



# Queer migration and drag performance in Japan: Rethinking identification, participation and belonging

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# 博士論文

Queer migration and drag performance in Japan:  
Rethinking identification, participation and  
belonging

(クィアな移民とドラッグパフォーマンス：日本にアイデンティフ  
アイすること、参加すること、所属すること)

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# Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>1.1 Lived experience</i>	<i>9</i>
1.1.1 Externalizing intersectional issues	10
1.1.2 On queer positions	12
1.1.3 Encountering and conceptualizing drag	14
<i>1.2 Theorizing lived experience</i>	<i>17</i>
1.2.1 Queer methodology	18
1.2.2 The problems with phenomenological social analysis	19
1.2.3 <i>Tojisha-kenkyu</i> : from the margin to the center	23
1.2.4 Validating experience through fieldwork: interviews and ethnography	25
<i>1.3 Chapter previews</i>	<i>26</i>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature review</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>2.1 Queer migration studies</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>2.2 Frameworks for researching queer migration</i>	<i>33</i>
2.2.1 Queer diasporic studies	34
2.2.2 Queer migration politics	35
<i>2.3 Perspectives in queer migration</i>	<i>37</i>
2.3.1 Negotiating gay identity through cross-dressing	38

2.3.2 Migrating to Japan for racial preference of sexual partners	38
2.3.3 Assimilating into the Japanese gay community	40
<i>2.4 Studies on drag</i>	<i>41</i>
2.4.1 Drag as a homosexual subculture	41
2.4.2 Contextualizing drag in Japan	43
<i>2.5 Conclusion</i>	<i>44</i>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	<b>45</b>
<i>3.1 Philosophical and theoretical underpinning</i>	<i>46</i>
3.1.1 Understanding queer migrant subjectivity using “stronger” standpoint theory	46
3.1.2 <i>Tojisha-kenkyu</i> for locating and explaining situated experience	47
3.1.3 Feminism, standpoint theory and intersectionality	49
3.1.4 Critical phenomenological inquiry	53
3.1.5 Queer phenomenology	56
3.1.6 Queer migrant’s “stronger” standpoint and the implications of whiteness	60
<i>3.2 Methods for collecting and analyzing data</i>	<i>62</i>
3.2.1 The phenomenological interview	62
3.2.2 Locating and selecting the <i>tojisha</i>	65
3.2.3 Ethnography of drag events	67
<i>3.3 Conclusion</i>	<i>71</i>

<b>Chapter 4: Reconfiguring sexual and gendered identifications from the temporality of drag performance into everyday life</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>4.1 Becoming gaijin amidst queer orientations</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>4.2 Reappearing as a drag performer</i>	<i>84</i>
4.2.1 Advantage of being <i>gaijin</i>	85
4.2.2 Commercialization of drag and Japan's <i>joso</i>	89
<i>4.3 The drag performance</i>	<i>93</i>
4.3.1 Challenging the worry of fitting in	93
4.3.2 Dismantling the worry of confinement	96
4.3.3 Rearticulating the worry of ostracization	98
<i>4.4 "Drag" up your life</i>	<i>101</i>
4.4.1 The parody of gender	102
4.4.2 Bringing the past into the present	105
4.4.3 Everything we do is performative	105
<i>4.5 Conclusion</i>	<i>109</i>
<b>Chapter 5: Negotiating participation beyond assimilation</b>	<b>110</b>
<i>5.1 Understanding participation through citizenship</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>5.2 Co-existence without visibility</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>5.3 From participating in queer communities to drag families</i>	<i>124</i>

<i>5.4 Challenging, conforming to, and distorting productivity</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>5.5 Conclusion</i>	<i>132</i>
<b>Chapter 6: Politics of belonging and power in transnational queer communities</b>	<b>134</b>
<i>6.1 Understanding the politics of belonging</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>6.2 Inclusion and exclusion</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>6.3 Contribution to political activism amidst neo-colonization</i>	<i>152</i>
6.3.1 How to be LGBT	153
6.3.2 Neo-colonization through queer migration	155
<i>6.4 Conclusion</i>	<i>158</i>
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>170</b>

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis investigates how drag intersects with queer migration in the context of Japan. Drag, which disrupts norms of gender and sexuality while reinforcing social images of femininity and masculinity, is used as a lens in understanding subjectivities, relationships, communities, and experiences of queer migrants. The term migrant is understood to mean an individual who has crossed international borders. This broad definition is used because the immigration policies of nation-states purposely declare categorical differences, such as legal/illegal, refugee, undocumented/documentated, or asylum seeker, precisely to constrain migrants' rights and to legitimate surveillance, normalization, and regulation of the migrant body (Luibhéid, 2014). Accordingly, the queer migrant in this thesis is an individual who is faced with social antagonisms on the basis of nation, race, gender, class, and sexuality because of their crossing of the borders of Japan from an international origin. I understand migration for this study as a voluntary personal choice of movement, displacement, and replacement impacted by the rapidly changing factors of globalization. Migration studies often focus on the socioeconomics of "costs and benefits, the working lives of migrants and their socio-structural position" and on "socio-cultural positionality and identity" (Mai & King, 2009: 297). Nicola Mai and Russel King (2009) also argue for the "sexual turn" and "emotional turn" in migration studies. The former relates to migratory trajectories based on desires to express sexual identities, and the latter situates emotions of love and affection as the reason for migrating. While considering these, I also add the queer studies approach of envisioning subjectivities beyond normative frameworks to show how drag demonstrates a queer practice that rearticulates the conventional understandings of gender. I organize this around the following themes: identification, participation, and a sense of belonging. The reasons for structuring this research around the above themes are multiple and overlapping. Through my own experience moving from the UK to Japan, I started to question how my subjectivity was socially constructed in different discursive formations in different societies as a queer being, a term I will develop subsequently. The emotional and sexual turns in migration studies apply directly to my migration trajectory, but it is not solely my relationship with my partner that keeps me here. My migration trajectory also involves a transformation of my values concerning moving to a new place. I have experienced a destabilization of established and imposed norms of gender and sexuality, particularly through a queer diasporic journey of drag. As this thesis will demonstrate, drag, as an exemplification of queer being, reveals the overlaps and destabilization present in the issues of destabilized identities, being a member of various collectivities in oblique spaces of in-between-ness, and finding a new place to call home inside and outside the boundaries of multiple communities. The shared culture of doing drag that I participate in with other queer migrants was amplified by the social separation and conflicts brought about not only by being a migrant in relation to the host culture but also by

drag's intersection with experiences of migration which obscure identification, have preclusions on participation and gives a sense of belonging. I examine the shared culture of doing drag by linking local, national, and transnational practices to their migrant experience. My role in queer migrant communities provides me access to investigate a specific population for this thesis to understand the correlation between queer migration and drag. My role, however, forces me to stress the methodological implications of the white perspective in doing research in Japan. According to Sara Ahmed (2006), spaces are orientated around whiteness rather than towards it. It is essential that I understand how my own white body has more ease in mobility or crossing boundaries in doing drag, doing research, and how the host culture allows my being to inhabit and reshape spaces. Therefore, I engage with the implications of the positionality of the white body throughout this study. The body in this thesis is understood as a site of affect, which is made different by the conditioning of the world bodies are in under cultural significance (Ahmed, 2006; Salamon, 2018). Building on this, bodies are sites of sensory perception for which we have certain apparatus to understand and maneuver in the world that affects them. The body is often the ground that creates an understanding of access or exclusion based on criteria of sex, gender, race, and class. Therefore, the body is essential in this thesis because otherness and whiteness, for example, are intrinsically connected to the body and its interactions with the world, and these are not simple reorientations of subject and object positions.

This leads me to the research questions of this study. First, how do the queer migrant's sense of norms, ideologies, and expectations of sexuality and gender become reshaped through migration? Second, how do queer migrants negotiate constraints and possibilities of sexuality, gender, and race in the context of heteronormativity? Third, how has migration transformed queer communities, cultures, and politics in Japan? The deployment of drag in this analysis aims to create a lens through which queer migrants' voices are analyzed to answer the above questions. Although the bureaucratic and legal processes of migration are of great significance, this thesis does not tackle these issues directly. Instead, my focus is on linking queer migrants' subjective experiences, practices, and performances with social, political, and economic structures because I am interested in the layered marginality in their subjective reality in a movement, displacement, and replacement of queerly being "in-between" "here" and "there."

To answer the above questions in a framework that is sensitive to positionality, I use queer theory to guide this research. Borrowing from Audrey Yue, my use of the term queer in this thesis has two functions: firstly, as an umbrella term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), or queer identities, and secondly, in a theoretical sense, "as a critical category that challenges normativity" (Yue, 2016: 213). Accordingly, the queer theoretical approach to understanding identities can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps,



dissonances and resonances, lapses, and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick, 1993: 8). Therefore, queer being is not only a lived experience that goes beyond the binary way of thinking, but it also assists the theorization of fragmented subjectivities by describing possibilities of gendered and sexual identities outside of normativity. Queer theory contributes to this thesis by attempting to face the complexities of subjectivity while acknowledging a multiplicity of queer identities. Katsuhiko Suganuma notes that it is difficult to avoid "cross-cultural borrowing" to make "sense of non-normative sexualities in Japan" (Suganuma, 2014: 244). Suganuma advocates for the use of queer studies and queer theory for trying to understand multiplicities and diversities of non-normative sexualities. Therefore, to research queer migrants in Japan, I must write reflexively about my own assumed sexuality and gender and avoid treating specific categories, such as "gay," as a universalized pre-social given. Instead, I should use my "cross-cultural" perspective as a queer theoretical tool to help "make sense" of sexuality and gender from my "queer" positioning without simply reorganizing them into terms that are familiar to a Western perspective. As Michael Warner contends, queer "rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner, 1993: xxvi). In this way, I can be accountable for the white perspective while also understanding the limitless possibilities of migratory experiences.

For Yue, in queer migration studies, the usage of queer functions both to describe LGBT migration based on identity politics and as a way of challenging normative ideologies surrounding migration. It is essential to understand that this does not simply mean an advocacy for the accommodation of LGBT people within migration policies but also a critically engaged transformation of the wider political agenda. Accordingly, queer migration goes beyond the "normal" understanding of migrants by introducing intersections of difference and marginality expressed in non-normative genders and sexualities. Migratory routes are not merely a linear narrative as they are affected by intersectional differences in differential ways. Queer provides a way to imagine the possibilities of differences in differential ways.

Still, the difficulties of using the word queer to reject the limits of rigid categorizations remain as José Esteban Muñoz affirms that "we may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (Muñoz, 2009: 1). According to Muñoz, queerness is "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Ibid.). Muñoz's futuristic embracing of queerness as always being on the horizon, therefore, marks the problematization of using queer in research. This conflict of using queerness in research is integral to this entire thesis. The terminology of queerness changes over time, which requires us as researchers to continuously negotiate its transformative constraints and

possibilities. Furthermore, the *tojisha*<sup>1</sup> (myself and the participants in this study) often dislike the terminology used to categorize them, particularly as an object in a study. *Tojisha* is another term that is contested in this thesis. Throughout the thesis, I explain how the terms have evolved over time and how they continue to be contested in relation to theory and as a way of categorizing the *tojisha*. Even with such conflicts and contestations of continuously negotiating the terminology of queer, queer migration has become a valid field of research in the broader topic of migration studies.

Recently, queer migration studies has been developed as a growing body of scholarship focusing on how sexual ideologies and regulations shape and reshape migration in intersection with its political, social, and cultural causes and effects (Luibhéid, 2014). Eithne Luibhéid demonstrates the importance of introducing queer theory to migration studies in the following:

Migration research that is informed by queer theory and attentive to positionality, relations of power, and questions about who represents whom—and that challenge usual assumptions—helps us to understand these complexities. Such research underlines the importance of not just “adding on” sexual minorities to existing histories but instead reframing all analyses to address how sexuality and migration are mutually interconnected in every migrant’s life—and how hierarchies of power involving sexuality become reworked, but not abolished, across transnational fields. (Luibhéid, 2014: 145)

Luibhéid clarifies that the use of queer theory in migration studies could be a way to understand the complicated and messy lives of queer migrants, but it requires a framework that challenges existing methods of knowledge production. Ahmed’s reinterpretation of phenomenology, which is informed by queer theory, could be the conceptual approach Luibhéid proposes. Ahmed’s queering of phenomenology attempts to examine the way the world attempts to form our experiences. While focusing on individual lived experiences, phenomenology allows us to consider possibilities for how the boundaries of subjectivity can be reformed. However, the classical phenomenological approach by itself may fall short in addressing the challenges that queer migration research requires, including positionality, power dynamics, representation, and reframing taken-for-granted assumptions. Therefore, I argue for a methodology that is queer as a way of meeting Luibhéid’s demands. Such a methodology

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<sup>1</sup> *Tojisha* in the Japanese gloss refers to persons “who have encountered discrimination or members of a discriminated class” (Nakamura, 2013: 173). The terminology of *tojisha* is explained and contested subsequently.

invites readers to think about how intersecting notions of power and knowledge can induce the emergence of, and attempt to govern transformative experiences and practices. Appropriately, this thesis adds a new dimension to the field of queer migration studies of how drag links with local, national, and transnational practices related to the experiences of queer migrants. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, it is precisely what drag “does” as a material “effort” that plays on gender performativity through a performance which, as a result, brings about a remapping of their social dimensions that set the boundaries for their identification, participation, and belonging. It also contributes methodologically to the field by critically engaging with the white perspective in conducting research in the context of Japan. Chapter Two includes an extensive literature review of queer migration studies and, its frameworks and perspectives.

The remainder of this introductory chapter sets the roadmap for the rest of this thesis. In what follows, I will demonstrate my experience of being a queer migrant in Japan to show the issues that accrue around my body as a white/male-presenting/gay researcher. Here, I demonstrate that these issues can be understood as advantages and disadvantages. Following this, I show that drag exemplifies queer being in a way that amplifies how I see my contribution to and rejection of the status quo. Then, I discuss the methodological, theoretical, and practical approaches for analyzing my experience and involving others who have experienced a similar phenomenon. This leads to the summaries of the subsequent chapters, which serve as the final part of this introduction.

## 1.1 Lived experience

This section explains how the research questions were shaped by the tensions in everyday encounters of being a queer migrant in Japan using Ikuyoshi Mukaiyachi’s *tojisha-kenkyu*, which is detailed later in this section. For now, *tojisha-kenkyu* can be understood as the starting point for locating standpoints and understanding situated experience and positionality. It gives me access to a marginalized situated experience as being queer and foreign. It is important to note that *tojisha-kenkyu* shares some similarities to phenomenology in terms of using first person experience as the starting point of research. As I will explain more subsequently, adding the critical lens to phenomenology makes it different to *tojisha-kenkyu* because critical phenomenology allows me to critique the power relation that situate marginalized experience. Thus, *tojisha-kenkyu* gives me access from the margin, and critical phenomenology gives me access from the center with a possibility to criticize the center from the margin. My entry point to being a queer migrant in Japan was my choice to continue a romantic relationship with a Japanese person. This “emotional turn” in my migration process is the starting point to demonstrate the complexity of intersecting factors that attempt to form, have formed, and will form my experience. After my point of entry, I

noticed how familiar objects or categories were reinscribed with different meanings and thus became strange. Through the method of *tojisha-kenkyu*, I will externalize the issues surrounding my body in four intersectional layers in terms of social standing as an academic, a racialized foreign being in conflict with whiteness, a gendered being, and a sexual minority, all in the context of Japan. This allows me to be attentive to positionality and power dynamics within the research itself by directly challenging representative assumptions and facing issues that my white male body accrues. After explaining my various standpoints, I can address why they need to be framed as queer positions.

### **1.1.1 Externalizing intersectional issues**

First, as a researcher, I may be granted access to certain cultural understandings or trust in certain situations. Being a researcher is arguably an earned status that places one “above” others on a social ladder, especially those who may be “less educated.” Among other more experienced researchers, I may be placed “below.” I may be given the authority to speak about others, and Japanese researchers or others in positions of power might propel and/or strain my power as a researcher. This may also be enhanced or reduced because of my white body or my European cultural and historical background.

Second, as a white person, I am marginalized as an outsider based on physical appearance, but it is not a case of racial oppression. Here, I have become the “foreigner,” and despite a sense of admiration of my blue eyes and fair hair, I am often treated as though I am unable to comprehend the society and culture; thus, I experience stereotyping in relation to both negative and positive behaviors and characteristics. For example, I am not expected to assimilate to the same degree as other foreigners, particularly those from East and South East Asia, nor am I expected to follow the social order due to an assumed lack of cultural understanding. Yet, in some day-to-day exchanges, I may be able to grasp the power to influence interrelationships if allowed to. For instance, the majority of Japanese society treats the “white minority” differently to *zainichi* Koreans, an ethnic minority in Japan. This shows the Japanese nation’s predisposition to divide the “Other” into subgroups, so aligning with whiteness may be more strategic for allowing an increase in social standing. Additionally, I have advantages in migrant communities because of both my white body and my native English proficiency. The spread of the English language is due to both British colonialism and sources of “soft power,” such as cultural missions and education exchange programs, facilitated by globalization (Altalouli, 2021). Accordingly, my white male body in Japan elevates my British “lower” class status because the usual signal of it—my accent in the English language—is not consequential in the Japanese context. Furthermore, my foreignness comes with the expectation that I will not be proficient in the Japanese language.

Third, as a male presenting person, I am affected by the access the male body provides to homosocial experiences, which often dominate a chauvinist and misogynist society. This is repeatedly demonstrated by people asking If I have “several girlfriends” and the broader cultural expectation of men being perceived to be physically and emotionally “strong.” My racialized body and assumed gendered sexuality position me in a superior place. In this way, my foreignness is elevated by whiteness, which may grant a specialist or prevailing position (socially, sexually, etc.). If a specialist status is granted because of whiteness, it will allow me to conduct research without taking accountability for the deep-rooted implications of this status. Additionally, in this elevation, my “low” social class in the UK has been reshaped through the process of migration. Yet, there is simultaneously a paradox of still being in a disadvantaged position in society; my body signifies that I am not a priority in this society, and I am marked with a degree of suspicion. For example, I have been stopped by the police numerous times to check if the bicycle I was riding was stolen. However, in the ten years I have been here, I would argue that these experiences have been far less frequent for me than for my non-white foreign friends who have told me about their feelings of being racially profiled by the police. That I do not experience continuous suspicion shows that my body affords me access to a degree of power in a possibly restricted but privileged position as white and male. However, I am not necessarily taken seriously in all situations due to my foreignness. The racial aspect itself, which could propel researchers as a majority in terms of power and privilege or doubly minoritize them, is unlikely to be problematized by researchers in Japan (Hughes, 2022).

Fourth, as a gay person, I am likely to be marginalized in daily interactions if I do not fit into “common sense” conversations about marriage and relationships in Japan (Lunsing, 2001). Growing up in the UK, I have internalized a similar kind of normative “common sense” of disclosing my proximity to heteropatriarchal norms that could be attributed to controversial legislation Section 28.<sup>2</sup> Coming to Japan, I experienced the same assumptions of fitting into the social organization of heteronormativity, showing a lack of recognition for non-normative sexualities. Despite this internalization of “otherness” when being open about my sexuality, it has given me access to specific minority communities (gay and queer). The benefit of this is that it makes me an insider in certain situations, but it simultaneously labels me as an outsider by going against dominant patterns of sexuality, if or when I choose to “come out.” Coming out is a way to reassert gay identity and confirm the visibility of a socially

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<sup>2</sup> Section 28 of the Local Government Act in England, in effect between 1988 and 2003, stated that “A local authority shall not – (a) intentionally promote homosexuality and (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.” Local Government Act 1988, Chapter 9. (n.d.). Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28>

excluded group of people historically criminalized and pathologized in a British context.<sup>3</sup> In Japan, my gay identity, which was formed in the UK, has been reshaped by migration and is governed and responded to in a different society with new forms of cultural common sense. I was not punished under the Japanese nation for attempting to uphold a gay identity, nor was I benefiting from its structures and social hierarchies to gain a certain status. There may be some difficulty in specifying what a nation exactly is, but for the purpose of this thesis, it is understood as a way to mark the boundary of a shared common culture. The standpoint from my “gay identity” within British boundaries I used in my previous research saw “Japanese gay identity” as less “progressive” because of the reluctance of Japanese men to claim their visibility through the same excessive essentialism, of asserting a universalized identity, as myself. In a sense, my liberal individualistic ideas of being gay made me discriminatory toward people with the same sexual orientation as myself because I assumed we are all universally gay in the same way. This is precisely why it is not theoretically sound to fix experiences of minorities as singular. As a white gay person, I have access to certain privileges that other non-white gay people may not have, in both social, recreational spaces and professional settings. However, foreignness is a sign of temporality which could be an indication that I do not fit into the norm of familial nation-state integration where marriage and population reproduction strain the lives of people. Temporality is used to describe how the body exists and is reshaped as a subject and an object in time and space. A meaningful sense of time and space for bodies emerges in response to another. The lack of condemnation allowed me to amplify the proliferation of my sexuality. Deploying such an essentialized experience of being gay could lead down a dangerous path of neo-colonizing the experience of gay men in Japan into a linear master narrative of being gay. Although the lack of legal protection and recognition by state authorities for gay people was one of the reasons for conducting interviews with Japanese men about their coming out stories, it is easy to argue that such an interrogation is based on white or Eurocentric entitlement, since global standards of human rights are often based on Western ideologies.

### 1.1.2 On queer positions

As demonstrated above, multiple advantages and disadvantages accrue around my body on the aforementioned intersectional layers of white, male-presenting, gay and foreign. The continuous negotiation and contestation within the layers symbolize queer positions in which positionality is never stable and always dislodged. I have previously tried to conceptualize such transformative experiences in *Feminisuto genshō-gaku nyūmon*:

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<sup>3</sup> In “Coming Out,” Jeffery Weekes (1977) presents gayness as a process of self-discovery and self-identification through law reform and social oppression. In terms of the evolution of the homosexual consciousness, religious contexts have turned it into a sin, the law has criminalized it, and science has pathologized it. See also Ken Plummer (1981) in *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*.

*Keiken kara 'futsū' o toi naosu [Introducing Feminist Phenomenology: Rethinking "norms" from experience]* in a chapter titled "Naze jibun no sekushuariti o kuchi ni dasu no ka? Keiken kara no sekushuariti saiko [Why do we talk about sexuality? Rethinking sexuality from experience]." In this book chapter, I discuss my gay identity as a foreigner in Japan, using a feminist phenomenological method of describing living experiences from the perspective of the *tojisha*. After "coming out" as gay in the Japanese context, I explain how sexual identity is understood or misunderstood because I am a "foreigner." Growing up in the UK, I internalized the empowerment of "visibility" as a sexual minority and its social and political significance. However, the visibility of sexual minorities and the protection of human rights that communities and movements in Japan have invoked since the 1990s are not necessarily linked to the concept of coming out in the same way as my British experience. To analyze the difference in each given context, I examined how structural heteronormativity affected my everyday life as a foreigner in Japan. For example, straight people would express some doubts about whether I wanted to be a woman or not (*onna ni naritai?*). Some straight cisgender women would say "*kakkoii noni!*" (But you're handsome...) or "*mottainai!*" (What a waste!). These encounters are characterized by misrecognition which ultimately results in erasing the possibility of experience outside heteronormativity. Thus, I become invisible in some sense, but my existence is still there to be seen.

I noticed here that my body becomes racialized as my foreign white body somehow signifies being handsome, when I had never been called that so arbitrarily before in my life. Additionally, in gay communities such as Doyama in Osaka and Ni-chome in Tokyo, I was hyper-sexualized through the assumption that foreign men "have a big dick." It goes without saying that I did not display my genitals in public, but this demonstrates how the manifestations of gender and sexuality go beyond seeing the body without clothes, as I become an object of fantasy even though what is being objectified is not in the vision of the spectator.

Interestingly, another response I sometimes had was that "it was ok for me to be gay because I am not Japanese." This shows that is not considered important for me to participate in Japanese society based on a presupposition of temporality onto my body. The objectifying gaze from Japanese society marks my body as a deviation from the "normal" body. Arguably, as I become the "stranger" in this process, a privilege is also constructed. According to Alfred Schutz, the stranger has difficulty fully assimilating into the host culture due to a difference of worldviews, who then questions "everything that seems to be unquestionable to members of the approached group" (Schutz, 1944: 502). These encounters mark understanding and negotiating myself as a racial and cultural "stranger."

At that time, I assumed some kind of solidarity with other “sexual minorities” which was reflected in my previous research on the coming out narratives of Japanese gay men. My perspective was biased in that I assumed our experience as sexual minorities would be our *biggest conflict* in everyday life because it was *my* biggest conflict back in the UK. By not engaging with and taking accountability for my subjective experience as a stranger and the historicity of my body, I attempted to “speak for” Japanese gay men as an object to confirm a fixed experience of minorities in line with a master narrative of coming out. I did not consider the complexities and difficulties of their stories, and what they mean “under” my Western eyes (Mohanty, 2003). As a foreign researcher in Japan, particularly from a white, European background, I recognize that there needs to be scrutiny from the researcher themselves to problematize the engagement and accountability in the verification of an approach, as well as positionality, particularly when attempting to speak for “the Other”. That is, 1) why we research, 2) what we describe, 3) how we verify this, 4) who is doing the research, and 5) who and what it is for (Smith, 2012). If the above goes unscrutinized, researchers run the risk of perpetuating biased norms of knowledge production, the ghettoization of minorities, and the hegemony of racist/orientalist theoretical models. It is clear from this that gendered and sexual experience is also racialized which additionally needs to be accounted for in a positional analysis to negotiate categories that add meaning to our situated experience.

### **1.1.3 Encountering and conceptualizing drag**

When I started doing drag, this added beneficial and disruptive dimensions that altered my identifications. Although doing drag does not mean that you are “gay,” a complexity which will be discussed more later, it did make my “gay identity” more visible than ever before allowing me to participate more in queer communities and develop a sense of belonging. Drag amplified my political voice through performances which mocked normative gender roles and behavior. It seemed to me that crossing gender boundaries suddenly made me an expert on gender and sexuality. It prompts me to ask the question of how crossing gender boundaries also involves sexuality and, to be specific, sexual orientation. At the same time, I no longer was a hyper-sexualized being as my “participation” in “masculinity” was apparently under suspicion and my “big dick” suddenly disappeared. Accordingly, “*mottainai*” (what a waste) from straight women became “*zanen*” (how disappointing) from gay men. The lens of drag highlighted a new dimension of the biases and limitations I carry with me every day.

Drag as a subculture has been defined by Esther Newton as a “homosexual practice” in which “the clothing of one sex” is “worn by the other sex,” a definition which is discussed in detail in Chapter Two (Newton, 1972: 3). In other words, drag performance can be understood as a tradition in gay communities. While acknowledging that



drag has a “theatrical structure and style” (Newton, 1972: 37) in that it requires an audience and provides a form of drama, Newton’s definition is lacking consideration of the complexity of drag which then confines the definition to cross-dressing by homosexual men.

In contrast, I build on the following definition of drag from Mark Edward and Stephen Farrier (2020) in *Contemporary Drag Practices and Performers: Drag in a Changing Scene*:

drag for minority subjectivities and communities (mainly, historically, the LGBTQ+ community) in part provides a channel to articulate a voice and subject position, and/or a mechanism of access to speak in a certain way to a specific audience [...] drag can be community-fuelling political, liberal, inclusive and radically resistive to dominant norms; it can also embody misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and racism [...] in service of a status quo and to question or attempt to radically alter it. (Edward and Farrier, 2020: 3-13)

By creating a channel for queer migrants to amplify their voice, drag allows queer migrants to provoke, destabilize, and challenge norms, ideologies, and expectations around their subjectivity. It also demonstrates a shift in power in and out of the status quo through imitating norms. Thus, drag in this thesis is understood in its complicatedness and messiness in multiple ways. First, it is understood as a performance art and a practice: a performance that is usually on a stage in a bar or club based on self-expression that mocks and exaggerates normative gender expression in highly stylized ways such as overelaborate wigs, makeup, and outfits. It includes but is not limited to lip-syncing, live singing, and dancing. Drag becomes a practice because there is a performative dimension of knowing and doing and an embodiment of ambiguity and subversion. The application of, or use of the idea of drag, becomes a certain way of knowing and doing. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four and Chapter Six, this is attributed to RuPaul’s Drag Race and the commercialization of drag. Second, drag, based on the performance and practice described above, which disrupts normative gender whilst reinforcing its social images, can be a tool to (un)intentionally resist and protest power structures of both gender and sexuality—such as cisnormativity and heteronormativity—that govern bodies by highlighting the parody of repetition (see Chapter Four). This double-edged definition raises the question of whether drag is too far away from everyday lived experience. Judith Butler provides insight into the extent to which drag is embedded in our understanding of gender and thus heterosexuality:

To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that ‘imitation’ is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarism, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome... that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is constantly haunted by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself. (Butler, 1993: 125)

Drag makes the constraints of heterosexuality visible by exaggerating our assumed “knowing” and “doing” of gender. Accordingly, the lack of “original” gender creates an urge to repeat norms based on gender and sexuality to cover up the anxiety from this visibility. Drag becomes a site of exposure of normativity produced by power structures that attempt to govern our bodies. The point of using drag in this thesis is to demonstrate the contrast in the parody of gender which we (un)intentionally reproduce in everyday life. By exaggerating the ridiculousness of gender, we can recognizably see it. Accordingly, drag not only disturbs us but also reminds us of something we “know” and “do” in daily life. However, it could be a misunderstanding of drag to simply say it is a political tool in its resistance to normativity. It is a political act that can disrupt the status quo; however, it is also important to remember that there are people who do drag because it is the only way for them to survive, work, or be part of a community (Newton, 1972). It would be misguided to place drag in discourse as a strategically operative political project to resist the power structure that regulates daily lives and identities. However, doing drag is a disruptive entity with political connotations. Although it may not always be intentional for those who do drag, the act itself often becomes politicized. This is because the stigma of drag is bound up in multiple structures within culture, such as heteronormativity, racism, cisnormativity, homophobia, and misogyny, which are running themes of discussion throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, it would also be misleading for me to co-opt drag as a revolution for queer rights in Japan based on Butler’s wording. There is some representation of what Western audiences would consider drag in Japanese mainstream media. It would be misguided to say that drag is solely a radical practice, because it is also present in mainstream culture in various forms. For example, Matsuko Deluxe and Nadsja Grandiva are both part of the mainstream media; they add their unique perspectives to mainstream entertainment and solidify normative

ideologies from their non-normative appearances rather than being driven by a political agenda for them to be “accepted” as minorities, so to speak. Although there to serve the status quo, their appearances may impact the lives of sexual or gender minorities precisely because they are in the mainstream and sometimes do share discussions of their everyday lives as, for example, cross-dressing gay men.

