

**Constellations of queerness**  
**Queer migrants' perspectives on the spectrum of safety in urban**  
**space in Berlin**

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### **Statement of authenticity of material**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the research contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Julieta Alvarez Caicedo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Julieta Alvarez Caicedo, Berlin, February 1st, 2024

## ABSTRACT

Since the existence of Eldorado, a nightclub, visited by gender non-conforming people during the Weimar Republic, Berlin has had an international image as a queer-friendly city. Nevertheless, the threat of violence in the everyday lives of LGBTQ people is still present, especially for queer migrants. Because of their economic and social vulnerability, queer migrants create specific ways of occupying space that are influenced by different elements. This research aims to answer the question of **how do queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety in urban space and create constellations to navigate the city of Berlin?** Through the concepts of safety as a spectrum and constellations, I aim to analyze the relationship queer migrants have with space. I conclude that queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety through their corporality and identity and create constellations through community, collective care, and a sense of diversity. Lastly, the recommendations for urban management proposed in this research are related to the recognition of the intersectionality of the diverse population of Berlin, the implementation of a participatory planning scheme that focuses on encounter rather than segregation, and the protection of queer heritage.

**Keywords:** Queer theory, Safety Spectrum, Migration, Constellations, Urban Diversity

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To the queers that open their hearts to me, making this research possible. To my Berlin family, and to all the queer migrants, who came to this city to be their unapologetic selves defying gender norms and occupying the space they deserve.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since I arrived in Berlin, I have met many queer migrants who come from different parts of the world, with different resources, migration statuses, professions, and expectations. From them, I have learned the ways of the city, the places where our queer identity is protected and even celebrated, which areas to avoid, and the strategies one must implement to diminish the feelings of discomfort when facing situations of harassment or violence. Through this community, I have been able to experience and enjoy Berlin. However, I have heard of, witnessed, and been the subject of threats because of gender identity and expression, often in public spaces or public transportation.

Because of my own experience in this city as a female presenting queer migrant and the experience of my community, and taking into account my sociology and urbanism background, I decided it would be of great importance to analyze how queer migrants navigate the city of Berlin, beyond the generalized idea of it being an LGBTQ friendly.

Ever since the existence of Eldorado, a nightclub, visited by gender non-conforming people during the Weimar Republic, Berlin has had an international image as a queer-friendly city, as it is stated in this DW article “Berlin is Germany's most LGBTQ-friendly city” (Chimbelu 2023). This image attracts international queer migrants who want to be part of the city. Nevertheless, despite the overall image of Berlin as a queer city, there is a threat of violence in the everyday lives of LGBTQ people. According to ILGA Europe, an independent NGO, during 2022 the “anti-LGBTI hate crimes rose by 17%” (ILGA EUROPE 2023) in comparison to 2021.

Some of the more vulnerable queer people are migrants, especially the ones with refugee status. According to the State Office for Equal Treatment and against Discrimination, “Berlin is the first federal state to recognize that LGBTI refugees belong to a particularly vulnerable group and have a special need for protection.” (Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment and against Discrimination 2016).



This vulnerability applies to every aspect of queer migrants' lives. Queer migrants create ways of occupying space that, as Gieseeking states, come from economic and political constraints (Gieseeking 2020) and are influenced by their previous context, the networks, and communities they built upon arrival, and their experiences in discovering a new city that might be, in many aspects, different from their own. In this sense, this research aims to answer the question of **how do queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety in urban space and create constellations to navigate the city of Berlin?**

My hypothesis in this research is that queer migrants' geographies are constituted by fluctuating networks, also known as constellations, that are in constant change and are influenced by their perception of safety.

This research takes place in Berlin at the present time and addresses the experiences of queer migrants in Berlin. Although different groups of people like women, migrants in general, religious minorities, and people of color, among others, also experience situations of fear and vulnerability in Berlin's urban space, this research will only focus on queer migrant people. Still, it takes into account the intersectionality of social categories that are embodied by queer migrants. In this sense, this research does not deny the experiences of these other populations, but it takes them into account as part of this intersectionality.

The main goal of this research is to answer the research question and to give policy recommendations that consider the safety spectrum of queer migrants and the specific geographies of their lives in urban management. Additionally, it aims to contribute to the filling of the research gap that exists on queer migrants' experiences in Berlin, as well as to propose new research territory in this field.

With this research, I aim to contribute to the field of urban studies from the perspectives of queer migrants. In this sense, it is important to consider what has been written about this population in Berlin. Literature on queer migrants in this city frequently references homonationalism. According to Jasbir Puar, homonationalism refers to the phenomena in which normative gay and lesbian identities and rights are used to favor nationalist and racist

goals. Its main premise is that the acceptance of gays and lesbians is seen as a sign of superiority in contraposition to less civilized societies in which these identities are not accepted (Puar 2007).

This concept is used in the article *The Dynamics of queer politics and Gentrification in Berlin* by Zülfukar Çetin. For him, homonationalism refers to the Western-Christian values that are enlightened, advanced, and humanitarian, which are threatened by Muslim migrants (Çetin 2018, p. 144). From the discourse analysis of the study made by LSVD (Lesbian and Gay Association in Germany) on the attitudes of young people with and without migration background the author states that “one can also observe the construction of an opposition in Steffens’ study, namely that of a gay-friendly West and a homophobic Rest”(Çetin 2018, p. 159).

In addition, in the article *A clash of subcultures? Questioning queer-Muslim antagonisms in the Neoliberal City*, Kira Kosnick references the concept of homonationalism in the scope of the conflicts over space when “the alleged concerns of a ‘queer community’ have been pitted against the alleged moral agenda of Muslim immigrants in the country”(Kosnick 2015, p. 687).

For Çetin and Kosnick the ideology of homonationalism has been a way of legitimizing gentrification in Berlin. Çetin exemplifies this phenomenon with the case of the District of Schöneberg, in the way an “Anatolian neighborhood was transformed into a Western gay neighborhood” (Çetin 2018, p. 162). For the author, the memory and history of migrant workers are often invisible (Çetin 2018, p. 163). For Kosnick, the commodification of gay life has exclusionary effects on cities (Kosnick 2015, p. 694). These effects are related to the right to safety in which racialized and impoverished others are considered a threat to (Kosnick 2015, p. 697).

This idea of homonationalism is also relevant in the case of refugees. In the article *As queer refugees, we are out of category*, Held states that queer refugees in Europe face ambivalent experiences in queer spaces. On the one hand, they are supposed to experience freedom

in the new European context. On the other hand, they face exclusion based on gender, class, and race in queer spaces that are frequently structured around white, male, gay, and middle-class identities (Held 2022, p. 1899).

This ambivalence is also addressed through the subject of queer diaspora. In the article, *Identity, Belonging and Solidarity among Russian-speaking Queer Migrants in Berlin*, Richard Mole explores the case of the Russian-speaking group called Quarteera. He addresses the difficulties queer people face in their home countries to live a visible and public queer life (Mole 2018, p. 86), and the challenges and ambivalent feelings they have when arriving in Berlin, a city that provides freedom, but also a place where they face different difficulties like legal status and language (Mole 2018, p. 96).

In his article *Rethinking diaspora: queer Poles, Brazilians and Russians in Berlin*, Mole analyses and compares the Brazilian, Polish, and Russian queer migrants in Berlin. Here he states that sexual identity is not the only important identity for LGBTQ migrants, their national identity also has an important role in their identity (Mole 2021a, p. 68).

Another aspect that has been studied in the field of queer migrants in Berlin is the party scene. In her article *Out on the Scene*, Kira Kosnick, addresses the case of the party Gayhane in Berlin made by and for Turkish people and any other queer migrant or person of color. For the author, the clubbing scene, and the existence of spaces like Gayhane are not subscribed to a certain community, even though it is made for a certain group of people, what happens within the space is a special way of migrant sociality. This clubbing scene, where one is surrounded by strangers to whom one's appearance and behavior are unremarkable is a different experience from being part of a community (Kosnick 2017, p. 77).

In addition, in the document *Rooms for Resistance: Migration and Social Markers of Difference in Berlin's Queer Underground Electronic Music Scene*, Gibran Teixeira Braga analyses the influence migrant and foreign music cultures have had on the underground club scene in Berlin. He concludes that "parties are spaces of ambivalence and

contradiction” (Teixeira Braga 2023, p. 217). These spaces promote a space of freedom free of hierarchies, but this “egalitarian atmosphere does not mean that they are inclusive spaces.” (ibid.).

Some of the research that has been made on queer migrants in Berlin has focused on the concept of homonationalism and its influence on gentrification. Furthermore, these studies have addressed the characteristics of queer diasporas in Berlin, as well as the role of queer migrants in Berlin’s party scene. Nevertheless, it has not addressed the aspect of queer migrants’ geographies in Berlin and the way these geographies are influenced by the perception of safety. In this regard my research aims to contribute to this body of literature by analyzing the spectrum of safety of queer migrants and the ways they experience urban life, taking into account, as described by the authors, that they experience the ambivalence of a city that on the one hand is considered internationally as a place for freedom for LGBTQ people and on the other hand can be exclusionary on the bases of race, gender and class.

This research begins with the theoretical framework. The main concepts that I use for my research are safety as a spectrum and constellations as a form of queer geographies. To complement my analysis, I use concepts related to the way bodies shape and are shaped by space, ethnicity, presenting as female, the specific aspects of queer migration and the role community has on queer migrants’ urban life.

In the following chapter, I present my methodological approach and the methods used for collecting information. My methodological approach comes from queer methodology. This methodology rejects the fact that heteronormativity<sup>1</sup> and cisnormativity<sup>2</sup> are the common grounds for social interaction. From this approach, I explain the research design and

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<sup>1</sup> Heteronormativity refers to the set of social norms and practices that assume that heterosexuality is a natural and normal sexual orientation, privileging heterosexuality over other sexual orientations.

<sup>2</sup> Cisnormativity refers to the set of social norms and practices that assume that it is normal and natural that the gender identity of people matches the sex they were assigned at birth, privileging cisgender identity over other gender identities.

methods implemented. First, the online questionnaire, followed by one focus group, and finally, unstructured interviews.

In the third part of this research, I analyze the data collected through the lens of the concepts described in the theoretical framework. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one addresses the influence of corporality and identity in the spectrum of safety of queer migrants. The second section describes the constellations of queer migrants in Berlin.

The last chapter draws some conclusions from this analysis and proposes some public policy recommendations. One main conclusion is that queer migrants experience the spectrum of safety through their bodies and identities. Another one is that they create constellations through interactions with others, defying threatening elements and Stars, which refer to places where queer migrants feel safe and comfortable.

Recommendations focus on the importance of a participatory planning strategy that recognizes the intersectionality of queer migrants as well as the importance of creating encounter opportunities for diverse groups who share similar vulnerabilities in urban space. Additionally, I propose that perceiving safety as a spectrum can be an effective approach when dealing with a diverse population.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this research is based on two key concepts: safety as a spectrum and constellations. Viewing safety as a spectrum acknowledges that it is influenced by many variables and that its perception is constantly changing depending on the context and characteristics of the individuals. For this research, I address the influence that corporality, migration, and ethnicity have on the spectrum of safety of queer migrants in Berlin. The theory of constellations offers a framework to understand how queer individuals navigate urban spaces. Through this lens, the analysis focuses on the fragmented and dispersed ways this population occupies and engages with the urban environment.

These concepts are interlinked, with the safety spectrum significantly shaping the formation of constellations. Queer individuals strategically navigate and occupy space, prioritizing locations where they feel a sense of safety and comfort, while actively avoiding places perceived as threatening. Simultaneously, the spectrum of safety is reciprocally impacted by constellations. The presence of familiar and comfortable networks of places contributes to an enhanced overall sense of safety for queer individuals.

### 2.1. SAFETY AS A SPECTRUM

One of the main premises of this research is that safety is a spectrum rather than a binary. For this, it is necessary to understand that, as Jina Fast states, space is not neutral (Fast 2018, p. 1). For the author, “dominant spaces are discursively constructed as safe for normative social identities (white, male, heterosexual, middle-class) through making public space unsafe for marginalized identities” (ibid.). What is considered safe for a certain group, might be perceived unsafe by another.

Additionally, “the idea of safety is relational, fundamentally related to the actual and perceived threat of violence” (Fast 2018, p. 3). The perceived threat of violence is decisive for the spectrum of safety. According to Hanhardt, this threat of violence has structured

queer behavior, aiming to stop queer deviancy (Hanhardt 2013, p. 31). Nevertheless, queer individuals find ways of navigating these threads and build “maps of where they feel threatened” (Fast 2018, p. 3).

Considering that space is not neutral, and that the feelings of safety are influenced by the threat of violence, I implement the concept of safer spaces from the perspective proposed by Jina Fast in her paper *In Defense of Safe Spaces*. She considers safety as more of a spectrum than something static and binary, she “understands the safety of the space as fluid, in constant negotiation, and never complete” (Fast 2018, p. 15). In this sense, a safer space recognizes the legitimacy of fear (Fast 2018, p. 9).

