

THE BOOK OF HEALERS



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WOMEN'S FUND IN GEORGIA



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FOREWORD



“The book of Healers” is a strategic handbook, aiming to forge conceptual connections for social justice activists and healer practitioners. Majority of readers might be new to the term “healer”, however, the term is no novelty. Sul Khan-Saba defines it as “healer of the sick”, “healing” refers to cure and healing from illness (Orbeliani, 1991, pp. 425, 491). The authors of the book opted for this word instead of “doctor”, because the latter is associated with Western medicine and institutional practices of care. Mkurnali is also an old Georgian word that later became “Akim/Ekimi” (Doctor) under the Arab influence. Therefore, we chose to reintroduce the old Georgian term “healing” (in Georgian “Dalkhena”) that refers to the alternative methods, and hence, acquires symbolic and political meaning. This helps us reconnect to the traditional local roots of healing, on one hand, and introduce decolonial perspective and emancipate ourselves from imperial ways of thinking, on the other.

We can recognize the importance of care under the modern day global pandemic more than ever. It has been a year and a half since people around us started to get sick and die. They struggle with depression, anxiety, fear and sadness, that are related to the rapid and fatal spread of the virus as well as the brutal and hard-hitting ways of fighting with it. Millions of people have already lost their jobs and homes due to the global pandemic. Billions are locked in their homes with their possibilities of moving and touching restrained. Millions got sick and over 5 million people have already died (Worldometer, n.d.).

Social groups with centuries-old experiences of oppression and discrimination suffer from pandemic the most. All around the globe these very groups had to bear the economic, social, and cultural costs of the pandemic and got physically and mental health injured. Moreover, these groups become victims of the sanctions against pandemic more often – authoritarian regimes of the world abuse these sanctions to fuel the institutionalized violence and discrimination against them (AMA, 2020). Uneven access to the Covid 19 vaccines also worsened existing geopolitical inequalities (Allison, 2021).

However, during the pandemic we also witnessed unprecedented mobilization of power and solidarity among oppressed and marginalized groups. Queer and trans people, women, emigrants, black persons and people of color, working class have mobilized and started to care for each other and other vulnerable groups. They started “communal care” campaigns to support the elderly, disabled and immunocompromised people, provided food, medication and helped them get services; they raised funds to help people who lost their jobs in service industries (including transgender sex-workers); sheltered homeless cats and dogs; saved the community spaces (Gagoshashvili, 2020).

It is not surprising that the pandemic actualized old traumas, including collective ones. In Georgia such traumas are fueled by post-soviet economic crisis, civil and ethnic wars, colonialism, institutional violence and oppression, etc. For the queer feminist community the trauma of May the 17th adds up to it (this will be further discussed in one of the chapters). Majority of these traumas are collective and passed through generations. An acute crisis like the global pandemic results in re-traumatization of individuals and groups. Transgenerational trauma is a well-known term to healers and activists and in the Western sciences it is recognized by Epigenetics as well (Curry, 2019). Empirical studies and primary experience stand as proof that traumatic experiences are passed from one generation to another.



However, fortunately, we also inherit our ancestors' great wisdom and ways of dealing with trauma. Local legacy of healing practices should be explored, restored and integrated within political and social movements. Healing is of utmost importance for emancipation from oppression, hence, it should acquire political meaning and be integrated into movements. The power of care and healing should be brought forth within the movements as well.

Healing is key to overcoming collective traumas, which is in turn instrumental to collective emancipation. Thus, "The Book of Healers" constitutes one of the pioneer attempts towards this aim. It was specially created for social justice movements, human rights defenders, advocates of women's and queer issues, healer practitioners and feminist activists – for everyone fighting for social transformation. Thinking and discussing these questions brings us together, unites us to heal and soothe our collective, historical and new sorrows.



HEALING PRACTICES IN GEORGIA: BRIEF REVIEW OF HISTORY AND CULTURE



*I'll reach the sky
Ask my mother
Bring back coltsfoot to the earth.*

Georgian folk spell.

Since ancient times women all around the world have been healers¹. They gained and enriched knowledge and passed it through to the next generations. Folk medicine and healing traditions were produced by women because from the very beginning they were more connected to nature. The same is true about Georgia. In almost every village you could find women who possessed knowledge about healing and produced various remedies. In addition, most of them could cast spells, use amulets and magic rituals together with the holistic medical practices. After all, Georgia (Kingdom of Kolchis) was the home to the most famous healers and witches like Medea and her aunt Circe².

Unfortunately, there is not much information about female-led folk medicine and female healers in Georgia. Several reasons led to their erasure from history. In the beginning, healing practices were banished by Christianity as "heather". The first Christians replaced traditional remedies with "the strength of faith" and "devotion to Christ." However, they could not totally eliminate traditional healing practices. These traditions carried on to exist in their marginal, sometimes transformed ways.

Georgian folk methods of healing saw another attack from Russian colonial politics. Since the very beginning of the annexation of Georgia, Russian authorities banished Georgian folk medicine and healing traditions. Later, this witch-hunt was further reinforced by the Soviets. Early Bolshevik government did their best to stigmatize female-folk healing practices in the name of emancipation. They juxtaposed the image of a liberated woman with one of a backward-minded uneducated peasant woman who performed some kind of witchcraft, and her healing methods and remedies were dangerous, dark and suspicious. As a result, healer women became targets of fear and ridicule.

¹ In Georgia "Mlkheneli" is defined by Sul Khan-Saba as "Healer of the body", (healing from illness, transformation, and recovery). Healer here assumes both joy and healing. Both of them are old Georgian words that later changed into the term "doctor" (Georgian: akimi/ekimi). In the Georgian version of this text, we use the old Georgian word "Mlkheneli" to decolonize the language in a political and symbolic sense and bring local traditional meaning to the word. In English translation, we will use "healer" to best describe the concept (translator).

² However, in the ancient world, they are associated with horrible, scary, and merciless images, they were stigmatized and symbolized as "uncivilized", barbaric, "other".

The image of a scary dark healer can be traced to 19th century Georgia. Georgian classic literature illustrates how the witch-hunt intensified colonial rule. Vardua from "Surami Fort" by Daniel Chonkadze or fortune teller from "Is a man a human?!" by Ilia Chavchavadze stands as proof of this tendency. Later, we are introduced with another cultural icon Pupala from the book "Wish Tree" by Giorgi Leonidze. All these images reproduced and crystalized powerful cultural symbols in Georgia. Healer women were largely associated with the images of "Vardua" and "Pupala". Even today most of them cause fear and suspicion that lurks through the mockery and disrespectful attitude they are subjected to.

However, it should be noted that in the early Soviet Union of the 1930s there were some futile initiatives and efforts to revive the popularity and recognition of Georgian folk healing practices in the "People's Republic". At that point, institutionalized, mainstream and patriarchal medicine had already gained some strength and saw rapid development. It goes without saying needless that at this point conventional medicine was largely dominated by men.

Another attempt to bring fame back to Georgian folk medicine was made in the 1980s. For example, at that time several issues of the 15th-century book "Karadini" by Zaza Panaskerteli-Tsitsishvili were printed. It was followed by the 16th century "Iadigar Daudi" by King David XI. And yet, the popularity of these issues can be traced to intensified nationalistic discourses that concentrated on the uniqueness of Georgia. And folk medicine was instrumentalized as one of the proofs to it. Naturally, neither of the researchers of folk medicine bothered to mention that all the knowledge presented in these books was first produced by female healers. And, later, it was collected by literate princes and kings who had power and demonstrated interest in the field. Consequently, the knowledge female healers gained through centuries bears the names of the above-mentioned (affluent) men.

Despite these efforts, in practice female folk traditions of healing were cast underground in Soviet Georgia. At this point, these practices were fragmented, diminished and impoverished. In spite of the Soviet propaganda, female healers remained the only available source of healing for common folks for a long time. At the same time, the image of a professional male doctor, devoted to the old and sick patients in remote places, was widely circulated. However, this imagery was far from being real.