This research focuses on drag’s function to distort the perception of norms in daily mundane activities which are assumed to be natural or fixed. Just saying “I am a drag performer” creates an instant interrogation because it tends to disrupt hegemonic ideas of normative gender and sexuality. Adding the conflation of being a migrant spark even more possibilities in differences. This prompts an interrogation such as: why do you do drag? Do you wear wigs every day? Do you want to be a woman? Are you a woman? Do only gay people do drag? Do you have sex in drag? What do you do with your dick? Do you do drag in your home country? What pronouns do you prefer? Do you identify as a man? Do you like to have sex in drag? Do you tuck?<sup>4</sup> These are all questions I have been asked by audience members and by people in daily interactions. Even within our “own” communities, members of which attempt to show understanding of difference by using careful language in their interrogation, it is still disruptive.

To conclude, the usage of drag for this thesis allows a break in the structure of heteronormative gender while also reinforcing the social image of what it means to *seem* to be part of it. As a queer position, drag serves as a way for me to make visible those shifting moments between serving the status quo and rebelling against it. Arguably, based on the terminologies, drag and queer are entangled, which can cause confusion about what they mean, raising the question of how to research this “well.”

## 1.2 Theorizing lived experience

The dilemma of queer permeates this entire thesis. In this section, I consider how to negotiate the possibilities of making queer lived experiences visible, of examining the materiality of queer bodies without fixing them in time and space, making assumptions, or attempting to speak for others’ experience. Thus, I emphasize now that the discursive approach I take in this thesis is necessary to reach the conclusions. First, I look to concepts from queer theory for guidance in making sense of my research questions.

Queer theory became popular in the 1990s thanks to deconstructive theorizations of sexuality and gender from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990). Although these texts do not strictly claim to be queer theory, they are often referred to as the founding texts. The

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<sup>4</sup> The act of hiding the penis using a girdle, gaff, or tape. This term is used regularly amongst people who have knowledge about drag.

term queer theory was coined by Teresa de Lauretis to serve as the title of a conference held in the same year as the above publications at the University of California, Santa Cruz (Halperin, 2003). The work from Sedgwick and Butler explores how sex, gender, and sexuality are cultural products that become social norms through language and everyday interactions which reproduces heterosexuality and thus heteronormativity as the “natural” and “neutral” default. Thus, queer theory aims to deconstruct such assumptions about sexuality and gender by focusing on unfixable subjecthood that exists outside of the domain of heteronormativity. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, however, drag is contradictory to queer theory in some sense because it not only destabilizes such assumptions, it also reaffirms fixed ontologies of gender. This brings us to several theoretical issues with using queer in conceptual approaches.

### **1.2.1 Queer methodology**

The field of queer migration argues for an approach that deconstructs assumptions with conceptual approaches. This section begins to deal with the methodological concerns surrounding the important question of theorizing lived experience of queer migrant bodies. Here, I will argue for in favor of the appropriateness of a queer methodology for reaching the intersection of queer migration and drag. A queer methodology is suitable not only for researching lived experiences of queer migration but also for developing strategies for unsettling structures and demonstrating differential ways of being and belonging for queer migrants. I will argue for a queer methodology that places multiple identities and positions into dialogue through an interdisciplinary approach.

Qualitative research would be most suitable for capturing the meanings behind the entangled experiences of queer migrants as it encourages the use of mixed methods:

Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate. We can do all of this qualitatively by using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multidimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them. (Mason, 2002: 1)

Recent arguments for the use of qualitative research indicate that “hybrid paradigms are emerging alongside new geographies of knowledge and new decolonizing epistemologies” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017: 31). Accordingly,

qualitative research could be a way to examine the complexity and multidimensionality of the placement, replacement, and displacement of queer migrants.

However, Jack Halberstam has previously argued that such an approach to research would be a queer methodology which “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam, 1998: 13). Halberstam’s usage of queer methodology is an interdisciplinary approach in which the researcher responds to a multiplicity of materials, sources, and methods that may clash in a disciplinary sense but that work toward making a better claim to the “new” knowledge being pursued.

This thesis is compelled to combine methods, theories, frameworks, and philosophies to work toward illuminating the ways that “traditional” research practices limit understandings particularly of queer being which is often excluded from the rigidity of such praxis. Methodologically, I argue that drag might complicate and deepen some aspects of research enquiry valued by queer and feminist scholars within and outside of queer migration studies in two significant ways: 1) by disrupting ways of knowing that are hegemonic or taken-for-granted, in particular the white perspective, and 2) by valuing and engaging with contradiction, particularly that the notion that comes from considering queer and drag in tandem.

Adopting Halberstam’s “scavenger-like” queer methodology for methods, theories, and philosophies to create a conceptual framework for this thesis, I came across *tojisha-kenkyu*, which is a form of phenomenological practice (Inahara, 2018).

### **1.2.2 The problems with phenomenological social analysis**

Phenomenology focuses on a shared state of preoccupation in subjective experience. That preoccupation is the fascination with the fact that we grasp and comprehend the various activities, objects, entities, and events that the world throws at us in everyday experience. More specifically, the objects in the world present themselves to us in the course of that experience. We understand and, make sense of them. Thus, they are intelligible to us. For queer migration research, this is significantly useful for understanding how daily experiences manifest to queer migrants from their experiences of heteronormativity in origin and settlement. By focusing on the relationship between how the objects and meanings appear to queer migrants in origin and settlement, I can analyze the moments when this becomes apparent. An appearance in phenomenology can be understood ontologically, as something existing in front of eyes, and epistemologically, as being known. These appearances are delivered to us through our perceptions of the world. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, even when the appearances of the queer migrants are

misrepresented, they nevertheless “appear.” Phenomenology is interested in understanding how it is possible for the appearance to be an appearance of objects, activities, and events. I argue throughout this thesis that this is specifically a queer process.

In phenomenology, to understand what causes appearances to be of reality,<sup>5</sup> or to present reality, it is necessary to understand the *content* of those appearances within fields related to everyday lives. For Edmund Husserl, we can understand what makes appearances “the things they are” by a careful descriptive elucidation of the underlying structures of that phenomenon. Thus, it is essential to pay careful attention to what is “*really* going on” when we experience something or when something or someone presents itself to us in our experience. For example, to doubt or be doubted, to deny or to be denied, to see or be seen, to recognize or be recognized, to have emotion about something, to imagine what something is—this is the phenomenological process. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, these experiences are central to the concept of the body and its role in the way we perceive being in the world.

Phenomenology of queer migration is both a method and a philosophy about the queer migrant subject in relation to the situated world around them and the objects within it. As a method, it is a way to understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of individuals through descriptions of the structures that attempt to form their experience, such as heteronormativity. As a philosophy, it is based on the principle that a single experience can be interpreted in multiple ways. That reality consists of each individual’s interpretations of that experience. Thus, phenomenology is useful for this research because it provides information about unique individual experiences, offering complex and multidimensional descriptions of queer migrant experiences and meanings.

In this way, the phenomenology of queer migration does not diminish the “traditional” phenomenological description, rather, it makes use of it in a multi-layered reflexive inquiry that analyzes subjective experiences of queer migrant bodies while simultaneously scrutinizing how structures of power attempt to form social, cultural, and personal bodily experiences. This is the core of contemporary phenomenologists’ usage of critical phenomenology within which I place this study. A critical phenomenology can be defined as follows:

A critical phenomenology draws attention to the multiple ways in which power moves through our bodies and our lives. It is also an ameliorative phenomenology that seeks not only to describe but also to repair the world, encouraging generosity, respect, and compassion for the diversity of our

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion of the nature of reality is beyond the scope of this thesis.

lived experiences. Such a project can never be an individual endeavor, moreover, but requires coalitional labor and solidarity across difference. (Weiss et al, 2020: xiv)

In this adoption of critical phenomenological inquiry into this thesis, however, it is important to acknowledge an issue of using phenomenology for social analysis. Classical phenomenology focuses on how meanings structure, as Martin Heidegger puts it, “being-in-the-world”. Such meanings are not inquiries into how structures *attempt to* structure “being-in-the-world”. Critical phenomenology emphasizes the factor of a “before” of which is contingent on historical and intersectional social paradigms that also structure experience. Based on Merleau-Ponty’s reading, it is difficult to determine being prior to knowledge. Being is the physical and social status from knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Thus, the emphasis on being may create a concealment in spaces where our self is undefinable regardless of others’ perspectives. The issue of space requires discussion. Space in this thesis has differential meanings that I explain as they arise throughout the thesis, such as physical space, phenomenal or oriented space, inhabited space, legal space, shared space, abstract space etc. As Henri Lefebvre notes concerning the body in space, “we are concerned with what might be called a ‘sense’: an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon” (Lefebvre, 1991: 423). Thus, the thread for bringing these meanings together is that what appears in space depends on how structures attempt to form experiences of the body which is the point of view that gets directed in space. Accordingly, using critical phenomenology I can focus on how the body occupies space where there are multi-layered differences created by meaning-making paradigms upheld through structural power that direct both the body and space rather than meanings that contribute to the constitution of being. However, it may sound like a re-ontologization of identity because the meanings that we hold, which form identities, are an act of being. In a critical phenomenological inquiry of difference, we can look at the moments which differential identities emerge and use them as a critical investigation of difference because they never stand alone at a fixed point. Thus, critical phenomenology focuses on intersubjectivity created by power relations that may actually be before subjective experience. In Husserl’s phenomenology from *Ideas I* (1913), a thought is always a thought of something, a perception is always a perception of something, and an emotion is always an emotion about something. These all form the meaning of our experiences. Critical phenomenology adds an intersectional dimension of a difference of a difference. In subjective experience, identity and identification is activated through its encounter with another; an identity of an identity. Therefore, I argue that if all subjectivity is intersubjectivity, then those moments of being—where identities appear, or where those moments of difference appear—we evaluate these meaning-making paradigms as intersectional phenomena

in their moment of “meaningfulness” coming to appear to certain bodies. Accordingly, I identify the “meaningfulness” of the research process itself coming to appear to my body as a researcher. This research itself has consequences from my body, for example, as a white gay male in the context of Japan. I must be aware of myself and the world of research I inhabit rather than taking an objective perspective of, for example, queer migrants’ everyday lives. Such a perspective would be impartial to the subjective differences of their lives. Placing myself and the research inquiry itself into phenomenological description requires an understanding of how structures such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity permeate, codify, and systemize a “neutrality” that is reproduced and glossed over in “thinking,” “being” and “doing.” Therefore, it is not just the ideas of being or a re-ontologization of being but that being which is implicated in a convoluted multi-layered interdependent reciprocity that makes it even possible to be. In other words, phenomenology in this thesis looks at the triangulation of how “meaningfulness” is coming to appear to the dimensions of the body as the subject and the object.

Therefore, I focus the body throughout this thesis. The queer migrant body as both a subject and object has a historicity of experience, of thoughts, of emotions, as mentioned above. It is also the signifier and perceiver of difference. The body is essential for critical phenomenology because it provides a chassis of an archive of so-called “neutrality,” and this is particularly so for the white body. Accordingly, this thesis uses critical phenomenology to:

scrutinize the quality of light that illuminates the world from a white perspective and to name the feelings that motivate this perspective, with the hope of bringing about a change, not only in the structure of whiteness but in the shape of the world that white supremacy has built. (Guenther, 2020: 15)

In other words, my usage of critical phenomenology in this thesis is also to place whiteness, patriarchy, and heteronormativity into inquiry by scrutinizing how the world from my white perspective has come to be and to describe this perspective and the motivations behind it to bring about not only change in the continued domination of whiteness but also the world that it has made and allows me to be in, specifically in my location of Japan. That is, my conceptual approach is not simply a description of oppression because of essentialized intersectional differences. Instead, it is looking at the root of the cause and developing a proposal for unsettling structures, arguing for critical engagement of taken-for-granted assumptions, and demonstrating differential ways of “being.”

Accordingly, I reinterpret phenomenology as a philosophy that analyses the meaning behind experiences of people and objects as phenomena which “appear” with meaning because it investigates at how these appear by



looking at the structures that come “before” such appearances. Phenomena appears in a structure that we exist in. In this structure we have the “subjective” and “objective.” Phenomenology looks at the appearances in triangulation with the subjective and objective. Husserl encouraged the use of phenomenology as a philosophical discipline to free the philosopher of all presumptions through descriptive writing, which aims to uncover structures of intentionality, consciousness, and the taken-for-granted lived experience in the life world (Luckman, 1978). However, the traditional phenomenological method of having a value-free account of lived experience lacks authentic engagement with the structures that allows the philosopher to take such a neutral position in the first place. Instead, phenomenology needs to be placed in dialogue with interdisciplinary fields that deal with issues that often go unnoticed in the construction of assumed neutrality, such as whiteness, cisnormativity, heteronormativity, or ableism. According to Ahmed, “phenomenology helps us to show how race is an effect of racialization and to investigate how the inventions of race, as if it were ‘in’ bodies, shapes what bodies ‘can do’” (Ahmed, 2006: 112). With the help of feminist and queer scholars such as Ahmed, Minae Inahara and Gayle Salamon, I will argue for a queer methodology that adds to the conversation of reinterpreting phenomenology with *tojisha-kenkyu* through a grounding of feminist standpoint theory in the hope of further developing a critical understanding of the world through taken-for-granted knowledge. Feminist standpoint theory can be understood as an approach for starting research from a standpoint at the margin of hegemonic frameworks, namely from the everyday life of a marginalized person (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015). Feminist standpoint theory encourages a “strong objectivity,” which goes against the neutrality of objective research. Appropriately, phenomenology is used to understand the experience of ourselves and others, and feminist standpoint theory is used to focus on perspectives and how the world appears to a certain perspective of a certain body (Inahara, 2018). Next, I will demonstrate next that *tojisha-kenkyu* is a method for bringing together these two perspectives.

### 1.2.3 *Tojisha-kenkyu*: from the margin to the center

*Tojisha-kenkyu* was introduced at a facility called Bethel House for activities related to psychiatric patients in Urakawa, Hokkaido in February 2001 (Ishihara, 2015). One definition of *tojisha-kenkyu* is the following:

The term *tojisha-kenkyu* (当事者研究) consists of two Japanese words: *tojisha* and *kenkyu*. *Tojisha*(s) refers to “interested person(s),” disabled persons themselves, or patients (service users) themselves. *Kenkyu* means “study,” “research,” or “investigation.” Therefore, *tojisha-kenkyu* translates as “study by interested persons themselves.” (Ishihara, 2015: 27)

Namely, this is a study done *by* the “interested persons” centered around themselves rather than research *on* them as an object by others. However, Koji Ishihara’s use of “interested” requires attention as *tojisha* often does not simply mean “interested persons.” Although generally used when referring to a group of people experiencing discrimination (Nakamura, 2013), it also includes those with a stake in something or affected by someone or something from *situated experience*. The word *tojisha* is helpful for this thesis because it provides a gloss term for people who have experienced a similar phenomenon of marginalization due to being a queer migrant. Accordingly, *tojisha-kenkyu* offers a way to learn from each other’s experience of such phenomena. Ikuyoshi Mukaiyachi (2017) defines the five steps of *tojisha-kenkyu*<sup>6</sup> as the following:

1. Separate the “issue” from yourself. By externalizing the issue, anxiety is relieved, and motivation increases.
2. Give your “issue” a new name. By giving it a name, it allows us to attempt to confront or challenge the issue.
3. Figure out any patterns, processes, and governing structures of your “issue.” This helps us understand the meaning behind the issue.
4. Think of ways of supporting, safeguarding, or aiding yourself. Then, practice those methods.
5. Reflect on and share your ideas with others, usually as a group, to verify the good and bad points of your research.

In *tojisha-kenkyu*, the “researcher” or *tojisha* faces their own issues and attempts to recapture the meaning and function behind them along with peers and supporters. The *tojisha* verbalizes their own experience, which is then examined with the help of their peers from multiple perspectives. Doing this facilitates access to our own experience, resulting in the capability to strategically maneuver between perspectives and thus change our situation (Ishihara, 2017). Accordingly, if we externalize the “issue,” we can reflexively make sense of what we experience. By looking at the externalized problem itself, we can separate it from one person (Kumagaya, 2015). Externalization of the issue at hand allows for 1) situating the so-called “patient” outside the medical setting, 2) connecting the phenomena of their experience to society using their own perspective, and 3) using this connection to improve situations for others with similar experiences thus 4) improving the social environment. I argue that *tojisha-kenkyu*

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<sup>6</sup> Summarized by Hughes in Bethel House Urakawa’s *Beteru no ie no ‘tojisha-kenkyu’* (2005: 4-5).

is a way to see how certain “issues” are constructed to appear for certain bodies within situated experience. Reiterating my earlier definition of the body as a site of sensory perception, it is challenging to separate identities from their relationship with the body because the body is the materiality we display and deploy ourselves in worlds that are modified by how experiences transform identity construction.

Following this ethos of *tojisha-kenkyu*, this thesis demonstrates how *tojisha* as queer migrants, including myself, work to improve the issues by targeting their situation as queer migrants in Japan from their own perspective. Specifically, I look at the issues of marginalization from the margins of society. It is especially important for *tojisha* to have frequent opportunities to discuss with other *tojisha* who have similar problems and difficulties to share information and practical methods of dealing with our “issues.” As I will discuss subsequently, I carried out interviews to create this opportunity. Accordingly, *tojisha-kenkyu* does not aim to reach a normative fixed experience of minorities from an extrinsically objective point of view. Instead, it encourages the *tojisha* to name their problems and difficulties as they find improvements subjectively and intersubjectively, taking away the assumed natural “scientific” objective account of subjective reality and putting the epistemological and ontological questions into the hands of the person with a stake in the situated experience. Arguably, if *tojisha-kenkyu* encourages subjective analysis, it requires further academic grounding. *Tojisha-kenkyu* has been linked to phenomenology and feminist standpoint theory (Inahara, 2018) for philosophical and theoretical underpinning. I will discuss this further in Chapter Three.

#### **1.2.4 Validating experience through fieldwork: interviews and ethnography**

It is important to note that my approach is not an attempt to test a theory on a sample of objects from a new demographic. As mentioned above, *tojisha-kenkyu* encourages verbalizing individual experience along with peers to find ways of making a situation better. Therefore, to strengthen the validity of these externalized issues, I have also conducted interviews with other queer migrant drag performers and an ethnography of drag events run by queer migrants living in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. The details of the performers are in Chapter Three.

Interviews are best to provide qualitative data because they allow for a semi-structured discussion on the externalized issues from *tojisha-kenkyu*. However, interviews with fellow *tojisha* easily become biased because of our close intersubjective relationship with each other precisely because we have experienced similar phenomena. Additionally, the interviewee may embellish their experiences somewhat when recounting them in the interview because of their relationship with the interviewer (Fontana and Frey, 2005). While I want to challenge the white perspective, I recognize that some interview participants may have answered untruthfully because they do not want

to admit that their whiteness is the reason why they do or did certain things. The reason for my concern is that it I myself as a research have the potential to influence the study. Therefore, I use the phenomenological interview method discussed in detail in Chapter Three to rely on the description of their experience from the *tojisha*.

The addition of ethnography to assist the validity of performers' externalized issues was done through direct observations of the drag communities and their queer practices. I carried out observations at drag events to develop cultural descriptions of the venues, audience members, performances, and other activities at the event. Through doing this, I can verify the issues queer migrants experience that relate to the cultural setting of a drag performance. It is important to note that ethnography is different and possibly contradictory to phenomenology. Phenomenology is based on the idea that there may be multiple ways of interpreting the same experience. At the same time, ethnographers are more interested in uncovering knowledge about the culture as a whole (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). In this queering of disciplines, I will argue that they work to complement each other rather than to conflict with each other in Chapter Three.

### 1.3 Chapter previews

This thesis is divided into seven chapters which all contain overlaps and are entangled with one another. The introductory chapter has introduced the aim and research question of the thesis, demonstrating the importance of applying queer theory to migration studies. I introduced drag as a new intersection in the field of queer migration. In queer migration studies, the usage of queer functions both to describe LGBT migration based on identity politics and as a way of challenging normative ideologies surrounding migration. I use drag performance as an exemplification of queerness. Drag is a gender subversive art form often misunderstood as simply "cross-dressing." I use drag as a lens through which queer migrants' voices are analyzed in multiple layers to articulate their subject position from their situated experience. I began to tackle the theoretical concerns of using queerness which, as a conflict itself, is integral to the entire thesis. After demonstrating the issues in my own situated experience, I discussed a possible conceptual framework for an analysis adopting a queer methodology. In this argument, I called for a critical phenomenological *tojisha-kenkyu* underpinned by feminist standpoint theory to be complemented with interviews and ethnography. This thesis then addresses the gap in research on the intersection of queer migration and drag and provides more perspectives from the Japanese context.

In Chapter Two, I situate this thesis within queer migration scholarship in a literature review that explores the development of the queer studies approach to migration as a field of study, including frameworks of and perspectives in queer migration. I also review previous studies on drag as a subculture and Japanese drag in

particular. Queer migration scholarship has focused on narratives of placement/displacement from repression to freedom or on searching for liberation, using queer theory to critique the heteronormative structures and policies that situate queer migrants in such positions. Frameworks used in queer migration studies demonstrate a need to connect localized histories of queer bodies with their present moment and utilize differential belonging. We can combine different forms of unlikely “queer” coalitions to forge a strategy of common interest. Perspectives on queer migration in the Japanese context show that foreign bodies are racialized into a place outside of the norms of sexuality and gender. Drag, as a subculture, has been understood as a homosexual practice, a stigmatized culture, and a means of survival. However, this is rendered differently in the Japanese context as a form of escapism. There is little to no research that connects drag to queer migration studies which leaves drag as a gap in the literature for this thesis to address.

In Chapter Three, I outline my queer methodology. In the first half of this chapter, I explain my methodological philosophy followed by the methods that contribute to queer theory and queer studies. I argue for a critical phenomenological *tojisha-kenkyu* based on the author’s position in Japanese society from both the margin and the center. I give critical insights into what it means to investigate minorities in Japan from a male/white/Western perspective and propose transformations to the male/white/Western-centric discursive space of research. Based on this conceptual framework, I argue that queer migrants’ standpoints should be considered to be “stronger.” Here, I demonstrate possibilities for dislodging perspectives from hegemonic locations by emphasizing the questions of embodiment at the center of inquiry and highlighting the shift in power dynamics that accrues around certain bodies. As a queer migrant myself, I place myself into the investigation as an object alongside peers and criticize my perspective and the hegemonic world it is historically connected to creating. This conceptual framework, I argue, is vital for understanding the creation of knowledge by white bodies researching in Japan. In the second half of this chapter, I outline the methods used to collect and analyze data, the sampling methods, and details of my ethnography.

In Chapter Four, I examine how the temporality of drag performance presents a possible framework for reorganizing the norms, ideologies, and expectations of sexuality and gender into the everyday lived experience of queer migrants. It is divided into four main parts: becoming *gaijin* (the foreigner), reappearing through drag, the drag performance, and “dragging” up. The first part emphasizes unfamiliarity and failure to extend into space because of the way queer migrants’ foreign bodies are perceived with which they develop a conscious way to occupy the space differentially. Becoming *gaijin* thus brings about discriminatory disadvantages that result in an internalization of otherness and highlights the implications of how such a position creates an advantage. The second

and third parts argue that drag is a way to help queer migrants “fit in” because of the status bestowed upon becoming *gaijin*. One of the advantages I discuss is that becoming *gaijin* allows queer migrants to explore stigmatized practices. They experience being strange in a new space where their appearances fail to align with social norms; by doing drag they make the space around them “strange” to “fit” their appearance. This is connected to the cultural flows and commercialization of drag, in which RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR) has created a new global economy in which drag is to be consumed and (re)produced. Here, I emphasize that queer migrants try to make sense of the meanings of their appearance as *gaijin* through drag. The fourth part argues that drag is a way of making the failures of norms, ideologies, and expectations of gender, sexuality and race more visible. The central concept in the theorization of drag in this section is “parody,” which is a form of self-reflexivity that places a demand on our knowledge and recollection of what we see as a beholder (Hutcheon, 1985). Drag is a parody of gender norms because it manages to install, reinforce, undermine, and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. I also introduce the concepts of gender performativity and temporal drag to support the theorization of drag. Through this, I argue that drag exemplifies the clash between the cultural significance of demonstrating the conscious sense of gender/sexuality and how this conflicts with our foreignness, our sense of who we are (ontologically) or whom we think we are (epistemologically) and how we fit into the social setting.

Chapter Five discusses the precarious space queer migrants occupy. I theorize this as “beyond assimilation.” I develop my argument for beyond assimilation beginning with the concept of citizenship and co-existence policies. Following this, I demonstrate queer migrants’ participation in queer communities and creation of drag families as a method of rebelling against productivity (through, for example, labor and procreation needed for reproduction). Because of the multiple ways queer migrants interpret their gendered, sexual, and racial identities through drag, queer migrants understand discrimination on multiple layers and thus use the advantageous positions that some of them occupy by virtue of gender, sexuality, and their racial and national origin as a favorable identity to participate in society/and or communities on “their terms” beyond the scope of citizenship or co-existence policies. Nira Yuval-Davis’ concept of multilayered citizenship allows for examining the participation of queer migrants beyond assimilation by considering formal/informal status in the settlement and bringing into dialogue their positioning in the origin (Yuval-Davis, 1999). Based on this, I argue that queer migrants secure memberships in relevant categories and thus reject assimilation. I introduce *Tabunka-kyosei*, or “multicultural coexistence”—a term that refers to building a multicultural communal society—as an attempt to govern queer migrants. I argue that such a policy strengthens queer migrants’ distanced position from Japanese people’s “regular” everyday lives, which is precisely what allows them to reject assimilation, leading to the possibilities of participating in queer

communities. As a result of their proximity to the main culture, queer migrants participate in queer communities precisely because these communities provide social resources that make adjusting to life in Japan slightly easier, offering a small step towards social mobility and an opportunity to thrive in mainstream queer culture, such as through drag. Participation in such communities allows queer migrants to create “drag families.” A drag family creates a means of support that did not exist in the Japanese context for certain queer migrants, and the ideologies of the drag family allow these migrants to align to the system of chrononormativity. Chrononormativity is the social expectation of “what is normal” in relation to temporality: for example, that certain events should take place at a certain time and in a certain order, such as education, entering the workforce, getting married, childbearing and buying a house, and viewing this expectation as a natural or normative organization of time (Freeman, 2010).

In Chapter Six, I argue that the multiple identities and the space beyond assimilation have given queer migrants a sense of belonging and a construction of power which creates a dynamic that fortifies political activism in queer communities and poses the risk of neo-colonizing local experiences of queerness. I develop my argument using the concept of belonging intertwined with my ethnography of drag shows in Tokyo and Osaka. Belonging is not reduced to solely a matter of identity; it also includes the multilayered aspects of participation within boundaries and how this is affected by power relations. I argue that RPDR has created a sense of belonging which queer migrants have appropriated for their benefit. My ethnography at drag events run by queer migrants demonstrates a politics of belonging which facilitates the construction of boundaries of inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories, and groupings within these boundaries by those who have the power to do so. These boundaries allow queer migrants a position to introduce a political agenda related to queer liberation into their performances, which brings a political inclination to the wider context. Through their transnational mobility, queer migrants bring a “liberal” and “logical” understanding of queer liberation to Japan which is ultimately rooted in Western ethnocentrism. As queer migrants are in a distanced position from the “everyday Japanese life” and reject assimilation while at the same time participating in a mainstreamification of queer culture, they can push excessive essentialist agendas. I argue there is a conflict of neo-colonization with the experiences of Japanese queer people. Because of the precarious space beyond assimilation, it allows queer migrants to grasp power which imposes narratives of “how to be LGBT” onto Japanese people but also be marginalized in that space by the dominant culture at the same time.

