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Queering Europe: Anthropological Perspectives in Conversation. A Text Collage

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ABSTRACT: *Starting from a fishbowl discussion, which has taken place at the conference, this paper discusses what can be gained from thinking across genderqueer theories and anthropological Europeanization research. It argues that thinking queerly includes a skepticism toward identitarian and normative understandings of Europe, as well as an ethnographic attention being paid to that which emerges in the gaps and cracks of Europeanization. The ways in which institutions working in the name of Europe generate heterogeneous experiences resulting in unequal and differentially distributed, multiple Europes are also key. »Queering Europe« oscillates between an emphasis on the central role of the sexual and the gendered in imaginations of Europe and destabilizing notions of Europe in a more general sense; as such, it is closely related to post-/decolonial approaches. This analytical move has three dimensions to it: First, queering Europe aims at deconstructing hegemonic imaginaries of the continent. Second, it makes visible the pluralistic and fragmented nature of Europe(s) and the ambivalent and sometimes unforeseen consequences that processes of Europeanization are accompanied by. Third, queering Europe can be envisioned as a way of imagining and thinking about Europe through a »critical utopianism« (Mbembe 2019) that puts solidarity center stage. Ethnography informed by decolonial critiques as well as by proposals for queering methodologies constitutes our chosen epistemological tool regarding investigating queering Europe as a mode of knowledge production and political vision.*

KEYWORDS: *Europe, Europeanization, queer theory, futurity, critique*

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Recent debates in queer as well as in Europeanization studies have spurred investigations into the idea of Europeanness as inherently liberal and tolerant, especially in terms of gender and sexuality, vis-à-vis an intolerant, pre-modern, non-European »Other.« Indeed, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity have long played a central role in imaginations of Europe. Consider, for instance, the mythological origin of Europe, the story of Zeus, who was in love with Europa, decided to abduct her from the shores of the Levant, rape her, and make her the first Queen of Crete (cf. Hard 2019). This illustrates not only that these imaginations have been gendered and sexualized—and violent—from their very inception, but also that they have also always been intersectional with other categories of difference.

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Taking our cue from a »fishbowl« conversation during the online conference »Troubling Gender: New Turbulences in the Politics of Gender in Europe« that was initiated by the Commission of Women and Gender Studies together with the Commission Europeanization_Globalization: Ethnographies of the Political in the recently renamed *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* (DGEKW, German Association for European Ethnology and Empirical Cultural Studies), we are going to discuss what a queer intervention into critical research on Europe might look like. What can gender and queer scholars and cultural anthropologists interested in studying Europeanization learn from each other? And, what role could ethnography play in exploring and advancing the potentials of this conversation?

When we speak of »Europe« here, we do not mean a clearly limited geographic space, a distinct cultural area, or a historically exclusive »project sui generis.« Along the lines of a critical Europeanization research—as it has emerged over the last few years within the anthropological disciplines (Borneman/Fowler 1997; Poehls/Vonderau 2006; Hess/Tsianos 2007; Welz/Lottermann 2009; Welz 2015; Adam et al. 2019; Römhild 2021)—we understand »Europe« instead as a globally entangled formation, multiple and incomplete, a product and at the same time producer of its colonial projects and imperial relations both past and present (Adam et al. 2019; Chakrabarty 2000). Like in a »hall of mirrors,« it modifies its shape and extent according to one's respective position and angle of view (Beck 2019, 227). Borders, horizons, and relations can shift, »others« once being included, once excluded, depending on a particular standpoint and perspective.

Consequently, the anthropological object of study is not »Europe as such,« but the manifold, often contradictory processes and »projects of Europeanization« (Welz/Lottermann 2009). We need to distinguish hereby between, on the one hand, a descriptive reference to »EUropeanization« understood as a rather narrow, politically intended and driven dynamic, initiated and steered by agencies of or close to the European Union and, on the other, »Europeanization« as an analytical anthropological concept that allows us to examine the multiple, polymorphous, and open-ended processes via which contemporary Europe is produced as a contradictory and internally hierarchized figuration. Some of these processes still take their beginnings in the institutions or policies of the EU, but can still induce unintended and unforeseeable effects once they »hit the ground« in their translocal development; others have their starting points in less visible transborder exchange and relations, through migration movements, and in artistic or political counterprojects (Römhild 2020). As Gisela Welz highlights, this analytical understanding of »Europeanization foregrounds becoming rather than being European, paying special attention to the unevenness and discontinuity of the process, instead of expecting convergence and increasing cohesion« (2015, 5).