In practice, female healers acted as the main healers and producers of remedies for people, especially in the non-urban areas. They were (sometimes the only) available healers for women, the poor and vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, most male doctors came from socially privileged families, had access to institutionalized education and served the privileged class of Soviet society.

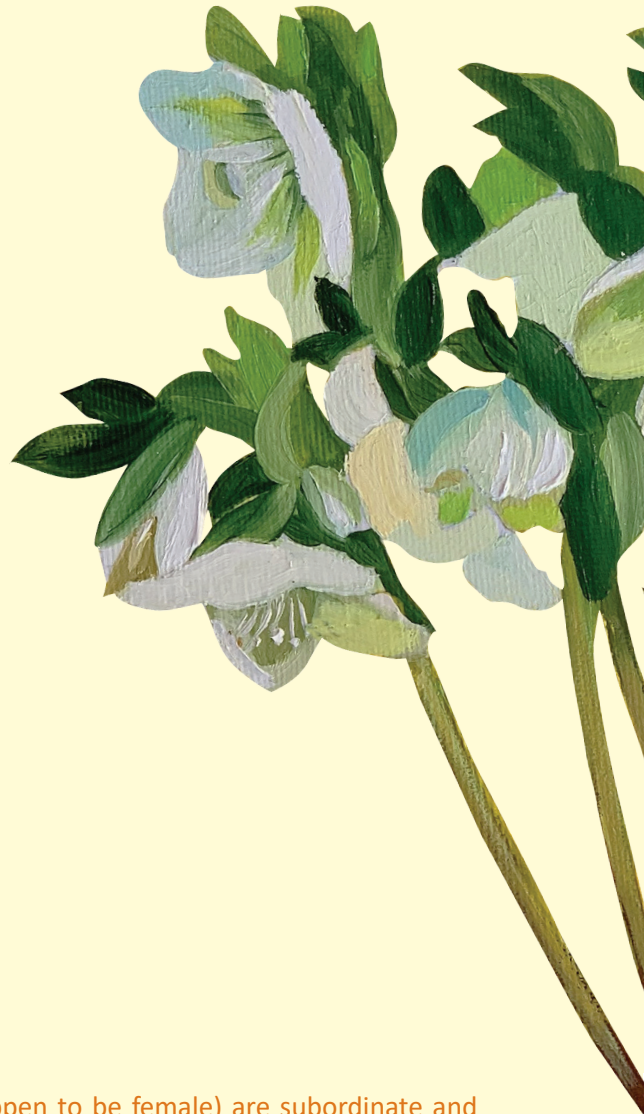
Institutionalized medicine occupied by men became one of the main arenas for power-grabbing and social control. It allowed the production of power and discourses of power that discriminated against women and other non-dominant groups. In addition, it aligned with the economic interests and pharmaceutical industry.

Consequently, apart from some exceptions, mainstream medicine squeezed spaces for women. The low-paid position of nurses, who act as subordinate to doctors, serves as a good example to this process. Institutionalized medicine even took the practice of midwives away from women. Instead of perceiving childbirth as a natural process, patriarchal medicine sees a woman giving birth to a child (and in general a woman) as a body that needs to be managed and intervened as some kind of abnormality. Subsequently, childbirth is managed as an illness and often results in huge emotional and physical stress and traumatic experiences for women.

On the other hand, a healer midwife and a pregnant woman had developed a totally different relationship. It was a healing practice and natural process based on mutual trust, solidarity and equal relationship. Nowadays, childbirth is usually led by a doctor-gynecologist (mostly men), while midwives (who happen to be female) are subordinate and occupy much lower status positions compared to the latter.

It is also important that Georgian feminists and suffragettes Kato Mikeladze and Nino Tkeshelashvili started their feminist activism while learning to become midwives. They did not practice this knowledge but they transformed it into activist endeavors by sharing information and raising awareness about female hygiene, self-care and related practices. These examples stand as proof of the connection between Georgian healing and feminist practices and illustrate the relevant need to revive them accordingly.

Unfortunately, witch-hunt in the name of development has led to the loss of the knowledge female healers had accumulated through centuries. However, we think it is to a degree possible to restore this



tradition and revisit our roots. At least, it can be introduced to the feminist agenda. Both healing and feminism are collective practices based on care for each other, for the environment and idea of living in harmony with nature. Diverse range of healing practices will give us a chance to regain ourselves, diversify and make our identities more wholesome, recover from collective trauma, and navigate more freely in a patriarchal and capitalist system. This is why we need to “reach” out to our “mothers” in the “sky”, and hence, rediscover the roots of female folk knowledge and practices, reclaim them. And then, we bring “coltsfoot” “back to the earth” - read as: integrate the female folk wisdom into life and activism, which in turn, serves as a way and tool for our political emancipation.



CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND ITS CHALLENGES



Since we believe that the healing practices should be brought back to the feminist agenda. In order to ground this statement in history, in this chapter, we will briefly review different directions of feminism, the history of the feminist movement in Georgia and the challenges faced by activism today.

In order to describe feminist activism, we should first define feminism itself. Feminism consists of different social and political movements and ideologies. They aim for political, economic, social equality and struggle for equal rights. In a patriarchal society, human man is considered as the predominant being, while the rest of the species (human or non-human) as second-class creatures. Feminists sought different strategies to fight for equality. Therefore, when we speak about feminism, we assume one of many variations of feminisms.

Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism, POC³ Feminism, Queer Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Anarchist Feminism, Intersectional Feminism, Eco-feminism, Postmodernist and Poststructuralist Feminism - these are some of the existing Feminisms in the world.

While each one of them is fighting against patriarchy, their methods of struggle, strategies and aims vary. These very differences result in the diversity of feminism. For years, critical attitudes to each other and constant pressure from anti-feminist forces have turned feminism into one of the most self-critical and fast-evolving ideology.

In the West, the history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The First Wave of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century concentrated on the suffrage movement and fought for the political rights of women. The Second Wave feminism (or so-called liberatory movement) was made up

³ People of Color .



of struggles against discrimination and equality in the 1960s. While "Personal is political" became a slogan for The Third Wave Feminism. The latter started in the 1990s and took individuality and diversity as its point of departure. It learned from the mistakes of the previous generations and ideologies of feminism. The Third Wave is marked with the confrontations against femininity. It exposed the limits of the feminism focused on the experiences of white, middle and upper-class women. It is a lot more intersectional and global than its "predecessors".

Feminism in Georgia started to develop in line with the history of feminism in the West. However, the Soviet occupation crippled and changed it fundamentally. In the 19th century, the knowledge and information from the West had its influence on the local context, while the historical developments of the 20th century - anti-western discourses and banishment of the classic forms of activism significantly slowed down the process.

The 1990s feminist activism in Georgia strongly depended on Non-governmental organizations and projects funded by donors. The western influence grew and at the same time, it set the grounds for ideological development of the existing organizations.

In Georgia the first local feminist mobilization took place in 2011. It was marked by a demonstration by The Independent Group of Feminists. This group exists to this date and maintains its core features (its feminist, independent and collective character). From the very start, it was labeled as a radical group and occupied a marginal place in the mainstream women's movement. Later, Georgia saw the rise of other actors as well - the group called "Women's Movement" (AKA the Group of November 25), feminists working on worker's rights, queer groups, young greens, leftists, etc.

Georgian feminist activism and movement is part of a global movement, and, hence, has to deal with similar

challenges. At the same time, we can safely say that feminist discourse is produced in local initiatives and is articulated in their content and support tactics.

The challenges posed against Georgian activism can be classified into two main groups:

Internal challenges:

These include the ideological differences and conflicts within the movement, the lack of safety and security, the reduction of movement to a few famous faces of the activism, limited space and support for young feminist initiatives.

