

An aerial photograph of a river winding through a dry, hilly landscape. The river is a vibrant green color, contrasting sharply with the tan and brown tones of the surrounding land. The river's path is highly irregular, with many sharp turns and loops, creating a complex, almost abstract shape. The surrounding land is covered in sparse vegetation and has a textured, craggy appearance. The overall scene suggests a natural, undisturbed environment.

# **SUSTAINABLE GEOGRAPHY**

## ***- GEOGRAPHIES OF SUSTAINABILITY***

The 8th Nordic Geographers Meeting in Trondheim, Norway, June 16–19 2019

## T22: Tightening the noose – the impact of constricted migration policy on sexual and gender minorities

**Day:** Tuesday 18.06  
**Time:** T22.1 14:15-15:45  
T22.2 16:00-17:30  
**Room:** [R50](#)

### Session organiser(s)

**Deniz Akin**, *Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, NTNU*, [deniz.akin@ntnu.no](mailto:deniz.akin@ntnu.no)

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### Session description

As neoliberal and populist policies are enforced in countries in the EU, borders are becoming increasingly difficult to cross and welfare regimes are weakened. The options for individuals to migrate to the EU are diminished and existing migrants are left with lesser resources in host societies. Contemporary cultural politics of immigration is also increasingly organized around cultural unfitness of migrants in the host society. Simultaneously, Western democracies have gradually marketed tolerance of sexual diversity as a distinct and inherent characteristic of their culture, distinguishing them from the homophobic rest. This while establishing a sexual humanitarian apparatus that turns out to shape, in a restrictive way, the asylum system. In this call for session presentations, we ask for scrutiny of how these shifts are affecting sexual and gender minorities, who appear as paradoxical figures in these politics. On the one hand, their non-normative sexualities require the protection offered by Western democracies, following self-claimed inherent tolerance of sexual diversity. On the other hand, the non-whiteness and the non-homonormative conformance of sexual and gender minorities provokes political and societal anxiety about their cultural unfitness. Without denying sexual and gender minorities' agency, we ask how these new border and welfare regimes are creating hindrances and challenges and how coping strategies are employed. This session focuses on intersectional analyses of migratory experiences across different routes and of migrant experiences in host societies.

## T22.1

### **Abstract 1: Intersecting vulnerabilities: Researching on LGBT asylum seekers in Norway**

**Deniz Akin**, *Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, NTNU*, deniz.akin@ntnu.no

This paper discusses issues of positionality and ethics in research practice that involves LGBT asylum seekers in Norway. Asylum seekers, regardless of their varied experiences and routes to Norway, occupy a peculiar social location that is defined by indeterminacy. Those who are waiting to appeal a rejected application and those who are simply waiting for their initial asylum application to be processed are particularly impatient, stressed and demoralized. This highly challenging period of time is further shaped at the intersection of individual asylum seekers' race, gender, sexual orientation, age, financial and social resources that shape not only people's immigration process but also their rights-claiming competence in the host country. This paper presents challenges that are inherent in conducting research with LGBT asylum seekers in Norway. Based on two different research projects I was involved, I will reflect on issues of power imbalance, recruitment, representation in research practice that involves adult LGBT asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors who are LGBT.

### **Abstract 2: Legal and social perspectives on asylum seekers/refugees for reasons of sexual orientation in Spain and Brazil - (REMOTE PRESENTATION)**

**Vítor Lopes Andrade**, *School of Global Studies, University of Sussex*,  
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Even though the first cases of asylum granted for reasons of sexual orientation date back to the 1980s, research on this issue have begun to emerge only in 2010 and are now increasing. Relating to the thematic perspectives, most of the literature is about Refugee Status Determination (RSD). There is a shortage of work concerning local integration, that is, research that focuses on the social reality that these asylum seekers and refugees face in host countries. Relating to the methodological perspectives, there are few comparative studies among different States. The comparative works – which approach RSD as well – are limited to European countries. There is a lack of research that comparatively analyses countries from the Global North with the Global South, concerning both RSD and social aspects. This paper is therefore a first attempt to analyse and to compare RSD and local integration of non-heterosexual asylum seekers and refugees from a North-South perspective, drawing examples from Brazil and Spain. To meet this purpose, apart from literature review, ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in the cities of Sao Paulo and Valencia in 2016 and 2017. The findings indicate that Brazil shows good practices concerning RSD, such as the fact that the applicant's sexual orientation is based on self-identification, while Spain, and Valencia specifically, shows good practices in local integration, e.g. there

