SITUATING QUEER MIGRATION: DISPLACEMENT AND A SENSE OF BELONGING IN GEORGIAN QUEER MIGRANTS

By

Tamar Shatberashvili

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of International Relations

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations

Supervisor: Professor Erzsébet Strausz

Vienna, Austria

2022

Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of Georgian queer migrants negotiating displacement and a sense of belonging in-between home and host countries. It departs from feminist IR and problematises dominant narratives around concepts and institutional practices of statehood, citizenship and identity that contribute to the exclusion of Georgian queer citizens. The empirical case study of ten Georgian queer migrants, I interviewed, builds on discourse analysis, and narrates stories of (un)seen identities and experiences across borders. Building on notions of movement, attachment, displacement, belonging and 'home', the core of my dissertation finds refuge in double consciousness and mestiza consciousness. The research aims at contributing to the existing literature and encourages a more nuanced investigation of an understudied topic of queer migration from Georgia, as part of Eastern Europe and FSU.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Erzsébet Strausz, for her continuous support, care and understanding. Working with you made it possible for me to truly enjoy the process of research and writing.

I can never thank enough my family, the one I was born into and the one I created. You are the support system I will always love and cherish.

I extend my gratitude to Georgian queer migrants with whom I had immensely moving conversations. Without your contribution, this project would not come to life. I would also like to thank my friends, queer community organisation representatives and everyone who supported me throughout the journey.

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... **i**
Acknowledgements ..... **ii**
Table of Contents ..... **iii**
Introduction **1**
Chapter 1 – The Practice and Politics of Queer Migration **6**
1.1 Contextualisation 6
1.2 Theoretical Grounding 8
1.3 Methodology and Positionality 11
Chapter 2 - Migration Experiences In-between Home and Host Countries **16**
2.1 Migration in Response to Social Exclusion 16
2.2 (in)Visible Queer Bodies Across Borders 18
2.3 Push Factors: Insights from the Interviews 23
Chapter 3 - Beyond the Known **28**
3.1 Movement out of Place 28
3.2 Finding Refuge in Double Consciousness and the Mestiza Consciousness 30
3.3 Transgressing Displacement and a Sense of Belonging 33
Conclusion **35**
Bibliography **37**

Introduction

"You have two hearts,
I am unaware of which one to sing to eternally,

I have two homes,
I am unaware of which one to protect."[1]

I hum the lyrics and begin an academic contemplation. Identifying myself as a queer woman from Khashuri, Georgia, located fifty kilometres from Tskhinvali the conflict zone between Russia and Georgia, I have myself felt marginalized and share empathy with individuals and communities perceived as 'the other'. Growing up in a conservative community, sexuality was a taboo topic. Only after moving from Khashuri to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, I was exposed to conversations about sexuality, and only after living abroad, I allowed myself to explore my queer self.

Years later, I find myself heavy with personal stories of marginalized queer individuals from Georgia, the former Soviet Union (FSU) and a post-socialist region (Eastern Europe) attempting to find refuge in spaces where they can embrace the complex nature of multiple identities. There have been made countless efforts of living and sometimes only existing in a home country, but it continues to be met with only violence and hatred. Some manage to gather all their resources left and remain, some reached the limit of their resistance and were not given any other choice but to leave their home countries. Becoming a migrant, and particularly queer migrant, can exacerbate everyday experiences of living and sometimes only existing in a host country. It creates a need to reconcile multiple layers of identities, such as queer identity with national, cultural, and social identities they were born into.

[1] Makvala Chikhladze and Archil Chikhladze, *ორი გული გაქვს [You Have Two Hearts]*, 1976, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLeykjpejv4. Own Translation

My thesis research question is *how Georgian queer migrants negotiate displacement and a sense of belonging in-between home and host countries*. This case study is an illuminating example of a study of queer subjects. It is a combination of theoretical and practical formations outside of the heteronormative foundations of both the nation and the idea of 'home'.[2] The country's geopolitics, Soviet past, and European stance together with relatively progressive but restricted antidiscrimination legislation[3] add an authentic contribution to a limited body of literature on queer migration from Georgia as part of Eastern Europe and FSU[4]. While data is available about the social exclusion of LGBTQ+ groups in Georgia,[5] there is hardly any research done about Georgian queer migrants.[6] According to my conceptual and empirical analysis based on interviews with Georgian queer migrants, the two most prominent identities coming in contact with each other are queer and national identities. Examination of my interlocutors' experiences gives a platform to marginalised migrants' (un)seen identities across borders.

Migration manifests in an endless journey between two or more worlds. Accordingly, the multiplicity of selves tries to navigate between these spaces and distinct personal and social identities.[7] Being in a process of constant negotiation of multiple identities, double

[2] Anne-Marie Fortier, '"Coming Home": Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (1 November 2001): 405–24, https://doi.org/10.1177/136754940100400403.
[3] Ioanna Sakellaraki, 'Georgia Passes Antidiscrimination Law', *Human Rights House Foundation* (blog), 6 May 2014, https://humanrightshouse.org/articles/georgia-passes-antidiscrimination-law/.
[4] Susan C. Pearce, 'Cultures in Contrast: LGBTQ Movements and Post-Soviet Religious Resurgence in the Republic of Georgia', in *Religion in Gender-Based Violence, Immigration, and Human Rights* (Routledge, 2019); Richard C. M. Mole, 'The Post-Communist Identity Crisis and Queer Migration from Poland', The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises, 28 February 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190856908.013.21; Alexandra Novitskaya, 'Sexual Citizens in Exile: State-Sponsored Homophobia and Post-Soviet LGBTQI+ Migration', *The Russian Review* 80, no. 1 (2021): 56–76, https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12298.
[5] Lika Jalagania, 'Social Exclusion of LGBTQ Group in Georgia' (The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Centre, 2020), https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/lgbtk-jgufis-sotsialuri-ekskluziis-kvleva-sakartveloshi.
[6] Pearce, 'Cultures in Contrast'.
[7] Debora Upegui-Hernandez, 'Double-Consciousness: A Journey Through the Multiplicity of Personal and Social Selves in the Context of Migration', *Diversity in Mind and Action: Vol I Multiple Faces of Identity*, 1 January 2009, 129.

consciousness, a concept coined by W.E.B. Du Bois, and the mestiza consciousness[8] coined by Gloria Anzaldúa, become central notions for me to think with. The commonality between these two concepts provides an insightful interpretation of what it is like to be a Georgian queer migrant.

Throughout the dissertation, I refer to self-identified queer individuals who had no other choice but to leave Georgia as migrants[9]. Some of them migrated to host countries to seek asylum while others left for education and labour purposes. Although I acknowledge the difference between "refugee"[10] and "migrant", my research zooms in on the experiences of my interlocutors as an understudied group of migrants. What is important to note is the shared struggle of finding refuge in host countries where they can embrace their true selves. It encourages nuanced investigation of migration paths different groups go through and introduces themes that could be further explored. When I unfold the experiences of participants of my research, I interchangeably engage with umbrella terms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and Intersex + (LGBTQI+) and queer individuals. Contemplating on conceptual and practical understandings of queer migration, I describe this journey as a 'quest for identity' symbolising "an embodied search for sexual identity – an individual search which can be materialised at differing, multiple scales and paths of relocation".[11]

In order to explain the significant role double consciousness and mestiza consciousness play in my interlocutors' experiences of displacement and a sense of belonging, I follow the subsequent roadmap. In the first chapter, contextualisation of the topic opens a conversation

[8] Theresa A. Martinez, 'The Double-Consciousness of Du Bois & The "Mestiza Consciousness" of Anzaldúa', *Race, Gender & Class* 9, no. 4 (2002): 166.
[9] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Definitions', Refugees and Migrants, 12 April 2016, https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions.
[10] Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order, and, as a result, require international protection. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
[11] Cesare Di Feliciantonio and Kaciano B. Gadelha, 'Situating Queer Migration Within (National) Welfare Regimes', *Geoforum* 68 (2016): 3.

about the significance of my thesis. It introduces major political, social, and cultural developments in Georgia influencing Georgian queer individuals' decision to migrate. Transitioning into theoretical grounding, I continue with literature that forms my broader epistemological position. I depart from feminist scholars' work that characterizes the role statehood, citizenship and identity play in Georgian queer migrants' everydayness. It problematises the limited space dominant narratives of these concepts and institutional practices allow for queer individuals and communities in Georgia. The last part of the chapter dives into the essence of the methodology I utilize throughout the thesis. After the description of the means allowing the execution of the research, I explain my positionality as a queer individual from Georgia and as a researcher.

