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Content

Introduction.....	1
Two queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana.....	3
Afkors.....	3
Red Dawns.....	5
Methods	6
Entering the field	6
Being an insider, a friend and a comrade.....	8
Qualitative research methods.....	13
Observing as a Participant.....	14
Written empirical data	17
Group discussions.....	18
Data analysis.....	22
Theoretical grounding	23
On identity and identity categories.....	24
The identity category „woman“	28
Identity politics.....	33
Theory of intersectionality	35
Queer theory	38
Queer intersectionality.....	42
Queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana	48
Emic approaches to feminism and queer politics	48
Herstory of queer-feminist activism in Ljubljana	52
Strategies and policies.....	55
Language	55
DIY, autonomous and radical vs. mainstream and liberal.....	58
Safe(r) space	61
Inclusion and exclusion in the safer spaces.....	63

The “community”	65
Thematic diversity, Holistic politics	67
“Affinity not identity”	71
Anti-identity politics in Ljubljana.....	72
Flexible solidarity and coalition building.....	79
Conclusion	87
Interview indication.....	88
Field notes, emails, and personal archive	89
Literature.....	89
Online resources.....	95
Abstract	97

Introduction

The interest behind my topic for the master thesis is a very broad, but essential question inside social science. The notion of identity is very present in society and in academia. Identity politics as feminist activism, or theory and research about identity as feminist anthropology, work mostly with identity categories such as “women”, “Blacks”, “lesbians” and so on. I want to look at alternative actions, theories and concepts to circumvent the reproduction of stereotypes about, for example, gender and sexuality. I will not only present interesting queer, poststructuralist and deconstructivist feminist approaches, but as well explain the politics of two Slovenian queer-feminist groups I spent time with in the context of an empirical qualitative research during the summer term 2018. My research question is: To what extent do queer-feminist collectives succeed in challenging identity categories such as gender and sexuality?

As an introduction to my thesis, I will outline a short history of feminist anthropology and some topics which are important for the further discussion.

In the late eighties and early nineties, a certain discussion started in feminist social sciences and has persisted in the various disciplines. Central concepts of feminism, feminist research and feminist theory were criticized and problematized, which led feminist academia into a dilemma that persists today. Zuckerhut and Habinger call this phase the “anthropology of differences” (Habinger & Zuckerhut 2005: 65). Scholars realize that gender is convicted of being socially constructed and even the notion of identity has to be relativized, person is not something unitary or rational, it is rather multiple and can even be contradictory (ibid.: 64). Responsible for these insights, amongst others, are Black and postcolonial feminists, who highlighted not only the differences between women, but also inside one person (ibid.). From this discussion, or as some scholars call it “crisis” or “problem”, the question evolved to whom feminism speaks if not to “women” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 140). Abu-Lughod explains the happenings as follows and also introduces here the approach of intersectionality:

“Feminist theorists have been forced to explore the implications for the formation of identity and the possibilities for political action of the ways in which gender as a system of difference is intersected by other systems of difference, including, in the modern capitalist world, race and class.” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 140)

In my master thesis on identity categories and the empirical research on queer-feminist activism in Ljubljana I tried to be very thoughtful with my use of identity categories. At first, I didn't want to assume the importance of categories such as "gender" or "sexuality" for my field of research, nor did I want to assume the importance of the concept "women" in the local feminist struggle, and least of all did I want to impose an identification on any member of the queer-feminist groups. It became clear that even though gender anthropology is my point of origin, I was not researching or writing about gender, because it is not the topic of the queer-feminist groups I was dealing with. Instead of gender, "[...] a complex process that involves the social construction of men's and women's identities in relation to each other." (Goertz & Mazur 2008: 1), I want to take a queer approach and deliberately ignore this notion within feminism, to criticize the continuous reproduction of gender identity in feminist anthropology and to highlight the importance of deconstruction. Among other feminist theorists, Sabine Hark stresses that in Gender and Women's studies, gender and gender relations have to be treated as an epistemological object and at the same time as something continuously produced through social and cultural practices. Feminist academia itself plays a role in this production and reproduction. (Hark 2001: 353). That is why I tried to avoid classical identity categories from the beginning and instead, I was researching how Ljubljana's queer-feminist groups exist and fight as a group without those essential categories, and what alternative concepts of collectivity can be important instead. In my opinion, this is the strength of anthropology: to not go into the field with ready-made concepts and categories, but to search for new ones in the field. As I will elaborate more exactly in the chapters on the politics and strategies of the collectives, most of the activists are clearly aware of the complexity of identity and identity categories and avoid reproducing simple pictures and concepts of "women", "feminists", "homosexuals", etc. Going with that, I was not tempted to make notes about the "male*" or "female*" constitution of a group or to ask about sexual orientation. I tried to think of everybody as an individual, sharing with his*her comrades values, not identities.

Regarding language my thesis is an awkward melting pot, respectively a mosaic. My mother tongue and my anthropological education are German, the main language in the field was Slovene and the magic language almost everybody understands and speaks is English, why I also decided to write in this language. I hope that this fact also simplifies my language to such

an extent that more people can read and understand what this is about, not being accessible only for the ivory tower of feminist social sciences.

As a first step I will present shortly the two groups I researched, respectively the two groups I worked with during my stay in Ljubljana. Subsequently, I explain my role in the field and my qualitative research methods in detail. Then follows a collection of theoretical chapters connected to the topics of identity, identity politics, queer theory and the theory of intersectionality, which presents the theoretical grounding for my master thesis. My aim is to explain how queer-feminist groups can work without focusing on a certain identity category and so I present my empirical data in the next chapter and explain the feminist strategies of the two queer feminist groups in Ljubljana. In the last chapter before the conclusion my goal is to recapture elements of the queer-feminist politics from which anthropology could learn something, followed by some suggestions of conceptualizing political groups beyond identity categories.

Two queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana

Afkors

“Afkors” is an acronym, compound by the words anarchist¹, feminist, kvir, orto² -radical, space (FN³ 28.3., GD⁴ 3). The space is often called by other names, for example “anarcho-queer-feminist space” (FN 20.2.), “femi-queer space” or sometimes just “plac”⁵. It is part of the Autonomous Factory Rog, a former bike factory, which was squatted by students and artists in 2006 (Autonomous Factory Rog 2018: online) and which hosts a great number of heterogeneous projects, galleries, ateliers, clubs, social organizations, and an indoor

¹ Anarchism is an essential concept in this collective and in other groups of the community. In my thesis I will not focus on this topic nor try to explain what exactly is meant by anarchism in this field.

² Dialect term, meaning “extremely/very”.

³ FN marks my field notes as a resource of information, see in the register: “Filed notes, personal archive and email conversations”

⁴ GD marks a group discussion as a resource of information; see more in the final “interview indication”.

⁵ Dialect term, meaning “space/place”.

skatepark. Afkors is in the main building in the third floor, was originally a shared atelier and was then renovated by a group of people to be a queer-feminist space in 2017 (FN 13.5.). In January 2018 it opened as the only queer-feminist space not only in the zone of Rog, but in the whole of Ljubljana (GD 3). A group of people realized the necessity of a safe(r) space for queer-feminist meetings, discussions, parties and much more, in this process the Afkors collective evolved (FN 13.5., GD 3). “[...] all of us came from different groups from before [...] so actually our idea was [...] to have a feminist space in Rog, and this was like the first point that connected us” (GD 3). It is an open group of ten to fifteen active people, who are involved in organizing the space and the program in the space. Meetings happen irregularly; during the four months of my fieldwork, two meetings were held. For general communication a mailing list exists. Many members of the group are additionally involved with other groups, projects, spaces and so on. As I saw many of the members on various occasions outside the Afkors space, I assume that a lot of personal and group bonding happens also outside the space. The most regular event in the space is Sunday brunch, where people are invited to join for an informal meeting with vegan food, coffee and sometimes beer, depending on how many hours people stay...

The collective is relatively new, but people exactly know what they want: they want to be political in many ways. They want to fight sexism, make safe(r) spaces, organize protests, make zines⁶, and support different kinds of marginalized people. In their manifesto in the journal *Dialogi*, they stated that feminism should be intrinsic to every autochthonous organization (Anarhistično-kvirovsko-feministični kolektiv iz Avtonomne tovarne Rog 2017: 23) and that core points of political work are: “equal personal relations, safety, wellbeing, comradeship and solidarity” (ibid.: 24, my translation⁷). These statements already hint at their understanding of political activism. As I will point out in the following chapters more exactly, their queer-feminist fight is based on a heterogeneous range of acts of resistance.

As a foretaste, I would like to add a very inspiring quote from the cover of a zine they published:

“No more sexistische Kackscheisse – Viva el feminismo queer!” (ibid.: 24)

⁶ Zines are simple booklets on various political issues.

⁷ “[...] so za politično delo ključni enakovredni osebni odnosi, varnost, dobro počutje, tovarištvo in solidarnost.”

Red Dawns

The history of the collectives' and festival's name is an interesting one. The Slovene name "Rdeče zore" is a reference to the German youth novel "Die rote Zora und ihre Bande" (1941) written by Kurt Kläber and the German radical anarchy-feminist collective "Rote Zora" from the 70s (Rdeče zore: online). As "zora" in Slovene language means "dawn", the English translation "Red Dawns" was chosen (ibid., Hvala 2010a: 85). The festival was held the first time in 2000, when women from ACC Metelkova (Autonomous Cultural Center Metelkova) wanted to be visible again as an important part of the squatted cultural center and outside of it. In an interview by Tea Hvala, Nataša Serec stated: "Well, in order to abandon our invisibility we came to the idea of a festival that would give us the possibility to show and affirm our abilities as organizers, as Metelkova activists, and also as artists. This was the basic idea that got us started." They wanted to "bring feminist issues into public space, to discuss them" (Serec in Hvala 2010a: 83). Since 2000, usually every March, the Red Dawns festival takes place in different locations, but mostly inside Metelkova. Metelkova is a zone consisting of four big buildings, holding many art studios, galleries, four clubs, a bar, and much more (Hvala 2010a:101). The program of the festival includes fine arts, performances, concerts, discussions, workshops and other events. A wide range of feminist and queer artistic expression is an important part of the program: "As an important field of battle we use art and artistic expression" (Rdeče zore 2017: 44, my translation⁸). The collective is an open group of fifteen to twenty people, some of them active for many years, some of them freshly included because they were volunteering at the past festival. Meetings happened almost weekly in the months before and after the festival. In spring and early summer, the collective met once or twice a month. Even though the festival is the main event of the year for the collective, they try to organize different small events, like picnics or benefit concerts during the year. An important part of the group seems to be the mailing list, where information about other events is shared, where they come to an agreement to support a statement or a political agenda of close initiatives and so on.

⁸ "Kot pomembno polje boja uporabljamo umetnosti in umetniški izraz."

As I will point out in the chapter about “the field”, the Red Dawns are political and feminist in many ways; in the festival and in the collectives a broad range of issues are discussed. As the Afkors collective, they oppose identity politics and try to include fights for the empowerment of many marginalized people.

“We have not searched for ‘the essence’ of Woman. The feminist struggles of the past have proved that attempts at defining women by our sex or even by our common features of character are misleading: they worry about metaphysics of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ instead of dealing with the reality of every-day hatred, disrespect and exploitation of women – and men. Festival Red Dawns does not advocate a further polarization of genders or ‘war of the sexes’. Instead, the creativity and the mingling of the participants of Red Dawns question the boundaries we take for granted; the isolating boundaries that separate people regardless of our gender.” (Rdeče zore: online)

Methods

Entering the field

The following chapter discusses my process of entering the field or in Jorgensen’s words “gaining entrée” to my setting (Jorgensen 1989: 40). I decided to do my research in Ljubljana because of two not very academic reasons. Firstly, I was afraid I couldn’t focus enough in my hometown Vienna. I am a very sociable person and sitting in a library the whole day in a city where I know many nice and fun people is hard. Soon I realized, it won’t be different in Ljubljana, but more to that later. The second reason for my decision to apply for Erasmus in Ljubljana to research and write for my master thesis was that I wanted to get into the Slovene language again. Growing up in a bilingual area in Carinthia I decided to go to a Slovene high school. There, I learned Slovene for eight years and now was the chance to refresh my linguistic knowledge after seven years of nearly no contact with the language because of my studies of social and cultural anthropology in Vienna. During my studies, I soon realized my interest in feminist anthropology and queer theory. As a specialization, these issues accompanied me through my Bachelor and my Master program. Apart from that, I started to get involved with feminist student groups and with queer feminist spaces in Vienna. As

Ljubljana is a much smaller city than Vienna, I was hoping to meet a queer-feminist scene, which is manageable to understand as a whole at least a little bit. Of course, there is no clear “scene” in Ljubljana with sharp borders, but still, the size of the city and country helped, not to be tempted to make a Doctorate thesis right away.

My plan was to dive into my field of research as much as possible by spending the whole summer term of 2018 in Ljubljana, on the one hand to gain a big spectrum of empirical data and on the other hand to complete as much of the writing process already there.

Before I moved to Ljubljana, I enquired via internet about the collectives existing, and about some specific Slovene literature on my topic. The most important step was though, to already get to know Elena⁹ beforehand. As I was also searching for a place to sleep, I was searching for feminist and/or queer people via the platform “Couchsurfing”. Elena responded to me right away. She could not host me, but was open to introduce me to some queer and feminist people, groups and places. In my first weeks in Ljubljana Elena was my gatekeeper, in the anthropological sense of the word, my key informant. Already on my second day in Ljubljana, she invited me to the vegan dinner in the anarchist infoshop (following A-infoshop) in the autonomous cultural center Metelkova, which takes place (usually) every Tuesday. This first day in my field was very essential for my field research. Elena gave me an overview of the two collectives she is part of, Red Dawns/Rdeče zore and the anarcho-feminist-queer space (Afkors) in the autonomous factory Rog. The same evening, she introduced me to several people who, with time, became important to me, for my research and as my friends. Among others she introduced me to Teresa, who had been strongly involved with the Red Dawns collective for many years, and together with many others was currently busy organizing the most important event of the collective, the annual international feminist and queer festival, the Red Dawns festival. As they were currently searching for volunteers for the festival I was invited to their meeting the same week. And that is how it came that I was at the first meeting of a queer-feminist group already on my fifth day in Ljubljana. Several facts made me even happier: firstly, that from beginning on I told almost every involved person of my role as an anthropological researcher and secondly, that everybody was perfectly fine with that fact and still welcomed me to join and participate. Thirdly, I started to

⁹ All names are changed.

speak Slovene from the first minute in my field. This step wouldn't have been essentially important but surely helped me a lot during my researching time in Ljubljana. Two weeks later Elena and I were in charge of the kitchen for the festival, which means we coordinated helpers and bought food, so a warm vegan dinner could be served every evening of the four main days of the festival.

In the following weeks I was an active part of the collective of the Red Dawns and as time went by, I also got involved more and more with the anarcho-queer feminist space in Rog (following Afkors). I attended Friday's meetings of the Red Dawns in Metelkova, Sunday's vegan brunches in Rog, organized by the collective of the collective of Afkors space, and many related events in Metelkova and Rog. I will elaborate more on my methods and my role in the field in the next two parts of this thesis.

Being an insider, a friend and a comrade

Very soon, I realized that I chose a perfectly convenient field not only for my theoretical interest but also for my personal wellbeing. Thankfully I can say that I not only fitted in with these groups because of my personality and my previous experience, but largely due to the extraordinary openness, friendliness and trust of both groups and of the many individuals involved in both these collectives. From the first day in my field I felt warmly welcomed as an activist and as a researcher (FN 20.2.). People helped me to find a place to sleep and invited me to sleep at the Afkors space if I didn't find one (FN 24.2.), I was invited to meetings immediately and onto the groups mailing list and was warmly welcomed there as well (FN 12.3.). Nobody was skeptical regarding my role as a participant and observer and people were even really interested in being part of group discussions for my masters thesis (FN 16.3., FN 17.5.).

I appreciated this openness very much and this comfort led me to be very open and honest as well, socially, and regarding my research. Every member of Afkors and Red Dawns knew very soon about my double role as a participating activist and an academic researcher and observer, additionally many people in the broader community were also informed. As spaces are mostly open or public spaces, it was of course not possible to inform absolutely everybody who was involved at events where I was conducting data material.

Due to this situation, I felt at home and as an insider. In qualitative research, this situation is often called “*going native*” (a.o. Jorgensen 1989, Kanuha 2000, Narayan 1993, Bernard 2006, Schindler 2005, Angrosino 2007) or “becoming the phenomenon” (Jorgensen 1989: 62). Many scholars highlight pros and cons of being a “native” anthropologist. I prefer though seeing myself as an “insider” and not a “native”, mostly because of the plausible critical elaborations of Kirin Narayan (1993) on the issue of being “native”. Narayan criticizes the dichotomy of being native and being not native, not only because of the old ethnocentric assumption of white anthropologists studying the native “Others”, but also because this discourse is still based on the image of cultures with sharp borders (ibid.: 671). The question of who is a “native” anthropologist and who isn’t, is a difficult question, because you can always share some elements but differ in other parts of “cultural identity” (ibid.: 672, 680). The expression of “cultural identity” in this case is a congenially vague one and matching better than being in the same “identity group” or “social identity group” as Kanuha describes it dealing with the same discussion (Kanuha 2000: 439). In my fieldwork, I felt like an insider not because I am a feminist, a woman, a student, a European, a Slovene-speaker, but because I shared experiences and political views with my study participants. I am not tempted to make a clear distinction between the “Self” and the “Other” not because I experienced being the “Other” due to my role as a feminist, woman and native (c.f. Abu-Lughod 1991: 139) but because I am the same “Other” as the people in my field regarding criticizing widespread consumerist logics, nationalist behavior, sexism, and much more.

Anthropologists among others have criticized the “othering” in theories of decolonialization. In inquiries and theories, in which the classical dichotomies of the ‘West and the rest’, or the self and the other are kept up, the act of colonization itself continues. Shortly I would like to place the approaches of Chicana feminists and compare their research situation with the one of myself. Feminist Chicana anthropologists have strongly opposed the classical traditions of the anthropological discipline, where the production of knowledge is based on the relation between a researching subject and a researched object (Heitger 2017: 4). Knowledge is only produced by the researcher and not solely gathered or produced in cooperation with the researched. Heitger was researching about this topic and highlights the main problems and legacies of the colonial history of anthropology. One legacy is the supposed professional distance, which should be kept between the researcher and the field, respectively the people in the field (ibid.: 8). In this case, a researcher should and could never be an insider. Chicana anthropologists who research Chican@s however, are insiders as well as outsiders in an anthropological sense. For them, the dichotomy between the categories of “insider” and

“outsider” doesn’t fit and has been criticized as a “contortion of the complexity of their multiple identities” (ibid.: 7, my translation¹⁰). On the one hand the situation of the Chicana anthropologists is analogous to my situation as a researcher in a “non-exotic” and socially close field, on the other hand I find it very difficult to compare decolonial theories and practices to my experiences in the field and the corresponding theoretic analysis.

The reason for this is that decolonial theories are often automatically connected, or imagined to be connected to, “classical” colonized areas as Africa or South America. The still potent power relations between the “West and the rest”, between black/indigenous and white, between the (ex-)colonizers and the colonized, between them and us is an important topic of these decolonial approaches. The situation in the case of my research in Ljubljana is slightly different. Of course, there are social differences within the nation and between Middle European countries, such as the still important history of socialism in Slovenia in contrast to a capitalist West. These power relations should also be analyzed, but my project does not offer the space and time for this. Other axes of differentiation such as skin color, religion, ethnicity or even a perception of “exotic otherness”, are not really an issue in the case of Slovenia when looking from an Austrian perspective. In this situation, the comparison with and application of decolonial theories in my master thesis makes sense only to a certain extent. But by opening the decolonial or postcolonial approaches to topics not related to blackness, indigeneity, Latin America or Africa, and by including the topic of capitalistic appropriation, my research can be seen as connected to such approaches as well, because I try to deconstruct powerful categories, because I try not to reproduce power relations between “us” and “them”, because I don’t try to draw an exotic picture of a foreign culture, because I am an insider as well.

Due to my previous involvement in similar groups, groups which were organized similarly and fought for comparable social changes, I felt at home politically and socially and not because of belonging to a certain “identity group” or “culture”. My experience with previous groups did not only help me feel comfortable but also probably helped me be accepted quickly. The fact that I could take on responsibility, that I was able to talk self-consciously in a bigger group, the fact that I knew *the codes* regarding feminist awareness, gender-neutral

¹⁰ „[...] Verzerrung der Komplexität ihrer multiplen Identitäten [...]“.

language, and similar and probably even my appearance helped me not only become part of both collectives very quickly, but also helped me become accepted as a researcher in their fields. Jorgensen states in this context: “Participating as an insider requires the researcher to select from among the roles already available in the setting” (Jorgensen 1989: 60). As I was a political insider, it was inevitable that I would become an active member of the two queer-feminist groups during my fieldwork, that I would be an activist, like everybody else.

In the time of my fieldwork I made many friends, I related to many activists of the core groups intensively. This fact made the months I spent in Ljubljana much nicer but also entailed certain difficulties. Sometimes it was difficult to draw the line between fieldwork and hanging out only on a personal level (see also Kanuha 2000). Many times, while taking notes after a conversation I had to make the hard decision if this information is supposed to be part of my data material or not, because of the very personal or sometimes also illegal content¹¹.