In the concluding chapter, I demonstrate the contribution to scholarship this thesis provides by adding the lens of drag as well as a new approach to researching in the field of queer migration studies. I restate the importance of the conceptual framework used in this thesis as a call for other foreign, particularly white, researchers to be

engaged with the implications of research. I also evaluate the limitations of this thesis, concluding with a possibility for more research related to drag as a migration trajectory.



## Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter aims to place this study in the context of, and its contribution to, queer migration studies. First, I outline the field of queer migration, which adds the queer studies approach to migration. Second, I look at the frameworks used in queer migration studies to show how previous research has analyzed the overlaps of social and cultural factors in the queer migrant diaspora in relation to the wider social context. Third, I demonstrate differentiated perspectives in the field of queer migration to clarify the different forms of knowledge around how queer studies can be used in migration research. Finally, to bring drag into dialogue, I finish with scholarship related to drag as a researchable sub-culture and how drag is situated in the Japanese context.

### 2.1 Queer migration studies

The field of queer migration intersects migration studies with theories related to gender and sexuality. In queer migration studies, queer theory shows that all migrants are in a web of power relations in which sexuality is intertwined with other dimensions of power—such as race, class, and gender— that reveals structural forces attempting to form the experience of migrants.

Eithne Luibhéid notes that migration research has often overlooked the connections between the politics of immigration and sexuality (Luibhéid, 2004). Migration research has commonly linked international migration's social, political, economic, and cultural causes and consequences using frameworks such as “push-pull, world systems, or transnationalism” (Luibhéid, 2004: 121). Push-pull relates to individual economic decisions of migration where the advantages of deciding to migrate compensate for the disadvantages. In the world systems framework, the focus is on the global economic dynamic. For example, expanding business from the global north to the global south creates an economic bridge for migration that relies on globalized capitalism and possible colonial relationships (Massey et al., 1993; Nawyn, 2016). Transnational frameworks link the origin and settlement countries and highlight the contradictions in the shift between cultural values. Within these frameworks, the subject was often restricted to men as active agents in migration. Women were considered a passive agent in migration until the “feminization of migration” demonstrating changes for women in the migratory contexts (Castles and Miller, 1993). However, these migratory contexts were still glossed over with normative presuppositions. The migrant often becomes normalized as cisgender and heterosexual through cultural, political, and media narratives. Transnational frameworks would be the most appropriate for theorizing migration and sexuality because they allow for some integration of cultural values and ties from the country of origin and settlement, which leaves open the possibility of differences that queerness entails (Luibhéid, 2004).

As migration studies explored possibilities outside of economics, a focus on sexuality and emotion emerged (Mai and King, 2009). Although sexuality has been primarily disregarded in immigration politics or framed under deviancy, recent queer migration research challenges the normative dimensions of heterosexualism, cisnormativity and heteronormativity within migration policies. Through transnational flows, the power dynamics that regulate sexuality is highlighted—for example, experiencing differentiated heteronormativity in the countries of origin and settlement (Luibhéid and Cantú, 2005). This can be analyzed using queer theory, which “analyzes and historicizes sexuality as a basis of power, governance, normalization, and struggle that changes over time and involves multiple actors and institutions” (Luibhéid, 2004: 123). In this way, queer, as a theoretical tool, questions how nation-states intervene and regulate sexuality in normative practices. It also questions how sexuality is related to other forms of social regulations such as gender, class, and race (Cantú, 2009). Accordingly, sexuality is continuously operated in tandem with gender, racial, class, and cultural considerations. That is, the nation-state using these categories, “actively participates in producing these distinctions and linking them to broader processes of nation-making and citizenship” (Luibhéid and Cantu, 2005: xvi).

Based on sexuality, gender, racial, class, and cultural considerations, nation-states are authorized to name who falls outside of the norms set around these categories as non-citizens and set limits on their entry into bordered territories as a procedural operation implemented in a discriminatory manner (Luibhéid and Cantu, 2005). However, even with these limitations, queer people still exist and continue to find new and inventive ways of being accommodated into existing discriminatory procedures.

This research is compelled to understand how sexuality becomes one layer of identification through discriminatory controls of migration, and gender, race, class, and how other factors intersect in queer migrants’ lives. According to Luibhéid, even after the point of entry, discrimination is also part of their everyday lives because of social antagonisms. This is demonstrated in the following experience of an immigrant gay man migrating to the United States of America:

Gay migrants [...] generally expected to experience new opportunities for self-expression and self-fashioning in the country to which they migrated, but instead often found themselves negotiating racism, heterosexism, cultural and language barriers, limited work opportunities, and (in some cases) anxieties round their undocumented status. (Luibhéid, 2004: 133)

In the process of migrating to the country of settlement, the negotiations of race, heterosexism, and cultural and language barriers cause queer migrants to experience transformative changes in their identities and find accommodations in inventive ways beyond the dominant culture. The experience of “LGBT” migrants all differs based on the needs of not only sexuality but also gender and the body itself. Accordingly, this demonstrates further the necessity of queer as a theoretical tool in queer migration studies because not only does it include LGBT identities, but it avoids essentializing this grouping as universal and transhistorical across borders. Queer creates a means to understand the complex relations of power attempting to mold queer subjectivities, which marks a conception for those with non-normative sexual and gender practices. Within this, there is an area to critique hierarchies, including race, gender, class, and geopolitical location in the experience of migration.

Migration policies are using operative LGBT politics, which is becoming a normative discourse of accommodating people outside of heterosexism into frameworks of family values (Richardson, 2018). Heterosexual marriage is, after all, one of the least complicated ways for migratory movements. Same-sex marriage is yet to be legalized on a global scale, demonstrating the setback for queer migrants. Arguably, all queer migrants are unable to be subsumed by normative family values. Feminist scholars have critiqued the concept of “the family” because of its construction as a normative ideology by demonstrating the differences in organization, representation, and formations of different types of households (Weston, 1997; Kamano, 2008). Gayle Rubin (1984) discusses how state actions and policies maintain normative sexualities and intervene in non-normative sexualities. For this thesis, it is essential to understand how the interplay of family and queerness intersect with other identifications. Queerness signifies the idea of a chosen family beyond biological or legal kinship. Thus, drag as a lens for looking at the queer migrant would add a dynamic perspective on the idea of family. Drag performers are often part of a drag house, which demonstrates an alternative to the dominant discourse on the family.

To conclude, queer migration is an area of study with the potential to expose constraints and possibilities in the policies and ideologies of migration involving sexuality which are structured through stratifications of class, gender, family ideologies, and race. The next section introduces frameworks that have been used for researching queer migration.

## **2.2 Frameworks for researching queer migration**

This section looks at two frameworks used in queer migration: diasporic studies and queer migration politics.

### 2.2.1 Queer diasporic studies

Gayatri Gopinath in *Unruly Visions* (2018) studies the queer diaspora through an “interrelation of archive, region, affect, and aesthetics” (Gopinath, 2018: 3). By focusing on aesthetic practices—literature, performance, music—that form queer diaspora—Gopinath proposes a framework that analyses the negotiation of intersections between race, sexuality, and migration. A key argument of Gopinath’s is the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora that form the “queer regional imaginary.” This term refers to both subnational and supranational “discrete regional spaces that in fact bypass the nation” (Gopinath, 2018: 5) for an alternative locus of gender and sexuality. It stands in contrast to the dominant national imaginary with which non-conforming bodies and affiliations conflict. It also stands oppositional to homonormative<sup>7</sup> models, which attempt to singularize experiences of queerness. In the dominant discourse of the nation, only certain kinds of queer being, like gay and lesbian, become legitimate. Accordingly, if the nation or categories of operative LGBT is not privileged in our analysis, it is deemed to have less value in scholarship. Gopinath exemplifies a “dissatisfaction with standard formulations of diaspora that inevitably foreground the nation as the primary point of reference” (Gopinath, 2018: 5), leaving no room for the queer diaspora. Adding queerness to diasporic studies is a way to access the “shadow space” of histories, subjectivities, and desires rendered invisible, bringing them into the present to show alternative possibilities of social relations. Gopinath calls for us to queerly curate our work through an interrelation of different concepts that revalue everyday subjects by engaging in the past and the present:

the region, as both subnational and supranational space, and the production of alternative cartographies; the personal and the autobiographical, and the impossibility of originary narratives of individual and collective selves: queer counter archives and the reframing of history; the role of the ordinary and the everyday, the affective and the sensorial, in producing these alternative archives and cartographies; the interrogation of the visual field and the limits of a politics of visibility and representation; queerness as an optic and reading practice that brings alternative modes of affiliation and relationality into focus. (Gopinath, 2018: 10)

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<sup>7</sup> Homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003, p. 50). This concept is discussed further in Chapter Six.

Accordingly, revaluing everyday subjects by associating the past with the present is “is an act of queer curation that seeks to reveal no coevalness or sameness but rather the co-implication and radical relationality of seemingly disparate racial formations, geographies, temporalities, and colonial and postcolonial histories of displacement and dwelling” (Gopinath, 2018: 4). Bringing in space and time into the analysis allows an opportunity for queer migrants to challenge normative narratives of their identifications, participation in societies, and sense of belonging. It is assumed in diasporic studies that migrants have a desire to return to or reclaim their origins. However, Gopinath challenges this by bringing the invisible and unintelligible subjectivity within the nation state’s borders to the forefront of analysis. This challenges the usual trope in visibility which requires coherent identities and representations. Gay men are more likely to meet the requirements of visibility than other non-normative sexualities and genders because it is understood in many different spheres of public and private divisions. I would argue that Gopinath’s queer approach to diasporic studies is similar to recent critical phenomenology. Even if subjectivities are rendered invisible, they still “appear” in the power structures that attempt to constrain, conceal or form experiences. In addition, the aesthetic element that Gopinath argues for also allows us to disrupt conventional ways of knowing and seeing bodies. Queer migrants are gendered and racialized as outside of normative injunctions, which is precisely why their bodies can be a site of intervention. As I discuss later in this thesis, knowing and seeing gender within and with certain boundaries is central to understanding drag.

Gopinath’s queer diaspora allows us to make visible the everyday regional desires, practices, bodies, and affiliations lost in dominant histories by using the past as a glimpse into the future. Adding the lens of drag into queer diasporic studies forms another layer of relation and relevancy to queer theory, which could “drag” up histories into a potential of unexpected intimacies and affiliations into the present.

### **2.2.2 Queer migration politics**

In *Queer Migration Politics* (2013), Karma R. Chávez critically engages with how queer politics, immigration politics, and activism intersect to challenge the normative discourse of inclusionary perspectives surrounding the queer migrant and their affiliations. Chávez’s queer migrant is “an inherently coalitional subject, one whose identities and relationships to power mandate managing multiplicity” (Chávez, 2013: 9). Chávez’s usages of queer “is a coalitional term, a term that always implies an intermeshed understanding of identity, subjectivity, power, and politics located on the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play” (Chávez, 2013: 7). This definition of queer lends itself to understanding the subjectivity of queer migrants because of their transformative

identity changes and shifting of power based on discriminatory categories while trying to survive in a foreign country.

Based on her queer terminology above, Chávez asks us to utilize difference as a resource rather than a hurdle to overcome that becomes “differential belonging.” Differential belonging is “tactical subjectivity,” which shifts from an orientation of belonging to the world itself to a mode of belonging in, and with those in the world. There is a “politics of relation” within this shift of belonging, which focuses on how social relations can be altered and coalitions can be built in the specific contexts of our various belongings, whether we are born into, chose, or long for them. For this thesis, differential belonging proves beneficial for recognizing how queer migrants in Japan are marginalized in certain ways but can tactically grasp some power, which places them in a peculiar space of having varying impacts to their participation in society and sense of belonging.

By focusing on the relationship between LGBT politics and migration politics, Chávez demonstrates the “rhetorical imaginaries” employed by both queer and immigration activists are way of “highlighting sources of invention, argument construction, persuasive tactics, and message strategies in, or in relation to, the public sphere” (Chávez, 2013: 15). This demonstrates that queerness and migration have similar approaches to their activism which is why the affiliation would work. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, drag as a lens also adds to a similar dimension of challenging LGBT and migration politics in the public sphere by destabilizing gender norms and migrant bodies.

Chávez frames her focus with interactionality, a concept building on intersectionality, which adds a critical dimension to her framework. Interactionality is:

a form of rhetorical confrontation that begins critique from the roots of a problem or crisis and methodically reveals how systems of power and oppression interact with one another in ways that produce subjects, institutions, and ideologies and that enable and constrain political response. (Chávez, 2013: 51)

Interactionality could be useful for queer migration research because it considers maneuverability and bodily experience without negating the oppression experienced in everyday life from identity politics and positions of power. The outcome of interactionality would not just be a change in legislation but opening conversations about more extensive possibilities about, for example, how meaning-making paradigms apply to representation in national and social imaginaries. I would argue that *tojisha-kenkyu* also shares a similar ethos to interactionality because it

also confronts externalized issues from the person in situated experience as a means to find the roots of the problem by looking at how systems of marginalization produce subjects resulting in a political voice from their standpoint.

Although Chávez addresses the complex roots of the queer migrant's social location (and the queer diasporic issues of differential belonging) without reducing experience to fixed identities, she fails to expound upon how to destabilize categories we find comfort in and critique the locations of power some queer migrants may occupy. Connecting Gopinath's aesthetic realm into queer migration politics may be an excellent way to amplify political activism as it can "perform." However, not every queer person would make use of the aesthetic realm for activism or destabilizing their identity category.

To conclude, the frameworks of queer migration politics and queer diaspora can:

illuminate the impossible positions migrants often occupy; challenge diasporic norms over authenticity; destabilize conventional understandings of gender, nation and home; bring a coalitional understanding of politics to the fore of migration analysis; and situate diasporic experiences within present and future possibilities for new ways of expressing intimacy and kinship beyond the scope of nationality and citizenship. (Rouhani, 2016: 229)

These frameworks provide a means to criticize the colonizing and racist presence of the white world that has placed queer migrants into systems of oppression within diasporic experiences. However, they do not provide a way for white researchers to place themselves into the framework, be accountable for their white perspective, and simultaneously put the white world under scrutiny. Although queer in these frameworks may allude to an affiliation, the white perspective still needs to be scrutinized. Otherwise, queer could merely be co-opted by hegemonic perspectives, which I will demonstrate in the next section. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Three, critical phenomenology adds the missing link of criticizing power from the center of knowledge production, i.e., the white perspective. Next, I will introduce multiple perspectives in queer migration research.

### **2.3 Perspectives in queer migration**

This section explores global perspectives in queer migration, beginning with a pioneer study on immigrant Filipino gay men—who engage in cross-dressing—to show that a glimpse into the everyday lives of queer migrants conceptualizes the shifting nature of queer migration and diaspora. Following this, two perspectives in the Japanese

context are introduced to show the full relevance of how complicated the ideas of queer mobility can be when certain worlds come into contact.

### **2.3.1 Negotiating gay identity through cross-dressing**

Martin F. Manalansan IV's *Global Divas* (2003) looks at the way Filipino gay men negotiate a "globalized modern gay identity" and "Filipino and American sexual and gender traditions" (Manalansan, 2004: viii). Specifically, Manalansan demonstrates how immigrant Filipino gay men in New York City deal with "bakla identity"—a Tagalog term encompassing homosexuality, hermaphroditism, cross-dressing and effeminacy—and the American ideas of gay identity.

Manalansan presents an origin of the globalized gay identity within New York City based on the 1969 Stonewall riots, the center for political activism related to gay rights. Manalansan's ethnography of immigrant Filipino gay men's everyday lives shows how they are situated in multiple sexual cultures. They do not just have an Americanized gay identity or a bakla identity but a hybridized one.

*Global Divas* also provides some hints about how drag may relate to migration. The act of cross-dressing made some immigrant Filipino gay men in his research more attractive to white men. Although worried about cross-dressing as an undocumented immigrant, this enabled Manalansan's participants to become a "real bakla". Manalansan argues that American gayness is routed in ultra-masculinity, so cross-dressing enabled immigrant Filipino gay men to be more "bakla."

Although very critical of the Americanized notions of modern gay identity, Manalansan does not apply the same deconstructive queer analysis to the idea of bakla identity or cross-dressing. Essentializing bakla identity creates an assumption that such identification is transnationally the same when arguably the practices of the immigrant Filipino gay diaspora in New York would not be synonymous in other global diasporic communities or even in the Philippines. Therefore, Manalansan's approach lacks an understanding of the complex and shifting nature of queerness, migration, and diaspora, resulting in a closed understanding of identification. It also leaves an opening for me to theorize drag in the context of queer migration outside the limited terminology of cross-dressing as a deconstruction of norms of gender and sexuality, which simultaneously reinscribes these norms.

### **2.3.2 Migrating to Japan for racial preferences**

Jamie Paquin's "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Sexual Preferences and Migration" (2015) interviewed Japanese and non-Japanese people about becoming the sexual subject of migration for satisfying a sexual desire for



racial preference of sexual partners. Paquin notes that heterosexual Western men living in Japan often end up with “sidetracked, directionless, and depressing lives... trapped in the unending cycle of teaching English and chasing women on weekends” (Paquin, 2015: 34). According to Paquin, their “chasing women” is wrapped up in racial preferences for Asian women, which becomes “a source of their own alienation, as their sexuality can become the primary or exclusive means of social interaction and personal expression” (Ibid.). As a result, their preferences have “social and political contestations of their legitimacy” (Paquin, 2015: 37). For Paquin, these preferences are often condemned, which he clumsily compares to how homosexual desire has been historically reprimanded and pathologized.

I take issue with Paquin’s framing of the above experience into the area of queer migration. It is precarious to place heterosexual Western men’s narratives, which are often the dominant in, for example, the national imagery of many Western countries, into queer theory. Queer theory is about challenging such kinds of hegemonic imagery. Although Paquin’s use of queer is related to the racialized orientation of sexual-object choice, arguably, white men parading around Japan seeking the sexual companionship of Japanese women is a gross misuse of a queer migration trajectory. Even if the object is in a sense queer as it receives “social and political contestations,” it is their subject position that allowed them to exercise a privilege based on the power granted to them through their bodily historicity. Perhaps this research would have been better situated in privileged migration. Frankly, from my own experiences of hanging around with heterosexual, white, foreign, English-speaking men in Japan, their “chasing women” is often praised with comments like “well-done mate” within their own communities. If Paquin had incorporated the way bodies provide privileged access to racialized sexual preferences, it could have added more persuasion to his argument. What is missing here is a critical analysis of the subject position of white heterosexual men.

Paquin concludes with the following suggestion: “we should instead deconstruct the binaries and normativity surrounding sexuality and seek to understand how these and other forms of sexual preferences figure in the projects of self-fulfillment occurring in the contemporary world, which often have transnational implications” (Paquin, 2015: 37). Although convincing, it would seem Paquin has not queerly ruptured the connection of heterosexuality and heteronormativity through the limitations of sexual preferences. Suppose heterosexual people are marginalized for their racial preference because of its binarized disposition. If that is so, how is it wrapped up in other intersectional factors that queer theory uses in its critical engagement? Paquin leaves open the discussion for understanding the racial hierarchy and power dynamic between Japanese and non-Japanese, particularly concerning Western sexual subjects. He also demonstrates the danger of using queer by which normative narratives

can co-opt it. This should urge foreign researchers who come to Japan to place their perspectives under harsher scrutiny within research.

### 2.3.3 Assimilating into the Japanese gay community

Hugo Córdova Quero's "Made in Brazil? Sexuality, Intimacy, and Identity Formation among Japanese Brazilian Queer Immigrants in Japan" (2015) discusses the issues surrounding migration and assimilation for Japanese Brazilian queer immigrants. Japanese Brazilian refers to Brazilian nationals of Japanese descendant or "*nikkei-jin*." *Nikkei-jin* is a gloss term for Japanese emigrants and their descendants and a person of Japanese lineage (Yamashiro, 2008). A new category of visa was established for migrants who are descendants of Japanese. This visa allows them to come to Japan for work and indefinitely renew their residency status. From the perspective of the Japanese government, Brazilian *nikkei-jin* were thought to be culturally "Japanese" enough for them to integrate into Japanese society with few problems (Yamashiro, 2008). Córdova Quero notes that Japanese Brazilians experienced downward mobility in social status within Japanese society as "unskilled workers," despite many of them being university-educated or professionals in their field back in Brazil, demonstrating a conflict in their integration.

Córdova Quero focuses on how queer desire, intimacy, bodies, and culture affect migration based on Japanese Brazilian gay men's experiences in Japan. Applying Judith Butler's concept of performativity, Córdova Quero's argument lies in that Japanese Brazilian immigrants' bodies face "continuous and unequal processes of negotiations and categorizations, whether self or exogenously imposed" (Córdova Quero, 2015: 42). In other words, their negotiations and categorizations of their sexuality and identity practices are self-attributed or imposed by the dominant culture of Japan, which results in a continuous re-categorization of their identifications.

Córdova Quero analyzes the racial contentions in the Japanese worldview of *uchi* (us/inside) and *soto* (them/outside) dichotomy. *Uchi* presents the purity of the Japanese people and what is imagined belonging to Japanese culture. At the same time, *soto* represents pollution of the foreigner's body and what is exogenous, which brings impurity and diseases. Despite the perceived racial similarity between Japanese and Japanese Brazilians, which should include them in *uchi*, Córdova Quero argues that the latter is racialized into the *soto*, based on his experience of patronizing gay bars in Ni-chome, the gay district in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Although there is a broader difference in terms of culture, Córdova Quero says that Japanese Brazilian immigrants are doubly incorporated into the *soto* side due to both their racialized foreign bodies and queerness. He emphasizes the association "with the myth that HIV and sexually transmitted diseases were 'a Western problem' brought into Japan by foreigners"

(Córdova Quero, 2015: 56). Thus, the foreign body symbolizes the invasion of disease from outside countries. Córdova Quero concludes that “Japanese Brazilian migrant bodies debate whether to assimilate to hegemonic discourses [of Japan] or queer those discourses through performativities of resistance” (Córdova Quero, 2015: 58).

Accordingly, this raises the question of whether the queer migrants in his study must reconcile with negotiations and categorizations of their bodies, expectations of gender, and divisions of labor while also attempting to understand how this reconciliation relates to the performativity of their queerness which may or may not be culturally acquired in the country of origin and rearticulated in the country of settlement. Furthermore, I must develop a deeper understanding of how such negotiations and categorization are situated concerning assimilation on a personal and diasporic level.

## **2.4 Studies on drag**

Research on drag has been organized around performance practice (Edward and Farrier, 2020), performance protest for gay and lesbian movements (Taylor, Rupp and Gamson, 2004), risks of perpetuating misogynistic discourse (Berbary and Johnson, 2017), leading to questions of whether drag is synonymous with blackface (Kleinman, 2000).

### **2.4.1 Drag as a homosexual subculture**

The pioneering study on drag was done by Esther Newton in her ethnographic study *Mother Camp* (1972) about drag queens in the United States, particularly as a homosexual subculture. Newton observed drag queens during the 1960s and interviewed several performers. Within the homosexual community, already a subculture of the dominant culture, drag causes a split in the homosexual community between homosexual men striving to be aligned to normativity, mainly related to passing as heterosexual in their work-life and being masculine, and those who see the alignment to femininity as deviance. The former she calls the covert homosexuals, who separate their homosexuality from public life, and the latter is the overt homosexuals, who withdraw “from *any participation* in the straight world” (Newton, 1972: 31).

According to Newton, to become a drag queen, the first step is “recognition of oneself as homosexual and entry into the homosexual community” (Ibid.). The second step is doing drag as part of the commitment to the community. Doing drag, the overt homosexuals commit “social suicide” and lose their stake in masculinity because they bring an embodiment of femininity into their public life. However, the coverts can maintain their social

relationships as long as their personification of femininity remains within the limits of just “trying out drag one time for fun” in the moment of performance in gay bars rather than extending it to their public life.

Accordingly, Newton theorizes drag as the ultimate stigmatization by borrowing from Erving Goffman’s conceptualization.<sup>8</sup> As homosexual society is stigmatized in straight society, drag is doubly stigmatized in homosexual society. Therefore, drag symbolizes and embodies Goffman’s stigma. Newton also uses the notion of camp to help theorize drag. For Newton, camp is a “strategy for a situation” that “signifies the relationship between things, people, and activities or qualities, and homosexuality” (Newton, 1972: 105). She notes that camp can be understood in three layers “incongruity, theatricality, and humor,” in which “incongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style, and humor its strategy” (Newton, 1972: 106). From this, it would seem campness in drag is a strategy to survive the alienation from the mainstream by destabilizing heteronormative sensibilities using incongruity, theatricality, and humor.

Although Newton’s ethnographic analysis of drag is sociologically and ethnographically sound, Newton forgets to mention the deep-rooted misogyny and how this is related to the reaction of femininity. Although feminist discourse in this historical context was not at the intersectional analysis like it is in the present, her research still lacks understanding of how something such as drag becomes stigmatized merely misunderstanding it as a gay practice precisely because there is no consideration of the structural forces that put racialized, classed, or gendered bodies into a position of disadvantage. Additionally, although there is an acknowledgment of the transgender paradigm of “underlying psychological conflict in sex role identification” (Newton, 1972: 37) in pushing gender-bending individuals toward the homosexual community to partake in drag, there is no depth in understanding how this is socialized as a conflict. She does point out the possibility for drag to debunk the “naturalness” of social roles defined by genitalia, but she fails to acknowledge the true possibility of this outside of her definition of the overt homosexual subject. Newton’s usage of camp is fruitful for theorizing drag but it still limits camp to the role as a homosexual man and “flaunting homosexuality” which is stigmatized based on “being less of a man.” Learning from Newton, it would be interesting to see how the initiation to drag and its stigma in globalized times has changed. As I will demonstrate later in the thesis, it is because of the commercialization of drag that assists queer migrants’ decision to perform drag. Rather than a stigmatized practice, it has become a source of power to a certain degree.

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<sup>8</sup> For Goffman, stigma is an “attribute that is deeply discrediting” based on character, physicality, or group identities (Goffman, 1963: 3). This discredited attribute complicates everyday life by rendering people abnormal and thus continuously striving to find full social acceptance.

## 2.4.2 Contextualizing drag in Japan

Following the discussion of drag as a subculture, I finish this chapter with a narrative from a Japanese drag queen, aiming to give some context to drag in Japan.

Toru Momo, a fashion anthropologist, interviewed the Japanese drag queen, Simone Fukayuki for *Kosupure suru shakai: sabukarucha no shintaibunka [Cosplaying societies: Subcultures of body culture]* (2009). According to Simone Fukayuki, a drag queen is defined as a “distorted cross-dresser” (Momo, 2009: 118, trans. by Hughes). That is, drag queens exaggerate the act of cross-dressing in excess in which there is a sense of beauty and pretentiousness. This kind of “cross-dressing” appeared in the 1980s in Japan when information about drag culture from the US arrived through fashion magazines and gay community magazines. It was parties produced by foreigners that had introduced drag elements, notably in Kyoto. Simone Fukayuki continues that drag was established in the 90s as an object to be consumed by itself rather than adding an element of excitement to existing spaces, often heterosexual spaces. Simone notes the close connections of drag to gay culture but states there are also drag performers who are “not gay” as well as “women”<sup>9</sup> (Momo, 2009: 126, trans. by Hughes).

The essence of drag for Simone is not limited to gay culture but is an uncategorized entity that stands out “wearing whatever you think is drag” (Ibid.). Drag takes inspiration from camp, kitsch, and “idols”<sup>10</sup> through a “theory of unique values and a methodology of expression” (Momo, 2009: 130, trans. by Hughes). Drag also plays on stereotypes driven by the performer’s methodology of expression. What makes drag different is the expression of Japanese campness, which has an element of *ero guro nansensu*. *Ero guro nansensu* is from the English words: erotic, grotesque, and nonsense. This stylized form from the late Taisho and early Showa periods was popular among those who felt alienation and anxiety due to rapid modernization. In a similar way to what Newton found in the American drag subculture, it works as a survival kit for alienation. Surprisingly, Simone insists that drag is not necessarily a political tool for social change because of this.

Although recognizing drag as a type of escapism from society by making fun of the nonsense that is gender, Momo fails to analyze Simone’s narrative around how going beyond social roles reflects upon what society is built on. Perhaps this demonstrates the lack of attention to feminism and queer studies in the wider political atmosphere of Japan, particularly within fashion and pop culture. Instead, the way drag is spoken about in Momo’s narrative with Simone relies on presupposed tensions between the tandem of Japanese “uniqueness” and Western modernization to make sense of transformations in gender and sexuality. Based on Newton, I would argue that it is

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<sup>9</sup> The Japanese text uses the word “*jyosei*”, often translated to woman. Based on the context, I would take this to mean “assigned-female-at-birth”.

<sup>10</sup> Idols refers to Japanese popstars such as Seiko Matsuda and Momoe Yamaguchi.

difficult to theorize drag as escapism because drag is a form of self-defense toward its stigmatization in its use of campness that disrupts mainstream society rather than just seeking some fantasy-like experience. Accordingly, Momo only demonstrates the surface of drag from a narrative of escaping the real world and who you are from the mundane everyday life you have come to know, lacking analysis into the drive behind wanting to find such escapism and why drag is the method of it.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to contextualize my research and position it concerning the academic scholarship. First, I outlined queer migration as an area of study. Then, I introduced frameworks for studying it and perspectives within the area. Finally, I introduced drag into the context of this thesis.

Adding queer theory to migration studies opens the possibility of deploying fluid and unstable identifications of continuously moving bodies. It also highlights the difficulties of queer migrant subjecthood when identifications become unrecognizable in relation to participation and belonging in the dominant culture. The available literature on queer migrations in the context of Japan is not organized in the same way as previous literature, which tend to be based on a narrative of placement/displacement from repression to freedom, or in search of liberation. However, there is the similarity of being confronted with issues of gender, sexuality, and race from the power structures in the countries of origin and settlement. Similarly, migrant communities are often represented in the light of heteronormativity. However, queer migration is a way to add multiple new representations to migration research.

I have made several theoretical points that inform the remaining analysis and situate my research theoretically. I noted how queerness challenges the positions occupied by migrants, particularly in the transformations of performative culture related to their countries of origin and settlement. Additionally, I have argued that critical phenomenology could be a way to add an interdisciplinary dimension to existing frameworks in queer migration studies to highlight the possibility of not only destabilizing the social locations through understanding subjectivity in layers of intersectional and structural factors but rethinking my own perspective and the world that it has created. In particular, that is the co-option of queer to justify a white perspective.

By combining queer migration studies with a reinterpreted framework for understanding the experience of queer migrants, this research will bring a new lens of drag to this field and contribute to the discussion of research methodologies. In the next chapter, I develop my argument for a radical methodology for queer migration.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter looks at the philosophical and theoretical underpinning for understanding the application of methods that best fit this thesis' research questions. That is, how and why the following frameworks, concepts, methods, analytical approaches, and philosophies are most suitable for understanding experiences of queer migrant drag performers in Japan through the following research questions: 1) how does the queer migrant's norms, ideologies, and expectations of sexuality and gender become reshaped through migration? 2) how do queer migrants negotiate constraints and possibilities of sexuality, gender, and race in a context of heteronormative regulation? 3) how has migration transformed queer communities, cultures, and politics in Japan?

This chapter is divided into two main sections, which form my "scavenger-like" queer methodology: 1) philosophy and theory and 2) data collection methods. The first section outlines my overall research approach, "stronger" standpoint theory, which incorporates *tojisha-kenkyu*, feminist standpoint theory, and critical phenomenology to theorize subjective experience. This approach contributes to queer theory's interrogation of established social, economic, and political power relations to deconstruct and reconstruct concepts, theories, and methods through an interdisciplinary perspective on subjectivity. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach can help make systematic conditions more easily understood by looking at them through multiple layers, demonstrating how subjective reality is always in negotiation with intersectional factors such as gender, sexuality, and race. Also, it engages with positionality to account for hegemonic practices in research that accrue around my body as a gay white researcher in Japan. An integral part of this approach relies on the notion of the body in relation to other subjects and being seen as an object. Here, I borrow from Judith Butler's discussion on the relationship between materiality and identity:

The process of that sedimentation or what might be called materialization will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the "I." (Butler, 1993: 15)

Accordingly, the body is the materiality for deploying ourselves into the social world or to see and be seen in which identities cannot be separated from it. Lived experience modifies the construction of identities, and this is all part of an interplay within the power structures that attempt to form the performativity of bodies. The second section deals with the methods used for gathering data which details the interviews and ethnographic elements carried out in my fieldwork.

### 3.1 Philosophical and theoretical underpinning

This thesis is framed using an approach I call “stronger” standpoint theory, a queer methodological approach to acknowledge complex factors that arise in the predisposition of knowledge production based on a critical phenomenology *tojisha-kenkyu* underpinned by feminist standpoint theory. In what follows, I will explain each of the elements that make up my approach and their theoretical value in this research.

#### 3.1.1 Understanding queer migrant subjectivity using “stronger” standpoint theory

“Stronger” standpoint theory attempts to provide a more theoretically rigorous approach to make research methodologically “better” by building on the engagement and accountability of positionality that places the *tojisha* as the center of power in knowledge production in a multi-layered positional approach. In this way, as a researcher in this thesis, I can engage and be accountable from different perspectives by negotiating categories of discrimination from the multilayers of majority/minority, assailant/victim, and the discriminator/discriminated reciprocally. Each perspective is at a different advantage and disadvantage in disparate points of time and space. The theoretical shift from these perspectives clarifies the privileges the majority side benefits from and the obstacles the minority side faces. As a majority, understanding the challenges facing the minority would encourage them to utilize the power derived from their social position to rethink power relations and work towards changing discriminatory systems embedded in chauvinism, racism, colonialism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.

In the introduction of this thesis, I externalized tensions of my everyday encounters as a queer migrant and researcher, demonstrating a multi-layered standpoint that emphasizes how certain “issues” appear for certain groups of bodies. In what follows, I will underline *tojisha-kenkyu*’s importance to show the benefits, and academic impact of activating the *tojisha*’s standpoint or including *tojisha*’s standpoints allows for sharing experiences and burdens of being othered, identifying with those people who share them, as well as creating solidarity for improving their situation. I then discuss feminist standpoint theory and phenomenology to methodologically theorize dialogue between the multiple positions made evident in *tojisha-kenkyu*. The word “stronger” indicates a queer methodological approach using an interdisciplinary combination of feminist standpoint theory, *tojisha-kenkyu*, and phenomenology, adding theoretical emphasis to the shifts in power from multiple positions.



### 3.1.2 *Tojisha-kenkyu* for locating and explaining situated experience

There is a usage of *tojisha-kenkyu* in Japanese academia as a meta-methodology that calls for marginalized *tojisha* to research their own socially vulnerable groups to engage with activism. By knowing their needs and how these are related to their specific situations because they themselves experience it, marginalized people should be the ones to demand self-definition, self-validation, and self-determination (Ueno & Nakanishi, 2003). Chizuko Ueno and Shoji Nakanishi exemplify a discriminated class of *tojisha*, asserting, “we know our situation better, so we should decide” and ultimately should be the ones to research it through a needs-based-model. The usage from Bethel House in the introduction of this thesis relates to affected parties not necessarily comprehending their own experiences as demonstrated by Koji Ishihara, Shinichiro Kumagaya, and Mukaiyachi in a way that “we don’t know, so let’s find out together.” However, both of these starting points lead toward the same goal of empowerment and the demand for self-definition and cultivation of situated knowledge based on subjective experience rather than being defined or othered by existing knowledge from specialist researchers who have not experienced the phenomena. This thesis uses both the latter and former usages of *tojisha-kenkyu* as a method, philosophical methodology, and epistemology. The latter starting point concerns a method for understanding situated experience *collectively* and dealing with issues the queer migrant *tojisha* do not entirely know how to express and perhaps blame themselves rather than the “issue” itself. And the former is oriented toward changing policy through a *collective* struggle by asking questions directly from the queer migrant *tojisha*, who “know” their experience rather than the dominating groups who “do not know.” Becoming conscious of how structural forces affect and marginalize people allows descriptions of lived experience that give an epistemic insight into how power relations attempt to form, for example, queer migrant experience and reinterpret social realities and knowledge production from their positioning.

An affirmative example of the above can be seen in the field of gay studies in Japan, pioneered by Kazuya Kawaguchi and Takashi Kazama. In the preface of *Gay Studies* (1997) with Keith Vincent, they note:

We define gay studies as being formed from within the struggle in a society that discriminates against homosexuality. A discipline that is carried by the gay *tojisha*, who thinks about themselves, [...] to fight against homophobia by analyzing social consciousness and the social structure. (Vincent et al., 1997: 2, trans. by Hughes)

The discrimination referred to here is derived from their personal, situated experience. In a court case related to the discrimination against homosexuals who were prohibited from using a municipal hostel facility in Tokyo, known as the *Fuchu* Youth Hostel Incident, there was a need for new research on social experience related to “homosexuality” that was not rooted in homosexuality’s pathologization in fields such as psychology to recognize diverse realities of homosexual lived experience. By writing about themselves in their research and thus “coming out,” Kawaguchi and Kazama’s personal investment becomes a valid form of evidence and testimony in service of a broader social issue that destabilized the pathologized homosexual subject. This demonstrates how *tojisha* voices can ask the epistemological question of who can be a “knower” (Haraway, 1988). *Tojisha-kenkyu*, therefore, can provide positive resources for affirming queer migrant identities and communities in which we can identify invisible experiences of marginalization that are made visible through proliferation.

It is also important to note that *tojisha-kenkyu* is not simply a way to demonstrate identity politics, but it also highlights the tension between experience and the aforementioned ontological positions. Kaoru Aoyama has connected this concept to her research on sex work, a marginalized subject area. Focusing on participatory action research, an approach urging collaborative and reflexive participation in research from participants and researchers, she demonstrates that attempting to equalize participation from both the “researcher” and the “researched” results in being marginalized in academia. Double marginalization itself is an optimistic perspective. However, it is in the researcher’s power to shake the structure of research in academia. So *tojisha* participatory action research could be a gateway to start deconstructing and rethinking research systems and practices (Aoyama, 2020). By using this *tojisha-kenkyu* model in this thesis, I become a facilitator for the *tojisha* toward their demarginalization in society and shifting mainstream academia’s objective and subjective knowledge production. In other words, *tojisha-kenkyu* also helps to question the naturalization of social norms and the institutionalization of knowledge processes.

From these examples, we can see the benefits and academic impact of how being the *tojisha* or including *tojisha* allows for sharing experiences and burdens of being othered, identifying with those who share them, and creating solidarity for improving the situation of queer migrants. By recognizing ourselves as the *tojisha* in research and its tensions, we are forced to confront ourselves in a web of power dynamics. In this thesis, the starting point of *tojisha-kenkyu* in the introduction of this thesis was a way to situate and explain the standpoint, which made my bias apparent (Inahara, 2018) from the shifts between standpoints of white/male/researcher and queer/foreign. By shifting between these, not only can I amplify empowerment through a raised consciousness that shifts attention to issues from that of excluded or marginalized perspectives of queer people to create new forms of knowledge, but

we may also urge the majority in dominant positions to rethink the origin and implications of hegemonic, for example, white or androcentric, perspectives.

Feminist theory has argued for the inclusion of excluded perspectives in research. To provide a theoretical underpinning for *tojisha-kenkyu*, I will demonstrate how feminist theory has allowed women, whose socially and historically placed discourse has been marginalized, to use such placing as a way for questioning hegemonic androcentric knowledge production.

### **3.1.3 Feminism, standpoint theory and intersectionality**

Feminism has built on existing literature by rethinking sexist and androcentric worldviews to center the perspectives of marginalized women. Accordingly, feminist researchers have been critical about the practices and exploitations in the power relations of research that highlight the domination of the majority, men, and exclusions of the minority, women. As a result, feminists call for reconfiguring research systems and practices designed by a worldview that has excluded them by asking epistemological questions of how it is that we have come to have knowledge of the world (Collins 1986; Haraway 1988; Harding 2015; Ahmed 2017). Black feminism has shown how black women have been excluded from research or exploited as resources (Collins, 1986). In turn, black feminists have attempted to deconstruct the power dynamics of research by fortifying themselves as knowledge producers, which could prove highly useful for queer migration research. As Sara Ahmed notes, with feminist theory, we can “redescribe the world we are in. We begin to identify how what happens to me, happens to others” (Ahmed, 2017: 27). This section builds on how feminist researchers have made it possible to produce knowledge with “a description of how it feels not to be at home in the world, or a description of the world from the point of view of not being at home in it” (Ahmed, 2017: 13). Beginning with feminist standpoint theory, I will demonstrate how “othered” perspectives enable us to understand meaning-making paradigms which attempt to form our experience and impose dominated worldviews onto researching those experiences.

Feminist standpoint theory argues for starting research from a standpoint outside of objective hegemonic frameworks, namely from the subjective perspective of a marginalized person. It increases the “strong objectivity,” or the undoing of hitherto “value-free data” from a “place of nowhere” by confronting objectivity with situated experience (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015). Feminist phenomenology has also examined how gendered difference impacts our “lived experience” and how we see the world (Inahara et al., 2020). In its “traditional” definition, phenomenology is concerned with perception, the relation between human existence and meaning, and the world and its structures (Salamon, 2018). Namely, how the world is delivered to us through our perception of what appears

in our proximity, which thus becomes implicit knowledge. Minae Inahara (2018) notes that feminist standpoint theory is a phenomenological method. It focuses on perspectives and how the world appears to a certain perspectives' body (Inahara, 2018), which will be discussed further in the following section. "Stronger" standpoint theory builds on these by not only including the subjectivity of the researcher as empirical evidence in the analysis particularly related to their engaged and accountable positionality as part of a marginalized group, but also urges researchers to destabilize their "powered" positions accrued around their bodies.

Patricia Hill Collins (1986) demonstrated that the outsider status as a black woman in sociology could generate a distinctive standpoint. Adapting Georg Simmel's (1921) concept of the "stranger," Collins defines the status of being the "outsider within" as "marginality." This marginality comes with 1) differentiated objectivity due to proximity with the majority, which is based on a lack of concern for minorities, 2) an advantage of the majority finding a sense of trust in strangers because of their lack of importance in society, and 3) an ability to see patterns in culture that those who are immersed in it cannot (Collins, 1986: 15). By bringing this marginality to the forefront, researchers may access new perspectives and reveal fundamental complexities in knowledge production. Implementing this in "stronger" standpoint theory, I argue throughout this thesis that as marginality as a queer/foreigner reveals complexities in research and knowledge production, these are then made visible to the majority within the same researcher as a white/male/researcher enabling a dialogue between the two.

Collins' argument on how stereotypes of black women are designed to control the performativity of black women demonstrates the power of the majority in defining others, thus highlighting exactly why we also need to take accountability for such implications in our research: "the insistence on Black female self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one of determining the technical accuracy of an image, to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself" (Collins, 1986: 18). Here, Collins amplifies her concern for the credibility and intentions of those in power to define and control dominated or oppressed groups. For queer migration research, it is essential to be critical of the dominant culture that has the power to exclude queer migrants from defining themselves. "Stronger" standpoint theory is helpful for queer migration research because it questions the construction of norms that invalidate queer experiences through highlighting power relations within the same researcher in which some of their experiences are deemed valid by the dominant culture.

Rather than "talk about people as if they are not in the room," Collins calls for developing new theoretical interpretations of the interaction between researcher and subject precisely because academic disciplines and their world views perpetuate structures of power. While acknowledging that observations in research become meaningful in the context of a theory, the problem is that some of the theories themselves run the risk of objectifying from a

place of nowhere. It raises the never-ending question of whether it is possible to be objective about subjectivity. Without fully understanding the complexity of standpoints, bodies, affect, and representations of individuals (such as through *tojisha-kenkyu*), objectifying queer migrants may perpetuate or reinforce controlling images of foreign nationals. In this way, objectivity could constrain queer migrant experience rather than emancipate it.

Black feminists have argued that intersectionality can help us navigate multiple discriminations and their position of power (Crenshaw, 1989). In her later work, Collins defines intersectionality as “the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015: 2). By employing intersectionality, she demonstrates how it can be used to analyze socially interconnected entities that are made visible through subjectivity and often excluded through objectivity. We are urged to confront identity transformations at intersections as subjectivity which could determine new situated knowledge and rethink research practices. I would go further to say that rather than using intersectionality as a methodological tool, a multi-layered positional perspective from shifting standpoints allows the researcher to become a subject in their own right in multiple positions and confront their biases in their “powered” positions. When the shifting standpoints engage, queer migrants can negotiate and contest privilege and subordination attached to certain positions.

In Japanese feminism, Chizuko Ueno has suggested that discrimination is interconnected. Ueno’s theory on *fukugo-sabetsu*, or complex discrimination—which could be referred to as a non-anglophonic form of intersectionality—is about “complex relationships in which multiple discriminations are twisted or conflicted in the multiple contexts that make them possible, and one discrimination intensifies or compensates for another” (Ueno, 1996: 204, trans. by Hughes). For Ueno, a single theory that focuses on one discrimination aiming to solve all discrimination is insufficient as this runs the risk of concealing the other forms of possible discrimination. This is an example of how discriminated people have created a structure of “conflict.” Ueno notes in an example of women with disabilities that the “liberation as a person with a disability” hinders the “liberation as a woman” because of the conflict in power relations of each social category (Ueno, 1996: 209-212, trans. by Hughes). Therefore, one “emancipated” discrimination does not automatically lead to the emancipation of another discrimination; it is far more complex and in continuous negotiation. Taking another example of women and ethnic minorities, Ueno states that the double minus in discrimination could turn into a plus. Complex discrimination involves multiple relationships that strengthen certain discriminations and subsequently turn them positive. This can be seen in the example of myself in the Japanese context having the ease of coming out and lack of expectation to integrate into norms of familial nation-state building from the discriminations of being a foreigner and queer. Within this,

advantages and disadvantages are created because of multiple reciprocations. The combination and effect of these “twists” and the complex power relations involved are far more convoluted than crisscrossing entities like that in the concept of intersectionality. Complex discrimination is “a power game in which *superiority and inferiority through self-evaluation compete and reverse each other*” (Ueno, 1996: 220, trans. by Hughes, emphasis added). For example, common strategies in these twists and complexities become apparent when a minority carries out a “semi-discrimination movement” in a game of “catching up” (Ueno, 1996: 228, trans. by Hughes). Through an evaluation of superiority and inferiority, the minority’s attempt to catch up with the majority without bad intentions results in ostracization. Ueno suggests three ideas for overcoming discrimination. First, refrain from retaliation against the dominant or controlling group. Second, catching up strategies, such as insisting women are just as discriminatory as men, are futile for dismantling the structural mechanisms of discrimination. Third, rather than condemn differences, it would be more advantageous to validate them.

Although intersectionality is a valuable concept for research, I would argue that Ueno’s theory is better suited to elucidate how power structures (and attempts to structure) social environments and research outcomes. Ueno’s idea indicates that minorities do not suffer from a single instance of discrimination or disadvantage. Instead, they experience difficulties in multiple forms. At the same time, if we expand Ueno’s theory into “stronger” standpoint theory, it allows us to engage with and be accountable for the position of being a majority/minority in which certain strata enjoy advantages and privileges as well as how these compete, twist, and interconnect with other majority/minority status’ within the same individual. Rather than piling up a list of minoritized identities that signify a pre-determined experience of discrimination for queer migrants in Japan, it would be more productive to engage and be accountable for socially assigned meaning-making paradigms—that may bestow privileges upon an individual—in a multi-layered shifting dialogue between social positions.

To conclude this section, I will summarize the relevance of feminist theory to this research. Feminist theory makes us rethink taken-for-granted experiences and encounters necessary for queer migration research. As previously demonstrated, it allows us to identify our position in the center or the social majority of being the “main culture,” and simultaneously have a specialized view at the margin with an “outsider within” perspective. Adopting this, “stronger” standpoint theory utilizes the marginal experiences foregrounded by feminist theory making us want to call for change in the dominating center or majority. Being already part of the center means we can easily criticize it. As an “outsider within” in queer/migrant communities, our marginality gives us the advantage of differentiated objectivity, advantages from temporality, and the ability to see differently from excluded positions. Applying these shifting standpoints into this research could be a pragmatic option towards change in future research and allow

myself and others to challenge its implications. To support this, phenomenology could help understand how *tojisha* see the world from their bodies and affirm it from such complex shifting positioning.

### 3.1.4 Critical phenomenological inquiry

Phenomenology is interested in the meaning of interactions. The body is often the ground that creates an understanding of interactions through access or exclusion, based on criteria of sex, gender, race, and class. For example, borrowing from Sara Ahmed, “phenomenology helps us to show how race is an effect of racialization and to investigate how the inventions of race, as if it were ‘in’ bodies, shapes what bodies ‘can do’” (Ahmed, 2006: 112). Therefore, the body is essential here because otherness and whiteness, for example, are intrinsically connected to my body and its interactions in Japanese society, which are not simple reorientations of subject and object positions.

Phenomenological studies in sex and gender have expounded upon how the female body is indoctrinated to behave differently throughout the life course (de Beauvoir, 1949). As a result, women’s bodily habits in patriarchal structures determine how they interact with the world, particularly in relation to male bodies. Race demonstrates how blackness is defined in a white world (Fanon, 1952). Franz Fanon was confronted with his race as a black man in France when he stepped into the elite white world in which certain objects become unreachable due to race. Bodies categorized with disabilities exist in a world for the able-bodied (McRuer, 2006; Inahara, 2020). Inahara confirms her realization of “becoming a disabled person” through her experience at elementary school in Japanese language class. With dysarthria, she could not read aloud in class like the other “linguistically normal” students (Inahara, 2020: 159).

These phenomenological examples of *tojisha* experience demonstrate how the process of internalizing otherness, or the perspective of the dominant, presents bodies as objects for the dominant. Phenomenology is useful for understanding how bodies live within limits of certain structures and contradictions. It is concerned with perception, the relation between human existence and meaning, and the world and its structures (Salamon, 2018). For example, as Simone de Beauvoir, Fanon, and Inahara demonstrate, habit and familiarity shape our understanding, bodies, and worlds. Using phenomenological inquiry for queer migration research, we can attempt to shed habit and familiarity to reveal diverse social relations and lived experience which Eithne Luibhéid argued is necessary for queer migration research.

In recent critical phenomenology, there has been a focus on “restructuring the world” in order to generate new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence” (Guenther in Weiss et al., 2020: 15). Lisa

Guenther breaks critical phenomenology down into a “philosophical and political practice.” The former derives from the traditional phenomenological sense in that it suspends existing understanding of realities to locate the structures that attempt to form experience. As a result, we can illustrate new variations of history that may have been erased or made invisible. As the latter:

critical phenomenology is a struggle for liberation from the structures that privilege, naturalize, and normalize certain experiences of the world while marginalizing, pathologizing, and discrediting others. These structures exist on many levels: social, political, economic, psychological, epistemological, and even ontological. They are both “out there” in the world, in the documented patterns and examples of hetero-patriarchal racist domination, and they are also intrinsic to subjectivity and intersubjectivity, shaping the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world. (Guenther in Weiss et al., 2020: 15-16)

Reconditioning our thinking in a way to consider redescribing what we see around us and the interactions we have using critical phenomenology would be valuable for queer migration research for several reasons. First, let’s take the central focus of phenomenology regarding “how things appear in the world” in an ontological sense. We can proceed by attending to perception from the place of our body (Salamon, 2018). By reaffirming subjectivity in the phenomenological inquiry, then “we expose the dualisms of self and other, of subject and object, to the light of experience” and so “the separation between them begins to dissolve” (Salamon, 2018: 17). With this, the combination of *tojisha-kenkyu* and standpoint theory allows us to ask the epistemological questions of how we come to know the meaning-making paradigms that accumulate over time and make provisions for certain bodies and attempt to define our ontological positions. In a sense, critical phenomenology is about targeting those paradigms which attempt to form our experience. *Tojisha-kenkyu* also has value in phenomenological inquiry because we can add the element of sharing the burdens as the starting point. As mentioned before, according to Inahara (2018), feminist standpoint theory is a phenomenological method. That is because it confronts the social location of objectivity with subjectivity to expose what is legitimized as knowledge or “truth” from hegemonic places of power that attempt to form experience. Therefore, I would argue rather than finding out “the truth” or “their truth” or “my truth” based on determined social location, we may triangulate all three “truthfulnesses” into an understanding of how the construction of “meaningfulness” appears to a group of bodies which are prevented from constructing “truth.”



Critical phenomenology is useful for demonstrating how the “meaningfulness” of race, gender and sexuality is constructed to appear for certain bodies. According to Gayle Salamon, “recent phenomenology has focused on the intersubjective nature of the world and the relations of power through which that intersubjectivity forms, and much of this work has engaged issues of social justice, of racial inequality, of gender and sexuality, [and] of incarnation” (Salamon, 2018: 17). An exemplification of this can be found in Ahmed’s (2006) *Queer Phenomenology*, which I will explain in detail subsequently. She argues that objects become “reachable within the bodily horizon of the social” (Ahmed, 2006: 103) based on, for instance, being “neutrally” male, heterosexual and white. The location of “neutrality” does not require interrogation into its own “meaningfulness.” The meaningfulness of certain bodies are conditioned to be visible or invisible.

Similarly, the same can be said for researchers. Namely, the “traditional” researcher, who is “neutral” with a “view from nowhere” and using “value-free data” (Harding, 2015), forgets to consider what exists “behind” the objects of study. Perhaps ethnography or anthropology gives cultural descriptions or attempts to “write culture” (Clifford, 1986); however, do they really delve into what objects mean to the people who actually go behind making those things possible as well as to the researcher themselves? By “go behind,” I mean making sure everything in the background “has been prepared” for those in the foreground to use as “ready-to-hand” objects. Do such researchers explore how the culture or world they are describing is constructed in a way for their objects to be easily or readily used? Hence, the expectation of ready-to-hand researchable objects and research methods requires interrogation. When you extend into a space where there are no ready-to-hand objects, Ahmed calls these moments “disorientations” (Ahmed, 2005). When the body is disorientated, it turns in a different direction. Here, we find a new perspective. As researchers, we are discouraged from being disoriented with our methods and methodologies because it can lead to “messy” research lacking “rigor” from the comfort we find in academic disciplines. However, we can then use disorientations, as Collins did with marginality, as a new perspective at the forefront of our analysis. Ahmed’s phenomenology works to examine differentiated bodies with differentiated effects and power/non-power within the structure necessitating them. Adopting this, “stronger” standpoint theory urges researchers to acknowledge those assumed “neutral” moments and shift between those disoriented or oriented moments.

Doing phenomenology proves that gender, race, sexuality cannot be separated from experience and perception. They are embedded in our social environments, resulting in layers of meaning-making categories that are imposed, often with comfort and discomfort, onto our bodies. It allows us to see the boundaries of the *tojisha* through a multi-layered lens which makes apparent identities and differences. We can say that there is no “neutral” gaze when demonstrating the multi-layers of positionality by affirming complexities. Through the “neutral” gaze,

situated experience is made invisible. Making race invisible, which has happened when research is done in or about Japan by white scholars, becomes a racial act in itself (Hughes, 2022). Its absence creates anxiety which perpetuates the alienation of certain populations. In opposition of this absence, by using “stronger” standpoint theory to make those absences visible and enabling us to focus on “race” as if embedded “in bodies,” aspects of phenomenology make researchers question their orientations towards different objects and debunk any potential of their majority status benefiting from a “non-position.” If my body as a white researcher in Japan is silent by erasing a dimension of myself that has an implication of power, then it becomes complicit in racist and colonial practices. I argue methodologically we should question what we see and do not take it for granted as simply ready-to-hand or as givens, and we look at the meaningfulness behind appearances. This is especially necessary for those positions, subject areas, and methods often marginalized in academia. In the following section, I demonstrate a detailed exemplification of critical phenomenology, queer phenomenology.

### **3.1.5 Queer phenomenology**

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ahmed brings together queer theory and phenomenology. Her theoretical outlining comes from “feminist, queer, and critical race and whiteness,” which can show us “how social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others” (Ahmed, 2006: 5). Citing feminist theorists such as Audre Lorde (1984), Donna Haraway (1988), and Collins (1998), Ahmed’s phenomenology is about embodiment and orientations. By considering embodiment and orientations, certain bodies are oriented toward certain objects depending on how the body can occupy certain spaces. Ahmed is interested in the representation of something in a tangible form, an understanding that our bodies exist in a world with a particular structural conditioning that allows bodies to not only take up space but what they are allowed to do. Ahmed examines “how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and racialized by how they extend into space” (Ahmed, 2006: 5). Accordingly, our bodies are sites of affect, which are made different by the conditioning of the world they are in. Bodies are sites of sensory perception where humans have certain apparatus to understand and maneuver in the world that affects them. There is a divide between humans who perceive and the world as it is constructed; the world is only open to humans through their perceiving it. Therefore, the world is made up of appearances in which our bodies can see and be seen. That world is not an objective reality which is precisely why Ahmed can deposit the notion of queer phenomenology. If the world was in fact objective, then we would all have those objective answers to all the problems in the world. Still, we need to understand subjective reality to rationalize such problems before taking an objective stance to answer them.

Ahmed wants to consider the extent to which our perception of the world, or our being embodied, has been influenced to some extent by forces of authority through racism, sexism, patriarchal configurations, and capitalism. These all contribute to altering how embodiment occurs. Ahmed imagines the process of humans undoing that process, in other words, applying the lens of queer theory, by posing the question of developing a phenomenological situation in which people are not as conditioned by those forces or at the very least made aware of them.

Ahmed does the above by looking at the phenomenological question of the “orientation” of “sexual orientation” (Ahmed, 2006: 1). Ahmed examines Edmund Husserl’s metaphor of the table and his orientation towards it. Ahmed critiques Husserl in that he forgets to consider what exists behind those objects on the writing-table. Ahmed asks who makes the table clean so Husserl can do his writing without worrying about domestic labor. Within Husserl’s presumptions, here lies a claim to neutrality. Certain things, despite the claim to neutrality, are forgotten. Ahmed asks what the table would mean to the people who go behind making those things possible in terms of domesticity. Is the world constructed so Husserl can easily use the writing table? Or will all the responsibilities of domesticity come to the forefront? And would it, therefore, be discredited by the white male philosopher precisely because that is not part of the presence demanded in his phenomenological moment?

