

Place of discrimination in the public/private division: case of ethnic
discrimination on the present-day rental market in Russia

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis: 20,912 words

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Signed Daria Tusheva

Abstract

Ethnic discrimination on the rental market is a well-studied area, however, a little feminist research has been done there. In my work I investigate how the recent case of introduction of the anti-discriminatory policy by CIAN, one of online rental housing marketplaces in Russia, highlights the local political specifics of the discrimination process. More specifically, I argue that discrimination in Russia is understood as a personal right.

Based on the quantitative data analysis augmented by the meaning condensation I show the major discourses related to discrimination that constituted this response. In addition to that, I provide justifications for considering discrimination to be a private personal matter, and offer a classification of topics discussed in the comments to show how they refer to the decision making in the process of discrimination. With the data gathered, I not only substantiate my argument about discrimination being located in the private domain, but also provide statistical data on the different forms of discrimination on the realty market in general: ethnic, gender-based and other types prevalent on the rental market in Russia.

This analysis illustrates that the public/private distinction is not fixed and raises new questions on the position of discrimination within the dichotomy of the public and the private in Russia. My research adds to the scope of a feminist literature on the private/public distinction and continues a tradition of the critical inquiries on the political theory concepts. This study sheds light on the constructivist character of the public/private division and stresses that it is limited by the historical, political, and cultural context. My research, therefore, helps to rethink the concept of the public/private split and reposition it as a piece of knowledge that needs to be approached critically when using in a non-Western context. In addition to that, my research findings add a rare data to the scope of the research on the ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia.

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I cannot believe to find myself in this point of my life (and of my day (or is it still night it is hard to tell now)). Without question, writing a thesis is the hardest thing I have ever done, and I could never do it without the support system I have.

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And as Snoop Dogg says, I wanna thank me. Watch the video “Snoop Dogg Gets Star On Hollywood Walk Of Fame” from 03:45.

Украине мир, России свободу! Хуй войне!

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Chapter I – Introduction

I moved out of my parents' home when I was 18. Since that time I have been moving from one flat to another, struggling to rent something cheap enough for a student on the biggest and the most competitive rental market in Russia. Now I am 26 and married, but finding a flat in Moscow is still a challenge. Usually, the search starts with opening an online rental marketplace such as *CIAN*, *Avito*, *Domclick*, *Domofond*, etc. I look for advertisements that suit my needs and then call the provided number, in most cases one of a real estate agent, but sometimes of a property owner. I choose carefully avoiding the ads that contain a legendary phrase “for Slavs only”, I do not want to interact with xenophobes.

An independent analysis shows that up to 20% of all ads on the Russian rental market contain the phrase “for Slavs only” and its analogs in the description¹, but who knows how many lessors would discriminate the lessee based on their ethnicity or race. I have an anecdote that I like to tell my non-Russian friends to explain the absurdity of ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia.

My husband and I are perfect renters by the Russian market's standards. Both of us have a prestigious job and no children, both of us are neither too young nor too old, but what is most important, both of us pass as Slavs. Light skin, brownish hair, bulbous nose (me) and light-colored eyes (my husband), totally Slavic names – there is no question about where our ancestors come from. But once even we raised suspicion in a real estate agent's mind. “Are you Russians?” was one of her first questions. “Are you registered in Moscow? Where do your parents live?” Her questions were getting more and more personal. “What nationality are your parents? Where were they born?”. Here I confronted her about the topic of her questions. The agent herself did not pass as a person of Slavic origin to me. Why would she specifically discriminate someone else? “You know, the owner just wants to be sure that the renter would be of Slavic origin. They had a few stories... With a group of people from...”. “I myself struggle a lot with it”, she continued, “I've rented the same

¹ At least two studies conducted by independent journalists are found:
<https://vc.ru/opinions/254336-tolko-slavyanam-kak-snyat-zhile-esli-vam-nikto-ne-rad>
<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/08/07/81525-slavyanskoe-gnezdo>.

flat in Moscow for over 15 years now, and I don't want to change it because, you know, it's not easy to find one if you're not a Slav."

I was not able to wrap my head around it. How is it possible? Why would someone who is being ethnically discriminated herself, pass this discrimination further? And why, after all, would a property owner be willing to use the services of a private broker of non-Slavic origin, but not rent a flat to one? Living in this context for my whole life it felt like there is some logic behind this, however I was not able to explain it to myself yet. Looked like I needed some additional information.

The same year, on December 6, 2021 CIAN, one of the biggest players on the real estate market that helps connect property owners, renters, and rental agents, announced a new moderation rule that prohibited people from displaying direct discrimination in their advertisements. The full text of the message said the following²:

"CIAN stands for equal opportunities for everyone.

We stand for equal opportunities for all CIAN users and believe that this decision will become a standard practice for the real estate sphere. We propose to join forces in putting an end to all manifestations of discrimination!

A text of an add should not contain:

Direct and indirect discrimination, as well as one's harassment and provocation of discrimination based on race or ethnic belonging (including such characteristics as skin color, ethnic and national origin, nationality, citizenship and religion)."

Proposing a policy like this in 2021 should seem at least outdated from the Western perspective. Moreover, the announcement consisted of a claim that almost to a word repeats the Russian constitution which 'guarantees the equality of rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen irrespective of gender, race, nationality, language'³ and so on. Thus, one may anticipate that this intervention would catch attention only because of how ridiculous it sounds in the present neoliberal world. However, the mass reaction was rather unexpected.

² <https://promo.cian.ru/equality>

³ Article 19.2. https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_28399/a4d26fe6022253f9f9e396e9ca6f63c80946702f/

People were outraged. Early comments began to appear the same morning and were present in most social media used in Russia, such as Telegram, Twitter, as well as professional forums and groups. Commentators called this decision “a failure of the company’s marketing strategy⁴” and even hipster media were raising a question of whether the new rule “is just another form of good ol’ discrimination?”⁵.

Returning to the text of the announcement, however, I would like to highlight an interesting fact. In this text, I would like to stress the usage of the term *demonstration* (Russian: проявление) instead of, e.g., *exercise* (Russian: осуществление). The text does not propose to ban discrimination *per se*, instead, it offers not to manifest it directly. It would be a speculation on my part to interpret this choice of words as intentional. At the same time, having my right to hypothesize, partly because I myself grew up and was socialised in Russian society, for me this is a telling case of the attitude toward discrimination. Everyone knows that discrimination persists in the real estate market, and this notice does not even intend to change this fact. What it tries to do instead, is to at least not demonstrate it as boldly as it is currently done. However, even this attempt resulted in a hostile reception. Why is it so?

In my thesis, I argue that discrimination in Russia is understood as a personal right. To elaborate, I hypothesize that Russians do not consider other actors such as the state, trade unions, or other social institutions or businesses to have a right to influence the process of discrimination. Moreover, it is expected, I argue, by the actors on the rental market that discrimination will not be regulated publicly neither by the state, nor by any other institution. Quite the contrary, I believe that in Russia discrimination in general is understood as something that belongs to the realm of private affairs unlike in the Western world. With a policy restricting the ability to publicly discriminate against future renters in the realty ads, CIAN, the aforementioned online marketplace, entered a sphere of what I argue is socially perceived to be the space of personal choice, which caused a huge outbreak of negative reactions. This case illustrates that the public/private distinction is not fixed and it raises new questions on the position of discrimination within this dichotomy of the public and the private in Russia. This research contributes methodologically to

⁴ <https://yamal-media.ru/narrative/zapret-sdavat-kvartiry-tolko-slavyanam-realnaja-mera-ili-marketingovyj-proval>

⁵ <https://moskvichmag.ru/gorod/posle-volny-negativa-tsian-dobavit-vozmozhnost-stavit-pometku-sdayu-zhile-ne-tolko-slavyanam/>

the literature about discrimination on the rental market and theoretically to the ideas of the division between the public and the private with regards to discrimination.

To support my argument, I analyze the public discourse around a case where an institution, an online rental marketplace, intervened in the accepted standard of discrimination. With my analysis I stem from the question: How do people make sense of the concept of discrimination in general? What do people think discrimination is? And, most importantly, *who* can legitimately *decide* what constitutes discrimination? Comparing the discourse that CIAN's announcement raised in social media to the one that was present in the media before, I will show that the new policy gave rise to the peculiar type of comments about discrimination. Based on the quantitative data analysis augmented by the meaning condensation I show the major discourses related to discrimination that constituted this response. In addition to that I provide justifications for considering discrimination to be a private personal right, and offer a classification of topics discussed in the comments to show how they refer to the decision making process of discrimination. With the data gathered, I not only substantiate my argument about discrimination being located in the private domain, but also provide statistical data on the different forms of discrimination on the realty market in general: ethnic, gender-based and other types prevalent on the rental market in Russia, thus, answering the following questions: Who exactly is discriminated against on the rental market in Russia? Is ethnicity the only widespread ground for discrimination, or there are other types of discrimination, such as gender- or age-based?

My research, I believe, continues a tradition of feminist critical inquiries on the political theory concepts. Many authors argue that feminists have not only done a lot to widen the understanding of the public/private divide. It is believed that the public/private distinction is the topic that mirrors what feminism is about: "The dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, *what the feminist movement is about*" (Pateman, 1989, p. 118). The importance of the public/private divide, I believe, stems from the fact that as a theoretically accepted dichotomy that is usually believed to be fixed and natural, it represents the other dichotomies feminist research struggles to denaturalize and deconstruct, such as male/female, us/them (Gal and Kligman, 2000, p. 47).

The public/private divide is not just a theoretical endeavour, it is a concept that, as it is argued, reciprocates the social reality oppressive to women. “Exclusion of women from the public occurred in many ways”, writes Ruth Gavison. “First, many legal systems excluded women politically by denying them the vote and even withholding legal status independent of their fathers or husbands. In addition to these exclusions, women were granted only limited economic and property-holding rights, and, in many countries, women were banned from many professions, including medicine and law” (Gavison, 1992, p. 22). This research uses feminism as both theoretical and political concept (Mahmoud, 2001) expanding the critique of the divide from gender and class to ethnicity and race.

It speaks about feminist research and practice being usually concerned with, namely “democracy and citizenship, [...] freedom, justice, equality and consent.” (Pateman 1989, p. 2). My work speaks about all of that, focusing especially on justice and equality, or rather, injustice and inequality in the form of discrimination and its role in the public/private divide. It is written in an attempt to understand how is it possible that discrimination can be so visibly present in the world of human rights, state protection, and civil engagement. However, the motivation behind it is not only theoretical. Ruth Gavison warns that: “fighting the verbal distinction between public and private, rather than fighting invalid arguments which invoke them, or the power structures which manipulate them in unjustifiable ways, is as futile as seeking individual therapy for problems of society.” (Gavison, 1992, p. 43). The far-reaching goal of this research is to add to the understanding of the problem of social inequality, and with that to move an inch closer to the solution for a specific context where I live and that I face every day.

The body of the thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter II I describe the historical and political context of ethnic discrimination in Russia as well as provide some data on how ethnic discrimination functions on the rental market in Russia. After that, in Chapter III I outline the theories on the public/private distinction, show the role of feminist research in approaching the topic, and provide possible explanations for, as I argue, ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia being understood as a private decision. After that I sketch the scope of studies of ethnic discrimination on the rental market in general, showing the gap to which my research adds some empirical data. In Chapters IV and V I specify my research design that includes both

quantitative and qualitative parts, and substitute my argument with the personal voices of people from both sides of the ethnic discrimination barricades. In the closing section I will touch upon...

In my work I use the terms 'ethnicity' and 'race' almost interchangeably. When discussing the oppression of the ethnic/racial/national Other in post-Soviet context, the borders between race and ethnicity, as authors argue, are blurred (Morozov, 2021). Often, when referring to ethnicity, scholars imply a cultural, linguistic, non-phenotypical difference, while race is mostly used in the context of 'visible' differences such as skin color. This distinction, in my opinion, harms more than it helps: while feminist researchers struggled to denaturalize differences, the ethnicity/race division still builds upon biological essentialism. However, one should take into account the Westernization of the discourse of differences: even in the Russian context, people adopt such concepts as 'racism' or refer to the Black Lives Matter movement to show an opinion on ethnic/racial discrimination within the borders of Russia.

Chapter II – Context

A. History of ethnic differences in Russia

Russia is a federative republic with 85 subjects of Federation⁶. The population of the Russian Federation is multi-ethnic, consisting of 41 self-ascribed ethnicities with many languages spoken on the country's territory. The latest published all-Russian population census gives us the picture of the ethnic content of the population: out of all respondents who answered the question, 81% identify as Russians. The next ethnicities/nationalities (Russian: народность) are Tatars, Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Chuvashs, Chechens (listed in descendent order), each constituting from 3.9% to 1% of the Russian population⁷. The most spoken languages (besides Russian and European languages usually taught in schools) that citizens of the Russian Federation speak or know are, unsurprisingly, Tatar (3.72% of those who answered this question), Ukrainian (1.26%), Bashkir (0.96%), Chechen (0.93%), Chuvash (0.92%). Other languages are spoken by less than 0.7% of the population⁸. From the data one may notice that in spite of being a multi-national state, Russia is a predominantly 'Russian' country.

The history of incorporation of other ethnicities into the Russian state is a story of colonialism lasting for centuries. Historians argue that this process may be described as a transition from a non-settler to a settler form of colonialism (Khodarkovsky, 2020), where by settler colonialism one means “those colonial processes organized around the presence of a settler population intent on making a territory their permanent home while continuing to enjoy metropolitan living standards and political privileges” (Elkins and Pedersen, 2005 in Englert, 2020, p. 1647). Indeed, if we take a closer look at the expansion of the Russian Empire that was ongoing since the 15th century, we will see that Muscovy was constantly conquering neighboring lands along with the indigenous population living on them (Taagepera 1987). Once conquered, these people were obliged to pay iasak, a kind of tribute to the tsar and later to the emperor, as well as convert into Christianity. They experienced continuous

⁶ <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-5.htm>

⁷ <http://www.statdata.ru/nacionalnyj-sostav-rossii>

⁸ https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Языки_России_в_порядке_численности_владеющих

discrimination, violence, and economic pressure from the side of Russian voivodes as well as from imperial legislation (Forsyth 1992, Slezkine 1994, Kivelson, 2007).

