"It's half being queer, and half just wanting to leave:" Queer migration in Kazakhstan

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<u>Abstract</u>

Queer migration has been studied among different groups and in different regions of the world but so far no comprehensive study has been undertaken in Central Asia. Much existing queer migration research focuses on specific destination countries or specific migratory pathways, and is often explored after the fact. This dissertation is based on qualitative research with aspiring queer migrants before they embark on a journey.

Through examinations of the decisions to migrate, which migratory pathway to take, and where to go, this dissertation offers the first academic insight into the phenomenon of queer migration in Kazakhstan. It brings new contributions on the factors behind queer mobility and immobility, explores the 'queer lens' through which aspiring queer migrants view migratory processes and decisions, and explores how their queer, national and ethnic identities intersect in these processes.

This study is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 15 queer migrants and aspiring queer migrants in Almaty, Kazakhstan with a range of life experiences and sexual or gender identities. Analysis generates new empirical insights into the factors that lead queer people in Kazakhstan to pursue migration, the pathways they choose, from asylum to education to work, and the destinations they seek. The study explores how and why Kazakhstani queer migrants differ from general migratory patterns in Kazakhstan and from queer migrants in other contexts.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, migration, queer migration, LGBTQ+, Central Asia, mobilities, immobilities, migration pathways, temporalities, migration destination choice.

Author's declaration

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

Signature _____

Signed at Almaty, Kazakhstan, 14 March 2021.

The defence will take place on _____ [date] at _____ [time] / at _____ [address] in auditorium number _____.

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Content warning

This text contains references to and discussion of the following potentially sensitive or disturbing issues: homophobia, transphobia, bisexual erasure, racism, sexism and misogyny, suicide, violence, family estrangement, rape, sexual abuse.

Table of contents

List of tables

1. Introduction

The study of queer migration has explored groups and perspectives across the world, but has thus far neglected the phenomenon in Central Asia. This dissertation seeks to fill this crucial gap in the literature by examining the attitudes and experiences of queer migrants and aspiring queer migrants in Kazakhstan. Queer migration is a relatively young field of study and lacks somewhat in theory and literature covering some themes. This research aims to offer an empirical insight into the phenomenon as it is experienced in Kazakhstan, informed and guided by theory from queer migration studies, migration studies and general scholarship on Kazakhstan.

The specific gaps in the literature that this dissertation seeks to address are explored in full detail in the literature review below, but aside from a gap on the phenomenon in Kazakhstan there are a number of other gaps that this study will also address. The majority of existing queer migration literature revisits migrant journeys retrospectively, which can lead to a "mobility bias" (Schewel, 2020) that excludes those who choose to remain or cannot leave. Further, many studies are conducted from or focused on the destination country, meaning that queer migrants who aspire to different destinations are excluded and their experiences unheard. This study aims to counter these issues by speaking to aspiring migrants before they move to capture crucial detail on how early decisions are made, how migratory aspirations differ across groups, and how identities and experiences intersect with migration. This dissertation will explore these issues across three broad themes: factors contributing to the desire to migrate or not migrate; pathways to migration; destination choice. These are elaborated on below, both in the literature review and in their own chapters.

In addition to filling these academic gaps, this dissertation provides an in-depth study of migration pathways among a marginalised group in an under-studied region. It

responds to calls in migration studies to shift focus onto people and journeys rather than destinations and policies (Vanyoro et al., 2019) and its examination of factors contributing to or preventing migration may inform efforts to support queer migrants in their journeys.

None of what follows is to say that life is dire for queer people here, or that Kazakhstan is an unlivable place for them. Same-sex sexual conduct is legal and the age of consent is equal with heterosexual sex, but legal frameworks such as same-sex marriage, adoption and discrimination protections are lacking. Many of the participants in this dissertation made clear that they love this place very deeply, and while the themes discussed here paint a concerning picture, many participants make clear that experience is neither universal nor constant. Many are part of thriving communities, are involved in queer projects, or work together to make their lives safer and healthier. Equally, many others are not able to access this. In short, the reader should not take away either that queer life in Kazakhstan is paradise, or that it is hell: for some it is one or the other, for some neither, and for some both.

Aims, research questions and findings

This dissertation aims to answer the following three key research questions, which are developed and expanded by the sub-questions below them. Each main question will be placed in its theoretical and literary context in the literature review and then will form the basis of its own chapter. Throughout the dissertation, the overarching themes of Kazakhstan itself, queerness and the intersection of queer and other identities will also be explored.

Chapter 4: "To stay or to go"
- Which factors contribute to queer migration mobility and immobility in Kazakhstan?
  - How do they impact queer migrants' attitudes to migration?
  - How do migrants negotiate factors with their queer and other identities?

Chapter 5: "Migratory pathways"
- How do migrants navigate different pathways to migration?

○ Which pathways do they consider?

○ What affects their perceptions, planning and decisions?

Chapter 6: "Destination"

● How and why do migrants select ideal migratory destinations?

○ How do experience, identities and language affect destination selection?

Main findings

A key finding running through this study is the distinctive approaches that queer migrants from Kazakhstan take as compared to the trends in general migration from Kazakhstan. The findings suggest that trends evident in general migration in terms of the ethnicity of outward migrants, and their destinations differ significantly, with ethnic Russians dominating general outward migration and countries such as Russia and Uzbekistan as the main destinations. While not a statistically significant sample, ethnicity did not appear as a factor in deciding to migrate among the 15 queer people who had considered or were considering migration in this study. It did, however, factor in destination choice, with both queer and ethnic/national identities playing a role in the almost universal rejection of Russia as a destination across ethnicities. I argue that this is due to the unique 'queer lens' that queer migrants must apply to decisions in their migration process, something that their non-queer counterparts need not consider. Chapter four establishes the queer lens in the context of factors impacting the decision to migrate and finds that it affects not just queer-specific factors but more general factors are also seen by migrants through it.

Though information on the factors that may push migrants from Kazakhstan or pull them to other places is available in literature, chapter four also provides the first examination of "repel" and "retain" factors (Schewel, 2020), a descriptive framework that enables the exploration of immobility alongside mobility. It finds that concepts such as 'normality' and temporality play a key role in shaping migratory ambitions. In chapter five, the key choices that queer migrants make around pathways to migration are explored, finding that though many may be eligible for asylum, most reject this pathway because of the poor treatment of refugees abroad, perceived

unlikelihood of success and the consequences of failure. Finally, chapter six establishes a framework that examines the formation of destination choices, finding a complex intersection of the factors, identities and experiences explored earlier in the dissertation, and raising questions for further research about how such choices are formed.

Impact of events on research

It should be noted that interviews were carried out before both the January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, and the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Participants' discussion of Kazakhstani politics, and of Ukraine and Russia as migratory destinations should be read with this in mind.

Language and terms

Given the international and intercultural context of this research, a brief note on how I have handled linguistic choices and terms to refer to particular phenomena is needed.

Regarding choices of terms, and with the use of multiple languages in mind, words such as 'queer,' 'gay,' 'lesbian' and the many variations of the LGBT acronym may have similar meaning but carry different connotations in English, Kazakh, Russian and other languages spoken by participants (Suyarkulova, 2019; Wilkinson and Kirey, 2010). Each term carries complex and bundled meanings depending on the speaker and will inevitably also be understood differently by the reader. For this reason, where a text or participant has used a specific term I will preserve that in quotations or references, but for the generalised concept I will use the term 'queer' throughout my own text and argument and use more specific terms only where necessary. 'Queer' has been defined by many but should here be taken to be "an umbrella term for non-heterosexual and gender nonconforming individuals… an ever-changing notion, which is never fixed" (Shoshanova, 2021:128).

As discussed in the literature review below, there has been some debate on what constitutes queer migration, and how the term interacts with related concepts. I

provide the working definition this dissertation uses in the <u>queer migration</u> section of the literature review.

Another term with varying connotations is 'migrant.' Though it is criticised by some (Vanyoro et al., 2019) for its tendency to dehumanise, because of its brevity and clarity I have elected to use it in this dissertation to describe the people who have migrated or are migrating (*migrants*) and people who intend to migrate or are considering it (*aspiring migrants*). Where it is necessary to distinguish between queer migration and the more general, non-queer phenomenon, I will refer to the latter as 'general migration.'

In some informal contexts, the words Kazakh and Kazakhstani are used interchangeably in English to indicate connection with the country of Kazakhstan. While there are nuances to each term and their equivalent uses in Kazakh, Russian and English, this dissertation will make the following distinction for the sake of consistency. Use of 'Kazakh' will refer to the Kazakh culture, ethnicity, people or tradition, as well as the Kazakh language; 'Kazakhstani' will refer to the country of Kazakhstan and things connected with it in a state-based, rather than ethnic or cultural, sense.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

"The other day I was trying to buy a queer book.

Just fiction, literature…

And here you can't even find that."

Participant A

Participant A, in the quote above, was discussing buying queer fiction books in Kazakhstan, but her comment could equally be applied to academic literature on queer migration in Kazakhstan, or even in the wider Central Asian region. As this review will demonstrate, there is a significant lack of literature on queer migration in both locales. That lack did cause concern as I approached this research but this is the academic gap that this dissertation seeks to fill. There does exist, however, a broader basis of literature, both academic and non-academic, which provides contextual, comparative and theoretical background on queer lives in Central Asia, queer mobility and migration in other geographical areas and on migration more generally, which can be used to site this dissertation and provide a basis for discussion.

Because this dissertation examines some significant gaps in the literature, it takes a theory generative approach to understanding queer migration in Central Asia, combining existing theoretical frameworks with a grounded theory approach. This review examines and discusses the literary and theoretical context in sections broadly reflecting the themes of the main discussion chapters of this dissertation, as well as the overarching themes of queerness, Kazakhstan, and identity. The first section offers theoretical and contextual background which also links to factors that encourage, enable, deter or prevent migration, the subject of the first main chapter.

Contextual background

<u>Queer migration</u>

Definitions of queer migration, sometimes compared with or referred to as sexual migration, are contested in the existing literature. In this section, I argue that a definition that takes into account the complex and overlapping motivations that drive queer peoples' mobilities and immobilities is necessary for studying the phenomenon in Central Asia.

'Sexual migration,' developed as a concept in the late 1990s in AIDS-focused public health literature (Manalansan, 2006:226), though a precise origin is hard to trace. Carrillo (2004:58-9) credits the term's origin to Cantú (1999) and Parker (1997), refining its definition to "international relocation that is motivated, directly or indirectly, by the sexuality of those who migrate." Carrillo also argues for the need, when examining sexual migration, to place one's study in a context wider than just one discipline or concept, particularly highlighting the importance of experiences, motivating factors and a research gap on the cultural impacts sexual migration has on the points of origin and destination, and migrants' sexual behaviour (Carrillo, 2004:68). This point, among others discussed here, influenced my decision to construct this study as broadly as possible to capture a wide picture of the many facets of queer migration in Kazakhstan.

By 2008, the language around the concept was changing, with scholars such as Luibhéid (2008) describing a wider and more inclusive concept of 'queer migration,' using the word queer to encompass a diverse range of non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, including fluidity or a lack thereof or (Szulc, 2020; Luibhéid, 2008; Gorman-Murray, 2009). Agreement on what constitutes the migration element of queer migration has also courted discussion, with Gorman-Murray (2009), for example, arguing that any migration at all influenced by the migrant's queerness constitutes queer migration, but that migration purely for education or work is not. More recently, theoretical works on the topic have argued for the concept as studied to encompass all migration by queer people (Szulc, 2020:221).

Mai and King (2009) called for a sexual and emotional 'turn' in the study of migration to acknowledge the impact of emotion, sex and love upon the motivations of those who migrate. They argue that "beyond their common function as mobile workers within the global capitalist economy, and beyond their victimhood fate as refugees fleeing war and persecution, migrants and other 'people on the move' are sexual beings expressing, wanting to express, or denied the means to express, their sexual identities" (2009:296). They call for scholars to consider these factors alongside those push-pull factors traditionally examined in literature, such as economic and aspirational, as well as the more pressing factors such as the political or legal, suggesting that previous scholarship has tended to impress economic or geographical factors on migrant stories from the academic side and has set emotion apart (Mai and King, 2009:327).

Reflecting on these arguments, I decided that this dissertation will use a definition, influenced by Carrillo (2004), Luibhéid (2008), Gorman-Murray (2009) and Mai and King (2009) that queer migration is any migration or connected process by a queer person. Though several queer migration studies will be discussed below alongside the main themes of this work, it is worth emphasising that the vast majority of studies on queer migration are carried out after migration and usually focus on one destination country. Examples discussed below include Stella et al. 2018 (from Eastern Europe to Scotland), Nieves-Lugo et al 2018 (from Latin America to the USA), and Kam 2020 (from China to Australia). This is not to say that these studies are lacking, but rather to highlight that pre-migration studies are rare and therefore little is known about the factors and processes that affect pre-movement decision-making. This dissertation contributes to filling this gap with its focus on aspiring queer migrants in the early stages of a planned journey, or the decision to begin planning one.

Kazakhstan

The best sources of contextual background to life as a queer person and queer migration in Kazakhstan and Central Asia are queer people who live here or are from here. While this dissertation gains direct insight from 15 such people, there is also significant research and reportage produced by NGOs and community groups within Kazakhstan, as well as a small but growing collection of academic literature. This

section will discuss these but also serve to provide contextual and theoretical background to the first discussion chapter, by highlighting expected outcomes in terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

A notable and recent exception to the sparsity of academic works about queerness in Central Asia is Shoshanova's (2021) article which examines queer identities in contemporary art in Kazakhstan. While it does not focus specifically on migration, there is deep exploration of the interaction of queer, Kazakh and Kazakhstani identities, as well as the social and legal barriers faced by artists and activists from sexual minorities. This provides useful theoretical and contextual insight into how these identities intersect in practical terms and might impact queer migrants as they too explore clashes and intersections that influence migration decision-making. In a similar vein, but not solely queer-focused, is Kudaibergenova's (2019) article examining the influence of nationalism and traditional cultural narratives on social media as actors try to 'retraditionalise' and shame women's depictions of their sexual liberation and queerness on Instagram. This has little relation to migration directly, but provides perspectives that assist in understanding and anticipating the kind of identity-based questions and factors contributing to migration that participants may experience.

Continuing on themes of identity and expression, Wilkinson and Kirey's (2010) study on young non-heterosexual and transgender people in Kyrgyzstan and their approaches to and relationship with the acronym 'LGBT.' Though it offers no commentary on queer migration, it does provide insight into how non-heterosexual people describe themselves in Russian as spoken in Kyrgyzstan, a near neighbour to the locus of this study, how they interact with authorities and provides insight into interactions of different identities which may well be reflected in this study. Similarly, Suyarkulova (2019) provides a useful framework for approaching the use and translation of the word queer/квир and its differing connotations in English in and Russian.

Shenker et al., (2021:84) from ALMA-TQ Transgender Initiative describe a situation of extreme difficulty and danger for transgender people in Kazakhstan. International migration is mentioned as a solution sought by some, but there is no closer

examination of that phenomenon. Notably, they report that trans people are often prevented from leaving or entering the country due to having documents in former names and depicting the wrong gender. They also highlight that internal migration is common among trans people, because of intolerance in smaller towns and better availability of medical care in large cities (2021:29).

The submission by the LGBT media and human rights organisation Kok.Team to the UN Human Rights Council regarding Kazakhstan's universal periodic review provides a summary of implicit and explicit legal discrimination against LGBT people, as well as a chilling list of incidents of violence, murder, police inaction and brutality, and a 50% rate of suicidal ideation among queer men (2019:3-6). Kok.Team also collects and reports personal accounts and discussions from queer people in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, which similarly serve as a depiction of many of the issues that might impact a queer person's decision to leave or stay in Kazakhstan, such as blackmail, violence, estrangement and workplace harassment (Kok.Team, nd-a). Finally, they have also compiled a research bibliography on queer issues in Kazakhstan, which proved useful to this project (Kok.Team, nd-b). Feminita, a grassroots queer feminist collective has also researched the issues and needs facing lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women in Kazakhstan. Their most recent landmark report discusses the state of rights of LBQ women as well as required actions to improve the situation. This report, too, finds a high rate of suicidal ideation (35%), as well as domestic violence, sexual violence, homo/transphobic violence, blackmail, inadequate healthcare and police inaction in the face of reports (Sekerbayeva et al., 2017). International NGOs take a similar view, describing the situation for LGBTQ+ people in Central Asia as a 'climate of fear' in Kazakhstan (HRW, 2015:7) with extreme stigmatisation and invisibility (Amnesty, 2017:27).

While some of this contextual material indicates that queer migration is occurring, the authors focus on the situation faced by queer people in their region of focus. This literature from Kazakhstan and its neighbours focuses heavily on factors that might 'push' aspiring queer migrants to leave the country, and may explain why queer migrants in Kazakhstan do not aim for neighbouring countries with cultural and linguistic ties, as general migration theory would suggest they should (Fafchamps and Shilpi, 2012). Despite some mention of queer migration as a concept that is

occurring here, there has thus far been no comprehensive examination of how destinations are selected, the factors that 'pull' aspiring migrants to specific destination countries, or factors that might lead a queer person to consider migration but ultimately stay in place.