The second and third chapters address essential insights from the interviews and bring in theoretical grounding and the analysis disclosing overarching problems. The second chapter begins with experiences of migration in-between home and host countries. It identifies differences between features of general tendencies of migration from Georgia and specificities of queer migration. The second part of the chapter introduces the current lived realities of my interlocutors in host countries. The last part reflects on push factors for migration and prepares a building block for the central theoretical grounding of double consciousness and mestiza consciousness.

The third chapter brings in conceptual and practical applications of feminist literature on the foundation of concepts such as movement, home, attachment, displacement and belonging. It transitions into analytical reflections on parts of the interviews focusing on the negotiation of memories and experiences created between Georgia and host countries. These concepts contribute to making sense of experiences of migration as a movement out of place which leads to the central importance double consciousness and mestiza consciousness play in understanding displacement and a sense of belonging of Georgian queer migrants. The concepts

of double consciousness and mestiza consciousness symbolise continuous negotiations of multiple identities across borders. Recognising the potential of theoretical and empirical analysis of Georgian queer migrants' insightful experiences in local, regional, and international contexts, the chapter finishes with the encouragement of further research and explores prospects of transnational queer activism in queer migration. Lastly, concluding remarks reiterate the significance of the dissertation and sum up the research findings.

Chapter 1 – The Practice and Politics of Queer Migration

1.1 Contextualisation

Georgia, the country at the border of 'East' and 'West', has been undergoing social, political, economic, and cultural transformation since the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union on April 9, 1991. As a post-Soviet state, the country is "at once its nation and its struggles are in some ways emblematic of those of other post-Soviet states".[12] The process of an ongoing transformation is largely shaped by the "Western project of modernization, with its newly made liberal subjects and neoliberal capitalism political economy".[13] During this process, sexual minorities have been attempting to claim personal, social, and political spaces.

The latest Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) country report of 2022[14] unfolds essential quantitative and qualitative data tracing the challenges and developments in Georgia compared to previous years. Throughout the whole report, the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and the status of minorities are mentioned several times. Contextualizing the GOC's, the most trusted institution's, reputation in Georgia, it is important to highlight that in 2002, the church and state (the Concordat) signed an agreement affirming the Orthodox religion "as a marker of national identity, its pivotal role legally recognized".[15]Taking a closer look at the BTI's 2022 report, the high level of trust in individuals such as Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, head of the GOC,[16] strengthens continuous privileged position and influence on society. The GOC contributes to the fixation of dominant national identity narratives excluding queer

[12] Maia Barkaia and Alisse Waterston, *Gender in Georgia: Feminist Perspectives on Culture, Nation, and History in the South Caucasus*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2018), 7.
[13] Barkaia and Waterston, 9.
[14] Bertelsmann Foundation, 'BTI 2022; Georgia Country Report' (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2022), https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report?isocode=GEO&cHash=291f37185c0e7cf2f26eed5afd68d479.
[15] Bertelsmann Foundation, 'BTI 2016; Georgia Country Report' (Bertelsmann Foundation, 1 January 2016), 7, https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/1039431.html.
[16] Bertelsmann Foundation, 'BTI 2022; Georgia Country Report', 4.

citizens. The example of May 2013 is one of the traumatic events for LGBTQ+ individuals emphasising the exclusionary policies exacerbated by the GOC.

Participants of the interviews I conducted frequently mentioned May 2013 and July 2021 events. Starting with the first one, May 17 is the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). May 17, 2013, marked the loudest violent homophobia by counter-protesters reported to number in the thousands, including priests.[17] The government failed to protect queer activists.[18] Actions spoke louder than words, and the Georgian Dream (GD) government allowed violent attacks on peaceful protesters. According to media reports, the attackers were accompanied by the religious authorities from the GOC.[19]

While the following year's protest was relatively peaceful, the Orthodox Church came up with a more civilized alternative statement. Since 2014 the GOC has been commemorating 'Family Purity Day' on May 17, symbolizing a clear message of supporting traditional 'family values'.[20] What is also crucial to reflect on is the country's ongoing Western path translated into the will to join the European Union (EU). Perhaps the reason for the relatively peaceful May 2014 protest with a larger police presence was the introduction of antidiscrimination law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and related sub-bills on May 2, 2014.[21] Although discrimination and social exclusion of sexual minorities continued in the following years, Georgia passed the requirements of signing the association agreement with the EU. I entered into force in July 2016 and later was followed by the enforcement of the visa-free regime of Georgia to the EU from March 2017.

[17] Amnesty International, 'Georgia: Homophobic Violence Mars Tbilisi Pride Event', Amnesty International, 17 May 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/05/georgia-homophobic-violence-mars-tbilisi-pride-event/.
[18] Bertelsmann Foundation, 'BTI 2022; Georgia Country Report', 39.
[19] Amnesty International, 'Georgia'.
[20] Pertaia Luka, 'Queer Rights Activists Mark 17 May in Tbilisi under Heavy Police Presence; Church Takes to Streets', *OC Media* (blog), 17 May 2017, https://oc-media.org/queers-in-tbilisi-mark-17-may-under-heavy-police-presence-church-takes-to-streets/.
[21] Sakellaraki, 'Georgia Passes Antidiscrimination Law'.

Another traumatising event that the interlocutors recalled was the death of Alexandre Lashkarava, a thirty-seven-year-old cameraman working for the independent station TV Pirveli, during a protest against an LGBTQ+ Pride march in July 2021.[22] More than fifty journalists were attacked that day by far-right assailants during the protest. This was a tragedy indicating a grave violation of human rights and mishandling of the safety of not only a sexual minority but also the freedom of media and journalists. The horror brought back public and international attention to the unseen and unheard discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, which especially deteriorates during the Pride month every year.

1.2 Theoretical Grounding

Firstly, I pay respect to my interlocutors, Georgian queer migrants, towards whom I carry the responsibility of writing a piece that speaks to individuals, communities, and the broader public. I try to move from and with the discipline of International Relations (IR) and allow space to express the pain, trauma, anger, happiness, joy and hope of the marginalized individuals and communities. I intend to achieve this through the medium of narrating personal stories, (re)thinking and (re)writing practical applications of theories I have been working with. Sometimes the reason is to vent frustrations, sometimes to have a space to breathe and other times to transform individual and communal pain into the healing process.

> "I came to theory because I was hurting-the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory des perate, wanting to comprehend-to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing."[23]

The purpose of my dissertation is to contribute to claiming a space in the IR discipline for personal stories of (un)seen marginalized individuals. I depart from feminist IR and go

[22] Agence France-Presse, 'Georgian Cameraman Dies after Attack by Far-Right, Anti-LGBTQ Mob', *The Guardian*, 11 July 2021, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/jul/11/georgian-cameraman-dies-after-attack-by-far-right-anti-lgbtq-mob.
[23] bell hooks, 'Building a Teaching Community: A Dialogue', in *Teaching to Transgress* (Routledge, 1994), 59.

beyond the discipline to explore intersectional approaches to postcolonial and decolonial literature. I work in liminal spaces in the disciplines of IR, gender studies and sociology. I engage with valuable contributions of scholars out of which I find myself the most influenced by the works of Michel Foucault, bell hooks, Vivienne Jabri, Eleanor O'Gorman, Judith Butler, Madina Tlostanova, Walter Mignolo and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Moving from and with feminist IR, what is relevant to question is the primacy of the nation-state as an international, and the boundaries between international, national and local.[24] Zooming in on my research, I ask a question about whether Georgia as a nation-state allows queer citizens to claim personal, social and political spaces in order to live free and secure life guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[25] While I wish to cover the regions of my interest, South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and FSU, in the framework of this thesis I focus on Georgia and examine cases of marginalized Georgian queer individuals, who were forced to or encouraged to leave their home country and find refuge elsewhere.

