

*The Necessity and Distorting Influences of Identity Politics*  
*in the Contemporary Context of Georgian LGBT Activism – The Need of*  
*Queering Politics*

By

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## **Abstract**

Revisiting problematization of the notion of fixed sexual identities as a foundation of social movements and rereading them in relation to the critique of such anti-identity politics discourse and describing the playfield that is set for Georgian LGBT organizations, I move to issues that were prevalent in interviews I have conducted with Georgian LGBT activists and expand on as matters of identity politics questions, including: the formation of LBT community; the rhetoric of being ‘born this way’; the necessity of coming out; homophobia as the choice and the LGBT Pride March. Discussing these questions I tried to illustrate politics of LGBT organizations, the dilemma of problematizing identity politics nowadays in Georgia and on the other hand the necessity of working on its violence producing side-effects.

I believe that constructing ‘Queer’ as an enemy against embracing identities, in a place where collective understanding of identity is depoliticized and ‘Queer’ is an unaffordable social and political marker, will give a rise to anticipation and distrust towards it.

I suppose that the question is ill-posed if it asks for choosing one, either embracing only rights based perspective or the radical transformational change that the movement can be engaged in.

I conclude that establishing queer politics as an exact opposite of identity politics is a dangerous theorization that might have fatal results for the activism characterized with identity politics as well as for the queer politics and its potentials because it limits the debate to the binary with two contradicting poles. Formulating the debate itself in dichotomous model and positing ‘Queer’ as an enemy of identity politics, might strengthen the exclusionary essentialist claims and leave no space for queering them, which is badly needed.

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## **Introduction and Comments on Methods**

In the beginning of thinking about my thesis, I was excited by on the one hand, being partially familiar with Georgian LGBT organizations' politics and on the other hand, with part of the queer problematization of sexual identity based politics. In the proposal of the thesis I was concerned with reasons and effects of the rhetoric of tolerance and being 'born this way' in the newly born LGBT movement of Georgia, having in mind thoroughly questioned stability and utility of identity categories. Planning to problematize Georgian LGBT organizations' supposedly essentialist politics, I would have placed myself under the risk of becoming detached from the context, producing the critique for the sake of critique.

From questioning the political usefulness of identity categories, I moved to questioning the political efficiency or the availability of doing so in particular place and time by particular people. From the present perspective, I want to emphasize the political and institutional importance of the work that still has to be done in the name of identities in Georgia, thinking maybe instead of asking for going beyond identity, we have to get to it in the first place. However, to the identity which is a position, social and political marker rather than a type of person, with an understanding of strategic necessity of organizing a movement around it and building an alliance. One of the main inducements for this change in my approach to the topic was simply questioning myself, how do I engage in activism with my theoretical understanding of sexual identity, facing that in concrete discursive context, considering that subject positions are grounded in precise socio-political contexts, giving up claiming one's sexual identity works in favor of homophobic quarters, in the context where 'queer' is widely unintelligible. For what is politically right thing to say and do is the effect of certain discursive forces that are shaping the politics and form the intelligible and the unintelligible in the given culture. Therefore, identities are not always identical to what we agree politically or

philosophically and incorporating one's theoretical understanding of identity categories in activism is not always possible. In other words, commitment to activist engagement often requires political practices that do not impeccably come into accordance with one's theoretical understanding of the issue and abandoning identity categories here becomes a task unaffordable to accomplish.

Revisiting queer problematizations of the notion of fixed sexual identities as a foundation of sexual, political, social movements and rereading them in relation to the critique of such anti-identity politics discourse, I decided to have as a case study the Georgian LGBT movement, which is entirely located in the capital Tbilisi and I am most familiar with. Herewith I want to designate that, throughout the thesis I am using the abbreviation LGBT and for example, not LGBTQ since this is the first term that is widely used in Georgia, by "LGBT Organizations" working there and by activists that I have interviewed.

I found it important to theorize the specific environment in which LGBT politics is in making and ways it responds to severe marginalization in the context of post-soviet Georgian nationalism that is intensely intertwined with the revival of the Georgian Orthodox religion and Church. For a better understanding of these contextual factors and the projects' situatedness within them, an account of workings of nationalism and religion in Georgia and their influence on the Georgian LGBT movement is given in the following thesis.

Using qualitative research method, I have conducted 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with activists including official staff members of "Identoba", "WISG" (Women's Initiatives Supporting Group) and "LGBT Georgia", three existing LGBT/LBT organizations nowadays in Georgia and the director of the first LGBT organization "Inclusive Foundation". I had about 10

questions mostly with additional follow-up context-related questions. All of the interviews were conducted in Tbilisi, in April, 2012.

Knowing there were issues that seemed to be of a certain importance for Georgian LGBT community, discussing these issues during interviewing were crucial for answers and arguments from interviewees directly or indirectly speak to what I am interested in, to the politics of organizations.

For mostly I was perceived as an in-group person, gaining trust did not represent a problem with most of the respondents, I think. The fact of previously already knowing some of these activists differently affected the interview processes as well as helped me in gaining access to other activists. Another factor was the fact that I am the gendered researcher and not all of the respondents were gendered in the same way as I am. Moreover, I think the fact that I was conducting interviews for my Masters' thesis had its influence also. As Abrams points it out, "Just as interviewer forms an impression of the interviewee, so the interviewee may well have an idea of the audience to whom he or she is speaking which may influence what is said and how it is said."<sup>1</sup>

My aim was looking at the ways LGBT activists speak about the movement. I wanted to see how activists represent main purposes that they work for, strategies and methods that they implement to achieve their goals, or did so in the past. Whether their politics can be characterized as essentialist though strategically directed or not. I had a right assumption thinking that most of them would have spoken in a way implying that there is no other way than working with identity politics because of certain political situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Abrams, "Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity" in *Oral History Theory*, Routledge, 2010, p. 55

There were several issues that dominated rhetoric of activists and I am addressing below. Issues that I expand on as matters of identity politics include the formation of LBT community; the popular rhetoric of being ‘born this way’; the necessity of coming out; homophobia as the choice and the LGBT Pride March. Discussing these questions I hope to draw a picture illustrating the politics of LGBT organizations and the dilemma of problematizing identity politics nowadays in Georgia and on the other hand the necessity of working on its violence producing side-effects.

I think it is crucial to look at how the restriction on openly expressing sexual identities results in LGBT activists stressing the importance of coming out, how the politics of LGBT organizations is formed as the direct response to discourses around homosexuality, how the emergence of identity politics and strategic or non-strategic use made of essentialism is related to the degree of oppression felt.

Through interviews, I wanted to see the playfield that is set for these organizations and how activists talk about discourses around homosexuality. For not only universal but local discourses around sexuality and identities when we talk about identity formation and its usage in concrete places, should inevitably be taken into consideration. This is not to say that the context should prevent us from approaching LGBT organizations’ politics critically, saying that considering the environment, risks that activists are taking by acting in a particular, often exclusionary ways, should be left unquestioned.

However, huge concern over “coming out” indicates difficulties and dangers of self-naming, where the rejection of identity politics and filtering materially endangered lives and experiences through academic language will possibly work in favor of people who demand the invisibility of homosexuals.



I believe that the Georgian case is an example of the ground where one can argue for recognition of the importance of sexual politics of naming, and where the self identification is not a mere act of reification of the normalizing system but can become the fueling force for radical political struggle.

I should admit that owing to space and time limitations I could not do justice to the wealth of literature on transnational politics of sexual rights, nationalism and especially, queer theory.

# CHAPTER 1: Identities, Identity Politics and the Queer Politics. Overview

## 1.1 Identity construction as the never-ending process

Stuart Hall pointing to the vigorous critique and deconstruction of the concept of unified identity with its integrity and originality within multiple disciplinary areas including postmodernism and feminism in recent years, asks what provokes the further debate around the question of identity and makes it so compelling. He answers the question by first stating that the deconstructive approach to the concept of identity does not provide the concept instead of the one subjected to the deconstruction, but only puts the latter “under erasure”<sup>2</sup> and gives quite thoughtful definition of the identity as “an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all.”<sup>3</sup> Further, Hall emphasizes the significance of identity for the modern political movements and states that not the rejection of identity, of ‘the subject’ but its reconceptualization according the discursive practices working in the process of subjectification is needed. He makes a valuable distinction between two kinds of understanding the ‘identification’, first is a ‘naturalist’ definition which is the formation of solidarity based on shared characteristics of persons and groups and another is the discursive approach that puts forward “..identification as a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process’. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be ‘won’ or ‘lost’, sustained or abandoned.”<sup>4</sup> Herewith I want to add that although identification can be discussed as always going on process, there are experiences following occupying particular subject positions that result in certain need of identifications and the experience of violence that definite identification practices generate, which are not in terms of their materiality in the same “always ongoing process.”

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity?’” in Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity*, p. 1 <http://www.northwestern.edu/clcst/pdf/hall.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 2

Hall emphasizes the significance of identities, pointing out that notwithstanding their fictional character, the importance of their impact on discourses, material and political life should not be ignored:

They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field.<sup>5</sup>

And as he indicates, identities, which are positions produced by certain discursive practices, emerge within specific discourses and the play of power and are the product of exclusion rather than of internal sameness. Additionally, since the construction of identity is dependent on its “constitutive other”, identity can only be constructed by the “form of closure”, by closing itself from its outside which always disturbs it: “So the ‘unities’ which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, overdetermined process of ‘closure’.”<sup>6</sup>

Hall considerably concludes with a logical observation which is worth of a good attention because he is stressing the political significance of identities, instead of taking up either of the side of debate, arguing that only acknowledgement of identities with their full nature – “their necessity and impossibility” will move the debate further.

“[...] the question and the theorization, of identity is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the ‘impossibility’ of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.16

## 1.2 Is “Identity Politics” the Exact Opposite of “Queer Politics”?

Differentiating several ways of arriving at defining identity politics Mary Bernstein states that frequently used term in social sciences and humanities, “identity politics” refers to the: “phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, the women’s movement, civil rights, lesbian and gay movements, separatist movements in Canada and Spain, and violent ethnic and nationalist conflict in postcolonial Africa and Asia, as well as in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe.”<sup>8</sup>

And if Neo-Marxist approach to identity politics is criticized for its exclusionary effects caused by the language of commonality<sup>9</sup> and New social movements theory unlike Marxist mode aims to analyze movements formed not only around the social class factor bringing in the possibility of conceptualizing identity politics less straightforwardly than defining it as distinct political practice<sup>10</sup> postmodernist approach to identity politics sees the very existence of status categories on which the activism is based already as the sort of regulation which will always result in a vicious circle reproducing the dominated and subordinated groups. Together with poststructuralist and postmodernist theories Queer politics which emerged in late 1980s is considered to form the view of identity politics as “..narrow, political, state-centered activism that fails to adequately address the cultural bases of power.”<sup>11</sup>

Another important note that Bernstein makes is positioning queer politics by scholars as the means of uniting diverse groups under the queer umbrella which is supposed to oppose the middle-

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Bernstein, “Identity Politics”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol.31 (2005), p. 47

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52-53

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56

class gay white men politics, by reappropriation of stigmatizing term “queer” and challenging the identity categories with an intention of opposing dominant norms.

According Bernstein, unlike identity politics which is unable to question the nature of status categories’ formation or to see the intersectionality of identity categories, queer politics suggests recognizing diversity among groups without essentializing group identities. She points out that very often, criticizing identity politics for its essentializing moves ignores not only the strategic nature of essentialist rhetoric but also difficulties that getting rid of social-political categories face. And she very accurately suggests that public claims made by activists should not be taken “at face value.”<sup>12</sup> Rather the social, political or/and cultural sources effecting the essentialist claims should be taken into consideration as well as ways activists see sources of their identities should be examined.

### **1.3 Butler’s Contestation of Identities - Going Against Identities?**

I do not see Butler’s contestation of identities as a simple going against identities or her critique of “coming out” phenomenon as the argument made in order to say that claiming an identity is useless or that the critique of “coming out” should be leading to hidden identities.

In the introduction of the “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” we read that Butler’s work “..has questioned both the stability and the value of identity categories, since they invariably operate in the service of oppressive, exclusionary, regulatory regimes.”<sup>13</sup> But Butler in this essay also designates the fact that “There is a political necessity to use some sign now, and we do..” and asks

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 67

<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” in Sarah Salih, Judith Butler eds., *The Judith Butler Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, p. 119

“..but how to use it in such a way that its futural significations are not foreclosed? How to use the sign and avow its temporal contingency at once?”<sup>14</sup>

And although she comes out under the sign of lesbian she emphasizes the uneasiness that she is having in this process which is only for contesting the same identity. Even though she argues that “stumbling-blocks” of identity categories are produced as a response to a request of regulatory oppressive regimes and work in favor of this source of production she also writes that identity “sometimes functions as a politically efficacious phantasm.”<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, she points out that the act of “coming out” is always producer of the new opacity and by saying that “[..]being “out” always depends to some extent on being “in”<sup>16</sup> claims the interdependency of these binary oppositions. However, notwithstanding her view of identity categories as phantasmatic troubling “errors”, she does not refuse that there is a necessity of using them, therefore makes her position clearer by calling categories “necessary errors” and further says that abandoning the use of terms such as “lesbian” or “gay” is not her purpose but the resistance to classification and to identity as such.<sup>17</sup> Acknowledging the effect of identity erasure that theoretical contestations of identity similar to what she proposes have, alongside with homophobic discourses, she rather pays more attention to the implication that the use of threatened identity categories might reproduce the violence that they are facing by their exclusionary character, and only after few lines again point out to the need of identity visibility as “[...] the starting point for a strategic intervention which calls for a transformation of policy [...]”<sup>18</sup> instead of something that should be the end of the political movement.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 126

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 120

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 123

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 123

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 126

Noticing that at the same time as homophobia threatens lesbian and gay identities with erasure, particular theorizations of identities work in a quite similar way she moves from a question whether considering the context should make us claim the importance of identities because they are threatened with abolition, to the question whether homophobic threats should define the answer to it or not, marking that “[...] the decision to counter that violence must be careful not to reinstall another in its place.”<sup>19</sup> I think that the first question and the twofold obliterating flow that non-heterosexual identities face should get more attention.

She also discusses how in case of lesbians “[...] oppression works through the production of a domain of unthinkability and unnameability.”<sup>20</sup> She argues that this domain does not recognize the existence of lesbianism, explicit prohibition is where the ‘reverse discourse’ can be formed, and ‘implicit’ prohibition is not a ground to be qualified as a prohibited object.<sup>21</sup> However, I cannot agree that only ‘explicit prohibition’ can be the source for the ‘reverse discourse’ and even if explicitness were what is required, I believe the exclusion from a discourse where lesbianism can be prohibited as male homosexuality is, already represents an explicit twofold prohibition of lesbian women. And Butler herself in the next paragraph rhetorically asks “Can the exclusion from ontology itself become a rallying point for resistance?”<sup>22</sup>

#### **1.4 Queer Politics and the Importance of Context**

Michael Warner criticizing social theory’s heteronormative concepts and terms which do not pay proper attention to sexuality argues that in spite of the heteronormative social theory as a toolkit, we

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 125

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 126

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 127

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 127

need queer theory in the task of understanding the emergence of sexual, social movements and queer politics. He points to the literature of social constructionism which challenges the universalizing discourse of rights and identity in the gay and lesbian politics. Queer politics in Warner's understanding has an aim of not rejecting but going beyond the identity politics and the discourse of tolerance, equality and normalization of homosexuality, logic of multiculturalism. Warner points out that North American white middle class culture of multiculturalism gives rise to the gay politics which values the politics of difference and group identities grounded in ethnicity which is becoming a source of claiming authenticity and this causes the tension because queer politics Warner states refuses the "[...] minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal"<sup>23</sup>. According to Warner, queer politics acknowledges the violence of normalization, it is not satisfied with gaining tolerance and protests against the idea of normal sexual behavior as such.

Warner indicates to Seidman's critique of white, middle-class, male activists of the US as a position the movement is generally based on, saying that "[...] queer theory must also reflect on the conditions that make the current practices of queer politics possible."<sup>24</sup> And make sure that these practices are not possibly available only for the privileged position of white middle-class male activists of the United States. This is a clear articulation of the crucial thought for this thesis, that there are unprivileged conditions that make queer practices impossible.

Warner points out that 'being queer' does not imply that one cannot name one's self in certain contexts 'a lesbian' or 'gay'. Queer politics according this view is not against strategic naming practices:

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Warner, "Introduction" in Michael Warner (ed.), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis and London), 1993, p. xxvi

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi



“Queer theorists are also lesbians and gays in other contexts - as for example where leverage can be gained through bourgeois propriety, or through minority-rights discourse, or through more gender-marked language (it probably won't replace lesbian feminism). Queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear.”<sup>25</sup>

### 1.5 Against “Identity Politics” or against “Identities”

Steven Seidman in “Identity and Politics in a “Postmodern” Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes” is discussing the history of gay and lesbian movements of 1970s and 80s, its discourses and is arguing that for new sociology and history of same-sex intimacies the focus on only white, middle-class European or American lesbian and gay male identities’ development and sources of origin is foundational and presents the postmodern standpoint as the provider of the possibility of differently approaching identity and politics.<sup>26</sup> Though, approaching the issue differently does not mean that the approach is unlimited and fully coherent.

Seidman describes the shift from gay liberation movement, from the struggle against binary sex and gender systems directed towards the sexual liberation, to the movement of separated struggles of lesbians and gay men organizing around the notion of unitary lesbian and gay identity and community. Dated with early 1970s and the mid-1980s the sociopolitical agenda of emphasis on the importance of personal identity, community and lifestyle formed the dominating ethnic minority model in the movement which in spite of its praiseworthy ability to mobilize groups of lesbians and gay men, at the same time resulted in the marginalization of those groups of people who were not fitting the white, middle-class ethnic model of identity which was the focus of the movement. He writes that the ignorance of racial and class variation was the similarity of separatist, ethnic

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. xxviii

<sup>26</sup> Steven Seidman, “Identity and Politics in a “Postmodern” Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes” in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis and London), 1993, p. 105

assimilationist lesbian and gay male subcultures, which did not contest the hetero/homo dichotomous sexual identity regime even in the case of lesbian feminists who thought of lesbianism as a socio-political act.<sup>27</sup> Besides this, another sort of marginalization is discussed based on nonconventional sexualities and experiences of people which leads the author to the debate on the constructionist theories questioning the unitary, transhistorical character of the gay identity and makes an important note about social constructionism as significant in terms of analyzing the “repressive consequences of imposing current Western perspectives on non-Western experiences”<sup>28</sup> and more importantly underlies the problem of social constructionism lacking the political potential because of its academia directed interests and liberationism’s purpose of abolishing the constraints of stable homosexual/heterosexual, masculine/feminine roles resulted in the attack on all identities.

Seidman asks a question which I consider to be one of the substantial for the following research:

“A key issue we confront today is as follows: How can we theorize and organize politically our multiple differences in light of the suspicions surrounding the dominant mode of identity politics? One strategy has called for the abandonment or destabilization of identity as a ground of gay politics.”<sup>29</sup>

But herewith, I would like to add that we should not assume that the political organization is always in that ‘light of the suspicions’ and strategic moves as well, are carried out in certain areas, places or institutions and even in academic circles the poststructuralist rejection of sexual identities as the basis of community because of its exclusionary character might not be emphasized, prioritized or positively represented everywhere. Furthermore, to what extent do people who are organizing

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 121

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 127

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 130

groups have access to this information and have an awareness of such problematizations of identity politics is a question. People who are initiators of LGBT political activism do not necessarily confront above mentioned issue so what does it mean to assume that they do, does it mean that they should? In case they are having this privilege of accessibility and awareness of debates around political organization based on identities, it should not be taken into granted that they do see those suspicions as the confrontation that needs attention and therefore solution, the issue might be simply absent from the agenda of some political organizations, following from what they face.

Seidman further introduces the poststructuralist proposition of identity (similar to Stuart Hall's and Judith Butler's arguments) as constituted through exclusion of something against which it sets its meanings and boundaries, argument that the construction of gay identity in relation to heterosexual one, reinforces the governing hetero/homo binary.<sup>30</sup>

However, first describing the exclusionary politics of the movement and the need of moving away from the ethnic model, Seidman further reveals his doubts about the place where poststructuralist critique takes us to. He argues that the poststructuralist politics of subversion of hetero/homo subjects as possible to be constructed only by opposing itself to another, does not clearly provide the consequences of this deconstruction and makes an inadequate representation of social practices by limiting them to their discursive and signifying character.<sup>31</sup> Naming as 'additional doubt' he makes a remark which I find of extreme importance because he observes that "[...] the poststructuralist critique of the logic of identity ends in a refusal to name a subject."<sup>32</sup> Referring to Judith Butler's politics of subversion as merging into or rather, transforming itself into the politics against identity he writes that the Queer as a sign unites all marginalized subjects and desires from

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 130

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 132

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 132

the mainstream straight and gay cultures setting itself against normalization but without naming the differences that once became the source for their exclusion, therefore aiming to disrupt the limits of self-naming, poststructuralists are ending up standing against identities and not the identity politics, as Seidman's helpful analysis suggests. This rejection of identities in itself rejects the importance and "[...] fails to theoretically engage the practices of individuals organized around affirmative lesbian and gay identities."<sup>33</sup>

In addition to this, Seidman makes it clear that the poststructuralist approach towards identities does an unquestionably significant work in the critique of identity politics, in the problematizing the unitary gay subject by revealing the normalizing and exclusionary character of identity politics and the false representation of subjects of identity politics which takes little notice of differences in the group. But, by its emphasis on cultural codes rather than on sources of formation of gay identities and groups organized around them, Seidman notes that poststructuralism as a tool for social critique is limited and what he offers as a next move is paying more attention to the embedded nature of the self in the cultural and institutional practices. He explains that if identity politics offers "[...] a strong politics on weak, exclusionary basis"<sup>34</sup> poststructuralism puts forward "[...] a thin politics as it problematizes the very notion of a collective in whose name a movement acts"<sup>35</sup> both being obsessed with the self and the politics of representation. As Seidman suggests, we need to think of self, subject and identity as of a particular social and political markers which then result in gaining particular social privileges according to the way you are marked.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 134

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 135

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 136

## 1.6 Dilemma in Identity politics and the Importance of Naming

Joshua Gamson emphasizing the importance of analyzing questioning the efficiency of using sexuality-based political identities, proposes that there is a dilemma in identity politics which is caused by the character of identities, which is being on the one hand the basis for oppression and on the other hand the basis for political power and action.

One of the questions that Gamson's article is raising is whether queer politics should dismantle ideas of community and formation of subjectivity in contexts where these two are under restriction by the dominant discourse. He provokes the reader to think of the importance of recognizing the 'made-up' character of identities, though at the same time properly evaluating its everyday and political viability in practice. According this text, recognizing sexual identities as fluid historical and social products and the non-naturalness of binary categories of homosexual-heterosexual opposition, does not imply that one cannot propose disrupting these categories and still act in the name of them.

Although I find challenging and criticizing the 'tolerance' or 'born this way' essentialist discourses praiseworthy, I still see the crucial need of politics of naming, as Gamson puts it, "right now, it matters what we are called and what we call ourselves."<sup>36</sup> But the politics of naming does not necessarily imply biological determinism. On the example of Georgia, I will argue that the question of identity politics is of strategic importance. Although Gamson points out that identity politics does not challenge the system of binary oppositions, which is the source of oppression, he on the same page argues for me very persuasively, that "deconstructive strategies remain quite deaf and

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<sup>36</sup> Joshua Gamson, "Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma", *Social Problems*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Aug., 1995), p. 397

blind to the very concrete and violent institutional forms to which the most logical answer is resistance in and through a particular collective identity.”<sup>37</sup>

### **1.7 Deepening Already Existing Wounds - The Only Effect of Identification?**

Susan Bickford in her article called “Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy, and the Complexities of Citizenship” provides a helpful analysis of critique of identity based politics coming from postmodernist, queer theories. She convincingly argues that the anti-identity stand ignores the central points of democratic politics which are problems of inequality and interaction. She instead favors the position of feminist theorists who despite sharing the perspective of identity criticism, see the mobilization potential of identity as crucial for achieving transfiguration of inegalitarian social order.

Bickford lists issues that are seen as dangers coming from the identity politics by many theorists. These are questions of formation of subjectivity and sense of community as impediments for the political action. I would argue that subjectivity and community in spite of understanding their reinforcing character of normalizing structures can be the main if not only sources for making claims and acting at this point in Georgia, and not the impediment but on the contrary, the fueling force for active political action and intervention with concrete political claims. She points out how Wendy Brown in “Wounded Attachments” represents the concentration on marginalization as the process directed towards strengthening it, as if identities which are constituted by its oppression can be constructions only having the potential of deepening wounds, reproducing the myth of suffering in order to prolong existence of identity categories.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 400

I am interested in Wendy Brown's analysis as in the source for thinking about and questioning how discourses coming from LGBT organizations can only be perceived as ingraining same social relations or as either directly or indirectly transforming them. Identities for Brown are relying on their 'wounded' characters and therefore she suggests the reorientation from the politics formed by these identities towards politics which will be more future oriented and active one. It does not seem that she suggests ignoring the historical disempowerment of certain groups by proposing de-attaching from past injuries and claims based on those wounds, but what she ignores I think, is forms of politics that claims of injury can form exactly in an active, future oriented and creative shape. Although she gives a noteworthy picture of "[...] politicized identity rooted in disciplinary productions but oriented by liberal discourse toward protest against exclusion from a discursive formation of universal justice"<sup>38</sup> and suggests that "[...] injuries suffered by these identities are measured by bourgeois norms of social acceptance, legal protection, relative material comfort, and social independence"<sup>39</sup>, arguing that politicized identities always have the standard of 'masculine, middle class ideal' as the 'object of desire' is not convincing. She questions the efficiency of resistance and its dangers of resubjugation of the resisting subject and these concerns are indeed 'legitimate' for certain types of political actions but not for every case in any context. Drawing identity politics only as "a negative form of action" of the "powerless" who want to be free from oppression, I suppose, is a very confined picture of identity politics' potentials.

Even if I agree with the statement that "[...] in its attempt to displace its suffering, identity structured by resentment at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection"<sup>40</sup> I believe that it can be the constitutive part, but identity is not structured only by resentment or it is not always the constitutive of identities and arguing that politicized identities look for 'a site of blame' for their

<sup>38</sup> Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments" *Political Theory*, Vol.21, No.3 (Aug., 1993), p. 393

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403

marginalization is ignoring their transformative political effect. Political action should not be limited to the reiteration of ‘wounded identities’ and injuries only because political claims generally do rise from lived experiences of people who have suffered and are still suffering.

Susan Bickford acknowledges that particular political actions “[...] run the risk of further entrenching normalizing conceptions of identity and the power of regulatory apparatuses to enforce and police them.”<sup>41</sup> However, she cannot find justifiable the act of rooting identity politics principally in resentment and suggests taking into consideration numerous discourses that produce identity. She argues that Brown ignores the fact that political actors might be familiar with troubles that are linked to the use of politicized identities but are still doing it so because of strategic efficiency.

Another main point that she makes and I totally agree with is that claims of oppression should not be heard solely as assertions of powerlessness directed towards gaining something from the powerful one, state for example. She acknowledges questions of identity as politically and strategically important and deepening already existing wounds not as the only effect of identification with a particular group.

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<sup>41</sup> Susan Bickford, “Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy, and the Complexities of Citizenship” *Hypatia*, Vol.12 No.4. *Citizenship in Feminism: Identity, Action and Locale* (Autumn, 1997), p. 118



## CHAPTER 2: Situating the Debate

### 2.1 Chauvinism and Heterosexism in the Work of Nationalism

In this section I will discuss those aspects of works on the relationship between nationalism and sexuality that I find adequate and important for further discussion of Georgian nationalism and consequential formation of discourses around homosexuality in order to some extent illustrate the actual playground rather than the background that these discourses are forming for those non-profit organizations that are working on LGBT rights in Georgia.

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an “[...] imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>42</sup> Explaining its imaginative character by the fact that members who find themselves as part of nation, have the imagined community of their nation in mind, the community which is constituted by people they will never actually come to know or meet and limited for defining community, the nation, requires boundaries, limits where the community ends and which separates it from other communities.<sup>43</sup>

From the very start revealing the “gender blindness” and “gender chauvinism” of the study of nationalism ignoring the place of women “in the making of nations and states” in “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations”, Joane Nagel provides a good analysis of “[...] link between nationalism, patriotism, militarism, imperialism and masculinity.”<sup>44</sup> She is pointing out that narratives produced largely by men defining women’s role, results in presenting

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<sup>42</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983, p.6

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

<sup>44</sup> Joane Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (2), March 1998, p. 258

women as minor actors who can only be secondary, supporting members of the cast for the leading men characters, having roles assigned through interests of men.

She denotes that cultivating nationalist ethnocentrism through the course of formation of the national identity with its cultural boundaries, not surprisingly results in chauvinistic nationalism which idealizes its nation and claims for its superiority.

Seeing the importance of state institutions while defining nationalism as political, according to Nagel, hand in hand go nationalism and masculinity as well, with male-dominated state institutions and states that because “(...) women occupy an important symbolic place as the mothers of the nation”<sup>45</sup> their sexuality becomes the site of control for nationalists.

V. Spike Peterson also in “Sexing Political Identities: Nationalism as Heterosexism”, exposes not only that nationalism is gendered but that it is heterosexist in its nature, defining heterosexism as the “(...) normalization of heterosexuality and the corollary exclusion of non-heterosexual identities and practices”<sup>46</sup> demonizing and criminalizing non-reproductive sex. She states that heterosexism, the keystone of state, makes sure that “[...] feminist, gay, lesbian and queer agendas are at best marginalized in today’s nationalisms.”<sup>47</sup>

## **2.2 Georgian Nationalism and the Church**

Natalie Sabanidze is one of the scholars, whose research interest is nationalism in Georgia. Her work is offering the understanding of the relationship and connection between nationalism and globalization on examples of Georgia and the Basque Country.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 254

<sup>46</sup> V. Spike Peterson, “Sexing Political Identities: Nationalism as Heterosexism”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (1), June 1999. p. 39

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 53

Through different approaches to nationalism, which include explaining the rise of nationalism by democratic transition, “deep-seated animosities” or instrumentalist approach, she focuses on globalization approach which makes nationalism appear “as a reaction and a response to the economic, political, cultural and psychological effects of globalization on contemporary societies.”<sup>48</sup> She argues that globalization which is seen as an intruder into “national space” can be the source for rising nationalism in response. Offering three types of new radical nationalism, which are ‘nationalism of new radical right’, ‘radical ethnic nationalism’ and ‘radical religious nationalism’ she refers to Delanty and O’Mahony, who are characterizing these nationalisms by “a strong presence of fundamentalist assumptions about group membership and hence a high degree of exclusion; the identity of the self – ‘the people’- is predicated on the negation of the other;”<sup>49</sup> As Sabanidze points out, Georgia is a good example of radical new nationalisms, of striking rise of post-communist nationalism after the collapse of Soviet Union.

Sabanadze observes that the beginning of Georgian nationalism can be linked to 19<sup>th</sup> century’s emancipatory nationalism. As she describes “by then Georgia was incorporated into the Russian Empire, which abolished the sovereignty of the Georgian kingdoms but in return unified them under a common rule as a Russian province, restoring a long awaited peace and relative stability. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia began to recover from the devastating Ottoman and Persian invasions.”<sup>50</sup> It was followed by patriotic themes in literature, press and appearance of Ilia Chavchavadze who is regarded as “a father” of Georgian nation with his famous words:”Language, Fatherland and Faith”. If by then Georgian nationalism as Sabanadze points out “aimed at preserving the “Georgian self”

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<sup>48</sup> Natalie Sabanadze, “Globalization and Nationalism: The cases of Georgia and the Basque Country” *Central European Press*, 2010, p. 11

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

and defending Georgian culture against threats of Russification”<sup>51</sup> nowadays it can be observed that logic has not much changed. “Georgian self” still needs defense, though now it is under the threat of “Westernization.”