Factors contributing to migration

The section will examine the literary and theoretical context to the dissertation's chapter on the factors that lead queer people in Kazakhstan to consider migration. It will examine and identify these factors through the framework proposed by Kerilyn Schewel (2019) which is based on the earlier descriptive push-pull concept in migration studies. This concept entered wide use after its adoption by Lee (1966). Lee elaborates an explanatory framework where migratory decisions and intentions stem from consideration of factors in the place of origin, factors in the destination, intervening obstacles and personal factors (1966: 50). A simplified explanation holds that the more negative factors ('push') are present in the origin, and the more positive factors in the destination ('pull') and if intervening factors can be overcome, then the more likely it is that a person will decide to migrate. While the concentration in his theory is on 'push' and 'pull', Lee does also acknowledge the influence of positive factors in the origin and negative factors in the destination, both of which may contribute to decisions not to migrate. These latter factors are expanded upon by Schewel (2019) as those that tend to hold a migrant in place as 'retain' factors, and those that tend to discourage migration as 'repel' factors.

Schewel argues that the concentration in migration studies on *mobility* over immobility led to these repel and retain factors being overlooked in studies since. She contends that abandoning the notion of push and pull factors as a theory alone, and by considering their counterpart repel and retain factors we can "highlight a range of potential influences on migration decision-making that go beyond its drivers" (2019: 339). This emergence of the concept of immobility in migration studies literature affords opportunities to shed light on the importance of those who do not move too. A full understanding of migration decision-making, journeys and processes cannot possibly be gained without understanding why some people do not move, as well as why some do. Further, examinations of preferences or reasons to

stay widen the discourse on migration beyond the economic focus which has dominated much of migration scholarship (Schewel, 2019: 331; Baas and Yeoh, 2019). As will be seen, economic concerns feature heavily in queer migrants' concerns. It is also evident that a full picture of the causes of queer migration cannot be gained without looking beyond that lens.

In this study, I will consider questions both of staying and going, by examining retain and repel factors alongside push and pull factors. The aim of this is to give empirical insight, led by the theoretical basis described here, into the pre-migratory views and experiences of the participants and uncover the factors that have led them to consider migration, including those which influence immobility. Until now, such an examination has not been carried out in Kazakhstan or Central Asia.

Without a basis of existing literature on queer migration in Kazakhstan or Central Asia, it is difficult to propose potential factors which contribute to the phenomenon. However, research on labour and other types of migration can offer some suggestions, as well as those found in studies of queer migration from elsewhere. According to Osipova (2021) Kazakhstan has a high rate of general outward migration, which climbed steadily between 2014 and the pandemic, as well as the largest negative net migration rate in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Analysis by the UNFPA (2019) places this in a longer-term context, also elaborated on by Osipova, of labour migration in which outflowing migration tends to consist of highly skilled workers seeking better prospects abroad, and incoming by a mix of skilled and unskilled. Both of these suggest that, if queer migrants reflect more general trends, then work should feature as a factor in the queer migratory decision-making explored in this dissertation. Several main reasons that people seek to leave the country are also proposed. The International Organisation of Migration's (IOM) examination of youth migration in Central Asia suggests that the most cited goals of migrants from Kazakhstan under 28 years old included seeking higher education abroad and better work opportunities. Their most frequent response to a survey question about motivations for leaving Kazakhstan was about corruption, impunity and government inefficiency, while the least selected was around the lack of respect for human rights (IOM, 2020: 38-42). Similarly, Osipova (2021) argues that

Kazakhstan's economic situation is the primary driver of outward general migration, along with the related desire to find better work abroad than is available at home.

In Bianchi et al. (2017), the authors theorise that men who have sex with men (MSMs) from Latin America leave their home countries for the US primarily to escape homonegativity and to find "sexual freedom." While these are coupled with other factors, including finding work, the majority of participants listed these as a factor in their decision. Similarly, in Nieves-Lugo et al (2019) the authors theorised that the most common reasons for migration by MSMs from three Latin American countries to the USA were to find work and improve their financial situation, and live a more openly queer life. Kam (2020) offers a view of movement of lesbians from China to Australia, whose motivations come from a combination of wishing to evade the pressure of heteronormative expectations at home, coupled with desires for globality and cosmopolitan mobility to result in migration that is connected with work, with love and affirmation and with escape from an unsuitable environment. The results of the Intimate Migrations project reported in Stella et al., (2016); Stella et al., (2018), and Stella and Cuthbert, (2017), which examined 'the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender migrants who have moved to Scotland from Central [and] Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union' (2016:4) also offers theoretical expectations and includes migrants from countries with some shared history and cultural elements with Kazakhstan. Stella et al. (2018) examine the notion of the 'normality' migrants sought: freedom to live as they wish. Participants here too described a combination of motivations in their decision to migrate, including their queerness, and a majority spoke of economic, employment or education reasons. Some described escaping marginalisation and violence, but for none was queerness the sole reason.

Similar combinations are also suggested in studies from other parts of the world, including Baas' (2020) study of Indian gay men in Singapore through the perspective of temporality, who, in simple terms, often move for reasons of work but feel the difficulty of their limited time in place because of the affirmation their presence offers. Baas (2020) further makes an interesting argument about the temporality of queer migration and migration more generally, pointing out the questions queer migrants have around their 'gay futures' in an uncertain immigration regime, and theorising

that restrictive migration regimes like Singapore's push queerness to a more prominent position in migrants' thinking about migration. Similarly, Baas and Yeoh (2020) argue for greater consideration of temporality in migration, particularly around the concept of waiting. This is well explored in post-migration contexts, including waiting for documents, status, family reunification (Griffiths, 2013; Mountz, 2011; Elliot, 2016; Gray, 2011; Villegas, 2014), but I found little exploration of 'waiting' in the earlier phases of migration.

Though this literature focuses on post-migration viewpoints, we can still extrapolate theoretical expectations that Kazakhstani queer migrants considering migration will include economic elements like better work opportunities, alongside better queer life or 'normality.' The search for better educational opportunities is also expected to feature. This expectation has indeed been met, though as will be seen below, the balance of factors and their framing in participants' attitudes differs in the pre-migration context. I did not anticipate that the concept of waiting would arise outside waiting for the chance to leave but, as discussed in chapter four, participants do discuss waiting as a factor pushing them to migrate – specifically, the desire *not to have to* wait for change in Kazakhstan. These expectations will be discussed in chapter four, which answers the research question 'what factors contribute to queer migration mobilities and immobilities in Kazakhstan?'

Migratory pathways

This section examines the literary and theoretical background to the research questions concerning pathways to migration. In this context, I use the word "pathways" to mean the ways in which a person gains the right or ability to live in another country in the long term, for example, the ways in which they gain visas, permits or some other form of status to do so. Because a majority of queer migration studies are conducted post-facto little is known about how aspiring migrants might weigh the pathways open to them and decide which one suits their purposes best. Many studies also focus on only one pathway: examples include Yu (2020) on education, Yue (2008) on affirmation and partnership, both Baas (2018) and Manalansan (2006) on work. In general migration too, there can often be a similar

focus, such as Fafchamps and Shilpi (2012) and Brunarksa (2019) both discussed in this dissertation, also focus on work.

Nevertheless, frameworks that can be used to deduce which pathways queer migrants in Kazakhstan may have considered are available. For example, Nieves-Lugo et al. (2019:117-8), though not studying pathways specifically, provided early inspiration as I considered which pathways might be applicable here. They categorise research subjects by several reasons for migration, which are dealt with in the work in four broad strands which can be equally taken to function as pathways: affirmation (i.e. to live more openly, or with a partner); escape (to flee persecution, claim asylum); economic (to work); and education (to study).[1] Nieves-Lugo et al. conclude that the most common among LGBT migrants to the US from three countries in Latin America are affirmation, economic and education.

The single-pathway studies provide useful context in forecasting expectations of which pathways to expect among Kazakhstani queer migrants, with both Yu (2020) and Yue (2008) influencing the direction of interviews in this dissertation to ensure that education, love and partnership were discussed as options. In terms of expectations as to which pathways migrants might select, some analyses suggest that work or economic reasons ought to be a primary pathway. Osipova (2021) analyses that the majority of general migration, for which a reason is specified, is work-related. For example, in 2018, over 2 million Kazakhstani citizens were working legally in Russia (IOM, 2020:19). Study too, is a key pathway for general migrants under 28 years old from Kazakhstan and should be expected to factor highly.

Turning to pathways to migration through asylum and refugee channels, a great deal is written in queer migration studies on topics such as which destinations might be likely (Mole, 2021), the law and politics of queer asylum (Ferreira, 2021) or the deep issues with traumatising, appalling and unfair processes (Lee and Brotman, 2011; Lee et al. 2020; Singer, 2021). Other examinations concern the mismatch between 'western' ideas of what queerness should look like in asylum claims (Murray, 2014; Gaucher and DeGagne, 2016). However, I have not been able to find any studies

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[1] Names of strands are given by me here for clarity. Authors consider only affirmation and escape as 'sexual migration.'

with queer asylum seekers before they migrate which might assess how they weigh the decision to pursue asylum. Of course, in some ways this is understandable given the extreme danger many face and the urgency with which their mobility becomes necessary. On the other hand, it is not unlikely that at least some of the participants in this study will have considered asylum as a pathway to migration, or even settled on it as their best way forward. As was discussed in the contextual background above, there are many issues in Kazakhstan as a whole which could put queer people in danger or subject them to persecution that would make a claim of asylum entirely reasonable and legitimate. However, the locus of this study, Almaty, is a relatively liberal and wealthy city which could reduce the willingness or ability of participants from here to pursue an asylum route.

Paul (2011) describes a pathway in general migration by which migrants move in a planned and intentional step-by-step, or 'stepwise,' pattern between several destinations, "working their way up" (2011:1842) in order to eventually reach a preferred destination. Though from a non-queer context, it is also to be expected that such a strategy might be planned by participants, especially those who have previous experience of living abroad, for example, for education.

As will be seen in chapter five, queer migrants in Kazakhstan do consider a range of pathways, including asylum, work, education and love, but all are approached through differing factors and concerns. These will be explored in the chapter, addressing the research questions regarding how queer migrants navigate pathways to migration, which pathways they consider and what factors affect their perceptions, planning and decisions.

Destination choices
The section will examine the literary and theoretical context to the dissertation's chapter on destination choice. While the dissertation will also offer new data on which countries the participants have chosen as their ideal migratory destinations, its primary focus is on *how* these decisions are made.

Modern research and theory on the way choices of destination are made among general, non-queer migrants is relatively sparse and has limitations that make its application to the circumstances of queer migration in Kazakhstan less appropriate. Some of the foundational works still referred to today focus on a family as the unit of migration, propose second home ownership as a factor, prioritise economic factors, or study internal migration in the USA (e.g. McHugh, 1984; Roseman, 1983), with questionable relevance to queer-specific contexts. As with much of the literature discussed already, the focus is also often on completed journeys and, as a result, tends to exclude those who could not or chose not to migrate (Brunarksa, 2019:49). I have been unable to find literature specifically examining destination choices among queer migrants. While studies available on destination choice in general migration offer some frameworks we can compare to the attitudes and choices of queer migrants, they tend to overlook the particular circumstances of queer migrants for whom, as this research will show, additional factors such as the perceived openness and safety of queer life in the destination must be taken into account. Most also tend to focus on where migrants go, rather than how they decide on a destination.

In a widely-cited and influential study of migration in Nepal, Fafchamps and Shilpi (2012) found that "migrants move primarily to nearby, high population density areas where many people share their language and ethnic background." Their study focused on statistical, economic data, studies only work-related migration, and excludes data from all but adult males. Their study rests on the assumption that migrants expect to match the average earnings in the destination, demonstrating the economic focus common to many such studies. Further, the study identifies a proposed explanation for destination choice by looking at where men moved and extrapolating the reasons they moved there. Funkhouser (2009) presents a similarly economic-focused theory, that pre-migration destination selection (between two choices) was influenced by the economic situation of the 'sending' household and their success in the home labour market. While it will be seen that economic concerns do affect queer migrants in Kazakhstan, it is unlikely that such models are appropriate to their pre-migration destination decision-making.

Of more relevance in the Kazakhstani context is Osipova's (2021) analysis of external migration in Kazakhstan. While the report focuses on general migration and

makes no mention of queer migration, Osipova offers a Kazakhstan-specific analysis and theorises on an ethnicity-driven frame for both external migration and destination. She points out that of the 42,000 people who permanently emigrated from Kazakhstan in 2019, 72% are ethnic Russian citizens of Kazakhstan, 7% ethnic German, and only 4.8% are Kazakh. Based upon statistics showing that the vast majority of migration from Kazakhstan is to Russia, with Germany in second place, she argues that "the Russian Federation is becoming the new homeland for the Russian-speaking population [of Kazakhstan]" (Osipova, 2021). If this frame is also applicable to queer migration then we should expect less of the Kazakh participants in this study to want to leave than those of Russian ethnicity, and we should expect Russia to top the list of destinations. This, however, is not the case and chapter six will explore the reasons why.

Some studies suggested that queer migrants who either took a migratory pathway based on finding work abroad, or listed finding a job as a pull factor or goal, tend to go to countries with which there are well-established labour migration pathways. For example, Brazil, Colombia and Dominica to the USA (Nieves-Lugo et al., 2019), India to Singapore (Baas, 2018), China to Australia (Kam, 2020), the Philippines to the USA (Manalansan, 2006). In Kazakhstan, figures from the most recent census (KRSA, 2008) indicate that the most popular destinations for general outward migration were Russia, Germany, Belarus and Uzbekistan, though no figures are presented on how many of these are for work. Regarding Germany, migration there for work or any other purpose is difficult for Kazakhstanis, requiring an expensive visa and local support, such as a concrete job offer. There are some exceptions for those from Kazakhstan's sizable German minority who, Osipova (2021) indicates, make up the bulk of emigration to Germany, and may be able to access visas and status more easily.

Another post-migration and non-queer study, Brunarksa (2019) examines destination selection among Polish migrants through a qualitative study but with far less of a focus on work than others. Brunarska's study provides a framework that we might expect to see among queer migrants in Kazakhstan: a typology of types of migrant decision-makers, based on ways of deciding rather than reasons for choosing - something missing thus far from queer migration studies, as well as general

migration (2019:44). The first of three types of decision-makers, the 'one-step,' describes a person whose decision to leave is inseparable from the choice of destination, in that it is not preceded by a decision to leave Poland (2019:50;58). This may not be relevant to queer migrants in Kazakhstan in their pre-migration phase, given that they are considering leaving. However, the second and third types, the single-criterion and multiple-criteria two-step decision-makers may have relevance here. They, respectively, decide to leave and then select a decision based on one criterion, such as social ties or job offers in a specific country, or based on multiple criteria, such as first selecting a group of countries by language spoken, and then by distance (2019:52-3). It is likely that this typology might help to explain decision making by queer migrants in Kazakhstan, though both their queerness and their early stage in the migration process may impact this.

Destination as a topic has been covered within queer migration studies, but from different angles and, so far, with no focus on the way the choice is made. For example, Gorman-Murray (2007:105) suggests the chosen destination reflects a "quest for self-understanding and self-identity." Meanwhile, there has also been discussion of the concept of the destination becoming the new 'home' in Fortier (2001), a concept that comes closer to the search for 'normality' discussed above.

In terms of the specific destinations that participants might be expected to name, the general migration literature discussed above suggests that we might expect nearby countries with linguistic advantages and ethnic ties (Fafchamps and Shilpi, 2012), such as Russia or Uzbekistan. Indeed, Osipova (2021), IOM (2020) and UNFPA (2019) all confirm these destinations for general educational migration, as well as high- and low-skill labour migration, alongside Germany and South Korea (Rakisheva, 2020).

However, these do not take into account additional needs of queer migrants, and countries like Russia and Uzbekistan have hostile legal and social environments for queer people, and the racism often faced by Central Asian people in Russia (Laruelle, 2007; Kuznetsova and Round, 2019). Queer migration literature suggest that destinations in Europe (Mole, 2021), the United States (Carrillo, 2004; Nieves-Lugo et al., 2018), Australia (Kam, 2020), Singapore (Baas, 2004), UK (Stella

et al., 2018), and Canada (Lee and Brotman, 2011) ought to appear among preferred destinations.

An examination of both the decision-making process and the preferred destinations selected is in chapter 6 of this dissertation, answering the research questions on how and why migrants select ideal migratory destinations, and how their experience, identities and language affect destination selection.

<u>Review conclusion</u>

The existing literature establishes the existence of queer lives in Kazakhstan, and the many political, cultural and social challenges they face, as well as the fact that queer migration is occuring. However, this literature is limited in that it does not explore that migration and, therefore, cannot identify the factors that lead to it or complicate it which not only frustrates understanding of the phenomenon but also presents barriers to any attempt to address its causes or smooth paths for queer migrants.

Queer migration and general migration literature have a great deal to offer for the study of queer migration in Kazakhstan but many theories and accounts from elsewhere, or without queer considerations, cannot be generalised to explain or understand queer migration in Kazakhstan. I hope that this dissertation can begin to provide the empirical study that is required to fill the literary gaps on Kazakhstan in queer migration, and on queerness in Kazakhstani migration.

3. Methodology

The main aim of this paper is to gather empirical data on the experiences and attitudes of queer people in Kazakhstan towards the concept of migration, and examine that alongside similar experiences and data on similar issues from other parts of the word. To do so, it seeks to understand the factors that make them want to migrate or not migrate, explore how they hope to do so, where they want to go and how and when they make decisions around migration.

Due to significant gaps in the literature on the topic of queer migration in Central Asia, this study focuses less on testing existing theories (suited to other contexts or phenomena), and rather takes as its primary focus the generation of new theory and understanding. As Golasfhani (2003:601) puts it, the aim of qualitative research such as this is to generate "understanding," rather than the *explanation* often sought in quantitative studies.