Adopting Ahmed then, if queer migrants enter this phenomenological space of, for example, the table, they do not have the privilege of just forgetting about all those other things necessary for it to be “clean.” They must worry about visas, financial issues, bureaucratic and language barriers, outing, ostracization, ridicule, discrimination, and inequalities based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and race. I argue that those worries become part of the phenomenological moment for my participants and are very present in their lived experiences in Japan. These worries might not have a physical tangibility in the same way that objects on the table would for Husserl, but they do come to the forefront for queer migrants. Queer phenomenology allows me to argue that worries of queer migrants—being objects of contemplation without subscribing to certain hegemonic criteria or certain easily digestible systems in the world— are often not given the same warrant or credit as being a valid worry. Queer migrants’ struggles with identifications also fall into this category as illegitimate worries. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, the worries experienced by queer migrants may be subjective but there is also an element to the construction of these worries that is because of the structures in Japanese society that attempt to form their experience.

Ahmed uses Martin Heidegger’s hammer analogy to demonstrate how a particular function determines an object. When the function has been fulfilled, the object disappears because it performs what it was meant to perform. However, this function can be unnoticeable unless the object itself breaks. For example, when the hammer breaks,

you are suddenly made aware of its function and the necessity for it to be fixed so its function can keep occurring. Ahmed counters this by giving the example of a hammer being too heavy for certain individuals. Then asks how it is possible to move beyond the convention of the functionality of the hammer regarding it as a neutral object. It becomes clear then that Heidegger also forgets how it is an object designed and intended for some bodies instead of others. Therefore, raising the question of who this object is for. Ahmed asks whether it is simply a neutral object bestowed with functionality or is highly embodied within a particular ideological framework that requires evaluation. In other words, “objects as well as spaces are made for some kinds of bodies more than others” (Ahmed, 2006: 51) in that they are made to adapt to a specific neutrality of the body. I argue that objects available to queer migrants are not designed for certain kinds of bodies. However, queer migrants with white bodies, a site of “neutrality,” expect objects in Japanese society to be designed for their bodies. Therefore, it has an effect on these bodies in certain ways. Queer migrants perceive those objects promise them to go certain places or do certain things, but they are confronted with the claim that certain objects are “neutral.” These objects are a product of a particular system that precludes or allows certain bodies from entering that domain.

Phenomenology helps analyze the relationship between objects and the queer migrant because it “can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (Ahmed, 2006: 2). Queer, in the simplest definition, means an oddity or something strange that does not conform to established ideas of normality. In the phenomenological process in this research, not only is the queer migrant altered through affect by the world, but the world around them is also altered. Throughout this thesis, I use expressions such as: making the space fit or reshape to fit their bodies. A process that could be argued is already queer in itself. Tied to this process of becoming and embedded in the phenomenological approach that Ahmed is taking is the possibility of bodies “finding a home” in the world around them under regimes of capitalism and heteronormativity in structures of racism. I argue that such regimes hinder their attempts to assimilate in Chapter Five. Specifically, phenomenology demonstrates the possibility for queer migrant bodies to grasp the world around them and then, in turn, have the world bend or reshape towards them, extending into a space I call “beyond assimilation.”

Developing the idea of bodies in space, Ahmed turns to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. His phenomenology explores the possibility of particular kinds of bodies having a dialogue with particular types of objects. Expectedly, it is not the case that there is a universal human apparatus for perceiving neutral objects which exist in the world. There are particular boxes with particular methods of seeing particular apparatuses of

understanding or perceiving the world with particular objects—which are constructed in various ideological, cultural, social, economic, and political ways—altering their meaning and opening all of these up for negotiation. This possibility leads to how particular kinds of bodies come to exist as they are. Different bodies have different histories and different understandings of the world. The same can be applied to objects in the world. How do bodies being perceived, and objects being perceived become what they are? Turning to Butler, Ahmed says that what bodies tend to do is an apex of history; histories of something rather than being original are then repeated. It is not the case that people just fall from the sky and are equipped with a set of beliefs. These are entangled in histories ascribed to a certain group of people which extends much deeper. This is where factors such as gender, race, sexuality are given the intersectional approach, but as I mentioned before, intersectionality often fixes experiences at particular intersections, which runs the risk of oversimplifying experience. I argue that queer migrants are often split into multiple smaller groups, and certain groups of identification become the participants “defining factor” affecting their participation and sense of belonging in Japanese society in Chapter Five and Six. However, many other dimensions of queer migrants influence and guide how their bodies are going to act, maneuver or be in the world.

Ahmed wants us to consider that if we exist in a world where space is mapped in accordance with ideological frameworks, then it is much more difficult for bodies that do not prescribe to those frameworks, or in Ahmed’s words, to feel at home in that world. What happens when queer migrant bodies do not prescribe to those frameworks? In terms of their everyday lives, queer migrants come under a regime of heteronormativity. The orientation of heterosexuality depends on its repetition in the system of compulsory heterosexuality. Yet, queer migrants demonstrate other possibilities even if it is not recognized in accordance with the ideological framework of, for example, the nation-state. This is where different orientations occur in which queer migrants can encounter new objects. In other words, the lines of orientation are disoriented, which “involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. At this moment of failure, such objects ‘point’ somewhere else or they make what is ‘here’ become strange” (Ahmed, 2006: 160).

As I have shown in the introduction of this thesis, it was when I experienced disorientation in doing research that I noticed the orientation of research itself. I argue the disorientation of queer migrants as becoming *gaijin* (the foreigner) in Chapter Four. My participants noticed the same feeling of disorientation when they described their experiences particularly around the idea of foreignness. They noticed something they no longer have as a queer migrant in Japan through the phenomenological interview. In these cases, the space becomes disoriented rather than extended to occupy them. In the case of the queer migrant, their bodies might foreclose their ability of what they “can” do, resulting in an alternation of what is “here.” Disorientation occurs when the queer migrant body is

unsuccessful in extending into the space because the space is unfamiliar due to multiple factors. For example, in the countries of origin, they were accustomed to occupying space in a certain way. However, in Japan, the country of settlement, they are required to occupy it differently. As Ahmed notes, “we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home” (Ahmed, 2006: 9). In this thesis, I argue that drag is a way of helping them occupy space and make sense of their disorientations. I demonstrate that the queer migrants’ “stronger” standpoint allows them to be in a familiar and unfamiliar room simultaneously and negotiate disorientation through drag. The layers of multiple discrimination enable them to partially recognize their surroundings and grasp power in some way to amplify their voice. At the same time, they are disorientated by unfamiliarity and lose power in some way that silences their voice. As I will show in Chapter Five, living a queer life in an otherwise primarily heteronormative Japan, their attempts to participate is among the many ways queer migrant bodies are brought out of line.

### **3.1.6 Queer migrant’s “stronger” standpoint and the implications of whiteness**

To summarize up until now, “stronger” standpoint theory requires 1) an understanding of the position of the researcher, 2) a consideration of ways to prevent perpetuating hegemonic discourses, 3) an understanding and contestation of “othering” in a multi-layered fashion by 4) taking into account situated experience in existing social environments.

Based on this, the queer migrants’ stronger standpoints are developed in the following way: as I locate and explain standpoints of situated experience of different performers, the historical, social, and cultural contexts of their standpoint allow us to identify the multiple discriminations. By understanding the meaning-making paradigms which connect to subordination and privilege accrued around their bodies, we can then highlight and describe the power relations. For myself in particular, I can destabilize dominant positions as a white/male/researcher to rethink social realities and recognize diverse differential needs and positions of the queer/foreigner at the margin by shifting between standpoints.

To demonstrate how I can do this in Japan as a white researcher, I borrow from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who argues that we also need to reconsider the institution itself. She calls this “decolonizing methodologies,” which is “concerned with the institution of research, its claims, its values and practices, and its relationship to power” (Smith, 2012: ix). Smith’s focus lies in how research has historically attempted to legitimize negative and stereotyped views about indigenous people, which depend heavily on the notion of the Other.

Borrowing from Edward Said's concept of "orientalism," Smith notes "scholarly construction" is authorized to talk about the orient, teach about it, generate views about it, and rule it (Smith, 2012: 2). This would suggest that representations of Japan had already been encoded for me before arriving here and therefore framing my attitudes towards Japanese culture and people. This concept implies that I already see Japan as the Other or the orient, making it easy to "objectify"—it is historically part of the occident's culture to do so. Phenomenologically speaking, power relations embedded in colonialism and racism have already attempted to form my experience. Yet part of me wanted to resist this idea because I was, borrowing Smith's words, *educated into* research at a Japanese institution. However, it may also show the power of being *born into* whiteness. There is a colonial history of an unearned position of "looking from the other side"; this status is awarded the privilege of neutrality and continues to form my experience. Although I do not have to identify with or ontologize this status to be heard, it is assigned to my body. Without critically scrutinizing neutrality's privileged position, I would be complicit in othering the Orient and so "unintentionally" perpetuating whiteness. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, it is because of whiteness that I problematized being gay from the point of view of Japanese gay men. Therefore, it becomes clear that *my* pursuit of academia was, albeit "unintentionally," deeply embedded in imperial and colonial practices.

The concept of "whiteness" is often constructed, through colonialism, as a non-position similar to the construction of heterosexuality through patriarchal configurations (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed argues, "colonialism makes the world 'white,' which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach" (Ahmed, 2006: 111). Borrowing from Smith, we could say that research itself perpetuates whiteness:

Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarship disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). (Smith, 2012: 8)

This demonstrates a responsibility to highlight the need for researchers to critique their own perspective within the institution. By taking responsibility for such taken-for-granted aspects, such as non-positions, objectivity, and apparent worldview of academic disciplines as a majority, researchers can reflect on how their academic work

contributes to representations of communities, particularly marginalized and oppressed ones, without letting their positionality fall between the cracks in the silence of complicity in perpetuating colonialist practices.

Therefore, “[Decolonization] is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith, 2012: 41). “Stronger” standpoint theory could help include white researchers with decolonizing methodologies theoretically and pragmatically. It allows us to connect the simplifications of minorities and “othered” perspectives into the shifting standpoint from the center to the margin of the *tojisha*, a form of multiplicity.

### **3.2 Methods for collecting and analyzing data**

The methods for data collection in this thesis include phenomenological interviews with queer migrants who perform drag, and ethnography at a drag event run by queer migrants called Beauty Blenda in Tokyo and Osaka.

#### **3.2.1 The phenomenological interview**

This research uses phenomenological interviews to collect data on *tojisha* experience of queer migrants who perform drag. According to Clark Moustakas, the phenomenological involves:

an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person’s experience of the phenomenon, these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question. (Moustakas, 1994: 94)

Although Moustakas uses the word co-researchers, I use the words participants because his wording would suggest that myself as a researcher and the other people involved in this study are on equal layers of power, which unfortunately is not the case and would go against my methodological underpinning. This is precisely why I argue for “stronger” standpoints, to demonstrate such imbalances in power between “the researcher and the researched.” I detail the information of participants in the following section. The phenomenological interview in this thesis aims to determine what an experience means for queer migrant drag performers who have had a similar experience to myself and can provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, the essences or



structures of the experience are derived. In Amedeo Giorgi's terms, adopting a descriptive approach lets the phenomena speak for itself. Even within the participant's descriptions of their experiences, they appear, and objects appear. When something appears, it is suggested that there could be something more that does not appear in its very appearance. The appearance of phenomena is "directionality"; a direction is offered or a significance is held out by the appearance we pick up, follow, or turn away from (Giorgi, 1979, cited in Moustakas, 1994: 151). Ahmed argues that, especially if these appearances are "unsuccessful," these moments are the ones we need to analyze. The phenomenological interview used in this study follows this logic of appearances.

Queer migration is prominent in my life in which there have been several meaningful appearances of phenomena which I have "picked up," "followed" or "turned away from". I was drawn to this study as I have been provided with advantages and disadvantages living in Japan from such appearances. I came to Japan when I was twenty-two years old, so I have spent most of my "adult life" here. Although some have been the best moments of my life, the appearances that stick out are the ones that have resulted in myself being ostracized by a subjection of mono-culturalism based on "sameness" and "difference." For example, I am constantly asked to define who I am, explain why I am here which acts as a reminder that I do not "belong" here. Yet, I am searching for a home in Japan. Drag has given me some "directioning" to find a home through the performance of multiple identities which have brought about something transformative in my everyday life. I am always in conflict with this idea of finding a home. It is these conflicts and challenges that make me want to study it. By reading about it, listening to others talk about their experiences of it, hopefully, eventually I can come to a place of understanding the phenomena of being a queer migrant in Japan.

I based my questions for the phenomenological interviews on the above and considered an element of a broader social meaning and personal significance. The following general questions were prepared for the interview:

- What experience stands out for you about being queer/living in Japan as a migrant?
- What dimensions, incidents and people are intimately connected with the experience?
- How did the experience affect you?
- What changes do you associate with the experience?
- How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
- What feelings were generated by the experience?
- What thoughts stood out for you in relation to being queer/living in Japan
- What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

- Have you shared with any of your experiences [or, who have you shared with] all that is significant with reference to the experience?

Integrated into the above questions, the queer migrant's "stronger" standpoints are developed and discussed in the following way: 1) I locate and explain standpoints of situated experience of different performers, 2) the historical, social, and cultural contexts of their standpoint allows us to identify the multiple discriminations, 3) by understanding the meaning-making paradigms which connect to subordination and privilege accrued around their bodies, the participants can then highlight and describe the power relations. Then we discuss 5) destabilizing dominant positions to rethink social realities and recognize diverse differential needs and positions of the queer/foreigner at the margin.

After the interviews, I transcribed the audio. I read through the entire description to get a sense of the "whole picture" of queer migrant experiences. Next, I read the same description more slowly and listened to the audio numerous times. From this procedure, I obtained a series of meaningful experiences. These were clustered into common categories or themes. Themes are constituted by their relationship to each other and the whole sense of this thesis. By synthesizing and integrating the insights achieved, the participants and I were able to:

- 1) Rethink the role of sexuality, gender, and migration in constructing subjectivities (identities, communities, politics, and practices related to drag).
- 2) Discuss how sexuality structures migration processes/experiences and how this relates to drag.
- 3) Deliberate how migration regimes/policies contribute to producing not only those who become variously defined as "normal" and defer away from their queerness.
- 4) Analyze how those who become defined as normative or "normal" within a structure intimately tied to intersectional aspects such as race, gender, class, culture, economic status, and other hierarchies.
- 5) Identify the troupes to marginalize the queer migrant subject, thus the coping mechanisms to deal with this, such as drag performance and the perceptions of these mechanisms.

Our interpretations of being a queer migrant were affected through this process based on dialogue, particularly with Labianna Joroe. Our interview lasted over three hours and thirty-five minutes. When we were talking about "being a man" and how this intersects with sexuality and race from our different perspectives, Labianna's interpretation went from "seeing a man in the mirror," to saying, "maybe it is the structural idea that I

have of what a man looks like” after I asked her how and why she knows that. Then, she questioned whether she has “some prejudice [she has] within [her]self.” She concluded that “if I really think about what a man is, what does it mean to be a man, then, I’m not sure.” Labianna and the rest of my participant’s involvement in this study is detailed in the following section.

### **3.2.2 Locating and selecting the *tojisha***

I conducted the interviews between March 2020 and August 2021 for this study. The interviewed drag performers identify with a broad range of sexual and gender identities. Where it is necessary, this is explicitly stated through the inclusion of their narratives. Their information is detailed in the following table. However, the intersectional detail below is not meant for me as a researcher or readers to fix their experience, it is to demonstrate the diversity of backgrounds in this study’s sample.

Performer	Age	Gender identity	Sexual orientation	Nationality	Racial and ethnic background	Visa status	Occupation	Settlement
Kosmic Sans	37	Male	Gay	French	Laotian	Working	Freelance graphic designer	Tokyo
Le Horla	28	Genderqueer	Bisexual	American	Vietnamese American and Czech American. Adopted by Japanese American parents.	Student	Part-time academic tutor / Student	Tokyo
Labianna Joroe	28	Male	Gay	Brazilian	Japanese Brazilian	Working	Sexual health	Tokyo
Maxim	30	Queer/non-binary	Gay	French	White	Working	Public relations	Tokyo
Belgium Solanas	42	Male	Gay	Australian	White	Working	English teacher	Nagoya
Miku Divine	32	Male	Gay	American	White	Working	English teacher	Nagoya
Niku Manko	35	Male	Gay	British		Working	English teacher	Osaka

The sampling method used to locate and select the participants was through my own personal connections in the queer communities in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. As a performer myself, it was easy to ask queens whom I had performed with or met in the scene or through others. As I am a member of the drag community, it affects the social interaction with the participant. As my relationship with the performers was personal, some asked me not to use their interviews. I also decided not to use one interview due to a conflict in our personal relationship. The former and latter interviews have since been erased and are not mentioned in the table above. I made it clear to the participants that although this project was for my doctoral thesis, I wanted the project to be an exchange of dialogue that could contribute to understanding ourselves more and create a transformative change in the broader social

contexts. I was honest about my position as a researcher and their involvement in the study, which often sparked a conversation about the politics of researching in Japan. All participants agreed to let me use their performer names mainly because they understood my project as placing drag as an embodied form of communication for addressing wider social issues. I made all the arrangements for the interviews directly with the participants through social media. The participants were interviewed in multiple locations. Most of the participants agreed to meet at a local cafe. Since I have a very close relationship with Niku Manko, Maxim and Labianna, they invited me to their homes. Even after the interviews, I continue to regularly contact all the participants through social media because drag has given us a special bond. We discovered things about each other through our conversations that we never had time to talk about when seeing each other at shows or bars. Our relationships mean that my data is biased. It is biased because many of our conversations were full of assumptions of what we knew or had heard about each other. Based on something I already knew about the performer, I was able to ask direct questions, turning the bias into an advantage for research. They were also comfortable challenging me and the questions I asked. Likewise, the performers also mentioned some happenings in the community to stir up a bit of drama for adding a spectacle to their experiences. I would not say that they answered untruthfully, but I will never know this. Critical phenomenology lends to understanding the meaning behind appearances and the structures that attempt to form their experience rather than the truth. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, some performers found it challenging to admit that their whiteness is why they can or cannot do certain things. Still, my sample size for this research is relatively small, mainly due to the limited number of queer migrants who do drag and are willing to participate in this study. However, the rigorous methodological approach validates this sample size.

### **3.2.3 Ethnography of drag events**

As I spent much time with the participants in private, traveled to see their shows, and even performed together, it was essential to include ethnographic techniques for understanding cultural descriptions of the social setting where drag is performed. The ethnography is only discussed in Chapter Six because I use it to help demonstrate the concept of belonging related to how queer migrants create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion around drag events. Ethnography is about a) developing a description of social settings from direct observations of activities of the group being studied, b) communicating and interacting with the people in question, and c) creating opportunities for informal and formal interviews (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Jorgensen, 1989; Lofland, 1971 cited in Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, ethnography is used to add to the descriptive quality of the thesis.

The primary location for my ethnography was at an event called Beauty Blenda. The cultural description of this event gained from this method is based on myself spending long periods in the social setting, using the language spoken in that social setting (both Japanese and English), participating in shows as well as being involved in the planning, organizing and producing of the events. The shows that I made field notes at are listed as follows:

Event Name	Date	Location	Role
Beauty Blender Vol. 1	24th August 2018	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blender Vol. 2	28th September 2018	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blender Vol. 3	26th October 2018	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blender Vol. 4	23rd November 2018	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blender Vol. 5	21st December 2018	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda Vol. 6	26th January 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda Vol. 7	22nd February 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda Vol. 8	23rd March 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda Vol. 9	20th April 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Audience
Beauty Blenda Vol. 10	25th May 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda TOKYO Vol. 1	8th June 2019	My Room Bar Rosso, Shinjuku, Tokyo	Performer
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 11	22nd June 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 12	13th July 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 13	3rd August 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda TOKYO Vol. 3	17th August 2019	My Room Bar Rosso, Shinjuku, Tokyo	Performer
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 14	7th September 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda TOKYO Vol. 5	5th October 2019	My Room Bar Rosso, Shinjuku, Tokyo	Stage hand
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 15	13th October 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 16	2nd November 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer
Beauty Blenda OSAKA Vol. 17	7th December 2019	Bar Theatre LUDO, Osaka	Performer

At each performance, I was descriptive in taking field notes which I organized by date. At each of the shows, I gathered a variety of information from multiple perspectives, such as performers, audience members, the

venue owners, DJs and bar staff. I myself was a performer at most of the shows but I also attended as an audience member and a stagehand to see how my perspective would be altered. I cross-validated and triangulated data by gathering different sources such as observations, interviews, program documentation, recordings, and photographs. As well as the observations above, I carried out interviews with performers of Beauty Blenda. It is important to note that only Niku Manko, Kosmic Sans, Miku Divine and Labianna Joroe participated in Beauty Blenda. The other interview participants had all been to at least one Beauty Blenda show as an audience member. I also gathered a selection of flyers from the events and archived conversations from Facebook and Instagram between performers and venue owners. I was as involved as possible in experiencing the performances as fully as possible while maintaining an analytical perspective grounded in the purpose of the fieldwork.

The show that I did most of my fieldwork at was Beauty Blenda. It is a show set up by myself, and three other performers, one of whom agreed to be an interview participant for this study, Niku Manko. The show ran for thirteen months in Osaka. The show began as a viewing party called Rupa ViewPa for the television show RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR) in February 2018. A viewing party is an event where people gather to come and watch a showing of a particular show or film. During the breaks and after the showing of RPDR, three other performers and I would perform. It was hosted at Bar Theatre LUDO in Shinsaibashi, a professional theatre space. After a suggestion from the venue owner to make the event into more of a "professional" showcase rather than a viewing party, we decided to make the show into a more significant event named Beauty Blenda. We thought that not only would it give us a platform to express our drag performance to a broader audience, but it would also be an excellent opportunity to create a new queer space in Osaka. The new format consisted of three sets of three or four performances with an opening and closing number. All the emceeing was intended to be in both English and Japanese. The show continues to run in Tokyo (at the time of writing, the show was in Shibuya). At the show, we often invited performers from other cities. This also led me to visit their shows, perform and observe other spaces for drag performance.

I performed in sixteen shows of Beauty Blenda Osaka and two shows in Beauty Blenda Tokyo between August 2018 and December 2019. Additional fieldwork was conducted to understand the international and Japanese drag communities. I attended DragMania at Eagle Tokyo and Global Kiss at Explosion Osaka on multiple occasions between 2017-2021. I attended Uneeq at Piccadilly Umeda Osaka in 2019, Tokyo Closet Ball in 2018 and METAMORPHOSE at Oriental Hotel Kobe in 2018. I also informally performed in Kobe multiple times at small international bars between 2018 to 2021. I interacted with audience members, performers, DJs, and the venue owners. Additionally, I spoke with many drag performers working around Ni-chome in informal settings.



### 3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated my queer methodology of this thesis with details of the theoretical applications of methodology, epistemology, and research methods.

First, I explained my methodological philosophy of a critical phenomenological *tojisha-kenkyu* underpinned by feminist standpoint theory based on the author's position in Japanese society. Externalizing the issue of doing better research in Japan using *tojisha-kenkyu* showed that we are not exempt from being a discriminator or being discriminated against as researchers. Feminist theory highlighted that, in a mesh of multi-layered positions, we are all eligible to be accountable for how we proceed in verifying our research. Thus, alleviating the idea that researching certain phenomena can be problematic from one perspective but not another because it is all problematic. Researchers are assumed to be educated into not seeing themselves as the oppressor. Still, as this thesis has shown, that is not necessarily the case in institutionalized academia that has excluded certain perspectives. Critical phenomenology helps theorize how "meaningfulness" appears to the researcher's body and criticize the hegemonic perspectives in the world of research with which it has been constructed. Through these, I gave critical insights into what it means to investigate minorities in Japan from a male/white/western perspective and propose transformations to the male/white/western-centric discursive space of research. This is theorized as "stronger" standpoint theory that places shifting standpoints from meaning-making categorized discriminations into continuous negotiation. Through this, I demonstrated how the methodological thinking in this thesis is a step toward showing researchers how to use their inclusion into academia to weaken systems of oppression in which they have a stake, and their experience is situated.

Second, I outlined the method for collecting and analyzing data which includes the importance of understanding experience through phenomenological interviews, the data of participants and sampling methods, and finally, the details of the ethnography used to complement this thesis.

Now, I can connect the queer understanding of queer migrant experience through the themes of identification, participation, and belonging.

## Chapter 4: Reconfiguring sexual and gendered identifications from the temporality of drag performance into everyday life

This chapter focuses on how the temporality of drag performance presents a possibility to reorganize the norms, ideologies, and expectations of sexuality and gender that reconfigure the identification of queer migrants living in Japan. Identification is essential to understanding everyday life because the “language of both politics and everyday life, to be sure, is rigorously categorical, dividing the population into mutually exclusive ethno-national categories, and making no allowance for mixed or ambiguous forms” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 27). Based on the discussions in Chapter Three, I use the term “meaning-making paradigms” to postulate identification and predicate a gendered, sexual and racial imposition on identities of, for example, the dominant culture. First, I look at queer migrants’ everyday lives to investigate how they become *gaijin* (a foreigner) as a result of imposed meaning-making paradigms. By analyzing their daily lives with attention to multiple layers of advantage and disadvantage, I demonstrate the possibilities of queer identities. Then, I demonstrate how the meaning-making paradigms that give those layers meaning are impacted by becoming a drag performer, the drag performance itself, and the commercialization of drag as well as how queer migrants reflexively deploy these layers as reconfigured identities in their everyday lives. To help theorize drag, I use Judith Butler’s framework of performativity to highlight drag’s repetition of gender, Linda Hutcheon’s theory of parody to demonstrate its use of irony and imitation, and Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of temporal drag to delineate its relationship to time and space.

Reiterating the discussion of Martin Manalansan IV from Chapter Two of this thesis, the mundanity of everyday life of queer migrants is shaped by ordinary daily practices which intersect and engage “with the intimate, the private, and the search for home in modern life” (Manalansan IV, 2005: 148). Examining queer migrants’ daily lives elucidates the common concerns and shared experience of being a queer migrant, formed through meaning-making paradigms in multiple layers. Examining their daily lives is a way to deploy and activate the queer migrants’ “stronger” standpoints, as I argued for in Chapter Three, to understand the shift between power in the center, for example as male and white, and at the margin, for example as queer and foreign. These standpoints reveal a distinctive perspective on Japanese society through the different ways that the center and the margin affect each other, such as by creating proximity to the main culture and (not) giving access to certain spaces or objects. From the phenomenological interviews, two main themes emerged related to the conflicts in queer migrants’ everyday lives: foreignness and queerness. Within each of these themes, layers of being foreign and queer cross/transcend/overlap with other layers; this is where I activate “stronger” standpoint theory to demonstrate that

foreignness or queerness cannot be separate from the different layers in which queer migrants' positionality gives them advantages or disadvantages.

I begin with vignettes and excerpts from narratives from queer migrant drag performers to demonstrate the constant negotiation and possibilities of being a migrant, or *gaijin* from the perspective of the main culture in Japan, rearticulating and creating themselves in a space that is synchronously here, there, and somewhere in the middle. This "in-betweenness" is a sort of queer space that is never one thing or another but is repeatedly bent, upheld, or pulled down by meaning-making paradigms. This is reflected in the continuous transformation of queer migrant identification.

#### 4.1 Becoming *gaijin* amidst queer orientations

Labianna Joroe is one of Tokyo's busiest performers and sex education activists and she is, in her own words, the hairiest drag act in Japan. Often sporting large, padded buttocks and exposing her chest hair, Labianna is a true beauty in drag, checking all the boxes of a conventionally pretty and petite feminine physical appearance, down to her perfect makeup—except for the chest hair. Her performances are invigorating with thought-provoking political messages and controversial encompassments of taboos, such as the topics she addresses and the visuals of her performances, based on her own experiences of growing up in Fukui and Nagoya.

Labianna's parents came to Japan as *dekasegi rodosha* (migrant workers who come to Japan as laborers seeking better pay than available in their home countries) in 1994, when she was three years old. Labianna's migration trajectory was shaped by the historical, economic, and political relationship between Japan and Brazil in which *nikkei-jin* (people of Japanese descent) with proof of Japanese blood lineage move to Japan and consider it to be their home. However, even though Labianna has spent most of her life in Japan, the state categorizes those with her *nikkei* status as "non-nationals," thus categorizing her as a foreigner, or *gaijin*. Although access to a diasporic community allowed the migration process to happen more smoothly for Labianna, the children of *dekasegi rodosha* experience different troubles than their parents as she explains in the following:

My mother is half Japanese by blood, [so] it was easier for her and my father to come to Japan as a *dekasegi*. So, they would give the visa easier than a pure...yeah, foreign person. So [*dekasegi*] would come to Japan, live a certain time, earn some money, and

then go back to Brazil or have their lives...not that they want to live a Japanese lifestyle, or they want to stay in Japan for the rest of their lives. It is something like, really, temporary. But when you talk about their kids, it's a different story. [Japanese people] think [*dekasegi*] are helping the industry, the economy but they are not gonna have a Japanese culture, they are not willing to learn Japanese, they are not learning to be a part of the Japanese culture.

