

The Story That Travelled

A Queer Refugee Interview Project

An Exhibition Project by Hanna Resch & Ernst van der Wal
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Home – I have to tell you, it is freedom and safety. Raghid

By looking at the life stories of queer refugees, this exhibition project explores how ideas surrounding displacement and belonging impact on the self-representation of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and intersex individuals who have fled their countries of origin in recent years because of political conflict or homo- and transphobia.

Die fotografische Interviewausstellung erforscht anhand der Lebensgeschichten queerer Geflüchteter, wie die Konzepte rund um Vertreibung und Zugehörigkeit einen Einfluss auf die Selbstdarstellung von Lesben, Bisexuellen, Schwulen, Transgender und untersexuellen Individuen haben, die aus ihren Herkunftsländern geflüchtet sind.

concept

The Story That Travelled is a collaborative photographic interview project that looks at the way in which *lbgti* (that is lesbian, bisexual, gay, trans and intersex) refugees use forms of visual and textual self-representation to give a sense of their life experiences. This project hopes to provide a more nuanced perspective on how migration, asylum and exile is understood by refugees themselves; that is, how *lbgti* refugees choose to represent their identities, histories, and sense of a future within the spaces and circumstances that they currently find themselves.

While the recent displacement of people from various nation states form part of a burgeoning field of interest amongst academics, policy makers and the public, little attention has been paid thus far to the manner in which dislocation affects *lbgti* refugees in particular. Such individuals are often rendered extremely precarious as they are not only confronted by ostracisation in their countries of origin, but even in their current place of refuge where their experience of sexuality and gender render them vulnerable to stigmatisation and violence. While *lbgti* subjects in general are increasingly encompassed in a national rhetoric of belonging in the German context (where *lbgti* citizenship is to a large degree constitutionally supported), *lbgti* refugees are often met with severe hostility within the new communities/spaces where they find themselves.

The complex issues arising from this tension between the experience of belonging and being dislocated is the main point of departure for this creative research project. As such, this project aims to create a space where *lbgti* refugees can choose how to give a sense of their lives, identities and sense of home.

on the photographs

For these photographs the participating refugees were asked questions about how they would visualise their past, present and future. What emerged during these interviews was the fact that their means of communication and visualisation is intricately tied to their mobile phones, insofar as these devices are crucial for receiving and sharing information, keeping in contact with their families and friends, and acting as a tool for orientating themselves during their difficult journeys.

During a consultation process with each of the participants, they chose to display images on their mobile phones that they associate with their past (Image 1) and their future (Image 2). These are images that embody the participants' histories and things they might have left behind or fled from, as well as their hopes and aspirations for the future in the country where they currently reside. In addition, the participants also chose to present themselves to the camera in such a way that they might communicate something about their current situation (Image 3). In these latter images they strategically show, or hide, what they consider to be important information about themselves.

The images are displayed according to the Arabic writing system, which reads right to left. This system was chosen by the participants as a means to represent their own visual culture.



3



2



1

on the interviews

This project was initiated after a long consultation process with queer refugees who are part of the RosaLinde Leipzig network. During these consultations the refugees expressed their desire to have some platform to share their stories with one another and with a larger public audience.

As a result, the photographic interview format was decided upon, as it provides a means to engage with these stories on a visual and textual level. These interviews, which were initially recorded, were later transcribed and printed, as it provided a means for the participants to revisit their interviews and to edit information. This allows for a degree of flexibility, as the text becomes a space that can be reevaluated by the participants and changed if there is any need for it.

To stay true to the participants and their style of communication, these interviews were left largely unedited. We believe that some of the nuances that the text brings across would be lost by ‘cleaning it up’ too much, hence the interviews were left almost exactly as it was originally recorded and transcribed.

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to RosaLinde Leipzig for supporting this project.