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At the Crossroads of Gender and Migration: Nonbinary Third-Country Nationals Navigating State Classification Infrastructures in Austria

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Abstract (German Version)

Die Erfahrungen von Personen, die sowohl nicht-binär als auch Drittstaatsangehörige in Österreich sind, werden in der aktuellen akademischen Literatur zu wenig erforscht. Die bestehende Literatur neigt dazu, nur eine Seite der Gleichung zu untersuchen - entweder nicht-binäres Geschlecht oder Migration -, aber nicht die Besonderheiten der Überschneidung dieser beiden Elemente. Diese Lücke wird noch deutlicher, wenn wir die genannten Erfahrungen in Bezug auf die staatlichen Klassifizierungsinfrastrukturen betrachten.

In dieser Arbeit möchte ich die oben genannte Lücke schließen: Ich möchte analysieren, wie nicht-binäre Drittstaatsangehörige in Österreich durch staatliche Klassifizierungsinfrastrukturen navigieren. In der Praxis konzentriere ich mich auf die Zuwanderungsinfrastruktur des österreichischen Staates, d.h. auf den Teil des österreichischen Staates, der Aufenthaltsanträge bearbeitet und somit Drittstaatsangehörige kategorisiert. Um mein Forschungsziel zu erreichen, stütze ich mich auf semi-strukturierte qualitative Interviews mit fünf Teilnehmern.

Die Ergebnisse meiner Forschung zeigen, dass die von mir gewählte Infrastruktur in der Navigation der Teilnehmer absolut dominant ist. Diese Dominanz führt dazu, dass die TeilnehmerInnen andere Infrastrukturen und Anliegen, wie z.B. die Klassifizierungsinfrastrukturen in den Ländern ihrer Staatsbürgerschaft sowie die nicht-binäre Geschlechterkategorisierung in Österreich, zurückstellen. Darüber hinaus manifestiert sich diese dominante Infrastruktur als eine (Un-)Informationsinfrastruktur, in der beide Parteien - AntragstellerInnen und Einwanderungsbeamte - versuchen, einander Informationen zu entlocken und dabei selbst so viele Informationen wie möglich zurückzuhalten. Während beide Seiten an dieser Dynamik beteiligt sind, verfügen die Einwanderungsbeamten über deutlich mehr Macht, um ihre Informationsziele zu erreichen.

Die wichtigsten Bedingungen, die die Navigation beeinflussen, sind Geld und Sprache. Hinsichtlich der Erwartungen, die sich auf die Navigation auswirken, haben die Teilnehmer pragmatische Ziele (dauerhafter Aufenthalt und Staatsbürgerschaft) und utopische Träume (grenzenlose und geschlechtsneutrale Gesellschaften) vor Augen.

Stichwörter: nichtbinär, Migration, Infrastrukturen, Information

Abstract (English Version)

The experiences of persons who are both nonbinary *and* third-country nationals in Austria is underexplored in the current academic literature. The existing literature tends to examine one side of the equation—either nonbinary gender or migration—only, but not the specificities of the intersection of these two elements. This absence deepens once we consider said experiences with regards to state classification infrastructures.

In this thesis, I wish to address the above-stated gap: I set out to analyze how nonbinary third-country nationals navigate state classification infrastructures in Austria. In practice, I focus on the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure—i.e., the branch of the Austrian state that processes residence applications and thus categorizes third-country nationals. To achieve my research goal, I rely on semi-structured qualitative interviews with five participants.

The findings of my research indicate that my chosen infrastructure is absolutely dominant in participants' navigation. This dominance results in participants' deprioritizing other infrastructures and concerns, such as classification infrastructures in their countries of citizenship, as well as nonbinary gender categorization in Austria. Furthermore, this dominant infrastructure manifests as an (un)information infrastructure, in which both parties—residence applicants and immigration officers—attempt to extract information from one another while withholding the maximum amount of information. While both sides engage in this dynamic, immigration officers hold significantly more power to achieve their information objectives.

The main conditions that affect navigation are money and language. With regards to the expectations that impact navigation, participants envision pragmatic goals (acquiring permanent residence and citizenship) *and* utopian dreams (borderless and gender-free societies).

Keywords: nonbinary, migration, infrastructures, information

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1. Introduction

Oftentimes, we notice that which we cannot ignore: the matters that are pressing, that demand our attention, that have the power to enact consequences upon us. That which we cannot ignore has the tendency to become overwhelming; it is therefore difficult for many of us to even imagine juggling *multiple* dimensions of that which cannot be ignored. Yet, in practice, there are many people—groups and individuals—whose matters that cannot be ignored are *intersectional* in their demands. What happens, then, when there is more than one axis to navigate?

In this thesis, I wish to analyze how nonbinary third-country nationals navigate state classification infrastructures in Austria. In practice, I will focus on the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, which tends to take a bureaucratic shape. Some of the struggles with categorization (and) bureaucracy I will describe in this thesis will probably be familiar to third-country nationals residing in Austria: the difficulty in getting assigned to an adequate migrant category, the efforts to meet the category's demands. Other struggles will be easy for nonbinary Austrians to recognize: the confusion over novel sex/gender categories, or the lack of access to these categories altogether. Nevertheless, this thesis will spotlight the *uniqueness* of the experiences of individuals who are both nonbinary *and* third-country nationals, experiences that have something in common with other groups, but are also very much a beast of their own.

The existing academic literature has neglected the specific intersection I will study in this thesis. While there are plenty of writings on the impacts of categorization on migrants, especially queer ones, there is very little work that focuses on *nonbinary* third-country nationals. Likewise, studies that describe the experiences of nonbinary people with gender categorization tend to exclude migration as a relevant variable. Furthermore, analyses of intersectional discrimination have not included the particular intersection I will be exploring. While I am definitely in good academic company, there is a gap I can fill and a contribution I can make.

To that purpose, I set out to answer the following research question: *How do nonbinary third-country nationals navigate the intersection of gender and migrant categorization within state classification infrastructures in Austria?*

In order to answer this question, I organize this thesis along the following structure. In my Case chapter, I introduce my reader to the particulars of my chosen case study: nonbinary gender, migration, the current state of nonbinary gender categorization in Austria, and the conditions under which nonbinary third-country nationals reside in the country.

In my State of the Art chapter, I provide my reader with an overview of the academic

literature that contributes to my case—and leaves gaps that I will attempt to fill. This overview will focus on queerness & infrastructures, migration infrastructures, and the categorization of queer migrants.

In my Theories & Concepts chapter, I will describe the main theoretical and conceptual frameworks I will work with. These frameworks address classification and its characteristics, definitions of infrastructures and migration infrastructures, chronotopes as migration infrastructures, and intersectionality.

In my Methods chapter, I will state my research question and subquestions; explain my choice of semi-structured qualitative interviews; spell out the steps in my chosen method; and conclude with an overview of my data analysis strategy.

I will subsequently proceed to my Empirical Findings chapter. In this chapter, I will describe my methodological findings, which pertain to gatekeeping as imposed on both interviewer and (potential) interviewee. I will then briefly consider the impact (or lack thereof) of gender classification infrastructures in participants' countries of citizenship on their navigation strategies. Furthermore, I will characterize the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure as an *(un)information* infrastructure, and the ways through which my participants navigate it. I will also describe the main conditions—money and language—that impact navigation. Additionally, I will state the expectations—both pragmatic and utopian—that affect participants' navigation. Finally, I will analyze time as the guiding thread in my findings.

In my Discussions chapter, I will briefly connect some of my empirical findings to broader discussions on the meaning of information amongst STS scholars who study information infrastructures, as well as on the importance of chronotopes in migratory contexts.

Finally, in my Conclusion chapter, I will summarize my main findings and suggest some potential avenues for future research.

This thesis is the bittersweet fruit of my experiences as a nonbinary third-country national residing in Austria. Consequently, my choice of topic is not just intellectual, but also deeply personal. I wish to study how nonbinary third-country nationals navigate state classification infrastructures because I want to spotlight a subset—*my* subset—of the population that is often left unheard. Being a nonbinary third-country national in Austria is a lonely experience; I hope that this thesis helps to make this experience slightly less lonely.

2. Case

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin by introducing the reader to a definition and characterization of being nonbinary. Furthermore, I will provide the reader with a brief introduction to recent developments in nonbinary gender categorization in the European Union and Austrian contexts. In this overview, I do not intend to defend the historical and cross-cultural existence of people and communities who do not fit into the male-female gender binary. This thesis presupposes that the existence of nonbinary people is not up for debate. As a consequence, I will focus on the recent *legal acknowledgement* of nonbinary gender markers. Changes in said acknowledgement are mostly explored within the field of legal studies, ergo my choice not to include this Case chapter as a section in my State of the Art.

Finally, I will sketch a brief overview of the definitions and legal standing of third-country nationals in Austria. In this section, I will also provide a brief explanation of my choice of subset of the migrant population in Austria. I will explore this decision in further detail in my Methods chapter.

2.2. A Brief Note on Being a Nonbinary Person

It is not the purpose of this thesis to dive into discussions—scholarly or otherwise—regarding the definitions and characteristics of being nonbinary. To avoid these conceptual discussions, I will provide as broad a definition of being nonbinary as possible.

The definition I found most useful is the one provided by the Cleveland Clinic: “Being nonbinary means not identifying solely (or at all) with being male or female” (Cleveland Clinic, 2023). There are two elements that I wish to draw attention to in this definition. First, being nonbinary can encompass a (multifaceted, fluid) identification with male, female or other genders, as well as a complete detachment from gender altogether. In other words, being nonbinary comprises a diversity of identities and expressions that cannot be reduced to a single experience. Second, the definition emphasizes *identity* and *identification*. I.e., a nonbinary person is someone who identifies as nonbinary; there is no objective rule for other people to determine a person’s identity.

Gatekeeping is an issue I will explore throughout this thesis. Many of my participants, as well as myself, have experienced instances of gatekeeping in the communities that were supposed

to welcome us—Austrian queer communities included. While I have provided a definition of nonbinary identity, the only question I asked my potential participants was the following: “Are you / Do you identify as nonbinary?” In order to respect each person’s right to self-identification, I consider that no other question is necessary.

2.3. Nonbinary- & Third-Gender Categories in Europe and Austria

It is important to note that, in the European context, the term *third-gender categories* is generally preferred over *nonbinary gender markers*. This preference reflects a specific feature of European nonbinary-gender recognition: Third-gender markers are not specifically meant for people who identify as nonbinary; they rather represent a description of a gender *category* that is neither male nor female. Why is this distinction important? As I will explore further on, European third-gender markers often tend to conflate *intersex* with *nonbinary* (Osella, 2022).

In the European Union, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)’s 2002 ruling on the Goodwin case established the right to legal gender recognition, although still defining gender along the lines of biological sex characteristics and not explicitly including nonbinary identities (Theilen, 2018). This landmark ruling is often cited in European Union states’ decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of nonbinary gender categories (Theilen, 2018).

But what does the state of legal nonbinary gender look like in national contexts in the EU? Osella (2022) describes the presence of three different models: denial, limited recognition, and self-determination. In the first group, countries like France and Italy have established legal frameworks that impede the inclusion of nonbinary gender categories. In the second model, which includes Germany and Austria, the legal recognition of nonbinary gender is granted on the basis of specific characteristics, generally sex-based. In practice, these limited-recognition models often translate into third-gender markers for intersex people only. The final model, represented by countries such as Malta (Quinan & Hunt, 2021), allows each individual to choose a nonbinary gender category without any additional steps or requisites.

The Austrian and German cases are heavily entwined due to multiple reasons: 1) the inclusion of third-gender categories was the result of court decisions (Osella, 2022); 2) the aforementioned rulings instilled a *constitutional* right to third-gender categorization (Osella, 2022); 3) in practice, each country’s third-gender categories are available to intersex people almost exclusively (Holzer, 2018); 4) due to these similarities, legal studies literature tends to subsume

Austria into the larger German context (e.g., Osella, 2022).

As a consequence of the above-described entwinement, the available academic literature that directly tackles the specificities of the Austrian case is limited. Nevertheless, scholars such as Petričević (2019) provide excellent overviews. In the Austrian context, the 2018 landmark ruling that introduced third-gender categories at a federal level directly addressed the needs and demands of an intersex individual (Petričević, 2019). The interesting element regarding this ruling is the multiplicity of official categories it generated, even if the original purpose was to accurately categorize intersex people only. The court's decision to expand the range of available sex/gender (*Geschlecht* in German) markers included specific alternative categories that were to act as suggestions for the necessary third-gender category: "inter" (standing for intersex), "divers" (often translated as *diverse* but more accurately translated as *various* or *miscellaneous*), "offen" (meant to indicate a pending sex/gender assignment) and "keine Angabe" (no sex/gender entry recorded) (Petričević, 2019).

In practice, this diversity of possible sex/gender categories has been unevenly implemented. As a concrete example, I can offer my own: When I applied for an Austrian residence permit at my local Austrian embassy back in July 2021, the only available sex/gender categories were male and female; as of March 2024, however, Viennese immigration authorities have started to include all six categories in their student residence permit renewal forms; nevertheless, in January 2024, my regional health insurance application excluded options beyond the gender binary. The examples I have provided show this categorical unevenness across a broad range of state spheres—from migration to healthcare, federal to state-level.

When more than two sex/gender categories are available, who gets to use them in Austria? As previously stated, the introduction of multiple sex/gender markers sought to accommodate intersex individuals. As the City (and federal state) of Vienna clearly states (Stadt Wien, 2024), additional sex/gender categories are only open to intersex individuals and *not* to nonbinary people. Additionally, the transition from binary to nonbinary sex/gender categories requires medical evaluation and approval (Stadt Wien, 2024). The city also states that it is following guidelines and rulings established by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Stadt Wien, 2024).

In summary, Austria provides a plethora of third-gender *categories* that are not meant for nonbinary individuals. Thus, we see the importance in distinguishing between sex/gender categories that are nonbinary—in the sense that they present an option beyond the original binary of gender categories—and the inclusion of nonbinary people in state sex/gender classification.

2.4. Migrants and Nonbinary Third-Country Nationals in the Austrian context

In this subsection, I wish to provide the reader with some crucial technopolitical definitions of who and what a migrant in Austria is. Each country defines migration and migrants differently. It is therefore necessary to provide my reader with a clear idea of who the participants of this thesis project are, as well as the legal conditions they live under.

As the United Nations Office for Refugees and Migrants (2024) notes, there is no international legal definition of who an international migrant is. Nevertheless, the office still provides us with a broad definition, which states that “an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status” (United Nations Office for Refugees and Migrants, 2024).

Austria considers its migrant population to consist of all *registered* foreigners residing in the country (Klimont et al., 2023). In other words, refugees and asylum seekers are counted as migrants. Likewise, undocumented foreigners are not given much attention in official migration numbers and classification. In terms of migrant categories, the largest distinction is not between asylum seekers and refugees, on the one hand, and (other) migrants, on the other. Rather, Austria emphasizes the difference between foreigners with the right to reside in Austria on the basis of their citizenship (EU, EEA and Swiss citizens), and those who do not have this citizenship-based right, known as *third-country nationals* (Klimont et al., 2023).

Third-country nationals are required to apply for a residence permit to move to Austria for a period longer than six months. Austria further classifies third-country nationals on the type of permit they are residing under: unrestricted duration of stay, restricted duration of stay, asylum-seeking, temporary stay without a change of legal domicile, and a miscellaneous category that includes refugees, seasonal workers and those under subsidiary protection (Klimont et al., 2023).

Certain categories of third-country nationals in Austria are granted equal status with EE/EEA/Swiss citizens in spheres ranging from employment to education. Detailing who falls under these special categories is beyond the scope of this thesis. In summary, my thesis will exclusively focus on migrants in Austria who are: a) third-country nationals; b) holders of restricted-duration residence permits; c) *not* on equal status with EU/EEA/Swiss citizens.

The reasons why I have decided to select this subgroup of the migrant population in Austria are multiple. First, my chosen subset has registered with immigration authorities and is

therefore submitted to multiple forms of state categorization. Second, the temporary nature of my selected subgroup's residence permits translates into frequent contact with immigration authorities, as well as the very conditional and therefore unstable permission to reside in Austria. Third, the lack of equal status in a series of spheres, such as employment, extends the reach of my participants' migratory status far beyond immigration bureaucracy. Fourth, I consider that I do not have the competence to handle the traumatic experiences of asylum seekers and refugees with the care and expertise that they deserve.

Last but not least, the literature on migration classification (and) infrastructures tends to focus on asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants, a tendency I explore in my State of the Art. While this focus is understandable and commendable, it also results in less attention paid to other migrant categories, such as educational or family reunification. In this thesis, I wish to spotlight these groups of migrants and the specificities of their experiences.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I briefly provided the reader with a definition of being nonbinary. The definition I chose emphasized self-identification above any other criterion; it also conceived of being nonbinary as inclusive of gender in its multiplicity, as well as exclusive of gender altogether.

Additionally, I succinctly described the state of nonbinary gender categorization in Europe and Austria, with a focus on the additional sex/gender categories—and who gets to use them—that Austria has started to (unevenly) introduce.

Finally, I introduced some key definitions with regards to migrants and migration in the Austrian context. I emphasized the situation of my chosen subset of the migrant population: migrants who are both third-country nationals and residing under a permit with a restricted duration of stay.

3. State of the Art

3.1. Introduction

There are several core elements guiding my chosen case and approach: migration, queerness, nonbinary gender, infrastructures, classification, time, and (what I have chosen to deem) navigation. The purpose of this chapter is to spotlight multiple combinations of these elements in the existing academic literature. As a consequence, this State of the Art will not provide the reader with a historical overview of the fields I will be working with. Instead, I choose to engage in a thorough analysis of just a few case studies per subsection in order to illustrate the connections I am trying to make with my own case and research questions. In other words, the literature I highlight in this chapter is meant to identify (some of) the clues that will allow me to answer my research questions further on in this thesis.

Regarding the core elements mentioned in the previous paragraph, two of these elements, classification and infrastructures, will structure this chapter; i.e., each subsection will try to combine my core elements through either classification, infrastructures or both. Likewise, time and navigation are this chapter's guiding threads: They appear in and try to connect multiple sections to one another.

3.2. Queer(ness &) Infrastructures

A salient aspect in articles that explore queerness and infrastructures is the interventionist intention behind these different strands of research. In other words, the literature that tackles queer(ness &) infrastructures seeks to make suggestions on how to improve these infrastructures. Another interesting aspect of this literature is that there is a strong emphasis placed on trans & nonbinary groups and individuals, a departure from the usual focus on gay and lesbian groups.

A relevant element in articles that address the experiences of trans & nonbinary people with infrastructures is the mismatch between interventionist intentions and outcomes. In other words, even the most well-intentioned (cis) professionals who seek to improve infrastructural access and interactions amongst trans & nonbinary tend to miss the mark. To illustrate this point, Thompson (2016) focuses on a new health infrastructure designed to capture data on, and thus better serve, trans & nonbinary communities. Despite such commendable goals, trans & nonbinary individuals criticized the data infrastructure, expressing concerns over privacy, access and safety, *especially when these concerns intersect with a person's race and migratory status*.

Based on the example provided above, I raise two points. First, infrastructures can have unexpected effects, often with significant consequences in people's lives. Second, these unexpected and intense consequences are strongly linked to infrastructural intersections with multiple characteristics trans & nonbinary people inhabit. In Thompson's (2016) results, trans & nonbinary individuals who were White citizens did not raise the concerns that immigrant and/or Black individuals did. In other words, in order to understand the full impacts of infrastructures in a person's life, I need to consider multiple spheres and personal characteristics. The unexpected and intersectional consequences of queer(ness &) infrastructures will be further explored in this chapter's Migration Infrastructures section.

One of the fields that has assiduously explored the intersection of queer gender and infrastructures is Human-Computer Interaction & Human-Centered Design (referred to as HCI in this chapter). HCI, marked by an interventionist inflection since its inception, can be defined as "a multidisciplinary field of study focusing on the design of computer technology and, in particular, the interaction between humans (the users) and computers" (Rice University Department of Psychological Sciences, 2024). The field has since expanded into the study of virtually all information technologies (Rice University Department of Psychological Sciences, 2024). Furthermore, due to the highly interdisciplinary nature of the field, many an STS scholar has found their way to HCI, and vice-versa.

A common feature of HCI's approach to queer gender and infrastructures is the portrayal of infrastructures as both providers and inhibitors of trans & nonbinary identities, goals, and access to healthcare. For example, Wilcox et al. (2023) find that trans & nonbinary individuals seeking healthcare in India, Mexico and the United States develop their own infrastructures of care by appropriating some aspects of existing infrastructures, such as personal health self-tracking technologies, or setting up their own community infrastructures via social media. Nevertheless, the same infrastructures that aid trans & nonbinary individuals can also hinder their healthcare goals: e.g., many self-tracking technologies do not include nonbinary gender options. Consequently, these care infrastructures that trans & nonbinary people set up can and do aid these communities in moving towards achieving their goals. These infrastructures, however, cannot overcome every hurdle posed by other, less trans- & nonbinary-friendly infrastructures.

What I take from Wilcox et al.'s (2023) conclusions is that a careful study of infrastructures and trans & nonbinary individuals people should strike a balance between personal agency and structural oppression. Infrastructures are not one-way streets that produce

predefined outcomes; neither are they neutral tools for any individual to wield. The questions I can ask in my research are therefore not *if* infrastructures both constrain and help nonbinary third-country nationals, but *how* and *to what extent* (in either direction).

3.2.1. HCI, Nonbinary Gender and Infrastructures

Within HCI research, there is a subset that specifically focuses on the experiences of nonbinary people with infrastructures. This subset—sometimes, but certainly not always—both includes nonbinary researchers and responds to a tendency in academic literature to subsume nonbinary identities into binary trans ones (Spiel et al., 2019). As we will see based on the examples provided below, the interventionist tone of HCI is also present in this literature.

Jaroszewski et al. (2018) study the role of nonbinary gender options in surveys, and argue that HCI's tendency to treat nonbinary gender survey responses as data noise is detrimental to the research itself. The dismissal of nonbinary gender responses perpetuates the erasure of nonbinary and genderfluid people from research. This erasure both negatively impacts nonbinary communities who don't have data to represent them, but also the quality of the surveys themselves. Without an understanding of and respect for nonbinary gender data entries, it is also impossible to distinguish between sincere respondents and trolls.

Jaroszewski et al. (2018) focus on the design side of nonbinary gender infrastructural inclusion suggests that including a nonbinary gender option in online research infrastructures does not necessarily translate into meaningful data inclusion. Therefore, it takes a certain level of care and thought to make nonbinary gender inclusion impactful. Jaroszewski et al. (2018) try to encourage meaningful inclusion amongst survey makers by pointing out research perks.

Overall, however, my take-home message is that the inclusion of new gender categories in multiple spheres, as is Austria's case, can be quite the careless process. I.e., nonbinary gender inclusion in classification infrastructures does not end, but rather *begins* when a new category is included. Likewise, due to the (relatively) carelessness that accompanies the implementation of nonbinary gender categories, the ways through which these categories might intersect with other categories is probably not taken into account.

An aspect that Jaroszewski et al. (2018) mention is that the potential for nonbinary gender trolling increases depending on the context a survey is distributed, e.g., online sports betting portals. Scheuerman et al. (2021) dive into nonbinary people's wants and needs for gender categorization depending on the specific infrastructural context. Participants argued that desired or accurate gender options in healthcare forms were different from those on dating apps. They

also pointed out that, in health infrastructures, sex/gender categories are often treated as proxies for more complex medical information. More troublingly, however, was that the lack or mismatch of gender options drove multiple nonbinary participants to stop engaging with some infrastructures.

Gender categorization mismatch in infrastructures is, therefore, not just a matter of respecting a person's identity (although this is, of course, an important goal). Nonbinary gender miscategorization can translate into the loss of important data with real impacts on a person's life. Likewise, nonbinary people *do* have choices when engaging with exclusionary infrastructures: Sometimes that choice is omission and withdrawal, resulting in the mismatch not being captured in the first place. Scheuerman et al.'s (2021) paper indicates that, when researching the infrastructural experiences of nonbinary individuals, absence is a strong starting point. This absence, however, can take many forms, from mismatches that erase nonbinary people, to choices not to engage with a mismatch. Nonbinary absence often hides the active presence of nonbinary individuals in the infrastructures they encounter.

But where, and to what extent, do nonbinary people encounter infrastructural exclusion? Based on an Austrian analysis, Spiel (2021) states that, on a daily basis, nonbinary individuals face an overwhelming majority of technological infrastructures that only offer binary gender categories. Furthermore, most of these infrastructures do not allow for individuals to opt out of gender classification altogether, even when gender information is not relevant. Considering that these infrastructures are present in almost every aspect of a person's life, from bureaucratic procedures to healthcare, the option not to engage is not particularly feasible either, or involves heavy penalties in terms of comfort, safety, profession, etc.

HCI literature has been extremely fruitful in its study on nonbinary people and infrastructures. Its insights have given me crucial tools to understand infrastructural encounters from a variety of perspectives: design, implementation, use, frequency. Nevertheless, considering the questions I set out to answer in this project, HCI does not address some relevant aspects.

First, due to the field's interventionist approach, the authors I have cited in this subsection tend to analyze, and make suggestions for, mostly *private* infrastructures, or state infrastructures that show some degree of permeability, e.g., (certain) healthcare infrastructures. What happens, then, if I decide to tackle state classification infrastructures that include and intersect with migration? State migration infrastructures cannot be described as anything but inflexible, especially when it comes to feedback and advice regarding inclusiveness. In Austria, as in many

parts of the world, it would not be absurd to argue that an inclusive state migration infrastructure is an oxymoron. The classification rigidity of state migration infrastructures is a perspective that is both original *and* unaccounted for (in terms of finding literature to guide me in the process).

Second, HCI literature that *specifically* tackles infrastructures and nonbinary gender categorization tends not to include the intersection of gender with other socioeconomic categories, such as race, class and migratory status. As presented in this section's opening, studies on queer(ness &) infrastructures do address intersectional categorization as an important vantage point. What do the particularities of intersectional *nonbinary* categorization bring to the table, though?

3.3. Migration Infrastructures

One of the key subfields I will be exploring in this SOA is migration infrastructures. Migration infrastructures, as a subfield in and of itself, is relatively recent. After all, Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) seminal definition of migration infrastructures—the “systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility” (p. S124)—is only ten years old.

In the past decade, however, migration infrastructures literature has become a fruitful and lively field, integrating and referencing STS, migration and mobility studies, geography, multiple social sciences, amongst other fields (Müller & Tuitjer, 2023). As with any other subfield, migration infrastructures literature comes with its own idiosyncrasies and priorities. In this section, I will explore some of these characteristics, with a focus on the contribution they make to my chosen case, either by inclusion or omission.

3.3.1. Migration Infrastructures: Multiple Forms of Control and Resistance

One of the defining features of migration infrastructures literature consists of a perspective that includes multiple actors and sides: Migration infrastructures do not just refer to state immigration apparatuses, such as border checks, but also other sites of migration control, e.g., the healthcare system (Borrelli, 2023). Furthermore, state actors are not the only ones who develop and appropriate migration infrastructures: Migrants and people on the move set up, maintain and subvert migration infrastructures, including the same migration control systems the state imposes, such as hospitals (Borrelli, 2023). Naturally, other actors that are not either state

officials or migrants also come into play: educational migration brokers are one such example (Liu & Lin, 2017).

How does this complex combination of expanded migration control and resistance look in specific migration infrastructures literature case studies? What shape do these infrastructures take? I can start by expanding on a previously mentioned example. Borrelli (2023) describes how different sites in Switzerland are being repurposed by Swiss immigration authorities to enhance deportation mechanisms. Hospitals are a primary example of this phenomenon: Swiss immigration authorities use the provision of healthcare to track down and facilitate the deportation of migrants who are in hospital. Without denying the crushing consequences of hospital-initiated deportation, Borrelli also points out that migrants facing deportation instrumentalize hospital rules to delay or defer their deportation. For example, some migrants figure out that certain medical conditions do now allow for a discharge, thus blocking deportation attempts.

The above-mentioned article exemplifies some of the elements I am trying to extract out of migration infrastructures literature: The acknowledgement that infrastructures play a role in power imbalances between migrants and the state; as well as the simultaneous focus on strategies and behavior migrants employ to carry out their mobility goals in hostile immigration infrastructures. It also reveals, however, one of my contentions with migration infrastructures literature: its emphasis on asylum seekers, refugees and people on the move with irregular status. While this focus is understandable, it also excludes the complexities faced by migrants who move and continue to stay under other categories perceived as less needs-based or irregular, such as education or family reunification. The threat of immigration intervention and expulsion is also ever-present in these migrants' lives.

Nevertheless, as we have seen based on Borrelli's (2023) paper, migration infrastructures literature tends to include a broad range of systems in its definition of migration infrastructures. This expanded notion of infrastructures allows me to think beyond self-evident sites or systems of immigration control and resistance, e.g., immigration offices or border controls. It also allows me to center the actions and perceptions of third-country nationals.

Novitskaya (2023), for example, analyzes the role of *narrative infrastructures* in queer post-Soviet migrants' asylum choice of the United States as host country. Even though the US had severely curtailed its asylum policy and engaged in state-sponsored xeno-, homo- and transphobia, many queer post-Soviet asylum seekers still chose the United States as a destination country. This

choice is due to a prevailing narrative of the US as a country of and for queer freedom, a place to be both queer and happy. Said narrative was sustained by migrants already settled in the US, members of queer communities back home, and the (relatively) new arrivals in the US. Thus, the narrative of the US as a beacon of queer freedom was instrumental in keeping the flow of asylum seekers alive, even when other infrastructural conditions worsened. In other words, the narrative functioned as a migration infrastructure.

3.3.2. State Migration Infrastructures & Classification

Another important element that migration infrastructures literature explores is the drive within state migration infrastructures to classify and categorize migrants, as well as the multifaceted consequences—both intended and unintended—said classification has on the lives of migrants. In other words, classification(s) imposed by state migration infrastructures are not felt in the realm of immigration procedures only.

A useful example of the far-reaching effects of migration classification is Sigona et al.'s (2021) study of how migration infrastructures produce migrant irregularity in the United Kingdom and Japan. The authors indicate that the vast majority of irregular(ized) migrants in both countries originally entered and stayed under regular migratory categories, such as work or education. State migration infrastructures, however, can and have changed the standards of the original migrant category, or impeded regular status renewal beyond a certain period under specific categories. As a consequence, previously regularized migrants fall into unregular status, a change that impacts almost every aspect of their lives, from limited housing options to more vulnerable working conditions. The non-state migration infrastructures they are able to access, such as labor or neighborhood networks, also change based on this new irregular categorization.

Along similar lines, Chee (2017) shows some of the unintended consequences of migrant classification as carried out by migration infrastructures. The author explores the case of Mainland Chinese mothers who seek to give birth in Hong Kong in order to acquire Hong Kong resident status for their children. With the aim of curbing this birth-based migratory phenomenon, Hong Kong state migration infrastructures have changed the rules that determine which children born on Hong Kong soil acquire resident status, and which rights these children have access to. This reclassification, however, has backfired: There is now a greater number of Mainland-origin families, mothers and children, trapped in the Hong Kong residence bureaucracy under more precarious conditions. This trapped status affects family reunification plans, potential returns to the mainland, and educational and professional trajectories.

Chee's (2017) case study points to the significance of the unintended when studying migration infrastructures: These infrastructures involve multiple (and often disparate) actors and resources, and even the most powerful among them struggle to produce their desired effect. Nevertheless, this relative ineffectiveness of migration infrastructures does not undermine their outsized impact on multiple aspects of a migrant's life: Be it the state or a local network of fellow countrypeople, migration infrastructures are deeply and keenly felt, especially in unexpected ways.

3.3.3. Migration Infrastructures & Solidarity: Inclusive or Exclusive?

As my reader has probably noticed, migration infrastructures are not defined as just facilitating, but also *conditioning* mobility. I.e., migration infrastructures literature acknowledges that migration infrastructures can hinder mobility. More crucially, perhaps, migration infrastructures literature also studies how *non-state* migration infrastructures contain complex mixtures of inclusion and exclusion. Migration infrastructures literature frequently chooses to analyze these exclusion-inclusion dynamics via its notion of migration solidarity infrastructures.

I am drawn to migration infrastructures literature's insights into non-state infrastructural inclusion and exclusion because it would be naive of me to assume that the non-state infrastructures my participants encounter are inclusive or imbued with solidarity. My interviewees are at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, and the intersections they inhabit can have an effect on the migration infrastructures they navigate—or are even able to access. Furthermore, thinking beyond intentional notions of aid, migration infrastructures literature also conceives of exclusion and inclusion as a necessary byproduct of the limitations of any infrastructure.

El-Kayed and Keskinikılıç's (2023) analysis of two different arrival neighborhoods for asylum seekers and refugees in Germany shows how the elements I have mentioned above manifest in practice. One of the neighborhoods, located in Berlin, had a long history of migrant settlement: It therefore offered newly arrived migrants a strong migration infrastructure that had plenty of experience with bureaucracy, language barriers and the job market. Nevertheless, this infrastructure was unable to offer affordable and quickly available housing, due to the neighborhood's ongoing gentrification. The other neighborhood, located in Dresden, offered recent arrivals affordable housing, long-term settlement prospects, and easy access to public transport. Due to its lack of large-scale migratory history, however, this second migration infrastructure did not offer the bureaucratic, linguistic and labor support the Berlin infrastructure

provided. Consequently, migration infrastructural inclusion and exclusion mirror one another and are difficult to separate.

Another key aspect that El-Kayed and Keskinilic (2023) touch upon is *who* gets to access these migration infrastructures and *how*. The authors conclude that, while Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) migrants felt welcome in and supported by the Berlin neighborhood migration infrastructure, Black refugees and asylum seekers could not tap into this infrastructure as easily. Be it due to language or phenotypic differences, being a fellow asylum seeker and refugee was not enough to access a local migration infrastructure dominated by MENA migrants.

El-Kayed and Keskinilic (2023) are purposefully vague in assigning responsibility to one specific characteristic—say, race—over another in the infrastructural exclusion of Black refugees and asylum seekers in the Berlin neighborhood. Hans (2023), on the other hand, proposes a different explanation for migration infrastructure inclusion. In his analysis of a Dortmund arrival neighborhood, Hans concludes that migration infrastructures rely on the solidarity of established migrant communities and individuals, who often wield both state and local resources to help new arrivals. The factor that drives established migrants' solidarity is not shared origins or language, but a common migratory experience: having endured similar migratory procedures, lived in the same neighborhoods, and relied on overlapping communities and organizations.

Where do these two accounts of migration infrastructural exclusion and inclusion leave us? First, the characteristics that condition migration infrastructure inclusion and exclusion are not necessarily self-evident: A *combination* of factors, from language to race, can play a role. This combination has an impact that is difficult to define, explain or parse out, but is still keenly felt by those experiencing its exclusionary consequences. Second, solidarity in migration infrastructures seems to partially rely on migratory trajectories as shared characteristics. In other words, just like race or language, migration becomes a characteristic in and of itself.

Last, but certainly not least, I notice that certain characteristics are given breathing room over others. When we talk about dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in migration infrastructures, where is the intersection of nonbinary gender and/or gender fluidity with other factors, such as migratory history and status? My research addresses an important gap in the characteristics that are considered relevant to explain migration infrastructural dynamics.

3.3.4. Migration Infrastructures: Time

My reader has probably noticed that the two articles I presented in the previous section refer to the *arrival* period in a migratory journey. This focus on arrival—and the migration

infrastructures that support it—is an important component of migration infrastructures literature (Müller & Tuitjer, 2023).

I will, of course, be looking into expanded and additional timings in my engagement with migration infrastructures. None of my participants is a recent arrival in Austria: All of them have undergone at least one residence renewal procedure. Likewise, my research questions’ emphasis on long-term experiences and future perspectives—expectations, aspirations, planning—necessitates a notion of migration infrastructure that can accommodate time as an analytical tool beyond arrival.

Landau’s (2021) analysis of native-migrant tensions in shared urban spaces in Johannesburg is a good starting point. The author argues that, while Black South African citizens and immigrants occupy the same urban environments in Johannesburg, they associate completely different notions of time—especially future time—to these environments. For Black South African citizens, Johannesburg is a space intimately tied to historical efforts to overcome Apartheid exclusion, and as part of the national promise of (eventual) Black prosperity. In this tightly bound time-space scenario, immigrants in urban Johannesburg represent both outsiders who cannot claim a share of Apartheid history *and* obstacles in Black South Africans’ path to urban-based prosperity. For immigrants in South Africa, however, Johannesburg embodies a different time-space weaving: The city is the space where the dream of a better future can be nourished and (hopefully) materialized. Due to the emphasis on a still-far away future, immigrants are therefore not particularly invested in their *present* in the city.

These completely disparate interweavings of time and space are, in practice, different migration infrastructures. They serve different groups of people, with opposing mobility goals, and feed and are fed by contrasting time resources. This contrast in time-space entanglements leads to multiple tensions between the aforementioned groups (Landau, 2021).

What I take from Landau’s (2021) analysis is the decentering of space as the main analytical unit through which to understand migration and its infrastructures. Time—as past, present and future—configures a migrant’s space: how they use it and with what intentions. Likewise, a crucial clue for my research is that time affects migrants’ relationships with other groups in the same space.

3.4. Queer Migration Categorization: Performativity, Intersectionality and Control

In this subsection, I will explore three recurring elements in the academic literature that tackles queer migration and categorization. The first element, performativity, refers to the ability migrant categories have to impose certain expectations, behaviors and punishments to those who are assigned to these categories. This performative subset of the literature tends to focus on queer asylum seekers and refugees, as well as on the multiple actors that both influence and are influenced by the performativity of migrant categorization, from asylum officials to queer organizations.

The second element, intersectionality, alludes to the entanglement of multiple socioeconomic categories in the experiences of queer migrants. In other words, the translation of migrant categories into queer migrants' concrete life experiences is often the result of a combination of factors that mutually influence one another, from race to language to gender expression. This subset of the literature also focuses on asylum seekers and refugees.

The literature that addresses the two elements described above tends to rely on a key phenomenon: homonationalism. Novitskaya (2023) defines homonationalism as “an ideology adopted by some nation-states, mostly in the West, which appropriates the progress made in LGBTQ rights, in the service of their own national exceptionalism” (p. 2026). In practice, homonationalist politics translate into the reinforcement of “neo-colonial and neo-imperialist discourses by positioning Western nations as exceptionally progressive vis-à-vis supposedly barbaric and homophobic non-Western societies while concealing the former's contributions to the perpetuation of non-Western homophobia” (Novitskaya, 2023, p. 2026).

Homonationalism also helps in explaining why so many European queer spaces are marked by dynamics of conditional inclusion and severe exclusion of queer asylum seekers and refugees. According to Held (2023), queer organizations in Europe have adopted their nation-states' homonationalist rhetoric of Western exceptionalism. This homonationalist stance has led to queer events and organizations' embracing of policing and prison systems, as well as these systems' racism and xenophobia (Held, 2023).

Finally, the third component, control, addresses how queer migrant categorization—e.g., the introduction of nonbinary gender markers—becomes a new way for immigration authorities to surveil and penalize migrants. While this literature still addresses the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, it also broadens the scope to other migrant and mobility categories.

3.4.1. Performativity

The literature that addresses the performativity of migrant categories when applied to queer people focuses on *queer/LGBTQIA+ asylum* as a migrant category. In other words, the performativity literature I am referring to is concerned with queer asylum seekers and refugees who migrate on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The consequences of this focus on queerness-based asylum are two-fold. First, as there are no other migrant categories that explicitly address queerness, migrants moving and residing under non-asylum-based categories are not taken into account. Second, and perhaps more crucially, this literature studies the experiences of queer migrants *whose queerness is disclosed to state authorities*. Further on, I will explore this disclosure of queer identity in the Control subsection.

In Wimark's (2021) account of queer asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden, Swedish asylum authorities expect—and, in practice, demand—certain behaviors out of queer asylum seekers and refugees. These expected behaviors are based on Western notions of what a queer life is supposed to look like, and range from having an active sex life to disclosing one's queer identity in public. They also often go against asylum seekers and refugees' personal and cultural preferences, as well as their acquired safety and survival strategies.

The state and its actors' dismissal of personal boundaries and safety concerns falls in line with homonationalist ideas of the West as a space where homo- and transphobia are nonexistent (Wimark, 2021). Said dismissal exposes queer people to violence from cisheterosexual individuals (both within their ethnic network and in dominant Swedish society). When this violence takes place, state authorities uproot the queer individual instead of the aggressor, thus penalizing the former for suffering violence due to a public queer identity they did not seek out in the first place (Wimark, 2021).

Wimark's (2021) research points to the performance expectations that come with migrant categorization. These categories are not just neutral names for mobility requests and allowances, but rather receptacles and enactors of the behaviors state authorities demand from migrants, without much or any consideration for each person's cultural and personal background. In other words, the required performance of appropriate queerness does not leave much space for intersectional understandings and considerations. Nevertheless, while the category imposes a certain performance, it does not pay the price for it. Instead, migrants scramble to meet these expectations while also dealing with their consequences.

Complementing Wimark's (2021) findings, Akin (2016) describes how queer asylum

seekers and refugees in Norway mobilize a broad range of resources to perform asylum-granting queerness. For example, queer asylum seekers and refugees highlight certain aspects of their life story, like their country of origin's queerphobic environment, to qualify as a *queer* person in need of asylum. Nevertheless, behind closed doors they present a more nuanced view of their experiences in their home country, often portraying these in a less negative light than in the asylum application.

