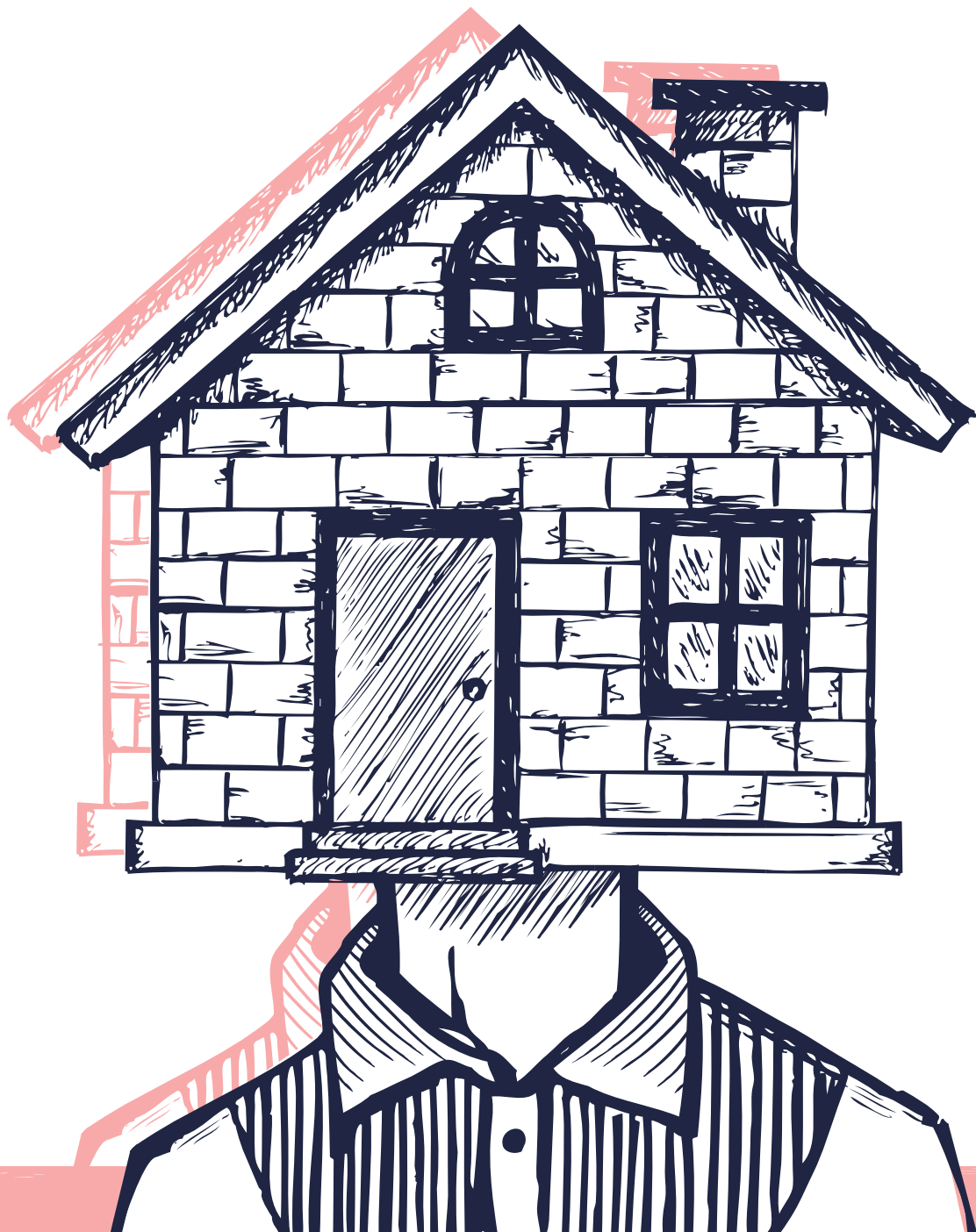


QUEER REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN ITALY:

FINDING A HOUSE BUILDING A HOME

BARBARA PORZIELLA





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Student: Barbara Porziella
Supervisor: Susi Meret

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on LGBTQ refugees and migrants within the Italian context, addressing, as one of the main issues which they experience, ‘homelessness’, intended as both a physical and an emotional condition. Indeed, queer refugees and migrants are not only diasporic subjects, separated from their country of origin, but they are also afflicted by ‘homelessness’ because of their estrangement from their ethnic communities, which often do not accept their queer identity, as well as because of their alienation from the local LGBTQ community, which perceives them as ‘Other’. Seeking to understand the ways in which this group can escape this condition, this thesis turns to the Italian LGBTQ organisations which not only have acknowledged the issue, but have also begun to tackle it by employing different grassroots, ‘from below’ practices aimed at the development, in queer refugees and migrants, of a sense of belonging to the local LGBTQ community, and, by extension, and with time, to the Italian society. Thus, this thesis deals with notions of belonging, and the re-conceptualisations of ‘home’ and ‘family’, rather than focusing on the idea of integration, of which it is critical due to its imperialist and neo-colonialist affiliations. Instead, it argues that belonging focalises on the individual and on their lived experience, and places inherent value upon them, independently of the nation-state’s assessments of their integration. By applying an intersectional perspective, this thesis seeks to approach the research matter understanding the different axes of power and oppression that exist within it. Furthermore, it relies on queer diaspora theory and politics of belonging to both approach the analysis and discuss its findings, ultimately arguing that, even when lacking proper, safe accommodation, queer refugees and migrants are able to detach from their ‘homelessness’ and find ways in which to find a sense of belonging, and therefore construct a ‘home’ for themselves, through their involvement with local LGBTQ organisations which target them with various ‘good practices’ that go beyond the service-oriented helpdesks and counselling offered in many cases.

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Section I

1. Introduction

In the past few years, Italy has become a bridge to Europe for many migrants and refugees¹. Among these, many belong under the LGBTQ umbrella and seek asylum precisely on the grounds of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Others might migrate or seek asylum for different reasons, but also embody a queer² identity which is lived in a conflictual way in the migration and asylum-seeking process. The Italian reception system, which is already overworked and strained by the impact of anti-immigration policies, often struggles to address the specificities of queer refugees and migrants, while authorities often lack sufficient understanding of the cultural sensitivities of this issue, as evidenced in past studies carried out by Arcigay, Italy's first LGBTQ association (cf. *Immigrazioni e Omosessualità - Tracce per Operatrici e Operatori*, 2008). This results in LGBTQ refugees and migrants being placed in dangerous situations, facing isolation, discrimination, and violence within reception centres (Torrìsi, 2017).

Due to a lack of cultural understanding, as well as Western cis-heteronormative perspectives on LGBTQ issues, queer migrants face constant affronts on their dignity, as they are asked to 'prove' their sexuality in various ways, in order for the Territorial Commissions to assess their credibility (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011; Jordan & Morrissey, 2013). Furthermore, the coloniser perspective of Western countries imposes upon queer migrants normative notions and processes relative to 'how to be LGBTQ': from the concept of 'coming out' to labels such as 'lesbian' or 'gay', queer migrants who do not necessarily use these terms in their country of origin are forced to claim them for themselves in order to be viewed as 'credible', 'proper' LGBTQ individuals in their host country (Murray, 2014). This aspect, in particular, does not concern exclusively the governmental authorities, but is also present within queer communities and LGBTQ organisations, which often carry certain expectations and normative values related to how their members should behave in order to properly fit in (Wimark, 2019).

¹ "At UNHCR we say 'refugees and migrants' when referring to movements of people by sea or in other circumstances where we think both groups may be present – boat movements in Southeast Asia are another example. We say 'refugees' when we mean people fleeing war or persecution across an international border. And we say 'migrants' when we mean people moving for reasons not included in the legal definition of a refugee. We hope that others will give thought to doing the same. Choices about words do matter." (Edwards, 2016). Throughout this paper, the UNHCR guidelines for proper terminology use will be applied.

² This paper will utilise as synonymous 'LGBTQ' and 'queer' to broadly refer to people who are romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same gender, and to people who identify with a different gender than the one assigned at birth, understanding however that both terms carry specific histories and Westernised assumptions. For this reason, different labels will be utilised if certain situations require it. For further definitions of various terminology, refer to the glossary compiled by ILGA Europe ("ILGA-Europe Glossary | ILGA-Europe", n.d.).

In a context such as the Italian one, in which immigration continues to be utilised for political scaremongering, and the LGBTQ population continues to report discrimination and lack of appropriate protection (Italy once again scores poorly on ILGA's Rainbow Europe Map, placing itself in 35th place out of 49 countries), the position of queer migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers is particularly precarious. From background research, it emerged that one of the main issues for queer migrants is that of 'homelessness' (or "perpetual liminality" according to Wimark, 2019), both physical and emotional: one of their major struggles is that of feeling unsafe inside reception centres, which leads many to live on the streets. At the same time, many queer migrants experience extreme isolation, an 'emotional homelessness' in which they are unable to create for themselves a sense of belonging to their host community, and therefore to develop a new concept of home and family in the country in which they are seeking asylum.

For these reasons, many of the projects developed by Italian NGOs have focused on housing, from 'Casa Caterina' in Bologna, "the first protected home in Europe for transgender refugees and asylum seekers" ('MIT Italia-Chi siamo – WordPress', n.d.) to 'TO Housing', an LGBTQ co-housing project developed in Torino which offers accommodation to the most vulnerable LGBTQ individuals, among which queer migrants and refugees ('TO Housing - Accoglienza LGBTQI - Associazione Quore', n.d.). However, other organisational practices which seek to address 'homelessness' by focusing on the renegotiation of concepts of 'home', 'family', 'community' and 'belonging' have emerged in recent times, such as queer migrants and refugees-specific meeting groups and events.

The focus of this thesis will thus be on both the construction of the physical and emotional 'homelessness' experienced by queer migrants and refugees, and on the processes taking place within Italian LGBTQ organisations in order to aid in the development of a sense of belonging. Relying on a decolonising, queer, and intersectional perspective, this thesis will operationalise concepts from queer diaspora theory and politics of belonging in order to approach the subject. Furthermore, this thesis will concentrate on bottom-up approaches, and how, at the same time, they can be utilised as the basis for more structured and comprehensive top-down approaches. The research design takes the form of a case study, where the Italian context represents the overall case, which I have been able to explore through the analysis of the organisational practices of the specific organisations selected to participate in this research. To carry out the analysis, primary data has been collected through qualitative interviewing with both queer refugees and migrants, and volunteers and social workers.

1.1. Problem Formulation

Following the above considerations, throughout this paper I will seek to answer the question:

How do NGOs in Italy address issues of physical and emotional ‘homelessness’ experienced by queer migrants and refugees?

In order to answer this larger question, I will rely on the following sub-questions:

- What do NGOs do on both short and long-term scale to improve forms of ‘integration’ and to prevent discrimination and intolerance?
- Are there ‘best practices’ to learn from?

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the practices that Italian organisations working with queer migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are implementing in order to supplement what the Italian reception system is lacking, particularly focusing on the notions of ‘home’, ‘homelessness’, and sense of belonging. I thus seek to understand whether these projects are addressing both the practical and emotional aspects of homelessness, whether they are being successful, and what issues they are currently facing.

1.2. Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into three Sections. Section I is dedicated to the introductory chapter, including its related subparagraphs. This section contains the Problem Formulation, and it addresses overarching aspects, such as that of subject relevance and objectivity. Lastly, Section I is also where the main context is defined, on one hand in regard to Italy and the narratives of home and family propagated by right-wing parties and politicians, on the other hand in regard to the notion of physical and emotional homelessness experienced by queer migrants and refugees.

Section II contains the methodology and methods and the theory chapters, with their respective subparagraphs. This section therefore provides the theoretical and practical frameworks for the research.

Section III features the analysis, discussion, and conclusion chapters, in which the collected data is analysed and the emerging conclusions are discussed in relation to the theoretical perspectives chosen. This section will also provide a conclusive answer to the problem formulation, as well as discuss possible gaps that should be investigated through further research.

1.3. Subject Relevance

As migration persists on being a strongly debated topic at the global level, with right-wing politicians using anti-immigration policies as main arguments in their campaigns, it is no wonder that the field of migration studies follows closely every development and has been growing exponentially. At the same time, however, much less attention has been paid to the issue of queer refugees and migrants,

often ‘falling through the cracks’, neglected by both migration and queer studies. While some comprehensive studies have been carried out to explore the topic, which have evidenced various problematic aspects in the ways in which LGBTQ migrants and refugees are dealt with by governmental authorities (cf. Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011; UNHCR, 2015), further research is indeed still needed. In particular, much research on the topic has been focused on the aspect of the asylum-seeking process, on the issue of credibility, and on the notion of ‘homonationalism’, i.e. the ways in which LGBTQ rights are instrumentalised by right-wing parties to argue against immigration (Puar, 2007). However, I argue that, despite accommodation being recognised as one of the most urgent issues (UNHCR, 2015, pp. 27-28), few have focused on what a lack of proper, safe accommodation on the long-term, i.e. homelessness, entails for queer refugees and migrants, who are essentially forced into a state of “perpetual liminality” (Wimark, 2019), alienated from their ethnic networks due to their queer identity, and unable to fit into the local LGBTQ community due to their ‘Othered’ and racialised existence as migrants.

For these reasons, I believe in the importance of this thesis as it intersects transnational migration studies with queer studies of home, and it highlights usually neglected aspects of LGBTQ migration, focusing on the dynamic processes of belonging, which place the individual and their experience as their centre, as opposed to integration, which often concentrates on the individual in their relation to the receiving country (Ireland, 2017).

Furthermore, this thesis can be understood as a perfect junction between the Master programme in Development and International Relations, and my chosen specialisation in Global Gender Studies, and represents one more attempt on my part in the on-going process of ‘queering’ academia, applying theories and frameworks traditionally relegated to the fields of queer and gender studies to other areas of study.

1.4. Objectivity and Delimitation

Matters of objectivity are always complicated to address, yet it is necessary to do so in every paper. While I do believe in the value of objectivity, understood as being transparent in the ways in which certain rules are agreed upon and respected throughout the research process (Bryman, 2012), I also maintain that “complete objectivity is impossible in social research” (ibid., p. 392). This signifies then being aware of possible bias and striving to minimise them, recognising at the same time that critical and therefore subjective positions are not to be understood as inherent drawbacks, but rather, as conscious choices made on the part of the researcher who, with their work, seeks not only to describe and analyse, but also to bring into discussion assumptions and hegemonic structures, in order to foster positive, real-life developments.

In this particular instance, I will therefore be critical of Westernised, cis-heteronormative perspectives, but also aware of my own position of power as a white and Western researcher, and thus of the bias and assumptions which I still carry. Furthermore, I acknowledge the ethical issues which arise in research, especially when it involves research participants: on one hand, then, I am aware of the inherent power imbalances between interviewer and interviewee, and, throughout the data collection process, I have sought to mitigate them in different ways, first and foremost by treating the interviewees as ‘experts’ on the topic, as they have practical knowledge and lived experience of the field to which I cannot compare. On the other hand, I also realise the difference in power that exists between the migrants interviewed, and the volunteers and social workers. However, throughout this thesis, I have sought to treat both groups equally, placing value on every interviewee’s words indiscriminately.

In terms of the limitations of this thesis, I first of all need to address time and scheduling constraints, which have a significant impact on the overall scope that this research is allowed to have. Furthermore, limitations related to the sensitive nature of the topic are also present, and I therefore maintain that I do not wish to endanger (for instance, by inadvertently outing someone) and re-traumatise (such as by forcing discussions on past violent and discriminatory episodes) any research participant for the sake of this thesis. Linguistic barriers have also constituted an issue for this research, however, I have dealt with them in the best of my abilities by offering the research participants the possibility to carry out interviews in their preferred language when possible.

I also acknowledge that no matter how many participants I am able to include in this research, they will always be representative only of their specific situation and context, and will hardly present a detailed and comprehensive portrayal of all Italian NGOs and associations working with LGBTQ migrants and refugees. Nonetheless, as stated above, I still believe in this thesis’ value, even if as only a small contribution to a field that is indeed in need of more dedicated research.

Lastly, I must address, as a further limitation, the conditions in which this thesis was written: due to the global pandemic of SARS Covid-19 which broke out in the spring of 2020, various aspects of this thesis had to be changed, and contact with certain organisations and individuals became more difficult, as they were dealing with more pressing issues. Thus, the uncertainty which characterised this period often threatened to obstacle the completion of this thesis, however, the support and guidance received contributed to combat this.

1.5. Context: Italy, ‘Gender Ideology’ and ‘The Family’

Recently, Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right party ‘Fratelli d’Italia’, shouted during one of her speeches: “I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am a Christian, and you can’t

take that away from me!” (Follain, 2020). Her words echo the arguments that more and more often are utilised by the “Global Right Wing” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 6), which has been using ‘anti-gender’ campaigns to mobilise the public opinion, focusing on fighting “gender ideology”, defined by Paternotte and Kuhar as “a term initially created to oppose women’s and LGBTQ rights activism as well as the scholarship deconstructing essentialist and naturalistic assumptions about gender and sexuality” (ibid., p. 8). Right-wing populists have therefore declared war to same-sex marriage (“Disobey gay union law, Salvini”, 2016) and the ways in which LGBTQ individuals organise their private lives, as they allegedly negate - as also commented upon by Pope Francis, “the anthropological basis of the family” (Pope Francis, 2016, p. 56). Thus, by contrasting the “hegemonic understandings of the ‘Italian family’”, queer individuals are facing a severe backlash in Italian society and politics (Franchi & Selmi, 2018, p. 2). Ironically, right-wing populists portray themselves as the real victims, who rise against the LGBTQ lobby that imposes its ‘gender ideology’ onto them, a phenomenon which can be evidenced from Meloni’s cry of “you can’t take that away from me!”.

In this sense, ‘family’ remains, in Italian society, particularly valuable, as it is “expected to provide all the protection and support that is not given by a welfare state heavily biased towards pensioners and core workers” (Naldini & Saraceno, 2008, p. 734). Right-wing populists have therefore latched onto the symbolic value of the notion of ‘family’, and have sworn to protect it against the threat of ‘gender ideology’ and ‘LGBTQ propaganda’. In 2016, while the ‘Legge Cirinnà’ that would allow Italy to recognise same-sex civil unions was being discussed, thousands of people convened in Rome for a ‘family day’ protest to support the ‘traditional family’, as “children need to have a father and a mother” (Simone Pillon, in Johnston, 2016). In 2019, the Italian city of Verona hosted The World Congress of Families, a conservative congress focused on family values, where ‘family’ is understood as a married, cis-heterosexual couple and their children. The event divided the country between its supporters and opposers, as various Italian politicians - (including the then Interior Minister Matteo Salvini) - spoke against abortion, about sexual orientation, and surrogacy, amongst others. Salvini also took the opportunity to criticise Islam and its treatment of women, in order to legitimise his anti-immigration stance (Barry, 2019).

In conclusion, ‘family’ is a particularly conflictual topic in the Italian context, and LGBTQ individuals are forced to constantly negotiate with society their conception of ‘family’, and struggle to build a ‘home’ to properly belong to. Therefore, the critical situation of queer refugees and migrants in Italy must be understood in light of this particular context, which is hostile towards both immigrants and LGBTQ individuals.

1.6. Context: Queer Refugees and Migrants and ‘Homelessness’

The paragraph above delineates the complex nature of the notion of ‘family’ in the Italian context, specifically in relation to LGBTQ individuals. In this section, I seek to connect that discussion to the notion of ‘home’, and, subsequently, ‘homelessness’ as it is experienced by queer refugees and migrants. ‘Homelessness’, I argue, can be understood both as physical, that is, as a lack of a physical space to live in, and emotional, as a lack of a place where ‘to belong’ and ‘feel at home’. In regard to the practical aspect of homelessness, multiple studies have already been carried out (cf. the project “Una Strada Diversa”, coordinated by the NGO *Avvocato di Strada* in 2014, and Cray et al., 2013; Durso & Gates, 2012; Ray, 2006). These studies focus on the worrying and emerging issue of LGBTQ homeless individuals. Their conclusions have tended to highlight a variety of problematic aspects, among which, the common ‘invisibility’ of LGBTQ homeless individuals, their isolation, and the necessity to address their specific needs. As said before, in addition to these issues, I also consider the emotional aspect of homelessness, which can be understood through the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘family’.