The imperial policies regarding ethnic and religious minorities were changing along with the historical development. What stayed unchanged, however, was the oppressive character of the attitude towards minorities. In the late 19th century during the conquest of the Asian territories, the justification for discrimination was the presumed backwardness of indigenous people. These people were believed to be 'civilized' too recently which implied their inability to govern themselves. Another line of discrimination was drawn upon religion: at the same time the whole Muslim population, not only of Asian origin but also Tatars, as well as Jews, were excluded from the conscription law, which again highlighted their not full formal status of allegiance. These legal changes and the propaganda supporting them were followed by the social reaction of violence towards specific ethnicities, regulated by the state, e.g. resettlement (Russian: переселение) of specific ethnicities (especially Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs) (Morrison, 2012) and grass-root anti-jewish pogroms (Grosfeld et al., 2020). All of that shows the constant othering of those who were of a 'wrong' religion or ethnicity in the times of the Russian Empire.

After the revolution, the official stance on the ethnic problem changed. The Soviet Union combined a lot of different mostly monotonic states under one roof claiming to have racial and ethnic equality based on communist ideas. However, while the communist propaganda was making efforts showing the Peoples' Friendship, the unspoken ethnic discrimination still persisted. In spite of the officially proclaimed racial and ethnic equality, the state continued introducing policies of Russification on the cultural level. E. g., such authors of non-Russian descent known to every Russian, as Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, were pictured as ethnic Russians. (Platt [Платт] 2017, Tlostanova, 2012). Another telling example of Russification is one of Josef Stalin, an infamous Soviet totalitarian leader of Georgian descent who changed his surname to a more Russian-sounding one, both to amplify his greatness and strength (a wordplay: 'сталь' [stal'] is the Russian for 'steel') and to become even more Soviet, meaning, Russian. On the discourse level, the state propaganda kept establishing the image of a generic Soviet citizen (Khomyakov, 2020) with Soviet identity overthrowing their national/ethnic identity. However in reality, as a Soviet man one should better be Russian: "[a]lthough Soviet propaganda persistently

emphasized the equality that existed among large and small nations, in practice Russians occupied a higher level in this friendship of peoples.” (Roman, 2002, p. 4). All of that lead to the marginalization of the local cultures and devalued them when compared to the Russian (Tlostanova, 2012).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union not many things have changed. The ex-Soviet republics, even those that struggled to get independency, still are economically dependent on the oppressor, staying now united in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an economic and legal union that resembles the structure of the Soviet State (Mazhikeyev, Edwards, 2021). This entity helped support the usual flow of immigrant forces to Russia from other ex-Soviet states which basically meant that there was no huge change in the content of ethnic discrimination in Russia. So, the pre-existing ethnic and racial hierarchies of oppression showing the internal colonialism in the post-Soviet space (Koplatadze, 2019) were present in both formal and informal discourse. As Meredith Roman shows, “[s]ince the collapse of this multi-ethnic friendship, administrative and law enforcement officials have systematically used public discourse and the registration system to exclude and racialize dark-skinned non-Russians in Moscow and re-imagine the community as white and Slavic.” (Roman, 2002, p. 1).

However, as post-socialist studies show that there are differences between internal colonial oppression and skin color-based racism in modern Russia. In the last years of the Soviet time and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the doors of the Russian hospitality mostly in the form of educational programs opened to people of color. “The party systematically invited individuals from African and Asian countries to study in its institutions of higher learning in order to propagate the image of the Soviet Union as a society free of racism” (Blakely in Roman, 2002, p. 6). However, even with the governmental warm reception, racism was still present: “[i]nstead of the big brother–little brother dichotomy, Africans and African-Americans’ subordination to Russians was framed in a positive manner in a dichotomy of teacher and student” (Roman, 2002, p. 7).

To conclude, the colonial history of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the modern-day Russia imply the supremacy of a White Slavic Russian citizen over people of a different ethnicity and race, even when the oppressive techniques become less blatant. This explains the normalization of discrimination in the current

public discourse in Russia, which I will describe in the next section of the Chapter. Which, I argue, plays its role in discrimination being believed to be a personal decision.

B. Normalisation of ethnic discrimination in the public discourse

As it was argued in the previous section, in the Soviet Union discrimination was positioned in a specific manner: a publicly spoken agenda of ethnic equality and unacceptability of ethnic discrimination of a Soviet citizen coincided with a covert, underhand but socially acceptable knowledge of ethnic differences and discrimination. This may be colloquially phrased in a Soviet-time saying: “Все всё понимают”, translated as “Everyone understands everything” (Glebov [Глебов], 2015): there is no need for something to be said out loud to be a part of reality. On the contrary, some things are intentionally kept silent. As no significant change was introduced on the social or state level, this pattern transitioned from the Russian SFSR to the Russian Federation. Here are some examples of how the discourse of discrimination is silently normalized in the Russian state.

On the governmental level one may distinguish several types of normalization. Firstly, in parallel with the anti-discriminatory clause of the constitution, more anti-immigrant laws are being introduced every year. Among them, e. g., is the additional legalisation of obtaining the residence and working permits that make immigration to Russia even more bureaucratically complicated and less attractive. “You are not welcome here”, says the Russian government without explicitly saying it. Secondly, on the level of executive power, specific attention is paid to the working class low-income ethnic minority groups. Some of recent police actions were directed towards the sanctioned clearances of immigrant dormitories⁹ or one-night displacement of private small immigrant-owned businesses¹⁰ known as ‘The Night of the Long Shovel Dippers’. Thirdly, the lack of state actions also signals about the normality of ethnic discrimination. There are no official statistics on the number of lawsuits won or even filed on the grounds of ethnic discrimination. The number of cases won on discrimination in general can be counted on the fingers of one's hand and one of

⁹ <https://novayagazeta-vlad.ru/2021/09/16/3943/yarost-v-buzhaninovo.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/02/09/8064839.shtml>

them include discrimination based on race or ethnicity¹¹. “It is almost impossible to win a lawsuit against ethnic discrimination in Russia”, researchers conclude (Veterinarov and Ivanov, 2018, p. 3).

As a result one can see the steady worsening of the attitude towards immigrants and people of ethnic minorities (will be discussed properly in the next section of the Chapter). Among other things, it includes an increase in immigrantophobia visible in the social polls and the rise of the ethnicity-centered discourse when describing crimes in pro-governmental newspapers. A ‘positive’ signal of normalization of discrimination can be seen in the oppositional discourse where people try to speak on the topics muted in the wide public discourse. In the last years, the number of grass-root anti-discriminatory projects has increased: now one can find some topic-specific local media that fight against discrimination of people of color¹², or even such a rare thing in present-day Russia as a trade union: a visible functioning union of food delivery professionals¹³.

To conclude, as in Soviet discourse before, normalization of discriminatory acts against immigrants and ethnic minorities through the state actions (or lack thereof) that is followed by the public silencing of the problem of discrimination persists in present-day Russia. This context, I argue, explains the state of being in which the discourse of discrimination is located in the private sphere of decision, and not in the public one as it is the case in the Western liberal countries.

C. Ethnic discrimination in the present-day Russia

One of the answers to that would be that ethnic discrimination is widely normalized in Russia. Neither academic research, nor sociological data question the wide presence of ethnic and racial discrimination in Russia.

According to the latest all-Russian population census published to date, conducted in 2010, the largest non-Russian ethnic groups living in Russia are the Tatar, the Ukrainian, the Chechen, and the Armenian¹⁴. They are also the most recognisable:

¹¹ <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/06/11/tolko-slavyanam>
<https://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/casesHDIM.pdf>

¹² <https://www.instagram.com/agasshin/>

¹³ https://vk.com/courier_fight

¹⁴ <http://www.statdata.ru/nacionalnyj-sostav-rossii>

among the most recognised ethnic names are Ukrainian, Jewish, Tatar, and those originating from the Caucasus region (Bessudnov and Shcherbak, 2020, p. 109). However, these ethnicities are not among the most discriminated in Russia. One of the problems, gaining social attention and adding to the ethnic discrimination in Russia, is immigrantophobia.

According to the poll conducted by Levada Center, one of the leading sociological agencies in Russia, in 2019, twenty-three percent of respondents mentioned international and immigrational problems among those worrying Russians most¹⁵. Moreover, 70% of the Moscow's population considered the number of working immigrants to be excessive, and 30% of respondents all over Russia would prefer not to let 'people of the Central Asian origin (the Tajik, the Uzbek)' who constitute the majority of immigrant work force in Russia enter the country at all¹⁶. Natalia Zotova *et al.* in their work on the situation concerning the discrimination of immigrants from Central Asia: "The phenotype of Central Asian immigrants — a darker complexion of the Kyrgyz, the Tajik, and the Uzbek, and more pronounced Asiatic traits in the Kyrgyz — distinguishes them from ethnic Russians and other Slavs and turn them into visible minorities, perceived as different and often subjected to ethnic and racial harassment" (Zotova et al., 2021, p. 3). Interestingly, this visibility coincides with the low rate of Central Asian population in Russia in general. The Uzbek and Tajik constitute only 0.4% of Russia's population and 0.5% of Moscow population¹⁷.

Surely, Central Asians are not the only ones often discriminated in Russia. Indeed, the social distance with the Roma people (Russian: "цыгане") and those of African origin is even bigger for Russians than that with people of Central Asian origin¹⁸. Social distance is one of the main sociological instruments to measure xenophobia and ethnophobia among people. It measures the acceptable closeness of communication with the ethnic Other bearable to the respondent. This instrument shows that only around 83% of Russians would prefer not to be in a personal acquaintance with people from Central Asia, 84% — with people of African origin,

¹⁵ <https://www.levada.ru/2019/09/18/monitoring-ksenofobskih-nastroenij-2/>

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ <http://www.statdata.ru/nacionalnyj-sostav/moskvy>
<http://www.statdata.ru/nacionalnyj-sostav-rossii>

¹⁸ <https://www.levada.ru/2019/09/18/monitoring-ksenofobskih-nastroenij-2/>

and 89% would prefer not to contact Roma people personally¹⁹, and these numbers have been rising over the last years²⁰.

Another way to study discrimination is to ask people how they perceive it. Mikhailov and partners (2020), a private analytical agency, state that the top three ethnicities that are recognised as being the most discriminated are the Tajik, the Uzbek, and those from the Caucasus region²¹. Speaking numbers, 23% of respondents believe that the Uzbek and the Tajik constitute the most discriminated ethnicity and 11% of respondents think that Central Asians are discriminated in Russia. Notably, the ethnicity that follows the ones mentioned above in being perceived as discriminated is Russians: one of eight respondents are convinced that Russians are discriminated in Russia²².

D. Ethnic discrimination on the Russian rental market

Little is known about the Russian rental housing market and even less is known about the discrimination on it. According to studies, around 10% of property is rented in Russia²³ (Gorbachevskaya, 2021), while 86% of housing is held private (Khmelnitskaya, 2013). One of the recent surveys shows, however, that this is not the case for immigrants. May Michigami's research (2018) provides data on the housing conditions of immigrants in Russia. This study shows that 67% of immigrants rent an apartment, mostly living together with 2 other people in a very small apartment of around 30 sq. m. with only around 11 sq. m. per capita (to compare with the general population that has around 26 sq. m. of living space per capita (Rosstat, 2019)). Only about 10% of immigrants looking for housing found an apartment with the help of a real estate agent, while the majority used word of mouth and interpersonal connections. This may indirectly reveal the discriminatory behavior that immigrants are encountered with when contacting a real estate agent. Since the scope of research data is limited, let us sketch up a theory of discrimination on the rental market in Russia ourselves.

¹⁹ <https://www.levada.ru/2019/09/18/monitoring-ksenofobskih-nastroenij-2/>

²⁰ <https://adcmemorial.org/statyi/kolonki/novaya-etika-i-starinnaya-realnost/>

²¹ <https://m-p-a.ru/proekt-myi-schitaem-tolerantnost-rossiya-za-ili-protiv.html>

²² *ibid.*

²³ <https://nafi.ru/analytics/10-millionov-rossiyan-zhivut-v-semnom-zhile/>

It is common knowledge supported by a number of facts a lot of people are ethnically discriminated on the real estate market specifically while attempting to rent a flat. However, both the legal context and the state discourse do not act to prevent discrimination. Even having a constitutional right to not be discriminated and having been promised protection against the violation of this law by the liberal state theory with the citizenship, racial discrimination on the real estate market in Russia seems to be institutionally not really regulated, neither by the state nor by (almost non-existent) trade unions. The fact that there is no institutionalized reputation institute, such as professional associations or licensing of the rental agents adds to this picture. There are no professional or legal sanctions for obvious discrimination; basically one may choose herself whether she will discriminate people or not.

My argument poses that this specific state of affairs can be theoretically explained through the perspective of the public/private distinction. In the next Chapter I will elaborate on the concepts of the public and the private, discuss how the border between them is constructed and explain the role of the feminist research in addressing the issue. My research adds to the scope of critical feminist research of the private/public distinction, arguing that in Russia discrimination is believed to refer to the private sphere of decision. This is an important finding, as it has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it raises a point about critical studies of knowledge production. I argue that the public/private distinction itself is context-specific and the way it is presented mirrors mostly the historical and practical experience of the Western liberal states. My research, therefore, helps rethink the concept of the public/private division, and reposition it as a piece of knowledge that needs to be approached critically when using it in a non-Western context. In addition to that, my research findings add rare data to the scope of research on the ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia. It provides another perspective on the statistics of discrimination, as well as opens a space for personal voices of the members of ethnically discriminated minorities.

Chapter III – Literature review

My research adds simultaneously to two topics: theoretically to the public/private discrimination and the place of discrimination in it and contextually to the scope of research on the ethnic discrimination on the rental market, providing a rare data on the Russian rental market.