While these small acts of resistance and/or acknowledgement of the absurdities of the queer asylum performance are present, said performance still impacts how these subjects perceive their own queerness and that of others. More concretely, several queer asylum seekers and refugees doubt the queerness of other asylum applicants, openly wondering if they are truly queer or "queer enough" (Akin, 2016). This speculation, Akin (2016) notes, falls in line with the asylum system's deep distrust of applicants.

As inspiration for my chosen case and approach, I highlight how Akin (2016) manages to strike a delicate balance between acknowledging the agency, autonomy and resourcefulness of queer migrants in their dealings with migrant categorization, as well as the normative impact state-sanctioned performances have on these individuals. More specifically, Akin (2016) shows how queer migrants absorb the expectations that have been imposed on them. This absorption, however, is not necessarily one of defiance and/or resignation; it can also manifest as agreement, or a combination of all three (and more).

Furthermore, if queer asylum categories demand a homonationalist performance, what sort of performance do other migrant categories that do not explicitly include queerness expect? As Wimarck (2021) shows, queer asylum seekers and refugees are penalized when their (imposed upon) performances of Western-style queerness reveal contradictions in a nation-state's homonationalist narrative. Does homonationalism extend to migrants moving and residing under other categories? Do these other categories expect a performance of non-queerness?

While the literature on queer migration categorization and performativity understandably focuses on queer-based asylum, I cannot help but wonder about the categorical performativity of queerness and migration *when these two elements are not explicitly coupled or acknowledged by either state actors or migrants*.

3.4.2. Intersectionality

In the previous subsection, I explored queer migration and categorization mostly through the relationships between state actors, especially asylum officials, and queer asylum seekers and

refugees. In this subsection, I will analyze dynamics that include more types of actors, as well as additional socioeconomic characteristics.

An important aspect of the literature that addresses queer migrant categorization and intersectionality is the explicit acknowledgement that migrant categorization—especially in the asylum context—has a huge effect on *multiple* spheres of a person’s life. This acknowledgement is similar to the points I raised in the Migration Infrastructures & Classification subsection.

The aforementioned, multidimensional effect is also closely related to the ambiguity many migrants experience when dealing with migration infrastructures: being simultaneously included into and excluded from networks, or thrust into situations of uncertainty and vulnerability. The question is not *if* some form of exclusion, rejection or precarization will take place, but *when*, *where* and *with whom*?

A useful example of this multipronged effect of queer migrant categorization is Held’s (2023) analysis of the intersectional experiences of queer asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) in Europe. The author describes how ASRs, because of their asylum status, are often placed in precarized conditions within queer communities and migrant networks. In the former, being an ASR can often translate into dangerous and denigrating relationships, such as “volunteers” demanding a sexual relationship in exchange for providing temporary housing, or local White Europeans not considering ASRs for serious relationships because the former perceive the latter as transitory or victims who cannot make for an equal partner. Migrant networks are also oftentimes hostile to queer people. Queer ASRs therefore experience a constant sense of unbelonging.

The “refugeeness” dynamics described above also intersect with other factors, such as race. Many queer spaces in Europe automatically bar access to people perceived as non-White, in line with homonationalist ideas of the exceptionalism of Western tolerance (Held, 2023). As a consequence, queer ASRs cannot even access spaces where support and companionship are provided to other queer people. Held (2023) also mentions that transgender ASRs face a much higher degree of scrutiny in queer European spaces than gay and lesbian ASRs do.

Nevertheless, Held (2023) makes a point of including the strategies queer ASRs develop to respond to their exclusion. Many ASRs set up their own events with the explicit purpose of catering not just to queer ASRs, but also those who support and engage with them. In other words, while the intersectional discrimination they experience as queer ASRs leads to discrimination and exclusion, it also produces new connections and instances of inclusion.

One of the dilemmas I wrestle with in this chapter (and the thesis as a whole) consists of

potential imbalances in intersectionality. In other words, how can I acknowledge that multiple categories come into play in shaping, say, the lives of nonbinary third-country nationals, without assuming that this categorical multiplicity translates into equal weight amongst categories. I.e., Held's (2023) research strongly suggests that "refugeeness" becomes a category that does not define but rather articulates intersectional exclusion, in ways that race is generally assumed to do.

While Held (2023) finds a way to identify or construct this articulating category, can a different migrant category, such as educational migrant, also function as an articulating category in the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria? More relevant to the time dimension in my RQs, do articulating categories shift depending on the time-space context each nonbinary third-country national finds themselves in?

3.4.3. Control

The case studies provided in the Performativity subsection illustrate some of the fundamental contradictions in homonationalism, especially when dealing with the asylum system. Nevertheless, the tension between a nation-state's pro-LGBTQIA+ stance and its conservative border policy also extends to instances of migration and mobility beyond the asylum context.

The tension outlined above is particularly striking in the literature that examines the inclusion of nonbinary gender categories in identification documents vis-à-vis heightened contexts of border surveillance. More precisely, when a nonbinary gender option on IDs is paired with border control(s), nonbinary individuals stand out in a negative way.

In a comparative analysis of the introduction of nonbinary gender markers on IDs, Quinan and Hunt (2021) describe how states that allow for a nonbinary gender option on passports also decline responsibility in pushing for these passports—and the citizens who carry them—to be accepted abroad. Thus, travelers with nonbinary-gender passports often face immense and insurmountable border obstacles, such as not being able to enter the country of destination, with little to no support from their countries of citizenship. The option of acquiring a nonbinary-gender travel document without the guarantee of its acceptance abroad creates a trap of heightened scrutiny for many nonbinary travelers, which can be particularly dangerous in countries hostile to queer people.

How do gender-diverse people respond to this paradox of travel? According to Quinan and Bresser (2020), gender-diverse people on the move often choose not to engage with the added border scrutiny that a nonbinary gender marker will expose them to. In cases where border authorities might suspect a categorical discrepancy (e.g., due to a person's gender presentation),

gender-diverse individuals often retort to lying, omitting information or modifying their physical appearance to minimize risk. While the authors highlight the strategies that gender-diverse border crossers employ to be able to travel safely and successfully, they also state that some individuals choose *not* to travel at all. In other words, gender-diverse people do engage in successful subterfuge to achieve their mobility goals, but these strategies only go so far. The limitations imposed by the intersection of nonbinary gender and border crossing can have stifling effects on the lives of affected individuals.

In my interpretation of Quinan and Bresser's (2020) findings, even in contexts where nonbinary gender categories are available, the ability to access and employ these categories is diminished or retracted by other forms of categorization, such as border crossing. In other words, who, and under what circumstances, can safely claim a state-sanctioned nonbinary gender category?

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to show both the stepping stones and the gaps in the literature that will aid me in answering my research questions. What I seek to carry out is an infrastructural analysis of nonbinary gender classification *and* migration in non-asylum contexts.

First and foremost, there is extensive literature that addresses all of the different elements I am seeking to explore, often in combination with one another. Infrastructure studies address migration, categorization and queerness. Queer studies explore migration and categorization. The lively field of HCI dives into nonbinary categorization in infrastructures. By tackling novel combinations of these different elements, my research tries to make humble contributions to the existing literature.

I also seek, however, to address the blanks that result from the combination of some, but not all, of the elements I tackle. The field of migration infrastructures rarely addresses the experiences of queer migrants—much less that of nonbinary migrants. Likewise, queer infrastructure studies only obliquely reference the specificities of nonbinary migrants.

As Spiel et al. (2019) observed, nonbinary people are generally subsumed into binary trans categories. While HCI does directly tackle nonbinary gender categorization in infrastructures, it does not address *state* classification infrastructures, much less those directly related to immigration control. On the other hand, when state classification, border crossing and nonbinary gender are addressed, as in Quinan and Bresser's (2020) research, this border crossing does not

necessarily address the experiences of migrants, i.e., people who change their country of residence. While still forced to face border surveillance, a tourist and a migrant have very different relationships with their country of destination.

Based on my literature review, I believe I can make a contribution to the existing literature by noting that: a) when infrastructures literature tackles nonbinary gender, it rarely considers migration as a relevant variable; b) the frequent combination of all queer and/or trans people in the literature tends to obscure the specificities of nonbinary gender categorization; c) non-asylum-based categories of migration—and their specificities—tend to be neglected in queer migration and migration infrastructures literature.

4. Theories & Concepts

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the main concepts and frameworks that will inform my analysis of my data. More specifically, I consider that—based on a combination of the readings I presented in the State of the Art, as well as my research questions—I need to define and characterize four notions: classification, infrastructures, *migration* infrastructures, and intersectionality and intersectional dynamics.

To that purpose, I will start with Bowker and Star's (2000) definition and characterization of classification and classification systems. I will then use classification systems to introduce Larkin's (2013) concept of infrastructures, with a special emphasis placed on their ontology. Additionally, I will rely on Jensen and Morita (2017) to expand on Larkin's (2013) formulations and conceive of infrastructures as *makers* of ontologies, as well.

My description of Jensen and Morita's (2017) contributions to the concept of infrastructures will lead me to explore the specifics of *migration* infrastructures, as defined by Xiang and Lindquist's (2014). Furthermore, I will acknowledge said definition's blind spots with regards to injustice and inequalities, and proceed to analyze Landau's (2021) use of chronotopes to address these blindspots.

Finally, the aforementioned discussion about inequalities and injustice will bring me to a discussion of Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality. This choice of author (and text) will serve two purposes: a) to gain an understanding of the dynamics of combined forms of discrimination; b) to explore how formal categorization impacts said dynamics.

4.2. Boxing Classification In

While the bulk of this chapter will consist of theoretical explorations of infrastructures, migration and time, I choose to start this narrative by defining classification. Considering the central role classification/categorization (I consider these words to be synonymous) plays in my research project, I should have a functioning definition and description of what it actually entails.

To that purpose, I rely on Bowker and Star (2000). The authors define classification as “a spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 10). While this definition is quite broad—and will be refined below—I consider it useful because it acknowledges that classification includes and *combines* space and time. This combination aids me

in centering both the spatial dimension of migration infrastructures—in its most basic sense, the regulation of inter-state movement and stay—, as well as their temporal element—the timings of migration infrastructures are just as impactful as the space they regulate.

Bowker and Star (2000) provide a more specific look into classification by defining a classification *system*: “a set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work—bureaucratic or knowledge production” (p. 10). A classification system would ideally contain the following characteristics:

- “*There are consistent, unique classificatory principles in operation*” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 10);
- “*The categories are mutually exclusive*” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 10);
- “*The system is complete*: With respect to the items, actions, or areas under its consideration, the ideal classification system provides total coverage of the world it describes” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 10).

I should clarify that this definition and its associated characteristics describe what an *ideal* classification system would look like in the *abstract* plane. In the real world, no classification system fulfills all three requirements simultaneously or thoroughly. Thus, the vast majority of classification systems try to approximate these ideal elements.

If no actual classification system reaches the ideal, how do we identify what is a classification system and what is not? Based on the pragmatist tradition they follow, Bowker and Star (2000) argue that the answer lies in identifying what is both *called* and *treated as* a classification system. In other words, something—in this case, a classification system—is real because it is perceived as real and has real consequences.

What do I take out of this definition and its corresponding requirements? First, classification systems operate under a logic of universal exclusivity. In other words, classification is a process that *seeks* not only to apply itself to everything it concerns itself with, but also to establish internal, uncrossable divisions. This notion of a universal division is particularly useful to analyze the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria. State classification, especially immigration categorization, is an unavoidable reality for third-country nationals; likewise, the labyrinth of available categories often involves a lack of categorical mobility: one’s classification is often difficult to change, and the conditions each category imposes are almost impossible to either escape or transfer. Classification is a tight-fitting omnipresence in nonbinary third-country nationals’ lives.

Second, ideally, a classification system is *complete*. What happens, then, when a system unevenly introduces new categories, as is the current case with sex/gender categories in Austria, or changes the requirements for each category, as tends to happen with migrant categories? This tension between the ideal goals and actual practices of classification systems is an aspect I wish to explore, and will describe next.

Last but definitely not least, classification systems possess both an ideal and a real dimension, and these two dimensions do not fully overlap. This partially incompatible duality is relevant to my research because it brings attention to one of the aspects I will explore in this thesis: the goals a classification system *claims and wishes to* be carrying out, the *actual* outcomes and workings of the system, and *who* needs to reconcile the ideal and the actual in their dealings with a classification system. In other words, if the ideal and the real do not fully overlap, but instead mesh together in context-relevant ways, who can and must navigate this classification intertwinement?

Considering these questions and concerns, I turn once again to Bowker and Star (2000): more specifically, to their approach with regards to formal and informal classification systems. One of the authors' main points regarding classification systems is that, if they are imposed on people, these individuals and groups find a myriad of ways to adapt to and subvert the formal categories they must contend with, especially when their lived circumstances do not match the classification they have been assigned to. Nevertheless, these informal classification workarounds only go so far, and formal classification systems can wield immense power over the people they categorize (Bowker & Star, 2000). In summary, any (formal) classification system involves *compromises* between formal and informal notions, processes and outcomes (Bowker & Star, 2000).

Bowker and Star (2000) acknowledge the deep impact of (formal) classification on people's lives. The authors pay special attention to formal classification systems' impact on a person's life trajectory, for which they have devised the concept of a *torque*. A torque is "the twisting that occurs when a formal classification system is mismatched with an individual's biographical trajectory, memberships or location" (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 223).

While bartering and subversion are common strategies people engage in when dealing with formal classification systems, the torque describes the utter chaos that can arise out of a mismatch that cannot be easily sidestepped or fixed. More importantly, perhaps, the torque illustrates the wide-reaching and long-term impacts of formal classification on a person's *biography*. This lifelong and lifewide effect is one of the aspects I will focus on in my empirical

findings. While I will not directly apply the torque to said findings, I include it in this chapter as a sensitizing concept to remind me of the importance of life trajectories in my analysis of navigation.

While a definition and characterization of classification systems is an optimal place to start from, my ultimate goal is to conceive of classification systems as *infrastructures*, a perspective already espoused by Bowker and Star (2000). These authors, however, relied on a definition of infrastructures that I do not use. In the following section, I will proceed to outline a definition of infrastructures, in accordance with the main sources I rely on.

4.3. Infrastructures: Fundamental Definitions & Characteristics

In this section, I choose to follow in the footsteps of STS infrastructure scholars, and provide my reader with a (relatively) broad definition of infrastructures. I will subsequently proceed to further refine this definition with addendums sourced from other authors. To that purpose, I first explore Larkin's (2013) *The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure*, which will provide me with a definition and ontology of infrastructures. I will then proceed to analyze Jensen and Morita's (2017) addendums to Larkin's formulations, with an emphasis on infrastructures as producers of new ontologies.

4.3.1. Brian Larkin's Ontology of Infrastructures

The broad definition of infrastructure I choose to work with is Larkin's (2013). The author defines infrastructures as:

built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life. (Larkin, 2013, p. 328)

As can be inferred from the above-mentioned definition, Larkin (2013) emphasizes a perspective on infrastructures that does not limit itself to technological elements and/or nonhuman actors. Rather, the author's proposed definition acknowledges the importance of a

multiplicity of components, from objects to people to knowledge as key players in infrastructures (Larkin, 2013). This multifaceted approach is inspired by actor-network theory (ANT) (Larkin, 2013), a framework that proposes a renunciation of predetermined categories of social analysis, such as structure, in order to more solidly grasp the relevant actors and relations in a network (Michael, 2017). I will revisit the impact of ANT on my approach later on in this chapter.

Larkin further elaborates on this proposed definition by delineating the *ontology* of infrastructures:

Infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter. Their peculiar ontology lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things. As things they are present to the senses, yet they are also displaced in the focus on the matter they move around. (Larkin, 2013, p. 329)

For the purposes of this research project, what stands out in Larkin's definition and ontology of infrastructures? To begin with, infrastructures engage in and affect both space and time. As stated in the provided quotations, space is one of the central elements to understand infrastructures. The *purpose* of infrastructures is to facilitate (and condition) the spatial circulation of a specific element; it is not a stretch, therefore, to apply this definition to the state-sanctioned definition of (and control over) migration.

Furthermore, infrastructures are also matter that moves matter, and this dual dynamic makes infrastructures both very clear and blurry to capture. This second characteristic points to infrastructures at not just regulators, but also mobile inhabitants, of space. The dual dynamic of both regulating and moving in space allows me to understand how classification infrastructures, in the experiences of my participants, is both omnipresent but vague, keenly felt but difficult to grasp. In other words, the spatial duality of infrastructures is a way to approach, and identify the patterns in, participants' eclectic encounters with classification infrastructures.

As a small-but-relevant observation with regards to time, Larkin (2013) mentions three factors: speed, temporalities, and breakdown. In other words, time—in its multiple forms—gives shape to infrastructures. As stated in the previous section, my approach to, and the results of, this research project require me to work with concepts and frameworks that can integrate both time and space in their analysis.

Another key takeaway from the provided ontological demarcation is that infrastructures “are things and also the relation between things” (Larkin, 2013, p. 329). Why is this specific

ontological feature analytically important? Larkin (2013) argues that infrastructures “cannot be theorized in terms of the object alone. What distinguishes infrastructures from technologies is that they are objects that create the grounds on which other objects operate” (p. 329).

Throughout this research project, I struggled to understand the ontological heterogeneity of infrastructures. For example, my interview questionnaire would focus too much on interpersonal interactions, and not enough on, say, technological actors. More commonly, however, I would take infrastructures to mean literal objects: paper forms, fingerprinting, etc. It was pretty obvious to me that I was missing a higher level of conceptual sophistication. Larkin’s understanding of infrastructures as *relations* and not just things was an eye-opener: I managed to look into and question completely different aspects of my interviewees’ experiences, such as interrogating what they were actually *doing* in the narratives they shared, as well as the connections between different actors.

A relations-based definition of infrastructures allowed me to grasp the thread of infrastructural flows, and not just be caught in its currents, clutching onto incomplete images. In other words, a relational notion of infrastructure aided me in understanding the infrastructural experiences of my participants as *processes*.

As hinted throughout this section, and in the ontological characterization Larkin (2013) himself provided, an important aspect of the definition of infrastructures I am working with is dynamics of visibility. For example, due to their relational nature, it is common to decenter infrastructures when they are acting as relations and not things (Larkin, 2013). Nevertheless, Larkin (2013) also cautions against formulations that assume that infrastructural invisibility is the working default, while infrastructural visibility is tied to breakdown. Instead, we should think of infrastructural visibility and invisibility as two extremes in a continuum, in which multiple degrees of (in)visibility can occur in order to fulfill a myriad of purposes (and not just to reflect integrity or breakdown) (Larkin, 2013).

Larkin’s (2013) perception of infrastructural (in)visibility as gradual and context-dependent is useful to me in the face of the unequal positions nonbinary third-country nationals occupy in their dealings with state classification infrastructures, especially immigration infrastructures. To put it simply, the intended visibility of an infrastructure is, of course, dependent on who it is supposed to be visible for. The suffocating presence of immigration classification infrastructures in nonbinary third-country nationals’ lives does not extend to, say, individuals with local citizenship. Likewise, invisibility might become an obvious and deeply

troublesome feature when one is trying to gain clarity in an infrastructure. For example, the lack of information visibility regarding immigration requirements is a constant source of headaches for my research participants.

Along similar lines, an eclectic approach to infrastructural (in)visibility also allows me to think of different *flavors* of (in)visibility. I.e., a situation in which, say, two different actors face infrastructural invisibility does not translate into similar outcomes for each actor. As an example, the aforementioned information invisibility is also present amongst immigration officers, who often seem unaware of the right information to provide, but do not face consequences equivalent to those an uninformed immigrant will have to contend with.

The positionality of infrastructural (in)visibility I have described above hints at the final element I would like to explore in Larkin's (2013) text. The author argues that any analysis of an infrastructure is a "categorical act" (p. 330). Infrastructures are exceedingly complex and operate on multiple levels; any study of an infrastructure will involve choices regarding which levels to include and which to leave out. As a consequence, Larkin (2013) does not conceive of infrastructures as positivist phenomena that are waiting to be discovered. Rather, the researcher's perspective and choices in defining an infrastructure constitute an act of categorization, of giving shape to (and not just observing) an infrastructure. This categorical act also spotlights one's own "epistemological and political commitments" (Larkin, 2013, p. 330).

As much as Larkin (2013) emphasizes the responsibility that accompanies the researcher's role in infrastructural delineation, I consider that this constructivist outlook provides me with plenty of intellectual freedom. If every infrastructural analysis consists of a director's cut, then there is no pressure to find the *perfect* perspective. As long as I am aware of and can justify the choices I am making with regards to defining my analyzed infrastructure(s), I have a valid perspective to work with. For example, I will focus on the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure in this thesis, and will further emphasize information as the flowing object and (human) interpersonal relations within said infrastructure. These choices, of course, leave plenty of other elements out.

Furthermore, I chose to write this thesis with very clear political and epistemological commitments in mind. I wanted to give voice to the thoughts and experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria, a populational subset that is vastly overlooked in the existing academic literature. If my director's infrastructural cut highlights my commitments, it is a welcome feature of conducting research on infrastructures. Instead of relying on conceptual

frameworks that try to downplay or subsume the researcher's subjective motivations, I am more than happy to put my own alignments front and center. Without these alignments, there would be no research project to begin with.