This dissertation adopted a qualitative approach, making an in-depth study of the motivations, aspirations and attitudes of LGBQT+ people in Central Asia to queer migration. This approach was adopted as appropriate for this project because such approaches offer "an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research," which suits this dissertation's aim of uncovering the complex motivations behind the phenomenon of queer migration in Central Asia rather than seeking to prove causal relationships or theory that can be generalised across contexts. It also suits interpretivist and constructivist positions inherent in research of this type. These are appropriate to the project's aims in that they enable "understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" and support the exploration of social phenomena and properties as outcomes of social interaction rather than standalone, abstract phenomena (Bryman, 2012:380).

These principles are key in a project such as this, where I aim to capture the queer migration through the eyes of those who are part of it: queer migrants. Yilmaz (2013:312) describes qualitative research as "an emergent, inductive, interpretive

and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world." She goes on to argue that the quantitative approach takes the standpoint that social phenomena have an objective reality independent of subjects, ignoring subjectivity (2013:312). Bryman (1984:84) also points out that qualitative research is well suited to research in areas lacking existing research and theory, providing a basis on which later research studies can build. For these reasons, I believe that a qualitative approach is best suited to developing understandings of how aspiring migrants in Kazakhstan perceive the migration process, their part in it and how they shape it.

Methods

In line with this approach, the principal method selected for this dissertation was semi-structured qualitative interviewing. Interviews are appropriate because they are not just a means of transfer of knowledge but are in themselves 'knowledge producing' (Brinkmann, 2018: 583) in that the interaction in itself, and the ability of the interviewer to probe further, allow for deeper knowledge to be gained than other methods. Interviewing is common in studies of queer migration, including those discussed above, reflecting that others have found this method suitable for similar works. I selected interviewing over other methods, such as surveying, because they are 'not neutral tools of data gathering, but rather active interactions' (Fontana & Frey, 2005: 698). Particularly in the context of sexualities, a mutuality between interviewer and interviewee can allow for a more honest and open exchange of information (Kong, Mahoney and Plumber, 2011:24).

This style of interview allows both me and the interviewee to be more flexible and open-minded about the content of the interview and the issues talked about (Bryman, 2012:12). In short, it allows the interviewee to talk about what is important to them but also allows me to keep them on topic and to explore the themes relevant to the research questions. This is in line with the project's inductive approach, and matches its aims and methodology well.

An interview guide was prepared in advance, which listed general topics to be covered. Given the focus in much of the existing literature on people who had already successfully migrated and on specific destinations, I wanted to leave the direction of the interview with the participants so that I did not inadvertently suggest destinations or inappropriately prompt answers to other questions. For this reason, the interview guide planned questions as openly as possible. I considered my positionality when formulating questions and conducting interviews, and took steps such as discussing my understanding of concepts, and discussing coding and analysis with the interviewees, to ensure I properly understood and did not impose external views and beliefs.

While discussing sensitive topics, I was aware of the need to form trust and rapport with the interviewees. It is also accepted that the way in which both parties participate in the interview may be affected by this rapport and interpersonal relationship but doing so openly and ethically can enhance the process and the honesty of the interview content (Kong et al., 2011). Though I conducted myself within ethical bounds, a degree of solidarity and trust is required in encouraging queer people to speak openly about their sexuality and this appropriate proximity with interviewees can benefit the research process (Kong et al., 2011). Achieving this balance is discussed later in this section.

Though these methods and methodology suit the aims, scale and restriction of this project, this study identifies directions for future research in which different techniques such as longer-term ethnography or participant observation may prove more suitable, particularly in the identification of aspiring migrant outcomes. Unfortunately these were not possible within the time available and the constraints of the pandemic.

Participants and fieldwork
Participants were invited on the basis that they were over 18 years old, and self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or any other non-heterosexual orientation, or whose gender identity is not that assigned at birth, or any combination of these. Participants were not required to specify which of these identities they held,

so long as they confirmed that at least one applied. The invited participants had all considered migration, and even if they had decided against doing so or were still undecided. The project did not seek (and did not find) a fully representative sample of LGBTQ+ people, evenly distributed across the country, though I am pleased to note a wide range of sexual orientations and diversity in gender identity in the group. Instead, it sought to uncover a deep and nuanced qualitative insight into the experiences and attitudes of this sample which may shed light on the experiences of others but should not be used to draw inferences about queer people as a whole.

Table 1: Key characteristics of research participants

Gender and/or gender identity (self-described)[1]		Sexual orientation (self-described)		Age group [2]	
Man	8	Gay	7	18-22	4
Woman	3	Lesbian	2	23-27	6
Non-binary	4	Asexual	2	28+	8
Trans or questioning gender identity	2	Bisexual	2		
		Pansexual	1		
		Not disclosed	1		

[1] Respondents were invited to describe their gender and/or gender identity as they wanted to be identified in the research. Total is more than 15 as some identified with multiple terms, e.g. man *and* trans, trans woman.

[2] Category 28+ includes two participants who did not specify their exact age but provided a range, e.g. 'I'm over 30.' The oldest participant was 35.

Table 1 shows research participants by gender and/or gender identity, sexual orientation, and age group, data which were self-reported without any prompt provided. I have elected not to disclose the ethnic composition of the group as I believe this provides a level of specificity that could lead to identification of

participants, especially those reporting a mixed background. However, the spread of participants did broadly reflect the ethnic makeup of Kazakhstan, with Kazakhs, Russians and at least three other ethnic groups (including those describing a combination) present in proportions reflective of society at large. All lived in Almaty or satellite towns in its region. Not all participants originate from Almaty, with several originally from other towns and cities across the country. Participants' highest levels of education ranged from high school to masters-level. Some were full-time students, and all were working at least part-time. All were living in stable accommodation, though several described a precarity to their living arrangements contingent on their ability to keep their sexuality or gender identity secret from family or flatmates. Eight of the fifteen participants had studied abroad for at least one year (but often more) and since returned to Kazakhstan.

Recruitment was carried out through respondent-driven snowball sampling, starting from informal social groups and contacts in Almaty. From here, initial participants were asked to invite acquaintances who met the criteria to voluntarily contact me. Snowball sampling's tendency to produce samples of people with wide social connections and to focus on smaller groups is well-discussed in literature and noted here. However, it has noted benefits in recruiting groups that are 'hard to reach' by other means, which I believe justifies its use here (Bryman, 2012: 203, 424; Johnston & Sabin, 2010: 38-9). A bias towards cisgender gay men was evident in the initial respondents recruited from personal contacts, however the group did diversify as the process continued. On average, each initial participant assisted in recruiting one more, and by the end of the fieldwork phase more participants were willing to participate than I had time to interview. All participants were under 35 years old. Efforts were made to recruit from other age groups, but the older potential participants I did engage with proved extremely reluctant to speak on the record, particularly about unsuccessful migratory journeys.

A total of fifteen interviews took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan in August and September 2021. Thirteen interviews were audio recorded in full, and later transcribed by me. Around 40 minutes of speech from the fourteenth interview was lost due to a microphone failure, but comprehensive meeting notes ensured the participant's contribution was captured and included. A fifteenth interview was

conducted via secure text messaging, at the participant's request. Two interviews were in Russian, and the remainder either a Russian/English mixture, or wholly in English.

Analysis

I transcribed the interviews myself, using speech recognition software to speed the process where possible, and translated those in Russian or the portions in Russian of those which were a mix. I approached interviewing and analysis from a grounded theory perspective, seeking to continue interviews and coding until data saturation was achieved. While understandings of what constitutes saturation are contested, I did not believe it was possible to continue until *no* new themes are emerging, as is sometimes claimed (Low, 2019: 132). Instead, I continued to the point where I observed that the experiences and attitudes being described covered mainly common themes, and outlying themes were broadly contextualised or understood (Low, 2019; Francis et al., 2009). I noticed this beginning to occur between the tenth and fifteenth interviews, and decided to stop at 15, the point where no substantive new themes were emerging (Francis et al, 2009:1242).

Though I came to the data gathering and analysis with some concepts and theories in mind, as discussed in the literature review above, I sought to mainly derive theory and understanding from the data. Transcription and coding took place alongside interviewing, with some basic deductive codes added at the start, and thereafter themes coded inductively, with this development fed back into the data-gathering process, so that subsequent interviewees were asked about emerging themes. Coding and analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti software, where I consolidated and grouped codes to identify themes which were then tracked across interviews to assess their impact.

Limitations

As discussed above, I fully accept that this study did not find a representative sample of LGBTQ+ people, evenly distributed across the country or the wider region. The sample group is young, urban and tends towards well-educated, all of which has potential to skew results towards certain outcomes, but still allows for a deep and

nuanced, qualitative insight into queer migration here in Almaty, which proposes new theory and discussion about motivations and aspirations around that concept.

I am aware that as a person from outside the Central Asia region, I bring to the interviews and my analysis of them my own set of biases and assumptions. I also bring privileges in my position as I interact with participants. I have done my best to remain aware of these and have taken such steps as I can to ensure that I can ground the research in the participants' reality, rather than imposing my views or prejudices. To do so, I discussed my understanding of the interview texts with the participants, as well as discussing coding, analysis and conclusions with some of the participants who volunteered to ensure I did not miss any cultural, historical or other factors an outsider might not know. This process helped me to strike a proper balance of emphasis on some points, and ensure that topics of importance to the participants were not outshone by topics that piqued my particular academic interest. I had intended to invite community leaders and participants to provide feedback on drafts of this dissertation but the shortened timescales following my evacuation from Almaty in January 2022 made this sadly impossible.

As a queer man, it is to be expected that I will have some emotional investment in the topic at hand, and might feel drawn to form bonds of friendship with participants. That personal experience can form the inspiration for academic research is long-established and accepted by many (Bryman, 2012:20) and, as already discussed above, a shared queerness between interviewer and interviewee can help to build trust and solidarity, and elicit more honest responses. It was my experience that this shared queerness made possible a level of mutuality, honesty and openness in the interviews in this project, which might not otherwise have been possible. Given my presence as a member or least outsider-member of the communities with whom I conducted research, the participants include people who were friends or acquaintances before the research or became friends and acquaintances after. I would argue that such social ties enhance the research's ethical compass, and developing mutually respectful social relationships with participants both before and after was a mutually rewarding social activity with worth in its own right. But it also allowed us to build the kind of understanding and rapport that meant participants felt they could trust me to properly understand and interpret

the thoughts they shared in their interviews, and it guaranteed I would do everything possible to ensure the research fully and fairly reflects the participants' experiences and opinions.

Finally, it is important to note that I do not speak Kazakh and could not afford an interpreter. I was therefore unable to interview any people who only speak Kazakh. I acknowledge that this will have excluded at least some potential participants and may have skewed the sample towards a well-educated urban selection. In this project, there was little that could be done about this: it is unlikely ethical permission would have been given for a volunteer interpreter, given the personal nature of the data, and there was neither time nor funding for me to learn Kazakh to the level required. It is notable, however, that most of the aspiring migrants interviewed in this project regarded English as a prerequisite for migration outside the CIS and Russian for within the CIS. However, it is still impossible to comment on how this consensus might have changed if the sample included speakers of only Kazakh. This is an oversight I hope to be able to address in future research, but for the moment the analysis and results discussed below should be considered with this limitation in mind.

Ethical considerations

This research was authorised by the Ethics Committee in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow. Stringent measures were in place to protect the rights and personal data of participants, particularly around data encryption, storage and transfer. Participants are referred to by pseudonym here and all data from which they could be identified has been removed. Steps were also taken to protect the participants' physical security and confidentiality (and mine) during the research, and to ensure there was no risk of accidental 'outing,' personal information being overheard or of danger from queerphobic/transphobic elements.

Special permission was secured to conduct in-person fieldwork during the pandemic. Stringent measures were taken to ensure risk of COVID transmission was minimised. Support organisations and resources were available for participants who were upset during or following interviews. In the event, a few participants became

emotional during their interviews but none required ongoing care or referral to support organisations. All participants, particularly the few who became upset during their interview, reported that they enjoyed the process and were glad to have had the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

4. Stay or go

"It's half and half: half being queer,

and half just wanting to leave Kazakhstan."

Participant A

This project's central aim from its outset has been to gain an empirical insight into the thoughts, experiences and aspirations of Kazakhstani queer migrants and aspiring migrants as they consider or begin to undertake a migratory movement and key to that is what draws them to consider migration at all. This chapter will discuss the research findings from the first research questions on the factors contributing to queer mobility and immobility in Kazakhstan, how they impact queer migrants' attitudes to migration, and how migrants negotiate them with their queer and other identities. It does so through the descriptive framework provided by the push-pull and repel-retain theories discussed in the literature review. In doing so, it will generate new knowledge and empirical insight by identifying these factors, and analysing how they impact queer migrant's attitudes to migration and how they interact with their queer and other identities. It will highlight common threads, as well as outlying experiences, and discuss the significance of the factors raised in comparison with existing theories.

Participant A's thoughts at the head of this chapter broadly reflect the sentiments of many participants when first asked in general terms about queer migration: that their queerness is only part of a range of factors contributing to thoughts about leaving. In A's case, she continued, saying "I feel like everyone who wants to leave Kazakhstan, all of them have one reason in common: escaping the weird policies and the government." In some ways, she is correct - among all the participants who expressed a desire to leave Kazakhstan, criticism of the government and policy did

feature. But in every interview, this was only part of a patchwork of factors that people said affected their thinking and decision-making around migration.

If we were to deduce expected factors from the literature available on general migration in Kazakhstan, we would expect economic reasons and seeking work abroad (Osipova, 2021), as well as seeking higher education (IOM, 2020) to be among the main factors discussed - and this is indeed the case. While most participants discuss these reasons, they are also interconnected with social, legal or other factors connected to their queerness. This interconnectedness of factors is similarly expected, appearing in queer migration studies from other parts of the world including Latin America (Bianchi et al, 2007), China (Kam, 2020), Singapore (Baas, 2019), and Central and Eastern Europe (Stella et al., 2018).

However, most of the participants not only interconnect the common economic or educational reasons with other factors connected to their queerness but many also view those common factors through their queerness. Existing works demonstrate an array of push and pull factors, but there has been, so far as I can tell, no exploration of repel or retain factors affecting any kind of migration in Kazakhstan to date. This chapter, therefore, offers new empirical insights: the queer lens, through which queer migrants view common push and pull factors, an insight into which queer-facing push and pull factors are most salient for them, and the first examination of repel and retain frameworks in the Kazakhstan context. The chapter first examines the proposed queer lens on general migration factors, before turning to examine push, pull, repel and retain factors through three broad themes that arose in the research.

The queer lens

As discussed in the literature review, queer migrants also experience a number of factors found in general migration from Kazakhstan, such as better work opportunities abroad (pull), education opportunities (pull) or corruption (push). For many queer migrants, these also seem to be of significant importance but their reflections on factors related to education, work and the economy are also seen through their queerness. To elucidate on this, I turn first to the words of Participant S,

who described working with older teenagers in a relatively queer-friendly and inclusive setting where a number of these young people chose to come out to S.

> "I know a lot of the [older] kids who, especially the ones who came out to me, it was a desperate thing for them to get into a University abroad… Kids with tears in their eyes are like, "please, you must get me into a University in Europe or the US or Canada or anywhere else, just not here." …For them it is also still a huge question… And even they still are aware that even though life isn't bad for them right now, they know that the moment they leave [this] bubble it's just over."
>
> -   Participant S

Participant Y also spoke about higher education choices through a queer lens, describing her search for a university which could guarantee her safety as a trans person. Having had to leave college in Kazakhstan because her safety was at risk due to her "transness and because it was so visible," she approached a prestigious university in Kazakhstan, which said it was also unable to protect her from bullying or abuse. She then applied for several universities abroad, securing a scholarship at one in North America but her visa application was rejected three times. She believes that transphobia or the consulate's suspicion that a queer, trans person would surely overstay lies behind the rejection, particularly as she was obliged to present identity documents in the wrong gender and was the only applicant to that university denied a visa that year.

Participant V also listed queerness as a factor - though not the most important one - in their choice to study abroad for their earlier undergrdaute degree, and in future for a master's degree. V explained that in the earlier decision, they simultaneously felt a need to be away from family disapproval, alongside heavy pressure from family seeking the prestige of a foreign education for their child. However, the decision to acquiesce to this did involve V's queerness. At that point V, who now describes themselves as a non-binary asexual person, believed they were cisgender and homosexual but they "thought that [Czechia] is still super messed up," and that despite there being many homophobic and conservative people there, "it's still better [than Kazakhstan]."

For most other participants who had already undertaken education abroad and later returned, queerness was not a factor in their decision because they were too young to consider it, they had not yet realised they were queer or the decision was made by their parents. But for others who are now seeking education abroad, queerness is a factor in that choice, though not always the primary one. Education as a *pathway* to migration is discussed in the following chapter, but it is important to note the finding that though the quality and prestige of foreign education appears to be a factor among both queer and non-queer migrants in Kazakhstan, queer migrants' underlying reasons often differ.

Similarly, several participants applied the queer lens to the economic situation, the struggle to find a good job and poor working conditions in Kazakhstan. Indeed, when asked directly about push factors, the economy and work were almost universally present in participants' responses, with only two not citing these in their interviews. Once again, these issues are listed highly in general migration studies as push and pull factors in Kazakhstan with highly skilled workers (UNFPA, 2019: 48-9) leaving for work abroad, and many others seeking better wages and standard of living (Osipova, 2021). And, while work was more often seen as a pathway to migration - that is, finding a job and deriving the right to live in a destination country from that - when discussing similar factors, some participants saw more in these issues than literature suggests their non-queer counterparts might.