are partnerships among NGOs that work for refugees' assistance and protection and LGBTI organizations, what facilitates the consolidation of supportive networks.

**Abstract 3: From sexual practice to sexual identity – legal developments in the right to refugee status on the basis of sexual orientation**

**Andrea Gustafsson Grønningsæter**, *Faculty of Law, University of Bergen*,  
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While most receiving countries today recognise that sexual minorities may be entitled to international protection as a 'particular social group' in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention, research have shown that queer asylum seekers often face particular challenges when applying for asylum. One of the major obstacles facing sexual minorities in the refugee status determination procedure has been the expectation that lesbian, gay and bisexual asylum seekers should take steps conceal their sexual orientation upon a return to their countries of origin by acting "discreetly", and thus avoid being discovered by potential persecutors. Such expectations have been described as "discretion reasoning" by refugee law scholars.

In recent years an increasing number of receiving countries have rejected that queer asylum seekers can be required to conceal or suppress their sexual orientation in their countries of origin. At the same time, this has resulted in a stronger focus among decision makers on how sexual orientation (as a right) can be defined and delimited. This paper will look at how the Norwegian immigration authorities assess the credibility of asylum claims that are based on the applicant's sexual orientation. The analysis is carried out through a case study of 187 Norwegian asylum cases from 2010-2015. Based on this, the paper analyses how concepts such as sexual orientation, or as it is increasingly formulated in national guidelines, sexual identity is understood and established by the immigration authorities. The paper will also discuss how the Norwegian practice relates to recommendations in international sources.

**Abstract 4: Queer Control: Asylum Determinations for Sexual Minorities in Finland.**

**Johanna Vanto**, *Faculty of Law, University of Turku*, johanna.vanto@utu.fi

Europe's 2015 'refugee crisis' underscored the dysfunctionalities of the refugee protection systems and it was extensively politicized. In 2015, Finland was amongst the destinations for the newcomers. At first, the response from the state was humanitarian in nature, and some of the initial efforts were characterized by hospitality and solidarity. But similarly to many other European countries, the government in Finland proceeded to make a host of restrictions to national immigration policy and legislation. My presentation will address the results of a continuing research project on the decision making of Finnish immigration control authorities (Finnish Immigration Service) as they applied international protection norms in the asylum claims of individuals during two distinct time periods: right before and



soon after the intense peak in the number of applicants. I will present tentative results of my ongoing PhD study focusing, in particular, on the implications of constricted migration policy for sexual minority asylum applicants.

**Abstract 5: Queering Refugeeess, Rescaling Sexuality: Sexual Minorities in Asylum Process**

**Florent Chossière**, *Department of Geography, Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée*,  
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This paper aims at exploring refugeeess of sexual minorities applying for asylum in France and its implications at multiple scales. Several researches have investigated the particular asylum determination process when sexual orientation is involved (Giametta, 2018 ; Hedlund & Wimark, 2018 ; Akin, 2017 ; Murray, 2014 ; Kobelinsky, 2012). By displacing attention from borders to border crossers (Ehrkamp, 2016), I propose to analyse the impacts of such a process on individuals' experiences and every day life in France. This research relies on a two-years-long ethnographic work, based on a participant observation within an association that supports queer asylum seekers and refugees in Paris, combined with semi-structured interviews. As « the particular subjective experience in relation to existing refugee policies » (Lacroix, 2004), refugeeess allows to emphasize not only the impacts of these policies on individuals' subjectivities, but also the ways they deal with the fact of being involved in an asylum procedure based on their sexual orientation in every day life. For sexual minorities, asylum procedure and refugeeess lead thus to a reshaping of sexuality as social location (Pessar & Mahler, 2003) both on national and transnational scales. On a national scale, asylum seekers have to face deep uncertainties and self-doubts as the asylum procedure put them in limbo and confront them with restrictive understandings of sexuality. On a transnational scale, being involved in a queer asylum procedure may be problematic as well as it can be a resource for oneself and for others.