Larkin (2013) has provided me with an ample understanding of the ontological underlyings of infrastructures, and the role the researcher plays in the making of this ontology. Nevertheless, I now wish to explore how infrastructures are not just the product, but also the makers of, ontologies.

4.3.2. Jensen and Morita: The Reality-Making of Infrastructures

Starting from Larkin's (2013) article, which I have presented in the previous section, Jensen and Morita (2017) provide expansions of and addendums to Larkin's (2013) ontological ruminations. More importantly for this thesis, Jensen and Morita (2017) argue that infrastructures are *ontological experiments*. By *ontological*, the authors wish to convey that infrastructures are producers of "novel configurations of the world - new (...) *ontologies*" (Jensen & Morita, 2017, p. 618). In other words, infrastructures are capable of shaping, and not just being shaped by, the relations and objects that integrate them, from politics to nature (Jensen & Morita, 2017).

By *experiments*, Jensen and Morita (2017) argue that infrastructures are highly complex, due to the large amount of dispersed practices, objects and relations that must be coordinated within an infrastructural flow. This coordination is also difficult because it must contend with the intentions and outcomes of multiple designs. Infrastructures have built-in inertia, as they are never at the mercy of a single architect or project, but rather integrate layers upon layers of previous decisions and consequences (Jensen & Morita, 2017).

As a result of this multilayered complexity, Jensen and Morita (2017) argue, the *outcomes* of the new ontological configurations that infrastructures produce are often unpredictable and unforeseen. In other words, the new ontological configurations that infrastructures bring about have a strong factor of uncertainty and surprise. The unpredictable character of infrastructural reality-making outcomes is why Jensen and Morita (2017) refer to infrastructures as ontological experiments.

Why do I choose to work with a formulation of infrastructure that emphasizes ontology-making and unpredictability? First, I was drawn to the authors' assertion that infrastructures are not just mirrors of the worlds they inhabit, but active remakers of their environments. This ontology-producing component illustrates why I find infrastructures to be a

relevant subject of study. If infrastructures are mere reflections of the world we live in—nature, culture, politics—why not just study the dominant elements that infrastructures mirror? Simply put, I needed a concept that would more eloquently illustrate and expand on the impression I had developed based on my and other nonbinary third-country nationals’ experiences: Infrastructures are not just mirrors or receptacles or channels; rather, they *actively* produce something new and different.

This active, lively ability to make new ontological configurations, as described by Jensen and Morita (2017), is also conceptually important within my research due to the inertia-based place it allocates to all of the different components of an infrastructure, from people to objects and beyond. Infrastructures coordinate a high number of actors and practices not just across space, but across time as well, due to the residual designs they carry. While infrastructures manage to coordinate the time-space flows amongst all these practices and actors, what happens to certain human actors who are in the flow?

Any given human actor—say, a third-country immigration applicant—is just one piece of the puzzle, so experiences of feeling lost, out of place and/or adrift are understandable in context, and cannot be easily reduced to *present* individual behaviors or interactions with other human actors. While the focus of this thesis is, evidently, human elements within state classification infrastructures, integrating time-space complexity and (the need for) coordination is a necessary analytical tool to give context to the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria.

As hinted in the previous paragraphs, the second reason why I choose to work with Jensen and Morita’s (2017) notions of infrastructural ontology is the uncertainty they give space for. The ontological consequences of infrastructures are by their very nature unpredictable. The uncertainty of processes and outcomes, especially with regards to the correct information to acquire and pass on, is a dominant feature in this thesis. However, what if uncertainty is built into infrastructures? In my chosen case, then, the task would not consist of asserting the infrastructural existence of the uncertainty my participants struggle with: this uncertainty is presumed. Rather, my job would involve grounding this infrastructural uncertainty by identifying the attributes of such uncertainty: the hows, the whens, the wheres.

4.4. Migration Infrastructures

Moving on from broad definitions and characterizations of infrastructures, I will now seek to specify the connection between migration and infrastructures. First, I will provide a

definition of migration infrastructures, as formulated by Xiang and Lindquist (2014). I will subsequently expand said definition by including critiques that address power and inequality within migration infrastructures. Finally, following these discussions on inequality and relying on Landau (2021), I will explore how time becomes a relevant element to understand migration infrastructures and precarity.

4.4.1. Migration Infrastructures: A Mediated Definition

Inspired by Bruno Latour, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) assert that “it is not migrants who migrate, but rather constellations consisting of migrants and non-migrants, of human and non-human actors” (p. S124). In other words, the authors argue against notions of migration that focus on the individual migrant, and instead propose to acknowledge the increasingly *mediated* nature of migration (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). It is whole constellations, containing a myriad of mediators, who migrate. Likewise, the mediators involved in migration are not necessarily *human*, and the authors draw our attention to other actors, such as technological ones.

Based on this perception of migration as a highly mediated, multiparty affair, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) propose the following definition of migration *infrastructures*: “the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility” (p. S124).

I consider this definition to be quite compatible with the one provided by Larkin (2013) for all infrastructures: The actors involved are both human and non-human, the interconnection between constituent elements is highlighted, and the emphasis of action and purpose is placed on conditioning the circulation of something specific. Some differences remain, though: Perhaps most obviously, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) do not explicitly define infrastructures as *relations*. It follows, then, to ask why I choose a separate definition of *migration* infrastructures.

In their pursuit to decenter the individual migrant, Xiang and Lindquist (2014) emphasize the equal—or even greater—role of all kinds of mediators in conditioning (human) mobility. This decentering of the individual migrant is particularly relevant to my research due to multiple reasons. First, it is only by decentering the individual migrant in the migratory process that I can center the actual content of the narratives that my interviewees have shared with me. A large part of this thesis will consist of findings in which the narrator is not the driving force in their infrastructural encounters. I could potentially concentrate on the moments in which research participants, as individuals, had control over a given infrastructural encounter. Nevertheless, I

choose not to, because this thesis is marked by infrastructural encounters in which each interviewee had to face the realization that their individual singularity was but a small part of something much bigger.

Furthermore, the decentering of the individual migrant also allows me to integrate loneliness and communal absence and exclusion in this thesis. Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) description of migration infrastructures explicitly refers to migration *constellations*. These constellations coexist with the fact that migration has become a more cumbersome and expensive process for many migrants, often due to mediators' actions (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). Said characterizations of migration infrastructures as both collective and not necessarily driven by solidarity is useful to think and explain contexts in which migrants have to rely on, negotiate with, or even fight against other actors in a given migration infrastructure, as well as their resulting experiences with loneliness and exclusion driven or influenced by these other actors.

Finally, the decentering of the individual migrant also allows me to start to question where the power in a given migration infrastructure lies, as well as how and with whom. While Xiang and Lindquist (2014) have been criticized for not addressing injustice dynamics in migration infrastructures (Kathiravelu, 2021), their provided definition does allow for initial inroads into an analysis of inequalities. If the individual migrant often finds themselves adrift and at a loss, struggling to enable their desired mobility within a migration infrastructure, who, then, can condition mobility? And how do they manage to wield this infrastructural power? Which components do they mobilize, and under what circumstances? And, considering my choice of interviewees, how are these power dynamics perceived by nonbinary third-country nationals?

4.4.2. Migration Infrastructures: Chronotopes

As briefly addressed in the previous section, Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) mediation-oriented definition of migration infrastructures is perceived as not being particularly adept at capturing dynamics of power, inequalities and injustice (Kathiravelu, 2021). In this section, I introduce the conceptual formulations of Landau (2021), which inquire into inequalities in migration infrastructures by combining space, time and morality.

Landau (2021) defines chronotopes as "subjective constructions that define the appropriateness of individual and groups' moral conduct in space-time. (...) Produced dialogically, they condition people's relation to histories, futures, and sites real and imagined. They are the foundations for perceptions of success, status, and justice" (p. 656). Landau (2021) further notes

that, when people's chronotopes align, a sense of community arises even across separated pockets of space. When people's chronotopes do *not* align, however, self-alienation, othering and exclusion are common outcomes (Landau, 2021).

While chronotopes combine time and space, the author gives the temporal effects of chronotopes on migration infrastructures a protagonistic role. Chronotopes are "temporal infrastructures" (Landau, 2021, p. 657), and it is their temporal aspect that allows them to condition exclusion and inclusion (Landau, 2021).

With regards to the study of migration and migration infrastructures, Landau (2021) argues that chronotopes are particularly well suited to it, because they highlight the social, and not just the material or institutional, channels of migration. In other words, chronotopes can be useful to explain dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and self-alienation in a broad range of social groups, broader than what migration infrastructures literature tends to consider. Likewise, chronotopes reveal the morals, fears, hopes and expectations entangled in migration (Landau, 2021). I.e., migration is not perceived as a fraught issue (just) due to the space it takes place in, but also (and mostly) because of the timings and temporalities it involves.

I choose to work with Landau's (2021) interpretation of the chronotope for multiple reasons. First, due to the method I picked—semi-structured interviews—the questions I posited to my participants granted plenty of room to their personal judgements on the events, individuals and infrastructures that they have encountered. Considering the profound impact that state migration infrastructures have had on the lives of my interviewees, the aforementioned personal assessments were frequent and deep-rooted.

Likewise, as I will further explore in the Methods chapter, I am keenly invested in participants' expectations, hopes and plans. I consider that the strong presence of the future in my research questions cannot rely on descriptive narratives of past events only, but should also include participants' opinions on how future events and developments could and should unfold, and why. In other words, navigation (as I conceive of and wish to study it) is a deeply emotional and ethics-riddled process. The aspects that Landau's (2021) interpretation of chronotopes as and in migration infrastructures allows me to explore is how time-space shapes and is shaped by morals and morality. There is a uniqueness to the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals that cannot be broken down into time, space and morals as separate components.

The second element I take from Landau's (2021) version of the chronotope is the idea of migration as not just a spatial, but also temporal, process. While I have repeatedly explored said

idea in this chapter, Landau (2021) proposes that time-space-morality clutters (i.e., chronotopes) are migration *infrastructures*, because they condition the movement, reception and integration of migrants. Furthermore, time plays a central role in turning chronotopes into migration infrastructures—it conditions how we engage with space, and the moralities we assign to it. In other words, I am drawn to the notion of chronotopes as migration infrastructures, because it helps me explain the actors and aspects that power the movement of a given element. Equally important is, of course, Landau's (2021) emphasis on migration infrastructures' functioning on the basis of not just technical, but also social and moral, mechanisms.

Landau's (2021) analysis of injustice and inequality—and the morals that both fuel and result from them—leads me to a discussion of the combined forms of discrimination—migratory status and nonbinary gender—that are central to this thesis. To properly explore these combined forms, however, I need to work with an author who directly addresses discrimination as a multifaceted phenomenon.

4.5. Crenshaw's Intersectionality: Combination and Categorization

An aspect of Crenshaw's (1989) framework that I wish to emphasize is the relevance she assigns to formal categorization and its consequences. A legal scholar, Crenshaw (1989) describes the negative effects of the definitions of gender and racial discrimination in US jurisprudence on Black women. Gender discrimination, as a legal category under which lawsuits are formulated and evaluated, exclusively centers the experiences and concerns of White women (Crenshaw, 1989). Likewise, the judicial category of racial discrimination considers Black men only (Crenshaw, 1989). As a consequence, Black women's allegations of discrimination on the basis of gender and/or race are dismissed unless they can be aligned with the grievances of White women or Black men (Crenshaw, 1989). The author therefore calls for analyses of discrimination that conceive of it as not just single-axis (e.g., just race or gender), but also as *intersectional* (i.e., containing multiple axes) (Crenshaw, 1989).

What the above-provided example illustrates is that formal, state-mandated and -enacted categories can determine the inclusion and exclusion of different groups of people, either by invisibilizing their struggles or forcing them to fit into inadequate categories. Likewise, Crenshaw (1989) analyzes experiences with discrimination that fall under multiple—yet mutually exclusive—categories: Black women often do not have their struggles acknowledged because there

is no specific formal category for them, and are thus caught between race and gender. Thus, discrimination categories, originally implemented to address racism and sexism, exclude *intersectional* experiences, as they conceive of discrimination as singular.

In my chosen case, the two categories I am working with—sex/gender and migration—are not explicitly designed to redress discriminatory wrongs. Nevertheless, Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework offers compelling guidance. With regards to classification and its consequences, Crenshaw (1989) indicates that formal categories that seek to address social phenomena also enact certain—and potentially exclusionary—versions of reality. Second, these categories tend to think of societal issues as single-axis and not intersectional. Third, when a lived experience falls under multiple formal categories, the preexisting classification system leans towards invisibilizing said experience or forcing it into (partially or totally) incompatible categories.

On a different note, Crenshaw's (1989) analysis is extremely useful to me due to its *ontological* implications. Crenshaw (1989) conceives of intersectionality as ontologically flexible. Intersectionality reflects lived experiences in which combined forms of discrimination can produce outcomes that are more than the sum of its parts—and therefore unique to a specific group (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, some of the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals with state classification infrastructures are not present amongst people who are just nonbinary or third-country nationals exclusively.

Intersectionality can also, however, result in outcomes where the combined forms of discrimination *can* be broken down into its individual components (e.g., the respective influences of sex/gender and migration can be identified) (Crenshaw, 1989). This facet of intersectionality is thus easier to link to other groups who experience only one of the involved forms of discrimination. Additionally, intersectionality also acknowledges experiences in which one form of discrimination is more prominent than others (Crenshaw, 1989).

These different ontologies all point towards a specific feature of intersectionality: It is context-dependent, situational, and therefore highly mutable and fluid. Intersectionality teaches us to pay attention to where and when intersectional discrimination takes place, as well as to accept that any person could face a wide variety of intersectional experiences. This last feature is particularly useful to understand nonbinary third-country nationals' narratives with regards to state classification infrastructural encounters, as the relevance of different factors—such as class or gender presentation—is always shifting.

Furthermore, Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality also provides me with a framework to explore the contrast between the fluidity of combined forms of discrimination and the rigidity of state-mandated categorization. More specifically, Crenshaw (1989) argues that formal classification is able to impose its rigidity on combined—and complex—cases of discrimination.

Finally, I choose to work with intersectionality, because it explicitly integrates notions of *structural* discrimination. Unlike most of the ANT-influenced authors I have presented in this chapter, Crenshaw (1989) works with structural categories, such as race and gender, and attributes discrimination to them. This embracing of structural categories to analyze power and inequalities provides me with the grounding I need to tackle my participants' experiences with discrimination. In other words, the use of structural categories allows for an analysis—and acknowledgement—of discrimination that centers power and inequalities, as well as the concrete shapes they often take in classification contexts.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to find conceptual and theoretical groundings for the main topics I will explore in my thesis. First, I relied on Bowker and Star (2000) to define and characterize classification systems. I focused on ideal versus real classification systems, and how these two dimensions interact with one another.

I subsequently introduced and discussed ontological definitions of infrastructures. I analyzed Larkin's (2013) work, which defines infrastructures as both objects and relations. I then relied on Jensen and Morita's (2017) expansion of Larkin's (2013) definition to characterize infrastructures as *producers* of new ontologies.

Later on, I employed Xiang and Lindquist (2014) to define migration infrastructures. More specifically, I highlighted these authors' characterization of migration, and its associated infrastructures, as a process that extends beyond the individuals who migrate, and integrates a broad range of actors and stages.

Nevertheless, I acknowledged Xiang and Lindquist's (2014) shortcomings with regards to matters of inequality. In order to address these shortcomings, I employed Landau's (2021) chronotopes, which combine time, space and morality to explain injustice in migration infrastructures.

Finally, following Landau's (2021) lead, I described Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework in order to address the dynamics of combined forms of discrimination, and the role

that formal categorization plays in these dynamics. Therefore, by starting and ending with categorization, I brought the chapter full circle.

The guiding thread in this chapter was my search for concepts and frameworks that would allow me to understand classification, migration, infrastructures—and the combinations thereof—as both spatial *and* temporal, with an emphasis on the latter. Likewise, I tried to preview some of my methodological choices and empirical findings in multiple sections of this chapter.

5. Methods

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce my reader to my research question and subquestions, and the methodological strategy that allowed me to answer them. As a first step, I will walk my reader through the thought process behind every question and subquestion..

The core of this chapter, however, will consist of an explanation and exploration of my approach to interviewing. I will start by briefly defining my general method, semi-structured interviewing, and explaining this choice over other qualitative options. Subsequently, I will proceed to dive into my notion of *interviewing as a prolonged encounter*. This notion argues for the inclusion and acknowledgment of research steps traditionally relegated to accessory status. I will use concrete examples and scenarios that occurred during my research experiences to illustrate the prolonged encounter.

Finally, I will describe my approach to data analysis. I will outline the features that I included (and excluded) in my transcription. I will then detail my coding approach, which is based on Thematic Analysis: qualitative, both deductive and inductive, and with a nonlinear stage guide.

5.2. Research Questions

As stated in previous chapters of this thesis, my research interests lie in the strategies, negotiations, compromises and choices (or lack thereof) that nonbinary third-country nationals make when dealing with the intersection of migration and gender within state classification infrastructures. To summarize these four elements, I choose the term navigation, which I will spell out in the Empirical Findings chapter.

I focus on state infrastructures due to their unavoidability. The four above-mentioned elements that I am interested in researching carry the assumptions that nonbinary third-country migrants somehow struggle, or do not neatly fit, into state classification infrastructures. Additionally, another implication consists of a unique form of struggle or dissonance regarding the intersection of gender and migratory status. Nevertheless, the four elements I chose also leave margin for inaction or a lack of effect: In other words, I leave the door open for nonbinary third-country nationals to tell me that said classification intersection does not impact their choices, daily experiences and/or strategies.

I am working with the assumption that there are different factors that inform and

condition how and up to what point nonbinary third-country nationals are able to navigate state classification infrastructures. Regarding these conditioning factors, I have reviewed potential leads in my State of the Art, ranging from classical structural factors such as race and income to more individualized aspects, e.g., intimate interpersonal relationships. It is worth noting that the division I have presented between *structural* and *individual* is for analytical purposes only. In practice, these elements tend to be profoundly entwined.

While (what I call) conditions might place an emphasis on so-called external factors, I also choose to look into the expectations that each participant carries and develops, and their impact on their navigation experiences. Once again, the separation between conditions and expectations is for analytical purposes only.

My exploration of conditions and expectations is mediated through time. I.e., I use conditions and expectations to understand how my participants shape and are shaped by the past, present and future. Potentially relevant dynamics of past, present and future expectations were explored in the State of the Art chapter.

Another aspect I wish to analyze is not just my research participants' experiences in their host country, but also the impact of their country of origin's gender classification infrastructures on their handling of the host country's infrastructures. I am assuming that, just as gender and migration form an intersection in the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals, the intersection of being both a citizen and a foreign resident can also be an interesting and impactful angle to study. Likewise, thinking of past, current and future experiences in each participant's country of citizenship allows me to once again weave time into my questions, but from a different perspective.

Considering my interests and goals, I propose the following research questions:

- How do nonbinary third-country nationals navigate the intersection of gender and migrant categorization within state classification infrastructures in Austria?
 - What are the conditions and expectations that impact the ability and willingness of nonbinary third-country nationals to handle this navigation?
 - How do gender classification infrastructures in countries of origin impact nonbinary third-country nationals' navigation of gender and migrant classification infrastructures in their host country?

Having defined my research question and subquestions, I now proceed to delineate the methodological strategy that allowed me to answer said questions. I start by detailing my choice of

method.

5.3. Choosing a Method: Semi-structured Interviews

Already in the early stages of this research project, it was clear to me that some qualitative techniques would be off the table. The truth of the matter is that nonbinary third-country nationals do not form an independent community in Austria. The combination of two small subsets of the population translates into the relatively common experience of never encountering a fellow nonbinary third-country national during one's stay in Austria. This knowledge of the relative isolation of nonbinary third-country nationals is, of course, the result of my being a third-country national in Austria myself. Due to my belonging to the subset of people that constitutes my participant pool, this text will contain frequent allusions to knowledge gained through personal experience.

I knew that ethnography was not really in the cards because of the aforementioned lack of community. While it would be technically possible to follow nonbinary third-country nationals in the different environments they occupy, there was a risk of: a) shifting the focus to the dominant individuals or groups in these environments; b) missing the main point of my research questions. At no point did I try to imply that my interest lies in what nonbinary migrants do in the exact moment when they face state classification infrastructures. *Navigation*, in my use of the term, refers not to the specific techniques and strategies nonbinary third-country nationals employ in their bureaucratic encounters. Instead, it tackles a process of perception, assimilation of and reflection on these experiences. Likewise, apart from the aforementioned focal risks, it would have also been unrealistic to expect to accompany participants to immigration appointments or be present whenever they filled out a form or used a restroom in a public building.