Sexuality was examined already in an early seminal article as one of the fields in which these dynamics play out (Borneman/Fowler 1997). We position »queering Europe« as a further contribution to these discussions. What new insights, then, can we gain about Europe as a globally entangled and internally fragile—as well as often brutal—formation, about political struggles around democracy and authoritarianism, about marginalized subjects and emerging utopias when we look at it through a queer lens?

Our title uses the word »queer« as a verb on purpose. Thus understood, queering is a deconstructive practice that questions the supposedly unquestionable truths of identity and normativity—not limited, indeed, to gender and sexuality. As Sara Ahmed writes, »[t]o make things queer is [...] to disturb the order of things« (2006, 161). Thinking queerly about Europe, then, would mean not only to be skeptical towards identitarian, essentialist, and normative understandings of the continent, but to pay attention to that which emerges in the

gaps and cracks of Europeanization, and to focus on the ways in which institutions working in its name generate heterogeneous experiences resulting in unequal and differentially distributed, multiple Europes (Boatcă 2021). Queering Europe, thus, oscillates between putting emphasis on the central role of the sexual and the gendered in imaginations of Europe on the one hand and destabilizing notions of Europe on the other. In this latter sense, it does not have to refer exclusively to sexuality and gender. It is sensitive to the heterogeneity of experiences in and with Europe, and it also takes into account the roads not taken as well as lost archives. As we will argue, »queering Europe« is not only a deconstructive move but also one that creatively constructs futures otherwise. In short, it is related to processes of re- and decomposing (Verran 2018).

To illustrate our argument, we consider the dividing lines between Europe's East and West, which are oftentimes taken to run between the acceptance of nonnormative sexualities in the West and their nonacceptance in the East. Thus, important for our point of departure, the discursive production of a »homophobic East« is not only a side effect of the EUropeanization of LGBTIQ rights, but rather a constitutive element in the construction of the imagined community called »Europe.« What Stuart Hall (1991) termed the »internalist« story of Europe, the story of European identity that is often told as if it had no exterior, turns out to be one that all too often neglects the legacies of European colonialism and imperialism. A queer critique—that is, a genealogical one of European LGBTIQ subjectivity—can make us aware of the (post)colonial exclusionary operations of the very emancipatory ideals of the fight for LGBTIQ rights. Zooming in on the central position of »coming out« in LGBTIQ identity, Judith Butler asks:

> »For whom is outness a historically available and affordable option? Is there an unmarked class character to the demand for universal ›outness'? Who is represented by which use of the term, and who is excluded? For whom does the term present an impossible conflict between racial, ethnic, or religious affiliation and sexual politics? What kinds of policies are enabled by what kinds of usages, and which are backgrounded or erased from view?« (1993, 19)[1]

Focusing on such questions, critical debates around notions such as »homonormativity« (Duggan 2002) and »homonationalism« (Puar 2007, 2013) have taken center stage in queer studies in recent years—as we will elaborate on later.

But it is particularly queer of color critique that has highlighted the potentials of the term »queer« beyond a focus on the sexual and its intersections with other categories of difference. The concept of »disidentification« introduced by José Esteban Muñoz is a good example of how a queer notion can be used to understand processes of marginalization more generally. »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« (1999, 4). In this sense, Fatima El-Tayeb makes use of disidentification as a »minoritarian strategy of queering ethnicity« (2011, xxxiii). We believe that this could be a good starting point for queering Europe as well.