## T22.2

**Abstract 6: Critical action-led geographies – acting in spaces in-between with queer asylum seekers**

**Thomas Wimark**, *Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University*,  
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In consideration of what is ethically sound in the endeavour to conduct research with vulnerable individuals and communities, researchers often turn to participatory methodologies. Participatory geographies has developed to subfield and is currently

conquering ever more space within geography, advocating social actions for change and involvement of participants in the research process. The question of how much participation is needed, however, is still debated. The degree to which the group is organized is recognized as important both for the success of the research process and the capabilities of the group to be involved in the process. Adopting participation among disorganized groups run a risk of getting stuck at mobilizing a group around an issue instead of creating deeper change and involvement. In this presentation I discuss some of the challenges in adopting participatory methods in such settings. I suggest that working in-between actors, individuals, and settings renders potential for achieving participation and change without centering the researcher as the sole owner of the project.

**Abstract 7: Role of support policies of LGBTI organization in the SOGI asylum system in Italy – (Remote presentation via Skype)**

**Noemi Martorano**, *Sociology and Gender studies at the EHESS of Paris*,  
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This paper looks at Italian LGBTI organizations which provide support and legal aid to asylum seekers that claim refugee permit on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). The focus is on the role played by the LGBTI organizations as intermediary actors between institutions and asylum applicants in the path to obtain refugee status. Having been created in response to normative and institutional gaps, these organizations have to cope and negotiate with the double injunction of assistance and selection, a binomial that structures the regulation system for asylum seekers in Italy. LGBTI organizations' support is in fact guaranteed only to asylum seekers when identified as LGBTI people by volunteers. The volunteers therefore operate a judgment filter on the applicant's sexuality and identity before the immigration institutions. The organizations thus assume an ambivalent position: on the one hand they offer an important support work in the process of obtaining refugee status, on the other they participate in the creation of new material and symbolic border. The analysis develops in three axes: firstly examining how the organization operate the preliminary judgment on asylum seekers sexuality and identity; than contextualizing how the support activity is inscribed in sexual humanitarian apparatus; and finally looking at the material effects of these organizations' activities in the path to help applicants obtain refugee status and in the process of externalizing asylum and redefining borders.

**Abstract 8: Traversing darkrooms: the lure of the glory hole**

**Abdullah Qureshi**, *Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture*,  
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Darkrooms are maze-like spaces or designated zones for cruising and/or anonymous sexual encounters. Predominantly popular within the gay community (though not exclusively), according to the online magazine Queerty\*, the origin of this sexual culture, as it exists within the modern world, in the US can be traced to the latter parts of the 19th/early 20th centuries, when it was still illegal to be homosexual. Glory holes, which are holes in a wall/partition used for oral and/or anal sex, are one of the features you may find in darkrooms – as well as public toilets or facilities associated with gay cruising. Within mainstream popular culture, for example, the film ‘Cruising (1980)’, or more recently, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody (2018)’, darkrooms and similar sexual practices/spaces are usually seen as dangerous, presented from the judgmental lens of morality, and problematically linked to murder and HIV/AIDS respectively. Challenging and complicating these perceptions, within this paper, I follow the narrative of a gay refugee from Iraq in Helsinki, from his initial rejection at a gay club to his experience as just another sexualized body in a darkroom. Drawing on the ideas of Jack Halberstam, I think about ‘rejection’ as failure to be accepted, failure to be gay, and failure to be white, and investigate how we can think about glory holes, and more broadly darkrooms, in relation to the politics of (Muslim) migrant bodies, and where they come from, within the context of ‘invisible whiteness’ as it manifests within the Nordic region.