Labianna recognizes that even though she has Japanese lineage, was educated in Japanese schools, acquired the language, and participated in the culture, she will always be considered a foreigner. According to Hideo Aoki (2021), this is because of Japan's zoning of non-nationals, in which:

Japan is one of the Asian democratic states following the 'double morality' of internal morality and external morality (Weber, 1905/1992) strictly distinguishing the inside from the outside, by forming a democracy that adopts a social constitutional principle of equality within Japan's community while maintaining inequality for strangers and foreigners. (Aoki, 2021: 13)

As discussed in Chapter Two, *nikkei-jin* are considered to belong to the "*soto*" (the outside) as opposed to the "*uchi*" (the inside) of the Japanese philosophical dichotomy. Anything on the outside is identified as an impurity to the inside; they are non-Japanese, they are *gaijin*. Even so, Labianna is negotiating the layers of foreignness and Japaneseness, placing her simultaneously on the outside and the inside. This means she can shift between the two, which as I will demonstrate later is then amplified through drag performance. Yet, the effects of being placed on the outside permeate more aggressively through her everyday life because of the meaning-making paradigms that accrue around her body:

Sometimes when I go to a restaurant, let's say like, very like, small local restaurant run by like these old married couple. And when I enter and I try to order in Japanese, they

will never try to speak in Japanese to me and they don't understand my Japanese 'cause in their mind they will expect me to speak a foreign language. They expect me to be like a complete, like, foreigner that can only speak, like, little words of Japanese and will try to order in English. So their mind is made to accept me speaking another language but Japanese. And they don't understand like, they cannot like, make this switch, so even if I reply to them in Japanese, they like, they cannot process it. So they will try to, like, reply in English, they will try to speak in English. Another example, like, this is cute ones. The more frustrating ones is like...was...like when I tried to rent a place. Like, the first thing they said to me is "no" because I am a *gaijin*. I am a foreigner. If I don't have the Japanese citizenship it's really hard to make it happen. And um, so when they look at me and they see I'm not a Japanese person, the first thing they say is "oh, maybe you won't get this place because you are a foreigner."

Even though Labianna speaks Japanese highly proficiently, the foreignness imposed by meaning-making paradigms that accrue around her body signifies the contrary. This is as a result of a set of fictitious stories about foreigners' lack of proficiency in Japanese, and these stories are bestowed with the power to fix her non-Japanese body to an orientation where her being-in-the-world is estranged between whom she thinks she is and whom people say she is. These stories also extend to her struggles with housing discrimination in that there are myths about foreigners which construct an idea of an intrinsic nature of "what foreigners do" in multiple dimensions of social, cultural, and political practices. I have also experienced housing discrimination firsthand. Foreigners are assumed to cause problems for landlords due to having communication issues, disobeying local and household rules, violating contracts, misbehaving, disrupting neighbors, or vacating suddenly; these myths are perpetuated in the dominant culture's discourse surrounding foreigners, which shapes the hegemonic perspective on the appearances of foreign bodies. If Japanese law were to prevent property owners from rejecting applicants based on discriminatory criteria,

such as nationality, then there could be an effort toward changing such discourse. However, “the principle of equality within Japan’s community” is for the inside, and “inequality for strangers and foreigners” is maintained on the outside (Aoki, 2021: 13), divided by the phenomenological appearance of the *gaijin*. As a nation-state, Japan has constructed a simplified discriminatory categorization of the non-Japanese (Jung, 1996). On top of this, there are deep-rooted xenophobic *jus sanguinis* administrative systems. The unification of nationality and race/ethnicity makes even some of those who are born in Japan not Japanese and thus foreign (Park, 2017). As Mai Ishihara (2020) has shown in her auto-ethnographic work on the complex issues surrounding Ainu, an indigenous group of people in Japan, Ainu people do not fit into stabilized categories of “Japanese” on a national level. Thus, the meaning-making paradigms that form the category of the outside extend beyond just foreigners.

For Kosmic Sans, who was born in France with Laotian lineage and came to Japan in 2011 on a working holiday, her experience of becoming *gaijin* was zoned in a similar but distinct way to Labianna’s experience. Kosmic, in her own words, is Tokyo’s visual entertainer. Her beautifully self-crafted aesthetic is avant-garde and high-fashion, suitable for a showstopping runway. Kosmic confesses to “not being much of a talker,” however, her introverted personality in everyday life is a striking contrast to her captivating performances and style on stage. Kosmic explains the continuous negotiations with the meaning-making paradigms in everyday life that make her foreign:

In France, I’m an immigrant descendant. I’m not considered “pure French.” In Japan, I am an immigrant too, from France. Everywhere I am part immigrant. Even when I go to Laos...I have been there for a week in my life. It’s more like sightseeing than my country. So in Japan, maybe more...at the beginning, they didn’t understand that I am French. “Why do you have black hair, why do you...” yeah that is a true thing. That happens a lot with the Chinese. “Why do you look Asian?” I am Asian but I’m French. That’s a whole identity thing. I used to have hard time with that. But less and less now.

Kosmic’s agency as a French person is erased due to the racialized ideal of *gaijin* by those who hold more power in the dominant culture have affixed to her. The French *gaijin* in Japan should not have black hair or be Asian.

Kosmic seems to be aware of the stealthy and subtle work of racism from her experience of being of immigrant descent and thus similarly being “out of place” in France. She seems to continually negotiate with the structures of racialized subjectivity whether she is in France or Japan. Still, her appearance is seen in different ways in her country of origin and her country of settlement, which comes with a degree of difference in how much she is noticed as being “out of place.” This shows that the appearance of her body is a matter of the objects she comes into contact with. Meaning-making paradigms in the given culture suggest that the appearances of foreign bodies are “already” orientated to a certain way of being-in-the-world. However, migration shows how her body is *situated* differently and gets *directed* differently. The conflict here is that being a “stranger” on multiple layers in different structures becomes internalized. The threat of being ostracized comes from the structures of the dominant culture and an internal struggle or an internalization of otherness, having been labeled as the Other by the hegemonic perspective (Becker, 1963), demonstrating that becoming *gaijin* is discursive.

Also hailing from France is the “bearded lady” Maxim, a gay-identified non-binary person, who also struggled with alienation. Maxim is one of Tokyo’s most recognizable drag performers and DJs. Her love for fashion and gender-bending aesthetics guided Maxim to drag performance. Maxim can be seen DJing at Aiuro-Café on most weekends. Maxim’s disorientation related to becoming *gaijin* in her daily life came from a different threat of alienation to that experienced by Labianna and Kosmic. Her sexuality came directly into play, particularly related to her work life:

It was at the end of my working holiday visa. So, I had my, only, like, chance of staying in Japan was to stay with this company and getting the work visa with them.

And my boss said to me, “Listen, you’re gay and you’re a foreigner in Japan. You will never be able to get married here. So the only reason, the only way you can stay here is to work for us.”

As Maxim’s foreignness intersects with gayness in the workplace, it reveals the heteronormative circumstances that can be used to marginalize those who deviate from its imposed ethical relations. Maxim’s boss is using the compulsory heterosexual system of power—which is administered through paternalism, patriarchy, and

gender normativity—to construct her subjectivity through the sexualized stigmatization of a foreigner who does not conform to dominant norms of sexuality. As demonstrated by Maxim’s boss, the workplace in Japan has a privileged place for heterosexuality as the overriding force which constructs ethical relations and maintains itself as the logic for difference. Accordingly, gayness is on the outside of this naturalized standard for ethical relationships, and this marginalizes Maxim. In contrast to Kosmic, who is also from France, Maxim is not racialized in the same way. In Maxim’s case, foreignness is not doubted because Maxim fits the ideal image of *gaijin* as a white person. That is, becoming *gaijin* is not only a result of the negotiation of being on the outside but is also determined by white bodies.

Being on the outside extends to multiple dimensions of everyday life where, interestingly, whiteness can play a particular role in directing queer migrants toward the inside. Suppose the constitutions of the foreigner and heteronormativity are constructed through the means of and for creating and maintaining social hierarchies and legacies. How do the layers of gayness and the directionality of whiteness affect this? Maxim expresses concern about how being on the outside doubly extends in the gay community (emphasis mine):

It’s like you’re on the edge of the edge of the edge of society. ‘Cause it’s like in Japan, you’re foreigner and you’re gay. And within the gay community, you’re, you’re not on the edge. *You’re being put on the edge by the gays* because they don’t like you or they, they just see you as a character that they don’t need in their personal lives. They need you at the clubs.

In the Japanese gay community, there is a normative idea of gayness that extends to support a specific image of a masculine, gender normative man, thus leading to biased representations and the exclusion of or harm to individuals who do not fit this model (Moriyama, 2012: 159). In Japanese sociologist Noritaka Moriyama’s analysis of gay men patronizing Ni-chome, the so-called “gay town” of Shinjuku, Tokyo, gay relationships are based on “sameness” and “equality” of being a gay man. From Moriyama’s analysis, it seems Japanese gay men maintain a macho appearance and share the same masculinist desires. This is related to the desire to maintain their social and cultural role as men in relation to the dominant culture. In multiple ways, not all gay identified queer migrants align with this blueprint of Japanese gay men. Maxim, for example, is white and self-identifies as feminine, non-binary, and gay, which deviates from the prescriptive models for the masculine Japanese gay community.



Therefore, foreignness and subversion of gender norms go against the Japanese gay communities' sense of fellowship amongst men tied together through their sexual orientation and the masculinist culture of gay magazines, bars, cruising spaces, and the Internet (Moriyama, 2012).

Additionally, the attempt to adhere to models of gayness is entangled with the complicated issues related to queer people migrating to express their sexuality. As Kath Weston notes in her work on gay migrants moving to bigger cities, "when the minority model grants gay people ontological status as a finite, bounded group, it universalizes a Western classification in which sexual behaviors and desires are supposed thoroughly to infuse a self" (Weston, 1995: 258). I would argue that this extends across the board for LGBTQ-identifying people. Queer migrants who come to Japan may expect to have some common interests based on their sexual orientation and gender identities formed in their countries of origin based on a globalized understanding of LGBTQ identities. However, it is the layer of strangeness and foreignness in Japan particularly that brings a disruptive nature, curtailing queer migrants' ability to fully "belong" or to "participate." Before this, however, are the complications of having to reconfigure and rethink their identifications to attempt to find some kind of ontological status. Maxim expects some kind of entry into the community based on gayness. Still, her appearance as foreign, or more specifically a white foreigner, is an obstacle due to which they become undesirable to others. This does not allow Maxim's body to extend into certain parts of the gay community, something which is habitual for white bodies in the context of France. White bodies are the ones that "inhabit space by extending that body and what it can reach" (Ahmed, 2006: 132) without obstacles, as a result of colonialism and racism. Gay white bodies, in this sense, expect to be able to reach certain objects without any obstacles. When this habitual extension of their reach is interrupted, it can be considered to the gay or queer migrant as a form of ostracization. However, the impositions of becoming *gaijin* for queer migrants may have informed them to expect such habitualized ostracization.

The geographic location of Ni-chome in Shinjuku, Tokyo, or so-called "LGBTQ friendly" district, has a mixture of commercial gay bars like those found in most globalized large cities with a mix of international and Japanese customers and dimly lit bars with no windows in slightly harder-to-find locations that are patronized by locals. From this mixture of bars, it becomes apparent how Ni-chome is gendered, racialized, and classed. When discussing this location in the interviews with the participants, they generally distinguished between the "international" and "Japanese" communities, which extends to the broader understanding of the queer community. For example, there is a strong affinity within the international communities with the minority model Weston (1995) speaks about, which spreads to all LGBTQ identities. Although such minority models, particularly as a result of activism from "the rise of the *tojisha*" (discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Six), have infiltrated into the Japanese

“side,” more localized identities exist in Ni-chome, such as the terms *okama*, *nyu haafu*, and *joso* discussed in the next paragraph, which do not follow the same model. Queer migrants in this study are set apart from the history of these local identities and thus do not find comfort in claiming them or feel the need to claim them. At the same time, their queer identities rely on the globalized understanding of LGBTQ as a minority model, raising the question of whether localized Japanese queer identities fit into such a model.

Izumi Yonezawa (2003) explains that *okama* is said to be a transformation of the male prostitute, or *dansho*, from the Edo Period, or *kage* (which literally translates to “the space in the shadows”). In addition, in the Edo Period, sexual acts between men can be seen in the tradition of *danshoku* (male eros), which takes the male subject-object position. In this tradition, there was a hierarchical sexual model of active and passive sexual roles: the active *nenja* (older male) who lusts after the passive *chigo* (young male) (Kazuma and Kawaguchi, 2010: 95). Sexual acts between men were not seen as “immoral” or “indecent” until after the Meiji restoration and the arrival of Western culture and knowledge of sexology in Japan, which pathologized the “homosexual” in contrast to the “heterosexual” (Furukawa, 1994). In recent times, *okama* constitutes a discriminatory slur for gay men, transgender women, and *nyu-haafu*. Yonezawa notes that *okama* is close to queer in meaning, but it lacks the exact nuance of social liberation, leaning toward more of a connotation of relating to either male homosexuals who behave effeminately or the act of anal sex. More commonly, *okama* is used in everyday language to refer to someone who is possibly a gay man or is overly effeminate. *Nyu-haafu* are those who “identify as a woman who were originally a man,” often working in the sex and nightlife industry, selling a gendered experience of “men who are more feminine than women” (Yonezawa, 2003: 266, trans. by Hughes). The words “new” and “half” suggest a species that is half man and half woman, a mixed gender to create a “new half.” As *nyu-haafu* is largely confined to the sex and entertainment industry, the identification of *nyu-haafu* is not pathologized, nor is it part of an agenda such as the LGBTQ movement for inclusion and accommodation of a minority in society. According to Mark McLelland, the type of industry *nyu-haafu* work in is “operating mostly at night,” and “these businesses cater to a primarily male clientele who stop by after work—that is, after the real business of the day is over—and expect to be entertained, pampered and taken care of” (McLelland, 2005: 197). This could suggest that *nyu-haafu* working in the sex and entertainment industries occupy a social space beyond the everyday of “normal” people, which is why it is not pathologized. Mitsuhashi Junko (2008) has connected transgender history to *joso*, which can be defined as wearing women’s clothing, or cross-dressing. In Mitsuhashi’s claim of universal *joso*, cross-dressing and thus transgenderism has become pathologized in European countries because of Christianity. The meaning of these Japanese “local identities” noticeably mostly relies on Anglophonic words stylized in *katakana* (syllabic writing used in Japanese mostly for

words of foreign origin) to assist the definitions. However, this does not mean that they derive from Anglo or other foreign cultures. Rather, the local identifications have their own histories which have reworked language to describe queerness prior to the status granted by the minority model of globalized queer identities.

Even if the queer migrants in this study are not part of the history of *okama*, *nyu-haafu* or *joso*, there is still a relationship between sociality and materiality of the body. For example, is a queer migrant who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a woman going to appear as *okama* or *nyu-haafu* from the Japanese perspective? Does using “local identities” situate queer migrants as an intelligible phenomenon for Japanese people? What is crucial here is the clash between the cultural significance of how we can demonstrate the conscious sense of gender and how this conflicts with our foreignness, of who we are (ontologically) or who we think we are (epistemologically), and how we fit into the social setting. Talia Mae Bettcher asks the epistemological and ontological questions of the self in her work on trans identities and bodies:

There are several closely related questions around gender transition, gender identity, and gender dysphoria (or, as I prefer to call it, “discontent”). The first is *prima facie* ontological or perhaps semantic: What is a woman, and what is a man? Does a transition really involve a movement from the one gender to the other? The second, closely related to the first, is epistemological: Are trans people correct in their self-identification? Under what conditions might we be correct? Both can be subsumed under a more general question: How must things be in order for trans identities to be valid? (Bettcher, 2020: 330)

If conscious self-identity is what it means to be a gender, we can experience that gender first-hand. However, we may not be seen as the gender we think we are experiencing because culturally significant body parts and forms of power may not allow us to extend into such space, both socially and physically. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Three in relation to Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), when we cannot “fit” into a certain space, we face a new direction. In that new direction, we may be able to make the space extend or reshape to “fit” us. For Bettcher, there are “two conflicting awarenesses of oneself as an object or potential object for others—an invalidating or ‘de-realizing’ one and a validating or ‘realizing’ one” (Bettcher, 2020: 333). Accordingly, queer migrants need not assimilate to such local identities if it is a matter of oneself as an object or potential object. It is not the case that they need such identifications of *okama* and *nyu-haafu* for claiming a minoritized *tojisha* (a person belonging to a discriminated class) voice to “uphold neoliberalism by emphasizing identity” to make themselves “a

better candidate for inclusion” and secure a realized and valid social status (Chavez and Luibhéid, 2020). *Tojisha* voices use minoritized LGBTQ identities precisely because they are more operative in terms of policy than the local identities. Internally, queer migrants may be living their life as whom they self-identify as in a manner of upholding neoliberalism. Externally, the cultural saturation of the myth of the foreigner is imposed, extending through to queer migrants’ daily lives. It is precisely because of being racialized as “foreign” that identities of gender and sexuality may be disregarded in the Japanese context. Returning to the international versus Japanese community, there is a perceived gap of knowledge about queer identities from both sides of the community, which both sides are tasked with filling. Regardless of whether the Japanese side, as the dominant culture, assumes the international side will never fully understand the culture and frame queer migrants into a simplification of *gaijin* in line with globalized or localized queer identities, there needs to be a dialogue of negotiation to blur the divisions.

Returning to Bettcher, her ontological and epistemological questions of gender and identity in relation to subjecthood and objectification extend through to the daily life of queer migrants in their dating lives. A twofold awareness seems to develop: as what they are presenting as a subject and of themselves as an object or potential object for others. Labianna demonstrates herself as a subject and object in her dating life, particularly when using online dating applications like Grindr and 9monsters:

That’s like very...people make sure they are into only *gaijins* or they’re not into *gaijins*.

If they see you are a *gaijin*, they just block you on those dating apps. So people just talk to you because you’re a *gaijin*. You have to take what’s the options, you know.

They ask a lot, “*gaikokujin desuka?*” (Are you a foreigner?) “*haafu desuka?*” (Are you half Japanese?) Or whatever. That’s the first question. The second question, “how big are you?” Or like “*dekasu desune*” (I bet you have a big [dick]). They automatically relating having a big dick. I’m sure they don’t talk to other Asians [like that]. I think they talk to white men, Latin men, black men and they ask those questions ‘cause they

have this stereotypical idea that *gaijin* have bigger dicks which is not a fact. I've seen so many Japanese guys or Asians guys have larger dicks.

As Labianna describes, queer migrants are constructed as sexualized objects in the dominant culture. The process of becoming *gaijin* places them into the hegemonic structure by making them familiar and intelligible as a potential object materialized as hyper-sexualized and intrinsically different to the majority. What is also at stake here is the materiality of the body under cultural significance because body parts and body image have a cultural meaning that people, including binary-identified trans men and women, are trying to conform to (Salamon, 2010). This is also part of dominant, or cisnormative, social norms of men and women. The “big dicks of *gaijin*” do not even have to appear for their body parts to be imagined, but somehow, it is part of the main culture’s knowledge. Perhaps the Japanese men Labianna speaks of did and still do experience sexual encounters with well-endowed foreign men. Perhaps this is reinforced by the digital sphere, where pornography adds to a hegemonic idea of hyper-sexualized men (tall, handsome, masculine, having a large penis, etc.). Interestingly, adding the layer of doing drag to the already complex positioning of the queer migrant as a sexual being further highlights the affective investments of not aligning with others’ expectations, as Labianna discusses in the following (emphasis mine):

For sure, [when] dating, as a drag queen, [it] is something that I don’t necessarily say upfront that I’m a drag queen. Maybe because I have this...I’m afraid of how society would think about me. I think I’m becoming more and more careless about it. For sure, if I say I’m a drag queen at the beginning, people will not put me in the sexual, or take me from the sexual zone [...] I still feel that when I say I do drag, people kind of like doesn’t desire me in the sexual way *as though they would if they didn’t know*.

Doing drag as a gender-bending form literally *drags* you out of the sexual zone in the masculinist Japanese gay community. Arguably, doing drag potentially takes away the objectified knowledge which associates foreigners with “having a big dick.” The social reality of becoming *gaijin* is layered into the appearances of non-Japanese

bodies maintaining the status of “foreigner,” but drag further destabilizes their ontologies and epistemologies. However, while the visibility of embodiment ensures that the myths about foreigners will be perpetuated on an everyday basis, the moment drag is mentioned, it could be a dislodging queering of the foreign ontology and epistemology. The disorientation of repeatedly not “fitting in,” whether it is bodily, socially, culturally, or institutionally, brings to question the matter of how queer migrations attempt to occupy social and physical space (Ahmed, 2006). The layers of queerness and foreignness have thus far shown these disorientations through queer migrants’ becoming *gaijin*. As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, “dragging” up allows queer migrants to rethink their awareness as a subject-object through queer orientations.

Recalling Ahmed (2006), orientations are related to the alignments of the body and space. Only when you are aligned to an orientation or know where you are and which way to face is it possible to know which way to go or which way to turn. Disorientation, therefore, is when the body fails to do the above due to unfamiliarity even though it appears; the bodies’ appearance is a matter of presence in the space which moves in and out of alignment with an orientation. An example of disorientation that could be experienced by queer migrants given in Chapter Three was the unique worries they experience, such as visa issues, housing discrimination, misrecognition, and ostracization, because even though some of these worries are subjective, queer migrants are powerless in some aspects of them. However, even powerlessness appears, and this appearance differentially occupies the space in the unfamiliarity and failure to extend into space the way we know how. This is what happens when we become *gaijin*. Queer migrants are disoriented in the settlement, being racialized, sexualized, and gendered as “foreign.” This requires us to attempt to “re-learn” what norms, ideologies, and expectations of gender, etc., are and how we occupy space in our appearance as gendered beings to deal with the aforementioned worries. In what follows, I will develop my argument that drag is a sort of “package” to help queer migrants do such relearning through re-articulations of gender and sexuality.

## **4.2 Reappearing as a drag performer**

This section bridges drag and the everyday lives of queer migrants who have become *gaijin* in those disoriented extended spaces where drag helps them realign their appearances. Participants in this study had many different reasons for doing drag. Personally, I was looking for a form of escapism from the mundanity of everyday life, which is perhaps similar to the way Momo Toru (2008) understands drag, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. Kosmic was looking for an artistic way to express herself, not just for work but as an embodiment of aesthetics. Maxim’s interest in fashion, particularly in clothing, allowed her to express her femininity, which guided her interest

in drag. There were two main interweaving reasons for becoming a drag performer that I heard from the majority of the queer migrant performers I spoke to in the interviews and informal conversations during my field work at drag events. The first is that being *gaijin* allowed them to explore stigmatized practices in an extended space of being *gaijin* and the drag performance. As they are strangers themselves in a new cultural and social space in which their appearances fail to align to the norm, queer migrants make the space around “strange” to “fit” their appearance. This is not exclusive to drag, as this also could be said for a range of diasporic communities creating or reimagining the space that allows them to flourish through their own practices and sense of belonging (Sigona et al, 2015). The second is the commercialization of drag in which RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR) has developed a new global economy for drag and queer culture to be consumed and (re)produced. The capitalist nature of consuming queer culture created by a sense of belonging is discussed in Chapter Six. For now, I look at how RPDR has helped queer migrants with their appearances as *gaijin* in relation to identification in the Japanese context.

#### **4.2.1 Advantage of being *gaijin***

When exploring new identities as a migrant, we can return to phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz’s (1944) concept of the stranger. To reiterate, the stranger, who has differentiated objectivity due to their proximity to others in the host culture, often experiences difficulty fully assimilating and questions everything that seems unquestionable to members of the approached group. The reasons for the choice to do drag for the participants in this study are twofold. First, due to disorientation, queer migrants search for ways to realign themselves by exploring stigmatized genders and sexualities by questioning the unquestionable. Second, such an exploration is made easier because they have left an environment with people who know them for a place where they are a “stranger,” allowing social freedom. Layered into this, their uncertainty about being permanent and thus the privilege of being temporary filters through their strangeness. These additional layers of alleviation affect what they “can” and “cannot” do in Japanese society. This is reflected in the decision of Belgium Solanas, an Australian gay-identified man living in Nagoya, to try doing drag. Belgium first performed drag at the longest-running drag show in Japan, Diamonds are Forever at METRO in Kyoto while she was living in the neighboring city Osaka. Diamonds are Forever is run by Simone Fukayuki, one of the most and longest established Japanese drag performers in Japan, whose narrative is discussed in Chapter Two. Although Belgium has spent more time recently creating digital media, she still performs in Tokyo from time to time. Belgium, who is over six feet tall, glamorizes the grotesque and the exaggeration of feminine beauty in her performances. Belgium questions whether it was solely the eye-catching aesthetic that provided her with the chance to perform drag or whether being *gaijin* afforded her such opportunities:

I think we were totally given opportunities we would never have been given if we were Japanese. Um, the only reason we first got to perform was because we were foreign. I mean, we looked cool [...] But the reason was that we were foreign, that was the reason. And, um, and I've been, I've done all sorts of stuff that I, there's no way I would've done if I was Japanese. 'Cause I think there's still a real sort of a shame, but a real, like it's in, I think Japanese drag queens are still sort of in their own little box and their own little world and a bit separate from other things. And I think because we were foreign, people just sort of saw it as art or whatever. So we were asked to do all sorts of art events and rock events, and drag events and whatever. But we, it was a really, well-rounded sort of group of things that we were asked to do. And I think that's purely because we were foreign.

Belgium's story dates to the early 2010s. The opportunities she discusses are mainly related to performing at Diamonds are Forever. I have no intention to discredit Belgium's accolades related to drag and the art she creates. However, I would argue that the power to do drag for her in this case may have been granted by being a white foreigner. Although Belgium did not explicitly say white foreigner in the above quotation, I would say from our conversation that she is aware of the advantages white people have in Japan. For Japanese people, whiteness could be associated with success. In Shunsuke Tanabe's study on exclusivity and discrimination against foreigners in Japan, he discusses how the prejudice and discrimination they face differs depending on Japanese people's favorable or unfavorable perceptions of their country of origin (Tanabe, 2008: 383). Tanabe states that the word *gaijin* connotes white foreigners from Europe and the United States. Japanese perceptions of white Western nations are favored and viewed as more progressive and successful than Asian countries (Tanabe, 2008: 370). Therefore, Belgium's white body grants an elevated status, allowing her to do certain things and reach certain objects. Alternatively, it could be possible to interpret her white body as an obstacle, as we saw previously with Maxim in



the gay community. Maxim expected to “fit in” with the gay community, but as she said in the previous section, Japanese people “don’t want you in their personal lives. They just want you at the clubs.” In a similar way, Belgium’s inclusion at Diamonds are Forever could be a demonstration of “just wanting white bodies at the club” for the purpose of entertainment.

As Ahmed argues, colonialism has made the world available for the white body. At the same time, however, possibilities for the foreigner have been defined by the dominant culture, economy, and politics. For Ruth Frankenburg, whiteness is “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (Frankenburg, 1993: 1). According to Tanabe, whiteness in Japan gives white foreigners racial privilege. I have argued methodologically in Chapter Three that for this research to even be possible requires myself as a white researcher and the white queer migrants in these interviews to be critical of our standpoint as a white person in a position at the center of power. The cultural practices that Frankenburg speaks of are the invisible cultural practices that are institutionalized to marginalize others, giving white people certain privileges. Whiteness in Japan may not wholly make certain objects available for the white body, but it does sustain a system of benefitting white people institutionally. The legal requirements for acquiring permanent residency as shown in the *Guidelines for Permission for Permanent Residence* from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan, state that the first requirement is “The person is of good conduct. The person observes Japanese laws and his/her daily living as a resident does not invite any social criticism.”<sup>11</sup> The *gaijin* are required to be “good” and to “not invite any social criticism” in their everyday lives. For Tanabe, white *gaijin* have an automatic advantage in that they are more likely than other immigrants to be seen as “good.” Moreover, this shows that law and its administration are governing minorities to be good in two senses: the law is requiring “goodness” from minoritized groups and it is establishing what “goodness” is for these groups. As a tactic for governing bodies, if queer migrants fall into the “bad” side, they will not meet the requirements for permanent residency. This shows that everyday life has unseeable structures that attempt to form the performativity of queer migrant life around the requirement to be “good.” I would argue that the appearance of the white *gaijin* is racialized as a “person of good conduct” in the Japanese context. Good *gaijin* are elevated by being white and Western (Tanabe, 2008) which may increase their chances of engaging in practices or reaching objects (Ahmed, 2006) that make you feel comfortable, allow you to “fit in” or be successful, and give your appearance a way to occupy space. The bad *gaijin*’s race may decrease their

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<sup>11</sup> *Guidelines for Permission for Permanent Residence*, Immigration Services Agency of Japan, Ministry of Justice, <https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/930003492.pdf>, 2019

chances of engaging in practices while highlighting memberships in communities using specific minoritized identity markers. For Tanabe, this would be the *ajia kei gaikokujin* (Asian foreigners), a phrase often seen in crime-related media. Accordingly, whiteness becomes visible by highlighting the difference between good and bad *gaijin*.