External challenges:

The members of the feminist movement often become targets of various types of attacks (physical, verbal, emotional). The integrity and professionalism of female human rights defenders, queer and feminist activists are doubted, questioned. The anti-gender movements and hate-crimes are rising, while the movement is short on resources (financial, human, etc.). More specifically, religious sentiments and macho culture are deeply rooted in the local context.

Considering these challenges feminist activists have to act in defense positions - be always alert and ready to protect themselves from an attack. Consequently, this leads to a burn-out. There is no solution to this problem, we can only observe some fragmented initiatives, mostly depending on the goodwill of an organization. This obviously cannot respond to the needs of the movement⁴.

⁴ For further information please see the article “Feminism and Women’s Rights: Movement from the Periphery to the Center”, Lela Gaprindashvili ([link](#)); Betty Friedan, Three Waves of Feminism: ([link](#)).



FEMINIST COLLECTIVES AND INTERSECTION WITH OTHER MOVEMENTS

Collective - A group of people united by the same work, aims and interest (Tchabashvili, 1989).

Feminist Collective - Despite power structures a feminist collective functions and acts together. In such collectives no one's vote (despite the social status⁵ of a member) counts more and is more important than another's. The feminist collective is based on the idea that all kinds of hierarchies are destructive and alienating. It is founded on the shared responsibility and communal interest (Muhlenberg College, 2018).

While feminism does not constitute one universal theory. It can rather be described as a collection of theories. Hence, feminist collectives should also be able to contain this diversity and intersectionality. In this way, they can really contain a variety of experiences.

It is important for a feminist collective to practice an intersectional approach. The feminist collective should be able to see ethnicity, sex, gender, class, religious affiliation, sexuality, race and other characteristics of the identity that might make a person target of different kinds of oppression. It is important to seek intersection in theory and practice with such marginalized groups as disabled people, who have quite different stances on the concept of care (Ketevan Khomeriki).

Therefore, "we need politics that seek the intersecting points rather than exclusion. What brings us together in our exhaustion and disappointment? What concepts and meanings do we share, what were our common mistakes, failures and achievements? We need to ask ourselves these questions and find unity in our approach to work. Because this line of "work" never leaves us, and it has actual effects on us, on our work, and, hence, on others. The approach oriented only at the criticism of each others' work cannot be efficient. We need to listen, share, and engage in non-formal talks. Put this way, solidarity does not necessarily assume to see things in the same way, but to accept our disagreement and recognize that mutual respect and connection makes us stronger." (Mariam Chanchaleishvili).

⁵ Assumes economic class, race, age, gender and other social characteristics of a person.



COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND MOVEMENTS IN GEORGIA



This part explores existing queer, women’s and feminist movements in the light of collective trauma. It also examines the consequences of challenging collective experiences by taking May the 17th as an access point for the analysis; it reveals how these experiences influenced the ways of struggle we choose.

Collective trauma is defined as a human psychological reaction to the event that affected or affects the whole society. Collective trauma can represent a historical fact or an occurrence, as well as collective memory about “something bad” happening to a specific group of people. Such an event can be war or other traumatic incident that influences one specific group of society or a society in total. Put this way, Georgia and Georgian society went through very hard times, especially during the last 30 years. The collapse of the Soviet regime was followed by the dissolution of all kinds of internal and external systems, civil war, armed conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, periods of famine and so on. The struggle for survival deeply wounded the society.

If we take a closer look at these events, we will see that mostly new nationalistic movements and discourses arose out of them, and they are still quite strong and go against feminist agenda.

The emergence of local women’s and feminist movements is tightly connected with the development of the non-governmental sector. However, we should also note the contribution of independent collectives (e.g., Independent Group of Feminists, Partisan Girls, etc.) that work for free and do not depend on the resources and politics of donors.

Akin to the women’s movements in the 2000s LGBT movement also emerged amid the non-governmental sector. The first LGBT organization Inclusive was founded in 2006. Its work mostly involved provision of services, creation of the community and raising awareness of the community about LGBT rights. “Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group”, worked closely with Inclusive and later became more independent. The organization was founded in 2000 and its women’s rights program was exclusively focused on the empowerment of lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. While in the beginning organizations aimed at

building community, creating safe spaces and empowering the community, later they started to address the issues of visibility – they organized different small performances and marches in the outdoor spaces and subsequently attempted to hold a demonstration of May the 17th.

The 17th of May is an internationally recognized day against homophobia and transphobia. With its own history and meaning in the West this day is associated with the struggle of queer movement.

Since Georgia aspired and still aspires to the West, the attempts to celebrate this day was considered a step towards Western values.

The months of May in 2013 and in 2018 influenced the LGBT movement of Georgia the most for several reasons:

1. In 2013 the LGBT organization publicly announced the demonstrations which constituted the largest attempt of such visibility.
2. In response to this announcement conservative groups and the Orthodox church mobilized thousands of people and occupied the territories around parliament. Despite the guarantees given by the ministry of internal affairs of Georgia, aggressive church-groups raided the LGBT demonstration in front of the parliament. The police did not fulfil its duty and did not protect the demonstrators. This event encouraged the violence towards LGBT and gender non-conforming people in the following days.
3. The experience of violence resulted in trauma for the whole movement. The negligence and ignorance of the violence by the government shifted the burden of resistance on this very day. Hence, since then every year activists have been trying to make the government reclaim the “day they were robbed of”.

Later, on the 17th of May in 2017 activists had their rights of assembly and freedom of speech secured during the demonstration in front of the chancellery office. However, it cannot compensate for the experienced trauma, because the government has never publicly recognized LGBT rights and the positive changes in legislation (like antidiscrimination law) are only related to the EU association agreement, and hence, are very fragile measures.

May the 17th in 2018 is perhaps the second crucial point in the history of the movement. The government offered to hold demonstrations near the chancellery office just like the year before. After several discussion and assessment of the situation the activists univocally decided not to hold a demonstration on May the 17th. This decision had several reasons:

- Safety: fascist groups started to mobilize, and made open threats to raid the demonstration. Moreover, the church started to collect people to celebrate “The Family Purity Day”. Even though the ministry of internal affairs made promises to protect activists, the latter were not certain that the 2013 would not repeat itself. Avoiding the usual violence on the streets after May 17th was also an important consideration.

- The activists were especially pressured by so called liberal groups who consisted of various opposition party representatives or affiliates. The latter wanted to publicly attend the demonstration and encouraged others to do so as well. Such engagement on the 17th of May is not surprising. While many of these people have held decision-making positions in the past, queer people have not benefited from those changes. Neither has there been any public support from the parliament. It was impossible because every existing party and political group holds antisocial and libertarian views. Such political agenda translates into “protection” of the freedom of speech and expression, on one hand, and fight against any kind of social protection, on the other, which in turn, harms not only queer community but the whole society. It was very convenient for the groups with hollowed out political programs to instrumentalize May the 17th and thus present themselves as pro-Western. As for the government, it is way easier to ensure the safety of a one-hour demonstration than carry out positive systemic reforms. Therefore, May the 17th demonstration would benefit everyone except for the queer community.



Thus, it can be said that in 2018 cancellation of the 17th May demonstration was a political act, refusing to be part of a sham orchestrated by the government, opposition parties and dominant groups. May the 17th is a traumatic experience for the whole community, and we expect that we “get it back” every year. It is somewhat similar to the lost territories, that will never be part of Georgia under the existing political order, however, they serve as “useful” bait in the hands of ruling elites, who constantly manipulate our sentiments, present it as only “right” way of rights and define the ways of struggle themselves, which usually victimizes community members (and others) and requires daily sacrifice from us.