Questioning the primary position of the nation-state, it is important to understand what the positionality of the self as a citizen is. According to Eleanor O'Gorman and Vivienne Jabri, when the private comes into direct confrontation with the public, "the self as citizen comes under scrutiny".[26] The confrontation of the private with the public is apparent when we look at LGBTQI+ experiences worldwide. A clear target of discrimination becomes their queer identity, an integral part of oneself as an LGBTQI+ person. "Identity requires specific social affiliations for its survival".[27] Social interactions and recognition of the identity contribute to

[24] Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 1989), 3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbn6.
[25] United Nations, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', United Nations (United Nations), accessed 16 April 2022, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.
[26] Vivienne Jabri and Eleanor O'Gorman, *Women Culture and International Relations* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 2, https://www.rienner.com/title/Women_Culture_and_International_Relations.
[27] Ken Booth, 'Security and Self Reflections of a Fallen Realist', *Taylor and Francis Group*, October 1994, 5, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203501764-11/security-self-reflections-fallen-realist.

the acknowledgement of individuals' presence in society. According to Judith Butler's vital contribution to a feminist discussion of identity, there is a need to replace the fixed notion of identity and adapt its rather fluctuating and fluid discursive forces.[28]

The exclusion of gender in IR was first problematised during the development of the first wave of feminist IR. According to Jill Steans, the marginalisation of gender issues in the discipline is a consequence of methodological individualism bringing a high level of abstraction and taking the state to be the key actor.[29] What is also important to mention is the sphere of nation/al ('belonging to a nation'). It can be formed as a result of the following three actions: first, perpetuating homosocial bonding at the expense of women and their discursive and material subordination; second, rejection of homosexuality as a threatening Other to a national body; third, homoerotic sentiments of national discourses, revolving around the love of one's country.[30] Positioning women as inferior, painting homosexuals as Other and performing unsolicited love for the nation are crucial elements of state-centric practices in Georgia, translating into the social exclusion of queer minorities and encouraging migration.

Deconstruction of masculinity has consequently become a contested issue for feminist IR. Exploration of alternative developments of feminist theories has been encouraged by the fracture of universal feminism arising from the challenges of the western, white, heterosexual and middle-class centre of the women's movement criticised by "third world" and "black" feminists.[31] Scholars such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak question categories of subjectivity and call for a more nuanced study of otherness and power relations. Against the "generalised other" found throughout international relations theory, more recent

[28] Susan Hekman, 'Beyond Identity: Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics', *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 3 (1 December 2000): 289, https://doi.org/10.1177/14647000022229245.
[29] Jabri and O'Gorman, *Women Culture and International Relations*, 3.
[30] Robert Kulpa, 'Nations and Sexualities - "West" and "East"', in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, 2011, 54, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315576107-4.
[31] Jabri and O'Gorman, *Women Culture and International Relations*, 5.

feminist contestations call for multiply located political space intersecting local and global power relations.[32] Georgian queer individuals fall under the category of the "generalised other". According to my conversations with my interlocutors, consequently, they experience contradictory feelings about their national and queer identities.

How can queer migrants born in Georgia navigate between the experiences created in their home countries and current host countries? While the following chapters try to answer this question, I note here one of the remedies suggested by Foucault. It applies to queer individuals who demand to recognise queer identities in the political arena in the discourse of everyday life. His central argument is a necessity of a new concept of power beyond a central source, either political or economic, power as everywhere permeating every aspect of life.[33] Additionally, there is the possibility of local queer individuals and migrants embracing national ideas as "one of the methods of their struggle[34] and not be merely 'swallowed' by them".[35] My interlocutors during interviews often mentioned phrases such as travelling back home, "nothing compares to my Georgian friends"[36] and "I have my closest friends in Georgia".[37] Origins and local cultural contexts are always part of individuals and the need of belonging to a national community as well as 'national love' can be individually and communally recreated, reclaimed and felt.

1.3 Methodology and Positionality

The dissertation engages with primary and secondary sources. It encourages further research on displacement and a sense of belonging in Georgian queer migrants as part of Eastern Europe and the FSU. Considering the sensitivity of the research and the safety of my

[32] Jabri and O'Gorman, 10.
[33] Hekman, 'Beyond Identity', 305.
[34] For example, reclaiming history, writing queer national history
[35] Kulpa, 'Nations and Sexualities - "West" and "East"', 56.
[36] Interview with participant 8, March 19, 2022
[37] Interview with participant 9, March 23, 2022

participants, their names and other personally identifiable information are anonymous. What they were comfortable sharing was data relevant to my research such as age, gender, and the name of the host country.

Firstly, review of feminist IR literature contextualises the research topic. The empirical case study focuses on lived experiences of Georgian queer migrants I interviewed, who have been living abroad for a minimum of six months. Due to limited literature produced on this topic, together with the intention to showcase a variety of geographical presence of Georgian queer migrants, I do not restrict my research to a particular country or a region and create an overview of Georgian queer migrants' experiences in host countries such as the US, United Kingdom (UK), Belgium, Germany, and Sweden.[38]

Contextualizing the role queer identity plays in Georgian queer migrants' experiences, semi-structured biographical interviews address factors such as experiences of social exclusion in Georgia resulting in migration, experiences of living in host countries and negotiations of displacement and a sense of belonging. Additionally, I reflect on my interlocutors' social and cultural backgrounds and migration statuses. However, within the scope of this research, I am unable to explore these factors individually and dive into comparison and contrast between distinct statuses of refugees, education, and labour migrants.

Diversity of the backgrounds, experiences, ages, and length of staying in different host countries allow a comprehensive overview of queer identities across borders. To achieve this, I conducted ten interviews online between February-March 2022. I selected participants through snowball sampling and an open call announced in relevant closed Facebook groups. As a queer individual, I have been part of these groups where self-identified queer individuals

[38] Three of the participants live in Sweden, two in the United States (US), three in Belgium, one in the UK and one in Germany.

exchange useful resources and information. Choosing a minimum of six months as a threshold for staying in host countries was determined by an intention of depicting experiences of displacement and a sense of belonging at an initial stage of settlement and later. Regarding the final selection of interlocutors, the decision was influenced by the availability of interested participants and the scheduled timeline for conducting interviews.

Introducing essential data about my interlocutors, six of them socially identify themselves as women, three of them as men and one as a transgender woman. The youngest three participants are twenty-five years old, and the oldest is thirty-seven. Four of them left Georgia to seek asylum, five left for education purposes and one for employment. Two of them who initially left for education purposes later started working and remained in host countries as labour migrants. At the time of interviews, one has spent six months in the host country, three two years, one three years, one over four years, one six years and two over eight years. The period spent in host countries ranging from six months to eight years and a half is an attempt to capture the complexity of queer migrants' experiences zooming in on their current realities, expectations, and plans.

Inspired by feminist approaches to ethnographic research, I aimed my research relationship with my interlocutors to be non-exploitative. The research intended to not only produce knowledge but also cultivate long-lasting relationships with the Georgian queer migrants I interviewed. Although I conducted interviews online, the line has been blurry between the 'field' and 'home' as a queer Georgian.[39] Because of this reason I often revisit the negotiation of positionality and reflexivity. What is equally crucial to mention is that I am aware of my biases of being an insider-outsider in my research, but I also realise that my positionality has allowed me to connect with my interlocutors' experiences to a deeper extent. I rework my

[39] Farhana Sultana, 'Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2007): 377.

in-between status by going through "the ambivalence, discomfort, tensions and instabilities of subjective positions".[40]

An equally important challenge I have been facing is the possibility of retraumatisation of my interlocutors. How I tried to mitigate this is by providing a relaxed atmosphere. I started with warm-up questions, having some prepared but allowing the interlocutors to take the lead and narrate their stories. While talking about traumatic events can be distressing, participants of my interviews shared that they found the conversation valuable and relieving. Recent observations of trauma survivors show that "for many survivors, sharing stories of trauma provides an opportunity to give testimony about the past and is perceived as therapeutic".[41] There was also no language barrier as I speak their native language. It created a safe space for them to freely express their thoughts. Additionally, I was able to connect to the participants of my research living in different countries and continents because of the reason that I conducted interviews online. I was able to observe the emotions and surroundings of the interlocutors to my best ability. Although, it is noteworthy that the online interviews are limited in this regard and in-person interviews would have given me the advantage of a full spectrum of sounds and physical and emotional reactions to the dynamics of the interviews.

As a queer woman, I wish to tell stories of Georgian queer migrants and write "with" rather than 'about' them.[42] Being in an academic space, I am aware of "over-concern about positionality and reflexivity"[43] paralyzing some scholars into avoiding fieldwork and engaging more in textual analysis. While the concern is understandable, because of this caution so many stories remain unheard. Additionally, I realize and bear with my positionality as an insider-outsider; insider, relating to my interlocutors as a queer woman from Georgia living abroad

[40] Sultana, 377.
[41] Soraya Seedat et al., 'Ethics of Research on Survivors of Trauma', *Current Psychiatry Reports* 6, no. 4 (1 July 2004): 262, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-004-0075-z.
[42] Sultana, 'Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics', 375.
[43] Sultana, 375.

myself for almost six years; outsider, as a person not having a substantial experience of marginalization in Georgia and unlike some of my interlocutors, not having gone through the hardship of seeking asylum.