Participant Y, for example, is comfortable in her current trans-friendly workplace but worries about whether she could find similar tolerance in another field in Kazakhstan if she chose to move on from that job. She remains undecided about migration, though is considering trying to find work for a few years in Ukraine. Participant X, who works remotely, is "repulsed" by the idea of having to work in an office where they might have to hide their queerness. Participant A also discussed the difficulties of having to live in the closet at work due to hostility and prejudice, with a particular contrast to what she knows from friends about workplaces in her ideal destination countries, the USA and Canada, expressing a preference for working in an environment where she could openly be herself. Even though A was more sceptical than others about her prospects of finding good work abroad, the queer lens through

which she viewed economic questions led her to conclude she would still prefer to migrate:

> "I still remember being broke. But I'm also like, what if at the time that I was broke, I was also able to love freely or be surrounded by people who support me and accept me for what I am? Like all of them: the workplace, friends, acquaintances and stuff. I would have probably been a little happier, regardless of not having as much money as I would love to have."
>
> - Participant A

The words of Participant X aptly sum up how many participants view factors that are common across society through a queer lens:

> "So a large part of it, of migrating, would be connected to better life opportunities. But those better life opportunities do involve self expression. And my identity is a big, big part of myself, obviously."
>
> - Participant X

While participants consider these shared issues through a queer lens, there are also a number of factors that affect their desire and capability to migrate both specifically as queer people specifically and more generally as Kazakhstani people. The queer lens can, however, still be seen even as they consider those more general factors. The personal and nuanced nature of the empirical data this project collected means it is impossible in many cases to fit the factors participants describe into neat lists of push, pull, repel and retain. Nevertheless, guided by these theoretical markers I will highlight where these theoretical phenomena arise throughout the following discussion of the factors most often raised by participants when asked what pulls them to other places, what pushes them from Kazakhstan, and what might prevent or dissuade them from migration.

Work and economic factors

Among the most widely discussed factors were money, work and financial resources. All 13 participants who sought to migrate, or were undecided, discussed these with a

variety of outlooks. The money required to undertake migration was often described in terms of a repel factor but it was not universally so, with some seeing their current jobs and earning power as a retaining factor, and nuanced concerns around work playing into both push and pull factors. This section will discuss these factors briefly, highlighting those which have most relevance to the participants' queer identities.

For those considering education as a pathway to migration, specific concerns were often expressed about the money required to study abroad, with the fees for postgraduate study in the UK and US specifically singled out by several, so, while some cite the poor quality of higher education in Kazakhstan as a push factor, the cost of education abroad can act as a counterpart pull factor or repel factor, depending on that cost. Participants also expressed more general concerns about money - or the lack thereof - and the need to have sizable sums available to migrate. While the cost of migration is not a queer-specific issue, factoring whether queer-friendly destinations cost more is. Participant T, for example, who is still undecided on migration, spoke about a family member who had moved to Russia, saying she needed around one million tenge[2] just to arrive and get established. He then applied a financial queer lens to this calculation, pointing out that even this large sum was significantly cheaper than the destination he is considering, Canada.

Others were similarly worried about the relative difference in spending power where even large savings in Kazakhstan potentially translate into far smaller wealth in economies with stronger currencies. While those stronger economies offer a pull factor for some, they also have queer-friendly pulls not available in economies where the tenge goes further, like Russia.

Extending the queer lens in financial matters, some younger participants had to consider their financial dependence on family in their plans, running a risk that if their sexuality or gender identity were known to their parents then they may be cut off financially, thus frustrating migration plans that depend on, for example, the education route. Participant U, for example, suggested that he would only come out to his mother after 'successfully' migrating: "Like if I have enough money and I live

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[2] On 5 Mar 2022, ₸1,000,000(KZT) ≈ £1470(GBP)/$1950(USD). Average monthly salary in Dec 2021: ₸136,312(KZT) ≈ £199(GBP)/$260(USD) (BNS, 2022:13).

happily. Yeah, I probably would tell my mum." Participant D also voiced concerns about the financial support necessary for migration being withdrawn by parents if he came out. Both indicated they were working and saving to achieve financial independence so that in the event of their parents discovering their sexualities, their savings would be sufficient to complete their studies and migrate without family support.

Of those who had already studied abroad, Participants C, E and V voiced concerns about their ability to find work abroad, based on difficulties they experienced before and after their studies. While this is a recurring theme among migrants in many contexts, C shed light on the issue coming not from his queer identity but from his Kazakh or Kazakhstani one. He explained that in the small British town where he studied, he could not find work because "first they want local students to work for them, then they want Europeans, then this, then that, then Kazakhstan being a -stan country is last on the list."

Most participants indicated they were taking steps to overcome such repel factors by saving money for future migration, apparently seeing financial issues as a factor that can be overcome in this way. However, research in general migration studies shows that the time that saving takes could potentially affect outcomes, as the longer they spend in their country of origin and the older they become, non-queer migrants in broader literature have been observed to become more financially embedded, find comfortable ways of life and develop stronger "place attachment" to their current location (Schewel, 2020; Lewicka, 2011; Fischer et al., 1997). This could turn a repel factor into a retain factor, and two of the oldest participants in this research, A and C, suggested they might already feel this way.

> "It's not that I don't want to go anymore - it's just that I think it's gonna be harder now because, usually if you migrate from a country like Kazakhstan to a country somewhere in Europe, you'll have to at first take on jobs like being a waiter and so on, and I think, the older you get, the more daunting it seems to do that."
>
> -   Participant C

For both A and C, the prospect of having to rebuild a career in this way, and to recreate financial stability functioned as a repelling factor for migration, suggesting that this theory applies also to queer migrants

Normality, society and rights

Turning again to more queer-specific factors raised by participants, a recurring theme was the concept of 'normality.' In part, this study's use of this term is borrowed from Stella et al's (2018) work on Eastern European LGBT migrants' search for 'normal life' after migration to Scotland. 'Normality' here describes a group of push and pull factors rather than an operationalised concept. It also reflects the discussion in the literature review around the need to expand study of migration outside the purely economic and political by encompassing sexuality and emotion (Mai and King, 2009). Stella et al. (2018: 55) put it - with reference to others - describe normality as a sense of "feeling accepted as 'normal', being visible as an LGBT person but 'blending in' rather than standing out because of it." Or, in this case, being pulled to migrate to a place because of the presence of such normality there, or being pushed from Kazakhstan because of its lack.

Indeed, the similarity in attitude to a 'normal' life between the post-migration group in Stella et al. and the aspiration to it in this study is striking. For example, Participant E described seeking tolerance abroad:

> "And I know that there is discrimination still in many European countries but I still think that it is kind of different because here [in Kazakhstan] if you say that you are gay, you will be punched and no one will defend or support you. But there, they will just hate you secretly, inside them."
>
> - Participant E

This has striking similarity with the words of 'Krzysztof,' a Polish migrant in his 40s who told Stella et al. that in Poland homophobic sentiments can be shown openly, but Scots are led by the prevailing political and legal climate to demonstrate outward tolerance and keep any prejudices to themselves (2018: 67). The kind of normality that E anticipates in Europe and acts as a pull factor for him, and the kind that

'Krzysztof' found in Scotland are remarkably similar. E gained his expectation studying abroad in Germany, going beyond an imagined picture of 'the west' as imagined in post-socialist populations, a concept common in studies of migrants from the former communist world (Stella et al., 2018; Rabikowska, 2010:288).

Other participants described several factors falling under this description, and some even described their feelings using (unprompted) the word 'normal.'

> "But just seeing [a man] walking down the street in a skirt. Such a change of perspective. It was just like - it was beautiful… And literally not a single person on the street would turn their head. It's just normal…I want to walk down the street and for people not to turn and look at me, for this to be normal."
>
> - Participant X, about the UK

Among others, X, E and Q, described normality as a pull factor, in the sense that they wished to live in a place where they can outwardly express their queerness and that is unremarkable. E spoke of wanting a "normal family," while Q longed to return to a place where he could wear makeup and "eccentric outfits" and it is perceived as normal.

Conversely, some participants described the abnormality with which they are viewed at present, citing these as being amongst their push factors. Among them, Q spoke of sexual encounters with married men who regarded queer sex as abnormal, and E cited beliefs in older generations that queer people are "abnormal," "a deviation" and in need of treatment. Participant Y described how she wished her student experience had been:

> "I just wanted to live normally. A calm student life where I have my student problems and I don't have to deal with this anger, this violence."
>
> - Participant Y on life as a trans student in Kazakhstan

Discussions were nuanced and participants did not always specifically label factors in terms of push, pull etc., so it is not possible to split participants in terms of whether normality as a generalised concept functioned as a push or pull factor: for many it

was both, felt from both sides and this was particularly the case among participants such as E, Q and X who had lived abroad and returned to Kazakhstan. There was, however, a clearer distinction when participants began to discuss specific elements of how they wished this normality to play out.

For example, for some it translated into the presence of legal rights as a pull factor to specific destinations abroad. Marriage, adoption rights and legal protections were common examples, including E's description of the "normal" family he wanted, which includes a husband and children. Marriage as a route to migration and residency abroad is discussed in chapter five, but the ability to marry a same-sex partner was specified as a pull factor to various countries abroad by nine of 15 participants alongside same-sex adoption and shared parental rights. For some, as will be seen below, the time participants expect to have to wait for analogous rights in Kazakhstan also functions as a push factor.

Queerness, identities and cultures

In a similar vein, participants very commonly cited push factors connected to traditional outlooks and social and cultural norms in Kazakhstan which exclude or target queer people. While these are discussed throughout this dissertation, this clash of identities surfaced most often while participants discussed push and retain factors. Such issues have been explored previously, as discussed in the literature review, but they have not previously been explicitly connected with queer migration.

Participants often described a push factor stemming from their queerness clashing with what they termed traditionalism, cultural values, patriarchal culture or similar terms. These were also often described alongside references to their (or their families') ethnic or religious identities, pointing out that some believe that a person cannot be Kazakh and queer, or Russian and queer, orthodox and queer, and so on. While this is a contention explored – and argued against – in literature (Shoshanova, 2021; Kudaibergenova, 2019), it has not previously been directly connected to queer migration.

While issues around unsupportive or homo/transphobic families have been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, a number of participants also spoke about the shame that their family would suffer if their queerness were to become publicy known. Shame (*uyat* in Kazakh), as discussed in the literature review, is a common thread in the examination of where queer and Kazakh identities meet. For example, two participants have relatives who occupy positions where, were the participants' queerness to become publicly known, the shame of this would have a severe impact on the relatives' status and careers. Both participants discussed this as a push factor to leave Kazakhstan, suggesting that they are less likely to damage their families from abroad. Fear of shame is not limited to participants of Kazakh ethnicity: a participant of Russian ethnicity described how shame functioned as a negative retain factor for them. Their family barred them from an exchange abroad programme because the proposed host family were a gay couple. While one of their worries stemmed from the common misconception that homosexuality and paedophilia are connected and they feared for his safety, the overriding concern was that the shame of the community finding out their child was living with queer people would be so unbearable as to outweight any benefits of the programme.[3] Participant B explained that for family members who are traditional and observe customs, someone in the family being queer would be "an apocalypse," while some others described the cultural pressure to marry young and have children so as to avoid even the suspicion of shame as a factor pushing them to migrate. They also understood a potential presence abroad as offering an additional pull factor in that if they are far away their lack of spouse and children are not visible to others, then the shame and family pressure is reduced.

Factors relating to family were not always push factors with several participants listing family and friends as strong retain factors, especially Y for whom it was a primary concern. A also had a very strong bond with her mother, so much so that she plans to migrate with her if possible. Family abroad was also a pull factor for some, with B, S, and X all mentioning this, while for others with broken or loosened family ties they held no sway as any kind of factor in migrating at all.

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[3] Due to the especially sensitive nature of these issues I have elected not to attribute them to participants' even with pseudonyms.

Fewer people named these kinds of societal shame issues than I anticipated based on existing literature (Kudaibergenova, 2019), but they were present as an undercurrent throughout discussions on a number of other topics. For example, Participant Y spoke of police officers rejecting her reports of discrimination and harassment, telling her "it's shameful for you to even talk about this, so it's better that you leave for good." Participant S related the intense shame they felt as a young person realising they were queer, and Participant A related employers' failure to address queerphobic workplace harassment to the shame surrounding queerness as a whole. Also concerning shame, and connected to the meeting of identities – but linguistic ones – was Participant A's discussion of how she identifies in Russian. She rejects the Russian word for lesbian, *лесбиянка*, preferring the English because it "doesn't feel shameful or degrading" but the Russian "still feels wrong." This reflects the differences in linguistics and identification practices discussed in the literature review (Suyarkulova, 2019; Kirey and Wilkinson, 2010), though A's was the only interview in which this was discussed in any depth.

Several participants described a culture of toxic masculinity and patriarchy in Kazakhstan as a push factor. Objections to this came from participants of all genders. V, who is non-binary, explained that "there's a lot of this hypermasculinity" and those not conforming to it face verbal abuse. They added that their own refusal to meet this standard causes people to call them a 'girl,' intended as an insult but they "never felt an issue about being called a girl." Patriarchy and toxic masculinity were also highlighted as push factors by A, H, Q and S. Participant Q also drew what he saw as ingrained cultural issues of patriarchism into dialogue with his sex life, explaining that many married men who describe themselves as 'straight' often seek sex with other man via dating apps, but treat their same-sex partners disrespectfully "because of the specific norms or what society dictates them, because *they* are the man." He explains that among such men, "sexual violence, it is a thing because you can't, you're not protected from it: women are not protected from it, men, most likely not." The police, he explains, often shame women who try to report rape, and would not entertain a report from a man. Continuing to connect these phenomena with patriarchal cultures, he explains how as a teenager an older man tried to extort sex from him by threatening to out him to his school and family, the shame of which

would be enormous. "A child, a young gay boy living in Kazakhstan, this homophobic heteronormative country. He wouldn't even think about going to police."

Participant D chose to tell his own story as a survivor of sexual assault and, indeed, said it was the main reason he wanted to take part in this research. He cites sexual abuse and rape culture, which he also believes to stem from patriarchal and homophobic cultural traditions, as his "number one" push factor for leaving Kazakhstan. "No one is protected from this, not only me as a man: also women too… But if [men] go to the police station and would say that someone committed this kind of crime, they will just laugh. Maybe they will assault too."

One final factor to consider in this section, is a repel factor raised by S and B who are both non-binary and take hormone treatments. Both described the rise of anti-trans activism in Europe and North America as a significant repel factor for them, because continued legislative and social pressure against trans-affirming healthcare has made obtaining hormone medications extremely difficult. Participant B fears that such developments may lead to the withdrawal of support for trans migrants to such countries. They also worry that radical activists abroad could adversely impact policy on trans rights in Kazakhstan. With hormone medications much more easily available in Kazakhstan, both face a balance of this significant and important repel factor against the many push factors they also face.

Waiting

In the first interview I conducted, Participant E raised a factor that increased his aspiration to migrate which was not anticipated in existing literature: the time it would take for the kind of normal life he sought to be possible in Kazakhstan, with strong indications that this functioned as a push factor for him.

> "I think overall, people are getting more liberal views… I know that a lot of youngsters think that LGBTQ are normal people. So I hope with time we will come to this point. But I fear that we will come and reach this point only when I will be over 80! So we need a lot of time."
>
> - Participant E (28+ at time of interview)

48

As Baas and Yeoh (2019: 165) point out, waiting, as part of the temporality of migration, "is increasingly recognised as an undeniable part of the migration experience," but, as discussed in the literature review, it is usually explored where mobility is underway. However, here E was describing waiting as a factor pushing him towards migration. I decided to explore this topic again in later interviews alongside the indirect questions about retain factors. While many did bring up retain factors such as family, duty or patriotism (discussed above), many others answered in a way that echoed E's push factor of waiting for queer normality. Participants A, B T, V and X all cited the long wait for normality and queer rights as a push factor to leave. A said simply "I'm not ready to start living my life at 60," while T "wouldn't want to just lose all that time in hiding." V described it as a common problem for queer Kazakhstanis, saying they "want to go places where they can actually be themselves, they don't want to wait" (V).

The desire not to wait for change was a clear push factor for several participants. But, as always, this sentiment was not universal. Indeed, for some, the need for social change and better acceptance and tolerance of queer people was spoken of as a retaining factor. Participant N spoke at length of his desire to see change in Kazakhstan for queer people and to be a part of making that change. N, who is 18-22, explained how he had wanted to migrate earlier in his life and even won a place on an exchange programme that would have seen him study abroad for a year but a family issue prevented him proceeding. He had viewed it as an opportunity to try out living abroad and see if he liked it and really wanted to move. But now, looking back, he is glad he stayed in Kazakhstan and says he probably wants to stay permanently. His queerness was a large part of his desire to leave, but now he feels a duty to stay, and recounted a conversation with some friends who had migrated from Kazakhstan and decided to stay abroad, which he felt summed up his feelings. He explained "I had this question for them: aren't you interested in raising the culture of your country?" He went on:

> "[Hiding your sexuality] is like a big boulder, right? The longer you carry it, the
> bigger that boulder gets. And when you tell someone the boulder becomes
> smaller. And when you tell everybody, it just disappears… I think that people

who are tired of hiding their orientation, they just want to get rid of this boulder. And at the same time they want to do it quickly just by moving to another country."

-    Participant N

He describes what could be termed a sense of duty to bring about normality for queer people in Kazakhstan, and hopes that this could come about quicker if queer people could and would speak openly about themselves without fear. In short, he is willing to wait for normality and do what he can to bring it about faster. While N went into the greatest depth on the topic, he was not alone in experiencing this sentiment as a retain factor. Participant H also said he did not want to leave, but rather prefers to wait through the small steps required to make things better. Participant Y described a similar retain factor, with similar overtones of duty and responsibility to queer people in Kazakhstan, saying that whether she migrates or not, she hopes one day to run "programs [in Kazakhstan] that will allow me to spread the awareness about sexualities, gender identity, not only in terms of human rights, but also that it's just completely normal because we're human beings."

5. Pathways

"Those who do have the opportunity to leave but don't, just

have an incredible amount of strength that I do admire.

But I don't want to be one of those people."

<div align="right">

Participant X

</div>

While the previous chapter discussed the factors that affect queer migrants' aspirations and capability to migrate – questions of 'should I go' – and the next chapter will explore questions of *'where* should I go,' I argue that the middle question in migratory journeys is just as important: 'how should I get there.' As was discussed in the literature review, the migratory pathway is frequently overlooked or examined one at a time, for example in studies that discuss only queer asylum, or only educational or labour migration.

This chapter of the dissertation will seek to answer the research questions on how queer migrants navigate different pathways to migration, which pathways they consider and what affects their perceptions, planning and decisions around pathways. The chapter discusses potential pathways or routes to migration by section, exploring asylum, education, work and skills, and love. As discussed in the literature review, I identified asylum, work and love as likely pathways for queer migrants in Kazakhstan based upon Nieves-Lugo et al.'s framework of economic, affirmation, and persecution motivations among queer migrants entering the US from Latin America (2019:115) as well as Yu (2021) and Paul (2011). However, the deeper discussion of education as an important and widely-used pathway was inductively developed during fieldwork after a significant number of participants raised it

themselves. The theme was then incorporated in later interviews and further developed. The final section briefly discusses 'stepwise' migration, a phenomenon or strategy that literature suggests would have more prominence in queer migrant planning but did not appear significant to participants here.

Among the participants who did aspire to migrate, the most favoured pathways to permanent or long-term migration were the kind of routes often termed 'regular,' meaning by obtaining legal status in their destination country. Despite the discussion in the literature review exploring asylum, which concludes it is likely that a number of participants might pursue it as a pathway, only one participant plans for such a goal, while others considered it but ultimately rejected it as an option. As explored in the literature review, the shortcomings of asylum programmes and the hurdles they involve are well-discussed in literature (e.g. Lee and Brotman, 2011; Lee et al. 2020; Singer, 2021) and this may be one factor in this outcome but, as will be seen below, the participants own perceptions of asylum also play an important role. This dissertation's concentration on origin from a specific area allows an exploration of aspiring migrants' attitudes to this pathway alongside others as they weigh up which one is likely to work best for them. The discussed literature also indicates that work and study routes are likely to play a significant role, an expectation which was met, but with caveats around how destinations and decision-making processes seem to differ between queer and general migrants.

Asylum

One of the most striking findings from the interview material is that, despite many potentially being able to make a legitimate and well-evidenced claim, most participants reject asylum and refugee pathways as anything other than a last resort, with some even questioning whether Kazakhstanis could be considered under sufficient threat of harm to receive asylum abroad. Given well-documented cases of violence, harassment, abuse of LGBTQ+ people in Kazakhstan, hate speech from political leaders and murder (Sekerbayeva, 2021; ILGA Europe, 2021; Sekerbayeva et al., 2017; Sekerbayeva et al., 2016; HRW, 2015; Article 19, 2015), and as discussed in the literature review, it may be expected that more participants would be considering asylum as an option. Indeed, many of those rejecting the idea did so

while saying that their *present* situation did not warrant it, but many of their situations were precarious and depended on continuing to be able to maintain secrecy from family, friends, neighbours or employers. This, however, may well be related to the relative socio-economic privilege of some of the participants and their primarily urban location: this outcome - like others in this research - should not be interpreted to reflect the situation for everyone in Kazakhstan. Several described the city of Almaty as being notably tolerant and one of the best places a queer person could hope to live in Kazakhstan, but were also quick to point out that such tolerance is hard to find elsewhere, for example:

> "Almaty is kind of the most gay friendly [city], I would say, in the entire CIS… Cities, for example, in the west, in the south, like Shymkent. It's actually terrifying, the things happening there."

> - Participant D

Discussing the pathways to migration they are considering, participants described notable opinions around reasons for rejecting pursuing asylum, aside from as a last resort. Some participants simply thought they were not eligible:

> "Am I able to? No, honestly. I never assumed that option would be available. I thought, what would I even claim, like political oppression?"

> - Participant X

> "I hear that some got their refugee status, for example, in Sweden. But I'm not sure whether we can be considered as a refugee. We still… Kazakhstan is an interesting case because I don't think that we are discriminated a lot legally, but we are discriminated by the society."

> - Participant E

While some others rejected the idea because they did not wish to risk parting with Kazakhstan forever. Participant T, for example, was among several who described the risk of being rejected for asylum and returning "as a person neither here nor there, nobody wants you." Participant Y would rather face the risks at home than risk never being able to return:

53

"Not being able to go back to my country, to my family and to my friends is so frightening that I really believe that I would rather die here in this country while surrounded by my family and friends…"

- Participant Y

Of particular interest and contribution to scholarship on contemporary queer asylum, especially as anti-immigration sentiment and policy grows in the global North, some rejected the idea because they feared poor treatment in the receiving country, or because they did not anticipate success. Participants A, E, F and S spent time talking over the enormous difficulties involved in gaining asylum in Europe or North America.

"I considered it. I thought of illegally weaselling my way… and then pleading for refugee status. But I know in the UK anything to do with gaining refugee status and then gaining the right to stay is so difficult and I've heard it's very humiliating as well."

- Participant S

It is of note, then, that several participants had already researched asylum systems and were well aware of the serious obstacles to gaining asylum-seeker status in countries of the global north. Participant A also raised an interesting concern about the potential consequences if she had to return after being rejected, a concern that essentially functions as a deterrent to even trying:

"There is a huge chance that you, as an authentic queer person with proven history of violence against you might not actually get it and have to come back. And then the entirety of government and our ministries will know that you tried to do that… Knowing our government, I would not have a peaceful life here."

- Participant A (speaking about the USA)

For some participants, Kazakhstan stood in a middle ground of queer/transphobia in terms of asylum: not the most oppressive, but certainly not queer-affirming. Some

describe it as a place where the potential threat and resultant need for asylum depends more on how an individual's queerness manifests than on the queerness itself. For example, Participant D described a situation where activists' and campaigners' can attract attention and repression from authorities to the point where fleeing and seeking asylum would be necessary, but he did not think that someone like him, leading an actively-queer but relatively quiet life in a large city would face such a need.

Most participants, however, said they would be willing to consider the asylum route in a worst-case scenario, if they fell into danger due to their sexuality or if the situation in Kazakhstan changed significantly for the worse. Participants A, B, S and Q had considered seeking asylum abroad in the past. Each had already explored asylum policy in different destinations but all - with the exception of Q, whose intention to seek asylum specifically in Canada will be discussed in the next chapter - had ruled this out as a primary option, even despite believing their grounds were legitimate and they could make a legal claim. A had contacted a free legal advice service in the USA, but ultimately decided that the risk of being rejected was too high and the process and seekers' treatment during it was so poor that at this age and stage of her life the possibility of success was not worth the risk. B too believes that they have a legitimate claim that could result in asylum in the USA or Canada but does not intend to pursue that path, due to the struggle involved. S described seeking asylum in Sweden as a 'backup plan,' favouring this country over others in the region because they understood its policies to be more supportive.

Across the group, it is clear that most participants had at least considered asylum and had researched routes and options, but ultimately most reject it as a pathway because of significant repel factors, including the difficulty of the journey and the risks posed by failure. Some are also concerned by the consequences of success too, being unwilling to risk never returning to Kazakhstan and the resultant loss of contact with friends and family. Of note is that no participant mentioned asylum outside of Europe or North America, both of which are important destinations for global queer asylum; such a focus is in line with theoretical expectations (Mole, 2021). The broad rejection of asylum also challenges assumptions about queer migration in western media and public discourses, where queer people are often

depicted as fleeing persecution in former communist, eastern European and Eurasian contexts (Stella et al., 2018:63; Boston, 2014).

Education, staying and overstaying

This section will examine how migrants navigate pathways connected with education, using this as a foothold to later gain permanent status in a destination country, and the factors which impact and determine these decisions. Starting with an examination of the experience of those who had already studied abroad, and moving on to examine how queer migrants may face different barriers and motivations for educational pathways, these insights arose inductively from the participants' own focus on education as an important route to migration.

Some participants who had previously migrated and returned to Kazakhstan – all of whom did so for education abroad – had considered pathways to stay in place, including through regular means or by overstaying beyond their visa validity, though all ultimately rejected or were unable to pursue this pathway.[4] For some, the reason not to do so focused on responsibilities to others or to family back home, including participants E and V who returned to support sick relatives, and B who returned to support the family with a legal issue. Participant U, who studied abroad and lived with a host family, was deterred both by his obligations to others but also by the legal consequences.

> "I've been thinking about what problems [my host] will have, my family, my [education abroad] coordinators and that my family will be worried about me. And that if I get caught, I probably won't be able to visit neither the US nor other European countries."
>
> -   Participant U (about the USA)

U's thoughts on this are similar to those of the participants above who were worried about the consequences and pitfalls of attempting an asylum claim, in that he too

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[4] While a person might have overstayed and later returned to Kazakhstan, there is some selection bias here in that the project's focus on people in Almaty could not have included any queer migrants who overstayed permanently.

was acutely aware of the potential consequences of pursuing migration through an irregular channel.

Participants C, E and V studied in countries where they could legally stay for a period after graduation and look for work, with this presenting potential for longer-term residency. However, all three highlighted the difficulty of finding a job in these countries, a repelling factor that resulted in their return to Kazakhstan despite the significant queer-focused push and pull factors that led each to try to stay abroad. C described the recruitment hierarchy where he studied in the UK:

> "First they want local students to work for them, then they want Europeans, then this, then that, then Kazakhstan being a -stan country is last on the list."
>
> - Participant C

Participant Q, who studied in China, attempted to extend his stay there by extending his studies. First he tried to deliberately fail his exams but this did not work, and then he successfully applied for further study but was denied funding when the COVID-19 pandemic began and he had to return to Kazakhstan. The education pathway, however, remains a popular choice among both participants who had already studied abroad and those who had not. Participant X, who studied in the UK but was obliged to return after their studies for health reasons was another to demonstrate intimate knowledge of migration processes in their ideal migratory destination, explaining that

> "The UK is bringing back that visa that they had, where after finishing a course, that you have two years to – your visa works for two years where you can work. So if I do manage to get a masters then I would be able to work for two years and then through that, I would be offered [residency] sponsorship and that would be completely ideal."
>
> - Participant X

Participant A, who is considering moving either to the US or Canada, is particularly interested in pursuing a master's degree in Canada for exactly the same reason, seeing the route to work and residency after graduation as a shortened pathway to citizenship there. A had already begun a master's degree at a prestigious university

in Almaty, but during her thesis proposal a professor suggested that the queer topic of her paper was invalid because queer people are not real people. She dropped out for a combination of reasons soon after, but still hopes to study as part of her migratory journey.

While education abroad was discussed in the previous chapter in terms of push and pull factors, many participants also understood education as a pathway not just to migration for the duration of the degree or exchange, but permanently. Some, such as B, F and U are still exploring options for study in the US or EU with this in mind. F, for example, has no bachelors' degree but is exploring options for internships abroad that might lead on to formal study. U is investigating exchange programmes his current university has in the EU, and B is actively exploring funding options for undergraduate study abroad. All three are doing so with the intention to stay in those destinations after studying.

Others have more concrete or immediate plans and aspirations to migrate for the longer term via educational routes. Participant S plans to apply for master's degrees in the UK, suggesting that this not only secures a route for them to stay longer in the UK, but also will improve their employability in their chosen profession. As mentioned, Participant A hopes she might pursue education in Canada and has a very developed knowledge both of funding options and the visa and immigration rules that could allow her to turn that into a long-term or permanent migration. For D, too, extensive research into immigration options became a pull towards Canada. Canada's popularity and the potential reasons for it will be explored in the following chapter, but it is notable that D has already begun making himself more attractive to Canadian immigration authorities by learning French and carefully researching which provinces, which professions and even which universities will give him the best chance of successfully gaining entry. While A hopes that a Canadian education will eventually lead to citizenship, D wishes to remain both Kazakhstani and Kazakh, a difference of opinion that will be explored in chapter seven.

For all participants hoping to follow an educational pathway cite the financial repel factor reappears. B, A and X all spoke of this, despite their continued desire to pursue such a course. S highlighted a particular financial issue that Kazakhstani

citizens such as them face if they wish to study in the UK: that the country is excluded from most scholarship and funding pools. "The UK has almost no financial aid for people from Central Asia and even less so if you're doing it in any creative kind of sphere," they explained. "Some universities straight up omit Central Asia entirely. So you will have specific [funding] for East Asia, Middle East, and then you will have Russia, Ukraine, Belarus… Kazakhstan is not in any of those." This makes S's route to queer migration to the UK via education even harder.

Education is a common pathway or reason for migration among young people generally in Kazakhstan, with the IOM finding that 62.5% of outward migrants under 28 were moving for this reason (MOM, 2020: 34), but Osipova citing government figures (not available to me) that suggest the overall figure across all age ranges is less than one percent. Such a split would be expected, with younger people making up the majority of students worldwide, and this is also reflected here with only two out of the five participants who are 28 or over mentioning education as a possible pathway.

Nevertheless, it does appear to be a popular pathway out of Kazakhstan for young queer people even beyond this study, with a number of participants saying they knew many queer people who had taken this path. N told me, "a lot of people I know from the LGBT community… some have already moved away… They all, of course, have not moved permanently. They all went there to study. But all of them have a clear idea to stay there." He said he knew people who had moved to Russia – of which he disapproved – Czechia, Slovakia, and the USA. V also knew a large number of such people, but suggested that for these people as it was for V themselves, education might not be the most likely pathway to succeed in the long term:

> "I think that was the year when I met the most LGBT people in Kazakhstan, and most of them, again, were choosing the route of going abroad for education. But eventually they had to come back because their education has stopped. Or they weren't able to financially support themselves there and they weren't able to find a job."

<div align="right">

- Participant V

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Work and skills

While the idea of finding a job abroad and using that as a pathway to migration and status in a destination country was very commonly discussed by participants as a route they may considering taking, the majority of the notable findings around work and migration come from its earlier discussion as a push/pull factor, rather than as a pathway. Work is a common pathway for general migrants from Kazakhstan and much discussion focused on factors both groups have in common. However, for queer migrants there were added concerns stemming from their queerness, that impact how they approach work as a pathway. They generally aim for different destinations, taking queer-friendliness into account, and also emphasise language skills as an important skill to be able to do so.

While there will be broader discussion of destinations in the next chapter, it is worthy of note that queer migration studies in other areas suggested that queer migrants who either took a migratory pathway based on finding work abroad or listed finding a job as or goal tend to go to countries with which there are well-established labour migration pathways. As discussed in the literature review, for Kazakhstan, such expected destinations for both high- and low-skill labour would include Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, Germany.

This raises the question of why participants in this dissertation aim for ideal destinations which, with the exception of Germany, are absent from this list of common labour migration pathways. While the decision-making processes of destination selection are examined in the following chapter, and pull factors in the last, there are a number of explanations that can be posited for this. Russia in particular, as will be discussed later, is an almost universally undesirable destination for the participants here for reasons of racism and homophobia. It may be that its cultural similarities with Belarus, and Kazakhstan's with Uzbekistan, make them undesirable destinations for queer migrants too. The countries highlighted in other queer migration studies are also often considered an 'upgrade' in terms of *both* economic and queer rights and freedoms standpoints, whereas, participants almost universally considered Russia a queer downgrade, and neither Belarus nor Uzbekistan were even mentioned. It is worth noting that this study is conducted

pre-migration and captures participants' thoughts and attitudes about what they plan for and expect around migration, rather than any certainty as to destination. However, most other queer migration studies, including those discussed in the literature review, take place post-migration and engage only in specified destination countries. A longer-term study might shed some light on the difference between these pre-migration attitudes and eventual outcomes. Nevertheless, participants almost universally reject migration to Kazakhstan's largest labour migration destination for a variety of reasons which will be explored in a section on Russia in the next chapter.

Other participants are also adapting to improve their chances of success via a work pathway. B, for example, is undertaking additional training to enhance their professional skills in the hope this will lead to better job offers. In addition to this and seeking remote work, B is also actively looking for such roles at international companies, hoping that with good performance and qualifications, they might become eligible to transfer to a company's offices in North America or Europe. E too specifically sought out a job with such a company.

Learning or improving languages also proved to be a common theme among those who hoped to move via work pathways. Most participants who indicated a preference or consideration for such a pathway spoke good English and at least one other language or were learning one. D, for example, who aims for Canada, was learning French in the expectation that it will help an application for residency in Quebec. Others with less advanced English skills, such as T, were aware of this as a potential weakness in any plan to migrate. T plans to improve both his English and his education by pursuing a master's degree, and described in his interview his hope that it would make a future path to migration easier. D, for his part, considers foreign language skills and their link to migration to be so integral to queerness that he even joked that every gay man in Almaty speaks English. This was, of course, a humorous exaggeration but he explained that he was serious about the link between learning languages, leaving Kazakhstan and being queer. This highlights a possible pattern amongst the participants: the two participants who were resolute that they did not

wish to migrate, H and N, had less advanced foreign language[5] skills or confidence in using them; among the three who were undecided or interested but not actively seeking migration, C and Y have very advanced language skills, but T is less advanced and lacks confidence to the point of preferring not to use English; but among the remaining ten who are positively intent on migrating, all speak English ranging from fair to excellent, and some also speak French, German or Mandarin.