To sum up, I would say that the 17th of May in 2013 was a difficult traumatic experience for the queer community and movement. And it was post-traumatic not only for those who were personally targeted but for those who identify themselves as queer. It was inevitable that the event of such scale would leave its trace on the collective memory, its consequences are still felt in activism. Trauma is often accompanied by such an urge to get rid of it that it prevents us from assessing situations objectively. This, in turn, influences our individual as well as collective actions. Therefore, it is important to start addressing this issue.

Recognizing trauma is the first step to overcoming it. It requires talking through trauma, which can only be done in safe spaces, where everyone is valued equally and where collective healing practices aim to empower a person. However, the journey towards overcoming the trauma is not limited to this. Moreover, a misguided approach can turn “talk therapy” into the source of re-traumatization and cause more damage to a person(s). There are other potentially more successful practices of healing as well. Emancipation from collective trauma that stems from oppression and often is transgenerational requires a collective and complex approach.

Empirical studies (van der Kolk M.D., 2015) and the experience of practitioners illustrate that alternative and body-oriented approaches are more efficient than the perspectives of the Western medicine (psychiatry – medical treat-

ment, psychology – psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, etc.). Social justice researchers and healing practitioners often favor alternative and somatic treatment and healing methods such as Yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, Reiki, acupuncture, psychodrama, art-therapy, EMDR⁶ and rituals and herbal medicine recipes from our ancestors.

In conclusion, we should note that one of the most important ways of overcoming collective transgenerational trauma is documentation of history, which is followed by collective mourning, practices of remembrance and passing through the memories, and actions of restoring justice. Without these components it is impossible to fully recover and heal from collective trauma and every attempt will most likely be limited to symptomatic treatment. Thus, healing and political movements intersect and they will remain incomplete without each other.

⁶ Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.

PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT, IMAGE OF AN ACTIVIST AND IDEA OF COLLECTIVE CARE AND RADICAL LEISURE



*Be careful with each
other, so we can be
dangerous together.*

Professional burn-out is an American term. It was first introduced in 1974 by American psychiatrist, Freudenberg. The term describes a human psycho-emotional condition of a person who performs emotionally hard and challenging work.

Characteristics of a professional burn-out include

- ☞ Perception of responsibilities and pressures as a burden;
- ☞ Sleep-related problems;
- ☞ Working more than regular hours;
- ☞ Feeling of exhaustion from physical pain (headache, general pains)
- ☞ Absent-mindedness and forgetfulness;
- ☞ Irritability;
- ☞ Feeling of being used and not appreciated at work;
- ☞ Feeling of indifference towards what we do;
- ☞ Feeling like a useless person and at the same time feeling that everything will be destroyed if we stop working long hours;
- ☞ Feeling that we do not have time to waste on eating, drinking, etc.

Professional burnout syndrome is quite common among activists. Number of specific details make feminist activism different from other experiences. Most of the feminist activists identify as women or as gender non-conforming. Therefore, these experiences need to be considered from a gender perspective.

Activists around the world go against states, corporations, institutions. Activists advocate for social transformation, which in turn, puts them in disadvantageous positions towards the systems of power they confront and aim to transform. Feminist activists fight against patriarchal, capitalist and other vicious systems. They are perceived as agents of change in social, political, economic and ecological aspects of

life. This struggle is a lot bigger than simple individual responsibility and cannot act as a burden for only a single specific activist.

However, there are certain unofficial demands and expectations towards most activists. They are expected to put all personal and professional obligations aside and sacrifice themselves to the causes they are fighting for. Activist work is also considered as additional unpaid labor. While getting paid for it is seen as corrupting its aims. There are no defined work-hours for activism, activists should be ready to help at any point - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In addition to the external challenges, activists are critical to each other. There might be various reasons for that - ideological differences, feeling of competition, internalized anger, etc.

One of the important factors is self-perception as a savior, martyr or instrument, which in turn, can also lead to dehumanization and disregard of all human factors (exhaustion, fear, disappointment, etc.).

Apart from the abovementioned problems, feminist women and gender non-conforming people experience oppression related to their gender identities as well. Activism is considered inappropriate, shameful work for women. It is seen as some kind of "street work" that makes women's "dignity", professionalism and reliability as well as their position as mother, child, sister, wife and other social roles ascribed to females, questionable. The attacks from opponents (enemies) on female activists' families and transferring a political struggle into personal realms constitutes a great source of distress for female activists. In addition to this, queer, gender non-conforming, transgender and non-binary people have to deal with homo/bi/transphobia as well.



Consequently, activists are posed with a dilemma: They either have to feed the idea of a "perfect activist" and address all the demands and expectations, or put up with the criticism for failing this role. Both of the options inevitably lead to burnout and self-harm. Besides, the current economic system makes it almost impossible for a person to have time for activism beyond work hours (For more information about intersections of radical leisure, colonization of time and oppression of women you can read *The Shadow of Radical Leisure: Relation of Colonization of Time with the Exploitation of Employees and Oppression of Women* (Barkaia, 2016).

In response to the current environment, economic system and patriarchal oppression feminists suggest the ideas and practices of radical leisure and collective care. The concept of radical care assumes spending free time for one's own satisfaction instead of simply satisfying one's needs. Women do not often have the luxury to do so.

Collective care assumes the practice of shared responsibility for the emotional well-being and mental health of each member of a collective, as opposed to seeing this as an individual burden. Justified criticism of activists and movements around self-care led to the changes in perception. It became inevitable for a sustainable foundation of movement to recognize the collective nature of a problem, and, subsequently, introduce feminist principles and share responsibilities.

Individualistic approach to self-care is often criticized as western, middle- and upper-class privilege, available to only economically and socially advantaged people. Such an approach privileges the capitalist notion of happiness based on luxurious items instead of actual emotional healing. It results in a fragmented limited feeling of satisfaction with no long-term consequences.

On the other hand, collective care practices are inspired by feminist principles and are rooted in local contexts. They are crucial for sustainable activism and movements. However, the limits and boundaries (one's own or the others') should be accounted for. This translates into the group's responsibility to understand connections between oppression and causes for deterioration of well-being within the group. At the same time, it fights against existing widespread discrimination in the society (Chen & Gorski, 2015).



HEALING PRACTICES, ECONOMY OF (SELF) CARE AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM



Healing is political.

Georgian feminist activism should cultivate care for oneself and each other and recognize it as political action. It needs to be defined as collective understanding, intention and decision that requires a desire to commit as well as strategic vision, human and financial resources, relevant knowledge. Such care should be based on international experiences and understanding of local context. The latter itself is capable of reinventing and sharing pre-existing intuitive wisdom.

Such decision-making can be described as a multidimensional process that comprises individual comprehension and agreement between activists together with the integration of such principles within the culture and functioning of organizations.

Put this way, space-making requires creative work and is dedicated to reflection, thinking, recreation, and rehabilitation. We can envision this process as resistance against the destructive forces that drive the current anti-human systems we exist in. The boundaries are often very hard to set and there always is a risk that activist endeavors thoughtlessly introduce and internalize violent practices of struggle. Sometimes such co-optation might even be instructed by pseudo-heroic narratives that perceive humans as a means, not the purpose of the struggle. Therefore, introducing care into the feminist agenda can serve as an important preventive measure to protect ourselves from such destructive inclinations, while sustaining criticism at the same time.

When we consider self-care, we should perhaps address the question of the "self" and its boundaries as well. The "self" is culturally defined and socially conditioned by the context we live in. For example, individualistic and collectivist societies set personal boundaries in different ways. Since the idea of "self" bears distinct meanings for women from various societies, our work should reflect these differences. Self-definition is a delicate intimate process; therefore, it is important to consider how (and to what extent) we allow ourselves to interfere in it, what is the advice we give to a person when we call for self-care. Should we even let ourselves encourage it? Should it be articulated as a piece of advice or a recommendation? These are some significant ethical considerations to ponder about.