Even though my role could be described as a double role in the field as an active member of the groups as well as of the community and an anthropological researcher, a clear border between these roles couldn't be set. I was in Ljubljana to research for my master thesis, but my active involvement in the queer-feminist groups could have also happened without choosing them as my field of research. I took on responsibility quickly. Me and Elena were responsible for the dinners for all participants of the Red Dawns festival only two weeks after my arrival, after some time I also felt responsibility for the Afkors space, brought food to every Sunday's brunch I attended and even collected firewood for heating the space. I was also part of a small group of Afkors-people who were organizing a discussion in A-infoshop about the “radical potentials of feminism today”. All these involvements were not only fun, but also gave me the feeling that I could give something back to the community in exchange for the data I conducted. Many scholars stress that reciprocity is important for field relations and for the research (a.o. Jorgensen 1989: 71). Michael Angrosino even suggests to “[s]elect a site in which you will not be more of a burden than you are worth to the community” (Angrosino 2007: 31) and gives the hint to “[m]ake every effort to be helpful.” (ibid.: 33)

¹¹ The extent of refugee support actions some members were involved in, exceeded sometimes legal grounds. For safety reasons and because this is not the focus of my research, I will not elucidate this topic more intensively.

As I could sometimes support the groups to a small extent, I even felt thankfulness towards me. Even regarding the group discussions, I got only positive feedback. After the first group discussion and one day before the second one, a group member shared via the mailing list: “[...] Irina made it a very stressless thing. Also it was really nice to talk about it all, we should do it more often. I am really happy that Daria¹² was able to join, for me it was a bonding experience. Very much so, really” (Red Dawns mailing list: 29.3.). Another person agreed: „Have a good time tomorrow, last time with Irina was really good, I enjoy a lot!” (Red Dawns mailing list: 29.3.). At this point I should probably explain why they are writing in English language and not Slovene. Both collectives have members whose mother tongue isn’t Slovene, they are for example Erasmus students, cultural volunteers or simply European migrants. So, there were activists in the Red Dawns collective with a Portuguese or Kosovar nationality. In the Afkors collective there was a Spanish, an Italian and a Hungarian person. No migrants from outside Europe have been active members of the collectives, this fact however, could also be noted important, and analyzed more deeply in a next academic project. If there was a person who did not speak Slovene, or in the mailing lists, the main language was English.

My close relationship to the people in my field was essential for my inquiry and the quality of the output. It was as nice as important to develop friendships in the field. Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy had the same experiences and positions friendship as a method for qualitative research. Elements of friendship as “[...] trust, honesty, respect, commitment, safety, support, generosity, loyalty, mutuality, constancy, understanding, and acceptance [...]” (Tillmann-Healy 2003: 731) are active approaches to minimize the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched (ibid.: 733). The exchange between the involved that Tillmann-Healy calls “radical reciprocity”, which I like a lot, aligns with my experiences in Ljubljana. The scholar states that friendship as a method can be seen as an important complementary method to classical methods of qualitative inquiry.

“Researching with the practices of friendship means that although we employ traditional forms of data gathering (e.g., participant observation, systematic note taking, and informal and formal interviewing), our primary procedures are those we use to build and sustain

¹² Changed name, was a long period member of the Red Dawns.

friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability.”

(Tillmann-Healy 2003: 734)

As already outlined, my insider role, or my double role as an activist and a researcher was probably essential for the insight and outcomes of my research. But what about the dangers of this role? What about the ability of keeping critical distance to the field? What about objectivity? Even though scholars agree, that total objectivity is never possible for any researcher (a.o. DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 111, Bernard 2006: 349, 370, Jorgensen 1989: 55), researchers are warned not to get lost in subjectivity, the researcher must still be able to step back and analyze observations in a critical way (Jorgensen 1989: 62, Kanuha 2000: 442). Jorgensen states that “becoming the phenomenon can be a strategy to be involved to a high extend and to experience daily life intensively, but “[i]n carrying out this strategy, it is important that the researcher be able to switch back and forth between the insiders’ perspective and an analytic framework” (Jorgensen 1989: 63). What helped me a lot regarding these difficulties was taking breaks during my months in Ljubljana. I visited my family, my colleagues in Vienna, friends in other parts of Austria and these were my moments of distance, where I could reflect my experience, talk about my role and my experiences and where I could go through the collected data to analyze it from a geographical and emotional distance. All in all, I think I found a good balance between the extremes of total subjectivity and total objectivity.

At the end of this chapter, I want to bounce back shortly in time and argumentation to a somehow subversive statement of Lila Abu-Lughod in her well-known article “Writing against Culture”. Despite the arguable use of the concept of “native” anthropologists, I feel addressed and somehow proud, when I read Abu-Lughod stating that feminist and native anthropologists’ objections “betray the persistence of ideals of objectivity” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 141).

Qualitative research methods

During my research, my focus was on explorative, inductive research. After some weeks of my fieldwork the Red Dawns and Afkors turned out to be my key groups of interest, and it

became clear that I would leave out other feminist or LGBT¹³ groups. In this period my thematical research focus also adapted to the circumstances I encountered. I was already influenced by a range of feminist and anthropological theory combined with experiences in similar groups. Being aware of my political and scientific presumptions, I tried to be open to the categories, theories and knowledge in the field. Due to this, I would say, that my research was a combination of inductive and deductive, theory-based approaches, as is also recommended by many social science scholars (a.o. Degele & Winker interviewed by Langreiter & Timm 2011).

The range of qualitative research methods I decided on was quite broad. A large part of my data material comes from the very important anthropological method of participant observation where I was “observing as a participant”. These actions could be described as getting and being involved, spending time *with* people and *in* spaces and being part of the collectives and the community. In other words, it could be subsumed by “hanging out”, which can be an essential part of fieldwork (Bernard 2006: 368). Especially at the beginning I tried to “go with the flow”, as Angrosino suggests (Angrosino 2007: 17). Collecting data from various written material (online and analog) was another important aspect of my data generation. Finally, I will explain my decision for choosing the method of group discussions and share my experiences with this method.

Observing as a Participant

For my main method in my qualitative research I selected participant observation. It is said to be the “[c]entral and defining method of research in cultural anthropology (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 2) or even the foundation of cultural anthropology (Bernard 2006: 342). I choose this method because I could gain direct insight in peoples` everyday lives and their communication, behavior, and much more. As I explained in more detailed in the passage about my insider role and as maybe it became clear in the introduction, the participatory part of my fieldwork was an important one from the beginning to the end of my time in Ljubljana.

¹³ LGBT is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. There are many different variations, which sometimes include more identity categories, as I for intersexual, A for Asexual, N for non-binary, etc. Sometimes the listing also ends with a * to underline the endless possibilities for identification.

Through participating I experienced situations by my own, I could observe while listening, chatting, dancing, cooking, lending a hand or similar. Jorgensen says, that “[...] the methodology of participant observation provides direct experiential and observational access to the insiders’ world of meaning” (Jorgensen 1989: 15). Participant observation opens us the question of adequate objectivity and being an insider or not again. Jorgensen defends the accurateness of a greater extent of participation right away by stressing, that only with participation do researchers get direct access to the everyday lives of the people we are interested in:

“Participation reduces the possibility of inaccurate observation, because the researcher gains through subjective involvement direct access to what people think, do, and feel from multiple perspectives.” (Jorgensen 1989: 56)

I participated in many different events in sometimes more active, sometimes more passive roles and tried to observe everything, which seemed to be important for my research. The events ranged from discussions, various performances, mostly as part of the Red Dawns festival, to the fights for the retention of the autonomous factory Rog, group meetings, collective vegan brunches and dinners, and much more. Most of the events happened in spaces of the two squatted and autonomous zones of Rog and Metelkova and were either organized by one of my mainly focused queer-feminist groups or attended by members of these collectives but organized by other collectives of the broader “community”¹⁴.

Especially in the first weeks, I attended many events, not only because the program of the Red Dawns festival was packed, but also because I wanted to get to know the groups, the people, the places and the way they organized. Although many key persons knew about my double role as a participant and a researcher, I generally didn’t make notes during an event, so as to not make the people around me feel too observed. Sometimes I wrote relevant statements down immediately to not forget them, in my analog notebook or I made a note on my smartphone. As soon as the event was over I wrote down my memory minutes in as much detail as possible. All these memory minutes were compiled as field notes in my field diary that I always carried with me.

¹⁴ For more on the “broader community”, see further in the chapter about the Queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana/Strategies and policies.

For sure, participant observation is a suitable method for researchers for whom it is easy to develop new relationships and who like to interact socially with people (Jorgensen 1989: 8). That applies to me, and so I quickly could position myself as an instrument for data collection. DeWalt and DeWalt as well emphasize, that “personal characteristics influence the level of participation” (DeWalt & DeWalt 2001: 30). It was an automatic development that I participated to a great extent in the two queer-feminist groups while staying in Ljubljana.

Regarding the qualitative research method of participant observation, four different participant roles can be distinguished: a complete observer, a participant-as-observer, an observer-as-participant and a complete participant. (Jorgensen 1989: 55, Angrosino 2007: 54f., Bernard 2006: 347) As my level of participation was quite high, I would locate myself in the role of the participant-as-observer. Angrosino characterizes this role as follows:

“The researcher who is a *participant-as-observer* is more fully integrated into the life of the group under study and is more engaged with the people; he or she is as much a friend as a neutral researcher.” (Angrosino 2007: 55)

During the events I attended during my participant observation sessions, I always tried to not only “go with the flow”, but also to be attentive about the things happening. Methods like spontaneous informal interviews, in other words, casual conversations with clarifying questions from my side (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 137, Jorgensen 1989: 22,88) and conscious active listening (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 87, 142) were also part of my methodology.

It is very interesting to observe, that the positions of observing and participating are often seen as conflicting (Jorgensen 1989: 55) or even as oxymoronic (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 28). Greater involvement as a participant is considered a larger threat to neutral analysis. The following quotation by Benjamin Paul (1953) is cited in many methodological books and articles, because it bluntly reflects this cleavage of wanting to be an insider but keep professional distance at the same time:

"Participation implies emotional involvement; observation requires detachment. It is a strain to try to sympathize with others and at the same time strive for scientific objectivity" (Paul 1953: 441)

Although the quotation depicts the situation very clearly, even though it has been written 65 years ago, it must be said, that Paul's positions in this article are very problematic. Without

going into detail, we can describe his stance as highly androcentristic and ethnocentric, from today's point of view. A much younger and maybe also more influential methodologist is H. Russell Bernard, who explains the difficult craft of a participant observation fieldworker which involves going back and forth, in and out, every day:

“Participant observation involves immersing in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly” (Bernard 2006: 344)

Talking about the method of participant observation, again, it is a hard job finding the right balance between the benefits of an intensive participation without losing the ability to observe and analyze critically as Hume & Mulcock elaborate:

“The rationale for this approach is that; by ‘being there’ and actively taking part in the interactions at hand, the researcher can come closer to experiencing and understanding the ‘insider’s’ point of view. At the same time, the practice of ethnography also assumes the importance of maintaining enough intellectual distance to ensure that researchers are able to undertake a critical analysis of the events in which they are participating.” (Hume & Mulcock 2004: xi)

Written empirical data

During my fieldwork I also gathered a lot of empirical data through diverse written documents. This started already at the Red Dawns festival, where program leaflets, exhibition descriptions and emails informed me about the language and content of their events. As soon I got more involved in the collectives, I asked them to add me to the mailing lists the Red Dawns collective and the Afkors collective use as a communication and organizing tool on a daily basis. The access to this mailing list not only helped me remain up to date with the events, but also gave me an overview of the shared information, and thus the (feminist and political) discourse. Gathering this data material was closely connected to the method of participant observation, because only by consciously following the happenings and observing the spaces could I gain access to a range of written material.

Additionally, I got a lot of information about the historic and recent self-representation of the groups through Homepages, a brochure with a collection of interviews by Tea Hvala from 2010 (Hvala 2010b) and a very recent edition of the magazine “:dialogi” about the need for feminism today (Dialogi 2017), which contained manifestos and statements from many feminist initiatives in Ljubljana. Tea Hvala, a Gender Studies graduate from Ljubljana, wrote her master thesis on the Red Dawns “When We Move, It’s a Movement!: Rdeče Zore Festival as a Feminist-Queer Counterpublic”. Among other data she conducted seventeen interviews and contributed to an important archiving of queer-feminist activism.

Deliberately I decided to not take Facebook pages, events and conversations into my empirical sample. As I don’t use Facebook in my private life and have the feeling I don’t understand how it works (maybe nobody really does), I would have been overwhelmed taking it into account. Nevertheless, I must admit, that looking up events from other collectives in the broader community was sometimes only possible by “facebooking” them, because for some groups it is the only platform where certain information is shared.

Group discussions

As a complementary research method, I decided to conduct group discussions. In the time of my fieldwork, I organized two group discussions with the collective of the Red Dawns, each time with different people in the organizing team, with only one person overlapping, and one group discussion with the Afkors group. In my fieldwork, the focus was more on the discourse of the groups and not on the voices of individuals. Moreover, I always had the chance to ask questions individually during the shared time with the members of the collectives, so group interviews seemed to me good to complement participant observation and a chance to get a general orientation of the whole collective as well as the differences within the group.

A big contribution to the development of the method of group discussion was made by Werner Mangold in the *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*. He was interested in the opinion of a collective and not of an individual. Mangold recommends this method for empirically researching the collective orientation of a group (Liebig & Nentwig-Gesemann 2009: 103). Liebig and Nentwig-Gesemann add, that with a group discussion it is also

possible to systematically analyze, not only the collective orientation of the group, but also the differences within the group regarding hierarchy, role, gender etc. (ibid.: 117). Both these two authors are mainly drawing from Mangold, who states that the opinion of the group is seen as a product of shared experience and collective interaction (ibid.: 103). These implicit or partly unconscious orientations can be determined in a group discussion and through this be made explicit.

The group of interest can be a “real group”¹⁵ or an “artificially constellated group”¹⁶. The advantage of a “real group” is that they already share experiences on which the discussion can be based on. The recommended size of the group is two to ten people (ibid.:105). Before the discussion it is of course important to inform the group of people generally about the project/research and how the data will be used. As a basis for the group discussion the interviewee should open the discussion by giving a general starting “impulse which is people inviting to narrate”¹⁷ (ibid.: 106).

As I was already involved in the collectives of the Red Dawns and the Afkors, I conducted all three group interviews with “real groups”, which means, that the people are also connected socially outside the interview setting (ibid.: 105). In the meetings I asked if they would be prepared to do an audio-recorded group discussion in one of the next meetings. Even though I was very welcome as a researcher in their group, I was nervous to ask them to do me this favor (FN 1.3.). I thought: Accepting me as a participant (and observer) is still different to being open to discuss for an hour, only for my master thesis. As they already knew about my general interest in queer-feminist activism, I only told them, that it will be about “identity”. In both the groups my proposal was accepted immediately and they saw it as a chance to discuss things they would discuss anyway, but had never taken the time to discuss (FN 16.3., FN 17.5.).

Shortly I would like to narrate about the process on the group discussions. The first two sessions took place in the *KUD Mreža*, the space, where the Red Dawns also usually have their meetings. I limited the size of the group to six people if possible, but most people in the

¹⁵ “Realgruppe”

¹⁶ “Mit “künstlich zusammengestellten Gruppen”“

¹⁷ “erzählgenerierender Ausgangsstimulus”

organizing team were interested in participating so we decided to carry out two discussions on two following Fridays. It happened to be the weeks directly after the Red Dawns festival, so before the first session, the meeting started with an evaluation and other finalizing issues for the festival. At the end, they gave the stage to me. A week after, it was similar, but I asked if it would be ok to do the group discussion at the beginning of the meeting, which they agreed to. At both sessions the language was English, not only because this would be easier for me, but also because people were taking part, whose mother tongue was not Slovene. I started with some initial words to make them feel comfortable. I assured them, that there was no right and wrong answer and that they should choose words and language that they felt comfortable with. I also told them that the discussion should be between them as a group, not involving me directly. Many times, when I was part of a meeting or a group discussion I myself had troubles to get a word in edgewise, especially if the discussion was intense. Because of this, I also offered my assistance to include people in the discussion if they gave me a hand sign.

As a next step, the discussion was opened by a set of questions from my side. I posed more or less following questions:

“What comes to your mind when I ask you about the collective of Red Dawns and the festival of the Red Dawns and the issue of identity? Do you think it’s an important topic in the collective and at the festival? Why? Why not? What identity? Is it woman, feminist, leftist, anarchist, queer, lesbian, gay, transgender, you name it... Do you think you as a collective and as a festival represent an identity deliberately or unconsciously? Who in your opinion is included and who is excluded to the festival and to the collective? Deliberately or unconsciously?”

The questions were intended to give the group a picture of my topics of interest and a vague frame of what the discussion should be about. By asking many questions at once, my aim was giving inspiration and stimulating a discussion based on identity in general, more than expecting direct answers to each of the questions. This plan worked out perfectly well at the first session. People started to talk to each other and I only posed my subsequent questions after more than 40 minutes. The group was continuously talking to each other, following the arguments of each other, agreeing or disagreeing with previous statements and in general having a very fluent discussion. In the second session, it was different. More volunteers were present, meaning that there were more people who were new to the collective. This part of the

group was less talkative about the topics I proposed, than the “older” members of Red Dawns collective. Soon it came to long brakes and subsequent questions from my side. To be honest, I did not expect this situation and did not prepare many more questions. This second session lasted for less than 40 minutes. In retrospect, I should have prepared questions, which would have touched the people of the group in a personal way, basic questions about personal involvement or experiences, especially as new members of the collective. Another possibility would have been to influence the division of the group more actively beforehand. I left to chance which people would appear at the discussions and who wanted to be part of it, but a balanced distribution of the volunteers to both sessions would maybe have prevented the bumpiness of the conversation in the second session. However, the second discussion was still interesting and I could catch many interesting opinions and statements about identity and identity politics.

Members of Afkors were part of my third group discussion. On the second official meeting I attended (also the second official meeting happening since the beginning of my fieldwork in Ljubljana), I posed the question, if they would be willing to do an audio-recorded group discussion. Immediately I explained to them how I imagined the process of the group discussion would be. Namely, I changed my concept from the last two discussions and wanted to try out something else. As I got closer and closer to the last third of my time in Ljubljana and as the structure of my thesis gained more and more shape, I had the feeling that I knew the people in the field, their knowledge and their opinions enough to present to them what I had at that point and what I wanted to write about. It was their chance then, to ask questions, to criticize me or to add anything, which was missing. Additionally, I had some questions prepared to stimulate a further discussion. There were six members of Afkors present and all of them were open to a group discussion. They were curious about my work and happy to touch topics they normally do not talk a lot about (FN 17.5.). We made a date for the next day, we would meet in Galerija Alkatraz, a gallery in Metelkova, where one of the activists was working, enabling her to also participate. Everyone who was there in the meeting the day before came, but one didn't feel well enough to participate. Another member of Afkors came to discuss with us, she is also part of the Red Dawns, which makes things even more interesting. My role in this discussion was different to my role in the first two discussions. On the one hand I felt like a debater myself, and on the other hand I felt more vulnerable, because I talked about my master thesis very openly, which could have offered a good basis to be criticized strongly. The discussion lasted about an hour, the topics were widespread and the

atmosphere was friendly. After this third group discussion, I felt very happy, due to two reasons: Firstly, during the group discussion, I hardly noticed an opinion, a statement, a fact, I did not know about yet, which means that I have a kind of a data saturation and reached more or less the end of data collection. Secondly, even though I told Afkors people during the discussion, how I will write about them and the Red Dawns as queer-feminist collectives, every person present accepted everything I stated about the groups, their strategies and their politics, without even batting an eye. This meant a lot to me, because after this discussion I felt total approval from the group regarding what I was doing there (FN 17.5.). What more can a researcher hope for?

From the beginning, I did not rule out conducting single interviews. One of my first methods in the field was even a single interview, which I later didn't use, because of the specialization of my topic. Later on, the idea of "normal", 1:1 interviews stayed in my mind, but in a way, I could not decide to ask one person for an interview if I could include them in a group interview together with many other voices. I could not have decided whom to ask for a 1:1 interview, because every person had interesting things to say and I could not have done 25 interviews. I realized with time, that I had a position in these groups, in which I could ask informal questions individually during participation, and so it came, that in the end I thought I had enough data without individual interviews.

Data analysis

The process of analyzing my empirical data was a constant back and forth, not at all a linear process. What helped me a lot in the first place was rereading, transcribing and clustering my data material conducted through participation and observation. I was illustrating, organizing and arranging the data in a tabula, as for example Angrosino suggests (Angrosino 2007: 71). In this tabula I was coding in parallel the data, making classifications or categorizations (ibid.: 70). I also graded the data into the essential information from groups, events and spaces.

As soon as I conducted my first group discussion, I clustered it by existing codes and made necessary adaptations to these categories. This process enabled me to get an overview of already existing answers to my questions and aspects, which were still missing, to be found out in the following interviews. Particularly in my third interview with the Afkors collective, I asked specific and purposeful questions after the main strand of discussion. After the third

group discussion, I re-wrote the essential statements, organizing them according to their thematic category. DeWalt & DeWalt's description of a process of data analysis seems to fit my case. They say, analysis is "a process of reviewing, summarizing, cross-checking, looking for patterns, and drawing conclusions" (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011: 179)

Three strategies helped my process of data analysis. First in this context, it was very important to organize my data right from the first moment of being in the field and gathering data. This helped me to keep a clear view and to not get lost in the jungle of data. Secondly, I think I was able to restrict my topic, the field of research and the possibilities of data collection to such an extent, that I was never overwhelmed, at least not by an abundance of data. The third aspect, supporting my analysis was the possibility to restructure my thoughts through informal conversations with friends inside and outside of the field.

