



Journeys of identity: Moroccan LGBTIQ+ experiences in migration across Germany and beyond

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Abstract: In a context of insecurity and health crisis, along with the criminalisation of acts between people of the same sex, in Morocco LGBTIQ+ rights to life, freedom from discrimination, and freedom of expression and association are violated. Affected people have mainly fled to Germany, despite the hardships in this 'Eldorado' state.

Population mobility has increased and become more heterogeneous over the last two decades, creating serious concerns about the health and well-being of people on the move as well as communities of origin and destination. In recent years, there has been a major increase in [research](#) on gender relations and their composition in the context of migration. Migratory movements are frequently linked to economic or security concerns. Nonetheless, attention is not paid to further reasons that may be related to individuals' sexual orientation, religion, or other factors that push someone to leave their country of origin to seek freedom and security abroad. Although sexuality is a privileged sphere of observation on how gender relations are built and recomposed, limited [studies](#) focus on 'emotional migration' (which is an emotional status pushing a person to leave the

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native country and migrate to find a healthier emotional space) and sexual trajectories of LGBTIQ+ migrants.

Gender and mobility in Morocco

The way in which LGBTIQ+ people's sexuality and migration processes from Morocco to Europe, specifically Germany, are connected and interrelate with each other can be examined in three spatio-temporal stages of the relocation process: pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. Coming to Europe can be a turning point in an immigrant's emotional and sexual life. Many are already adults, although a [considerable percentage](#) emigrate at a younger age or begin their sexual lives after they arrive. Migrants and refugees from all over the world move to Germany in large numbers from African and Arab countries besides Russia. People are forced to flee for various reasons based on individual experiences in their societies. [69 countries](#) have 'anti-gay' laws, many of which result from their colonial heritage. The 'natives' were subjected to conservative Western moral values during colonisation. As seen in Uganda, Christian missionaries played and continue to play an important role in '[importing](#)' [homophobic attitudes](#).

Gender and migration in Morocco: context and relationship

Migration research has been generally undertaken from [a male perspective](#), or in relation to financial concerns, while considering women and LGBTIQ+ as companions, or simply not taking them into consideration. Nevertheless, the trend will evolve over time, indicating a progressive 'feminisation' of migration and an increase of women as in-migrant population, as well as leading to stronger migration flows not only in terms of poverty and financial necessities but also in terms of gender identity issues. Sexuality issues will give rise to problems linked to the movements of LGBTIQ+, such as asylum seekers, refugees, and illegal immigration. It must be highlighted that, at a time when many countries around the world pass legislation to protect sexual minorities and gender identity, and other countries legalise same-sex marriage and adoption, 29 states around the world allow transgender people to change their sex and civil [status](#). Nonetheless, [63 countries](#) punish with prison, torture, or forced labour, persons who have sentimental attraction or sexual relations with someone of the same sex. In the jurisdictions of [11 countries](#) homosexuality is punished by death penalty or there is a possibility for private, consensual same-sex sexual activity.

Unfortunately, Morocco has adopted such discriminatory laws. It criminalises LGBTIQ+ people and sexual encounters outside of marriage. [Article 489](#) of the Moroccan penal code criminalises 'licentious' or 'unnatural' acts between people of the same sex. These acts are punishable with imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years or with a fine up to 1200 dirhams. Politicians, the government, and the Fuqaha refuse to review and amend such a law. Therefore, sexual minorities seek their freedoms and desires in other countries.

In this context, it must be also noticed that violence becomes the usual means and mode of settling scores and social relations. The struggle for power and access to wealth risks creating internal and external conflicts that can become devastating for the LGBTIQ+ migrants looking for a safer place. For example, Ali* does not run away from a war, neither from misery nor sadness. He is a Moroccan gay man who wishes to leave his country due to the cultural, religious, and legal restrictions placed on LGBTIQ+ individuals in Morocco. He is trying to get away from the 'zamel' culture that the local collective imagination has imposed on sexual minorities. 'Zamel' is a pejorative Moroccan word meaning gay and comes in classical Arabic from the word Zamil meaning colleague or companion. The taboo status of homosexuality in Morocco, and such societal violence pushes the LGBTIQ+ community to emigrate while seeking for a space of rights and freedom.