The process of self-perception, setting and marking boundaries for one's own self can be described as "mapping" of our communities and the society at large. It requires specific work and is instructed by the aims of self-reflection. This process unpacks the need to shrink or broaden our boundaries. We start to



articulate who or what we care for within ourselves and beyond the self. The “map” needs to be created, revisited and reproduced over and over again. Essentially, this process has no distinct value of its own unless it is supported with relevant conditions and space to be deployed in.

The next step is to determine how we care. Obviously, there is no universal, all-embracing answer for it. But rather it varies, changes and renews itself in flux. The importance of self-care and care, in general, is not recognized and integrated into modus operandi. The system geared by competition upholds the need for care and defines it only in terms of market value. We often come across advertisements of spa-facilities, as well as certain adaptations of meditation, Yoga and Oriental spiritual practices, gyms and various care-oriented facilities and methods.

Due to the normative environment, self-care practices can even put more pressure on us. The beauty industry vividly illustrates this problem. The latter articulates and disguises its aims under the agenda of care and self-maintenance. Moreover, care for children and the elderly serves as another example. Such type of care is usually tied to the social role of a woman, it is often unpaid when performed in one's family and sometimes becomes a source of income when it is purchased within or outside of the country.

We can imagine ourselves both as recipients and providers of care work. For example, when we purchase recreational services or witness how others and we work to secure time for leisure and emotional relaxation. We also consider the availability of the latter for ourselves and the people around us in terms of money, time and emotional capacity.

Emotional and physical labor is integrated into the existing system, it is circulated, distributed, sold, vastly promoted as a commodity, as a part of a general competitive environment. In order to get ourselves out of the position of a passive consumer, we need conscious critical reflection. The latter does not simply assume the total negation of all the above-mentioned practices. However, criticism acts as a defense mechanism, so that we adjust practices to us and not simply adapt to them ourselves and manage to get out of the commercialized realm of the current care industry. Otherwise, we can easily fall prey to well-established latent or direct aggressive marketing and reproduce the same consumerist patterns of care.

In the economy of care, we observe how care is distributed, what role it plays in the market, who receives it and to what extent. At the same time, the sociology of care acquires an important role. It needs to be observed and understood how gender, race and class issues are entwined with the psychology of care. In other words, how is it distributed, who acts as a caregiver and a care-recipient and who demonstrates readiness and allocates emotional resources for it.

There are some risks attached to the process of care, for instance, excessive care. In this case we can observe how the object of care is suppressed in the process by the violent forms of care-like actions.

It is also important to analyze how this or that struggle (feminist or queer activism) or system (capitalism or patriarchy) is founded on care, which forces fuel and sustains it. There is no struggle without care. Not a single existing system or resistance against it is able to survive without it. Women have been historical caregivers and they are very well aware of it.

These issues often fuel reflection and are raised in feminist spaces. It is important to take responsibility over receiving and giving care. We can rediscover the forms and meanings that contradict the established and branded practices suggested by the system. This process is lively and opens up possibilities to liberate ourselves from stereotypical perceptions, broaden our consciousness and not only create new spaces of comfort but carry out this work in an empathetic, tolerant environment through active consideration of our bodies and each other.

The healers intend to create such spaces and relations among feminist activists.



INTEGRATING HEALING PRACTICES AND COLLECTIVE CARE IN FEMINIST ACTIVISM



*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence.
It is self-preservation, and that is an act of
political warfare.*

Audrey Lorde.

Over the past decade, understanding and recognition of the effects of collective trauma and the importance of self-care has grown significantly among feminist and queer movements (ASTRAEA, 2019). Many interesting practical instruments, which aimed to handle systemic oppression by caring for our bodies, stem from such movements. In this context, the restoration of healing practices and culture as well as the struggles for rights and freedoms are seen as a precondition for transformation and political liberation of existing systems.

The idea of self-care itself has long been recognized as an act of political resistance (Lorde, 1988). Its documented history is known to us through women's and the civil rights (racial justice) movements. This idea essentially goes along with the critique of patriarchal, capitalistic and racist policies of medical institutions, which show that experiences from systemic exclusion and violence are associated with poverty and exploitation of labor; And poverty itself is linked to health problems and endangers well-being. This creates a vicious circle that is hard to break. In order to destroy hierarchies defined by gender, class and sexuality, groups need to be able to live a healthy life, which in turn requires them to have more control over themselves and their decisions about their health care (Harris, 2017). They also had access to the healing-related methods. Such skepticism towards systems may seem strange to many, but medicine and institutional care practices as an essential part of the existing hierarchy of power. They historically recognize bodies of women, queer, racially oppressed and people with disabilities as essentially unhealthy, guilty of something, and aim to pathologize, "correct", hide and/or destroy them. In this regard medical institutions and industry are tightly connected with the prison and penitentiary establishment – as both are rooted in oppressive practices that maintain power and capitalist economy, while pretending to serve progress and public order. Eugenics and racist, colonialist, ableist theory of population control is a vivid example of medicine and some of the medical sciences (Mingus, 2015).

In the 1960s members of the civil (racial justice) movement in the United States were trying to expand self-care practices from individual bodies to a community and movement, and they were quite successful in it (Spade, 2020). Activists of that time were guided by the healing approaches of their ancestors and firm belief that centuries-old healing tradition helped Afro-American people to survive and overcome horrors of slavery. These practices were instrumental in struggles for survival, care and liberation, and

therefore, traditional healers held important positions in every aspect of life, including social movements. Same is true for the indigenous American peoples. Despite institutionalized racism that tries to limit and eliminate traditional healing approaches and healers, the political tradition of healing has fortunately survived and is gradually expanding. Afro-American, queer feminist, indigenous and emigrant activists guided by decolonial, intersectional, collaborative practices widely explore, spread and use healing as a tool and strategy of emancipatory struggle (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016).

Under these circumstances, since the 1960s the members of the civic movement in America were trying to bring self-care practices to the individual body movements and ground them in community work. Noteworthy, they managed it well (Spade, 2020).

While talking about collective healing and self-care as a political act, it is important to look at it through postcolonial lenses. It should be noted that the history of civil movements is better documented in the West and because of geopolitical aspirations and situation in Georgia, less is known about non-Western movements and social groups that used collective healing practices.

However, integration of collective and healing practices within social movements is an anticolonial phenomenon – in the USA black activists started to restore, explore and pursue the practices of their ancestors. Moreover, indigenous American peoples' movements have long been relying on practices of healing and collective care. The same is true for every post-colonial context of the world. It is important to raise the same issue in Georgia and prioritize it in the agenda of social movements.

As noted above, recently, alongside the growing popularity of the concept of professional burnout, the popularity of the idea of self-care has increased significantly as well. This in part contributes to its depoliticization and growing into consumerism (Mamore, 2018). The capitalist model of self-care creates the stereotype that taking care of oneself is everyone's private business and individual responsibility, which should be taken during the free time from work. This approach is harmful because it excludes institutional changes at a workplace, and in other collective spaces. This applies to NGOs many of which choose a path of professionalization and may follow human resource management models typical for the private sector. It is also typical for more horizontal, informal collectives with limited access to resources and ones that find it difficult to deal with collective trauma due to different reasons.

Practices of self-care or healing are less known in Georgia except for yoga and fitness which respond directly to consumerist individualistic models of self-care. The concept of integrated and holistic security (now quite well-known in feminist circles) was in-



troduced to us from the West. Despite some limitations, mostly horizontal and collaborative attitude of women's foundations towards the partners, their flexibility and good analytical approach to local realities has become a key positive experience for many, including Georgian feminists and have contributed to some significant changes.

Although these modules didn't unveil ways to solve systematic problems, they created a space to discuss and criticize different forms of activism, especially heroic ones. At these spaces, it became possible to talk about fatigue, exhaustion and being sick, as well as to realize that the feeling of guilt and shame that we experience while having rest is not our burden to carry. It became possible to admit that we struggle to see and appreciate ourselves beyond activism. These modules definitely helped us to understand that human emotional resources are inexhaustible. Moreover, the anxiety and exhaustion we feel are not unique and many other feminist and queer activists feel the same way.