In this thesis, ‘family’ is associated with ‘home’ in the sense that ‘home’ represents the physical space in which “homing”, “the work of physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the location of residence, which is not the same as the location of ‘origin’”, can take place (Ahmed et al., 2003, p. 129). At the same time, then, ‘home’ symbolises an emotional space, as these processes develop in connection with constructing a sense of belonging to a group, which the research participants identify as their ‘family’. For this reason, I argue that queer refugees and migrants experience a heightened level of ‘homelessness’ which intersects both their identity as migrants and as queer, and which is bifold as it relates both to a lack of safe accommodation, and to a lack of opportunity to carry out homing processes and infer their location of residence with personal significance. In contrast, other groups which are still vulnerable to homelessness present certain advantages when compared to queer migrants. For instance, migrants are often able to access safe accommodation and forms of support through “ethnic networks”, as they “assist with information about the new society, accommodations, finding work and creating stability and social attachments in the new country” (Wimark, 2019, p. 8), while queer individuals in Italy “do family” through constant meaning-making work, as they “carve out space for their experience” (Franchi & Selmi, 2018, p. 18). Queer migrants and refugees have access to neither.

As Ahmed (2006) points out, we discover ‘home’ when we are away from home: this aspect links to migration, understood as “a process of disorientation and reorientation” (ibid., p. 9). She continues, stating that, “if orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails” (ibid., p. 11). Thus, I argue

that the disorientation described by Ahmed can be identified with the ‘homelessness’ experienced by queer refugees and migrants, who, by lacking a physical space to call ‘home’, are also impeded from “making the strange familiar”, and therefore from developing a ‘sense of belonging’ (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Considering the role occupied by the concept of ‘home’ in both the queer narrative, in which ‘home’ often signifies the heterosexual childhood home and the displacement from it, and migrant narratives, where ‘home’ connects to a place that is distant in both space and time (cf. Ahmed, 2006; Fortier, 2003; Brah, 1996), it is then not absurd to discuss of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ in regard to the experiences of queer refugees and migrants. Members of this group are in fact exposed to both the estrangement from their heterosexual childhood home, as well as from their “ethnic networks” (Wimark, 2019, p. 8), because of their queerness, and to the estrangement from their home intended as their country, which they are forced to leave behind, and, in case of asylum seekers, to never return to.

Section II

2. Methodology and Methods

This chapter focuses on the thesis’ ontological and epistemological positions, introduces the research design chosen, in this instance a case study, and defines the kind of data analysed, as well as the collection methods utilised to gather it. Lastly, it will describe the ways in which the data has been processed.

2.1. Ontological and Epistemological Positions

In every research project, the philosophical matters of ontology and epistemology need to be brought up, in order to disclose the researcher’s understanding of reality, knowledge, and thus of ways to investigate reality. In this thesis, I maintain a constructivist ontological position, as I argue that reality, social phenomena and their meanings are constantly re-accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). However, as the theoretical frameworks which I rely upon tend to derive from critical theory, my ontological position can also be understood as ‘critical-aligned’, in the sense that, as critical theory is interested in “changing the status quo so that once participants become aware of how oppressed they are, they can act to transform the world” (Dieronitou, 2014, p. 6), I am also focused, in my approach to research, in revealing hegemonic structures and favouring change.

In terms of my epistemological position, it can be said that it belongs to the interpretivist paradigm, due to the fact that, rather than explaining human behaviour, as it would be the case with

a positivist approach, my aim is understanding it (Bryman, 2012, p. 28). However, one should be aware that, when relying on interpretivism, understanding is reached through multiple layers of interpretation: “the researcher is providing an interpretation of others’ interpretations [... and] the researcher’s interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline” (ibid., p. 31).

Departing from my ontological and epistemological considerations, I can therefore address the kind of methods which will be employed: as this thesis deals with emotional, intangible concepts such as ‘sense of belonging’, ‘homelessness’, ‘home’ and ‘family’, I have chosen to rely on qualitative methods, because they are concerned with concepts, understanding of these, experiences and meanings (ibid., p.380). This allows me to appropriately explore and gain insight of my research topic. In this sense, then, my approach can also be considered phenomenological, as it “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2018, p. 159). Indeed, this study relies on a few individuals’ experience with ‘homelessness’ and ‘belonging’ to derive an “essence” (ibid.) of these phenomena.

2.2. Case Study

This thesis will take the form of a case study, in which the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews will be utilised to collect data. According to Bryman, the case study is “the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman, 2012, p. 66). In the instance of this thesis, the ‘overall case’ is the specific Italian context. However, to be able to carry out the analysis, I contacted individuals from six different organisations, relying on their accounts of the Italian context in relation to migration and LGBTQ activism. Furthermore, Italy was chosen as the focus of this research for various reasons: while one of these is the role played by Italy as a bridge to Europe for many refugees and migrants, others relate more closely to its political and cultural context, which, as mentioned before, in recent years has fostered surging hostility towards both immigrants and LGBTQ individuals. At the same time, however, the Italian context has also allowed for the development of new and interesting practices, such as the establishment of one of the very few transgender-specific refugee accommodation projects. This seemingly contradictory situation is therefore particularly compelling and in need to be explored.

The case selection process began after a thorough research, which allowed me to identify a number of Italian LGBTQ organisations and associations which have in recent years grown concerned with the issue of queer refugees and migrants, and therefore either established separate sections within their organisation to deal specifically with this group, or initiated projects aimed at them, the most common being that of a helpdesk active on certain days that provides various services, such as legal

advice and psychological counselling. Some organisations have also activated housing projects meant to offer accommodation to the most vulnerable queer individuals, who might have been exposed to particularly dangerous situations in reception centres.

The organisations which responded after initial contact were the following:

- Arcigay Nazionale, the largest Italian LGBTQ organisation. It is present across Italy with its 69 chapters, or ‘committees’. While Arcigay Nazionale can provide guidelines and support certain practices, the local committees maintain some form of independence, and are led by local Arcigay Presidents and a board of directors (“Arcigay – Chi Siamo”, n.d.).
- Arcigay Rainbow Vercelli Valsesia, the Arcigay committee for the provinces of Vercelli and Biella. In 2016, two Nigerian refugees and activists within the organisation expressed the need for, and therefore created, the group “Africa Arcigay”, aimed at queer refugees and migrants (“Arcigay Vercelli – Africa Arcigay”, n.d.).
- Migra_Antinoo, the group working with LGBTQ refugees and migrants within the Arcigay chapter in Naples. They operate a helpdesk for queer migrants and refugees, and organise thematic events (“Arcigay Napoli – Migra_Antinoo”, n.d.).
- G.A.G.A. Vicenza, an association of volunteers who offer support to young LGBTQ individuals. They also operate a helpdesk for queer migrants and refugees, and have activated an independent project, “Black and White GaGa”, to provide social and empowerment opportunities (“G.A.G.A. Vicenza – Servizi”, n.d.).
- Movimento Identità Trans (MIT) Bologna, one of the oldest Italian LGBTQ associations. Although their main focus is on transgender identity, they work with a variety of issues and provide different services. Besides a helpdesk for queer migrants and refugees, they have also activated a project, “Casa Caterina”, to provide accommodation to transgender refugees in an environment in which they can feel safe (“MIT – Servizi”, n.d.).
- CIDAS, a social cooperative which provides various services aimed, amongst others, at aiding the elderly and the disabled. They also work with migrant integration projects, and have been included in this research because of their role in managing the project “Casa Caterina” focused on transgender refugees, together with MIT and ASP Bologna (“CIDAS – Chi siamo”, n.d.).

These organisations were chosen because of their particular focus on queer migrants and refugees. This has been concretised into a variety of projects, activities and initiatives that span beyond the weekly/monthly helpdesk, a service that multiple LGBTQ organisations throughout Italy now offer. Furthermore, as it emerges from this list, all of the organisations contacted, with the exception of Migra_Antinoo in Naples, are located in Northern Italy. This does not mean that there are no

organisations working with queer refugees and migrants in the rest of the country, but rather, that the existing LGBTQ organisations in the South of the country might offer support in less structured and formalised ways, or that they might rely on the national LGBTQ organisation, Arcigay, which is present in most bigger cities. Additionally, it needs to be acknowledged that 46% of the Italian population lives in Northern Italy³, which therefore might account for the higher number of active LGBTQ organisations. Thus, the focalisation on Northern Italy signifies that this thesis does only partly portray the entirety of the Italian context. Rather, it portrays the context reachable through the more formalised and therefore identifiable organisations.

The chosen organisations represent neither the “extreme” nor “typical” cases (Bryman, 2012, p. 70). Instead, they have been included in this research because of their ‘good practices’, with the aim of highlighting them and their impact on the lives of queer migrants and refugees.

2.3. Data and Collection Methods

In order to answer my research question, I rely on primary data regarding the selected Italian organisations. This data is collected from the members of the selected organisations, which includes both the Italian volunteers and professional figures within the organisations, and the queer refugees and migrants who engage in the various activities organised, with the aim to avoid reproducing power unbalanced saviour/saved narratives, and instead placing queer refugees and migrants at the centre of the narration, and on the level of ‘experts’ within the field.

As addressed before, the data has been gathered through qualitative methods, particularly, semi-structured interviewing. The semi-structured interviews were carried out following a previously prepared interview-guide featuring a list of questions related to the research topic, namely, physical and emotional ‘homelessness’, and good practices undertaken by the various organisations (Appendix, p. 57). At the same time, however, the flexible nature of this method (Bryman, 2012, p. 470) allowed for a conversational tone and for the emergence of unanticipated aspects and issues. Furthermore, the interviews were carried out online through different video calling platforms, which allowed the interviewees to have control over certain aspects of the interviewing process, such as the physical location. In this way, ethical issues commonly related to the interviewing process were dealt with, as the distance imposed by the screen⁴ created a more informal setting, and, consequently, a more relaxed dialogue. Additionally, all interviewees were offered the choice to conduct the interview in either Italian or English, as a significant fraction of the interviewees originated from countries

³ Data available through the National Statistics Institute (ISTAT): <https://www.istat.it/>

⁴ and by the global Covid-19 pandemic

where English is one of the official languages. In this way, I hoped to further address ethical aspects related to the interviewing process in terms of power imbalances and privilege.

The subjects to interview were identified through “snowball sampling” (Bryman, 2012, pp. 202-203): after establishing initial contact with the organisations and carrying out interviews with the Italian members, I relied on them to provide me with the contacts of queer migrants and refugees who might be interested in participating in my research. This came with both advantages and disadvantages: on one hand, through this method I have been able to gain access to a group which I might have had difficulties coming in contact with otherwise, especially given the impossibility to visit the organisations in person and meet their members beforehand; on the other hand, it limited my participant selection to a restricted group of individuals, who, it must be noted, are themselves activists and involved in the organisations, and therefore might have heightened sensibilities of the subject, compared to the general migrant population.

2.4. Data Processing

Once the interviews were carried out, they were transcribed with the aid of the automatic transcription service Konch, made available to Aalborg University staff and students. The relevant portions of the transcriptions can be found in the appendix section (see here: pp. 57-85). However, certain details have been edited out to protect the anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, some interviews have been carried out in Italian and have not been translated in their entirety. These will still appear in the appendix, and the statements that were translated into English and utilised in the analysis section will be highlighted.

The data collected was then organised and processed through the software NVivo, which allows researchers working with large amounts of non-numerical, unstructured data to carry out a wide variety of actions: from the classification of information, to the visualisation of relationships within the data. NVivo allows the creation of ‘nodes’, or clusters of meaning, as well as sub-clusters, in which instances of a phenomenon found in the data can be categorised. For this thesis, I relied on my background research and previous knowledge of the subject, and therefore created the main nodes of ‘belonging’ and ‘homelessness’. I then added to the ‘homelessness’ node the sub-clusters containing instances of either ‘physical homelessness’ or ‘emotional homelessness’. Similarly, ‘belonging’ presents the sub-clusters ‘finding home or family’, ‘good practices’, and ‘positive outcomes’. While processing the data, it became clear that the ‘good practices’ encountered fell into the category of either ‘empowerment’ or ‘sharing’. These two sub-clusters were therefore added. The figure below displays this structure.

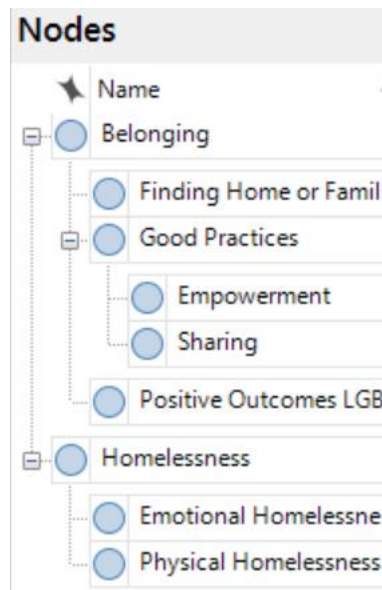


Figure 1: screenshot from NVivo

The interview transcripts were therefore analysed through this framework, and the significant statements were categorised into the related nodes, based on both the presence of certain words, such as ‘family’, ‘home’, ‘brothers’, ‘my people’ and so on, and on the overall meaning conveyed by the statements. This process has indeed been interpretative, and therefore subjective in some ways. Nonetheless, I maintain that these categorisations, even if arbitrary and at times with blurred boundaries, have contributed to the creation of a useful framework through which to approach and structure the analysis. In some ways, my approach to the data has been informed by Discourse Analysis, particularly due to its constructionist nature, as “the emphasis is placed on the versions of reality propounded by members of the social setting being investigated and on the fashioning of that reality through their renditions of it” (Bryman, 2012, p. 529): in this thesis, indeed, I have only been able to access and investigate the social setting which I sought to focus on, namely, the Italian organisations working with queer migrant and refugees, through the discursive constructions created by the interviewees. However, the overall approach cannot be equated with DA, as it lacks a focus on ‘the discourse’ and what it seeks to accomplish through the usage of language. Instead, as mentioned above, interpretation and the application, upon the data, of the framework created in NVivo has constituted my main approach.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section introduces the thesis’ main theoretical approaches, namely: intersectionality, queer diaspora, and politics of belonging. It provides brief descriptions of each of them, and then illustrates

the ways in which each of these theories is utilised to both carry out the analysis and discuss its findings, in order to provide answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis.

3.1. Intersectionality

‘Intersectionality’ refers to the metaphor, created by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), of the different forms of oppression that an individual might be subjected to. Originally, it served to highlight the flawed ways in which the feminist and antiracist movements conceptualised oppression and privilege, focusing on the ‘woman question’ or on the ‘race question’ without acknowledging their interconnectedness, as experienced, for instance, by black women. Intersectionality, then, needs to be situated in its original context, as the product of the struggle of women of colour, often lesbian-identified, so that it is not utilised vaguely and watered down in its significance (Carastathis, 2014).

Particularly, Crenshaw (1991) defines intersectionality in three separate ways: she differentiates between structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality, she writes, addresses “the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of white women” (ibid., p. 1245). Thus, because of the non-intersectional nature of institutions, they fail to intervene in meaningful ways against issues experienced by women of colour as both gendered and racialised subjects.

As for political intersectionality, Crenshaw discusses how it serves to point out how “women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (ibid., pp. 1251-1252). Therefore, political intersectionality reveals the inadequacy of feminist and antiracist struggles, as the former is focused on the experience of white women, while the latter on that of men of colour, and thus, by failing to address the intersections of gender and race, they end up reproducing racist and sexist forms of oppression.

Lastly, Crenshaw identifies representational intersectionality as a way to address the racist and sexist stereotypes which are utilised to represent women of colour, thus further marginalising them (ibid., pp. 1282-1283).

Furthermore, Carastathis (2014) adds a fourth understanding, ‘analytical intersectionality’, to discuss the ways in which the notion of intersectionality has been utilised in academia as a research paradigm. In particular, she cites Patricia Hill Collins on the matter, who has written about how intersectionality can be utilised to reveal power relations and the construction of oppression through identity (Hill Collins, 1990). Analytical intersectionality is considered useful because of the benefits of simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity: as an approach, it deals with multiple

analytical categories at the same time, it manages to capture experiential and structural complexity (Carastathis, 2014, p. 307), it does not reduce oppression to one main aspect or category, and it is inclusive, making visible those groups that tend to be overlooked in hegemonic feminist theory (ibid., p. 309).

In the context of this thesis, intersectionality provides the main theoretical framework through which my research can be carried out: it lays down the groundwork for understanding oppression at the intersection between migrant and refugee status, queer identity, ethnic minority identity. By approaching my topic intersectionally, then, I seek to not focus on one specific aspect, but rather to acknowledge and highlight the multifaceted and complex nature of queer migrants and refugees, and therefore to look at how this complex nature is addressed by organisations and projects which are aimed at them.

Therefore, intersectionality here functions analytically as a research paradigm, because of its benefits of simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity (Carastathis, 2014, p. 308).

3.2. Queer Diaspora

The notion of queer diaspora aids, in this thesis, with the conceptualisation of ‘homelessness’, experienced both physically and emotionally by queer refugees and migrants, as it “constitutes a rich heuristic device to think about questions of belonging, continuity, and solidarity in the context of dispersal and transnational networks of connection” (Fortier, 2002, p. 184). Through queer diaspora, it becomes possible to define the undefinable, by shining a light on the interstitial spaces of the transitory, of homelessness, and liminality, inhabited by queers and migrants in different ways, and essentially embodied by the queer migrant subject.

As Fortier explains, the notion of ‘queer diaspora’ refers to the intersection between theories of diaspora and queer theories. Queer diaspora, then, favours a turn “toward contingency, indeterminacy, power, and conflict” (ibid., p. 183) rather than relying on theories of identity. Major contributors to this theoretical perspective, amongst others, are Brah (1996), Puar (1998), Gopinath (1996), Eng (1997), Ahmed (2000) and Fortier herself, who relies on the abovementioned authors in her discussion of queer diaspora (2002). In order to understand queer diaspora, however, one must first define what is meant by ‘diaspora’. Fortier engages critically with the existing literature, bringing in multiple opposing perspectives while also pinpointing a few key elements which she defines as constituent of ‘diaspora’: how this concept is now often linked to transnational networks that include immigrants, refugees, and other transiting categories, how it engages with notions of borders, transculturation and hybridity, and, in particular, how it must have “push factors”, i.e. how it is inherently connected to forced migration and displacement (ibid., pp. 183-184). Furthermore,

diaspora represents “post-nationality”: it redefines notions of home, identity and belonging, and thus comes into conflict with established understandings of concepts such as nation and tradition (ibid.). It also “questions the language of integration, assimilation or inclusion assumed within national frames, which takes for granted a linear narrative of migration as disconnected from colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial relations of power” (Ahmed et al., 2003, pp. 7-8). Through these processes, a “diaspora space” (Brah, 1996, p. 209) is created, existing between ‘the global’ and ‘the local’ (Fortier, 2002). This ‘diaspora space’, I argue, can also be understood as a condition of homelessness, both physical and emotional, and as a condition of “perpetual liminality”, proposed by Wimark (2019) to describe what many, particularly, queer, refugees experience due to never having had a safe home in their country of origin, and not being able to fit into the country of arrival, and therefore never being able to find true belonging.

The various ways in which ‘the queer’ correlates to diaspora in order to conceptualise queer diaspora is explored in depth by Fortier (2002), who departs from a review of previous literature focusing on the “diasporic character of gay and lesbian communities dispersed world-wide” (p. 185) while also warning us against the automatic conflating of the queer subject into the diasporic subject. For instance, she brings forth a discussion surrounding the example, made by Watney (1995), of the relief a gay man experiences upon entering a gay bar in a foreign country, and therefore finding ‘belonging’. Yet, she argues, the traveling subject in Watney’s example is an unmarked body, privileged in his white and Euro-American freedom of movement, while, as Puar (1994) contends, some bodies cannot simply move across borders because they are marked as “Other” (p. 93). Thus, when talking of queer diaspora, one must also acknowledge power dynamics in relation to who is doing the traveling and who is being “travelled upon”, and, furthermore, question the “exemplifying [of] queer diaspora through travel (Fortier, 2002, p. 186).

A further connection between queer and diaspora can be found in the “claims about the condition of exile and estrangement experienced by queer subjects, which locates them outside of the confines of ‘home’: the heterosexual family, the nation, the homeland”, and, therefore, in the narrative of “migration as emancipation” and its trope that links moving out and ‘coming out’ (ibid., p. 188). Thus, both diaspora and queer deal with the notion of home and problematise it, however, Fortier points out, they do not simply reject home, but instead often deploy “homing desires” (Brah, 1996, p. 180): “in their refusal of home, queer migrant subjects reclaim a space to be called ‘home’” (Fortier, 2002, p. 189). A further point made by Fortier which I highlight in relation to this particular paper is that, through queer diaspora, it is possible to think about community “in terms of difference, dispersal, disconnection, diversity, and multilocality” (ibid., p. 192) rather than exclusively in terms of commonality.

Therefore, I have chosen to utilise queer diaspora throughout this paper to engage with concepts of home and belonging in relation to both a diasporic and queer perspective, reflecting the migrant/diasporic and queer identities embodied by the subjects of this research, and rejecting instead the concepts of integration and assimilation often utilised as the lens through which to approach migrants and refugees.