Nevertheless, safer spaces are not the same for everyone, which is why this research considers the specific ways queer migrants experience such a spectrum between safe and unsafe. As an example, in their study with undocumented queer Latinx in the US, Cisneros and Bracho problematize the traditional safe spaces for queer communities. They argue that what is traditionally safe for a white queer person like queer clubs or relationships, can hold a thread of violence for undocumented queer Latinos (Cisneros and Bracho 2020). For them, the concept of safe spaces has ignored how race, ethnicity, and class can make these spaces threatening (Cisneros and Bracho 2020).

Therefore, they consider that it is important to “operationalize safe spaces as environments in which people feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors” (Cisneros and Bracho 2020, p. 3). For them, safety goes beyond the physical aspect and includes “protection from psychological or emotional harm” (Ibid.).

Another aspect that is relevant to the current study is the fact that safer spaces are in constant transformation (Cisneros and Bracho, 2020 p. 5). According to Fast, the safety of space is fluid, negotiated, and constructed from the relational work that happens in it (Fast, 2018).

### 2.1.1. Migration and Ethnicity

Taking into account what was previously mentioned about Cisneros and Bracho's research, one important layer of my analysis is migration and ethnicity. Berlin is a city of migrants, according to the Central Register of Foreigners, it is the home of 949,375 migrants from different backgrounds (Statistisches Bundesamt 2023), almost one-third of the total population of the city, 3,755,251 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2023). I will take into account the "motives and effects of migration through a gendered and sexualized lens" (Valenzuela 2021, p. 27), as well as the idea that migration can change and reshape sexual practices and gender identities (Valenzuela 2021, p. 28).

Gorman Murray states the following patterns of queer migration stated by Gorman Murray: 1) Coming out-migration. 2) Gravitational group migration. 3) Relationship migration (Gorman-Murray 2009). Richard Mole adds a fourth one, 4) "To take advantage of a more comprehensive range of sexual rights" (Mole 2021b, p. 4). One could understand that the objective of migration is to live in a freer environment where it is possible to explore gender identity, sexuality, love, and community.

In this sense, Cristian Valenzuela states that in the creation of a queer self, "people are willing to make economic sacrifices to relocate and leave settled lives and jobs" (Valenzuela 2021, p. 37). Nevertheless, Mole argues that

"LGBT migrants often discover that Europe is not as welcoming as they were led to believe and they find themselves marginalized, both as ethnic minorities in the destination society and as sexual minorities within the diaspora community" (Mole 2021b, p. 2).

Therefore, safety has a different meaning for queer migrants in contrast to native queers. Jesus Cisneros and Christian Bracho found in their study that "Latinx LGBTQ undocumented immigrants experience the stigma and stress of criminalization in ways distinct from other LGBTQ populations" (Cisneros and Bracho 2020, p. 2). They mention that their participants



described feelings of exclusion, rejection, and anxiety in spaces considered safe like “an LGBTQ bar or club, and within interpersonal relationships” (Cisneros and Bracho 2020, p. 8).

In this study, “LGBTQ nightclubs represented potentially unsafe environments where rejection and discrimination awaited at the door” (Cisneros and Bracho 2020, p. 15). This adds up to what the authors call acculturative stress, referring to the “challenges immigrants face when negotiating cultural differences between home and host culture” (Cisneros and Bracho 2020, p. 8).

In this sense, queer migrants might have two factors in their identity, their queer identity and their ethnocultural identities related to their ethnic homeland. As Mole states, not all migrants might be interested in being part of their ethnic communities, but “they may still define their identities regarding the ethnic homeland and visit diasporic spaces to enjoy their national culture, traditions, and cuisines, i.e. they have a ‘diaspora consciousness’”(Mole 2021a, p. 71).

For this reason, Mole introduces the concept of “queer diaspora”, which is defined as

“A community of migrants as a social form, united by shared sexual as well as ethno-cultural identities, which operates not necessarily within but also outside (or largely outside) the larger ethno-culturally defined diaspora”(Mole 2021a, p. 75).

Even though the concept of queer diaspora won't be the center of the present research, it is important to bear in mind the relevance of the queer community of migrants that share cultural practices and identities. Nevertheless, I consider that in a multicultural context like the city of Berlin, migrants find connections with others with different backgrounds, creating a community that hosts diverse individuals.

In her article, *A Clash of Subcultures*, Kira Kosnick states that even in cities where sexual minorities are tolerated and encouraged through “‘gay villages’, LGBT tourism, and nightlife, the transgression of gender norms in public space can unleash violent aggression” (Kosnick 2015, p. 687). In this sense, “the claiming of ‘queer space’ in cities is bound up with contested racializations” (Kosnick 2015, p. 689).

### 2.1.2. Bodies in Space

Corporality plays a significant role in the life of queer people because it is one of the sites where aspects like gender identity, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, among others, intersect. The fact that people who defy the societal norms of gender, race, and class, occupy a certain space can be a source of different forms of violence (Hanhardt 2013) like harassment, name-calling, or assault. For this reason, Hanhardt states that “a wide mix of individuals inside and outside the city have pursued safety through strategies of discretion” (Hanhardt 2013, p. 11). This means that queer people often prefer to hide or diminish their queer looks or behavior to avoid acts of violence in certain spaces.

From this perspective, Petra Doan argues in her article *The Tyranny of gendered spaces*, that the gender division of space is a type of tyranny that acts upon people the moment individuals challenge the hegemonic expectations of gender behavior (Doan 2010, p. 635). In this sense, people outside the normative identity encounter limitations in space which negatively impact their lives (Fast 2018, p. 14).

Even though these gender norms threaten the possibility of the existence of queer people in space, this same presence also transforms space. According to Doan, the performance of gender changes the space in which it is performed and it shifts according to the performer, the space, and the observer (Doan 2010, p. 637). From this perspective, the geographer Lise Nelson considers that performativity that breaks gender norms also opens space (Nelson 1999).

In this sense, the existence of queer bodies in space defies the heteronormative ideas of gender, opens up new places, and as Fast argues, “reframes the function of power as productive rather than simply oppressive” (Fast 2018, p. 14). From this perspective, I argue that even though queer bodies experience constraints, their mere presence produces and transforms space. Queer individuals are not passive agents in urban life, but can, to a great extent reclaim their right to existence.

When talking about corporality in space, it is necessary to consider the experiences of female presenting individuals. As Valentine asserts in *The Geography of Women’s Fear*, This population experience certain forms of violence in public space:

“Unlike men women find that when in public space their personal space is frequently invaded by whistles, comments or actual physical assault from strange men. This inability of women to choose with whom they interact and communicate profoundly affects their sense of security in public”(Valentine 1989, p. 386).

This element of constant threat in public space is decisive for the way they navigate urban environments. These acts of violence are, according to Gardner “the demonstration of the public norms of identifiably heterosexual society” (Gardner 1995, p. 159), which, as Fast states, is a way of denying safety in public space for women, queers, and persons of color (Fast 2018, p. 3).

### **2.1.3. Community**

As has been explored in the previous pages, queer life, and migrant life are connected to the idea of community. From the authors that have been referenced, it can be interpreted that being part of a community is an empowering aspect to be able to navigate a heteronormative system. As Petra Doan states, “gender performance in public spaces supported by a wider community is a powerful defiance of the system” (Doan 2010, p. 640).

This idea of community is relevant because it influences the spectrum of safety in urban space, the sentiment of being part of a community creates a collective idea of what constitutes a threat and why (Hanhardt 2013, p. 30).

As Doan asserts, in public spaces, some individuals feel empowered to enforce the heteronorm (Doan 2010, p. 640), and

“These policing behaviors are sometimes exaggerated by the presence of other silent but supportive watchers. At the same time gender variant performance in public spaces that is supported by a wider community can be a powerful statement against the dichotomy” (Doan 2010, p. 640).

In this sense, the community acts as a protective element against violence in space.

## **2.2. CONSTELLATIONS, A FORM OF QUEER GEOGRAPHIES**

The theory of constellations was proposed by Jen Jack Giesecking in their book *A Queer New York*. They<sup>3</sup> state that constellations are a way of queer geographies in which lesbian and queer people produce urban space that does not rely on the creation of a neighborhood that is bound to property ownership (Giesecking 2020, p. 198). I chose to use this theory as opposed to the generalized idea that LGBTQ people only occupy space through the consolidation of the so-called Gayborhoods (Ghaziani 2014).

According to Amin Ghaziani, a Gayborhood is a distinct geographical point where gays and lesbians set the tone with residences, gay-owned and gay-friendly cultural venues, businesses, and organizations (Ghaziani 2014, p. 2). This idea that the way LGBTQ people inhabit space through being part of a gay neighborhood has been challenged. Christina Hanhart states in her book *Safe Space. Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* that “linking the understanding of sexual identity to a place, as well as the

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<sup>3</sup> I use the pronoun *they* to refer to gender non-conforming and non-binary people. This applies for the authors and the participants of this research.

promotion and protection of gay neighborhoods, reinforces race and class segregation”(Hanhardt 2013, p. 9).

From Giesecking’s perspective, people of color, poor and working-class individuals as well as women, lack the economic and political power that would allow them to sustain formal LGBTQ neighborhoods (Giesecking 2020, p. 217). Similar to this statement, Yvonne Doederer asserts “that gay white men, in particular, can afford to rent or buy apartments and spaces in urban quarters of interest to LGBTQ communities (...) Very few lesbians, queer females, and transgenders of my acquaintance own apartments”(Doderer 2011, p. 435).

As presented by the authors, the socioeconomic and political constraints that queer individuals, especially migrants, people of color, trans and gender non-conforming people experience in urban life and the possibility of inhabiting urban spaces restrain their possibilities of being part of Gay Neighborhoods. In contrast, this population creates different forms of space that have been theorized by Giesecking as constellations.

The concept of constellations accounts for the way queer migrants appropriate and exist in the urban space. The networks that create these constellations, as stated by the author, have often been outside the conventional way of seeing socio-spatial relations and explain the different practices that a diverse group like the queer migrant community has in urban space.

This concept is relevant for this research because it proposes an approach to queer spatialities that takes into account the fluidity of queer lives. Since queer migrants in Berlin may lack the political or financial capital to secure long-term spaces (Giesecking 2020), the author proposes an approach in which they recognize that:

“Lesbians’ and queers’ places are more scattered and visible only when you know where and when to look. In ways similar to stars and other celestial objects, lesbians and queers rely on these places to make and make sense of their identities, relationships, and communities”(Giesecking 2020).

Additionally, from this perspective, “space is a constructed and contested medium of identity that exists within individual, social, and structural power relations” (Giesecking 2020, p. 10). From this perspective, queer spaces are transgressions of the heteronormative and homophobic structures and are “interwoven with the racialization, classing, and gendering of space”(Giesecking 2020, p. 10). This perception that asserts that there is an intersection of diverse elements of social life in urban space is accurate when researching a population that embodies such diversity in the urban universe of Berlin.

### **2.2.1. Stars, Lines, and No-Go Areas**

Constellations are created through physical spaces where people interact with each other, where they can be their true selves alone or with company, as well as specific spaces represented by people, identifying people as infrastructure, like friends and lovers (Giesecking 2020, p. 204).

For the author, these spaces are considered stars, “like stars that come and go in the sky, contemporary urban lesbians and queers often create and rely on fragmented places and fleeting experiences”(Giesecking 2020, p. 3).

. The author found in their research that:

“Participants produce their stars with others (first kiss, proposal, hot one-night stand, tragic breakup, activist zap, friendships, popular bars, drag queen bingo at the LGBT Center, chat rooms) or on their own (reading, listening to music, a realization of one’s sexuality, first-time binding<sup>4</sup>, reading lgbtq history in a library, crying over a tragic breakup, bookstore, or online). Like other marginalized groups the world over, along with constellations of physical and virtual places, they also use people as infrastructure, often

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<sup>4</sup> Binding is a practice performed by transgender people assigned female at birth. It consists of using compression garments to minimize the appearance of the chest.

referring to ex-girlfriends, lovers, and friends as guiding beacons” (Giesecking 2020, p. 204)

Moreover, the stars that makeup constellations are “fragmented in comparison to the ideal of the tightly clustered businesses and residences imagined but rarely realized in the lgbtq neighborhood”(Giesecking 2020, p. 4).

Furthermore, lines are the paths created between stars (Giesecking 2020, p. 210). According to the author, queer people create paths between stars to make sense of the space, people, and experiences that are available to them. These lines connect individuals with space and allow the sociospatial production of constellations (Giesecking 2020, p. 4).

For the author, stars and lines were equally important in the everyday geographies of their participants. (Giesecking 2020, p. 211). Moreover, queer life in the city also includes what has been defined by Giesecking “as no-go areas where their participants felt threatened or experienced harassment or violence” (Giesecking 2020, p. 210). From this perspective, the author considers that queer communities create fluid informal networks that link different public and private spaces that are almost imperceptible to outside observers (Giesecking 2020, p. 211).