On the other hand, working on these modules in Georgia has not gone far beyond the individual level. They have not been implied institutionally into organizations and movements. We are not unique in this either. All around the world people write about the fact that instead of healing, activist spaces have become spaces of burnout and pain, where healing is not important and is seen as selfishness. This problem can't be solved only by calls for self-care and individual healing.

While we are actively trying to exclude our emotions from the workspace and move grief and pain into private spaces, it creates an environment where being sick, getting older or just being unable to keep up with the pace is connected to lower productivity and consequent shame. This is quite a paradox because while working in a movement you always face some kind of violence. Civil and legal movements may become the target of an action that causes collective or/and intergenerational trauma. We will later have to bear this burden through our bodies. These traumas pile up after one another and have profound effects on us, our ability to work and fight for change (Astraea, 2019). Under these conditions, it's important to look for care and healing models that connect individual and collective issues with each other (Piepza-Samarasinha, 2016).

Movements need collective care and healing for many reasons (Dhanani et al., 2021):



- a. The concept of trauma and steadiness in activism is itself based on ableism and binary-dominated Western thought. Collective care and healing help us to reverse colonial ideas of productivity and ability. It gives us the opportunity to get rid of the toxic notion which dictates that our only value is the work we do. While the same logic

sees self-care as just another means to achieve productivity;

- b. The stereotype that women cannot bring out the energy for change in critical situations and are under the verge of burnout is also connected to the stereotype of productivity. While burnout and exhaustion of activists are undoubtedly problematic, historically there are numerous examples when women without almost any resources have done necessary work in times of crisis. Thus, traumatized and exhausted person does not assume they will necessarily be weak or powerless as well;
- c. Collective healing can help us solve conflicts in movements and collectives. Collective care does not consider escaping conflict or responding to it with destructive patriarchal models. It rather seeks to understand what causes the conflict and how is it possible to deal with it collectively. In other words, how it can be transformed. That includes abilities to express emotions and tensions from the collective traumas in a way that brings us closer and not apart from each other.
- d. Collective healing and care are not isolated from cross-sectoral systematic oppression. Accordingly, it is based on specific experiences, needs and traditions of the community. Spaces based on collective care consider these oppressions. They do not hold individuals responsible for their illness, or even for being late at work due to transportation system failure or for the desire to work at home due to their needs.

Thus, we cultivate responsibility to create structures in which self-care is transformed into community care and collective healing is not our individual, but collective responsibility. So that we are cared for and we also can care for others. We are responsible for creating a space in organizations and collectives which have a room for people's happiness as well as illness, sorrows and other different needs. Collective healing allows us to "take care of ourselves and fight oppression with a rage", says Dean Spade.

Feminist and queer movements in Georgia understand the importance of care practices really well. Safe spaces (including spaces for fun and relaxation) are really special for them. They also recognize the importance of intersection and collaboration between the groups. The existence of safe spaces where activist groups would be able to share their experiences and expand their support network is also fundamental. There is desire and need to create safe space, "but it is never supported by big groups or such big groups are never recognized - different values, internal conflicts and competitions hinder sharing experiences among activists in a healthy way" (Mariam Chanchaleishvili).

Activists believe that empathy is a basic need. More and more people must talk about the care practices as a necessary and central issue. It is very important to restore and build trust in care practices, "to bring activists together in the informal spaces where the environment helps them to get closer, to speak openly, to share traumas and fears and to express hope. Also, it's vital to redirect our focus on small achievements, they might be little and slow, but they still are here and that's because of the activists" (Tamar Tarkhan-Mouravi).

The importance of care work is recognized at the organizational level as well. "Too much formalization and overwork mustn't lead to severance of emotional connection to work, ideas and each other. Therefore, it is important to balance clear assignment of responsibilities with the need for emotional comfort and motivation. This is the only way to turn work environment into a feminist space. This balance is also crucial for work "to fulfill and not to exhaust you" (Eka Tsereteli).

Moreover, we should see and appreciate the efforts of individuals who work at our organization, recognize each other's resources and be ready to care. "It is crucial not only to transform care into gratitude, but also engage in the process of care. This way we create horizontal spaces where punishment and expulsion are excluded from the repertoire of action. This emotional touch truly distinguishes feminist approaches in the organizations from the others" (Eka Tsereteli).

LGBT/QUEER MOVEMENT AND URGENCY OF COLLECTIVE HEALING



The formation of the LGBT community as a political movement in independent Georgia is closely linked to feminist activism. During the formation of important agenda for the community, an active part of queer women found their first political platform and allies within the feminist groups.

Since 2005-2006 the first LGBT organization was founded and feminist activists became more involved in queer issues. An important way to empower the community was to care for each other's physical and emotional safety. Due to the lack of resources, this process of care basically took place in unprofessional spaces and depended on collective effort, relationships and social and emotional resources. From today's perspective, these processes were more intuitive and empowered groups of queer women, on the one hand, but also led to emotional exhaustion for the part of the people involved in these care practices on the other hand.

Along with internal processes, this exhaustion is largely connected to external factors. All the stress and traumas that the Georgian LGBT community had to endure because of living in homo/bi/transphobic and patriarchal society marked its not-so-long documented history. The biggest source of such trauma was a mass attack on a peaceful gathering of the LGBT activists on May 17th, 2013. After that, the community and activists suffered from annual retraumatization because they were unable to organize planned peaceful events and this became a subject of their confrontation with both - the state and each other (Saganelidze, 2019).

It is fair to say that May 17th is a collective trauma for the Georgian LGBT community. A lot has been written about these types of traumas, such as the Holocaust and genocide of indigenous people in the North and the South Americas, as well as the experience of slavery and segregation of black people in the colonized states of America and Africa. According to the researchers, if the group has experienced historical oppression, collective trauma can be passed from generation to generation and can have a negative impact on the general well-being of the community (Yuko, 2020). At the same time, even though no group is homogeneous and everyone perceives and deals with trauma individually, such traumatic experiences create and enforce emotional connection, the sense of common identity within the group (Yuko, 2020).

In terms of dealing with trauma, it is crucial to understand it and to overcome the feeling of helplessness through restoration of justice. It also may be useful to give the traumatic event a symbolic, tangible form to encourage mourning and introspection. Often this is done with sculptures and memorial plaques (EMC, 2015). Georgian queer community did not overcome the trauma of May the 17th, because justice was

not achieved (EMC, 2017), no one was recognized responsible for these events and there was not even a symbolic acknowledgment of the violence. Consequently, the feeling of powerlessness and reasonable fear remained in the community. All of the activists that we were asked about the experience from May 17th mentioned that it took them years to deal with this trauma and that queer community has not overcome it yet. This, in turn, constitutes a big problem for formulating a consistent policy of the movement. "This trauma required special therapy over years... In 2013 we had a one-day therapy. There were orthodox icons on the wall. It acted as a trigger and a reminder of how we were hated by the church, the parish, the God and the psychologists in the room who could not even realize how problematic these icons were at that time" (Sopo Pruidze).

"For me, that day of May 17th was a feeling of terrible helplessness, which I had never experienced before. I found myself out of the siege and from a very close distance I could see people trapped in yellow buses. I thought my friends were getting killed and there was nothing I could do. I was screaming and my voice was not heard or was lost in the noise of the crowd, just like in a dream. That was my first experience of facing the real "crowd" up close. I use the word "crowd" because people there had lost their individuality, their responsibility and were part of some wild, destructive energy for which the government opened gates for. I could hear cynical and evil comments from police and saw a priest who encouraged a young boy with a stick to reach the trapped people from another side. There was no hope left, it was hell. For a long time I repeatedly had nightmares about it" (Tamar Tarkhan-Mouravi).