While the sample is not statistically significant and it is therefore not possible to draw a wider conclusion, there is a discernible pattern here. However it does raise questions around whether these participants concentrated on acquiring languages in order to facilitate migration, whether language acquisition opened them to the possibility of migration, or any of a number of other possibilities. It is worth considering that the group of participants here are a relatively young (all under 35), urban (all living in or near Almaty) and well-educated (13 out of 15 with undergraduate degree or higher) so any development of theories along these lines also ought to consider how this might reflect in a wider, non-urban, and less privileged group.

Love and marriage

Migration to be with a specific partner (Yue, 2008) was not raised at all by participants as a pathway or factor affecting desire to migrate, and marriage was spoken of as a factor only in the sense of the legality of same-sex marriage serving as a pull, or its lack serving as a push factor. In discussing pathways, however, I asked participants specifically about love and marriage as pathways, hoping to explore their thoughts around the prospect of gaining residency or status in a destination country through a relationship with a person there. In most interviews, I left the distinction between genuine love and relationships and so-called 'passport marriages' ambiguous in the question.

The majority of participants indicated that they were not against the idea of finding a partner abroad after migration, with some also saying they were also open to finding a partner in Kazakhstan and migrating with them. Participant E suggested he would

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[5] While a whole dissertation could be written about Russian being a foreign language in Kazakhstan, for the purposes of this discussion by 'foreign' I mean languages other than Kazakh and Russian.

prefer to find a partner in Kazakhstan before migration, saying "I kind of think I would like to find a partner from here... I'm not sure. Because we can share common interests and we're from the same country." However, most expressed thoughts around gaining the right to live abroad through marriage or relationships with an if-it-happens-it-happens attitude: no one was specifically seeking a foreign partner in order to do this, but if they met someone they loved then they were not against using the rights that may come with that. The majority spoke strongly against seeking a partner specifically for this purpose, with D, for example, describing it as "pathetic."

A number of participants had at least thought about the option of a 'fake' or passport marriage. Participants A and S had friends or ex-partners offer to marry them for this purpose, but ultimately rejected this route as too reliant on another person, and too susceptible to fail, with S noting the significant evidence required with no guarantees of success:

> "You need proof of relationship. You need witnesses, you need photos, you need text messages. And they can still deny you… [authorities] have the right to refuse to marry you because you're a foreigner."
>
> -   Participant S

All participants who considered this pathway ultimately decided they prefer another route for a number of reasons, including considering it illegitimate (D, E), not suiting their way of thinking (A, U), and the danger of marrying someone you don't know (Q). Participant S said they had "almost" married an ex-partner but ultimately decided not to. They also knew of a couple in the UK whose genuine relationship had been destroyed by marrying to obtain status for one party, and who advised S "just don't do it, especially if it's someone with whom you are in a genuine relationship. Only ever do it if it's a friend."

Stepwise migration: a missing pathway

It is somewhat surprising that the concept of 'stepwise' migration (Paul, 2011) was not a more common feature in participants' plans and thoughts on migration. While it is not necessarily a pathway, per se, it is a route of migration where a migrant makes

'stops' en route to a final destination, perhaps to obtain status or documents, or to earn money to assist in eventually reaching their desired goal. It is common in forced migration journeys, but also occurs in other contexts. While I did not expect that participants would name the concept in their interviews, I was surprised that the idea of moving to one place as a staging post on the way to an ideal final destination came up only once:

> "Moving to Russia or Ukraine would be like a temporary measure for about a year or a half a year to give myself some fake sense of productivity, of moving slowly west."
>
> - Participant S

Sadly, present circumstances make this plan, described in late 2021, likely impossible for the foreseeable future. Perhaps the lack of planned stepwise migration reflects the fact that the participants here were considering their plans in a pre-migration stage, or that Paul's (2011:1880) suggestion that stepwise trajectories are not always intentional applies here.

6. Destination

"I wouldn't mind going to America.

Though America does scare me.

It's a bit of an insane place."

<div align="right">

Participant X

</div>

This chapter seeks to answer the research question on how and why queer migrants select their ideal migratory destinations, as well as how their experiences, identities and factors such as language affect these choices. I use the word ideal not to indicate that their aspirations are fantastical or represent a dream: they are aims or goals based on planning and intent, or describe preferences for a best-case migratory outcome. All participants were well aware that things might work out differently in practice.

As discussed in the literature review above, theory on how and why migrants select destinations is sparse, and in the field of queer migration appears not to exist at all. Noteworthy in this study - and unusual in prior studies of queer migration - is that the respondents were mainly in a pre-migration phase of their journeys, that is to say that most were discussing *future* migration and plans. Those who had migrated temporarily and returned to Kazakhstan were asked both about their destination selection on earlier occasions and their pre-migration approaches to a second journey. As discussed in the literature review, most queer migration and migration studies research focuses either on one destination, or on completed journeys, introducing potential for selection bias and reinforcing the so-called 'mobility bias' (Schewel, 2019) in that data is gathered only from those who reached a specific destination, or from those 'moved.' In this instance, however, insight has been gained into the decisions and processes that inspire migrants' choices before the

physical part of the journey begins. I emphasise this here to reinforce that the data offered in this chapter presents a range of experiences: from those who have identified ideal destinations and are negotiating how they might get there, but also from those with prior experience of migration for study and used that experience to identify the place they wish to live in future.

I elected to focus a chapter on destination because discussions on the topic were revealing during the interviews, highlighting some key theoretical contributions of this study, and also because, though all participants experienced difficulties and described push factors, none described their desire to migrate in terms of 'anywhere but here.' In short, destination choice is under-studied among queer migrants, but is an aspect that plays a central role as they consider or plan migration. It will shape the journeys many will choose to later take, so an examination of such choices is worthwhile.

As discussed in the literature review, current literature might help to predict which destinations are chosen, pointing to western Europe (Mole, 2021; Stella et al., 2018), or North America (Carrillo, 2004; Nieves-Lugo et al., 2018; Lee and Brotman, 2011). Equally, analysis of general migration trends in Kazakhstan (Osipova, 2021; IOM 2020; UNFPA, 2019) might also point towards Russia, Belarus and Uzbekistan, but may fail to take into account the queer lens. Little literature, however, offers tools to predict or analyse the ways in which destination decisions are made. Brunarska (2019) may help categorise and describe the types of decision-makers found, but understanding the decision's origins remains difficult.

This research highlights key factors shaping participants' attitudes towards potential destinations, but was more limited in uncovering how these factors become salient in different participants' approaches. By this, I mean that the aspiring migrants' preferences on the choice of (ideal) destinations are often clear, and the participants clearly and succinctly explain the reasons they are pulled towards these destinations. What is less clear, however, is how these preferences were constructed and why the factors mentioned by interviewees in their decision-making were the most salient ones. Questions about how migration preferences are formed, and how they interact with queerness and other features of one's identity are a gap in queer

migration literature more broadly, and I argue that this is fruitful ground for further study.

This chapter will explore these issues by first turning to the decision-making process, then examining factors impacting the choice of the most popular destination, Canada, followed by a brief discussion of how previous experience abroad affects choice, and concluding with exploration of how queerness and other identities impact destination choice.

Construction of choices

In discussing the difference between factors shaping destination choice and construction of choice, I note that all participants who indicated either that they had selected ideal destinations or had migrated and returned, were able to discuss in detail the reasons for their destination selection: the reasons they wanted to be there, encompassing a number of factors. However, it became clear that more time and a different approach may be needed in order to identify how and when queer migrants and aspiring migrants had identified and weighed up potential destinations, to the exclusion of others. Many compared their ideal choices against Kazakhstan, and some against other destinations, but even despite all participants expressing their destination preferences in terms which acknowledged that the ideal might not be achievable, or that flexibility of choice might be required on their part, very few described the decision-making or thought process that would place, say, Canada, the US and Germany over Malta, Australia and Sweden.

As discussed above in chapter four, among the participants who did express a desire to leave Kazakhstan permanently or at least in the long term (13 of 15), none suggested that they wished to live in that specific country purely for its own sake; that is to say that the country itself did not appear to function as a pull factor, but rather a combination of pull factors within it, with desires to migrate built upon these and other push, pull, repel and retain factors. No participant said they wanted to live in a specific country to the exclusion of all others. Most presented a range of considered options with varying degrees of reasoning behind their choices. Some indicated that they considered themselves to be at an early stage in the

preference-forming process. Examples include Participant U, who highlighted English- or French-speaking "western countries," T who aims for Canada primarily but would also consider the EU, or F, who prefers Spain, Italy or South America.

Indeed, all three examples here were followed by an indication from the participant that once they were closer to the stage of actually moving, they would do more research. Participant U, for example, a student aged 18-22 who had lived in the USA, said that he would continue a search for 'the best' country for his needs after he graduates. Three people, however, did give their destination choice in terms of a ranked or partially ranked list with reasons for their choice based on their research or preferences. Each of these considered themselves to be further on in their journey, waiting for a cue to move forward, like a savings goal, completion of studies or the end of the pandemic. For example, Q prefers Canada, with Europe as a second choice and the USA third. B also prefers Canada, ranking the US and UK behind it. Participant D explained his reasoning more deeply:

> "First place is Canada. For me there is a couple of criteria to choose the countries. First thing is no racism. Of course, no homophobia and so on. I mean, at least it should be protected by the law. And as I am Asian and I look like an Asian. Definitely. I have Chinese roots. I would want to live in China, but what China: People's Republic of China or Republic of China? I will never move to Communist China. So Taiwan is the second, if I can move. Because Chinese is going to be my fourth or fifth language. Also maybe Northern Europe. Scandinavian countries."
>
> -   Participant D

It is worth examining an example more closely to identify the posited difference between the how and the why. For example, Participant Q's commitment to Canada as his number one destination was abundantly clear throughout his interview, as well as the specific reasons why he believes this destination would suit him well:

> "Canada is my number one. First of all, because of how they treat gay people and immigrants. Second of all is because the passport is - oh, it's so good."

"First of all, I'm Asian, and I'm very femme. And Canada is known as a very tolerant country. People say that it's the States, but we all know that it isn't. "

"Plus, Canada has this really good thing … when an immigrant comes to the country, they actually help him, like social services."

-    Participant Q

He was able to list these reasons and more as to why he wanted to live in Canada, and why it suited his needs particularly and personally. He knew of and had planned for accessing support services and had even established contacts in the country. While Participant Q is under no illusions that the journey will be a hard one and might not succeed, his plans are concrete. But, when asked how he found out about Canada, how it entered his planning and how he selected Canada among those countries with the factors he sought, he had less to say.

"I don't remember. It just came to me naturally, I think. Through social media, reading articles, hearing people talk, it just naturally became my number one … I've only heard nice things about Canada. Well, other than that it's boring."

-    Participant Q

Participant Q was by no means alone in providing only light detail on this process. Even when asked how they found out about destination countries, or how they settled on some to the exclusion of others, many seemed to have fixed their ideal based on quite light research. Participant U, for example, suggested some of his initial ideas came from media, TV and the internet, while D had heard about Canada from queer friends who also aimed to migrate there. Indeed, during their interview, Participant S expressed surprise at my questions about how widely aspiring migrants might research possible destinations before settling on ideal targets, asking "do you think people are organised? You wanted people to be logical and organised?" So perhaps the logic and processes of destination choice formation might be hard to unwrap. Such patterns are surprising in the context of previous literature concerning destination.

It may be that, as suggested in the literature review, the majority of queer migrants in this study fit into the second or third types of destination decision makers described by Brunarska (2019) in that some seem to have selected based on one criterion, while others narrowed down from several. It remains unclear, however, how the processes leading to this point of decision are constructed, what factors affect them and how those factors themselves are selected and constructed. As a question that emerged inductively from the research, and one not widely explored pre-departure in queer migration literature, I feel it is worthy of further future research. Unfortunately, the condensed timetable of this research did not allow for a deeper investigation of this in interviews conducted after the theme emerged, or for repeat interviews.

Ideal destinations: "Oh, Canada"

Of the 11 participants who had selected a destination, five named Canada as their first choice – by far the most popular destination among this sample group. Though this study did not include observational methods involving these or other participants, I have been living in Almaty as a member or outsider-member of queer communities for the past year and regularly discuss my research with new people. Around four out of five people who respond by saying that they are considering migration also mention Canada as their preferred destination. In short, Canada appears to be a very popular destination among many aspiring queer migrants in Kazakhstan.

In some ways, this presents a puzzle and in some ways not: Canada was an early pioneer in queer asylum and remains one of the world's leading recipients of queer asylum seekers and refugees. It is also the focus of a significant amount of academic research on queer asylum processes, effects and impacts (Lee and Brotman 2011; Lee et al. 2020). Its policies are favourably viewed by organisations and publics internationally (Gaucher and DeGagne, 2016). However, the application of those policies - particularly regarding non-asylum queer immigration (Lee, 2015) - have come in for significant criticism for, among other issues, rejecting applicants who do not conform to westernised 'homonationalist' views of what homosexuality should look like (Murray, 2014) and problematic views of bisexuality as a choice not deserving of asylum (Gaucher and DeGagne, 2016). Further, Canada does not

feature in the lists of countries which receive high levels of general immigration from Kazakhstan (Osipova 2021; IOM, 2020; UNFPA, 2019.

In addition to public discussion around Canada's queer asylum policies, further explanations for its popularity among participants could include its regular placement at or near the top of lists and 'listicles' of the best, safest or most tolerant for LGBTQ+ people to live. A cursory search reveals a number of such rankings or assessments, including some based on reputable research such as ILGA's World Map (2021) and State Sponsored Homophobia Report (2020), both of which favourably assess Canada, as well as less methodologically transparent but widely-shared measures such as Equaldex (2021), which places Canada fourth in its equality index. Participants D, Q and A also perceived Canada to be either free of anti-Asian racism or comparatively less racist than other countries, though it remains unclear how these impressions were formed.

One participant, Q, intended to pursue an asylum pathway to Canada. He described a developed plan[6], had researched policies and procedures and sought support and advice from a queer asylum-focused charity in Canada to ensure he would be able to prepare his claim as fully as possible before departure. Though, as can be seen from his quote earlier in this chapter, how Canada came to his notice and became his primary focus is still unclear. While it seems likely that Canada's reputation as a queer asylum haven described above might have influenced Q, it is possible that it may also have infuenced other participants' preference even though most intend to pursue other migration pathways. The majority of participants who identified Canada as their primary preferred destination had strong reservations about asylum and refugee pathways, describing these for a number of reasons as only a last resort – a common sentiment discussed in the previous chapter. In trying to identify how these participants chose Canada, they were asked what first made them think of Canada. Most responses encompassed a range of pull factors which could equally apply to several other countries, such as tolerance, freedom, better economic or educational opportunities and a perceived lack of racism as compared to the US or Europe. Some specified particular connections, such as hearing about Canada from friends

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[6] Not described here, to avoid risk to its completion.

(Participant D) or success stories of queer asylum in Canada involving acquaintances (Participant Q). But the construction of those choices (see table 2) remains unexplained.

Indeed, all of those identified Canada as a target have researched and assessed their chances of successfully migrating there, making reference to specific policies, such as extra 'points' for Québec-bound migrants who speak French, the need for Canadian-recognised educational qualifications, and the ability to stay for one year after graduation to find work. Indeed, so pervasive was Canada throughout interview discussions on destination selection that some participants who did not identify it as a first or preferred choice also spoke about its policies, implicitly comparing them with other destinations:

> "If you consider Canada, in order to move there, you have to be pretty smart. I looked at the criteria too."
>
> - Participant T
>
> "For example migration to Canada… according to that calculator I cannot easily move cos, you know, I'm not an engineer et cetera."
>
> - Participant C

Both participants were considering other destinations and highlighting why they probably could not move to Canada, further reinforcing its centrality in participants' thought process around destinations. It should be noted, of course, that Canada is not the *only* destination that participants aimed for but its apparent importance to many was striking. Its reputation for queer asylum, positive media portrayals or participants' knowledge of successful queer migrants there may all have influenced this position, but further research may be required to identify the source of its importance in these processes. Nevertheless, while this examination of Canada as a popular destination taken together with the preceding section on choice does not identify the source of its importance, it does shed light on how participants examine and balance factors such as language skills and social issues like racism, tolerance and opportunity against repel factors like exclusive or selective immigration policies.

Return to the familiar: past educational migration

Participant S moved to Europe in their teens to attend high school, but had no say in the country choice, which was determined by their parents. S did then lead the choice of where in Europe to go to university after school was finished. They cite a number of factors in the decision, including language skills, the likelihood of finding work in their desired field after study, availability of trans healthcare[7] and a view of the "romanticised idea of liberal Europe," which much later became more sceptical. They weighed these up against other options and ultimately settled on moving from the first European country to start university in the UK. However, even in retrospect, the complexity of the decision and the construction of preferences is not completely clear – on, for example, why only consider Europe, or why only assess a few countries there – and would warrant further exploration. Participant S' previous migration experience does, however, seem to have an influence on their future destination selection, as it does with others who studied abroad.