In order to circumvent the problems ethnography would bring, I chose semi-structured interviews as my research method. Semi-structured interviews can be characterized as qualitative interviews that rely on a pre-established set of questions, while still offering the liberty to modify the order in which the questions are asked, as well as to add follow-up questions (Jensen & Laurie, 2016). The order and follow-up flexibility of semi-structured interviews was one of the key reasons why I picked this format. Based on the subjects each participant brings up, I can change the question order or phrasing to accommodate their thought process and smoothen the transition between questions.

The semi-structured format also allows for a personalized, in-depth setting in which participants can feel comfortable sharing their experiences and speaking at length (Jensen &

Laurie, 2016). Consequently, semi-structured interviews provided a distinct advantage in conveying state classification navigation as a *process* to be narrated and reflected upon. Likewise, the chance to sit down and talk at length would also allow the participants and myself to explore my first subquestion, i.e., the conditions and expectations they work with. When one is occupied, it is difficult to reflect on the two aforementioned elements and their impact on our behavior.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are advantageous in research contexts where the chosen case or topic is not particularly well-known: the follow-up feature allows the researcher to explore new or unexpected leads that interviewees provide (Jensen & Laurie, 2016). I cannot overstate the importance of such a feature to my project. Due to the very limited coverage of the specificities of my topic, thinking on my feet during data collection is an ability that should be both present and allowed in any methodological approach I choose.

While semi-structured interviews provided me with a general skeleton for data collection, I still felt the need to address other steps in the research process. My approach to these additional steps is described in the following section.

5.4. Interviewing as a Prolonged Encounter

My methodological anchor consists of the idea of the interview as a prolonged encounter. In the prolonged encounter, I consider the data-gathering stage as just one among many steps in an interview. I have decided to characterize interviewing as an encounter because each step is directly impacted by previous meetings and communications with participants. Due to this interactive feature of the prolonged encounter, the steps in my chosen approach are nonlinear; i.e., different steps tend to stop, resume and overlap with one another. I do not claim to have originated the notion of reframing steps traditionally perceived as accessory to interviews as crucial components of the interviews themselves. Rather, I choose to work with the prolonged encounter as a tool to articulate my thoughts and build a cohesive narrative for my reader.

Another element of the interview as a prolonged encounter is its narrative character. In other words, I will try to weave a story out of the different stages of my research; my personal, narrative voice will be the guiding thread. Following Silverman's (2017) lead, this methodological narrative seeks to explain rather than justify my methodological choices.

In this chapter, I will work with the idea of mood-setting. A key component of my approach to interacting with participants consisted of setting the mood: for trust, intimacy, data collection, mutual understanding, etc. Plenty of this mood-setting involved paying attention to details, such as location or nonverbal cues. I wish to mirror this process of mood-setting in my

writing. To put it plainly, I will include a myriad of details in this narrative that may seem irrelevant, but are actually quite important in setting the mood I wish to convey to my readers.

5.4.1. First Steps: Questionnaire-Building and Gatekeeping

While I have described the steps in my prolonged encounter(s) as overlapping and interactive, we all have to start somewhere. In my case, two steps were the starting points: recruiting and drafting a questionnaire. In practice, I carried out these steps simultaneously, as the activities of one stage left me with plenty of time and space to pursue the other.

Taking my overall lack of experience with qualitative interviewing into account, I decided to develop my questionnaire by closely mirroring my research questions and the concerns behind them. In that sense, it was crucial to settle on research questions early on in the process, instead of changing them through an inductive approach.

I initially wrote down and tweaked questions that expanded on the potential situations, feelings and scenarios that I imagined would be answers to my research questions. Considering the overall lack of research on nonbinary third-country nationals (in Austria or elsewhere), I relied on my own experiences, nonbinary or third-country acquaintances' anecdotes, and/or speculation I had engaged in when dealing with state classification infrastructures. For example, some of the speculative scenarios I had imagined involved being a nonbinary third-country national undergoing medical transition. Even though it was an experience I did not undergo, my being nonbinary made me take such potential scenarios into account. Not only was I comfortable in including imagination and speculation into my questionnaire-building, I also considered this inclusion necessary. Due to my chosen research questions, the interaction between reality and imagination is a key component in my approach to navigation: What we experience impacts what we expect, and vice-versa.

While developing my questionnaire, I started working on—what I thought at the time—was the recruiting stage of my research. Now, I consider that my recruiting stage actually consisted of gatekeeping management rather than recruiting. Following Bondy's (2012) lead, I fully agree that access to the field is a crucial methodological component that should—but tends not to—be explored in qualitative research. More importantly, Bondy (2012) argues that the conditions of access to and continued presence in the field impact the empirical outcomes we are able to derive out of our research.

Apart from working on my questionnaire, I had to find actual nonbinary third-country nationals willing to participate in my research. As I had previously mentioned, there is no field for

nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria. There are some organizations that aid asylum seekers and refugees—not the specific subset of migrants I am working with—and others that focus on queer people from certain parts of the Third World. Yet the reality is that these organizations have so much on their plate already, that helping out a hapless master's student is not high on their list of priorities. Likewise, most nonbinary third-country nationals enjoy socializing in far less formal environments. Basically, I had to find an extremely small and scattered pool of potential participants.

I was aware that I would struggle to find participants. What I was not prepared for is the amount of gatekeeping I ended up facing. Initially, I chose a word-of-mouth sampling strategy (I cannot call it snowballing because that would require finding at least one initial participant). I visited queer spaces of socialization, introduced myself and asked these queer gatekeepers to spread the word. Likewise, I asked my nonbinary acquaintances in other environments to recommend potential sites (either physical or digital) for recruitment. In all instances, I was directed to organizations that work with queer refugees and asylum seekers, even though I had explained that I was not going to interview these groups of people. I immediately found it odd that I was not being introduced to either specific individuals or additional gathering places. As a publicly out queer person for over a decade at that point, I was expecting the community to help me out. All of the gatekeepers I encountered were White and European. Perhaps European queer people were used to institutionalizing their social relations? I was so naïve that I did not realize I was being gatekept in the first place.

Of course, none of the very busy organizations I was sent to replied to my emails or calls. In a stroke of luck, however, a university colleague granted me access to the main gathering spaces (mostly online) for nonbinary people in my city of residence. Imagine my shock when several of the aforementioned gatekeepers were also members of these online communities but had not offered to let me join. While the revelation that I had been heavily gatekept by White European nonbinary people was quite devastating, these negative experiences with gatekeeping were crucial in eventually allowing me to bond with some of my potential participants. I will explore the outcomes of these shared experiences with gatekeeping in my Empirical Findings chapter.

I mention my experiences with gatekeeping in queer spaces due to the impact it had on my recruiting strategy. I needed to find ways to circumvent (White Queer European) gatekeeping. My overall lack of success in queer circles led me to focus more energy on sharing my research project with acquaintances and colleagues who are not queer but move in left-leaning and progressive

circles. These people suggested that I seek out potential participants via left-leaning and queer mailing lists they subscribed to. They mentioned that these lists often serve as sites of research participation recruitment. Other (non-queer) colleagues and acquaintances suggested specific individuals that they knew on a personal basis.

Once I had more than one avenue to contact potential participants, I developed a research participation pitch. Fine-tuning my pitch was one of the hardest steps in my research process: I needed to present myself as a non-threatening, yet confident, young researcher. I had to tout my status as a nonbinary third-country national without sounding too exclusionary. The technical components of participation needed to be very clear, yet brief enough not to bore any potential participants. Additionally, I had to develop short introductory messages for each of my chosen formats: group chats, mailing lists, and in-person meetings.

In this process of sending out my pitch to every person, group chat and mailing list that had been suggested to me, I confess that I did not worry about my safety or privacy. I stated my full legal name on the pitch, included both my personal and academic email accounts, as well as my place of work and study. I have kept my potential participants' privacy and safety in mind through every step of the process, understanding the perils of being both nonbinary and a third-country national, yet I suppose I subconsciously acknowledged that I could not afford the same level of privacy and safety as a researcher. The truth remains that I would have probably not managed to find any willing participants had I not been so open about my own identity.

Ultimately, a combination of access to nonbinary and genderfluid spaces and progressive mailing lists and acquaintances led me to find a reasonable number of participants. I managed to get in touch with five nonbinary third-country nationals residing in Austria. Two participants responded to messages I posted on a popular WhatsApp group chat for nonbinary and genderqueer people in my city of residence. Another contacted me after a friend saw my email on a university mailing list. A fourth participant was part of a large Austrian discord channel for trans and nonbinary people I joined for research purposes. Finally, the fifth participant agreed to meet with me because we have a shared (cisheterosexual) friend in common. Out of the four recruiting environments I have described, two (mailing list and friend's contact) were suggested to me by cisgender individuals, and the other two (WhatsApp and Discord) by the aforementioned nonbinary university colleague.

A very concrete outcome of managing to make first contact with potential participants consisted of setting up introductory meetings. Following my supervisor's advice, I scheduled

introductory meetings with potential participants before any data collection could take place. The purposes of these intro meetings were for potential interviewees to see my face, gauge my intentions one-on-one, and ask me all of the questions they may have about my research approach and their participation. These initial meetings would not, of course, constitute any promise to participate in data collection.

In order to accommodate my introductory meetings, I developed a subset of questions for these meetings, which would be repeated during data collection. These intro-meeting questions served the purpose of giving each participant enough breathing room to tell me about their life trajectories and experiences at length. Due to my research questions' relatively narrow focus, the data-gathering step would not allow for each participant to expound on their life stories at great length. I did not wish, however, to negate the importance of these broader narratives; I therefore decided to give them plenty of space in the introductory meetings.

Engaging with Bondy (2012) once again, I should include brief notes on how the different recruitment sites impacted my interactions with potential participants. The aforementioned city-wide group chat afforded me and my interlocutors a combination of engagement and privacy that would have been impossible in physical meetings or via email. Both participants contacted me via private chat and spent several hours asking questions before agreeing to meet me in person for the introductory step of the prolonged encounter. It did not hurt, of course, that I had been granted access to the group chat, which is invitation-only.

Another participant contacted me via email after a friend of theirs saw my email on a mailing list. We almost immediately switched to Signal and quickly set up an introductory meeting. Once again, I suspect that the friend filter made this participant feel comfortable enough to contact me. Likewise, the participant with whom I shared a friend in common contacted me because they trusted their friend's judgment. One way or another, filters were important to smoothly transition into real-time communication and in-person introductory meetings.

Another filter was, of course, the fact that these four participants and I reside in the same city. The comfort they could expect, and the level of security they could rely on, just by meeting me in their city of residence cannot be understated. In many ways, it was their own turf, yet a turf that we also shared. Even if I had had the time, energy and money to travel to other parts of Austria, I do consider that it is advantageous to both participant and researcher to meet on (literal) common ground.

The fifth participant, on the other hand, contacted me via a Discord channel that is open

to the public. Before taking our conversation any further, they requested that my advisor send them an email from his university account stating that my proposal had been officially approved and that I was specifically looking for nonbinary third-country nationals. This request delayed our communication by several weeks while I arranged for my advisor to send the email. Another factor that contributed to the participant's caution is that we live in different Austrian cities.

5.4.2. Introductory Meetings, Questionnaire-Tweaking and Gatekeeping as a Tool

The introductory meetings consisted of some of the most challenging-yet-satisfying moments in this research experience. I gave all participants the option to meet online but strongly encouraged them to pick an in-person format, just so that they could see that I am a real person, and because it's generally easier to talk to someone without two screens acting as mediators.

The four participants who lived in the same city as myself agreed to in-person meetings. I asked participants to pick a location they felt comfortable in. Two participants suggested eateries they were familiar with. The other two, however, had no specific places in mind and therefore agreed to meet at a coffee shop I suggested in an area that they were well acquainted with. Now that I had officially entered the terrain of managing individual expectations and senses of comfort, I had to walk the tricky line between letting confident participants guide our encounters according to their preferences, and showing confidence to more unsure potential interviewees. In other words, building a sense of safety and comfort for each interviewee involved a careful calibration between leading and being led; as a solution, I would oftentimes just explicitly ask what each participant preferred.

Aside from setting the rhythm of the introductory meeting (as described above), I also had to set the tone. I struggle with social settings in which spontaneity and cue-reading are important components. In my research-based introductory meetings, however, both parties were meeting for a very specific purpose: eventually carrying out a research interview. Having that goal in mind, it was relatively easy for me to act in ways that were perceived as appropriate by potential participants. The introductory meeting was not a casual or informal interaction, so spontaneous behaviors were not really expected. In fact, my own lack of casualness contributed to conveying the seriousness of my research pursuit.

Apart from building trust, a major purpose of the introductory meetings consisted of extensive note-taking in order to adapt my questionnaire to each (potential) participant's

trajectory and worldview. I informed each participant that these notes would not be considered data (and, ergo, would be excluded from my thesis). Because I had embraced the idea of the introductory meeting as an atypical encounter, I was comfortable with long pauses in our conversation while noting down all nuggets of relevant information. The length of these introductory meetings varied widely. Note-taking lasted an hour and a half, approximately. Afterwards, however, 3 out of 4 participants chose to remain to chat and get to know one another better.

The fifth participant, who resides in a different Austrian locality, chose—for obvious logistical reasons—to carry out the introductory meeting via video call. The differences between in-person and online introductory meetings were quite stark. First and foremost, the in-person meetings allowed both researcher and potential interviewee to focus their full attention on the meeting. During this fifth meeting, however, the potential participant was also cooking and therefore not fully focused on our conversation. Their time frame was tighter, as well, as they were about to sit down for a meal. As a consequence, I gathered significantly less information for my questionnaire-tweaking than I did in the other four meetings. Furthermore, the constrained time frame also resulted in less space for the potential participant to talk about their experiences as a nonbinary third-country national that were not directly relevant to my research. This lack of space resulted in a much longer data-gathering stage.

5.4.3. Informed Consent as Ethical Anchor

I have tried to incorporate ethical reflections and concerns into every aspect of this narrative. Nevertheless, there is a specific stage in my research process that both anchors and tests my ethical concerns: developing and negotiating the informed consent form.

As previously stated, the introductory meetings I carried out did not include data collection. The data-gathering stage of these prolonged encounters consisted of a traditional semi-structured interview: Each participant and I sat down to go through my questionnaire and record the questions and answers with the explicit purpose of gathering data. In order to arrive at this data-collecting stage, however, I first needed to reach an agreement with each participant regarding the content of the informed consent form we both had to sign.

The informed consent form is a bureaucratic procedure (in the sense that I cannot formally conduct the empirical component of my research without it). I chose, however, to treat this procedure as an opportunity for both the participants and myself to review and negotiate our ethical standards. In other words, the informed consent form served as a tool to test if our mutual

concerns had been addressed.

In order to carry out this discussion of the informed consent form—and its ethical implications and ramifications—I used part of the introductory meetings to address potential ethical concerns, my role as a researcher, and the options each participant had in the research process. I also decided to send the informed consent form to my participants several days in advance, with instructions to review it and raise any issues they encountered. I repeated this request before the data-gathering step. I wanted to give each interviewee multiple opportunities to read through, seek clarification about, and disagree with the contents of the informed consent form.

Overall, due to their status of nonbinary third-country nationals with temporary residence permits, the main concern regarding the ethics of participating in my research project was privacy. Consequently, most of the questions and modifications I had to address involved privacy-related matters, such as the storage of data.

This primary concern also pushed me to be very clear and transparent regarding what sort of privacy I could offer. Because of the incredibly small size of my sample, I explained to my participants that I could not guarantee full anonymization, thus offering pseudonymization instead. In other words, I explained that, regardless of any measure of privacy I could take, I could not rule out the possibility—however improbable—of someone managing to identify a participant's narrative. All five participants understood the risk and agreed to proceed under the offered terms. In this thesis, I have not included any participant's name, age, country of citizenship, region of origin, university, or field of study. I have mentioned, however, the residence permit category they are residing under, as well as the length of their stay in Austria.

While I chose to use informed consent discussions and forms to anchor my ethical goals, this choice did not make my goals easy at all times. For example, informed consent forms tend to include very technical language. While almost all of my participants are college educated and have had experience with academic research, they were, for example, confused about the specific meaning and practical implications of pseudonymization in the social sciences. It was a bit of a struggle to negotiate between the technical vocabulary that my field expects in a research project, and guaranteeing my participants' actual ability to understand said technical requirements.

Along similar lines, while I chose to use the informed consent process and form as my ethical anchor in my prolonged encounter, the signing of the form did put a full stop to our ethical discussions. More precisely, regardless of the promise and availability to revise the terms of each

participant's informed consent, none of them did so after the forms had been signed. This finality could, of course, be interpreted in a positive light (i.e., the process had been clear and satisfactory enough, thus not generating any further issues). I consider it important, however, to acknowledge that it could also be a sign that my chosen method did not leave much space to raise issues beyond a certain step.

5.4.4. Setting the Mood: Space and Comfort as Key Elements in and for Data Collection

All five participants agreed to in-person data-collection sessions. Due to the sensitive nature of my research topic, a top priority in picking a location was, once again, privacy. Another priority, however, was comfort: a place that was agreeable enough for both parties to open up. I offered my student dorm as a location, to which all five participants agreed. I also gave the option of conducting the data-collection step in my private room or in one of the dorm's study rooms. Another key element in setting a welcoming mood was offering participants food and drinks, keeping their preferences and dietary restrictions in mind.

Each data-gathering session lasted between 60 and 95 minutes. Nevertheless, due to the prep work involved in setting up the three recorders, getting the food ready and signing—and further discussing—the informed consent form, as well as a general space for questions, small talk and comments, each session lasted closer to two hours.

Considering my chosen semi-structured format, I prioritized having my questionnaire at hand in order to improvise the question order and follow-up questions based on the information each participant was feeding me. I also needed to maintain a healthy level of eye contact and active engagement with each interviewee. As a consequence, I chose not to take notes during data collection.

5.4.5. Debriefing

As the final step in the prolonged encounter, I asked each participant to feedback the data-collection experience. This debriefing served the purpose of: a) identifying if any participant wanted to withdraw their consent; b) addressing participants' lingering doubts and concerns; c) helping me decide which elements of the mood-setting to keep or discard; d) giving each participant the chance to reflect—in line with my ethical commitment to opening up numerous avenues for a participant to choose to withdraw or continue, and under what circumstances.

These sessions were carried out at each participants' convenience: at my dorm, or on the way to public transport stops, longer if the participant was available and willing, shorter if they had other commitments. Once again, I did not write down notes or memos in this debriefing stage, due to my wish to be fully immersed in my interactions with participants.

I consider that the interview as a prolonged encounter ended with the debriefing stage. The main reason why is the significant stop in interactions after this stage. Starting with recruiting and ending with debriefing, I maintained a steady stream of contact with my participants. This stream basically ended when I embarked upon data analysis and chapter-writing. Once I contact participants again, it will be to inform them of the results of their participation and my research. In other words, the rhythms and purposes of our interactions will have shifted.

5.5. Data Analysis

In this section, I will describe the two main undertakings in my data analysis: transcribing and coding. More specifically, I will attempt to show how these steps are interconnected, with a special emphasis placed on transcribing's analytical role.

5.5.1. Transcription(s)

I consider that my data analysis began with the transcription of the data-gathering sessions. First, transcribing is a process that involves multiple analytical choices. I decided to exclude repetitions, pauses and lapses, and non-verbal fillers and cues from my transcriptions. Likewise, I left most so-called language mistakes untouched—as long as they did not interfere with my understanding of the narrative.

The aforementioned choices were informed by my belief that the act of transcribing the data is also a moment to absorb, process and interpret my data. For example, my choice to leave out repetitions was made after I had first tried to translate every nonverbal and repetitive element. This approach was not only massively time-consuming, but also unhelpful. I would focus on capturing every hum and grunt and completely sideline what the interviewee was actually saying, thus losing out on valuable data-absorption and -interpretation time.

Second, I made the choice to exclude the aforementioned elements because they did not aid me in answering my research questions. A semi-structured interviewing format for research data collection purposes is as artificial a setting as one can conjure. Most of the questions had already been asked and answered in the introductory meetings. Due to the explicit goal of data collection, each participant felt comfortable interrupting me, seeking clarification, rephrasing

their answers, and checking if they had responded satisfactorily. In other words, the main avenue to understand one another was verbal communication.

Nevertheless, I did include non-verbal elements whenever they aided in understanding a specific interaction. For example, in more than one instance, shared laughter conveyed that both interviewee and interviewer shared the experience being discussed. These useful instances of non-verbal communication however, constituted a very small minority.

5.5.2. Coding

To carry out the coding component of my data analysis, I chose a thematic coding approach that combined both deductive and inductive strategies. Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) definition, thematic analysis is "a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes" (p. 4). A theme can be further defined as "a shared, multi-faceted meaning, patterned across at least some of a qualitative dataset; encapsulates several related analytic insights, unified by a central organising concept or idea" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 296). Themes are derived out of a combination of codes (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 296).