Sabanadze explains that before the invasion of Democratic Republic of Georgia by the Red Army(1921), nationalism in Georgia was represented as a “cultural and political force, oriented towards reform and moderate political work”<sup>52</sup> but after 70 years of the Soviet rule nationalism appeared in its different form with hostile attitude towards ethnic minorities, undemocratic inclinations and folklorized nature.

Years between 1993 and 1998 are described by the rise of globalization as during the governance of Eduard Shevardnadze, who had an image of democratic reformist, Georgia gained significant international support. However, as Sabanadze observes last few years of Shevardnadze’s governance nationalist tendencies gained anti-Western, anti-globalization characters because of corruption and flourished black economy that his governance produced. Georgian Orthodox Church became the one who had to preserve and protect the Georgian national identity from globalization. Sfterwards state became associated with globalization and its dangerous impacts on Georgian national identity, and the new feature for Georgian nationalism became Georgian Orthodox Church. The head of Orthodox Church, the Patriarch Ilia II is seen as a guardian and the only rescuer of ‘Georgian-ness’ and religion and the role that he plays in civic and political life of Georgia is enormous, with expressed conservative approach towards values of “western world.”

Paul Crego emphasizing the role of religion in formation of Georgian national identity quotes words of Ilia Chavchavadze which have not lost its influence in present day Georgia: “Christianity,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 73

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 81

in addition to the teaching of Christ, means among us the entire Georgian territory; it means k'art'veloba ("Georgian-ness"). Today, as well, in all of Transcaucasia, Georgian and Christian mean one and the same thing. To convert to Christianity – is to become Georgian.”<sup>53</sup>

### **2.3 Three dominant discourses around homosexuality in Georgia**

Analyzing intersecting points of nationalism and sexuality, emphasizing the role of religion in the formation of Georgian nationalism and exclusion of 'sexual minorities', examining how Georgian Nationalism together with Georgian Orthodox Church construct the image of Georgian society, which is exclusively heteronormative, Tamar Tsereteli's work is considerable academic account that speaks about the main discourses around homosexuality in Georgia.

Crucially for my purposes in this thesis Tsereteli identifies three main themes circulating in media debates around the issue of 'sexual minorities' in Georgia which are: “[...] homosexuality as a threat to Georgian culture and religion; homosexuality as an ailing fashion of the west; and finally, homosexuality as a threat to the nation's demography.”<sup>54</sup> She accurately argues that socially acceptable forms of sexual behavior are largely defined by religious elites and Georgian nationalism embedded in the religious discourse. Tracing the role of Orthodox Christianity in formation of Georgian national identity, she explains that the soviet rhetoric viewed homosexuality as a criminal act which was uncommon for Georgia, as well as for all soviet countries and was directly linked to the West's capitalist countries. Following the fall of communism, she points to the fact of flourishing religion after 70 years of being suppressed under the soviet regime and its formation as the inevitable aspect of 'Georgian-ness'.

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Crego, "Religion and Nationalism in Georgia" p. 3 Retrieved From: [http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/Crego\\_Religion\\_articles\\_previous.pdf](http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/Crego_Religion_articles_previous.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Tamar Tsereteli, "Nationalism and Representation of Gays and Lesbians in Post-Soviet Georgia" MA Thesis, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, 2010 p. 3

She makes an important point by saying that constructing homosexuality as deviant and abnormal is the process which is achieved by constructing the Georgian traditional family, which is constituted with “virile men, who are devoted to the nation’s well being and prosperity” and women who are the mothers of “virile Georgian heroes.”<sup>55</sup> She writes that the church provides the image of ‘true’ Georgian people who are Orthodox Christians devoting themselves to the motherland and therefore, forming the nuclear heterosexual families.<sup>56</sup>

To sum up her argument, the foremost characteristic of Georgian nation which is Orthodox Christianity assisting Georgian nationalism forms the idea of heterosexual Georgian nation, hence identifying as Georgian, oppression of ‘sexual minorities’ as not the part of Georgian, Georgian traditions and Orthodox church, generally becomes a necessary part of the play.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 40

## **CHAPTER 3: The Georgian Case. Activists Discussing**

### **3.1 Role of the Church and the Totalitarian Heritage**

Concerns prevalent in interviews in the first place are: the need of strengthening LGBT community and the lack of its political activeness, the problem of invisibility and coming out. Then the issue of lesbian invisibility, homophobia spread through all of the institutional carriers of science such as school, universities, hospitals, psychiatric institutions, dominating pathologizing medical model and the role of the church, state and the media in forming the discourses around homosexuality and the lack of human resources. The main emphasis is put on the need to work with the community members and all of the interviewees point to the significance of the politics of self-naming in the context where the appearance of any issue regarding LGBT people in public space receives an aggressive rhetoric of ‘propaganda’ and the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality, in the context of socio-political and economic crisis of the country which functions as the ground for aggravating homophobia.

Much of what follows bellow in this section is an account of conducted interviews. This chapter will provide clearer picture of the LGBT movement in Georgia, or rather, in its capital city – Tbilisi. Discussed are organizational challenges, and activists’ concerns over the general context of Georgian LGBT community, Soviet past and its impacts on movement’s development, which reflects claims presented in the previous section.

I am using activists’ real names because besides their agreement on non-anonymity and the fact that their positions mostly make anonymizing impossible, I think that the life of organization is quite dependent on its director and partially or fully consequential to leader’s individual politics, therefore it is important to be seen who is the author of particular views and ideas expressed. Another thing I

want to make clear here is the issue of academic background of interviewees because four of them have their MAs in Gender Studies from CEU, one has a degree in Master of Social Sciences (MSocSc) in Gender Studies from the Center of Social Sciences (CSS) and another will acquire the degree from the same program this summer. This is not directly defining representations of thoughts given in interviews but should be taken into consideration that some of the activists are having these kind of academic backgrounds and are supposed to be more or less acquainted with questions previously discussed in the thesis. Yet, it does not mean that if one does not have a degree in Gender Studies, they are not giving an account which problematized identity politics, though here again their academic background plays its role. I think it is important to keep in mind that this kind of difference is present and has its particular influence on ways of articulation of thoughts.

### 3.2 Nationalism and the Church

*“Homosexual in Georgian ethnic national discourse is bad not because it is sin, but homosexuality is sin because it is not Georgian and everything that is not Georgian is bad. It is a very dangerous philosophy. That everything non-Georgian is dangerous.” (Irakli)*

Giorgi, activist from “LGBT Georgia” argues that in patriarchal heteronormative culture which excludes everything ‘different’, it is not only homosexuality that is in contradiction with Georgian-ness but sexuality in general. Therefore, he believes that in order to change the situation, *“We should be the activists of sexuality since sexuality is still a problem in the country.” (Giorgi)*

Shota, the former member of both, “Identoba” and “LGBT Georgia”, explains that the church forms an idea of Georgian-ness and draws its definitive boundaries:

*“Ethnic-religious national narrative after communists now is produced by the church. Church is trying to influence the formation of the idea about what does it mean to be Georgian.” (Shota)*

Eka, the executive director of “Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group” (WISG) also tells that nowadays the church defines who has the right to exist in public space. According to Ana as well, who is an activist from “Identoba”, nationalistic discourse is coming from the church pointing out its increased power over last years. Paata, who was an executive director of the first LGBT organization “Inclusive Foundation” expressing a similar view, saying that: *“Nationalism became more religious than ethnic, the flagship of nationalism has shifted from the state to the church.” (Paata)*



When she talks about the relationship between the church and the government, Mariam, the coordinator of program in “Women’s Fund in Georgia” puts it perfectly:

*“There is a very strong connection between the government and the church and it will be the same in case of any government. Church has an unquestionable authority and influence over government and political processes and they are having mutual benefit, one gaining guaranteed number of votes and another guaranteed amount of money or landed property”. (Mariam)*

David Mikheil, the director of “LGBT Georgia” points out the state’s neutrality towards the issue of LGBT movement:

*“State is trying to be neutral, on the one hand not to irritate the church and on the other hand Europe, because if we were without Europe and West, State would not have cared about us at all, West is giving warnings to them and as I know the state is interested in strengthening LGBT movement because they need it ‘there’. (David Mikheil)*

However, I would suggest paying more attention to Shota’s opinion questioning results of the civil sector’s dependence on the government, suggesting that the independence from the government should be the main characteristic of the movement. The will to be closely connected to the state might run the risk of developing what Lisa Duggan calls the politics of ‘homonormativity’ “(...) politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”<sup>57</sup>

### **3.3 Totalitarian Heritage**

Mariam notes that the absence of past civic movements’ experience is a crucial impediment for the movement together with the small financial support which afterwards results in activists’ individual, competitive work rather than in cooperation.

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<sup>57</sup> Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” in Russ Castronovo, Dana D. Nelson eds., *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, p. 179

Ana emphasizes the importance of academic work and experience which as she says, is the privilege that not every movement has and determines the form of activism that the movement is engaged in:

*“It is very obvious that academic experience has its significant influence on the choice of type of activism and the access to the information is an absolute privilege that Georgian activists I think have never, and the information they are receiving and reading is either outdated or conventional. Today’s LGBT literature that is easily accessible and conventional is not the best. Academic work is the most important for strengthening the community.” (Ana)*

She tells that the lack of information is one of the characteristics of the specificity of the Georgian context. Calling it *“a bit extreme case, though not catastrophic, but going towards it.”* (Ana)

Eka explains that Georgia did not have the chance to acquire the experience and changes that are conditioned by the civic movements in the West during the Soviet period. For the last 20 years she sees the first steps being taken forwards the LGBT movement only now. Further marks that crisis-ridden socio-political, cultural and economical life has been vital for forming the exclusive environment for the activism.

*“It was impossible for this to happen before, for this type of civic movement requires the foundation of civic self-consciousness, space, lots of things are required, but we are moving from one crisis to another, economic, ethnic or political it might be. No matter how much we talk about the shared Soviet past and its attitude towards the otherness, these gradations culturally still form different environments for the activism.” (Eka)*

Shota expresses noteworthy concern over the implemented projects of LGBT organizations, which are under the risk of coping methods and practices without taking into good consideration the context they are working in, pointing out that he finds decisive the totalitarian past with its heritage and impact on discourse of sexuality which is remaining in recreational paradigm:

*“Society still has totalitarian attitudes and sexuality is seen as only having recreational aspect and everything that is not fitting this aspect is not acceptable. If we will not be aware of it, it will be*

*very difficult to change the situation with copying the projects and measures taken by US and Western European LGBT organizations, it will be mending the roof when the house has no foundation. (Shota)*

Of all the informants he is the only one who reflects on the relationship of misogyny and homophobia and stresses the need of working on women's rights. Putting an emphasis on the totalitarian environment where sexuality different from heterosexuality was persecuted he indicates that after the formal decriminalization of homosexuality in 2000, the situation has not significantly changed.