A. Public/private

As my thesis argues, ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia is understood by the property owners and rental agents as a decision that should be made in the private sphere, not in the public one. In other words, professional rental market actors see discrimination as an activity that should not be regulated from the outside. This finding, supported by the data that I analyse in the next Chapter, adds to the huge scope of literature in legal, political and feminist studies that discusses the public/private distinction. My theoretical argument supports the circle of works that sees the public/private divide as non-fixed, constructed, and tied to the cultural and political context of society. Most importantly, it justifies that many types of discrimination (and not only sex-based) are influenced by the public/private split. For that, I suggest that more attention should be devoted to studies of ethnic/racial discrimination in the public/private divide. My study can be seen as an early attempt of making a path for this type of research.

In order to explain my theoretical implications, firstly, I will briefly present the history of the concept of the public/private divide to highlight the changing nature of what constitutes the public and the private. Secondly, I will list critical claims around the distinction and its nature. Thirdly, I will shortly summarize the role of feminist research in rethinking these concepts and point out the topic that received little attention in the works, namely, ethnic/racial discrimination and its connection to the the public or the private. Finally, I will propose the reasons that may have lead to discrimination being understood as a private affair in modern Russia. After which, in the next Chapter, I will elaborate on the empirical research I conducted.

1. Theorizing the public and the private

The division between the public and the private has been used in political and legal studies for a long time. There are several definitions of what refers to the public and the private. It is important to understand that what constitutes the public and the private is context-specific and depends on time, politics, and social events of the time when this division is theorized. I argue that modern understandings are also Western-oriented as they practically rely on the legal cases formed in the U.S. and theoretically stem from Western liberal political thought. Most of the theories, I argue, do not challenge the positionality of such fundamental concepts as ethnicity or race in the public/private dichotomy. For that, one should regard critically the concepts she uses, as the concepts' meaning may change depending on the context discussed. Thus, discrimination that is set up as a public issue, I argue, in Russian context is believed to be a private choice. So, a researcher may imply the things that are context-dependent without implying it.

The public/private division can be traced back to Aristotle (Elshtain, 1974, Arneil, 2001) with the political issues located in the public domain and the domestic issues sent to the private domain. Early modern theorists of the state based their ideas on Aristotelian account, constructing the public as being populated by the rational politically active citizens who equally participate in the decision-making processes. One of two influential representatives of liberal political theory, John Locke, sees rights as natural, pre-state and pre-given, with a need to protect them from the coercive power of the state (Horwitz, 1981). Thus, in this account, such 'natural' rights as owning property belong to the protected private sphere. Another theorist, Thomas Hobbes, argues that rights are given to the citizen when she enters civil society and are protected by the state (Brest, 1981). In this line, for constitutional positivists all rights, including the right to set up contracts or to hold property, would be public rights. Hegel creates a completely different division of the public and the private. He bases on Locke's vision of the public domain as coercive and opposes it to the private that he understands as affectionate. However, in his perception, both the state (according to Locke) and civil society (according to Hobbes) refer to the public domain (Sampford, 1991).

In the modern political theory the public/private divide is brought up in the debates of republicans and democrats. Liberal democrats see marriage, sex, and birth as

private issues that should not be regulated externally, and the market as a public one. Republicans, on the other hand, argue that private property is something that should be protected by the state and therefore viewed as public, while familial matters, they argue, influence state's citizenship and therefore should be under the control of the public gaze (Mnookin, 1981).

However, as feminist theorists argue, one should be careful in drawing a line between the concepts that share the same name but describe realities of different historical periods.

The following short list of traditions shows how different streams of political thought ascribe not only different functions to the public and the private, but fill both parts of division with different meanings. In general, after a quick research of the literature concerned with the public/private divide one may find a plenty of accounts on what constitutes each of the two:

- Public = state vs. private = economics (Gal and Kligman, 2000)
- Public = state economics vs. private = market (Gal and Kligman, 2000)
- Public = political vs. private = apolitical (Aristotle in Elshtain, 1974)
- Public = state-apparatus vs. private = corporations (Sampford, 1991)
- Public = influencing people as a whole vs. private = influencing only the actor (Sampford, 1991)
- Public = known and observed vs. private = unknown, unobserved, free from (the gaze of) the other (Gavison, 1992)

In general, the list once again supports the idea that the understandings of public/private divide change throughout history. Feminist authors would develop this argument even further, stressing that the distinction is not only context-dependent, it is also ideological. The term 'ideological' here is used in two senses: what constitutes the public and the private, firstly, derives from the ideological background of the theorists, and, secondly, shapes the perception of how the social world should function.

Many feminist theorists argue that the divide itself is an aspect of ideology (Gal and Kligman, 2000). Others criticize 'the given nature' of the public/private distinction or the vagueness of it (Gavison, 1992). Another line of critique refers to the non-fixed

boundaries between the public and the private (Gal, 2002). Sampford (1991) assumes that there are several public/private distinctions and not just one, while other feminists believe that there is no distinction at all: everything is political, or, rather, 'personal is political' as formulated by Carol Hanish (in Lee, 2007). The general feminist argument will be that the distinction simply does not match women's experiences (Heath, 2000).

The biggest topic feminist theorists are concerned with when discussing the public/private distinction is the gendered nature of the divide, constantly unnoticed by political theorists. In the earliest schemes of the division, the public domain was not populated by just equal social contractors of any kind, they were grown up male political actors of the ethnic/racial majority only. Women, children, and slaves were not understood as equal, on the contrary, they were seen just as labor force that helps create the goods that will be decided upon by in the public domain (Elshtain, 1974, p.454). Carole Pateman, among other feminist scholars, shows that the story of the public/private division is a male story at first. The public and the private are thus gendered: the public is male and the private is female. Pateman reads the Enlightenment theorists through the feminist perspective, looking at how Locke's theory of natural rights is based on the notion of fraternity and social contract, and how this division in general is oppressive to women through the whole societal history (Pateman, 1988, 1989).

To delve deeper into her trailblazing works, in 'The Sexual Contract' (1988) the author argues that there is a distinct gendered subordination in the 'new civil order' that is 'omitted' or 'forgotten' because after the first division of society into public (civil society) and private (domestic sphere), the patriarchal civil society is then divided into the public sub-sphere that is concerned with civic freedoms and the private, that is irrelevant and does not constitute the case for analysis. Exactly within this 'private-in-the-public' lies the sexual contract: a clear idea of subordination of women, fixed in the marriage contract or even in the job contract (as to create an entity of paid work there should also be domestic unpaid labor). Here Pateman makes two arguments: the first one is concerned with the codependency of the public and the private, that feminist scholars usually point out. The second one is the connection between the patriarchal right and the capitalist abuse of workers: Carole Pateman provides an

example of the prostitution industry as a public image of class-dependent patriarchal relationship (Pateman, 1988, p. 17).

In another book, 'The Disorder of Women' (1989), Pateman continues her argument explaining that women are perceived as a threat to the moral civil order of men for their close connection to the natural, and for that, women are excluded from the public domain (p. 4). However, she argues, their exclusion is not full. Women are incorporated in it but not as individuals. They are incorporated as *women*, as private beings dependent on men and having fewer political rights and occupying a specific place within society, a private one. For Pateman, the liberal separation of the public and the private upon which rests the whole modern civil order, 'hides' the exclusion of women from universal rights. Another line of division of civic culture, along with gender, is class: working-class wives were always included into the public sphere, however, also almost unseen. The author argues that this once again the sexual division of labor and the continuity of it from the private (domestic) sphere to the public (workplace) one.

To sum up, the public/private divide has a long tradition of theoretical discussion. Feminist authors that point out the constructed nature of the divide and the ideological essence of the line the distinctions is drawn upon hold an important place. By criticizing the public/private distinction, feminist scholars and activists were able to highlight discriminative practices accepted in society (Mnookin, 1981, Klare in Sampford, 1991). However, most of the research was dealing with the oppression of women, in some cases adding the perspective of class, even when acknowledging that the public/private distinction "hides" other forms of oppression as well. The other forms of discrimination such as ethnicity- or race-based did not find their place of attention, notwithstanding the reality of discrimination, arguably both in the public and in the private. Some of the feminist research challenges the feminist critics of the public/private divide for being color-blind (bell hooks on Susan Okin in Arneil, 2001, Landes, 2003).

Modern understandings of the public/private divide are theoretically and practically located in the Western perspective and, as some authors argue, are being Eurocentric (Thompson in Landes, p. 29). This context and the public/private distinction that follows it, shape the way theoretical constructs are understood on a

broader scale. As I will highlight later, in regard of race, the public/private divide was settled decades ago.

In the U.S. legal tradition, the understanding of where the dividing line between the public and private decisions lies is created in the process of legal disputes: “If we now know more about the location of the border between public and private action, this is rather because the Court has pricked out more reference points than because it has elaborated any satisfying theory” (Friendly, 1981, p. 4). The racial discrimination question was finalized in 1976, when it was legally decided that “Section 1981 not only required a state to give blacks and whites the same legal rights in contracting, but also forbade private racial discrimination in the making of contracts in the case at hand, the refusal by two private schools in Virginia to admit black children as pupils” (Karst, 1989, p. 1). Thus, it may be said that at least after 1976, ethnic/racial discrimination was less and less seen as a possibly private decision. Legal practice makes it clear: there is no place for discrimination in private contracts. Modern legislature remains the same: European public law is concerned with the fair allocation of goods which is the other name for what we in social sciences call discrimination (Cherednychenko, 2020).

I suggest that because of specific social context, the Western-oriented one, where race was legally and socially accepted as a public issue without further changes and theoretical encounters, little attention was devoted to the question of the ethnic/racial discrimination’s position in the public/private split. My research covers this gap by pointing out the ‘abnormality’ of the reaction provoked by the introduction of an anti-discriminatory policy, and theorizing it in terms of the public/private division. In my work I argue that, unlike the general Western context, in the Russian context ethnicity/race is placed in the private domain. Here I will discuss the place of ethnicity/race in the distinction and its connection to the local social, historical and political context of present day Russia.

2. Ethnic discrimination and public/private

In literature, discrimination usually refers to the public sphere. It can be noticed, among other places, that racial/ethnic discrimination that happens even within the sphere that is assumed private (on the economic market, in the streets, in social

media) is regulated either by the state or by the policies introduced by private companies (such as hate speech on Instagram) and is assumed as a usual, expected, not abnormal thing by the majority of the Western population.

As my data shows, however, in the case of ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia, actors of this sphere perceive discrimination as a private choice. This finding (1) adds to the argument of the constructed nature of the public/private split, (2) indicates the influence of the historical, social, and political context, and, most importantly, (3) justifies that many types of discrimination (and not only the sex-based one) are influenced by the split. All of this leads to the conclusion that more attention should be devoted to studying ethnic/racial discrimination in the public/private split. In my research I argue that discrimination that is generally believed (in the Western academia) to be a social issue regulated by the state with the help of civil society and therefore referring to the public sphere of decision, in modern Russia is socially believed to be decided within the private domain. Although discrimination in fact is regulated by the state in the constitution which makes it a public issue in every sense possible, according to the data I provide in this research, people usually keep this fact silent, referring to the constitution only to argue for the freedom of speech.

I personally will try to use terms ‘the public’ and ‘the private’ without strict definitions, as one of this work’s objectives is to construct what is understood as public and private. However, if a definition is needed, I would propose to see private as a sphere that ‘needs’ to be hidden, either from the state or from the moral norms of civil society. Or even narrower, in contemporary liberal society, private is a sphere where discrimination and other forms of oppression are legitimized, openly or by keeping things silent. From a feminist lens, this can be unwrapped from the other side, citing Ruth Gavison, “the private is public for those for whom the personal is political” (Gavison, 1992, p.2). I see the public and the private as nested theoretical constructions that, agreeing with Susan Gal, can be divided into more ‘publics’ and ‘privates’ by zooming in and out (Gal, 2002). To my mind, the public and the private would stem from the words of the people I base my analysis on. When a commentator says: “this is none of your business”, I read it as “this belongs to my *private* sphere”. It also speaks to the definition given by Scruton that private is where “the individual can tolerate no right of control in anyone but himself” (in Sampford, 1991, p. 190).

In the next part of the Chapter I provide possible answers to the question of why people expect discrimination to belong to the private sphere of decision. I will present a perspective of the individual rights paradigm, discuss the historical past and present of Russia that may have come into interplay in the case, and briefly state the complications that come with the discrimination happening online.

There are two streams of thought in the liberal political theory. In the first one the rights are natural, unalienable and given pre-state, whilst in the second one citizens entering the civil society relinquish all natural rights and possess only those granted by legislatures and other lawmaking institutions, called a constitutional positivism paradigm (Brest, 1981, p. 3). These two accounts on the rights may come into interplay in an attempt to define where the dividing line between the public and the private lies. In other words, the parties holding opposite opinions on who gives one certain rights and, therefore, what applies to the public and what to the private, may not agree on what refers to the realm of public or private.

This reverberates with the inconsistent (at the first glance) claims made by the commentators. The first one is that it is one's natural right to manage one's property, thus referring to the natural right paradigm and viewing property operations as a private matter, including the choice to discriminate while choosing a renter. At the same time, like-minded people may raise a vocal concern about the CIAN policy contradicting the state-protected constitutional legal right to the freedom of speech. In other words, for those commentators, discrimination in property management was a private issue, while they considered the announcement of certain rules imposed by a private company to be a 'discrimination against Slavs', which was still in the realm of the public.

Another possible viewpoint may be the one of the rights violation. Theoretically, justice in the Rawlsian perspective bases, among others, on the principle of fair equality of opportunity, or the non-discrimination principle, which protects all other rights from violation (Arneson, 2009, p.3). In addition to that, one of the duties that human rights entail is a duty to take action when one's rights are violated (Shue in Donnelly, 2009). Following this logic, the discrimination of opportunities, the case of which would be ethnic discrimination when attempting to rent a flat, should be the distortion of the very justice principle in the public domain. However, it looks like the 'Slav' commentator perceived the aforementioned announcement not as a protection

of minorities' rights, but as a violation of their own right, e.g., free speech. One may ask how it is possible when using the provided theoretical models? My preliminary answer to that would be that the commentators perceive these interactions as taking place not in the public realm of the civil society but in the private domain. One of the pieces of evidence supporting for this idea, would be that the reaction to the perceived violation of the commentator's human rights was not to file a lawsuit against the company, but to raise vocal concerns in less state-governed spaces, such as social media.

