

## Doctoral School Research Award 2022/23 Report

### Bisexuality and Asylum in the United Kingdom and France

Aine Bennett



1: The Canal St-Martin near my sublet in the 19ème arrondissement

My research focuses on people claiming asylum in the UK and France on the basis of their bisexuality. Much of my research involves interviews. In the UK, I have a network of contacts within migrant activism and support services and found legal caseworkers and solicitors very responsive to written requests for interview. In France however, I needed to spend some time in the country to build a network to help me meet potential participants.

I was fortunate to receive the full financial support I requested from the Doctoral School Research Award. This enabled me to stay in Paris from April to August 2023 as an invited researcher at the *Centre de Recherche de l'Institut de Démographie* at the *Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne* for an extended period of fieldwork. The Research Award

covered my travel to and from France and contributed to living costs, allowing me to spend sufficient time in France. Being in Paris also enabled me to present at a conference at the *Campus Condorcet*.



2: Marching with Solidaires on May Day



3: Graffiti criticising Gérald Darmanin, Minister of the Interior, who is responsible for immigration

Staying in Paris meant I was able to meet fellow researchers working on queer asylum in France and learn from their experiences and share their contacts. I attended events that offered the potential to meet relevant people and observe the broader context of migration and racial capitalism in contemporary France, such as a transnational trade union congress or the launch of an anti-racist journalism network. This helped me to

secure interviews with people from some of the key support organisations in France.

Furthermore, I gained insight into the functioning of the *Cour National du Droit d'Asile*, through conducting an interview with a representative of the court and observing appeal hearings.



4: A sign at Paris Pride in June highlight biphobia



5: Graffiti about Nahel's death on the CNDA building

My time in France coincided with the uprisings following the police killing of teenager Nahel Merzouk. The response to this fatal act of police violence drew attention to French state racism and the links being drawn by publics between police and border violence. This experience has greatly informed my understanding of the context of migration and asylum in France.

Although I made connections, I still found it much harder to secure interviews in France than I had in the UK. I struggled at times to balance continuing other

necessary work on my PhD with making the most of potential opportunities and managing my mental health. The shorter period of my time in France compared to my fieldwork in the UK meant that this sometimes resulted in potentially missed opportunities, such as when I chose not to attend a queer Arab film screening as I was feeling too

anxious. This “hanging out” element of fieldwork was something I found harder alone and abroad. To mitigate this slightly, I also conducted two visits to the *Musée de l’Histoire de*



7: Historic posters from anti-racist and migrant organising in the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration

*l’Histoire de l’Immigration*. While there was a limited engagement with sexuality in the museum, these visits provided incredibly rich data on public discourses about immigration, France’s colonial past, and its ongoing treatment of its racialised inhabitants.

Overall, the Doctoral School Research Award enabled a very fruitful and enjoyable period of fieldwork.



6: Entry to the main exhibition at the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration