QUEER TRAUMA AND URBAN SPACE:
BODY, INTERACTION AND EVERYDAY LIFE

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Women's Initiative Support Group (WISG) is a feminist organization that aims to help building a society based on the principles of social justice, through women's empowerment and political participation.

Women's Initiatives Support Group works with the communities of lesbian and bisexual women, transgender and intersex people and women representing other marginalized groups.

WISG works in the following directions: Advocacy for the integration of women's and LGBTQI+ issues in politics; Community empowerment for social and political participation; Creating publicly accessible critical knowledge about gender and sexuality through research and art projects; Developing culture/practice of intersectional queer feminist organizing.

Women's Initiative Support Group is the author of the key studies and policy analysis on sexual orientation and gender identity in Georgia. Our research studies, shadow reports, policy documents, and information regarding other activities are available on the organization's official website: www.wisg.org

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PREFACE

Over the years, the "Women's Initiative Supporting Group" (WISG) has been observing and analyzing the strategies of local queer and feminist activism, practices of political instrumentalization of queer and women's issues, and its effects on psychosocial and social conditions of the queer community. We strongly believe that it is fundamental for an effective and fair activism to create and produce knowledge related to these issues. However, we further find that integrating these issues into academic research is critically essential. In this context, we particularly value the opportunity to facilitate interdisciplinary research; one outstanding example of it being "Queer trauma and urban space: body, interaction and everyday life."

The study informs us about traumatic experience, its nature and effects on the lives of the queer community members in urban space. This knowledge offers us a perspective on overlooked or entirely excluded issues, such as the effects of different forms of activism and everyday experiences on the personal lives of the queer community members. On the other hand, it is a valuable resource for those specializing in gender, psychology, and urban studies, and for queer and feminist activists and supporters.

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ABSTRACT

In the last years, in Georgia, the discussions regarding visibility politics and feminist agenda have resurfaced following the traumatic experiences. However, there is less focus on the consequences, which different forms of activism have in the everyday lives of the community members, and the chronic nature of traumatic experiences. Interaction of queer people with the environment they have to live in, work, form and develop social relationships remains out of focus. In this regard, it is essential to understand the impact of traumatic events the members of the queer community experienced on May 17 or July 5 and continue to experience daily. Therefore, the study relies on in-depth interviews with queer persons, and discusses their relationship with urban space and forms of interaction in the context of trauma. The analysis revealed that this relationship is mutual. The social environment and its superstructure evoke feelings of danger and constant expectation of traumatic experiences or make queer persons victims of an actual assault. On the other hand, queer people develop and change how they look while simultaneously also impact the surrounding physical and social environment. In this regard, the study reveals the fluid, constantly changing character of queer body and its strategies when socially interacting with urban space.

Key words: trauma; urban space; queer body; everyday life; fluidity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last few years have revealed the crucial importance of public space in daily life of the community and the public in general. Members of the community and the other members of society use a street, avenue, square or park to establish their own place, role or even physical existence. Expression of one's own identity through different forms of activism also serves this purpose (Janelidze, 2018).

In a society imbued with homophobic attitudes, individual or group expression (or its attempt) of queerness is considered as a reason to justify the violence by dominant groups, turning urban space into a battlefield of some sort (Shoshiashvili, 2021; პუბლიკა, 2021).[1] The developments of May 17 and July 5 have already become examples of how the dominant groups are attempting to gain control over a public space, and by doing so, bring a new wave of individual or group traumatic experiences to the community members. It clearly reveals the controversial character of public space and the traumatic nature of queer life related to that space.

Events such as attacking a small group of queer activists on May 17, 2013, and establishing a "family holiness day" on this queer sensitive date, have considerably changed the attitudes towards visibility politics in the community-based organizations.

Considering the context, especially in regard to individuals' physical safety, some organizations shifted their focus from visibility politics to providing the community, particularly the vulnerable members, with targeted services. The goal was to ensure a dignified life of the community members through the social and economic empowerment. Despite this significant shift in activism, no in-depth open discussions have been held regarding this issue within or outside the community. Therefore, it is not surprising that when discussing different forms of oppression of queer community members, the focus always remains on visibility politics. However, one of the main achievements of this form of activism is that it helped to shape the concept of "a Georgian

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1 The article is available from: https://publika.ge/article/homo-bi-transfobia-romelic-quchebshi-grd-zeldeba/ (Accessed 20/08/2021).

gay". As such, there is a consensus in general public that the queer community does exist. It is worth mentioning that compared to 2013, the majority of the population of Tbilisi does not endorse violence (Sichinava and Saldadze, 2021). However, homophobic attitudes remain a widespread problem in Georgian society (Babunashvili and Gilbreath, 2021).

Queer body, as a biological and social entity, has a high chance to disappear completely from public space due to the existing threats to its health and physical existence. Events like May 17 and July 5 highlight and confirm this notion, as do the other individual or group attacks and killings of queer persons. Self-realisation is a remote possibility when there is no safe space left for queer bodies to survive physically. Observing the interaction between queer bodies and space will shed light on these issues.

Judith Butler (1993) emphasizes the material dimension of a body and argues that it must be the focus of studies on gender and sexuality. She focuses on how heteronormativity determines body and gender, and gives them desired material shapes, considering such bodies as sole viable actors. Chronic persecution, attacks, banishment or marking space in advance are the mechanisms which exclude queer bodies from public space. From Butler's perspective, this is the very heteronormativity that tries to marginalize the body as the main material element of queer identity.

There have been ongoing attempts to persecute and marginalize queer body in Georgia for already many years now: the violent chronicles of May 17, anti-gay demonstrations that aim to persecute queers, killings of transgender people, discrediting the LGBTQI community-based organizations, and raiding their headquarters are just a few of the examples affecting first and foremost the lives of queer persons, but also the whole society. Moreover, everyday experiences of violence and discrimination that remain unnoticed by broader society are no less damaging to LGBTQI persons.

Current discussions around queer trauma in public space mainly focus on visibility politics (მელაშვილი, 2014; ჰაინრიჰ ბიოლის ფონდის სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონული ბიურო, 2016; ნახუცრიშვილი, 2018; ჯანელიძე, 2018), overlooking the interaction between queer body and space in the context of trauma. Furthermore, it is often vague what we mean when we talk about public space. Does it include online space? Social media platforms? Traditional media? A street, square, city? Or everything at once?

Relying on the feminist perspective on queer trauma and geographic conceptualization of space and body, the study aims to analyse the traumatic lives of the community members in urban space. Namely, how traumatic experiences impact daily lives of queer persons, their attitudes toward – and – forms of interactions with space. In this study, we conceptualize urban space as a place where people manage their daily activities – a workplace, street, square, park, social circle of friends or exclusive spaces such as café-bars or nightclubs.

1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study consists of several main sections that gradually bring us closer to the research question and introduce its conclusions.

The first section is dedicated to a theoretical overview to establish a conceptual framework for the intersection between trauma, body and space. First, we will discuss the nature of trauma from the feminist perspective. We will mainly focus on the continuous effect of traumatic experiences on individual's life and discuss issues of overcoming trauma and loss.

Next, we will discuss the role and significance of body and space. These two concepts are valuable for studying traumatic experiences of queer community and for understanding their consequences. When considering body and space from a constructivist standpoint, their interdependent character becomes more apparent, which will help us better grasp the process's dynamics. It also reveals the impact of traumatic experiences on body/space interaction.

Next, to establish a research framework, we will describe the fieldwork and design of the study. In this section, we will go through the methodology and tools we used to analyze empirical material and integrate the research narrative. We will also reflect on the ethical dimension of the study and the authors' positioning.

After describing the methodology, we will move to the interpretation of the empirical material. In this section, we will discuss the study's key findings in the context of the theoretical framework. Analysis of the narratives clearly shows the chronic impact trauma has on the everyday lives of queer persons. This, in turn, determines how queer persons perceive their bodies and

the space they have to live in. Altered behaviours and instincts, alienation, persistent feelings of fear and anxiety when moving in public spaces, and different yet dangerous events reveal the necessity of the strategies that the community members engage with to survive physically. In the final section, we will also explore how queer persons perceive solidarity and the risks they see coming from outside and inside the community in terms of managing their own agenda.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents a theoretical framework which relies on important concepts and approaches involving trauma, space and body interconnection. First, we will overview the nature of trauma, its prolonged effects and existing academic knowledge on coping with trauma. Next, we will discuss the character of the body/space interaction. In this part, we consider body and space as social constructs and focus on the role fear and traumatic experiences play in perceiving urban spaces as safe.

2.1 THE NATURE OF TRAUMA

In academic and artistic circles, research on trauma takes different shapes. On the one hand, trauma is considered a possible cause of mental disorders. On the other hand, it has collective and transgenerational, organisational and social, cultural, and political dimensions. In the present study, we rely on the traditional notion of trauma; 'trauma' is the Greek word for 'wound'; from the 19th century on, understanding of trauma has been linked to mental health. At the same time, the feminist view of psycho-trauma uncovers the traces of trauma in minority groups and marginalized parts of society.

The knowledge on trauma accumulated in the mental health field helps us better understand its consequences. For example, according to the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a traumatic event is defined as an incident involving a threat to life or physical injury. The incident itself can be described as traumatic or potentially traumatic (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

At present, PTSD is among the best-studied disorders. Its symptoms and their substance will show us the scope of impact that traumatic experiences may have. However, it is not the only condition that may develop due to a traumatic experience. Post-traumatic stress disorder has three main dimensions: 1. Re-experiencing the traumatic events as new; 2. Avoidance of traumatic reminders; 3. Hypervigilance and a sense of current threat (Rothblum, 2020).

Table 1: *The principal symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Source: Gelder et al., 2006*

The principal symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder
1. Re-experiencing
   Intense intrusive imagery; 'Flashbacks'
   Recurrent distressing dreams
2) Avoidance
   Difficulty in recalling stressful events at will
   Avoidance of reminders of the events
   Detachment
   Inability to feel emotion ('numbness')
   Diminished interest in activities
3. An enduring feeling of being threatened without external cause
   Persistent anxiety
   Irritability
   Sleep disturbances
   Poor concentration

The difficulties caused by traumatic experiences may affect person's daily functioning, e.g., ability to work, perform daily tasks, and establish and maintain relationships. Therefore, in modern assessment instruments fourth dimension, determining the level of personality functioning has been added to the three dimensions of symptoms.

The predominant western paradigm of trauma is strongly influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis. The first theorisation of trauma is associated with Freud's name, from the time of his collaboration with Joseph Breuer, when he studied hysteria (Nemiah, 1996). According to Freudian analysis, trauma is predominantly related to the inner conflicts of an individual. It is an individual experience. Feminist scholars believe such an understanding is culturally biased towards White Europeans and fails to notice the historical and political determinants of trauma (Fassin and Rechtman, 2007). At the same time, the continuous nature of trauma remains unnoticed. This is particularly true for marginalized groups or victims of domestic or gender-based violence. Conversely, studying the traumatic experiences of marginalized groups will

help us understand how violence is gradually legitimized and normalized (Pain, 2019).

Additionally, the feminist theory focuses on the collective nature of traumatic experiences. It plays a key role in understanding the quality and scale of traumatizing effects that recurring and prolonged forms of social violence may have, e.g. slavery, colonialism and racism (Pain, 2019). The same applies to the post-Soviet spaces if we consider past experiences of mass terror and persecution, which needs to be analyzed in the context of collective trauma (ჯავახიშვილი, 2018).

Judith Herman (1994), a psychiatrist and scholar, points out that understanding trauma begins with rediscovering the past. She compares psychological trauma to being lost in time, where it is difficult to tell apart the past and present as if living in double reality. Herman goes on to describe this condition as a "post-traumatic mind". She puts a strong emphasis on experiences of gender-based violence and relates trauma to domestic violence, child abuse, and political terror. Herman looks into the historical context of trauma studies, indicating that pursuing such studies is a political question since exploring psycho-trauma mainly requires investigating the experiences of oppressed groups. The history of trauma studies itself illustrates how a particular group/theory may suffer oppression under a prevailing political climate (1994, p. 7). Herman describes a political form of amnesia, when for instance, governments grant amnesty to mass violence perpetrators, and argues that this hinders the healing of society and restoration from the damaging effects of trauma since understanding traumatic memories is its essential prerequisite.

The chronic nature of trauma becomes apparent when considering the experiences of marginalized groups because traumatic experiences are part of their everyday lives. As a result of developing the concept of chronic trauma, the complex post-traumatic stress disorder emerged in the mental health field, which implies "prolonged, an insidious, progressive form" of post-traumatic stress disorder. Dehumanized identity, identity alteration, anger, depression, self-loathing and suicidality are among the expected effects of chronic trauma. Thus, the traditional understanding of trauma – the rupture in continuity between present and past – was challenged[m1] . According to Herman (1992), the maintenance of chronic trauma caused by gender-based violence is facilitated by the non-interference of other systems, which, in the

end, normalizes violence against different groups. As Herman puts it, three factors determine the chronic nature of trauma: 1. Repeated exposure to violence; 2. Close control by the perpetrator; 3. The victim has the limited prospect of escape (Pain, 2019).

If we apply these assumptions to the experiences of queer community, the main signs of chronic trauma will surface: 1. Repeated episodes of violence, growing hate and rejection, difficulty creating/obtaining safe spaces (repeated exposure to violence); 2. A permanent violent environment intensifies the wish to flee the country and creates a feeling of being trapped (difficulty escaping the abuser, undermining victim's power); 3. The growing power of the Orthodox Church, the rise of ultraright groups and their formation as political parties (close control by the perpetrator).

The process of recovery from trauma is vague because one of the most critical components in overcoming this experience are solidarity and human support, both from within the community and the wider public. Modern studies underscore the need for the engagement of the community in trauma processing, especially when trauma is related to a particular social group. Empirical data indicate *that lack of social support and contextual life stressors* (e.g. stigma, bullying, microaggressions) are the strongest risk factors for developing trauma-related mental health disorders (Brewin, et al., 2000).

One of the fundamental characteristics of trauma, affecting all spheres of life, is the loss of power and control, both over one's own body and the environment. Usually, a person doesn't feel safe even in her/his own body and loses control over thoughts and emotions. Persistent feeling of threat and hypervigilance is characteristic for such experiences. A person loses basic trust and frequently experiences social alienation. At the same time, trust in one's self is also lost; in such cases, there is a greater risk that the person will give up her/his agency and leave decisions to others, making her/his condition worse as the sense of power and control further diminishes (Herman, 1994, p. 74).

With the normalization of trauma its chronic nature becomes invisible to the outsiders. Psychological violence, being the main component of the dynamic between abuser and abused, plays a unique role in such experiences and produces the same amount, or even more, of fear and trauma as physical violence (Pain, 2019).