3. Possible explanations for the Russian case

After arguing why ethnic discrimination belongs to the private discourse, I will sketch a set of possible social, historical, and political explanations of how one may theorize the existence of such a situation. As I showed earlier, the border between the public and the private, if it ever exists, is formed by the social context. I argue that the context of the Russian political regime with a long history of totalitarian communism, the transition to liberal democracy, and a steady shift to the authoritarian state with a decaying reminiscence of democratic institutions, shaped the way people understand the public and the private. Apart from the socio-historical factor that I will describe below, one of the aspects adding to the situation is the online form of discussion between CIAN and the commentators.

As Susan Gal argues, in communist times everything was public (Gal, 2002, p. 86). This statement, I believe, refers not only to the management of social institutes such as security, education, marriage, etc., but also speaks to the fact that the most private things, namely words and actions in the social sphere, were also regulated by the state at the most totalitarian times of Russian's history. This past, in my opinion, still influences the present in several ways. I can assume that there is a widely shared discontent with the governmental control of one's 'personal life'. After regaining some privacy and freedom of decision, people are not willing to give this control back to any institution that may attempt to grasp it. Therefore, the previous inability to decide for oneself on the topics connected to the daily life may have lead to the counter-movement of 'privatisation' of decision in the 'domestic' sphere. The other habit s imposed by the state that may have stemmed from the totalitarian times is the learned self-silencing. In the reality when publicly stating one's disagreement could

result in repressions, the critique of social reality, which in this context meant literally everything, was allocated to the private, close, trusted people and spaces. According to this logic, the frustration with CIAN's policy that in more liberal democratic context may have lead to legal disputes, was habitually assigned to the private discussion in more or less safe space of the Internet. In post-totalitarian regimes such as the present-day Russia the role of civil society is almost invisible. It is explained by the historical Soviet context that did not allow the organizations not managed by the state to flourish. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union that gave the opportunity to finally build organized structures, people did not trust any kind of organization that had a right to decide, either state-governed or privately handled (Howard in Chambers and Kopstein, 2009, p. 5). To summarize, the communist and totalitarian Soviet legacy supposedly can play a role in Russians' current habit of putting emphasis on personal decisions in the domains directly connected with daily lives and of not raising public concern when disagreeing with the actions of a huge decision maker as a corporation.

As was argued in the previous Chapter, Russia has a long history of ethnic discrimination. However, the history of erasing ethnic discrimination from the public narrative is just as long. One of the imperial moves to create a unity out of discrete states was the creation of a Soviet citizen, a comrade (Russian: "товарищ"), one that can be of any ethnicity but in her essence is indistinguishable from other Soviet people. In the realm of actions, however, ethnic-based oppression was obvious. In the present Russia, I suggest, the story continues: ethnic discrimination is not present in the state's actions (or lack of such) but in the public discourse. And if it is not public and the state does not acknowledge the existence of discrimination, then discrimination is private. Thus, it is not just the habit of not raising concerns that Russians may have inherited from the Soviet Union, but the 'privatization' of discrimination specifically.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the economic model of regulation started to transition into the market economic model. Previously, the state made decisions in spheres that now are seen as private: education, health, housing, etc. However, after 1991, many of state-governed domains 'grew' a private sector: private schools, private health insurance companies, a private market of rental property. Out of the indicated domains, housing is the one that distanced from the state regulation most:

92% of all housing is owned privately (Rosstat, 2019, p. 15), out of 4 Russian national priority projects the housing project received the smallest financing²⁴, and the general amount of housing aid received from the state helps only 4% of the population yearly and this number has been decreasing (p. 17). For many Russians, especially for those who went through ‘the shock therapy’ of the market opening, having private property is one of the biggest life goals. “According to some experts, the lack of their own housing in Russia is associated with an unsuccessful life. The attachment of Russians to property is easily explained. After all, for 70 years, people did not have anything in their property until it was possible to privatize housing” (Gorbachevskaya and Gimelshtein, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, private property may be perceived as something even more private than, say, getting married or getting a job. And as ‘private’ implies, it should be managed without interference. If the state does not interfere, why should one allow some private company to control the management of the property?

Finally, another possible actor in this complicated system of implicit motivations and values is the space in which the argument between CIAN and the commentators occurs. Many authors argue that the Internet presents a peculiar entity that “challenges the traditional concepts of the public and the private” (Lasén and Gómez-Cruz, 2009, p. 205). The privacy of personal accounts and anonymity, the publicity of the online space, the ideal representation of a *forum*. The privacy of websites (each controlled by a specific person, company or institution, being in fact a type of private property), the publicity of access to the websites (Cohen and O’Byrne, 2013). The Internet is still a pretty new invention by the standards of political theory, with neither users, nor legislators or theorists having a strict understanding as to which realm (the public or to the private) everything that happens there refers. One thing is apparent, and it is the not fixed nature of the Internet and everything that happens online. In that ambiguity, I think, the implicit concepts of ethnic discrimination on the rental housing market can be practised unrestrictedly.

²⁴ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202012300039?index=0&rangeSize=1>

B. Discrimination on the rental market

A lot of research is done on discrimination on the rental market. Since the 1980s, numerous works have been published researching which ethnicities are discriminated against on the rental market in various geographical locations, how gender intersects with ethnic discrimination, what are the roles of the agent and the property owner in this process. Now this topic has gotten its second wind as incorporation of the Internet into the everyday life practices gave one new opportunities to delve into the processes of discrimination on the real estate market through online mediators. In my work I also engage with the topic of discrimination, specifically highlighting how discrimination is perceived within the public/private split. However, in my opinion it is impossible to understand the influence of the research without knowing how it speaks to the field of works on discrimination on the rental market in general. My thesis adds specifically to the scarce area of research on discrimination on the Russian rental market. The quantitative part of my results draws the general picture showing which minority groups reside in a situation of normalized ethnic discrimination. In the next section I will briefly describe the general scope of research on discrimination on the rental market, discuss its legal side, and contemplate the role of the Internet in the process of discrimination on the rental market.

In the last fifty years, the major focus of research on discrimination on the rental market was directed towards establishing the statistics of discrimination on the real estate market of the Global North. Most of the research used field experiments as methods of collecting data, usually contacting real estate agents or property owners via phone (this is called mystery calls), emails, built-in chats on platform or other forms of online communications, and even personal meetings. In the Russian context, however, the little research that exists looks at the description of realty advertisements and analyzes them quantitatively in an attempt to understand how widespread the problem of discrimination is. The level of discrimination is usually measured as the acceptance rate of the applications, the rental cost gap, and the general effort that a future renter has to make in order to finally rent a property.

1. Ethnic discrimination

Meta-analysis shows that even after eliminating publication bias, ethnic discrimination persists around the globe, however, levels of discrimination decline with time (Auspurg et al., 2019). As expected, research has shown that both real estate agents and property owners are more willing to see generic 'White people' as renters. In the U.S. context people of Black, Asian, or Hispanic origin were discriminated against, in Europe there were people of Arab origin/ Muslims, and even Eastern Europeans were ethnically discriminated in the case of Scandinavia. In all cases, members of ethnic/racial minority groups either struggled more during the search process or had to pay more than people perceived as White would pay for the same property.

Christensen and Timmins (2021) show that race 'costs' African Americans 4.7% of their yearly income and 10 to 30% more effort while searching. When it comes to communication, people from minority groups are 3 to 17% less likely to receive a call-back (Neumark & Rich, 2019) and 5 to 30% less likely to be told that the property advertised was unavailable (for the Black and the Hispanic) (Oh & Yinger, 2015). More subtle forms of discrimination were also studied. According to the study of Hanson et al. (2011) property owners were more keen on responding to White future renters in comparison to African-Americans. It took them less time to respond and their replies contained more useful information such as personal contacts of the owner, invitations to viewings, thorougher descriptions of the property. In addition to that, the answers were more polite in general. Online, Caucasian users were shown more realty advertisements than African-American (Asplund et al., 2020).

2. Hierarchies of discrimination

There is a kind of a hierarchy within ethnic/racial discrimination on the rental market. Arabs/Muslims are most discriminated against of all the studied minority groups. Then come Black people. Asians, Hispanics, and Eastern Europeans the least discriminated minority groups (Auspurg et al., 2019). Continuing with hierarchies, some studies looked at how ethnic/racial discrimination interplays with gender (Ewens et al., 2014) or class (Rich, 2014, Flage, 2018). Ethnic/racial discrimination is

more evident when the potential renters are perceived to be from the lower class, but in some location there was discrimination even when confronting people of different ethnicities from the upper class (Hanson & Hawley, 2011). In another study Lauster and Easterbrook (2011) showed that landlords prefer heterosexual couples to single parents or same-sex couples. However, a partial explanation for this is class-dependent: authors argue that the primary reason for discrimination of single parents is the prejudice about their economic stability.

Proceeding with gender, real estate agents would be most happy if the renter were a White woman, then comes a White man, then a woman from a minority group, and only then comes a male member of a minority group. A study of Ahmed & Hammarstedt (2008) clarifies that people with Swedish sounding names received more call-backs and were offered more viewings than people with Muslim names. Another interesting fact, however, is that a Swedish woman was more likely to move further in the rental process after applying for a property than a Swedish man. This hierarchy not only matches the common expectations but also follows the theories of social psychology.

In social studies this phenomenon is generally explained through the concept of benevolent sexism (Glick, Fiske, 1997). It explains that patriarchal norms and gender roles sometimes are shown as a 'positive attitude' towards women, still, however, continuing to be generally harmful to women in a broader sense. In particular situations, however, the social agreement of some general women's positive features play in their favor. Women are usually attributed such characteristics as cleanliness, trustworthiness, and higher morality in comparison to men (in a limited circle of cases). For that, as studies show, choosing between a male and a female renter of the same racial, ethnic, or religious group, preference is given to a woman.

3. Around the process of discrimination

In some studies authors differentiate between two types of discrimination, statistical and taste-based discrimination, in an attempt to grasp the driving forces that encourage discrimination / people to discriminate (Becker, Arrow in Auspurg et al., 2019). By taste-based discrimination writers usually mean the one that is grounded in personal prejudices against the other group (Verstraete & Verhaeghe, 2020, p.

705). This type of discrimination is usually referred to as economically irrational in opposition to statistical discrimination. In this type of discrimination, people rely on the previous experience that made them cautious about renting their flats to certain groups of people, sometimes even scared (Flage, 2018, p. 252). However, one should be cautious when connecting some negative experience with race or ethnicity. Social psychology states that people tend to connect 'outstanding features' with exceptional events (Agadullina, Lovakov, 2018). It explains how in the constructed vision of the world, visibly perceived differences such as skin-color-based race or religious/traditional ethnic clothes, and semiotically connected to their names, accents, or usage of language, often go along with exceptional events, such as non-normative behavior or physical harm. Thus, statistical discrimination would not mean that only people of a certain race, religion or ethnicity cause inconveniences for property owners, but that property owners and real estate agents are more prone to remember these events when they include 'the Other'. I consider this distinction to be superficial, however, I find it still important to discuss in order to understand how discrimination works in general and to be able to establish ways to reduce it.

Several articles propose ways to combat ethnic discrimination on the rental market. One of the prevalent suggestions would be giving more information about a member of ethnic/racial minority to lower the influence of group-related stereotypes in a particular case (Cui et al., 2020). However, according to research it helps reduce discrimination only from private landlords (Flage, 2018, p. 254). It is not the only way in which discrimination by different actors on the rental market varies. An important study was conducted by Verstraete and Verhaeghe (2020). They showed the unusual position where real estate agents may find themselves while navigating the owner's will to discriminate. The agents who agreed to help the owner not include people of ethnic minorities into the list of potential renters used the following techniques. Some just refused applications from ethnic minorities or did not include them in the list of applicants that they presented to the owner. Others suggested that the owner came up with the stricter rules of selection not including a direct ethnic criterion but implying it, e. g., looking for tenants with a high language proficiency and income. The latter showed the owner all candidates but indicated the ethnicity of the applicant on the list.

One may ask why do agents have to complicate the discrimination. The answer lies in the legal character of discrimination. In the Western countries ethnic, gender-based and other discrimination on the rental market (but not only there) is forbidden by both state legislature and professional organizations' rules. Since 2013, the Fair Housing Act proposed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development protects the members of a protected class ("including gender, race, color, disability, religion, familial status, or national origin") from discrimination by an owner or a rental agent (Asplund et al., 2020, p. 24). Even stricter rules are imposed on local level: in several states of the U.S. it is not allowed to even ask about applicant's race, religion, gender, or disability status (Cui et al., 2020, p. 1087). On the level of professional organizations internal codes of conduct are in effect, violation of which "may impose sanctions including a warning, a suspension or a withdrawal of licence to operate" (Verstraete and Verhaeghe, 2020, p. 704). Previously it was stated that the absolute levels of ethnic discrimination have declined in the last years, partly due to anti-racist and anti-discriminatory legislation, however, as can be seen in the case of real estate agents navigating discriminative wishes of the owners, discrimination still persists, the techniques of discrimination just changed.

4. The internet, Russia and the rental market

It is hard to believe that the essence of discrimination may change fast. Even with such a technological and social breakthrough as the Internet, not much has changed besides the way people search for the property (Asplund et al., 2020, p. 24). Authors argue that online platforms with hundreds of property advertisements, called online listings, combatted the inequalities in access to the rental advertisements, they did not equalize the supply (Boeing, 2020, p. 449). On the contrary, some argue that discrimination became even more visible on the Internet, which is definitely the case for the Russian rental market (Veterinarov & Ivanov, 2018, p. 2).