3.3. Politics of Belonging

In combination with the notion of queer diaspora, Yuval-Davis' discussion regarding the 'politics of belonging' (2011) will be utilised in the analysis to focus on the process of building a 'sense of belonging', and, therefore, on the construction of 'home' understood as a safe, welcoming place. As mentioned above, the notion of 'belonging', in this thesis, will be utilised as opposed to that of 'integration', following Hartnell's discussion regarding the problematic nature of the term, which can be linked to 'assimilation', and therefore to hegemonic and imperialist understandings of migratory subjects (2006). Furthermore, this choice needs to be understood in the context of this thesis, which focuses precisely on the physical/emotional aspects of home and belonging, rather than on integration and its assessment through various indicators.

Before addressing the notion of 'politics of belonging' and the ways in which it can be utilised to carry out a meaningful analysis, it is necessary to isolate the concept of 'belonging'. Yuval-Davis defines it as being about emotional attachment and about feeling 'at home' (2006), a further problematising notion, as discussed through a queer diaspora perspective, which highlights the conflicting nature of 'home' for both queer and migratory subjects, and, subsequently, for queer migratory subjects. Hartnell adds that belonging is "an imperfect analytical concept that tears a jagged path across pertinent legal categories and available political opportunities" (2006). Indeed then, 'belonging' is a complex concept, which can be understood in multiplicitous ways: it relates to emotional attachments, but also to pragmatic situatedness and social relationships (Lovell, 1998); it includes and excludes, by separating 'those who belong' and 'those who do not' (Yuval-Davis, 2011); it is, essentially, "always a dynamic process [...] usually multi-layered [...] and multi-scale" (ibid., p. 12). In particular, Yuval-Davis distinguishes between three main analytical aspects that contribute to the construction of 'belonging', namely: the aspect of social locations, the aspect of people's identifications and emotional attachments to various groups, and the aspect of ethical and political value systems.

The first aspect, social locations, indicates a person's belonging to certain groups, depending on gender, ethnicity, class and so on. However, these social positionings intersect along axes of power, depending on the historical context: "different systems of stratification tend to give differential

weight to different intersectional categories of location and axes of power and they might operate in many different ways” (ibid., p. 13), therefore, an intersectional approach is needed in order to not prioritise one social or economic category above others. Lastly, Yuval-Davis warns about the markers of social and economic location, such as skin colour or particular behaviour: these markers, she argues, should not be equated with subjective identification, and therefore should not be conceived as representation of an individual’s belonging to a certain category (ibid.).

The second aspect, identifications and emotional attachments, deals with “identity narratives”, i.e. with the ways in which individuals define who they are. They “can relate to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed to explain the present and probably, above all, they function as a projection of future trajectory” (ibid., p. 14). Indeed, an in-depth discussion surrounding identity and the construction of self transcends the aims of this thesis, nonetheless, in order to operationalise the concept, it can be possible to summarise the construction of identity as a dialogical process, reflective and constitutive, that is both individual and collective, and constantly in a state of ‘becoming’. (ibid., p. 16).

The third aspect, ethical and political values, addresses the ways in which the other two aspects of social locations and identity construction are judged by the self and others. These assessments relate to the ways in which existing ideological perspectives delineate identities and categories, and therefore focus on how an individual embodies a certain social location or identity.

According to Yuval-Davis, when ‘belonging’ becomes problematised, as well as when ‘home’ is threatened, ‘politics of belonging’ emerges by exercising power and constructing boundaries focusing on the inclusion/exclusion of individuals and social categories. In this instance, she explains, we approach the notion of power by understanding it in a feminist and grassroots-activism perspective, i.e. as ‘empowerment’ and ‘power of’, rather than as gaining ‘power on’ someone (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 19). Ultimately, the politics of belonging are concerned with maintaining and reproducing the abovementioned boundaries of belonging, with resisting those who seek to challenge these boundaries, and with the “struggles around the determination of what is involved in belonging” (ibid., p. 20).

Within the context of this paper, politics of belonging is utilised to approach the empirical data and highlight the ways in which the construction of a sense of belonging in queer migrants and refugees happens, focusing, therefore, on the ‘empowerment’ aspect, and on how this category gains ‘power of’ their life and migration path when involved in the activities of LGBTQ organisations. Likewise, the theory will also be applied to the data gathered from individuals working within said organisations, in order to analyse whether, and - if so - how, these organisations seek to develop the

queer migrants and refugees' sense of belonging, addressing both the issues of physical and emotional homelessness that they experience.

Through politics of belonging, then, it will be possible to recognise the 'homing processes' taking place, understanding them as "a resistance that pushes against patriarchal, cis-hetero-patriarchal, capitalist, and ableist systems that build and maintain borders, deeming racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies disposable" (Borges, 2018, p. 70). Furthermore, I maintain that, while queer diaspora allows me to conceptualise the 'homelessness' experienced by queer migrants and refugees, it is in combination with politics of belonging that I can utilise it to focus instead on the re-construction of home in conditions of diaspora: I can therefore observe the homing processes taking place, so that perpetual liminality is escaped, and a new construction of home is achieved.

Section III

4. Analysis

As detailed in the methods section (see here: pp. 9-13), all transcribed interviews were processed through the software NVivo. Analysing the data, certain words and sentences were categorised under the node 'homelessness'. This allowed me to identify the ways in which the interviewees, both migrants/refugees and volunteers/workers, construct the condition of physical/emotional homelessness experienced by the queer migrant subject. Other wordings are instead categorised under the node 'belonging', as they represent the different ways in which a sense of belonging is formulated and being constructed, and, therefore, how a notion of home is being re-built by the queer refugees and migrants on one hand, and by the NGOs volunteers/workers on the other. Within the node 'belonging' in NVivo I have highlighted: 1) the expressions of having found home and family; 2) the 'good practices' such as 'empowerment' and 'sharing' implemented by the activists and volunteers interviewed, and 3) the visible positive outcomes reported, which, for instance, confirmed that a heightened sensibility towards matters of belonging and displacement and consequent actions dealing with those matters contributed to alleviate the homelessness experienced by queer migrants and refugees.

This chapter will therefore focus on the progression characterised by: 1) the physical/emotional homelessness, 2) its resolution through homing processes, and 3) the construction of a sense of belonging. By pointing out the good practices and the positive outcomes, I will aim to provide the empirical grounds upon which to draft a discussion that will address my research questions based on the theoretical perspectives introduced in their respective sections.

In approaching the analysis part, I followed, as general guidelines, the conditions described by Bryant (2015) regarding the access to safe housing for the queer subject:

“the basic need for shelter; the requirement of intimate space in which to develop personality in relation to gender, sexuality, and community; the need for privacy to satisfy claims to emotional and mental well-being; the need to acculturate into routines of daily living; the ability to invest space, objects, and practices with personal relevance, developing routines that reflect individuality; the cultivation of homing as a way of life that acknowledges the advantages of occupying domestic space, which produces the urge to locate homing as a device to build community” (pp. 280-281).

I have summarised these in the table below.

“THE CONDITIONS FOR HOUSING QUEERS SAFELY” (Bryant, 2015, pp. 280-281)
1. THE BASIC NEED FOR SHELTER
2. THE REQUIREMENT OF INTIMATE SPACE
3. THE NEED FOR PRIVACY
4. THE NEED FOR DAILY ROUTINES
5. THE ABILITY TO INVEST SPACE, OBJECTS, AND PRACTICES WITH PERSONAL RELEVANCE
6. THE CULTIVATION OF HOMING

Table 1

Therefore, I have highlighted a clear lack of one or more of these conditions as an instance of homelessness, while the presence of one or more of them contributed to the construction of home and belonging.

4.1. Homelessness

Throughout the interviews I carried out, the issue of both physical and emotional homelessness has emerged in various ways, at times spontaneously, while, in other occasions, it was necessary for me to directly inquire about living conditions inside reception centres in order for the interviewees to elaborate on their experience, identifying their situation as home-less, diasporic, liminal.

While, analytically and for the purpose of organising my findings, it makes sense to distinguish between physical and emotional homelessness, it must be acknowledged that, in most

cases, the demarcation between the two is actually quite blurry. For instance, a person's experience inside a migrant reception centre could be classified as an example of physical homelessness in the sense that, despite having a place where to sleep and eat, many queer refugees and migrants cannot feel safe in that space without repressing some part of themselves and their needs. Therefore, the space which they are forced to inhabit not only does not feel like an emotional home, but it also fails at being a safe home where to simply live and 'exist'.

4.1.1. Physical homelessness

From the data collected, it is possible to highlight a few instances of physical homelessness discussed by the interviewees: the majority of the queer migrants and refugees interviewed talked of physical homelessness in one way or another, from expressing dissatisfaction with their living situation in a reception centre, to reporting of being essentially kicked out of the accommodation. The volunteers and individuals working with social cooperatives and NGOs also contributed to this discussion, sharing what they have encountered while active in the field and their own experiences with homelessness not only pertaining specifically to the queer migrant subject, but also to the queer subject in general.

One interviewee, Joy⁵, pinpointed the main issue of being a queer migrant/refugee in a reception centre:

"It's just like taking you out of [country of origin], where you know that gay people are not accepted... and putting you back with the same [people you were escaping from]. The place changed. The emotion... my mindset stayed the same. Nothing changes for you personally because it's just like... If you don't have the courage, then you are not free to be who you want to be." (Appendix, p. 80).

The kind of homelessness she experiences is therefore not only emotional, but also physical in the sense that, referring to the Bryant's conditions above (2015), the reception centre does not represent a "safe home" (p. 280) because it does not allow her to develop her personality by exploring her sexuality freely. Instead, the physical proximity to her fellow nationals forces her back into the situation she had been trying to escape from by seeking refuge in Italy. This is a paradox that many, if not all, queer migrants and refugees have to face. She herself recognises that queer migrants and refugees are in need of a "different kind of help" because of the further difficulties they encounter:

"it's enough to be black leaving your family home and not having anyone to look out for you here [...] It's hard enough to be alone [...] And you were already alone before, [when] you

⁵ All names have been changed to protect the research participants.

were with your family but you did not have peace and you finally leave them and you come here [...] I'm just trying to say that as a lesbian person you encounter more difficulties than a normal straight person [...] Most gay people do, so you see things from a different perspective. You are around the people that are not encouraging you.” (Appendix, p. 81).

She identifies her struggle in terms of her identity as a black person, as well as in terms of being away from the family and deprived of the safety that it represents. Furthermore, she asserts a sense of emotional homelessness existing already when living with her family. One could thus interpret her words as signifying that, when a queer person seeks to escape the emotional homelessness experienced in their family at home and/or in the home-country, they end trading it with physical homelessness. The problem, however, is that even at that point the ‘emotional home’ seems impossible to reach when being placed into a reception centre where the other residents are in the best case unsupportive, and, in the worst case, actively hostile, to the point of physical violence.

Further examples of the sense of homelessness experienced by queer migrants and refugees can be found in other interviews: Peter recounts that, when he first arrived in Italy and was placed in a reception centre, he did not know anyone and felt particularly lonely, especially when the other residents started isolating him. Ultimately, he had to be moved to a different centre, because he could not live together with his fellow nationals. Aaron, who still lives in a reception centre, simply told me “I am not OK right now” (Appendix, p. 72).

The situation gets even more dramatic when the queer migrant subject is transgender, i.e. when their gender does not match their sex assigned at birth. For a transgender individual, the migration journey hides even more dangers, even once arrived to a ‘safe country’. The main struggle, indeed, is that of being placed in the wrong reception centre on the grounds of IDs and documents identifying them as one gender, while their physical presentation is completely divergent from what the papers say.

Maruf, for instance, tells of his experience as a queer migrant individual with female documents but a male gender expression, yet also retaining some physical characteristics typical of a female body. Because of these ‘discrepancies’ he was a homeless asylum seeker, unable to access the Italian SPRAR (‘Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees’) which is gender segregated. Through a support network, he found a host family that welcomed him until he was finally accepted into a male reception centre. However, his situation was still distressing:

“I shared my room with another guy... imagine, I was still wearing my binder at the time, it killed me, I wore it at home 24/7 [...] in there I suffered some abuse [...] once a guy beat me

up for a stupid reason, [...] but he put his hands on me [...] from that moment, I was anguished, I swear... I told myself, 'It's over now'." (Appendix, p. 73).

In Maruf's case, the situation is particularly complex: on one hand, he 'passes'⁶ as a man, however, in order to maintain that appearance in the eyes of the other residents, he must wear his binder (a tight-fitting undergarment used to compress the breasts, simulating the appearance of a flat, 'masculine' chest) at all times, a practice that is both painful and dangerous – indeed, he told me, he has suffered long-lasting lung injuries that trouble him to this day because of it. His safety in the reception centre therefore rests on his ability to hide his queer self – once one of the other residents touches him, he loses all hope. Then, neither when 'passing' as a man, neither when being recognised as queer, does the reception centre represent for him a safe home: in both instances, he is subjected to stress and fear. Ultimately, Maruf concluded, living in a reception centre feels nothing like home, but in fact, like prison, where "you're treated like an animal, to say the least" (Appendix, pp. 74-75). Referring to the conditions discussed by Bryant (2015), we can observe how, while the accommodation does provide shelter, it fails at giving him the intimate space and privacy needed to feel safe and comfortable.

Another interviewee, Viviana, also offered some insight on the particular struggles of trans migrants, and her experience with homelessness.

"At first I was here with my family, because I have my family here too, but I was not well, they told me to cut my hair off and to change myself but that was not what I wanted, it wasn't... I was not myself. So I was not feeling well and after three months I left and started my life in [city] while they are in [city]. It was very difficult for me but I didn't know... without knowing anyone. Without speaking [Italian]... and that's how it started. Me, alone with my suitcase."

Therefore, while she migrated together with her family to Italy, she was forced to 'migrate' even further, outside of the family-home, in order to live authentically. As a trans woman, as an asylum seeker, as well as a sex worker, she inhabits a very liminal and diasporic space: she moves often between cities, living sometimes in motels, sometimes in overpriced apartments without any lease agreements, struggling to have her asylum seeking application approved and to access safe hormones.

⁶ The concept of 'passing' refers to the ability of a transgender person to be perceived as the gender they identify with rather than as their gender assigned at birth. The term is considered controversial and is widely debated within the transgender community. GLAAD Media Reference Guide lists it as a "problematic" term ("GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Transgender", n.d.). It is used in this instance because it is relevant to the situation, but I do so in complete awareness of the implications that such a term has.

Through a friend, she finds a place in a reception centre, however, she refuses the offer: the centre is for men, and she does not agree with her categorisation as one. Furthermore, she adds:

“They need to give me a space, I don’t care even if I’m alone, but I can’t be placed neither with women nor with men. You need to offer a space for a trans individual, because women’s needs are not the same as mine, and men’s needs are not the same as mine. I am trans, I cannot be with either one gender nor the other.”

Her trans identity therefore contrasts with the norms put in place in systems such as the Italian SPRAR which contribute to push her further into a homeless and liminal existence. She therefore recognises this particular struggle, and argues that the queer, and, specifically, trans migrant subjects cannot find a safe home in a reception centre, even if they are identified as their gender and not sex assigned at birth, because the needs of a trans individual are widely different from those of a cisgender one, and those needs have to be satisfied for a person to feel safe and ‘at home’, as illustrated by Bryant’s conditions (2015, pp. 280-281).

Interviewees who volunteer or work within the field of migration and LGBTQ rights also describe their encounters with homelessness. Several identify for example the issue of queer migrants and refugees forced to live in close proximity with their country nationals, the very same people they were trying to break away from by choosing to migrate to a different country. Greta mentions, for instance, how some of them fear having their food poisoned by other residents, or having the police called on them with a fake excuse so that they would get in trouble. Giorgio adds, in regard to queer migrants and homelessness:

“We have had both some guys who were being discriminated against in the reception centre and therefore wanted to leave, and some who were kicked out because they [had reached the maximum limit of their stay inside a reception centre] and so they had to leave” (Appendix, p. 61).

Another interviewee, Milena, recounts:

“The girl whose case I was working on was in a reception centre [...] with four Nigerian women, when they found out she was a lesbian they started to behave... in a not very friendly manner towards her, but the worst thing is that the person responsible for that centre, a person who is deeply homophobic and also a bit racist... started to behave awfully against her” (Appendix, p. 66).

Gianna and Francesca, who work specifically with transgender refugees, highlight the particularly traumatic journeys experienced by the individuals under their care, as well as the further issue of being placed in the wrong reception centre upon arrival. As addressed by, among others, Viviana: “I am scared of staying only with men, I am scared of what they could do to me” (Appendix, p. 77).

These statements evidence how the homelessness experienced by queer migrants and refugees stems, then, from different, overlapping sources: indeed, as both Greta and Milena discuss, fellow migrants and refugees constitute one major source of anxiety and fear, however, one must not overlook the role played by the individuals who operate in the reception centres, or who work and volunteer with migrants and refugees. These, as emerging from Milena’s anecdote, can be discriminatory and, exercising significant power over the migrants and refugees who rely on them, are in the position of inflicting serious harm. Lastly, it is necessary to acknowledge the harm that derives from the ways in which the reception system is structured, which, as seen in Viviana and Gianna and Francesca’s testimonies, is particularly damaging towards transgender migrants.

A further point, brought up by Sasha, and which is adjacent to the topics discussed in this thesis, relates to the aspect of physical homelessness experienced by many Italian queer individuals:

“In South Italy today, there are still many people, LGBT people, who are kicked out of their home. Myself, I came to Arcigay because I had been thrown out and at the time I slept there, which is something you are not allowed to do. I was young and I had nowhere to sleep because my parents had thrown me out, the association helped me in a process of... awareness of my identity and my rights, a path ‘from shame to pride’.” (Appendix, p. 62).

While this specific aspect cannot be explored in depth within the limits of this thesis, it was relevant to highlight how homelessness, in this instance physical, does not affect exclusively the queer migrant subject, but indeed is experienced by many others. By discussing this issue, Sasha relates their personal experience to that of the individuals whom they seek to help, and therefore contributes to the development of an extended solidarity which encompasses individuals from different, yet also similar, paths of life.

4.1.2. Emotional Homelessness

The demarcation between physical and emotional homelessness is blurred, especially in the case of queer migrants and refugees. The statements highlighted above focus however more explicitly on the aspect of physical homelessness, while, in contrast, the ones below will pertain to a more emotional homelessness, expressing, for instance, a longing for family and a place where to belong.

Both Hope and Joy express this sentiment, explaining how they discovered the LGBT association they are now members of:

Hope: “He introduced me to the association when he found out that I was a lesbian... [He asked] if I would like to join them. I said, ‘OK, I was actually looking for an association to join’.” (Appendix, p. 84).

Joy: “I’ve been wanting to join a group. I went into a group in [city]... they were not really... not that they were cruel or something like that but it was that... I didn’t really feel comfortable because it was just like there was nobody I could relate to.” (Appendix, p. 80).

Hope and Joy, as queer migrants, were experiencing a sense of emotional homelessness in the sense that, while they might have had a physical place where to stay, they still lacked a further connection with people ‘like them’. Joy re-states this feeling by clearly explaining: “home is nothing without a family” (Appendix, p. 80). In this sense, then, it is important to recognise the significance of being able to transform the living space into “domestic space” through “homing”, as it serves to build community (Bryant, 2015, p. 281).

Even when queer family is found inside a reception centre, its precarious nature renders the queer migrant subject particularly exposed to the emotional homelessness that can derive from its loss:

“I met my girlfriend actually in the camp and it got to a point where they started telling us things like ‘you can’t let the rest of the girls know you are together’. They were trying to separate us and they transferred her to a very far city. You know what I’m saying. Just to keep us apart. And at that moment I was wishing that... I wish there was camps for gay people, specifically lesbians. Then I would have been happy.” (Appendix, p. 82).

In Joy’s case above, for instance, her attempt at finding love and building an ‘emotional home’ in the reception centre is quickly obstructed by the reception system itself, which first imposes secrecy upon her lesbian relationship, and, subsequently, tries to break it off entirely by keeping the two women apart. This event precipitates Joy into a deep emotional homelessness, as she wishes for a place reserved for people like her, a place where she can belong and live truthfully without any of the consequences which she has had to endure attempting to live as a black, African, lesbian woman.

In a similar manner to Joy and Hope, transgender migrants and refugees also seek connection to others to mitigate their emotional homelessness. This, however, can prove to be particularly difficult:

“But I didn’t seek her [person responsible for one of Arcigay’s chapters] out afterwards because I felt like... it was just a gay association, and a gay person cannot understand a trans person’s life, even though I went through identifying as a gay man first, and then a transvestite...” (Appendix, p. 77).

In this statement, Viviana is referring to the fact that, due to her particular struggle as a trans woman, she does not feel like she truly belongs to a group which is mostly comprised of gay individuals. Her emotional home is therefore even further away.