Irakli, the director of "Identoba" also gives a notable account of problems that the movement is facing in our time, and similarly to most of the activists, he highlights the lack of debates and academic work which he sees as the basis for the movement's formation. He points out that there are groups of people who have expressed the interest in working with LGBT community and on LGBT issues but he finds it problematic that these groups have no identified views and problems that they are having are not ideological based on their visions of certain issues but on personal disagreements. He talks about the lack of problematizing the terminolog and the lack of questioning the strategy for the movement.

*"Everywhere before the movement's emergence there was a debate and a consensus over the openness of the movement, whether it should be directed at strengthening the community or changing the society, whether we should fit in, or they. Here is no discussion of these issues, interests are not academically identified because there is no academic LGBT group, articles translated from English will not form the movement." (Irakli)*

Mariam expresses her concern over the fact of similarity with the region in terms of direction towards working on MSM and that *"gay men are more active and seen, leaving less space for lesbian, bisexual and trans women."*

Shota identifies the tendency of leadership as the main organizational challenge for the post-socialist region. He explicates that the lack of human resources in the LGBT activism and few

people who are “out” within the movement results in a small number of leaders who are often in unequal relations with people they are working together with, without the mechanism of mutual control. And he is not the only one who articulates this problem. Irakli also points out that he managed to obtain more financial resource than finding human resources.

When talking about difficulties the movement is struggling with, Irakli adds the fact that community members do not have the “luxury” of social communications, spaces, clubs, exhibitions or thematic events. Irakli distinguishes forming and strengthening the sense of solidarity and overcoming internalized homophobia as the prior goal of “Identoba”, alongside with fighting homophobia in the society. However, comparing to other countries he does not portray Georgia as “backward”, as it is often done by activists as well, rather, singles out similarities and the only difference of having shorter history of movements.

*“I have been on the training of IGLYO for one month in Amsterdam, where all European and several middle east’s LGBT organizations’ leaders were attending, many of them wrote for me the description of their situation and said the same, that involvement, the sense of solidarity and interests within the community were low. I cannot say that Georgia is backward, they just have longer history, in terms of activities we are not different.” (Irakli)*

If activists stress that Georgian case is exceptional, they mostly explain it by acknowledging the complex socio-political heritage, nationalistic chauvinism and xenophobia, and the lack of civic consciousness that is still strongly prevalent in the country. And if I ground the thesis in the scholarship produced exceptionally for “the Western” context, therefore its applicability is a problem, I do it because LGBT politics in Georgia is strongly influenced by the transnational LGBT politics and international sexual discourses.

### 3.4 LBT “Women’s Club”

“Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group” (WISG), founded by women for women in 2002 with an aim of protecting women’s rights and improving their cultural and socio-economical status in Georgia from 2006 works on a program of LBT group empowerment. Before 2009, this program was running by WISG’s executive director Eka Aghdgomelashvili in the first LGBT Organization “Inclusive Foundation” where first meetings called “Women’s club” were carried out. But soon after December, 2009 when the police raided organization during one of these regular meetings of “Women’s club” and arrested executive director of “Inclusive Foundation” Paata Sabelashvili for possessing and keeping marijuana in the office, Eka Aghdgomelashvili left the organization but did not stop working on the program and managed to continue its regular meetings in a safer space.

LBT group’s empowerment program is often called the “Women’s club” and referring to this program I will also do the same. I want to provide information about reasons of club’s formation and its aims and achievements represented by activists I interviewed because these representations show the importance and political necessity of sexual identities and politics of naming nowadays for women in Georgia.

Paata Sabelashvili explained the need of Women’s club’s formation by the dominance of gay men in the LGBT community. Eka Aghdgomelashvili stated that some of the reasons for deciding to work on such program was the greater amount of resources spent on men in the “Inclusive Foundation” and the fact that “LGBT Group” is not homogenous and the necessities that members of this group have, differ from each other and women needed their own space in order to reach the better integration in the LGBT community. Most importantly the aim of empowerment and increasing self-esteem among LBT women is emphasized. The program also provides free services of consultations with a psychologist and sexologist for the members.

*“Advocating has become very important but I still think that working with people is exactly the most important thing if we are talking about real social changes which should not happen from above with changing laws but should be carried out by these people themselves, therefore they have to be ready for it and they first of all need something else and not only official documents or laws. So, the main strategy is still working with community.” (Eka)*

Taking into consideration this emphasis on the need of working with individuals in order to improve first of all their psychological state of being and self-understanding it becomes a bit inadequate to begin theorizing beyond identities criticizing the identity politics of organization or the essentialist understandings of selves that it is directed to form, instead of the pathological one, formed as a result of socialization.

Eka also stated that in order for the movement to arise, people should have the sense of protest and be motivated to engage in it. She observes signs of this process and is glad that Women’s club is one of the impetuses for it. It is important to note that these signs of protests among members of Women’s club are emerging only now after years of Women’s club’s existence.

First of all Eka is telling that in Georgia men are more successfully socialized than women and LBT group is very closed and asocial one. She indicates to the existence of available gathering public spaces for men in forms of bath houses or saunas unlike women and stresses the characteristic of LBT group as strongly asocial and isolated, having a difficulty in acquiring the sense of group belonging and notes that it might be the indicator of internalized homophobia which is the problem in the group and according other activists as well, not only the problem for LBT group only but for gay men too.

Although Eka suggests that nowadays it is easier to make announcement with a name of lesbian rather than a feminist and explaining that the latter might receive more negative reaction because it has become the swear-word and is related to everything negative and dangerous, but when you are emphasizing the sexual identity she says it is easier because you can have a counter-argument

arguing that it is your identity and person's identity cannot be a problem like her skin color cannot be a problem but someone's attitude towards it. This representation I think is close to the 'born this way' rhetoric and it excludes the political, ideological character that lesbian identity might have besides the sexual one.

Nino on the other hand, who is working together with Eka in "WISG", is drawing the opposite picture. First, she also tells that one of the main direction for "WISG" is working on a group's empowerment and creating safe social space where you can communicate without hiding your identity, also to help people in overcoming internalized homophobia because in order to start the civic activism Nino states that one should be strong enough in order to have the ability and ambition to change something in the society by positioning self as a group member.

Further she adds that first the concept of lesbian should be created by educating, emphasizing rights, because she thinks that first the construct should be formed and then it can be followed by the queering process. She represents identity politics as necessary form of activism nowadays in order to make the group visible and after explaining that women's sexuality is only interesting for the society in terms of its procreative aspect and we are facing double discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation together, she concludes that at this point women can more easily act as feminists rather than explicitly with the name of LBT group.

*"We are going out as feminists not as lesbians, this is not possible yet, no one is ready for it, but I think it is fine for now." (Nino)*

Mariam as the member of Women's club says that the function that the club had for her was forming the sense of community and belonging as well as the feeling of solidarity and the understanding of the fact that we are representing one social group and the violence, discrimination we experience is the reason of our belonging to this group and we can by collective action change it.

Discussing strategies of naming, she points out that Queer is politically weak position which will work for vanishing of the group that is already invisible because no one talks with the name of LBT group in Georgia and at the same time there are abundant number of stereotypes against the group.

According to another activist from “Identoba”, Natia, development of a lesbian community was very gradual and logical in Georgian environment. She considers the present period to be the time when women are already ready for visibility and activity and tells that she thinks the greater resource for the activism nowadays is among women because this group is not divided and has more potential to be formed as a movement. She is telling that Women’s club makes its members more active and besides the fact that women are getting known to those women who they share identity with, the issue of socialization is important because she as well notes that LBT women are more asocial than men and less communicative because of the way they are brought up in Georgia.

Tamta recalls that there was a problem with making girls active and notes that it is only the last one-two years that girls are having their own initiatives. She also says that working individually with people when you are living and are grown up in such an environment, requires lots of time and energy.

Shota is suggesting that reasons why LBT community comparing to gay men have no problems inside the group in terms of conflicts between the members might be the fact that Women’s club is not orientated on public visibility unlike other two LGBT organizations and the public profile is the factor that can fundamentally change the life of organization, though he acknowledges that in-group orientation of “WISG” is logical.

Irakli thinks that outward orientation of the gay community might leave it in a better position in the future while he is not sure that lesbian community will manage to represent their rights publicly



and gives an example of gay movements who often did not care about women and states that he is afraid the same might happen in Georgia.

*“Lesbian community as it is formed today by concrete organization is different from the gay community by its internal group-orientated character. If they are going outside, then under the name of womens’ organization but they have higher solidarity in the group and self-assessment and appraisal of community members. Gay community is extremely disintegrated, solidarity among this group is very weak which might be representing the modeling of masculinity, orientation on sexual satisfaction and not on social values, friendship. (Irakli)*

What from these discussions should be clear is that the main focus on strengthening the group, the necessity of forming the sense of belonging and community and sense of solidarity means that these issues are problems and the presence of such problems does not give the possibility of rejecting identity politics.

### **3.5 Implications of Strategic Use of “Born this way” Rhetoric**

#### **(What if I was not “born this way”?)**

Nana Kakabadze – the leader of organization “Former Political prisoners for Human Rights” in the interview published in the newspaper “Asaval-Dasavali”, edition 19-25, in March of 2012 declares:

“Defending rights of sexual minorities or concretely, of ‘mamatmavlebi’<sup>58</sup> implies following actions: when someone is insulting them physically, beating, torturing, arresting, human rights defenders and lawyers should take care of it, in order for them to have the conditions for a quiet life, for not being persecuted and oppressed, but what is happening today in Georgia, is not defending rights of sexual minorities, but the propaganda of ‘mamatmavloba’, lesbianism and transsexuality.”

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<sup>58</sup> Georgian slang for homosexual man, implying criminalization connotation of the term as Sodomy Law in Soviet Georgia was known as the law against “mamatmavlebi.”

“[...] the state encourages and favours the propaganda of depravity, in result coarsely violates human rights.”