2.1.1. Trauma and loss

Trauma is inevitably related to a loss; psychological loss is always present, regardless of physical loss. Loss of basic trust, safe spaces and social connections are some of the examples. Recognition and mourning of a loss are critical stages in recovery and trauma processing. However, perceiving it as a failure, traumatized person often goes to great lengths to avoid or escape mourning.

Mourning, typically, is related to emotions such as sadness, grief, and sorrow, and implies recognition of the loss. Due to its complex nature, a person develops a fantasy to mask or deny mourning. As a result, the stage of mourning is denied, and the person gets "stuck". In the process of recovery, a period of stagnation sets in. After a traumatic experience, a person may, for example, develop fantasies of revenge, forgiveness, or compensation. For a traumatized person, revenge fantasy implies picturing that she/he is making the abuser go through the same suffering. Thus, the traumatized person identifies herself with the abuser, and the fantasy becomes a mirror image of the traumatic experience. The fantasy of forgiveness is the opposite of revenge. In this case, a person avoids one's rage and tries to beat the abuser through the act of love. The victim thinks showing love and forgiveness towards the abuser/perpetrator will relieve the traumatic experience. However, one can not heal trauma through hatred or love. It is expected that fantasies of forgiveness become torture, as forgiveness is an undeniably challenging task. Even from a religious standpoint, forgiveness is not unconditional and requires repentance from the perpetrator. In the fantasy of compensation, the victim expects her loss to be compensated. The part of the problem is that it is impossible, and it further ties the traumatized person to the perpetrator; if the perpetrator does not provide compensation, the victim won't be able to process the experience. The compensation fantasy may also develop towards all surroundings. All three types of fantasies separate us from reality and hinder trauma processing, which requires recognition of loss and mourning since mourning bears the function of restoration and revival (Herman, 1994, p. 175).

The mourning process in queers is further complicated by the lack of social support since the loss of marginalized groups evokes less compassion in society.

2.1.2. Overcoming trauma

Trauma has a structural character, meaning the outer world plays a significant role in aggravating and prolonging the victim's condition.

Empowerment and restoring connections are the core principles of recovery. It is necessary to restore the connection with one's own body and others, followed by the restoration of values and faith. The solidarity of a group plays a crucial part in overcoming traumatic experiences, as it appears to be the antidote to trauma. Trauma isolates and dehumanizes. It stigmatizes, frequently invoking feelings of guilt and shame. The support from a group, in turn, restores and strengthens a sense of belonging and helps a person overcome negative experiences (Herman, 1994, p. 196).

The recovery takes different forms in single acute and chronic traumas. A single acute trauma does not usually grow into a psychological problem if the victim has a robust support system. In contrast, chronic trauma (experiences of abuse, domestic violence, gender-based violence) is more challenging to overcome, particularly when a person continues to live in an abusive environment.

One of the essential stages of healing and recovery is establishing basic safety and restoring trust towards surroundings/outer world. Having at least a partially safe space where the victim can reconstruct and integrate the traumatic experience bears great significance in overcoming trauma (Herman, 1994, p. 175). It is, in fact, hard for queer people to create such safe spaces. There is a lack of consensus regarding traumatic experiences in the community. For instance, one group may see the events of May 17 or July 5 as a victory, while the other group might consider these dates grief-filled. Such polarization contributes to confusion and disorganization within the community. Safe spaces where such experiences can be labelled and analyzed are chaotic. When such discussions switch to virtual platforms, means of expression of complex emotions, fears, confusion, or distrust are limited and appear less authentic.

Reclaiming power and control is an essential prerequisite for recovery because as we have already mentioned, chronic trauma exacerbates victim's sense of helplessness. Regaining control starts with reclaiming control over one's own body. It is the first step in overcoming a traumatic experience, which gradually moves outward and extends to the environment.

Finally, the culture-specific views of trauma significantly impact trauma processing (Pain, 2019). Social attitudes and expectations often determine the severity of a traumatic experience: how the victim's behaviour is defined, how the victim should tell her/his story to a listener, and whether society believes in the story or does it blame the victim for what happened? Traumatized persons often find it difficult to talk about their experiences, evoking different reactions or mistrust in listeners. Sometimes external systems see traumatized persons as helpless/inept and rob the victim of the means to act independently or exoticize the victim. By focusing on the victim's symptoms, we only concentrate on person's skills and abilities, overlooking the system which fails to "interrupt" the chronic trauma. It is therefore essential to look beyond the diagnosis and understand the experience, taking into account the social and political context.

2.1.3. Urban trauma and activism

In Rachel Pain's theoretical framework, urban trauma is defined as the psychological effect of urban violence – chronic, collective, spatial dimension that operates simultaneously on different scales. Urban trauma is related to a loss and grieving, particularly to the loss of safe spaces and loss of control over and belonging to the space (Pain, 2019).

Hartal and Misgav (2021) tell us about how individual traumatic experiences lead to the construction of large social movements. On Israel's example, they consider the relationship between queer traumas and activism, assuming that activism could play a significant role in healthy grieving of loss and reclaiming spaces, even through memorialisation. In the study, they view trauma from the theoretical perspective of urban social movements and define it as a spatial construction influencing politics and social movements. Queer urban trauma refers to the events in which LGBTQI people suffer damage due to their identity or participation.

Traumatic experiences within the LGBTQI community impact queer urban activism, spatial presence and ability to construct safe spaces. Both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem have witnessed such violence toward the LGBTQI community. Misgav identifies two patterns of reaction urban social movements employ 1. Immediate, radical in nature, fuelled by anger and rage and led mainly by queer activists. Such response is usually temporal/short and

small-scale. 2. Delayed in time, structured, re-located, large-scale and inclu-sive, joined by public figures and wider public (Hartal and Misgav, 2021). In response to the murderous attacks on queer people in Tel Aviv and Jerusa-lem the community received support from the public and politicians. A city mayor opened the memorial of the victims. The queer community was not left alone in the face of these traumatic events. Such support contributed to the recognition of loss and healthy grieving.

Considering Georgia's example, it is safe to say that attempts to take lives or actual killings of queer people do not invoke compassion/empathy and are rather approved and encouraged by some influential political figures and "clergymen". Under such conditions, it is crucial to understand the role of queer activism in fighting for the community's freedom.

2.2 URBAN SPACE

Harthal's and Misgav's study (2021) underscores the significant role urban space plays in queer trauma. Therefore, after we have examined the nature of trauma, it is best to define the theoretical framework of urban space and then discuss the body/space interaction.

Since the 1980s, known by the name of Cultural Turn, postmodern and poststructuralist views have replaced the conventional understanding of space solely as a territory. The latter implies that space is not an isolated ter-ritory with a particular, fixed form. As Doreen Massey (1994) puts it, space/spatial and socio-economic factors form/influence each other. Space, on the one hand, is a social construct; particular social relations determine its shape and character. On the other hand, certain geographic features might contrib-ute to forming socio-economic relations and the essence of particular social strata. For instance, economic space can be considered as "the geographical organization of the relations of production" (Massey, 1994, p. 22).

Amin and Trift (2002) offer a postmodern understanding of space. Urban space is not a completed territory that consists of physical elements only or has one particular form. From this perspective, a city is a constantly chang-ing phenomenon. It is not just a territory fixed in space, divided by different functions and spatial categories. The authors emphasize its flexible nature and view urban space as a system of continuous mobility, flow and everyday

practices. In such an arrangement, the line between spatial and social elements becomes blurred and stretched – "the city has no completeness, no centre, no fixed parts" (2002: p. 8). Instead, urban space is a point of intersection for disjointed processes, rhythms, new directions and open flows. Amin's and Thrift's take on the city focuses on the significance of cognition and behaviour. We encounter desires, passions, emotions and human instincts daily in cities, which take the forms of kisses, hugs or moving bodies expressing happiness or sadness. Therefore, every single element, from individual perceptions to individual experiences, is equally valuable in the effort to analyse city. In other words, we shall not be looking for an absolute truth while considering urban space. It can be easily understood through individuals' experiences, whose movements across the city are governed by different motivations. They temporarily take up urban spaces and leave instant footprints (2002: p. 22).

With the individual experiences, identity and character of spaces are determined and changed according to the narratives, labels or symbolic meanings people attach to them. Therefore, we can imagine urban space as a palimpsest, multilayered unit where everyday individual experiences, footprints or their intensity intersect and create a constantly changing environment. In this context, we may consider the apparent domination of one particular group in urban space as conditional, transitional and temporal. To illustrate, we shall recall the latest developments of July 5 and 6 in the centre of Tbilisi.

The ultra-right violent groups taking to the central avenue of the capital, putting up a metal cross construction in front of the Parliament building in an exasperated manner is an attempt to dominate public space through their desired symbols, religious feelings, and narratives. Two factors highlight the transitional nature of domination over a public space. The same geographical space has been used many times for protesting or expressing different points of view in different forms and methods. The government has also used this same space to demonstrate the physical aspect of socio-spatial domination. After disbanding of the ultra-right group, the same space was taken by part of the LGBTQI activists and their supporters.

We shall say that domination over the space outside the parliament fluctuates between the groups, and it does not have one permanent "master". This space appeals to public/social groups since it is where power is concentrated.

Hence, marking one's own space there is particularly valuable. We can consider Rustaveli Avenue and the area in front of the parliament as an example of a stretchy, fluid space.

Social, economic and political events in the country's history have shaped the form and appearance of this space and provided it with symbolic elements. This space and social processes determine each other's character, essence, and visual appearance, and "control" over this space is always transitional.

April 9 memorial is a material symbol with space-time dimension, created as a result of public consensus over the April 9th tragedy for the day of mourning and remembrance of the citizens killed. It does not indicate a particular group's control over that space. Conversely, the cross put up on July 5 – a symbol of the power imbalance between social groups – is perceived as a symbol of domination over the space. Putting up the cross can be considered an attempt by dominant groups to mark the urban space and a materialized element of "oppressing the weak". In the wake of the continual shift in the power balance, relying on post-structuralism, this artefact must lose its relevance as a symbol of oppression and domination. The queer community can play a significant role in this process. Let us consider it from the perspective of the theory of trauma. The metal cross represents a symbol of the "victory" of violence/violent groups, indicating their growing power and control over the space. It also indicates weakening of the queer community's influence and intensified desire to flee, as it serves as a constant reminder that the community has been subjected to violence and was banished. One way for the queer community to heal from this experience and reclaim control over the space is to label and recognize the loss, grieve authentically, and refuse false positions of victory or defeat.

The victory/defeat dichotomy amplifies a superficial understanding of the problem. Such a perspective supports reproducing and maintaining the status quo. It overlooks the opportunity of the oppressed groups to break the cycle. It also contributes to the perception of the black cross as a "victory" symbol of violent groups. It interferes with materialization of the community's mourning and loss. This construction, as well as setting May 17 as a family holiness day, serves as a traumatizing factor, for it remains a reminder of declaring violence against the community. However, we could say that there

are considerable differences between this cross and family holiness day and the crosses put up in other places and other religious holidays. In this case, their existence in that particular time-space moment is related to the presence of the queer community and lacks primary religious meaning. Hence, the question: what if we take this artefact away from the violent groups and utilize it as a constant reminder for the wider public of the oppression of the queer community? What will happen if we use this cross to mark the exclusion of queer community from society? In this way, cannot we remove the religious legitimization that we all involuntarily give to it, whenever we deem it as a symbol of "victory" of violent groups over the secular state and the queer community?

These questions indeed resonate with the problem of domination over space; however, in this text, there are no specific answers to be found. These questions can only become the subject of a broader discussion between the queer community and other social groups.

2.2.1. Place of queer body in space

In a patriarchal society, heteronormative rules govern urban space. These rules, deeply rooted in society, drive people to adapt to the mode of life and even subject their bodies to its "demands", and thus cover up their identity and provide a safe environment for themselves.

Identity and a bodily contour are determined not by individual's biological characteristics but through social relations and power distribution in public space. Presumably, that is what Judith Butler (1993) means when she says that heteronormativity uses its power structures and, through heterosexual hegemony, gives desired shape to a body and gender and considers it the only legitimate viable biological and social unit.

Elizabeth Groez (1995) does not equate queerness with sexual preferences and believes it may be common for both heterosexual and homosexual people. She considers diverse sexual practices, partners, goals and objects to be basic standard features. Therefore, queerness can be regarded as an antipode to heteronormativity. Because of the latter, dominant groups deem it a "deviant behavior", and label queer people as "deviants". As a result of such 'othering' queer people's use of public spaces, the public expression of their identities becomes significantly restricted, and even their lives are subjected to a threat.

A body that does not meet the accepted norms automatically becomes subject to oppression in public space. Groez (1995) belives that while the body is the main target of oppression, what matters more to the heteronormative majority is to what extent a queer person conforms to the norms imposed by society. She argues that if one does not contradict these norms by actions, society pays less attention to who a person is. Hiding queer identity in public space is what matters the most. In such a scenario, they will accept a queer person as a group member. This very distinction between identity and behaviour determines a person's position in public space. Groez considers such differentiation to be the primary source that fuels homophobia since it is based "on the activities of members of a group" (1995), not on their personal values. "They can do whatever they like in the privacy of their own homes" – is a widely used expression and an excellent illustration of that. Such attitude aims at marginalization and exclusion of non-dominant, different identities and interrupts harmonious co-existence of "private" and "public" – making people live double lives. It makes an effort to differentiate a person and behaviour, considering the body, not as something that exists but possible source of heteronormative behaviour. In such a case, there is no place left for a queer body in public space.

Ultraconservative groups, who consider themselves as "virtuous gatekeepers of traditional values", justify banishing the queer community from public space, for they are the ones with "non-traditional values" who "oppose to holiness of family" – for they are "different and dangerous". David Sibley argues that a wish for spatial and social belonging determines such an attitude. When people are trying to relate to a specific group, they seek to exclude others who they consider as "dangerous to holiness":

> Spatial exclusion has been the dominant process used to create social boundaries... Exclusion becomes imagined as the key means by which hegemonic groups (normally white, middle-class and heterosexual) have been able to marginalize and control those who do not match their ideas of what is an acceptable way of living or behaving… (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 121).

However, the constructivist perspective, dividing society into oppressors and oppressed, contributes to further binary perception of the problem and hinders

understanding of the dynamic character of social connections, relationships and power structures. The developments on Rustaveli avenue illustrate the Foucauldian[2] view of a horizontal, transitive and continuous distribution of power. The space which is primarily dominated by one group of society can be taken by others who are subjected to marginalization by dominant groups.

All this indicates how the body may be used to normalize and reproduce spatial exclusion. Power redistribution between groups of society depends precisely on an individual's body, which operates as a spatial agent, a variable to emphasize the difference (Grosz, 1995; Hubbard et al., 2002). Gill Valentine is a scholar who thinks that bodies are 'the product of interactions... constituted by particular constellations of social relations' (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 115). As a result of these interactions, bodies of certain types and shapes become normalized and "allowed" in public spaces, while bodies that are different are considered marginal and undesirable. Such understanding of moral geography becomes a prerequisite to spatial exclusion.

Under such conditions, it is essential to consider queer experience in the context of interconnection between body and space. For this purpose, representation and proper articulation of the problem are crucial. According to Groez, this is where a problem arises. While relying on emotional and physical aspects related to queer strivings and sexuality, she argues that in theorization "the most intense moments of pleasure… cannot be reduced to adequate terms" (Grosz, 1995, p. 222). Relying on this position, to problematize trauma – since we consider it a physical and emotional event – it is essential to construct narratives based on experiences.

2.2.2 Space/body interaction

Since space and socio-economic processes determine each other, and these processes are human-led, the biological body becomes central in the perception and development of the relationship with space. A body may be considered a spatial unit that takes up specific territory, utilizes, and creates space. This understanding of a body is related to the ideas related with

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2 Michel Faucault is a XX century French philosopher. Faucault believed that power is not static and in the hands of one specific group. Rather it is transient and dynamic. Non-stop interaction of members of the public with each other makes the power dynamic as a result of which behaviours, perceptions, habits and connections are altered.

Cultural Turn. Growing focus on consumerism and lifestyle in geographic studies facilitated subjecting a body to research (Hubbard et al., 2002).

Like space, body and identity are considered social constructs, denying biological determinism, which views bodies of different types and shapes only as useful for a particular activity. The traditional approach, differentiating individual's abilities based on biological body, justified and encouraged marginalization of a non-heteronormative body and gender-based inequality, racial, sexual preferences or belonging. The constructivist approach doesn't recognize the superiority of any one specific type of body or identity and argues that such division is a product of dominant societal attitudes formed in the process of socialization.

Humanistic approaches in geographic analysis focus on space/body interaction and its role in forming each identity. Our experiences of the world and our sense of place form relationships between individuals and, at the same time, help us see how the space is shaped by these individual experiences (Hubbard et al., 2002). Amin and Thrift's conceptualization of urban space resonates with this idea.

David Seamon (1979) differentiates three main areas of intersection between individual and space:

1. Movement – how individual bodies move through urban space;
2. Rest – how individual bodies find a place for a rest/to have a rest;
3. Encounter – how bodies interact with other bodies in everyday life.

This "triadic understanding of space/environment" emphasizes body's agency to perceive the environment through its lense and recognizes its epistemological superiority in exploring space and place. In this regard, the body is not in touch with the outside world, navigating in space primarily unaware. If we follow the traumatic experiences of the LGBTQI community, conceptualization of individual body/space interaction given by Seamons fails to recognize several important aspects. Experience of enduring trauma in a specific space may lead the individual to think ahead and withdraw from habitual behaviour when visiting the same space again or deliberately avoid the routes near the space.

The understanding of space/body interaction offered by Seamon seems to be rooted in a somewhat privileged position. We could elaborate on two

essential points of the triad from the feminist perspective as ways and strategies queer persons use for finding and creating "safe spaces" (rest) and spaces for socialization (encounter). The body determines how the person perceives a specific space – clothing or body contour often indicates whether a space makes a person feel comfortable, accepted and appreciated, or tries to marginalize, exclude or create feelings of insecurity (Hubbard et al., 2002). Thrift (1996, 2008) makes this very individualized experience the focus of the study and believes that seemingly banal, everyday practices determine an individual and his behaviour toward others in a particular space (Thrift, 1996, 2008; Hubbard et al., 2002).

In a post-socialist context, based on the example of Kyrgyzstan, von Boemcken et al. (2018), while considering the everyday practices of queer community, discuss deliberate strategies they use to avoid confrontations in public spaces. Queer people are compelled to refrain from expressing identity through their bodies; instead, they use tactics for adaptation and hiding. It may imply mirroring heteronormative behaviours and fashion styles or creating semi-public sterile spaces where only community members and close friends can gather, separately from the general public. The study also focuses on the strategies of covering up one's identity using one's body. For instance, lesbian women efficiently adapt to heteronormative fashion styles in urban areas, as general trends in fashion make some space for androgyny. Gay men try to model their behaviour and the way they walk on the body language of a heterosexual man; they pay regular visits to the gym to obtain more "muscular, 'male' body".

The male body has an essential place in gay culture. Muscular physiognomy emphasises its aesthetic significance and is a central element of gay identity. However, in specific socio-geographical contexts, its aesthetic significance resolves into the background and becomes a tool ensuring security instead. In this way, queer body takes on more practical meaning/significance. Adopting the elements of heteronormative appearance reduces the chances of dominant groups to identify gay men physically. On the other hand, by demonstrating masculine features of their bodies, gay men avoid interaction with potential abusers, signalling that they are capable of defending themselves in case of a physical altercation.

2.2.3. Fear and traumatic experience in relation to space

Taking up an urban space by ultraconservative groups with the arguments based on moral motifs and excluding fellow citizens with "different" bodies or identities carry a message that a queer body is a dangerous element to public life. It prompts the reproduction of fear in two directions. First, it aims to convince society that the queer community "threatens the country and the Christian values with extinction", since it denies dominant heteropatriarchy. Second, by cultivating the fear of violence, it tries to suppress the problems resulting from the socio-economic exclusion of the queer community members. In this way, dominant groups keep maintaining systems of power and oppression. Therefore, fear becomes one of the determinants of behaviour in public spaces. It calls upon a counter-reaction to "exclude, reject and shun" suspected strangers (Sparks et al., 2001, p. 885). As a result, fear determines the community members' everyday activities, consumption, and domestic arrangements.

Sparks et al. (2001) believe that linking personal experiences with broader social order is essential for theorization of fear in the context of urban space. Methodologically, tying these experiences to specific locations that are the source of trauma, individualized fear, and uncertainty is crucial. They argue that it provides some level of representativeness and resonates with the issue raised by Groes (1995) on articulating queer experiences. By studying differences between the local and general societal attitudes regarding a particular district and its level of crime, the authors argue that specific knowledge of the space is needed. The study showed that while it was a commonly held opinion, backed by statistics, that a criminal situation in a particular place was severe, the place was perceived as dangerous; however, the residents of the district believed the environment they lived in was safe. Sparks et al., focused on close social ties developed between the locals, giving them a sense of security and belongingness to the place. The same logic should be applied in differentiating between fear and traumatic experience in the queer community. Groez (1995) raises the question of whether and to what extent experiences of oppression and discrimination are similar for different community members. Is there a difference between the types of oppression or attacks lesbian, gay and trans persons become subjected to in public spaces? Are the community members equally exposed to homophobia? Does a par-

ticular location invoke equally traumatic feelings of danger in each member of the community? What are the reasons for the differences in their attitudes?

While reflecting on space and personal experiences, it is essential to consider that individuals identify with a specific space through particular experiences and determine their own role accordingly. As we have already mentioned based on Massey (1994), space is a point of intersection of individual experiences of persons with different identities. This feature gives the space a controversial quality and might often become the source of conflict. Nevertheless, such spaces prove to manifest social diversity. However, it is equally essential to consider the time factor in discussing space. The perception of safety of a particular location may vary during the day (24-hour day-night cycle). Many of the transgender respondents remember traumatic experiences – mostly related to sex work – that took place at night. However, they also consider appearing in public spaces risky during the daytime due to their non-conforming appearances.[3] Threats are changing with every day and night, and we will discuss this subject in more detail in the findings of the study.

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3 Audio trans narratives – project Wikd Rose, which connects queer history and memory with urban space – ss available from: https://narratives.wisg.org/ka/rose-garden

3. METHODOLOGY

The study aims to find and analyze the points of intersection between traumatic experiences of the community and space. It implies understanding of how queer traumas unfold in space. Specifically, the study focuses on how traumatic events affect queer people's everyday choices, sense of belonging, attitudes, and interactions with space.

For this purpose, the study aims to answer several questions based on the participants' experiences:

1. What are the queer traumatic events, and how do these experiences affect the everyday lives and behaviours of a queer individual?
2. What does the safe space mean, and what spaces are considered safe by queer people?
3. What is the essence of the queer body/urban space relationship? What are the strategies for manoeuvring through the space?
4. How do queer people see solidarity and activism, and which roledo they play in overcoming traumatic experiences?

3.1 STUDY SAMPLE

In search of answers to the listed questions, we conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen participants. The interviews were conducted offline and online with all participants by both authors of the study. The average duration of the interviews wasfrom one to two hours. We recruited members of the queer community and their friends through a targeted sampling. Three of the respondents were selected based on the snowball principle. The table below shows the list of the participants with altered names. The youngest of the participants was 21, whereas the oldest was 43.

3.2. AUTHORS' POSITIONING AND ETHICAL DIMENSION OF THE STUDY

This text, in essence, belongs to the category of qualitative research, and, therefore, the epistemology is based on the interpretation of empirical data.

Interpreting the data and generating new knowledge is one of the main features of the study. In this process, the researcher's position is crucial since the author's point of view, knowledge, and experience determine the character of fieldwork and understanding of the accumulated information (McDowell, 2010). Therefore, the authors do not claim that the study proposes the absolute truth. It only aims to revive the respondents' narratives within the theoretical framework presented in the study's first chapter.

The authors of the present study work in the field of social sciences. However, their professional focus and experiences differ. This circumstance is a significant factor in the study. As a clinical psychologist, Salome Shiukashvili (co-author) has practical and research experience with the community. She knows the community and has closer relationships with its members, hence the mutual respect. Salome's experience as a practitioner psychologist (counsellor) is particularly important in discussing trauma-related issues.

Unlike Salome, Giorgi Kankia, the second author of the study, specializes in urban geography, urban planning, and spatial analysis and thus brings a perspective of an outsider into the research process. In conducting the fieldwork, the latter poses a significant challenge. The sense of alienation between the respondents and researcher intensifies, and under insufficient interpersonal trust, a respondent might not welcome the deep exploration of a sensitive subject. This problem was more or less evident during the interaction with the study participants. That said, it might as well positively impact the study outcomes, giving an outsider's perspective on the subject of the study. This circumstance may contribute to the credibility of the problems concerning the community discussed by the participants and make it more evident to the dominant groups.

The in-depth interviews were based on the open questions related to several important issues selected by the authors. In this process, it was particularly important to employ open questions by the so called outsider co-author. It allowed for informal conversation, establishing trust between a participant and the researcher. The strength of this method lies in allowing a respondent to openly express opinions and share personal experiences (Flick, 2018). In this process, the power balance is in favour of a study participant because she/he knows the information is crucial to the study. Due to the nature of the study, it was necessary to introduce the principles of confidentiality to

the study participants. For this purpose, the authors have replaced the actual names of the participants with fictional names. The participants were provided with adequate material incentives to compensate for the time, energy, and discomfort experienced while discussing sensitive, often personal topics.

Here, we shall also mention another significant feature of the fieldwork related to online interviews. This approach may be considered safer in the face of a pandemic and, generally, for discussing sensitive subjects with a stranger. However, as experience has shown, a virtual medium makes it more challenging to break the ice between a researcher and a participant, which, as a result, often contributes to accumulating superficial information.

Before starting the fieldwork, the authors introduced the content, conditions, and the focus of the study to the participants and obtained their written consents. The authors asked them for permission to record conversations, the sole purpose of which was to prepare transcripts for further analysis. The participants provided verbal consent to the researchers' request.

3.3 ANALYSIS

The interviews recorded were digitalized in the form of transcripts. Next, we coded the gathered information in the qualitative research software, based on important topics. The coding process is iterative because important topics are sorted anew, and codes change accordingly. Next, we synthesized the material, and provided the interpretation.

The table below shows the summary of the gathered information alongside the names, interview dates and the important topics identified. It should be noted that the topics reflect both predetermined questions by the authors and important problems highlighted by the respondents throughout the interviews.

Respondent	Identity	Age	Date	Important topics
1 – Nino	Queer woman	32	11/09/2021	Physical appearance; coping; fluidity of safe space; traumatic experience.
2 – Keti	Queer woman	26	15/09/2021	Traumatic experience; solidarity; fluidity of safe space; heteronormative appearance; coping.

3 – Maia	Queer woman	34	16/09/2021	Traumatic experience; gender-based sexual harassment.
4 – Andrea	Transgender man	21	28/09/2021	Constant fear and anxiety; expectation of an attack; fluid physical appearance; coping.
5 – Asmat	Queer woman	43	01/10/2021	Self-establishment; traumatic experience; physical experience; fluid space.
6 – Sandra	Queer woman	30	16/09/2021	Family; self-establishment; physical appearance; traumatic experience.
7 – Eva	Transgender woman	32	02/10/2021	Traumatic experience; fluid space; self-establishment; fluid physical appearance.
8 – Irakli	Queer man	33	04/10/2021	Family; self-establishment; physical appearance; traumatic experience; coping.
9 – Tiko	Queer woman	35	18/09/2021	Criticizing visibility politics; analysing the problem of solidarity/empathy.
10 – Tea	Queer woman	21	12/10/2021	Sexual harassment; solidarity in the community; loss of feeling home; coming out as a chronic trauma.
11 – Ia	Transgender woman	25	18/09/2021	Body hating; limited space; non-binary body; broadening space in the process of transition;
12 – Mikheil	Transgender man	42	18/09/2021	Attacks/traumatic experiences; hiding body as a way of coping; privileges of being in man's body.
13 – Zura	Transgender man	35	24/09/2021	Hiding body, as a way of coping; traumatic experience; broadening space in the process of transition.
14 – Nika	Queer man	29	30/09/2021	Fluid space; fluidity as an asset; activism; standardization of queerness; exclusive spaces.
15 – Mariam	Non-binary	23	30/09/2021	Sexual abuse; body hating; fluid space; fluid physical appearance.
16 – Natalia	Queer woman	25	29/09/2021	Traumatic experience; coming out as a chronic trauma; coping; activism.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Below we will discuss in detail the traumatic experiences of queer body in urban space. We will touch on the issue of individual perception of trauma, its symptoms, gender dimension, coping strategies and the impact of trauma on the lives and relationships of queer people. In addition, we will try to convey what solidarity and activism mean from the community members' perspective and how it can be shaped. In discussing safe spaces for queer people, we will consider a sense of security and fluid, everchanging nature of a space. We will also mention the strategies and approaches queer people use to navigate spaces that constantly pose danger to them. In the course of the study, we will find out how body determines queer identity and how it is a strategic instrument used to create a safe environment. In examining queer bodies and spaces, we will consider how a city and physical environment affect the behaviour and appearance of queer people and vice versa, and how certain perceptions of city may develop from queer perspectives.

4.1. QUEER TRAUMA – A CHAIN OF EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

> I'd compare trauma to… to a seed, you know, which – in case you repress it and do not take care of it – will grow and possess you and come to you in one way or form or another. It is not the same seed anymore… it's changed… distorted, enlarged…" (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021)

In this chapter, we will go through the queer traumatic experiences and the ways of coping. The interviews show that traumatic events related to sexuality and gender identity/expression are rooted in the early years of childhood and related to intimate relationships and the process of self-determination. Traumatic experiences follow queer people from adolescence into adulthood and intensify over time. For instance, people lose friends, get excluded from their families, and become subject to attacks in public and private spaces. However, their ways of coping evolve as well, and they develop certain

strategies to reduce such experiences. The participants note that in the face of continuous violence, they don't have the luxury to relax. They have to develop new skills and strategies to survive.

In the interviews, we asked the participants what trauma means to them, which associations the word invokes, and which experiences and events they consider traumatic. We discussed personal experiences as well as experiences they went through as members of the community, such as the developments of May 17, 2013, the killings of transgender women, and the events of July 5, 2021. Despite the different levels of engagement in the listed events – some of them went through life-threatening situations, while others watched it on screen from home or even from another country – their reactions are quite similar. Subjective perceptions and explanations revealed standard features the participants associate with trauma.

4.1.1. Trauma and forced changes

The participants associate trauma with the changes in their lives that affected their personal qualities and the relationships with others. When asked what traumatic experience means to them, associations such as helplessness, fear, emotional distress, forced changes, repressed memories, unexpectedness, and negative emotions often emerged, "a seed that grows and becomes distorted, if not taken care of."

Natalia describes trauma as an adverse event, which changes a person over time against one's will. For example, the fear experienced in childhood has changed her ways of expression and relationships. She became more cautious and suspicious. She realized these changes only in hindsight, later in her adulthood.

> Little things change you in the end; that's what is traumatizing to me… and it's that the years pass before you finally realize that you have been changed because of something; you made a different choice while you never wished things to turn out that way… (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

In discussing the possibility of renewal of trauma, Nino observes that traumatic experiences may come back in different forms during life.

> [trauma] stays on your mind for a while in a particular form. It may not always be active, but it's there, and it's renewal is possible (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021).

Similarly, for Thea, trauma implies something that has been forgotten but still finds its way into one's consciousness and interrupts everyday activities:

> Trauma is a sort of experience that might not personally concern me. I might only be a witness to it, but it instantly prompts negative emotions and afterwards, somehow, it gets stored in consciousness incorrectly. To give an example, I am reminded of my traumas, my childhood traumas, today. I might be cooking, and some facts from the past will resurface (Interview with Thea, 12/10/2021).

When thinking of trauma, Andrea describes physiological sensations; he says that these same sensations are the signals indicating that something is not finished yet.

> Physically I feel something like… I have a sensation mostly as if my heart is being squeezed, and I've figured that whenever it happens it means something is not quite right, and I am being reminded of some traumas (Interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Maia focuses on the overwhelming feelings of fear and helplessness that bound a person to avoid a traumatic event or resist it:

> First of all, it's fear… I can't recall anything… it's fear… yes, feeling of powerlessness, helplessness, I've had feelings of utter helplessness in such experiences (interview with Maia, 16/09/2021).

4.1.2. Queer trauma

In the interviews, we discussed how queer traumas are different from traumas other groups experience. The participants focus on two main factors. First, it is the difficulties related to the process of self-determination, which might result in denying oneself and bringing a person to self-destruction.

Some participants mentioned self-harming practices and alcohol abuse, or complete social isolation. The second factor is coming out:

> It's does not matter which queer community you belong to… we all have had the most troubling childhood experiences. First, it all started with self-perception. For me, it was traumatizing as it was for others. I know many members who had this challenging moment of self-acceptance. Everything begins from that moment and continues throughout life, and then society comes into play and many more factors; I wonder all the time how have we managed to keep our sanity to this day (interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

Natalia speaks about society's impact and recounts a childhood moment when she first fell in love with a school-mate girl. She confided in a friend about her feelings, who revealed her secret to the whole school. Natalia remembers feeling tense and afraid all the time that the news would eventually reach her parents.

Revealing sexual orientation or gender identity to others can be a difficult and emotionally daunting task. It may be followed by multiple negative consequences – cutting ties or being subjected to physical abuse, to name a few. It may become particularly traumatizing in the context of family and close relationships, when rejection is the only answer to coming out.

For instance, Ia recalls how, after she came out to her family, she felt compelled to leave her home – either she had to go or her brother. Ia decided to rent an apartment herself since her younger brother would not bother to do the same. Thea speaks about chronic pressure and how coming out becomes a dividing line between the old and new life. However, starting everything anew can be tricky:

> When you are hiding, it is somewhat prolonged psychological pressure. You create it for yourself. When you have already come out and the whole drama is over, you feel much more free and you really can move mountains and nothing can stop you, because they know it and there is nothing else left. But you must be in that mental state, mental ability, to endure this one big drama when your whole life

> turns upside down. First, it crumbles before your eyes and then it's time for restoration. The life you lived for so many years has been an illusion, you have to shatter it with your own hands, shatter it for the sake of your mother, father and especially for the sake of your-self and your private life (interview with Thea, 12/10/2021).

At the same time, coming out is considered an opportunity to overcome chronic trauma, but only in cases in which social support is present.

Zura tells us how initially he feared revealing his gender identity since he did not want to lose people and be left alone. However, connecting to other queer people and hearing about their experiences empowered him to start the process of coming out to his mother. Mariam sees coming out as an effective tool and points out that coming out to her friends made her more capable of defending herself:

> I used to forgive a friend of homophobia or unacceptance, but after that (coming out), I don't do that anymore, and I just have broken up a relationship. Until coming out, I thought it was impossible. I always hesitated to do so. But after that, I've been able to defend myself better (interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

The participants also note that, at times, coming out plays a significant role in receiving support since friends and family members start to see them differently – a queer is not some distant stranger; it is a family member or a friend. However, the more discriminatory and aggressive environment is, the higher the risk that queer people will go through traumatic and violent experiences, especially after coming out.

4.1.3. Gender and trauma

The narratives revealed that traumatic experiences differ by gender. Queer women differ from queer men in their experiences, while the experiences of transgender and non-binary people are even more distinctive from the others. In the interview, Eva points out the necessity of understanding traumatic experiences through the lens of intersection since the experiences of people belonging to multiple minority groups are considerably harder, and they use

different mechanizms to cope. Eva is a member of a religious minority and a transgender woman, while Mikheil is a member of an ethnic minority and a transgender man. Such intersection creates a certain hierarchy of oppression within the community as well.

The queer women participants are bound by experiences of sexual harassment, stalking, and rape. They describe numerous changes their body, mind, and perception of space and time went through as a result of these experiences. For example, there are places that they consciously avoid visiting, and their self-expression and attitude toward the body have changed.

Mariam recalls an episode of attempted sexual violence having a long-lasting effect on her life. She mainly focuses on negative emotions she experiences toward her and other bodies such as aversion to touch, and desire to 'change' her body, which eventually resulted in her refraining from a relationship in the form of a partnership:

> A drunk man followed me, and I had headphones in my ears and could not detect it… he attacked me… attacked, and although in the end, I could escape that situation, it took me a very long time to… my own body… I don't know, I felt very… felt very humiliated and ashamed, but I could not tell what I was ashamed of (interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

Irakli speaks about the consequences of sexual repression after a traumatic experience:

> I believe that it (consequences of trauma) did affect my sexual life for the following several months. I might have realized that a little bit later… for several months, I hadn't have even the slightest desire; somewhat unconsciously, I guess it grew into self-censorship (Interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

He believes that the ultimate goal of the attacks on queer people is to destroy their sexuality and the sense of freedom linked to it. They, Irakli argues, aim at maintaining unequal power structures and reproduction of oppression of the community:

> Such repressive acts, these acts of violence, now I believe, are entirely aimed at suppressing these sexual impulses. Because a person who is sexually free and is comfortable with his body, self and sexuality, and can receive pleasure and enjoy it, such people, I think, are dangerous to the system. And that's why I believe this whole narrative by the religious and political establishment is built mainly on the repression of sexuality (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

Nino tells us about an attempted attack at the university when a group of boys standing nearby besieged her and her partner. Nino notes that going to the university became tough for her after the incident because she had to walk the same place and be surrounded by potential aggressors each time. In the interview, Nino points out that even though she continued to study at the university and went to work, where she also experienced harassment based on gender expression, her sense of well-being and enjoyment decreased; however, she stayed/remained functional:

> The idea of going (to university) itself became unpleasant and undesirable… as for the work, I loved the work I was doing, but the level of enjoyment, or well-being, at the workplace… since I knew that because of my appearance I was banished? I don't know what word to use… so I was alienated from them; therefore, it impacted how much I wanted to go to work, yes… how good I felt there (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021).

Mikheil recalls an incident of physical assault in a public space with a girlfriend, before transition. Mikheil says that there have been a lot of similar incidents in his life. For this reason, Mikheil severely restricted his social circle. His life has been reduced to "home and work". He avoids public entertainment spaces and crowds in general:

> We were sitting in "Deda Ena Park", smoking cigarettes, and I had my hand resting on the bench, not that I was hugging her or something. I had my hand stretched out behind and smoking. "You, fucking lesbians" and… three men started beating me, so I could not tell where

> I was or what was going on. I was severely beaten, twice stuck with a
> knife, they cut my leg and passed the knife over a rib, well it was not
> a deep wound… (interview with Mikheil, 18/09/2021).

However, Mikheil points out how the transition to the male body creates itself a sense of security and makes her less vulnerable to threats. He says that since his body became noticeably masculine, and he is positioning as a man, attacks and oppression became less frequent:

> Nowadays, since they perceive you as a man, many are trying to
> be careful because a man might respond differently; he may be
> stronger than you are, and aggression is no more the language
> they communicate with (interview with Mikheil, 18/09/2021).

4.1.4 Coping with traumatic experiences

The participants choose different approaches to effectively cope with traumatic experiences. In some cases, approaches are constructive in nature; in other cases, they can be aimed at self-destruction.

The traumatic experience may itself become a way of coping. Eva recalls incidents of attacks in public spaces that changed her and changed the attitudes of abusers toward her. After the attack, it seems as if she had sacrificed something to win the right to walk those streets and spaces safely:

> Nowadays streets are not safe for me, but it's not "Fort Boyard" ei-
> ther, I don't have to overcome all those obstacles because I am not
> afraid anymore. Same with those children who beat me and insult-
> ed me, or ignored me, or even people who say hello. Imagine, peo-
> ple who had beaten me on May 17, in 2013 [public space location],
> my nose was bleeding like a fountain… and these days, when they
> meet me on the street [public space location], saying "what's up", I
> respond like "oh, pardon me?" and I pass by. I pass by since I am no
> more afraid to walk that same "spot" where I was beaten… so, you
> know, you go through changes, and a circumstance or a place you
> think of as dangerous, tomorrow might become safe and vice versa
> (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

For the most part, Natalia chooses to attack back. For her, it turned out to be the most effective way of avoiding negative experiences. She says that at the workplace, for example, they know that she will respond; thus, everyone at the workplace avoids harassing her – "I speak back the language they speak to me", says Natalia.

Mariam tells us that after traumatic experiences, her desire to control the environment has intensified. She uses control to avoid danger. It helps her calm her anxiety, even though it takes a considerable amount of energy:

> Always, everywhere I am very vigilant and try to control the situation… I always look back while walking down the street and never use my headphones, I'm always trying to be aware of what is happening around me (interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

Social coping

To cope with traumatic experiences, the participants talk to trusted persons or refer to professional help services – "I am aware, it is hard, but you have to consult with a specialist, etc. You must not dwell on it forever", notes Eva.

Thea says that psychological service helped her in coping with traumatic experiences. "Going to therapy helped me to understand many things. Like things I was running from or turned a blind eye on, and they worried me, and I brought all those buried topics to the surface and took a different look at them…", she notes.

Mariam says that in the process of self-determination, her queer friend turned out to be her main supporter, who was going through the same at that time. It was beneficial since they had no access to information and knew nothing about community organizations:

> It's my best friend… both of us identify as queers. When we came out to each other, it made it easier, because we shared our thoughts, we shared information… having at least one person to talk to, that meant a lot to me (interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

Isolation and self "makeover"

Tendencies to self-isolate reduce opportunities for self-realization and discourage people from developing and growing, by limiting their space. When traumatic experiences are chronic, they tend to create a vicious cycle. Queer persons are familiar with that experience. For example, for Mikheil limiting space and contacts is the solution. For years, he says, after going through more than a few painful experiences, including in the process of transition, he lost close friends and cut his relationship with his brother, causing him pain and damage. He finally decided to strictly limit social contacts:

> I found the right solution that I am on my own… I found my golden cage, where I feel at peace and let in only close people who I know for sure won't stab me in the back (interview with Mikheil, 18/09/2021).

Zura has chosen the same way of coping. In his case, limiting social contacts and accessible spaces is related to his transition. He says that, after joining activism and revealing his gender on social media platforms, contacts were severed automatically:

> My space, I mean my surroundings, is only limited to community members, friends, and supporters, and that's it. Family and close extended family: two aunts, two cousins and three friends (Interview with Zura, 24/09/2021).

Like other participants, Natalia does not see the future in Georgia in terms of achieving happiness and considers leaving the country. Many of her friends have left the country, she says, and she is preparing too:

> It is not only about poverty [desire to leave the country] … It may be that they [queer people] want to be happy as well, which is very hard to achieve here. You might not be beaten, but not be happy either, since you cannot be who you really are because of many things. They probably leave for happiness rather than something else… (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

After a bad experience of cyberbullying, Andrea deliberately started to create a new person in himself who would not ever fall victim to such attacks:

> I took myself and created a prototype of the desirable person, embodied him and just left out everything that was not aligned with that prototype. It was the biggest change led by a trauma (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Andrea also recalls a period when he just "froze" and tried to be unreachable to avoid attacks – "I hid my feelings and emotions from people and acted as if I was made of stone", Andrea notes.

Meeting with traumatic memory

Traumatic memories, thoughts about traumatic experiences that sometimes forcibly intrude the mind, are handled differently by the participants. One of the ways to cope with negative emotions is to escape from traumatic memories and completely forget about them. A safe space is necessary to cope with traumatic memory, where a person will be able to speak or express feelings in one way or another. In this regard, queer persons are in a more complex situation since safe spaces are often less accessible to them.