Another interviewee, Omar, recounts in his interview:

“When I arrived here to Italy I was afraid to explain my story to my social workers. Not having had the possibility to meet an association, I was just there at the reception centre. When I was staying there I didn’t tell my friends there [about my sexuality], I only told my roommate. [...] He advised me to not be afraid and talk to my social worker, but not to the other residents” (Appendix, p. 78).

In Omar’s case, his accommodation does not provide him with anything besides a shelter: every other condition presented by Bryant (2015), from intimate space for personal development to the cultivation of homing, is completely lacking. Furthermore, it is possible to observe how not only the impossibility to safely express one’s own sexuality affects a person, but also how a lack of contact with LGBTQ associations and therefore with a larger community contributes to constructing a sense of emotional homelessness in the queer migrant subject. Many, seeking to escape this condition, search intently for a connection, for their community, for somewhere to belong, even if that means exposing themselves to discrimination and violence. For many, a way out of this liminality is discovered accidentally, when they learn that being queer is not illegal in Italy, and that there are supportive networks aimed at them. For many others, this condition seems simply inescapable, and mental health issues such as anxiety, PTSD, and depression arise (Messih, 2016).

The interviewees who volunteer and/or work within the field highlighted similar aspects: the particularly traumatic migration journey braved by trans migrants, “migrations that are not only geographic but that extend on other levels” (Appendix, p. 67); the issue of a deep fear of rejection from the ethnic networks which, for many diasporic subjects, are often an inestimable form of support (Wimark, 2019), and therefore a sense of shame when interacting with cultural and linguistic mediators belonging to their own ethnic network; a request for the possibility to find connection and therefore escape the emotional homelessness through social relations in a safe space, such as meeting groups and various social events. Greta, for instance, remarks how the meeting group for queer

migrants that she coordinates was born out of a request from two Nigerian men who, after obtaining refugee status, observed that, as black gay men, their problems were not over, and thus insisted on the need to create spaces and groups where people like them could also find a sense of belonging, and through which they could also learn about their rights.

4.1.3. Summary

Throughout this section, I have sought to display the ways in which homelessness represents a major issue for the queer migrant subject, focusing first on its physical aspect, intended as not simply the lack of a place where to stay, but rather, as the lack of a safe space where to live authentically, referencing the conditions of a safe home, as described by Bryant (2015); I have then focused on the emotional aspect, and, therefore, on the isolation and longing for community, family, sense of belonging, ‘home’, experienced by queer migrants and refugees. This section has therefore allowed me to identify ‘the problem’ at the core of this thesis through an analysis of primary data, displaying at the same time that many queer migrants and refugees who experience this dual homelessness also tend to seek ways to alleviate their condition, often reaching out to existing LGBTQ organisations. The following step is therefore to focus on belonging, in order to understand how notions of home and family can be constructed through social connection and activism.

4.2. Belonging

In order to identify in the data collected instances in which a sense of belonging is actively sought after and constructed, I have created three main nodes in NVivo: 1) ‘finding home or family’, 2) ‘good practices’, and 3) ‘positive outcomes’. Each of these contributes in different ways to the construction of a sense of belonging in queer migrants and refugees. Once again, while the categorisations are useful for analytical purposes, they are of course to be considered somewhat arbitrary, that is: in reality there is no such clear-cut demarcation between them. Still, I maintain that the division into three main clusters of significance is helpful in structuring this section and organising the analysis and subsequently in the understanding and discussion of the interviews.

4.2.1. Finding Home or Family

Within the node that I named ‘finding home or family’, I have identified multiple instances in which queer migrants and refugees illustrate their “homing processes” (Ahmed et al., 2003, p. 9) through which they are able to reconstruct a sense of home, safety and belonging for themselves. This allows them to escape, or at least alleviate, their homelessness, their liminality, and their diasporic condition. Several of the queer migrants I interviewed have utilised the word ‘family’ to talk about the LGBTQ organisations and meeting groups that they have joined in; they also mention a connection with the

people they have met through these groups, and a desire to be active and offer the same help they have received to others who might need it.

For instance, when Aaron was questioned about how he feels towards the LGBTQ migrant group he is a part of, he stated: “I love being with them, whenever I’m with them I’m happy because I found my brothers.” (Appendix, p. 71). Afterwards, we discussed the lockdown situation in Italy⁷, and he expressed how much he missed “his people”, referring to the other members of the group. When I agreed that it is hard to be away from “your friends”, he gently corrected me: “Yeah they’re not my friends, they’re my family” (Appendix, p. 72).

Omar, too, explained the relationship that he has established with his LGBT migrant group:

“When we’re [at the LGBT organisation’s headquarters] there’s no difference, we’re all equals. Sometimes when we’re at [coordinator]’s home it’s like our home [...] it’s like a family. [...] It doesn’t end there, we can go get coffee together, we eat together and so... it’s family. It’s a family.” (Appendix, p. 79).

In this statement, Omar highlights the “homing processes” (Ahmed et al., 2003, p. 9) carried out by the group, which transform it into a family: spending time together in and outside the organisation’s offices, eating together, meeting up for coffee. They are small, everyday, insignificant gestures, and yet, the meaning that is attached to them is indeed greater, and they allow Omar to feel a sense of belonging and, in many ways, to find ‘home’. In his case, then, the space shared by the organisation’s members becomes a home as it does fulfil, in some ways, Bryant’s conditions (2015): it offers shelter, even if temporarily; it allows for the development of personality and the exploration of notions of gender, sexuality, and identity; it offers mental and emotional support; it favours the development of routines that are tied to the ideas of ‘domesticity’, and upon which community can be built.

Similarly, Steven added:

“[That is why] I feel like I’m in a family because in this moment I have no family besides them, so if I have troubles I always call [LGBT migrants helpdesk coordinators], I tell them what’s going on and they help me, they’re like a family [...] There’s also this guy [...] I feel a little bit better with him, about talking about my things... My difficulties too, I always share them with him” (Appendix, p. 69).

In his case, as well, the organisation offers valuable support, which contributes to Steven’s re-interpretation of the organisation as a domestic space, and therefore of its surrounding community as a family.

⁷ The interviews were conducted under the world health crisis triggered by the virus Sars Covid-19 in 2020.

The notion of finding a sense of belonging, as well as the impact that it can have, are also described by Hope and Joy in this way:

Hope: “[...] since I’ve been in Arcigay. It has been a pleasure for me [to be in] contact with them because since I’ve been there... I’ve been so free, like, meeting people like me. Expressing myself freely.” (Appendix, p. 84).

Joy: “when I joined [LGBT migrant group] I really felt the connection because I saw people that relate to me, something that I can relate to because it’s like a family. We are trying to elevate one another and trying to help one another. We have the same goal and we have the same vision.” (Appendix, p. 81).

Both acknowledge a sort of euphoria in relation to meeting ‘people like them’, i.e. in recognising and actualising the self through the other – what Yuval-Davis calls “the dialogical construction of identity” (2011, p. 16) – and in establishing a connection that they never imagined possible/available for them. Their newfound belonging to a community ‘sets them free’, and the community ‘feels like a family’ because of the understanding of mutual support. Therefore, regardless of their actual housing situation, regardless of whether the interviewees live on their own or whether they are still inside the migrant reception system, they are able to build an ‘emotional home’ for themselves by engaging with a local LGBTQ organisation and other queer migrants and refugees, and the connections that they establish contribute to liberate them from their homelessness. Once again, the processes which favour this construction of home have to do with the fulfilment of Bryant’s “conditions for housing queers safely” (2015, pp. 280-281). In particular, Hope mentions having the possibility to access a physical space where to freely express gender and sexuality, while Joy addresses her being able to “project messages of personal identity” (ibid., p. 283) onto the organisation-home, which she does by finding connection through shared goals.

Furthermore, the aspect of mutual support and desire to aid others in overcoming feelings of fear and internalised homophobia⁸ as well as other struggles shared by many queer individuals, emerges throughout multiple interviews in various ways:

Viviana: “I told [person responsible for LGBT migrant group], ‘look, when a trans woman or a transvestite comes along... or a gay boy who wants to start hormone replacement therapy,

⁸ “Internalized homophobia represents “the gay person’s direction of negative social attitudes toward the self” (Meyer & Dean, 1998, p. 161) and in its extreme forms, it can lead to the rejection of one’s sexual orientation. Internalized homophobia is further characterized by an intrapsychic conflict between experiences of same-sex affection or desire and feeling a need to be heterosexual (Herek, 2004).” (Frost & Meyer, 2009, p. 97).

and you guys don't know what to do... I have already gone through all of it, I understand the person's worries and anxiety'. So I said, 'look, send them to me and I'll talk to them'."

Omar: [When asked about future projects/activism] "Calling out to the people who are afraid like I was. Now there are many who are afraid, and I put myself in their place. When I had just arrived, I was scared. I told myself that when I went out with my friend hand in hand, maybe someone would say something... offensive, or glare at us. So, calling out to these people who are scared, telling them to join our organisation, because when you're there nobody can hurt you [...]" (Appendix, p. 79).

Steven: "I am the coordinator of the group now, I mean that I take care of the organising... the new people who join, I am responsible for talking to them, explaining how we behave here, what we do, things like that" (Appendix, p. 69).

In Viviana's case, she takes on the role of 'mentor' for other individuals struggling with issues related to gender identity, recognising that, as she has faced those same struggles before, she can offer helpful advice to those in need, in ways and at levels that the cisgender activists in the organisation might not be able to do. Similarly, Omar voices his desire to reach out to other queer migrants and refugees who might be hiding parts of their identity because of their fears, as he had done. He therefore relates to their situation on a very deep and personal level, and that connection motivates his activism, which he wants to focus on dissipating the fears around coming out, and on displaying the acceptance, security, and family that can be found within LGBTQ organisations and communities. As for Steven's statement, it has been highlighted because it displays very interesting insights into the aspect of mutual support: Steven shows his pride in welcoming others inside the organisation and in being 'the keeper' of the group's behaviours and therefore of delimitating the group's sense of belonging. The help which he offers to others is therefore fundamental, because he immediately teaches the newcomers about the group's core values and beliefs, through which they, too, can become part of the group. His role then is not that of an exclusionary gatekeeper, but rather, of a facilitator for the inclusion of new members.

People who volunteer or work with these organisations have also shared their experiences, observing, for instance, how a need for belonging and community favoured the development of meeting groups out of simple service-oriented migrant helpdesks. Some highlighted the ways in which the queer refugees and migrants constructed and 'managed' their sense of belonging to an

LGBTQ organisation, as well as to each other, through various practices. In particular, referring to the latter, I found significant the statements made by Gianna, who works inside the only trans-specific refugee apartment in Italy, which currently hosts four transgender women:

“Now that I have known some of the residents for a very long time and we have shared the entirety of their transition, a sense of belonging to [Casa Caterina] has been created, in the sense that finally [Casa Caterina] is recognised by the residents themselves as a safe space, a unique place that does not exist anywhere else. [...] There are moments, that are particularly important to me, of great solidarity between the residents, moments of bonding and sharing, for example, a person who is further in her transition path reassures another who has not yet started taking hormones on the fact that she will be able to start her transition soon and that it will be amazing as her body will transform and so on...” (Appendix, p. 68).

Before this statement, she had told me that, initially, inside the apartment, there had been more conflicts than anticipated, which related to both cultural differences, as the residents have very different cultural backgrounds, and to different understandings of womanhood and of being transgender, as the residents are in different stages of their transition. Therefore, while the organisations in charge of the project had been focusing on the aspects that the residents would have in common, i.e. being transgender women and being refugees, and assumed that a sense of belonging would naturally develop, the residents collided over their differences, a development which displays a need for intersectional approaches which consider aspects beyond the fixed categories of race, gender, class and so forth, and instead acknowledge the multifaceted struggles of each individual. However, as Gianna pointed out, time has contributed in placating the situation, and, while conflicts still remain, what matters is that the residents now realise the value of living in a space that is specifically dedicated to them and their needs as transgender migrant women, and are thus in the process of developing a sense of belonging to both the physical space and each other. For Gianna, the particularly meaningful moments that indicate the possibility of positive future developments are the displays of this sense of belonging and emotional connection, such as the support that one transgender woman offers to another struggling with anxiety over her transition: while initially, their different stages of transition might have generated conflicts, it is now through them that an emotional connection is created.

A minor, but still interesting aspect that emerged from multiple interviews, both with the queer refugees and migrants and with the people who volunteer and/or work with the organisations included in this research, is that of the ways in which the sense of belonging is not only constructed, but also proudly displayed. For instance, many queer refugees and migrants, when asked about which

activities related to their LGBTQ organisation/meeting group they particularly enjoy, have mentioned the various Pride events and LGBTQ demonstrations they have taken part in.

Aaron, for example, explained:

“I’m gay [...] I love being at an event whenever they are doing events, I love being there. I’m very happy whenever I do. Something like gay Pride, international day against homophobia, something like that. Yeah. I love being ‘on duty’. I can’t wait to be at Pride this year.” (Appendix, p. 72).

Pride, indeed, is a very meaningful event for the queer community, as it represents not only the ongoing battle for civil rights and its history, but it is also a celebration of life lived ‘out and proud’, even if, for some, that might only happen once a year. Pride, in and of itself, is about belonging, about finding one’s own community, about getting together as a large, loud, colourful family. It is not surprising then that queer migrants and refugees have so wholly embraced Pride events: being at Pride reinforces their sense of belonging, and, through their participation, through speaking on stages in front of hundreds or thousands of people, they make themselves visible and known, rejecting their liminal and homeless condition, and instead finding home and belonging. Connected to this is the aspect of showing belonging: Giorgio told me of the personalised t-shirts with their organisation’s logo that the queer refugees printed for them to wear at Pride, where they marched holding their own banner, and of how, when one queer refugee is invited to speak on stage at a demonstration, everyone else follows, standing together in solidarity. Sasha, too, recounted of one time when a group of “flamboyant” Nigerian men showed up at the LGBTQ migrant helpdesk they⁹ volunteer at, all seeking to buy Pride and rainbow-striped apparel and renew their memberships to the organisation. As Sasha noted,

“they really wanted to display this sense of belonging to the community, it was something that truly struck me, and they said, ‘you know the rainbow is not just a Western symbol’. They recognised themselves in some way in the rainbow and in the colours of the flag...” (Appendix, p. 62).

Indeed, utilising certain symbols to signify belonging to a group is a very common practice, which, while not being able to establish a sense of belonging and community on its own, can definitely offer a valid contribution, as the examples discussed above have displayed. This aspect reflects what Yuval-Davis calls “the performative dimension” of the constructions of belonging (2011, p. 15), as certain practices, in this case, donning rainbow-striped items of clothing, “are crucial for the

⁹ Sasha’s preferred pronouns are they/them.

construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment” (ibid., pp. 15-16).

As this section has focused on the construction of a sense of belonging through the notions of home, family, and community, it is now necessary to turn towards the other nodes which I identified and highlighted when processing the gathered data, i.e. ‘good practices’ and ‘positive outcomes’. While the former refers to the various bottom-up and grassroots practices undertaken by the LGBTQ organisations I approached to favour the development of a sense of belonging in the queer migrants and refugees, the latter focuses on the queer migrants and refugees’ response to these practices.

4.2.2. Good Practices

As mentioned before, this section’s focus is on what I identified as the ‘good practices’ implemented by organisations and/or individuals within them. It must be acknowledged that the majority of the interviewees who work with said LGBTQ organisations, do so on a voluntary basis, and even those who are compensated have very little power at the organisational level. This means that their ability to make certain decisions regarding the practices to implement, if they have it at all, is usually limited to their own ‘area of influence’, i.e. their own approach and method, which still need to be based on specific established guidelines, whether from the UNHCR or from another recognised ‘authority’ on matters of migration and LGBTQ identity. For these reasons, most of the good practices outlined are described as ‘grassroots’ and ‘from below’ and do not represent overall, ‘institutional’ and generalised approaches. Only one interviewee, who has a more ‘executive’ position within the national LGBTQ organisation and who is therefore responsible for decisions that define the ‘standard’ approach to various matters, can be seen as representative of the ‘institutional’, ‘from above’ perspective.

Following this clarification, it is now possible to turn towards the examples of ‘good practices’ underlined in the data, as reported by both those working with the LGBTQ organisations and by the queer refugees and migrants themselves. While I found, across the majority of interviews, many common practices that aligned themselves with the guidelines and approaches supported by Arcigay at the national level, such as carrying out training workshops for social workers and others working within reception centres, relying on professional figures such as psychologists and cultural mediators, and maintaining the importance of activist networks within the field, which can be seen as representing the ‘institutional’ and ‘from above’ approaches, I have chosen to highlight below the ‘alternative, person-focused, from below’ practices that I have encountered.

One of the practices that was described by many as being particularly effective in contributing to the construction of a sense of belonging has to do with the concept of ‘empowerment’. While one

of the interviewees himself, Francesco, is wary of the word, he does remark that ‘empowerment’ is the best way to describe the reasoning behind the implementation of certain practices, such as providing the queer refugees and migrants with organisational tools and structures, or with platforms and opportunities for public speaking, without the patronising and often neo-colonialist narrative of the migrant-as-victim and NGO-as-saviour. When asked about the queer migrant and refugee group that exists within the LGBTQ organisation he is a part of, Francesco explained:

“Almost three years ago now I think, we said, ‘you know what? Let’s try and get [queer refugees and migrants] together and ask them if they would like to... find others who have had similar experiences’ and they agreed so we organised the first meeting which was a bit like... us [volunteers] trying to lead off with ice-breaking activities and things like that. [...] Then we thought, since our presence tends to ‘freeze’ them, let’s suggest that the next meeting will be led by one of them. ‘So you can take care of everything next time, we won’t be there or well we’ll be in the next room just doing other stuff’... we did that. It worked so well that the next time they told us ‘you can just go’... Later it turned out that they had decided to elect a treasurer and a secretary for their group.” (Appendix, pp. 58-59).

Giorgio added, in regard to the same experience:

“[We told them] ‘We won’t come anymore, you’re adults, you can talk about whatever you want, you don’t need us as ‘white babysitters’ to tell you what to do or how to run things’. [...] Since then the participation in the group has increased. [...] Now it’s them telling us what to do. This is something good because they have become autonomous. Even just the aspect of going grocery shopping because they know that an event is coming up and they need to organise it... It means thinking outside of ‘I am a migrant and I need to send the white person to do the grocery shopping. No, I am a person. I live in this area, I go to the store’.” (Appendix, p. 61).

Both of them have told me about the meeting group for queer refugees and migrants that they coordinate, and how, when they first started it with the intention of bringing people together and creating a sense of community and belonging, they thought of it as a failure because of scarce participation and seeming lack of interest. However, as their statements highlight, the situation improved significantly when they as the ‘white authority figures’ took a step back and left the queer migrants and refugees, the intended focus of the meeting group, to handle everything themselves, from booking a meeting room to buying snacks. In this sense, then, they were ‘empowered from below’, in the sense that the organisation did not seek to impose any community-building activities

on the queer refugees and migrants, whether they wanted or not. Instead, the organisation understood the importance of self-realisation and autonomy, meaning that they provided the queer migrants and refugees with valuable tools such as a physical safe space where to meet, but they let them decide for themselves whether and how to meet and organise. In a way, then, Francesco and Giorgio contributed to the fulfilment of the conditions described by Bryant (2015): they provided the queer migrants and refugees with a physical and intimate space where to explore their identities and to develop practices and domestic routines, through which they have been able to cultivate a sense of home, family, and community.

Others, too, commented on the aspects of empowerment, self-realisation, autonomy. Greta, for instance, remarked that she had been pleased to receive the request, from queer migrants and refugees, for the opportunity to meet and be actively involved in the LGBTQ movement as a group, instead of being “mere users of a service” (Appendix, p. 64). The assertion of this need, she continued, was seen by her “as a force, as something that truly is the symbol of intersectionality, of the lack of representation of [different] identities within our movements” (Appendix, p. 65). Therefore, rejecting the neo-colonialist narratives surrounding migrants and NGOs, she instead focused on listening to the needs of the queer migrants and refugees who wanted to have their voices heard and wanted to become active protagonists of their own narratives rather than being reduced to passive and powerless victims. Understanding her privileged position as the one ‘in charge’ of her Arcigay chapter, Greta effectively utilised it to give a platform and a voice to the queer refugees and migrants, who tend to be marginalised both from their ethnic networks and from the local LGBTQ communities, emphasising the importance of standing up for oneself rather than relying on others to do so. The queer migrant group that was formed started then to contribute in various ways to the activities of the organisation, such as by welcoming other migrants struggling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, by offering guidance during the asylum seeking process, and by participating as speakers during SOGI trainings inside reception centres aimed at both the professionals and the residents.