From this theoretical framework, it is possible to conclude that the perception of safety as a spectrum, entails considering the influence of diverse social categories. In the context of this study, the intersection of queer and migrant identities plays a pivotal role in shaping this spectrum. Furthermore, this spectrum significantly impacts how queer migrants navigate and inhabit urban spaces. The concept of constellations allows the exploration of this fluid relationship between queer migrants and the city. These constellations, shaped by the safety spectrum and the socio-economic constraints within urban spaces, provide insights into the spatial experiences of queer migrants. The constellations, in turn, contribute to shaping the safety spectrum, as they consist of locations—referred to as stars—where queer individuals feel secure and at ease, as well as no-go areas that are perceived as threatening.

### 3. METHODOLOGY & METHODS

#### 3.1. QUEER METHODOLOGY

My positionality is significant for this research as I am part of the community I am studying. As a queer-identifying person who migrated to this city from Colombia, I am embedded in the social universe of queer migrants in Berlin. From this point of view, I chose to conduct my research from a queer methodological approach. This methodological approach aims for the recognition and representation of queer life in social and political action. It rejects the idea of heteronormativity and cisnormativity as the common ground through which social life should be observed and analyzed (Lauretis 1991, p. 3).

From this methodological approach, this research is based on the rejection of the idea that cis heterosexuality is the common ground of every social interaction in urban space. In this sense, my first premise is that queer people experience the city in a different way from heterosexual cisgender people. Additionally, within the queer community, there are differences and inequalities in this same experience. As Ghaziani and Brim stated, some of the aspects of a queer methodology are:

- “Reject unchanging categories”: they propose that concepts like “heterosexual” or “homosexual” are embedded in the historical context (Ghaziani and Brim 2019, p. 10)
- “Reject impermeable categories”, categories can be changed and analyzed through different historical periods (Ghaziani and Brim 2019, p. 11)
- “Reject Dualisms” queer life demands researchers to create multiple and plural categories that go beyond binaries (Ghaziani and Brim 2019, p. 12)

In this sense, a queer methodology invites the researcher to question the immutability of the categories used in social research. As well as to perceive the world as “vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive, or indistinct” (Ghaziani and Brim 2019, p. 14). As Heather Love stated, “From the start, queer scholars have acknowledged, or often



celebrated, the messiness of their subject matter, and have invented new modes of research, writing, and performance to deal with it” (Love 2019, p. 28).

In this research, I was looking for the specific perspectives queer migrants had on urban life. For this, I considered that “queer ways of life contain symbolic meanings related to the closet, music, television, literature, ritual events like Pride<sup>5</sup>, specific iconography like drag, diverse family forms, and unique subjectivities aesthetics, and forms of socialization” (Ghaziani 2019, p. 115). All of them are traversed by variables like race, migration status, and economic situations, among others that influence participants’ urban experience.

Another aspect of this section is my embeddedness in the studied subject. This poses the issue of being inside and outside at the same time. Andrea Doucet and Natasha Mauthner state that from the perspective of some feminist researchers, including Ann Oakley, when the researcher shares some aspects of the identity with her research subjects, there is a reduced possibility of exploitative or unethical research (Doucet and Mauthner 2008, p. 333). From this perspective, being part of the community might pose a positive element when it comes to reducing the possibility of exploitative research.

Therefore, as a researcher who is part of this community, the “intersecting power relations of race, gender and social class” (Collins 1999, p. 85) must be considered when approaching the participants and analyzing the data. This embeddedness also means a certain degree of bias that might be observable in the data collected, this will be addressed in the description of the methods used in this research.

About the design and implementation of the methods, I kept in mind the ideas of McDonald about the way methods are queered. This includes deconstructing heteronormative social constructs and creating new ones through the lens of queer life, opposing rigid categorization and problematize what is perceived as the commonplace (McDonald 2017, pp. 134–135)

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<sup>5</sup> Demonstration of LGBTQ pride, known in Berlin, Christopher Street Day.

From this perspective, my objective was to create instruments that allowed me to build categories from the data and avoid the imposition of my own experience and beliefs. As Grzanka asserts, the idea was “to develop an instrument in which individuals could endorse multiple beliefs simultaneously, even if those beliefs might appear to contradict one another” (Grzanka 2019, p. 91). In this sense, the implementation of queer methods allowed me to embrace both the coherent and the chaotic (Ghaziani 2019, p. 116) of the experiences of queer migrants in Berlin.

### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The main objective of this design was to understand the differences within the community, as well as the common ground when it comes to the spectrum of safety in the urban space of Berlin for queer migrants. This was inductive research, in which I aimed to find regularities and build concepts from the data collected.

To achieve this goal, I implemented three methods, an online questionnaire, a focus group, and individual interviews, in total 53 people were part of this research. Data collection took place during September and October of 2023. It is important to take into account the language barrier in the data collection, since I am not a fluent German speaker my research design was mainly in English and Spanish, this poses a limitation since it was not possible to talk to people who do not speak these two languages, leaving German only speaking queer migrants outside of the scope of the research.

The idea was to implement one method after the other, so each could be improved by the last. The first method implemented was the online survey from which I was able to have a broader impression of the participants of this research and know who was interested in being part of an interview or a focus group.

From this data, I was able to design the focus group which gave me more specific information, but also showed me that there were more angles that I needed to address. With these two results, I designed and implemented the semi-structured interviews.

I wanted to approach the subject from an inductive point of view, creating concepts and categories from the people's responses, letting each method improve the other with categories and ideas that were said in the previous one. Therefore, the online questionnaire is mainly qualitative to be able to draw elements from the people's responses. It was also used to reach out to the group of interest and recruit individuals for the focus group and interviews.

The qualitative data was analyzed with the program Atlas T.I., this includes the focus group data, the interview data, as well as the qualitative information collected through the online questionnaire. With the software, I was able to create categories of analysis to find regularities and create concepts and networks from what participants said.

In every stage, participants were informed of the objective of this research as well as the usage their data would have, referencing the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### 3.3. METHODS

In the following section, I will describe each of the methods that were implemented for this research, the online questionnaire, the focus group, and the individual interviews.

These three methods were accurate to answer the research question of **how do queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety in urban space and create constellations to navigate the city of Berlin?** Because the perspective of safety is mainly subjective and depends on personal and social variables that are difficult to quantify. For this reason, a mainly qualitative approach allows the researcher to dive into these perceptions and find regularities.

#### Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire's main objective was to explore the characteristics of the queer migrant community and the spectrum of safety in Berlin. According to the book *How to Research*, "Questionnaires are one of the most widely used social research techniques. The idea of formulating precise written questions, for those whose opinions or experience you are interested" (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 201).

The questionnaire had a non-probability sample, an approach "used when the researcher lacks a sampling frame for the population in question, or where a probabilistic approach is judged not to be necessary" (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 170). In my case, I did not have a sampling frame for the population subject of this research. Considering that I am part of the queer migrant population in the city, I was able to make use of my own social networks using snowball sampling which is the "building up a sample through informants" (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 170).

According to Ghaziani, "Chain-referral techniques are compatible with an understanding of queerness as mutable and group membership as fluctuating" (Ghaziani, 2019, p. 108). This approach to data collection "is sensitive to community structure, geographic clusters, and social networks" (Ghaziani 2019, p. 106).

In this sense, I shared the survey through WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook groups that I was part of and asked my contacts to share them with the queer migrants they knew. 43 people answered the survey in the period from September 25, 2023, till October 24, 2023.

Nevertheless, the fact that I used my social networks to gather information posed a bias in the data collection. This was visible in the data obtained from the instrument since there were many Colombian respondents (18.6%), as well as many gay male respondents (46.5%). The characteristics of the online respondents can be seen in Appendix 1.

Since the online questionnaire did not have a representative sample of the population subject of this research, I did not aim to have results that spoke for the totality of the queer migrants that live in Berlin. Its purpose was to have an idea about the perspectives of this population as well as to be able to create some categories from the information obtained.

The online questionnaire had a mix of closed and open-ended questions that aimed to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Detailed information about the questions can be found in Appendix 1.

### **Focus group**

With the information obtained from the online questionnaire, I implemented the focus group. According to the book *How to Research*, "Focus groups offer the opportunity to interview a number of people at the same time, and to use the interaction within the group as a source of further insight" (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 194). The objective of the focus group was to collect more specific data about the perception of safety of queer migrants that shared similar characteristics.

In this sense, I considered it to be an adequate method with the expectation of having "unanticipated findings because of the ways in which the discussion itself generates thoughts and feelings" (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 194).

20 people stated in the online questionnaire that they were interested in being part of the focus group. I could choose participants with similar characteristics or participants with diverse characteristics. Both options had different objectives, but in the end, the main issue that defined the sample of the focus group was the availability and disposition of potential interviewees.

Many of the people who said that they were interested in being part of the focus group were no longer interested when I contacted them, which reduced the possibilities. From this, I decided that the focus group would be made with people with similar characteristics. There was a high probability that the people who would want to be part of this activity were people who already knew me and would feel comfortable with me asking questions about their experience as well as comfortable sharing them with other people they already knew.

In this sense, the group of people that were part of the focus group were people who already knew each other and me. I consider this to be an advantage, as it is stated in the book *How to Research*, in a focus group “It may feel a safer experience for some people who prefer to discuss issues within a group rather than individually” (Blaxter et al 2010, p. 194). Additionally, the connection of the participants with the researcher improved the feelings of trust and the possibility to express more profound feelings. This is especially important on the topics of gender, sexuality, corporality, and some traumatic events that might be easier to share with trusted people.

Nevertheless, the similarity of the individuals left outside different experiences that were important for the research. This is the reason why in the following method, I chose more diverse participants.

Detailed information on the issues addressed during this focus group and the characteristics of the participants can be found in Appendix 2.

## Unstructured Interviews

After the focus group, I proceeded with the one-on-one unstructured interviews. Holland and Ramazanoglu describe an unstructured interview as a social event that is modeled on the conversation. **In this sense, rules of interaction are established to define a certain atmosphere for the event, enabling the interviewer to apply strategies that allow people to talk about delicate topics like sexuality and gender** (Holland and Ramazanoglu 1994, p. 193).

An unstructured interview provides a social universe in which participants create their own rules and times, the interviewer must consider the behavior of the interviewee and adapt to it, guiding the conversation to the information she wants to know while allowing the interviewee to express their ideas, always leaving space for surprises and unexpected elements.

The main objective of these interviews was to gather data from participants who were underrepresented in the previous stages of the research as well as to have in-depth conversations about issues regarding the spectrum of safety in the city of Berlin. This was particularly important when talking to female-presenting people who had specific experiences on safety because of their corporality. In this sense, 5 people were interviewed, 2 trans women, 1 cisgender woman, 1 non-binary person, and 1 queer identifying person. The specific issues addressed in the interviews and the participants' characteristics can be found in Appendix 3.

These participants were contacted from the list of 22 people who stated in the online questionnaire that they would be interested in being part of an interview. they were interviewed from October 23 to October 30 of 2023, these dates are important since some of the respondents referenced the situations, they lived in regarding protests that happened in Berlin from October 7<sup>th</sup>. Only one of the interviews was conducted in Spanish.



## **4. THE SPECTRUM OF SAFETY AND THE CREATION OF CONSTELLATIONS OF QUEER MIGRANTS IN BERLIN**

In this chapter, I present the results of the research and relate them to the concepts addressed in the theoretical framework. It is divided into two sections. In the first one, I answer the question about how do queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety. In this first part, I propose a tension between ethnicity and queer identity. From the results it is possible to conclude that for some queer migrants, their ethnicity has a bigger role in their perception of safety, followed by being female presenting and with less significance, their gender expression.

In the second part of this chapter, I address the question of how queer migrants create constellations in the city of Berlin. These constellations are created within the spectrum of safety. In this sense, queer migrants are aware of the characteristics that make a space uncomfortable and threatening, as well as the characteristics of a place where they feel free, relaxed, and safe. These places are the stars that compose their constellations and are built through community, collective care, diversity, and a comfortable urban environment.

### **Participants**

As it was presented in the methodological chapter, a total of 53 people were part of this research. Participants came from 20 different countries. They have been living in the city for different periods, the shortest less than a year and the longest more than ten years. The results presented in this chapter come from the online questionnaire that was answered by 43 people, the focus group that had 10 participants, and the unstructured individual interviews that were conducted with 5 participants. More detailed information can be found in Appendix 1, 2 and 3.

In general, participants of this research consider Berlin a safe city. 48.8% of online questionnaire respondents consider Berlin a safe city, while 42% consider it safe sometimes. Nevertheless, the perception of safety of 48% of the online questionnaire respondents has decreased while for 32.5% of respondents has increased. In the following

section, I will dive into the details of this perception and the different components of the safety spectrum.

#### **4.1. THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORALITY AND IDENTITY IN QUEER MIGRANTS' SPECTRUM OF SAFETY**

During this research, it was visible that participants experience the spectrum of safety through their corporality and identity. In this section, I will address the relationship between the body, identity, and feelings of safety and comfort in Berlin for queer migrants.