There is an observable trend that six out of the eight participants who already studied abroad identified the country they studied in as either their *main* ideal migratory destination, or placed it among a 'top' few countries. Participants B, S and X studied in the UK and all three expressed a preference to return there, in some cases a very strong first preference. Participant E studied in Germany and hopes to return either there or to a border region of a neighbouring country. Participant V studied in Czechia and hopes to return there at least "at first" – a suggestion that they are considering 'stepwise' migration (Paul 2011), something rare in this sample despite its prevalence in queer migration and discussed further below.

There are some exceptions, however. Participant C studied in both China and the UK and had little influence himself over either destination selection. He is agreeable to returning to the UK but did not discuss China as a possible future destination. It should be noted, though, that his desire to migrate at all is less concrete than some other participants, as discussed in chapter four. Similarly, Q also studied in China and expresses a desire to return there only in the short term. The level of education undertaken abroad or the time spent there may affect this trend. Participant S spent

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[7] Which was relevant at the time of the decision, but has now changed: see chapter four.

less than one year in the European country where they attended high school and made no mention of a desire to return to that country. Similarly, Participant U spent one year in the USA attending high school but now expresses lukewarm sentiment towards migrating there in the longer term, preferring France or another European country.

Existing literature (Yu, 2020) from a different context may have suggested that we could expect more queer people who had studied abroad to want to remain in Kazakhstan in order to build or change queer communities, but a desire to return to destinations migrants have previously experienced is also reflected in literature such as Brunarska. It is nevertheless notable that a possible pattern is observable, and that it serves to demonstrate that past experience and connections with a country serve as a factor in destination choice for Kazakhstani queer migrants.

Identities, queerness and Russia

Questions of identities have recurred throughout this dissertation and have been discussed in the contexts of factors and pathways, but the theme on which participants' concerns regarding the mix of their queer, national and ethnic identities were strongest was in choice of destination. As discussed earlier, a number of literary sources suggest that expected destinations ought to include Russia for those following educational or work pathways (UNFPA, 2019; IOM, 2020, Osipova, 2021). Other queer migration studies similarly suggest that work pathways may also coincide with established labour migration routes from Kazakhstan, the largest of which for both low- and high-skill labour is Russia (e.g Baas, 2018; Kam, 2020).

I argue that there are two reasons for this theoretical discrepancy. Firstly the destinations listed for general migrants are actual destinations, whereas the ones participants have discussed here are the ideal destinations for which they aim, so it is possible that in general migration too a study of ideal destinations would look quite differently. Even if this is the case, I argue that secondly, such an outlook overlooks the queer lens that participants apply to their migratory decisions and, for many, also overlooks questions of their ethnicity.

In their interviews, there is no clearer example of this than when asked about Russia as a possible destination, and this section will briefly discuss these themes in the context of destination choice in relation to Russia and other examples.

"Well, the entirety of Russia is off-limits because of racism."

- Participant A

Participant A provides possibly the most succinct version of the answer given by every single participant of Kazakh or other non-white ethnicity. Some who had spent time in Russia related stories of racist assaults and abuse they had experienced or witnessed. Racism against Central Asians in Russia, particularly migrant workers in low-paid jobs, is well documented (Laruelle, 2007; Kuznetsova and Round, 2019). Two participants who are themselves ethnic Russians also commented on this issue, acknowledging that their Kazakh friends would face more difficulties moving to cities in Russia than they would. A perceived lack of racism was also mentioned as a positive pull factor by a number of participants in discussion of destination selection too: Q and D both mentioned this as an important factor in their choice of Canada. While for others, it was a repel factor in other countries but of less concern than in Russia: A gave careful consideration to racism in the US before settling on it as one of her preferred destinations, and Q mentioned racial abuse he experienced in Europe as a repel factor.

Repel factors for Russia extend further for many participants too – the issue is not just racism but homophobia, with many citing the so-called Gay Propaganda Law[8] as a factor that prevents them considering Russia. Though for Participant S, the economic draw of Moscow remained a temptation, particularly in their field, where it is harder to find work in Kazakhstan without fluent Kazakh: "It's like, you get beaten up in either city, but in one of them you can get a job."

The general migrants from Kazakhstan who elect to go to Russia or other significant destinations such as Uzbekistan and Belarus may do so for a number of reasons, from seasonal labourers to those going for well-paid city jobs or to study at more

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[8] Full title: Law for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values

prestigious universities. It is possible that they too would still prefer to go to other destinations like the EU or North America. But many of the participants who must apply either a queer or racial lens to the decision, like B, disagree:

> "Russia is pretty racist. Like if you're not Russian, you're not white coloured. You'll get problems… Comparing Russia and Kazakhstan, you have two shitholes and Kazakhstan is a better shithole than Russia."
>
> - Participant B

B was joined in this sentiment by others, who would rather stay in Kazakhstan than face the repel factors of racism and homophobia in Russia. As with all themes and factors in this dissertation, there is nuance dependent upon the individual participant and their circumstances, but the broad pattern of responses to Russia – almost universally described by participants as both racist and homophobic – is a good example of the ways in which queer migrants' queer and other identities intersect in the choice of destination.

7. Conclusions

"I just want to say at the end of this,

'if you can't love yourself, how in the hell

you gonna love somebody else?'"

Participant C, quoting Ru Paul

To conclude, this final chapter will reexamine the important gaps in the literature that this dissertation sought to address. By exploring these and the work's findings alongside its research questions, this chapter will establish the dissertation's theoretical contributions and the ways in which it contributes new understanding to the study of queer migration in Kazakhstan and more widely.

A clear Central Asia-shaped gap is evident in queer migration literature, yet the existence of queer lives in Central Asia and that queer migration does occur is also established. While existing literature concerning queer lives in Kazakhstan does provide insight into reasons a queer person might want to leave, it does not address migration, its causes or the ways in which it functions. A better understanding of the phenomenon affords opportunities to understand its causes and ways in which difficult situations could be improved. Queer migration literature skips over Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan migration literature skips over queerness: though both can offer some theoretical and contextual input to the understanding of Kazakhstani queer migration, both alone are insufficient and do not take account of the circumstances of the other. Further, little is offered in either body of literature to understand or explain pre-mobility migration experiences, nor the decision-making

processes in these early stages, leading to their invisibility in migration and asylum policy until they start moving.

In chapter four of this dissertation, I sought to answer the research questions on identifying factors contributing to queer mobility and immobility in Kazakhstan, their impacts on queer migrants' attitudes to migration, and the ways in which they negotiate these factors alongside queer and other identities. This chapter proposes the queer lens as a way of describing the specific way queer migrants view factors affecting migratory aspirations, where even apparently unconnected issues such as work and money must be assessed with their queerness in mind. The chapter also identifies previously undescribed factors, such as the rise of anti-trans sentiments in the UK which are deterring aspiring trans and non-binary migrants. How the queer lens is applied to money is elucidated particularly thanks to this study's pre-migration focus, identifying how young queers stay closeted until they have the finance to migrate. The applicability of temporality in a pre-migration setting, as a factor rather than a feature is also illuminating and has potential to contribute to the new study of temporality in migration. Finally, the finding that Kazakhstani queer migrants view migration as a way to deflect shame from their families related to their queerness can contribute to discussions on the topic in other, similar locales.

These findings are key in understanding the sources of queer migration and identifying where additional support may be needed. They also begin to fill a gap in queer migration studies in the wider region, where some cultural and societal factors may be similar in neighbouring countries. While it would be naive to suggest these findings might be used to resolve the issues that push queer migrants, they could contribute to efforts from organisations in destination countries to facilitate journeys by, for example, addressing repel factors.

Chapter five provides answers to the second stream of research questions on pathways to navigation by examining how queer migrants navigate different pathways to migration, which pathways they consider and what affects their perceptions, planning and decisions around pathways. The queer lens was again a key factor cutting across migrants' navigation of pathway choices, influencing the ways they consider decisions and judge factors to be taken into account. One of its

most striking findings was participants' rejection of asylum as a potential pathway to migration: of the 13 (out of 15) who had decided to migrate or were still considering it, only one actively planned to seek asylum.

While not all would be eligible for asylum, it appears that some could make legitimate claims. This is based on participants' perceptions of the poor treatment of asylum seekers, an expectation of failure and anticipated consequences, as well as some participants' belief that they are ineligible because Kazakhstan is simply not as bad as other places for queer people. This chapter also highlighted the importance of education abroad as a route to migration and the link between previous experience and future migration decisions. Finally, chapter five also proposed a potential link between foreign language ability and intention to migrate that could be explored in future studies. These findings highlight the need for better understandings of asylum processes and improved support for those whose circumstances make them eligible. They may also shed light on how pathways to residency through education in queer-friendly countries may exclude well-qualified and motivated queer migrants from countries like Kazakhstan.

Chapter six answers the third strand of research questions on destinations, by highlighting how and why queer migrants select ideal migratory destinations, and how their experience, identities and language affect destination selection. In doing so it has revealed a complex picture of ideal destination selection, where push, pull, repel and retain factors intersect with careful analyses of the likelihood of success and the steps necessary to succeed. It does, however, also uncover deeper questions about the early formation of preferences and what practices or strategies, if any, may be applied in the early construction of the choice. I argue that this may be a fruitful field for future queer migration research and may assist in answering questions like the one I posed in this chapter's first section: how are some destinations selected to the exlcusion of others. Further, this chapter has also revealed the intersections of participants' identities and the influence of their past experiences and the impact these can have on the selection of ideal migratory destinations.

Directions for future research

While I would argue that further study into any area of queer migration in Kazakhstan will be valuable in contributing further knowledge to an under-studied subject in an under-studied region, I would make three more specific reccommendations.

Firstly, I believe that a longer-term study that compares the pre-migration intentions of queer people in Kazakhstan with eventual outcomes would bring benefits not only to the understanding of the phenomenon in Kazakhstan but also across the field as a whole. This could enhance current understandings of what factors predict success among migrants, as well as providing insight that could improve the difficult processes and sometimes dangerous journeys that queer migrants and asylum seekers take.

Secondly, I also believe that a deeper study of the intersection of ethnic, linguistic, national and queer identities in the context of queer migration in Kazakhstan could open up understandings that would contribute knowledge across several academic fields, including area studies, migration studies, queer studies and others, as well as shedding light on issues that could assist in the work queer people do to support each other in places where these identities are believed to be mutually-exclusive.

Finally, questions remain unanswered on the early processes of decision-making and preference-forming around destinations. A study of these early influences and decision-making pathways could identify new frameworks and theories relevant to migration scholars working with different groups and/or in other geographic regions, as well as in asylum and forced migration settings. A participant-led study of these early stages could assist in calls to decolonise migration studies by diverting focus from specific country destinations, and its examination of policy and institutional influences and socio-economic and cultural factors could inform efforts to support queer people before, during or after migration journeys.

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Declaration of Authorship (KIMEP)

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or a substantial proportion of material which have been submitted for the award of any other degree at KIMEP University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. This thesis is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated, and the views expressed here are my own.

Signed:

Date: 14 March 2022

Appendices

Appendix 1: Table of participants

Pseudonym	Gender identity (Self described)	Sexuality (self described)	Age (grouped)
A	Woman	Lesbian	28+
B	Non-binary, maybe trans	Bisexual	23-27
C	Man	Gay	28+
D	Man	Gay	18-22
E	Man	Gay	28+
F	Woman	Bisexual	28+
H	Man	Not disclosed	28+
N	Man	Gay	18-22
Q	Man	Gay	23-27
S	Non-binary	Lesbian	23-27
T	Man	Gay	18-22
U	Man	Gay	18-22
V	Non-binary	Asexual	23-27
X	Non-binary	Asexual	23-27
Y	Trans woman	Pansexual	23-27

Appendix 2: Participant information sheets (English and Russian)

Study title and Researcher Details
Study title: **Queer Migration in Central Asia**
University: University of Glasgow, Scotland and KIMEP University, Kazakhstan
Degree: International Master in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies
Researcher: Elliot Napier [email address here]
Supervisors: Prof Rebecca Kay, University of Glasgow. Dr Nurseit Niyazbekov, KIMEP

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?
This study is exploring how LGBTQ+ people in or from Central Asia feel about moving to another country – something known as 'queer migration.' I will conduct interviews with LGBTQ+ people who have moved to another country, or have thought about or tried to do so. The study hopes to find out why LGBTQ+ people do or do not want to migrate, and how they do so.

Why have I been chosen?
You are being invited either because we have met or spoken before and I think you might like to contribute to the study, or because someone else in the study has suggested you might be able to contribute and be willing to take part.

Do I have to take part?
You can decide if you want to take part. If you decide to, you can stop at any time and without giving a reason even after the interview. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

What will happen to me if I take part?
I will invite you to take part in an interview with me. This might be by Zoom, or by email or secure messaging such as Telegram or WhatsApp. I may offer to interview you in person: you can decide what you prefer.

We can speak in English or Russian, or a mix of both – you can decide.

The interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes. It will focus on your experience as an LGBTQ+ person who has lived in Central Asia, and whether you have thought about moving from or to other countries, or if you have already moved the reasons you did so.

I will make a secure audio recording of the interview. If the interview takes place by email or messaging, a written record will be taken.

After the interview, I will write out everything that was said and remove anything that might identify you. Your comments and thoughts from the interview will be used in my master's thesis to help understand how and why LGBTQ+ people decide to move abroad or not.

If you decide to be interviewed in person, we will both take steps to keep safe from COVID-19: we will wear masks (I can provide one for you); we will stay 2m apart at all times; we will meet outside if possible; if we meet indoors, the room will be well ventilated and I will clean

the surfaces before and after the interview; I will ask you to avoid public transport where possible.

If you are at increased risk of harm from COVID-19, we will carry out the interview on Zoom instead. The Ministry of Health has published information on who is at increased risk of harm, and you can read this information by clicking here. If you are over 60 or have any of the conditions described in the Ministry's information, we will carry out the interview on Zoom and not in person.

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19 we will postpone the interview or use Zoom instead. At the interview, we will use the Ashyq app in test mode to check the risk of transmission of COVID. Using the test QR code with the app doesn't record that you were with me. You can find information about how to protect yourself and others from COVID, how to get tested and what to do if you feel unwell at www.coronavirus2020.kz

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
All information collected about you will be kept confidential.

What you say in your interview will be written down and may be used in my thesis, but I will remove your name, age, location and any other information from which you could be identified. If your words are quoted in the thesis, I will make sure that no one could work out who said these words and will use a number (eg. "Participant 4") instead of your name.

All documents and recordings will be encrypted and transferred to the University of Glasgow's servers securely. At the end of the project (expected to be June 2022) interview recordings and any identifying data will be destroyed.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm. I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The study will be the basis of my master's thesis. All identifying data collected during this research will be destroyed at the end of the project. This is expected to be in June 2022.

You can contact me to ask for a copy of the final thesis or a shorter summary report if you want to see it. It might be published in a journal or presented at a conference. Participants will **not** be identified by name in the thesis and all identifying information will be removed.

Who is organising and funding the research?
I am a student at both the University of Glasgow in Scotland, and KIMEP University in Kazakhstan. I receive funding for my studies from the European Commission in an Erasmus Mundus scholarship.

Who has reviewed the study?
This project has been reviewed by the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Forum at the University of Glasgow. This project has been approved by my supervisor at KIMEP University.

Contact for Further Information
If you have any questions, if there is something you do not understand or if you need more information, please contact me at [email address here]
If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer at [email address here]

Название исследования:	**Квир-миграция в Центральной Азии**
Университет:	Университет Глазго, Шотландия и Университет КИМЭП, Казахстан
Степень:	Международный магистр исследований Центральной и Восточной Европы, России и Евразии
Исследователь:	Эллиот Нэпир [email address here]
Руководители:	Ребекка Кэй, Университет Глазго. Нурсеит Ниязбеков, КИМЭП

Вам предлагается принять участие в научном исследовании. Прежде чем принять решение, вам важно понять, зачем проводится исследование и что оно будет включать в себя. Пожалуйста внимательно прочитайте следующую информацию и обсудите ее с другими, если хотите. Спросите меня, если что-то непонятно или если вы хотите получить дополнительную информацию. Потратьте время, чтобы решить, хотите ли вы принять участие.

Какова цель исследования?
Это исследование изучает, как ЛГБТК+ люди в Центральной Азии или из нее относятся к переезду в другую страну, то есть "квир-миграция". Я буду проводить интервью с ЛГБТК+ людьми, которые уже переехали в другую страну, или думали об этом, или пытались это сделать. Исследование надеется выяснить, почему ЛГБТК+ люди хотят или не хотят мигрировать, и как они это делают.

Почему меня пригласили?
Вас пригласили либо потому что мы уже встречались или разговаривали раньше, и я думаю, что вы могли бы внести свой вклад в исследование, либо потому что кто-то из участников исследования предположил, что вы можете внести свой вклад и готовы принять участие.

Обязательно ли мне принимать участие?
Вы можете решить, хотите ли вы участвовать в исследовании. Если вы решите, вы можете прекратить участие в любое время и без объяснения причин, даже после интервью. Вы не обязаны отвечать на вопросы, на которые не хотите отвечать.

Что будет со мной, если я приму участие?
Я приглашу вас принять участие в интервью со мной. Это может быть по Zoom, по электронной почте или с помощью защищенных сообщений, таких как Telegram или WhatsApp. Я могу предложить вам провести интервью лично. Вы можете решить, что вам больше нравится.

Мы можем говорить на английском или русском языке, или на смеси обоих - решать вам.