Theoretical grounding

In the following part of my master thesis I will look at how identity is perceived in social science, how identity politics and fixed categories have been criticized in the feminist academia in the last thirty years and how anthropology and other fields are still struggling with these connected questions. Subsequently I will have a look at the theory of intersectionality, a theory which was and is very important for feminist anthropology but was not yet able to incorporate the critiques from queer theory. In the end I will propose an anti-categorical intersectional approach, to highlight not only the simultaneity of different oppressions but also to not stipulate the categories on which these oppressions are based on again and again.

The theoretical literature I read and include presents a colorful mixture of Slovene, German, US-American and literature of other origins. Reasons for this are, for example, that in my home libraries in Vienna, German literature and thus German discourse are of course more present. The high percentage of English, respectively US-American literature, is mostly because these discourses and authors are generally very present in academia, which of course can be criticised.

On identity and identity categories

In the last twenty to thirty years there has been much discussion and writing on identity (Hall 2000), where it was extremely popular in both political contexts and in academic debates (Hark 1999: 9). Identity as such is a very broad and complex issue. Of course, in some way every subject has an identity, but as with so many other things, it cannot be described objectively because of the inevitable disparity between the inside and the outside view on the one hand, and because of the inability to catch the whole range of different aspects of identity which would have to be included. In the following passages, I will elaborate some views on and approaches to the notion of identity and further of identity categories.

Firstly, I want to present a fitting differentiation of identity, made by the gender theorist Mary Hawkesworth:

“It should be noted that ‘identity’ can also mean markedly different things. It can mean a psychological sense of ‘who I am’, a sociological notion of a person qua agent prior to assuming specific social roles, a Foucauldian concept that captures an array of regulatory practices that produce the internal coherence of the subject, a philosophical concern with the individuation and unity of a person in the face of change, or a narrative construction the individual develops to make sense of his or her life.” (Hawkesworth 1997: 656)

This quotation shows some forms of usage of the concept of identity. The first and the last example refer to the image of oneself and the identification of others, in other words constructing a concept of identity for yourself and others. The other examples refer to academic approaches to the notion of identity. Social sciences, and among these anthropology, for a long time have conceived identity as unitary and coherent (cf. Luhrmann 2001). T.M. Luhrmann points out, that identity is “[...] no longer perceived as a match between inner experience and outer acknowledgment, but as a kind of mastery of multiple narratives of self-presentation” (Luhrmann 2001: 532). Sabine Hark¹⁸ describes identities as effects of complex narratives, with which individuals and collectives situate themselves

¹⁸ Hark prefers to be written about without a pronoun (email conversation 9.10.2018).

politically, historically and culturally (Hark 1999: 65). These “multiple narratives” of identity can be “individual or collective narratives that answer the question ‘who am/are I/we’” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 197), as Nira Yuval-Davis asserts. So, the answer to the question of who somebody is, which identity the person has is influenced by narratives of oneself and narratives about other people or groups. This could also be described by the notion of discourse. Because the description or definition of somebody’s identity depends on discourse, there is no such thing as a homogenous and objective identity, as also Stuart Hall points out:

“[...] identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. [...] identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse [...]” (Hall 2000: 17)

Several scholars also draw attention to the fact that nobody has only one identity, but several subjectivities, multiple identifications that can vary by situation, location and context. Sometimes one aspect of a person’s identity is more important or stronger than other aspects. And these defining aspects of identity and subjectivity can also change any time (a.o. Narayan 1993: 676, Hvala interviewed by Chidgey 2010: online). As I noticed clearly, some activists from the queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana were totally aware of the changeability of their identifications as can be seen in the following quotation from a member of the Red Dawns collective:

“I think it is very possible, I will find myself in an atmosphere or in a crowd of people where everybody is going to say: I am a feminist and I am going to say: I am not! If you are a feminist - I am not! And the same I would say for being for example gay. There is a situation in my life where I would say I am gay and there is a situation where I would say: I am not gay.” (GD 1)

The quoted activist addresses another very important aspect of identity. When they¹⁹ say, that they do not define as a feminist because a group of certain people consider themselves feminists, they remind us, that identity is often based on the aim to connect to or differentiate

¹⁹ I am using “they” as a gender neutral pronoun for non-binary activist.

from somebody else or a group of people. Degele and Winker accentuate the differentiation as the basis for identity; people choose categories of differentiation to establish borders. Following this notion, a person defining herself as a mother or a German, it is delineating themselves from non-mothers and non-Germans. This delineation doesn't have to be a conscious one. Still, every category of identification excludes a certain "Other" (Degele & Winker interviewed by Langreiter & Timm 2011, 68).

Thus, it can be said that identity is not a unitary concept, it constitutes itself permanently in a new way, regarding the people to be differentiated from, the discourse and the situation. Identity goes hand in hand with descriptive categories. Without categories, identification seems to be an abstract theoretical frame with no substance. Identity categories are linguistic and social classifications, which seem to give the social world a structure to hold on to, to put oneself and others in a cluster. Philosophical anthropologist Neil Roughley differentiates between identification (Identifikation) and self-image (Selbstverständnis) and states, that with both concepts we are asking for an ascription of predicates, but these predicates are not the identity as such, they are only an abstract of it (Roughley 1996: 247). In other words, to describe who or how people are, we need descriptive words, with which some people can identify, and some cannot. Rather than talking about "ascription of predicates", as Roughley states, feminist scholars mostly refer to "subject positions" or "identity categories". As with identity itself we face the same problematics trying to use concepts as identity categories. Categories such as, for example, "woman" or "gay", tend to construct binaries, normativities and reproduce essentialisms, as for example Judith Butler suggests:

"Identity categories have never only a descriptive, but always a normative and exclusionary character as well" (Butler 1994: 49, my translation²⁰)

Nira Yuval-Davis uses very similar words including the aspect of power or hierarchy through alluding to the access to resources:

²⁰ „Identitätskategorien haben niemals nur einen deskriptiven, sondern immer auch einen normativen und damit ausschließenden Charakter“.

“Categorical attributes are often used for the construction of inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries that differentiate between self and other, determining what is ‘normal’ and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not.” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199)

All these quotations suggest that categories do not only group the world into parts, but into more privileged and more marginalized parts. Thus we can say that identity categories do produce political realities. If we stick to binaries such as man/woman, black/white etc., we reproduce the hierarchies behind those categories. Hark sees the problem of identity in the fact that the attention lies on the question of “who or what I am” or “who or what we are” and not on the processes and stabilization of identity (Hark 1999: 16). Sabine Hark also suggests that only if we question the unity and homogeneity of subject positions, are we able to theorize the multiplicity of the conditions of subordination (Hark 1999: 173). For a patriarchal, imperialist and capitalist society the maintenance of identity categories is very important. That is exactly why we as feminist and queer scholars and activists have to look behind the curtain and ask ourselves not only how can we fight a specific discrimination but even how the basis of identity categories can be destabilized.

Even though we are aware of the relativity and dependency of a situation and the essentialization of identity categories, in anthropology, as well as in political activism, it is still very common to talk and write about identity categories, because it fits our knowledge, our experience or our identification. But firstly, it is not noted that all the people who are addressed find themselves represented in these categories. Secondly, we risk reproducing essentialist and stereotypical pictures of identity categories. In keeping with this, I would like to quote from the lyrics of a performance from the Red Dawns festival. The title of the performance was “what are words doing?” and it included, besides other aspects, moving people in a red-lighted room, behind open windows in the first floor. Visitors watched from outside the building and listened to a text, coming from the speakers. The author and main performer was Qëndresë Deda, an artist from Kosovo, studying in Ljubljana.

“You are this, you are that, you are...Come on, you have no idea what is going on my mind. We are not our bodies and not our minds, at least am not identified with it!” (Qëndresë Deda, 2018, text of the performance “what are words doing”, personal archive)

In this performance Qëndresë Deda is abstractly criticizing quick ascriptive assumptions that people make about other people, without knowing what the person thinks or how the person would identify themselves.

In the next part of this work, I will focus on the usage of identity categories, such as “woman” in feminist anthropology, and its pros and cons. Before switching to the next chapter, I will throw in a quotation about identity, which I find very inspiring because of its radicality and kind of queerness:

“An additional argument against identity has to be named in the margin: Identity, the constant to-be-as-yourself, has the side effect to arrange for the complete calculability of a subject and thereby in no way only cause universal boredom, but to be smoothly applicable considering a controlling, assessing power.” (Schmid: 1996, p.370f., my translation²¹)

The identity category „woman“

Thoughts and critiques of the category of „woman“, as a central subject of both the social sciences, feminist anthropology and feminist emancipatory movements, have been increasing for many decades now. Much has been said about the topic, but still feminist scholars have not found a common way to deal with this question. My aim in this passage is to present different voices from the last few decades that have engaged in the complications regarding the identity category of “woman” and the category of gender as such.

The question about the subject of “woman” is always one about representation, who is meant to be included by a category, what images and maybe prejudices lie behind an invocation, who is been excluded by the simplicity of “woman” being the opposite of “man”. One of the most essential moments in the history of the critique of an essentialist usage of the category

²¹ „Ein weiteres Argument gegen die Identität ist nur am Rande zu nennen: Die Identität, das ständige Sich-selbst-gleich-sein, hat es im Nebeneffekt an sich, für die vollständige Ausrechenbarkeit eines Subjekts zu sorgen und damit keineswegs nur universelle Langeweile zu verursachen, sondern problemlos einsetzbar zu sein unter Gesichtspunkten einer beherrschenden, berechnenden Macht.“

came from *Black feminists* in the US in the 70s and 80s. To not only repeat this fact, without specifying who these *Black feminists* could be, as so many scholars do, I would like to provide an example. In the late 70s, the Combahee River Collective presented a manifesto, explaining their experience as a US-American Black feminist group, elaborating their critiques of white mainstream feminism. Very personally and clearly they highlighted, that there is no such thing as a singular feminism, because Black women fight against very different discriminations than white women. They saw it as necessary to establish a critical identity politics which struggles against sexism and racism, heterosexism and class oppression at the same time. (Combahee River Collective 1987 (1977)). This and other statements from other *Black feminists* made clear that talking about “women” was not as easy as thought by mainstream white feminists, because of a variety of different experiences and meanings of being a woman. Referring to “women” as a consistent social group masks differences within this category, which are entangled within relations of power and hierarchies (Kerner 2005: 217, Habinger & Zuckerhut 2005: 65). What followed in the next decades was a variety of debates and crises in anthropology and other similar fields. This can be described as a “crisis of representation”, a “crisis of categories” or the “debate on equality and difference” and was influenced by feminist theories using poststructuralist and deconstructionist approaches. One of the main goals of feminist poststructuralism is to critique the category of “woman“ as such.

“With an insistent indication of the heterogeneity of women, the collectively imagined feminist category “woman“ is challenged and the presentation of women as a unity criticized.” (Raab/ Schwarzer/Wagels/Wirtz 2001: 98, my translation²²)

All of this ended up in a critical flow, subsumed under the term postmodernism. By challenging all sorts of assumed knowledge, postmodernists are considered to be the main critics of essentialism (Mouffe 1995: 315).

What bothers all these feminist theorists from the last thirty years about the uncritical use of the category “woman” is basically still the same as the critique that was made by the Combahee River Collective in the 70s. “Woman” suggests a certain homogeneity within the

²² „Mit dem nachdrücklichen Hinweis auf die Heterogenität von Frauen wird die kollektiv gedachte feministische Kategorie “Frau” angezweifelt und die Darstellung von Frauen als Einheit kritisiert.“

category; it ascribes it an essence, lying beneath the term; an essence of maybe the same experience, the same behavior, and the same roles that are opposed to being a “man”. Generalizations of the notion of “woman” depend on “essentialized conceptualizations, masking the complexity subsumed within the category” (Lewin & Silverstein 2016: 15). The fact that certain feminist scholars assured the scientific community repeatedly, that there is no such thing as a collective female identity, did not stop many theorists from reproducing generalizations. As we learned, language is an essential part of discourse formation, so naming categories as “women” and “men”, but also “lesbian” and “gay” or “black” and “white” constantly produce and reproduce binaries, dichotomies and imagined identities. Hark says that in this context, the practices of appellation²³, in a quite literal sense produce men, women, sexuality and gender in the first place (Hark 2001: 354).

The consequence of these insights is that it leads feminist scholars to the question of how we can deal with this dilemma of wanting to highlight and research oppressions based on intersubjective notions of gender, race, class and others from a feminist perspective without reproducing essentialisms and hierarchical dichotomies. If all subject positions are socially constructed by discourse, how can we deal with categorical notions in theory and research? Hark even asks provocatively, what right of existence does feminist theory have, if gender and “woman” are not useful categories any more (Hark 2001: 357)? If gender categories should be relativized and deconstructed, what then is the basis for feminist theory? Besides feminist theory, scholars and activists also question the continuing legitimacy of feminist politics and question if feminist politics should have a collective identity as a basis. As an example, the feminist anthropologist Henrietta L. Moore expresses her concerns quite directly: „What is the basis for feminist politics if women are no longer a group?” (Moore 2006: 28). Chantal Mouffe reformulates the fears of many feminists as follows:

“It is often said that the deconstruction of essential identities, which is the result of acknowledging the contingency and ambiguity of every identity, renders feminist political action impossible. Many feminists believe that, without seeing women as a coherent identity, we cannot ground the possibility of a feminist political movement in which women could unite as women in order to formulate and pursue specific feminist aims.” (Mouffe 1995: 317)

²³ “Bezeichnungspraxen”

Mouffe herself sees the deconstruction of certain categories as a necessary condition²⁴. Delia Schindler also retraces the apprehensions of opponents of the postmodern deconstruction when she says that it has been argued that feminism would lose its political subject, if there were no longer a solid category of “woman” - in dissociation from “man” - on which women’s solidarity could be based on in the battle for emancipation; feminism would get into crisis of legitimacy, and relations of power and control would be obscured (Schindler 2005: 108).

One of the most important theorists in this context was of course Judith Butler (a.o. Young 2005: 14). She destabilized the distinction between *sex* and *gender*, not only through the social construction of gender, but also by asserting that biological sex is constructed through discourse (cf. Butler 1999). She also criticized feminist movements for holding on to an illusory subject called “woman” (Butler 1991: 181). Butler provoked a series of discussions and different scientific practices, which were seen with fear by the critics of deconstruction. Her interventions were perceived as depoliticizing theories (Lorey 2011: 106f.) As a very vivid discussion in this context I recommend the argumentations of Benhabib, Fraser and Butler (1994). In some parts of the book Nancy Fraser acts as a mediator and tries to highlight the importance of different approaches. She says that feminism needs the deconstructive critique, which means liberation of identity as such because identity is automatically something repressive (Fraser 1994: 75). She argues that the significance of deconstruction doesn’t exclude reconstruction. By reconstruction in this case she describes, as I understand it, the possibility of collective identification by utopian hope and mystification (ibid.: 76). Collective identities can enable subversive agency even while being discursively constructed and complex (ibid.: 76f.)

The supporters of deconstructive approaches, such as Isabell Lorey, emphasize that these theoretic developments do not mean to completely erase all categories and groupings and focus only on individuality. The aim is tough to focus on perspectives of conflicts and struggles, and within these, categorizations can be examined critically and production and reproduction of power relations and the adequacy or inadequacy of certain categories can be

²⁴ cf. Spivak 2005 on the usability and political potentials of deconstruction.

determined (Lorey 2011: 102). In other words, it means that in theory and research feminist scholars should not generally and without prior reflection use identity categories, such as “woman”, because it is a term with no clear meaning and scholars run the risk of reproducing stereotypes and dichotomies. The challenge of feminist scholars is, if using a term like “woman”, to deconstruct a female subject at the same time. The destabilization of the category “woman” in the moment of invocation is described by Sabine Hark as a “theoretical and political significant Paradox” (Hark 2001: 362, my translation²⁵).

The insights about the essentialization of certain identity categories in theory and practice made by *Black feminists*, deconstructivist postmodernists and queer theorists made it possible to perceive identity categories as relational and socially constructed. Through a focus on power relations we can attempt to decode specific discourses surrounding identity, as described by Lewin & Silverstein or Iris Young:

“The shift from assuming that “woman” is a singular unified category of study, [...] to a framework of gender as relational, revised our inquiry to underscore questions of agency, power, and identity.” (Lewin & Silverstein 2016: 15)

„By destabilizing categories of both biological sex and gender identity, recent deconstructive approaches to feminist and queer theorizing have opened greater possibilities for thinking a plurality of intersecting identities and practices.” (Young 2005: 12)

This means that before we start to research empirically, we should be aware of the possibility that “woman” may mean something very different in the field or is not even important as a category. Hierarchies and oppressions of gender and sexuality are based on stereotypes, which we as scholars must not reproduce. In the next passage, I will continue to discuss struggles based on subject positions, but on a more general level. These struggles and the anthropological and other academic approaches to them I will term “identity politics”.

²⁵ „[...] theoretischen wie politisch bedeutsamen Paradox [...].“

Identity politics

In the past chapter I talked about the category of “women”, which is still mostly thought to be the general subject of feminism. As many other social movements focus on certain oppressed and marginalized subjects, I will talk briefly about such politics, which generally can be described by “identity politics”. But before I begin, let me stress that it is not often easy to draw a border between theory and practice. How can I argue about identity politics, and not only refer to actual politics of social movements, but also include academic theorizing about these movements and anthropologic language describing an ethnographic field? Where does feminism end and feminist theory start? Or where does queer theory end and where does queer politics start? When feminist scholars write about identity politics, what is their definition of politics? Do they refer to all kinds of appellations of a certain identity, in an academic, social or state political context or do they restrict this term to groups longing for social change as feminist groups, gay and lesbian groups, etc.? I found these questions unanswered after reading literature from the social sciences that dealt with identity politics. In my opinion, the inconsiderate use of simplified identity categories in anthropological research and analysis should also be included in this context, in other words: a feminist pamphlet of an anthropologist can be described as as political as an ethnography of lesbianism in Indonesia on the one hand or a demonstration for the rights of women on the other hand. I hope that I have clarified that my definition of “identity politics” is a broad one. The anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann describes identity politics as follows:

“Identity politics takes this central relationship between a dominant group and a subordinate group, an us and a them, and makes theories out of the attempts to change it” (Luhrmann 2001:354).

Because of this very general definition, and the possibility to include all kinds of “attempts” and “theories”, I find it a good definition to work with.

One important theorist in this context is again the sociologist Sabine Hark. In Hark`s book: “deviante Subjekte: Die paradoxe Politik der Identität“ (1999) the identity politics of lesbian groups in Germany are criticized. As I see it, this work could also be considered anthropological. The author states that whilst theoretically there may be agreement that identities cannot be considered coherent or complete, for political practice it appears

imperative that essential identities and their interests exist and are represented in the political field. In this identity politics “the exclusionary effects of representation are ignored” (Hark 1999: 21, my translation²⁶). As I have established regarding the complexity of identity and identity categories themselves, the aim of identity politics to represent a certain “identity” should be looked on with suspicion. Who exactly should be represented in fights for “women”, “gays”, “blacks”, “Sinti and Roma”, and who shouldn’t, is an important question in this context. So, for example being a “lesbian” is becoming a “normative ideal”, which itself excludes those who do not fulfill the requirements and thus the same patterns are reproduced than the one it is fought against (Hark 1999: 28).

“‘In the name’ of identity social and cultural borders are drawn, rights are demanded and refused, social norms and practices are formulated, in short: it’s acted politically. In doing so, with a matter of course it is talked about national, cultural, ethnical, gender or sexual identity, as if it has always been clear, who or what it is about [...]” (Hark 1999: 9, my translation²⁷)

Hark also stresses that, “[...] identity is not the expression of a pre-discursive essence or of a substance that is in a way readily on hand [...]” (Hark 1999: 31, my translation²⁸). Identity is always only momentary, which means that the fundamental exclusions lying behind identity categories, on which the identity politics is based on, should be analyzed (Hark 2017:51). Sabine Hark draws on the arguments of important feminist scholars such as Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler (Hark 1999, Hark 2017), making it very clear, that identity politics and the related subjects do more harm than good. Also Phelan is unambiguously in her words when she says that:

“Doing a better identity politics does not mean finding the best definition of our identities so as to eliminate problems of membership and goals, but means continual shuffling between the need for categories and the recognition of their incompleteness.” (Phelan 1995: 351)

²⁶ „[...] werden die ausschließenden Effekte von Repräsentation ignoriert [...].“

²⁷ „‘Im Namen’ von Identität werden soziale und kulturelle Grenzen gezogen, werden Rechte gefordert und verweigert, soziale Normen und Praktiken formuliert, kurzum: Es wird politisch gehandelt. Dabei ist oft genug mit einer Selbstverständlichkeit von nationalen, kulturellen, ethischen, geschlechtlichen oder sexuellen Identitäten die Rede, als sei immer schon klar um was oder wen es sich dabei jeweils handelt [...].“

²⁸ „[...] Identität ist nicht der Ausdruck eines prädiskursiven Wesens oder einer Substanz, die gewissermaßen fertig vorliegt [...].“

As we know, these debates have been continuing for some decades, including doubting the legitimacy of feminism itself. In the next quotation from a written conversation between two feminist scholars, it is not only clear that feminist activism and theory should not be abandoned, but also, that we have to admit that we didn't come very far in answering the question posed:

“This is not to say that I think ‘we’ should give up on feminism, or its institutionalization as a project for cultural and social change. But it does mean that the moment of a certain jubilation about ‘identity politics’ has passed. Where we are to go *from here*, and *in what language*, however, is a lot less clear.” (Kamuf & Miller 1990: 124)

By touching the issue of identity politics shortly, I wanted to open up the platform to two approaches in social sciences to deconstruct or intersect identity categories. Until now, I have deliberately left out strategies that answer the question of how we can be political and how we can research people without reproducing heteronormativity and binaries. What can be the organizing principle of feminist groups if not identity and can anthropological researchers and theorists deal with these difficulties. In the next two chapters, I will hint at the possible answers to this, though I will save the main analysis for the very last chapter.