"This experience has taught me that as an activist I have to create the space to talk about my experiences on my own. Since 2013 there has been no discussion or sharing of experiences. This gap often makes my positions on some issues incomprehensible and does not allow others to see a bigger picture. Discussing such issues and creating safe space during these talks will be important for the queer activism in its totality" (Eka Tsereteli).



For feminist activists who have not been involved in activism at that time the events of May 17th is something to learn from. It was an example of systemic injustice and oppression that is still encouraged in our society. “This day clearly showed me the challenges in terms of the legal status of LGBTQ people, the intersectional nature of this oppression and public opinion around it. This experience together with others has convinced me over time to dedicate my time, work and effort to fight against this and other injustices” (Ani Gogberashvili).

The trauma caused by the murders of transgender women (EMC, 2017) (Liberali, 2016) also went unaddressed. When the members of the community pass away due to severe illnesses and social conditions (Lubitow et al., 2020), it can clearly be related to systemic problems. It only reinforces a sense of helplessness. Ongoing epidemics make stress from these traumas even more destructive. Such normalization of collective trauma is particularly harmful to the well-being of the community. It weakens the resistance and catalyzes both physical and mental health problems, a rate of which is higher in the queer community compared to non-queer people (Aghdgomelashvili, 2016).

In addition to this, the collective trauma and emotional well-being of LGBT people in Georgia has not been researched. The same goes for the physical health problems caused by minority's stress and its comparison to the main population. However, the limited information we have speaks of a pretty serious problem. For example, the research conducted by Women's Initiative Support Group informs us about the needs of LB groups in healthcare (Aghdgomelashvili, 2016). According to the study there are significantly higher rates of self-harm and self-destructive behaviors in the LB community.

- The rate of tobacco (79%) and alcohol (92%) consumption is also high. 51% of the respondents consume once a week in small amounts and 14% once a week in big amounts, while 9% consume daily. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents reported that they have had sex while under the influence of substances.
- According to the study, during the past two years 44% thought about suicide, while 7% attempted to take their own lives, 11% overdosed on medication and 16% tried to physically harm themselves. All these rates exceed the rates of self-destructive behavior among gays and bisexual men.
- Rates of heavy and club drug use were low by 2015, but opening of clubs may lead to different results today.

Community's response to external traumas, self-destructive behavior, worsening of well-being create solid grounds for internal traumas as well. From outside society often perceives the queer community as a homogeneous group, but of course, it is false generalization. Besides ethnical-racial and class differences, there often are quite negative attitudes towards bisexual and trans people within the community itself. Even in the trans community people may dislike non-binary people and so on.



Under these conditions and hostile environment, where it is almost impossible to gain accessible tools and knowledge to deal with past traumas, it becomes especially important to thoughtfully introduce individual and collective self-care and healing practices to the community.

As Dean Spade describes, the capitalist and colonialist structures put us against each other in the struggles for survival. We have to rely on systems that are focused on benefit and disregard our well-being (Spade, 2020). These systems degrade the environment and harm people. In such a hostile environment supporting and caring for each other become radical acts of resistance.

Healing can mean a lot of things in Georgian queer community. It includes: What is already being done, such as providing community members with access to free health services (both physical and mental) that do not further re-stigmatize members; Instances of community members providing shelters for homeless queers, or even the willingness of those who have income during the pandemic to share resources with queer people in need are also manifestations of collective care. Support and consideration of each other's physical safety is another example of care. These are systems developed by transgender sex workers and/or gender-nonconforming queer people that allow them to share each other's location and to have possibility to ask for help in case of an emergency. Furthermore, the emotional security we provide through non-patriarchal forms of communication and by creating safe spaces is just as important as a physical one.

EXISTING CARE PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES IN GEORGIA

Security

The formal discussion about care practices in Georgia goes back to 2013, when Swedish women's organization "Kvinna till Kvinna" and feminist organization "Urgent Action Fund" together with other partner organizations started working on concept of integrated safety, created manual for trainers and trained several groups in the partner countries.

The concept of integrated security is designed directly for female human rights defenders and feminist activists. It covers their work, health and other personal issues. Space aims to enable activists to develop joint strategies that meet individual needs as well as take responsibility for friends and colleagues. It allows participants to share their challenges, achievements, personal stories in horizontal environment, connect to their roots and remember why and how they get involved in feminist activism.

Currently, there are two active facilitators in Georgia. They are providing workshops for target audiences of two different organizations, Women's Fund in Georgia and Women's Initiative Support Group.

Besides, there are internal organizational practices that some feminist organizations apply to their work and structure. These include: mindfulness meditation practices focused on stress reduction, art therapy, services of psychotherapists, collective gatherings, flexible agendas, health insurance packages for employees, driver's services, etc.

Read more about integrated security (<https://www.integratedsecuritymanual.org/>)



FEMINIST SPACE AND ITS IMPORTANCE



Creating feminist spaces may seem simple, but in fact, it is a complex process that involves different components. In this case we can replace the word "feminist" with the word "safe" and the idea will not change. Having a safe space based on feminist principles is a basic step for any feminist initiative.

Safe space does not assume that the risks disappear altogether. Not all threats come from conscious processes. Sometimes even listening contains risks in itself. The latter might include emotions triggered during listening, marking boundaries, and a non-judgmental environment.

By focusing on a safe space, as facilitators we become integral parts of the space and encourage participants to bring their individual worlds with their vulnerabilities and characteristics.

**Training space is an emotional experience.
It does not simply assume rational exchange of information.**

Safe space-making requires both physical and emotional conditions. Special attention should be drawn to the safety of people who are involved in relatively dangerous kinds of activism (queers, sex-workers, advocates for sexual and reproductive rights, people who work with victims and abusers, etc.).

Facilitators of the training should explicitly state with the participants that it is a safe space to express one's own emotions. Such an approach gains special significance among activist circles due to general negative attitudes towards emotions. Emotions are labeled as a sign of weakness; therefore, activists often feel the need to hide, control and repress them. Once we embark on a journey of safe space making and work transformation, the expression of emotions and dealing with them becomes an important point of departure (Ljubinkovic, 2014).

Organizing physical space

We need to ask ourselves some important questions before choosing a space for our workshop:

- ☞ Where is the space located?
- ☞ How easy is it to reach for the activists who reside in different parts of Georgia?
- ☞ Who owns the place?
- ☞ Who will be present in the space together with the participants of the training? Will there be tourists, other customers?

- ☞ Who is the target of the training and how safe is the space for them?
- ☞ How close is a training facility to the nearest hospital? How fast and easy is it for the ambulance to get there?
- ☞ Is the space adopted to people with special needs?
- ☞ Can the space meet various dietary needs (like vegans, vegetarians, allergies, etc.)
- ☞ How many people will stay in each room and are their needs considered in advance?
- ☞ Can the space provide additional materials (like stationary supplies, pillows, carpets, colorful paper, threads, envelopes, sketching supplies, sticky notes, stickers, flipcharts, markers, pens, pencils, etc.).

Target Group

- ☞ What are the needs of our target group?
- ☞ What are the individual needs of each participant?
- ☞ Does every participant have emotional and physical capacity to take part in the suggested exercise? If not, which alternative activities can we provide?

Trainers/Facilitators

- ☞ How many facilitators are needed for conducting the training?
- ☞ Which competency requirements should they meet?
- ☞ According to the schedule, how is the workload divided among trainers?
- ☞ What are the responsibilities of each trainer?

Assisting Personnel

- ☞ Is it possible to hire additional personnel for managing logistics?
- ☞ How safe is the technical personnel for the group?
- ☞ To what degree will this person be involved in the process?
- ☞ When will this person be able to enter the space without disturbing the process?
- ☞ Does this person have basic competencies to provide participants and facilitators with medication and required medical items in case of an emergency?