My positionality as an insider-outsider has encouraged me to write myself in the dissertation. Being emotionally close to the topic not only has given me closer access to interlocutors but also my own emotions, reflections, and interpretations. Anchored in epistemological principles, I justify my presence in my dissertation with the following three reasons, finding myself as the protagonist of the research and an interpreter, who takes up the role of not only interpreting but also weaving pieces of silence together.[44] I narrate the stories that I am trusted with. Part of my job as a researcher becomes the responsibility of translating and interpreting the messages to the reader. Translation of these narratives is part of a collectively owned journey not to reach perfection but as an act to "disorder the dominant languages and paradigms through which we often encounter knowledges and knowledge makers".[45] In order to cohesively shift from one story to another, from one theory to another, I am also the mediator, allowing silence but the transitional balance between telling the stories and letting the stories be heard.

[44] Lorraine Nencel, 'Situating Reflexivity: Voices, Positionalities and Representations in Feminist Ethnographic Texts', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Embodied engagements, 43 (1 March 2014): 79, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.07.018.
[45] Richa Nagar, 'Hungry Translations: The World Through Radical Vulnerability', *Antipode* 51, no. 1 (2019): 9, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12399.

Chapter 2 - Migration Experiences In-between Home and Host Countries

2.1 Migration in Response to Social Exclusion

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, migration developed into a noticeable tendency in Georgia. In the first years of independence, international labour migration "became a major survival strategy for many Georgian households".[46] While in the first years of independence, migratory flows consisted of mostly men migrating, primarily to Russia in the early 2000s, later on, more women began migrating to the European Union, Turkey, Israel, and North America.[47] Although the feminisation of emigration from Georgia influenced the formation of a new body of scholarship focusing on gender and migration in Georgia,[48] there is no comprehensive data produced about minorities, specifically about Georgian queer migrants. Consequently, I mainly rely on general migration data and my conversations with participants of the interviews and members of prominent queer organisations in Georgia, Equality Movement and Tbilisi Pride.

The migration of sexual minorities from Georgia differs from general migration tendencies. Firstly, unlike economic hardship which is a prominent reason for general migration from the country, Georgian queer citizens decide to leave for personal safety and security. Radio Freedom, a prominent media platform in Georgia, published an article in 2021 addressing the reasons of Georgian citizens leaving the country. Tamaz Zubiashvili, an expert in migration studies, reported that more and more people emigrate from Georgia and the main reason often is economic difficulties.[49] Regarding queer migrants, according to my interlocutors,

[46] Barkaia and Waterston, *Gender in Georgia: Feminist Perspectives on Culture, Nation, and History in the South Caucasus*, 181.
[47] Barkaia and Waterston, 181.
[48] Tamar Zurabishvili and Tinatin Zurabishvili, 'The Feminization of Labor Migration from Georgia: The Case of Tianeti' 1 (1 January 2010): 73–83; Erin Trouth Hofmann and Cynthia J. Buckley, 'Global Changes and Gendered Responses: The Feminization of Migration from Georgia', *International Migration Review* 47, no. 3 (1 September 2013): 508–38, https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12035.
[49] Tea Topuria, 'რატომ მიდიოდნენ საზღვარგარეთ ადრე და რატომ მიდიან ახლა - მიზეზები იცვლება [Why People Emigrated Abroad Previously and Why do they Do it Now - Reasons Change]', *Radio Freedom*, 3 November 2021, https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31544281.html.

discrimination-based exclusion plays the most important role. Secondly, a general migration flow from Georgia is significantly affected by a Georgian diaspora worldwide.[50] However, in the case of queer migrants, based on my interviews, they count on informal networks instead of the Georgian diaspora. As a result of data collected from my interviews and conversations, Georgian queer migrants often receive a residence permit as a result of a successful asylum-seeking application, education purposes and employment.

According to the Georgian government's 2021-2030 years migration strategies, the agenda prioritises raising awareness about the possibilities of legal migration for the society, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and vulnerable groups.[51] However, in the report, sexual minorities are not explicitly mentioned and fall under the category of vulnerable groups, which indicates the continuous silencing of queer individuals' needs on the legislative level. Additionally, according to Appendix one of the Georgian government's 2021-2030 years migration strategy, the government's priorities are the following: migration management, legal migration, illegal migration, reintegration, diaspora, asylum, and integration.[52] However, none of the sections consists of a description of how this strategy could apply to different groups of women, youth, or minorities' needs.

The interviews I conducted are an attempt of grasping the experiences of Georgia queer migrants that are unseen by government officials. I prepared an interview guide in a way that would allow my interlocutors to reflect on their personal experiences and feelings connected to migration, 'home' as origin and destination. As a matter of fact, past events that individuals recall are usually processed in different sequences consisting of images of places, people,

[50] Topuria.
[51] Migration Commission, 'საქართველოს 2021-2030 წლების მიგრაციის სტრატეგია [Georgia's Migration Strategy for 2021-2030]' (Migration Commission, 2020), https://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=225&clang=0.
[52] Migration Commission, 'საქართველოს 2021-2030 წლების მიგრაციის სტრატეგიის ლოგიკური ჩარჩო; დანართი 1 [Logical Framework of Georgia's Migration Strategy for 2021-2030; Appendix 1]' (Migration Commission, 2020), https://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=216&clang=0.

houses, and events, all of which attach 'home' to physical locations, things, and bodies.[53] Throughout interviews, they recalled what it felt like to live in Georgia and how it feels now to live in host countries. It brought up points of reworking lived experiences across borders. Anger, fear, sadness, happiness, and hope were present in all conversations. While my interlocutors acknowledged their privilege of safely continuing their journey toward self-exploration, they also reflected on the feelings of separation and loss they have been experiencing.

2.2 (in)Visible Queer Bodies Across Borders

Three of my interlocutors are students. Two of them currently live in Sweden and one lives in the UK. Participant 1 (P1)[54] migrated to Sweden for her master's studies in September 2021. Her partner lives in Sweden and this influenced the choice of the host country. It was equally determined by interest in the master's program, scholarship received and the acceptability of queer individuals. She shared that "when you are a newcomer, it is a breath of fresh air not to be pointed at when you are out in public with a partner". P3[55] left Georgia in 2017. After completing his studies in Sweden, he decided to pursue a master's degree. Like P1's, P3 has visited Sweden before. Familiarity with the place played an important role in the decision-making process. Although he expected a fully acceptive environment, because of his "Middle Eastern look and a darker skin" he was exposed to softer forms of homophobia and racism. Working in customer service, almost every day he faced comments such as "If you do not speak Swedish, what are you doing here? Go back where you came from". What made the adjustment period easier for both was an international environment and communication with other migrants from all around the world.

[53] Fortier, '"Coming Home"', 413.
[54] Interview with participant 1, February 9, 2022
[55] Interview with participant 3 March 3, 2022

P10[56] has been living in the UK for five years for her studies. The choice of the destination was determined by familiarity with the country and the possibility of living together with her partner. She noted: "If I was not queer, I do not think I would want to live somewhere else." It took her two to three years to understand the politics, and traits of people and to navigate the day-to-day customs. However, she believes "fully embracing adaptation on an emotional level is impossible" for her. She is very tied to the Georgian context and shared that it is hard for her to make friends in the UK. She finds the cultural and social circumstances she has been socialised in Georgia different from the UK, which creates an additional barrier for her to naturally develop friendships.

Four of my interlocutors were forced to leave Georgia to seek asylum. Three of them live in Belgium and one lives in Germany. Together with educational purposes, asylum-seeking seems to be one of the most common ways for Georgian queer migrants to find refuge in countries which are open and inclusive of sexual minorities. After the implementation of visa-free entrance in the EU zone, migration flow from Georgia drastically increased.[57] My interlocutors who left the country for the purpose of seeking asylum decided to migrate after the decision was implemented, as this made it easier for them to seek asylum. They had to spend sometimes weeks, sometimes months at camps before being granted asylum. Informal networks with other queer individuals already living in the host countries of their choice played a central role in deciding where to migrate. They considered this movement a necessary but forced and sometimes rushed decision. The following paragraphs dive into examples shared during interviews.

[56] Interview with participant 10, March 29, 2022

[57] Topuria, 'რატომ მიდიოდნენ საზღვარგარეთ ადრე და რატომ მიდიან ახლა - მიზეზები იცვლება [Why People Emigrated Abroad Previously and Why do they Do it Now - Reasons Change]'.

P4[58] initially left for Belgium for a year, after which she returned to Georgia and later left again. Currently, she is learning Dutch and is trying to settle down. Remembering the experience at the camp as a transgender woman, she shared that it was stressful, however, she did not feel discriminated against. P4 knew other Georgian queer individuals who had left for Belgium, including one of her friends who bought a ticket for her to go to Belgium. Considering it was a rushed decision and her support system was in Georgia, including her partner, she decided to act on "longing for home" and returned. However, after what happened on July 5, 2021, which resulted in the death of a cameraman, she decided to leave again and plans to stay in the host country. Although, if things change in Georgia when it comes to discrimination against queer individuals, she prefers to return. P6[59] also sought asylum in Belgium. Currently, he works in the service sector and is taking a language course. Having left at the beginning of 2020, COVID-19 made his experience much more difficult. He started going to one of the queer organizations which helped him meet other community members, but "because of COVID-19 they closed it and I was left on my own". What complicated the post-camp transition process was the difficulty of renting a flat, which is a shared experience for Georgian queer refugees. P6 shared that not speaking the local language sometimes was the reason for rejection. Additionally, it is very difficult to directly get a job after being granted asylum as you need time to learn the language. "I could not show them my salary as I did not have a job yet and the money government supported me with was not accepted by landlords".

P2[60] left for Belgium two years ago to seek asylum. She is currently learning the language and works in the service sector. Like others, she chose the host country because she already knew other queer refugees from Georgia and for her Belgium was one of the most queer-friendly countries. She also arrived there when COVID-19 started to spread and spent six

[58] Interview with participant 4, March 5, 2022
[59] Interview with participant 6. March 12, 2022
[60] Interview with participant 2, February 23, 2022

months in the camp. P2 said she is trying to recover from traumatic experiences of marginalisation in Georgia, but she is not feeling better. A by-product of these events, similar to some of the interlocutors, has been isolation. Attachment to the events, friends and family in Georgia also proves to be a shared experience between Georgian queer migrants I spoke with. She shared: "After I left, I am very dependent on Georgia." P5[61] left for Germany three years ago to seek asylum. Currently, he works in the service sector and is in the process of learning the language. He spent three months in the camp which he compared to a prison. "We had shared bathrooms, rooms, hot and cold food served together". He noted that after Georgia received the status of a safe country, asylum seekers were more unlikely to be granted approval. He also had a friend living in Germany who encouraged him to leave. After multiple incidents of physical and verbal violence in Georgia, he had no other way left. Talking about this, he got very emotional and had tears in his eyes: "I have never been abroad. I did not imagine living in a strange environment."

Three of my interlocutors are labour migrants in their respective host countries. Two of them live in the US and one lives in Sweden. P9[62] and P8[63] initially went to their current host countries for studies and later started working. P9 went to Sweden in 2017. Being one of the founders of the Georgian queer scene, in 2017 she reached her limit and even after leaving the country, it took her six months to start recovering from the stress and the burnout activism caused. She did not need a long time to adapt to Swedish socio-cultural contexts because she already knew Swedish and was in an international environment during her studies. She noted that she was very lucky to have found a job when she graduated from her studies. One of the

[61] Interview with participant 5, March 10, 2022
[62] Interview with participant 9, March 23, 2022
[63] Interview with participant 8, March 19, 2022

reasons for choosing Sweden additionally was the safety of queer individuals and a standard of living. Other reasons were the high quality of education and the scholarship she received.

P7,[64] who left for the US almost nine years ago, has also been one of the pioneers of the Georgian queer scene. She has been involved in grassroots activism professionally and voluntarily for around seven years. She was offered a job in the US and decided to go with her partner. The informal network was something that contributed to the decision as well as familiarity with the city she initially moved to. P7 has visited the city before for a project. She shared: "It looked like the city where I grew up. It turns out I choose places according to what it reminds me of, and this city reminded me of home, close to a familiar environment." She also acknowledged that it has been surprising for her to adjust to not being a target of violence. "I am a more accepted migrant because I am white." Although she currently lives in one of the most cosmopolitan cities, P7 shared that she lacks a sense of community, and it has been hard to get into spaces she wants to be a part of. P8 has been living in the US for eight years. She pursued her master's studies there and stayed as a labour migrant after. She decided to move to the US as she believes she could integrate easier in a country where everyone is an immigrant. She shared that she is integrated into the Georgian as well as the international community in the US.

The stories introduced above indicate how shared and, at the same time, different current statuses, and experiences of Georgian queer migrants I spoke with are. While negotiating new chapters of their lives in host countries, their current realities are influenced by the social and cultural contexts they grew up in. In response to this challenging experience, some try to distance themselves from Georgians in their host countries and others continue to be attached to their previous lived realities in Georgia.

[64] Interview with participant 7, March 18, 2022

2.3 Push Factors: Insights from the Interviews

Following my interview guide, I was curious to familiarise myself with the push factors of migration decisions of my interlocutors. Before returning to the results of my interviews, I introduce forms of exclusion identified by the latest quantitative research analysis of the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Centre (EMC).[65] What it describes is, on the one hand, how sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression lead to cultural oppression and, on the other hand, a nation-state with an excluded identity group.[66] According to the analysis, forms of marginalisation in Georgia revolve around the following topics: the right to self-determination and coming out, violence, access to education, labour rights and access to employment, access to an adequate quality of health care, social protection and adequate housing, solidarity groups and civic activism.[67]

Returning to the empirical analysis of the interviews, the events such as May 17, 2013, and July 5, 2021, influenced the decision of my interlocutors to leave the country and/or prefer not to return to Georgia. Pioneers of queer activism in Georgia, P8 and P9 reflected upon how traumatizing May 17, 2013, was. However, they do not isolate the event from other experiences and share how draining it was to be in the heart of activism. P7, who left Georgia in 2013, noted: "On the one hand, we ran away from the violence. On the other hand, we all have other wishes. I always wanted to live somewhere else". For P9 although leaving Georgia was the only healthy option she had left, she felt guilty because she had been in activism for ten years in Georgia and she felt like she left her friends behind. She recognises her needs, but the feeling of fighting and sacrificing has always been there and is hard to overcome. The feeling of guilt

[65] Considering the space limitation, I am not able to further reflect on the report. However, this section has been inspired by its findings.
[66] Jalagania, 'Social Exclusion of LGBTQ Group in Georgia', 15.
[67] Jalagania, 10–13.

may be connected to "selective and reflective remembering, a process in which migrants feel some remorse for getting out and leaving behind others in conflict situations".[68]

P2 shared that especially after what happened on July 5, 2021, she feels very worried about her friends who are still in Georgia and encourages them to leave. The feeling of survivor's guilt could also stem from "a sense of moral responsibility".[69] P1 also talked about July 5, 2021. By the time the news of the cameraman's murder became public, she already knew she was going to be moving to Sweden. However, this incident made her realise that she had no doubts about the move, and it was a better decision for her. On that day, she was very close to the location of the happenings, and she remembered: "The hardest thing for me to realise was a potential threat to my wellbeing, which is not something I have ever experienced".

