the commercialization and superficiality of Pride, of asylum policies and societal irresponsibilities, should not be a surprise to queer geographers. However, careful attention to the variegated socio-spatial lives and landscapes of these critiques as they emerge in Copenhagen calls exceptionalist understandings of Nordic queer progress into question as it also opens up useful avenues for reconsidering the normativities of Pride in the current moment.

Careful attention to the dynamics of emplacement and displacement in Pride events also offers different ways of approaching longstanding conversations about place and normativity in queer geographies. This is more than just an opportunity to mobilize the complexities and promiscuities of place to complicate normalizing narratives and a-contextual critiques. Rather, it is also about exposing place and normativities to different kinds of situated theoretical consideration and empirical investigation. Indeed, a shift in empirical focus from (emplaced, variegated) normativities to (emplaced, variegated) critiques can lead to a different set of questions. One might, for example, examine the conditions under which certain kinds of problems emerge as an object of critique and concern in queer and trans spaces, or investigate the regimes of justification through which queer and trans political claims are articulated in and across different times and places (Boltanski, 2011). Muñoz (2009) has shown how queer critique contains within it a gesture toward other possible futures. Attending to the variegated landscape of critique, then, is also attending to the possible futures implicit therein.

With and against a critical common sense about the depoliticization of Pride events in certain kinds of places, I would suggest that attending to the political claims and critiques that emerge at, around, and against Copenhagen Pride shows just how much this depoliticization has itself been politicized, as minoritized people step forward and make claims about the kind of queer and trans spaces they want to have and the kind of cities and the kind of world they want to live in. Queer and trans migrant critiques, always already displaced from the perspective of prevailing normativities, nevertheless make a place for other kinds of futures. Liinason and Sasunkevich (2023) have speculated about the uncertain possibilities of the emergence of more radical Pride politics in the Nordic countries. Perhaps if we look to something like Nørrebro Pride, or to moments of interruption and emergence in the official Copenhagen Pride program, we might say that at least relatively more radical Pride politics are already here, if we can be sensitive to their emergence. Ingrained divisions between *here* and *there* may be less than helpful for such a project.



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## Queerburban place-making/unmaking/ remaking

Alison L. Bain | Julie A. Podmore



*Pinkish H9W*