Ia, for instance, chooses to forget – "I'm trying to erase my past from my life", she notes. Conversely, for Natalia remembering and recognizing negative experiences turned out to be a valuable experience; it helped her find the answers:

> I just started thinking about it, and that was it, why I wanted it, and if I wanted it why I couldn't move on, and live the life as I wanted, and I came to that conclusion. I would never think about things from my childhood that were traumatic, and I thought that was my way of self-defence; I tried not to remember, and now little by little I'm remembering hard stuff, I cannot even tell whether it happened to me or someone else… I just forgot about it… (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

Mariam tries not to rush and step-by-step overcome the influence of traumatic memory on her everyday life. She is trying to talk about it with other people, which gradually decreases its negative effect:

> I do get angry at myself that I let those moments have a massive impact on me, but I don't push myself, and little by little, I will get used to it; and at some point, I will get there. Because I always used to have this feeling of panic that I would never be free of these fears; but I have learned to wait and let myself adjust (Interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

Meeting with the memories of traumatic experiences, remembering them, and telling a story, is usually related to complex emotions. Nonetheless, it is a necessary element in overcoming trauma. However, rushing through this process may lead to only temporary relief. Therefore, these two strategies – remembering and devoting time – are essential for queer people to turn their traumas into experiences and lessons on individual and the community levels.

Meaning as a way of coping

Making sense meaning of what has happened may require considerable resources and take a long time. Some of the respondents remember incidents of violence against activists and discuss the impact of trauma and how their perspectives shifted, thus being able to survive and feel empowered.

In discussing the events of May 17, 2013, Sandra, whose life was in danger that day, says that that incident made her realize her role in this life. She saw meaning in her daily decisions and where she stands:

> That experience showed me... it really helped me find myself, it showed me where I had to be; I even started searching for a job that day… I knew where I wanted to work, who to work with and in which team… (interview with Sandra, 19/09/2021).

She puts great emphasis on saving a memory of trauma since that very memory gives her impetus to care for other people.

Irakli notes that he does not see trauma as a tragedy and believes these experiences should not drown us. If you survive this 'death' in literal and figurative senses, everything goes well after that. Therefore, this very experience might become a significant motivator in pursuing other interests:

> To escape and come out from this horrific experience, you start to develop so many skills and do not let yourself to relax for a moment, it's the other way round, it turns into a huge tide of energy, directed to your work, to your area of interest, you just need to give it a direction and it is such a tide of energy … what proved to be a hindrance to your development and full realization of yourself, becomes the fuel to your development and living to the fullest (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

Thea has a similar view. She tells us that trauma has two outcomes/solutions: either it pulls you back or leads in the right direction. According to Thea, processing trauma is a crucial element of recovery; speaking about trauma is necessary, or you get in the loop of negative emotions. And the memory of trauma comes back unexpectedly and brings you back to the past:

> There are two ways you could use it, either it empowers you, and you are stronger in a similar situation... That's why you are trying to process the trauma, to be more resilient and feel stronger; or it comes back and you end up in similar situations, and they make you feel bad again; it is the same catastrophic scenario and something horrible is happening again, and anxiety and panic attacks come back as well (interview with Thea, 12/10/2021).

4.1.5. Collective trauma and its circulation

Activism is linked to the production of collective and personal traumas. The participants recall episodes of pogroms and violence linked to public demonstrations. These episodes impact the whole community, and it is possible to consider them as collective traumas.

Maia remembers May 17 of 2013, and notes that she followed that day's developments from another country. She thinks that to this day, she has not

been able to comprehend what had happened. She describes the negative feelings caused by those events:

> I tried many times to put myself in their (activists at the scene) shoes, but you can't really do that, can you?... It has affected everybody, I guess, the whole community; in some respect, it is a common experience for everybody… I remember in the following months, I had these anxieties, I felt a bit more insecure (interview with Maia, 16/09/2021).

Asmat recalls the same day. She explains that she does not participate in public demonstrations as she does not want to put her child at risk of loosing a parent. Asmat sees engaging in public demonstrations as a privilege:

> To this day, it's a bitter memory, I can't watch those scenes. At that moment, I was at work and could not physically go. And the reason for why I avoid demonstrations is that I do not have the luxury to sacrifice myself, I have a child who needs me (interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

Natalia tells us about the developments of July 5-6 of 2021, when she took part in "Tbilisi Pride" event. She recalls how she was forced to leave the place:

> Even though I went there with this attitude… how to put it… I was thinking, "who will dare to harm us"… first we were inside, and some horrible screaming was coming from I don't know where, and in the end, we had to escape from the upper side, and it was such a meaningless thing to do, chased by some people and it was a horror… I was not afraid, but this meaninglessness, of running because of something so trivial and you don't even know why you are running or being chased… this is what concerns me in relation to that day and in general too… (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

In most of the interviews, the participants mentioned an increase in the incidents of violence during May and summer. Every year, this period becomes

a challenge even to those not engaged in activism. The participants note that during May and summer, they become more vigilant, avoid going out, they dress in darker colours to avoid danger. Visibility days become days of hiding for queer people. During this time of the year, community members see themselves as the most vulnerable since not only queer identity and body become targeted, but any non-normative appearance.

Nika speaks about moral pressure accompanying this period, affecting persons with different points of view within the community. It affects people who do not support public demonstrations or are not actively involved in different events. Mainly, he sees a problem in outside actors criticising queer persons. More often than not, these people come from the most privileged backgrounds:

> That was that time, when one woman politician, who had waved that rainbow flag on TV several times, said that those who… well, I can't recall the exact quote, but… she referred to the queer community… "those who do not fight for their rights and freedoms" deserve neither of them. So actually, the people who refused to go to the demonstration were labelled as "wimps", I mean for real, they labelled those people as "wimps", it is not like I have made this up, and we often have to stand before this moral court (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

Irakli believes some events have led the queer community and the wider public to reexamine things. Discussing the events of May 17 of 2013, he notes:

> Maybe there was not this big national cathartic moment, but the significant part, the core of our society, political and cultural life was somehow… it's as if that day gave us this push… at least we saw what we don't want to be and what a man shouldn't be in general, what politics shouldn't look like and societal life and what country we want to live in, at least we saw that. That day gave us a little push toward cleansing and awakening (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

To cope with collective trauma, society's engagement is essential. The queer community could apply activism to create space for discussing traumatic, negative experiences and contribute to the process of mourning and memorialization. Irakli recalls a memorial webpage for May 17, which, to some extent, has ended the process of mourning and gave it a specific time/space dimension. As for the developments of July 5-6 of 2021, it will take some time to process:

> Three months have passed after it was created, and indeed, it seems like it had an effect of self-curing… it was that we have overcome, at least me, and many have said the same… it seems like we have overcome, you know, it has become part of the past… it [May 17] is no more a part of our everyday lives (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

4.2. SOLIDARITY – A TOOL TO END CHRONIC ABUSE

„Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships,
it cannot occur in isolation"
(Judith Herman, 1992)

This chapter will focus on how queer people perceive solidarity, the significance of activism, and their role in coping with the chronic nature of violence.

4.2.1. Community-based support

Solidarity and supportive human connections play crucial role in coping with traumatic experiences. Trauma tends to marginalize and isolate an individual, while social connections act like antidote. Social support is essential for persons whose social circle has considerably shrunk after coming out or who are hiding sexual orientation or identity and only express authentic self within the community. The participants recall moments of solidarity within the community at critical times.

Thea tells us about her feelings when she started attending queer gatherings in a community-based organization. This experience, she says, helped her overcome feelings of loneliness and rejection since she realized she was not the only one to struggle with difficulties related to queerness:

It is security, respect… having shared experiences is important, because if you have not gone through the same thing, you won't be able to fully understand me… You may say 'oh, it is horrible?', but it won't be the same as having gone through the same experience (interview with Thea, 12/10/2021).

At the same time, Ia and Zura recall moments of support from non-queer persons, like classmates, and the readiness of childhood friends to support them in adulthood, which has a positive effect on their well-being:

My childhood girl mates wrote to me, I don't know how they found me on Facebook, I already had a new name and surname, and they recognized me. They wrote, "I fully support you, you can always count on me" (interview with Ia, 18/09/2021).

4.2.2. Social solidarity

"No one is going to get empowered in Georgia by solidarity
and evoking empathy in people.
You can't evoke empathy,
there's simply no empathy there…"
(interview with Tiko, 18/09/2021).

To combat isolation on an individual level, supporting each other within the community is a valuable asset. However, the absence of external support leads to the isolation of the whole community. Tiko, for example, believes that evoking solidarity in broader society is impossible since queer problems are not on the societal agenda; therefore, there is no empathy toward queer people. She explains that this situation results from the low standard of living, as people are living in a survival mode. Therefore, freedom of expression and sexuality remain overlooked. Given the circumstances, Tiko thinks that instead of focusing on public activities, it would be better to focus on strengthening/empowering the inner circle. She believes that everything the activists do publicly contribute to worsening the everyday lives of queer persons. It turns them into targets of aggression and "reproduces traumas".

> The majority has no empathy, they don't have time for empathy, they have different agenda, and for them [broader society], all of this is a little bit tiring and extra (interview with Tiko, 18/09/2021).

Opinions differ regarding the expression of support by different age groups. The participants note that the younger generation is more supportive toward the queer community; however, they also recall having experienced negative and crueller attitudes from young people. Overall, there is hardly any support from external groups, and the participants could not recall the moments of solidarity. For the most part, they remember the moments of seeming solidarity. On support from political parties, Natalia notes that she would not put her trust in them since whenever there is a decisive moment, they just 'hide', and queer problems stay invisible or are overshadowed by other topics.

> Political parties, whether they are in the parliament or not, those very people never speak about this topic, say, the largest oppositional party, it hid on July 5-6 (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

Zura believes that participating in political life and voting is pointless, as his voice is never heard. At the same time, Nika remembers a signed agreement between political parties and the organization "Tbilisi Pride". He points out the behaviour of political figures after the developments of July 5 as evidence of their spurious support. He thinks that once again, the focus moved away from queer problems towards the opposition between Russia and the West and criticism of pro-Russian government, while the queer community faces actual social problems and demands to be visible in public life. The needs of the community were used by the political parties to mark themselves as progressives in the eye of international partners:

> Solidarity depends on the benefit. When oppositional parties signed that document with "Pride", they just showed it off in front of Europe, like, hey look, we are the democrats here. But in fact, not so long ago they blackmailed us and spied on us and just like that they became "friendly" overnight, so…" (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

Nika also points out spurious solidarity in entertainment spaces. There too, he explains, solidarity from non-queers is based on the hope to benefit from it:

> Like, when a heterosexual girl wants to have a gay friend who will go shopping with her to "Zara". Or the so called "postdude" boys, want to have one gay friend "for a change", so that not to embarrass themselves with "woke" people; to be able to say, like I have a gay friend, he's very good at "partying", and he has great girlfriends (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

Natalia gives an example of her workspace, where no one overtly expresses hate or rejection based on SOGIE; however, their real attitudes find expression in small acts:

> No one identifies as a homophobic where I work. They don't want to be perceived like that. If you ask them a serious question about minorities, their position is fair. But in reality, the jokes they're making, their attitudes are usually clear, and they are like that. They are homophobic, xenophobic, but nobody wants to admit it. It's like they are joking, but it is not a joke when a person is insulting you (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

Ia believes the divide between the community and the broader society must disappear. She criticizes identity politics and thinks that contributes to the isolation of the community. However, she also focuses on the responsibility society carries in this process and thinks that they must come to terms with their queer children:

> Society must eliminate this divide between them and us, and perhaps that's the way to overcome homophobia. Until society has this idea of us being strangers, an island, different from them… and we contribute to it with parading sexual orientation and identity [politics]… (interview with Ia, 18/09/2021).

Nika points out the necessity to make the broader society uncomfortable. Unless everyone experiences violence, no one will show solidarity, Nika explains:

> Suddenly that week, while this horror was happening, it turned out that some have heterosexual sons with long hair and earrings and daughters with short hair, and they were horrified by the thought that their children too would become targeted. So, in fact, unless the broader society is disturbed and thinks that they too are going to be targeted, their children are going to be targeted, everything is pointless until then (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

4.2.3. Activism and recovery/restoration

Activism can be considered as a tool for recovery from traumatic experiences. Following negative events of great magnitude, affecting the whole community and society, activism may provide guidance, when it comes to connecting the community with the society, healthy coping, mourning and memorialization.

The interviews show how opinions differ regarding the role activism plays in these events. In fact, queer activism is more related to the reproduction of traumatic experiences rather than abilities to overcome them. The participants criticize queer activists, the community-based organizations, politicians and public actors.

Tiko says that the best solution is to come to terms with the reality. The queer community and community-based organizations refuse to do so; The activists deny the reality and instead invite the whole community to live in an illusion. The reality is devoid of empathy, solidarity, here life is not something valuable; therefore, it is pointless to ask for solidarity from any group:

> You must take off your pink glasses so that you won't end up all confused, like "why exactly did it happen to me, is not the police protecting us?" To cut it short, it's best to see the reality, I would recommend that to the queer community… and it wood make me happy, if there were people in the queer community who think like me… and if they make a revolution… if they dissociate themselves from some parasites who manipulate with their identities (Interview with Tiko, 18/09/2021).

Nika criticizes activism and the community-based organizations for their imitated politics and thinks it won't bring any result. He thinks that it is essential to lay the groundwork for the emergence of local, authentic perspectives on queer agenda.

> In Georgia and the countries that follow the West's example, there's still a chance to create something local, unique and different and not necessarily think that we need our Stonewall or we should shoot a Glitter bullet and paint everything in colours (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

Natalia too criticizes activism and its monopolization. She thinks, that the solution might be to make "non-active" individuals act. Over the time the queer politics got associated with certain faces/figures, who do not necessarily represent the queer community. Natalia believes that the role of the community-based organizations is to engage queers in producing politics, to talk to them:

> What queer community thinks is never visible… that is the problem, in my opinion, that if there's someone somewhere making a comment, it is an activist, who is a heterosexual, and it makes no sense… I don't understand that… (interview with Natalia, 29/09/2021).

Mariam says she can not foresee anything good when thinking about the future, solution, and solidarity. It makes us, the researchers feel the protest coming from her as if we are asking her to provide a recipe for solution. After all, phobias and violent behaviour are a problem of broader society/external groups rather than the queer community. However, it seems that society is less concerned with it compared to queer individuals.

> Mostly, I'm trying to imagine the worst-case scenario in my head when thinking about the future; say, it is the queer community, Georgia itself, our territory, and I don't see anything changing for the better. I think in my lifetime, I cannot imagine the future

so bright where queer community is living their best lives, I mean, they cannot live a full life, it won't happen any time soon. Future doesn't look good to me, and I don't see anything good coming (interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

In the process of analysis, queer activism appears as a disunited/fragmented body, as if it is being pulled in different directions simultaneously. In a situation with no sense of unity, making activism responsible for the healing is not easy. Discussing the formation and development of activism is beyond the scope of this paper, yet its understanding is still important in coping with traumatic experiences.