One of the most outrageous forms of social exclusion identified from my interviews and the abovementioned report is violence. Physical, verbal, and silent violence has been the deepest wound most of my interlocutors struggle to recover from. The feeling that resurfaced during interviews when sharing stories of violence was fear. The trauma of multiple kinds is so grave that the feeling of fear continues to disrupt their everydayness in host countries. The most vulnerable spaces they recalled are streets, public transport, and work, particularly employment in the service sector. What I could also observe during interviews were explicit signs of minority stress in society. It "can be caused by both external (discrimination, hate-motivated crime) and internal factors (internalised homophobia)".[70] Some have publicly revealed their sexual identity, and others have changed their behaviours for the purpose of social adaptation. However, stories shared indicate experiences of minority stress manifesting in limitation of social interaction

[68] Phillip M. Ayoub and Lauren Bauman, 'Migration and Queer Mobilisations: How Migration Facilitates Cross-Border LGBTQ Activism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 15 (18 November 2019): 2761, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1497955.
[69] Ayoub and Bauman, 2761.
[70] Jalagania, 'Social Exclusion of LGBTQ Group in Georgia', 35.

with the outside world, anticipating rejection, concealing their identity for fear of violence and harm, or internalised stigma.[71]

P2 faced physical, verbal, and silent violence because of her queer identity. She shared that she had a lot of difficulties at different workplaces. Working in the service sector exposed her to many cases of homophobia. The moment she realised she had no other way but to leave was after she and her partner were attacked and severely beaten by a man in the middle of the city centre. "There were so many people around, no one did anything, not even offering water." P6 like P2 worked in the service sector. He recalled his experience of working at a supermarket, where he would often be verbally attacked. One of the major factors influencing his decision to leave the country with his partner was his close queer friend migrating to Belgium. He said: "If I thought a lot about it, I am sure I would not leave". P5 has also been a target of violence multiple times. Like P2's experience, P5 noted that after three men attacked him while he was walking back home, more than the physical pain he was hurt by people passing by when he was laying beaten up on the ground. Although violence became a part of his everydayness, the reason why he decided to leave was how much his visibility as a queer individual affected his family. This was the point when he realised as long as he was in Georgia, he could not separate his life from his family's.

In P3's case, coming out was one of the most difficult and decisive points to leaving for Sweden. The only effort left was to think about where he could escape to. P3 was the one who extensively reflected on the only emotion he has been receiving from Georgia, fear, even now, after 5 years of migrating from the country. He added that fear translated into disgust of the Georgian society and in response, he still prefers to avoid contact with Georgians in Sweden. P7 shared her experience of fear with "not having a place to go outside of Georgia". Becoming

[71] Jalagania, 35.

a citizen of the US gave her a sense of freedom. P9 talked about fear in the context of limiting self-expression as a queer individual. Living in the UK and having gone through the experience of coming out with her family, she is not afraid as she has a place to go.

Revisiting and reworking the pre-migration period, I observed mixed opinions about being part of a queer community in Georgia. Some consider they belong or belonged to a queer community, while others think they never belonged to the group. P1 believes that queer community organisations play a key role in bringing this feeling of unity to the table. P3 for instance, who has been working at some of these organisations, thinks that the community is divided and because of continuous competition within the organisations, he preferred and still prefers distance from it. P9 although feels like she belonged to the queer community in Georgia, being involved in activism she found the environment very toxic. She explained that it has been very complex to negotiate personal life and work when you cannot differentiate these two spaces as a queer individual.

While finding peace with the decision to migrate, queer individuals I spoke with shared their experiences and feelings of loss and separation translating into sadness and melancholy. P5 who left Georgia after multiple humiliations and traumatic events, sometimes finds himself void. He recalled that one day when he was taking a walk, suddenly he realized he is in Germany and not in Georgia anymore. He was asking himself: "Why am I here?". He described this moment as feeling empty of all identities, feeling like nobody. P10 shared that for her getting accustomed to living in the UK is very difficult and she has grown used to the idea that she will never make peace with this. She noted: "I am in a state of constant yearning for the love of my close friends and family. I feel loved but this love is not practised every day". P10 also acknowledged the social contexts and heterosexual families she was born and socialised into. Aspects of attachment to the (heterosexual) culture of my interlocutors' childhood and pre-

migratory experiences explain feelings of separation and loss[72] while creating a home away from home.

What lived experiences of Georgian queer migrants described above showcase is the complexity of material and immaterial factors influencing the decision to migrate. Some of the main push factors identified in interviews are physical, verbal, and silent forms of violence, social exclusions and traumatising events of May 2013 and May 2021. My interlocutors shared to be experiencing feelings of guilt and fear as a result of the decision to migrate. While factors and paths of migration are identified in the case of Georgian queer migrants I interviewed, a more nuanced description of experiences is required.

[72] Fortier, '"Coming Home"', 409.

Chapter 3 - Beyond the Known

3.1 Movement out of Place

In the quest of how Georgian queer migrants negotiate displacement and a sense of belonging, I return to concepts of queer identity and sexuality that create chaotic but authentic connections with notions of movement, attachment, displacement, belonging and 'home'. I perceive sexuality as movement and queer as 'movement out of place'[73] when asking questions trying to grasp the essence of how my interlocutors negotiate displacement and a sense of belonging in movement. What my research shows are that Georgian queer migrants have been experiencing conceptual and material movement translating into the feeling of being out of place. On the one hand, this could be explained by non-normative sexualities generally seeming out of place and being enabled by the displacement of culture.[74] On the other hand, the 'quest for identity' encourages more and more movement. It might be useful to acknowledge that "not only can one be at home in movement, but that movement can be one's very own home".[75]

This leads to the essence of my dissertation that unfolds ties between home, migration, displacement and belonging. According to my research, the personal journey of queer 'quest for identity' for Georgian queer migrants comes to light with (re)working displacement in their home country, the help of queer individuals' informal networks and perception of 'home-as-familiarity'.[76] Searching for alternative ways of being, my interlocutors found themselves physically distant from familiar marginalisation, expectations of tight-knit family, kinship and community relationships and reinventing their everyday lived spaces and their meanings.[77] Although distancing from the familiar, some of them found themselves keeping in contact with

[73] Fortier, 406.
[74] Fortier, 406.
[75] Andrew Dawson and Nigel Rapport, *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of 'Home' in a World of Movement* (Routledge, 1998), 27, https://www.routledge.com/Migrants-of-Identity-Perceptions-of-Home-in-a-World-of-Movement/Dawson-Rapport/p/book/9781859739990.
[76] Fortier, '"Coming Home"', 407.
[77] Andrew Gorman-Murray, 'Rethinking Queer Migration Through the Body', *Social & Cultural Geography* 8, no. 1 (1 February 2007): 112, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360701251858.

the familiar environment by settling in places that remind them of home. Familiarity with the choice of destination, such as having visited the host country, also played an important role as mentioned earlier. Engaging in the movement away from a home country, informal networks played an important role. While queer diaspora is more widely referenced in academic articles,[78] it did not come up during the interviews. Instead, stories about informal connections and friendships with Georgian queer migrants having left the country were shared.

Extending on migration as a movement, peripatetic nonlinear paths of migration (moving back and forth between locations) rather than singular relocation may be more important to queer subjects[79] and particularly, for Georgian queer migrants. When I asked my interlocutors how they feel about settlement in their host countries, the majority reflected on certainty about the temporary settlement and the will to relocate either within the host country, a different country or return to Georgia. Following an understanding of home in movement, for the majority ontological and emotional security could be found in the movement itself.[80] Although COVID-19 restricted travel, the most explicit destination that is and would be frequently visited for my interlocutors is Georgia**.** For instance, P9 travels home twice a year. Similar to other interlocutors' wishes, she wants to become a citizen of her host country and later on, perhaps return to Georgia for a certain period. Although the wish has been present ever since she left, she is afraid of being legally dependent on Georgia and, on the one hand, finds her ontological and emotional security in frequent visits and, on the other hand, the safe space she has created for herself in Sweden.

[78] F. C. Mort, 'Essentialism Revisited? Identity Politics and Late Twentieth Century Discourses of Homosexuality', *The Lesser Evil and the Greater Good. The Theory and Politics of Social Diversity*, 1994, https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/essentialism-revisited-identity-politics-and-late-twentieth-century-discourses-of-homosexuality(db4f85d9-1fff-423e-9238-1c5a79cac596)/export.html; Jasbir Kaur Puar, 'Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad', *Signs* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1039–65; Alan Sinfield, 'Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and The Ethnicity Model', *Taylor and Francis Online*, 30 June 2008, 271–93.
[79] Gorman-Murray, 'Rethinking Queer Migration Through the Body', 113.
[80] Gorman-Murray, 113.

Having extended on migration experiences of Georgian queer migrants, movement manifested in temporary or permanent relocation practices in host countries and frequent visits to Georgia leads to the core of my dissertation. The last section of the thesis engages with double consciousness and the mestiza consciousness, tying together the building blocks of previous sections.

3.2 Finding Refuge in Double Consciousness and the Mestiza Consciousness

While I have attempted to pay respect to the courage and vulnerability of my interlocutors' authentic stories that moved me to the core, plenty of insights, emotions and experiences remain (un)told, with us, with me. My thesis finds refuge in double consciousness and the mestiza consciousness. Although Du Bois and Anzaldúa resonate with experiences of oppression in African Americans and Latina/os in America, the commonality between these two concepts ties together my dissertation. Du Bois deals with race and class issues and Anzaldúa additionally focuses on gender and sexuality.[81] In order to showcase the connection between the concepts and the topic of my thesis, I introduce them in the context of my interlocutors' experiences.

