When Dance Becomes Political: Georgian Rave Culture as the Site of Global and Local Construction of Politics

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between understandings of politics and rave culture in Georgia at international and local level. It looks into the social movement that emerged around rave culture in Tbilisi and relates it to the global process of Europeanization of the country. By examining the portrayal of this movement on international media and putting it into conversation with the local actors – ravers and leaders of the movement, the paper argues that the movement was mobilized by intentional framing of technologies of rave culture, namely, cultural style, music, drugs, dance, and club space, as political.

The political agency of ravers emerged in relation to the inhumane drug policy that the Georgian state was actively using as a repressive mechanism at that time. Apart from the collective political mobilization, this thesis investigates individual and performative ways of doing cultural politics. The sexuality and body politics, that largely marked the movement and the culture as queer, defined political agency of ravers in confrontation to the society. This very struggle between the younger and older generations, so-called liberal and conservative parts of society over the "right to the body" has largely been articulated by international media. While these framings are not necessarily wrong, they have omitted and downplayed the importance of the collective struggle against the police state and reduced the agenda of the movement to cultural confrontation between different groups of society. This process has taken place in the global context of what is labeled as "post-Soviet" transformation of the country from "pre-European" to the European state.

On the conceptual level, the construction of modern liberal subjectivity has been exclusively defined in lines with queer modernity and serving to uphold developmentalist vision of Georgia by Western media. While embracing modernity as a reference point, rave culture in Georgia has negotiated and contested the Eurocentric vision of the culture through its struggle for the drug policy. Despite this contestation on the practice and discourse level, the movement has been largely dependent on international media representation. Whilst confined to one case, the study informs how culture that has mostly been associated with escapism and hedonism can produce political activism. It can further be expanded into covering the wider geopolitical space of post-Socialism as well as in theorizing Europeanization and ideas of modernity beyond cultural politics.

Key Words: politics, rave, social movements, cultural style, Europeanization, globalization, modernity, Liberalism, performativity, body politics, drug policy

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Introduction

On 10th of June, 2017, thousands of people marched in the main avenue of Tbilisi to protest detention of hip-hop artists based on drug charges[1] marking the largest grassroots demonstration in the history of independent Georgia since the 2003 Rose Revolution. A year later, on May 12, 2018 the second wave of protests hit the streets of Tbilisi in response to the police raids in two famous nightclubs of Tbilisi - Café Gallery and Bassiani. The protest turned into a massive rave in front of the parliament building. This event was referred to as "rave-olution"[1]. Even though the protestors were unable to fully achieve their goal and change drug policy, one must admit the obvious: between 2015-2018 the activists associated with the techno clubs mobilized the largest grassroots movement in the country. "We Dance Together, We Fight Together" was the slogan of the resistance and the techno club 'Bassiani' became the epicenter of protests and international and local media coverage.

Much before the demonstrations, international media outlets widely framed clubs in post-Socialist space as places of social transformation of the youth. Georgian rave culture was related to the more globalizing process of Europeanization of the country. Even though not all demonstrators in 2018 were affiliated with the rave culture, media and public perception presented it as the protest of raver culture. The latter became political on two levels – the liberation of the body from oppressive local culture and state (articulated both by international media and the leadership of the club), and the collective mobilization for the legislative changes. The connection between these two understandings of cultural politics makes rave culture in Georgia an interesting case to investigate and positions it in the broader context of rave history, on one hand, and the academic debate about the role of cultural politics in political mobilization, on the other.

While rave culture and techno clubs have historically been associated and studied in the context of escapism, hedonism, nihilism, I would like to explain the relationship between understandings of politics and rave on international and local levels. More specifically this paper will answer following questions:

- How did Georgian ravers acquire political agency in the local and global narratives?
- How did the grassroots mobilization of the movement take place in the club Bassiani?

- How did the political subjectivities arise in relation to the body politics of the rave culture in Georgia?
- What do these understandings tell us about global geopolitical imagination about Georgia?

Based on the interviews with ravers and international media articles on the movement, I will look into the collective, individual and geopolitical dimensions of politics around rave. In the first chapter, I will review the existing theoretical approaches to the cultural elements of rave and performativity and briefly look into its history and convergence with the humane drug policy movement in Georgia. In the second chapter, I will explain how the technologies of rave culture: music, dance and drugs were instrumentalized by the leaders of the movement and how the framing of these very technologies led to political mobilization. In the third chapter, I will concentrate on two major themes of the culture: drug use and sexuality and explain how political subjectivities came into being in global and local narratives. In the final chapter, I will argue that the logic behind this subjectivity construction is defined by the ideas about modernity and reflects the global imagination about Georgia as a post-Soviet pre-European state that can transform into European modern state by intelligible queer performance.

Chapter 1. Context and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will explore the existing approaches to techno culture and its political potential and relate it to the Georgian case of rave movement. I have divided the notion of politics into three interconnected understandings: 1. politics as collective mobilization with the Georgian case of rave as movement, 2. the cultural politics of rave as culture with its technologies, 3. geopolitics and respective project of European modernity.

1.1. History of techno culture and Georgian case of rave movement

Born in Detroit and raised in Europe, techno music "joined [pre-existing music genre] house in inspiring and invigorating popular music of Europe in a way that was unheard over the past twenty-five years" (Gilbert & Pearson,1999:74). It originally emerged in 1980s as non-commercial working-class subculture but has been largely commercialized and widespread since then. With its stylistic expression in clothes, music, substance abuse and hedonistic lifestyle, techno rave has millions of young followers. In this thesis, I use the words "rave movement", "rave culture" interchangeably. I will refer to it as a movement when speaking about the Georgian case and activities of the rave community beyond club settings. And, I will use "culture" in a more general sense as dance and music culture. This particular understanding of rave as culture is more common in academic texts.

While techno has Western origins, it is by no means "representative for a people or a culture, but rather as an example for the removal of ethnic ties to dance music and for a musical culture delimited by civilization" (Jerrentrup, 2000:71). It has DIY approach requiring no knowledge of music instruments or signing – everyone, who has a computer, can learn it. The sonic characteristics of technology-based music and social character of raves that turned it into a global music and dance culture. While techno can be heard and listened to anywhere, and raves do not necessarily assume certain kind of music, I will be considering techno raves in association with clubs.

Dominance of seeing rave as culture or subculture by no means deprives it of political connotation. Unlike young people who articulate their discontent with political conditions and revolt against traditional political institutions, rave culture "struggles in political sense for their right to their own lives" (Hitzler & Pfadenhauer 2002:90). Cultural studies saw the 1990s rave events in the UK and the US as DIY self-organized spaces and emphasized on their ability to

contest mainstream culture and ideologies (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007). With mainstreaming and commercialization of the culture in academia, rave is considered as politically "died out" phenomenon, and drug consumption associated with it is framed as a public health issue, usually assessed through epidemiological quantitative research (Ibid).

Unlike in academia, international media "resurrected" rave as political and is widely constructing a Eurocentric narrative of how post-Socialist capitals are becoming more political through development of rave culture. This reflects the vision of politics that does not necessarily assume the collective or public mobilization, but the exact same definition of politics as "right to one's own life" (Hitzler & Pfadenhauer 2002:90), which according to these articles, the youth of post-Socialist countries are deprived of.

Ironically, in Georgia, techno led to actual collective mobilization and can be considered a socio-political movement. The word "movement" is sometimes used to describe the global character of techno raves (see, for example, Hitzler & Pfadenhauer 2002:90), I refer to techno in Georgia in the more conventional sense as a political movement that seeks "change beyond individual benefit through collective action" (Dzenovska 2018:25). Thus, rave is the movement and the culture at the same time. The two concepts can be understood in the collective and cultural ways of doing politics, respectively.

Collective action of techno movement in Georgia was largely framed in relation to the society and the state. Collective action frames are action- oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of social movements (Benford, R. & Snow D. 2000:614). The process of attribution is central to diagnosing the problem (e.g. harsh drug policy) and suggesting relevant solutions (e.g. change of legislation). And subsequently create motivational framing - "the rationale for engaging in the action and construction of respective vocabulary" (Benford, R. & Snow D. 2000:617).

In the process of meeting these framing tasks, movement engages in intentional as well as unintentional strategizing, discursively assemblages the parts of experience, events and information that are relevant to these strategies and faces possible counter action (Benford, R. & Snow D. 2000). These can include very wide range of actions and practices that social movements (including Georgian one) usually exploit. While the techno movement in Georgia can be studied from different angles, I will look into how it exploited a variety of conventional and non-conventional political tools and agency of its technologies for political mobilization. I will concentrate on the framing processes that led to grassroot mobilization in clubs and

motivated ravers to participate in activism outside of the club. Treating rave as a culture allows me to contrast it with other social movements in Georgia because the affiliation with club makes it different from any other grassroot mobilization or advocacy practices in the country. At the same time, treating how the elements of these culture have been framed as political (mostly by leaders) allows me contrast Georgian case with the other rave cultures that never left club settings.