Taking this a step further, accepting the identities granted by the Western minority model through self-labeling may also add to being a good *gaijin*. For José Estaban Muñoz, the queer “good subject” is the one who “chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms” (Muñoz, 1999: 11), which, in this case, can be understood as the unambiguous claiming of a static identity label granted by the LGBTQ minority model. However, for Belgium, there is more of a focus on her foreignness. White foreigners may not have to choose such paths because their racialized body is already seen as good. At the same time, common views of foreignness, particularly for white *gaijin*, do not extend beyond a focus on being a foreigner which comes with possible advantages and disadvantages as Belgium explains (emphasis mine):

I think realistically within a certain point you can get to in Japan, where regardless of what happens, you're still going to be a foreigner. It's just reality. It's just reality. It's sort of, I don't think it's actually a bad thing at all because it gives us a lot of freedom [...] And if you I think if you're in the right headspace, you can sort of *create your own little world a bit* [...] I think there's part of me that's always wanting to go against whatever. No matter where, like, regardless of where I am, whatever the majority thinks, I don't want to be part of it.

In this sense, because the good *gaijin* is already allowed to occupy space because of their whiteness, this also allows them to create their “own little world” and attempt to go against the grain. I would argue that this “little world” in queer communities allows them to do drag because of the global influence of RPDR. However, it also raises the question of why drag is practiced in queer communities to such an extent that queer migrants who have no connection to the queer history of Japan are allowed to exemplify their queer being through drag performance without conferring with the dominant culture. As I will demonstrate in the later chapters, there is a danger of neo-

colonizing localized communities with the globalization of drag. The following section introduces the commercialization of drag and how it is linked to the second reason stated previously for queer migrants' decisions to become drag performers in relation to the localized practice of *joso*.

#### **4.2.2 Commercialization of drag and Japan's *joso***

For queer migrants in this study, the second main reason for doing drag was the phenomenon that is RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR). RPDR is an American reality competition television program in which drag performers compete to become "America's Next Drag Superstar." It began in 2009 on Logo TV, a cable channel known for programming aimed toward LGBTQ audiences. It later moved to VH1, a major network with greater viewership and more widely known for reality content, in 2017, marking its favorable reception among mainstream audiences. As of 2022, RPDR has run for fourteen regular seasons and six All-Star seasons. RPDR has become a worldwide franchise with versions in the following countries: Thailand (2 seasons), Chile [The Switch Drag Race] (2 seasons), United Kingdom (3 seasons), Canada (2 seasons), Holland (2 seasons), Spain (2 seasons), The Philippines, Mexico, Australia/New Zealand [Drag Race Down Under], Italy, and France. An international cross-over season, UK vs The World is also scheduled to be released in 2022. The franchise gained popularity in Japan when it was added with Japanese subtitles to Netflix, one of the largest streaming services in the world. Before that, RPDR was only seen or talked about in queer spaces and events. I specifically remember the increase in attention around season nine of RPDR, when people in my proximity in queer spaces began to talk about the show more frequently. I discuss the queer kinships as a result of RPDR in more detail in Chapter Six.

According to Simon Doonan (2019), RPDR has brought drag further into the mainstream than it had ever been before. Prior to RPDR, drag was, like in Esther Newton's ethnography of drag as a subculture demonstrated in Chapter Two, stigmatized in queer communities or limited to specific categories such as glamour drag, comedy drag, black drag, etc. (Doonan, 2019). Drag did experience a mild mainstream success in the 1990s with RuPaul's talk show The RuPaul Show on VH1. During this time, drag queens also made appearances on TV shows and on fashion runways. Recently, drag is used in an affirmative way on television such as in America's premium television network HBO's *We're Here*, as well as on fashion runways, in music videos, on social media, and in advertisements. RPDR alumni have made appearances on several other mainstream television shows such as breakfast television shows, panel shows, cooking, sewing and singing competitions, and reality shows. There are also several drag conventions around the world, including the official RuPaul's DragCon in Los Angeles, New York, and the UK. Michael Lovelock says the success of RPDR is based on the queer identifications with the show: "The programme's

assemblage of drag, with its attendant values and functions in marginal queer communities, and reality TV, one of the most expansive cultural products of the twenty-first century, produce a complex of discourses around queerness, labour, success and the relationship between queer identities and hegemonic, heteronormative culture” (Lovelock, 2019: 157). Accordingly, showing queer people doing drag on a reality show allows the audience to believe they are relatable “ordinary people,” leading to its mainstream success.

RPDR may not have impacted the mainstream media in Japan in the same way just yet, but it has without a doubt influenced the local drag scene in Tokyo and Osaka. This impact has reshaped how “drag” is talked about, having implications for its narratives. From my conversations with audience members at the shows mentioned in Chapter Three, it appears the audience has come to understand drag through watching RPDR, in which the successful performers become a commercial and stylized template for what they expect to see from drag. I often recalled audience members making comparisons between the performers and the cast members of RPDR. These comparisons would be based upon comparing makeup, wig styling, body shape, and clothing. Arguably, it is as though the performers cannot appear as drag performers without the paradigm of RPDR to validate them. Many of the audience I spoke to shared that they liked Aquaria and Violet Chachki, both of whom are winners of RPDR whose drag is considered very high fashion. It raises the question of whether there is a fetishization of foreign drag, which is a fantasy-like phenomenon present among the Japanese audience in which they specifically want to see foreign queens perform, mainly because they have watched RPDR. Their tendency to compare the performers to queens such as Aquaria and Violet Chachki provides a hint to the answer to this. Still, the audience is coming to see drag at shows specifically run by and accommodating queer migrants. Labianna, who performs with Japanese queens, noted the differences in how drag is defined because of RPDR. Labianna notes that drag is often understood in the Japanese as *joso*:

So they all pretty much say *joso*. Especially for male, cis male who does dress as a woman. But it's not like this exaggerated version. I think it's easy when you think about an American drag queen. Really big hair, big makeup, performance, dress, and that's it. If you go to an American drag show, it's pretty much the show and they're out. They just perform and they are out. They retouch their makeup, they do the second

show and they are out. They have one host for the night and that's it. But in Japan, the queens, if you work in a show, it's very hardcore because you have to dance the whole night on stage and do your show, and interact with people, and drink with people. Also, we have the bar queens, I think in America, bar queens is not a good...but in Japan, it is pretty normal to work as a hostess in a bar. So the big word they use for the cis male who does that is *joso*. Which is trans...this type, cross-dressing or transvestism, I don't know the word. This is the main word [*joso*] they use to express those allegedly drag queens in Japan. And now it's like Drag Race...more people are aware of the term drag queen. So they are kind of like, there's this big debate, discussion to say where is the...Who is drag and who is *joso*, who is cross-dressing. They want to find this line. "No, she is just a cross-dresser, and she is a drag queen."

Suppose the stylization of drag that the audience expects to see is rooted in the US as a result of RPDR. In that case, it is vital to highlight the transnational connection between the histories, temporalities, and culture of the places of origin and settlement. This further marks the absence of assimilation in line with *joso* and the possibility of obscuring *joso* through the commercialization of drag. From my observations at drag shows in Tokyo and Osaka, foreign queens often emulate what they see on RPDR rather than doing the type of work that Labianna explains is involved with *joso* which involves more of a focus on client relationships than the drag we see on RPDR. When I asked Belgium, she also said that she thought that RPDR has changed the scene:

I think for a long time, a lot of people didn't know what a drag show was. And I think also the audience itself has changed because in Tokyo now there are people that come to those shows. I don't think they've ever seen a drag show, ever, tons of people.

So they're like, they're basing it purely off Drag Race. That's what they think the show [in Tokyo] is going to be.

Paradoxically, queer migrants are influenced to do drag by the commercialization of drag while also being part of why it is assimilated into a normative framework. In a sense, this goes against queerness; although queer migrants think they are challenging or politicizing their existence through doing drag and making drag more visible, it is actually because of their invisible privileges allowing them to do so which ends up as the object of their political critique (neo-colonization is discussed further in Chapter Six). This can result in ostracization of local *joso* because they do not meet the expectations of the overly high standards of stylization and extravagance in makeup, wigs, and outfits that RPDR has set, and which queer migrants are aligning with. Although it is not the case that RPDR is wholly erasing *joso*, RPDR supports a paradoxical globalized and simultaneously diasporic idea of queerness that is borrowing from transnational histories and bringing them into the present, creating a dialogue of new possibilities. The function of *joso* is also ultimately different, relying more on the relationships between the performers and the clientele. Simultaneously, even though the mainstream focus of drag allows it to be commercialized, it still “drags” along with it a politicization that may or may not have been there with *joso* as we can see in Belgium's explanation of the positive impact of RPDR:

It's making a positive impact in the community for sure because I think especially younger people, just, it's a visible reflection of their identity that hasn't existed here.

This is an example of the politics of misrecognition coming from a place of a globalized understanding of queerness. Queer migrants look at local examples of gender non-conforming subcultures, such as *joso*, as if they do not represent an identification of the queerness they know. Therefore, the appearance is not being seen as the actor intends it. The question is whether *joso* falls into the same “queer brackets” as drag. The queer migrants' standpoints then potentially problematize Japanese drag by bringing the politics of representation and misrecognition into it. During my fieldwork on one of many trips to the gay club EXPLOSION in Doyama, Osaka, I saw a *josoka* (person who does *joso*) do a lip-sync performance to a Janet Jackson song. Not only did this performer mimic and exaggerate Janet Jackson's gestures, but they also darkened their skin to physically and racially imitate a black person. As

mentioned in Chapter Two, drag can embody discrimination in the form of misogyny and blackface, which I will discuss in more detail subsequently. At the same time, however, it may be that because the space in Japan is “made” for Japanese people, such an act of blackface would go unnoticed and unquestioned by the main culture in which *joso* is not regulated in the same liberal way as globalized drag culture.

The commercialization of drag and its globalized diasporic aspect creates several points of focus that are necessary to the analysis throughout this thesis. As I will demonstrate later, the drag I engaged in and observed may fall into some form of colonized culture “received” from the international community, which then becomes a normative queer culture with a duality of providing new platforms for queer people in Japan, such as the *josoka*, while also limiting or regulating the potentiality of localized queerness. For now, I focus on developing my argument about doing drag to show how it provides ways for queer migrants to reconfigure their own appearances in spaces.

### **4.3 The drag performance**

Drag performance itself is embodied and affective. Within this, the queer migrants have a moment in space and time where the materiality of the body is present with an embodied subjectivity through signifiers such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, able-bodiedness, and age. In the performance itself, we can connect these signifiers to queer histories by reinhabiting them into the performance. As we will see throughout this section, these then transfer differentially into everyday experiences of queer migrants and provide a possibility of rethinking their worries.

#### **4.3.1 Challenging the worry of fitting in**

Although Labianna’s performance may reinforce certain mainstream drag archetypes popularized by RPDR, such as looking feminine, voguing, doing splits and high kicks, and using drag vernacular, there is a particular element to her aesthetic that challenges those assumptions. Many of the dance moves (such as voguing) and terminology used in the drag scene is taken from the ballroom scene as popularized by the documentary movie *Paris Is Burning*. For example, this includes “words and phrases like ‘throwing shade’ (a particular, subtle meaning of insulting an interlocutor), ‘reading’ (a more explicit tactic of insult), ‘slay’ (to do something with particular effectiveness or finesse)” (Lovelock, 2019: 157). It is important to note that “RuPaul’s Drag Race pays recurrent homage to an earlier media text, the documentary film *Paris is Burning*, about self-constructed families (or ‘houses’) of black and Latinx drag queens, transwomen and gay men in New York City in the late 1980s as they compete in spectacular, underground ‘drag balls’” (Lovelock, 2019: 156). This would suggest that RPDR appropriates the

culture shown in *Paris is Burning*, which queer migrants in Japan are then reappropriating in a completely different context. In many of my observations from the stage itself and as an audience member, I heard many screams of “slay queen,” “werk” or “yaaas,” which all come from the black and Latinx ballroom scene and now can be heard in places like Osaka and Tokyo. As a performer and audience member myself, I also have used the terms, contributing to this reappropriation. However, Labianna, Belgium and other participants I interviewed, are trying to decentralize some of those appropriations and popular expectations of how drag should be. Labianna often exposes her chest hair to directly confront the popularized understanding that the object of drag is to look “feminine.” Regarding this, drag allows her to engage in an intersectional critique, from the performance stage to everyday life, because it “demonstrates the instability of all claimed identities on an intersectional basis: performers play with identity markers, including race, class, dis/ability and age” (Edward and Farrier, 2020: 10). Labianna explains:

I shaved to do drag. Why? Like, you know...women have hair as well. We shouldn't be portraying a female figure...having like a stereotypical idea so I was like “OK, fuck it! Just let my hairs out!” And let's be, let's break this thing. At the moment, I don't like to call myself a drag queen, I just say drag artist, drag performer. Be more open to suggestions and idea while we can do what we...There's no limit.

Labianna's chest hair and armpit hair intentionally subvert mainstream drag expectations of having to look lavish and glamorous all the time. Breaking through the idealized template of drag also allows her to play with identity markers. Because of this, audience members assume she has no connection to Japanese culture, history, etc., and often speak English when approaching her. Accordingly, Labianna goes beyond aesthetics by subverting the tacit understanding of what a *gaijin* looks like with her linguistic ability. When explaining her Japanese heritage to Japanese audiences, she also subverts the ideas of what “being Japanese” is through drag:

Sometimes I can hide my *gaijin*-ness but what I do is not necessarily what Japanese queens does. They are not very political, not very actively speaking for rights and any



kind of issues, so maybe they can say to me I do what I do because I'm a *gaijin*. They know that they...I fight for mental health. Let's talk about mental health, drug issues, feminism, they can just say..."she is doing that because she is a *gaijin*," you know.

Her drag aesthetic resists an ideal presentation of a woman and foreigner, allowing her to hide her "*gaijin*-ness." This would suggest she is "passing" as Japanese when in drag in the dominant culture, but what exactly does she appear to pass as? Her linguistic ability would allow her to extend into the space as aligning to Japaneseness. However, audiences also assume her political motivation is due to foreignness, suggesting that *what* she says rather than *how* she speaks Japanese is the unveiling of her *gaijin*-ness because of its political content. This demonstrates how queer migrants' standpoints can reveal that even in queer spaces, Japanese people tend to avoid political agency. Regarding Labianna's aesthetics, her appearance is not based on popularized "natural make-up" for Japanese women, a minimalist look that enhances and brightens up basic features of the face.<sup>12</sup> Labianna's make up is glamorous and exaggerates all of her facial features. Her extremely padded body idealizes the female body in an exaggerated way that could be seen as falling into the norms and stereotypes of what a non-Japanese woman is imagined to look like. Still, the exaggeration itself challenges the idea of "what a woman looks like," and broader misogynistic ideologies about women. As Edward and Farrier note, "some drag performers mobilize elements of misogyny, homophobia, ageism, racism, and disability discrimination to undermine these attitudes, some for the sake of cheap laughs" (Edward and Farrier, 2020: 12). Therefore, the drag performance is recognizably social and political in its conception as Labianna's identity markers also become exaggerated, particularly in real-time performance. Labianna's drag challenges the position of "foreign" in Japan and highlights the social antagonisms in everyday life that are embedded in the wider xenophobic society. She simultaneously occupies the political activist spotlight, which some Japanese people avoid, and the spotlight on the stage, which positions her to be consumed by an audience as entertainment. Drag, in this sense, becomes a way for her to deal with her worries about fitting in in the Japanese context.

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<sup>12</sup> See Shiseido, *The right way to do natural makeup. We've got you covered with tips on base and point makeup, as well as recommended items!*, <https://www.shiseido.co.jp/sw/beautyinfo/DB008812/>

#### 4.3.2 Dismantling the worry of confinement

Kosmic Sans and Maxim both demonstrate a queer embodiment of how drag redirects their bodies to help them deal with issues of confinement. These issues are shaped and directed by how Kosmic and Maxim appear to occupy space, resulting in reshaping the space to allow them to address the issues.

Kosmic's drag demonstrates how disorientations related to becoming *gaijin* provided an opportunity to go on a journey from being "out of place" to finding that drag reorients the body to new possibilities mainly through the power of aesthetics. As Kosmic explains in the following, just playing with makeup, which could seem trivial, turns into a reflexive process of self-identification:

My drag is...Still under construction. It's a lot of visuals. I like to tell a story with my looks and performance. Even if it is not very...The purpose is to take on a journey, a storyline or something for each performance, or picture or video. Like at the beginning, I was just trying to do some pretty makeup but now it is about expressing something deep. Just for fun. I just discovered another part of myself I didn't know, I think, and find stuff I couldn't do before. Like, a lot of drag...before drag I wouldn't be able to go on stage in front of everybody. But now I don't care much about going in front of the stage, even out of drag.

Kosmic's discovery of drag is in response to the sense of confinement of the self within a space that does not extend to her (Ahmed, 2006). The assumption that she could not do certain things before finding drag suggests that the space, or what was "in front of her," foreclosed her somehow. The reappearance in drag using her own art as an expression of herself, starting with just trying to do "pretty makeup," changed her directionality, reorientated both her body and the space around her, releasing her from a sense of confinement. Also articulated here is that Kosmic's way of "being-in-the-world" is embodied differently because of drag. Drag is not only not an art form that allows her to express herself intellectually, emotionally, and physically; it also affects her modes of comportment in everyday life. To put it simply, she is more confident because of drag. Phenomenologically, drag

allows you to “turn toward” a new direction. Facing the “right” direction brings into view certain objects which are reachable. Often these objects follow certain “straight” lines that are heterosexualized and racialized in line with the hegemonic culture (Ahmed, 2006). Drag queers these directions and lines because even though there are certain lines to follow with which queer migrants cannot align, they still both appear and “try” to follow the lines. In the failure to follow the lines, a new direction becomes available. Following these new lines affects what queer migrants “can do” by making new objects reachable in their appearances in strange spaces. Thus, drag reshapes the space to allow their appearance to occupy the space, thus dealing with their worries about possible confinement.

In a similar vein, for Maxim, drag performance is an embodiment of freedom in which drag has reshaped her space to enable her to feel liberated from confinement. As Maxim explains in the following, drag provides liberation from the confinements of everyday limitations of social confinements:

Like drag is different for all of people. Like for most people it's probably just like dressing up as a woman, but I think drag is, it's about liberation and the possibilities that we could have, but we don't. So drag brings that out [...] I think that's where there's a, we could cross the line between like the drag world and imagination and social reality.

For Maxim, drag performance is an embodiment of freedom because of the liberation and possibilities outside of what we are expected to do. This understanding relates to Kosmic in that both their appearances and the bodily activity of doing drag have an empowering nature. Yet, for Maxim there is also a political element. Although drag could be interpreted as a practice that lacks the seriousness necessary for political change, Maxim demonstrates that drag may well be a tool for bringing reform. This is connected to the context of Japan and the foreign body within it doing something disruptive. The materiality of foreign bodies is already disruptive in the Japanese context. In addition to this, drag is a disruptive embodiment which “makes strange” the normative or oversimplified ideas of *gaijin*. Drag reveals the contingency of the confinements in the myth of the *gaijin* by disrupting the “set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects” (Butler, 1990: 149). As Maxim mentions, the drag world is twisting the lines between the imagined and the social realities of the world.

This relates to the perception of foreign bodies as being universal, bodies which “should” follow a certain trajectory of certain narratives and certain aesthetics. This includes the expression of certain identities, desires, and subjectivities, but drag allows a sense of detachment from these. Therefore, a new politics emerges from queer migrants doing drag.

#### **4.3.3 Rearticulating the worry of ostracization**

In contrast to Maxim and Kosmic, Le Horla, uses drag to embody certain minority identities. Le Horla, a gender-queer person of Czech and Vietnamese descent, was adopted by a Japanese-American family. Their<sup>13</sup> drag aesthetic is mostly inspired by horror and gore but also comes with stylized conventional forms of glamor. Le Horla’s drag is not limited to feminine drag, they also performs masculine styles of drag, traditionally performed by those known as drag king. Their understanding of the power of drag to play with identity markers comes from their minority perspective:

I guess I’m used to always sort of seeing things from like a minority perspective. You know, and always, well, what is.. when we say like you know default, all-American, or anything of those sort of default identities I think most people in America problematize that because they are immigrants, the reason children of immigrants, they’re not [trivial], so I think the fact that I always want to problematize that and similarly with essentialism you see in Japan, and what is Japanese identity. Actually, what I’ve been studying in college is now...that Japanese identity was only created in basically the Meiji period. Erasing a lot of Ainu, Okinawa and other indigenous groups, so you know when we say like, this is Japanese and this isn’t Japanese, that’s actually quite problematic and oversimplifying. If you kind of group up being like “what does

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<sup>13</sup> Le Horla uses they/them and he/him pronouns.

American mean? Who is us? Who is them?" I think throughout your whole life, you always question those boundaries and those lines.

Le Horla's minority perspective in an American context has allowed them to develop a "view from the bottom," much like that of the excluded or silenced standpoints visibilized with *tojisha-kenkyu*, as discussed in Chapter Three. Having that critical lens of asking ontological and epistemological questions in relation to identification, Le Horla's understanding of the power of drag and its disruptive nature to the status quo is evident. They define drag as the following:

It's a gender subversive performance art. Especially where you sort of exaggerate or and subvert different hyper gender roles. For example, if you are doing a drag king performance, regardless of your starting sex or gender, it would probably be doing satire of what men are "supposed" to look like, which could mean looking hyper-masculine, like a kind of Johnny Bravo type thing, or it could also be, I'm gonna look like a man but also a kind of gender-fluid femme-man too. Anything that makes the viewer think, "Oh why do we expect men to look this way? Why do we expect women to look this way?"

Returning to Ahmed, queer orientations are "those that put within reach bodies that are unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy. Queer orientations might be those that don't line up, which by seeing the world 'slantwise' allow other objects to come into view" (Ahmed, 2006: 107). By inhabiting the queer orientation, we can redirect ourselves from the assumptions related to normative embodied expectations by seeing "slantwise." Le Horla is fully aware their body is "out of line" in the normative limits of certain spaces from seeing the world slantwise. Le Horla's experience of having the minority perspective in their country of origin has made a transnational movement to the settlement, which is also incorporated into their understanding of drag. Drag further creates a

chance to see slantwise to rearticulate gendered expectations and deconstruct a reliance on limitations in normative structures, which secure the differences of being in certain minoritized positions for Le Horla. Drag reveals that these differences are often understood as bodily facts. However, what we can gather from Le Horla is that rather than bodily facts, binarized categories of gender through which we make sense of certain bodies are meaning-making paradigms administered through culture which tells us “what is femininity” or “what is a masculine man.” Drag from queer migrants is a representational aesthetic that provides access to different cultures by articulating minoritized experiences. This invites the performer to bring with them specific socio-cultural and historical situated knowledge and experience that may not be able to “come into view” in the hegemonic culture, while they are simultaneously still seeing from their minoritized perspective. Drag evokes images of minoritized experience that in their appearance do not line up with certain directions, resulting in a realignment of new possibilities. Le Horla exemplifies this in their decision to continue living in Japan because of drag. Drag realigns the disorientations of becoming *gaijin*:

At the time, before I got into drag, I was thinking of leaving Japan. I felt a bit burnt out, you know. It was just like, I came here to experience Japan and get all the weebies<sup>14</sup> out of me. And I did that. I wasn't really watching anime anymore. Those things weren't really a draw for me. I obviously like living in Kanto. I'd just moved to Yokohama. You know, going to Tokyo on the weekend. I liked all of that, but I always had a lot of difficulties fitting into the queer community because I'm non-binary, I don't necessarily fit in with lesbians, I really like gay male culture but obviously I'm not a gay man. You know, that kind of thing. And drag was just kind of this, sort of, ready-made community and set of friends and stuff. It's the sort of thing where it is very easy to forge connections through drag, meeting you for example. People I've

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<sup>14</sup> A weeb is a slang term for a person who is interested in Anime.

talked to online. If you have that shared passion and interest, it is a very easy way to start conversations and get to meet people. So that was the thing that really made me feel like I was putting down roots, maybe a long-term kind of way that I couldn't do when I was in the JET program<sup>15</sup> living in the *cho-inaka* (countryside). And I guess as a gender non-binary person, I think it was just a very good way of helping me articulate what gender is for me and how I view my own gender.

The ready-made community that Le Horla speaks of allowed them to find ways to make space reshape to “fit” their non-conforming identifications. The disorientation experienced in everyday life becomes a way to face the “right” direction for maintaining relationships with people with shared interests. Accordingly, it allows them to form relationships other than those that cause these worries based on assumptions even within the queer community. Drag allows for an articulation of identifications that describe Le Horla's embodied subjectivity and identities. Through the drag performance, queer migrants can reflexively think about the complications and contradictions of disorientation in their lived experiences in multiple ways, such as, how non-normative gender is treated differently in origin and settlement. These worries can be released into the parody of negotiating gender, a demonstration of the visual misalignment of bodies with meaning-making paradigms.

As Labianna, Kosmic, Maxim, and Le Horla have demonstrated, performing the frustration of becoming *gaijin* has the potential to rearticulate worries about assumptions of identifications on their own terms. As queer orientations reveal the hegemonic sociality of being compartmentalized by the dominant culture, queer migrants use them in drag performance to liberate themselves by redeploying imposed categorizations. In the next section, I will discuss how this thesis theorizes the concept of drag in relation to queer migration.

#### 4.4 “Drag” up your life

It is difficult to separate drag from gender and give drag its own set of histories and practices precisely because it is a performance that is based on ideas of gender and sex. As Labianna and Le Horla have demonstrated,

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<sup>15</sup> The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program is a government initiative that mostly invites university graduates to teach English as an Assistant Language Teachers in schools.

creating an aesthetic that is hyper-feminine in the sense that it is an unachievable type of femininity, reconfigures our gaze as an audience member at that moment regarding what we understand to be femininity. The temporal moment takes from historical understandings of femininity as a fixed idea and brings it to the present in a distorted reappearance. This section looks at how the moments of reappearance, or “dragging,” allow us to ask epistemological questions of “unknowable” identifications and ontological questions of “not existing” by taking from (global) histories that are different from the present space which moments of reappearance occupy. As a result, this brings about an unrecognizable, unacknowledged, and understudied configuration of identification in a temporal moment that is transferred to the everyday lives of queer migrants, thus clashing with regulatory systems that perpetuate essentializing and binarized concepts of sexual, racial, gender, and national identities.

I titled this section “‘Drag’ up your life” because queer migrants—specifically in this thesis—encounter a queer history by negotiating with identity politics emphasized through time and space. The idea of space here is in both a physical and an abstract sense. The performers appear in the space physically, but the appearance is an exploration of social and cultural boundaries. “Drag” as a verb means to pull, so we are “dragging” up the history of our bodies and identities into the present space by doing drag. It is precisely through staging an identity through the vehicle of our bodies that we can destabilize fixed categorizations by showing that identities and bodies are “normative injunction[s]” of something that has come before (Butler, 1990: 148). For example, when dominant forces have erased queer migrants’ subjectivity—whether gendered, sexual, or racial—the migrants can reclaim their subjectivity within the performance. However, the performance is only at a specific time and place. In this temporal moment of appearing, queer migrant drag performers find their way of defining themselves. They define what it means for them to be, for example, foreign and queer in Japanese society. To demonstrate how theory lends itself to the subject positions that drag performers reinhabit on the stage through to daily life, I draw upon the concepts of parody, temporal drag, and performativity.

#### **4.4.1 The parody of gender**

Parody, in the simplest definition, is imitation. According to Linda Hutcheon, parody can be used theoretically as “one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity” (Hutcheon, 1985: 2) because it places a demand on our knowledge and recollection of what we see as a beholder to understand what is in front of us. Hutcheon takes this idea of imitation but notes that it is “characterized by ironic inversion” (Hutcheon, 1985: 6). In imitation, repetition occurs “with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (Ibid.). The distance in



parody is “signaled by irony,” which can be “critically constructive and deconstructive” (Hutcheon, 1985: 32). Hutcheon’s theory of parody is framed by postmodernism as explained in the following:

It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or ‘highlight,’ and to subvert, or ‘subvert,’ and the mode is therefore a ‘knowing’ and ironic—or even ‘ironic’ one. Postmodernism’s distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale ‘nudging’ commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern’s initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact ‘cultural’; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn’t grow on trees. (Hutcheon, 1989: 1-2)

Based on Hutcheon’s postmodern thinking, drag is parody because it is a hyper re-enacting of gender by bringing in questions of what is natural, real, repeated, staged, and forced under cultural conditions. From the standpoint of postmodernism, parody, and thus drag, is a way of pinpointing contradictions in everyday conventionality by urging an interrogation of taken-for-granted assumptions of originality, subjectivity, identities, histories, neutrality, etc. Accordingly, we can see how drag mocks and subverts everyday gender identities by exaggerating them, particularly in the moment of performance. Drag is easy to understand for audiences because of the transcoding of its parodied gendered elements. Gendered conventional signals, such as a girl wearing a pink dress and pretty makeup, assist the understanding of femininity for the audience of drag performance. The signals from the visibility of everyday gendered convention are exaggerated so much in the drag performance that it becomes ridiculous, revealing its injunction. These signals are conventions made by us, repeated over time, and assumed to be natural. Queer migration and drag then show that recognizing such conventionality as an encoder or decoder is never a simple issue in cross-cultural contexts. However, in the case of the queer migrant doing drag, the dynamic of transnationalism brings cultural variations to reveal more possibilities and with that, it exposes the injunctions. It thus complicates the repetitions of gender from the imagined origin into the settlement, adding more complications to understanding performativity of gender, as discussed subsequently.