My main argument is that the safety spectrum of queer migrants is determined by their corporality and identity. Nevertheless, there is tension between ethnicity and gender expression within this identity. In this sense, safety for queer migrants is fluid, fragmented, and different depending on the identity and background of each person. According to Fast,

“The idea of safety is relational, fundamentally related to the actual and perceived threat of violence. To feel safe is to move through space without fear of violence; while to feel unsafe is to experience one’s vulnerability to violence” (Fast 2018, p. 3).

This actual or perceived threat of violence changes regarding the specific characteristics of each subject that inhabits space. As I mentioned in the theoretical framework, the existence of queer and diverse bodies in space defies cis-hetero normativity.

In certain instances, the perception of threat among participants increases when they don’t belong to the ethnically white category. In other cases, presenting as female is deemed a more significant concern. Furthermore, a sense of vulnerability arises from the intersectionality of being female-presenting and having a non-white ethnic background. Additionally, in certain situations, the feelings of unsafety are amplified by the expression of a queer gender identity.

#### 4.1.1. Unequal Safety Experience Related to Ethnicity and Migration

Participants of this research stated that ethnic identity has a considerable influence on feelings of vulnerability in space. For some respondents, their ethnicity is related to a decrease in safety perception. This means that there is an unequal safety perception between white participants and participants of color. In this sense, Zaid considers that:

“The first time I faced a racist, discriminatory system was when I started living here (...) Here queer identity is greatly affected by white hegemony. (...) Yes, I can tell you that I can feel safe, but the aspect of being a racialized person affects me a lot. How I am perceived or how I can move, that is what affects the most my mobility in this city.<sup>6</sup>” (Zaid, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

In this quote, Zaid highlights the tension between queerness and ethnicity. For them, being racialized has a bigger impact on their spectrum of safety than their queerness. Furthermore, a participant from the online questionnaire, who has been living in Berlin for six years, expressed a similar sentiment: “I feel like I have to look less migrant in some white districts” (Participant 4, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). This aligns with Mole’s argument that LGB migrants tend to discover that Europe is not as welcoming as they thought in the first place (Mole 2021b).

Regarding this unequal safety experience, participants perceived a difference between the experience of a white person and a person of color. Adam, who is white identified stated that he perceived an unequal safety experience related to ethnicity, he stated:

“So at the beginning, I felt very safe, and I think I was living in a bubble. But like when you start talking to people who have different experiences or because they are like people of color, for example, like you realize that the

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<sup>6</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “la primera vez, ya que me enfrenté como a un sistema de racismo, de discriminación, fue cuando ya empecé a vivir aquí. (...) Aquí la identidad queer se ve mucho afectado por la hegemonía blanca. (...) Si yo te puedo decir que si me puedo sentir seguro, pero el aspecto de ser una persona racializada afecta muchísimo. El cómo me perciben o cómo me puedo mover, es lo que más afecta mi movilidad en esta ciudad.”

safety that you experience is not the same and it's not, unfortunately, it's not equal for everyone." (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

Additionally, Adri who is a Brazilian trans woman said:

"It does help a lot because I have friends that are black, and they do go through a lot of harassment. It doesn't matter their gender identity. You know, people actually stare at them, and I saw this happening, which is very uncomfortable. And this doesn't happen to me. You know, people usually approach me in a more friendly way because they read me as a white person." (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

Another element that was mentioned by people was the relationship with the police. Adam talked about the decrease in safety perception:

"And especially now, after the situation in Palestine, like the Gaza and everything, what's happening on the streets with the police, and when you see how aggressive they are towards Arabs and people of color, it also changed my perspective a lot." (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

Nima talked about their relationship with the police stating:

"I mean, I feel like it's. I feel a lot safer because I am white. I do often pass as a cis<sup>7</sup> woman, unfortunately, fortunately. And I really like, see them targeting especially groups of young men and boys who look Arab" (Nima, Interview 4, 26.10.2023).

In this sense, Zaid who is Mexican and Moroccan said:

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<sup>7</sup> Cis is short for cisgender which refers to a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth as opposed to transgender which refers to a person who identifies with a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth.

“Certain racial identities have more passing than others and we are seeing it right now, at a time when they only stop you if you look like the Arab cliché, and this is the situation that has led me to think like this: When I go out, can I wear my hair down? do I have to do my hair a certain way? if I should dress a certain way, and in that sense, I don't feel safe in Berlin<sup>8</sup>” (Zaid, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

The relationship of spatiality and ethnicity was mentioned by Adam in the following way:

“Of course, you have, like, young people and people of color living everywhere in Berlin. But I have the feeling that most people prefer to, to live inside the ring. And somehow outside of the ring you have this like white working class and like people who I wouldn't consider that are like open-minded.” (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

What participants stated regarding the impact of ethnicity on the spectrum of safety in Berlin aligns with Cisneros and Bracho's notion: “Racism produces difference spatially by producing places that are simultaneously inclusive and exclusionary, depending on one's racialization and citizenship.” (Cisneros and Bracho 2020, p. 16). In this sense, one same urban space can be inclusive for ethnically white queer people while being simultaneously exclusionary for queer people of color.

For some participants, the places where they feel safer and more comfortable are the ones where there are queer people of color. For Sofía, the presence of queer people of color gives her a sense of safety and comfort:

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<sup>8</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Ciertas racialidades tienen más passing que otros y lo estamos viendo ahorita, en un momento en el que solamente por si te ves con el cliché árabe te detienen. Y esta es la situación. Eso me ha llevado a tener que pensar así. Cuando salgo, ¿puedo ir con el cabello suelto? ¿tengo que peinarme de cierta forma?, si me tengo que vestir de cierta manera y desde ese sentido yo no me siento seguro en Berlín”

“And my experience is that in places where people are predominantly of color, but not predominantly male, are the places where I feel the safest. When I'm around women and queer and trans people who are, who are of color, that's when I feel the best.”<sup>9</sup> (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023)

In this sense, the queer-ethnic diaspora, as mentioned by Mole, can create spaces where queer migrants that belong to it feel comfortable and safe. Zaid refers to *Puticlub*, described on their Instagram page as a “Queer LatinX Party” (“Puticlub [@puti\_club],” n.y.): “That same freedom, that same confidence that I might feel in Puticlub, I cannot feel it in Berghain”<sup>10</sup> (Zaid, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

For them, there is a difference in the way they can behave in these two places, being *Puticlub* a party where they feel more comfortable, and safe, as well as a place where they know their identity will not be questioned because it is a party created within their ethnic diaspora.

It is possible to conclude that queer migrants who were part of this research are aware of the unequal experience of safety that racialized people have in Berlin. For some of them, this has a bigger influence on the way they navigate the city than their queer identity. In this regard, their ethnicity is one of the main factors that impact their spectrum of safety.

#### **4.1.2. Being Female-Presenting**

Some participants considered that being female presenting increases their vulnerability in space. Female presenting participants stated that in different contexts like public transport, clubs, or public spaces, they are subject to unsolicited interaction, sometimes sexual harassment. According to the online questionnaire, 100% of queer-identifying respondents,

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<sup>9</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Y mi experiencia es que en espacios donde la gente es predominantemente de color, pero no es predominantemente masculina, son los espacios en los que me siento más segura. Cuando estoy rodeada de mujeres y de personas queer y trans que son, que son de color, es cuando me siento mejor”

<sup>10</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Esa misma libertad, esa misma seguridad que a lo mejor puedo sentir en Puticlub, no lo puedo sentir en Berghain.”

100% of female-identifying respondents, and 71.4% of non-binary respondents stated that they have experienced acts of violence like harassment, name-calling, catcalling, physical violence, or other types of violence in public spaces.

For Nima, a non-binary person when talking about one time they were sexually harassed on the street:

“Schlesisches Tor, I went out of that station, and, like, this one guy did, like, catcall<sup>11</sup> me a little bit aggressively, and I think I was dressed a little bit more femme. And so I think if I like if I presented more femme I would feel less safe in those places.” (Nima, Interview 4, 26.10.2023).

One gender non-conforming respondent of the online questionnaire stated that they need to change their behavior when “walking home at night and also in public spaces like parks. Depends on time but as someone who looks like a woman I still feel at danger at night when I’m alone” (Participant 22, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

For Sofía the situation is:

“I am normally a trans feminine person who passes as a cisgender person, who is confused with a cisgender person. And the effect that that has is that men sexually harass me a lot. In other words, I have a lot of catcalling, and the men make super unpleasant comments to me. It happens to me almost daily that men approach me to ask for my phone number, to ask me to accept a beer, or to ask whoever wants to start a conversation of some kind. It almost happens to me daily and during the summer, when I wear, when I cover up less it is worse<sup>12</sup>.” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

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<sup>11</sup> Catcalling refers to being sexually harassed in the street with threatening sexual comments

<sup>12</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Yo normalmente soy una persona trans femenina que pasa como persona de cisgénero que le confunde con una persona cisgénero. Y el efecto que eso tiene es que los hombres me me acosan sexualmente mucho. O sea, que tenga muchísimo cat calling, que los manes me hagan comentarios súper desagradables. Me pasa casi que diariamente que los hombres se me acercan para

For some participants, being female presenting intersects with their ethnicity. Mei-hua mentioned it the following way: “because my appearance I'm Asian looking and when I walking on the street, I always can get some sexual harassment. But I don't think it is about the queer is only about Asian looking or female looking. (...) They consider Asia female as a target” (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

These results align with what Gieseekingstates,

“Those assigned female at birth often remember how they must navigate public space as they draw lines between their places and experiences, and leave streams of memory in their wake” (Gieseeking 2020, p. xvii).

Queer migrants that are perceived as female create different geographies of the city. These are influenced by the threat of violence and harassment that reinforces the perspective of “public space as masculine space, white space, heterosexual space”(Fast 2018, p. 3). Harassment and threats of violence become a way of denying them the right to occupy urban space. This influences the safety spectrum of female-presenting queer migrants, as well as their constellations of safe spaces.

#### **4.1.3. Gender Expression in Berlin**

Another element that influences the spectrum of safety is gender expression. In general, Berlin is perceived by participants as a city where they can express their identity. But when it comes to everyday life, the research revealed that in fact, they need to adapt and change their behavior to feel safe.

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pedirme el teléfono, para que les acepte una cerveza o para que el que quiera, que comience una conversación de algún tipo. Casi que me pasa diariamente y durante el verano, cuando uso, cuando me tapo menos es peor.”



### **“I wanted to stop hiding” Overall perspective of Berlin as a queer city**

Some participants perceived Berlin as a queer city. Adri considers that “Berlin is a very queer place in general” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023). Andrés asserts that,

“Here in Berlin, I do see, for example, manifestations of diverse people, you can see them, and that gives me peace, here I can be who I am, I don’t have to hide, I don’t have to change my partners' pronouns, I don’t have to hide anything<sup>13</sup>” (Andrés, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

For these participants in Berlin is possible to express their identity. As Carlos mentioned, “I feel that I started experimenting and getting to know myself when I came to this city because I was able to see all the different possibilities that you can be<sup>14</sup>” (Carlos, Focus Group, 22.10.2023). The city is perceived by participants as a place where it is possible to explore oneself.

Adri considered something similar: “I can just be me wherever I go” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023). While Sofía stated,

“Berlin is probably one of the few cities in Europe where the alternative queer trans image has been normalized, in which you can wear crazy clothes, crazy hair, crazy makeup, whatever.<sup>15</sup>” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

This possibility is associated with the perception of the city as open-minded. When comparing Berlin to his previous city, Warsaw, Adam stated “So in general, I feel like it's

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<sup>13</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish “Pero aquí en Berlín sí veo, por ejemplo, las manifestaciones de gente diversa. Las ve, uno, les ve y eso me da una tranquilidad. Aquí yo puedo ser quien soy. Aquí no me tengo que esconder, no tengo que decir cómo no tengo que cambiar los pronombres a mi pareja, no tengo que esconder nada”

<sup>14</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “yo siento que yo vine a experimentar y a conocer realmente quién era cuando me vine a esta ciudad, porque pude ver toda la cantidad de posibilidades que puede ser”

<sup>15</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Berlín es probablemente una de las pocas ciudades de Europa en las que se ha normalizado la imagen alternativa queer trans, en la que puedes utilizar una ropa loquísima, pelo, pelo loquísimo, maquillajes locos, lo que sea”

more safe. Even though Warsaw is changing, but still, I find Berlin more open-minded and more and more safe.” (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

This possibility of being able to explore one’s image is related to being visible in space. According to Cam “Here I feel a little bit safer in the sense of being able to be visible and show myself, I believe we are many and it is much more visible<sup>16</sup>” (Cam, Focus Group. 10.22. 2023). The possibility of being able to show themselves comes from the fact that it is considered an open-minded city and that there is the idea that people don’t care what others do, as one non-binary respondent of the online questionnaire, one characteristic of a space that makes them feel safe and comfortable is that “nobody actually cares about how do you behave and how do you look” (Participant 1, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

This visibility in urban space relates to anonymity. For Andrés,

“It's easier to maintain that anonymity, it's easier to maintain that invisibility here [in Berlin]. Without restricting yourself. you can express yourself. Without fear of being judged, without fear of being pointed at<sup>17</sup>” (Andrés, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

For him, this possibility of being visible was one of the reasons for moving to Berlin “In fact, that is one of the reasons why I wanted to come to Berlin because I wanted to stop hiding.<sup>18</sup>” (Andrés, Focus Group, 22.10.2023). This would be an example of one of the migration patterns proposed by Mole, to migrate in order to “take advantage of a more comprehensive range of sexual rights” (Mole 2021b).