“[...] Putting forward this issue is harmful not only for our families and children, but for Georgia’s future as well. In such traditional and religious country no one should dare propagating ‘mamatomavloba.’ In orthodoxy ‘mamatomavloba’ is the mortal sin!” “Maybe it is not right to put a person in prison because of their sexual orientation, but it is certainly a crime, when you are letting the mamatomavali speak about his unhealthy sexual orientation loudly and you are propagating it. Personally, I support to reenact 121<sup>st</sup> article of the Criminal Code.”<sup>59</sup>

In response to this interview LGBT organization “LGBT Georgia” called Nana Kakabadze for making public excuse, emphasizing the fact of decriminalization of homosexuality in Georgia in 2000 and saying in its official announcement that:

“While developed world strives for human rights equality and many countries aim to eliminate discrimination under sexual orientation, hearing antihuman announcements from human rights defender is very inconsonant for “LGBT Georgia”. Unfortunately, this is not a first case, when human rights defender opposes human rights.”<sup>60</sup>

Herewith, I think it is important to say that though the act of decriminalization in 2000 is often seen as the success worth highlighting since it was the first precedent in the South Caucasus, the fact that the act did not have any kind of social basis for this change and was not the result of debates around the issue in public or in the Parliament should not be ignored because as the first LGBT

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.scribd.com/doc/86154316/%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9B%E1%83%AE%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94-%E1%83%95%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0-%E1%83%A5%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%97%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A-%E1%83%99%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%9B%E1%83%93%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%9A%E1%83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%90%E1%83%A8%E1%83%98-%E1%83%90%E1%83%A6%E1%83%A1%E1%83%93%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%A1-121-%E1%83%94-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A3%E1%83%AE%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98#download>

<sup>60</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=315367465185801](https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=315367465185801)

organization “Inclusive Foundation” writes,<sup>61</sup> the only reason for the act of decriminalization taking place was meeting the criteria of gaining membership in the Council of Europe, therefore the effect of the legislation improved only by this purpose and left publicly unknown can be questioned.

Another significant point here is the comparison between Georgia and the “developed world” which is the common way of dichotomous representation of Georgia and the ‘West’.

Few days after publishing the above mentioned article, Kakabadze was invited to the TV show “Subjective Opinion” where the representative of LGBT Organization “Identoba” Magda Kalandadze replied by saying that:

“Human is born with specific sexual identity and they cannot change it” at the same time as she was saying it, Kakabadze agreed by: “yes, of course”. In the very tensed atmosphere formed for the dialogue where Kakabadze was defending herself as having subjective opinion which had a right to exist, saying she was only against the politics of government as the source of “propaganda”, Kalandadze repeated that “[...] it is human’s identity, human is born that way and human lives with this identity” here Kakabadze noted that it was not the ‘news’ for her. The author of the call for banning ‘homosexual propaganda’ agrees with the understanding of homosexual identity as biologically determined.

Reminding her this case Magda emphasized in the interview with me that although she does not actually think that the person is born with sexual identity, in the homophobic society like Georgia you cannot tell your opponent that homosexuality is “simply the sexuality” and that in the given

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CGYQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ilga-europe.org%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F8014%2F48865%2Ffile%2FHomophobic%2520statements%2520by%2520public%2520officials%2520in%2520Georgia%2520%2520final.doc&ei=Y6iIT4yUFYOLsWaSyeWjBQ&usq=AFQjCNHIMieVzhS3oZ5FO4jILqj6IAe3Pg&sig2=InG-jqGBP6-Qv2X1jofchw>

moment she had to talk in a way she had done, which can be characterized as the strategic move. She argued that:

*“If specialists in Gender Studies have a pretension that this was wrong definition of homosexuality, I think that at that time it was necessary to talk like that and I think in the future we will often face the danger of the need to define human sexuality as something that cannot be changed.” (Magda)*

Activists rarely problematized the ‘born this way’ rhetoric. Shota, who is quite critical to the work of Georgian LGBT organizations in general, tells that tabooing debates on issues like polygamy, queer politics, negative effects of identity categories, science not having the final answer on the question of where the different sexuality comes from, is already in itself the wrong direction. This reminds me of Donald Hall who points out to issues that are rarely addressed or are always enclosed with silence and have to be put forward in the queer communities, making a pleasing exposure of the “destructive myth of a “soulmate” and the fact of “overwhelming cultural pressure to conform to the dyadic structure of two people in a monogamous pairing”<sup>62</sup>

Shota says that, this way, chosen by certain people means that today what is happening is copying tendencies present in the ‘West’s’ LGBT mainstream. He says that the answer to the human rights defender’s attempt to initiate banning ‘homosexual propaganda’ was “disadvantageous”, even “unethical” and “unjust” and thinks that the rhetoric of activists should be determined by the idea of personal autonomy and free will, not by the rhetoric which is “latent assistance for further discrimination”:

*“When the rhetoric of human rights defender is oriented on pathologizing, it can only strengthen my homophobic opinions. If you are trying to convince a person that the one who is considered sick by them was born that way, just happened so and nothing can change it anymore because it is naturally determined as person’s ‘invalidity’ - to use the old term, then this is pathologization.” (Shota)*

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<sup>62</sup> Donald E. Hall, “Reading Sexualities, Hermeneutic theory and the future of queer studies” London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 53

The director of “Identoba” although finding the ‘born this way’ discourse problematic says that if he had to answer Kakabadze, he would have done it in the same way, though indicates that this fact that in the group there are people who are aware of problematic character of this rhetoric but are still choosing it, indicates to a serious problem.

Ana also discussing the issue on the one hand critically is saying that:

*“Politics that ‘we are born this way therefore do not judge me’ is problematic because in fact it is in agreement with Kakabadze’s rhetoric and says that there is something wrong with the orientation but people are born this way. It is not the different rhetoric actually with its basic idea that there is something wrong with particular sexual activity, identity.” (Ana)*

However, afterwards adds that in spite of this, argument of being “born this way” is first of all important for many people for their self-comfort and is also a powerful and effective rhetoric nowadays in Georgia. She makes a point worth of attention:

*“When you have 5 min on TV you cannot start telling that it is a social construction and that there is an example that sexual orientation has not been existing as a concept at all and this is modern thing and why the homosexual act is so marginalized because this and that has effect on it and we have to oppose norms and live happily. No one would listen or understand and that is the simple communication, working for achieving concrete effect.” (Ana)*

Mariam as well, saying that this rhetoric is the source of becoming trapped in normalization, adds that:

*“Although, homosexuality is so often considered to be the fashion, product of west imposed on us, connected to the elite show-business, sphere of intellectuals, there are so many accusations that I can understand if this argument is used, but still, you have to be very careful.” (Mariam)*

Additionally emphasizes the need of being careful and proposes that if activists think that sexualities are socially constructed and culturally, historically defined, they should talk about it and do not fall into the biological determinism which is often the case as she tells.

On the other hand, Natia argues that suggesting unstable, changeable character of sexual identity will work for those, who are asserting that homosexuality is curable.

*“If we make an appeal to the changeable character of identity, and we do not know to what extent it is changeable, I mean the basis of identity, the sexual orientation, it will not work. If you want to start a conversation with the society, society which asserts that homosexuality is changeable and curable, you cannot answer them with the same claim, you cannot tell them that yes, it is changeable but I do not want to change it because I like the way I am.” (Natia)*

While I fully acknowledge that intentions of speaking with this rhetoric indeed matters, I think there are implications that should be taken into better consideration. Why does the biological determinism become the main claim for activists and what does taking a stance against it gives in result, should be examined.

Lisa Duggan in “Queering the State”(1994) will be helpful here because in this article she finds it important to ask the question which is the significant part of foundation of the following thesis. Recognizing that “(...)we run into difficulty the moment we step outside our classrooms, books, journals, and conferences”<sup>63</sup> “[...] how do we represent our political concerns in public discourse?”<sup>64</sup> What she suggests is that in order to be politically effective and transformative we must solve difficulties linked to the process of translation of queer language and argues that the response to difficulties that can be called “strategic essentialism” is certainly not productive because with its essentialist categories of identities it leaves us within the fixed minority group. She makes an interesting point by arguing that the ‘No Promo Homo’ campaigns are built on the theory of contagion which might be seen as the reason for LGBT rights activists for forming their arguments based on biological determinism in order to oppose the contagion theory, which is not seen as the solution, instead she suggests the move away from rights claims of a minority group and rather working on ways to show off the reverse, the promotion of heterosexuality by the state apparatuses with an aim of destabilizing heterosexuality without naturalizing gay identities. At the same time as acknowledging that civil rights strategies would not and should not be replaced in some situations

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<sup>63</sup> Lisa Duggan, “Queering the State”, *Social Text*, No. 39 (Summer, 1994), p. 5

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

she argues that: “In representing our situation in public discourse, we need a less defensive, more politically self-assertive linguistic and conceptual tools to talk about sexual difference.”<sup>65</sup>

Sending a message that homosexuality is innate unlike homophobia and this should somehow eliminate the discrimination based on the phenomenon which is inborn is not convincing and even though I believe that claims should not be based on the same logic that accusations towards the group is built upon, I do understand that the message can be described as somewhat strategic response to claims that posit homosexuality as a disease that can be contaminated or behavior that can attract the rest of population and be learned due to the ‘promotion’. But people suggesting the treatment and the need of homosexuals to be cured, do often acknowledge the proposition of inborn nature of homosexuality. Arguing for the innateness and unchangeable character of homosexuality does not guarantee and will not necessarily recede the demand for the recovery. And most importantly, although the spread of homosexuality in this case is placed in terms of disease, I think refusing the possibility of contamination which is often used as self-defensive tactics, runs the risk of implying that increasing homosexual practices and transitions from heterosexual identities is bad and undesirable.

“The rhetoric of homophobia has always been an ill informed mix of essentialist and anti-essentialist, speaking of homosexuality as a disease, contamination, an abomination or a personal weakness to be striven against by moral crusade and rigorous self-discipline.”<sup>66</sup> And I want to put it explicitly here that as Wilton states and I find this statement very pertinent: “It is hard to devise an intellectually coherent challenge to a position so lacking in logic or rationality.”<sup>67</sup> Making a useful use of work of Diana Fuss (1989) Wilton refers to her suggestion that the essentialism is the direct

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>66</sup> Tamsin Wilton, “Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda”, Routledge, 1995, p. 46

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 46

response to the oppression felt by the group and the correlation between these is resulted in the degree of essentialism corresponding to the ferocity of homophobia. This might well explain the essentialist politics of Georgian LGBT organizations.

I am not arguing for the ability to create some kind of desires in ourselves but as Donald Hall writes accurately and I fully agree, although we do not change our sexualities through controlling them mechanically, “[...] we certainly can find ourselves altered over time through a wide variety of external forces and internal decision-making processes [...]”<sup>68</sup>. And it is true that when we refuse to take a stance of naturalizing sexuality and arguing for being born with certain sexuality, when we embrace the possibility of alteration, we possibly get the request to alter our sexualities back into ‘normal’ one, heterosexuality. This approach is often used by reactionaries from the church who argue that homosexuality is curable. The question is how do we answer them.