Thematic Analysis is a method and not a methodology, in the sense that it is theoretically flexible—i.e., the researcher can choose which theoretical assumptions to work with (Terry et al., 2017). It is also a method that allows for both deductive and inductive coding (Terry et al., 2017). In my case, my coding strategy was deductive, because I worked with initial codes derived from my research questions and conceptual frameworks. While these initial codes did not predetermine themes, they did suggest a direction in which my themes could end up going. My coding strategy was also inductive, in the sense that new codes emerged out of my encounters with the data. These emerging codes became my themes' building blocks.

Some of the above-mentioned characteristics—*patternmaking*, theoretical choice, openness to induction—already hint at another facet of the Thematic Analysis approach I have chosen: Big Q. Big Q is an approach to qualitative research that emphasizes the researcher's subjective role in constructing empirical interpretations and results (Terry et al., 2017). In other words, I did not assume that my empirical results are objectively independent, "out there" and waiting to be unveiled by an unbiased researcher.

I chose to manually code my data. Despite this technique being more time-consuming than relying on a coding software, I have found that it allows for a much more immersive analysis. In terms of a particular set of steps, I relied on Braun and Clarke's (2021) *nonlinear* guide, which I

have provided below:

- “*Familiarizing yourself with the dataset*” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 36): reading and rereading one’s data, accompanied by note-taking based on analytical insights;
- “*Coding*” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 36): identifying interesting segments in the data, and assigning single-meaning codes to these segments;
- “*Generating initial themes*” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 36): identifying patterns in meaning across the dataset by clustering codes and developing potential themes that might address one’s RQs;
- “*Developing and reviewing themes*” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 36): readdressing the dataset with the potential themes in mind, with the purpose of reviewing the latter’s suitability to study the former and eventually developing one’s working themes;
- “*Refining, defining and naming themes*” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 36): fine-tuning and demarcating the meaning and concept(s) behind each theme;
- “*Writing up*” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 36): developing a narrative that conveys one’s analytical findings.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to guide my reader through my methodological process and procedures. First, I introduced my research question and subquestions, and explained the thought process behind them. I then proceeded to outline my methodological strategy to answer my chosen questions. I detailed my decision to work with semi-structured interviews, on the basis of their flexibility and narrative structure.

Subsequently, I expanded the semi-structured interviewing format to include steps that are generally considered accessory to the research process, such as recruiting and post-data-collection debriefing. I referred to this expanded approach as *interviewing as a prolonged encounter*. Within this prolonged encounter, I emphasized ethical concerns arising out of recruiting, holding initial meetings with potential participants, negotiating informed consent, creating a comfortable environment and dynamic for data collection, and receiving feedback.

Finally, I described my approach to data analysis, which consisted of transcribing and qualitative coding. I presented transcribing as a crucial step in my data analysis, because it allowed me to both absorb and interpret the data. With regards to coding, I followed a Thematic Analysis approach, with both deductive and inductive elements, as well as a non-linear sequence of steps.

6. Empirical Findings

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I set out to present my methodological findings, as well as to answer my main research question and subquestions. In order to establish a connection between this chapter and my Methods chapter, I start by presenting my methodological findings, which mostly pertain to gatekeeping dilemmas that affect both (potential) interviewer and interviewee.

Moving onto my research question and subquestions, I introduce a small prelude that seeks to illustrate the analytical tools of fixedness and fluidity I work with in this chapter. I then proceed to answer my second subquestion, due to the brevity of my answers as well as said answers' connection to the prelude.

I subsequently answer my main research question in Section 6.5, anchoring my main findings around the idea of an (un)information infrastructure. In Section 6.6, I provide the first half of the answers for my first subquestion: conditions of navigation. In Section 6.7, I transition from conditions to hierarchies, long-term navigation, and the answers to the second half of my first subquestion: *expectations*. Finally, in Section 6.8, I explore the idea of time as a guiding thread in this chapter, which eventually allows me to tackle *ideal expectations* in Section 6.9.

In order to protect the privacy and identity of my participants, the examples I provide are purposefully vague, with as little background information as possible. Furthermore, even though I have provided more than one example per interview, I do not connect shared-origin examples to a specific profile or alias.

On a different note, I will kindly appeal to the reader's patience with regards to this chapter's structure. As previously mentioned, I answer my research question and subquestions out of order. Furthermore, I have chosen to close said chapter with my participants' hopes for, and dreams and notions of, a better, fairer world. Consequently, I have not written a closing summary for this chapter. This structural decision is based on my wish to preserve Section 6.9's emotional and intellectual weight, and to give the findings contained therein their due. Nevertheless, I will provide the reader with a summary of my main findings in this thesis's Conclusion chapter.

6.2. Methodological Findings: Double Gatekeeping

In the Methods chapter, I stated that I was gatekept by members of local queer communities in my search for potential participants. Likewise, I did not seek out migrant

communities because I assumed—based on my own experiences—that they would not be particularly queer-friendly. Eventually, mostly by circumventing local queer spaces and relying on left-leaning networks that include cisheterosexual individuals, I managed to find five participants.

Once I sat down to chat with each participant in our intro meetings, three important aspects became abundantly clear: 1) all of my participants had either been—explicitly or implicitly—excluded or gatekept from queer and/or migrant communities; 2) these experiences with exclusion and gatekeeping were important factors for us to bond over; 3) none of the participants would have seriously considered meeting with me and participating in my research project had I not been a nonbinary third-country national myself.

Because I belong to the populational subset I chose to conduct research on and with, I was carrying out an inside job. In that sense, the conditions that determined my recruitment outcomes—being gatekept by White Europeans, not fully trusting cishet migrant communities, relying on the kindness of individual connections and acquaintances—were both abysmal and ideal. All of that lonely struggle was now a shared struggle. I wanted to find and listen to nonbinary third-country nationals, and they wanted to find a nonbinary third-country national who would understand and pay attention to them. Due to the incredibly small pool of individuals we belong to, none of us had encountered a fellow nonbinary third-country national before.

Based on these shared experiences with gatekeeping, I consider that my research trajectory exemplifies a case of *double gatekeeping*: when researcher and participant are *both* gatekept from accessing spaces where they could meet one another. I believe double gatekeeping to be a relevant methodological finding due to the dual effect it has. With regards to one side of this dual effect, double gatekeeping is a colossal barrier to carrying out a research project, both for a researcher and willing potential participants. Ultimately, double gatekeeping can very much stop a research project from taking place, but not for a lack of willingness on the two sides of the research equation that are required to come together willingly.

Based on my research experience, I believe that double gatekeeping is (partially) the result of nonbinary third-country nationals lacking a field of their own in Austria. We engage with predominantly White European queer communities, or socialize in overwhelmingly cishet environments, even if some of those environments are more migrant-inclusive. As a consequence of inhabiting these fields in which we are not the target audience, any contact from outsiders or newcomers is filtered through gatekeepers who are not—and do not prioritize—nonbinary third-country nationals.

Regarding the other side of the aforementioned dual effect, however, gatekeeping positively impacted the level of involvement, and thus the quality of the outcomes, both my participants and myself brought to the table. This higher quality was felt all the way from interviewees' predisposition to participate, through the questions they were willing to answer, to the amount of time they invested into different stages of the prolonged encounter. In other words, double gatekeeping became a necessary component for each side of this interviewing equation to open up and give their best to the research project.

Therefore, I view double gatekeeping as a condition that enhanced the risk but also the reward of carrying out this research project. Managing double gatekeeping did not exclusively consist of minimizing its negative consequences, but also of maximizing its positive effects.

6.3. A (Fixed & Fluid) Prelude

In my conversations with participants, I quickly noticed that they were fairly aware of current gender categories in their countries of citizenship, and quite unaware of Austrian gender classification options. The classification infrastructure they absolutely dominated, however, is the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure. Uncoincidentally, this latter infrastructure is the one all participants feel they lack the most information on and need the most help with.

Why is the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure so much more salient than gender classification infrastructures? In my interpretation of my participants' narratives, gender classification does not require a large amount of attention or wrangling: the available categories are preassigned, limited and not up for debate. In other words, one's belonging to a specific category is *fixed*. Migration classification infrastructures, on the other hand, are much more unstable, unreliable and unpredictable: *fluid*. Belonging to any category, much less the desired one, is not a given. Ergo, navigating migration classification infrastructures requires much more active effort. In the next section, I will explore why the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure requires all of this extra effort and attention.

Before proceeding to the next section, however, I wish for this prelude to introduce nuance and complexity to my argument regarding the fixedness and fluidity of certain classification infrastructures. While I stand by my argument that migration classification is significantly more fluid and uncertain than gender classification in Austria, there is a specific context in which the above-described dynamic of gender fixedness and migratory fluidity is inverted: medical transitioning.

Gender categorization is fixed when it is at the service of migration categorization (e.g.,

permit renewal applications). When the opposite is true, as is the case in medical transition contexts, gender becomes the unstable category and migration acts as the fixed one. Two of my research participants have sought to medically transition in Austria. Their status as third-country nationals, however, determined that their ability to medically transition is dependent on the laws of their country of citizenship. As a consequence, one participant could access the medical care they needed via the Austrian public healthcare system, whereas the other was barred from doing so and has had to rely on the private sector.

Nevertheless, the participant who managed to continue their medical transition via the public sector repeatedly encountered ignorance with regards to nonbinary identities. One physician, for example, wrote on a medical report that the patient (i.e., my participant) claimed to be transgender but did not wish to undergo surgery. Even once the inflexible hurdle of migratory restrictions is lifted, gender appears as a category that is difficult to pin down in terms of its definition and requirements, a challenge that grows with the addition of nonbinary identities in the binary categorical context of medical transitioning in Austria.

With this example, I seek to show my reader that categorical fixedness and fluidity follow certain patterns but still show plenty of space for inversions and exceptions. While said patterns can be quite powerful, the unpredictability that arises out of the interactions of migrant and gender categorization is a repeated theme in this chapter, and should therefore not be underestimated.

6.4. A Brief Note on Countries of Citizenship and Their Gender Categories

The answer to my second subquestion, *How do gender classification infrastructures in countries of origin impact nonbinary third-country nationals' navigation of gender and migrant classification infrastructures in their host country?*, is relatively brief and straightforward. The impact is low, subtle and stable.

In this chapter's prelude, I argued that, in the context of navigating the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, immigration classification takes precedence over gender classification because the former is unstable while the latter is stable. This gender-categorical stability is mostly due to each participant's country of citizenship: gender categorization, as assigned by one's country of citizenship, tends not to be questioned or subjected to additional checks by Austrian immigration authorities.

This stability of gender categorization in and through my participants' country of citizenship is one of the reasons why my research participants did not view gender classification infrastructures in their country of citizenship as particularly relevant or impactful in their choice—and ability—to reside in Austria. The other reason is that their status as citizens of their countries of origin is also stable and unchallenged—for better or for worse. Their status as law-abiding third-country nationals residing in Austria is, of course, dependent on their country of citizenship: to be classified as a third-country national in the first place, to hold a valid travel document, to request documents whenever necessary. As much as their citizenship determines a less privileged immigration experience (vis-à-vis, say, European Union citizens), it is also a very stable category that does not give my participants any additional grief.

This stability of gender and citizenship in one's country of origin allows participants to push their country of citizenship, and its gender classification options, to the back of their minds. Apart from maintaining relationships with loved ones and requesting documentation, my interviewees are not particularly involved in matters pertaining to their countries of citizenship. Their whole lives are in Austria, and Austrian classification infrastructures, especially immigration infrastructures, feature much more prominently in their daily and long-term experiences.

The benefits of stability and emotional and physical distance remain dominant regardless of a country's actual options for gender classification. Two participants come from countries where partial nonbinary gender categorization is available, whereas three are citizens of countries in which only binary categories are provided. Nevertheless, all five participants declared that, regardless of potential or actual availability in their country of citizenship, they would stick to binary gender categories on all official documentation for the foreseeable future, even if they would eventually like to have the option to choose.

6.5. An Information Infrastructure?

In this section, I attempt to answer my main research question, namely:

How do nonbinary third-country nationals navigate the intersection of gender and migrant categorization within state classification infrastructures in Austria?

6.5.1. Information Is Power (and the Lack Thereof Is Vulnerability)

As the title of this section suggests, my main finding is that what all participants want in their dealings with migration classification infrastructures is reliable, easily accessible

information. Regardless of how much help my research participants get with regards to other aspects of migration and gender classification infrastructures, they all feel that they cannot get help for the thing that matters most—the right information. Ergo, how do nonbinary third country nationals navigate state classification infrastructures in Austria? The answer consists of information seeking and management.

My interviewees are always struggling to find the right information, because the right information is itself unstable and capricious in migration and gender classification infrastructures. Therefore, my participants are always looking for new ways to handle information in and for migration classification infrastructures, and, to a lesser extent, gender classification infrastructures. The interaction between gender and migration in a specific classification infrastructure is particularly unknown and difficult, or even impossible, to find information for.

Why do I choose to use the term *information* and not *knowledge*? Knowledge can be acquired and repurposed, whereas any changes in information render previous acquisitions useless. In other words, I wish to convey that information seeking and management can manifest as Sisyphean feats for my participants.

The infrastructure my research focuses on is the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, i.e., the infrastructure in charge of granting third-country nationals the right to reside in Austria. The focus placed on this specific infrastructure is due to the dominant, decisive role it played in participants' narratives.

The Austrian state's immigration infrastructure is, of course, a migration infrastructure. Following Larkin's (2013) lead, however, I acknowledge that infrastructures are (at least partially) the product of my perspective and framing. Consequently, I consider the aforementioned focal infrastructure of my research to be an *information infrastructure*, as well. If infrastructures condition and give shape to the flow of people, goods and ideas (Larkin, 2013), this specific infrastructure is characterized by its object (information) being moved as little as possible on both ends. More specifically, each side—the Austrian state versus third-country nationals—seeks to: a) give the other side as little information as possible; b) extract as much information as possible from the other side. In other words, my chosen infrastructure is marked by high information seeking and low information deliverance.

I want to clarify that, while the above-mentioned feature of my focal infrastructure applies to both sides, it does not by any means represent symmetrical power. The Austrian state—in the form of its subdivision responsible for handling immigration applications—sets the tone of this

information infrastructure. As previously mentioned, each side seeks to acquire and avoid delivering information *as much as possible*. The side that manages to more successfully achieve this goal is, of course, the side that sets the tone. While the participants I interviewed managed to hide certain information from the immigration system, they ultimately had to submit to immigration officers' demands for information. Information officers, on the other hand, can get away with not delivering requested information, with no apparent negative consequences.

This disparity in the consequences deriving out of information seeking and deliverance is crucial to understanding why participants do not seek out alternative gender categories in Austria. While the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure is characterized by high information seeking, the immigrant does not exhibit this characteristic with regards to non-crucial information. My participants' assigned gender status quo goes unquestioned in the Austrian state immigration infrastructure. Engaging with additional gender categories will very likely disturb this relatively comfortable status quo. Considering how unclear these new sex/gender categories are, and how uneven their implementation has been, seeking information on them is not a desirable pursuit. Thus, in nonbinary TCNs' context, information seeking regarding additional gender categories can easily become an avenue for the tide to turn and receive additional *questions* instead. I will explore the ramifications of *questions* in a subsequent subsection of this section.

The danger of information-seeking turning into additional information *demands* points to further inequalities in the information-seeking and -avoidance dynamics within my chosen infrastructure. Immigration applicants have to be careful in the information they seek, as dealing with the Austrian state's immigration infrastructures does not leave nonbinary TCNs with enough space to afford further complications. Is there, however, an equivalent scenario in which an immigration official asks too many questions and thus becomes the object of questioning themselves? Based on my participants' experiences, the answer seems to be negative, thus hinting at an unequal dynamic.

6.5.2. Not All Information Is Created Equal

Continuing on the topic of power asymmetries in my chosen information infrastructure, the power to demand or withhold information is directly affected by the character of said information. A nonbinary gender identity is relatively easy to conceal, due to the aforementioned fixedness of sex/gender categorical belonging in the Austrian state's immigration classification infrastructure. In other words, official (and binary) sex/gender categorization, as provided in official documentation by the immigrant's country of citizenship, is not questioned by Austrian

immigration officers. All participants perceived being nonbinary as a disadvantage in the immigration process, and therefore chose to stick to the binary categories they are legally assigned to. Just as in the case of medical transitioning, however, one should wonder if gender diversity is as easy to conceal if a participant modifies their gender presentation.

Three participants explicitly expressed concerns over how their gender presentation would, or even should, affect their experiences with immigration procedures and officers. One participant, who was not medically transitioned, told me that they choose a fashion and beauty aesthetic that is purposefully gender nonconforming. For example, they choose to style a specific facial feature in an intentionally cartoonish manner. Nevertheless, these attempts at physically conveying their nonbinary identity often fly over cisgender individuals' heads. As the aforementioned participant stated, the involved facial feature still represents an alignment with their assigned gender in most people's eyes. This tendency to be perceived as the gender they were assigned at birth has extended to the immigration context: During one of their residence renewal applications, this participant purposefully left the sex/gender slot blank. The immigration officer who received the form, however, took one look at my interviewee and ticked off their assigned gender, assuming that the absence of a selected sex/gender category had been an oversight.

Another participant, who has medically transitioned, fears that their ambiguous gender presentation may lead to more—and more unfriendly—immigration surveillance, even if such a scenario has yet to occur. Nevertheless, they also noted that their physical features that tend to be associated with the “opposite” sex are frequently interpreted by cisgender people as the result of a health condition, and not as the product of gender transitioning. Likewise, anticipating potential issues with immigration authorities over their gender presentation, my participant also noted that the features that can be perceived as gender nonconforming are relatively easy to hide with different forms of clothing.

What I conclude based on these (and other) examples is that my participants believe and notice that immigration authorities default to the binary in their interpretation of gender presentation. The different ways through which multiple interviewees engage in gender nonconformity are not interpreted as such in immigration procedures. Even when a nonbinary immigrant wants to explicitly acknowledge their nonbinary identity in immigration procedures, as was the case for one of the participants I mentioned, immigration officers default to their infrastructure's binary categories.

While nonbinary gender identities remain concealed even in the face of attempts to distort

the binary, other forms of information are not as concealable. All five participants mentioned the Austrian state's financial requirements for first-time and subsequent residence applications as incredibly stressful and troublesome. In fact, most participants were unable to meet the Austrian state's financial requirements at different points in their migratory trajectory. Nevertheless, each interviewee's financial standing is not a piece of information they could easily choose to conceal: Austrian immigration authorities consistently demanded detailed financial information, thus driving multiple participants to conjure an improved financial status out of thin air, be it by relying on local relationships, incurring debt abroad, or other strategies. Thus, when and where financial information is concerned, my participants cannot rely on the relative ease of concealment, and must therefore find different—and more difficult—ways of providing the right information to immigration authorities.

6.5.3. The Ghost of Questions Past, Present & Future

As explored in the previous section, all five participants expressed the desire and need to hide their nonbinary identity from the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure—be it officers, forms, or other manners of registration. When questioned as to the *specific content* of their fear of disclosing their nonbinary identity, two elements stood out. First, multiple participants explicitly described immigration authorities, and the system as a whole, as very conservative. Gender nonconformity is therefore perceived by my participants as going against the conservatism present in immigration procedures, and thus (potentially) leading to negative outcomes.

This first element indirectly touches upon the second, and most salient, reason to hide one's nonbinary identity. In the previous subsection, I described how the Austrian state immigration infrastructure, be it in the standards it implements or the officers that embody it, tends to default to binary gender, even in the presence of gender nonconformity. Likewise, I have also mentioned how each participant's belonging to their legal gender category is not questioned by Austrian immigration authorities (unlike, say, their financial or academic standing). Therefore, third-country nationals do not *need* to provide any sort of additional or detailed sex/gender information in Austrian immigration procedures (unlike, once again, financial or academic information). As a consequence, informing any Austrian immigration officer or system that one is nonbinary involves providing information that will lead to plenty of additional *questions*.

Every participant mentioned a deep fear of questions. Questions represent additional and unpredictable demands for new information. These new demands are often difficult and expensive to fulfill, thus leading to increased uncertainty and stress for my interviewed

participants. Questions are known amongst my interviewees as arbitrary in their character and fairness: Most of the time, additional questions are a way for immigration authorities to turn every stone over, even when the applicant has already provided ample evidence of conforming to the matter at hand. Questions are not just a waste of precious time, but can also undo positive outcomes in immigration procedures. It is therefore crucial to avoid *questions* in one's dealings with the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure.

Amongst my research's participants, the easiest way to avoid questions is to provide as little information as possible. In other words, one should provide the required information *only*, with no add-ons or caveats. One of the participants narrated how, when they were moving from one European country to another, they were detained at the airport and missed their flight, all because they mentioned that they were moving to, and not just visiting, the second European country.