4.3. SAFE SPACE – FRAIL AND FLUID

„every space is safe as much
it is dangerous"
(interview with Sandra, 16/09/2021)

The experiences told in the previous chapter have shown us the time/space dimension of trauma. Traumatic experiences of the community members, whether in their everyday lives or while engaging in activism, have outlined the role of a body in the time/space dimension and how it impacts the behaviour towards the environment, surrounding people and spaces.

In this chapter, we will discuss these topics in more detail and how queer individuals perceive safe spaces. In the course of the interviews, numerous factors have come forward determining to what extent individuals perceive the social and geographical spaces as safe. It has been clearly demonstrated that sense of safety is constantly changing and not linked to a particular geographic location. There is no urban space evoking an absolute sense of safety and security:

Every space is safe as much as it is dangerous. There is no particular space since you can't tell who is waiting for you in the corner, who will not like you, or who will remember you, you never know that (interview with Sandra, 16/09/2021).

Queer people may consider social situations as safe spaces, such as being with friends, an event, a closed event. Therefore, we could tell that, in this case, a safe space is essentially fluid. It is temporal and constantly changing. Sense of safety in such space is relative. For the most part, it relies on external factors since after a particular gathering or meeting, people have to return to the spaces, that are a source of constant anxiety for them (a street, park, public transport, and even home). This attitude is solidified by individual or group traumatic experiences of the community members and therefore determines the differences in their perception of safety:

> Physical safety is not the only thing you need as a person when you are in a particular space. It is crucial to be accepted without judgement, having no need to prove that you are an ordinary, normal person, nothing is wrong with you, etc. (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021).

It indicates that alongside physical safety, people also need support, recognition and acceptance to feel safe. The frail nature of safe spaces is particularly evident as queer-sensitive dates are approaching. The participants believe that as May 17 approaches, the risk of attacks and violent incidents grows. Therefore, members of the community feel more insecure around this time since the spaces that may appear safe on the surface might instantly become dangerous for queer individuals. It once again demonstrates how frail safe space is for community members and underscores its amorphous nature. Below, we will consider several examples of safe spaces.

4.3.1. Home

It might not come as a surprise to say that home, or feeling home, is associated with safety, comfort, privacy and cosiness for the community members. However, based on personal stories, it is certain that, a significant part of them lack this feeling, and have to overcome many obstacles to create a safe living space for themselves. There are some who, after coming out to family members, could maintain healthy relationships with them. However, for some queers being at home could be a source of constant anxiety and fear since they are afraid of reactions from family members and follow-up

consequences. For the most part, they lack control over the situation and without economic independence from the family, many of them might be left out without a shelter and habitat. And there is a risk of violence and banishment from the circle of closest people. Therefore, the community members are at risk of both economic and social exclusion. These aspects are clearly revealed in the individual narratives of the respondents.

When speaking about home, Eva relates it to a sense of safety, where she is not afraid that "someone might insult or attack her and become physically violent towards her". However, she also notes that feeling at home is not related to the whole house where she lives with her family, but rather to her room, where she is separated from her family members:

> The apartment building had an extension where I managed to build a separate room, taking loans and with my own efforts… I did it and then later this turned out to be my space and my home. My room is my home, where I can lock myself up and feel completely safe… feel relieved from the burden I carry throughout the day and feel more free and daring… Lately, what helped me most is my doggo, that I have by my side, laying next to me, cuddling me, and I cuddle her back, and so it is, this is home (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

For Eva, privacy is essential; she has gained this feeling of being home after arranging her own room. The reason for that might be having family members who are transphobic. For Eva, her room and the dog create that safe and comfortable space she calls home. At the same time, this quote from Eva underscores the problem of housing accessibility in the city, a particularly sensitive issue for the queer community.

Like Eva, Irakli believes that home is the space where nothing bothers him and where he can relax, "both in terms of appearance and spiritually". Although he had to move a lot during his adult years, he always returned to his family since he considers himself part of it and has an unalienable sense of belonging to his family. Unconditional recognition and acceptance of Irakli's identity by the family might be the reason for that. Therefore, family for him is "a unity of people, who live together, for each other". These same

circumstances give him the feeling of being at home, where not only does he feel safe, but he can be who he is.

For Sandra, family means "understanding, talking, sharing plans, ideas, joys and happiness with each other"; however, unlike Irakli, she is deprived of that. She would not call a place home where family members have no desire to communicate with her. Due to her identity, there have been many instances when family members refused to listen to her:

> In my family it is considered that we all are friends. But when needed, it is never the case. It is probably nice to have a family, who listens to you and in case of not agreeing with you, at least understands and shows some support. In my case there was like "I don't want it, don't talk to me, I don't care, don't tell me that, I don't want to hear it" or "why are you playing on my nerves?" and stuff like that and then, gradually, I lost the desire to talk to them (interview with Sandra, 16/09/2021).

Despite Sandra not being physically threatened by her family members, she still cannot find that feeling of unity that would bring a sense of belonging to the family and being home. For her to feel safe and comfortable at home, it is essential, along with physical safety, to have family members respect her and consider her needs equally important.

For Andrea, feeling at home is not directly linked to living with his family. He shares his home with a relative associated with childhood traumas and his current problems. Therefore, Andrea lacks that sense of peace and privacy essential to feeling home. Home is the place he has no slightest control over and is a source of constant anxiety. As in Eva's situation, the problem of accessibility to housing comes forward:

> I lack that feeling of peace. Moreover, we have a dog, they recently brought it, and it creates this chaos around me all the time. My cousin was going to move out and suggested I move out too, with a friend, but at the last moment, they decided that paying rent is lost money and it's better to get a mortgage (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Andrea gets the feelings associated with peace and comfort of being at home from relationships with friends. Outside spaces are where he can be with friends and freely communicate with them. For him, home is not a specific space where he spends a considerable amount of time of his life; it is instead that fluid space others talk about. Apart from physical safety, one needs a sense of belonging in this space that makes one feel accepted and appreciated. When a person cannot create meaningful connections with family members after coming out or does not reveal the identity, home is not perceived as a safe space, and the one prefers being with a chosen family. Thea believes that home is where a person is encouraged by their family to feel calm and express oneself. However, in her case, the opposite is true, and she is under a threat of being excluded from the family:

> They might not kick me out of the house or something because my siblings might support me… but I know for sure, that they think of me as a sick person, they will exclude me from everything. Sure, we will live together, but there won't be a place for me at the family gatherings. I could become a victim of violence from one of the members if no one defends me. There's a threat of insult and physical abuse and exclusion. I expect exclusion most of the time (interview with Thea, 12/10/2021).

Thea believes it is necessary to compensate for „what is missing, and you look for the people, who love you the way you are". For Thea her partner is who creates that atmosphere – "when you pretend at home to be a heterosexual, and then suddenly with your partner you don't have to hide your orientation, your character and you can share anything." However, the sense of safety might be disturbed not only by the unstable relationships with family members but by neighbours as well. This interference from the environment can become the source of anxiety and even fear.

The same holds true in the case of Asmat. After frequent changes in residence due to socio-economic problems and personal tragedies, she was forced to leave the house she inherited from her mother and move to another place. The reason was the pressure coming from neighbours:

> The situation was extremely tense, and one neighbour came and told me I had to go, implying that everyone knew everything, and the environment was pretty aggressive. Even then, homophobia was at its peak, and I knew it was better to leave, to leave that place, before I was still alive (interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

Eva recalls the incidents of breaking in private spaces and homophobic attacks by neighbours – "there have always been some activities [by the neighbours]… them rushing out to our place and banging on the door… and they never talk to me, they complain to my mother." These examples clearly outline what are the essential features of safe space for queer people. Home is one of the spaces that is associated with difficulties related to queer identity. Every case is different and is multiply determined by individual, external or socioeconomic factors. A common the respondents share, alongside physical safety, is a search for an environment, where they will be accepted and appreciated for who they are, and won't need an extra effort to establish themselves as equal individuals.

4.3.2. Workplace

Despite traumatic and negative experiences related to a workplace, at the time of the interviews, the majority of respondents were employed by occupation or doing a job they considered important. Some of them have already created safe spaces in the workplace. However, before that, they had to overcome barriers and sometimes personal insults due to their appearance and physically expressed identity:

> I was a tomboy, relatively masculine. For some time, I had been working in an airport, and the staff bullied me for how I looked and how masculine I looked compared to other girls. I was more androgynous, not on either side… well, they were like… "why I don't have nails done", "why I don't use makeup", and stuff like this, very often, behind my back, laughing and so on, very actively (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021).

Their need for control is the strongest in spaces like the workplace, as the pressure "to fit in" is the highest. It was particularly apparent in the case of

Nino. After changing the workplace, she was forced to conform to demands at the new workplace and make her appearance "more colourful" and feminine by using makeup and clothing style. Unlike Nino, Asmat's strategy is to do the opposite. She considers her current workplace safe; however, she had had experiences when she had changed her workplace over a disagreement regarding physical appearance. It is more related to establishing new requirements in an already safe space and refusing to conform:

> As an established employee in that particular space, I used to feel when some new requirements were coming, and since they demanded additional things, not specifically related to my job, I was forced to leave. Basically, it was because of the dress code, appearance-related thing (interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

The respondents choose strategies for achieving safety depending on their environment. Approaches tend to be different and vary by situation. A seemingly safe space could become uncomfortable if suddenly required to 'fit in'. Strategies also change with the fluid spaces. Below we will discuss in more detail the similarities and differences in strategies.

When speaking about the workplace, Sandra notes that the workplace and the colleagues have partially assumed the role that naturally family members should play. The workplace is a safe and comfortable space for Andrea too, who works at one of the community-based organizations. Eva perceives her current workplace as safe, however, she also recalls a traumatic incident:

> In 2014, when my transition started, I played a transfeminine role and a large period of my life I lived as a cisgender woman in dress, on heels, with makeup, long hair etc. It used to draw attention, especially during the daytime, although I used to go out at night, since I worked as a sex worker. One night seven people attacked me and beat me to death. I have the scars on my hands, face and body to this day (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

Eva's story is particularly interesting since it shows how the physical expression of identity can play a detrimental and negative role when it comes to

safety and health. Geographic location, and urban space play a central role in the perception of safety by Eva. For her, the so-called 'Pleshka', the main source of social and economic survival for many transgender women, might as well become the place for physical attacks and even death, as many cases reveal. Here, fluidity of safe space is evident again.

4.3.3. Emotional bond with space and its gender aspect

When discussing the safety of public spaces for the community members, first, we are reminded of attacks and facts of group violence they have endured more than once as individuals and as the community. These traumatic experiences are stored in the memories of the community members and determine their perception of safety when being in a public space. Ultimately, this impacts the quality of life and everyday interaction with urban space. For example, in Tbilisi, walking down Vachnadze street fills Sandra with the disgust and insecurity she felt on May 17 of 2013, when a group of attackers smashed a minibus she was in alongside other activists and associates. She received some injuries as a result. This place evokes negative emotions in her even after eight years and is linked to traumatic experiences she went through with her friends and associates. However, she turned out to be the only respondent who emphasized the strong emotional connection she still has with that particular place in the city.

Andreas's relationship with the urban environment and the fluid nature of his perception of space and its safety proved quite interesting. For him, a sense of safety is linked to the surrounding territory of his house, his neighbourhood. This attitude comes from the fact that they know him in the neighbourhood and "are not aggressive" towards him. To feel safe, and what is more, to wear an earring and nonheteronormative clothes, he needs to have a tight connection with the environment. He was reminded of this interconnection after the developments of July 5th:

> It was there… exactly, in my neighbourhood, Saburtalo… that even when I was returning from Rustaveli, I was always tense, and as soon as I was on Saburtalo, I no longer felt anxious and had that feeling of relief that I had survived (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Despite feeling less threatened, compared to other parts of the city and suburbs, Andrea notes having constant anxiety that he still might be attacked in his neighbourhood:

> Sometimes I have this irrational feeling that I might be attacked even in my neighbourhood… this thought comes just like this… while walking on the street, and somebody is walking in front of me, and I think he will stab me. This feeling is still present all the time (Interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Drawing on the examples of his and his friends' individual experiences, he considers the suburbs more dangerous compared to central districts. We will return to this subject later, and before that, we will examine the gender dimension of space.

When discussing his own experiences and safety level in the city, Andrea focuses on the gender dimension of urban space. A space dominated by women is associated with more safety for him compared to spaces dominated by men. He recalls how he immediately felt safe in one of the central parts of the city after several women passed by in a park mainly dominated by men.

The gender aspect comes forward when it comes to the quality of urban space amenities. For example, a badly lit street is a problem for queer women particularly, who believe that there is danger everywhere for women at night. At night even central areas of the city are perceived as dangerous by them. Attacks in such circumstances are not due to their queer identity, but gender, expressed in sexual harassment:

> Traumatic experiences I remember are not in any case related to my sexual orientation. Every case of such experience is related to my gender (interview with Maia, 16/09/2021).

Maia recalls several facts of sexual harassment that must be familiar to every woman who has been a victim of gender-based violence in open or closed public spaces. These experiences are related both to the streets and public transport. For example, the subway is perceived as particularly dangerous from the queer

and gender point of view. Being in a closed space and not being able to escape is central to perceiving the subway as a problematic space.

4.3.4. Center and periphery

Queer persons perceive the centre as safer than the periphery. As a result, many of them leave villages and move to cities. The difference between the centre and periphery is apparent in the city itself. The city centre is dense with multiple urban functions, determining its economic and social diversity. Therefore, the central part of the city is distinguished by its higher tolerance toward those who are "different".

As a result of population and urban function density, central areas of the city are distinguished by their crowded streets. Several participants have highlighted this aspect as a determinantal factor for feeling safe. A high concentration of people in one space creates a more controlled environment, making public safety more secure in such areas. However, as we have already seen, the community members often avoid crowds, particularly in suburban areas. When Asmat was walking down a crowded street in Gldani with her son, she was attacked due to her nonheteronormative appearance, "in broad daylight, nobody intervened, nobody said anything [to the attacker] to stop him".

Nika also points out a greater degree of protection in central areas. He thinks that moving to Vake, makes him feel somewhat privileged since he is now free from troubles and incidents related to living in other neighbourhoods. Asmat's experiences show that homophobic attacks and incidents are part of the everyday lives of those queers who live in the suburbs:

> Me and my partner, we were sitting in one of the "Sashaurme" in Gldani. Suddenly a group of boys passed by, they looked at us and one of them shouted out to another: "You were there on 5th of July, right?" I knew, they wanted us to hear it… I didn't pay any attention, what's the point… Things like that happen all the time… (Interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

Eva tells us about her experience when living in Avchala. She used to take the long route to her house to avoid homophobic attacks, causing her additional discomfort and fear:

> To reach the house I had to walk the street, always full of gatherings, or take the route through a cemetery, imagine walking through a cemetery at night. These men and boys sometimes played football, and would throw the ball at me on purpose, and the word "fag" was very usual thing to say… I couldn't stay there longer. It is logical, I was afraid… (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

Given these experiences, it is unsurprising that Nika feels privileged after moving to Vake since he can "move more freely". According to Maia, extreme feelings of insecurity in peripheries are related to less tolerance toward physical appearance that is "less aligned with the norm". However, some of the participants note that where men with criminal mentality gather, whether in the suburbs like Gldani or the centre like Mtatsminda, the mentality is quite the same and equally as dangerous.