Another set of practices implemented by various LGBTQ organisations to help in the development of a sense of belonging and in the construction of home for queer migrants and refugees has involved coming together to both share experiences and establish connections across cultures, nationalities, and languages. Sasha, for instance, recounted:

“We organised this ‘sharing moment’ and the majority [of the participants] were migrants. [...] The psychologist made us do these exercises of representation of our traumas... it was very intense and lasted many hours. [...] People really opened up... they were very generous with their narrations. [...] It was fantastic and they [the queer migrants] were very pleased

because there were many Italian gay guys [who shared that] they were not accepted by their families and were living in a very stressful situation, and then there were them [the queer migrants], one had been arrested in Libya, another had been tortured. So there was this sharing of traumatic experiences with different intensities but... it brought us all together and it was very beautiful” (Appendix, p. 63).

As they describe, organising an event which sought to discuss and process together traumatic experiences related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and migration/diaspora was impactful as it allowed people, marginalised in similar yet different ways, to interact and be vulnerable in a safe environment. One of the results of such an event was therefore that of establishing belonging through shared experience. This aspect can be related to Yuval-Davis’ discussion of “identity narratives”: if identities are “stories people tell themselves and others about who they are”, then “these stories will often relate, directly or indirectly, to self and/or others’ perceptions of what being a member of such a grouping or collectivity (ethnic, racial, national, cultural, religious) might mean” (2011, p. 14). In this case, by sharing individual identity narratives, the collective narrative is enriched, and the group’s sense of belonging is constructed and reinforced.

Another interviewee, Maruf, mentioned a similar instance regarding the organisation he works for:

“[We said] ‘why don’t we do something social?’ That is something really needed to feel at ease because honestly we are not very highly regarded in the Italian [LGBTQ] community, we do not feel like we belong. [...] So ‘Fabulous Beyond Borders’ was launched, a socialising group for LGBTQ people, migrants and refugees, second generation immigrants, asylum seekers and Italians... the group has given extraordinary results. [...] We organised a language workshop, ‘how do you say ‘trans’ in your language? What is the origin of the word? What is its history?’ and so on. We created a little handbook.” (Appendix, p. 73)

He then addressed his organisation’s approach:

“This is our model, based on culture, on mutual respect, on not treating people like children. We are equals, in the sense that, when a person comes to the helpdesk [...] we sit calmly together and put people at ease by speaking softly and also by sharing ‘pieces’ of our lives, reassuring them” (Appendix, p. 74).

In the first statement, Maruf highlights the experience of ‘Fabulous Beyond Borders’ which is focused on sharing and exploring aspects such as cultural norms and language in relation to queerness,

national/transnational/diasporic identity, and ethnic identity, and which, as he mentions, emerged out of a sense of lacking belonging and cohesion within the Italian LGBTQ community. But the practice of sharing, although at a more personal level, is also implemented in different settings, such as when a person visits the helpdesk to be aided in the asylum-seeking process: by disclosing personal experiences that might relate to those of the person seeking help, the person in question is encouraged to speak without fearing shame or judgement, and reassured that they are in a safe environment where they can belong. This practice, in a way, overturns the conventional approach where the migrant/asylum-seeker is the only vulnerable actor, who must disclose everything to the social worker/police officer/volunteer/etc. in front of them in order to obtain help, while the other actor remains invulnerable in their position of power.

The sets of practices identified and analysed above, then, constitute ‘good practices’ in the sense that they respond to specific needs that have been expressed by queer refugees and migrants; furthermore, the organisations implementing these practices acknowledge the issue of homelessness at the emotional and physical levels, and seek to address it by fostering belonging, by creating, within their limited possibilities, physical safe spaces, and, therefore, by building home.

4.2.3. Positive Outcomes

This last section is focused on the ‘positive outcomes’ of the ‘good practices’ highlighted above, which means that it deals with statements evidencing the effects of the practices implemented by the LGBTQ organisations on queer refugees and migrants’ lives.

In regard to the ‘empowering’ and ‘sharing’ practices described before, for instance, it is possible to observe the effects that they have had, as reported by both migrant and non-migrant interviewees:

Hope: “They [fellow Africans] see being gay as a sin. I would like to just... let’s just work on making people understand that being gay is not a sin. It’s just... it is just your person.” (Appendix, p. 85).

Joy: “I spoke in the Pride last year in [city] and started speaking about a lot of things, trying to bring awareness about immigrant gay people living in Italy and just trying to bring awareness that the law that you make affects us. We don’t have a hand in the issue in the sense that the government doesn’t care about what we say but they speak for us anyways so.” (Appendix, p. 80).

Joy: “My first thing that I want to speak of in any opportunity in any platform that I am given is to speak of a representative inside the LGBT association in Italy, there should be an immigrant there because there are LGBT migrants in Italy. So there should be somebody there who represents us. Somebody there that knows what we are passing through. That really knows how it feels. Not somebody that was told. Somebody that knows. That is the first thing that I would try to bring to light. Secondly [...] the issue of racism, I would like to confront that [...] I would like to bring to light the kind of life that immigrants are living because nobody is really doing that.” (Appendix, p. 83).

Greta: “It happened that some guys who are staying in the reception centres in town saw the [Pride] parade, understood what it was about, and decided to contact us shortly after.” (Appendix, p. 65).

Greta: “When [member] joined he never spoke, he was super shy and really affected [by his situation] and now he is like... he loves life, he is super cool, and he works really hard for the group, he translates for everyone” (Appendix, p. 65).

Maruf: “One guy in particular, thanks to his capabilities he became a social worker on equal terms [with Italian social workers]. In the sense that he has an incredible talent for communication, never seen before in my life. This guy from Gambia involved others [in the organisation] [...] we grew to be forty or fifty people.” (Appendix, p. 75).

Omar: “My boss saw me in public when I spoke at Pride. He was there with many people, I saw him while I took the mic, he was in front of me, I spoke and when I looked at him I told myself ‘oh no my boss is here! I can’t go to work anymore’. No, he didn’t do anything. He came to me and we talked. I felt good, free. When I go to work we joke together and talk about everything.” (Appendix, p. 78).

The statements above can be summarised with the word ‘confidence’: through their activity in the LGBTQ organisations and meeting groups which have sought to address the aspects of homelessness, belonging, and community-building, and therefore go beyond the strictly service-oriented approach, the queer refugees and migrants have acquired/strengthened confidence in their identities and in their worth as members of the Italian society. This confidence, in turn, fuels in them a desire to both help others in need and bring systemic change. Hope, for instance, wants to focus her activism on changing the mindset of the ‘fellow Africans’, while Joy wants to address the racist and ‘neo-colonialist’ issues

surrounding the Italian context, where immigrants are ‘discussed upon’ rather than being the ones in charge of their own narrative. This problem persists within well-intentioned LGBTQ activist networks, whose members at times claim to speak for queer migrants without the authority to do so (Boni, 2020, May 7; Laamari, 2020, May 7).

We can also observe the impact of LGBTQ activism on queer migrants and refugees in Greta’s statements: she remarks the importance of visibility and representation for queer migrants and refugees, in situations such as Pride parades, as they can inspire others to escape the closet and seek out organisations where to safely explore their sexuality and/or gender identity; she also points out how being surrounded by such a positive environment can contribute to improve a person’s mental health.

In relation to the ‘empowering’ practices, Maruf reports of one acquaintance who has been able not only to go through the immigration and asylum-seeking process, but also to learn valuable skills through it, allowing him to work within the field and therefore apply his own experience as a migrant to help others. Maruf’s own narrative has followed a similar path: a war-doctor and activist in his country of origin, he had to seek asylum in Italy due to the threat posed to his life; while inside the migrant reception system, he volunteered and joined local activist networks, through which he further developed his skills; he is now a social worker for one of the most important LGBTQ organisations in Italy.

Lastly, Omar’s statement is a useful example, as it represents the seemingly insignificant, yet actually deeply valuable effects that certain practices implemented by LGBTQ organisations can have on queer migrants and refugees’ lives. By being encouraged to share his story in public, Omar made himself visible as a gay man in the eyes of many who might have not known otherwise, and this is important because it liberated him from the many fears that a closeted person experiences at their workplace. Instead, by speaking out, he took charge of his own narrative, removing the threat of being ‘outed’ by others.

All these statements, ultimately, have been defined as ‘positive outcomes’ and highlighted here in order to not only support the argument that acknowledging the importance of constructing a sense of belonging is ‘a good practice’, but also to display that actively doing so creates visible, valuable results that go beyond the emotional aspect of ‘pursuing happiness’ – which in and of itself would be sufficient, I would argue, following UN Resolution 66/281 (International Day of Happiness, 2012, June 28) which recognises “the relevance of happiness and well-being as universal goals and aspirations in the lives of human beings” (ibid.). Instead, I maintain, the outcomes which I have chosen to highlight display both queer refugees and migrants’ emotional responses and finding happiness in their situations, and their intention to push forward for everyone who, like them, has

experienced victimisation, isolation, homelessness. Through the ‘good practices’, queer refugees and migrants have found ways to improve their lives, and, consequently, have found the motivation to become activists themselves and improve the lives of many others, standing on their own feet and relying on their own voices.

4.2.4. Summary

Throughout this section, I have sought to dissect the aspect of ‘belonging’, analysing the data I gathered by focusing on the different ways in which a sense of belonging is constructed, and, therefore, how queer refugees and migrants build a home for themselves. I have displayed here the main elements of how this is done, identifying firstly the “homing processes” (Ahmed et al., 2003, p. 9) carried out by queer migrants and refugees to establish notions of home and family, re-identifying them with their organisational activities and the communities surrounding the organisations. Secondly, I highlighted the ‘good practices’ implemented by different LGBTQ organisations to foster the development of a sense of belonging. Specifically, I was concerned with the practices of ‘empowerment’ and ‘sharing’: the former, as I have displayed, rejects narratives of migrant victimisation and ‘helplessness’, and focuses instead on providing queer migrants and refugees with the tools and platforms needed to take control of their own narrative and regain power; the latter, similarly, seeks to challenge power imbalances between the migrants and the organisations, attempting to establish processes of mutual as opposed to unidirectional help and more equal-level relationships through various practices that involve connection to one another, whether by sharing lived experiences and thus revealing vulnerabilities, or by confronting together cultural norms. Lastly, I have shown examples of various ‘positive outcomes’ of said good practices: for many, finding home and belonging has also meant finding freedom and happiness, as well as finding motivation to keep fighting in order to bring systemic change and to keep improving the situation of queer refugees and migrants, eradicating the conditions for homelessness, isolation, liminality.

4.3. Final Remarks

This chapter has sought to be data-oriented, while also following a logical thread, focusing first on establishing the issue of the physical and emotional homelessness experienced by queer refugees and migrants, and, subsequently, on its resolution, i.e. on how homelessness can be contrasted through the construction of a sense of belonging, and through the renegotiation of the concepts of home and family. While the main focus of the chapter has been the data itself, interpretation and discussion were needed, as well as a connection to the theoretical perspectives which have informed in multiple ways this entire thesis. However, I maintain that a more in-depth discussion that brings together the

observations made throughout the analysis and that engages more directly with the theories presented previously is indeed necessary, so that ultimately I can attempt to offer an answer to the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. Therefore, the following chapter will be dedicated to these matters.

5. Discussion

At the beginning of this thesis, I posed the question:

How do NGOs in Italy address issues of physical and emotional ‘homelessness’ experienced by queer migrants and refugees?

Then, I stated that, in order to provide a satisfactory answer to this question, I needed to address the following sub-questions:

- What do NGOs do on both short and long-term scale to improve forms of integration and to prevent discrimination and intolerance?
- Are there best practices to learn from?

In this section I therefore seek to answer all three of these questions, relying on what has emerged from the analysis and discussing these findings in relation to the theories which I have described above (see here: pp. 14-20). At the same time, it is my intention to broaden the scope of this discussion by relating to the context, addressed in the first section of this thesis, of the Italian social, political, and cultural landscape.

To answer my questions, I believe it necessary to depart from the concept of physical and emotional homelessness and its construction as emerged from the analysis: indeed, the queer migrants and refugees interviewed not only can relate to homelessness as a concept, but can operationalise it themselves and utilise it to address their particular situation. In Joy’s words, it is possible to observe the way in which she conceptualises her experiences as a lesbian refugee through the lens of homelessness, or, referring to my own theoretical approach, of queer diaspora. In particular, Joy is pushed to inhabit the “diaspora space” (Brah, 1996, p. 209) because the queer narrative of “migration as emancipation” (Fortier, 2002, p. 186), according to which moving out of the family-home emancipates the queer subject, who can then come out ‘of the closet’ and ‘come home’ into the queer community. But this has failed her: moving out by migrating has not emancipated her, instead it has isolated her, as she has been rendered extraneous to her ethnic network because of her queerness, and alien to the mainstream Italian LGBTQ community because of her body marked as ‘Other’: migrant, racialised, different. Hers is, thus, a homeless condition. Her narrative is not unique, but found also

in the other interviewees: their experiences in asylum centres evidence a discomfort in having to share a living space with their fellow nationals, not necessarily because of a past negative incident, but also because of generalised anxiety and fear surrounding their queer identity, particularly in the context of their ethnic and cultural background. Even in cases in which the queer migrant has emancipated themselves from the migrant reception system, living on their own, studying, working, volunteering with LGBTQ organisations, essentially ‘having integrated’ into society, the aspect of homelessness remains partly unresolved: Maruf, for instance, mentions how, despite not fearing visibility for his activism – which he embraced before coming to Italy and is the reason why he had to seek asylum – has not been in contact with his ethnic community and is not interested in doing so (Appendix, p. 75).

The homelessness experienced by queer migrants and refugees is therefore very pervasive, articulating itself as both physical and emotional, and affecting this group in different ways at different moments of their migration journey. The questions which I have sought to answer through my analysis consider these aspects, and deal with them accordingly.

Focusing on the first sub-question, on the basis of my analysis, I argue, first and foremost, that the Italian LGBTQ organisations that were included in this research have shifted, or have started to shift, away from the concept of ‘integration’, and, instead, towards that of ‘belonging’. Following this argument, their approach to queer migrants and refugees has acknowledged the aspect of the homelessness that this group faces, both on the physical and emotional level, and sought to combat it by fostering the development of a sense of belonging to the larger queer community, and, simultaneously, contributing to the creation of a safe and welcoming environment. In particular, a focus on belonging has prompted these organisations to listen to the needs of the queer migrants and refugees, so that the actions and activities planned for them include them actively. This from the moment of their ideation, and deriving from the needs expressed by this group rather than from a patronising understanding of what they ‘should want’. Important, then, is also the understanding that the organisations should provide practical and organisational tools to the queer migrants and refugees to utilise to create for themselves the solutions that they prefer. A further conclusion reached is that workshops and training sessions aimed at the third sector contribute significantly to the diffusion of this knowledge, and, lastly, that the creation of queer-specific spaces, reception centres, and migrant accommodation is widely requested and indeed needed.

The practices highlighted above then introduce the answer to the second sub-question, focused on the so-called ‘best practices’. Throughout the analysis, however, I have refrained from determining, exactly, which practices should be considered ‘the best’, as I have neither the empirical grounds, nor the interest to do so. Instead, I argue that, within the framework of ‘belonging rather than integration’, I have been able to observe a number of practices which have yielded positive

outcomes, and which I therefore identified as ‘good practices’. Particularly, because of the individuals included in this research, these ‘good practices’ represent a grassroots, from-below approach that focuses on the creation of equal, power-balanced relationships between queer refugees and migrants and the LGBTQ organisations. Through this approach, the aim is to disentangle the narratives of queer migration and victimisation, and to challenge the “White Saviour Complex” often found in humanitarian and development aid (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Various interviewees have also addressed this aspect: Maruf, for instance, has taken a critical stance against the infantilizing treatment often reserved for migrants and refugees, and Francesco and Giorgio indeed recognise their ‘whiteness’ as a pernicious form of privilege, especially in the context of their roles within their LGBTQ organisation. To carry out these challenges, the activists rely on intersectional theories which allow them to position themselves and the queer migrants and refugees they work with on axes of power, privilege, and oppression, so that the power relations between them can be understood, addressed, and managed.

Therefore, I have categorised the ‘good practices’ discussed with various LGBTQ activists as related to either ‘empowerment’, or to ‘sharing’. The former category refers to practices which, I have shown, place the queer migrant subject as the one ‘in charge’, i.e. as the active subject who is directly involved in the ideation and realisation of activities and projects pertaining them, rather than as the victimised object who is merely a receiver of aid and a user of a service, as Greta addressed. The latter category, on the other hand, refers to practices which, through the – often emotional – process of sharing with each other lived experiences, in-group knowledge, cultural norms, linguistic customs, seek to construct a sense of belonging that acknowledges differences but also posits value on the similarities which can be found amongst all those seeking refuge under the queer umbrella. Activists such as Sasha and Maruf have highlighted the compelling impact that such practices have had as observed in their organisations, referring to the importance of the development of an emotional connection which humanises the queer migrant subject rather than relegating them to the role of agency-deprived victim.

Lastly, then, I can offer an answer to my initial problem formulation, arguing that the way in which Italian LGBTQ organisations can address the issue of perpetual liminality, or homelessness, of queer migrants and refugees is through a focus on sense of belonging, i.e. by facilitating “homing processes” which entail “the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted – in migration, displacement or colonization” (Ahmed et al., 2003, p. 9). In the context of this thesis, I have displayed how LGBTQ organisations have therefore become the locus for these processes to take place, as the queer migrants and refugees have been able to reclaim the usage of concepts of home and family, disjoining them from the notions of the heteronormative home

and blood family, and instead reconfiguring them to signify ‘chosen home and family’, in which their queerness, rather than being unreconcilable, becomes a fundamental aspect of their belonging.

While this description might sound complicated, the “homing processes” (Ahmed et al., 2003, p. 9) shown are remarkably ordinary actions: Omar describes sitting together in someone’s living room, having dinner, and then going out to get coffee; Steven talks about how he can share his worries with another member of the queer migrant group he is a part of; Hope and Joy mention their connection to the people in their organisation, how they share the same goals and how that brings them together; Viviana and Omar bring up their drive to help others who might be in the same harsh situation that they used to be in. Many interviewees have brought up Pride parades and events, as well as the rainbows and symbols commonly associated with the LGBTQ community, as another contributing element to the construction of their sense of belonging to the community, which has been inferred more and more with the meaning of ‘home’ and, most importantly, ‘family’. Therefore, the important role of the organisations has been in recognising the need for home and family and providing ways for the “homing processes” to take place, by creating safe and welcoming environments, by implementing ‘good practices’ that seek to tackle queer migrant homelessness, and by taking on a ‘from below’ rather than an ‘institutional’ approach. Overall, this discussion is informed by the theory of politics of belonging as explained by Yuval-Davis (2011): to define belonging one must create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, however, in this instance, the focus is on the inclusionary power which is exercised in the re-creation of home and family within the Italian LGBTQ community, rather than on the aspect of exclusion.

Connecting the findings which emerged from the analysis, I have therefore been able to address my initial questions. Nonetheless, I recognise that there are a few issues that remain unresolved: physical homelessness, as the answer above has focused primarily on the emotional aspect of homelessness and the construction of home and belonging; the alienation from the ethnic networks experienced by queer migrants and refugees; lastly, the diffusion and replicability of good practices.

Unfortunately, physical homelessness remains a struggle that LGBTQ organisations and activists are completely aware of, and yet are often unable to deal with in meaningful ways. While LGBTQ-specific migrant reception centres and other forms of migrant accommodation are discussed and considered necessary by activists and queer migrants and refugees alike, the reality of the current Italian social, political, and cultural landscape represents an insurmountable barrier, as the migration system has been in recent years deprived of funding and dismantled (“Short overview of the Italian reception system - Italy | Asylum Information Database”, n.d.), while LGBTQ issues are dismissed and/or actively opposed as “gender ideology” (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). While there are a few

exceptions, such as the project “Casa Caterina”, which is a safe house for transgender refugee women, and whose development has been recounted by interviewees Gianna and Francesca, it hardly can be said that a solution has been found. This signifies that, even more so, the LGBTQ organisations’ physical space becomes the essential locus for the queer migrant subject to re-construct home, even if only for a few hours per week, as it represents for many the only physical space where they can exist fully and comfortably in their identities as queer migrants and refugees.

Another issue, that of the alienation from the ethnic networks, remains problematised for many queer migrants and refugees. However, from different interviews, it has emerged that this aspect is at least being considered, even though practical ways to deal with it have not been clearly defined. For some, such as Greta, Hope, Joy, and Omar, a way to contrast this is through education and dialogue: by sharing their story and being visible, their hope is that of challenging the mindset of many ethnic communities, so that the violence and discrimination experienced by queer individuals within them can be halted. For others, such as Maruf, ethnic networks have lost their intrinsic value, as the stability, safety and advantages they provide to migrants (Wimark, 2019) are not extended to queer people, who instead turn to the queer networks for support. Thus, it can be said that one of the ‘solutions’ to the alienation from ethnic networks relies not on challenging their boundaries, but rather, on establishing new queer migrant networks. Whether there will be a prevailing approach, or whether a new one will emerge in future developments, is difficult to predict at the moment. Currently, then, we can only accept that the problem remains, although it is not unnoticed.