The two approaches, which can be used to respond to the essentialist use of identity categories that I will present in the following chapters are the theory of intersectionality and queer theory. Both theories were borne from activism itself, in the streets rather than within the academic ivory tower. Still they developed in very different contexts and criticize universalism and essentialism from different angles. Briefly, I will present the politics and theories surrounding these two approaches, before comparing them and looking at a potential fruitful combination of intersectionality and queer.

Theory of intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality refers to the fact, that every individual, every subject is influenced by different axes of identities within the subject itself. As a very simple and classical example: A woman is not only a woman, but a heterosexual, white, Jewish woman or a pansexual, Asian woman. The theory of intersectionality highlights, that the way in

which a person is marginalized, discriminated or even privileged, has not only to do with one of these axes, but the intersection of all of them. An intersectional analysis then is a mode of empirical research focusing not only on one category, but in the convergence of different subject positions.

Intersectionality has a long history in Black feminist thought, for example in the works and lives of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ella Baker, to name a few, but the term came to be coined and theorized about more explicitly by Black feminists in the 70s and 80s, who criticised the feminism of white middle-class women by claiming to face different problems. They stressed that not all women are oppressed in the same way and therefore feminists cannot talk about “the women”. As noted previously, many feminist scholars do not go in detail, when talking about this topic. Without further explaining many, theorists, especially white theorists, talk about *Black feminists* without naming important personalities or examples. As an uncommon positive example in this context an article of Ina Kerner could be mentioned, in which she starts by retelling the story of Hazel Carby and explaining her Black feminist criticisms from the 80s, which anticipated many positions of the postcolonial critics in academia in the following decades (Kerner 2005: 217).

One of the most important theorists who contributed to the initial development of intersectional theory in the 90s was Kimberlé Crenshaw, a US-American legal scholar. She was the founder and leader of the intellectual movement of *Critical Race Theory* (Hochreiter 2011: 51). Crenshaw noticed, that the special experiences and discriminations of Black women could not be described solely by sexism on the one side or racism on the other. She also determined that anti-discrimination laws in the US were designed in favor of Black men or white women, leaving out the experiences of Black women (Walgenbach 2007: 48). To be Black and a woman means therefore to face a special kind of oppression, and not simply two additive discriminations. In this case, gender and race are the two subject positions, which intersect. Intersectionality as an instrument for analysis therefore tries to capture the social complexity of inequalities.

In the critical debates around intersectionality some important questions arise. An important discussion is the question of what categories or subject positions should be included in a theory or analysis of intersectionality. Most theorists reiterate the triad of race, class and gender. Susanne Hochreiter explains in her article “Race, Class, Gender? Intersectionality

Troubles” (2011) how much the academic opinions on this issue defer. Some scholars insist on the classical triad, because these categories are “historically and culturally dominant” (ibid.: 52). Others mention many more categories to be included, for example sexuality, ability or religion. In my opinion this is a very difficult debate, because depending on the group or the situation, other facts as age, appearance and social competence can be very important factors, but where to draw the line? Does it make sense to create an endless list of differences being aware of the impossibility to include everything into our (anthropological) analysis? Hochreiter articulates the central problem of this listing:

“The key problem of all these names and concepts is the question of what kind of difference is acknowledged and re/constructed as a category and which differences keep being unnamed.” (Hochreiter 2011: 52)

Most scholars take a middle ground and enumerate race, class and gender and adding a dissatisfying *etc.* to it. I like Katharina Walgenbachs implicit critique, stressing that all categories not mentioned are reduced to an *et_cet_era* (Walgenbach 2013: 272). With this queer mode of writing, she alludes to the blank spaces, respectively excluded subject positions (ibid.: 272f.).

The second issue, I want to mention is the uncertainty of what exactly “gender”, “race”, “class”, “*et_cet_era*” in their intersections or interdependencies are. Many different descriptions can be read in the literature. Walgenbach states, that it is not clear, what is intersecting, whether it is categories, axes, relations, or identities (Walgenbach 2007: 61). Other scholars such as Nira Yuval-Davis are talking about axes or lines of difference or social divisions (Yuval-Davis 2006). Tove Soiland in her critical pamphlet about intersectionality uses the expression “positions of inequality”²⁹ (Soiland 2008: online). Patricia Hill Collins also reflects on the description of the main categories of intersectionality. She criticizes the constant use of the concept of power, also within intersectional discourse, but these “abstract references to power [...] neglect how political domination operates” (Collins 2017: 1465). This is why she suggests describing “race, class and gender” as “intersecting oppressions”

²⁹ „Ungleichheitslagen“

rather than “intersecting systems of power” (ibid.). On the other hand, there are also positive sides to the uncertainty of what “race, class, gender, etc.” should be called. Walgenbach, Dietze, Hornscheidt and Palm see it as a potential, that intersectionality does not say what exactly is intersecting. Like this, it stays open for interpretation and can be used in a flexible way (Walgenbach/Dietze/Hornscheidt/Palm 2007: 9). Kathy Davis as well describes intersectionality as a very vague and open concept, but thinks that this is also a reason for the “spectacular success” of the approach (Davis 2013: 60³⁰). Even if the critiques of universalism and the display of differences within categories, such as “women” existed before Crenshaw’s visualization of the intersection of axes of differences, it broaches these central problems of feminist science in a very special way (Davis 2013: 62). With these critiques, “intersectionality fits with the disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas” (Brah & Pheonix 2004: 82). By questioning the possibility of postulating the homogeneity of any group, the theory of intersectionality is an important part of the very dominant critique of identity politics (Soiland 2008: online). Isabell Lorey links intersectionality to deconstructivist theories and to Judith Butler, by arguing that the pluralization of basic categories, as proposed by intersectionality, is already showing the ambiguity of one single basic identity category (Lorey 2011: 108).

Queer theory

The concept and development of queer is maybe even more complex than that of intersectionality. Again, we are dealing with a concept of US-American origin, developed outside of the academic context (Hark 2017: 25). „Queer” used to be a derogative word for gays and lesbians in the US. In the 90s, members of the gay and lesbian movement adopted the term to protest against the assimilationist politics within the movement. Social perceptions of the normativity of gender and sexual identities were criticized. Very quickly “queer” developed as a critical approach and theory to oppose heteronormativity and gender binaries, in other words; critics were and are criticizing the assumption of two static, opposed genders (or sexes) and the automatic image of these genders as connected through love, desire and

³⁰ „[S]pektakuläre[r] Erfolg[_]“.

“natural” reproduction. The queer approach considers any identity to be socially constructed through discourse and not naturally given. The aim is to both multiply gender and sexual identities and destabilize them. In other words, to create non-identities, or dis-identities. Queer methods should make genders and identities un-clear³¹ and fluid. Queer can be seen as an umbrella term for all people who are against fixed identities and the politics connected to it. Political alliances in queer groups or spaces try to establish individual freedom and performative expression beyond hierarchies of differences. Its theoretical politics are based on inclusivity, open to all genders, sexual orientations and anti-identities.

The institutionalization or academization of queer as “queer theory” or “queer studies” occurred quickly and intensely. According to the anthropologist Margot Weiss, the founding of Queer Theory begins with Gayle Rubin’s 1984 article “Thinking Sex” (Weiss 2016: 169). The first person to actually use the term “queer theory” in academic writing was Teresa de Lauretis in 1991 (Weiss 2016: 173). Probably the most famous and mostly cited author of queer theory is still Judith Butler. In an encyclopaedia article about queer anthropology, Cymene Howe describes the early developments of queer theory as follows:

“The ‘queer turn’ of the early 1990s in the humanities and social sciences was an auspicious intellectual shift for queer anthropology. Inspired in great part by Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* and soon after, among others, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, Michael Warner’s *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on race, nation, and sexuality and Gayle Rubin’s [...] analyses of sex/gender systems, the development of queer theory was a rather epochal event.” (Howe 2015: 754)

One of the most important queer theorists in the German language zone is Antke Engel. Engel stresses, that the queer focus lays on the “problematization of hegemonic conditions”³² as “heteronormativity, phallocentrism, racism, eurocentrism and last but not least, capitalistic exploitation”³³ and is in strict opposition to identity politics, which often produces and

³¹ „VerUneindeutigung“, cf. Engel 2005

³² „[...] die Problematisierung hegemonialer Verhältnisse [...]“

³³ „[...] Heteronormativität und Phallogentrismus, Rassismus und Eurozentrismus und nicht zuletzt [...] kapitalistische Ausbeutung [...]“

reproduces a stigmatized marking of minorities or marginalized groups of people (Engel 2005: 264).

Most scholars agree on the fact that queer is a political stance, as well as an academic epistemology, and not simply an identity. It is not just a fresh term for a new identity or an umbrella term for non-binary genders, gays, lesbians, transgender people, and intersexual people, because queer is “profoundly anti-identitarian” (Weiss 2016: 172). Still, many social scholars write about *being queer*, as if queer studies were only a new term for gay and lesbian studies. Of course, I could list endless examples of authors, who do so, but as this is not my focus here, I only want to give one small, but significant example. In Cymene Howe’s article on “queer anthropology”, which seems to be representative of as an encyclopaedic article, the queer critiques of identity and identity categories are left out. First, the author gives a liberal and not very critical definition of queer anthropology:

“Queer anthropology can be broadly defined as the effort to examine social systems, practices, and symbolic resources that emerge in contexts of sexual difference from the (presumed) norms of heterosexuality and gender ascription.” (Howe 2015: 752)

Howe continues with a description of the history of anthropological ethnographies of gay and lesbian issues and phenomena throughout the world, queer anthropology being the subsequent replacement for those ethnographies. She sees queer as a “sexually inflected term of identity” (ibid.: 753) and as a term describing all not conformable genders and sexualities: “As a capacious umbrella category of belonging, queerness became a designation for many ‘alternative’ configurations of sexuality, gender, and desire” (ibid.: 754).

Even if queer theory is not only about sexuality, and if I am always critical if scholars limit their paper only on queer in the sense of deviant sexuality, I have to admit that the issue of sexuality itself is not an unimportant one in this matter. I want to give an example. Without being always clear about her definition of sexuality, Heike Raab still manages to highlight the important notions for queer theory regarding the issue of sexuality. She depicts the important

role of queer theory in the examination of heteronormativity, being powerful and connected to many basic social and cultural concepts (Raab 2005). Approaches from queer theory not only have strategies to radically de-naturalize³⁴ sexuality *and* gender, but also to analyze the discursive production and the social interplay of sexuality and gender (Raab/Schwarzer/Wagels/Wirtz 2001: 98f.). As such, homosexuality for example is paradoxically an important topic for queer theory on the one side, because it subverts heteronormativity by its existence, on the other side though, homosexuality and queer are contradictory to each other, because homosexuality presupposes the existence of a fixed gender identity.

Searching for literature about queer anthropology, I found a very interesting debate from 2016, when a roundtable discussion about queer anthropology took place. Members of the European Network of Queer Anthropology, a 2013 founded subgroup of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, gathered to talk about the potentials and difficulties of combining anthropology with queer epistemologies (Graham 2016). The very honest and open discussion of the participants showed the uncertainties about the role and the definition of queer anthropology within anthropology and within queer studies. A big focus during the roundtable discussion was anthropological ethnography. It was emphasised that categories and the importance of categories can vary in different contexts, and that the researcher cannot assume that every concept and category can be transposed to every context. This is a unifying fact of anthropology and queer theory (ibid.: 365). Another participant said, that one of the things that anthropological and queer research practices and methodologies have in common, is their ability to challenge binaries (ibid.: 366). So, conceptual categories of gender and sexuality can have very different meanings in our research field than they do in Western academia (ibid.).

By referring to the discussion above, I want to summarize that queer anthropology does not want to establish a new discipline of anthropology or queer studies, nor does it want to be just another term for gay and lesbian anthropology. The aim is an anthropological theory and an ethnographical research of any kind that is critical of universalist language, reproducing

³⁴ „die Strategie einer radikalen Entnaturalisierung“ (Raab/Schwarzer/Wagels/Wirtz 2001: 99).

stereotypes and power relations. Ending with my short description of queer politics, queer theory and queer anthropology, I would like to add my favorite quotation from Judith Butler, subversively stressing the potentials of a queer way of living, acting, writing, fighting or researching:

“The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: ‘man’ and ‘woman.’” (Butler 1999: 98)

Queer intersectionality

As a next step in my theoretical discussion I would like to show, that for fruitful anthropological empirical research and theoretical discussion we need both the queer and the intersectional approach. We must try to articulate the complexities of lives by considering intersecting power relations, but at the same time, hegemonic identity categories shouldn't be reproduced in the field, nor in the analysis, but constantly questioned and destabilized. Because both, intersectionality and queer theory are important inputs, I will explain, why I find McCalls' anti-categorical intersectional approach the most applicable one. In the following passages, I will finally compare the two approaches and illustrate some academic discussions on a possible combination of both approaches.

Nira Yuval-Davis calls the deconstructivist project of postmodern feminist theory (queer) and the analysis of the interplay of the categories race, class and gender (intersectionality) two of the most important trends of the current feminist debates (Davis 2013: 63). Even if both approaches have many notions in common, such as their focus on difference and diversity, they nevertheless diverge on some essential points, such as their approach to identity categories, which leads to critiques of intersectionality from deconstructivist theorists on the one hand, and to suggestions for a productive cooperation of both approaches on the other hand. I want to trace both the critiques and the suggestions in this chapter.

For a comparison I would like to include Heike Raab's analysis, in which she lists three main critiques of queer theory towards identity politics and identity categories (Raab 2005: 247).

After describing the three points, I will consider which of the points can also be seen as a critique from theorists working with an intersectional approach.

1. Feminist identity categories as “woman” or “lesbian” are based on the exclusion of plurality and difference.
2. The focus of social movements should be to politicize the norms and practices, which produce, reproduce and stabilize the identity, and not the imagined collective identity.
3. To operate in the name of a certain identity bears the risk to automatically regulate and control the identity norms. (all 3 points Raab 2005: 247)

As I see it, the 1st and the 3rd are critiques that could have been voiced from queer and the intersectional approaches. The scholars and activists behind the theory of intersectionality describe how mainstream feminism was based on the category of “woman”, which included mainly white middle-class women. This is connected to the third point, because these white middle-class women had the power to define what feminism meant, what equal rights meant, what empowerment meant, and what a feminist and emancipated woman looked and behaved like. The second point is the only point of difference between these two approaches. The theory of intersectionality in a way criticizes the exclusionist mechanisms of categories, but not the categories themselves. In contrast to queer theory and politics, the idea of intersectionality is not to deconstruct the categories and analyze the production and stabilization of the categories, but to differentiate by adding other seemingly relevant categories and analyzing the effect of the intersection of those.

When we talk about queer theory and intersectionality, we must be aware that every scholar uses the approaches in slightly different ways. However, I think I clarified in the last two chapters, what I consider the common or classical theories or approaches to queer and intersectionality. Intersectionality traditionally repeats the classical triad of the axes of difference “race, class and gender”, which is exposed to the critiques of many feminist scholars. Paula-Irene Villa for example asks herself if the categories, that we must use, if we want to use the concept of intersectionality, are appropriate to understand real life practice (Villa 2013: 230). She goes on by questioning the potential of intersectionality:

“Do we see, what happens in practice, in the intersubjective micro politics of everyday acting, if we put on the intersectional glasses? Can we describe the complex ‘action’ of people with -

admittedly complex and interwoven - categories, which are offered by the patterns of intersectionality? Or do we reduce again the actual complexity and specificity of practice on a chosen group of categories, of which we suppose being (as in the commonly accepted triad of gender, race and class) ‘core’-dimensions of the modern social structure?” (ibid.: 230f., my translation³⁵).

Many scholars agree that the intersectional analysis runs the risk of ignoring the deconstructivist insights and poststructuralist and postmarxist critiques and acts on the assumption that identities and identity categories can be fixed entities, ready to be intersected with other entities. The repeatedly mentioned axes of differences of gender, race and class for example, not only fail to indicate the differences within these conceptual frames, but also reproduce simplified images of oppositional binaries within the categories. The focus of intersectionality is on multiple identities, rather than questioning the production and reproduction of power relations through the categories themselves and their meanings: “Even the multiplication of fundamental categorizations cannot escape the reproduction and stabilization of existing relations of control and power” (Lorey 2011: 111, my translation³⁶). Similarly, Hark stresses that theories of multiple identities fail to challenge the traditional perception of identity as a unit. The subject is constructed through different identities, but categories such as race, class and gender are still considered to be an entity (Hark 1999: 58). If intersectional analysis continues to reproduce the concepts, which are intersecting as subject positions, it runs the risk of a reification of identity (Binder & Hess 2011: 37, Engel/Schulz/Wedl 2005: 12). Engel, Schulz and Wedl suggest to consider the concepts of intersectionality as an intersection of relations of power and control and not as an intersection of identity positions (ibid.: 9). Otherwise, an analysis of the mechanisms of identity construction is lost (Engel/Schulz/Wedl 2005: 12) and subject positions are stipulated in an

³⁵ „Sehen wir, was in der Praxis geschieht, in den intersubjektiven Mikropolitiken des Alltagshandelns, wenn wir die intersektionelle Brille aufsetzen? Können wir das komplexe ‚Tun‘ der Menschen mit den – zugegebenermaßen komplexen und verschränkten – Kategorien beschreiben, die uns das Raster Intersektionalität bietet? Oder reduzieren wir erneut die tatsächliche Komplexität und Spezifität von Praxis auf eine auserwählte Gruppe von Kategorien, von denen wir annehmen, sie seien (wie die allgemein akzeptierte Trias Geschlecht, ‚Rasse‘, Klasse) ‚Kern‘-Dimensionen moderner sozialer Strukturen?“

³⁶ „Doch auch die Vervielfältigung von fundamentalen Kategorisierungen ist nicht in der Lage, der Reproduktion und Stabilisierung bestehender Herrschaftsverhältnisse zu *entgehen*.“

essentialist way without the space to configure them as constructed, movable and situational (Binder & Hess 2011: 37f.).

As described in the previous chapter about the theory of intersectionality, the theory and analysis of intersectionality in its aims and techniques is not clear and many attempts of structuring of the theory have been made. So, Tove Soiland for example states, that intersectionality can be described in two main trends; “[...] one, whose cognitive interest is led by the fundamental critique of categories, and another, whose point is to be able to (more) adequately capture and conceptualize the complexity of social inequalities” (Soiland 2008: online, my translation ³⁷). These differences within intersectionality and the different approaches to identity categories are described in detail in Leslie McCall’s often cited article “The Complexity of Intersectionality” (2005). In this article, she differentiates between three epistemological and methodological approaches in intersectional analysis - the inter-categorical, the intra-categorical and the anti-categorical complexity. Within these three approaches of complexity, the anti-categorical is the only one able to highlight the complexity of categorizations themselves. McCall herself explains this notion in the following way:

“Social life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences.”

(McCall 2005: 1772)

It is very interesting to observe, how McCall’s declarations are perceived and depicted in very different ways. Sarcastically, it could be said that her explanation allows scholars to pick the aspects they need to strengthen their argument, the present discussion not excluded. To give some examples: Yuval-Davis, in her description of McCall’s differentiation mentions the inter-categorical and the intra-categorical approach, but completely ignores the third (Yuval Davis 2013: 207). Others, as Tove Soiland seem to interpret the conclusion, that McCall suggests the approach of inter-categorical complexity, because with such an analysis

³⁷ „[...] eine, deren Erkenntnisinteresse von grundsätzlicher Kritik an Kategorien geleitet ist, und eine andere, der es darum geht, die Komplexität sozialer Ungleichheitslagen adäquat(er) erfassen und konzeptualisieren zu können.“

categories can be perceived as spaces of inequalities, which is important for an analysis of inequalities (Soiland 2008: online). When researching this topic, I found a surprisingly amount of German voices debating the anti-categorical approach and the fruitful combination of queer theory and intersectionality. Paula-Irene Villa for example sees great potential in the anti-categorical critique and bemoans the marginalization of it within intersectional theory (Villa 2013: 232). She even concludes her article by reminding the readers, not to forget, “what intersectionality according to McCall (2005) was or could be: a critical stance towards categories, or even an anti-categorical turn” (Villa 2013: 239, my translation³⁸). So, we can put on the record that McCall sees the potential of intersectionality but discusses the various possibilities within the approach. She shows us that reproducing essentialist categories is not a must and that a queer approach, in her words an anti-categorical approach, is possible. As I understand it, anti-categorical intersectional methods of research and analysis can also be perceived as a queer-intersectional approach and epistemology. In other words: a combination of intersectionality and queer presupposes an anti-categorical approach in McCall’s terms, though still most scholars who work with an intersectional approach choose the inter- or intra-categorical way (Dietze/Haschemi Yekani/Michaelis 2007: 114).