According to Du Bois, "experience of the double consciousness means to be both split apart from one's self and connected to one's self, to be at tension with one's self and ease with one's self".[82] Returning to P5's story, he recalled that when he was a kid, he would go to the sea in his hometown. He would always feel that across the horizon there is a different universe and he wished to be there. "I thought I would feel good in a place, where I am a stranger." This wish originated from the experience of aggression he has been receiving from people in this universe perhaps because of the reason that they recognised him. After arriving in Germany, he liked the feeling that he was a stranger to everyone. However, he noted that it is very difficult

[81] Martinez, 'The Double-Consciousness of Du Bois & The "Mestiza Consciousness" of Anzaldúa', 159.
[82] Martinez, 170.

to be a nobody and have no sense of belonging. P5's experience is an instance of the twoness of double consciousness, in which neither self is abandoned or rejected.[83] It also manifests in his self-esteem. On the one hand, he believes he is smart and can make it. On the other hand, at times his self-esteem drops. One example influencing the fluctuation is his experience at a public service office. After sharing that he is a refugee, he was asked if he has finished school. P5 was struck by the expectation that refugees are uneducated.

Anzaldúa resists the multiple axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality, within the matrix of domination, with her oppositional/mestiza/border consciousness.[84] She reflects on the experiences of queer individuals emerging from multiple determinants of the matrix of domination. Border consciousness is a concept she uses to map out a sense of "the plurality of self".[85] What is equally essential to note is her background as a Chicana lesbian of the working class. Anzaldúa extends on this in her project "belonging" nowhere, depicting her multiple identities always prohibiting her from feeling completely "at home" in any one of the many communities she is a member of.[86] Resonating with my interlocutors' experiences, P10 shared that she does not feel well in the UK, nor in Georgia. "There is no guaranty I would feel better somewhere else." While constant yearning for friends, family and memories from Georgia is present, she tries to negotiate her safety and life with her partner and often visits Georgia.

> "I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face,…to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space."[87]

[83] Martinez, 170.
[84] Martinez, 166.
[85] Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, 'Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: Cultural Studies, "Difference," and the Non-Unitary Subject', *Cultural Critique*, no. 28 (1994): 11, https://doi.org/10.2307/1354508.
[86] Yarbro-Bejarano, 13.
[87] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 22, https://www.spdbooks.org/Products/9781951874025/borderlands--la-frontera-the-new-mestiza--5th-edition.aspx?bCategory=1SP.

Experience of double consciousness and border consciousness has been present throughout my interviews with Georgian queer migrants. In addition to insights shared, P10 noted that when she is in Georgia, she misses her home in her host country and when she is in her host country, vice versa. P8 like P10 commented: "I will always miss Georgia, but if I leave my host city, I will always miss it". When asked about what creates a sense of home, P9 told me that her sense of home is divided between Sweden and Georgia. Her ideal scenario would be to continue living in Sweden and have an imaginary door, which would allow her to socialize with her friends and close ones in Georgia.

In response to continuous experiences of the split from oneself, Du Bois calls for "recognition of the multiplicity of selves that a person can have, and for a social reality that allows their expression".[88] Georgian queer migrants, who carry multiple identities and experiences created across borders should be able to embrace them without losing either one of them. What also resonates with the experience of my interlocutors is carrying a double consciousness in connection with national and queer identities. Similar to the alienating process of creating a national identity in El Salvador,[89] as showcased throughout my thesis, in Georgia this process is oppressive. Queer individuals and groups do not see themselves represented in the so-called national identity created by the ruling party and could be inferred to be holding a double consciousness. It is experienced through two types of factors that make up national identity. On the one hand, my interlocutors share objective factors such as socio-cultural contexts, but, on the other hand, subjective factors vary, which allow a person to assume the national identity, such as consciousness and acceptance of the identity.[90] In a globalised world with diverse paths and forms of migration flows more space and freedom should be given to

[88] Upegui-Hernandez, 'Double-Consciousness', 131.
[89] Upegui-Hernandez, 138.
[90] Upegui-Hernandez, 139.

migrants to rethink, rework and reconsider the meaning of their national identities in their host countries.

3.3 Transgressing Displacement and a Sense of Belonging

Why are the experiences of Georgian queer migrants valuable and insightful within local, regional, and international contexts? Unfolding closer observations on displacement and a sense of belonging across borders, the experiences of my interlocutors show the liminality of emotions and physical movements between home and host countries. Accordingly, double consciousness and the mestiza consciousness of queer migrants transgress binary conceptual and empirical practices of migration and encourage further research. One direction of research could be exploring the relationship between migration and transnational queer activism. For instance, while my interlocutors go through the phase of double consciousness, they express the will to continue and/or renew engagement in Georgian queer social movements after they make peace with identities rooted in multiple spaces. The turning point for marking this new phase seems to be becoming a citizen of host countries to always have a home as origin in Georgia and a home they created for themselves.

Reconciling differences in understandings of sexuality and gender identity, migrant inflows increase the tendency for queer social movement organisations to orient their focus beyond the state, often manifesting in the promotion of queer rights in migrants' home countries.[91] One of the most successful cases of showcasing the potential and importance of queer mobilisation is Polish transnational queer activism. Polish example reflects the feeling of guilt, moral responsibility and social obligations to the homeland,[92] similar to what my interlocutors' have been experiencing. Most queer individuals I spoke with had been actively

[91] Phillip Ayoub and Lauren Bauman, 'Migration and Queer Mobilisations: How Migration Facilitates Cross-Border LGBTQ Activism', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (13 July 2018): 2759, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1497955.
[92] Ayoub and Bauman, 27761.

involved in Georgian queer organisations and the political scene in Georgia and have the wish to find ways of continuing participation. An instance of the German-Polish cooperation on transnational queer activism illustrates how members of the Polish queer migrant community, who left the country after intense state-sponsored repression from 2005 to 2007, remain engaged in local activism and mobilise themselves into action in their host countries on behalf of activists in their home country.[93] Mutually beneficial, on the one hand, it is indeed queer mobilisation and the creation of queer migrant networks that allow queer migrants to reconnect and (re)engage with their home countries and, on the other hand, transnational exchange of resources and information contributes to the local and international development of more socially and politically inclusive queer social movements.

[93] Ayoub and Bauman, 'Migration and Queer Mobilisations', 18 November 2019, 2765.

Conclusion

Approaching the finishing lines of my academic contemplation, I continue humming the lyrics and I feel the rush of melancholy, fear, anger, happiness, and hope. This thesis engaged with conceptual and empirical analysis of how Georgian queer migrants negotiate displacement and a sense of belonging in-between home and host countries. The study of Georgian queer migrants' experiences contributes to an understudied topic of queer migration from Georgia, as part of Eastern Europe and FSU.

Firstly, contextualisation of the topic introduced initial markers of limited personal, social, and political spaces queer individuals are given in Georgia. Affiliation of the church with the nation-state drew attention to the problem of the fixation of dominant national identity narratives that marginalise queer citizens. Departing from feminist IR, theoretical grounding revealed how the primacy of the nation-state does not allow the inclusion of queer citizens' multiple identities. Butler's and Foucault's contribution to feminist discussions of identity suggested an adaptation of fluidity and a more nuanced examination of otherness and power relations. Followed by methodology and positionality, engagement with primary and secondary sources led to the findings of the dissertation. My findings are based on interviews with ten queer individuals who have spent six months to eight years and a half in host countries. While it is not representative of other Georgian queer migrants, it analysed shared experiences of displacement and a sense of belonging in-between 'home' as origin and destination. Shared feelings of guilt and fear were present when participants of the research recalled experiences of social exclusion and push factors influencing the decision to migrate. Currently living in Belgium, Sweden, the UK, Germany, and the US, they continue their journey toward self-exploration and engage with practices of freedom, familiarity, attachment, isolation, separation, and loss.