In the following, we would like to suggest that there are at least three dimensions to these issues worthy of further exploration. First, queering Europe aims at deconstructing hegemonic imaginaries of Europe. In this sense, queering can be mobilized as an oppositional project against both homonationalist renderings of Europe as an imperial liberal formation and the protectionist, neo-authoritarian counterhegemonic forces that strive to

generate a purified, essentialist, and identitarian notion of the continent. Second, queering Europe makes visible the always multiple and fragmented nature of Europe(s) beyond such normative and identitarian imaginaries. It asks us to pay attention to the ambivalent and unintended consequences of Europeanization. In this sense, queering problematizes simplified dichotomies of East and West or North and South, and highlights both internal European differences and the postcolonial entanglements of Europe with its external »Other.« Third and finally, we envision »queering Europe« as a »critical utopianism« (Mbembe 2019) in the sense that it makes visible ways of imagining and thinking about Europe in which solidarity is put center stage. In this sense, it takes inspiration from queer and feminist imaginations for other ways of being in the world. Queerness, thus understood, is the »warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality« (Muñoz 2009, 1).

In all three dimensions ethnography is our chosen epistemological tool, as informed by decolonial critiques as well as proposals for queering methods and methodologies. This toolkit helps to avoid the problems associated with what Dace Dzenovska calls a »diagnostic mode of knowledge production« (2018, 87). This mode measures how particular people and places fare in relation to an already-defined problem and aims to identify and correct social »ailments« that prevent the presumable full achievement of EUropeanness, understood as a combination of liberal democracy and free-market economy. Our focus on an ethnographically informed mode of critical knowledge production teases out the differential and unequal effects of processes of Europeanization as they are experienced by various actors in different parts of the continent. In order to achieve this goal, we also take gender theories and concepts into account, which we understand as tools that can help us to analyze the power dimensions and the gendered nature of both Europeanization processes and their accompanying effects.

Deconstructing Hegemonic Imaginaries of Europe

In hegemonic, neoliberal discourses of Europe, women's and LGBTIQ rights have been used to legitimize the »war on terror« or the sealing off of »fortress Europe.« This appropriation of liberal values, often considered as universals, in the name of imperial and exclusionary nationalist politics has been discussed for some time via notions such as »homonationalism« (Puar 2007; 2013), »sexual nationalism« (Mepschen/Duyvendak/Tonkens 2010), »queer necropolitics« (Haritaworn/Kuntsman/Posocco 2014), »sexual exceptionalism« (Dietze 2019) and »femonationalism« (Farris 2017; see also, Gutekunst/Hess in this volume). A common feature of homo- and femonationalist discourses is that they postulate the superiority of the West vis-à-vis either an external, uncivilized, non-white Muslim »Orient,« or an internal, not-quite-modern-yet, postsocialist Eastern Europe (although these two points might converge: think here of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kosovo). Although women's and LGBTIQ rights have been hard and long fought for in the West time and again (and must continue to be), »tolerance of homosexuals« is now regarded as the defining criterion of Europeanness—or, more accurately, EUropeanness—par excellence (Ayoub/Paternotte 2014). Identitarian LGBTIQ politics, from this perspective, has become an instrument of governance: it is but a tool for a Western European exceptionalism that claims that it is only here queer people can live well, for the establishing also of parameters to measure »developmental progress« throughout the world.

The case in point is (South)Eastern Europe, where the EU institutions have taken the success of LGBTIQ activism as a litmus test for the »European progress« of various coun-

tries (Renkin 2009). Understanding EUropeanization as a normative and civilizing project, embodied in the protection of LGBTIQ people's human rights, has made it impossible to consider how to relate forms of belonging and difference that have been historically developed in Southeastern Europe to contemporary LGBTIQ politics. One example are the traditional forms of queerness and third sex / third gender expression in Southeastern Europe such as ostajnice / burrneshe / »sworn virgins.« This local form of what Herdt (1993) calls »third sex / third gender« has been described by ethnologists (Šarčević 2004; Kaser 1994), but left out of most contemporary theorizations of queerness and gender in the region (but see Kapetanović 2022; Brković 2021a).