Dietze, Haschemi Yekani and Michaelis explain in their article why queer theory and the theory of intersectionality are able to correct each other’s methodologies (ibid.: 108). A “queer intersectionality” or an “intersectional queer theory” could modify the deficits and limits of the original approaches and could productively destabilize both theories (ibid.: 109). Two direct and explicit pros of co-thinking queer and intersectionality are the strengthening of the aspect of sexuality within intersectional analysis on the one hand and to break the silence inside the rather white history of queer theory about diverse co-existing axes of differentiation (ibid.: 107). The three authors give examples of productive overlaps and cooperation, in other words synergies (ibid.: 113). So, both queer theory and intersectionality are transdisciplinary disciplines of research to investigate complex practices of discrimination, power and resistance (ibid.). In the authors opinion, both approaches should

³⁸ „Genau deshalb plädiere ich nochmals dafür, nicht zu vergessen, was Intersektionalität nach McCall (2005) war oder sein könnte: eine kritische Haltung gegenüber den Kategorien, ja sogar eine antikategoriale Wendung.“

be aware of the “complexity and temporality of processes of subjectivation and positions”³⁹, but both not always comply with the requirements because queer and intersectionality do not yet influence each other sufficiently (ibid.: 114).

As I explained, both approaches deal with categories in different ways, and this is exactly the point, where queer has a critical and useful potential for the theory of intersectionality:

“Queer theory can subvert the implicit substantiating effect of the invocation through categories per se and its fixation on power symmetric binarities as Black/White, male/female, hegemonic/ subaltern in intersectionality approaches.” (Dietze/Haschemi Yekani/Michaelis 2007: 109, my translation⁴⁰)

In this way, the queer deconstruction and destabilization of identity categories can be not only compatible, but even meaningful. In other words, “[a] queer- intersectional research complements the reference to categories through a deconstructivist perspective [...]” (Lutz/Vivar/Supik 2013: 19, my translation⁴¹). The authors stress that queer studies among other fields can be seen as a necessary critical approach to intersectional analysis (ibid.).

Not only can the queer insights be helpful for intersectional analysis, but also the other way around. Queer theory without the critical aspects of intersectionality runs the risk of being white dominated and ethnocentric. By pointing out the differences in discrimination according to multiple subject positions, intersectionality highlighted racism within feminist theories and actions and connected that to colonial histories and forms of epistemic violence. It reminds activists and especially theorists not to forget to involve actual discriminations that occur, because of categories as black, woman, homosexual, etc.

To summarize, many recent feminist scholars agree that intersectionality with its strong focus on identity categories should be interwoven with queer theory to destabilize and deconstruct essentializing identities. This is possible by choosing an anti-categorical approach to

³⁹ “Komplexität und Temporalität von Subjektivierungsprozessen und Positionen“.

⁴⁰ “Queer theory kann den implizit vergegenständlichenden Effekt der Anrufung durch Kategorien per se und ihre Fixierung auf machtsymmetrische Binaritäten wie Weiß/Schwarz, männlich/weiblich, hegemonial/ subaltern in Intersektionalitätsansätzen untergraben.“

⁴¹ “Eine queere Intersektionalitätsforschung ergänzt die Bezugnahme auf Kategorien durch eine dekonstruktivistische Perspektive; [...]“.

intersectionality, as outlined by McCall (2005). By dealing with the anti-categorical complexity, we can join the important insights of both queer theory and the theory of intersectionality for a queer-feminist anthropology.

Queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana

Emic approaches to feminism and queer politics

In the following chapter I will present how queer and feminism are understood in the field, how the two queer-feminist collectives deal with the terms and the realization of a queer and feminist or queer-feminist politics.

In general, I argue that the Red Dawns and the Afkors collective stick to a feminist perspective, which criticizes essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, meaning a view that opposes strict binaries and instead includes a broad range of political fights. Their agenda is not limited to classical feminist issues such as the oppression of women and their bodies, violence against women or equal wages for both sexes, but includes alliances and solidarity with non-binary people, trans people, refugees, anarchists, and other marginalized people. They criticize other, more liberal and mainstream feminist groups, like the feminist city tour in Ljubljana (FN 25.2., 23.3.) or their protest on the 8th of March on the occasion of the international women's day (FN 6.3., 5.4., DAF 2018: personal archive⁴²).

Some weeks after the Red Dawns festival, Afkors collective decided to prepare a discussion on the "radical potentials of feminism today" (FN 3.4.) not only as an act of solidarity because the anarchist infoshop was in need of a program for the weekly Fridays discussion "infokafana", but also to insert feminist discussions in other autonomous spaces. More than twenty people, especially activists from infoshop and Afkors (FN 6.4.), attended the discussion. This evening showed that discussions about feminism are needed and that the

⁴² Recorded discussion in A-infoshop about "radical potentials of feminism today", 6.4.2018

question of what feminism is or should be is ongoing. Two strands of argumentation about feminism that most participants agreed on can be clearly identified. The first is about the definition of feminism, respectively the question of what feminist struggles should fight for. It was agreed that feminism is not a fight of women against men (DAF 2018: personal archive), but rather that it is a fight against patriarchy, not for women. This difference was underlined, because patriarchy affects all people and not just women (ibid.). Feminism is a fight against all hierarchies in general (ibid.), a common fight against oppressions, which come with a patriarchal system (ibid.). The feminist struggle should be an open one, connecting with other struggles (ibid.), being aware of the intersections of different axes of oppression (ibid.).

The second strand of argumentation was a rejection of the capitalist appropriation of feminism. Feminism nowadays has become a lifestyle you can buy with a t-shirt, a pacified, liberal and individualistic feminism opposed to a radical and critical one (ibid.). These views correspond to statements made in the interviews I conducted. Silvia, a new member in the Afkors collective feels comfortable in the group, because she sees that feminism is not a fashion, but in Afkors collective she meets people constantly reflecting on their prejudices, because everybody works on his*her awareness, it's a different basis for feminist activism than in other groups (GD 3). In the same interview, Alma agreed with the general opinion of the group discussion, that feminism should be a broader struggle:

“If you define feminism in a kind of way that is autonomous or anarcha, that is criticizing also capitalism and state and racism, borders and things like this, in itself, then it is much easier to understand that these are all part of the same struggle, [...]” (GD 3)

As both groups see feminism as a struggle against oppression of all genders and strictly dismiss heteronormativity and categorizing people simply as “man” and “women”, queer-feminism could be one description of their feminist orientation. So, let us take also a look at how the two collectives deal with the term “queer”: Even though both collectives have the political orientation of queer in their name and in their everyday politics, they do not talk a lot about the term and its significance. Nevertheless, the main discourse around the term is a skeptical one, being aware of the US-American origin and the complexity of the term.

Tea Hvala considers the concept of queer definitely as a western import (Hvala interviewed by Chidgey 2010: online). In her essay “Queer trouble in Ljubljana” Tea Hvala (2012a) confirmed that “queer” has been perceived as “yet another colonizing discourse” (Hvala 2012a: 183). A “colonizing discourse” in this case means a modern, western, American,

neoliberal and capitalist discourse, but still, the queer-feminist collectives made an effort to add a Slovene connotation to it, because the situation in Slovenia is a different one then in the US in the 90ies:

“[...] ideas about queer identity, queer theory and queer politics have been significantly changed by local knowledge production and practices; changed in ways that bear no resemblance to the discourse of anti-assimilationist activists in the United States in the early 1990s. Since the term was adopted from literature about activism in the US and brought to a completely different sociopolitical context, the change was expected.” (Hvala 2012a: 181)

One strategy to acknowledge the Slovene adaptation of “queer” can be outlined by the common translation of “queer” to a phonetically spelled “kvir”. Both queer-feminist groups use this concept in the Slovene title. The Red Dawns even renamed their festival from “mednarodni feministični in queerovski festival” (2007-2016) to “mednarodni feministični in kvirovski festival”⁴³ (Rdeče zore 2017: 43). In my group interview the Afkors collective agreed that “kvir” has a different meaning to “queer”. “Kvir”, as a Slovene adaptation is considered a rejection of academic language and a rejection of the imperial logic behind language (GD 3). Despite this change in language and many years of queer-feminist activism, it is still questionable whether the concept of “queer” already has “solid grounds” as Lidija Radojević, a member of Red Dawns in 2010, asked (Radojević interviewed by Hvala 2010a: 94). Back in 2010, she described the situation as follows:

“Concepts can be tied into a local environment only when they are supported by a scene. By engaging with the concept, creating new practices, a new language – we don’t know how to translate the concept because we don’t have a scene. It takes time, work, and then the concept can grow by itself. Probably, it’s going to be different from the American version, for now, we are copy-pasting it, because it was developed there, but once it is planted in fertile grounds... [...]” (Radojević interviewed by Hvala 2010a: 94)

⁴³ Both can be translated by “international feminist and queer festival”.

The fact that in 2018 there is still not something like a clear “queer” scene is one reason for the still unanswered question, of what the Slovene adaptation of “queer” looks like exactly. Another reason is most probably the complexity of the term and its history, both in the academic and the activist world. Moreover, that within the collectives everybody understands the term differently (GD 3), makes it impossible to explain it to people outside the collectives. Silvan spoke about this uncertainty. Right before the Red Dawns festival, they said, that people from outside will ask, what queer is and that the collective will need to have an answer (FN 2.3.). At the same time, members of the collectives pay homage to and defend the complexity of “queer” and dispute simple conceptions of it. They criticize the usage as a description for all sexual and gender minorities, as an abbreviation of an endless listing of identity categories, for example “LGBTIA*”. Silvan accurately pointed this out in one of the group discussions: “People don’t know what queer is, except if they see it as an umbrella expression for all those letters which you don’t want to pronounce” (GD 1).

“Queer” as an identity or the notion of “being queer” is another simplification which is criticized by the collectives. As “queer theory is anti-identity politics” (GD 2), it is something that wants to escape identification and does not want to invent another identity category: “[...] so queer is actually questioning the identity, that’s why it really cannot be an identity. Saying: ‘I am queer’ in a way is oxymoron” (GD 1).

Even though the local concept of “queer” is hard to catch, even for the queer-feminist collectives itself, it is reflected in their everyday subversive politics of questioning normativities of gender and other identities. This can be observed for example in their language usage [see chapter on language] and in their openness to all genders [see chapter on safe(r) spaces], but also through art and performances at the Red Dawns festival. Exhibitions (FN 9.3.) and performances (FN 9.3., 10.3.) played with gender, criticized it, satirized it in a colorful, trashy, weird, queer way. To give an example, I will quote a part of the lyrics of a performance by an Italian trio, reciting a manifesto of a squat in Thessaloniki, accompanied by music and theatric performance:

“There will be some time that the bodies will be back.
When there will not be any genders
since either there will be no genders
or there will be a lot of them”

(Performance/concert/open form: Manifesto -Et l'Europe alors (IT)

text of the performance: personal archive)

Herstory of queer-feminist activism in Ljubljana

Researching about the herstory⁴⁴ of queer-feminism in Ljubljana, was aided by two facts. Firstly, the history of queer activities is not a long one. Groups only started using the term in the second half of the 2000s⁴⁵. Secondly because Tea Hvala wrote her master thesis on the Red Dawns and made a good job giving an overview, of not only the festival, but also of the discourses and happenings around it between 2002 and 2010. She was part of the organizing team for several years and conducted many interviews with organizers of the Red Dawns festival, focusing her research on the formation of an alternative space and a “counterpublic” through the realization of the festival (Hvala 2010a). She contributed to an archiving and hence strengthening of the group and festival of “Rdeče zore” and queer-feminism not only through her master thesis, but also with several articles she wrote, for examples ones about feminist street actions (Hvala 2012b) or the reception of “queer” in Slovenia (Hvala 2012a).

In the 90s Ljubljana`s feminist and LGBT scene was faced by rapid changes because of many happenings in this era. The ACC Metelkova got occupied and established and with that many groups and spaces were formed and deformed again inside and outside Metelkova; Ženski center (women center) was established, some years later split up again, the lesbian ŠKUC LL separated from the feminist ŠKUC Lilit, Gender Studies were established at the university. Many short-term and long-term feminist and LGBT initiatives began (Hvala 2010a, Hvala 2012a, Velikonja & Greif 2012). Slovenia at that time was dealing with a very different situation than for example Austria or the USA. The state was newly constituting itself after

⁴⁴ I am using both herstory and history, herstory a feminist critique of male history writing, also used by some members of the queer-feminist collectives (a.o. FN 3.3.).

⁴⁵ At the 26th of December 2006 the initiative *Alter šalter* performed “queer dancing” in the lesbian club *Monokel*. It is the first mentioning of the term “queer” in the historical chronology of ŠKUC LL (Velikonja & Greif 2012: 262).

the socialist era. Capitalism, political conservatism, sexism and homophobia were on the rise. Hvala writes in this context of a time of “political differentiation”, some left feminist, lesbian and gay groups turned more radical as an answer to the political power regime, others tried to get legal recognition by creating NGOs or getting involved with academic feminism (Hvala 2012a: 182f.). Suzana Tratnik and Nataša Sukič, two core members of the lesbian society *ŠKUC LL*, also stated, that some movements were institutionalized in the 90s. This was the case with the feminist movement for example, but not with the lesbian and gay groups (Tratnik in Kuhar 2008: online). Mostly because of these reasons, Hvala reached a point in 2012, “[...] that in the last twenty years, lesbian activism has been more visible than feminist activism” (Hvala 2012b: 127). In an interview by Tea Hvala with Suzana Tratnik, Tratnik said:

“Because of Rdeče zore, people started talking about feminism or, actually, feminisms again. For a long time, this was not the case, especially after Ženski center [Metelkova Women’s Center] died away. (...) Because the feminist scene from the 1980s partitioned and got specialized – some focused on violence against women, others on Women’s Studies, etc. – there were no events, no public spaces, no gatherings. And that was missing.” (Suzana Tratnik interviewed by Hvala 2010a: 81)

It was in these troublesome times, when the term and notion of “queer” was introduced. Suzana Tratnik was the first Slovenian author to write an article about the new category, theory, activism and language of “queer” in 1995 in the journal *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* (Journal for Critique of Science⁴⁶). “Queer” was looked on with curiosity but also with suspicion. It was seen as a threat to the lesbian, gay and feminist movement, to take from them the ground they had been fighting for, for so long. This ground is of course the politics based on identity categories, such as “women” or “lesbians”. Tratnik accuses the approach of deconstructing not only the construct of gender, but also of sexuality (Tratnik 1995: 66). Another point of suspicion was the US-origin of the term, and it was asked, whether this term was even employable in Slovenia, considering the different historic situation and the implicit and explicit meaning of the English word “queer” itself (Tratnik 1995, Hvala 2012a).

⁴⁶ English translation according to the official homepage (*Časopis za kritiko znanosti*: online).

Even though Tratnik (1997), Sukič (1997) and Velikonja (1997), lesbian activists and writers appeared less alienated by the notion of queer in articles from the same journal two years later, in 1997, there was no broad reception of queer activism or queer politics in the feminist or LGBT movement (Hvala 2012a). The next important step in the Slovene history of queer theory was the translation of Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble" into the Slovene language by Suzana Tratnik in 2001. Even if I am not a translator, I find already the translation of the title irritating. "Težave s spolom" means problems/troubles/difficulties with gender, which can have totally different implications from the start (FN 20.3.).

When I argue that queer or queer-feminist initiatives and groups only started up in the second half of the 2000s, I want to indicate that my understanding of "queer-feminist initiatives and groups" has been elaborated in the chapter on the theoretical grounding. However, I didn't find any evidence, that there were any feminist performances, parties, discussions, festivals or similar which called themselves "queer" before 2006. Vesna Vravnik tried to introduce queer theory in these years, organizing workshops together with the group *Alter šalter*. Later they wanted to switch to activism, but they had the feeling that Slovenia, or this place, was not ready for queer activism. That was, why they started to defend identity politics and lesbian visibility in the public space again (Hvala 2010b: 80).

Through the archiving of the Red Dawns, Tea Hvala's interviews in 2009 and 2010 and my empirical material, it becomes clear that something changed around 2006 (Hvala 2012a, Rdeče zore: online, Velikonja & Greif 2012, FN 20.3.).

During the first few years, the Red Dawns festival was explicitly a women's festival. At that time, it was a feminist event, which did not directly criticize the notion of "gender" or "women". Only in 2006 did the festival change its name to "international feminist and queer festival". It was the first year, when intentionally "women, men and others" were invited (Rdeče zore: online). The group explicitly criticized common essentialisms and gender binaries in their invitation text:

"*Red Dawns* is a queer festival that dares to ignore expectations, habits, concepts and roles which 'fatally' define us as either women or men. We do not advocate a further polarization of genders. Instead, we support the creativity and the mingling of *Red Dawns* participants who question the boundaries we take for granted; the borders that separate and isolate us by dividing us into two different sexes." (Rdeče zore: online)

To the members during this time, this process was considered “a natural development” (Serec in Hvala 2010a: 88) introducing “a global trend and discourse to a local environment where it is not known yet” (Radojević in Hvala 2010a: 94). Another festival organizer stated: “It says ‘feminist’ because we aspire to that. We added ‘queer’ to widen the scope, especially because feminism is still perceived as something that concerns women only [...]” (Ehrlemark, Anna in Hvala, Tea 2010b: 87). So, in 2006 the Red Dawns Festival was “finally moving away from the – theoretically and practically – controversial subject of ‘women’” (Hvala 2010a: 89).

Strategies and policies

After having given an overview on the history of queer-feminist activism and the critical, inclusive and deconstructivist approaches to feminism and queer politics, my aim in the next sections is to highlight some of the important political strategies and policies inside the queer-feminist groups to explain their everyday practices of resistance, struggle and comradeship. A conscious language, an autonomous and radical approach, the creation of safe(r) spaces, the importance of the “community” and a holistic approach to politics are some main strategies of queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana. Through my qualitative research these topics crystallized to be essential for the collective’s activism. The following points show the framework for the work of both the Afkors and Red Dawns collective by which we can already roughly make out the extend of challenging identity categories such as gender and sexuality. A more detailed analysis of that aspect will be discussed in the next chapter.

Language

Most people from the queer-feminist collectives are quite aware of the political importance of language. Language is not only a tool to make the people around us conscious of the apparent and hidden sexism in many expressions, and to include all gender identities, but also to change the discourse and thus reality in small ways. In this section, I want to give some examples about the conscious spoken and written language used in the queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana. Because of their general negation of strict gender binaries they added a “*” to a written identity category, for example “women*”, or they add “star” in spoken

language, for example “sister-star-collectives”. In the manifesto of the Red Dawns collective they explain this choice in a footnote: “In the text we are using ‘women*’ as an expression, which includes also all transgender, intersex-people and other non-binary people.” (Rdeče zore 2017: 43, my translation⁴⁷)

Interestingly, I never noticed anyone using “men*” or vocally “men-star”. Even more interestingly, when we also consider that the usage of the prefix “cis”⁴⁸ was almost limited to the category “man”. This can be explained through the possible need to restrict who is invited to some queer-feminist events, which could be expressed for example by “women*-only” or “no cis-men”. Queer-feminist usage of language is creative and can also include spontaneously, but still in a way intentionally, inventing new words. On one evening of the Red Dawns festival for example, the drag queen Savinja Zakaj addressed the assistants who were collecting voting papers (for bodeča neža, the election of the most sexist public statement of the year) from the audience, as “feministične škratke in škratice” (FN 7.3.). This could be translated as “feminist elves and elfies (in female form)”, even though the female version of “škrat” does not exist in the Slovene language.

The individual, personal pronoun is also an important part of conscious language. The issue of asking people you are getting to know, about their pronouns is raised now and then. It is considered respectful, to ask and not to assume someone's gender or their preferred pronoun. During the first two meetings of the Red Dawns that I attended, we made a circle to introduce our names and our pronouns. In the Slovene language it is common to either choose between “ona”-“she” or “on”-“he” for your individual pronouns, or to let people use any of these two. Like Silvan from the Red Dawns, who says, that he*she uses all pronouns (FN 2.3.), vocal binary gender references are much more common in the Slovene language than in English, and even more common than in the German language, because of the constitution of the Slovene grammar. One cannot even speak about oneself without (sticking to an officially accepted grammar) having to choose between a female or a male form. “Jaz sem bila...”/ “Jaz sem bil...” means “I was” with the gender difference of the “a”. The English language makes

⁴⁷ “V tekstu uporabljamo ‚ženske*‘ kot termin, ki vključuje tudi vse transpolne, interpolne in druge spolno nebinarne osebe.”

⁴⁸ “Cis” is the opposite of “trans” and describes people identifying with the sex, they were born with.

it easier for non-binary people, or for people who do not want to be nailed to their gender every other second. In the English language, it is quite common to use gender-neutral pronouns such as “they”⁴⁹. For example: “Lee comes later, because they missed the bus.” Neva for example, a person from the Red Dawns collective prefers the pronoun “they” in the English language, though “ona” in the Slovene language (FN 2.3.). After the two first Red Dawns meetings, I didn’t witness questions about the personal pronoun much. Mostly it was common practice to either assume a person’s pronoun without asking or to avoid having to articulate a pronoun (FN 8.4.). It could be said that in this way they do not correspond with their ideals, but honestly, I must add, that I never noticed an awkward situation, with somebody feeling alienated or similar.