The empirical findings of the thesis contribute to the existing literature on feminist IR, postcolonial and decolonial studies of queer subjects and queer migration. Inspired by conversations with Georgian queer migrants and scholars such as Vivienne Jabri, Anne-Marie Fortier, Gloria Anzaldúa and Du Bois, I built on notions of movement, attachment, displacement, belonging, 'home', double consciousness, and the mestiza consciousness. What my empirical data shows is that queer migration can be perceived as an experience of conceptual and material movement. It also demonstrates that the 'quest for identity' of Georgian queer migrants, generally seeming out of place, encourages more and more movement and even perception of home in movement. Unlike general tendencies of migration from Georgia indicating economic hardship to be a prominent reason for migration, queer individuals decide to leave for personal safety and security. Additionally, while the Georgian diaspora worldwide plays an important role in general migration flows, queer migrants count on informal networks.

Leading to the core finding of my dissertation, the empirical analysis revealed nonlinear migration paths that manifest in an endless journey between two and more worlds. Describing spaces conceptually and geographically, my interlocutors continue to negotiate multiple personal and social identities in physical sites of home and host countries. Experiences of displacement and a sense of belonging of Georgian queer migrants examined throughout the thesis finds refuge in double consciousness and the mestiza consciousness. Continuous navigation of liminal spaces calls for recognition of multiple ways of being. Transitioning to a new phase, interlocutors who have spent more than two years in host countries expressed the will to continue and/or renew engagement in Georgian queer social movements. Encouraging further research, one direction suggested in the concluding chapter is an exploration of the link between migration and transnational queer activism.

Bibliography

Amnesty International. ‘Georgia: Homophobic Violence Mars Tbilisi Pride Event’. Amnesty International, 17 May 2013. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/05/georgia-homophobic-violence-mars-tbilisi-pride-event/.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987. https://www.spdbooks.org/Products/9781951874025/borderlands--la-frontera-the-new-mestiza--5th-edition.aspx?bCategory=1SP.

Ayoub, Phillip, and Lauren Bauman. ‘Migration and Queer Mobilisations: How Migration Facilitates Cross-Border LGBTQ Activism’. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (13 July 2018): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1497955.

Barkaia, Maia, and Alisse Waterston. *Gender in Georgia: Feminist Perspectives on Culture, Nation, and History in the South Caucasus*. 1st ed. Berghahn Books, 2018.

Bertelsmann Foundation. ‘BTI 2016; Georgia Country Report’. Bertelsmann Foundation, 1 January 2016. https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/1039431.html.

———. ‘BTI 2022; Georgia Country Report’. Bertelsmann Foundation, 2022. https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report?isocode=GEO&cHash=291f37185c0e7cf2f26eed5afd68d479.

Booth, Ken. ‘Security and Self Reflections of a Fallen Realist’. *Taylor and Francis Group*, October 1994. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203501764-11/security-self-reflections-fallen-realist.

Chikhladze, Makvala, and Archil Chikhladze. *ორი გული გაქვს [You Have Two Hearts]*, 1976. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLeykjpejv4.

Dawson, Andrew, and Nigel Rapport. *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of ‘Home’ in a World of Movement*. Routledge, 1998. https://www.routledge.com/Migrants-of-Identity-Perceptions-of-Home-in-a-World-of-Movement/Dawson-Rapport/p/book/9781859739990.

Di Feliciantonio, Cesare, and Kaciano B. Gadelha. ‘Situating Queer Migration Within (National) Welfare Regimes’. *Geoforum* 68 (2016): 1–9.

Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. 2nd ed. University of California Press, 1989. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbn6.

Fortier, Anne-Marie. ‘“Coming Home”: Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home’. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (1 November 2001): 405–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/136754940100400403.

France-Presse, Agence. ‘Georgian Cameraman Dies after Attack by Far-Right, Anti-LGBTQ Mob’. *The Guardian*, 11 July 2021, sec. World news. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/jul/11/georgian-cameraman-dies-after-attack-by-far-right-anti-lgbtq-mob.

Gorman-Murray, Andrew. ‘Rethinking Queer Migration Through the Body’. *Social & Cultural Geography* 8, no. 1 (1 February 2007): 105–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360701251858.

Hekman, Susan. ‘Beyond Identity: Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics’. *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 3 (1 December 2000): 289–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/14647000022229245.

Hofmann, Erin Trouth, and Cynthia J. Buckley. ‘Global Changes and Gendered Responses: The Feminization of Migration from Georgia’. *International Migration Review* 47, no. 3 (1 September 2013): 508–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12035.

hooks, bell. ‘Building a Teaching Community: A Dialogue’. In *Teaching to Transgress*. Routledge, 1994.

Kulpa, Robert. ‘Nations and Sexualities - “West” and “East”’. In *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, 43–62, 2011. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315576107-4.

Martinez, Theresa A. ‘The Double-Consciousness of Du Bois & The “Mestiza Consciousness” of Anzaldúa’. *Race, Gender & Class* 9, no. 4 (2002): 158–76.

Migration Commission. ‘საქართველოს 2021-2030 წლების მიგრაციის სტრატეგია [Georgia’s Migration Strategy for 2021-2030]’. Migration Commission, 2020. https://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=225&clang=0.

———. ‘საქართველოს 2021-2030 წლების მიგრაციის სტრატეგიის ლოგიკური ჩარჩო; დანართი 1 [Logical Framework of Georgia’s Migration Strategy for 2021-2030; Appendix 1]’. Migration Commission, 2020. https://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=216&clang=0.

Mole, Richard C. M. ‘The Post-Communist Identity Crisis and Queer Migration from Poland’. The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises, 28 February 2019. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190856908.013.21.

Mort, F. C. ‘Essentialism Revisited? Identity Politics and Late Twentieth Century Discourses of Homosexuality’. *The Lesser Evil and the Greater Good. The Theory and Politics of Social Diversity*, 1994. https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/essentialism-revisited-identity-politics-and-late-twentieth-century-discourses-of-homosexuality(db4f85d9-1fff-423e-9238-1c5a79cac596)/export.html.

Nagar, Richa. ‘Hungry Translations: The World Through Radical Vulnerability’. *Antipode* 51, no. 1 (2019): 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12399.

Nencel, Lorraine. ‘Situating Reflexivity: Voices, Positionalities and Representations in Feminist Ethnographic Texts’. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Embodied engagements, 43 (1 March 2014): 75–83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.07.018.

Novitskaya, Alexandra. ‘Sexual Citizens in Exile: State-Sponsored Homophobia and Post-Soviet LGBTQI+ Migration’. *The Russian Review* 80, no. 1 (2021): 56–76. https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12298.

Pearce, Susan C. ‘Cultures in Contrast: LGBTQ Movements and Post-Soviet Religious Resurgence in the Republic of Georgia’. In *Religion in Gender-Based Violence, Immigration, and Human Rights*. Routledge, 2019.

Pertaia, Luka. ‘Queer Rights Activists Mark 17 May in Tbilisi under Heavy Police Presence; Church Takes to Streets’. *OC Media* (blog), 17 May 2017. https://oc-media.org/queers-in-tbilisi-mark-17-may-under-heavy-police-presence-church-takes-to-streets/.

Puar, Jasbir Kaur. ‘Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad’. *Signs* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1039–65.

Seedat, Soraya, Willem P. Pienaar, David Williams, and Daniel J. Stein. ‘Ethics of Research on Survivors of Trauma’. *Current Psychiatry Reports* 6, no. 4 (1 July 2004): 262–67. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-004-0075-z.

Sinfield, Alan. ‘Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and The Ethnicity Model’. *Taylor and Francis Online*, 30 June 2008, 271–93.

Sultana, Farhana. ‘Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research’. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2007): 374–85.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. ‘Definitions’. Refugees and Migrants, 12 April 2016. https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions.

Topuria, Tea. ‘რატომ მიდიოდნენ საზღვარგარეთ ადრე და რატომ მიდიან ახლა - მიზეზები იცვლება [Why People Emigrated Abroad Previously and Why do they

Do it Now - Reasons Change]'. *Radio Freedom*, 3 November 2021. https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31544281.html.
United Nations. 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. United Nations. United Nations. Accessed 16 April 2022. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.
Upegui-Hernandez, Debora. 'Double-Consciousness: A Journey Through the Multiplicity of Personal and Social Selves in the Context of Migration'. *Diversity in Mind and Action: Vol I Multiple Faces of Identity*, 1 January 2009, 129–49.
Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. 'Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: Cultural Studies, "Difference," and the Non-Unitary Subject'. *Cultural Critique*, no. 28 (1994): 5–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/1354508.
Zurabishvili, Tamar, and Tinatin Zurabishvili. 'The Feminization of Labor Migration from Georgia: The Case of Tianeti' 1 (1 January 2010): 73–83.