In this context, it is understandable why the disclosure of a nonbinary gender identity is perceived by participants as a prime conductor for *questions*. Considering how the Austrian state immigration infrastructure does not seem to be particularly knowledgeable regarding gender nonconformity, what would the disclosure of a nonbinary gender identity lead to? Would officers conclude that the applicant lied on their application? Would they discriminate against the applicant and find different ways to sabotage their application? *Who knows?*

And that is the issue in a nutshell: *Who the hell knows what the outcome of an immigration procedure in Austria will be?* My research participants must navigate extremely high degrees of uncertainty and *uninformation*. As I have argued before, this constant-yet-ever-changing state of being uninformed is the cornerstone to understanding the intersection of gender and migration in the experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria. Withholding information about their nonbinary identity is a way for my interviewees to protect themselves in an infrastructure in which giving information away constitutes a loss of power and control. Nonbinary gender is an unpredictable and unexplored variable in an infrastructure already stacked against applicants; why add it to the mix?

The combination of question aversion, great uncertainty, and lack of information also helps to explain my participants' general ignorance regarding Austria's additional gender categories, in the state's migration infrastructure or otherwise. Most participants had not encountered these new categories in any official documentation at the time of interviewing. Although all participants were somewhat aware of the existence of one or more additional

sex/gender categories, none of them could tell me who and what these categories were for. Once again, the Ghost of Questions Past, Present & Future rears its unsightly head. Choosing, or even asking after, gender categories beyond the binary is just an invitation to receive—and try to answer—additional questions from immigration authorities. When I asked about these additional sex/gender categories, I received slight variations of the same answer: *Why make my life harder than it already is? I want to keep things as simple as possible.*

6.6. The Concrete Conditions that Impact Navigation

In this section, I seek to answer the first half of my first subquestion, namely:

What are the *conditions* and expectations that impact the ability and willingness of nonbinary third-country nationals to handle this navigation?

6.6.1. Money Makes Immigration Procedures Go Round

In terms of answering my first subquestion, one condition is clearly dominant: money. Regardless of socioeconomic status—of which there is a high level of diversity in my sample—my participants repeatedly named money as their main immigration struggle, as well as the factor around which all other actions arrange themselves.

In order to understand the importance of money in my participants' migratory trajectory, we need to take several factors into account. First, Austria requires proof of a (relatively) high income for most of its residence permits. For example, as of 2024, third-country nationals 24 and older seeking a student permit need to prove that they have at least €1,217.96 a month, *12 months in advance and without debt in Austria* (OeAD, 2024). As another example, family reunification residence permits are dependent on proof of a monthly income equal to or exceeding €1,921.46 for a couple, plus an extra €187.93 per child (Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2024). Such high amounts are extremely difficult for my participants to prove due to multiple reasons. First, the total amount itself far exceeds participants' monthly expenses and—sometimes—income. Second, showing proof of having the total amount *in advance* is particularly troublesome, because most participants rely on monthly installments to make ends meet, even when they do have access to the required amount in the course of a given year.

As a consequence, most of my participants have resorted to multiple strategies to fulfill their permits' financial requirements. One participant mentioned asking their relatives to incur debt in their country of citizenship. Another participant asked their partner to take out a loan in Austria. Yet another interviewee has relied on close friends to lend them the necessary amount in

informal arrangements.

One can notice a pattern in the examples provided above: the financial requirements imposed on third-country nationals are fulfilled via interpersonal relationships. This financial reliance can create friction in participants' relationships, such as generating a bitter, unequal sense of gratitude. For other participants, financial reliance on relatives leads to continued contact with individuals who are not queer-accepting; the need for secrecy is therefore extremely high and nonnegotiable. Most importantly, however, is the absence of such individualized, interpersonal networks: What happens when a nonbinary third-country national does not have someone to rely on financially? Before they found one such person, one participant came extremely close to having to leave Austria permanently. The personal compensates for what the public does not offer.

In the public's absence, some participants have also resorted to the private sector. One participant who, due to their citizenship, was unable to medically transition via the Austrian public healthcare system is relying on private appointments, subscription services, and loans to undergo procedures abroad. These private solutions to a public problem were not within this participant's income until recently, however, and only after several years of waiting. A different interviewee, on the other hand, does not have the financial resources to medically transition through the private sector, and is therefore reliant on Austrian public healthcare, which they described as deeply ignorant of trans & nonbinary healthcare. Along similar lines, in order to fulfill the ECTS requirements that come with a student permit, another participant enrolled in a second paid, private bachelor's program, a significant additional cost they had not anticipated.

Based on the above-mentioned examples, money acts both as a bar that nonbinary third-country nationals constantly struggle to reach, but also as the alternative to many of the Austrian state's shortcomings. More specifically, money is both an active impediment in my participants' will to stay in Austria, but also the means through which they carry out objectives that are unreachable through the public sector. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state that it is the specific forms that the Austrian state's immigration system expects money to appear as, and for what purposes, that determine if money is an impediment or an advantage.

6.6.2. Navigating the Language of Infrastructures

As argued throughout this chapter, navigation contains multitudes. Nevertheless, one of the aspects that featured prominently across multiple interviews is the nuances of language in navigating categorization in the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure.

Participants found it quite evident that, in their dealings with Austrian immigration, there

were multiple forms of German to deal with, and that getting ahold of these forms was crucial to their success in navigating immigration procedures. Fluency or proficiency in the required forms of German is oftentimes inaccessible to those learning the language in formal settings, such as language courses. One participant, who was already fluent in German by the time they moved to Austria, mentioned that one of their biggest hurdles in their first residence application was their lack of knowledge of *legal* German, a variant that is not taught in the academically oriented German courses they had had access to. They emphasized the significant difference between legal and academic German, differences that resulted in the participant having to initially rely on the kindness of near-strangers—mostly native Austrians at their place of residence. Despite the help these Austrian acquaintances provided, they were unfamiliar with the intricacies of legal German in a *migratory* context, thus leaving plenty of holes for my participant to fill on their own. Requests for clarification lodged at Austrian immigration authorities were almost always met with silence or unhelpful answers.

Differences in vocabulary registers are not the only invisible, but impactful, language barriers that my participants faced. A different interviewee noted that fluency, or even proficiency, in Standard German was not enough to get taken seriously during immigration appointments. They also speculated that their gender presentation at the time contributed to this lack of respect. As a solution, the participant started bringing their partner—a large man and native German speaker—to their appointments, immediately noticing an improvement in the treatment they received at the hands of immigration officers.

This participant, however, noticed a radical change when they switched migrant categories. This categorical move brought along many changes, amongst them friendly immigration officers who were perfectly comfortable in handling all affairs in English.

A third participant is residing in Austria under a residence category that requires them to show proof of fluency in the German language. The state, however, defines said fluency as fluency in Standard German, and decides which language providers and examiners are accredited to fulfill this language requirement. Said participant, however, lives in a part of Austria where the dominant dialect is not Standard German, and thus has limited opportunities to hone their Standard German skills. Likewise, they find their knowledge of Standard German virtually useless in their attempts to interact with Austrians. Thus, the state's Standard German requirements create an inescapable cycle: my participant uses Standard German in teaching contexts only, thus not practicing enough to become fluent; they do not learn the local dialect, either, and therefore

struggle to immerse themselves in their community. This state-mandated emphasis on Standard German has also led to this participant being excluded from local queer communities: Members of these communities communicate in their local dialect and struggle to accommodate Standard German (or any other language, for that matter).

What can I derive out of these examples? First and foremost, language is both a medium to navigate immigration infrastructures as well as an end in and of itself. In the first two examples, access to specific language forms was crucial for my participants to understand and manage to complete their residence applications. In the third case, however, language was the end goal: Showing proof of (Standard) German fluency is one of the fundamental requirements to stay in Austria. This double purpose of language recalls Larkin's (2013) definition, in which infrastructures are both things and the relations between things.

Second, language reveals subtle forms of classification in the Austrian immigration infrastructure that are not explicitly mentioned, especially because they hide under the broader umbrella of *German speaker*. Very few Austrian immigration categories do not require some form of German fluency or proficiency certification. As a consequence, most immigration procedures are handled by immigration officials who refuse to speak in any language aside from German; the system itself, from forms to online explanations of formal terminology to contact information, is almost exclusively in Standard German. As many of my participants assumed, fluency in (Standard) German would be enough to fulfill this German requirement in immigration procedures. Nevertheless, German fluency revealed itself to be a Pandora's box of convoluted and subtle meanings. In the eyes of the immigration officers handling their cases, or just in their attempts to navigate the system's standards, they were classified as lacking, even if they officially fulfilled the formal language requirements imposed on them.

Third, language and its categorical nuances fit the overarching pattern of lack of information. The crucial information of which language register, variant, dialect or vocabulary to use or master in immigration contexts is, once again, absent and withheld. Therefore, third-country nationals scramble to figure out and acquire the right terminology, accent and proficiency.

This third point recalls my earlier observation that my interviewees do not wish to engage with the new sex/gender categories in Austria due to the general context of (un)information they must constantly face. In their discussion of their choice not to engage with the aforementioned additional categories, many of them mentioned that they are unaware of the specific meaning of

each category, in the sense that legal terms in German are often defined by specific organs and in ways that are not intuitive to speakers of other German forms. The overall opacity of these new sex/gender categories thus acquires an additional layer: They are opaque in part because the specific language forms behind them are opaque.

6.7. The Hierarchies of Migrant Categories

In the previous section, I mentioned the case of a participant who switched from one migrant category to another, and immediately perceived the advantages that derived from this change. On a related note, another participant switched from a highly privileged, advantageous residence category to a less privileged one. Both participants mentioned that, while immigration struggles were present in each category they were assigned to, some categories translated into less stressful and uncertain immigration procedures. In other words, there is a hierarchy amongst migrant categories in Austria.

This hierarchy, however, is not as straightforward as it might appear to be. In the second participant's case, for example, the first category they were assigned to offered little-to-no restrictions on the length of stay in Austria, as well as the chance to skip financial and academic verification procedures. Nevertheless, the category did not grant the participant the right to work in Austria legally, a huge drawback due to their career requirements and goals. Consequently, the participant chose to transition to a residence category that offered them the chance to work half-time.

The outcome of this transition is the embodiment of *you win some, you lose some*. The second residence category allowed my interviewee to engage in professional training and advance in their career, the main motivation behind their move to Austria. Under their former permit, these life goals would have remained elusive. Nevertheless, the new permit brought layers upon layers of bureaucratic complications and surveillance, with huge ramifications in other aspects of their life. To put it plainly, they transitioned from a category that was left to its own devices to a permit that was submitted to high degrees of oversight. In the end of the day, though, this participant moved to Austria to carry out a distinct goal, and was therefore willing to renounce the comfort of their previous residence category.

The first participant I mentioned, on the other hand, perceived their category switch as a total gain: the permit's duration is longer, immigration officers are friendlier, work restrictions are lifted, and each year of residence counts towards permanent residence. More importantly, the new permit category brings this participant closer to their ultimate goal: to be able to reside in Austria

with as few restrictions as possible, first via permanent residence and eventually through citizenship.

The long-term goal of achieving a more permanent migratory status is echoed by almost all participants. In fact, I would argue that building long-term migration strategies is one of the main modes of infrastructural navigation the nonbinary third-country nationals I interviewed engage in. The pressing concerns of each and every immigration procedure, generally in the form of permit renewals, take up a significant part of each participant's year and short-term concerns, often leaving little time, energy and resources to execute other plans. Precisely due to the constraints imposed by frequent immigration procedures, however, almost all of my participants were strategizing how to transition into more permanent migrant categories. Considering that each category rigidly determines the rights of a third-country national in Austria, my interviewees were heavily invested in setting up the conditions to move to permanent resident or citizen status. In other words, the instability of their current categories is not sustainable, and the solution they see is to seek more stability through new categories. The ways through which this long-term change is to be achieved varies, but can include the legal acknowledgement of an interpersonal relationship with an Austrian/EU/EEA citizen, or the pursuit of a successful career in an in-demand field.

This search for long-term migratory stability intersects with multiple participants' nonbinary identity. Many of them told me that they were waiting for Austrian permanent residence or citizenship to be able to medically transition. Others mentioned that they were working towards settled status so that they could start careers in nonbinary activism. Some wished for Austrian citizenship in order to have a backup when they chose to move to a more nonbinary-friendly country. In summary, the doors that migratory classification opens and closes in Austria has an overflowing effect: The possibilities each migrant category offers impact the public and official gender categories my interviewees are willing to engage with.

These long-term perspectives that entwine migratory and nonbinary hopes and goals are one of the keys to understanding a conundrum that has baffled me throughout this project: How can I understand that my interviewees consider being nonbinary an important part of who they are, while also ensuring that this aspect of their identity remains as detached from their migratory procedures as possible?

The question I am positing is not a moral one; i.e., I am not questioning *why* my participants choose to engage in this dual dynamic. Rather, I am interested in understanding how

they manage to reconcile these two apparently contradictory aspects. It is in this reconciliation that dreams, goals and long-term plans come into play: My participants postpone the reconciliation of their gender and migratory categorizations, but still wish for that reconciliation to take place.

As we can see, the reconciliation I have described has a strong *temporal* logic. This temporal logic is also apparent in other sections of this chapter, e.g., with regards to meeting the financial requirements that are part of each residence permit renewal. In the subsequent section, however, I will turn the spotlight on time itself, and the ways through which it impacts many of the elements I have previously analyzed in this chapter.

6.8. Time as the Guiding Thread in This Information Infrastructure

Immigration procedures often feel as if they could literally freeze time. In the waiting period between submitting a residence application and receiving an approval, all activities and plans in an applicant's life come to a halt, or are rearranged around the application and its eventual outcome. After a couple of experiences with the uncertainty of this waiting period—and the excruciatingly unexpected additional steps that accompany it—, my participants stopped making any plans for the application period. Instead, hyperplanning for the application itself becomes a coping mechanism. Participants prepare for every possible scenario and left-field occurrence. As a consequence, the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure sets the rhythm for my participants' whole year.

Many of the strategies interviewees described consisted of arranging the timings and sequences of migration procedures. One participant asked a loved one to take out a loan just in time for their next residence renewal application. Another arranged for their language certification to line up with their next immigration appointment. A different interviewee is in the habit of asking their university's administrator to release or withhold their grades depending on the immigration-mandated ECTS quota for a given year. I stand by the statement that the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure sets the rhythm of nonbinary third-country nationals' whole year, especially during the application months. Nevertheless, my interviewees manage to establish their own advantageous choreographies, as short and small as they may be.

While I consider it important to acknowledge these micro-choreographies, it is equally crucial to note that all participants described how they do *not* cope with the uncertain waiting that

immigration infrastructures impose. Interviewees characterized waiting periods as extremely stressful, nerve-wracking, and impeding of all functioning. Their coping mechanisms, both logistical and emotional, only go so far. Above all, waiting is a very lonely experience, one that even the most sympathetic of companions cannot truly grasp or offer the appropriate support for.

Interviewees deeply resent having to arrange their lives around the timings of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure. One participant told me about the life they could be leading if they did not have to wait for their application's outcome, and how they were envious of friends who could have that out-of-reach lifestyle. More than one interviewee mentioned the pain of realizing how limited the empathy of some close friends reveals itself to be in these waiting periods. They also expressed a dislike for the sense of gratitude they feel towards those loved ones who do stick around to offer companionship and help. The uncertain waiting that is part of immigration procedures impacts relationships and lifestyles because it affects so many steps in a person's trajectory.

Immigration has resulted in seismic shifts in my interviewees' lives. Due to these massive changes, the risk of not being able to move or return to Austria can be life-shattering. This threat of being locked out means losing primary relationships, irreplaceable and nontransferable academic and professional achievements, and/or the increased safety afforded to queer people (compared to some participants' countries of citizenship). However, due to the lengthy application period—as well as the relative rigidity of the time of the year when it takes place—some participants see no choice but to take the risk of being locked out. One participant chose to uproot their life in their home country to move to Austria during a period of great personal and social upheaval, giving up their job, home and local relationships without any guarantee that their residence permit and entry visa would come through in time. Ultimately, their immigration woes worked themselves out, but the very high probability of an unfavorable outcome weighed heavily on this interviewee's mind.

Another participant chose to pursue an internship in their country of citizenship right after handing in their residence renewal application. This internship was extremely important to them, as it constituted the first step towards long-held and long-term personal and professional goals. Because of the renewal's tight timeline, however, they had to settle for a shorter internship compared to their colleagues. In this constrained time frame, they also took the risk of assuming that the application would run smoothly, which ended up not being the case. The participant managed to have an Austrian friend run after the additional bureaucracy and fix the pending

issues within a week. But, as they told me, it was a week filled with stress and intense rushing around, a whole week that neither they nor their friend were ever getting back. Additionally, if the interviewee and their friend had not managed to fulfill immigration authorities' additional demands, the interviewee would have been locked out of Austria, losing years of irreplaceable academic and professional progress, as well as intimate relationships.

The potentially life-shattering effect of immigration timings falls in line with the concept of infrastructures I am working with. Infrastructures condition the flow and speed of a given element, be it human or nonhuman, material or immaterial (Larkin, 2013). In nonbinary third-country nationals' dealings with the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, time and space coalesce and fold into one another, becoming one in the circulation of third-country nationals. The space an immigrant wishes to inhabit is bound to the timings of being granted access to said space. At the same time, however, the timings in a third-country national's life—relationships, career, health—are bound to the migratory space they are in.

6.9. Do Nonbinary Third-Country Nationals Dream of Gender & Mobility Utopias?

To be a nonbinary third-country national in Austria is to be—or to become—a pragmatic person. As presented throughout this chapter, each research participant described in abundant detail the myriad feats of pragmatism they engage in on a daily and long-term basis. This pragmatic approach to life is not a matter of choice: staying in Austria would not be possible otherwise.

Furthermore, in the previous sections, I tried to convey that interviewees' perceptions of timings and long-term coping strategies often rely on subjective notions of time: time is often *felt*, and not just observed or counted. This subjective element does not annul the deeply objective approach participants have to time: Planning, applying, modifying and amending follow very strict deadlines and cycles.

All individuals I interviewed were thoroughly cognizant of the actual, concrete conditions they must grapple with in their navigation of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure. Nevertheless, they were also keenly aware of how unfair and capricious the aforementioned infrastructure is. This combination of needing to default to pragmatism while also recognizing the inequity in the system made me wonder about the ideal scenario(s) participants envisioned.

All five participants conjured ideal worlds where borders—as products of the nation state

as we know it—would not exist. Perhaps unsurprisingly, interviewees’ frequent contact with state immigration infrastructures has led them to outright reject nation-state borders and borderings. In their ideal world, mobility would be everyone’s choice, independent from one’s place of birth. This borderless world would, of course, include very little red tape: no paperwork, travel documents, or application periods. Many participants framed this ideal of untethered mobility as a *right* that every person should be allowed to enjoy.

Likewise, interviewees described an ideal world in which gender would not be a matter to be decided by authorities or the majority in a society, but a personal choice and right that deserves acknowledgement and respect. In this ideal world, gender itself would not play a prominent role in the classification of people; as many participants pointed out, gender is a *necessary* piece of data in very few contexts only. Additionally, in these scenarios, gender would not consist of closed and state-imposed categories, but rather of a broad spectrum of identities that each person defines and decides upon.

My take-home message regarding the intersection of gender and migration in my research participants’ ideals is that the combined constraints imposed by this intersection in the real world not only do not hinder, but in fact enhance, the ideal world these interviewees conceive of. Just like nonbinary third-country nationals meticulously plan and prepare for each residence renewal application, and hide their nonbinary identity from immigration officials, they also dream big in terms of what a different world could look like. I struggle to think of the infrastructural navigation I have described in this chapter without including both elements: the pragmatism and the utopias.

7. Discussions

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss two overarching topics by combining some of my empirical findings, reviewed literature and chosen theories and concepts. More specifically, I will start by linking my analysis of an un(information) infrastructure to other uses of information in infrastructural studies in STS. Additionally, I will explore Landau's (2021) call for the alignment of chronotopes in migratory contexts through two chronotopes I have identified in my empirical findings.

This chapter posits questions and does not offer many answers in return. It seeks to make small inroads into pushing the boundaries of both my empirical findings and the authors that have influenced my research.

7.2. The Multiplicity of Information in Information Infrastructures

While the main finding of this thesis consists of identifying and analyzing an (un)information infrastructure, my reader has probably noticed that I am yet to present a definition of an information infrastructure. This omission is intentional, and derives from two sources. First, I chose a definition of infrastructures (Larkin, 2013) that does not depend on qualifying the entity that is in circulation; rather, the emphasis is placed on the objects and relations that enact and condition said circulation. Due to this feature of my chosen definition, I prioritized characterizing the circulation dynamic of (un)information, and not the (un)information being circulated itself.

Second, I identified that, amongst (some) STS scholars, analyses and definitions of information infrastructures tend to be very context-dependent and, therefore, malleable. As a concrete example, Ribes and Polk (2014) note that their object of study, research infrastructures, often falls under the umbrella of information infrastructures. The authors further exemplify information as *data* sharing and coordination—amongst other activities and components (Ribes & Polk, 2014). Finally, they argue that the HIV research infrastructure they choose to study is not *just* an information infrastructure, because it includes elements beyond the informational, such as pharmaceutical technologies, or that are only tangentially related to information, such as material specimens whose availability is dependent on information practices (Ribes & Polk, 2014).