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<sup>16</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Acá me siento un poco más seguro en ese sentido de poder visibilizarme y mostrarme que creo que somos muchos y está mucho más visible.”

<sup>17</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Es como más fácil mantener esa anonimidad, es más fácil mantener esa invisibilidad acá. Sin restringirte. te puedes expresar. Sin temor a que te juzguen, sin temor a que te apunten el dedo”

<sup>18</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “De hecho, esa es una de las razones por las cuales yo quise venir a Berlín porque quería dejar de esconderme.”

For participants Berlin is a city where they can be visible. This is possible because they are not alone, and they can explore their gender expression while feeling safe. The fact that there are diverse people around makes queer migrants confident to explore their image and behavior.

This outlook of Berlin is influenced by the previous context. When talking about Copenhagen, Sofía mentioned that:

“The difference between Copenhagen and Berlin is that Copenhagen is a much more normative city. It is a city in which there is much less diversity in all aspects, less racial diversity, less gender diversity. I mean, there’s just, like it is very binary.<sup>19</sup>” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

In this sense, the previous context of queer migrants influences the image of the safety and comfort of the city.

It is possible to conclude that for participants, the spectrum of safety is traversed by the image of Berlin as a queer and diverse city. This image provides a frame that allows them to feel safe enough to explore their identity in a different way from their previous context.

### **“I would feel safer looking like an average citizen” Change in looks and behavior**

Despite this general idea, 81.4% of online questionnaire respondents, said that there are places in the city where they feel they must change the way they look or behave. 100 % of female, gender non-conforming, intersex women, and queer-identifying people consider this.

As Hanhardt states “a wide mix of individuals inside and outside the city have pursued safety through strategies of discretion, individual self-protection, and varied, often unofficial

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<sup>19</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish “La diferencia entre Copenhague y Berlín es que Copenhague es una ciudad muchísimo más normativa. Es una ciudad en la que hay muchísima menos diversidad en todos los aspectos, diversidad racial, diversidad de género. Es decir, solamente, hay como, es muy binaria.”

group measures” (Hanhardt 2013, p. 11). This is the case of some of the participants of this research. One queer respondent stated that they feel they need to change the way they look or behave in “some of the stations of U8 and also streets of Neukölln where I feel like I would feel safer looking like an ‘average citizen’.” (Participant 8, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). From the perspective of Fast, this is an example of behavioral adaptation to fear (Fast 2018).

In the online questionnaire, people stated that the places where they need to change are government buildings like the Ausländerbehörde<sup>20</sup>, doctor’s office and places where surrounding people feel threatening like “More conservative and “German spaces like Köpenick” (Participant 13, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023), specific streets and squares like Sonnenalle or Kottbusser Tor and neighborhoods like Neukölln, as well as public transport infrastructure.

Carlos stated:

“That is why I prefer to be a little more neutral on the street and then do something crazier if I’m going to be at a party in some stylish space. It is important to me to decide before leaving how am I going to be, and I am going to be as low-key as possible, to be low-key because, in the end, it is important to have peace of mind. For me, it is more important not being worried than to be showing more.”<sup>21</sup> (Carlos, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

As Doan states, the performance of gender, transforms and is transformed by space (Doan 2010), “because each performance is subject to the performer, the observer and the space

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<sup>20</sup> Foreigners Authority office

<sup>21</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Por eso prefiero estar un poco más neutral en la calle y después hacer algo más loco si voy a estar en alguna fiesta en algún espacio con estilo. Entonces me parece importante decidir antes de salir cómo voy a estar, y voy a estar de la manera más, más tranquila, para estar más tranquilo, porque al final es importante tener tranquilidad. Para mí es más importante estar tranquilo que estar mostrando más.”

in which it is performed” (Doan 2010, p. 637). In this sense, some participants mentioned that they change the way they look or behave to feel safe.

For participants, changing the way they look or behave is a strategy that makes them feel more comfortable and safer in spaces that feel threatening. Though Berlin is perceived as a city where it is possible to explore one’s image, aesthetic, and gender expression, there are still places where participants feel like they need to change themselves to feel safe and comfortable.

In this section, I asserted that queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety through their corporality and identity. But this is not equal for all queer migrants, in some cases being nonwhite makes participants feel less safe, in other cases being female presenting is the most relevant element that affects their feelings of safety and in some instances, their gender expression is something that needs to be tone down when being in a place that feels threatening.

#### **4.2. THE CONSTELLATIONS OF QUEER MIGRANTS IN BERLIN**

As outlined in the theoretical framework, my analysis of the relationship of queer migrants with Berlin, revolves around the concept of constellations. Initially, I delve into the factors that contribute to a place feeling threatening or unsafe. Subsequently, I explore the components that define a "star" within the constellations of queer migrants. A star is perceived as a location where they experience feelings of safety, relaxation, comfort, and freedom. Therefore, constellations are integrated into the mental map of the city for queer migrants, delineating times and places marked by feelings of safety and unsafety.

Taking into account Gieseeking perspective, queer migrants experience Berlin through networks or constellations that link public and private places (Gieseeking 2020). These constellations change according to variables related to the spectrum of safety that each person experiences according to their own identity and corporality and are constituted of stars and lines. The author considers that “asking about lesbians’ and queers’ everyday

geographies revealed that the dots on their maps and how they moved between them were equally important”(Giesecking 2020, p. 211).

Constellations are a form of queer geographies. From the perspective of Giesecking, queer geographies break heteronormative, homophobic, and I might add cisnormative ways of space and are influenced by race, class, and gendering of space (Giesecking 2020). Queer migrants in Berlin create their own ways of inhabiting the city, as Carlos stated:

“I feel that in Berlin you have the possibility of living a life where you can only interact with Homosexual, LGBT, and trans people, you have the possibility of living a life apart from heterosexual people because the number of spaces there are for us is much bigger<sup>22</sup>” (Carlos, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

The geographical imagination of queer spaces is, as stated by Giesecking, network-driven (Giesecking 2020). This network type of geography allows participants of this research to exist and move in a specific spatiality in the city feeling safe and comfortable away from cisheteronormativity. Nevertheless, as I will explain in this section, this is not a fixed state of space, but rather a fluctuating attribute that is influenced by many variables.

#### **4.2.1. Perceived Threats in Urban Space for Queer Migrants**

Within these mental maps lie what Giesecking refers to as "no-go areas," which the author defines as "areas where they felt threatened or experienced harassment or violence" (Giesecking 2020, p. 2010). Participants identified specific locations in the city where they feel less secure. The results highlight that they possess a mental map pinpointing these

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<sup>22</sup> Self translation. Original quotation in Spanish: Yo siento que en Berlín tu tienes la posibilidad de vivir una vida donde solamente puede relacionarte con personas homosexuales, LGTB, trans, tu tienes la posibilidad de vivir una vida aparte de la gente heterosexual, porque la cantidad de espacios que hay para nosotros es muchísimo más grande.

areas, which they reference in the online questionnaire, interviews, and the focus group. This section delves into the characteristics that render certain places unsafe.

#### **4.2.2. Big Groups of Men and the Tyranny of Gendered Space**

Participants stated that they feel less comfortable when they are surrounded by big groups of men as well as the presence of threatening people. Adri mentioned: “So it is kind of like hard for me to be observed by a group of men on the streets. It makes me feel very unsafe” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023). Additionally, one queer-identified respondent of the online questionnaire considers they need to change the way they look “in some areas of Neukölln, where groups of men hang on the street trying to bully you” (Participant 32, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

The presence of big groups of men might be associated with the presence of threatening people, with this label I grouped what participants referred to as homeless people, drug consumers, suspicious people, and people with erratic behavior. Participants considered that the presence of this type of people is threatening, Sofía comparing with her previous city Copenhagen stated:

“People are unpredictable, but I really do think that people are more violent in Berlin (...) here they shout at you in the street all the time, they shout at you, they shout at you in train stations, subway stations. They insult you<sup>23</sup>” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

Even though the overall image of Berlin is that no one cares about other's behavior, and this gives a sense of invisibility and anonymity, in the presence of big groups of men and threatening people, **some participants feel observed in a way that makes them feel**

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<sup>23</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “La gente es impredecible, pero realmente yo si pienso que la gente es más violenta en Berlín (...) acá te gritan en la calle todo el tiempo, te gritan, te gritan en las estaciones de tren, las estaciones de metro, te. Te insultan.”

uncomfortable and vigilant to the erratic behavior of others. This is an example of what Petra Doan defined as the tyranny of gender, she argues,

“Transgendered and gender variant people experience the gendered division of space as a special kind of tyranny – the tyranny of gender – that arises when people dare to challenge the hegemonic expectations for appropriately gendered behavior in Western society. These gendered expectations are an artifact of the patriarchal dichotomization of gender”(Doan 2010, p. 635).

In this sense, the tyranny of gendered spaces is enforced by the behavior of big groups of men who, through their actions in space, are reclaiming their power over one place and letting others know that they are not welcome if they don't embrace heteronormativity. For Doan, “The tyranny of gender oppresses those whose behavior, presentation and expression fundamentally challenge socially accepted gender categories” (Doan 2010, p. 639).

Participants know this, which is why they are aware that the presence of big groups of men might result in feeling uncomfortable or unsafe. This is another example of how participants navigate the space regarding the perceived threat of violence (Fast 2018).

#### **4.2.3. Queer Experience in Public Transport**

The lines in the constellations of queer migrants are mainly related to public transportation, the U-Bahn route they take, or the walk between their main station and home, which were mostly described as threatening. In general, public transportation was perceived as an area where they feel insecure or where they have been subjects of attacks.

One non-binary online questionnaire respondent said that one of the places where they need to change their behavior or looks is public transport: “Still I feel a little afraid when I go out on the public transport or some streets like I always have to keep an eye on my back just in case.” (Participant 40, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).



Sofía stated:

“It happens to me a lot that when I'm with my young trans friends, it is every time, we can't be on the subway without being insulted, without someone coming at us, and normally it's because they flirt with some guys or because they're voguing<sup>24</sup> in the middle of the U-Bahn, or they attract a lot of attention and that bothers men, it annoys the men that see them” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

Furthermore, Adri stated: “Alexander Platz, the train station is my main train station and the most scared when I walk pass by because usually there are times where I was followed or harassed” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

Regarding aggressions, 23.5% of the online questionnaire respondents stated that aggression in public spaces or public transportation like being beaten, harassed, or followed, changed their perspective of the safety of the city. One cisgender woman stated: “I got physically attacked in U-Bahn and it made me more vigilant about surroundings” (Participant 19, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). While a non-binary person mentioned:

“Just a really noticeable uptick in the number of mildly bad interactions on the street and public transportation -- like pickpocketing attempts or being hit or yelled at by houseless people when I'm trying really hard to not be provocative” (Participant 27, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Mei-hua mentioned: “I also run into some sexual harassment, not sexual harassment, just like verbal sexual harassment in S-Bahn and U-Bahn. Like I have at least like five times, above five times” (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

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<sup>24</sup> Type of dance

To avoid these situations, participants mentioned some strategies. For Mei-hua, one of the things that diminishes these negative situations is being accompanied by a German person:

“My same-sex partner from Germany. They don't care. So, for me, it's quite safe. Even in U-Bahn or S-Bahn. And sometimes we're holding hands on the street and I feel like no one cares so much (...) they know the context of this culture” (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

Public transportation is a space that has double significance. On the one hand, it constitutes most of the lines referenced by participants as connecting different stars (Giesecking 2020, p. 4), and on the other hand, it is also dangerous. It is not possible to consider it a no-go area since it is necessary for urban life, but it is perceived as a threatening space, where respondents assured, they had been victims of physical violence and sexual harassment.

#### **4.2.4. Perspectives on Specific Districts**

Respondents mentioned some districts and neighborhoods where they feel unsafe or uncomfortable, specifically, Wittenau, Wedding, Köpenick, Neukölln, Kreuzberg, and Marzahn. I will focus on the ones that were mentioned the most, Neukölln, Kreuzberg, and Marzahn.