Apart from that fact, little is known about discrimination on the rental market in Russia, and ethnic discrimination in particular. A recent paper, published in the Social Science Research Network (SSRN, now belonging to Elsevier) without reference to any particular academic institution, is to my knowledge the only academic study that deals with the similar to my set of data. In their work, Victor Veterinarov and Vladimir Ivanov (2018) research the costs of ethnic discrimination on the Russian rental

market, drawing a picture of the state of ethnic discrimination. Using data from online listing CIAN (the same company that introduced the anti-discriminatory policy), they established that 5% of property advertisements in Saint-Petersburg and almost 19% in Moscow contain direct ethnic discrimination (p. 5). Ethnic entities that compiled the keyword list were the following: “‘Asia’, ‘Caucasus’, ‘Uzbek’, ‘Tajik’, ‘Kirgyz’, ‘Armenian’, ‘Russian’, ‘Ukrainian’, ‘Slav’ and their derivatives” (p. 6). The authors established that, in general, a property listed in an advertisement that contains “Slavs only” or any other similar sign of ethnic discrimination, costs less than a flat of the same type without specified choice of tenant. The authors explain this evidence through the lens of neighbourhood economic equilibrium: “[t]he higher density of discrimination around the landlord signals her or him the normality of expressing xenophobic views”, adding right after that an important theoretical implication, “[t]herefore the restrictions for landlords to discriminate explicitly by advertisement text can decrease the level of discrimination itself” (p. 19). At this point we do not yet know whether the ban of explicit discrimination, imposed by CIAN 3 years after the article was published, has a chance to lower the level of ethnic discrimination in Russia, but it looks like there is an agreement between the small group of researchers of ethnic discrimination on the rental market in Russia that this topic needs further scholarly and administrative attention.

To conclude and sum up this part of the chapter, discrimination on the rental market is a well-studied academically consistent phenomenon. While researching discrimination, authors usually ask a question of *how* people discriminate: who do they prefer, why, what are the justifications for it and the possible or factual outcomes of discrimination. In my research, however, I investigate the very concept of discrimination, asking *who can make decisions* about discrimination. In other words, I am describing the situation based on the data of how people conceptualize their own acts of discrimination, whose prerogative it is to discriminate. This question, I argue, can be best explained through the lens of the public/private distinction.

My research covers several gaps at once. Firstly, it provides new statistics of discrimination, widening the scope of knowledge of who are discriminated against on the Russian rental market. Secondly, it gives space to the participants of the discrimination process. From the side of the property owners and real estate agents, it shows how ethnic discrimination in Russia is justified. From the side of

discriminated minorities, it shows their frustration and even highlights how blunt discrimination may be more 'enjoyable' than the hidden one. Thirdly, my research relies on non-traditional data, namely, not on field experiments or listing advertisements analysis but on the analysis of first-person data, therefore, more native and ecological.

This study sheds light on the constructivist character of the public/private division and stresses that it is shaped by the historical, political, and cultural context. Additionally, it may serve as another reminder to engage critically with the concepts used to explain the social reality and urge researchers to localize theories and thus widen our understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Chapter IV – Methodology

After arguing for the private nature of the decision on discrimination, I would like to proceed to the justifications of my assumptions. In this Chapter I will elaborate on the research design, including the explanation of what kind of data was obtained and in which way, how the data was analyzed and what are the limitations of the chosen methods of analysis. Apart from that, this chapter will shed light on the ethical constraints of the research as well as discuss how this study fits into the general category of intersectional analysis.

To analyze the discourse surrounding the ban on direct discrimination in order to show how people understand discrimination and their role in the process of it, I used a complex mixed-method design of data analysis. Firstly, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the open access data that can be gathered in the web in relation to the event. The result of this analysis was in a form of the meaningful groups of data (clusters), that I used to make sense of the overall discourse around the event. Secondly, I qualitatively approached the clusters adopting the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to create a theory of the major discourses (here technically named as groups of clusters). Thirdly, I conducted a close reading of the data in an attempt to answer the broad research question: who's prerogative, people think, is it to discriminate? Both the leading discourses and the closely read pieces of data are presented in the next Chapter.

A. Introducing the research

It is not easy to analytically establish what people think, even harder is it when the goal is to show how occurred the change in the opinion. Gladly, this research initially had a starting point, and it is the announcement of a discrimination prohibition policy on the website of CIAN. This event triggered my academic interest, and the methodology of the study had just to comply to the question and the possibility of accessing the data.

After seeing the negative reaction to the anti-discriminatory announcement in the social media, I came up with a question: why do people hate it? Translating it into academic language, why do people negatively react to the new policy? What exactly

they do not like about it? What, in general, they think of it? To answer these questions I needed to somehow recreate the social discourse that was created around the event. And in order to be sure that it is event that formed the discourse, I also needed to compare it with the previous state of discourse. If now all that people talk about is the prohibition imposed by CIAN and its perceived discriminatory nature, was discrimination always in the centre of social attention around CIAN? How often were people noticing the discrimination on the rental market and what did they think about it? Having a preliminary scope of research questions I needed to answer a simple question: where do I find the data?

There are different types of data and the most convenient one for general analysis is verbal written data with easy access to it. Another methodologically important characteristic of the data is the way it is produced: natively or per request. The phenomenological approach posits that the way of discourse production influences the data, so in an attempt to access the natural social discourse around the discussed event I chose to focus on the data produced by the communicative actors themselves, not biased by my research question and theoretical presuppositions at least on the stage of production.

The Internet provides a large scope of data generated by the users that arguably represents a common discourse surrounding online marketplaces. Data connected to the event may be found by different means: social media such as VK, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram; forums on websites; comments and reviews, among others in reviews to mobile applications, and so on. Different sources suit different research tasks, and in the next paragraph I will elaborate on which requirements should the data source meet to fit the purposes of my analysis.

The choice of the sources for my research was formed by the following factors. The first of them is the *type of audience*. For this research I was looking for the general, not specific population, as the research question concentrates on the wide general discourse. The second characteristic is *richness* of the data. By this I mean to what extent is general discourse represented in this particular data source. It is possible to find a very particular account on the data if the data is provided only by the English-speaking websites and forums. Next come *accessibility* and *ethical correctness*. Some data may be useful, general and rich, but it is located in the closed forums, in this case I will say that it lacks accessibility. While the data that is provided by

personal messages, accessible to the researcher still should not be used due to ethical and legal limitations. Usually, it is not only unethical, but also illegal to use these sources of data. The last characteristic that can be applied to good research data is *unbiasedness*. For some data containing platforms, such as professional forums financed by some realty-related companies, it may be beneficial to regulate which data will be published or stored, in other words it may be censored. This will definitely influence the discourse built upon the data, which I try to avoid.

So, after carefully considering the above-mentioned factors, I decided to opt for the least biased open-access data sources that presumably would deliver the widest range of data: reviews of the CIAN application in Google Play and Apple Store. After deciding where to look for data one faces an issue of retrieving it. The most straightforward method may be gathering data by hand. This method is the most limited as well, as when we talk about tens of thousands of data pieces, manual copying and pasting may take months. Another way is to find the intermediary agent that would aggregate that data in another data format to lighten the burden of creating a data corpus by hand. The problem here may lie in the realm of access: some of these mediators give access on a paid basis or limit the amount of data they provide. The most transparent method may be to address the data holder and ask for access, and here a researcher asks for a favor which will not always be granted.

However, as CIAN is a relatively small company, to provide a data for research is more of an exceptional case than habit. CIAN's research team did me a great favor of providing me with the requested information. For CIAN-data there were no other gathering limitations besides the source (Apple Store and Google Play CIAN application reviews) and the dates (November, 29 - December, 19). The exact sourcing code used by the company's data analyst cannot be described here due to NDA. Let me here stop for a minute and elaborate on the specifics.

1. What is CIAN

To reiterate, I chose on the type of data: pieces of opinion in form of messages, social media posts, or other information natively produced by the individual in the online sphere. After reflecting on the possible ways to access the data, I opted for the open source data that any internet user can access without asking for the data

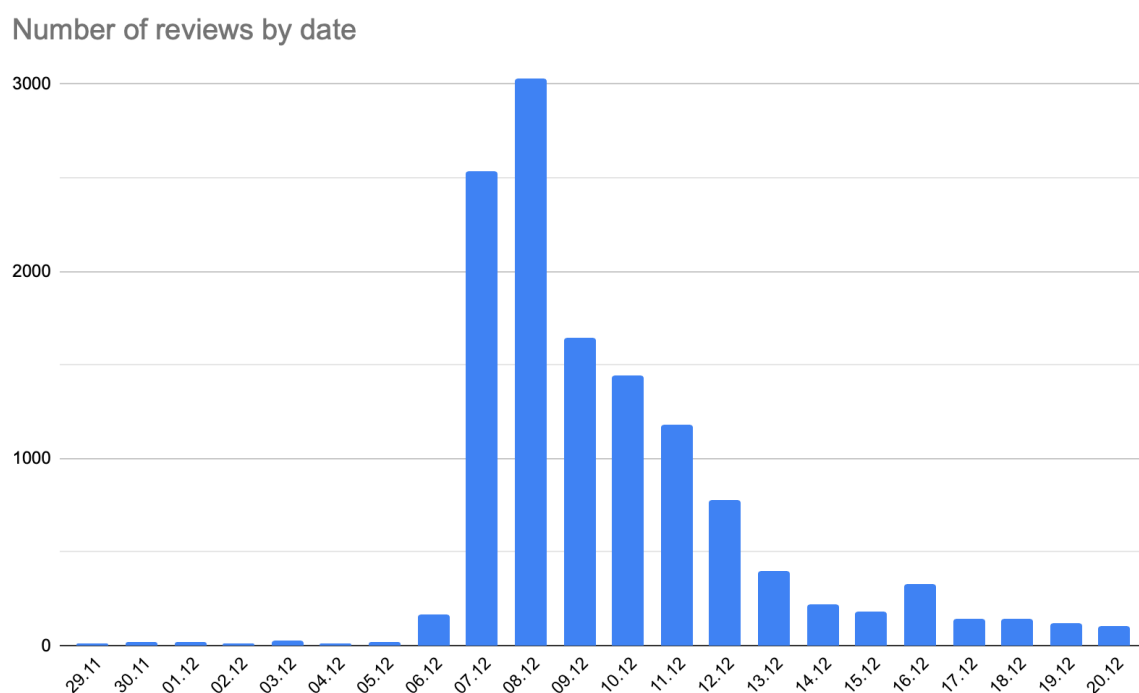
creator permission. This type of data was found in the reviews (or comments) people left on the mobile application of CIAN in the biggest online application markets such as Apple Store and Google Play. This data was provided by the company itself. The spokesman of the company knew only the research topic (ethnic discrimination on the rental market). We did not make any agreement limiting my research, neither did I own him or the company the presentation of the study results. This interaction, however, was totally legal, as the data they provided me with was an open source public data, so no No Disclosure Agreements from my side or permissions from users were needed.

As it was told recently, CIAN (Central Information Agency on Realty) is a privately owned enterprise online platform that provides services for property owners, realty agents, and realty searchers. It is mostly used as a property advertisement listing. If one looks for a flat to rent, she visits the platform online (either in the browser, or downloading a mobile application), specifies her search (the space, costs, location, etc. of the property) and sees a list of results with property descriptions and contact number of a realty agent or a property owner, depending on the advertisement. From the side of property owner/agent the process looks a bit different: a realty professional has a personal account where she can post a property advertisement with the description of the property that then will be visible to the searchers. This platform shows only a contact number of the realty professional and has no other entrance points for communication apart from that.

As stated above, CIAN functions as a website and as a model application, with the same basic functionality. To install the CIAN application, one needs to go to the application store, the two most popular of which are Apple Store and Google Play, depending on the operation system of the mobile phone. The store page, where the link to the application can be found, usually contains a review section that is by design devoted to gather information on whether users like or dislike the application. However, in many cases the review section becomes a platform to share an opinion, just as it happened with CIAN. The major reasons for that are the accessibility of the review section (everyone who has an account in an application store can share their opinion), the publicity of the review (it is seen to the other people who entered the application's page), and, I argue, the anonymity of the reviewer (neither the viewers, nor the company knows anything about the reviewer apart from her login).

Thus, the data I obtained had the following characteristics. It was a set of textual reviews openly published by the anonymous reviewers in the easy-access social-media like space limited by the date of the publishing. In general, my data set consisted of 12,549 reviews written in the period between December, 6, 2021 and December, 20, 2021, a week before the prohibition event (29.11-05.12) and two weeks after the event (06.12-19.12). See distribution of number of reviews per day in Figure 1. In the next section I will describe what operations were executed with the data in order to reestablish the discourse surrounding the event by understanding what new people wrote in reviews after the policy was introduced.

Figure 1. Number of reviews by date



2. Research design

The design of the research is as follows. First, the data containing the public evaluation of the work of CIAN in general was gathered. Second, it was divided into two samples: before the event and after. Third, the samples are analysed separately

using machine learning algorithms. Forth, the resulted outcome of the big data analysis was post-checked and generalised where possible.

Machine learning is an umbrella term used to describe methods that help analyze huge amounts of data. In social sciences more and more researchers rely on this method in order to discover, measure or interfere something in or about social reality (Grimmer et al., 2021). As some of the qualitative frameworks, machine learning analysis helps to “mov[e], in a principled way, from initial field notes and interviews toward the generation of organizations, explanations, and new hypotheses.” (Grimmer et al., 2021, p. 405). In the basic words, a computer system, or a machine, learns in a human-like way to operate with data, gradually improving with each iteration of learning. In a larger sense, an algorithm firstly looks at how a human would analyze the data (test dataset) and then try to do it itself (validation dataset). A human then checks whether the machine understood the problem and if not changes the parameters of the algorithm. This process is being reiterated as many times as needed for a human to agree with the results that the machine provides. In short, this is a human who works as a testing instrument for the adequacy and sufficiency of machine performance. When all parameters of an algorithm are set, the enormously large sets of data can be analyzed without spending hours of human attention.

In this particular case of data analysis in this thesis, what the machine did is called natural language processing. In this scope of methods, human language is being analyzed on the grounds of the sentences' the grammatical structure, semantics, syntax, etc. In the present case, meaningful parts of text reviews were mapped into the multidimensional space (particularly, here each word was represented with a 300-dimensional vector) with the following property: the closer the meaning of words, the closer are their word2vec images. Then, a clustering²⁵ algorithm was applied: dense agglomerations of vectors were grouped into clusters, thus, reviews with similar meanings were formed together. Model parameters were adjusted manually to get a reasonable segmentation of reviews. Thus, text reviews were mapped onto space as if they are mapped inside a human mind, and then the closest groups of vectors were formed into clusters.