Another issue is that EUropeanization as an LGBTIQ framework has created »binary and exclusionary Queer / Islam divisions that prevent the emergence of intersectional solidarities and subjectivities such as queer and Muslim« (Rexhepi 2016a, 32; see also, Slootmaeckers 2020). The process of EUropeanization has motivated policymakers in Southeastern Europe to make sure to fulfill the EU-prescribed parameters of progress in order to advance their country's accession. This has foregrounded fast-paced legal changes in the area of LGBTIQ human rights protection. Yet, social transformations might take a different tempo from legal changes. Queer anthropological and sociological researchers have shown that the focus of LGBTIQ activists on legal change meant that questions of how racism, economic (in)equality, and class issues shape coming out and queer visibility have received much less activist attention. This has resulted in the rendering invisible of certain forms of vulnerability and hurt of LGBTIQ people who live on the European peripheries, especially in its rural parts (Bilić 2016).

In the process, »complex queer subjectivities among Muslims in Albania and Bosnia are essentialized and reduced to Eurocentric binary sexualities to promote European belonging in these two countries« (Rexhepi 2016b, 147). In Croatia, as Nicole Butterfield (2016) shows, relying on the external pressure imposed by the EU, major LGBTIQ activist organizations have focused on lobbying for legislative protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In doing so, they have constructed a hierarchical differentiation between what they call »professional activism« focused on legal change and so-called amateur or cultural-based activism. These organizations have embraced lobbying strategies similar to those used by transnational LGBTIQ organizations in the EU. These professionalized approaches have reproduced discourses of human rights and European identity that may foreclose recognition of difference within the diverse LGBTIQ communities of Southeastern Europe (Kalezić/Brković 2016). The case in point are LGBTIQ people living in small towns and rural spaces, where the ongoing process of coming out undermines the imagined hierarchical distinction between the rural and urban, and merges acceptance and silencing of queerness in complicated ways (Butterfield 2017). The liberal grammar of EUropean discourses of civilizational difference makes it almost impossible to address in theoretical, political, and activist terms how best to support LGBTIQ people in communities where family relationships strongly shape one's economic opportunities and the household economy is vital to survival.

In the wake of EUropeanization as a disciplinary project on the edges of Europe, the Australian political scientists Dennis Altman and Jonathan Symons have observed a rising global polarization on issues of sexual and gender diversity. What they call the »queer wars« between the advocates of LGBTIQ rights as human rights and their opponents is often, as they say, »perceived as an inevitable cultural clash between Western democracies and ›the rest‹« (2016, 3). Indeed, this curious anxiety around sexuality has led to a culturalization of geopolitics. As Phillip Ayoub and David Paternotte note, »actors at both ends

of the ideological and political spectrum repeat [...] this mantra, the idea that Europe and LGBTIQ rights are linked« (2014, 3). LGBTIQ activists both inside and outside of the EU invoke the language of Europe in order to legitimize their positions, while their opponents use exactly the same language to contrariwise delegitimize them. This is evident, for example, in the derogatory term »Gayropa,« which is used by anti-gay, anti-Western forces in Russia (Graff/Korolczuk 2022).

In these antagonistic struggles, however, there is more at stake than a specific civic liberty. The right-wing populist and national authoritarian attacks on the right to abortion, gender activism, or the visibility of LGBTIQ people are directed at constructing a purified political community, one in which women make do with their reproductive role and certain categories of humans are rejected. In many European countries, right-wing populist or national conservative governments have been pushing forward anti-progressive rhetoric and policies as a way to consolidate their grip on power. Attacks on women's and minority rights, the promotion of nationalistic politics of memory, the introduction of religious, often explicitly anti-liberal ideologies in school curricula, or the questioning of academic freedom are just some of the political techniques to move public debate and societal consensus to the right. In countries like Hungary or Poland, these strategies have been combined with governmental measures to take over and dominate public or state institutions. Constitutional courts have been packed with party loyalists, the judiciary instrumentalized for political purposes, and public television and radio stations transformed into one-sided propaganda tools.

Fabricated narratives about the »attacks of the international LGBT movement« against Poland and Polish families, or about migrants »storming Poland's and Europe's external borders,«[2] can easily be circulated through these hijacked infrastructures (Adam et al. 2022). Power takes on authoritarian forms here: divergent positions are excluded and problematized, polyphonic debates closed off, and unbridgeable antagonisms put in place. By queering Europe, we would like to contribute, then, to ongoing interdisciplinary efforts to study how exactly these processes come together. Struggles around gender and sexuality are taken as entry points to study under what conditions democratic power is gradually becoming authoritarian.