##### **Neukölln**

One of the places participants referenced the most was the district of Neukölln. In the online questionnaire, 26.5% of respondents who consider there are places where they need to change the way they look or behave stated that Neukölln was one of those places. One gender non-conforming online questionnaire respondent asserted that they need to change the way they look or behave in some parts of this district: “I live close to Sonnenallee and Oranienstrasse, some people judge others and shout things I can't understand” (Participant 34, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Additionally, participants of the interviews considered that this area of the city makes them feel unsafe, Sofía a transgender woman stated:

“Neukölln is a part of the city where sexual violence is much more noticeable. It's where I'm sexually harassed the most, it's where men make more intense comments, where boundaries are least respected<sup>25</sup>” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

Adam feels certain discomfort in the street of Sonnenalle located in Neukölln:

“Also like Sonnenalle when there's like a lot of people it gives me sometimes anxiety. So maybe it's not like feeling safe or not safe but triggers a little bit and changes my mood and my perspective on how I feel.” (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

Nevertheless, most online questionnaire respondents who stated they need to change the way they look or behave in this district do not live in Neukölln, 4.6% (2 people) of the 14% (6 people) who live in Neukölln consider they must change the way they look or behave in this district, and one non-binary participant who lives in the district, considers:

“So, I love Neukölln because it's a little messy. A little chaotic. Yeah. Like, I, I love kind of like the mess and the chaos and also. Yeah. I don't know. Something about Neukölln. I'm like, Great” (Nima, Interview 4, 26.10.2023).

For them, the messiness and diversity of the district is appealing.

## **Kreuzberg**

About Kreuzberg, 14% of the online questionnaire participants stated that they need to change the way they look or behave in some parts of the district of Kreuzberg. Adam mentioned that “when I go to Neukölln or Kreuzberg, there are situations or places where I don't feel 100% safe” (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023). Additionally, one female-identified

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<sup>25</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Especialmente en Neukölln, o sea Neukölln es una parte de la ciudad en la que la violencia sexual es mucho más marcada. Es donde me acosan sexualmente más, es donde los hombres son más pasados con sus comentarios, donde se respetan menos los límites.”

respondent of the online questionnaire stated that she feels safe, relaxed, and free in “Most of the city honestly, although a bit less so at night in some districts (Wedding, Neukölln especially around Kottbusser/Görlitzer). I feel the safest in areas like Pankow, Pberg<sup>26</sup>, Wilmersdorf” (Participant 15, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

In Kreuzberg participants of the online questionnaire mentioned specific areas in this district where they feel they need to change their behavior or looks like Kottbusser Tor, Görlitzer Park, and Oranienstrasse.

### **Marzahn**

Marzahn was a District also mentioned by participants. One queer lesbian online questionnaire respondent mentioned that they feel the need to change the way they look or behave in “Neukölln, sometimes Kreuzberg, of course, all Marzahn-like hoods.” (Participant 25, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). A gay male respondent stated, “I usually walk all around the city I feel safe, there places I avoid like Marzahn because of their "fame" but besides I feel very safe around Berlin” (Participant 37, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). Adri considers:

“I think there's a lot of places with like a background that I would avoid. Like Marzahn, it's a neighborhood where I wouldn't go alone, or only with queer people you know, have some cis-het people with me. So just to feel safe” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

Adam has the following idea of Marzahn:

“I have a friend, she's a dentist, she's working in Marzahn, and she's telling me that you can feel that, that people are different. Some of them are like maybe also like less educated in terms of like equality and like the important topics.” (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

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<sup>26</sup> Prenzlauerberg

Nevertheless, none of the people who consider Marzahn as a no-go area live there. Even though some participants haven't experienced any acts of violence in this district, it is possible to conclude that the idea of Marzahn as a threatening area comes from the reputation this district has and the negative stories, they have heard from people close to them.

Participants in this research identified certain districts that they find threatening, a perspective shaped by both personal experiences of harassment and narratives they have encountered. In Neukölln, participants cited specific situations of harassment that negatively impact their sense of safety. In Kreuzberg, they need to change the way they look and behave to feel safe. Marzahn, on the other hand, is viewed as dangerous primarily due to its reputation rather than direct personal experiences.

#### **4.2.5. 'Dangerous Times' for Female-Presenting Queer Migrants**

Some female-presenting participants said that at night and in summertime, their feelings of safety decreased. Mei-hua stated:

"I would say, after 10 p.m. I don't want to walk alone like areas like Neukölln, or Hermannplatz, somewhere in Prenzlauerberg also just like after 10 p.m. I don't want to walk alone." (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

Additionally, Sofía mentioned that the time of the year affects her perception of safety, being summertime when she receives the most harassment in public space, "It's definitely a seasonal thing, and in the summer it's practically impossible for me to go out without having several episodes of sexual harassment in one day<sup>27</sup>" (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

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<sup>27</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: "Definitivamente es una cosa a medio seasonal, seasonal y en el verano es prácticamente imposible que yo salga a la calle sin que, sin que tenga varios episodios de acoso sexual en un día"

Female-presenting respondents mentioned the influence the time of day and year has on their experiences and feelings of safety. Nighttime and Summertime -when they wear tighter clothes- are associated with more episodes of sexual harassment, increasing their vulnerability in space.

As Valentine asserts, one of the main strategies women use to stay safe is to avoid “‘dangerous places’ at ‘dangerous times’” (Valentine 1989, p. 386). From this perspective, for queer migrants, especially those who are female presenting, the time of day and year significantly shapes the construction of their mental maps and constellations.

#### **4.2.6. The Presence of Outsiders in Queer Spaces**

Queer migrants in this research perceive the presence of cisgender<sup>28</sup> heterosexual individuals, identified as outsiders in queer spaces, as threatening. They associate this presence with unsolicited sexual interactions and an overall sense of discomfort.

Mei-hua shared her experience with this type of behavior:

“When I saw the poster, I thought it was Queer Party, but actually, I think, inside, it's like, full of, like, straight men. And someone always hitting on people<sup>29</sup> is not quite normal in Berlin, I would say” (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

Adri has had a similar experience:

“You know like usually people like, I don't wanna say Cis-het<sup>30</sup> couple but like you know a boy and a girl, man and a woman, they are teaming together,

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<sup>28</sup> Cisgender refers to a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth as opposed to transgender which refers to a person who identifies with a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Hitting on’ refers to the action of someone behaving in a way that shows they want to engage in a sexual interaction.

<sup>30</sup> Cisgender heterosexual couple

they appear out of nowhere, unicorn hunters<sup>31</sup>” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

These feelings of unsafety with the presence of heterosexual people in these spaces were also expressed by Daniel:

“They are like the heteros, like in a queer baiting<sup>32</sup>, taking advantage of spaces that I feel have been fought for and that are for something else, so we always say like everyone is welcome, but well there is also a point in which we say like what are these guys doing here? I don't feel safe with this straight man dressed in a skirt, but at any moment, I mean, is he going to attack me or is he judging me or what? Then there comes the point where the bars that are opening up to queer parties, and let's face it, are much better than a straight party, then they come like these people to appropriate and invade.<sup>33</sup>” (Daniel, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

These feelings of unsafety are grounded not just in perception but also in concrete events. Among respondents to the online questionnaire, 17.6% cited homophobic attacks as events that change their perception of safety. One of these incidents involved an attack on the queer bar Topsy Bear. Two respondents specifically referenced this attack, including a non-binary individual who stated:

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<sup>31</sup> Unicorn hunters refer to a dynamic in which a couple looks for a third party to engage in sexual activities, usually ignoring consent and boundaries. Unicorn hunters are perceived as predatory (Dagger, n.d.)

<sup>32</sup> This term refers to “Anyone who’s seen as making themselves seem like they’re LGBTQ+ when they’re not” (Factora, 2022)

<sup>33</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Están como los heteros, como en un queer baiting, aprovechando espacios que siento yo que han sido luchados y que son como para otra cosa, entonces siempre decimos como que bienvenidos todos, pero pues también hay un punto en el que decimos como y bueno estos, estos qué hacen acá no me siento seguro con este hetero vestido con falda, pero en cualquier momento, o sea, realmente me va a atacar o me está juzgando o qué? Entonces llega el punto en el que los bares que se están abriendo a fiestas queer y pues aceptemoslo, son mucho mejores que una fiesta hetero, entonces ya vienen como esta gente a apropiarse e invadir.”

“I was at Topsy Bear, a gay bar that was supposed to be safe for us, and a cis-straight male walked in asking if it was a bar for fags, when I answer that it was, he and other guy peppersprayed the bartenders and the chemical made us leave” (Participant 40, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Participants perceive the presence of cisgender heterosexual outsiders in queer spaces as invasive, associating it with unsolicited sexual advances and aggression. The existence of these "others" in the space is perceived as a threat, causing discomfort and apprehension. This unease comes from the possibility that these “others” do not share the same values or could behave violently or uncomfortably.

#### **4.2.7. Privilege of Hegemonic Masculine Behavior in Queer Spaces**

Another element that was referenced by participants as something that brings discomfort is the privilege of masculine behavior in some queer spaces. Participants of the focus group mentioned that KitKat and the area of Nollendorfplatz are very masculine places where they don't feel comfortable:

“There are certain events, as they said, like *Revolver*, or everything related to the area of Nollendorfplatz that tends to be more related, more focused on being macho (...) where femininity is frowned upon, and those spaces, where I have gone to learn, to see also, but are places where I would rather not be<sup>34</sup>” (Carlos, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

Additionally, Cam stated about the feeling they have: “Nollendorfplatz is like I am gay, but I am not a fag, right? Like I am masculine<sup>35</sup>” (Cam, Focus Group. 22.10.2023).

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<sup>34</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Por eso hay ciertos eventos, como decían el Revolver, o todo lo que está relacionado alrededor de la zona de Nollendorfplatz que tienden a ser como más relacionadas, más centrados en ser macho (...) donde la feminidad, está mal visto. Y todos estos son espacios a los que he ido por aprender, por ver también, pero son lugares donde no preferiría estar”

<sup>35</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Nollendorfplatz que es muy como soy soy gay, pero no soy marica, cierto? Como soy masculino ”



According to some participants, this type of behavior also makes other identities feel uncomfortable. For example, Nima, a non-binary person stated: “Yeah. I also definitely tend to avoid the parties that are like, very tailored to cis-gay men, especially like cis-white-gay men. Yeah, they. That's also not really a welcoming space.” (Nima, Interview 4, 26.10.2023).

Adri a trans woman mentioned: “I don't feel very safe in those spaces also. I feel like gay men are also men and they take a lot of space in the party” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023). Additionally, she mentioned that:

“I feel that Berlin has a huge queer community, and we don't have a lot of queer spaces. We have a lot of gay men spaces, but not a lot of like queer or FLINTA<sup>36</sup> spaces.” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

Even though there are places in the city like Nollendorfplatz and KitKat, that are traditionally perceived as safe and comfortable spaces for queer people, the fact that the hegemonic masculine behavior and looks are predominant might make identities that do not adhere to these behaviors feel unwelcome, which adds up to the perspective that there are not enough queer or FLINTA spaces in the city.

As discussed in this section, various aspects of urban life contribute to heightened feelings of unsafety among queer migrants. On one hand, there are more generalizable factors such as the presence of large groups of men, experiences in public transportation, the time of day and year, and the specific reputation and experiences in certain districts. On the other hand, participants pointed out more specific characteristics within queer spaces that contribute to their discomfort, including the presence of cisgender heterosexual outsiders and the privilege of hegemonic masculine behavior in these queer environments. This

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<sup>36</sup> FLINTA means female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans, and agender

insight provides a glimpse into the safety spectrum that queer migrants navigate and how it shapes the formation of constellations.

### **4.3. WHAT ARE QUEER MIGRANTS' STARS MADE OF?**

As I stated in the theoretical framework, constellations are made by stars. For Giesecking, because of economic and political constraints queer people produce space in the way of “stars that come and go in the sky, contemporary urban lesbians and queers often create and rely on fragmented places and fleeting experiences” (Giesecking 2020, p. 4). These stars are spread in space and can only be seen when you know when and where to look (Giesecking 2020).

In this section, I explore what stars are made of. For this research stars are the places where participants feel free, relaxed, comfortable, and safe. They referred to different places like their homes, friends' and partners' homes, workplaces, clubs, parties and bars, districts, parks, lakes, theaters, cinemas, and festivals, among others. For queer migrants, these stars are created through practices of community and collective care, diversity, respect, and a comfortable urban environment. I also highlight the relevance queer-only spaces have in queer migrants' constellations.

#### **4.3.1. Community and Collective Care**

For participants, community and collective care contribute to their feelings of safety and are important elements that constitute a star. This includes the feeling of being protected in case something happens, in the sense that the community and people around you have your back.