²⁵ “Clustering methods partition observations into mutually exclusive categories, or clusters, using the principles of unsupervised dimension reduction.” (Grimmer et al., 2021, p. 407)

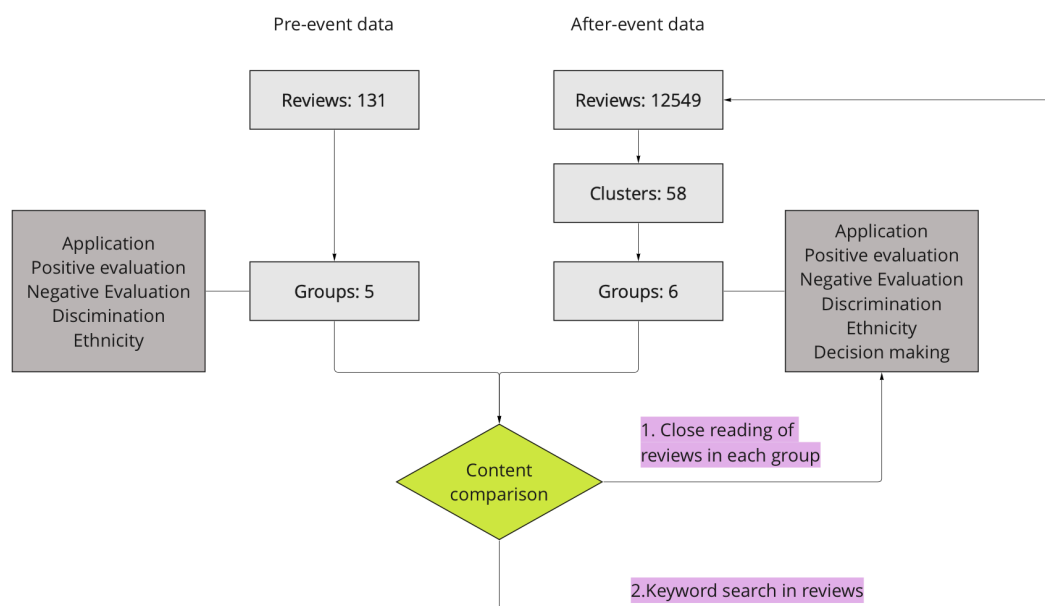
One can imagine it as sorting groceries in the fridge: I first put all the groceries on the table and put away the bags, then I put dairy products together, vegetables on the shelf, and bottles into the fridge door. The robot, or, in this case, a machine learning algorithm, looks at how I am dealing with the food I bought and then tries to do the same under my supervision. After several iterations, I trust the robot enough to leave her to sort a truck of groceries I just brought, and then I ask it: show me how you grouped the stuff? It will show me all the groups it has created and then I will assign names to these groups. If I supervised the algorithm enough, the groups most certainly will be 'kinds of milk', 'cheeses', 'wines', but they can also be 'green items' or 'round items', depending on what I showed as an example of a good grouping. In this metaphor groceries are reviews that they need to be grouped, and 'cheeses' and 'kinds of milk' are the names of the clusters I gave to the groups that machine learning created for me with these reviews.

Now I will describe in general terms which operations I did with data in my analysis. Returning to the actual data, fifty-eight meaningful clusters established by the machine learning analysis covered 2,978 of the 12,549 reviews written in the period between December, 6, 2021 and December, 20, 2021 (one can find the list of clusters with the number of reviews in each one of them in Appendix A). After that, I decided to group the clusters and give broader umbrella labels to see the principle that may have been the basis for combining these reviews into groups. Overall, I created 6 groups, they are discussed later in the text. You can use the Figure 2 to help you follow the analytical design. (In Appendix B you can also find a full table of clusters, groups, and numbers of reviews in each)

Next, I compared (in groups) the reviews written after the ban with the ones written before, to check whether it was the moderation event that enabled the topics to come forth. The groups I compared are listed in dark-grey boxes on both sides of the scheme, one showing groups of pre-event data and the other of after-event data. It turned out that one of the groups was connected to the decision making in the process of discrimination, which caught my attention and also pointed at which reviews should be read more closely in order to understand the role of a person, a real estate agency, and the state in the process of discrimination (an arrow with a rose heading shows that I did a close reading of every group in the after-event collection).

In addition to that, I applied a keyword search in the reviews' text to answer a quite simple question: from discriminating whom exactly CIAN's announcement asked users to refrain? And finally, I conducted a close reading of the text to contextualize the analysis and add personal voices of the people involved. All that is shown on the scheme with the second arrow leading straight to the text of the reviews ignoring the group box.

Figure 2. Flow of data analysis



— Organizing cluster into groups

Let us take a look at the groups formed by organising clusters of the after-event data. Reviews may have been concerned with *application* (1) itself, which included the easiness to use the application, satisfaction with the service provided by the company and attitude toward the company in general. The other label was *ethnicity* (2): here I collected such clusters as 'for Slavs only', 'Russia is for Russians', etc. The third one regarded *discrimination* (3). Then, probably the most influential label for this thesis is *decision making* (4). The reviews grouped under this label express who has a right to decide to whom to rent a flat, who should choose the renter, etc. The last two labels were designated to the emotional evaluation of the app and the situation in

general. *Negative evaluations* (5) may have sounded like ‘Trash!’ (‘Помойка’) or ‘You reached the bottom!’ (‘Днище!’), while *positive evaluation* (6) consisted only of one group with comments saying ‘Good job!’ (‘Молодцы!’), that could also be meant as a sarcastic response, but human, not machine reading, helps assume that most of these reviews were actually supportive of the ban.

Some clusters included reviews that could be labeled in two ways, like ‘application’ and ‘ethnicity’ when people wrote that ‘this application is not for slavs’. Therefore, while counting the percentage of reviews that refer to each particular label, I made a decision to not sum up the percentage to 100%, instead, I divided the number of reviews in each particular cluster by the general number of reviews. The results are following: less than half of the reviews were concerned with application, one third of the reviews referred to ethnicity, 15% reacted to discrimination and one of eight reviews touched upon the topic of decision making and how the ban of ‘for Slavs only’ influenced it. Less than 1 percent of reviews were positive and supportive.

Table 1. Percentage of labeled reviews written after the ban

Group	Number of reviews	Percentage
Application	1308	43,92%
Ethnicity	1011	33,95%
Discrimination	449	15,08%
Decision making	382	12,83%
Negative evaluation	191	6,41%
Positive evaluation	21	0,71%
Overall	2978	112,89%

— Comparing clusters before and after the event

Before delving into the scrutiny of the reviews of the most interest to my analysis, labelled as *ethnicity*, *discrimination*, *decision making*, let us compare these numbers with the ones of the time period before the ban of ‘CIAN is for slavs’. By doing so we will be able to conclude whether discrimination was always part of the discussion, whether the emotional evaluation of the app shifted with the event, and if ethnicity was discussed, especially knowing that ethnic discrimination was present on the market long time before.

The difference between ‘before’ and ‘after’ is astonishing. In comparison to the After-event reviews, the Before-event sample of reviews clearly shows that reviewers were almost never preoccupied with the question of discrimination. Twice as many reviews (82%) were related to the application, and most of the reviews (47%) were positive in one way or another. All negative reviews contained an opinion on the CIAN mobile application itself, and 36% of positive reviews were concerned with the same. Overall, 17% of all reviews were just a positive, supportive evaluation of what the company is doing. To reiterate, 0% of the reviews were just negative prior to the ban, which in comparison to the 6% that were after the ban shows how hugely the event influenced the company’s image in general.

Table 2. Percentage of labelled reviews written before the ban

Group	Number of reviews	Percentage
Application	88	82,24%
Positive evaluation	50	46,73%
Negative evaluation	19	17,76%
Ethnicity	1	0,93%
Overall	107	147,66%

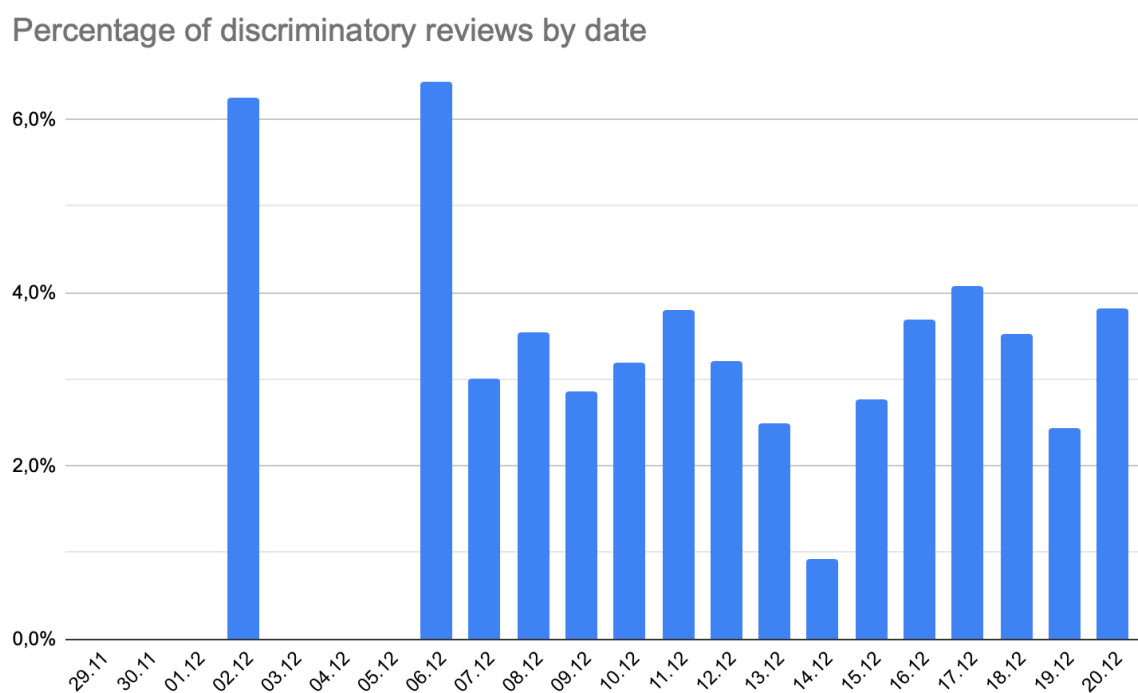
Table 3. Complex percentage of labelled reviews written before the ban

	Number of reviews	Of application	Of positive	Of negative	Of all
Application x Negative evaluation	19	21,59%	–	100,00%	17,76%
Application x Positive evaluation	32	36,36%	64,00%	–	29,91%
Application plain	37	42,05%	–	–	34,58%
Positive without Application	18	–	36,00%	–	16,82%

The most important conclusion that can be made based on this data is that no reviews at all touched upon decision making, and only one spoke about discrimination and ethnicity. That differed a lot from the situation after the event. On the diagram below one can see that every day after the event there was a number of reviews stating an opinion on discrimination, while prior to the event there was only one discrimination-related review. The graph below may be slightly misleading due to the fact that not the absolute numbers of discriminatory reviews are compared here,

but the numbers relative to the general number of reviews that day. To read this graph, it may be useful to refer to Fig. 1, that shows how few reviews there were prior to the event in comparison to the number of reviews written after the event. Thus, 1 of 16 reviews written on December, 2, 2021 amounts to the same percentage of discriminatory reviews that were written on December, 6, 2021, when 11 of 171 reviews touched upon discrimination. However, keeping that in mind, this graph may still be useful to see the general trend: almost no discriminatory reviews were written before the event, whereas a huge number in terms of percentage was written on the day of the anti-discriminatory announcement, and every day after the event around 4% of reviews were discussing discrimination.

Figure 3. Percentage of reviews concerned with discrimination by date



The only review, written in the timeframe from November, 29, 2021 to December, 5, 2021 and connected to discrimination, raised concerns about CIAN being discriminatory towards non-Slavs. Here a person shared their lived experience of discrimination. She says,

“I don’t understand it. Aren’t there any other people except for Slavs? Or they are not considered as people? My husband and I cannot rent a flat because of that. You should call the app ‘Slavian’ instead of ‘CIAN’. There is no sense in using it and searching [for a flat]. What a piggishness!”

This review helps to get a first impression of the struggles people of non-Russian ethnicities faced when attempting to rent a flat in Russia, as well as visibly connects discrimination to the work of CIAN. In the next Chapter, I will take a closer look at the general discourse of discrimination that can be seen in reviews written after CIAN’s announcement of non-discrimination policies. I will explain, relying on the data, who is usually discriminated, how discriminators refer to them, and how discriminated people phrase their experience. Moreover, I will look at the topic of decision making in the process of ethnic discrimination and list justifications people use to explain that discrimination is their personal matter and it should not be supervised by, e. g., CIAN. After that I will see whether there are other forms of discrimination visible in the reviews, how normalized discrimination is in general, how people connect their ability to discriminate to current politics, and what role the concept of new ethics plays here.

B. Approaching the research

After describing the research design I would like to contemplate on how this design situates my research in the feminist set of works.

1. Intersectional approach

Intersectionality is a concept that for many is synonymous with the contemporary feminist research. However, it is easier to describe what is intersectionality than to give it a strict definition. Leslie McCall introduced intersectionality in a following way: “no single dimension of overall inequality can adequately describe the full structure of multiple, intersecting, and conflicting dimensions of inequality” (McCall, 2005, p. 1791). This research, I argue, in its idea relies on the intersectional approach.

In this research ethnicity cannot be understood without a reference to class. Many of these who are discriminated are working migrants, a precocity without state or social protection. On the other hands, those who discriminate are not just mostly White people. These are either proper owners, which means that these people have a

stable passive income, or really agents with usually a high stable income. So this is at least not just an ethnic discrimination, this is also a class discrimination. Notwithstanding the fact, that the data I obtained does not allow to make an direct intersectional analysis, as all reviews were collected anonymously without reference to a reviewer's gender, class, religion, or occupation, I believe that the set of question the study touches upon can be considered as intersectional.

Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp in their chapter about Intersectionality for the Oxford Handbook for Gender and Politics describe several characteristics of what is intersectional. One of them, is of relationship between intersectionality and boundaries. The authors argue that boundaries is one of the questions an intersectional analysis often deals with. "This attention to boundaries within intersectional scholarship can be understood as part of a larger tradition and recent trend within humanities and social scientific scholarship that uses the concept of boundaries to make sense of various relational processes" (Lamont and Molnár in Hill Collins and Chepp, 2013, p. 5). Theoretically, my research deals with the boundaries not only between ethnicity and race, ethnicity and class, gender and ethnicity, it also adds complexity to the question of boundaries *per se*, where it meets the intersectional goal.

2. Ethics of research

Another feminist question that this research addresses, especially in relation to its methodology, is the question of ethics. As authors argue, "using any methods — is a political act, whether the researcher understands the politics of her research or not" (Ackerly and True, 2013, p. 2). And as a cautious researcher I have to state the possible biases and their political implications that may stem from my methodological positionally.

Many feminist scholars contemplate on the ethics of the qualitative research. An observation or an interview are the direct intrusions into the lives of research participants, and a researcher should be very cautious about her influence on them. Feminist data studies draw a researcher's attention on her positionally in the quantitative research as well. Even though in my research I am dealing with the open source data, I do not really have a participant's agreement to participate in my study.

The fact of collecting the open data in the ‘free’ public space is in itself totalitarizing. Data does not emerge from the vacuum, neither is it store without any motivation. The fact of open storage of internet data, that is usually done by private institutions such as CIAN, may be considered as “discriminatory and complicit with state and military surveillance” (Leurs, 2017, p. 133). Keeping that in mind, in my research I choose to comply with the ethics of care (Gray, Witt, 2021). According to this approach, one should not perceive the data as faceless set of words and numbers. On the contrary, a feminist research should try to position the human behind the data. I will contemplate on my informants’ positionally in the Conclusion Chapter, but before that let us turn to the data itself.

Chapter V – Analysis

In this Chapter I describe the discourse recreated from the data gathered after the introduction of the anti-discriminatory policy. As it was stated in the Methodology Chapter, the obtained reviews were automatically grouped into clusters, and then clusters were individually assessed and grouped under 6 labels. In the next section, I explain these labelled groups of clusters to contextualize perceived discrimination within the broader discourse of attitudes.

A. Reading the discourse

1. Application

Application is the largest group of comments: almost every second one is included in it. In this group, I collected reviews that were referring mostly to how the CIAN mobile application functions, what problems users face while interacting with it, and whether they like or dislike the application or the company in general, without mentioning discrimination directly. The group consists of such and similar reviews:

“the application lags”

“the app runs slow”

“the app is cool one can always rely on it and find whatever one needs thank you”.

Much fewer reviews accuse the application (owners) of deleting negative comments. Whether it is true or not I cannot establish, unfortunately.

Another way to speak to the company directly is to call it out:

“bye-bye cian”

“bad really bad cian”

“cian is expensive and not secure anymore”.

Why people are sad or angry with CIAN will be shown in the following sections. However, firstly, I would like to elaborate more on the ways people emotionally react to their reviews.

2. Negative evaluation

In the negative evaluation group I combined reviews that also do not say anything specific about the cause of the negative attitude read in the comment, and, in addition to that, those reviews do not concentrate on the object of their discontent. One of fifteen reviews belonged to it. In this group one can find such clusters as “trash”, “you suck”, “you are scammers”, etc. It does not make much sense in translating and presenting these comments in my opinion, as the meaning and form are quite clear.

3. Positive evaluation

The other group that shows an emotional attitude towards the application and the company without specifying it is the group of positive reviews. It is the least numerically significant group with the number of reviews constituting less than 1 percent of all reviews. This group consists only of one cluster, namely, ‘a good job’ cluster. Nonetheless, as it has been already said, support of the company is a rare topic in the reviews produced after the prohibition of discrimination in rental advertisements.

4. Ethnicity

The second largest group of clustered reviews is the group that included clusters speaking about the matters of ethnicity, however, not in the way one would expect. This group consisted of such clusters as: ‘Slavs only’, ‘Discrimination against Slavs’, ‘Russia is for Russians’, ‘Hail to the Slavic kin’, etc. After the trigger event raised attention to discrimination of ethnic minorities on the rental market, it seemed logical to expect reviews somehow referring to usually discriminated ethnicities. However, every third clustered review was either supporting Russians or pointing at the new policy being discriminatory against Russians with ‘Russian’ or ‘Slav’ being the most discussed ethnicity of all named.

“this is a russophobic app directed towards discrimination against Slavs”

“you mean one cannot rent a flat for Slavs only?”

“it was a bad idea treating Slavs like that what did we do to you”.

5. Discrimination

Every seventh review referred to discrimination, however, again, not to discrimination against ethnic minorities in Russia, but to the presumable discrimination of the ‘titular’ ethnicity/nation. The commentators were concerned with the discrimination against Russians themselves. Thus, the group included the following clusters: “Discrimination against Russians”, “Russophobes” and “Racists” (addressing CIAN, so it seems), and “Russophobia” and “Racism” accordingly.

“discrimination against Russians very bad”

“you support discrimination why”

“go Russians[,] away with discrimination of discrimination”.

Surely, discrimination against not only Russians can be seen in these reviews. However, one needs to get more creative to establish who else is discriminated against. As it was previously described, the machine learning algorithm clusters reviews based on their proximity which often is automatically understood as consisting of the same or similar words. This is a good method to establish the most coherent topics among the reviews, but one needs to pay closer attention to be able to read in-between the lines. For that, the next step of data analysis that I executed was a keyword search and a following close reading of reviews.

Using this method, I was able to gather first-hand data and demonstrate which ethnicities are most discriminated on the rental market in Russia, which language the discriminators use and which characteristics of members of ethnic minorities indicate to them that this potential renter is of a different ethnic group. I will also provide space for the voices of the oppressed to show the other, painful and unjust, side of the same process.

Literature and statistical data clearly show that there are many groups that people have hostile stereotypes about. However, to my knowledge, no academic studies are trying to find out people of which ethnicities are discriminated on the rental market in Russia, how people justify their choice to discriminate, and how discriminated people perceive that. In my research, I managed to provide both quantitative and qualitative answers to these questions.

B. Discrimination in reviews

After giving an abstract view of the reviews , let us move to more specific accounts on ethnic and gender discrimination, as well as the discourse of personal right or personal choice to discriminate.

1. Ethnicities and stereotypes

To reiterate, this data was obtained by keyword search through all the reviews collected. I created a pool of keywords taking into consideration previous research, my knowledge of the situation, and the snowball method: some extensive reviews contained hints on what other words may be included in the list. The full list of keywords and the frequency of their usage in texts can be found in Appendix C.

As previously stated, there are some opinions on what ethnicities are discriminated against the most. Almost all data points at Central Asians as being among the most vulnerable, as well as the Roma people, people of African origin, and those coming from the Caucasus. My data draws a slightly different picture. Of all keywords searched in comments describing discrimination, people of Central Asian origin are ranked first. Almost one third of all comments that included at least one keyword was mentioning Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzs, or Asians in general. It is almost seven times higher than the number of comments that were concerned with Romas or people of African descent. Interestingly, people coming from the Caucasus (in general and by ethnicity), Chinese people, and Jews were nearly never mentioned. This situation does not speak to reality of the ethnic constitution of Russia: these three ethnic groups together barely constitute 2% of the population. I hypothesize, in line with Zolotova et al. (2021), that because of their visible phenotypical features and the migrant status these groups are perceived as a bigger threat than they factually may be.

“I will rent (my flat) only on the grounds of nationality And will never (rent it to) someone from the Caucasus or a Central Asian immigrant And I don't care about CIAN”

“If I want to rent my realty to people of Slavic origin I have my right to mention it in the advertisement for example I have no interest in communicating with

Uzbeks Tajiks Chechens Kabardins Georgians Kyrgyzs Azerbaijanis Turks Hindus Dagestanians Ukrainians Pakistanis Chinese Moldavians Romanians Bulgarians and other representatives of world's countries"

"Why the f*ck can't I point out in advertisement that I don't want to rent my flat to Tajiks Uzbeks and other newcomers (Russian: "приезжий")".

It is visible that ethnicity is seen as a valid ground to dislike a possible renter. Oftenly, there are ethnicities of the working migrants that are in disfavor. However, in some cases minorities are opposed to a Slavic identity, that may even not include Ukrainians. Here one might raise a question of what do people mean when they use the category of Slav? I may assume that by Slav people mean 'a good person without the outstanding ethnic features'.

Some comments not only showcase negative stereotypes but go further into dehumanizing people of ethnic minorities. Some reviews compare members of ethnic minorities with animals, others just refer to them as to dirt.

"Now ROMAS (Russian: «цыгане») OFFICIALLY IN THEIR CARAVANS (Russian: табор) ALL NON-HUMANS AND UNDER-SHIT Now I WILL HAVE TO WRITE ONLY FOR HUMANS"

"Go rent your property to Uzbeks Tajiks and other animals why do I have by to find out during apersonal encounter whether an animal or a human came I don't recommend this app if you want your flat not to turn into trash than better use Avito [a direct competitor of CIAN]"

Many property owners complain about non-Slavic people not paying rent on time or destroying the flat. We do not have statistics on how often non-Slavic people appear to be bad renters in comparison to Slavic ones, so it is not possible to establish whether the owners' complaints capture reality properly. What we do know academically though, is that this is how stereotypes work in general: a visible marker becomes a justification for negative behavior.

"Bye-bye CIAN bye-bye Your cursed policies killed you Rent flats TO SLAVS ONLY This is my rule I rented to Uzbeks (they) defiled it with bugs (,) to highlanders (—) destroyed the whole flat heating doors broke everything Just uncivilized Not your business to choose whom to rent to You suck".

People of non-Slavic origin also left reviews after the anti-discriminatory ban and shared their lived experiences of discrimination. Most of the comments that contained personal experiences are written in ‘broken Russian’, here I will translate them disregarding the typos, as I did with the previous translations as well.

“I came from Uzbekistan Want to rent a flat but people refused me because I am Uzbek I am already tired of walking from the underground [metro]”.

“Whole kishlak [village] was collecting money for my trip to Russia to earn honest money why no one wants to rent a flat I am (from) Uzbekistan”.

Language is often one of the markers of the group for property owners and rental agents. People are often judged for not knowing proper Russian and sometimes English. Sometimes commenters connect the usage of language with mentality, a common concept in Russia that implies that people of the same culture or nationality share the same understanding of the world, and, therefore, are somehow considered as belonging to my group.

“Why cannot I post an ad with a clause (that I rent) to Slavs only I want to rent MY flat to Slavs only It doesn’t mean that I am a racist and hate other nations and peoples It simply means that I want to communicate with Slavs with people that are similar to me that speak the same language as I do and share the same mentality Simply discrimination against Slavs”

Other factors that discriminated people themselves mention as a ground for their discrimination are surname, eye shape, etc. Skin or hair color, however, does not play that big of a role in discrimination. I assume that a stereotypical Slav is not imagined as having only pale-white skin or wheat-colored hair. This helps us understand the specificity of ethnic discrimination in Russia more thoroughly.

“(A few) years ago there was no discussion about grassroots racism and a fight against it Because someone cannot fix the immigration policies Russian citizens of the non-titular nation suffer A Tatar from Ryazan [a city in Russia] named Alexey that cannot be visually distinguished from a Russian faces hardships with renting a flat just because his surname is Ahkmetov [...]”

After seeing a considerable number of examples of who is discriminated, one may predictably ask: if people feel that comfortable sharing opinions about discrimination that they will rise against someone preventing them from demonstrating their position

in rental advertisements, how do they justify their behavior? What reasons do they give for not being willing to comply with CIAN's rules? Some comments provided in this section already touched upon the topic of *decision-making* in the process of discrimination. In the next section of the paper, I will present to you the results of a combined analysis of machine learning clusterization and keyword search to answer the question of who, (according to the people's opinion) has a right to decide whether to discriminate someone?

2. Decision on discrimination

Most of the comments that supported discrimination or showed disagreement with the policy started with words similar to 'I will rent my flat to whom I want'. To specify, one in eight clustered reviews included an opinion on decision-making in the process of discrimination. This finding made me curious: Is a will to discriminate perceived to be enough to legitimize discrimination? Do people base their right to discriminate upon personal preferences and not, e. g., social agreements? The data used in this research shows that Russians perceive ethnic discrimination to be their personal affair that shall not be interintervened with by other parties. For them, the fact that they want to behave in a certain way justifies their right to do so, when it concerns discrimination. To dig further, some reviews provide justifications for why they are actually 'allowed' to do so. In this part of the paper, we will look further into the language that is used to describe discontent with the new policy.

One of the visible discourses in showing disagreement is a discourse of right. The commentators believe that they have a right to choose (to whom the flat will be rented), to decide. Some claim that it is a 'basic human right' or even, surprisingly, their constitutional right to freely choose what to do with their property.

"No shady company has a right to forbid to freely (handle) my property [...] when a shady private establishment begins to limit my civil rights and esteems their rules by their inner belief higher than country's Constitution [...]"

"Absence of a human right to freely voice one's opinion The organization commits to the policies of censorship and encroaches on the freedom of every individual and also the grounds of the legal status of a person I ask the

management of the company to closely read the Constitution of Russian Federation once again”

One can see in the quotes above that the personal will of the commentator is opposed by the will of the company. Here, I assume, the opposition occurs on the same level of social hierarchy: the company wants that, I want this, I find them stupid and stand by my opinion. From this perspective, the choice to discriminate or not is perceived as a private decision. Nothing here regulates discrimination except for the private individual (even when referring to a company) consciousness.

Addressing CIAN, people state that it is ‘none of your business’ or ‘not your decision’, implying that a company should not interfere in the process of discrimination. Interestingly, who is eligible, apart from the commentator herself, is not shared:

“I rent to those who I see fit. It’s none of your f*cking business what I put into my ad”.