Another common strategy to “queer” language is to underline written words, to not only include man and women, but all genders between and beyond. This could look as follows: „Novi_e prostovoljci_ke“ (Red Dawns mailing list: 1.3.) meaning “new volunteers” or: “Pozdravljene_i, drage_i prijatelji_ce Rdečih zor” (Red Dawns mailing list: 4.3.), which could be translated as “Hi, dear friends of Red Dawns”.

Through my qualitative research, I was not only able to observe, how people talked within the collectives, and what they talked about, but also what they did not talk about. I noticed that they strictly avoided talking about identity categories, particularly about seemingly biological genders or other categories that are considered to be essentialist. During the group discussions, it happened twice, that a person of the group started a statement involving these identity categories, realized it at the same time, and retracted the argument. One of these categories was “female feminists”, the person immediately laughed and dismissed it as a “biology expression” (GD 1). The second statement was: “[...] we are almost all white, we are almost all women, cis, I don’t know, like, now I am just making assumptions, sorry...” (GD 3). Considering this tendency to refuse essentialist identity categories, I was surprised by Tea Hvala’s blunt listing of categories to describe the members of the collective, back in 2010: “Since most of the organizers are young, left-wing, middle class, educated and ethnically Slovene straight women [...]” (Hvala 2010a: 92).

⁴⁹ See also: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: online.

Some people in the two collectives are thoughtful about the relativity of significations of certain terms. It is often pointed out that concepts or words like “feminism”, “queer”, “radical”, “identity” (GD 1, GD 3) can have diverse meanings to different people, and that we should have this in mind, when we use these terms. This small observation also shows how aware individuals in the Afkors and Red Dawns collective are of language and its importance on many different levels.

With these examples I have shown that a conscious and gender neutral or all-gender-inclusive language is an important policy and strategy of the two focused collectives.

DIY, autonomous and radical vs. mainstream and liberal

Queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana see themselves as groups based on principles of DIY (do-it-yourself), autonomy and radicality (GD 1, GD 3). DIY-collectives are grassroots and counterpublic groups. Their specific actions can take many different forms and are a self-organized answer to state and capitalist politics (Hvala 2010a: 56f.). These projects or actions can include producing viral or analog media, organizing protests, inspiring discourse with music, art or performances, DIY-workshops, squatting and much more (Chidgey 2009: online). Hvala talks in this context of “everyday acts of resistance” (Hvala 2010a: 56). “Being autonomous”, means being independent from state infrastructure, financial support and locating in autonomous spaces, such as the squatted zones of Metelkova and Rog. But it also means that events do evolve within the scene, making reaching the public with its politics a hard challenge (GD 3). “Radical” is an attribute that is part of the name of Afkors, and also some members of Red Dawns ascribe radicality to their group (GD 1). Others think that they are not so radical, but that they are definitely perceived as such. “I don’t think that we are doing something very radical, we just doing things that we want to show” (GD 1). Red Dawns activists agree that inside the collective and the broader community there is a different definition of radicality. Outside the bubble, the things they are doing are perceived as radical (GD 1). The general society has been described as “apathetic and numb” and that it “lacks radicality” (GD 1). Nowadays something is radical quickly, this changed a lot in the last years: “today what is radical five years ago was not. And what was radical then it’s almost impossible today” (GD 1).

Many of these ascriptions happen in relation to other feminist or LGBT-groups, which are considered to be more “mainstream” and “liberal”, which these collectives criticise. In the three group discussions and during my participant observation, several initiatives with oppositional positions and politics were mentioned. Most frequently mentioned in this context was the organization of the pride parade. Other organizations were, for example, *ŠKUC LL*, a long existing lesbian organization and *Iskra*, a “progressive youth organization” (Iskra 2018: online), whose feminist subgroup organized the protest on the 8th of March. Below is a table to illustrate the most common differentiations that the queer-feminist groups saw between themselves and other feminist or LGBT-groups. I am aware and self-critical of the simplified representation of a mode like this, though a more detailed explanation will follow.

Red Dawns and Afkors	Other feminist or LGBT groups/projects
DIY & autonomous	Mainstream & professionalized
No financial support	Financial support
Anti-capitalist	Neoliberal, commercialized
Radical	Liberal
Bottom-up, low hierarchies	hierarchical
Smaller reach	Bigger reach
Holistic struggle/politics	One-sided struggle/politics
Queer/ anti-identity politics	Identity politics
autonomous places	Mainstream places
No cooperation with state and city	Cooperation with state and city

The queer-feminist groups are perceived as autonomous and DIY (GD 1) and also position themselves like this and are proud of it (GD 1). They consider themselves not as mainstream in contrast to the organization of the pride parade, for example. Red Dawns and Afkors are not mainstream, because they are bottom-up, without finances from the government (GD 3), because of the places they choose, the topics they present, the way they work together and the way they try to be as non-hierarchical as possible (GD 1). Their work ethic is seen as being different than other collectives (GD 1).

In contrast, the two groups consider the pride parade to be mainstream because it is more connected with party and fashion and not so much with struggle (GD 1). The commercialization and professionalization of the events organized by the pride parade committee (GD 1) and also the supposedly “gay” club *Tiffany* and “lesbian” club *Monokel* (FN 3.3.) is also mentioned. The Afkors collective also criticises the pride parade for collaborating with politicians and letting them present themselves on the stage, because they represent the existent repressive politics (GD 3). These are the reasons why they do not like to cooperate more intensively with this organization. (Afkors mailing list 22.5., FN 26.5.)

Mainstream projects are said to have approaches, which could be described as neoliberal or also liberal (GD 1, GD 3). Within the feminist and LGBT community, Red Dawns and Afkors are the more radical ones, opposed to the others, which are more liberal (GD 1, GD 3). A protest or an event being “liberal” is considered to be not enough, not critical, loud, aggressive, radical enough (a.o. Afkors mailing list 24.5.). One of these “liberal protests” was the feminist demonstration of the 8th of march in Ljubljana, organized by Iskra, where members of Red Dawns joined but left before it was finished because they were disappointed with its liberalism and “kind” appearance (FN 8.3., DAF 2018: personal archive).

Lastly, queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana criticise other feminist and LGBT-groups for their identity politics, for fighting a “war of sexes” - as at Iskra’s protest - where it seemed like a “women-against-man-fight” (DAF 2018: personal archive). Another example is the ironic ironical jokes about the organization *ŠKUC LL* from some members of Afkors. Because of the nearly unchanged heads of the organization for thirty years and their strict focus on lesbian identity politics they were called „the only lesbians in Ljubljana“, „the big lesbians“ or „the legendary lesbians“ (FN 28.3.).⁵⁰

To sum up, it can be said that Afkors and the Red Dawns as queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana position themselves as DIY, autonomous and radical in opposition to other queer or feminist groups, which are mainstream and liberal.

⁵⁰ Read more about the criticism on and of *ŠKUC LL* in the chapter about identity politics and anti-identity politics in Ljubljana.

Safe(r) space

In the following chapter, I will talk about the importance of the strategy and concept of building up and maintaining safe or safer spaces. “Safe spaces” and “safer spaces” are two expressions, which describe the same concept. The latter indicates that no matter how hard collectives try, they can never ensure a complete safe space. For this reason, I will stick to the expression “safer spaces”. A safer space is a technical solution for providing better conditions for people to express themselves (DAF 2018, personal archive), to feel safe expressing what they think (GD 2). Tea Hvala defines a safe space as one that is supportive of someone’s identity, a place where it is possible to discuss new issues and receive emotional support (Hvala 2010a: 47). This goal can be achieved in several different ways. Sometimes the space itself is an important feature, as we can see by the example of the Afkors space. In case of Red Dawns it is about temporary safer spaces, created through the program of the festival in geographically diverse places. Safer spaces are characterized by the explicit expulsion of discriminatory behavior such as sexism, homophobia, transphobia, heteronormativity, etc. Some safer spaces or certain events in safer spaces, explicitly invite only certain kinds of people, for example women*, lesbians, and trans* or similar, or explicitly exclude certain people, mostly cis-men.

Following the Afkors collective stating that safety, personal relations and solidarity are extremely important in political engagement (*Anarhistično-kvirovsko-feministični kolektiv iz Avtonomne tovarne Rog* 2017: 24), I think that sometimes it seems to be even more important that people feel comfortable and protected in a space and group than to actually discuss feminist and political issues (FN 28.3., GD 3) This aspect could be observed, for example, at the several Sunday brunches in Afkors.

With their international queer and feminist festival the Red Dawns create a safer zone for several days, or in other words, temporarily safer spaces. The organization increases the safety in the festival venues, especially the ones in Metelkova, which are not all “[...] specifically lesbian, gay or queer even though, on a declarative level, they support sexual minorities” (Hvala 2010a: 109). Tea Hvala correlates the safety of a space with the supportiveness regarding the identities of those who visit the events. A space “[...] has to be safe: supportive of feminist, lesbian, trans, boi, butch, queer, gay and other minority identities of people who visited the festival” (Hvala 2010a: 107). At the Red Dawns festival, a

workshop about consent and rape culture took place. The three Italian leaders of the workshop stressed that everywhere and always there exists a general social responsibility to take care of each other and to make safe spaces (FN 10.3.) Participating at the festival, I can say that I felt this mutual protection on my own self. One night at the festival, there was a situation I would like to share:

“At one point I got immediately frightened. We all danced wildly to the nice music in a circle, mostly people from Red Dawns and Afkors, when I randomly turned my head and noticed four or more men* standing behind me, including the guy from the bar I was talking to earlier. I was confused and didn’t know if this should mean anything or how I should deal with this situation. Without me saying a word, Vida immediately came to me and asked me if I am okay. Others came as well and assured themselves, that I am all right. This awareness and support gave me immediately a feeling of safety and I could enjoy continuing to dance.”

(FN 9.3.)

The described situation seems like an embodiment of a safer space, people being conscious about others well-being, a space, where a confused look already leads to solidarity and support. People around oneself have similar experiences and so it is often not necessary to explain oneself. Activists from Afkors highlight this aspect as one of the most important ones. One member of the collective describes it as follows:

“[...] when I come to the space, and I am really angry about something sexist that happened, I will not have to explain why this is sexist, and why this is bothering me and why this is not good and blablabla, and I won’t have to do this because I will just say and I will immediately get like this sisterhood, support and understanding and common sharing of anger and this things and this is for me what is the main point of the collective [...].” (GD 3)

In comparison to the collective of Red Dawns, for the Afkors collective, “having a space” is even more important, because the group evolved through the need for a space, where mutual understanding and personal safety exist automatically:

“[...] for me the need to have a space in Rog comes also from this of having a space where you don’t have to explain these things, and where politics of care and inclusiveness, safety, it’s like something that is like part of the space already and you don’t have to fight on every step to achieve it [...].” (GD 3)

The direct action of taking the physical space of Afkors and renovating it, so it can be comfortable, making it “their own” space, is something very unifying for the group (GD 3). At the group discussion with the Afkors collective, memories of the installation and maintenance were shared. It became clear, that it was very important for them to be independent by having a place “[...] where you can actually really do things that you want to” (GD 3). The Afkors space is a resource, which can be used now for different events of the collective, and other feminist initiatives (GD 3).

Inclusion and exclusion in the safer spaces

As already introduced in the beginning of this chapter, the upholding of a safe space, or a space where every member can feel comfortable, is sometimes based on the exclusion or invitation of certain kinds of people or individuals, either on the basis of identity or political orientation. This politics of conscious inclusion and exclusion I will call invitation politics. In the following passages, I will explain how Afkors and the Red Dawns deal with this question.

Both collectives, Red dawns and Afkors, do not exclude people based on an identity category to take part in the collective. Cis-men are also generally welcome, even though in the months in Ljubljana there was no person defining as a cis-man active in one of the collectives (FN 23.2., 28.3.). Nevertheless, both collectives are open to restrict certain events for “women*-trans*-only” if necessary or wished by the organizers (FN 23.2., 28.3.). The Afkors meeting agreed, that the invitation politics shouldn’t be based on strict rules but on trust; people trust each other that they invite and bring people to the space, which are nice and behave correctly (FN 28.3.). At this year’s Red Dawns festival every event was open to all genders, but in the evaluation of the festival, the organizers agreed that they were lucky that there was no man* coming to the contact dance workshop. They said that it could have been displeasing for some, because of the large amount of bodily contact. They decided to think of setting a women*-only-policy in this case the next time (FN 23.3.).

In one of the meetings of the Afkors collective, they talked intensively about invitation politics. They agreed that certain named individuals can be excluded from the space and asked to leave or kicked out if he*she comes, if members of the collectives do not feel comfortable around this certain person. The argument was brought up that ‘we’ construct and

frame the space, so 'we' should feel comfortable. Vida stated, that it would be important for her to not see certain members of the lesbian organization *ŠKUC LL* in the space, especially if she helped to organize the event. She named three or four names that are known to most of the collective, who should be excluded. The reason is a long existing conflict, I don't dare to try to explain here. Alma also named three people, she wouldn't like to see in the space, because they laid their hands on women and still failed to see their mistake after talking to them. The differentiation was made between public space and open space. It is not considered a public space, so restrictions are okay, and it is an open space but not infinitely, it still must stay a safer space, where people can feel comfortable (FN 28.3.). So, the queer-feminist groups close themselves, to protect themselves, because they are tired of the sexism, racism, phobias, of the outside world (GD 3). They are creating a bubble with certain values, and they are happy to have this bubble (GD 1).

I want to highlight the very openness and inclusivity of both collectives on the other hand. The two groups I researched consider themselves as open to people and "ready to welcome people" (GD 1, GD 3). New members, like Natalija for example, who entered Red Dawns collective by volunteering for the festival, felt this openness very much (GD 2). As I already remarked in the chapter about my role in the field, I also felt welcomed in both collectives, and I was honored by the fact that they trusted me completely from the beginning (FN 25.2.). Another feature of the inclusiveness is the fact that as soon as there is a person, who doesn't speak Slovene, the whole group switches to English (FN 1.3.). It is not a big challenge to be part of one of the collectives, as soon as somebody was at the meeting and is on the mailing list, she*he is seen as a comrade in the collective (FN 1.3.). Still, the Red Dawns have the feeling, that people outside the collective don't perceive it like this, they don't know that "they can just join" (GD 1). Red Dawns also stressed, that they try to be so open, because it was always important, that new people come and share ideas, so the festival can constantly change and evolve (GD 2). Nevertheless, openness doesn't mean being a hundred percent inclusive, it doesn't mean everybody can come and behave like jerks, they are not exclusive, but they still exclude people who exhibit unacceptable behaviors or political orientations (GD 1, GD 3).

At the end of this chapter, it could be outlined that building permanent or temporary safer spaces is a conscious strategy to ensure the well-being of all comrades. Sometimes it is necessary to exclude certain individuals, so the individuals in the group can feel safe. For

specific events, there is even a need to exclude a certain group of people based on an identity category. Nevertheless, the queer-feminist collectives try to be very open to new people, who share their values and ideas.

The “community”

In the following passages, I aim to draw a vague picture of the community the queer-feminist collectives are part of. In Ljubljana, the queer-feminist groups are not considered to have their own, queer-feminist scene, because there is no such thing - as Nataša Serec and Lidija Radojević said in their interviews with Tea Hvala in 2010 (Hvala 2010a: 88, 94). If anything, it could be said that there exists a certain feminist scene on the one side, in which Afkors and Red Dawns would locate themselves on the radical and autonomous corner of this scene, and an LGBT-scene on another corner, which is seen as connected to both collectives, especially through people who are active here and there, but which is still considered to be a different scene (GD 1). It has also been stressed, that they bewail and do not really understand this demarcation of the LGBT-scene. Despite the explicit queer and feminist agenda, both groups are strongly connected to the autonomous leftist scene in Ljubljana, even if many of the collectives in this scene are not explicitly queer or feminist. Asking about this issue, one activist of Afkors explained:

“I would say that the answer is kind of affinity not identity, because, no (laughing), but really, because there are groups that identify themselves as trans-feminist, gender-non-binary feminist or I don't know if they define themselves as queer feminist, but so, in like declarative, descriptive way they would fit with our kind of politics but the practice that they do, the collective, is very much like liberal, mainstream, legalist, and then you have collectives, like for example infoshop, that does not define them self as queer-feminist, in an affinity, practice way it's much more close to our politics, even though it does not explicitly define itself as ...also in Rog there are groups with which we can collaborate really well, even though they don't define themselves feminist [...]” (GD 3)

The activist highlights that collectives that share autonomous spaces and political agendas such as anti-hierarchical working or anti-capitalist views can be closer to the queer-feminist collectives than others who claim to be feminist or queer and do not work in a similar way.

Interestingly there is something like a community that members of the collectives refer to. Talking about the “broader community” (a.o. FN 28.3.), they mean a bond to other leftist, feminist, autonomous, DIY, and radical groups. Which people, spaces and groups are specifically perceived to be part of “the community” is not an easy question to answer; probably this is something that changes from moment to moment and from person to person. The demarcation between inside and outside “the community” could constitute a further field of research. Tea Hvala states, that this “community” is locally known as the “alternative scene” or the “liberated territory” of Ljubljana (Hvala 2010a: 6). However, it can be observed, that the connection of some collectives inside the squatted zones of Rog and Metelkova are strong ones. Among these connected initiatives are obviously Red Dawns and Afkors, the feminist choir *FPZ Z'borke*, the feminist cabaret including *FEM TV*, the initiative *direct social work*, the anarchist infoshop in Metelkova, the two clubs and event venues *Tiffany* and *Monokel* in Metelkova, the *social center*, the *Ambassada* in Rog and the *Cirkusarna* in Rog. The constant strive to network between similar initiatives and spaces was also verbalized by Red Dawns as a concrete goal (Rdeče zore 2017: 45). These „sisters*collectives” (FN 28.3.), as an activist of Afkors called them, are connected to the two queer-feminist groups through similar political approaches and hence solidarity, but there are also personal overlaps. Many people from Afkors and Red Dawns are also involved in other collectives and projects, which is important for connection, solidarity and good communication within the community: “[...] it is quite important actually to have a collective that has different members also routed also in other collectives to bring the topics of those collectives and then combine this [...]” (GD 2). During one debate evening in infoshop, where many members of the Afkors collective were present, an activist from infoshop explained very plausibly, why a good autonomous network is important. A strengthening of the connection between autonomous collectives leads to even more autonomy. It is important to help each other out to achieve even more independency from the state and the economic system (FN 11.5.).

As mentioned before, the squatted zones Metelkova and Rog play a special role regarding the activism of the queer-feminist groups Red Dawns and Afkors. Due to the occupation, the groups do not have to pay rent for the spaces they use, which would otherwise make things much more complicated. So, both groups try to contribute to the flawless existing of the squats by attending squat assemblies or being actively involved in the fights for the preservation of the squat, as in the case of Rog. When it was clear that certain comrades had to pay large amounts of court costs because of the battle for the right of abode, both

collectives showed solidarity by participating in the collection of financial support (FN 28.3., 23.3.). Some members of Afkors are also involved in other struggles connected to other collectives in Rog, including support for repressed people inside Rog (Afkors mailing list: 25.4., 9.5.) and fights against deportation (Afkors mailing list: 18.5.). Aside from this, some activists from Afkors also participate in the mailing list and the meetings of Rog (Afkors mailing list: 9.5.).

The history of the squat of Metelkova is much longer and the situation is also more stable than the one in Rog. Tea Hvala attaches great importance to the existence and hence also the squatting of Metekova on September 9th 1993 for the collective and the festival of Red Dawns (Hvala 2010a: 51). As a space for alternative art, culture and politics Metelkova: “[...] also carried a symbolic dimension since it was seen as one of the key social initiatives in the process of democratization and pluralization of the (urban, political, cultural) public in Slovenia; as a “touchstone” for the potential of the so-called “civil society” to “maintain democracy” as Slovenia and Ljubljana entered the “transitional” 1990s” (Hvala 2010a: 100). She also states that the organizing structure of the Red Dawns is “[...] impossible to understand without this wider frame of reference” (Hvala 2010a: 101).

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that both queer-feminist collectives are part of a “broader community” that consists of collectives with similar political topics and worldviews, which are connected by affinity, solidarity and the common struggle for autonomous spaces.

Thematic diversity, Holistic politics

In the following chapter, I want to describe the broad range of issues the queer-feminist collectives, I spent time with, are dealing with and are fighting for. In a previous passage, I stated that the collectives are open and inclusive towards new people to a high extent, and as I will clarify in the following chapter, many people are active in other collectives and spaces as well. These two facts make it even clearer that the issues which are shared, discussed, explained or opened by performances, or just phrased over and over, are diverse. This leads us to some insights: Feminism is a swarm of birds, taking many shapes and each element of it is important on its own. Issues like patriarchy, violence against women and sexual harassment, body standards, care-work and wage differences, sexism and motherhood are only some

classic examples. Queer-feminism widens the spectrum even further and introduces issues like performance, porn, sexuality, the meaning of gender, subversion, and much more. Another aspect is that feminist fights are always connected to other political issues, such as, for example, democracy and state politics, capitalism, imperialism, racism and fascism. The queer-feminist collectives take many of these issues into account and draw a big picture of thematical diversity. The Red Dawns festival has a colorful program consisting of different events with different issues, which all together present the concept of the festival itself. Afkors collective wants to open a safer space for critical people and groups, who all together build a broader community to fight the repression of marginalized parts of the society. This thematic diversity is partly a very conscious decision. The collectives know that different oppressions are interwoven and that a broader, holistic and intersectional approach is essential (GD 3). For this reason, the pride parade is also criticized by Afkors. It has been said, that the pride parade addresses only a small agenda of the struggle and does not address the issue of borders, for example (GD 3).