These struggles and the accompanying authoritarian shifts have multiple European dimensions to them. In December 2021, for instance, the leaders of numerous right-wing populist and nationalistic parties from all over Europe gathered for the »Warsaw Summit.« Establishing a right-wing alternative to the »progressive« visions formulated in the coalition agreement of the newly elected German government was one declared intention of this meeting: a Europe of independent »fatherlands« based on »normal families« and »Christian values,« with fortified external borders instead of the successive federalization of the EU and a gradual but steady transfer of national sovereignty to supranational institutions.[3] Anti-gender and anti-migration rhetoric and policies provide the basis for this dystopian, transnational vision of a purified, white, and heteronormative Europe.

A racialized idea of the continent forms the background to further political projects, too. Homonationalism, on the one hand, can be understood as a hegemonic relation that positions subjects along the axis of civilized/modern/tolerant/Western/liberal versus barbaric/primitive/violent/non-Western/illiberal. For those seeking to oppose neoliberal Western hegemony, on the other, this geopolitical relation might rather figure as a fight between a traditional, Christian, masculine, heterosexual, illiberal East and a decadent, sinful, effeminate, gay, liberal West. Either way, in both of these opposing hegemonic projects, Europe is imagined as a white community in need of protection from others that threaten its very

essence—regardless of whether the latter is seen as residing in »Western liberalism« or »Judeo-Christian culture« respectively. Against this background, queering Europe could itself be understood as an oppositional force against phantasies that seek to »purify Europe.«

Showing the Multiple and Fragmented Nature of Europe(s)

In order to counter these developments and to undermine the illusion of the possibility of creating a single unified Europe, it is necessary to better understand the processes of its production. Going further in this direction, critical postsocialist studies might help in the endeavor of queering Europeanization—especially as it resonates with utopian thinking in queer studies. As the recent turn to authoritarianism echoes some of the earlier geopolitical symbolization of the »West« and the »East,« it might be helpful to reconsider Europeanization from the perspective of critical postsocialist studies. Such perspectives strive to decenter Europe in ways that are close to the postcolonial approach, while not necessarily being exactly the same. Critical postsocialist studies start with the question of why postcolonial studies produced knowledge that was accepted as an important theoretical contribution relevant for thinking about other places differently, while postsocialist studies are still largely read as area studies (Chari/Verdery 2009). Although postsocialist studies have generated complex and subtle theoretical insights, to this day they are largely approached, in hegemonic fashion, as a regionally specific body of knowledge: that is, one not having a broader relevance for thinking about other people and places differently. One reason for this discrepancy is the different relationships that postsocialism and postcolonialism have had with Western Europe's sociopolitical orders: postcolonialism is positioned as a clear and unambivalent Other to the former colonial centers in the Global North. Postsocialism, on the other hand, is positioned as sort of an internal Other—not quite one that carries the potential for politically inspiring a world otherwise, but rather a close cousin who »lags behind« and who needs help to develop (Majstorović 2007).

This hegemonic way of positioning knowledge about postsocialist people and places is also reflected in the production of Eastern Europeans as people who are non-»white« whites, non-European Europeans and gendered non-citizens (Blagojević 2009, 27–63). Ivan Kalmar (2022) argues that the process of EU enlargement has been shaped by the logic of racial capitalism, whereby the inability of many actors from Eastern Europe to compete on global markets has been interpreted as a sign of racialized backwardness (see also, Lewicki 2023). At the same time, Kalmar continues, many Eastern Europeans project the same kind of racialization onto others, constructing whiteness as key to legitimating their own European belonging.

The project of EUropeanizing Eastern Europe has left no space to think together with actors from that very region about how to organize polities and societies. Hegemonically, EUropeanization was understood as a »transfer« of knowledge—this has included policy and legal knowledge, as well as knowledge on how to organize the entirety of society in accordance with »European values« (Lendvai 2007). Hegemonic ways of conceptualizing that transfer of knowledge assume it to move in only one direction: from the European centers to the (South) Eastern European periphery, which must use and implement this knowledge to »catch up« with the rest of Europe. Yet, moving academic, policy, and cultural knowledge is never a unidirectional process with clear points of departure and arrival: knowledge becomes interpreted, inflected, and reworked as it moves across locations (cf. Clarke et al. 2015).

In our reading, to queer Europe would mean, then, disturbing this conventional, hegemonic direction of the production of the continent, and understanding better how knowledge about sexuality and queer people participates in these processes. Queering Europe could mean dismantling the hegemonic geotemporal nature of EUropeanization and its dominant ideas about political development, delay, and the need to »catch up,« as Bojan Bilić and Sanja Kajinić (2016) suggest. Empirically grounded cultural research is, hence, vital for complicating and provincializing the hegemonic temporalities of EUropeanization. Rediscovering that the first European festival of lesbian and gay film was held in socialist Yugoslavia in the 1980s, Kajinić (2016) illuminates a complex and ambivalent trajectory of queer visibility in Slovenia, where socialism, capitalism, democracy, and grassroots activism have come together to form a messy constellation that challenges the linear progress implied by the image of the »end of history.« Rahul Rao suggests »to provincialize the time of Western modernity« and »to make visible the manners in which subjects and populations placed in positions of temporal belatedness, or outside of time altogether, have ›defied, deflected, and appropriated‹ their temporal emplacement« (2020, 26). In line with such analytical moves, we suggest that queering Europe allows us to consider the ways in which variously positioned queer people do not lag behind or progress ahead of others, but simultaneously constitute part of the continent's political present.

Queering Europe as »Critical Utopianism«

Following Rao's reflections, we see a third possibility for queering Europe. We propose to connect to debates in queer studies about temporalities, the assembling of new archives, forms of the latter that allow us to imagine a being otherwise, and the possibilities of queer futures. That is, we relate our reflections to ongoing feminist and decolonial debates about archives and archiving practices. With their broad understanding, these debates address the archive as an institution as well as its imaginative horizons (Bradley 1999; Danbolt et al. 2009; Hartman 2007, 2009, 2019; Arondekar et al. 2015). There are at least three potential points of departure in queer debates on temporalities. The first, related to the above-discussed politics of homo- and femonationalism, investigates the politics of time as a driving force for the production of the dichotomies, such as progressive/backward or modern/primitive, which inform the imaginary of the outlined East-West divide.

As Neville Hoad (2000), among others, has shown, the spatialization of time is used not only to construe racial otherness but also allows sexual difference to be taken as a marker for racialized hierarchies. Following Hoad, Rao argues that it is not only the notion of sexuality and its interconnection with a Western concept of selfhood that is part and parcel of the postcolonial situation, rather the very project of queer politics itself: »[S]eeking to win recognition for a diversity of sexual identities to which individual selves might have access, contemporary LGBT activism is both enabled by and further entrenches ontologies of personhood originally forged in conditions of colonial modernity« (2020, xix). Thus, the ongoing fight of gaining hegemony in the field of sexual politics might itself be so deeply entangled with modernist concepts that they contradict the endeavor of queering Europe. But is not this critique itself a product of a privileged situation, or at least of a relative safety and predictability to the social (cf. Loick 2021)?

Per the famous words of Wendy Brown, there have always been rights that »appear as that which we cannot not want« (2000, 231). The »suffering of rights« (Brown 2000) becomes even more paradoxical in the current moment, with LGBTIQ rights and those of sexual au-

tonomy now being endangered or even already denied again in certain parts of Europe. Nonetheless, we may look, with Rao, at the ongoing struggles from another point of view, not so much critiquing the entanglements with modern concepts but in seeking to make use of the differing temporal situations. Rao suggests that even though »queer postcolonial presents are marked by the shadow of both past and future« these »temporal zones« themselves offer »distinct resources and terrains for struggle« (2020, 10). Or, put differently, the temporal zones within the contradictory situations found all over Europe may offer ways to transcend »business as usual« even vis-à-vis queer politics and contain some of those utopias that allow one to imagine another world.