Here let us examine another dimension of urban multifunctionality. As we already said, there are no areas in the city, not even in central districts, where community members feel completely safe. The reason for it, as Irakli explains, is that the "street is more of a naked space, there are all sorts of people, and you cannot tell who you may come across with". At such moments, public amenities, like a bank, pharmacy or supermarket, serve as a sort of shelter for queer persons, particularly at nighttime. Despite having endured one of the most brutal attacks around the Saburtalo area, the urban multifunctionality might be why Eva feels safer walking down Bakhtrioni or Tsintsadze street dressed in colourful clothes at night.

The distinction between the city centre and periphery disappears upon approaching queer-sensitive dates, accompanied by the mobilization of homophobic groups and intensifying homophobic attitudes. During that time, appearing in the city centre or spaces considered safe, like neighbourhoods, is equally as dangerous for community members as in the suburbs. Irakli recalls an incident when on the 5th of July, he had to take a taxi to reach his workplace in the same district, in the city centre:

> For the first time in my life, this year, when leaving the house, I called a taxi to reach the workplace, three streets down. Now I think that it was a very paranoid attitude and had no connection to reality,

but you know… When I imagined the length I had to go, even this little territory, a small street, in my own neighbourhood, I suddenly felt this uncertainty, that you don't know what happens. People are being killed on central avenues (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

When it comes to safety, these experiences clearly show us that the difference between the centre and periphery is somewhat spurious. Individual perceptions and experiences are central to marking a specific city area as safe. Periodicity is one of the most conspicuous factors in perceiving space as safe, and perception constantly changes day or night upon approaching queer-sensitive dates or any other calendar date.

4.3.5 Exclusive spaces

The concentration of queer-inclusive bars, nightclubs, and entertainment spaces in the city centre might be another factor in perceiving the area as safe. Events held exclusively for queers play a central role in creating safe spaces for the community. As some participants point out, at some point, the nightclubs have mobilized resources to help some community members. The participants note that friendly bars play an essential role in the community's life since they provide space for socialization. The participants note that such spaces helped them acquire more self-confidence and a sense of security as they realized they were not alone:

When I first went there [a Night club, queer event], I remember sitting for last several hours and watching, because I had discovered a whole new world, I thought that because I was 19 at that time and had never met so many queer people, I had never seen such space, there was no such thing around me. I was just feeling happy in that moment, that there existed that place where I could feel safe (interview with Mariam, 30/09/2021).

Creating such semi-public spaces aims to increase community members' safety since, unlike public spaces, it uses a specific social filter. However, it also implies exclusivity that might become easily detectable for violent groups and makes people inside that space more vulnerable. Andrea and Nika focus on these aspects of queer spaces:

> More or less, everybody knows that [on that street] there are
> queers and if someone decides to do something, we are the most
> vulnerable there, as we tend to be there most of the time, like
> publicly. I feel that threat all the time, because… anyone can come
> in [in a bar] and make a scene… there have been such cases, too
> (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

> When it is public, the space it is and what is it for, it is like a direct
> suggestion, like come and hit me. The second issue is segregation.
> That these people need separate space (interview with Nika,
> 30/09/2021).

The respondents criticize another aspect of exclusive queer spaces; as they
note, such places often become stereotyped. Most of the time, they are con-
sidered gay-friendly places and do not represent the diversity of the commu-
nity:

> It is called queer, but in fact, it is an ordinary gay bar, where you
> go, and it is oriented toward men – if there's a DJ, it's a man. It is
> stereotyped, it's only for men. It is a framework created in the 80s,
> and if it doesn't fit in the framework, you can't call it a queer bar,
> so it must fit some standards, and I think that queer space must
> conform to any standards (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

At the same time, an unequal power dynamic is characteristic to these
spaces. The participants note that the community often fails to tolerate a
different viewpoint, creating internal conflicts and psychological pressure. It
is especially noticeable in relation to producing visibility politics, which has
made many queers subject to attacks and humiliation. And then again, this
circumstance harms the community members:

> Partly, perhaps, they [activists] find it difficult to talk with each
> other. They can fight over a minor thing or go public with it and
> harm everything that has already been harmed (interview with
> Natalia, 29/09/2021);

> If we talk about collective safety, this unity [the queer community], in the first place, it is repressing a different opinion, since if you say something different, or criticize – shut up, because it is better for the community and you are causing damage to shared interests (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

According to some respondents, another reason for perceiving central urban areas as safe is that community members easily adjust to the general tendencies of city development. They criticize the concentration of urban functions and queer spaces in the centre. They believe that this very circumstance might be the contributing factor to why suburbs remain zones of elevated danger for queers:

> The whole queer politic is stereotypical and the whole politics is a copypaste. And I am not surprised that it impacts urban space, and I don't have a right to demand something. Why open it in the center? Start decentralization and whether it's queer politics, or maybe it will be somewhere in the outskirts of the city… but there comes the issue of safety (interview with Nika, 30/09/2021).

Detecting the causal relationship between the concentration of urban functions and safety is not the purpose of this study. Do queer spaces emerge where the sense of safety already exists, or do queer spaces determine perceiving a specific location as safe? Such spaces in the city's central districts play an important role in perceiving them as safe. On the other hand, it is unclear whether such spaces in the suburbs would contribute to a sense of safety for the community members. These two questions are intertwined, and we can only speculate about the causal relationship.

However, two factors become apparent in this regard, highlighting space's significance when it comes to the gap between the broad society and the queer community. On the one hand, queers try to avoid specific spaces where they don't feel safe and accepted. The spaces like churches or most Georgian restaurants are lost to and inaccessible for the community members:

As surprising as it might be, I have been a godparent more than once, and also used to attend church. Before breaking up, once I went to church with my partner, because he is a religious person. It used to be a safer space then, because I did fit in, I prayed, sang and I had a priest. I can go to a church now too. When friends are visiting as tourists, and they are interested, I bring them there, show them icons that I consider a work of art rather than an element of faith, and will tell stories about them (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

On the other hand, exclusive spaces, which one can access only after passing a specific filter, isolate queer people from the remaining society. Apart from the sense of safety, in the face of widespread homophobic attitudes, such spaces might provide compensation for the loss queer people suffer during their lives. When discussing prerequisites for accessing these exclusive spaces, Nika underscores one significant element – "first, create such 'look', and you are in…"

The physical appearance becomes a prerequisite in distinguishing between the community and the remaining society. In the next chapter, we will discuss the body and appearance and show how a biological unit acts according to a certain space, situation, or context.

As the examples have shown, perception of space as safe is determined, alongside subjective opinions and individual experiences, by many factors (function diversity, crowdedness and domination of space by women, concentration of queer-friendly exclusive spaces and periodicity, differences in the attitudes and confrontations within the community). The essence of safe space is multifaceted and depends on often impossible-to-predict factors. It again highlights the fluidity of space as a geographical element, which is constantly changing and has no particular shape. A safe queer space is one example. Therefore, it is impossible to state with certainty which spaces are safe for queers and which are dangerous.

4.4 HETERONORMATIVE AND QUEER BODIES

"to be safe and have
the style you want to have… you can't have both"
(interview with Nino, 11/09/2021)

In the discussion, topics of bodies, appearance and specific manners would often surface naturally. It once again strengthened the faith in the unique role body plays in studying traumatic queer urban experiences. Incidents of homophobic attacks are related to clothing style, feminine expression in men, or non-binary appearance. In discussions about safe spaces, these topics surfaced naturally. Attacks on Eva and Asmat and negative attitudes towards Sandra and Nino determined by their non-binary images highlight the central role body and appearance play in marginalization of queers. These experiences impact the social interactions of community members in public spaces. Body and visual expression are the central elements of queer identity. Since queer bodies do not fit in heteronormative frameworks, they are easy to detect:

> Other social groups are less likely to be identified by appearance… that's one of the main differences… they [queers] are physically identifiable (interview with Keti, 15/09/2021).

Before anything else, the distinguished appearance increases the community's visibility in public space and highlights the fact that they, too, are part of society. However, risks also come with it. Visually expressed elements are easily detectable and might subject queer persons to hate-driven attacks. As we have already seen, people are not immune to the attacks, even in queer-friendly spaces. Nino believes, based on personal experiences, that identity expressed through appearance makes queer people live under elevated risks of violence:

> [that] is a very significant problem for the queer community, that you can't express yourself. To be both safe and be able to have the style you want to have… you can't have both (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021).

We remember Eva's experience as a transgender woman subjected to a brutal attack in a public space. In such a case, the body, a necessary element of identity, might become the reason for negative and traumatic experiences. As Nino says, "it is not necessary to act in a demonstrative way… it is like, if another person detects and identifies you, something might happen". Being distinguished by her masculine appearance at some point in her life, Nino had to endure bullying at the workplace since her appearance did not fit the widely recognized standards of femininity. Like her, Asmat believes that had she have the feminine appearance, she would find it easier to hide her identity and would come across to fewer obstacles in life. Although not targeted for her non-binary appearance, Sandra used to constantly experience emotional discomfort and fear in public spaces due to others' attitudes towards her appearance – someone could say, "Oh, look, she looks like a boy, turns out she's a girl". However, in some social situations, her appearance would become an asset:

> [when looking for an apartment for rent] I don't have it as transgender and gay men have; usually, the case is that they are more tolerant towards women, lesbians, it's like girls are perceived more positively, like "she is a boyish type" and they might be more happy that " they won't bring men in there" (interview with Sandra, 16/09/2021).

Sandra's non-binary masculine appearance, linked to her fighting character, is accepted, appreciated and perceived in a more positive light. Gender non-binary, "neutral body" is perceived as particularly risky. It is especially apparent in the experiences of transgender participants. They note that before the transition, when they were in so-called "neutral bodies", they were more vulnerable to attacks and harassment in streets and public spaces. After their physiognomy became more masculine or feminine, cases of harassment decreased since they became more invisible by conforming to the standards and acquired more self-confidence of being able to self-defend. Ia recalls:

> If someone in the streets used to, say, tell me "is it a man or a woman", it could be so stressful for me, I could get depressed over that for months, and I had severe anxiety because of that. Now I am so self-confident that I am who I really am, it is such an achievement, and why should I be anxious when a stranger, who is nobody to me, says something to me (interview with Ia, 18/09/2021).

At the same time, a man's body is associated with increased safety and has access to more spaces than a woman's body. It is particularly highlighted in the narratives of transgender men. Heteronormative appearance and the privileges attached to it, as the prerequisite for self-realization in public life and feeling safe, are well seen in the narrative of Andrea (a transgender man). As a result of the transition, he felt through his personal experience how a woman's multilayered oppression is replaced by the privileges linked to patriarchy:

> Take, for example, a taxi, when I sit in it, I don't have a knife grabbed by my hand, I am not trying to memorize the number of the car and I don't have the application for 112 opened in my phone, despite being a trans man, privileges of patriarchy have reached me already (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Like Andrea, Mikheil points to a "privileged" position he found himself in as a transgender man – "because of the appearance [of a man], there is no space I can't access or will get afraid of or something…". When discussing the body, Andrea notes that perception of safety in public spaces is periodic and related to queer visibility dates, and the anxiety over his appearance intensifies around that time:

> Usually, I feel safer in winter. Not to mention the environment, I have to dress in so many clothes, that I am basically perceived as a cisgender heterosexual man… with the coming of summer, apart from the chaos that is happening outside, I have to wear a t-shirt all the time and I always fear that my breasts still give away and they notice something… so it might cause something (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

Even cold and hot weather might significantly impact the appearance and the safety of a queer body, its peaceful and safe navigation through public life. On the surface, it may indicate the unstable character of a queer body, which is dependent on external factors only. However, the narratives show that queer body is used as the main tool to navigate through society and urban spaces. This capacity to manoeuvre gives queer body the very resilience necessary for survival and development of an individual.

4.4.1. Resilience of queer body and navigation through space

We see that body is the primary tool employed to navigate society and urban space safely. Queer body as a social construct determines to what extent a queer person has access to a specific urban space. Discussion on exclusive spaces showed that the prerequisite to accessing them is to meet the requirements related to appearance, to have a certain "look". This visual "filter" operates in open public spaces, in this case in the form of a standardized heteronormative body, which is strictly feminine or masculine. In this instance, this filter aims to exclude queers from shared space. "Normalization" of the body is one of the ways to become part of a common shared space. This topic is particularly sensitive to those whose physiognomy does not conform to the traditional masculine/feminine dichotomy. A normalized body contributes to the self-establishment of a queer individual in society. Normalization is achieved by becoming an "ordinary" human being as a result of a long and difficult process of transition; the process is accompanied by institutional challenges – "before changing my name, I was quite reluctant to even look for a job, because my name was not congruent with my appearance."

There are several strategies queer individuals apply in their interaction with space and society. Due to the incongruence between one's appearance and name, Zura has chosen an avoidance strategy and excluded specific workplaces from the beginning to avoid a potentially unpleasant working environment. Asmat prefers a different strategy. For her, the way to establish herself is based on emphasizing her identity from the beginning:

> Before they had demanded anything, I always had this certain period of time for me to establish my self in that situation. When I was establishing my self… say, as a relevant person to that space…

was it a workplace or something else… I had already taken roots, so to speak, I was already established in that particular space (interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

Sandra's strategy combines some aspects of the approaches Asmat and Zura employ. Like Zura, she knew from the beginning in what kind of environment she wished to work. In cases of having doubts, she, like Asmat, used to explore the situation directly – "I used to ask, what's your attitude? Because it's better to know it from the beginning, to not to have to go through breaching contract and leaving". In Nino's case, we have seen that she had to compromise and adjust to the workplace by becoming more feminine.

Along with the above-mentioned strategies, there are several more that community members apply for maneuvering in everyday situations. Here we discuss approches queer people use daily for navigation and positioning in public spaces. As we have seen, we can perceive urban public space as a "battlefield", where different social groups try to mark their own space in everyday life. This space must be considered a vital element for everyday individual existence, essential for leading a full life. Just like for other social groups, it is essential for queer persons to to have a sense of control over the space and sense of safety. The community members, through manoeuvring, try to adjust to this space and fit in depending on the context. Therefore, considering the fluid, constantly changing nature of space, no doubt it is a realistic goal. Adjusting one's self to space is not equal to total conformity to established norms that may only exist as a result of dominant groups "taking over" a space. As Irakli argues, these strategies are only necessary and pragmatic in nature.