Here, again, the discourse of the protected space is present. The phrasing of this particular comment reminds me of a clearly contractual libertarian idea of ‘this is my yard, I do what I want here’. Sometimes, the ‘protection’ of the space comes from the factual ownership of a property, but in some cases even this is not needed: discrimination is a private affair, I may be discuss it with my wife, but not with you.

Quite often in their reviews, people operate the concept of ownership. The fact that it is ‘my flat’, ‘my property’, ‘my realty’ clearly shows, as it seems, that the owner is to decide, on discrimination or non-discrimination as well.

“The app’s administration chose a policy of imposing their rules upon the users detrimentally to them [the users] I will rent MY dwelling ONLY to those who I WANT”

As it was discussed in the literature review, the history of private ownership of a property is quite young in Russia, however, as it can be seen, it is used as a string argument, the one that is not expected to be questioned.

Yet, before turning to a politics-connected matter, the last question regarding discrimination should be addressed. Namely, whether ethnic discrimination is the only form of discrimination that persists in the rental market in Russia? In their announcement, CIAN concentrates on “such characteristics as skin color, ethnic and national origin, nationality, citizenship and religion”, leaving out gender, sexuality, and

many others. Does it mean that the Russian rental market is discriminatory only (or mostly) on the grounds of ethnicity and race?

3. Gender stereotypes on market

While the huge scope of academic research shows that on the rental market people are discriminated against not only on the grounds of their ethnicity but also based on their gender, sexuality, ability, marital status, etc. (Asplund et al., 2020, Boeing, 2020, Flage, 2018), neither academic studies nor polls (to my knowledge) touched upon this topic. Along the same lines, CIAN's announcement did not include gender, sexuality, age, or whether the person is able-bodied, on the list of characteristics that cannot be openly discriminated against in a rental advertisement. However, a common research logic suggests that in Russia, a society where gender stereotypes exist²⁶ and LGBTQ+ people are not accepted²⁷, gender and sexuality stereotypes should have penetrated the rental market similarly to other spheres of social life. Is it so?

Keyword frequency analysis allowed us to establish the following: when ethnic discrimination is at the center of attention, gender discrimination is also not forgotten. Five percent of all discrimination-connected reviews were talking about inequality in relation of property owners and renters to people of different genders. Thus, in compliance with the literature, people are more willing to rent property to women than to men. This discriminatory choice, as it can be seen in reviews, is often directly communicated in rental advertisements next to the statements about ethnic discrimination.

“Why do you fight against discrimination based on nationality but let discrimination based on gender be Why is there a point of rent only to women (*девушкам*) Why do you oppress men [...]”

“Reading the replies I understood that you are being hypocritical Because talking about discrimination on all grounds but then seeing guests from the Caucasus and not seeing the ads only for women Just”

²⁶ <https://www.levada.ru/2018/03/29/gendernye-stereotipy/>

²⁷ <https://www.levada.ru/2021/10/15/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-lgbt-lyudyam/>

Only a few reviews mentioned discrimination on other grounds, such as being a part of the LGBTQ+ community ('not for transgenders'), a student, a disabled person, a prostitute, or an addict. No reviews at all talked about gays or lesbians. I assume that despite the visible attention that social media pay to the LGBTQ+ community, people themselves do not care that much about sexuality in their daily lives. In addition to that, I suppose, plays the general visibility of gay and trans people a huge role. In a recent poll, almost 90% of respondents answered that they do not have homosexuals among their acquaintances²⁸.

In conclusion, my analysis clearly shows that the problem of ethnic discrimination is widely prevalent on the Russian rental market. Most discriminated ethnicities are of Central Asian origin (Uzbeks, Tajiks), and often the dislike for them has no grounds. Ethnic discrimination is also hugely normalized. People perceive discrimination to be their personal choice and even their civil right, which other agents such as a private company like CIAN should not interfere with. In addition to that, gender discrimination is also visible on the rental market, with property owners more likely to rent flats to women than to men. In this sense, why CIAN's anti-discriminatory move did not pay attention to gender-, age-, or sexuality-related discrimination is an open question.

In the next chapter of the thesis, I will discuss the political context of these findings in an attempt to answer the question of what socio-historical and present circumstances lead to Russians believing discrimination to be a social norm and private right.

4. Justifications for discrimination

As it became obvious from the previously showed data, people believe that discrimination is a process that implies a personal right. And one might wonder how people justify their right to discriminate, especially assuming that discrimination in general is still evaluated negatively from the ethical point of view.

Surprisingly, for this question, most justifications found in the reviews contained ethnic discrimination and were socially-based. Some of the justifications can be grouped under the label of liberal values. It includes the following justifications:

- It is an *open market*, therefore, people should not be constrained in any way

²⁸ <https://www.levada.ru/2021/10/15/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-lgbt-lyudyam/>

- Discrimination is a basic *citizen right* therefore everyone should enjoy it
- The *society is free* in general, and everyone can do whatever they want
- People have *basic human rights*, such as a right to decide what to do with their property
- Or even presenting a right to discriminate as a right supported by *constitution* in for of a right of free speech.

All these justification, as stated above, can be grouped as liberal values. I find this particularly interesting as Russia does not have a story of ‘successful’ liberal political life that citizens may have enjoyed. I believe that this discourse is self-imposed from the Western context.

The other group of justifications is hard to put under the same label, but I would attempt to name it ‘history’. One of review authors honestly stated that they were taught to discriminate:

“I was taught that at school Negros are in Africa Chinese are in China Why cannot I decide to whom to rent a flat?”

This comment another time highlights the reality discrimination in, presumably, Soviet times. The world has a specific order, and this is the order of the other races living in the other parts of the world, even when publicly they are welcomed.

The other review justified discrimination on the basis of Russians being a titular nation. Although the discrimination in question is not based upon nationality but mostly on ethnic/racial features, the concept of nationality and ‘titular nation’ in particular can be seen in the review quite often s:

“The titular nation will decide whom to rent flats to or not And no application no Western agenda can change it [...]”

The only justification for discrimination I was able to find that included not social but personal reasons to discriminate was a simple “I do it because I want to” or “I just don’t want to have them in my flat”. This trope can barely be called a justification in my opinion but, rather, an unwillingness to disclose (probably to themselves) the underlying beliefs about a right to discriminate. However, such phrasing speaks perfectly to the discourse of the private decision. One does not need to contemplate

on why she chooses to discriminate. It os her right, as she assumes, and her business.

Chapter VI – Discussion and conclusion

The public/private divide has a long tradition of theoretical research. Feminist scholars critiqued the concept of divide itself for not mirroring the reality of women's oppression. Feminist stance on the division can be summarised in the slogan 'the personal is the political'. Half a century ago, the Western legal and after that the theoretical world reached an agreement that discrimination is not a personal affair, but a public issue that should be regulated legally and socially. However, as I argue in this thesis, this agreement is context specific and cannot be generalized to the societies with the different political history.

In my researched I analyzed the discourse around the case of a negative reaction to the anti-discriminatory policy. In December 2021 CIAN, a private company working for a real estate market, issued a policy with a prohibition of the direct discrimination in property advertisements. Not complying with the theoretical assumptions, this policy was perceived as a discrimination against those who want to discriminate. Justifying their position with a freedom of speech or even without any justifications, people were raising an opinion that it is their own choice whether to discriminate or not when it comes to their own property.

This case, as I argue, represents a peculiar situation in which discrimination is believed to be a private decision and should not be regulated externally. Using the concept of the public/private distinction I translate this statement as a belief in a private nature of discrimination. Arguing so, I highlight the constructivist character of the public and the private, as well as put into question the generalizability of the traditional for political studies assumption of the public character of discrimination. This speaks to the vast scope of the feminist critique of the public/private distinction, adding the axis of ethnicity to the feminist argument of gender and class being exempted from the public which has lead to the perpetuation of discrimination.

Not discussed in the present research, this data may pose a theoretical question of the social perception of big private companies. The reaction caused by the introduction of a new policy by a semi-big private company gives a space to question how do people locate this company within the public/private division? Do they believe CIAN to be another private actor in the world of contractual relationship, and for that

it's policies are not authoritative enough to obey them? Or, on the contrary, does CIAN resemble the state too much which, knowing the context of the attitude of Russians to the state, causes a counter reaction when an institution attempts makes public another sphere of life? These questions may be answered in the next research on the topic.

One of the limitations of the current research is the fragmentality of the data. The analyzed reviews were written anonymously, which may lead to the internal and external biases. For an external bias, it is impossible to establish the general sociodemographic characteristics of the informants and therefore to understand whether the sample data can be generalized over to population. Internally, the informants' anonymity may change their behaviour towards more hostile. Arguably this behaviour may be also more 'ecological' and honest, however, the case situation differs from any other form of public interaction, where even being anonymous a person is still exposed to the others.

In conclusion, I want to stress the importance of the critical awareness to the colonality of knowledge. As feminist and critical studies showed numerous times, each theoretical concept has its history of development, with different forms of inequality ingrained into it. One should be cautious while using 'global' concepts, such as discrimination, in non-Western contexts without questioning the implicit theoretical biases it may create.

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Appendix A. List of clusters with the amount of reviews in each

Rank	Cluster	Number of reviews
1	Miscellaneous	1592
2	Application	743
3	Only slavs	576
4	Want rent flat	147
5	Discrimination of slavs	140
6	Discrimination (of Russians?)	99
7	Service	82
8	Rusophobs	68
9	Reviews are being deleted	60
10	CIAN	49
11	Ads	47
12	Want rent flat slavs	47
13	Application & slavs	45
14	Trash	43
15	The new update (bad)	38
16	One star (store rating)	36
17	Russia is for Russians	33
18	Rules	30
19	Tolerance	29
20	Stars & slavs	29
21	Racists	27
22	Suck	27
23	Heil to the Russian kin	26
24	Right rent my flat	26
25	(Low) marks	24
26	App rent flat	23
27	Good job (also ironic)	21
28	Right want rent	21
29	Too much advertisement	20
30	Can whom rent flat	20

Rank	Cluster	Number of reviews
31	Russophobia	20
32	Scammers	20
33	Application & ads	19
34	The new policy	19
35	Bad interface	18
36	Application & reviews	17
37	People (also supportive)	17
38	Racism	16
39	Heaven of slaves (?)	16
40	Reached the bottom (another word form)	15
41	Reached the bottom	14
42	Censorship	14
43	Rent whom realty	14
44	The new initiative	14
45	People rent whom	13
46	Computer program	13
47	Application & service	13
48	Discrimination of Russian people	13
49	Whom rent property	13
50	Hello to	12
51	Garbage (hat)	12
52	Application & discrimination	12
53	Application & company	12
54	Nationality	12
55	Filters	12
56	Application & search	11
57	CIAN & slaves	11
58	I choose & property	11
59	Application & discrimination & slaves	11

Appendix B. List of grouped clusters

Number of reviews	Cluster	Group	Additional group
1592	Misc.	misc	
743	Application	app	
576	Only slavs	ethnicity	
147	Want rent flat	decision making	
140	Discrimination of slavs	ethnicity	discrimination
99	Discrimination	discrimination	
82	Service	app	
68	Rusophobs	discrimination	
60	Reviews are being deleted	app	
49	CIAN	app	
47	Ads	app	
47	Want rent flat slavs	decision	
45	Application & slavs	app	ethnicity
43	Trash	negative	
38	The new update (bad)	app	
36	One star (store rating)	negative	
33	Russia is for Russians	ethnicity	
30	Rules	decision making	
29	Tolerance	discrimination	
29	Stars & slavs	ethnicity	app
27	Racists	discrimination	
27	Suck	negative	
26	Heil to the Russian kin	ethnicity	
26	Right rent my flat	decision	
24	(Low) marks	negative	app
23	App rent flat	decision	
21	Good job (also ironic)	positive	
21	Right want rent	desision	
20	Too much advertisement	app	
20	Can whom rent flat	decision	
20	Russophobia	discrimination	

Number of reviews	Cluster	Group	Additional group
20	Scammers	negative	
19	Application & ads	app	
19	The new policy	app	
18	Bad interface	app	
17	Application & reviews	app	
17	People (also supportive)	decision	
16	Racism	discrimination	
16	Heaven of slavs (?)	ethnicity	
15	Reached the bottom (another word form)	negative	
14	Reached the bottom	negative	
14	Censorship	discrimination	
14	Rent whom realty	decision	
14	The new initiative	app	
13	People rent whom	decision	
13	Computer program	app	
13	Application & service	app	
13	Discrimination of Russian people	ethnicity	discrimination
13	Whom rent property	decision	
12	Hello to	misc	
12	Garbage (hat)	negative	
12	Application & discrimination	discrimination	app
12	Application & company	app	
12	Nationality	ethnicity	
12	Filters	app	
11	Application & search	app	
11	CIAN & slavs	ethnicity	app
11	I choose & property	decision	
11	Application & discrimination & slavs	discrimination	ethnicity

Appendix C. Table of key-words frequency²⁹

Label	Number	Percent
Tajik	60	11,7%
Asia	48	9,3%
Left	43	8,4%
USA	40	7,8%
Uzbek	36	7,0%
Liberal	33	6,4%
BLM	32	6,2%
Girls/women only	27	5,3%
Europe	25	4,9%
Roma (цыган)	22	4,3%
Language	22	4,3%
Constitution	20	3,9%
Black (races)	20	3,9%
-- Statistical discrimination	15	2,9%
Cuckold	13	2,5%
Khach (хач)	7	1,4%
Mentality	6	1,2%
Agenda ('povestka')	6	1,2%
-- Phenotype	5	1,0%
Surname	5	1,0%
Hitler	4	0,8%
Churka (чурка)	4	0,8%
Kyrgyz	3	0,6%
Transgender	3	0,6%
Africa	2	0,4%
Heterosexual	2	0,4%
Dagestan	2	0,4%
China	2	0,4%
Drug addict	2	0,4%
Caucasus	1	0,2%
Negro	1	0,2%
New ethics	1	0,2%
Turkey	1	0,2%
Feminist	1	0,2%
Overall	514	100,0%

²⁹ Words starting with '--' were not used as key words and rather describe a group of keywords that can be gathered under under this label.