Here, the second strand of discussion takes its starting point. It is strongly related to the notion of the »simultaneity of the non-simultaneous,« coined by Ernst Bloch (2016) to understand the temporal logics of Nazi Germany. Taking up this notion, a nonlinear understanding of history is the point of departure for disentangling the different layers of time. In so doing, it is possible to acknowledge and reflect on how the present accommodates numerous and sometimes radically differing temporal life worlds (Danboldt et al. 2009; Freeman 2010; Muñoz 2009). In respect to processes of Europeanization in the sense we elaborated above, taking up the concept of the »simultaneity of the non-simultaneous« offers two possible directions of onward travel. First, it allows us to understand Europe as always having consisted of different realities—threatening and deadly for some, full of privileged spaces of possibility for others (Das 2010; Berlant 2011). Second, it opens the possibility to grasp traces of a utopian future already existing in the current moment.

From this point of view, »queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future« (Muñoz 2009, 1). Muñoz's plea for an »insistence on something else, something better, something dawning« (2009, 189) is meant to transcend the here and now in pursuit of a utopian longing. He offers »cruising utopia« as »a flight plan for a collective political becoming« (ibid., 189), a search for the »not yet« (Bloch, cited in Muñoz 2009, 4) in the face of political pessimism and all-too-easy pragmatism:

> »It is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity. That dominant mode of futurity is indeed »winning,« but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a »not yet« where queer youths of color actually get to grow up.« (Muñoz 2009, 95f.)

From this point of view, a queer future might become imaginable. Namely, one in which dwells »a queer subject [...] »who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our experience« (ibid., 96). Here, queerness »should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough« (ibid., 96).

To get there, speculation may be a viable tool—and this introduces the third strand of discussion that might be taken up for the project of queering Europe. Speculation, which has long been part of feminist theory and practice, has a capacity for analyzing normative order structures and, in so doing, unfolds a generative and formative power. Historian Saidiya Hartman has demonstrated how this can be done in the face of one-sided and incomplete (colonial) archives. Her speculative narratives fight the gaps in what has been handed down by producing a »counter-narrative liberated from judgment and classification« and offering »an account that attends to beautiful experiments—to make living an art—undertaken by those often described as promiscuous, reckless, wild, and wayward«

(Hartman 2019, xiv). In speculating about the »might have been« of the past, Hartman offers counter-archives. These narratives also disturb the possibility of narration itself (Hartman 2019, 2007), as they do not simply close the gap between the known and unknown, the speakable and the silenced, but actively connect different times with each other and orient already toward visions of the future. Here as well, we can find starting points for queering Europe: This project might benefit from Hartman's proposal to overcome the limits of archives by »advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities)« and by deploying »critical fabulation« (2008, 11). Her identification of gaps in archives and the speculation about the not yet fully explored, alongside Donna Haraway's SFs (Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, Science Fiction, 2013) and the re-imagination of current as well as past social worlds, offer powerful tools for strengthening thinking capable of mobilizing an »other« Europe as well.

If in this sense queering Europe also includes »exercises in critical utopianism,« a notion coined by Achille Mbembe (2019), then we need a decisive look at collectivities and their imaginaries as they appear in contemporary practices. During one of his Cologne lectures in 2019, Mbembe recalled Kant's idea of »hospitality« as »one of those rights each and every human being could claim in virtue of his or her being a human being.« Arriving in another country, a person on the move could expect »not to be treated as an enemy«; to receive an answer, at least, once she or he knocks at the door. Mbembe continued on to examine in detail how, in spite of that, this right is constantly suspended by EUropean border policies that have transformed the Mediterranean Sea into a death zone and aim at restricting and preventing the mobility of Africans not only toward Europe but already on the African continent itself.

Based on this blunt analysis of a gloomy and violent present, Mbembe developed the utopian vision of an Africa that »opens to herself« by turning the continent into a waste, borderless »space of circulation,« one in which no person of African descent will be treated as a stranger or asked to leave. From this perspective, we could read the persistent migration projects of many Africans currently crossing borders and hostile environments despite all dangers, restrictions, obstacles, and violent enmity as traces of a visionary future yet to come: »[T]he rising of a new region of the world where we will all be welcome, where we will be able to enter unconditionally [...] and to embrace eyes wide open the inextricability of the world, its entangled nature and composite character« (Mbembe 2019). We take this »exercise in utopian thinking« as inspiration to speculate about comparable ways in which queering Europe can hint at a visionary future.

At the same time, practices of imagining, speculating, and anticipating are also criticized for moving too far away from the object of research and its situatedness (Best 2011; Love 2010). The demand is to endure the banality of the everyday (in the life world, in the archive, in organizational, infrastructural, and institutional logics) and to make this very banality the subject (Stoler 2010). Haraway speaks of a »thick present« in this context, calling for us to endure the intolerability of our times: »In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meaning« (2016, 1). But how is it possible—to return to the beginning of this line of thought—to endure the disparity of simultaneity and at the same time to contribute to its transformation (cf. Binder/Chakkalakal 2022)?

Maybe we are already living in a time reorganized by speculation, as Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik argue in *The Speculative Time Complex* (2016). They posit that »human ex-

perience is only a part of—or even subordinated to—more complex formations constructed historically and with a view to what can be obtained in the future« (Avanessian/Malik 2016, 8). As such:

> »Complex societies—which means more-than-human societies at scales of socio-technical organization that surpass phenomenological determination—are those in which the past, the present, and the future enter into an economy where maybe none of these modes is primary, or where the future replaces the present as the lead structuring aspect of time.« (ibid., 8f.)

In addition to the supposed loss of a political standpoint in the present, another problematic of the future is precisely that it is not only accompanied by exploratory possibilities but also always by normative implications. These are often wrapped up in well-known temporal logics such as development paradigms or evolutionism and heteronormative time logics. That is why Arjun Appadurai (2013) insists on the political necessity of engaging in practices of future-making in order to participate in the politics of time.

Bringing these different aspects together, critical utopianism or speculative futurities must combine conceptual work and sober analysis of historic and present conditions with ethical judgments and visionary forward thinking. With regard to Europe, such an exercise has to begin with an examination of how the militarization of borders, the mobilization of hostility toward migrants, and the strengthening of anti-gender and anti-queer positions work together to transform the continent into a more authoritarian, purified and »white« formation—with imagined futures that threaten the present, and thus ones able to be used to mobilize against unwanted groups and practices. The restriction of access and categorical closures come together with the normalization of majoritarian violence: Queer and feminist life forms are denigrated, the lives of migrants and refugees harmed and put at risk.

Against this background, the stories about alternative concepts of freedom—as elaborated, for example, by LGBTIQ communities in Montenegro (Brković 2021b), or with regard to the aspirations of Eastern European sex workers in Berlin as part of inscribing themselves into European modernity that Ursula Probst (2023) introduced during the fishbowl conversation—might point to another possible future. We read them as elements of a critical utopianism about Europe. They subvert hegemonic narratives and categorical settings, they transgress boundaries and claim presence—that in line with queer critiques of the present and standpoints elaborated within critical Europeanization research. They emerge in the precarious messiness in which many life projects in and across Europe are currently situated. Consequently, we propose queering Europe as a polyphonic undertaking, in which gender and queer studies scholars, political anthropologists, and European ethnologists collaborate to excavate further sources and generate new archives for the development of a utopian vision of Europe. We envision this Europe as a globally entangled region—one where queer subjects can dwell and thrive, and one where difference is always already multiple and never reducible to dualist logics of »us« and »them.«

Notes

1 We understand, as such, the acronym »LGBTIQ« not to be an analytical category but rather a powerful discourse worthy of analysis. Identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter, or even queer are products of European notions of selfhood and individuality. Furthermore, using the supposedly inclusive acronym »LGBTIQ« can serve to distract from differences and hierarchies between those subject positions, in the way that it appropriates trans, nonbinary, and inter experiences without actually paying attention to them. With this caveat in mind, we use »LGBTIQ« to refer to subject positions at odds with heteronormativity and the binary sex-gender system.

2 We refer hereby to reports and headlines broadcasted by the main news program »*Wiadomości*« of Polish public TV (TVP) in September 2021 (»attacks of the international LGBT movement«) and autumn 2022 (migrants »storming Poland's and Europe's external border«).

3 We are referring again to the wording of reports accompanying this meeting in the news programs of TVP in December 2021.

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