The complex situation of the Moroccan LGBTIQ+ community

In 2022, I examined quantitative and qualitative data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and, at times, a survey with 20 participants who have Moroccan nationality and are part of the LGBTIQ+ community in the country. The participants were questioned about their sexuality, the main reasons for migrating, their impressions on Germany and their home country, and changes in their understanding of sexuality. The participants, the majority of whom were anonymous, unanimously agreed to leave Morocco and live elsewhere. The reasons were particularly related to safety, sexuality, and the risks in their home country. 37 percent of the participants chose Germany as their LGBTIQ+ migration destination, which represents the majority, followed by the United States with a rate of 25 percent, and Canada with a rate of 20 percent. The remaining 20 percent was distributed between England, France, Italy, and Spain.

Why Germany as a country of destination?

Focusing on Moroccan LGBTIQ+ community's experiences in Germany, it is worth highlighting that, among the [44](#) European countries, Germany is one of the safest countries for LGBTQ+ migrants, ranking as 10th safest country in the world according to a study on the [Gay Travel Index](#) 2021 (which measures the legal situation and living conditions for members of the queer community in 202 countries and regions). Germany is the main destination of Moroccan migrants for several reasons. This occurs in several legal and illegal forms, but the majority are done through study permits. Germany is a highly attractive country economically, ranking fourth in the world and first in Europe in terms of GDP. This makes it an ideal destination for LGBTIQ+ workers. Additionally, Germany ranks as the 17th safest and peaceful country globally according to [Global Peace Index](#) 2021, providing a secure environment for emotional migration for LGBTIQ+ people. Same-sex marriage has been legal in Germany since 2017, and laws are in place to protect the LGBTIQ+ community from sexism and homophobia. Furthermore, Germany is one of the most gay-friendly countries globally, with many LGBTQ

associations and organisations working to protect sexual minorities, such as the *Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland* ([LSVD](#)). Europe has been discovered not to be an 'Eldorado' for LGBTIQ+ people of colour and African race who seek difficult longings and belongings in the diaspora and face multi-layered discrimination, racism, and rejection. The Germany Federal Republic is composed of 16 federal states, each with its own constitution and self-governance within legal limits. This decentralisation creates disparities in migration, asylum seeking, and integration experiences, including complexities for Moroccan asylum applications. Some federal states are more open-minded and safer than others, with LGBTIQ+ migrants preferring *Stadtstaaten* (city-states) like Berlin. According to Abdallah, a gay man participating in my aforementioned survey, 'indeed, the discourses change, as for some it is a better place, while for others it is a second hell'. In talking about his own experience leaving Morocco to emigrate to Germany in search of a better life, unfortunately, he mentioned racism as well as many difficulties associated with the integration and reception of LGBTIQ+ migrants. He claimed: 'Germany was not the right country for me, or it is not what some people believe it to be. True, there are safeguards in place, but are they sufficient?' Despite the existing German laws, sexism, homophobia, and racism are still prevalent in the country. Nobody can deny that social prejudices have vanished or pretend that the difficulties encountered have become less and less prevalent. The current debates over marriage for all and homo-parentality are raging, highlighting how much of the apparent acceptance of differences shown in recent years was motivated by 'tolerance' rather than respect for the other.

Looking ahead

Even though homosexuals are increasingly free in some countries and enjoy their right to equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, homophobia persists and it is still difficult for young people to admit their sexual orientation to their parents. Regrettably, some people are still rejected by their families simply because they are LGBTIQ+. It is important to raise these silenced voices —who have endured several sexist and homophobic discourses— and to call attention to the institutionalisation of sexual rights in Morocco, which is frequently lumped into the category of a monolithic Muslim society. Choices are numerous, and sexual orientations are just as different as other choices and aspirations in life. Therefore, relevant issues require further analysis. First, it is necessary to monitor Morocco's ability to pass a law criminalising discrimination against LGBTIQ+ persons so they can stay in their country and not suffer migration- and integration-related issues elsewhere. Second, it is necessary to advocate for possible amendments of articles 489 and 490 of the Moroccan penal code, which criminalise and punish same-sex love or sexual relations outside of marriage. Third, it is necessary to address how Moroccan institutions could become prepared to eradicate prejudices, practices, and homophobic

discourses and to accept the diversity and pluralism of Islam, and, above all, how the LGBTIQ+ community could become a living force by remaining in Morocco.