This holistic politics of the two queer-feminist groups can be observed on many different levels. As a matter of principle, they already present themselves to the outside as critical towards various different oppressions. So, on their homepage and in their manifesto for example, the Red Dawns address many different fields of battle. In 2006, the year when the Red Dawns festival was called feminist *and* queer for the first time, they connected their feminist agenda to other leftist fights. In the introductory text they reminded their guests of Slovenia`s recent history by promising them songs of partisans and warning them about the rise of the New Right (Rdeče zore 2018: online). In their manifesto, they illustrate the broad range of their fights:

“Constant allusion, reflection and operation against [...] forms of oppression and violence, against patriarchy, capitalism, class stratification, fascism, nationalism, and imperialism is an important element of our fight” (Rdeče zore 2017: 44, my translation⁵¹)

⁵¹ “Konstantno opozarjanje, reflektiranje in delovanje proti [...] oblikam zatiranja in nasilja, protipatriarhatu, kapitalizmu, razrednemu razslojevanju, fašizmu, nacionalizmu in imperializmu, je pomemben element našega boja.”

In the same pamphlet, the Red Dawns also list a range of aspects that they campaign for:

“We are speaking up for: - the visibility of women* and (sexual) minorities, who`s battle has to be integrated in the context of a broader fight against discrimination of all kinds and oppressions on all levels [...] - the autonomy of our bodies and free sexuality - [...] – economic security without fear of poverty” (Rdeče zore 2017: 44, my translation⁵²)

Even if in the last quotation I left out many aspects and listed only a few as an example, it clarifies that the Red Dawns aim for a holistic leftist perspective of oppression and try to include as many of these aspects in their political agenda.

Another example of the thematic diversity and holistic politics of the queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana is the broad spectrum of events and topics in the space organized by the Afkors collective. The irregular Sunday brunches unifies many topics casually, discussions about refugee situations and flight are most common (FN 8.4.) Sometimes even concrete plans are made to help certain refugees (FN 25.2.). The consumption of vegan, dumpster dived or stolen food is an indication of the critiques of capitalist and neoliberal production, distribution and consumption (GD 2, GD 3). Apart from the Sunday brunches, many different things happen in the space. The feminist cabaret group *FEM TV* train (GD 3), round tables about menstruation (Afkors mailing list: 14.5.) or violence in lesbian relationships (GD 3) are held, debates about feminationism (Afkors mailing list: 29.5.) or feminism in Rojava (Afkors mailing list: 14.6.) are organized. Even if the program in the Afkors space is not as dense as in the Red Dawns festival, it can be seen, that issues brought up range from capitalism, racism, and approaches to feminism to the body and violence.

Using two more examples I want to show that even within one action or event many different political causes are present. For the protest of the 8th of March, a group of people from Afkors gathered in the yard of Metelkova to prepare banners for the demonstration. Again, integrating different oppressions, they chose the inscription: “lesbian feminists against

⁵² “Zavzemamo se za: vidnost žensk* in (spolnih) manjšin, katerih boj mora biti vpet v kontekst širšega boja proti diskriminaciji vseh vrst in zatiranju na vseh nivojih [...] - avtonomijo naših teles in svobodno seksualnost [...] – ekonomsko varnost brez strahu pred revščino”.

fascism, war and capitalism” (FN 8.3.). Another very nice example is the performance of the duo *exxxtra*porno*, one evening of the Red Dawns festival. Two very trashily dressed people were on the stage, one playing electric guitar and one singing. The lyrics of two songs involved a range of issues like porn, performance, violence, queer, drag, femininity, migration, patriarchy, motherhood, rape, care-work, homosexuality, mainstream-feminism, bodily expectations, poverty and much more (FN 9.3.).

The topics discussed or touched on by the actions or performances are brought up by the individual members, activists and performers themselves. Both Red Dawns and Afkors stress, that the activists and artists choose what is relevant to be shown or discussed. The program of the Red Dawns varies each year. Tea Hvala states, that “people within the organizational team fluctuate and the program depends on the aesthetic and political preferences of each year’s collective” (Hvala 2010a: 106). The festival itself intentionally has no main topic each year, even if there is such an expectation from outside (GD 2), because “it is about opening the field and letting these things that we believe should have some space to be presented, to have the space” (GD 2). As a matter of fact, they conclude that it can happen, that there are two lectures or performances which contradict one another, because they are open to hosting different feminist views (GD 2). The Afkors collective made a similar argument when they reflected on their program. The events, actions and topics came from specific people who wanted to introduce certain topics (GD 3); so the heterogeneity comes from the fact that people from beginning came from very different collectives and groups, or were not part of any group yet (GD 3). To my subsequent question of whether the broad spectrum of topics was a conscious decision, they answered, that this heterogeneity was partly conscious, partly from the people of the collective addressing the needs within the collective, in the community or in society (GD 3).

So, it can be concluded, that the thematic diversity - the diverse acts of resistance - are on the one hand a reaction to the happenings in the society, in the community and a mixture of individual interests, and on the other hand, a conscious decision for a holistic political agenda. Even though the queer-feminist groups are fighting as many different fights as possible, they can never actively fight against every existing oppression. Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele stress, that:

“[...] individual feminist or queerfeminist groups and players cannot attack all forms of authority and discrimination simultaneously. So, it is necessary, because of the intersections of social inequalities on various levels and along different categories, to broaden the acts of resistance.” (Degele & Winker interviewed by Langreiter & Timm 2011: 74f., my translation⁵³)

“Affinity not identity”

Within the following two chapters, my aim is to sum up the political standpoints of the queer-feminist groups regarding identity, identity politics and alternative strategies of collectivity, to look at my main research question; to what extent do the queer-feminist collectives succeed in challenging identity categories. For this reason, I will give a voice to feminist theorists and activists from Ljubljana to capture their somewhat differentiated points of view. As a pre-conclusion I will continue with a discussion of the possibilities for political alliances based on concepts that differ from the criticized identity politics. This last chapter is an empirical one as well as a theoretical one; it tries to analyze queer-feminist politics in Ljubljana and to describe alternative conceptualizations of coalition building beyond identity categories.

The title “affinity not identity” should not present a policy recommendation as such, but can serve as a subversive and lively slogan. I have it from members of Afkors, and not only the slogan, but also the meaning behind it, accompanied me throughout the whole process of researching and analyzing.

⁵³ „[...] einzelne feministische oder queerfeministische Gruppen und AkteurInnen nicht alle Diskriminierungs- und Herrschaftsformen gleichzeitig angreifen können. Es gilt also, wegen der Verzahnung sozialer Ungleichheiten auf verschiedenen Ebenen und entlang unterschiedlicher Kategorien auch die Widerstandsformen zu erweitern.“

Anti-identity politics in Ljubljana

In the last decades, many Slovene authors, who are activists at the same time, have discussed their opinions regarding the discrepancy between queer politics and identity politics. One of these activist-authors is Nina Perger, a social scholar and active member of the LGBT community, for example, a member of the organizing team of the pride parade. In her article “Between queer theories, queer politics and gay and lesbian movements“ (2014), she makes a clear distinction between queer politics on the one hand and being critical of identity politics on the other hand, citing Ljubljana’s gay and lesbian movements as good examples (Perger 2014: 71). She criticizes identity politics sharply, stating that it “[...] include[s] those subjects who meet the criteria for specific – gay and lesbian – identity categories, which serve as a basis for political representation in which non-normative subjects are excluded” (ibid.). She considers queer politics to be very different from this position, because identity binaries of gender and sexuality are challenged and a critical stance towards identity - or a promotion of “disidentity” - is the focus. Opposed to identity politics, where struggles are based on a specific exclusionary identity category, “[...] queer politics and struggles are established on the basis of common interests, not identities” (ibid.). Another scholar in this context is Suzana Tratnik, who as early as 1997, made a similar distinction:

“Some try to constitute ‘identity’ as a basis of the claim for a stronger social integration (for example: we are like everybody else and that’s why we shouldn’t be treated differently), other use ‘difference’ as a strategy for the disruption of hegemonies of dominant social/sexual regulations [...]” (Tratnik 1997: 153, my translation⁵⁴)

In this quotation, we can see that Tratnik compares identity politics directly to an approach of assimilation, undertaken by groups following identity politics. In her article she focuses on lesbian groups, which according to her, tend to exclude all those who do not completely fit

⁵⁴ “Nekateri poskušajo konstituirati „identiteto“ kot temelj za zahtevo po večji družbeni vključitvi (npr. Taki smo kot vsi drugi in zato nas ne bi smeli obravnavati drugače), drugi uporabljajo „drugačnost“ kot strategijo za motenje hegemonije dominantnih družbenih/seksualnih ureditev [...]”

expectations by, for example, not being “totally others”⁵⁵ or “entirely/sufficiently ours”⁵⁶, as non-feminist lesbians, butch and femme lesbians, hidden homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgender, newbies, etc. Through this, these kinds of groups set strict borders on inclusion and exclusion (Tratnik 1997: 153f.). As another theoretical and political voice in this context, Nataša Sukič should be mentioned. She stated that identity politics was meant to be the core strategy of social change: “[...] the idea is, that it is possible to effectively counter social discrimination based on individual experiences with specific forms of oppression [...]” (Sukič 1997: 213, my translation⁵⁷). Yet in the 90s the “queer movement”, representing the central theory, politics and action in this era, “was understanding the idea of mutual networking, uniting under its patronage lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, transgender, feminists, women, ...” (Sukič 1997: 214, my translation⁵⁸).

As I already explained in the chapter about the history of queer-feminist activism in Ljubljana, the trend of queer was perceived in distinctive ways, and most activists did not welcome the approaches with open arms. One group to be named in this context is the already mentioned lesbian society *ŠKUC LL*, which was very critical of queer politics and followed an identity politics instead. In my time in Ljubljana, I observed an odd relationship, and noticed historical and contemporary conflicts between *ŠKUC LL* and other queer, feminist or LGBT-groups. Tea Hvala in 2012 elaborated a conflict from the past, which is still present in people’s minds, she was describing how *ŠKUC LL* accused the lesbian feminist collective *LFU* (lezbično-feministična univerza) of:

“queerovanje”⁵⁹ – of ‘drowning’ the autonomy and specificity of the lesbian scene by organizing several cultural events together with gay men in Monokel, the only lesbian club in Ljubljana. Ironically, since they had to leave Monokel in December 2010, *LFU* members have

⁵⁵ “v celoti drugi”

⁵⁶ “ne povsem/zadostni naši”

⁵⁷ “[...] ideja je v tem, da se lahko le na osnovi individualnih izkušenj s specifičnimi oblikami zatiranja učinkovito upreš družbeni diskriminaciji, [...]”

⁵⁸ “*Queer* gibanje, [...], je dojelo idejo medsebojnega povezovanja, saj pod svojim okriljem združuje lezbijke, geje, biseksualce, transvestite, transseksualce, transgenderje, feministke, ženske, ...”.

⁵⁹ “Queerovanje” could be translated by “queering”.

been organizing both women-only and mixed events in Tiffany, the only gay club in town.”

(Hvala 2012a: 188)

I was told the same story by one of the members of the Red Dawns, Afkors and *LFU* (FN 20.3.). Hvala continues by stressing, that for the LGBT community in Ljubljana, queer represents a neoconservative politics of privacy, rather than a progressive or confrontational politics of visibility. Nataša Velikonja, herself an active member of *ŠKUC LL*, finds it necessary to disassociate queer politics from LGBT politics (Hvala 2012a: 190). In Velikonja's and Greif's book on the history of *ŠKUC LL*, the authors do not hesitate to emphasize their identity as lesbians and the representation of such an identity category through the book and the group as such (Velikonja & Greif 2012). Nevertheless, Velikonja's stance towards identity politics seems to be an arbitrary one. Already in 1997, she distanced herself critically from identity politics, because of its internal flaws:

“Identity politics, struggles for identities, based upon race, gender, sexuality, respectively way of life, [...] didn't succeed realizing the expected goal [...]. The emphasis on identities first was successful because of the active identification of marginalized and deconstruction of classical paradigms of representation, in the continuation imperfections appeared, mostly because of the fragility and variability of particular identity categories themselves [...].”

(Velikonja 1997: 175, my translation⁶⁰)

Now, after having gained a quick glimpse at some voices of the Slovene LGBT and feminist community regarding identity politics, we can note that the general opinion in feminist and LGBT activism opposes identity categories. Most activists and theorists are clearly aware of the fact that politics based on one identity category are to be looked on with suspicion, firstly because of the constant exclusion of people who do not fit this category perfectly and secondly, because categories are only socially constructed normativities and cannot be perceived as simple representations of real life. Even if I did not encounter any group in

⁶⁰ “Identitetne politike, boji za identitete, osnovane na podlagi rase, spola, seksualnosti oziroma življenjskega stila, [...], niso uspele realizirati predvidenega cilja, [...]. Poudarek na identitetah je bil sprva učinkovit zaradi aktivnega prepoznavanja marginaliziranih in dekonstrukcije klasičnih paradigem reprezentacije, ob nadaljevanju pa so se pokazale pomanjkljivosti predvsem zaradi same krhkosti in spremenljivosti partikularnih kategorizacij identitet”.

Ljubljana, which presented itself as consciously following identity politics, uncritical of what the consequences of this would be, opposing identity politics seems to be highly present. Maybe a little bit exaggeratedly it could be said, that activist groups are constantly constituting a spacegoat⁶¹ of groups that do not really exist and who follow identity politics, to legitimize their own intellectually reflected politics. However, let us have a look at the opinions of my core research groups, the queer-feminist collectives Afkors and Red Dawns.

Firstly, I want to reuse a statement from Lidija Radojević from Tea Hvala's interview conducted in 2010, because it represents, in a very critical and political way, how the Red Dawns perceived and still perceive their politics:

“[...] feminism forgot about a lot of things when it focused on identity politics exclusively; it forgot about the social element that was once already there. To connect queer and feminist politics with that – that's the essence! This is how you touch the deepest roots of chauvinism.” (Hvala 2010a: 69)

Both collectives do not base their struggle on a simplifying identity category such as “women” or “lesbian” or neither “queers”. The members of the Red Dawns collective actively criticize these apparent identities. It is stated that they have not accepted identity categories, like women, queer, lesbians and so on (GD 2), that they do not acknowledge identity as such (GD 1), or that they struggle with the concept of identity and identity politics (GD 2). Identity is criticized, for example, because its goal is to classify individuals into categories; people “[...] want to put you somewhere and I don't want to be there [...]” (GD 1). It's a tool for society to disregard you, to put you down, as a collective or individually (GD 1). Members do not feel like they must identify themselves with a certain category within the group (GD 2), that “[...] you are not questioned who you are [...]” (GD 2). I also personally had the feeling that identification was not an issue, no one inside the groups ever asked me, for example, if I was heterosexual, homosexual or pansexual. Identity categories and especially sexual and gender categories could almost be seen as something like a taboo. As described in the chapter

⁶¹ Of course, the correct word is “scapegoat”, but as the topsy-turvy word “spacegoat” was a funny insider joke in the Afkors collective I had to smuggle the word into my thesis.

about language, cases during my interviews showed that people, who ascribe categories as “women”, “cis”, or “white” to other people inside the group, are immediately corrected.

Regarding the question of how important identity is for Red Dawns, they have divergent positions. On the one hand it is perceived that identity is not necessarily so important for the collective (GD 2), but on the other hand, they want to represent a broad spectrum of marginalized positions in the program of their festival. The constellation of the program is often connected to identity and identities, because the topics they chose were connected to a certain identity (GD 2), or because certain actors or performers presented themselves in a certain way (GD 1). At the festival, Red Dawns want to give space to different people, want to have an inclusive and diverse festival, a diversity of different feminisms and a diversity of different queer identities, and so, when selecting the program, it can happen that they think in terms of identity categories. Something like: “hey, we don’t have anything lesbian” (GD 2). They also stress that they do talk and discuss about the performers and artist at the festival, whether or not to have a certain person “[...] due to certain values that of course goes well with let’s say certain kind of identity if you put it like that” (GD 1). Even if identity politics is not the collective’s frame of the festival, they still find it important to not exclude topics and actors representing a certain identity category, they still want to fight for these identities (GD 2). Also Tea Hvala describes the festival as “[...] a highly interactive public space that was supportive of their feminist or/and lesbian identity [...]“ (Hvala 2010a: 84). A member of Red Dawns explains their politics very nicely:

“[...] for me it comes out of identity politics but it sees the necessity of not focusing on an identity as an essential closed up total category, and I think this is, I think, sort of what connects to the form of the festival, [...] I mean every year journalists ask us: what is the topic of this year’s festival and [...] it is important always to point out, there is intentionally no topic, and I guess in a way that even works as a provocation, because people always want to categorize” (GD 2)

The aim is inclusivity, but the group members are also aware of the fact that they can never be hundred percent inclusive, because it is unavoidable to never exclude anybody (GD 2). To represent an even broader spectrum of diversity in the festival, a broader representation in the collective would be needed, to not only talk *about* some group of people (GD 2). To summarize, it can be said, that whilst the Red Dawns do not discuss identity as such, it is

connected to the program (GD 1) because of their aim to cover a broad spectrum of positions and identities.

Hopefully I have already clarified that to be a part of one of the queer-feminist collectives, no personal identification as “women”, “lesbian”, “queer” or similar is presupposed. Still, there are presumptions about certain identifications, as a member of Red Dawns collective clarifies: “[...] there is a certain presumed identity, that I guess is considered important, cause obviously, if somebody identifies as a ... ahm ... a men`s rights activist and a Nazi-fan, obviously I don`t think this type of identity is welcomed in this collective, so yes, to say that it [identity] is not important would be a lie...”(GD 2). A member of the Afkors collective brought this issue up in a very similar way. She said, that they do not expect somebody to join the group “[...] that is like against gay-rights, right? or against women-rights [...]” (GD 3). These examples raise the question of the border between identity and values or political orientation. The line between these concepts is not a clear one and the members of the queer-feminist collectives are theoretically against identity, but still find a lot of “sameness” between themselves (GD 3). But what is this sameness? How can it be described? What holds the group together? What unifies them?

Several times in the group discussions, similar values were foregrounded. In the Afkors collective, a certain sameness within the group was put on the level of values and politics, and not on the importance of the level of sharing the same identity category (GD 3). One relatively new member remembered joining the group not expecting everyone to be “women”, lesbians” or something, instead she was expecting the certain values of the group and “a common way of thinking” (GD 3). Another activist highlighted that an integral and connecting part of the collective or the space is common language and common understanding of politics (GD 3). Members of the Red Dawns collective also made similar statements, as for example: “[...] being a collective implies sharing some values, some fundamental values [...]” (GD 1) or “[...] we have very similar ideas or approaches to things [...]”, explicitly including also the audience of the festival (GD 1).

A certain sameness within the groups can also be named as similar life experiences or *habitus*. One person pointed out the fact that she felt that the members of Afkors have the same “socialità”⁶² as her, “the way in which you socialize, and what you do when you socialize” (GD 3). In my opinion, the aim that everybody in a group feels comfortable could also be described by affinity. It is important how people feel in the group and that hierarchies are tried to be as flat as possible (GD 3), it is also important that people are nice to each other (GD 2). If the groups are friendly and caring to each other and as non-hierarchical as possible, it is a “collectivity, which is something that for me transcends the idea of identity” (GD 2).

A nice example of affinity uniting the group is the final part of the third group discussion, when one person suggested that everybody who wants to could share a nice experience in the Afkors-space with the others. Some people did tell a story that they experienced in the space, involving a happy moment because of the insight of shared responsibility or a moment in which somebody realized that there is a good basis for trust in the group. One story was about funny memories of a party and another story was about the nice experience of being able to learn concrete things from each other (GD 3). Because of these shared stories inside the space, I dare to say that sharing responsibility, trust, fun, and exchange of skills are also relevant aspects of affinity, holding the group together, forming a political union. Last but not least, I have to add that in the case of Afkors, the space itself, the buildup, the maintenance and the importance of a queer-feminist space itself help unify the group (GD 3).

In this chapter, I gave an overview of the opinions of activists and social scholars regarding identity politics. Politics based on certain essentializing identities have been criticized from different angles. My two core groups in Ljubljana positioned themselves on the negating side and preferred not to base their political work on a shared identity, but rather on shared values, a shared political orientation and the shared aims and goals that they have, which I described in the previous chapters. All of this does not mean, that the individuals are not same in certain ways, but what this sameness exactly is, and if it is important to know and name it, is not clear at all. Apart from same political interests, similar life experiences, affinity or friendship are also important unifying elements.

⁶² Italian, could be translated by sociality or gregariousness.

To summarize, in the empirical part of this master thesis I pointed out that queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana have a heterogeneous profile and build everyday acts of resistance against capitalism, sexism, racism, homophobia and much more. Their fight is based on alliances of affinity, not identity. Not only do they criticize identity politics, all sorts of binaries, and inflexible identity categories in theory, but they also challenge them in the everyday life of their activism. Classical identity categories such as “women”, “lesbian”, “bisexual” etc., are not an issue. This queer way of feminist activism is constantly and in many different ways trying and succeeding to challenge classic identity categories such as gender and sexuality, but the activists are simultaneously aware of the complexity of identity and of the fact that in some cases representation and the conscious support of certain oppressed identity categories, such as lesbians* or women*, is important.