The final issue emerging from this thesis’ conclusions relates to the aspect of the diffusion and replicability of the ‘good practices’ meant to contribute to processes of belonging carried out by Italian LGBTQ organisations. Indeed, this issue has to do with the favouring of an approach ‘from below’ rather than ‘institutional’, as a common criticism to grassroots and ‘from below’ movements points out their fragility due to horizontal and structureless organisation (Schradie, 2014). However, I argue that this case presents an important difference: while the practices are categorised as ‘from below’, the context is that of already established and structured organisations, which provide a much more fixed framework compared to that of social movements. In this sense, then, it can be seen how the grassroots practices might ‘infect’ the overall institutional framework, to the point of reflecting in the institutional practices implemented, for instance, by Arcigay at the national level, favouring then their diffusion. Being able to assess whether these observations represent accurately the trajectory that the organisations will follow is, however, out of my reach. Instead, I entrust the migrants, refugees, activists, volunteers, social workers at the forefront of this community to challenge, expand, extend, redefine the boundaries of practices and institutions, as I know they can.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore the realm of Italian LGBTQ organisations and their approach to queer migrants and refugees. Having identified the problem of this group's 'homelessness' at both the physical and emotional levels, I sought to understand whether the LGBTQ organisations acknowledge this issue, and, if so, which practices they employ in order to address it properly. To answer my questions, I interviewed individuals who orbit around six different Italian organisations, including volunteers, social workers, and queer migrants and refugees.

In each interview, we discussed the meaning of being 'home-less' and of 'belonging'. We talked about found families, about reception centres and the asylum application process, about being lesbian, gay, transgender, intersex, and what those labels mean when they intersect with the migrant identity that, in the Italian context, is always 'Other', racialised. People shared with me the ways in which they lost home, and then found it again. Others discussed procedures, guidelines, practices, activities, projects, systems. All of what they shared was distilled into this thesis, so that the questions I had posed could be answered. As I detailed in the previous section, the concept of belonging plays a fundamental role, as it is recognised by both the organisations and the queer migrants and refugees as the way through which the homelessness condition might be mitigated or even escaped. This concept has therefore been the focal point of this thesis, rather than that of 'integration', for various reasons. First and foremost, the framing of the problem through the 'emotional' notion of diaspora and displacement as 'homelessness', in this particular context, needed to be reflected in my approach, which would have been unfeasible if I had chosen to utilise the concept of 'integration' instead, which is indeed complex, but also quantifiable and assessable in some ways ("Migrant integration", 2020). Secondly, as expressed before, I approach the concept of 'integration' critically, due to its inherent connection to the imperialist notion of 'assimilation', which imposes upon the migrant subject the need to reshape their identity in order to fit in within the receiving country (Hartnell, 2006). Therefore, the unquantifiable, fluid nature of the physical and emotional homelessness experienced by queer migrants and refugees discussed throughout this thesis has required me to focus on a solution to it that matches its instability, namely, 'sense of belonging'.

Through the analysis I have therefore displayed the ways in which these two concepts are constructed and operationalised by the queer migrants and refugees and by the organisations working with them, and ultimately answered my questions in the previous section.

Therefore, I can now turn to raise further questions to be addressed in future research. Particularly, these questions have been shaped by the global Covid-19 pandemic which reached its peak concurrently with the writing of this thesis. This situation has brought uncertainty upon various aspects of life, leading many to question not only 'when' there might be a 'return to normalcy', but

also ‘whether’ at all. All sorts of everyday practices have been disrupted or reshaped, including those of LGBTQ organisations, which have resorted to the cancellation of events, meetings, and activities. Events planned for ‘Pride month’, in June, have also been cancelled, in order to comply with the safety regulations and social distancing norms imposed to combat the spread of the deadly virus. While some organisations have attempted to carry out activities and offer their support services online, I have nonetheless wondered about the impact that social distancing has had, and will continue to have, on the countless queer refugees and migrants relying on the physical safe spaces provided by LGBTQ organisations and on the surrounding communities in order to find home and belonging. Will this situation set them back, precipitating them again into a state of homelessness? Similarly, what will this signify for the LGBTQ organisations and their practices? Will they need to revise their approaches, and reconstruct new models and practices on top of the ashes of the old ones? I doubt that there can be certain answers as of now, however, I believe that future research will have to approach the topic in relation to the developments following the global pandemic, which, through all its horrors, has also shown our incredibly sympathetic and resilient nature: from volunteers mobilising to deliver supplies to those in need, to nationwide singalongs, we have all grown a bit closer while staying apart. Whether we bring it all into the future with us, remains to be seen.

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Appendix

Interview Guide – Volunteers and Social Workers

Opening questions:

- What is your role within the organisation?
- What is your organisation's approach to queer migrants and refugees (e.g. informal, formal etc.)?
- Are there any specific projects aimed at queer migrants and refugees that you work/have worked with?
- Are these projects long or short term?
- What have you learned from these projects in regard to queer migrants and refugees?
- Are there any emerging issues?
- Is your organisation in contact with migration NGOs and people working with migrants and refugees?

Specific questions (to ask in order to prompt more narration):

- Are you/the organisation you work with aware of the issue of homelessness in queer migrants and refugees?
- Have you worked on projects focusing on providing accommodation to this group? Can you tell me about it?
- Have you/the organisation you work with organised social events, meetings etc. aimed at queer migrants and refugees? Can you tell me about it?
- Who is in charge of organising events for queer migrants and refugees? Is there any form of self-organising coming from queer migrants and refugees?
- Have you noticed significant positive developments?
- Have you noticed particular issues that can be improved?

Interview guide – Queer Migrants and Refugees

- Would you like to tell me a little about yourself? [not mandatory]
- What is your experience with [organisation]?
- How have you found out about them?
- Is there some person, within the organisation, whom you are particularly close to?
- What is your current living situation? Has [organisation] helped you with it?
- Do you/have you participated in events organised by [organisation]? What do you think of these events?
- Have you organised events with [organisation]?
- Is there any aspect that you would like to change/improve regarding [organisation's] work?

Selected Excerpts from Interviews

Interview Transcript – Francesco

00:07:54

BP

Quindi insomma questo aspetto di famiglia di comunità anzi famiglia piuttosto che comunità, mi hai detto.

00:08:02

FR

Sì, loro usano la parola famiglia. Io tendo a usare comunità perché va be, perché io sono il bianco di turno. Uno è perché io ho la mia famiglia. Loro no. O meglio l'hanno dovuta lasciare, non ce l'hanno più. Un riassuntino veloce il progetto ti dicevo che era nato [organisation], che avevamo iniziato a fare questi sportelli. Io mi sono accorto che a un certo punto avevamo abbastanza utenza perché appunto poi se devo parlare invece come operatore parliamo di utenti perché avevamo questo sportello individuale e che lo sportello individuale in realtà poi poteva far partire quello che era un lavoro di gruppo e quindi ormai tre anni fa credo, sai che c'è? Proviamo e li facciamo conoscere tra di loro e gli proponiamo se vogliono fare... trovare altre...incontrare altre persone che hanno avuto lo stesso tipo di dinamica ci hanno detto di sì è successo abbiamo fatto un primo incontro che è stato un po noi che cerchiamo di tagliare l'aria soprattutto con giochi di icebreaking queste cose qua. Poi ho avuto fortuna che il caso ha voluto che avessimo scelto una stanzina in cui c'erano un calcio balilla. Queste cose qua dove non è neanche necessario parlare. Quindi era tutto molto più facile che poi l'altro problema fondamentale che avevamo è che comunque metti insieme... come se io mettessi nella stessa stanza...

00:09:30

FR

Un tedesco un francese un anglofono uno svedese... non è che questi devono essere tutti d'accordo solo perché hanno la pelle bianca e perché sono scappati dal loro Paese.

00:09:45

FR

E quindi c'era questa problematica che era un po più abbastanza forte che si sentiva e in più la continua traduzione mia da inglese francese che creava dei...

00:09:58

FR

Cambiavano le cose come dicevo se traducevo per secondo il francese di sicuro era molto meno approfondito perché ripetere le cose due volte diventavo cretino a un certo punto.

00:10:17

FR

Poi è andata avanti un anno in cui facevamo esperimenti proponevamo attività proponevamo interventi in cui a un certo punto avevamo iniziato a parlare di cosa significa malattie sessualmente trasmissibili piuttosto che di quali cambiamenti avvenivano in Italia rispetto al governo le richieste d'asilo sempre con cibo e cose da bere. E in questo quasi anno sono passati nove mesi abbiamo anche visto che c'erano delle persone che erano più scaltri di altre diciamo che erano di... sicché abbiamo detto, sai che c'è visto che la nostra presenza ha l'effetto un po' di freezarli proponiamo che il prossimo

intervento il prossimo sia condotto da Tizio. Quindi Tizio Guarda fai tutto tu la prossima volta noi non ci presentiamo o meglio saremo nella stanza a fianco a fare il nostro lavoro associativo, altre cose... lo abbiamo fatto. Ha funzionato molto bene tant'è che poi la volta dopo che siamo arrivati i ragazzi ci han detto no ma voi potete andare pure. Quindi abbiamo iniziato a fare un sacco di incontri... è venuto fuori che poi loro hanno voluto nominare un tesoriere del gruppo un segretario del gruppo perché noi abbiamo dato delle regole che il referente deve essere sempre presente. Apertura e chiusura vogliamo avere un verbale di quello che è successo durante perché comunque la nostra sede è dentro un edificio in cui ci sono altri comunale in cui ci sono altre associazioni. Dobbiamo rispondere eventualmente di danni queste cose qua e altre piccole cavolate va be no alcol droghe ovviamente tutte queste cose per dire sì. Voi come tutti ma abbiamo anche un gruppo trans molto giovane va dai 17 ai 19.

00:12:26
FR

Anche loro hanno praticamente le stesse regole e niente ha funzionato e sta funzionando questa cosa tant'è che adesso anche da un punto di vista è una parola che ormai è abusatissima, del loro empowerment. Pochi gli strumenti che ci hanno chiesto quando ce li hanno chiesti ma vediamo che ne so adesso sono tutti molto più disponibili quando facciamo una manifestazione pubblica se devono intervenire sul palco c'è più gente che vuole intervenire e la maggior parte delle volte salgono tutti. Quando chiamiamo 'c'è uno che può intervenire?' Si saliamo tutti e salgono in gruppo proprio e quando li senti parlare. Parlano di famiglia, adesso mi è appena venuto in mente mi vengono in mente le cose. Poi io sono super smemorato.

Interview Transcript – Giorgio

00:03:07

GI

...poi in realtà hanno cominciato ad arrivare i migranti e noi eravamo abbastanza inesperti nel campo nel senso che a parte la conoscenza dell'inglese io non avevo nulla. M. l'altro ragazzo che collaborava con me... lui è un ragazzo trans quindi si è specializzato nell'aiutare le persone T arrivavano persone migranti e noi non avevamo competenze di base. Per fortuna in quel momento poi è arrivato F. che lavorava come operatore in una cooperativa e da lì abbiamo cominciato ad accogliere come sportello solamente inizialmente le persone migranti LGBT. Quindi cosa facevamo di base quando arrivavano era quello che facevamo era ascoltare la loro storia e le problematiche che portavano all'interno dello sportello e cercare di più dal punto di vista legale psicologico appunto con l'aiuto anche di psicologi di dare un supporto. Però l'aiuto si fermava lì appunto il concetto di appartenenza mancava totalmente nel senso che era semplicemente un servizio che noi offrivamo e quello appunto... è nato poi dai migranti stessi che cominciarono a venire all'associazione... La voglia di creare qualcosa di più nel senso che loro si sentivano in qualche modo appartenenti a questa associazione che era un servizio in realtà dal nostro punto di vista nel senso che ci dicevano voi mi avete dato tanto e io voglio restituire questa cosa ma voglio soprattutto aiutare quelli che adesso sono come ero io tot mesi fa quindi da loro principalmente da un ragazzo gay della Costa d'Avorio e da un ragazzo gay nigeriano che erano i primi utenti diciamo nel nostro sportello è nata questa voglia di creare qualcosa di più di creare un gruppo. Quindi loro in prima linea si sono offerti di darci una mano e hanno cominciato a, uno, diventare volontari dello sportello. Quindi appunto accoglievano i ragazzi che venivano e, due, invitare anche questi ragazzi a trovarsi come gruppo e discutere di tematiche che decidevano loro. La cosa bella secondo me di questo gruppo è che all'inizio funzionava male cioè nel senso per uno o due anni ha funzionato... non male, però era sempre tipo noi bianchi che conducevamo il gruppo che noi pensavamo tipo avete queste tematiche di cui parlare. Loro ci stavano dietro perché erano abituati a fare così nel senso sono arrivati in Italia si sono trovati nei centri di accoglienza in cui c'erano i bianchi che gli dicevano cosa dovevano fare.

00:07:29

GI

Loro vivevano solo come migranti e quella era la loro concezione. Non erano persone erano migranti e lì in [organisation] erano lì in quanto migranti LGBT di base. E loro si vedevano per primi così nel senso che questa è la problematica che emergeva quindi noi parlavamo appunto decidevamo un po cosa fare magari non so adesso di che cosa volete parlare parliamo dei rapporti con la famiglia. Mettiamo caso, parlano tra di loro. Noi mediamo un po ed era sempre molto improntata sul Bianco finché pian piano abbiamo deciso... ah e il gruppo cresceva nel frattempo nel senso che comunque siamo arrivati a una ventina di persone all'interno. Poi in realtà nel gruppo Whatsapp sono anche 40 ma è sempre lo stesso problema chiaro e finché a un certo punto abbiamo detto sapete cosa fate voi. Lasciamo stare. Noi non veniamo più siete grandi siete adulti potete parlare delle cose che volete non avete bisogno di noi baby sitter bianchi che vi diciamo cosa fare o come gestire le cose al che abbiamo dato di fatto le chiavi dello spazio della sede dell'associazione. Gli abbiamo insegnato come prenotare le stanze come fare

le cose e si organizzano loro. Da quando abbiamo fatto così i numeri sono aumentati all'interno del gruppo. Funziona molto meglio e si sentono molto più... Anche prima si sentivano continuavano a parlare di loro come una famiglia come un gruppo molto stretto. Però adesso di fatto lo sono nel senso che sono autonomi e indipendenti. Parlano delle loro cose addirittura spesso quando andiamo lì magari per dire Guardate che c'è questo evento. Tra un mese. Loro ci dicono ok parla di questo evento e poi vai fuori dai coglioni... Perché noi dobbiamo parlare delle nostre cose.

00:09:30

GI

Quindi questo è un motivo di grande orgoglio per noi perché nel senso come un po quando è brutto da dire però... All'inizio li abbiamo visti un po come dei nostri figli da curare. E adesso sono loro che dicono a noi cosa dobbiamo fare della serie. Questa è una cosa molto bella perché sono diventate delle persone autonome. Anche solo il fatto di prendere andare a fare la spesa perché sanno che c'è l'evento e devono organizzare per l'evento. Questo vuol dire pensare al di fuori del sono migrante e devo mandare il bianco a fare la spesa. No sono una persona. Vivo in questo territorio vado io a far la spesa. Addirittura si raccolgono i soldi da soli fanno delle collette per gli eventi. Poi loro utilizzano i soldi all'interno dell'associazione hanno nominato una tesoriera e un segretario tutto senza che noi dicessimo niente. Adesso si sentono appartenenti al 200% a questo gruppo nel senso che si proteggono l'un l'altro quando vengono fuori cose all'interno o anche quando vengono attaccati tra virgolette dall'esterno. E poi chiaramente all'interno del gruppo poi ci sono di fatto sono diventati dei volontari nel senso che ci danno una mano quando noi siamo un po in crisi perché spesso non riusciamo a... quando arriva un caso all'interno dello sportello che è un caso molto spinoso e noi non riusciamo a venirci fuori arrivano loro e ci danno una mano a risolvere la situazione e questo molte volte ci ha aiutato a sbloccare proprio la situazione insomma...

00:25:23

BP

Ecco se avete pensato a progetti del genere se c'è stato comunque un... Qualche discussione a riguardo su come aiutare chi ha bisogno per esempio di trovare un posto fisico dove stare.

00:25:40

GI

Allora abbiamo avuto problemi di ragazzi sia che erano discriminati all'interno del centro di accoglienza che quindi volevano andar via sia che erano stati buttati fuori dal centro di accoglienza perché erano fuori dal progetto e quindi dovevano uscire. Quindi in entrambi i casi chiaramente c'era il problema di una casa come posto fisico. Allora quello che abbiamo fatto noi è stato di fatto prendere andare con loro a tutte le agenzie per le case... immobiliari senza alcun risultato nel senso che comunque ci sono anzi c'è bisogno di uno stipendio fisso delle mensilità e quindi da quel punto di vista ne abbiamo girati 750 anche per contatti e amicizia...

Interview Transcript – Sasha

00:23:42
SA

Purtroppo devi sapere lo saprai che al Sud d'Italia ancora oggi ci sono molte persone che vengono cacciate di casa. Persone LGBT. Io stessa sono arrivata in [organisation] perché ero stata cacciata di casa e all'epoca io ho dormito lì. È una cosa che non si può fare. Ero piccola non avevo dove dormire perché i miei mi avevano messo fuori e poi anche l'associazione mi ha aiutato in un processo di...

00:24:12
SA

Come dire presa di coscienza della mia identità dei miei diritti. Un percorso from Shame To Pride.

00:24:48
SA

Per quanto riguarda invece il lato simbolico c'è un episodio molto bello che mi fa molto sorridere sempre di questi ragazzi nigeriani. Praticamente io sono molto donna di casa cioè io sono anche la persona che si occupa delle pulizie in sede cioè come lavoro e quindi quando lavo a terra non si entra.

00:25:45
SA

...e arrivarono questi ragazzi nigeriani dopo l'orario di chiusura.

00:25:51
SA

Eravamo io e la mediatrice e io dissi no no li vidi da lontano e dissi abbiamo chiuso. Basta. Oggi va bene così quel giorno era stato pieno di utenti. E questi ragazzi si avvicinarono e mi dissero 'tesoro noi veniamo da molto lontano' e io dissi non posso dire di no perché poi se li vedi sono **favolosi**. Mi abbracciarono entrarono in sede...

00:26:17
SA

Avevano una tessera vecchissima di un circolo ricreativo che poi prima faceva parte di [organisation].

00:26:25
SA

Poi si è distaccato e comunque quindi hanno voluto fare la tessera, fecero la tessera e la baciaron e mi dissero 'we love [organisation]' e mi chiesero per caso se avete una maglietta delle mutande col logo... le mutande no la maglietta sì ce l'abbiamo e loro avevano proprio voglia di manifestare questo senso di appartenenza alla comunità, fu una cosa che mi colpì tantissimo e dissero 'Sai che poi l'arcobaleno è anche un simbolo non solo occidentale'.

00:27:01
SA

Loro si riconoscevano in qualche modo nell'arcobaleno e nei colori della bandiera... In qualche modo però sono persone che stanno in Italia da tanti anni non dico che sono naturalizzati però stanno da parecchi anni e quindi questa cosa mi aveva colpito, è sicuramente la questione legata alla casa intesa... io la intendo come comunità.

00:28:20
SA

Quindi lo spazio fisico della sede diventa un luogo... Ora purtroppo con questa questione del coronavirus io sto ricevendo un sacco di messaggi dai ragazzi. Sono prevalentemente Camerun Senegal Nigeria e mi sta dicendo ma quando aprite quando aprite quando aprite perché [organisation] diventa il loro momento di... peraltro l'ultimo incontro che abbiamo fatto o il penultimo mi sembra l'ultimo proprio è stato un incontro con le nostre psicologhe noi abbiamo una sessuologa e una psicologa che fa psicodramma. Bravissima, abbiamo fatto questo momento di condivisione in cui i migranti erano la maggioranza, è stato un caso, sono venuti tantissimi ragazzi e quindi facevamo in italiano e io traducevo in inglese e la psicologa ci faceva fare questi esercizi proprio di rappresentazione dei nostri traumi... comunque questa cosa è stata molto forte intensa e durata tante ore. Per fortuna c'erano dottoresse che sono bravissime e loro si sono aperti tanto hanno... Sono stati molto generosi nel raccontarsi. Dopo sono rimasta con loro perché comunque era stata una condivisione profonda e mi sono resa conto che era stato un momento bellissimo che era quello che un po io sognavo di fare.

00:30:36
SA

Però se non hai le competenze giuste... poi far uscire fuori dei traumi e non gestirli...