Интервью будет длиться от 30 до 45 минут. Оно будет посвящено вашему опыту как ЛГБТК+ человека, живущего в Центральной Азии, а также тому, думали ли вы о переезде из других стран или в другие страны. Если вы уже переехали, то по каким причинам.

Я сделаю защищенную аудиозапись интервью. Если интервью будет проводиться по электронной почте или посредством обмена сообщениями, будет сделана письменная запись.

После интервью я запишу все, что было сказано, и удалю все, что может вас идентифицировать. Ваши комментарии и мысли из интервью будут использованы в моей магистерской диссертации, чтобы помочь понять, как и почему ЛГБТК+ решают переехать за границу или нет.

Если вы решите пройти личное интервью, мы оба предпримем меры по защите от COVID-19: мы наденем маски (я могу предоставить вам одну); мы будем постоянно находиться на расстоянии 2 м друг от друга; мы встретимся на открытом воздухе, если это возможно; если мы встретимся в помещении, комната будет хорошо проветриваться, и я буду очищать поверхности до и после интервью; я попрошу вас по возможности избегать общественного транспорта.

Если вы подвергаетесь повышенному риску причинения вреда от COVID-19, мы проведем интервью на Zoom. Министерство здравоохранения опубликовало информацию о том, кто

подвергается повышенному риску причинения вреда, и вы можете ознакомиться с ней, нажав [здесь](). Если вам больше 60 лет или у вас есть какие-либо заболевания, описанные в информации министерства, мы проведем собеседование в Zoom, а не лично.

Если у вас есть какие-либо симптомы COVID-19, мы отложим интервью или проведем его с помощью Zoom. На интервью мы будем использовать приложение Ashyq в тестовом режиме, чтобы проверить риск передачи COVID. Использование тестового QR-кода в приложении не фиксирует, что вы были со мной. Информацию о том, как защитить себя и других от COVID, как пройти тестирование и что делать, если вы почувствовали себя плохо, вы можете найти на сайте www.coronavirus2020.kz

Будет ли сохранена конфиденциальность моего участия в этом исследовании?
Вся собранная о вас информация будет сохранена в тайне. То, что вы скажете в интервью, будет записано и может быть использовано в моей диссертации, но я уберу ваше имя, возраст, место проживания и любую другую информацию, по которой вас можно будет идентифицировать. Если ваши слова будут процитированы в диссертации, я позабочусь о том, чтобы никто не смог выяснить, кто сказал эти слова, и вместо вашего имени буду использовать номер (например, "Участник 4").

Все документы и записи будут зашифрованы и надежно переданы на серверы Университета Глазго. По окончании проекта (предположительно в июне 2022 г.) записи интервью и любые идентифицирующие данные будут уничтожены.

Пожалуйста, обратите внимание, что конфиденциальность будет соблюдаться, насколько это возможно, если только во время нашей беседы я не услышу ничего, что заставит меня беспокоиться о том, что кому-то может угрожать опасность. Возможно, мне придется проинформировать об этом соответствующие агентства.

Что будет с результатами исследования?
Исследование станет основой моей магистерской диссертации. Все идентифицирующие данные, собранные в ходе исследования, будут уничтожены по окончании проекта. Ожидается, что это произойдет в июне 2022 года.

Вы можете связаться со мной и попросить копию окончательного варианта диссертации, если захотите. Она может быть опубликована в журнале или представлена на конференции. Участники не будут названы в диссертации по имени, а вся идентифицирующая информация будет удалена.

Кто организует и финансирует исследование?
Я являюсь студентом Университета Глазго в Шотландии и Университета КИМЭП в Казахстане. Я получаю финансирование на обучение от Европейской комиссии в рамках стипендии Erasmus Mundus.

Кто рецензировал исследование?
Данный проект был рецензирован этическим форумом Школы социальных и политических наук Университета Глазго. Данный проект был одобрен моим научным руководителем в Университете КИМЭП.

Контакт для получения дополнительной информации
Если у вас возникли вопросы, если вам что-то непонятно или если вам нужна дополнительная информация, пожалуйста, свяжитесь со мной по адресу [email address here]

Если у вас есть какие-либо сомнения относительно проведения исследовательского проекта, вы можете обратиться к специалисту по этике Школы социальных и политических наук по адресу [email address here]

Appendix 3: Participant consent forms (English and Russian)

Consent Form

Title of Project: **Queer Migration in Central Asia**
Researcher: Elliot Napier [email address here]
Supervisors: Prof Rebecca Kay, University of Glasgow. Dr Nurseit Niyazbekov, KIMEP

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐ No ☐   I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information for this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐   I consent to oral interviews being audio-recorded, or a textual record being made of written interviews

Yes ☐ No ☐   I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym (number, letter or false name) in interview transcripts and in the final dissertation.

I acknowledge that:

Yes ☐ No ☐   All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised during transcription.

Yes ☐ No ☐   Research data will be treated as confidential and stored securely at all times.

Yes ☐ No ☐   Identifiable material, including interview records, will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Yes ☐ No ☐   I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐   I have received a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

Consent:
Yes ☐ No ☐   I agree to take part in this research study

Name: Signature   Date:

Форма согласия

Название проекта: **Квир-миграция в Центральной Азии**
Исследователь: Эллиот Нэпир [email address here]
Руководители: Ребекка Кэй, Университет Глазго. Нурсеит Ниязбеков, КИМЭП.

Пожалуйста, отметьте нужное

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Я подтверждаю, что прочитал и понял информацию об участниках данного исследования и была возможность задать вопросы.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Я понимаю, что мое участие является добровольным и что я могу отказаться от участия в исследовании в любое время без объяснения причин.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Я согласен на аудиозапись устных интервью или текстовую запись письменных интервью.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Да ☐ Нет ☐ Я признаю, что в стенограммах интервью и в окончательном тексте диссертации участники будут называться псевдонимами (цифрами, буквами или вымышленными именами).

Я подтверждаю, что:

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Все имена и другие материалы, которые могут идентифицировать личность, будут обезличены во время расшифровки.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Данные исследования будут рассматриваться как конфиденциальные и храниться безопасно в любое время.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Идентифицируемые материалы, включая записи интервью, будут уничтожены после завершения проекта.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Я отказываюсь от своих авторских прав на любые данные, собранные в рамках данного проекта.

Да ☐ Нет ☐   Я подтверждаю предоставление уведомления о конфиденциальности в отношении данного исследовательского проекта.

Согласие:
Да ☐ Нет ☐   Я согласен принять участие в данном исследовании

ФИО: _____ Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Appendix 4: Interview outlines/guides (English and Russian)

Interviews are semi-structured and are intended to be flexible enough to cover topics in a different order if the interview proceeds differently. In line with the methodology, themes can be added and participant-led and this document is not an exhaustive script. Questions will cover the broad themes as below. Key questions/themes in bold.

English
For interviewees who have not (yet) migrated
●	Whether they want/ed to migrate to another country
●	If yes, whether this would be permanent or temporary (e.g. a few years and then return) and reasons for this
o	The main reasons that they want to leave where they are
▪	E.g. society, culture, governance, family, repression/restriction, danger or other themes
▪	Relationship of this to sexuality
●	There will likely be several aspects to these and each will be explored as deeply as possible – may also revisit later
o	Whether they have identified a 'target' country(s)
▪	Basis of the choice(s). What inspired choice(s), e.g. language, education, employment, culture, ease of access, connections, LGBT rights etc.
●	Portrayals in media, cultural diplomacy etc.
▪	There will likely be several aspects to this and each will be explored as deeply as possible
o	Do they have (semi-)concrete plans for migration?
▪	If so, when and how do they intend to make the move
▪	Do they identify a specific pathway/motivator? (economic, affirmation, escape)
▪	Do they regard this a firm plan or more of a dream
●	Reasons for this. What barriers stand in the way of achievability?
●	How this might change
▪	Have they done anything with the intention of making migration likelier to succeed? Eg. learned a language, got specific qualifications, pursued a particular career path etc
o	Expectations or hopes that life will be better abroad
▪	How these expectations contributed to plans/desires
●	If they considered migrating but decided not to, what prompted them to consider it?
o	Push/pull factors as above
▪	If they identified target etc, follow as above
o	What ultimately led to deciding not to move?
▪	Draw factors at home
●	Eg. family, love, culture etc
▪	Barriers to migration
●	Eg. language, finance, education etc
o	What they hoped to achieve with a move
▪	How and why those changed
o	Possibility of changing their mind in future

For interviewees who have migrated
●	Broadly as above regarding decisions, target country selection etc
●	Discuss the route (ie. via work, family etc – the practical act)
o	How this was managed – how difficult it was
●	Motivations
o	Was sexuality an important factor?
▪	If no, push (appropriately) on how they felt before the move

- Would you have said it was before you left?
o What other factors: as above, with push/pulls etc.
- Did you achieve what you wanted?
o Eg. was life better, liberated, found love, etc.
▪ Explore carefully but thoroughly
- Changes in them as a person, outlook, expectations, ambitions etc
- Have you 'returned'?
o If yes
▪ What drove that decision (care to be taken – reasons might not be happy)
o Pushes: eg. culture, language, homesickness, hostility etc
o Pulls: eg. family, food, friends, culture etc
▪ How things changed in the home country
- Eg. are the push factors still present?
o If no
▪ Would they return? Do they have a plan to do so?
- What are the reasons?
o Push/pulls as above
▪ How do they view the home country now?
- i.e. are push factors still present, have things changed?
- How they view those who still wish to leave
o Supportive, not supportive?
o Do they help others?
o Did they have networks from the home country?

For all interviewees (preferably towards the end of interview)
- Thoughts on the concept of queer migration generally?
o Do they know many people who want to go/stay?
o Reasons behind the phenomenon generally
▪ Differing motivations – own versus others
- Possible impacts on society
o Eg. negative: brain drain, liberal voices leaving, delay in cultural change
o Eg. positive: personal development, returners encouraging tolerance

Russian
Назовите, пожалуйста, имя, которым вы подписали форму согласия.

И согласны ли вы продолжить интервью?

Мы можем остановиться в любой момент. Вы можете в любой момент решить, что не хотите больше принимать участие.

Как вы знаете, я не очень хорошо говорю по-русски и могу не понять всего, что вы говорите. Но это интервью записывается, и после интервью я внимательно прослушаю его несколько раз, чтобы убедиться, что я все понимаю. Пожалуйста, говорите как можно медленнее и четче.

Как вы знаете, мы собираемся поговорить о миграции ЛГБТ. Сначала я спрошу вас о вашем опыте и мыслях. Позже я спрошу вас об обществе и других людях.

Миграция ЛГБТ - это не только когда люди мигрируют из-за своей сексуальности, но и любая миграция, в которой ориентация ЛГБТ играет определенную роль. Академики понимают, что сексуальность не всегда является основной причиной, и именно об этом я надеюсь узнать.

Для респондентов, которые еще (пока) не мигрировали:

Думали ли вы о переезде в другую страну?
Можете ли вы рассказать мне об этом подробнее?
Вы бы переехали на постоянное или временное место жительства?
Каковы основные причины, по которым вы хотите уехать?
Например, общество, культура, закон, семья, репрессии/ограничения, опасность или другие темы.

Связано ли что-нибудь из этого с вашей сексуальной ориентацией?

Вы уже решили, куда хотите уехать? Есть ли несколько стран, о которых вы думали?

Основание для выбора. Почему вы выбрали именно эти страны? Например, язык, образование, работа, культура, легкость доступа, связи, права ЛГБТ и т.д. Образы в СМИ, культурная дипломатия и т.д.

Есть ли у вас конкретный план миграции?
Когда и как вы собираетесь переехать?

Определяют ли они конкретный путь/мотивацию? (экономический, утверждение, побег)

Это твердый план или скорее мечта?
Какие препятствия стоят на пути к достижимости?
Что может измениться, чтобы заставить вас изменить свои планы?

Сделали ли вы что-нибудь, чтобы облегчить миграцию? Например, выучили язык, получили специальную квалификацию, выбрали определенный карьерный путь и т.д.

Ожидания или надежды на то, что за границей жизнь будет лучше.
Как эти ожидания повлияли на планы/желания
Считаете ли вы, что ваша жизнь была бы лучше в другой стране? Почему вы так думаете?

Если вы думали о миграции, но решили не делать этого, что заставило вас сначала подумать об этом?
Вы выбрали страну или страны?
Чего вы надеялись достичь?
Что вы надеялись изменить в своей жизни?
Почему вы решили остаться здесь?
Например, семья, любовь, язык, культура, образование, деньги.
Как вы думаете, можете ли вы в будущем решиться на миграцию?

При изучении этой темы мы говорим о "факторах отталкивания" и "факторах притяжения". Факторы отталкивания - это то, что заставляет людей хотеть уехать. Притягивающие факторы - это то, что привлекает людей в другое место.

Каковы ваши основные факторы отталкивания?

Каковы ваши основные факторы притяжения?

Для респондентов, которые мигрировали
- В общих чертах, как описано выше, относительно решений, выбора страны и т.д.
- Обсудите маршрут (т.е. через работу, семью и т.д. - практические действия).

Как вы попали туда, где находитесь? Т.е. вы переехали через поиск работы, с партнером, для получения образования, в качестве беженца?

Почему вы решили уехать? (Обратитесь к факторам "толкать/тянуть")

Была ли ваша сексуальная ориентация важным фактором?

Как вы думаете, если бы я спросил вас до вашего отъезда, вы бы сказали, что сексуальная ориентация была важной частью решения?

Достигли ли вы того, на что рассчитывали?
Например, стала ли жизнь лучше, освободилась ли, нашла ли любовь и т.д.

Изменились ли вы как личность после переезда?
Политика, мировоззрение, амбиции

Знаете ли вы других людей из Казахстана в вашей новой стране? Есть ли у вас своя община?

Вы "вернулись"?
Если да
Почему вы решили вернуться?
о Толкающие факторы: например, культура, язык, тоска по дому, враждебность и т.д.
о Притягивает: например, семья, еда, друзья, культура и т.д.

Изменилось ли здесь что-нибудь с тех пор, как вы уехали?
Сохранились ли побуждающие факторы?

Если не вернулись
Рассматривали ли бы вы возможность вернуться сюда в будущем? Есть ли у вас план?
Почему
Подталкивающие/отталкивающие факторы, как указано выше

Как вы оцениваете свою родину сейчас?
Т.е. сохраняются ли факторы, подталкивающие к отъезду, изменилось ли что-то?
Как вы относитесь к людям, которые все еще хотят уехать?
Помогаете ли вы тем, кто хочет уехать?

Для всех интервьюируемых (ближе к концу интервью)
Как вы относитесь к миграции гомосексуалистов в целом?

Много ли вы знаете людей, которые хотят уехать?

Как вы думаете, по каким причинам некоторые ЛГБТ хотят уехать?

Как вы думаете, какое влияние оказывает миграция гомосексуалистов на Казахстан?
Как вы думаете, это хорошо или плохо для страны? Хорошо это или плохо для прав ЛГБТ?

Есть ли что-то еще, что вы хотели бы сказать?

Appendix 6: Code book

Appendix 4: University of Glasgow ethical approval

University of Glasgow

School of Social & Political Sciences

School Ethics Forum for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

Notification of Ethics Application Outcome – UG and PGT Student Applications

Application Details

Undergraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☐   Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☒

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2021/060/IMCEREES

Applicant's Name: Elliot Napier

Project Title: Queer Migration in Central Asia

Application Status: **Fully Approved**

Date of Review: 03/06/2021

Start Date of Approval   14/06/2021   End Date of Approval   30/06/2022

NB: Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection from the date of approval.

Fully approved
Means that the applicant can proceed with data collection with effect from the date of approval.

Amendments required
Where amendments are required by reviewers, applicants must respond in the relevant boxes below to the recommendations of the School Ethics Forum and provide this as an 'Amendments Response' document to explain the changes made to the application as well as amending the documents, as relevant. Changes to the application form or supporting documents should be highlighted either in block highlight or in red coloured text to assist the reviewers. All amended application documents should then be sent to the ethics administrator by the Supervisor for the approval of the SEF before data collection can proceed.

Rejected
If your application is Rejected a new application must be submitted to the School Ethics Forum. The reviewer feedback below will indicate whether a similar future project is likely to be supported. Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document provided as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated. The new application forms should be signed off and submitted to the ethics administrator by the Supervisor.

REVIEWER MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS	APPLICANT RESPONSE

REVIEWER MINOR RECOMMENDATIONS	APPLICANT RESPONSE

ADDITIONAL REVIEWER COMMENTS	APPLICANT RESPONSE

Appendix 4: University of Glasgow fieldwork risk assessment authorisation

Full 10-page document is retained for inspection as needed.

Participant Acknowledgement

This section should be completed by each participant in the activity to confirm that they have been provided with a copy of this risk assessment and acknowledge the risks identified therein and their own responsibilities in mitigating those risks. Add additional rows as appropriate.

Name	Employer	Contact Information (phone number or e-mail)	Signature	Date
Elliot Napier	Student, University of Glasgow	████████	Elliot Napier	15 Jun 2021

Approval and Sign-Off

I have reviewed this proposal together with the attached fieldwork risk assessments. I am satisfied that this trip is essential fieldwork/travel and that reasonable control measures are in place to manage foreseeable risks. Appropriate approval should be sought from all institutions employing participants in the activity.

Signed (Principal Investigator/Group Head or equivalent):   Date: 16.6.2021

Print Name: Rebecca Kay

Signed (Head of School/Director of Institute/Head of Service or above):   Date: 21/07/2021

Print Name: Michael Murray, Head of Professional Services

Fieldwork/Project Risk Assessment Template 2.1

106