Flexible solidarity and coalition building

In this last chapter, I want to return to a couple of questions. What can a queer-feminist struggle be based on? How to deal with categories in feminist activism and anthropology? What can queer and intersectional feminism mean? What alternative possibilities for coalitions and alliances do we have? What other aspects of groups can be unifying for a political group? What can feminist collectives and anthropologists build on if not identity?

After having seen how the collectives Afkors and Red Dawns deal with identity and dis-identity I want to have another look at the theoretic concepts about political coalitions beyond homogenizing and essentializing identity concepts. The conceptualizations and thinkers I choose here are not at all the only ones who had something important to say about this topic. I decided to depict on the one hand authors whose quotations cannot be found in every second feminist paper, and on the other hand I try to reproduce voices from queer, black, Slovene and anti-racist feminist scholars. Still, it is important to stress that I don't claim to give an overview on the voices and concepts on the topic of feminist activism and research without identity politics.

In feminist activist groups there must be unifying elements, otherwise there would be only fragmentation. Felski says that feminist theorists shouldn't stress the absolute difference and

should admit that points of identity-sameness exist and are not only a repressive tool of power (Felski 1989).

“Some form of appeal to collective identity and solidarity is a necessary precondition for the emergence and effectiveness of an oppositional movement [...]” (Felski 1989: 168f.)

Hvala, who wrote her master thesis on the Red Dawns in 2010, based a lot of her work on Rita Felski's insights. In this point, she opposed her position by adding that there can be feminist groups, who stress neither a “unifying identity”, nor an “absolute difference”, but something in between (Hvala 2010a: 35f.). Among others, she surely meant by that the way of group formation and the politics of the Red Dawns. In the following passages, I will bring examples of what elements could be seen as unifying aside from identity and how we can conceptualize feminist political alliances in anthropology. Neither now nor later will I depict the recipe or solution to these dilemmas and questions. My aim is only to highlight the complexity of identity and identity categories on the one hand and to describe alternatives on the other hand.

One of these unifying elements could be the notion and the approach of solidarity, solidarity among people who define themselves in different ways, and solidarity between groups who focus on different topics but fight for a similar social change. How solidarity fits with the individualizing politics of queer, and what should be the basis for solidarity and the borders of it must to be examined in more depth.

It is very interesting to think about solidarity and queer politics together, because contradictory relationships can be identified. On the one hand queer politics and theory always runs the risk of focusing too much on individuality and fitting well with and going along with a selfish neoliberal credo. In the times of the optimization of the individual self, it is hard to still hope for a thing called solidarity (see also Hark 2017: 18). Hvala also highlights this aspect as an essential problem of western feminism: “[...] the reluctance to actively participate in collectively and voluntarily-run political, cultural and artistic non-profit projects due to the increasing value attributed to individualism and consumerism; and the general lack of solidarity, [...]” (Hvala 2010a: 79f.). On the other hand the opinion exists that queer and solidarity, and respectively affinity, go well together. Nina Perger, a queer-feminist scholar from Ljubljana is convinced that queer brings the possibility to reject the focus on identity and work with the concept of affinity instead. She refers to Shane Phelan (1995), who also stresses that “[...] politics must be informed by affinity rather than identity [...]”,

because there are always differences in groups, and also inside individuals themselves (Phelan 1995: 345).

The terms solidarity and affinity are similar but not be used completely synonymously. Perger connects affinity to having the same political interests, values, wishes and goals (Perger 2014: 78, 81). As I see it, affinity has to do with attraction in one or the other way, it means a mutual bond between people, connecting them through friendship, trust, help, understanding, support, and so on. The second level of affinity is the connectivity through a shared goal, which can be to plan a demonstration, to organize a festival or to maintain a queer-feminist room. This goal is in its realization of course political, but the term and concept of affinity leaves out the question of how a certain sameness can be named and conceptualized in a feminist group, which is an interesting fact and can be seen as both positive or negative, depending on the situation and the aims. Solidarity on the other hand is a different and somewhat broader term. It implies a political level but does not automatically include who to be in solidarity with, why exactly and where to draw the border. Solidarity within a feminist group and between groups of oppressed or marginalized people is extremely important for social and political change. But what exactly should this solidarity be based on? Nancy Fraser, talking about cultures of solidarity⁶³ in this context, stressed that cultures of solidarity should be built without being homogenizing and repressive (Fraser 1994: 74); in other words a solidarity which does not focus solely on simplifying identity categories. In the next passages I will look at suggestions about connectivity and solidarity at the level of political interests and positions.

For example Sabine Hark and Cathy Cohen attempt to build a theoretical and conceptual ground to develop political alliances without the reference to classical identity categories.

As a kind of solution or résumé of Hark's work (1999), it is suggested to think in terms of or work with homogenous identities, but rather with deviant subjects⁶⁴. In the very short last chapter of Sabine Harks book, this concept is presented. It is an alternative concept for the

⁶³ „Solidaritätskulturen“

⁶⁴ „deviante Subjekte“

perception of political individuals in activist and social movements. The author says that *deviant subjects* are subjects whose identity is never completed, they are not identical in time or space, and their point of origin is the difference within identity, “the constitutive flaw on the roots of any kind of identity” (Hark 1999: 181, my translation⁶⁵).

Imitating Butlers (2009) words, Hark (2017) stresses that precarity is what unites all deviant subjects. Precarity is not an identity, it is a social condition connecting women*, trans-persons*, non-heterosexuals*, differently abled, poor people, refugees, blacks and so on. “Thus, the focus on precarity as a shared experience holds the hope for solidarity alliances beyond identity, [...]” (Küppers⁶⁶ 2017: 10, my translation⁶⁷). The passages from Butlers work that Hark is referring to, advertises the focus on “precarity and its differential distributions” to build new coalitions away from identity politics and identity categories, alliances against state violence and other institutions of power (Butler 2009: 32).

To build political coalitions with the focus on precarity as a shared experience, returns us to the condition of solidarity, or in Hark’s words, sociality⁶⁸. This sociality keeps us from situations in which individuals are positioned in relation to concurrence and forced into normalized identities. Alliances of precarity open up the possibility of points of contact in fields where oppositional notions have been fore grounded (Hark 2017: 48). Like this, political groups can form a coalition with other movements which are critical to power and control and thus build a strong opposition (ibid.: 55).

The second scholar, I want to include here, Cathy J. Cohen, has a similar argument. Queer is everybody and everything opposing normativity and fixed identities, so it does not have to be connected to sexuality or gender. Other non-normative and marginal positions, such as punks, can be comrades with the same political goal (Cohen 2013). Cohen is disappointed by queer politics. It has a radical potential, “[...] the ability to create a space in opposition to dominants norms [...]” (ibid.: 75), but many times queer groups hold on to the binary of queer vs.

⁶⁵ „[...] der konstitutive Mangel and der Wurzel jeglicher Identität [...]“.

⁶⁶ Küppers wrote the foreword for Hark 2017.

⁶⁷ „So birgt der Fokus auf Prekarität als geteilter Erfahrung neue Hoffnungen auf solidarische Bündnisse jenseits von Identität, [...]“.

⁶⁸ „Sozialität“

heterosexual. But apparently, not only the groups she researched, but also Cohen herself understands queer as everything which is not heterosexual in a way, because of her strong focus on gay and lesbians in the article. However, Cohen, like Butler and Hark, also prefers to focus on social and political positions rather than identity positions: “I envision a politics where one’s relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one’s political comrades” (ibid.: 75). In a very clear and honest way, Cohen highlights the importance of a left coalition:

“Thus, inherent in our new politics must be a commitment to left analysis and left politics. [...] Fundamentally, a left framework makes central the interdependency among multiple systems of domination.” (Cohen 2013: 78)

As feminist groups, other struggles against oppressions, discriminations, capitalism and so on need fundamental social, economic and political changes. Cohen says that if all oppressions are connected through the state, capitalism and patriarchy, also the struggles should be connected. She suggests that movement building should be rooted “[...] in our shared marginal relationship to dominant power which normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges” (ibid.).

Nira Yuval-Davis has a similar opinion, but a different approach. By suggesting an alternative concept to identity politics, namely transversal politics, she tries to find a balance between universalist essentialism and the supposedly deconstructivist nothing. Still, she is very clear about the bad sides of identity politics, which “homogenizes and naturalizes social categories and groupings, denying shifting boundaries and internal power differences and conflicts of interest” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 94). As an alternative to identity politics she advocates the so called transversal politics (Yuval-Davis 2006:195).

“[...] [T]ransversal politics aims to be an alternative to the universalism/relativism dichotomy which is at the heart of the modernist/postmodernist feminist debate. It aims at providing answers to the crucial theoretical/political questions of how and with whom we should work if/when we accept that we are all different as deconstructionist theories argue.” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 91)

As some scholars mentioned before, she prefers to focus on political values and aims rather than identities, a sort of feminist coalition politics where differences within are something normal and accepted. With this, the “what” becomes more important than the “who” (ibid.).

Instead of unity and homogeneity, dialogue in the groups and between the units should be emphasized (Yuval-Davis 1997: 94). With this focus on political and social values she follows Butler's argument that groups can also be capable of acting politically by forming alliances, not being bound to the subject category of "woman" (Butler 1991: 36). Still, Yuval-Davis does not disregard the fact that real oppression and discrimination occurs on the basis of specific categories, thus the struggle against these oppressions has to work with categories to a certain extent, but the struggle should not be limited to these categories (Yuval-Davis 1997: 95).

Twenty years after Yuval-Davis' article, in 2017, Patricia Hill Collins rereads her insights and takes a look at the actuality of her thoughts. On the basis of the recent US-American Black Feminism and a struggle called "Black Lives Matter" she debates the issues of transversal politics and solidarity. Collins agrees with Yuval-Davis on the fact that political coalitions are rooted in certain social contexts on the one hand and can shift in order to achieve transversal politics on the other hand (Collins 2017: 1470). She stresses that "[...] Black women developed a more strategic, dynamic and sophisticated approach to solidarity [...]" (Collins 2017: 1468). Black women in the US realized that solidarity does not have to be an "ideological uniformity", which means that Black feminists do not have to be connected to patriarchal and homophobic Black groups, just because of a shared blackness (Collins 2017: 1468f.). Collins thus adheres to the argument that African American women show us that "[...] flexible solidarity [i]s a core feature of transversal politics" (Collins 2017: 1461). The author shows us, that solidarity as the basis for transversal politics, the alternative to identity as the basis of identity politics, has to also be handled with care, and should be researched more intensively. In the case of Collins' research, we of course come also back to the importance of intersectionality:

"Black Lives Matter points to the necessary interconnectedness of intersectionality and flexible solidarity within its own praxis as well as the continued challenges of using these ideas within broader social movements." (Collins 2017: 1472)

In the last passages, I brought in some examples of suggestions regarding what to base our feminist politics and struggles on, if not identity. Coalition politics with the focus on deviance or precarity as the uniting sameness was suggested. Left criticism has to be part of every (feminist) struggle and like this, the connection of different power relations and thus

intersected marginalizations can be highlighted. Affinity respectively solidarity are important notions within groups and between political collectives but has to be flexible and not based again on identity categories as a support for identity politics. Transversal politics can be alternative concepts. Queer politics in this case has a diverse but important role, though most consider it to have a critical and deconstructive potential of activism beyond identity categories, even if no scholar describes queer (-feminist) groups actually acting in this manner. In contrast to these scholars, like Hark (1999) or Cohen (2013), I have the impression that the queer-feminist groups in Ljubljana do really unite on a basis other than identity. As described in the chapter about their strategies and policies and other parts of my master thesis, the collectives Afkors and Red Dawns do focus on a collective political aim of creating queer-feminist spaces and events and connecting by solidarity. For instance, in the following statement we can see clearly that solidarity and affinity are important parts of the struggle of the Afkors collective, when they present the goals of their action:

“solidarity + collective fight + own political analysis + collective action + there is no revolution, social change without feminism + non-hierarchy + identification of undiscussed power relations + the chance to listen and being listened + the personal is political! + practicing non-stereotypical femininity and masculinity + heterogeneity + affinity instead of identity + feminism is for all” (Anarhistično-kvirovsko-feministični kolektiv iz Avtonomne tovarne Rog 2017: 23, my translation⁶⁹)⁷⁰

As I explained in the chapter about “the community”, both collectives do not draw fixed borders with other leftist groups and both groups are involved with other autonomous groups fighting for similar political issues. They are also aware of the interconnectedness of different marginalizations and oppressions. The importance of flexible solidarity among similar groups aiming for similar social changes is an important feature of contemporary feminism, also highlighted by the editors of an extensive booklet about feminism in Slovenia:

⁶⁹ “solidarnost + skupni boj + lastna politična analiza + skupna akcija + ni revolucije, družbenih sprememb brez feminizma + nehierarhičnost + prepoznavanje neobravnavanih razmerij moči + možnost poslušanja in biti slišan_a + osebno je politično! + prakticiranje nestereotipnih ženskosti in moškosti + heterogenost + afiniteta nemesto identitete + feminizem je za vse”.

⁷⁰ This quotation is a collection of phrases from a zine by the Afkors collective with the title “No more sexistische Kackscheiße – Viva el feminismo queer!”.

“We therefore need to consider feminism simultaneously in tension and solidarity with movements and theories responding to social phenomena such as migrations, systematic racism, exclusion of sexually nonconforming persons, discrimination against non-heterosexual couples and communities, and so on.” (Čičigoj & Založnik 2017: 251)

The highlighted topics refer to the question of the basis of a feminist group, but at the same time it discusses the issue of the categorization and conceptualization of groups in the social sciences in general. How should social and cultural anthropologists think and write about groups? Is the correct way to dismiss all classical identity categories to avoid reproducing essentialist stereotypes? How intensively should we investigate within the group we are researching about the emic and applied categories, or do these questions make social reality unnecessarily more complicated than it is? There has been much discussion about these topics in the social sciences, especially within feminist and decolonial approaches, and it is always followed by a lack of clarity over whether scholars talk about actual identity categories in concrete groups, or about how to conceptualize these groups as a researcher. It is unclear, if someone is debating on a theoretical or a practical level and thus it again reflects the difficulty of clearly distinguishing between practice and theory. Regarding this clarity, and more generally regarding the question of how to talk about us as feminist scholars or feminist activists, we still have to do conceptual work. To avoid reproducing only the insights of the great feminist thinkers of the 90s and to not only be stuck in the mantra of everything being a social construct, we have to go from there and find out what we can really base our struggle on, if not identity.

By presenting some suggestions I wanted to portray a plurality of strong concepts and thoughts with slightly diverse wordings and backgrounds on the one hand and to give a review of a collection of theoretical frameworks for feminist anthropology on the other hand, to maybe take a step forward with this basis.

Conclusion

During working on my master thesis, I occupied myself with some of the essential questions of academic and activist feminism. I was asking, to what extent it makes sense to base feminist struggle on identity categories, such as, for example, the most important category in feminism: “woman”. Should we base solidarity on womanhood or do we run the risk of reproducing the essentialist constructions of “female” and “male” gender and sex? These questions, that have occupied feminists for many decades, remain incredibly important.

What also concerns many feminist theorists regarding the uncritical use of the category “woman” in academia, is that the term suggests a homogeneity within the category; it ascribes it an essence, lying beneath the term; an essence of perhaps the same experience, the same behavior, or the same roles that are opposed to being a “man”. Since the rise of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches to cultural and social anthropology, different ways of dealing with the dilemma have emerged. Tendencies to deconstruct, ignore, queer, intersect or pluralize identity categories have emerged in academia, as in activism. I present two main approaches to feminist anthropology in my thesis: the theory of intersectionality and queer theory. I outline the main aspects of these two theories and argue that both approaches are important and have potential for a critical feminist agenda, but that intersectional research and analysis must be critical of identity categories in a queer and deconstructive way.

As an empirical counterpart, I spent more than four months in Ljubljana, looking at the queer-feminist scene and the local activist practices connected to identity categories. I focused on two groups; Afkors and the Red Dawns, spending an intensive time with them by involving myself, hanging out, being a part of them and conducting qualitative data, mainly through participant observation and recorded group discussions. I looked at their approaches to feminism and queer politics. It was noticeable that activists from the queer-feminist collectives in Ljubljana were totally aware of the difficulties connected to identity politics and in their daily actions and political strategies they in many different ways consciously opposed a politic based on simplified categories. Their political strategies and policies included, for example, a conscious use of gendered or even gender-less language, an autonomous and radical positioning in contrast to mainstream or liberal approaches to activism, and the inclusion of various oppressions, as racism, homophobia and classism, into their queer-feminist agenda. Following these strategies, Afkors and Red Dawns collaborate with

autonomous squats and anarchist groups, more than with other feminist or LGBT organizations. The two queer-feminist groups showed that it is possible to base a struggle on affinity not identity, or in Phelan's words, that "[...] the ground for common action cannot be 'identity' but must be shared commitments; it must be sympathy and affinity rather than identity" (Phelan 1995: 351). I discovered that affinity, for the two collectives, means a common struggle and connection based on support and friendship on the one hand, and on sharing a certain goal on the other hand. This certain goal can be managing a queer-feminist space in a squat, organizing a queer-feminist festival or smaller events. The connecting element is not an identity category or the fight for such. The queer-feminist groups from Ljubljana show us, that feminism is a struggle against various oppressions for all people.

With the help of our comrades in Ljubljana, I highlighted, that for fruitful anthropological empirical research and theoretical discussion, as for an inclusive and radical feminist activism, we need both a queer and intersectional approach. We must try to articulate the complexities of lives by considering intersecting power relations, but at the same time hegemonic identity categories should not be reproduced in the field, nor in the analysis, but rather constantly questioned and destabilized. The discussion about categorization based on identity in the feminist social sciences is not yet over. By presenting the historical background of feminist theoretical discussions, giving some conceptual suggestions about flexible solidarity and coalition building, or "affinity", and by introducing the queer-feminist politics of Ljubljana, I hopefully have been able to frame a complex discussion, which is taking new and interesting steps. Now it is for feminist anthropology to evolve with this basis and leave the old, often repeated points of the discussion behind.

Interview indication

GD1: Group discussion 1, with 6 people from the collective of Red Dawns, 23.3.2018

GD2: Group discussion 2, with 7 people from the collective of Red Dawns, 30.3.2018

GD3: Group discussion 3, with 6 people from the collective of Afkors, 18.5.2018

Field notes, emails, and personal archive

Field notes:

- February to June 2018, Ljubljana

Emails:

- Emails from Red Dawns mailing list, March - June 2018, online
- Emails from Afkors mailing list, March - June 2018, online
- Email conversation with Sabine Hark, 9.10.2018, online

Personal archive:

- Qëndresë Deda, 2018, text of the performance "what are words doing"
- Recorded discussion in A-infoshop about "radical potentials of feminism today", 6.4.2018
- Performance/concert/open form: Manifesto - Et l'Europe alors (IT), text of the performance: personal archive, 10.3.2018

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Abstract

This thesis is about the question of to what extent it makes sense to base feminist struggle on the identity category “woman”. Should we fight for the rights of “women” and how strongly does this risk reproducing essentialist constructions of “female” and “male” gender and sex? Since postmodern and poststructuralist approaches in cultural and social anthropology, different ways of dealing with the dilemma have emerged. Tendencies to deconstruct, ignore, queer, intersect or pluralize identity categories have emerged in academia, as in activism. In feminist anthropology there are (amongst others) two main approaches that I am presenting here: the theory of intersectionality and the queer theory. I argue that both approaches are important and have potential for a critical feminist agenda, but that intersectional research and analysis must be critical of identity categories in a queer and deconstructive way.

For my empirical research, I spent more than four months in Ljubljana, focusing on the queer-feminist scene and highlighting how the local activist practices can be seen as alternatives to identity politics.

Diese Arbeit behandelt die Frage, bis zu welchen Grad es Sinn macht einen feministischen Kampf auf der Grundlage der Identitätskategorie „Frau“ zu führen. Sollten wir uns einsetzen für die Rechte „der Frauen“ und wie stark ist das Risiko essentialistische Konstruktionen von weiblichem und männlichem *gender* und *sex* zu reproduzieren? Seit den postmodernen und poststrukturalistischen Ansätzen in der Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie wurden unterschiedliche Wege mit diesem Dilemma umzugehen ausprobiert. Tendenzen von Dekonstruktion, Ignorierung, *queering*, Differenzierung, Durchkreuzung und Pluralisierung von Identitätskategorien haben sich verstärkt. In der feministischen Anthropologie gibt es unter anderem die zwei bedeutenden Ansätze der Intersektionalität und der *queer theory*, auf die ich hier näher eingehe. Es wird erörtert, dass beide Ansätze Bedeutung und Potenzial für eine kritische feministische Agenda haben, dass unsere intersektionalen Forschungen und Analysen auf einer *queeren* und dekonstruktivistischen Weise kritisch gegenüber Identitätskategorien bleiben müssen.

Für meine empirische Forschung habe ich mehr als vier Monate in Ljubljana verbracht. Ich habe mich der queer-feministischen Szene gewidmet und die lokale aktivistische Praxis als Alternative zu Identitätspolitik beleuchtet.