00:30:42
SA

è stato bellissimo e quindi loro erano rimasti contenti perché c'erano stati ragazzi omosessuali italiani che non erano accettati dalle loro famiglie che avevano una situazione di stress fortissima e loro che uno l'avevano arrestato l'altro in Libia era stato torturato. Quindi c'era stato questo scambio di esperienze traumatiche. No con delle intensità diverse... Però poi ci ha accomunato tutti ed è stato bellissimo.

Interview Transcript – Greta

00:01:41
GR

In realtà questo gruppo è stato il primo gruppo di attivisti africani in Italia il primo gruppo di attivisti africani rifugiati LGBT nel senso che c'era già prima migrabò. C'erano tante realtà che però, non si occupavano principalmente dei rifugiati africani. Noi in realtà ci siamo trovati all'inizio nel 2015 e abbiamo cominciato a prendere dimestichezza col tema informarci sui tipi di protezione internazionale a capire come gestire i casi. A [city] sono cominciati i primi sempre nel 2015. Io ho cominciato a fare volontariato perché io parlo inglese e francese correntemente. Allora ho pensato di cominciare a fare volontariato e in parallelo con il mio attivismo per la comunità LGBT ho deciso di andare a insegnare italiano nei centri. Così quando poi si sono rivolti al nostro comitato i primi richiedenti asilo sono stata io in automatico ad occuparmene. Però all'inizio erano tipo 2 o 3. Passa un annetto tra tutto noi approfondiamo la materia ci facciamo un'idea un po più precisa di come gestire determinate cose e nel 2016 assistiamo due ragazzi nigeriani che erano insieme e che ci dicono 'vabbè ma adesso che però abbiamo avuto i documenti siamo sempre gay e neri qua non è che i nostri problemi sono finiti'. E ovviamente questo mi ha stupito molto a noi in generale perché...

00:03:22
GR

ci si aspetta che loro poverini vengano a chiederti aiuto e poi si nascondano per il resto della loro esistenza. Perché sono così traumatizzati così come dire convivono con l'omofobia interiorizzata dal primo momento in cui hanno capito che avrebbero potuto avere un orientamento sessuale diverso senza saperlo chiamare orientamento sessuale o identità di genere e quindi effettivamente l'idea paternalistica occidentale è che loro siano **meri utenti di un servizio**. In quel momento quando loro ci hanno chiesto questa cosa noi abbiamo capito che loro in realtà era giusto che fossero una risorsa era giusto che se lo volevano chiaramente perché per i motivi di cui sopra non tutti se la sentono ma come non se la sentono tutti gli attivisti LGBT europei. Voglio dire anche quello dipende da chi ha voglia di metterci la faccia per questa causa di chi ha voglia di vivere serenamente la sua vita con i propri diritti garantiti senza necessariamente andare a far le manifestazioni o a fare i podcast. C'è anche quello ovviamente...

00:04:42
GR

Insomma ci siamo resi conto che era importante che loro diventassero una... che potevano essere una risorsa e quindi abbiamo cerca- io in prima persona ho detto 'va bene ragazzi. Capisco che voi magari vi aspettate di più. Noi è la prima volta che ci occupiamo di queste cose. Facciamolo insieme. Però ditemi voi che cosa vi aspettate da noi e che cosa possiamo fare per voi e con voi soprattutto' e quindi loro han detto, 'ma noi dobbiamo fare in modo che le persone come noi non si trovino nella nostra condizione di non sapere neanche i loro diritti di non sapere che possano essere protetti. Di non sapere che hanno diritto allo status di rifugiato di non sapere che si possono sposare. Noi queste cose le abbiamo sapute quando abbiamo parlato con voi perché...' tra l'altro uno di questi due ragazzi aveva tentato il suicidio nel centro di accoglienza quindi veramente in preda a un moto di disperazione. Della serie se vivo o muoio fa lo stesso e quindi si è sentito di provare a parlarne. Però

chissà quanti altri casi ci sono che non sappiamo. E quindi loro hanno detto 'Siamo noi che dobbiamo... noi lo sappiamo chi sono i gay che sono qua, lo sappiamo chi sono i gay africani scusa li andiamo a chiamare facciamo un gruppo' e io sconvolta... ok siamo un gruppo ma pensavo 'che gli faccio fare?'

00:06:23

GR

Cosa facciamo adesso che c'è questo gruppo? No perché han fatto loro nel senso io non voglio prendermi meriti che non ho, io sono contenta insieme al mio comitato di essere stata sensibile di aver voluto valorizzare a questo loro spunto perché avrei potuto fregarmene o dirgli 'ragazzi non abbiamo le forze' mentre io l'ho vista subito come una... come una potenza come questa questa cosa come veramente... l'emblema dell'intersezionalità della rappresentanza mancata delle identità nei nostri movimenti perché comunque tutti quelli che fanno attivismo LGBT sanno che esistono le persone immigrate LGBT. Però mai nessuno si pone il problema di rappresentarli nè di far sentire la loro voce e nè di assecondarli.

00:30:19

GR

Effettivamente ci ha cambiato tante prospettive noi ne siamo convinti che questo sia determinante che debba essere esportato sotto forma di rete che i ragazzi debbano avere la possibilità di parlarsi tra di loro di creare una rete tra di loro sicuramente coordinata da noi però non dobbiamo sempre... una volta che loro sono formati e che hanno capito come funziona un'associazione pur supervisionando tutto come faremmo con degli attivisti nuovi giovani non so come dire ma è giusto che li lasciamo liberi di esprimersi con... L'anno scorso noi abbiamo deciso di fare non solo il primo Pride della storia di [town] ma il primo Pride in Italia il cui tema erano proprio i migranti LGBT cioè non i migranti ma proprio le intersezioni non solo i migranti perché Palermo ha una primogenitura importante da questo punto di vista però proprio sull'identità dei migranti LGBT sul palco del nostro pride hanno parlato 7-8 richiedenti asilo e rifugiati donne uomini.

00:31:27

GR

Ed effettivamente ne sono venuti tanti tanti addirittura nella foto del Pride c'è stata gente i tipici fasci cretini che scrivevano 'ma cos'è a [town] siete tutti neri?'

00:31:41

GR

Perché veramente c'era un sacco di gente migrante ed è stato bellissimo perché comunque anche lì per esempio è capitato che ragazzi che sono ospitati nei centri in città abbiano visto la parata abbiano capito di cosa si trattava e poi poco dopo abbiano deciso di contattarci.

00:53:43

GR

E allo stesso tempo [person] è arrivato e non parlava mai era uno di quelli super timidi super presi male e adesso invece è tipo ama la vita è fichissimo si sbatte un sacco anche per il gruppo traduce per tutti.

Interview Transcript – Milena

00:33:17

BP

Mi chiedevo se per l'aspetto quindi... per esempio di contatto comunicazione con le cooperative con i centri di accoglienza, se volontari operatori dell'organizzazione ad esempio hanno delle linee guida per quando c'è un ragazzo che ad esempio ha gravi problemi all'interno di un centro d'accoglienza. Come quindi favorire un... non so portare un aiuto?

00:33:51

MI

Si noi abbiamo un progetto Migranet e l'abbiamo realizzato proprio in collaborazione con alcune realtà territoriali che fanno accoglienza proprio per questo nel senso che l'obiettivo era poi quello di creare dei patti sul territorio che qualcuno ha fatto per iscritto. Qualcuno tipo a [town] non abbiamo mai buttato giù una convenzione scritta ma c'è o c'è stato un percorso di formazione anche da parte mia rispetto alla cooperativa che gestisce l'accoglienza degli Sprar e dei Cas alle cooperative che gestiscono queste cose. E quindi dopo quella formazione e dopo lo scambio che abbiamo avuto quando sono più che altro loro a cercare noi cioè più che essere il ragazzo in sé per sé a venire in maniera autonoma sono soprattutto le cooperative a chiederci di vedere le persone di incontrarle o di oppure ci chiedono consigli sull'approccio. Quindi a [town] per esempio la mia città nel 2019 ho seguito nello specifico una ragazza e due ragazzi.

00:35:11

MI

Perché la cooperativa all'interno del quale facevano il percorso Sprar o CAS... Mi aveva coinvolto io ho incontrato i ragazzi ma poi dopo abbiamo fatto un lavoro insieme in sinergia con la cooperativa per cui ti faccio un esempio una di queste ragazze... la ragazza che ho seguito era in una struttura di accoglienza in provincia, un po lontana dalla città con quattro nigeriane che quando hanno scoperto che lei era lesbica hanno iniziato ovviamente ad avere ovviamente insomma hanno iniziato ad avere dei comportamenti... Poco amicali nei suoi confronti ma la cosa più grave è che però la persona l'operatrice di quella struttura persona profondamente omofoba e anche un po razzista... Ha iniziato ad avere una serie di comportamenti terribili nei suoi confronti. Lei la ragazza in autonomia in questo caso perché è una persona comunque anche con un livello di scolarizzazione un po più alto. Da questo paese è venuta in città, è venuta da noi e ha iniziato senza dire nulla a frequentare l'associazione finché poi un giorno mi ha detto che mi doveva parlare e doveva parlare di questo problema. Abbiamo iniziato un percorso noi insieme al Centro che segue poi le donne nello specifico per farla trasferire per cui abbiamo scritto a l'Asp della città che gestiva ancora i Cas e l'abbiamo fatta trasferire in un'altra cooperativa. Quando poi è arrivata in un contesto molto più accogliente di quello precedente abbiamo iniziato un percorso insieme con la cooperativa...

Interview Transcript – Gianna & Francesca

00:20:31
FRA

Quindi poi questo era un po' il quadro generale sicuramente io ho vissuto meno dall'interno la struttura per quanto come coordinatrice è sempre stata una delle strutture che ho provato a seguire più direttamente. Anche perché prima di lavorare nell'attuale cooperativa in cui mi trovo io lavoravo per [organisation] e mi occupavo di unità di strada. Quindi facevo un drop-in di bassa soglia e avevo avuto la possibilità di sperimentare di più nell'ambito del sex working.

00:21:08
FRA

Quindi diciamo nel momento in cui abbiamo aperto questa struttura di accoglienza conoscevo già alcune criticità che anche il MIT aveva sperimentato in un'altra casa diciamo di sostegno ai soggetti trans che aveva avuto in gestione dal Comune di Bologna. Però non sapevo realmente quelle che sarebbero state le enormi sfide che avremmo affrontato. Io ci tengo sempre a sottolineare che diciamo che **le nostre ragazze hanno avuto dei percorsi migratori particolarmente traumatici e quando parliamo delle loro migrazioni parliamo di migrazioni che non sono soltanto geografiche ma sono migrazioni appunto che si sviluppano su altri livelli** come dicevi anche tu **anche dei livelli molto più effimeri**. Volendo che sono appunto quelli emotivi e sono ragazze che hanno subito violenze. Dico ragazze perché ad oggi abbiamo avuto soltanto in accoglienza mtf. Quindi per questo diciamo sto parlando declinando tutto al femminile. Sono ragazze che hanno sopportato e che purtroppo ancora oggi sopportano violenze molto gravi purtroppo basate principalmente sulla loro identità di genere... diciamo quindi queste violenze arrivano sia dal contesto esterno ma paradossalmente soprattutto in una prima fase di apertura della struttura arrivavano anche dall'interno cioè abbiamo sperimentato anche...

00:22:49
FRA

dei momenti di transfobia tra loro stesse che sono stati molto difficili da gestire. Non nascondo. Il MIT è sempre stata una presenza fondamentale...

00:42:33
GIA

E quindi non posso parlarti di una diciamo di una situazione che resta sempre immutata nel tempo dipende molto dal periodo da che cosa sta vivendo una determinata beneficiaria rispetto alla propria... al percorso di transizione inserimento lavorativo piuttosto che alla propria regolarizzazione di documenti eccetera. Però devo dire che è... **ora che insomma soprattutto alcune beneficiarie conosco da veramente tantissimo tempo ormai abbiamo condiviso insieme tutto quello che è stato il percorso di transizione si è creato un po' più un senso di appartenenza a Casa Caterina nel senso che Casa Caterina finalmente anche nelle stesse beneficiarie viene riconosciuta come un luogo protetto un luogo unico nel senso qualcosa che comunque non esiste da nessuna parte.**

00:43:29
GIA

E questo secondo me è già una cosa molto molto importante che devo essere sincera abbiamo faticato a far capire alle persone che comunque Casa Caterina non è un'esperienza che è stata fino ad ora replicata.

00:43:42
GIA

Io mi auguro di sì che prima o poi verrà replicata perché secondo me sono esperienze straordinarie ed estremamente avanguardiste in questo senso. Diciamo che questo è uno dei lavori più difficili cercare di far capire la straordinarietà della struttura nel proprio nel contesto di sentirsi in una comunità protetta, protetta non significa essere in carcere. E questo è un altro grande tema un altro grande argomento di discussione. Il fatto di far capire che ci fossero determinate regole da rispettare per tutte è stato un... Un tema che ci ha fatto molto scontrare nel tempo rispetto al rispetto degli orari e al non chiamare gli amici a casa non avere ospiti eccetera quindi questo è stato molto difficile. Però devo dire che ci sono momenti che per me sono estremamente importanti di grande solidarietà tra le beneficiarie di grande e di grande vicinanza e di condivisione no per esempio la persona che è più avanti del percorso di transizione rassicura quella che ancora deve cominciare a prendere gli ormoni sul fatto che prima o poi arriverà riuscirà a farlo li prenderà sarà bellissimo perché poi il corpo si trasforma eccetera. Secondo me siamo in una fase lontana rispetto a quello che parli. Parliamo di senso di appartenenza tout-court però secondo me siamo ancora all'inizio di questa di questa esperienza. Tra l'altro Casa Caterina non ha ancora tutta questa grande visibilità. Nel senso che come hai detto tu hai fatto fatica a trovare materiale ma perché di Casa Caterina in realtà si sa ben poco. Comunque è stata un'esperienza pilota eccetera quindi tutti erano molto cauti nel parlare di questa esperienza e però sono dal mio punto di vista stiamo lavorando nel modo giusto. Se riuscissimo poi a integrare tutte le figure di cui abbiamo parlato con quelle professionalità che sono assolutamente indispensabili in una struttura come questa secondo me riusciremo anche a trasmettere alle beneficiarie le future ospiti della struttura che Casa Caterina non è soltanto una struttura SIPROIMI ordinari...

Interview Transcript – Steven

- BP: Quindi quando sei riuscito a staccarti dal centro e a stare... andare per esempio all'associazione? Ti ha aiutato questo, ti ha fatto sentire un po meglio?
- STE: Sì sì quando sto con [organisation] mi sento meglio perché mi ha dato il coraggio di lasciar stare accoglienza perché adesso sono libero, faccio quello che voglio, ma prima non potevo farlo. Se c'era un evento LGBT non potevo andare perché ero in accoglienza, ma adesso no, io posso fare tutto.
- BP: E allora volevo chiederti io nella mia tesi parlo dell'aspetto di sentirsi a casa e di sentirsi un po... di trovare una famiglia tramite anche le associazioni, tu questo un po lo senti, c'è quest'aspetto di sentirsi come una famiglia?
- STE: Si per questo momento sì mi sento come in una famiglia perché in questo momento non ho nessuna famiglia a parte loro, quindi se io ho difficoltà sempre io chiamo [organisation members], dico quello che sta succedendo e mi aiutano, sono come una famiglia.
- BP: All'interno dell'associazione del gruppo mi hai detto quindi tu fai un sacco riferimento a [organisation members] come persone. Ma c'è anche qualcun altro con cui tu non so... Ti senti particolarmente in contatto? Qualcuno a cui sei particolarmente legato e che comunque consideri un po una anche parte della tua famiglia adesso a questo punto?
- STE: Da noi nella nostra sede e nel nostro gruppo c'è un ragazzo, lui si chiama [O.]. Ma lui adesso non viene più da noi perché lui lavora sempre. Con lui mi sento un po un po meglio. Di parlare delle cose mie. Anche le mie difficoltà, ne parlo sempre con lui.
- STE: Sono io che adesso sono il responsabile del gruppo... che organizzo tutto... i ragazzi anche i nuovi che vengono, sono io il responsabile del parlare con loro. Come ci comportiamo qua, cosa facciamo, tutto quanto.
- STE: Adesso stiamo facendo senza [Italian volunteers], siamo cresciuti.

Interview Transcript – Peter

PE: When I came to Italy in 2016, I didn't know anyone. I stayed with CRI [Italian Red Cross]. I was alone, the people there started isolating me, in the end they transferred me because it was not possible to stay with other Nigerian people. [Friend] introduced me to [organisation], they went through my story, and helped me live with myself. [Organisation] helped my life, I never regretted joining. We do so many activities, Pride and events, international group meetings... I wouldn't have been able to be who i am without [organisation]. [Italian volunteers] are wonderful, they really make us feel at home, they try to help me, they make me understand that I am not alone. They are incredible persons. I wish I had met them earlier, before now.

PE: We attended Padova Pride, and there were so many people like us. We talk, we have things in common. Now I know that it is possible to have this kind of life that I couldn't have in my country, I am grateful to [organisation]. Initially I was scared because of my country, but now I got my feet, I am what I am, it is my life not yours.

Interview Transcript – Aaron

- 00:03:08**
BP Did you like that there was a group like that where you could meet and talk about things?
- 00:03:18**
AA Yeah. Yeah. [The organisation] was always so... they are good.
- 00:03:26**
AA I love being with them whenever I'm with them I'm happy because I found my brothers. So I'll be happy.
- 00:03:48**
BP And have you participated in activities or events?
- 00:03:58**
AA Yeah. Many events! Yeah. I went to Padova gay pride, Vicenza gay pride, Verona... Yeah. I've been to many events.
- 00:04:08**
BP Did you like going to the events? Was it fun?
- 00:04:12**
AA Ah it was delightful. Yeah. I love to go whenever they're doing events.
- 00:06:13**
BP Do you have your own place or do you live at the reception center?
- 00:06:22**
AA Oh yeah. I'm still in the 'cooperativa'.
- 00:06:31**
BP Is it okay for you there?
- 00:06:36**
AA Well it's not okay... I'm not ok right now.
- 00:06:57**
BP Not okay. Yeah. Would you prefer living somewhere else?
- 00:07:05**
AA Yes.

00:07:08
BP

Have you talked for example... would you ever talk for example with [the organisation] of creating a space that is only for LGBT migrants?

00:07:22
AA

That would be better.

00:14:02
BP

Is there something then in particular that you would like to tell me more about [the organisation] about what you do? The events, something that you think is interesting to talk about?

00:14:18
AA

Yeah. [unintelligible] I'm gay, Okay. So I love being at an event whenever they are doing events I love being there.

00:14:33
AA

I'm very happy whenever I do. Something like gay pride, international day against homophobia, something like that. Yeah. I love being on duty. I can't wait to be at Pride this year.

00:15:06
BP

Do you miss... I think right now there is not a lot of meetings because of the lockdown in Italy right?

00:15:17
AA

Yeah. I miss my people right now.

00:15:20
BP

Yeah. I can imagine it must be pretty hard being away from your friends.

00:15:33
AA

Yeah they're not my friends, they're my family.

Interview Transcript – Maruf

00:03:09

MA

Quando sono arrivato ho fatto la richiesta d'asilo, lo Sprar, il Servizio centrale a Roma dice che in questo caso 'ha i documenti al femminile si ma ha un aspetto maschile', il secondo carattere sessuale maschile con la barba eccetera però sinceramente ho anche un fisico femminile, 'quindi con quale struttura possiamo inserirlo?'. Mi ha ospitato questo attivista, poi gli altri due, una coppia lesbica e poi è stata un po' una situazione... Difficile trovare un posto per me. E poi attivando la rete di migrabò all'epoca mi hanno trovato un po' una famiglia che mi ha accolto, una famiglia con una figlia lesbica che mi ha accolto. Sono stato... Insomma mi hanno accolto finché il giorno in cui... il giorno in cui è arrivata la...

00:04:53

MA

La risposta dello Sprar dell'accoglienza e il progetto nazionale per il quale mi hanno inserito in una struttura maschile, e quindi mi hanno inserito in un appartamento.

00:05:15

MA

Condividevo la stanza con un altro ragazzo, immagini che avevo all'epoca stavo ancora usando il binder, mi ammazzava, qua a casa 24 ore su 24, che sai che il binder puoi indossarlo al massimo per sei ore... e sì quindi che praticamente in quella struttura ho subito un po' di violenza tipo cioè non... nessuno sa chi sono. Però è accaduto un episodio. Allora allora dopo 3-4 giorni un ragazzo mi ha picchiato per una cosa che è una stupidaggine, quello sai, turni di pulizia chi pulisce a casa eccetera eccetera e mi ha picchiato mi ha messo le mani addosso e io ovviamente cioè immagini... se sanno chi sono. Ovviamente quando mi ha attaccato da quel momento ho avuto l'angoscia ti giuro che sinceramente... Ho detto, adesso è finita.