Emotional Labor

Apart from following the agenda and its exercises, facilitators perform emotional labor after hours. Therefore, it is important for each member to have contact information of at least one facilitator so that they can contact them in case of an emergency.

Facilitators actively engage in an informal environment and observe whether participants feel comfortable or need further individual assistance. At the end of the day, facilitators should gather and discuss the emotional well-being of each participant, share information and evaluate the relevance of the agenda and make possible changes if necessary. This way the time will be spent efficiently.

The workshop should not last for less than three days.

Materials

Apart from the stationary supplies, facilitators should bring with them several care-oriented items such as essential oils, coloring mandalas, musical instruments, scented candles, meditative relaxing music of their choice.

Emotional Safety

Each participant collaborates with facilitators in space-making. This process assumes collective agreements that every member of the workshop (including facilitators) consent to and follow certain rules.

Such collective agreements might cover following issues:

- ✎ Setting personal boundaries;
- ✎ Confidentiality;
- ✎ Being present in space and time;
- ✎ Respect for time or agree on a flexible schedule;
- ✎ Dedicating sufficient time to one's own health;
- ✎ Creating and occupying space (To speak or not speak and why?);
- ✎ Empathy and solidarity towards each other;
- ✎ No judgment;
- ✎ No hierarchy;
- ✎ Taking collective responsibility over care.



GRATITUDE, APPRECIATION AND INTEGRATED SECURITY



Appreciation culture plays an important role in social movements and human rights organizations. We live in an environment where our bodies and minds are forced to constantly respond to stress, solve crises and overcome problems. Consequently, our threshold is very low for anger, disappointment and other feelings with low frequency vibrations. Positive feelings with higher frequency vibrations are much harder to generate and require a lot more work.

There is an assumption that feelings of appreciation might prevent depression. Obviously, it is not so simple. Depression is a complex phenomenon. However, it is important to focus on the positive sequences of events. Such an approach is much healthier for groups and individuals, it stimulates learning, growth and collective care.

Integrated security workshops consist of exercises that are not directly related to appreciation, but concentrate on positive emotions and reinterpret their meaning during facilitation. For example, participants of the training might be skeptical towards everything, they might find it hard to abandon critical positions and give up on the enjoyment they get from it. In such cases we should try to reconfigure their approach by identifying positive and pleasant things in our immediate surroundings, things we appreciate in ourselves and others. We can develop the same approach in activism, accordingly. It is important to understand what we are grateful for within our feminist spaces. Such gratitude should not become an obligation and turn into some kind of tackiness. It is a feeling not a rule of etiquette. The moment it is deprived of emotional character, appreciation (and its expression) loses its function.

In order to introduce the culture of appreciation and gratitude at our organizational/activist/collective spaces we need to encourage, identify and solidify positive events and emotions. Appreciation culture can also contribute to the positive shift in relations between generations. A new generation will be able to see how feminist spaces were created and what led to the context they live in now.

Such an approach can help us overcome ageism and develop respect across generations. On one hand, the younger generation does not consider themselves as pioneers in every regard. At the same time, older generation does not perceive young activists as unreliable and incompetent. Appreciation culture allows everybody to see themselves as part of a shared history.

However, at the same time, these processes require delicate treatment. When expressing gratitude is part of an everyday communication culture between coworkers, such behavior becomes habitual and common. And yet, we need to distinguish between simple courtesy and actual honest appreciation of human work. Therefore, such an organizational culture of appreciation should be rooted in relevant values of that institution.

What do we encourage when we promote appreciation culture and practices? This is another question to consider. For example, do we encourage self-sacrifice to activism, exhaustion, self-destructive labor? Therefore, in order to prevent such instances any expression of appreciation should be reinforced with relevant behavior, e. g. person responsible should also make effort for harm reduction - assist their coworker to better distribute their workload and take care of themselves. Within larger movements, we should be critical about what kind of activism we encourage and what consequences they bring. It is important to consider whether we establish new norms and hierarchies.

Women's Fund in Georgia serves as a good example:

"Women's Fund envisions strong, recognized and happy woman with equal rights in a free, safe and just world. To make this vision come true a lot of changes need to be made. This requires time, as the saying goes "one step at a time". Women's Fund holds it very important for our feminist desires, principles, and aims to become reality and spread in the spaces of our supporters, partners, activists. However, this process should not be forced upon or done insincerely. By contrast, we listen to their voices, understand,



consider and participate in their struggles, achievements and failures. Thus, our fund intends to broaden and accelerate the process of a feminist transformation.

Over the years our programs (whether grantmaking or not) assumed a lot more than mere financial support of our grantee partners. Their safety, solidarity, wellbeing, appreciation and recognition were integral parts of our agenda. Be it an Urgent Action Grant program, capacity growth workshops or efforts to introduce feminist collective care practices stand as proof for that. Not to mention, a feminist residency that is entirely dedicated to movement building, feminist queer or green activists, their physical emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Taking up on residency construction was a political decision from the very start. We were driven by the same intentions when we established the Kato Mikeladze Award. We wanted to appreciate the work of the feminists among previous generation, and, at the same time, we aimed to encourage younger feminists, express our gratitude and recognition to them.” Kato Mikeladze award was founded in 2013 (Women’s Fund in Georgia, 2021).



EMOTIONAL HYGIENE

Any organization (registered NGO or non-formal collective) constitutes an emotional field. It is not a sterile space. Therefore, issues of emotional hygiene need to be considered. We should encourage logic and forms of communication based on appreciation and gratitude and prevent destructive forces.

The political and informational spaces in Georgia pose many problems in these regards. The traditions of debate and constructive disagreement are underdeveloped. Such types of communication penetrate activist spaces as well. Consequently, personal and professional conflicts get mixed up, hostile relationships are built among activists, while emotions are used to manipulate the process.

Emotional hygiene in practice assumes embracing "the No"-s, considering each other's boundaries, recognizing and respecting rather than repressing emotions. These notions derive from the idea of emotional balance. The disturbances of this equilibrium can cause a number of problems.

PRIVILEGES AND UNITY

Along with the appreciation culture the movements should analyze privileges and norms. They might need to reconsider and change them. In many ways feminists and queer activists differ from each other and from other members of the community who are not so active in the movement. These differences include access to resources, support, knowledge and education. Activists and organizations should consider these privileges and plan their strategies bearing them in mind. They have to recognize potential risks associated with their actions.

Let us take an example of representation. When you assert your power of expression you become part of the political process and gain influence. Your individual actions have consequences for the whole community, they increase risks for other people. Every once in a while, one has to check their own privileges and reflect upon them. This is the only way to prevent abuse of power.



AFTERWORD



It is not a random coincidence that Georgian term for healing ("Lkhena") is related to the word fest ("Lkhini"), which, in turn, is defined as joy, "having fun" (Orbeliani, 1991, 425). It assumes that healing, freeing from sorrows, curing, surviving is impossible without joy and festivity. There is no healing without joy and no joy without healing. For the oppressed social groups suffering and pain is as much of political importance as happiness and joy. Hence, together with mourning we should integrate festivity into our daily activism as well. For us – women, queer people and members of various oppressed groups every day constitutes struggle for survival and every survival is a festivity. If transgenerational and collective trauma stems from oppression, systematic violence and discrimination, emancipation should be collective, and transgenerational healing as well.

We believe that our old historical and collective struggle for survival and emancipations as well as collective historical traumas imprint our genetics. However, generations also inherit resilience, ability to regenerate powers and to fight, genetic ability of self-restoration. Healing recipes and rituals that we learn and inherit from our grandmothers play a key role in this process. It is also essential that there are elderly or still beginner healers among us and their knowledge is stored and transferred, expanded and acquired. Moreover, healer practitioners should be involved in feminist, queer, anti-colonial and leftist movements. There should be the people who will apply different kinds of healing (whether Western/institutionalized or alternative methods) for political emancipation. Only together with them can we heal and enjoy ourselves.



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