Concession

By using their biological bodies as the main tools to manoeuvre, queer persons try to navigate through everyday spaces safely. For this reason, they apply different approaches and adopt different social roles. In other words, queer community members choose diverse approaches to self-preserve, and for that, they use their bodies and flexibility. Eva is one of the community members, who, because of her feminine appearance, has become a target of homophobic attacks for more than once. To survive physically, she made a

concession and returned to her masculine appearance – "I am sorry that I had to compromise some things, but the fight continues". Concession is perhaps the most widespread strategy in taking up the space everyday. This strategy is partly related to periodicity of danger and the centre/periphery we have already discussed in previous chapters. However, it is important to mention here as well, since it is always relevant in their lives, how "survival instinct" materialises in the changing appearances and behaviour of queers in public space. Irakli observes:

> No matter how much we talk about this dangerous environment, homophobia, that naturally exists, but lately this problem was almost overcome, this stigma on [appearance]. I mean for real, every public space I went to, there was a pride almost everyday… especially among younger generation – I mean queers… they were more free, open and like out of their minds, because they have not felt that sense of danger before (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

Traumatic events of July 5th have changed everyday appearance and behaviour of some of the queer persons at once. "When I saw those people," Irakli continuous:

> Suddenly some of them dyed hair in black, some shaved their head altogether. I met one of the persons three months later, he came dressed like an ordinary guy with a criminal mentality. That was the tragedy for me, suddenly realizing that if these people [violent groups] have killed this energy full of life and this freedom, what they used to express by their queerness… if these people started walking like guys with a criminal mentality", dressed all in black, this country really has no future, I thought to myself.

Adopting a different role is another widespread strategy to avoid danger and adjust to a certain location or situation. When renting an apartment, it is quite common to play roles of friends or heteronormative couples to gain the sympathy of the landlord:

> Every time I lived with my partner, and we rented an apartment, we were undercover as girlfriends, and they thought we were friends and there were no problems… Saying that we were partners was not an option… (interview with Nino, 11/09/2021).

The need for applying such a strategy again illustrates how problematic it is for queer people to access the housing, while accompanied by economic problems and the risk of homophobia. For many of them, to live independently from their families might be the only chance to keep their identities. Eva recalls the time when in order to gain access to independent living, she had to marry a queer person. Heteronormative marriage, for them, was the only way to lead lives as they desired. Adopting a different role and adjusting to the context might be the only way for Eva to provide safety for herself. When there's a risk of attack from a violent group of people, being alone, she tries to play a role of a foreigner who doesn't understand Georgian or pretend to be religious and avoid aggression that way. Thus, adopting a different role is one of the main strategies queer persons have to use to participate in certain spaces and situations.

It is not surprising that as a result of enduring trauma in urban spaces, we come across changed behaviour, expression and appearance of queers. What Irakli said clearly indicates how these temporary, although traumatic events, can completely change the perception of safety of the city, open spaces and, more importantly, how these perceptions are translated into people's appearances and behaviours. However, as Irakli notes, this has only temporal nature and "they [queer people] gradually start coming out again and open their compressed bodies". Nevertheless, by the response to these traumatic experiences, it becomes apparent how queerness is being covered up, queer bodies become "compressed" and censored in order to avoid danger. It is supported by Andrea's narrative:

> There are cases… last time, I was in Varketili and I had my hair dyed in bright blue and all the way to Varketili and being there, I was anxious that "what if something happens". But mainly, when my hair is dark, and when I go to Varketili or other suburbs, I always try to dress and look in a heteronormative way, so that don't get perceived as something different… And that's how I avoid a conflict (interview with Andrea, 28/09/2021).

To "normalize" their appearance, they have to change it completely or change only some elements. Altered appearance and "compromised" queerness, can be explained by the desire to avoid conflict. Eva said no to transfeminine appearance, though keeping some of the elements in even the most conservative spaces:

> Well, I took off the dress, cut my hair, put away my "make-up", but colorful clothes remain… I can walk by the church in colorful clothes, with the earring every day, or even enter the church, but if it is some queer date or Orthodox religious day, then it is not quite safe to be in territory surrounding the church, where it is crowded (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

Here, Eva also refers to periodicity, which underscores fluctuating nature of queer appearance, safety perception and a sense of being accepted. She wishes to demonstrate her queerness more openly, although, as we will see below, she applies complex combination of strategies to avoid the threats as a result of this act of visibility.

Self-establishment and protest

As we have seen, a transgender person "compromises" a significant part of his/her transfeminine self but keeps and is proud of the appearance which partially compensates for the loss. In addition to using concession strategy or hiding her identity by adopting a different role, Eva also tries to emphasize her queerness by her fashion choices:

> I'm traveling by bus, and everybody is in grey and you are wearing a yellow jacket, purple sneakers and a hoodie and you are in the bus… When you feel that you are different and that it is you… eyes, staring… Nothing has changed to this day, I love colors the same. … In Georgia sadly we have this very bad tradition of staring at someone, that you feel and then you see. Even when there is no conflict. There is a man or a woman staring at you. And you feel they are staring, and you are embarrassed, it makes you uncomfortable. I used to avoid meeting the staring eyes before, but now I might have become very rude to stare back… I look back staring too (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

Distinguished fashion style helps Eva mark her place in a public space. Like Eva, Zura too, a transgender man, returns staring gazes with staring back. By displaying self-confidence and pride, they position their bodies and identities in public space, despite apparent negative attitudes from the surroundings. Irakli uses the same approach:

> Usually, I don't have that moment of fear… It's on the contrary, I walk as if everything belongs to me… You hold your head up high. You walk and think, it is your street you are walking down… as soon as I feel the stare… filled with a little disgust, aggression, I act and hold myself as … as if telling them without words that "I am so not interested in your opinion and I so don't care, that it must be enough for you to not dare to come closer." I just hold myself the way that people would think it's better not to touch me (interview with Irakli, 04/10/2021).

Sometimes, a queer person's appearance may also combine a function of expressing protest. Irakli recalls that for some time, he stopped wearing an earring. However, after the 5th of July, as a way of protest, he resumed wearing it. Therefore, the appearance of a queer person might be altered for safety reasons as well as for expressing a protest toward some social developments.

4.4.2. Sensory body

Individual or group traumatic experience impacts the instinctive behaviour of queer body in public space. Due to lack of safety guarantees, queer people constantly feel the need for control over the surrounding space by different sensory or motoric functions of the body. The instincts developed as a result of constantly expecting a possible attack is apparent in the physical vigilance of Eva, Asmat, Maia and Mariam when moving around the city:

> We were walking down the street, I was carrying two heavy bags, my child was small then… My head bowed low, speaking to the child, I couldn't even see what was going on in front of me and when I stopped and inched back and forth and with a peripheral vision I see that someone is following me and I lifted head up

and went "what do you want?!" and he went "who are you? "And I knew that something was happening… (interview with Asmat, 01/10/2021).

Since pride month has passed, I rarely hear about attacks. Of course, I still hear about them but not that frequently… I still carry electric shock and a pepper spray and carry it in my hand when in the street, or in my pocket to access it easily if something happens (interview with Eva, 02/10/2021).

> I can't tell how safe it was, but yes, to feel more safe I would mobilize myself and therefore, would always adjust. Well, whenever I had to walk dark and remote streets, where you automatically sense danger… I would quickly remember simple tricks for self-defence, a string of heavy keys in my hand… In such situations, I would basically prepare for self-defence (interview with Maia, 16/09/2021).

> Everywhere and all the time, I am always vigilant trying to control the situation. I always look back when walking down the street and I no more wear my headphones, trying to control what is happening around (interview with Mariam, 23/09/2021).

Electric shock and pepper spray in hand, or intensified desire to control the environment, is an instinctive reaction of a queer body to imminent danger it could face because of his/her appearance and identity. Eva notes that constantly expecting danger is why queer perople developed instinct of walking fast: "what's the difference between queers and non-queers? We walk fast. I walk fast." These fears or physical vigilance is fueled by traumatic experiences in the everyday lives of community members and their friends. These experiences and memory of oppression force many community members to move across the city not by public transport but by taxi. Despite the risks, the latter has become a sort of safe tool in navigating through public spaces, both literally and figuratively. The story told by Irakli about taking a short ride by a taxi on 5th of July also resonates to that. Despite working in the city centre, where perceived safety is relatively high, Andrea avoids going out on the street after finishing a working day. He only leaves the workplace after the taxi arrives.

5. CONCLUSION

When discussing the relationship between body and space, traumatic experiences can be considered an intermediary factor which alters the body, its ability to explore space and forms of self-expression. Furthermore, traumatic experiences force queer body to develop strategies to reduce damage. For example, it uses strategy to control, limit and restrict surrounding space. Moreover, to avoid traumatic events, queer people considerably limit spaces for socialization, which leaves them with only exclusive spaces. Such spaces are usually concentrated in the city centre or/and are customized to certain bodies and appearances. This creates unequal accessibility to safety, socialization, and to the processing of traumatic experiences and mourning because safe space is essential part of them.

Traumatic memory follows the queer community everywhere, from a young age when romantic feelings develop towards the other person for the first time. Sometimes, coming out becomes a source of chronic trauma. Limited safe spaces don't provide means to reflect on trauma. Unprocessed wounds ultimately transform into some sort of a phantom in the community's life, expressed in everyday life in forms of mistrust, interpersonal difficulties, and avoidance of certain spaces. According to Herman's theory, traces of chronic trauma and its three characteristics are present in the life of queer community: growing power of violent groups, diminishing power of the queer community either by erasing queer-sensitive dates or by taking away spaces, and high rate of immigration in the queer community (the latter is beyond the scope of a current study). Activism plays a significant role in the analysis of traumatic memory on a collective level. For instance, memorialization of 17th of May, 2013, in the form of a webpage contributed to mourning and trauma processing for the people involved in the webpage development process. As we have seen in the analysis provided by Harthal and Misgav, the latter is an example of a delayed in time, planned, re-located response to a traumatic experience, which usually has a positive outcome. At the same time, this process needs a certain unity within the community, since without unity, recovery is not possible.

Lack of solidarity on the way of recovery is evident both on personal and community levels. External groups often utilize solidarity for personal

benefits, evoking feelings of falsehood and mistrust in the community. This again, reduces the community's chances of recovery from chronic trauma. At the same time, being in a queer body might be traumatizing itself because such bodies are problematized and excluded by the environment from a young age, negatively impacting the later stages of life of queer persons. Here, we shall mention the relationship between queer body and woman's body. Based on narratives of the participants, in cases of women, often traumatic experiences were more related to their gender than queer identity. Furthermore, the chronic nature of trauma is evident from a gender perspective, which directly resonates to Judith Herman's theory of gender-based oppression. However, this topic is the subject of further analysis and enquiry because experience of oppression for women is as multilayered as it is for queers. Chronic traumatization and exclusion push a woman's body into a vicious cycle, just like a queer body.

The marks individual and group traumatic experiences leave on queer body and mind were evident in discussions with community members. The empirical material is a proof for the significance of body/space interdependence. It once again underscores the need for considering these seemingly separate spatial elements as a single unity. As Amin and Thrift argue, urban space is constantly changing, but so is queer body. On the one hand, its fluid nature is determined by the strivings, desires and preferences generally characteristic to queer people.

On the other hand, we shall not forget about the pragmatic reasons for which queer body goes through constant changes – the need for safe space and self-preservation/survival. We should not consider the body as separate from the mind since it does not move across space mechanically without thinking. The analysis of traumatic experiences shows how queer bodies and minds change at once, deliberately changing or keeping certain behaviours and appearances.

Identified as different from heteropatriarchy, queer body is being excluded from public spaces by hegemonous groups. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the exclusion is facilitated by external groups as well as by desire of the community members to be excluded. The reason for the latter might be largely due to perceived threat coming from the dominant groups. Queer people have difficulty finding safe spaces even in places that should provide

a sense of security – whether it is home, circle of friends or exclusive queer spaces. Therefore, this lack of stability impacts the relationship their body and mind have with space. Socio-spatial exclusion of queers is artificially constructed. Like the space we live in. As Amin and Thrift put it, except its physical elements, the city is a creation of individual experiences, including queer experiences. While for a heteronormative person, a pharmacy or a supermarket is a place where one buys drugs or food, for a queer person, it is a shelter, a place one could hide from an abuser/aggressor. In both cases, the two persons are driven by the same desire – to keep health and physical fitness. The differences in their objectives might be due to differences in their bodies or appearances. As a result, certain places in queer minds are mapped as dangerous, influencing their behaviour and appearance. Walking fast, pepper spray in hand, constant vigilance and the need to control surrounding space, avoiding certain places or conforming to certain requirements, all of this to avoid danger.

These are only a few strategies queer people apply to lead safe lives in cities and to survive physically. Like the notion of safe space, the strategies used to create safety are contradictory, constantly changing, and dependent on the context. These approaches are applied in groups and individually, probably followed by different outcomes.

So far, we have mentioned a single aspect of body/space interconnection. Surrounding space determines a queer body's visual and behavioural character, but queer body also determines a space's character. Queer body has a significant impact on the shape of a city. Exclusive spaces are created to protect the queer body, like nightclubs, and art and entertainment spaces, that become essential for the socio-cultural development of the city. Queer body is why the metal cross put up in front of the parliament lacks its religious meaning and is rather associated with the community. It is important to look at this artefact from this perspective rather than applying the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy. The latter poses a risk of preserving the status quo - a few members of community are not in power to win the fight over a space with heteronormative majority. It is essential to use these artefacts or stolen queer-sensitive dates as a constant reminder of the oppression the queer community suffers. Despite the past traumas and potential dangers, queer body's resilience is evident. It continues to utilize urban space and establish itself.

In the course of the study, it became evident that there is a need for a broader discussion regarding the many forms of oppression the community faces as well as discussion on the coping strategies they employ. It is particularly important to discuss the problems related to visibility politics, first within the community itself. Furthermore, it is necessary to evaluate the risks of instrumentalization of the community's interest in public politics and its possible negative impact on the perception of safety by queer people. Additionally, the problem of access to housing intertwined with other socio-economic problems was identified during the fieldwork. Intersectional oppression many members of the community face is evident.

The analysis showed the significance of online platforms as they might be compensating for limited safe spaces in the lives of queer people. However, it also makes queer people vulnerable to cyberbullying and other risks online platforms pose. Greater emphasis must be given to the community's opinion regarding the essence, meaning and forms of solidarity. The role of activism must be re-evaluated in this regard. While activism achieved wide recognition of the existence of queer community, lately it appears to be more damaging to members of the community and less helpful in processing the traumatic experiences. Activism can support creation of safe spaces and thus guide the community in the healing process. Furthermore, in this process, it is crucial to engage so-called outsiders alongside people directly involved in activism.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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