In the example provided above, we see a characterization of information that is data-oriented, more specifically, research-data-oriented. This data-oriented approach can be also found in Meissner and Taylor's (2024) migration information infrastructures. The authors argue that

as a result of technological advances in the capacity to analyse more and more complex datasets, migration has increasingly become the subject of new forms of datafication and analysis. Those processes entail that various new forms of data, new analysis and policy practices and new sets of actors enter migration research. Taken together, these are what we here refer to as migration information infrastructures (MII). (Meissner & Taylor, 2024, p. 2228)

In the above-provided definition of (migration) information infrastructures, data is conflated with information. The data Meissner and Taylor (2024) are referring to, however, is generated and processed by national and supranational, official and extra official agents. In other words, the focus is placed on information-as-data *on and extracted from*, and not provided or controlled by, migrants.

While both definitions of information are, as previously mentioned, data-oriented, they also show how (some) STS scholars choose to define information on the basis of how each infrastructure *uses* information. In Ribes and Polk's (2014) example, information is data because data is one of the necessary components of their chosen HIV research infrastructure. In Meissner and Taylor's (2024) case, information is data because data is the currency in which old and new migration information agents trade.

Along similar lines, my approach to my chosen (un)information infrastructure also relies on how information is used and circulated. In my Empirical Findings chapter, the (un)information infrastructure I analyze emphasizes information as provided, extracted or withheld in the context of interactions between nonbinary third-country nationals and immigration officers. More importantly, perhaps, my chosen (un)information infrastructure involves the circulation of information that is directly related to a specific migrant's application.

It is perfectly plausible that the information that applicants provide to immigration authorities—or that officers demand—is either converted into or derives from the forms of data that Meissner and Taylor (2024) describe. Nevertheless, as Larkin (2013) reminds us, every

infrastructural definition involves choices to retain and to discard. In my infrastructural cut, the information-as-data is not present. Instead, I analyze the circulation of (un)information in a context where it has a concrete face attached to it, and interactions are highly individualized. This personal feature of my chosen infrastructure is, of course, derived from my decision to interview third-country nationals, and not immigration officers or policy makers.

My chosen infrastructural cut adds to the eclectic use and definition of information in STS studies of information infrastructures. More specifically, my research dives into moments of and perspectives on information circulation that complement, but do not exactly consist of, information-as-data, especially in migratory contexts. This thesis's infrastructural cut shows a different side of information, portraying it from the perspective of those who do not view information as data, but rather as a deeply personal and capriciously individual element in circulation. Nevertheless, despite this unpredictable and particular character, this project's participants still feel that they have a (partial, unequal, limited) hold over the information in circulation.

7.3. What Chronotopes Are We Talking About?

In my Theories & Concepts chapter, I introduced Landau's (2021) application of the chronotope to migration infrastructures, with a focus on how chronotopes can both damage and promote injustice and inequalities in migratory contexts. Based on my empirical findings, the question that remains is the following: Have I managed to identify one or more chronotopes in my participants' narratives?

First and foremost, I wish to clarify that, as stated *ad nauseam* in this thesis, I have chosen a particular infrastructural cut, with a focus on (un)information. It is not my intention to try to reframe this (un)information infrastructure as a migration-infrastructure-chronotope. I do, however, hope to pin down chronotopes in my data, interpret them as migration infrastructures, and connect them to my (un)information infrastructure.

Second, I should also acknowledge that Landau's (2021) research accesses and compares the chronotopes of multiple groups in close spatial proximity. This thesis only has access to the chronotope(s) of one group—nonbinary third-country nationals. Therefore, any parallel between my own work and Landau's (2021) must be taken with a grain of salt, especially with regards to the possibility of synchronizing contrasting chronotopes.

Having introduced these two disclaimers, I can proceed to answer the question I posited in

the beginning of this section. As stated in my Empirical Findings chapter, participants manage to tolerate the migratory and gender indignities of present-day Austria by labeling them necessary to achieve their concrete goals and plans in *future* Austria. One example of this present-future conciliation is the almost-universally present goal of acquiring Austrian citizenship; to that purpose, yearly residence permit renewals are a necessary evil. Consequently, I consider the conciliation of present and future Austria to be a chronotope; more specifically, it is a chronotope that acts as a migration infrastructure, in the sense that it facilitates and conditions interviewees' short- and long-term mobility to and stay in Austria.

There are two consequences that arise out of this specific chronotope, which I will deem the pragmatic chronotope. First, how is the pragmatic chronotope connected to participants' utopias? In this thesis's Empirical Findings chapter, I proposed that participants juggled not just pragmatic approaches to Austrian state migration classification infrastructures, but utopian perspectives, as well. The pragmatic coping mechanisms often consisted of not adding potential hurdles to already complicated, unpredictable bureaucratic procedures. (Variations of the phrase *It's too much trouble* were frequently uttered.) Utopian coping mechanisms, on the other hand, allowed interviewees to express and process the injustices, inequalities and uncertainties they faced in their dealings with the aforementioned infrastructures.

I believe that the utopian coping mechanisms I have described constitute another chronotope, which I will refer to as the utopian chronotope. Landau's (2021) interpretation of chronotopes as migration infrastructures takes morals and morality into account: Just like time and space, morals are crucial to understand how a chronotope works. The utopian chronotope has a strong moral component, because it allows participants to cast judgment on their experiences with the Austrian state's migration infrastructure *without* letting go of their very necessary bureaucratic pragmatism. In other words, the utopian chronotope allows nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria to both assess their dealings with state classification infrastructures as morally bankrupt *and* envision ideal, morally sound scenarios.

Furthermore, I have also previously described how lonely nonbinary third-country nationals in Austria are, especially with regards to, and in consequence of, migration infrastructural encounters. None of my interviewees would ever dream of directly challenging or seeking accountability from an immigration officer. Likewise, interviewees' loved ones are often unfamiliar with the specific struggles they face as both nonbinary people and third-country nationals in Austria. The utopian chronotope fills the emotional void generated by infrastructural

isolation.

However, due to these two elements—moral catharsis and response to loneliness—the utopian chronotope is confrontational. It gives voice and confronts injustice, it builds a better (imaginary) world by challenging past and present occurrences. This confrontational facet brings me to the second consequence that arises out of the pragmatic chronotope—and its supporting actor, the utopian chronotope. The second outcome consists of the following: What happens when a chronotope-as-migration-infrastructure fulfills its purpose as a coping mechanism by being confrontational?

Landau (2021) argues that chronotopes in confrontational and close proximity must be aligned if values of hospitality and inclusion are to be achieved between locals and migrants in migratory contexts. I cannot claim to have access to the chronotopes on the other side of my chosen infrastructure; nevertheless, participants made it abundantly clear that they do not believe that the so-called other side, mostly embodied by migration officers, is willing or able to treat them with kindness and consideration. Considering the characteristics I have narrated, would the utopian chronotope be able to accommodate a conciliatory worldview? More specifically, if the utopian chronotope undergoes enough changes to be accommodating of other groups' chronotopes (and their associated expectations), can it still fulfill its purpose of channeling moral assessments and supporting pragmatic responses to state hurdles?

The argument I am trying to make here is that the compromises contained in Landau's (2021) call for chronotope alignment might perhaps lead to a chronotope's inefficacy with regards to coping with and acknowledging inequalities and injustices. If the outcome I am describing takes place, what can make up for its absence? A different chronotope within the community? Or a chronotope within the other group in close spatial proximity that is also seeking mutual alignment?

Another factor to consider is large power imbalances, which are present in my research—but not in Landau's (2021) analysis of his chosen groups in close spatial proximity. If a group lets go of a confrontational chronotope in order to align itself with another, more powerful group, what is the guarantee that the latter will modify its own chronotope to the point of compensating for the former's loss of support and catharsis? If the stakes of embracing, modifying and even letting go of chronotopes are indeed moral, who will keep the power imbalances in check?

7.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I asked myself two questions. First, where do my findings fit within (some of) the STS literature that explores information and infrastructures? Second, what are the consequences of Landau's (2021) call for chronotope alignment when (and where) strong power imbalances are present?

As a partial answer to my first question, I argued that my analysis of an (un)information infrastructure follows the path of STS scholars who have used information as a conceptually flexible term that adapts to the purposes it is asked to serve, from research infrastructures to migration data. Nevertheless, my approach to my chosen (un)information infrastructure spotlighted two elements that are not as dominant in the aforementioned literature: contexts in which information has not been explicitly turned into data, and the actions and strategies of migrants in those contexts.

With regards to the second question, I identified two chronotopes—pragmatic and utopian—in my findings, and wondered whether the second chronotope is open to alignment with other groups' chronotopes in contexts of asymmetrical power between groups in close spatial proximity. In other words, if a chronotope ultimately relies on confrontation and opposition to support marginalized migrants, can it be aligned with chronotopes that rely on conciliation and compromise? I chose to leave the answer to this question open-ended and ambiguous.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I set out to analyze how nonbinary third-country nationals navigate state classification infrastructures in Austria. The motivation behind this goal consisted of exploring the *intersection* of sex/gender and migrant categories in the aforementioned infrastructures through the lived experiences of nonbinary third-country nationals. This intersection was particularly fascinating to me, because Austria is currently undergoing changes in its sex/gender categorization, as well as constantly modifying migrant categories and their meanings. Further goals consisted of identifying the main conditions and expectations behind participants' navigation; as well as the impact of gender classification infrastructures in participants' countries of origin on their navigation experiences in Austria.

Considering the above-stated goals, I relied on five semi-structured qualitative interviews with nonbinary third-country nationals residing in Austria to answer my questions. The main methodological and empirical findings of my research will be summarized in this chapter. Furthermore, I will also attempt to connect said findings to broader questions in some of the fields and subfields—migration infrastructures, information infrastructures, classification—that I worked with in this thesis.

8.2. Methodological Finding

In this thesis, I described the struggles I faced with gatekeeping amongst local—i.e., overwhelmingly White European— queer communities and organizations. While my issues with gatekeeping almost managed to derail my research project, they also became important experiences to bond over with participants, who had often faced similar exclusion.

I chose to name this gatekeeping dynamic *double gatekeeping*. Double gatekeeping consists of a situation or context in which both researcher and (potential) participant are kept apart and therefore unable to collaborate with one another. This dynamic is relevant because it elevates both the risks and the rewards of a research project. On the one hand, a project can fall apart if it is not able to subvert double gatekeeping. On the other hand, double gatekeeping can lead to a greater investment on both ends of the research equation. The shared struggle with exclusion can result in increased ease, comfort and trust in participant-research interactions, and thus lead to deeper and higher-quality data.

8.3. Main Empirical Findings

The main empirical finding of this thesis answers my main research question: *How do nonbinary third-country nationals navigate the intersection of gender and migrant categorization within state classification infrastructures in Austria?* The answer to this question consists of two moves: a) identifying the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure as the main infrastructure in which participants' navigation takes place; b) framing this chosen infrastructure as an information infrastructure.

First, I should clarify what I mean by the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure: In this research, it consists of the branch of the Austrian state that handles the residence applications of third-country nationals and thus classifies them into migrant categories. The reason why I picked this particular infrastructure is because it was the dominant infrastructure in participants' narratives. No other state (and/or) classification infrastructure could compete in terms of time, energy or grievances. In other words, the Austrian state's immigration was the anchor around which participants' infrastructural navigations revolved.

After identifying the main infrastructure my findings would center around, I decided to characterize this infrastructure as an information infrastructure, which is the central finding of this project. To put it simply, in their navigation of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, the core element that this infrastructure circulates is *information*. Both sides of the infrastructural equation my participants mentioned—residence applicants and immigration officers—are constantly trying to get information out of the other side while also attempting to deliver as little information as possible. In this sense, the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure is an *uninformation* infrastructure, in which information and the lack thereof are in constant interaction.

The acknowledgement that both sides of the equation are engaged in high information seeking and low information deliverance does not imply, however, that these sides have symmetrical power. Immigration officers are able to withhold and demand information much more easily than third-country nationals. The consequences of this power asymmetry directly impact migrants' navigation of my chosen infrastructure. First, participants were quick to identify which kinds of information were easier to conceal than others, as well as how: financial information, for example, was particularly thorny to avoid giving out in full. (Nonbinary) gender information, on the other hand, was both easy and necessary to conceal. Second, the fear of receiving requests for additional information led participants to avoid asking for any information

that they did not deem absolutely necessary. Information on the newly available sex/gender categories in Austria was one type of information that participants deemed too risky to ask after.

The findings that pertain to my main research question already hint at the answers to my subquestions. With regards to my second subquestion, *How do gender classification infrastructures in countries of origin impact nonbinary third-country nationals' navigation of gender and migrant classification infrastructures in their host country?*, the answer is quite brief. The impact was low and easy to ignore, especially vis-à-vis the stressful demands that the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure imposed. In many ways, the low impact of gender classification infrastructures in participants' countries of citizenship is due to how stable their classifications were; they went unquestioned and therefore did not become a source of additional worry.

Moving on to my first subquestion—*What are the conditions and expectations that impact the ability and willingness of nonbinary third-country nationals to handle this navigation?*—I chose to answer it in two parts. First, I addressed the prime conditions that impact navigation: money and language. With regards to the former, money manifested as one of the main obstacles imposed by the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure. The amount required, as well as its timings and formats, was a constant hurdle that participants had to overcome in each residence application. Investing money into the private sector, however, was one of the main avenues through which participants could achieve their personal and professional goals despite the shortcomings and restrictions of the Austrian state.

On a different note, language—an apparently uniform category under the banner of German—proved itself to be deceptively and distressingly multifaceted. Candidates had to learn to navigate multiple forms of German, from local dialects to German immigration legalese. Due to the labyrinthine intricacies of the German language in my chosen infrastructure, participants did not have much clarity regarding the meaning behind and eligibility criteria for current sex/gender categories in Austria (and, as previously described, were very reluctant to ask).

When it comes to the second half of my first subquestion, *expectations*, participants mentioned both very pragmatic and highly idealistic factors. With regards to pragmatic factors, participants stated that withstanding the indignities of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure was strongly based on short- and long-term goals that would ease the need to interact with said infrastructure. Overall, participants were working towards more stable residence categories, such as permanent residence, with the ultimate goal of acquiring Austrian citizenship. Likewise, the realization of personal and professional goals in Austria played a significant role in their pragmatic approach to navigating my chosen infrastructure. This

pragmatic approach, however, was sustained by more utopian notions of gender and mobility. Participants' expectations ranged from stateless, borderless societies to contexts in which gender would not be a relevant variable in people's day-to-day lives.

As argued in my Discussions chapter, I consider that the pragmatic and utopian approaches I described above constituted two separate chronotopes, in the sense that they each allowed participants to reconcile specific time-space configurations in Austria. The pragmatic chronotope aided interviewees in enduring their interactions with—and achieving their goals within— my chosen infrastructure. The utopian chronotope, on the other hand, provided participants with the time-space to acknowledge the injustices and inequalities they faced *without* compromising the pragmatic chronotope.

As illustrated by the example of the chronotope(s), my findings constantly made reference to time, timings and temporalities. In fact, I argued that time was the guiding thread in and between participants' narratives. Particular timings were imposed on participants by the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, to the point that interviewees were in the habit of articulating their lives around residence application timings. Nevertheless, time was also an avenue through which participants could make navigational choices. Without dismissing power imbalances within my chosen infrastructure, interviewees developed temporal strategies to increase the efficacy and efficiency of their navigation.

Time, however, also revealed that the navigation participants adroitly engaged in had its limits. Oftentimes, participants believed that there was nothing they could do to tackle a specific infrastructural demand, and felt overwhelmed by the sacrifices and uncertainty they constantly had to face.

8.4. What Next?

Some of the findings I have addressed in the previous section pointed me towards potential avenues to explore in further and future research. I will proceed to spell these potential routes out in this section.

8.4.1. Nonbinary Third-Country National as an Articulating Category

In this thesis's State of the Art chapter, I described how the categories of *asylum seeker* and *refugee* articulate migrants' experiences in and reception within host communities, especially queer ones. Oftentimes, said articulation brands migrants negatively; thus, these two categories

act as a scarlet letter that migrants cannot easily escape.

In the Austrian context, I wonder if the category of *third-country national* plays a similar role. Austria, and many other continental European countries, hosts plenty of immigrants who have the right to reside in the country; third-country nationals, on the other hand, do not have this right, a distinction that results in deep and widespread ramifications and creates strong distinctions between third-country nationals, immigrants with the right to reside, and Austrian citizens. Considering that most of the third-country national category's ramifications are profoundly negative, does the category also act as a scarlet letter?

The literature review I conducted for this thesis seems to suggest that the category of third-country national remains unexplored in social science research. This thesis has not focused on the dynamics of this category per se, especially in relation to other migrant categories, but it has argued that it poses uniquely negative challenges to the immigrants moving and residing under it.

8.4.2. Dancing in the Dark

In my Discussions chapter, I argued that my use of the term *information infrastructure* falls in line with a tendency within the STS infrastructures literature to define information not as an independent term, but rather as a highly context-dependent concept that adapts to the purpose it is expected to serve. As an example, I mentioned Meissner and Taylor's (2024) definition of migration information infrastructures. This definition focuses on new forms of datafication of migration information, and also emphasizes the emergence and growing role of new actors in the migration-information-as-data landscape.

The above-described data-oriented take on information in migration infrastructures is, of course, quite different from the one I have presented in this thesis, because my work focuses on a moment in which information did not circulate as data yet. Rather, it was embodied by specific individuals and submitted to very personalized and capricious treatment. Third-country nationals, however, could still impact this information circulation precisely because it was very individual and almost random.

How can I reconcile my participants' very active approach to migration information circulation in individualized and capricious infrastructural encounters with the opaque datafication that Meissner and Taylor (2024) describe? First and foremost, I do not see these two approaches as incompatible. In my Empirical Findings, I described how nonbinary third-country nationals were always struggling to find the right information; in other words, they were dancing in the dark, constantly trying to manage *uninformation*. Perhaps Meissner and Taylor's (2024)

work can cast (partial) light on infrastructural encounters and experiences that manifest as uninformed in the lives of nonbinary third-country nationals. Ultimately, both my work and Meissner and Taylor's (2024) address different sides of the same type of migration information infrastructure, as well as each side's lack of clarity and accountability. A further step would consist of studying how these two sides would and could come together, and if said combination would result in added clarity.

8.4.3. Gender Classification Infrastructures and Nonbinary Third-Country Nationals

In this thesis, I emphasized the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure almost exclusively. While I have already stated my reasons for doing so, I also wish to acknowledge that there is plenty of potential in studying nonbinary third-country nationals' navigation in gender classification infrastructures. The most obvious infrastructure would be the Austrian state's medical transition infrastructure, which I have briefly mentioned in my Empirical Findings chapter.

As stated in this thesis, one of the main factors that contributes to the dominance of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure over any other is how uncertain it was: participants invested enormous amounts of resources into handling this uncertainty, at the expense of so many other aspects of their lives. Along similar lines, and basing myself on the experiences of participants who were medically transitioning, Austria's medical transition infrastructure can be deeply baffling, as well. The intersection of migratory and gender categories, however, would be the opposite of that described in this thesis: migration would act as the fixed category, while sex/gender would undergo uncertain changes.

The outcomes of these new dynamics could, of course, contain both similarities and differences with regards to the results I have shown in this research project. Nevertheless, the actual characteristics of said differences and similarities will continue to be unknown as long as they remain unexplored.

8.5. Closing Remarks

I would not be surprised if many researchers who study groups that face multiple forms of marginalization struggle to strike the right tone. The right tone refers to, of course, a fair balance between conveying the struggles of our participants without taking away their agency and capacity

for joy (or any feeling beyond despair).

In this thesis, I attempted to flesh out the specifics of my participants' navigation within the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure. Instead of stating *ad nauseam* that participants both struggle and do something about said struggle, I felt it would be more productive to use navigation as a term that would encompass—and move beyond—the aforementioned dual dynamic. I.e., I chose navigation to convey the uniqueness of my participants' infrastructural experiences. If they despaired, negotiated, subverted, and/or rejoiced, what did these actions and feelings actually look like?

In my interviewees' navigation of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, information (and the lack thereof) was the crucial element in circulation. The dynamics of this circulation often contained power imbalances that played in favor of immigration officers and against my participants. Furthermore, the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure had the particular talent of imposing its timings on residence applicants.

As a response, participants learned how to take advantage of the infrastructure's timings, developed effective and efficient choreographies to cope with further infrastructural impositions, and dreamed big in terms of possible and ideal futures. They also struggled to meet the demands of the Austrian state's immigration infrastructure, often had to forgo cherished goals and plans, and openly admitted to not managing to handle certain infrastructural encounters marred by short- and long-term stress. In other words, they did plenty. Sometimes it felt like very little; sometimes it felt like just the right amount.

9. References

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