A non-binary participant stated in the online questionnaire that one of the main characteristics of a space that makes them feel safe, free, and relaxed is “Either a feeling of collective care (like everyone is genuinely looking out for each other, shares, checks in, etc) or the feeling that I'm kinda invisible” (Participant 27, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023), another queer online questionnaire respondent considered: “The knowledge that if

anything happens, other people will come to the rescue and that I won't be left to defend on my own" (Participant 32, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Additionally, for queer migrants who were part of this research being in a group usually makes them feel safe. 79% of respondents to the online questionnaire stated that they feel safe in their neighborhood when they are with someone else. As Daniel asserted:

"I really believe that when I feel the spaces safe, it is more than anything because I am accompanied. Like we always say, the parties as a group like we always go as a pack to wherever we go<sup>37</sup>" (Daniel, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

For Adri, a trans woman:

"I feel that a lot of people you are in a group or in a pack, they feel less entitled to do something against you. So even if it's a group of like, I'm the only trans woman in a group of cis women, it never happens to me to be harassed or anything like that" (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

For Adam, the places where he feels comfortable "are always making you feel that I'm safe and that I'm part of the community" (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023). Furthermore, Carlos stated:

"That is why it is also important to look for spaces that are not predominantly white, because, as Andrés says, the more different we all are,

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<sup>37</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: "Realmente creo que cuando siento los espacios seguros, es más que todo también porque voy acompañado. Como que siempre decimos las fiestas como en grupo, como siempre como que vamos con en manada para donde vamos"

the easier it is to be in community and in peace<sup>38</sup>” (Carlos, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).

Feeling surrounded by a community, being in a group of friends or accompanied by someone else, creates among participants a sense of collective care. Participants are aware that the pursuit of safety is collective and not individualized (Hanhardt 2013, p. 30). As Petra Doan mentioned, “I came to realize the value of being surrounded by an affirming community when challenging the tyranny of gender” (Doan 2010, p. 645). For queer migrants in Berlin, an affirming community is one of the elements that shape stars. It is also a way they stand up against exclusion in space and feel confident to inhabit the city.

#### **4.3.2. Diversity, Acceptance, No Judgment, and Respect**

Another aspect that constitutes a star is diversity. For one gay respondent of the online questionnaire, the characteristic a space has that makes him feel safe, comfortable, and relaxed is “The company of diverse and queer people. Noticing a crowd that is sexually, culturally and racially diverse.” (Participant 9, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). For another queer respondent to the same question, the characteristics of a safe space are “Queer open-minded focus, non-white supremacy, diversity, body positivity” (Participant 41, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). Additionally, 16.3% of respondents to the online questionnaire stated that one characteristic of a safe space is the feeling of acceptance and not judgment, a place where they can be free.

Diversity is related to being surrounded by other queer people, one queer respondent to the online survey stated that a characteristic of a space that makes them feel comfortable and safe is that “there are other queer people who are friendly and open-minded” (Participant 8, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023). This fact is linked to the idea that a place

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<sup>38</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Por eso también es importante buscar espacios donde no sean predominantemente blancos, porque como dice Andrés, The more different we all are, the easier it is to be in community and in peace.”

is free of judgment, where there is respect and acceptance, and where each person's identity will not be questioned.

One non-binary respondent to the online questionnaire mentioned that some characteristics of the place where they feel comfortable are:

“It is organized by and for queer people, there is a lot of diversity on bodies and gender expression, and nobody is supervising the identity, nobody is asking too many questions about what and why is the reason for my identity, they are just existing in freedom.” (Participant 40, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Another gender non-conforming participant answered the same question: “The people of course, a non-judgmental and welcoming environment. I’d say somewhere where you can make your own and don’t feel like you’re intruding” (Participant 22, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Some of the places that were mentioned by participants where they can be themselves without fear of being judged or assaulted were: Berghain, Möbel Olfe, Kwia, Silver Future, and some public spaces like FKK areas of lakes.

For participants, diversity gives them the possibility of feeling safe creating a community. Carlos mentioned: “The more different we are, the easier it would be to be in community and peace<sup>39</sup>” (Carlos, Focus Group, 22.10.2023).). While for Adam diversity is also related to collective care:

“I think when you have like diverse crowds and you have like more representation and also like somehow you can like, take care of each other

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<sup>39</sup> Self translation. Original quotation: “mientras más diferentes todos seamos, es más fácil estar en comunidad y en tranquilidad.”

and altogether you can create a safe space.” (Adam, Interview 3, 23. 10. 2023).

In this regard, what participants of this research state reinforces Fast perspective. For the author a “safe space should be understood not as static and acontextual, as truly “safe” or “unsafe,” but through the relational work of cultivating such spaces.” (Fast 2018, p. 1). For queer migrants in Berlin, to create a star, this relational work must include the element of diversity.

As London’s case presented by Valenzuela, queer life in Berlin cannot be separated from the overall perspective of diversity that queer migrants have of the city. Valenzuela states:

“London’s queerness is deeply intertwined with its multiculturalism. As recognized in the respondents’ narratives, the city’s acceptance and celebration of homosexuality and queer culture – which make it an attractive destination for international non-heterosexuals – cannot be separated, in lived experience, from its social and cultural integration and ethnic diversity” (Valenzuela 2021, p. 50).

As mentioned before, participants in this study perceive Berlin as a diverse city, a factor that significantly influenced their decision to reside here. Consequently, for a location to be considered a "star" within the constellation of queer migrants, it must embody and sustain this sense of diversity. For these individuals, diversity fosters a feeling of community, safety, and care.

#### **4.3.3. Queer Only Spaces**

For some participants, it is important to have places that are exclusive for queer people, Mei-hua expressed her preference for those places:

“Because, you know, you go inside and all the people here they are queer, and they know this kind of area is for queer only and then everyone is so friendly.” (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

Additionally, one queer respondent of the online questionnaire mentioned that they feel free comfortable and relaxed “in some bars during specific nights where a queer/flinta<sup>40</sup> event takes place, or when you are with friends in familiar environments (their house, or your own)” (Participant 32, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Furthermore, for participants, being surrounded by queer people gives them a sense of safety, Sofía explains it in the following way:

“If I go to Berghain or if I go somewhere, to a queer party, I feel much safer, because practically all the people around me are trans people. So I kind of feel a lot safer<sup>41</sup>” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

For a non-binary respondent of the online questionnaire, one of the characteristics of the safe spaces is the “presence of queer people of color and empathetic people” (Participant 11, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Queer-only places are important for queer migrants who were part of this research. For them, these are places where they can be themselves, without the fear of aggression. Here they can find an affirming community that is friendly and open to diversity. Because of the sense of acceptance and familiarity, these places are stars in the constellations of queer migrants in Berlin.

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<sup>40</sup> FLINTA mens female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans, and agender

<sup>41</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “si voy para Berghain o si voy para algún lado, alguna fiesta queer, pues como que me siento mucho más segura, porque prácticamente todas las personas que me rodean son personas trans. Entonces como que me siento mucho más a salvo”

#### **4.3.4. Comfortable Urban Environment, Families and Females**

The urban environment is important for a place to feel comfortable and safe. A comfortable urban environment, as stated by participants includes open spaces, quiet streets, fewer cars, green areas, and silence. For 14.5% of the online questionnaire respondents, the urban environment is important. One respondent of the questionnaire stated that some of the characteristics of the places where he can relax and feel comfortable are “Quieter streets with fewer cars, more green areas, and fewer negative encounters with homophobes.” (Participant 2, Online Questionnaire, 24.10.2023).

Some participants mentioned that the presence of families and females in a specific space makes them feel comfortable. For Adri, one place that has this characteristic is the Volkspark Friedrichshain :

“Usually I go to the Volkspark Friedrichshain, usually is one that I go, but, usually I drink mate, and when it is warm enough I take my mate, sit on the park [lawn], read, sit in a group maybe, listen to music. I never had any issues there, but I think it is because it is very family, there are a lot of families around there.” (Adri, Interview 1, 23.10.2023).

In addition, Mei-hua also perceives that the family characteristic of her neighborhood makes it safer:

“This neighborhood is like a family neighborhood so it's completely safe, I would say this neighborhood is perfect to me. It's very quiet and I'm not sure it's like friendly to queer people because I haven't seen just like a queer couple holding hands on the street. But still, this neighborhood made me feel so safe because nothing happened there” (Mei-hua, Interview 5, 30.10.2023).

Even though she does not consider her neighborhood as mainly queer, it still feels safe for her. Moreover, the female presence in the Kreuzberg Turkish market makes Sofia feel safe:



“I love Kreuzberg, like the intersection between Kreuzberg and Neukölln. I really like to go to the Turkish Market, especially because the Turkish Market is filled with Turkish women so it’s like I feel more at ease <sup>42</sup>” (Sofía, Interview 2, 24.10.2023).

For these female-presenting participants, the presence of families and other females in a place instills a sense of safety. As a result, it can be inferred that the well-being of queer migrants is positively influenced by the diversity of people in a given location. While families and females may have distinct needs and dynamics in urban spaces, the intersection of various groups has the potential to create a welcoming and enjoyable urban environment for everyone.

The results of this research contribute to the constellation framework by incorporating the perspective of the safety spectrum. In this context, queer migrants’ constellations are transformed in response to the fluctuating feelings of safety and are built upon an everchanging mental map of Berlin. These constellations are dynamic and change in response to the presence of elements that bring feelings of safety and unsafety. Constellations are the way queer migrants in Berlin inhabit the city, they enable them to resist exclusion in urban spaces and live beyond the restrictions of cisheteronormativity.

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<sup>42</sup> Self-translation. Original quote in Spanish: “Amo Kreuzberg, como la intersección entre Kreuzberg y Neukölln. Me gusta mucho ir al Turkish Market, especialmente porque el Turkish market está lleno de mujeres turcas, Entonces es como que me siento más tranquila.”

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Queer life is simultaneously coherent and chaotic, fluid, and messy. It has a logic of its own that influences the way queer people experience urban space. Therefore, I wanted to answer the question of **how do queer migrants perceive the spectrum of safety in urban space and create constellations to navigate the city of Berlin?**

My approach was about the way queer migrants experience urban life and feel safe and comfortable. For this analysis, I used the concepts of constellations as a way of understanding queer geographies, the way bodies shape and are shaped by space, ethnicity, and the influence in the feelings of vulnerability of being female presenting, the perspective of safety as a spectrum, as well as the specific aspects of queer migration and the role community has on queer migrants' urban life.

I was able to answer my question and confirm my hypothesis. I found out that queer migrants in Berlin inhabit the city through constellations. These are fluctuating networks that are in constant change and are influenced by their perception of safety.

Participants of this research perceive the spectrum of safety through their corporality, for them, ethnicity plays an important role in the way they navigate the city. Additionally, being female presenting is a variable that influences the way some participants experience urban safety, especially in public space and public transportation, for them, the threat of violence is always present in urban space.

Even though Berlin is a city where queer migrants can explore their gender identity, they also must adapt their behavior and image to the possibilities of violence. For some participants, this means looking 'less migrant' to have a more 'low-key look' to be accompanied by German or cis-het people, to have different routines according to the time of day or year, as well as to avoid certain districts or stations.

**Moreover, I discovered that constellations are created through interaction with others.** Queer migrants that were part of this research create mental maps of stars and lines that

are influenced by their relationship with others in space. In this sense, they have a clear idea of the places and areas that feel comfortable and safe, which I refer to as stars, as well as the threatening elements they encounter in their paths.

These stars are created through community, collective care, and a sense of diversity, elements that also influence the spectrum of safety. The presence of these elements in a specific star contributes to the feeling of safety and locates it in a constellation of places that can be visited and inhabited with comfort. These constellations are built differently depending on the characteristic of each queer migrant, which is why constellations are diverse and fluctuating.

The relevance of this research lies in the problematization of the overall perspective of Berlin as a queer-friendly city. Even though for participants of this study, Berlin is a city where they can express their identity with more comfort than other places, they still feel the threat of violence that comes from, as Doan explained, the tyranny of gendered spaces that reinforce hetero and cisnormativity (Doan 2010). As explained in previous paragraphs, these threats are different and are related to the intersection of multiple social categories that influence the spectrum of safety for each migrant, as well as the way they build their constellations.

Some limitations of this research are related to the language barrier. It was not possible to talk with queer migrants who did not speak English or Spanish. Additionally, due to time constraints, the economic aspect influencing queer migrants' access to the mentioned stars in this study could not be fully explored. Similarly, the influence of migration status on the lives of queer migrants in Berlin was not thoroughly examined within the scope of this research.

Future research opportunities lie in investigating the impact of gentrification on the preservation of affordable and inclusive iconic stars like bars, cafés, and bookstores, among others, where queer communities are built. Additionally, further research could be done on exploring the repercussions of the commodification of queer life on the most vulnerable

queer migrants and their ability to access the broader spectrum of rights, which, as noted by Mole, is one of the reasons LGBTQ people leave their home countries (Mole 2021b, p. 4). Another research path could address the issue of affordable housing for vulnerable queer migrants, examining the strategies communities employ to address this challenge. Moreover, exploring initiatives like house projects that specifically cater to queer people and the community they foster within could offer valuable insights.

## 6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the intersectionality embodied by queer migrants in planning practices, it's necessary to recognize that their safety spectrum is influenced by various aspects of their corporality and identity. Factors such as ethnicity, presenting as female and gender expression play significant roles in shaping their urban experiences. Therefore, incorporating the needs and perspectives of queer migrants in Berlin requires an understanding of the diversity they embody, acknowledging that their queer identity is just one facet influencing their urban lives.

In this context, participatory planning is a valuable tool. Urban planning is an ongoing effort that must adapt to the ever-changing conditions of the city, especially in Berlin, a city of migrants. From this perspective, a planning methodology that not only includes queer migrants but also provides spaces for interaction among different groups is essential.