In the “Sexual (Dis)Orientation: Gender, Sex, Desire and Self-fashioning” (2004) Wilton writes:

“The plea, ‘we can’t help it, so be nice to us’ is a seductive response to the experience of oppression, perhaps especially for a group of people customarily bullied and excluded when young.”<sup>69</sup>

“Essentialist theories then, however much some gay people may welcome them, are a product of homophobia. As such, they represent a political and psychological trap. This is reflected in certain of the accounts given by participants in this study, inasmuch as essentialist/orientationalist beliefs about

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<sup>68</sup> Donald E. Hall, “*Reading Sexualities. Hermeneutic theory and the future of queers studies*”, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 7

<sup>69</sup> Tamsin Wilton, “*Sexual (Dis)Orientation: Gender, Sex, Desire and Self-fashioning*”, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 26



the nature of ‘lesbianism’ acted to impede, rather than to facilitate, their recognition of, and ability to act on, desires for intimate, sexual or romantic contact with other women.”<sup>70</sup>

I am concerned with this thought for I think it is quite accurate. I believe that ‘born this way’ discourse is impediment not only in the process of questioning one’s sexuality and transitioning from one identity to another, but also gives a hand to the violent identity policing practices even within the LGBT community, which I think is one of those results of “identity politics” and its part – rhetoric of born with life-lasting stable sexual identity that should be the clear indicator of the necessity of queering the understanding of sexual identity in Georgia and not only.

Strong emphasis on propagating homosexuality and demanding its invisibility from public space arguing it is propaganda willing to spread homosexuality forces the argument of “born this way” to be the main response-argument. Mostly LGBT organizations’ work and actions are censured as ‘propaganda’ and claiming stable inborn identities becomes the response for homophobic quarters partially because the church who is institutionally positioned to dictate, argues for unstable homosexual identity that can be changed. Herewith Wilton’s explanation that the sense of being gay for all one’s life, as expected leads to the understanding of one’s self as born homosexual and afterwards not surprisingly results in supporting essentialist claims of being born homosexual is relevant.

### **3.6 Necessary Politics of Self-naming**

#### **(Stating One’s Homosexuality – An Act of Seduction?)**

Mariam, program coordinator at “Women’s Fund in Georgia” states that another problem LGBT community is facing nowadays is having no one who is publicly “out” activist.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 187

*“The problem is that there is no one publicly out we have no precedent of lgbt activist saying that he is gay or she is a lesbian on TV. There are very few people who are ready for coming out and being active in this sphere of LGBT rights.”(Mariam)*

David Mikheil, the director of “LGBT Georgia” says that there is no LGBT movement because *“everyone is afraid of going out and being out.” (David Mikheil)*

Giorgi, activist from “LGBT Georgia” also accentuates the need of coming out as one of the means, almost as an inescapable element for increasing the ‘acceptance’.

*“When you are the LGBT activist and you want to work on the issue of rising awareness in the society and reduce the homophobia, you will not be able to do it unless you show to the society who you are asking acceptance of. In order to increase acceptance of community, community should be seen, people should be visible.”(Giorgi)*

Nino from “WISG” also questions the existence of movement due to the invisibility of the LGBT group.

*“I think there is no movement yet, majority still cannot see the group there is not enough visibility in order to call it movement, even the feminist movement is not seen in Georgia, though I think there is a basis for these movements.” (Nino)*

And only Shota articulates the connection between coming out and the privilege under certain circumstances:

*“Being visible in homophobic environment within the lgbt movement, means being privileged.” (Shota)*

LGBT activists’ concern over visibility in Georgia is often linked to consequentially resulted possibility of claiming rights, visibility therefore is the following result of “collective coming outs” which is presented as the necessity. Coming out – self-naming as non-heterosexual is the logical product of heteronormative regime which imposes heterosexuality on you by an assumption that you are heterosexual until indicated otherwise, this indication and risky act of self-identification as a member of LGBT group very presumably renders one vulnerable to homophobic reactions. Activists often say that the main function that coming out has besides the improvement of psychological state of person is that people who have never seen a person identifying in front of them as non-

heterosexual are becoming less homophobic when they are getting known to homosexuals especially if they are among their friends or relatives.

The need of coming out expressed and stressed by activists sometimes draws a picture of “closeted” homosexual as politically not as progressive as they should be in order to gain their rights and not as psychologically brave as “out” people are, though at the same time awareness of risks and difficulties that are unfortunately linked to the act of coming out is mostly designated. Work of all of the three organizations is directed towards improving the psychological state of LGBT community’s members in order to strengthen them politically.

The act of self identifying according to Donald Hall is an act of reducing the complex story of one’s bodily and emotional responses to the statement of “I am a...” determined by certain “set of decisions and impositions” and this is an operation which became only possible after late-nineteenth-century sexology and its consequential identity politics provided the taxonomy in which one could frame own desires and sexual self-understanding.<sup>71</sup>

In the “Excitable speech” Butler goes through analyzing how the statement “I am a homosexual” might act and what effect it can produce in particular situations depending on who is the audience. She writes that understanding of utterance as an act does not necessarily mean that it “acts upon the listener”<sup>72</sup> but the issue here is that over determination of the force prescribed to this utterance of “I am a homosexual” in cases of using Butler’s phrase “paranoid fantasy”, is transformed into the statement expressing the homosexual desire and becomes “the verbal vehicle of seduction”<sup>73</sup> not the simple ‘self-definitional’ statement, but as saying “I want you sexually.”<sup>74</sup> “Homosexuality, within

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<sup>71</sup> Donald E. Hall, “*Reading Sexualities. Hermeneutic theory and the future of queers studies*”, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 1

<sup>72</sup> Judith Butler, “*Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*”, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, p. 113

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111

this paranoid metonymy, has become a paradigm for contagion. The self-descriptive utterance of "homosexuality" becomes the very act of dangerous communication which, participating in a contemporary reevaluation of that sacred scene, infects its listener-immaculately-through the ear."<sup>75</sup>

According Butler understanding of statement stating one's homosexuality as an act of seduction and the panic over "imposing the disease on us[heterosexuals]", as Butler notes, works for pathologizing discourse of homosexuality<sup>76</sup> but she makes clear that such performative effect of the utterance is only possible by "performativity of a state discourse that makes this very attribution"<sup>77</sup> meaning, that if the regulatory discourse of homosexuality were not construing the utterance of homosexual identity as contagion the statement alone would not have that performative effect and would not be understood as performing the homosexual act. She further points out to that "...we surely need to take seriously the contention that "coming out" is intended as a contagious example, that it is supposed to set a precedent and incite a series of similarly structured acts in public discourse."<sup>78</sup> What I want to say here is that the demand for putting an end to 'imposing homosexuality' made in a self-defensive tone that was recently very frequently voiced while discussing the need of banning propaganda or the pride marches, can be understood as the reaction consequential to the viewing of march for example as a collective self-naming by LGBT group therefore collective expression of desire of homosexual act and inducement. The march is understood as temptation producing directed towards arousing desire and fears that public visibility of homosexuals might have a 'fatal' effect on children passing by, can particularly be the result of approaching march as action aiming to encourage imitation. The same goes when the individual statement of homosexuality is the issue. And in this light, it is the least probable that one can respond

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 116

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 121

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 125

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 124

by saying: “[...]frankly, I wouldn’t mind seeing more people attempt to expand their sexual repertoire and responsiveness so that the violence-producing polarities of hetero/homo are brashly, behaviorally deconstructed.”<sup>79</sup>

### 3.7 Slogans

#### From ‘Homosexuality-as-Pathology’ To ‘Homophobia-as-Pathology’

“Orientation is not a Choice, Hate is!” “Homosexuality is not a disease, Homophobia is!” – These were slogans of “LGBT Georgia” on a discussion “Freedom and Fear” during the IDAHO week. Slogans spread by the same organization in the city at the same time were saying “Orientation is not the choice! Hate is!” “Homosexuality is not the disease” “Everyone has the right to love! No one has the right to discriminate!”

Referring to Kitzinger (1987) Wilton in “Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda” (1995) makes an important point that arguing for homophobia as a disease and pathology rather than homosexuality, only changes the object of pathologization, leaving the debate in the paradigm of pathology where the question is which one from two is diseased: “[...] the trend of replacing homosexuality-as-pathology with homophobia-as-pathology achieves no more than a change of focus. As long as the notion of pathology remains available for political deployment, there can be no guarantee that the object of ‘pathologification’ will not one day again be lesbian or gay.”<sup>80</sup>

Slogan aims to say that homophobia is not biologically given unlike homosexuality and suggests that homophobia is a choice which can be changed unlike homosexuality. Here I want to raise a question: to what extent is homophobia choice? Especially when being a proper Georgian man

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<sup>79</sup> Donald E. Hall, “*Reading Sexualities. Hermeneutic theory and the future of queer studies*”, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 9

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

means excluding homosexuality from its boundaries. Homophobia can be discussed as the means for proving one's 'manliness' and expressing homophobic attitudes becomes compulsory for proving your heterosexuality, manliness and national identity. Reasonable Georgian man is "the one who embodies homophobic cultural norms"<sup>81</sup> and as Butler writes "...this reasonable person is also pervasively paranoid, externalizing a homosexuality that "endangers" the reasonable person from within."<sup>82</sup> Thus, it is possible that homophobia is a choice only to the extent that one wants to be perceived, treated and appreciated as truly Georgian who is undoubtedly heterosexual.

Renkin in "Homophobia and Queer Belonging in Hungary" argues that understandings of homophobia in post-socialist Eastern Europe have limitations worth of noticing. One of the approaches he discusses is understanding homophobia as "[...] deeply individual reaction grounded in personal fear of sexual "Others".<sup>83</sup> Although acknowledging the emotional aspect of homophobia, he makes a valuable note by writing that grounding homophobia in psychological and personal realms leaves a little chance of understanding it as consequential of the political and cultural processes.

Another approach that is been contested is understanding homophobia as a not surprising result of post-socialist Eastern Europe's nationalist ideologies' relationship with sexuality, which is at risk of representing homophobia "as a timeless and unchanging part of an equally timeless and unchanging nationalism"<sup>84</sup> and represents the binary opposition of nationalism and homosexuality which he argues, is the simplified way of viewing the post-socialist sexual politics.

And as Renkin examines the association of LGBT people with "the West" and "Europe" he provides observations that very closely resonate another influential approach to homosexuality in

<sup>81</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, p. 106

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106

<sup>83</sup> Hadley Z. Renkin, "Homophobia and Queer belonging in Hungary," *Focaal* 53, 2009, p. 22

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23

Georgia which shapes homophobia as backwardness: “LGBT people appear here as a kind of “indicator species” for the postsocialist creation of inclusive society – for “normal” social progress.”<sup>85</sup> Renkin argues that these approaches overlook the agency of LGBT people and the importance of their practices as determining “the structures of sentiment and power that surround them in post-socialist Eastern Europe.”<sup>86</sup>

### **3.8 Pride March as an instrument for increasing Visibility**

The last issues I want to expand on as matter of identity politics is the question of pride march. It is one of those concerns that comes up in almost all of the interviews without me questioning it and I certainly see it as the indicator of the importance of it to the activists and to the Georgian LGBT politics because these are the people who together with the rest of activists form the politics of LGBT organizations nowadays in Georgia.