Techno raves have been introduced to Tbilisi when the culture was already largely commercialized and mainstream in Europe. It started as a commercial project in Tbilisi as well. In 2000s several electronic music clubs have opened, but thetechno boom started in 2010s, especially with the opening of club Bassiani in Tbilisi. While the movement around techno club has been the biggest in size, this period coincides with rise of other grassroots social movements (Women's Movement, Queer Movement, Anti-Occupation Movement). Mass demonstrations, campaigns, cooperation around legislation with the government have been common tools which the civil society has been using indicating the overall increase in political activism.

The rise of these movements had several reasons – the recent change of government being one of the main ones. Political party Georgian Dream was a coalition of all opposing parties that came to power in 2012. The newly elected government largely promoted itself in contrast to its predecessor's ("United National Movement") punitive politics. One of the first things they did after elections was the massive amnesty of prisoners. Georgia had one of the biggest shares of prison population in Europe (Human Rights Watch, 2018). However, random forceful detainments and testing of people for drugs as well as imposing harsh punishment based on drug charges, together with the lack of proper legislative framework to process the drug related cases were still common after amnesty, especially in 2013-2017 (EMC, 2019).

Harsh drug policies have not been challenged due to the painful memory of the 1990s. After the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, heroin addiction had become one of the biggest public health issues in the country. No wonder, the fight against crime and drugs was so entwined and encouraged, up until 2014 it had never been a subject of public debate, except for the fragmented demands of legalising Marijuana. Detention of Beka Tsikarishvili on possession of Marijuana led to the first campaign "Beka is not a criminal", which brought the change in drug

legislation, but more importantly, led to release of hundreds of people and turned into “The White Noise Movement”.

The White Noise Movement extended its scope to advocating for more extensive legal changes in harsh drug policy and covered not only Marijuana, but other substances as well. The movement provided help to those being prosecuted for drug charges, to the families of the victims of the policy, and to spread information about one’s rights and possibilities of the grounds of communication with the police. The advocacy and communication with the users and their families was limited to legal help and can be considered as the first steps of movement building. Several NGOs were involved in this process. With the opening of club Bassiani the scope and the character of mobilization was extended and moved around the club. From the very start there was connection between the techno clubs and the movement due to the club leader's personal involvement in the cause. The association of drugs and clubs made this connection even stronger. Even the first meeting to announce the start of the movement and results of the campaign “Beka is not a criminal” was held at club Mtkvari. Later, in 2016, the National Public Meeting on Drug Policy at club Bassiani, made the movement and the club inseparable. Clubs formed the grassroots power of the movement, while the NGOs took over the legal and institutional aspect of it.

When the clubs got raided in 2018 the rave movement already had very strong support of tens of thousands and connections within the ruling party. The raid was unexpected, because the policy change the movement had been fighting for was already suggested by the Healthcare Commitee of the ruling party. The very same day of the raid around 10000 people came to protest in front of the parliament building in Tbilisi. The demonstration turned into a rave, which was supposed to resume the next day, but was prevented by the small, but extremely aggressive groups of men (including organized alt-right). The minister of internal affairs apologized to the demonstrators and the police evacuated them by buses. The police did not find any drugs in the club, and Bassiani opened in 2 weeks. A few months after Marijuana was decriminalized. However, the suggested policy change was never fully implemented, and the movement fell apart.

Neither techno, nor clubbing are inherently social or political. The collective character of the raves does not answer the question of mobilization either, because Georgia is an exception rather than the rule in terms of collective action outside of the club. However, it should be

recognized that the club with its intentions as well as its general organization of the space in a way that people can interact with each other creates solid grounds for recruitment of at least low-risk activists through communication and group affiliation. The latter refers to the resistance through the activities that do not involve physical, emotional, or financial dangers (McAdam, 1986). Due to the brutal drug laws in Georgia the spaces where drug consumption is hugely the part of the culture definitely constitutes the high-risk activity itself, which might have already created certain grounds for people's openness to participate in other types of low or high-risk resistance. This can be considered as cultural opportunity. Cultural possibilities are the factors that "constrain and facilitate movement frames and framing activities" (Benford, R. & Snow D. 2000:629). It will later help understand how the movement framed dance and rave as political in relation to existing cultural possibilities.

The relative freedom of expression and demonstration that existed in 2017-2018 also created space for the specific forms of activism that grassroots groups widely opted for. This can be described as political opportunities. The degree and extent of political possibility in any society is usually very hard to predicate (Benford, R. & Snow D. 2000:631). However, I will investigate how the leaders of the club assessed political possibilities to further their agenda and faced constrains and counter-action.

Apart from drug policy change, techno aimed for the cultural societal transformation as well – expressed in changing attitudes towards drug consumption and sexuality. The two can be described as the right to the body. Clubs have tightly been associated with the queer movement and acted as gay friendly places since the 2000s. In 2016 Bassiani and affiliated queer activists started organizing queer nights series "Horoom" at the club. In a homophobic country like Georgia, where over 90% of population explicitly articulates its hatred to LGBTQ+ community (Aghdgomelashvili, 2016) and the freedom of assembly and demonstration for queers is constrained by conservative and church affiliated groups, such association immediately turned them into a political statement.

At the same time the techno clubs in the city have been positioning themselves as against homophobia, sexism and for equal rights. In general Bassiani has been consistently supporting other movements (feminist groups, miners' strike) in their public statements and collaborated for some causes. However, apart from White Noise Movement these intersections were more fragmented. As for the queer movement, it was largely supported through mainly queer nights, which turned the clubs into spaces of safe socialization for LGBTQ+ community. These

activities challenged the normative cultural concepts of sexuality within the club, which I refer to individualized or performative understanding of politics and I will elaborate on later in this chapter.

Whether I look at collective or individual ways of doing politics, the process of meaning production in the club is central to my analysis. Therefore, I will explain the agency of dance, music, space and drugs and their relationship with the raver body and style, that were the pre-requisites of the attribution process.

1.2. The cultural politics of rave as culture and its technologies

When I first started thinking about rave culture, I kept asking myself what made Bassiani so special. With concrete walls and industrial design, the space constitutes a very dark labyrinth where one barely sees anything. The main dancefloor is large and hosts thousands of people every weekend, the small one is much lighter in terms of actual light and music played in it. The dress code is black, the music strictly techno, or industrial and hard techno, sometimes house-techno and at queer parties house (the genre historically associated with queers and women). Fascinating for sure, but the space itself is not even designed in a way to leave much space for communication. But it is not speaking, it is dancing and music that framed rave as political. Therefore, I will elaborate on these aspects of culture in this section.

When reflecting on the role of dance, music, space and drugs treat them as technologies that greatly determined political content and forms of struggle of rave in Georgia. Such approach is inspired by the vision of non-human agency in Action Network Theory. The latter aims to understand interaction between human and non-human world as dialectical. It "claims that we should simply not believe the question of the connections among heterogeneous actors to be closed, that what is usually meant by 'social' has probably to do with the reassembling of new types of actors" (Latour 2005:75). Such broadening of social as not limited to human interaction allows seeing the technologies of rave as participants of the social process and explain how they have been charged with meaning. The problem of this approach is that it can easily fall victim to essentializing them and turn their working into self-fulfilling prophecies. Saying that the technologies of rave have agency does not inform about what kind of meaning they will produce. However, they are useful for my inquiry as they created certain cultural possibilities within the rave culture that were intentionally or unintentionally exploited for political purposes.

Historically techno music was developed in the harsh socio-economic reality of Detroit. "Techno was not the sonic representation of inequality", but rather operated in the zone of beat induced pleasure and relief (Gilbert & Pearson 1999:74). This distinguishes the social meaning of techno from other genres like hip-hop that also was born in response to racialized social-economic oppression but articulated it in storytelling manner. Void of verbality techno does not illustrate or narrate. It challenges the humanist notions of "musicality" by not forcing "machine music into shapes and textures" (Gilbert & Pearson 1999:74). In doing so it blurs the inherited sonic distinction between "technology" and "humanity" in music (Ibid).

As an electronic dance music techno is literally designed to make you move and synchronize with the music as well as the other bodies in the space (Burger & Toivianen 2018). While the techno by its name refers to technologies, rave is inherently human and collective. Which makes the music and dance site-specific. The space and relevant "vibe" that is generated during the event bears the most importance (Ibid).

The design of the techno clubs often repeats the atmosphere of the hollow concrete warehouses that hosted them before. The dance is performed together with the others but not in relation to each other. Dark clubs, consumption of drugs and alcohol, as well as social construction of the space as queer and free from social norms might encourage sexual encounters, but due to its post-humanistic qualities mentioned above techno culture with its gender neutral clothing and dancing styles, and robotic sound creates space "not simply to regress to a moment before the regulating discourses of sexuality,… but to go beyond them into an imagined cyborg future, and "act as the site of a constructible, engineerable, alterable, androgynous corporeality" (Gilbert & Pearson 1999:74-75).With one eye in the future, techno provides possibilities to reconsider gender and sexuality. Its historic association with the marginalized and racialized groups will help me understand the subjectivity formation in line with queer body politics of the movement.

Technologies and site-specific embodiment of techno culture does not imply that it will necessarily be free of sexism, racism and other structures of oppression. For example, the struggle against the discrimination of female DJs, is still very real and are often discussed at conferences or public debates in the industry. However, even in its construction of the role of DJ techno does leaves a lot of space to charge with meaning in relation to socio-cultural context. For example, the DJs are not usually the reason for people going to clubs (Biehl-

Missal 2019). Together with the music and space the drugs also constitute very important part of the culture.

In 1980s certain set of drugs like MDMA, Ecstacy, Speed was introduced to the rave scene. These substances work on human brain on chemical level which is usually experienced by users as feeling energetic, empathetic, euphoric and happy (Kalant 2001). While alcohol and different kinds of so called club drugs together with consumer habits definitely play role in creating the specific "vibe" in the club, I would rather understand substance abuse as another set of technologies which not only became political, but the main reason for organizing.

The historic and cultural implications of drugs give insights in their role to the political agency. Certain set of substances like cocaine and cannabis became illegal in Europe and America not based on the public health concerns, "but because they were associated with the cultures of non-white immigrant communities and of groups of young women enjoying unprecedented (for at least a century) degrees of social, economic and sexual independence" (Gilbert & Pearson 1999:155). While humans have been engaging with various kinds of substances in different ways, some became illegal in specific historical moments of Europe which defined their social meaning in relation to different kinds of authority, that sought to regulate the bodies of the marginalized (Ibid). In the context of Georgia, it is primarily state regulation of the drug use which relates to the struggle of ravers; therefore, it will be treated as the politically charged issue around which the movement was built. The negative attitude of society towards drugs can be described as cultural constrain that acted against the movement.

It should be noted that the social organization of consumption also generates political meanings and subjectivities. Substance abuse at techno clubs is often referred to as "recreational" and relate to the abovementioned function of release and pleasure. The reason behind it is the overall idea of pleasure and release mentioned above. The techno culture in this sense transgresses the ideas of capitalist productivity and rationality with its dissociation of time, accent on pleasure and feeling (Gilbert & Pearson 1999).

However, the transgression is individual and does not imply collective mobilization at all. Quite the contrary, it encourages unapologetic escapism (Ibid). Paul Willis (2014) to some extent articulates the same criticism when speaking about Hippies and Punks. He claims that these subcultures only challenged the systems of oppression through symbolic solutions and never really mobilized against the underlying structural inequality (Willis 2014). But he sees the transformative capacity of cultural "politics through transformation of objects, style,

thought and consciousness" (p. 224). Willis (2014) understands politics as dynamic ideology that catches its momentum in everydayness. Put this way, the portrayal of techno in relation to the local norms (or what is imagined as local mainstream) does constitute politics through everyday performative expression of that ideology. In the next section I will elaborate how the ideology can be articulated not only through verbal, but respective performative embodiment that places the body as the central site of meaning inscription (Biehl-Missal 2019:19)

1.3. Cultural style, performative capacity of rave culture and modernity

"Freedom is not a potential that waits for its exercise. It comes into being through its exercise" (Butler, 2009, p. vi-vii). This very notion of freedom as exercise has been central in constructing the rave as political project and ravers as political subjects. The frequent use of the word "Freedom" and the visually charged demonstrations of ravers make liberty something one has to "embody" - exercise corporeally. For example, freedom in this context is embodied through dance, consumption of drugs, relevant (usually gender neutral) clothes that serve as cultural markers of these activities. The meaning of these cultural markers is acquired contextually and reproduces cultural styles.

The cultural style refers to "practices that signify differences between social categories" (Ferguson 1999:97), e.g. In this case raver/liberal/young/European vs. Old/conservative/traditional/pro-Russian are social categories that are produced and are recognizable as relevant cultural styles. I intentionally avoid referring to ravers as the subcultural style, because for it to act like one it has to challenge the "normalized" process of signification (Hebridge 1991). Such vision would limit it to only local understanding of rave as resistance to the locally produced meaning of cultural styles, while globally rave is not necessarily transgressing the mainstream process of signification. Quite the contrary, as mentioned above, it has penetrated number of spaces as the mainstream culture.

However, as much as it constitutes a global cultural style, it varies from a place to a place. The reason for this is its performative capacity of the style (Ferguson, 1999:98). In this sense "performativity suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler, 1990:139). This definition of performativity was originally developed by Judith Butler regarding social construction of sex in "Gender Trouble", however, I would like to use it in broader sense and apply it to understandings of subjectivity formation, particularly, production of ravers as political subjects. The cultural style of ravers is very tightly connected to body

politics which in turn involves gender and one's right to the body (in terms of drug consumption, dance), but by no ways is limited to it.

Following Butler's logic (1990) subjectivities are not merely expressed in performance but are rather constructed through the very performance. In order to be recognized as political actors, the ravers have to be able to understand the repertoire of what they see as politics and enact it in a certain way. If struggle for freedom over body is perceived as the political agency the relevant performance should be in place. However, this is not a mechanical process in which one gets instructions and follows the script, but a creative production (Ferguson, 1999). Therefore, it cannot be reduced to simple attribution of the rave as political project with its toolkit of European narratives, but rather complex process of creating Liberal subjectivities at the crossroads of the global and local.

The core idea of Liberalism in this context can be defined as its belief in natural freedom of individual, which everybody has to aspire to (Jahn, 2012). "In line with this assumption, the demise of the Soviet Union, understood as a major barrier to the realization of this natural development, led to the expectation that democracy and freedom could now (be) spread unimpeded across the world" (Jahn, 2012:151). While these visions of modernity have largely been challenged, and existence of multiple rather than one West-oriented understandings have been suggested. "We live in an age of modernity where proposals and counterproposals all use certain key, modern principles as reference points" (Furie, 2010). It means that different actors might be using various access points and categorizing logic for defining modernity. Even when explicitly they operate in the same framework of e.g. European modernity, the latter does not act like unifying coherent discourse. I will argue that this relationship between local and global forces is more complicated than simple imposition of meaning by the latter to the first. However, the context in which the ideas about modernity emerge play important role.

1.4. Geopolitics and respective project of European modernity

Since independence Georgian cultural and political policies have been explicitly Europe oriented. The interest in techno culture by international media, as well as number of international articles and media pieces, promoting Georgia as party/tourist destination has been a parallel trend as well. Especially after the 2003 Rose Revolution the process of Europeanization and modernization was celebrated in multiple ways starting with reforms, policy changes and campaigns, ending with such everyday symbols as flags of European Union

above every governmental building in the country. One of the important cultural factors has been the tendency to see Europeanization in connection to human rights protection, especially of queers. The reasons for the tendency to see Europe as the propagator of queer rights in Georgia is not arbitrary and been supported by relevant reforms like introduction of anti-discrimination legislation as pre-requisite of European Association Agreement.

I will argue that when applied to Georgia the idea of European modernity takes sexual transformation as its main accessing point. Puar (2013) calls this strategy homonationalism. The term originally was developed to describe the strategy of sexual "othering" of the racialized/ethinicized groups to serve the nationalistic and imperial interests of USA (Puar 2013:4). For example, justifying violence and war in Iraq by producing the latter as homophobic and therefore dangerous and backward minded (Ibid). Unlike the example provided by Puar, Georgia is not produced as non-European and "other" who needs to be targeted with force and excluded, but rather I will argue that Georgia is constructed as pre-European, pre-liberal country that has to politically (through reforms) and culturally (performance) meet certain criteria to become part of European culture through embracing this very queer modernity (Puar, 2013). Thus, the rave culture became political project not only through collective or individual resistance, but as the one with specific Europe-oriented agenda.

By contrast, the drugs has never really been the part of Western modernist project. Quite the opposite, European modernity was "puritan" in relation to drugs due to the historical associations to minorities outlined above (Gilbert & Pearson 1999). In case of Georgia the police did not target the minorities or only disadvantaged groups of users. The "zero tolerance" and "war of drugs" more typical to US context (Wacquant 2012) was implemented and "sold" as European/modernist projects. The massive character of incarceration of male population was quite arbitrary, and the police power promoted through several reality shows and live arrests of criminals. In this thesis I will argue that the main demand of the rave movement was not limited to the freedom and the right to the body but exposed the repressive mechanisms of the state.

The political agency of ravers emerged in the political context that placed their agenda in opposition to such "puritan" anti-drug modernity. Suggested version of modernity was largely contested and manipulated, taking some aspects (queer modernity) while rejecting the other (puritan modernity). Therefore, relationship between the global (Western) and local (Georgian) should be understood in terms of "glocalization" - the process of merging the global

products/ideas with the local and forming something new (Appadurai,1990). The interrelated ideas of Europeanness, freedom and politics do not move only one way (from global to local), but merge and can be locally challenged as well.

The possibility to transgress is related to political agency and largely defined as such. Butler (1990) sees the capacity to challenge the binary system of gender, through the subversion of this performance. The raver culture challenges the mainstream cultural styles of body and corporeality at local level through drug consumption and gender expression, which is recognized as resistance both locally and globally. At the same time, it is complicit in terms of the ideas of what proper liberal European modern subject means and should act like. Thus, resistance cannot be equated to political agency as it is relative to different forces. Therefore, I treat political agency not in absolute terms equated to resistance, but in relation to existing/created cultural and political opportunities and meaning production processes. Framing political agency proactively for something (queer liberation and drug policy) and reactively (against or in accordance to state and police, society and European ideas of modernity) will act like access points for my research. To cover the respective global and local processes of such attribution I analyzed international media articles and conducted in-depth interviews with ravers. I will elaborate on my choice of units of analysis in the following section.

1.5. Methodology

The division of local and global understandings of politics in relation to techno is quite arbitrary, because in both cases I use same access points to them. However, in my treatment of the data as well as positionality towards the units of analysis I have been an outsider towards the media articles and insider towards the ravers and leaders of the movement. The first required much less ethical considerations than the second one, as I had to negotiate my role as an anthropologist and activist (sometimes even friend).

Instead of imposing meaning of what is rave, politics and resistance, they were generated through 13 in-depth interviews with the ravers and leaders of the movement. Due to pandemic the interviews were conducted online, which affected the dynamics of the interviews – made them formal and uncomfortable. However, the respondents had more time and were more keen to talk. For the reasons of confidentiality their quotes will be presented with letters instead of their names. The respondents were far from being passive subjects who enact upon ideas they

have been introduced with, but rather produced and reproduced meaning in their own terms (Blaike, 2004). Their relationship with media articles and international representation was very much based on knowledge of the latter and intuitive, sometimes (in case of leaders)even strategic and academic approach to the subject.

The sampling of the leaders was intentional – people responsible for different aspects of the movement – club, queer parties, drug policy, media communication etc. Such stratification allowed me to get multiple entry points into the structure of the movement and processes of different kinds of mobilization, but all of them somehow affiliated with the club. The club Bassiani was chosen since it contributed to the movement building and cultural production of rave most. All the leaders have been activists before starting the movement, were educated, well-traveled and had some background in creative industry and NGO sector as well. The respondents had discussed these topics in different formats before (interviews, international conferences) and gave very extensive information to each question. Often using academic terms themselves.

The interviews with the ravers was based on more random sampling and respondents were recruited through raver community groups on Facebook. Their age ranged from 18 to 35 and came from diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. Most of them were students, worked at service jobs like bartenders or were small entrepreneurs themselves. Some were into rave culture for years; others had started it recently. In terms of political activism, except for two of them had participated in some kind of activism – demonstrations, mainly, but only one had been very active and the rest had participated only in the events associated with the rave movement or queer events. A lot of people expressed their desire to be interviewed and spoke about their attitudes in very extensive manner, most of them knew about the history of techno and dance in general and quite good knowledge of drug legislation as well.

Another type of data source was popular media articles. The majority of these articles appear in magazines about culture, art and music, but I came across several big international outlets that made story-pieces on the topic. In this thesis I thoroughly investigated 4 articles specifically (2 in The Guardian, 1 in each of The New Yorke Times and The Economist) about Georgia. I have intentionally excluded magazines specifying in culture, art, music, because their perceived audience is supposed to be more familiar with the rave in Georgia and have more niche audience. Since they are specialized in art and culture they bring forth the political,

creative and consumerist components of rave to promote it as well. However, these articles did not offer any significantly different approaches to the topic either.

By contrast the magazines I concentrate on have a lot more readers and much more ambitious goals. For example, in the mission statement of New York Times they state: "We seek the truth and help people understand the world". Similarly, The Economist, while specialized in writing about "business and world affairs", sets their aims as the "advocacy of economic and political freedom around the world". The Guardian goes further by not simply setting the mission, but their audience as "a global, progressive audience". These outlets can definitely be described as liberal media in a sense of how much emphasis they place even in their mission statements on "enlightening" the world, the progressive, free audience. The key concepts that often repeat themselves in relation to rave culture as well.

Obviously, there are articles that produce a lot more extensive in-depth investigations and paint more complex picture of political life and rave culture in Georgia. However, I concentrated on the tendencies that dominate international media rather than more marginal pieces. Overall, the articles provide quite uniform vision of the techno culture and generally society in Georgia as well as Post-Soviet space. The dichotomies generated by these articles would make Levi-Strauss would jealous about. Therefore, exactly the division principles of these categories were assessed through discourse analysis. In the interviews subjectivity formation and framing logic of arguments was analyzed with the same method, and both were coded in Atlas software.

The analysis is limited to only a certain part of the community and the opinions cannot be generalized over the whole movement. However, certain dominant trends and narratives have been easily identified. The concepts that had emerged in the interviews and ones from the international media articles have been put into conversation with each other. Codes generated by two sets of data have also been very explicitly similar.

My position as an activist and part of the rave community gave me the access, but also challenged me as a researcher and interviewer. On one hand, I had the trust of the community, but their familiarity with my views and ideological positions might have affected the interviews with leaders. Over the last 5 years I have been friends with some of them, co-organized demonstrations and talks, but also had conflicts over the privacy issues at Horoom events. This is why they often became protective when I asked about political capacity of rave and often emphasized their openness to criticism.

On the other hand, since the grassroot movements are in decline in Georgia and the government has become a lot more violent in its treatment of political movements, the relatively insider positionality allowed me to get the information that they would not share with the outsiders. Those who did not know about my views on drugs and sexuality, were more prone to explain the situation at clubs as harmless and criticized the movement less.

While the interviews revolved around the term "politics" it was often implicit and required follow-up questions with ravers. For analytical purposes I divided the discourses about politics, freedom and culture in 3 categories: 1. the politization of the culture and respective movement building, that is mostly deals with the interviews with the movement leaders; 2. The subjectivities that arise in relation to drugs and sexuality and define political agency of ravers. This part is the dialogue between the articles and interviews; 3. the geopolitical dimension of the techno and politics that is mostly based on the international media articles and generates the understandings of political agency in relation to Europeanization at the country level. The analysis will be divided in three respective chapters.

Chapter 2. Producing Political Meaning in the Club

"Music, dance and drugs – when you put such potent substances together a lot can happen." (Interview with B.). On how exactly the leaders put these "substances" together to give them political meaning leaders suggest "dancefloor activism", which despite my frequent exposure to clubs in Tbilisi, was still hard to understand. During the interviews they elaborated on it and draw a picture of very intentional meaning-production processes which I will explain in this chapter.

In its most literal sense the "dancefloor activism" refers to the communication, agitation and socialization in the club during techno events. The clubs like "Cafe Gallery" and "Mtkvari" in Georgia had already been associated with queers and drug users even before Bassiani. However, unlike the latter they did not articulate explicit political stance and agenda. Bassiani positioned itself as the safe space for marginalized groups of society, primarily queers and drug users, to some extent, women. "Society thinks we are faggots and junkies. Actually, they are right," - says one of the founders of queer nights Horoom. Bringing together queers and users

and at the same time embracing these identities framed ravers in relation to sexuality and drug politics from the very start.

On the other hand, the society implicitly became the target of their activities and discourses. Their actions went beyond these formal activities like demonstrations, queer events and online activism. Rather, it exploited the technologies of rave culture to its benefit. The framing in the narrative of all leaders is largely defined as "meaning production", which exploited drugs, music, dance and space to serve bigger agenda of transformation. The leaders speak of these technologies of rave culture as of vessel that you can "fill in" with meaning.

The first step that distinguished rave clubs in Tbilisi from other famous clubs of the world was their relatively open-door policy. While the clubs often position as safe spaces for queers, women and other oppressed groups, to make this space actually safe, clubs in Tbilisi did not impose strict face control. It was not "homophobes out", but rather the agenda was to let everyone in and change them -"All marginalized groups started to unite at the dancefloor. People from suburbs and gettos, men with patriarchal mindset, all were in. But the difference was that we [queers] were setting rules. And these rules were based on care and respect culture. They were pre-set by us as a way of collective survival and organizing. This culture became habitual and naturally spread outside of the club setting." - says G. co-founder of the queer Horoom nights. The inclusion and transformation of the different groups of society rather than exclusion of those became the main organizing principle. It is behavior, the cultural style reflected in the ways "people relate to each other" (both ravers and leaders actively use this phrase) that had to be changed through active communication.

As claimed by ravers the Tbilisi dancefloor really attracted people of different social groups among young people which reflected in my interviews as well. However, the ticket in big clubs like Bassiani or Khidi usually costs at least 6 Euros which is not necessarily affordable for everyone. While all respondents speak about the problem of economic inequality in the country, the fact that the club is the commerce and automatically leaves certain groups outside has largely been ignored. Although I still cannot say if the rave was an exclusively middle-class activity or not, it definitely was dominated by certain type of people: who could afford ticket or had social contacts to get invitations and who were let in by face-control.

The people coming to the club was imagined as potential activists and target to transform. The leaders frequently use words like "fighters" and "allies" in relation to clubgoers. However, both

ravers and leaders admit that there was the limit to inclusivity. The face control at the club had to make sure no one gets hurt, harassed or abused in the club. This is why queer parties had very strict verification process to get in.

The ravers complain that the word “raver” has become very mainstream and people who “do not understand the values of the culture and are homophobes” still subscribe to it (Interviews with L. and T.) Or “people go just to do drugs in the club” (Interview with the leader N.). This illustrates the conflicting aims of the rave as culture that to some extent has to differentiate itself from the mainstream and maintain certain exclusivity (Jerrentrup 2000) and the aims of the rave as movement to turn people to low or high risk activists (McAdam 1986). The club as the business and rave as culture with its values and ambition to differentiate itself clashes with the idea of unity and expansion that social movement aims for. The relationship with the police decided this problem for the benefit of political movement building and mainstreaming and turned the culture into a political tool for achieving the goal. The conflict never disappeared, though.

The connection between the drug policing and relevant political resistance to it derived from the nature of repressive mechanism that started to target clubgoers (usually men) around clubs. “When the clubbing booms in Georgia since 2014 the police did not need to run after people on the streets. They knew that a lot of drug users gather here. The police would follow people going in or out of the club and arrest them. The area around club became convenient hunting ground. On the other hand, it became a convenient place for communication and indoctrination of victims of drug policy and general public for as well. This movement was the result of synergy between clubs and activists.”

However, the latter went way beyond that. Even much earlier before the rave demonstration of 2018, the term “struggle" was often used in reference to the clubbing nights. For a long time as a clubgoer and supporter of the movement I thought it referred to the kind of resistance that is drug consumption or transgression of gender roles, and/or to the transformation of people’s attitudes I assumed was happening on the dancefloor. As an ethnographer I realized that it implied to actual as ravers call “aggressive” (yet, rarely physical) confrontation with the police.

"We barely managed to dance during raves. At every event someone would get arrested and we [activists and lawyers] would run to the police stations and drug testing centers. In the end the policemen recognized us immediately and were sick of us and would let people go just not to deal with us." – recalls one of the leaders B. P. describes it as seek and rescue game. He says: "We would abandon the dancefloor, go rescue the arrested person from the police, and bring them back to the club to dance. This is what "We Dance Together, We Fight Together" stands for. This was turning the event into a catharsis" - explains P. the political meaning of dance.

The catharsis here stands to describe the pleasure of victory rather than hedonistic or escapist act of forgetting. However, it is not the only kind of pleasure experienced in the club. "unwinding", "leaving the problems behind", "self-reflecting", "zoning out" have been the terms often used by ravers to describe their conditions in the club. Only most politically active ravers were involved in this part of dancefloor activism, but all of them attribute to dance, music and drugs more complex qualities than recreation and hedonism. The problem of police brutality and injustice is usually mentioned to explain the need for and pleasure from such recreation.

The relationship with the police was prerequisite and mediatory with the relation to state. With the growth of the movement, as leader B. puts it, their strategies shifted from "police to politics" he says: "We started learning international practices. Our rhetoric also shifted from exposing repression to healthcare politics. Came up with the legislative project and suggested to the government. However, the main power still lay within the movement. They [government] saw it as social capital." According to the leaders the politicians called the project on legislative changes as "Bassiani project". Unlike many other civil society initiatives, the state started to take them seriously because of the grassroots power they had demonstrated during protests and in confrontation with the police. The shift from police to politics is framed as the transition from individual solutions (like rescuing the arrested people) to collective and institutional ones (like legislative change). This framing is reflected in the slogans of the movement as well: "Care instead of punishment." Learning international practices to find a diagnostic frame implies the evidence-based political solution to the problem. Hence, the change expected is

not simply at the cultural level, or address the problem of police brutality, or denounces state's regulatory politics, but expects the politics to be democratic and social.

Nevertheless, the right to the body is implicitly present in all interviews mostly in relation to sexuality. It did not matter if respondents identified themselves as queer or not, all of them defined club as the space of interactions that they otherwise did not have, mostly in relation to gender and sexual minorities. The place was claimed to make people more tolerant and friendly because of its diversity. The latter often described in relation to people's looks and gender expression.

Drugs are ascribed an important role in this transformation. All respondents agree that drugs "amplify" the experience of enjoyment and pleasure, but also make people more "empathetic". At the same time, they differentiate between the "workings" of different drugs. "When MDMA was popular and available in Tbilisi we witnessed the best times of rave. This drug is most empathetic", - explains one of the leaders of the movement. By empathetic he means making one empathetic. This word repeats itself or the same concept is articulated as "solidarity", "understanding others", "openness to others", "tolerance", "help", "care".

Club drugs are also believed to have certain qualities that make one more motivated and hence participate in activities outside of the club. One of the leaders B. contrasts them with the other drugs that were usually consumed by previous generation. The latter usually being Heroin, Morphine, synthetic mixtures with "downer" effect. By contrast, club drugs like Ecstasy, MDMA, Methamphetamines are labeled as "uppers" and less addictive. The drugs are essentialized as having power of their own but are not seen as indispensable part of the culture. While framed in quite essentialist terms drugs are more important to my inquiry in relation to the police and state is the crucial aspect of the mobilization, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter.

In their narratives all respondents were justifying the drug use not being the most important part of the culture by repeatedly stressing out that the most important uniting factor of community was music. It is less accentuated as political, but more as the reason for going to club and having the capacity to impact one's understanding of the world. "The music was becoming better in the country and I was growing with it, with better music the relationships between people became better as well" – Explains L. in the interview. While music is crucial

part of techno based rave culture, the capacity to "catch the beat" which refers to the state of aligning one's mind with the music and other is believed to be the collective, social component of it. Not surprisingly, the most important technology of rave that was charged with political meaning is dance. Going back to the idea of the raves as site specific dances and humble position of the DJ. Dance is the central term and a symbol of resistance and it did so for a reason.

Instead of opting for civil rights framework, which has been quite common among grassroot movements of Georgia, the techno culture took the idea of dance as its central instrument of peaceful struggle or as one leader P. calls it "flower power". The accentuation of body, and more precisely, dancing body, was supported by the idea of dance being inherently related to freedom. In interviews all leaders and often ravers describe dance as historically important part of spiritual rituals and battles and connect to the history of Georgia. Such framing has been intentional and present from the very start. The name of queer event series "Horoom" is traditional Georgian military dance. Similarly, the word Bassiani means "the one with bass", but also refers to the battle in medieval Georgia. Such associations of dance and battle also integrated the local cultural elements and capitalized on existing cultural possibilities.

The dancing body is "weapon" of struggle, the end of the struggle and the place of the conflict between state and the rave community. In ravers, narrative acquires its political capacity as means of communication. Empathy mentioned in relation to drugs, flickers through interviews in relation to dance as well. "The ability to synchronize bodies to each other" and "to one beat" has been articulated by respondents as one way of unity and mobilizing as well. Dancing body is thus primarily politicized in relation to other dancing bodies. Its capacity to deliver message is amplified rather than played down due to the absence of text. "It is hard to say something without hurting someone. We came up with the new peaceful language of protest. Everyone was tired of verbal protests." – Explains P.

All leaders refer to how they intentionally used the absence of text to their benefit. "Techno can easily be charged with meaning because of no lyrics" – says the co-founder of club N. However, dance on its own as well as the music are not essentialized as political. Almost all respondents agree that for it to be political it has to carry a political message and address the respective authority. In this case state and society.

The leaders repeatedly stress out that the policy papers suggested by other movements in Georgia usually would end up on some politician's shelves and forgotten. Human rights frames exploited by these entities (the leaders often refer to worker's movement, feminist and queer movements) have been criticized because of their reliance on conventional ways of communication. However, all leaders and some of ravers think that rave as a movement has exhausted its possibilities. They think new ways of activism need to be invented. On how to proceed most of them do not have the answer.

In their assessment of achievements leaders define unity and grassroots power against state as the most important one. While the policy change did not happen in its suggested form, the policing and forceful testing on drugs decreased. The implementation of the anti-drug laws also involves less incarceration and usually results in probation and deals with prosecutor. Decriminalization of Marijuana consumption also resulted in much less arrests. These observations are voiced by all respondents. Such framing mostly resonates with the framing of the problem as political and finding collective solution to it.

The second and most considerable achievement, according to respondents, is the unity and increased awareness, that they report is transforming subjects and their relation to each other and their body. "People [attending raves] changing overnight" (usually explicitly or implicitly implying changing their attitudes towards queers) has been repeated number of times by most respondents, especially leaders. This change and idea of transformation goes deeper into the subjectivity construction, which is not limited to the raver, but targets whole society. This discourse is articulated by international media and to an extent by respondents as well and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Producing Political Subjectivities

3.1. "Junkies"

My interest in rave culture was originally triggered by the articles and documentaries about the techno scene that I was repeatedly confronted with. As frequent club goer and supporter of the movement, I found these articles odd or even misleading. When comparing them to the narratives of the ravers it became obvious that these articles also downplayed the role of drug policy and the struggle against state and the police. My interviews with Georgian clubgoers,

especially with the leaders suggested that respondents were more than familiar with international media representation and referred to it before I even asked a question. Overall, the understanding of political struggle as well as culture was explicitly reflected on and criticized by respondents. In this section I will discuss how the political subjectivities are fashioned in relation to drugs and sexuality in/through the narratives of local and international actors, and explain how political agency is inscribed in these subjectivities through relevant performance and representation.

The common narrative that brings together the articles and differentiates them from the ones written about the Western techno-scene represents Georgian (as well as post-soviet) society in dichotomous terms: it appears divided along "progressive" and "liberal/social liberal" lines. The Economist, for example, states that "Tbilisi is getting hip, and traditionalists feel threatened" (17 May, 2018), and the Guardian that "in just a few years, Bassiani has become a catalyst for progressive politics in a conservative society" (January 22, 2019). The cleavage runs sometimes along generational lines, defining the younger segment as sexually liberated (accepting especially of homosexuality), westernized, future-oriented, in favor of freedom of expression and lifestyle. This segment is contrasted with a conservative, prudent, traditional side of society. "The decriminalization of cannabis" says for example The Guardian, "has been a confusing development in the standoff between Georgia's young, progressive generation and their conservative elders" (Guardian, January 22, 2019).

Apart from the facts that these articles contain several inaccuracies and omissions, the language about techno culture in Georgia, and more generally about Post-Soviet countries, is strikingly similar to each other. Articles often come with photos of dark club pictures and demonstrations that often include young queer-looking people in leather, latex, or cross-dressing attires. Headlines and titles of the articles as well as picture already refer to the confrontation within the society, hint to the Soviet past and/or define party as political. These include for example: "Bassiani: the Tbilisi techno mecca shaking off post-Soviet repression" (Guardian January 22, 2019), "At This Techno Club, the Party Is Political" (New York Times, May 29, 2019), "Dance revolution: Young Georgians fight for their right to party" (Economist, 17 May,2018).

The raids on clubs, the reasons for the mobilization during the large rally of May 12th, 2018, and the roots of the movement in club and techno culture surfaces/may be alluded to here and

there, but are never fully developed into a coherent conclusion of what exactly the protest were about. The only exception is a New York Times article (May 29, 2019) which dedicates a few sentences to the history of clubbing politics. Everywhere else, the aim of the struggle is defined vaguely as some "right to party" (The Economist, 17 May, 2018), and in all outlets the conflict is subsumed under some general confrontation between liberal and conservative forces, Western and Post-Soviet ways of living and relevant younger and older generations. Police brutality and the organized politics of the party in power are rarely connected to the broader context of repressive drug policy and confrontation with the state. Most often, descriptions totally exclude context and present detention and raids as mere facts, as in in curt exposé in the Guardian: "In May last year, armed police raided Bassiani and made eight drug-related arrests; in response, thousands of clubbers protested outside parliament, sparking a dramatic weekend of counter-demonstrations and riot police intervention" (January 22, 2019).

By contrast, the symbolic epicenter of the struggle and major disappointment in ravers' eyes is state policy and police. Respondents all agree about the brutal character of the drug policy, and reflect a profound understanding of how it is politically instrumentalized in order to control the population. As one respondent S. puts it: "The government needs to manipulate people. The terror gives politicians power". Although ravers' attitudes towards drug consumption may oscillate dramatically between adamant refusal of consumption to a sincere embrace of drug culture, actors all support the view that the only adequate state response to drug problems is through care, prevention and information rather than punishment. They all have been victims of drug policy to some degree, either personally or through friends or family. Male respondents especially are likely to have been stopped by the police around the club, sometimes incarcerated for years for being caught with small amounts of MDAMA, Ecstasy or any other substance. Many of them were on probation at the time I interviewed them. In other words, all have a pretty much direct experience of being treated like "criminals that need to be punished together with the murderers and rapists" —in the terms of a respondent once arrested for possessing two pills of Ecstasy.

Such vision questions the state authority which uses police violence as control mechanism. The police violence is also often described as "cynical" (Interview with B.) and "humiliating" (Interview with A.). One of the ravers tells a story of how police strip-searched him in the street near club - "I was standing there in my underwear in the middle of the street." The police

brutality is not perceived unfair not only because of the positive meaning ascribed to drugs, but due to the ways it was done. Respondents implicitly and explicitly see it as the demonstration of power towards its population. The slogans of the movement "The War with the People Has to End" and "Violent Drug Policy Has to End" refers to this framing.

Resistance is shaped as the bottom-up confrontation, while rave culture representative of the people. At the same time, the latter does not attempt to break in through to the top, but rather peacefully co-exist. Party politics is very sharply contrasted with the grassroots politics, the first one considered to be corrupt and something to be avoided. "I am politically active and protest everything I consider to be unfair, however, until it becomes party politics." - says the respondent. This sentiment is very common among ravers who still are cautious when using the word "politics" and try to contrast the "honesty" of their protests with the formal politics. The respondents are not afraid of the word and use in variety of context to describe their everyday practices. The idea that the latter affects public and what is perceived as formal politics and the other way around is quite explicitly articulated by respondents.

"Everything is more or less political. It has even become a problem. The dance is political if it sends a message to the society and state, if the action bears meaning beyond entertainment. For example, having a different space at the dancefloor, especially queer nights, is already a statement."- says one of the respondents. The vision of the state and society as recipients of the message is common response to the question what makes rave political. Unlike articles, changing people's attitudes to drug users and depriving the state of punitive drug mechanisms is the central agenda of the movement. It does not exist on its own in the confines of the clubs either. "Dance cannot be political in the club if it does not leave its settings. Art cannot be political if it is locked up and does not reach people." - says another respondent. The political agency is largely framed as the capacity of "demonstration" be it protest in the streets or confrontation of the immediate communities like family and friends, or through style expressed in clothes and behavior. Thus, politics is not limited to the space and subjectivity, but ideology and ways of communicating it, which as mentioned above, does not have to be verbal.

The argument against policing is not limited to the ideas about justice and right to the body. It is seen as cause of the lack of information and access to drugs that eventually leads to higher fatality and incarceration rates. "When drugs are unavailable, you seek for something easy to

get and might end up using something really bad for your health." - explains one respondent the drug related deaths in 2018. Such arguments [against repressive drug policy] are often voiced by respondents and are grounded in the public health needs. When ravers call themselves users, they not only refer consumption of drugs, but their thrive to deprive the state of its control mechanism and assert power over their bodies. However, the latter is not seen as individualized and private, but as public entity that might need care, management from the state.

If the struggle against drug policy is so central to rave politics, why does the international media so eagerly omit the confrontation between the state and rave culture? It might have several reasons. However, as mentioned above the grassroot movements against drug policy have never reached such huge support in the history. While there is a lot of exchange between clubs throughout the world, as the leaders of the movement say, "even in Europe they are trying to avoid speaking about drugs. The drugs are still stigmatized topic." In its quest to paint a positive picture of ravers, international media might intentionally be avoiding such frame.

Subjectivities are strictly divided into dichotomous categories that fill in the pre-existing analytical categories of West and Post-Soviet, liberal and conservative, young and old. The subjects are deprived of the capacity to challenge these dichotomies or ascribe different meanings to them, there is nothing in-between. The society consists of these crystalized subjectivities that operate solely in the domain of culture, hence, the underrepresentation of the state and institutions like police that uphold the system of oppression. Nevertheless, despite such under and sometimes misrepresentation the content of the struggle, political agency is by no means denied to the rave culture. Quite the opposite, the latter is assumed to embody a bigger, more fundamental and geopolitical struggle of liberation and modernization. And the most fundamental criteria of determining their capacity to do so is framed as transgression of the sexual and gender norms. In the following section I will explain how queerness becomes the marker of political agency in the narrative of international media and relate it to the ways rave culture is gendered at local level.

3.2. "Faggots"

The articles in question do not always explicitly explain the reasons of the rave struggle, but in all of them clubs are largely portrayed in opposition to the "traditional" ways of living (like extended families, prevalence of the Orthodox Christianity) as "rare space for sexual encounters" (Guardian January 22, 2019), "rare islands of free expression" (New York Times, May 29, 2019). The control mechanisms of the club against the imagined danger from conservatives is also directly connected to the perceived need to create a safe space for queers in the club.

Sexuality acts as a logic of both categorizing the society in abovementioned binaries and at the same time acquiring political agency. "After a police raid prompted mass protests, the defiantly queer nightclub became an emblem of a new, progressive Georgia. Its founders explain how they're standing up to conservatism." (Guardian January 22, 2019) While queerness is not the reason for police raid in question as a conservative act is constructed against progressive and queer. The same is true for the headlines and titles that never really mention state or police and frame the struggle in cultural terms. The culture becomes political through queer performance against the conservative part of society.

This vision is not necessarily contradictory neither to the local discourses about politics and rave, nor it's perception by different groups of society and government. The comments of local alt-right also very much resonates with these ideas: "Bassiani and Gallery are gay clubs, where drugs are being sold and the youth are recruited in illegal activities," quotes Guardian (January 22, 2019) Dimitri Lortkipanidze, a leader of Georgian March, an ultranationalist group. Similarly, at the demonstration of 2018 the prime minister apologized to the ravers who were besieged by alt-right groups for the raid and promised that the police "would protect the safety and health of each citizen of Georgia, despite their [sexual] orientation, religion and age"[1]

The existence of queer parties – as only safe place for many "closeted queers who have never been out, and suffered a lot" (interview with founder of Horoom G.) is one of the important ways the club is constructed as political space. Together with being a user, queerness and queer support is openly stated as one of the most components of freedom. In interviews the struggle

[1] The minister responsible for the raid apologized during the demonstration https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxtHcbXh4T8

for freedom that involved liberation of the clubgoers as well as the Georgian society goes hand in hand with transgressing gender and sexual roles. Homophobia and patriarchy are also mentioned as the major problems of the society that the rave culture opposes to. While in articles freedom is almost exclusively connected to queer sexuality and right to party, the ravers paint a lot more complex picture how the raver subjectivity is gendered and sexualized.