00:24:19

MA

Abbiamo detto, 'perché non facciamo qualcosa di sociale? Di che cosa qui realmente hanno bisogno per sentirsi a loro agio?' perché sinceramente nella comunità italiana noi non siamo ben visti sinceramente non sentiamo che apparteniamo a questa comunità, chiaro? Chiaramente senza offendere nessuno ovviamente. Fu lanciato 'favolose oltre il confine' un gruppo di socializzazione tra persone LGBT migranti e rifugiati seconda generazione richiedenti asilo e italiani... è stato... il gruppo ha fatto delle cose cioè ha dato risultati straordinari. E poi abbiamo fatto allora praticamente facevamo domenica e come noi guardiamo un film parliamo eccetera eccetera invece tipo mercoledì facciamo aperto al pubblico eccetera eccetera. All'epoca fu a ottobre il decreto di sicurezza che abbiamo fatto anche cose durante la giornata mondiale per ricordare le vittime trans e sul movimento italiano la storia qual è il paragone con altri movimenti o altre cose, attività... è stato molto molto... ha dato dei frutti... Veramente bellissimo, è stata una delle grandi esperienze...

00:34:11
MA

Diciamo questo è il nostro modello, basandoci sulla cultura il rispetto dell'altro di non trattare quelle persone come se sono bambini come se sono scemi che non sanno niente. Poi facciamo alla pari. Sinceramente alla pari nel senso che, perchè una persona quando ti viene allo sportello cioè se voglio fare uno sportello come una cooperativa con tutto il rispetto ovviamente io innanzitutto l'ho vissuto sulla mia pelle quindi ho bisogno magari di una persona che mi ascolta. Non facciamo un [unintelligible]... facciamo tranquillamente. 'Ma hai bisogno di bere qualcosa, una bibita? Un caffè?' Abbiamo il divano e...

00:35:26
MA

Quindi sediamo tranquillamente e, cioè... facciamo sentire le persone a loro agio pure parliamo piano piano raccontando raccontando anche pezzi delle nostre vite incoraggiando quella persona.

00:52:19
MA

Il fatto è che prima di arrivare in Italia Io avevo una vita avevo delle responsabilità del lavoro dell'attivismo delle cose. Tu devi vedere quella cosa là invece di aggiungerla di svilupparla di maturarla per andare avanti invece di azzerare tutto, cominciare dal sottozero. Non funziona. Cioè. Tipo ok ma allora cominciamo dalle strutture... Le strutture... Sinceramente [unintelligible]. Ok non tutte ci sono alcuni sì alcuni no ma la maggioranza sì. Ovviamente tutto questo ha un legame assolutamente principale quello politico. Una persona che rimane un anno e mezzo in una struttura CAS tipo o [unintelligible]. Tra l'altro 10 persone in una stanza senza finestra pensaci adesso in questa situazione com'è.

00:53:32
MA

E cioè...

00:53:37
MA

Le persone si sentono in prigione come [unintelligible] la stessa cosa cioè se io passo un anno in un posto del genere c'è ma chi mi fa superare quella cosa lì... vieni trattato come un animale detto poco gli animali secondo me neanche gli animali li tratti così.

00:54:49
MA

Tutte le persone contano hanno un valore ma veramente invece di applicare solo un modello. Per una... cioè per tutti e non funziona. Chiaramente non funziona. Hai bisogno di più tempo di una persona magari che deve imparare da zero tra l'altro... a sminuire il valore dell'altro nel senso che trattare le persone come se sono bambini e in una maniera veramente che tu non... sei una capra incapace di fare un cavolo, tipo...

00:55:42
MA

'Ma sai quello come si usa? sai quello come si usa? sai come si fa?' Ma per carità stiamo scherzando? Cioè.

00:55:54
MA

Una mancanza di trattamento... di trattare le persone alla pari. Queste persone non sono sceme.

01:01:21
MA

Questo dipende dalla scelta della persona. Se la persona vuole essere libera purtroppo [unintelligible] dalla comunità di oggi anche se qua... Allora **io per esempio non ho nessun contatto con la comunità libica** qua tra l'altro sono pochi, non sono tanti... Milano e Perugia e Roma la maggioranza. Io non ho nessun contatto con loro, sinceramente. Per un motivo molto semplice. Io volevo vivere... Tradotto non è il discorso di vergogna perché ne ho pagato la conseguenza con la mia visibilità in Libia ho pagato e molto caro altrimenti non mi trovavo qua. Al momento, perché sinceramente non è stata una mia scelta scappare. Secondo può essere anche una cosa... cioè la comunità il supporto che ti dà la comunità soprattutto di comunità quelle grosse pachistane cinesi nigeriane gambiane malesi eccetera eccetera.

Interview Transcript – Viviana

00:07:14

VIV

Quindi io prima qua stavo con la mia famiglia, perchè ho la famiglia qua anche, ma non mi sentivo bene tanto per dirti che a me mi hanno detto di togliermi i capelli cambiare un po ma non era quello che io volevo, non era... io esattamente non ero me stessa. Quindi non mi sentivo bene allora tre mesi e sono andata via e ho iniziato la mia vita in un'altra città. Quindi per me era molto difficile ma non sapevo... senza conoscere nessuno. Senza parlare... e niente è iniziato così. Con la mia valigia, io sola.

00:10:50

BP

Per quanto riguarda con [organisation] partecipi un po all'associazione giusto alle attività?

00:11:03

VIV

Giusto. Sì mi piacerebbe mettermi alla grande come sempre ho fatto io nell'altra associazione in quanto ho la mia esperienza ma uno prima perché io non ho un lavoro no. Quindi a volte sto cenando con loro e mi chiama un cliente perchè io parlo così e devo lasciare tutto per lavorare. Perchè se non riesco a pagarmi le cose, anche se trattiamo di trovare un lavoro anche se da [...] non mi interessa da zero ma lo voglio fare ma mentre una mentre l'Italia non cambia questa idea che la trans serviamo solamente per fare il sesso....

00:11:45

VIV

Credo che per me è un po difficile la situazione. Ma ho fiducia anche.

00:11:53

VIV

Ma sì, sto con loro quello che io posso, se ce l'ho il tempo, sempre sono disponibile per loro, anche quando mi chiedono guarda che abbiamo una persona che vuole intervistare il mondo della trans perché per loro questo è nuovo, e anch'io le ho detto 'guarda quando ti arriva una trans un travestito che non sai che fare un ragazzo gay che vuol fare la cura ormonale...io ho passato già tutto questo, lo so qual è la preoccupazione, l'ansia di una persona capisci?'

00:12:23

VIV

Quindi io ho detto 'guarda passamela a me no io parlo con loro'.

00:16:55
VIV

Io ho cercato un'associazione gay e ho trovato [person]. Le scrivo tutto questo, della mia situazione, dei problemi nel futuro con [landlord]. E le ho chiesto aiuto.

00:17:27
VIV

Ma dopo non l'ho cercata più perché non mi sentivo come... pensavo che fosse solamente un'associazione di gay, e un gay non può capire la vita di una trans anche se io ho passato dall'essere gay prima, dopo travestita...

00:22:02
VIV

Mi aveva trovato un posto a [city] ma in una casa di accoglienza dove io dovevo stare con gli uomini, cosa che io gli ho detto: Non sono d'accordo. Non sono d'accordo. A me mi danno uno spazio, dove anche se io sto sola, non mi interessa ma io non posso stare nè con le donne nè con gli uomini. Devi avere uno spazio per la trans. Perché così, il bisogno della donna non è il mio bisogno, e il bisogno dell'uomo non è il mio bisogno. Io, sono trans, non posso stare nè con una nè con l'altro.

00:23:54
VIV

E invece io di mettermi in questo problema... Uno perché ho paura di stare solamente con uomini ho paura di quello che mi possono fare perché tutti mi fanno quello che loro vogliono no, anche se dicono di no, mentre la donna puoi avere anche una stronza che mi infastidisce in questo senso... Io preferisco stare sola ma sempre sicura tranquilla.

Interview Transcript – Omar

00:03:56
BP

Ok. E come ti sei avvicinato all'Associazione, come l'hai conosciuta?

00:03:56
OM

Ok... Allora io quando sono arrivato qua in Italia ero al centro di accoglienza. Avevo una storia particolare e... non avevo il coraggio di parlare della mia storia ai miei operatori... Perchè sai la maniera in cui noi viviamo in Africa e qua è diversa... quindi avevo questa paura quando ero in Africa. E quindi quando sono arrivato qua anche in Italia avevo paura di spiegare la mia storia ai miei operatori. E non avevo avuto anche la possibilità di incontrare un'associazione, quindi sono stato così al centro di accoglienza coi miei operatori.

00:18:49
BP

E invece, mi raccomando io ti faccio domande qualunque cosa tu se non mi vuoi rispondere dimmelo, Io lo dico sempre però ecco... Invece quando stavi al centro di accoglienza. Come ti sei trovato con gli altri ragazzi? Tu mi hai detto comunque avevi paura anche di parlare con gli operatori di essere gay. Quindi hai avuto problemi? O comunque sei riuscito ad andare avanti senza troppi problemi? Diciamo...

00:19:31
OM

Allora quando ero al centro non ho... io non ho spiegato agli amici che erano lì, solo alla persona con cui dormivo a casa. Solo a lui, e lui è nigeriano. L'ho studiato bene prima di spiegare la mia storia... è stato lui la prima persona che ho spiegato mia storia, quando l'ho spiegato perché lui ha più l'età di me. Lui mi ha consigliato di non avere paura di spiegare al mio operatore, ma non agli altri che sono lì con noi. Quindi ho avuto il coraggio di spiegare a quella maestra che mi ha aiutato a mettermi in contatto con l'associazione e gli altri non sapevano... non ho avuto non ho avuto problemi quando ero lì con nessuno con gli operatori con gli amici. Nessuno. al mio posto di lavoro anche non tutti sanno ma ci sono alcune persone che sanno che sono gay, anche il mio capo. Perché lui mi ha visto in pubblico che parlavo a proposito di quando abbiamo organizzato questo evento, il Pride.

00:21:05
OM

Ho parlato, e lui era con la gente, con tante persone, l'ho visto prima avevo il microfono, lui era davanti a me, io parlavo quando l'ho visto ho detto, 'Mamma mia guarda che c'è il mio capo qua! Non posso più andare al lavoro'. No, non ha fatto niente. Mi ha avvicinato, mi ha parlato, io mi sono sentito bene, libero. E quando, e sempre quando vado al lavoro lui ride con me, parliamo di tutto. Quindi non c'è poco... non ho avuto problemi con nessuno. Anche quando esco con il mio amico. Io faccio tutto con lui, nel club facciamo selfie, facciamo... Non c'è nessuno nessuna persona che... come l'Africa. Sai, in Africa quando fai queste cose è veramente pericoloso perché ho visto che hanno picchiato una persona, io ero con mio zio. Gli ho

detto 'ma perché. Perché...' questo tempo avevo. Avevo 15 anni. Poi ho chiesto a mio zio 'ma perché. Perché lo picchiano così'. Hanno detto che perché lui è gay e per quello e lui è un'abominazione, non è... non è buono. Questo non è buono. e avevo paura perché lui non sapeva che io anche io ero gay. E quando vedo che qua in Italia facciamo queste cose non c'è tutto... questo disastro.

00:22:39
OM

Io sono contento.

00:22:41
BP

Invece per quanto riguarda non so c'è qualcosa che vorresti fare di più con l'associazione, quindi qualche programma qualche progetto che ti piacerebbe fare o portare avanti?

00:23:18
OM

Eh sì certo è di fare richiamare la gente no di chiamare la gente che hanno paura come avevo paura io. Adesso ci sono le persone che hanno paura. Io mi metto nel loro posto.

00:23:40
OM

Quando ero appena arrivato avevo paura. Mi dicevo che quando esco con il mio amico mano nella mano e insieme nella strada magari qualcuno diceva una parola... una parolaccia o mi guardava male.

00:23:59
OM

Quindi chiamare queste persone che hanno questa paura di venire, di venire nell'associazione e magari quando c'è questa associazione, quando sei in questa associazione magari nessuno può farti male...

00:26:44
BP

Nel gruppo dell'associazione pensi di aver trovato un po una comunità?

00:26:58
OM

Sì! Quando siamo lì non c'è la differenza siamo tutti uguali. A volte quando siamo a casa di [person] è come a casa nostra. Alcuni dormono lì quindi è come, come la famiglia e dopo, io invito alcune persone a venire a casa mia a giocare alla playstation. Mangiamo insieme torte e queste cose. E' lì che ho incontrato loro. Ma non è lì che finisce, neanche fuori. Possiamo prendere il caffè insieme. Mangiamo insieme e quindi... è la famiglia. E' una famiglia.

Interview Transcript – Joy

00:03:08
BP

So you came out and then you were looking for a group to do activities...?

00:03:36
JOY

In reality I've been wanting to join a group. I went into a group in [city]... they were not really... not that they were cruel or something like that but it was that... I didn't really feel comfortable because it was just like there was nobody I could relate to. Everybody was just uptight so.

00:03:57
BP

OK so. So you joined the group and then you started doing different activities like speaking about your experience. Yeah?

00:04:16
JOY

Yes I spoke in the Pride last year in [city] and started speaking about a lot of things trying to bring awareness about immigrants gay people living in Italy and just trying to bring awareness that the law that you make affects us. We don't have a hand in the issue in the sense that the government doesn't care about what we say but they speak for us anyways so.

00:06:05
BP

So when you mention that for example a group like [organisation] is like a family. That is exactly what I'm looking at. So how then do you create family through participating in activities?

00:06:50
JOY

So first of all I'll start by saying that **home is nothing without a family**. So even if you have a place to stay but you don't feel comfortable in that place you cannot comfortably call it a home. So in my own personal experience arriving in Italy I was put... Normally the first thing in my head was to see the place that I'm going to... I came here just because I wanted to be free. I have other reasons too. So when I go to the place where first I stayed at when I came to Italy. I can't say much about that but when I was in the camp recently because I left the camp the first time and I came back into the into the camp. It's from my personal experience. It's. **It's just like taking you out of Nigeria, where you know that gay people are not accepted. And putting you back with the same Nigerians. The place changed. The emotion... my mindset stayed the same. Nothing changes for you personally because it's just like... If you don't have the courage then you are not free to be who you want to be.** If you don't have anybody to tell you that you are free to live here be whom you want to be then you don't know how to go about it. Because the same thing you keep hearing is the same thing you hear yelling back in your country you know because nobody... And you know we Africans we

always like to talk to Africans like us. We never want to seek out... most, not all, most. So you keep hearing the same thing and nobody tells you how to go about it because this is not an issue that is spoken well of. This is not a public issue. This is something that needs awareness. Nobody is bringing it to awareness. So it's kind of like weird because you don't know how to go about it from there except to try to seek for help. I've been in Italy for like more or less a long time now and I was looking for a group for almost two years before I came into the last camp I was in and they finally look for a group for me. And when I got there I went there once and... once and [unintelligible]. Yeah. Because I could not feel the connection. I could not feel anything there because everybody was just in his own world or something like that. So that is why when I joined [organisation] I really felt the connection because I saw people that relate to me something that I can relate to because it's like a family. We are trying to elevate one another and trying to help one another. We have the same goal and we have the same vision. This is not just about being black because I see other people will... we have a lot of other people that are helping us, that we have the same goal. They are seeing things from our perspective so you can relate to them. So this is something that... that is why what I said about family.

00:10:07
JOY

I think that gay people should be receiving a different kind of help because it's enough to be black leaving your family home and not having anyone to look out for you here or something like that. It's hard enough to be alone, [unintelligible] when you are alone. And you were already alone before you were with your family but you did not have peace and you finally leave them and you come here and maybe you don't because life is not like easier for some people that I don't mean this to be like a hypocrite or something like I'm not trying to [unintelligible] about anybody. But I'm just trying to say that as a lesbian person you encounter more difficulties than a normal straight person. It's normal because you see it from a different point of view. Not everybody comes on these kind of challenges but most people do. Most gay people do. So you see things from a different perspective. You are around the people that are not encouraging you.

00:15:07
BP

So for example would you prefer if for example there were specific centers... that were specific for LGBT individuals?

00:15:18
JOY

That's a good question. First of all. Let's start by saying that. Well I've never really thought that deep. But if you say I wish you give like gay people... I'm trying to say personally that if there can be people to enlighten that would go to these camps to enlighten people generally about what it is to be lesbian

and being gay. And that is not a sin. If there were more volunteers doing what [person] has been doing. If there were more people who were trying to help to bring this thing to make people understand to make not just Italians to make other countries like people in the camps especially to understand that being gay is not a sin, is not a crime. It's normal totally normal. Then I think that we can resolve these issues. Maybe people will come to a better understanding you know or better still we can. A person I just personally think that what we need is not to isolate gay people. What we need is to leave them where they are but bring more trainings because this is not be [unintelligible] only to be isolated just because people do not understand the kind of people they are the kind of life they are living. It's not their fault at all is just about informing people. That is the least we can do.

00:16:51
BP

Yeah I get that. Also like a very interesting point because yeah talking with different people quite a few people said that they had bad experiences in reception centers and that for them it would have been such a great thing to have an LGBT specific center which I also understand. But I also understand the perspective. Like the you know ghettoization thing and isolation. So yeah there is different...

00:17:20
JOY

Yeah. There is a... There are good sides with it and there is a bad side to it as well. It's like. Me like personally when I was in the camp... I wish sometimes because I was in the Camp with... my **I met my girlfriend actually in the camp and it got to a point where they started telling us things like you can't let the rest of the girls know you are together. They were trying to separate us and they transferred her to a very far city. You know what I'm saying. Just to keep us apart. And at that moment I was wishing that... I wish there was camps for gay people specifically lesbian people. Then I would have been happy.** But at that point it doesn't really solve anything because at the end of the day we are trying to stand for whom we are. We are not trying to like running away from it. So it makes sense at some point. But at some point. It doesn't just add up. You know what I'm saying.

00:18:35
BP

What about... in terms of what you've been doing with [organisation] what are the things that maybe you would like to change or to do more like what are your maybe future projects that you would like to carry out, if any?

00:19:02
JOY

Yeah first of all I would like for us. I don't know if this is possible. If this is just me thinking. But I know that nothing is impossible. Definitely everything is possible. So I was thinking that if **my first thing that I want to speak of in any opportunity in any platform that I am given is to speak of a representative inside the LGBT association in Italy there should be an immigrant there because the LGBT migrants in Italy... So there should be**

somebody there who represents us. Somebody there that knows what we are passing through. That really knows how it feels. Not somebody that was told. Somebody that knows. That is the first thing that I would try to like bring to light. Secondly I will... because anytime that immigrants as a whole... the issue of racism, I would like to confront that as well. Immigrants as a whole are the only news we hear most times mostly negative news about immigrants. We never get to hear the positive side or the struggles or how they struggle. Only few people really really care about the stories of immigrants. When the issues of blacks or not only black we have more... People that they are not black but they are immigrants as well. We have people from Peru when the first thing that comes to mind when anybody say immigration is crime or something else. I would like to bring to light that people are really struggling. The people they are good people because nobody... If you live in a good environment and if you have the comforts that you need you don't have to do something negative. It doesn't come to your head. You know I would like to bring to light the kind of life that immigrants are living because nobody is really doing that.

Interview Transcript – Hope

00:03:00
BP Can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved with [organisation]?

00:03:21
H Yes, like since I've been in [organisation]... It has been a pleasure for me. Like, contact with them because since I've been there like I've been so free like meeting people like me. Expressing myself freely. All thanks to [person] for making us understand about LGBT and [unintelligible]. She knows how to support someone. I know that and not being depressed like. Let me just say like up- like assisting one another. Giving each other the power to come over like...

00:04:14
H You know in our country being a gay is not accepted. So she just made us know that in Italy, we can express ourselves whenever or wherever we are.

00:04:30
BP Yes. So how did you how did you know about this organization, how did you first meet them?

00:04:39
H It was through a friend, through a gay friend. He introduced me to the association when he found out that I was a lesbian.

00:04:57
H So it was like there is an association on... the association is for gay people, if I don't mind, if I would like to join them. I said 'OK I was actually looking for an association to join ever since'.

00:15:52
BP So speaking a bit more about... what would you like to be able to do more for example with your work with [organisation]? Would you like to improve? What would you for it to be better? Do you have some projects or some plans that...?

00:16:16
H Yes I would like to improve [organisation] and make most of our Africans understand that... or even apart from Africans. Even the Italians. Most of them are racist too. So I would like to inspire most people.

00:16:36
H

Let's let people know that being gay is not a sin.

00:16:42
H

Being gay is... maybe you don't have refuge or you don't have you don't know what you are doing. Or maybe people see it as maybe it's just... [unintelligible].

00:16:57
H

Maybe they just see it as a sin. Let me just put it this way. They see being gay as a sin. I would like to just... let's just work on making people understand that being gay is not a sin. It's just... it is just your person.



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
STUDENT REPORT

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