In almost all cases the pride march is linked to the visibility of LGBT people as one of the instruments for working on the problem of invisibility which is often argued to be the main impediment for working against homophobia. Pride march and making people visible is dominantly linked to each other.

Kates and Belk define LGPD (Lesbian and Gay Pride Day) as “(..) a complex, multilayered form of consumption- related cultural resistance that raises awareness of social injustice and discursively informs social meanings in everyday life outside the festival”<sup>87</sup> and trace its emergence back to the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>87</sup> Steven M. Kates and Russell W. Belk, “The meanings of lesbian and gay pride day Resistance through Consumption and Resistance to Consumption” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 30 no. 4 August 2001, p. 393

homophile rights activism and “Stonewall riots” of 1969 which is commonly recognized as the first open protest of lesbians and gays against oppression and the symbol of gay liberation movement. As authors indicate, “Stonewall” became the source of political discourse which put terms such as ‘pride, defiance and visibility’ in the center of gay and lesbian political rhetoric.

While talking about the Pride March activists often refer to events organized by “Identoba” and “LGBT Georgia” both marking the International Transgender Day of Remembrance because events had a form of march of 20-30 people. One organized by “Identoba” included pacing through the city center with the rainbow flag and banners with following slogans: “I <3(love) my transgender friend”, “Transphobia sucks”, “I am a ~~homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transgender,~~ a person”, “STOP”, “All different All equal”. In addition, offering the rainbow cake to the people in the street.

Another event organized by “LGBT Georgia” comparing to “Identoba”’s event was a bit smaller in number of people and it was carried out only with a rainbow flag and the light blue balloons in the park. Referring to these events director of “LGBT Georgia” explains that now there is more possibility of going out in streets during the daylight without a fear of being raided, but when asked about consequences of so called “little pride” if it were only announced by the media, television, he adds:

*“If it were announced for the broad masses they would have been there and something bad would have happened, but it is not the problem either, because sometimes that is necessary. Yes, I am not telling a nice thing but it is necessary to test the police, to check whether state protects you or not, in order to use it afterwards. If the police does not protect you, you will never hold a pride, you have to check your strength.” (David Mikheil)*

As for the function of the pride in Georgia, he points out two messages that pride is sending by his opinion, first and most important is showing that being gay is not shameful for gay people and another is the reaction to the dominant discourse that marks homosexuals as sick people:



*“Often people ask: why is the sexual orientation something one can be proud of? Yes, it is not, but I am saying that I am not ashamed of being gay and this is one of the messages of pride and the second message is that, if the society agrees that every Murtazi<sup>88</sup> is ugly, every Murtazi living there will go out and say: look we are not ugly, so when they are telling you that you are sick, you should go out and tell them: no, I am not sick! The first part is more important, that I am not ashamed of being gay.” (David Mikheil)*

Nino tells that pride march is necessary but it should be very peaceful and careful march, with an accent on human rights. She says that thinks for the next year it will already be possible to hold a pride march in Tbilisi.

The editor of “Identoba”’s online magazine, Magda, also speaks about the necessity and the significant meaning of pride in terms of working for improving the group’s visibility. Pride march for her is *“[...] declaring the identity of a person and saying, look, I exist as well, I am not invisible and it is good that I exist.”*(Magda) She is explaining that because of invisibility of the group and people having doubts about their existence and rights’ violation, going out in order to demonstrate that you do exist and you are oppressed is the only way left.

The director of “Identoba” also emphasizes the political necessity and efficacy of the pride march for increasing the group’s visibility in Georgia. For Tamta as well, Pride march has its significance, though points out that it will take form according to the Georgian environment. She as well, talks about the function of Pride as the instrument for increasing visibility.

*“In order to become visible, to show people that you have rights and the right to exist and you want to be seen, to live and love and be who you are, once in a year go out and celebrate. For Georgian society it is very important in order to make people see that the pride is not some scary monster.” (Tamta)*

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<sup>88</sup> Used as a very unpopular name in Georgia.

Paata is telling that there is already the need of mass movement's beginning and stating the absence of tradition of expressing civic solidarity and position through marches, reveals that street activism will surely cause the confrontation, which he notes, is the necessary part of the movement.

*“Time for street confrontations will surely come, increasing visibility will be followed by increased aggression first.” (Paata)*

Similarly to the rest of activists, he links pride march to the function of increasing visibility:

*“Visibility is important, you should express the need of your political rights you should be seen in order not to stay the problem on the paper and become personified problem.” (Paata)*

Eka tells that she knows very few of those people who will have the civic courage and participate in the Pride which for her is the event strengthening the community and giving a hope to people, encouraging others to act as well, and therefore sees it as the good form of protest expression though like Tamta, she designates that Pride march will not automatically take the same form as it has in ‘West’, and most importantly, she notes that Pride should not be the aim with an end in itself and stresses the need of more complex work against the kind of oppression that LGBT group is experiencing in Georgia, which I find very accurate. *“There are so many problems surrounding us, there is a nightmarish situation, I do not consider it as the only way to make the issue and problems visible.” (Eka)* Although she as well, makes a remark that Pride might have the function of working against invisibility which she represents as the main source for homophobia.

For Ana Pride is not the best form of activism because together with the observing gaze that she tells Pride is forming, she points to the problem of discriminative representations in the march that is often the case. Discussing the possibility of holding the Pride march she talks about the kind of dilemma that the state might have regarding this issue. She adds that the president by supporting the Pride march will go against the church and therefore this is very unlikely to happen, though on the

other hand, she suggests that if the president will receive the request from LGBT organizations and reject it, the worse might happen in terms of country's relationship with EU.

Likewise, Mariam makes a comparison between Pride march and coming out and claims the importance of Pride march in terms of the effect that it will have on LGBT group's visibility saying that:

*“Pride has the same meaning for me as the coming out has in terms of increasing visibility and showing that there are many of these people and they do exist and that these people do not like what is going on and how society relates to them and will not be silent anymore locked in their houses and bedrooms but will clearly express their position. (Mariam)*

Only one of the informants, Shota is announcing that marching in the streets today in Georgia is, using his words, “just not serious”.

Far from understanding Pride as the ritual which “[...] constructs its own symbolically inverted moral universe, calculated to shock, offend, and ultimately subvert a dominant heteropatriarchy that prescribes culturally acceptable and hegemonic norms”<sup>89</sup> the meaning of pride for activists is the expression of a collective nonheterosexual identity and rather than celebration of self and community the purpose that it might serve at this point, is seen as claiming the existence of this self and community first of all. When activists emphasize that Pride will take form according to the context of Georgia, they are explaining that it will not have the aspect of carnivalesque celebration but serve as the source for increasing visibility and community solidarity. Pride march is taken as an indicator of and an attempt to build and strengthen the community.

Lory Britt and David Heise's analysis of social movements that are engaged in identity politics I suggest is one of the most relevant theorization for discussing Georgian LGBT activists' politics. In the “From Shame to Pride in Identity Politics” authors write that “[...] social movements involved in

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<sup>89</sup> Steven M. Kates and Russell W. Belk, “The meanings of lesbian and gay pride day Resistance through Consumption and Resistance to Consumption” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 30 no. 4 August 2001, p. 424

identity politics deal with people who initially are ashamed, isolated and perhaps stressed. The first task is to turn shame and depression into other emotions with higher activation in order to incite and motivate.”<sup>90</sup> The aim of organizations’ is exactly what these authors write for the aim of identity politics, replacing the model of inferiority and innate deviance by the model of oppression, shifting from feelings of fear to the feeling of anger which should motivate people to join the struggle, substituting shame with pride.

## Conclusion

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<sup>90</sup> Lory Britt and David Heise, “From Shame to Pride in Identity Politics” in *Self, identity and social movements* Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J. Owens, and Robert W. White (eds.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 255

In the following thesis I wanted to present why the critique of identity politics can be in practice problematic in particular social contexts where not only ‘queer’ but ‘identity politics’ is difficult, courageous and at times dangerous to be carried out. Although I admit that there is certain inadequacy in attacking identity politics in contemporary Georgia, I believe there are distorting influences that it has and I tried to address.

I believe the theoretical deconstruction of identities should not imply destruction of them and that they are not only externally defined matters of stigma but often necessary mobilizing forces for establishing broad political coalitions and in making political claims where the group has to counter violence and systemic oppression from political, economic, social and cultural institutions. Though, personal experiences cannot be always reflectively translated into political identities.

Thinking about essentialized identities we should remember the political context where they emerge and in relation to which they work as well as the place they have in the dominant discourse, but herewith we should keep being careful and work to avoid exclusions and identity policing practices that identity politics often comes together with.

I also believe that in ‘identity politics’, the collective understanding of ‘identity’ should be politicized and its relational character emphasized rather than arguing for its innateness. Georgian activists’ concerns over the community strengthening can be referred to as to the indicator of the lack of politicization of collective understanding of identity. Therefore representation of ‘Queer’ as an ‘anti-identity’, might do the depoliticizing work in this context. Constructing queer as enemy against embracing identities will possibly give a rise to anticipation and distrust towards it.

I strongly believe that the question is ill-posed if it asks for choosing one, either embracing only rights based perspective or the radical transformational change that the movement can be engaged in.

I feel in harmony with Donald Hall's assertion that "[...]we desperately need an approach to sexual identity that motivates, that embraces the "politics" in identity politics, and that articulates a vision for the future."<sup>91</sup> Moreover, it is crucial to question the global character of Queer, for as Hall formulates it:

"The term, its denotations, and connotations still circulate primarily among members of the privileged classes and those with Western media and internet access. Queerness is not global if we include in the "global" subsistence farmers, the illiterate, most North Koreans and Saudis (who do not have unrestricted access to the web or other media), and innumerable others."<sup>92</sup>

Carol Guess sees the very danger that the term "queer" is accompanied with and is similar to what Warner is arguing about queer politics and practices available for only one kind of dominant position, noting that: "While the vagueness of the word indeed allows it to function as a useful catch-all term for non-normative sexualities, the term "queer" stands a very real risk of being usurped by the more powerful of the many groups for which it serves as an umbrella."<sup>93</sup>

The conclusion I have for now in relation to the issue I have explored is that establishing queer politics as an exact opposite of identity politics is a dangerous theorization that might have fatal results for the activism characterized with identity politics as well as for the queer politics and its potentials because it limits the debate to the binary with two contradicting poles. Formulating the debate itself in dichotomous model and positing Queer as an enemy of identity politics might strengthen the exclusionary essentialist claims and leave no space for queering them, which is badly needed.

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<sup>91</sup> Donald E. Hall, *Reading Sexualities, Hermeneutic theory and the future of queer studies* London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 12

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>93</sup> Carol Guess, "Que(e)rying Lesbian Identity" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 28, No. 1, *Identities* (Spring, 1995) p. 36



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