From this perspective, one recommendation is to engage in participatory planning sessions specifically with queer migrants, ensuring their ideas are considered while simultaneously, creating platforms for discussions between queer migrants and other groups, such as families and females who share similar experiences when experiencing the city. This research reveals that, despite challenging cis-heteronormative notions, queer migrants share aspects of needs and ideas with other population groups. These encounters enrich the city's planning with diverse perspectives, benefiting not only queer migrants but also other vulnerable populations.

Additionally, recognizing the significance of queer migrant spaces in Berlin is important in planning initiatives. This research highlights the relevance of public and private places in fostering community and collective care for queer migrants. However, the threat of gentrification might jeopardize these spaces, potentially erasing essential components of queer heritage in the city. Urban management should prioritize safeguarding these spaces, not only to enhance Berlin's international reputation as a queer-friendly city but also to

uphold the rights of vulnerable queer migrants and other marginalized populations to a just and equitable city.

Moreover, the understanding of safety as a spectrum, influenced by various variables and constantly evolving, can be applied in the planning for other city populations. This framework facilitates comprehension of how different vulnerable groups engage with urban spaces, considering the intersectionality of various social categories within Berlin's diverse population. Viewing safety as a spectrum enables urban managers to devise solutions that cater to the diverse needs of the city's inhabitants and include an approach to safety that aims for the encounter of different social groups, rather than segregation.

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## APPENDIX 1. ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

The online questionnaire had a mix of closed and open-ended questions, it aimed to gather qualitative and quantitative data. I received answers from the online questionnaire for one month, between 25.09.2023 and 24.10.2023.

### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The open-ended questions were analyzed and categorized for quantitative purposes but also analyzed through Atlas T.I. as qualitative information. This section explains each categorization for each question.

#### Question 1: What is your gender identity?

In this question, respondents wrote what they considered their gender identity was. There were many different answers. In some cases, people responded with different labels, such as trans non-binary / Antibinary, or Non-binary /transgender /transfem. For this research gender identity is considered a spectrum, which is why any of the answers were valid and the following categorization was mainly done to be able to organize the data and find some regularities. The categories that group the answers were used as guidance and do not pretend by any means to be an absolute truth. The following table presents the categories and different responses that were part of them:

Category	Answers
Cisgender male	Cisgender Cis Cisgender male Cis man Cisgender man Cisgender male Cis man Cisgender man
Male	Male Male learning about being non-binary Gay man

Category	Answers
	Man
Female	Female
Gender non-conforming	Gender non-conforming
Intersex woman	Intersex woman
Non-binary	Non-binary He/they Trans non-binary / Antibinary Non-binary trans
Queer	Queer Queer, female Cisgender / queer
Transfem / Transgender woman	Nonbinary, transgender, transfem Transgender woman

*Table 1. Online questionnaire. Categorization of Respondent's Gender Identity*

### **Question 2: What is your sexual orientation?**

In this open-ended question, respondents wrote what their sexual orientation was. As for the previous question, there were many different answers. I consider sexual orientation to be a spectrum and every individual can describe it as they wish. For this research, I categorized them to be able to find some regularities in the data. The following table presents the categories and different responses that were part of them:

Category	Answers
Androsexual	Androsexual
Aromantic	Queer aromantic
Bisexual / pansexual	Pansexual Bisexual Bi Pansexual /Gay Queer, bi Pan Bi/pan sexual
Complicated	Complicated
Fluid	Fluid
Gay	Gay Homosexual Mostly homosexual
Hetero	Hetero

Category	Answers
Lesbian	Lesbian
Queer	Queer

*Table 2. Online questionnaire. Categorization of Respondent's Sexual Orientation*

**Question 12: Could you mention a place, or places, in the city where you feel free, relaxed, and safe?**

The qualitative information of this question was analyzed with Atlas T.I. and related with the findings from other sources, but it was also categorized as follows to find quantitative regularities:

1. Own home
2. Friend's or Partner's home
3. Workplace or University
4. Exercise
5. Club, Specific party, or Sauna
6. Community queer groups or spaces
7. Cultural festivals, street festivals, theaters, or cinemas
8. Restaurants, cafés, or bookshops
9. Specific districts
10. Parks
11. Lakes
12. Indoor spaces

13. Everywhere or mostly everywhere

14. Depending on the time of the year

**Question 13: What is the main characteristic or characteristics these spaces have, that make you feel free, relaxed, and safe?**

The qualitative information of this question was analyzed with Atlas T.I. and related with the findings from other sources, but it was also categorized as follows to find quantitative regularities:

1. Acceptance, no judgment, respect, and freedom
2. Community, care, and organized by queer people
3. Comfortable urban environment
4. Diversity
5. Invisible, anonymous
6. Open minded people
7. Surrounded by queer people
8. Specific for queer people
9. Surrounded by agreeable people
10. Surrounded by people I know
11. Others (gender-neutral bathrooms, there is no danger, no men around)

**Question 15. What was the event that changed your perspective of safety in the city?**

The qualitative information of this question was analyzed with Atlas T.I. and related with the findings from other sources, but it was also categorized as follows to find quantitative regularities:

1. Pride
2. Aggression in public space or public transportation (being beaten, harassed, followed, robbed)
3. Homophobic attacks on individuals or places
4. Specific places where drug consumption is not the main thing
5. Other people's stories or news
6. People perceived as threatening
7. Nightlife with friends
8. Unsolicited interaction
9. Crowds at night

**Question 19: Which are those places in which you feel the need to change your behavior or look to feel safe?**

The qualitative information of this question was analyzed with Atlas T.I. and related with the findings from other sources, but it was also categorized as follows to find quantitative regularities:

1. Government buildings (Ausländerbehörde, Hartz IV, Airport)
2. Everyday places (Work, school, Doctor's office, nail salon)

3. Places where surrounding people feel threatening
4. Transport infrastructure
5. Neukölln or located in this district
6. Other Neighborhoods or districts
7. Kreuzberg or located in this district
8. Depending on the time of day
9. Clubs
10. On the street

### **Closed questions**

The following were closed questions:

- Question 3. How old are you?
- Question 4. Which is your Home Country?
- Question 5. Where did you live before coming to Berlin?
- Question 6. How long have you been living in Berlin?
- Question 7. In which District of Berlin do you live?
- Question 8. Do you consider Berlin a safe city?
- Question 9. How safe is Berlin compared to the place you lived before?
- Question 10. How safe is Berlin compared to your home country?



- Question 11. How has your perception of safety changed from the moment you arrived in Berlin?
- Question 14. Is there any public or individual event that changed your perspective of safety in the city?
- Question 16. Have you experienced acts of violence, like harassment, name-calling, catcalling, physical violence, or any other type in PUBLIC SPACE?
- Question 17. Have you experienced acts of violence, like harassment, name-calling, catcalling, physical violence, or any other type in PRIVATE or SEMIPRIVATE SPACES?
- Question 18. Are there places in the city where you feel you need to change your behavior or look to feel safe?
- Question 20. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood in the daytime?
- Question 21. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood in the nighttime?
- Question 22. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood when you are alone?
- Question 23. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood when are with someone else?

### **Questions for choosing participants for the focus group and interviews**

To find participants who were interested in being part of the next stages of the research, I asked in the online questionnaire:

- Question 24. Would you be interested in being part of an interview?
- Question 25. Would you be interested in being part of a focus group?

The objective was to be able to have a diverse sample. 22 people stated that they would be interested in being interviewed while 20 people stated that they would be interested in being part of a focus group.

I contacted some of these interested respondents, but many of them were no longer available for the research, from this, I decided to move forward with the ones that had an affirmative response, this poses an additional limitation to the interviews and focus group data collection that will be addressed in the following sections.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

43 people answered the online questionnaire, they were numbered from Participant 1 to Participant 43 to be quoted in the research, they had the following characteristics:

### **Gender identity:**

<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cisgender male	15	34.8%
Male	6	14%
Transfem / transgender woman	3	7%
Female	2	4.6%
Intersex woman	1	2.3%
Gender non-conforming	2	4.6%
Non-binary	8	18.6%
Queer	6	14%

*Table 3. Online questionnaire. Participant's gender identity. 2023*

**Sexual orientation:**

<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Androsexual	1	2.3%
Aromantic	1	2.3%
Bisexual / pansexual / polysexual	15	34.8%
Complicated	1	2.3%
Fluid	2	4.6%
Gay	20	46.5%
Hetero	1	2.3%
Lesbian	1	2.3%
Queer	1	2.3%

*Table 4. Online questionnaire. Participants sexual orientation. 2023*

**Time in the city:**

<b>Time in the city</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 1 year	3	7%
1 year	3	7%
2 years	9	21%
3 years	7	16.2%
4 years	5	9.3%
5 years	4	11.6%
6 years	1	2.3%
7 years	1	2.3%
8 years	3	7%
9 years	3	7%
10 years	1	2.3%
More than 10 years	2	4.6%

*Table 5. Online questionnaire. Participants' time in the city. 2023*

**Home country:**

Home country	Number of respondents	Percentage
Venezuela	1	2.3%
Uruguay	1	2.3%
USA	2	4.6%
UK	1	2.3%
Turkey	2	4.6%
Thailand	1	2.3%
Spain	2	4.6%
Russia	3	7%
Poland	3	7%
Mexico	3	7%
Lebanon	2	4.6%
Italy	1	2.3%
Greece	1	2.3%
Germany	1	2.3%
France	2	4.6%
Colombia	8	18.6%
Canada	2	4.6%
Brazil	5	9.3%
Armenia	1	2.3%
Australia	1	2.3%

*Table 6. Online questionnaire. Participant's home country. 2023*

**Previous country:**

Previous country	Number of respondents	Percentage
Uruguay	1	2.3%
UK	1	2.3%
Turkey	2	4.6%
Syria	1	2.3%
Spain	3	7%
Slovakia	1	2.3%
Singapore	1	2.3%
Russia	2	4.6%
Poland	3	7%
Mexico	1	2.3%
Lebanon	1	2.3%
Italy	1	2.3%

<b>Previous country</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Ireland	2	4.6%
Greece	1	2.3%
France	4	4.6%
Colombia	4	4.6%
Chile	1	2.3%
Canada	2	4.6%
Brazil	4	9.2%
Argentina	1	2.3%
Another German city	3	7%

*Table 7. Online questionnaire. Participant's previous country. 2023*

## APPENDIX 2. FOCUS GROUP

The focus group was a semi-structured interview, it was conducted on October 22, 2023.

The following issues were addressed:

- Gender identity and sexual orientation
- Home country
- Previous country or city
- Time in Berlin
- Perception of safety compared to home country and/or previous country
- Issues related to ethnicity
- Issues related to heteronormativity
- Places where they need to change the way they look and why
- Places where they feel comfortable and why
- The feelings of invisibility and anonymity

### PARTICIPANTS:

Participants' gender identity and sexual orientation were defined by themselves. Their names were changed to maintain anonymity.

Name	Gender Identity	Sexual orientation	Time in the city	Home country	Previous country
Daniel	Cisgender male	Gay	3 years	Colombia	Colombia
Carlos	Queer male	Gay	4.5 years	Colombia	Another German city
Zaid	Gender fluid	Gay	2.5 years	Mexico	México

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Time in the city</b>	<b>Home country</b>	<b>Previous country</b>
Cam	Non-binary	Androsexual	Less than a year	Colombia	Colombia
Andrés	Queer	Gay	2 years	Colombia	Singapore

*Table 8. Table 6. Focus group participants*

### APPENDIX 3. INTERVIEWS

Since these were unstructured interviews, there were no fixed questions, instead, the questions were formulated according to the rhythm of the conversation. The main issues addressed were:

- Gender identity and sexual orientation
- Home country
- Previous country or city
- Time in Berlin
- Perception of safety compared to home country and/or previous country
- Corporality in space
- Being observed in space
- Characteristics of the places that make them feel safe
- Characteristics of the places that make them feel unsafe
- Perspectives on queer spaces
- Influence of the people they are with, in their feelings of safety

#### PARTICIPANTS:

Participants' gender identity and sexual orientation were defined by themselves. Their names were changed to maintain anonymity.

#	Name	Date of the interview	Gender identity	Pronouns	Sexual orientation	Time in the city	Home country	Previous country
1	Adri	23.10.2023	Trans woman	She	Pansexual	7 years	Brazil	Brazil
2	Sofía	24.10.2023	Non- binary femme	She	Polisexual	1 year and 8 months	Colombia	Denmark
3	Adam	23. 10. 2023	Cisgender male - Queer	He	Gay	7 years	Poland	Poland
4	Nima	26.10.2023	Non- binary	Them	Aromantic pansexual	4 years	USA	Ireland



#	Name	Date of the interview	Gender identity	Pronouns	Sexual orientation	Time in the city	Home country	Previous country
5	Mei-hua	30.10.2023	Cisgender female	She	Lesbian	1 year	Taiwan	Taiwan

*Table 9. Interviewed participants*