Discrimination against LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers: the case of residential spaces in Switzerland

Swiss context

- Conservative norms and structures related to sexuality, gender and migration despite high migratory rates[1] and advances in LGBTIQ+ rights[2];
- Violent acts againt LGBTIQ+ people and against racialized or non-Swiss people[3];
- In residential spaces: racism during housing visits[4], inequalities in the assignation process of asylum-related accomodation[5], acts of LGBTIQ+-phobic violences in asylum centers[6].

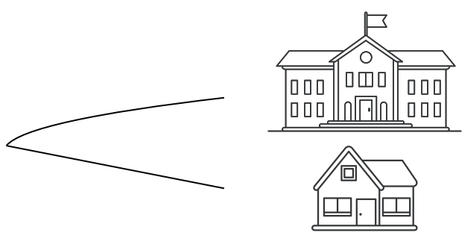
Objectives

- To analyze the experiences of discrimination lived by individuals with an asylum background, on the basis of their sexuality, gender, race and migration status in the spaces where they reside.
- To bring an intersectional scope[7-8] in research on discrimination in residential space in Switzerland.

Methods

- 24 semi-structured interviews with 12 LGBTIQ+ participants, all:
  - having an asylum background (either a refugee permit, a non-resident authorization for asylum seekers or a temporary protection),
  - coming either from Middle-East, Africa, Eastern or Southrn Europe.
- Literature review and reports.

1. *Where do discrimination happen in residential spaces?*



In collective assigned accomodation
(Federal Asylum Centers, Cantonal Asylum Shelters, Emergency shelters)

In private housing
(Private rental room, flat, house)

i.e. in: transitional spaces (e.g. stairs, lobbies), shared spaces for domestic activities (eg. kitchen) and related to bodily privacy (e.g. bathroom), common leisure areas (e.g. garden), private spaces during housing visits.

2. *What are the types of discrimination?*

In collective assigned accomodation:

Verbal provocation and harassment i.e. about sexual orientation (e.g. Osser is called “animal” because of her lesbian sexual orientation);

Rejection from shared spaces i.e. about transgender identity and race (Middle East / Subsaharan Africa) (e.g. Ery, transgender woman from Middle East is excluded from the shared kitchen);

Material degradation (e.g. Fej, cis-gay man, had his bedroom door broken);

Sexual violence i.e. experienced by lesbian cis-women & transgender participants.

In both settings:

Contemptuous look i.e. about race and gender expression;

Injonctive heteronormative remarks (e.g. Dive, cis-gay man, lives in a private flat with his husband, and hears from his neighbor: “you're not a family here!”);

Verbal provocation and harassment i.e. about gender identity and expression (e.g. Ery, transgender woman, is regurlarly questioned about her tank tops and painted nails at the collective center).

In private housing

Verbal provocation and harassment i.e. about race (e.g. Dive hears about his cat: "Fuck off !” and “Turkish cat!”);

Rejection i.e. about sexual orientation (e.g. since Osser revealed her lesbian sexuality to her neighbor, the neighbor and the neighbor’s daughter stopped greeting her);

Physical attempts (e.g. Naya, nonbinary transgender, reports a neighbor stopped them from passing in the corridor, yelled at them, and spat on them).

3. *Who enacts the discrimination?*

In collective assigned accommodations:
Fellow residents, staff (e.g. security guards).

In private housing:
Neighbors, real estate agency staff, landlords.

References:

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Conclusion

- LGBTIQ+ individuals with an asylum background experience several types of discrimination - on the basis on their sexuality, gender, and race - in the residential spaces in Switzerland, particularly in collective assigned accommodation and private housing.
- Whether under institutional or private governance, residential spaces reproduce the power asymmetries shaped by dominant systems in Swiss society i.e. cis-heteronormativity and postcolonialism.

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