To begin with, clubgoers describe "freedom" in the club as "liberty to be whoever you want" or "who you want to be at that moment" (interviews with ravers). One interesting point is that more often than not neither "freedom" nor "being" is not defined in essentialist terms as something one discovers or expresses, but as quite fluid, not fixed in time and largely related to the solidarity, sexual/gender non-conformity and drug use.

The sexual liberation is also not simply related to sex and homosexuality, but rather to transgression of toxic masculinity as well. The transformation of "babuliki" (slang for the urban, masculine, macho type man in Georgian) and the absence of fights at club is referred by almost every respondent as the important achievement of the club. The transformation is observed not only through personal interaction, but also the respective performance. For example, one of the leaders G.quoted his friend: "When as a man in Georgia you get beaten up because of long hair and ear-piercing, you are queer, what the hell else are you then?" And added: "Queerness means different things in different cultures. Sometimes the earring can be a statement". Transgression is also connected with nudity, wearing drag or extravagant clothes, but above all the relationships produced by the culture.

To the question "What is the basis of rave culture?" The respondents univocally answer: "The respect for each others' space." The club is also described as a place where one does not get judged for what they wear or how they behave provided they do not bother others. As a frequent clubgoer, I definitely can testify against the first statement. The informally established dress code of techno clubs is being non-mainstream, embodying the cultural style of rave through all-black clothes, glitter at queer parties, exposing your body parts, wearing comfortable sport shoes and pants. This alternative normativity is not imposed as dress code in most clubs of Tbilisi, but encouraged by more subtle social ways like negative or positive comments on looks. However, overall, the cultural style seems to be still less based on what one wears, but how one acts. The struggle is defined in the same sense as well. "The way people treat each

other, the culture of behavior codes and etiquette – this is what united us" (interview with a leader G.). According to more experienced ravers this is the culture that one might possess before club, but also acquires/learns by going to clubs. Once again emphasizing the flexibility to individually manipulate the style.

The door policy at Bassiani is not really based on dress code. This is one of the most important differences between Georgian techno clubs and ones in Europe. That is also the reason club owners and leaders do not agree with the comparison of Bassiani to Berghain, Tbilisi techno scene to the one in Europe, often made by the international media. "European clubs openly exclude homophobes, we say the opposite: come let`s dance together and follow rules" (Interview with the founder of Bassiani N.) Another leader P. says, that unlike Berghain, where cutting a line into club through VIP lists, is considered to be cool, while in Tbilisi it would be unacceptable. This is more than just partying for us. The privileges have to be abandoned at the entrance of the club. Everyone has to be equal of the dancefloor."

Obviously, this does not mean that the ravers do not define themselves in opposition to the society, especially conservative groups and alt-right, but their vision ranges from total hatred to understanding and self-blame. "Maybe we did not dance with them. Maybe they think we look down at them and that is why they hate us." - says one of the leaders. Another one says that the 2018 demonstration went out of their control. "We were totally demoralized and could not manage who was saying what. It was very spontaneous. Things were said that made people upset." The demonstration ended when the minister of internal affairs suggested the police would forcefully dissolve the counterdemonstration. "The counter protesters were not a lot in numbers, but very radicalized and aggressive. Some of them were affiliated with some groups in the government, but other were not." - says one of the leaders. Another one explains their solution to stop demonstration and take activists by government-provided buses "We could not allow the police that raided us the previous to do the same to the other part of society. So, we swallowed our pride and agreed to dissolve our demonstration".

At the same time, not just the counter-actors, but the society is largely portrayed as homophobic and conservative by clubgoers and leaders. Lack of education, influence of the church and state are named as main reasons for it. Similar to the articles in question they suggest that the confrontation in the society is generational. "The iron curtain lay over our parents one. They

cannot perceive the progress. For example, the way they think about women." (Interview with T.). According to the interviews even the drugs are gendered and belong to generation. "The older generation calls our drugs "faggot" drugs", - says leader B. Another one P. says that they [ravers] tried to demasculinize the drug use by framing the oppression of queers and victims of drug policy.

Some attribute even more importance to the generation and suggest that the rave culture is reaction to parents' culture. "This was the protest of the youth. The elder ones were there as well, but it is the young who initiated. It was a counter-action against older generation's culture from the people born in independent Georgia. It was kid's culture." - explains one of the leaders.

While most agree that "This dance belongs to this [young] generation" (Interview with S.), their confrontation is largely framed as ideological. The conservative part of society is not limited to the older generation. In respondents' narrative conservative ideology is framed as deprived of the political agency. "They are brainwashed" (interview with T.) or "were brainwashed", manipulated by church, state, institutions. The tendency to contrast themselves as belonging to rave culture somehow co-exists with their political agenda to transform their opponents. This conflict played out very dramatically during the 2018 "Rave-olution", when according to leaders the speakers at the demonstration repeatedly framed the society as "backward minded" and contrasted them with the ravers. According to the leaders, the conflict over how to handle the counter-action against the ravers led to the dissolution of the movement, and, consequently, loss of political meaning of rave culture as well.

Put this way, the downplay of drugs and struggle against government at expense of endogenizing queer agenda by international media seems to be negligence, rather than intentional decision. However, not when we look at the alignment of the queer with analytical categories of modernity and more global context of Europeanization. The strategy employed by international media is homonationalism. Which is actively reproduced by local actors as differentiating strategy. Therefore, rather than the purposes of "othering" as described by Puar in context of the Muslim subject, in this case queer modernity serves the purposes of making the subject intelligible and extend the boundaries of Europeanness through "transition" rather

than exclusion. In the following chapter I will elaborate the geopolitical dimension of the rave culture and explain how Georgia as "post-soviet" is constructed in Western imagination.

Chapter 4. The European Gaze

The categories of "conservative" and "liberal" articulated by international media can be grouped under respective geopolitical and ideological frames: the division between the West and Post-Soviet, and the construction of modern subject of developmental state. Since Georgia is not considered to be the East Europe, it is labelled as "New East", that is even "further than East Europe" (Guardian, September 21, 2016) and novel to what I will call the European gaze[2]. The New East is not limited to Georgia, but includes other countries of the Post-Soviet bloc - Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and sometimes Russia as well. Thus, Georgia is imagined as part of bigger geopolitical space that is separate from other part of the world.

The geopolitical division is largely based on the vision of Soviet history as determining and unifying experience of the region. Stuck in spatial and temporal transition constantly haunted by its past, 30 years and one revolution after it remains post-Soviet, but at the same time "pre-European". I do not use the term pre-European in its conventional meaning – to describe times (usually Americas, New Zealand, Australia) before colonization, but rather as the ideological reference of subject formation (lexico.com).

Transition from the pre-European subjectivity to becoming European is not described as a continuous process, but rather as a painful "rupture" and revolution (the frequent use of these words in all articles being one indicator). Similarly, ravers largely perceive this process as transformation of generations from Post-Soviet to modern, but rather than rupture they see it as continuum. Instead of confrontation both literally and figuratively expansion of their ideas and "befriending" the perceived other part of society. The task the leaders think they have achieved to only certain extent. Once again, the need to transform society and communicate

[2] Term widely used in relation to describe the colonial tendency of producing subject through gaze. Variations are widely used in feminist literature "male gaze" as well.

clashes with the logic of differentiating their culture. This very clash physically played out at the 2018 demonstration between the ravers and conservative groups, which the movement could not contain anymore and fell apart.

While the leaders and ravers see transformation as the continuous process and present, media places the European and Westernized in the "future" against the present of Georgia that still lives in the Soviet "past." The future, on the other hand, spatially only exists in the West, but is not unattainable. It does not come with time, but rather with the ideological transformation to the liberal subject, even the drug policy is defined as "narrow minded" (Vice, 19, 2019). Quite opposite to the words "repressive", "punitive", "non-human", "harsh" used by the respondents. The problem of policing is turned into the problem of culture and society and that of the "mind" and mentality rather than the body. It is the latter that has to embody the mental transformation, though. And has to do it in a way that is intelligible to the presumed Western reader.

I use "European" and "Western" interchangeably and the same goes for the articles in question, but I still prefer "European" to explain the specificity of the case. While the articles are not necessarily written by European authors, the Geopolitical quest of Georgia to belong to Europe constructs these subjectivities from the perspective of "European gaze" that not only decided (literally and figuratively) whether the subject belongs to the European family or not, but also sets the criteria of this judgement. Therefore, European Gaze is guided by the principle of intelligibility – the subject has to be articulated in the ways accessible to investigate by writer (the author(s) and understandable to the reader. The tropes of difference, as mentioned above, come to being in relation to the temporal placement of the subject in the "limbo" of post-soviet. When looking at the connection between the sets of dichotomies and inaccuracies in the articles, these intentions become obvious, e.g. "On Sunday afternoon, counter-protesters with shaved heads arrived, wearing masks, to spoil the fun" (Economist, 17 May, 2018). Georgian alt-right does not usually have shaved heads. Skinheads that might be associated with alt-right neither were there, or present among Georgian radical right scene altogether, but the representation of the alt-right in this case is adjusted to the visual understandings of the assumed reader.

The same principle of intelligibility guides the inner paradoxical connections created within the sets of dichotomies e.g. Soviet is associated with Orthodox that "still prevails" (Guardian January 22, 2019), ignoring the fact that Orthodox Church rose in Georgia only after the collapse of Soviet Union. Once again the vision of queer modernity as inherently secular (Puar, 2013) leads to the ahistorical connection of religion with the past to uphold the linear developmentalist temporality.

The ways in which struggle and transformation are articulated are much more diverse throughout articles. Different modes of politics are mentioned and emphasized at varying degrees. The collective mobilization, awareness raising, legislative change are covered at varying degrees. However, the political agency is largely determined as performative capacity of embracing queer modernity. "A new, Westernised generation "want to express themselves not only by dancing, but through different lifestyle" quotes Guardian (January 22, 2019) a popular political scientist from Georgia. The politics in these articles is defined as the conflict between the generations with different cultural styles. The narrative solidified with the selective quotes by local actors.

In general, the visual material, but also the way of writing is very much oriented to create a certain political and spatial landscape. The sets of categories are embodied by humans and non-humans – when e.g. describing "post Soviet pool" (NY times, May 29, 2019), mountainous landscapes, bodies and ways people dress lighting, and above all music make up the non-human agency of the New East in diverse ways. Sometimes they make the articles sound like tourist brochures in their efforts to create certain imagery of the urban and rural scenery. "It has also helped make Tbilisi a dream destination for techno tourists, who complete their long weekends with a soak in the city's sulphurous hot springs and a few bracing shots of chacha", - we read in Guardian (January 22, 2019. Clothes, space, mountains, but also other mainstream touristic clichés like chacha (Georgian name for grappa) are painted in a way to "sell" them to potential client. The construction of ravers in lines with modernity is largely associated with the ability to consume the culture. However, at the same time is it a lot more than commerce. Its never-ending state of transformation from post-Soviet to modern resolved this paradox – the commercial character of the club as business, but at the same time it being the place of political struggle and individual transformation brings both the ideas of economic and cultural liberalism together.

In the articles pre-European subject and Europe not only contrasted, but also brought together. Techno clubs become political through their imagined connection to the past of the Europe. The struggle between liberalism and conservatism is seen as the history of Europe repeating itself. Consequently, Georgia is stuck in imagined post-Soviet temporality of the past which at the same time makes it interesting, exotic and consumable. But its geopolitical "location" is not fixed and unchangeable. It can embrace the queer modernity through never ending cycles of revolutionary "acts", like the "rave revolution". This is how dance in front of the parliament building in Tbilisi becomes geopolitical performance that goes way beyond the local transformation of youth culture and/or drug policy.

I do not assume that the discourses articulated by the international media directly reproduced by local actors. As suggested by Anna Rekhviashvili (2018), instead of viewing them as passive recipients and practitioners of the pre-existing discourses, interviews illustrate how they negotiate, reinterpret, criticize and use media attention to their own benefit.

When commenting on international media and the representation of Georgian techno culture as 1990s Berlin, the respondents hugely disagree the comparisons. "Europeans could not understand our struggle. They cannot imagine people going to prison 5-8 years for one Ecstasy pill. They have always had hedonistic approach," - says P. The movement leaders and the ravers who have more knowledge of the techno scenes of Europe say that the European rave culture has different values and emerged in the specific context that shaped it as "resistance against gentrification, loss of pleasure." Whereas the repressive policies in Georgia shaped it as struggle against state and police. "Techno had lost its political meaning and was escapist and hedonistic in Europe," says the founder of the club N.

And yet, there is certain agreement respondents that the techno inherently is based on the ideas of equality and care. Some ravers think that since this culture existed in Europe longer, it has similar history as a culture, but not necessarily as a political struggle. "Since Georgians were already good at dancing and partying they easily understood and embraced techno", - says S. The performative capacity of the culture both literally and figuratively establishes techno as something that can be locally adjusted, or has already been mixed with pre-existing cultural opportunities and challenged by political constrains.

In narratives of respondents the vision of modern subjectivity is not necessarily connected to Europe. While the word "development" often repeats itself in the interviews, respondents usually disagree with comparisons of Berlin and Georgian techno. Those who have been to Europe are even more skeptical of those connections articulated by international media. Even though, they never using the term, they describe the process of transformation as "glocalization" of European techno project into Georgian. The trope of difference between Georgian and European is not constructed the same way by ravers and leaders of the movement. The ravers emphasize the longer history of techno in Europe that for them refers to more embedded culture and less constrains of drugs. "Soon we catch up with Germany, but I do not know where Germany will be at that moment," – says S. The vision of Georgia as developing, but also always in quest of catching up with Europe reveals another geopolitical trope that the development is not just linear, but continuous process that always goes forward and which arranges countries in relation to each other.

Another tendency of imagining European past in Georgian present is also articulated by ravers. "Probably it was the same in Europe, people started to organize in clubs and then hit the streets", - says L. The leaders also refer to political meaning techno acquired in uniting post-Berlin wall city. Similar references have been made by Horoom founders in relation to Stonewall Riots to justify the importance of entertainment places in political mobilization. At the same time, unlike media they reflect on it not as history repeating itself, but as the part of history that they chose for reference. History becomes not something that happened, but discursive frame they use for justifying their politics. Thus, Berlin Narrative is consciously exploited for political goals.

However, the leaders speak of certain dependency on international media and the tropes produced by them. One of the leaders P. explains how he immediately contacted international outlets after the raid of the club. Implicitly, international media plays role in gaining negotiating power against government and hence such emphasis on it. According to the respondents during and before demonstrations in 2018 government actively targeted ravers, especially leaders through "troll factories". Support of international media allowed ravers to take informational war in the space where they believed government has less power. And more importantly, it

implicitly can be seen as the leverage, since the Georgian politics in last 17 years have so actively been revolving around becoming part of European Union.

Thus, rave movement had to protect itself from the policing as well as make political choices of alliance and confrontation in the hostile political settings in which primarily depended on the grassroots power of the culture and international support. As a result, the movement selectively embraced some parts of suggested project of modernity (like queer modernity), but reinterpreted the political agency of the subject in its own terms in other aspects (drug consumption and policy). While more or less aware of this process, there is a limit to their power to negotiate. As stated above, their capacity to challenge the state depended on triangulation of grassroots power and international media. This dependency puts them in precarious position in relation to the latter in terms of how much discursive power they can exercise. Therefore, political dance is danced not simply in relation to each other, the society and/or the government, but the imagined international (Western) society that is the consumer of the culture and political arbiter of these agents as well.

Conclusion

In my thesis I treated relationship between rave culture in Georgia as the analytical site of global and theoretical discourse formation about political subjectivity and agency. Two important aspects of body politics – sexuality and drug consumption have determined the organizing logic of these categories at both discourse and practice level. The political agency has been shaped by the ideas of performativity of cultural style, which mostly takes transgression of gender and sexuality in relation to local cultural constraints as its central marker. However, I also demonstrated that while this tendency of defining the political agency in relation to sexuality is pronounced in the narratives of both local and global actors, the other aspect - relationship with state and police and respective struggle against harsh drug policy has been severely underrepresented in the narratives of international media.

During my research I could not find any examples of big grassroots drug policy movements and realized that the question of drug consumption is not simply downplayed because of the associated stigma, that still makes it a taboo even at discussions about nightlife and rave, but informs about the global imagination about Georgia. Labelled as post-soviet the country is

constructed as in its transitional state to European modernity. The ideas about linear progress and modernity are present in the local discourses as well, to a great extent also shaped by the country's geopolitical thrive to join European Union. Whether local discourses embrace or reject certain aspects of it they are still guided by the idea of modernist transformation. The difference emerges in practices as well as the content of the latter, more precisely, local actors largely criticize and challenge the international representation and comparisons and seek for the space for local interpretation. The local framing of political problems in relation to state and police control of the body is not limited to the everyday performative politics through transgression in relation to the society, but exposes the repressive character of the state that reduces its politics to policing and instrumentalizes drugs as the control mechanism.

While the political agency in relation to state and police is important to my analysis I intentionally concentrated on the grassroots movement building through club, instead of going into more detail how the movement beyond club communicated with the state and how the politics were made at party level. This was motivated by my aim to uncover the most important aspect of rave movement – grassroots mobilization around the culture that made it different from other political movements in Georgia as well as other rave cultures around the world. Another reason was related to the limited access to the events happening behind the closed doors of the party. While ravers and movement leaders were very open in giving opinions and sharing information on their immediate communication with the police and state, the more specific interests of the state actors in drugs and possible connection to the cartels, or inner struggles inside the party need the kind of investigation I am not equipped for.

Handling rave as the movement that was formed by framing the space, style, music and above all dance as political gave me the possibility to bring forward the relatively rare phenomenon of the cultural politics turning into a collective politics. These findings can further be instrumentalized for practical purposes of movement building as well as inform theory on cultural politics.

Unlike my respondents, I look back at those years of struggle with more optimism. The movements have ups and downs and they inevitable disappear or change form. Political meaning that the rave culture in Georgia generated has helped thousands of victims of drug policy and demonstrated alternative ways of making politics. The possibility of culture to inspire and produce collective politics can further investigated on larger geopolitical level (e.g.

Post-Socialism) as well as conceptually expand the ways of understanding Europeanization and ideas of modernity beyond cultural politics.

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