Parody concurs with the inscriptions of gender as a continued repetition of the performative element and acknowledges the potential to change the broader possibilities of gender. These repetitions are always different precisely because they are parodies; they always miss something, add something, change something or distort something of the so-called “original.” Accordingly, the act of imitation highlights the actual critical differences. In this way, we can say that queer migrants’ drag politicizes representations by demonstrating that cultural interpretations of gender, femininity, and heteronormativity are ideological. Le Horla explains the conventions and presuppositions that drag undermines and subverts in the following:

If you’re really, if you’ve done a good job where you look completely like a different person, you look like an alien, right? Like, people don’t know if I’m like biologically female or not, which I think is great, that’s like the best gender fuckery of all. You look like a hyper hyper-feminine person, people are like, “ok that’s cool. But wait, are you a boy or girl?” That’s the question you should be asking ALL the time. I think that is why I don’t do drag king as much because with drag king, people immediately know, “oh your assigned female at birth dressing like a guy.”

Therefore, playing on such conventionalities and demonstrating the contradictions of assumed naturalness in hetero-patriarchal configurations shows that parody could amplify political meaning, thus confirming gender as a performance and also subverting it. Drag reminds you of something you do in daily life by deploying and destabilizing essentialized ideas of gender through an exaggeration that assumes an original. Although we “know” drag is ridiculous, we can also see it as an exaggeration of gender conventions demonstrating that it is not entirely detached from everyday life. Yet, there is some disengagement when it comes to following social norms. Additionally, the dynamic of queer migrant bodies also adds a dimension of parodying the disparities of, for example, race. It is precisely through failing to conform to norms of gender or race that queer migrant bodies are “out of place” in an embodied sense. Doing what certain genders do affects what certain genders can do over time. Drag demonstrates that gender depends on repetition and that what changes is an effect of repetition through time. The

concept of temporal drag will help shed light on the embodiment of parodying gender, particularly when the object of parody is something from a fixed point in the past that is brought to the present space.

#### **4.4.2 Bringing the past into the present**

Temporal drag works “as a counter-genealogical practice of archiving culture’s throwaway objects, including the outmoded masculinities and femininities from which usable pasts may be extracted” (Freeman, 2010: xxiii). In other words, it is a reconnection of cultural and historical identities with embodied queer experience “dragged” from the past—for example, an “old-fashioned” understanding of sex/gender—into the present, which is structurally hetero-patriarchal. I borrow from a phenomenological study by Iris Marion Young in “Throwing Like a Girl” (1980) to develop this argument. She argues that assumed gendered movements, such as throwing a ball, are not biologically determined. Instead, they result from regulated discourses and practices that encourage girls to experience their bodies as an object for others. This is a subtle training for the body that affects girls and young women’s embodiment to reflect a norm of restriction to their bodies that is tied closely to femininity. “Throwing like a girl” means to be not performing the skill to the highest level. If boys are said to be “throwing like a girl,” this not only represents an insult to their masculine identity but also alludes to a bodily impediment. In a drag performance, performing the act of throwing—like a girl or like a boy—connects performativity to the present or the not quite here yet (or the here, there, or in the middle-ness of being a queer migrant) (Muñoz, 2009). Temporal drag can bring historical identity politics as a fixed point in a certain time and space into the messy queer moment of the here and now, which acknowledges history in the narratives of the agency currently enabled on the stage. As drag challenges cultural ideologies of gendered identities and bodies, “throwing like a girl” becomes redundant because the performance asks epistemological and ontological questions. The imitation dragged from the past subverts our knowing because of the ironic inversion in its duplicity. Challenging identities imposed onto queer migrant bodies or using essentialized identities for strategic purposes challenges the functioning and passing of identities in which we find comfort in within our everyday lives by creating a dynamic allowing us to see through the dichotomous divisions and discriminations about not only gender and sexuality but also ethnocentrism. To develop this argument further, I will expand on the concept of gender performativity.

#### **4.4.3 Everything we do is performative**

Borrowing from Judith Butler’s (1990) theory on performativity, to “drag” up your life demonstrates the idea of subject formation by deconstructing the category of “*gaijin*,” “gay,” “man,” or “woman,” revealing its

assumed universalized essence is also a construction. French philosopher Michel Foucault (1976) pioneered the idea that subjects appear by a specific regiment of a system within power and knowledge. For Foucault, this is the system of structures of social power and governing knowledge that legitimate and reinforce each other to forge all of our understanding of the world (Foucault, 1976: 82). This lays the foundations for the boundaries of what the subject “is” or “can be.” Therefore, those who emerge as a subject in that setting are already determined in advance (Butler, 1990: 3). Through “dragging” the domain of culture in which we reside, the idea of the subject becomes more ambiguous, especially with consideration of the multiple dimensions that make up, for example, the queer migrant doing drag. Although they may be *gaijin* to the dominant culture, “foreignness” or “queerness” is performed variously within and by various cultures under different regimes of power. This is why “foreignness” or “queerness” should not be homogenized into a fixed subject, as this would imply that they are complete entities that can be found anywhere, with a basic foundation that is understandable. However, I would argue that there is a transnational transformation of identities reshaped in the process. Drag allows queer migrants to take control of these transformative identities. The drag performance assists the recognition of queer migrants by challenging the system in which the subject is formed or reformed, or is being formed and reformed, by reimagining it from the performance from those queer moments of being disoriented, such as those brought about by becoming *gaijin* and misrecognition.

Thinking critically, however, it is difficult but essential to realize that queer migrant bodies and their gender are governed by the very logic they intend to overturn. Returning to Foucault, possibilities of subjecthood are confined to a hegemonic institution that encapsulates everything perpetually and repeatedly, binding us to boundaries of social norms within power and knowledge. Accordingly, drag poses risks by perpetuating the system of gender norms we are trying to disrupt or critique, but by doing that, we challenge it from within.

One argument about the potential dangers of drag has been demonstrated by Kelly Kleiman (2020). Kleiman links drag to blackface, a darkening of the face to mimic and mock black people, because “each is a masquerade in which powerful or privileged people dress up as less powerful or less privileged people” (Kleiman, 2020: 670). She likens drag to blackface because of their relationship to less powerful people—women, and black people—historically excluded from performing on the stage. Kleiman says that the impersonation of stereotypical and exaggerated behaviors is merely an insult because “the forms of drag and blackface perform the same function: to ease the minds of an audience threatened by change (whether this pertains to the coming of abolition or the advent of sexual equality) by presenting the agents of that change as ridiculous rather than frightening” (Kleiman, 2020: 673). Thus, both drag and blackface rely on the audience’s assumptions and willingness to think that women and black people are insignificant in the broader social context. Arguably, some drag performance retains a certain

degree of masculinity at the same time as symbolically being feminine, which can potentially fall in disguised misogyny, reinforcing the devalorization of women under the patriarchal system. What is important to take from Kleiman is that she says it relies on the audience's assumptions and conventional understanding of what gender, race, etc., are. However, as Butler argues, such naturalized presumptions and understandings differ in various cultures under different regimes of power.

For arguing against Kleiman, I use Butler's deconstruction of the categories of sex and gender, which lends itself to the discussion of performativity. Butler notes that the term sex has been understood as retained by body parts and that gender is a creation that is adopted and is fluid. Butler argues that sex as a natural concept should be reconsidered carefully (Butler, 1990: 10). Calling on Foucault, Butler suggests that because of sciences such as biology or anatomy, which indicate a transcendent "natural-ness" in line with a privileged status—by virtue of it being "natural"—we bow down to sex as a naturalized concept being "reality" (Butler, 1990: 24). Kleiman's argument is based on an idea of powerful men dressing up as less powerful women, assuming the body has a natural difference in natural status based on a binary. In this way, Kleiman's argument functions to maintain the inequality women face based on her wording that drag functions "to ease the minds of an audience threatened by change." However, as Butler argues, the body is (also) a creation with its own historicity. Sex itself is artificial because the body is not a "neutral" blank slate and for Butler, culture is the determining factor that gives meaning to it. It is a creation with its own history, which Butler calls the metaphysics of substance. Underneath the ideological concept of gender is this substance that is sex, this perpetual thing that occupies a metaphysical place (Butler, 1990: 34). Gender is something emerging through culture that then, to justify itself and set the boundaries for what is normative, imbues the two anatomical differences that are supposed to exist with a transcendental "natural" status often reflected in systematic and legal procedures. This then operates to affirm, promote, justify, and validate the gendered components on top of sex. Through parody, drag exposes the above by challenging, emphasizing, and mocking the normative structures perpetuated through discourses of authority, power, scientific rationality, and rampant materialism that particularly focus on those that circulate around compulsory heterosexuality and cisnormativity. Compulsory heterosexuality, in Adrienne Rich's 1980 essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, is the normalized status quo of opposite-sex kinships and sexual relations. Through its socialization, compulsory heterosexuality maintains men's objection and domination of women under the patriarchal system. This leads to the invisibility of genders outside of the binary and sexualities outside of heterosexuality.

I would argue that drag recontextualizes the stage for the "self" or everyday life of the queer migrant. The self is connected to what it means to be gendered, racialized, and sexualized (i.e., categorized by meaning-making

paradigms), which is fractured by the performance of drag. By doing drag and parodying gender performativity as it exists in this world can destabilize virtually everything we know about ourselves because it destabilizes the self and regulatory institutions, such as compulsory heterosexuality and cisnormativity, we find ourselves in. Migration adds the layer of this happening within the here, there, and in the middle, because the regulatory systems of gender that attempt to form experience are different depending on the social context of the space. Migration is “a process of disorientation and reorientation: as bodies ‘move away’ as well as ‘arrive,’ as they reinhabit spaces” (Ahmed, 2006: 9). This transcendent understanding of the state of the body that is in motion on multiple layers of appearing and reappearing to inhabit space should open up infinite numbers of possibilities that allow us to negotiate social norms.

However, queer migrants still experience gender being ensured by regulative phenomena through various power relations set by norms and expectations. Takashi Kazama (2020) argues that the nation-state of Japan perpetuates coherent gender norms as part of its culture and national identity, exemplifying that gender is told and retold. In other words, it is “performed.” Thus, performativity is the act of doing gender through time which comes to naturalize or normalize it through narrative trajectories, which become an internalized reality within the boundaries of a certain context which is tangible as an identity, as Butler discusses in the following:

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. (Butler, 1990: 34)

Butler argues that gender comes to affirm the natural attributes associated with it, which then comes to affirm, justify, and validate the existence of gender itself. Drag upsets the so-called authenticity of “serious” masculinity by hybridizing it with so-called “trivial” femininity by parodying the performance of gender that has been institutionalized and normalized. We can challenge the normative construction of gender with physical appearance or attempt to appear in differential ways underpinned by a range of discursively constructed processes. Drag by queer migrants thus shows that there is no end-state of identity, but rather a fluid construction, and dynamic reconstruction and interpretation of meaning-making paradigms. If the meaning-making paradigms set the ontological parameters of understanding what identities are, then drag is the embodiment of going beyond these parameters.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Previous research in Chapter Two showed that drag was once fueled by its stigmatization. However, this chapter has shown that now it is the everyday lives of drag performers, in which they are negotiating and reconfiguring their social identifications, that fuel drag. Becoming *gaijin*, which has its advantages and disadvantages in Japanese society, reveals disorientations in everyday life based on appearances. Dragging up mitigates the disorientations by allowing our (re)appearances to have reconfigured meanings. Perhaps the participants' presentation of the self in their daily lives, particularly in this research, is based on postmodern Western thinking, as it relates to politics, which lends itself to their reconfigurations of sexual and gendered identifications. However, even with such bias, drag still demonstrates a negotiation of social norms, which is not a stable ground for identity. Particularly with gender, drag shows that it is a process stabilized over time that produces an assumed fixity. Drag makes intelligible how queer subjectivity appears in the negotiation of social norms. For example, in the context of heteronormativity, queer migrants are positioned outside the normative parameters based on an assumed fixity of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, they still appear and disrupt those parameters. This disruption is based on their participation in drag as a result of the commercialization of drag thanks to RPDR, which also brings about issues related to the consumption of queer culture discussed in Chapter Six. Next, I will discuss the difficulties of appearing within the national parameters of Japan.

## **Chapter 5: Negotiating participation beyond assimilation**

This chapter demonstrates that drag enables queer migrants to reappear in space and participate in society beyond normative ways, regardless of hegemonic structures that attempt to limit queer migrants' ability to forge a livable subjectivity. First, I indicate how queer migrants are in continuous negotiation with the process of assimilation by analyzing the boundaries of citizenship and policies of co-existence. This leads to analyzing queer migrants' attempts to participate in Japanese society, which are met with exclusionary measures of nationalist and heteronormative regimes. Within these, queer migrants appear in a space "beyond assimilation." Beyond assimilation invites critical thinking about time and space for a more queer understanding or simulation of assimilation that is not strictly bounded or at risk of being undermined by citizenship/the nation-state, allowing individuals to participate in society in differential ways. Space in this chapter is understood as the space in which queer migrants live their daily lives, both in a social and physical sense, where they create relationships and participate in society. I show that participating in queer communities—with particular focus on the drag family—allows queer migrants to believe that their participation in Japanese society follows the normative logic of life events, albeit not fully. Following this, I demonstrate how queer migrants challenge, conform to, and twist the organization of productivity for the nation-state in relation to family ideologies, using Kazue Muta's concept of gendered family, and the demand for foreign labor. I use the concept of chrononormativity, a term used to describe the organization of bodies in line with production, to exemplify how queer migrants parody productivity not only for their existence but also as a result of their existence. Accordingly, drag offers an alternative way of thinking about the politics of assimilation for queer migrants.

### **5.1 Understanding participation through citizenship**

The queer disorientations mentioned in the previous chapter were a common reaction to the misalignments in the everyday life of being a queer migrant. In response to those disorientations, queer migrants could realign themselves in the moment of performance, which then transferred back to their daily lives. However, that increased shifting of maneuverability and displacement brings about encounters of negotiating participation in the boundaries of the nation-state, which often leaves queer migrants placeless. This place of nowhere effectively immobilizes the queer migrant body, the site of affect, which is made different by the conditioning of the Japanese context, which hinders and has other implications for their attempts to participate in society.

Participation is the act of joining others, such as the members of society, to do some shared activity. However, there are often limitations on this act of joining certain others in certain structural conditions to do certain



things. These limitations are used in the politicized areas of membership in a community. This is often discussed in the discourse of citizenship, which I will use to show how its normative regulation expressly excludes queer and foreign people. To contextualize the participation of queer migrants in Japan, I begin with an explanation of citizenship, then move on to the situation in Japan.

T.H Marshall defines citizenship as “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (Marshall, 1950: 28). This “full membership” status alludes to the legal position and national identity of the community in question (Richardson, 2018), to which queer migrants do not always subscribe. Given the historical context of Marshall’s work, this definition does not consider power imbalances granted from certain statuses and discrimination to positions outside of normative assumptions related to gender and sexuality.

Japan’s citizenship policies, like those of many other nations, are “based on deeply rooted understandings of nationhood” and “reflect shared understandings of what the ‘nation’ should look like, who is worthy of membership, and who should be granted rights and privileges administered by the state” (Chung, 2010: 18).<sup>16</sup> One can say that Japan’s citizenship policies are strongly tied to nationalism. The association of citizenship with nation-states constructs an image in which the globe is divided into different territories, each of which belongs to a nation, which ideally has its own state (the concept of imaginary community is discussed in Chapter Six). The reality, of course, is very far from such fiction. Japan is no exception to the global waves of immigration of populations from one country to another due to colonialism, wars, natural disasters, persecution of particular ethnic minorities, and the gap between the rich and poor. Japan was never colonized. However, it fits into the narrative of modernity, in which hegemonic normality based on Western learning was introduced to aid in Japan’s development (Bhaba, 1994). Borrowing Kyung-Sup Chang’s (2010) notion of “compressed modernity,” Japan modernized in a “compressed” and “dense” manner. Its modernization happened in a short period and was centered in urban areas, resulting in a juxtaposition of compounding “native” and “foreign” elements, transforming and reconfiguring institutions and social relations. An exemplification of this can be seen in how sexuality has been regulated in the “pursuit of modernity” and has “relied on the international circulation and appropriation of ideas, norms, and policies regarding sex” (Frühstück, 2003: 24). This raises the question of how Japanese citizenship policies regulate sexuality and reproduction of norms related to gender.

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<sup>16</sup> There are considerable differences between this and the colonial citizenship of Koreans or Taiwanese which demonstrates that there are different classes of citizens in Japan based on levels of minoritization.

According to Akitomo Shingae, sexual minorities in Japan—particularly gay men—started to advocate for sexual citizenship rights in the 1990s because of the AIDS global epidemic. This was related to concerns about discrimination, invasion of privacy, access to testing, and the use of health insurance for testing (Shingae, 2013: 95-99). According to Takashi Kazama (2020), Japan’s lesbian and gay movement began in the 1970s. Yet, the beginning of the AIDS global epidemic in the 1980s highlighted these movements and the exclusion of sexual minorities, especially gay men, making them more visible in society (Shingae, 2013). In the 1990s, the Fuchu Youth Center incident<sup>17</sup> also advanced the recognition of the needs of gay men because of the political protests resulting from this case of discrimination led to increased visibility of sexual minorities. The 2000s saw the “rise of the *tojisha*,” in which the subjects in question themselves accelerated a shift in their subjectivity from being excluded to being empowered as sexual minorities. They accomplished this through sharing their experiences as the “only arbiter of knowledge about the self” to demonstrate their needs for social inclusion (McLelland, 2005: 189). In the 2010s, sexual minorities became an “object of inclusion but only partial, circumscribed citizenship was granted” (Kazama, 2020: 49). Kazama demonstrates this using the example of how the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has dominated parliament since its establishment in 1955, appropriated Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) diversity policies to present a limited form of social inclusion. Their 2018 policy proposals include aiming for “a society where people do not need to come out” rather than “a society where people can come out” (Jimin-to, 2016: 1). In the same year of 2018, Mio Sugita, a Japanese politician of the LDP, infamously said that it is a waste of taxpayers’ money to support the rights of sexual minorities as they are “unproductive” to a society based on their lack of contribution to reproducing the population.<sup>18</sup> The LDP’s proposed policies relegated “SOGI to the private sphere without public recognition,” and made “nationalism intrinsic to the concept” (Kazama, 2020: 49). Accordingly, sexual minorities are not fully included in the discourse of citizenship. There are three conditions for full citizenship for sexual minorities in Kazama’s wording:

The first condition perpetuates hierarchy, keeping cisgender and heterosexual people at the top, and prevents minorities to demand their rights [sic]. The second relegates the existence of minorities to the private sphere. The third confines diversity to the acceptance of a culture based

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<sup>17</sup> A court case related to discrimination against homosexuals who were prohibited from using a municipal hostel facility in Tokyo. See Mark McLelland (2000) *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities*.

<sup>18</sup> “Jimin sugita-shi kikou ni hihan aitsugu LGBT ‘Seisan nai’” *Nihon keizai shinbun* (Japan), July 21, 2018, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO33618520R30C18A7PP8000/>.

on heterosexism and gender norms. The conditions placed by the LDP to promote diversity show their unwillingness to grant full citizenship to sexual minorities. (Kazama, 2020: 48)

If citizenship policies in relation to nationalism frame sexual minorities' inclusion, what happens to those who have the added layer of being a foreign resident? According to Erin Aeran Chung, foreign residents "have access to a wide array of social welfare benefits – including housing assistance, unemployment insurance, and health insurance – that are comparable in scope to those offered in a number of Western European countries" (Chung, 2010: 13-14). However, Hifumi Okunuki posits that *gaikokujin* (foreign people), in contrast to *nihonjin* (Japanese people), are not full members of Japanese society but are "users and supporters of the current structural system" (Okunuki, 2019: 104, trans. by Hughes). According to Okunuki, the three main desires in terms of citizenship and social inclusion for migrants in Japan are the ability to freely enter and leave the country, the right to vote, and social rights (Okunuki, 2019: 84). Chung's definition implies that there are possibilities for incorporation in terms of social security to receive state benefits such as health care and pensions, yet also demonstrates that foreigners in Japan cannot embark on a fully-fledged process of assimilation so easily. Adding the layer of being queer further complicates the above issues for foreigners in Japan, as Kazama previously demonstrated.

For such situations, it may be more fruitful to understand citizenship based on different criteria which separate nationhood from citizenship. Ken Plummer's (2003) "intimate citizenship" includes the notion of changing intimacies and connects new forms of citizenship in an ever-changing social order where public discourses of private matters proliferate. For Plummer, intimate citizenship involves "the decisions people have to make over the control (or not) over one's body, feelings, relationships; access (or not) to representations, relationships, public spaces, etc.; and social grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences, erotic experiences. It does not imply one model, one pattern or one way" (Plummer, 2003: 14). Intimate citizenship is a reconceptualization of citizenship including the choices of doing something as well as discourses and dialogues around doing such practices. However, Plummer's intimate citizenship may be more suited to a Western context because of its emphasis on choice, which signifies a sense of agency and individualism that may not have the same leverage in the Japanese context. Additionally, even where there is access to the choices that Plummer mentions, we can still be or feel excluded based on cultural and racial or ethnic differences. Queer migrants are often not listened to or accepted into a community due to a lack of recognition of difference related to gender and sexuality.

Citizenship discourse accommodates a binarized understanding of gender. Within this, gender confirms heterosexuality as a place of non-identity because heterosexuality is allowed to disappear into the folds of the

system—it does not have to appear as it is assumed to be the natural state. Heteronormativity, which positions the assumed state as the norm, is filtered into all social and institutional structures, including assimilative frameworks and everyday encounters. If you see a queer migrant with a specific body type that matches the understanding of the male body, they must be a “he,” “he” must be masculine, and therefore “he” must be heterosexual. In the queer migrant experience, such phenomena occur in both the origin and settlement. This shows the extent to which sex, gender, and sexuality are all wrapped up in compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), which filters all ways of seeing the world, including social citizenship. I argue that this also includes assimilative frameworks for foreign residents. Nationalism is linked to the status quo of heteronormativity, and together they create multiple exclusions and discriminations against queer migrants. Both are reflected in the LDP policies mentioned earlier. If citizenship and assimilation are all glazed over by a heterosexual lens, this assumes heteronormativity to be “neutral,” which detaches queer migrants from the discourse of citizenship and assimilation. As the LDP demonstrated, if they pander to minoritized movements like the LGBT movement within the larger frame of SOGI (even if it is relegated to the private sphere), it becomes a place of intelligibility; however, this only serves, in Judith Butler’s words, the heterosexual matrix.

Rather than advocating for LGBT citizenship through intimate rights alone, it seems the idea of citizenship needs careful reconsideration. Nira Yuval-Davis (1999) argues that citizenship should be understood as a multilayered construct distinguishing between identification and participation in collectivities. Collectivities exist in different layers such as “local, ethnic, national, state, cross- or trans-state and supra-state” (Yuval Davis, 1999: 122). If we look at how boundaries are constructed in the public and private spheres, then it is possible to develop an “acknowledgment of one’s own positioning(s) while emphathizing [sic] with the ways others’ positionings construct their gaze at the world” (Yuval Davis, 1999: 131). Accordingly, “difference encompasses equality and perceived unity and homogeneity are replaced by dialogues that give recognition to the specific positionings of those who participate in them” (Ibid.) as well as the situated knowledge such positions can offer. As this thesis has argued, it is essential to note that the difference between identification and participation is that identity politics tends to homogenize and marginalize difference into a dichotomy of us/them often based on ethnic, national, and racial differences. On the other hand, Yuval-Davis’s usage of participation is affected by social, economic, political, and legal positionings that are never dichotomous.

Drawing on the concept of multilayered citizenship allows for examining the participation of queer migrants beyond assimilation by considering formal/informal status in the settlement and bringing into dialogue their positioning in the origin. It also considers the relationship between the countries of settlement and origin and

each country's position of power in the international world order. Since it is arguable that there is not full citizenship available for (queer) migrants in Japan (Hirano, 2020), multilayered citizenship is a more fruitful concept to use in the context of Japan. Using this concept, I argue that queer migrants secure memberships in relevant categories and thus reject assimilation. I recognize that it is not clear how multilayered citizenship would work for changes in policy such as issues related to migration control, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, when we apply the concept to "real people," it becomes clear very quickly that participation understood through positioning will be different for me, a white British student, and for Labianna Joroe, a *nikkei-jin*, working full-time in a Japanese company. In response to my question about her feelings about assimilating into Japanese society, Labianna said:

I think [assimilation] opens a conversation to the counter-talk saying, "go back to your country." [Saying go back to your country] doesn't work for me anymore because I have been living in Japan for more than 20 years. And there is no country for me to go back at this point. Right? It doesn't work for me anymore, Saying that, you are making no points. You are giving scores to me because I have the same rights as you have to be in Japan. I really want take the Japanese citizenship because they will have no arguments to say that. So Japan will be my passport, my nationality. Then there's no other place to go. Even now with COVID, if I leave Japan, I cannot come back because of my [Brazilian] passport. I think it will open their eyes. One thing that I got really surprised and touched recently was with the BLM movement. I was working with BLM Tokyo to organize, and volunteering and translating the website and everything. I was releasing a lot of information on social media. And people around me, in the drag, around Labianna, you know, people that I thought will never talk about racial issues, they were talking about racial issues. And that is something that touches me a

lot. Because in their lives, living as Japanese people, they wouldn't have to care about that because it is not their reality up to now. But when I see them educating themselves and asking questions and say like, "oh am I being racist?" You know, it is a big stake. From zero to one. I think it's harder to make from zero to one than from one to a hundred. I think that is something really big. I want that to happen with all issues, female issues, female rights, gender equality, sexual minorities. And they are straight females. Or gay males. It's really good to see those people being aware of these kind of issues. And me being relevant to them.

Labianna acknowledges her position and perspective while claiming that if she were to acquire Japanese citizenship, her influence in advocating for human rights would be amplified. If Labianna wants Japanese citizenship, she must undergo the process of naturalization, the legal act of acquiring a nationality. However, even without naturalization, Labianna has still assimilated to a certain degree. Assimilation is the process in which non-nationals integrate into the dominant culture. The classic model of assimilation is defined as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life" (Park and Burgess, 1921: 735). This definition of assimilation implies that the process is an inevitable and linear one in which migrants are under obligation to relinquish their own culture in favor of the host culture. However, as we can see from Labianna, it is not so simple to be fully incorporated into Japanese society, even with her Japanese lineage and residential status. Even though Labianna has adopted the host nation's behaviors, language, and way of thinking, she is still denied full access to certain opportunities and institutions. Labianna's idea of assimilation implies that she sees a need to change her national identity to Japanese in order to advance her work to reduce prejudice and discrimination toward certain groups of people. At the same time, from living in Japan for over twenty years, she knows the host culture does not want to "absorb" her in a one-way process. This demonstrates that the particular meaning-making paradigms related to sexuality, gender, and race that accrue around migrant bodies enhance, preclude, or impede this process, mainly due to participation (in citizenship) and social acceptance.

It is also essential to consider that Labianna's migration trajectory results from Japan's policies for bringing *nikkei rodosha* into the country to work. Migrants in this particular category, *nikkei*, have multiple exceptions in their residency status. This category allows for unrestricted activities related to labor and has the indefinite option to renew their residency permit, though this pseudo-permanent residency is not equal to citizenship in Japan. Therefore, it would seem that on an institutional level the category of *nikkei* exists primarily for economic purposes. Through labor recruitment, *nikkei-jin* help build the nation, but there is an assumption that they will leave. Perhaps the *nikkei* exception is suited to the framing of acculturation. According to Milton Gordon (1964), acculturation is a process of cultural assimilation in which non-nationals alter their cultural practices and acquire the language, behavior, and beliefs of the host society. As queer migrant identities' transform, so do their positionalities and perspectives. In these shifts, there are elements of collectivity within different communities, which I will argue allows queer migrants to simulate the process of assimilation, defying its often-linear understanding of class mobility. Accordingly, queer migrants redefine and reconfigure such collective shifts to facilitate their belonging (see Chapter Six).

Phenomenologically speaking, this raises the question of whether Labianna's naturalization would depoliticize the space for the purpose of fitting into the dominant culture. Even though she aims to reconfigure the dominant culture by showing that those with Japanese citizenship can be in diverse positionings, assimilation aims to mitigate the feeling of not being at ease, which is synonymous with being foreign. Even with Japanese nationality, there are other multiple layers in which Labianna and other queer migrants would not occupy dominant social locations. Their non-normative identifications would still be undermined, resulting in an obstacle to participation.

## **5.2 Co-existence without visibility**

The Japanese government have introduced attempts to overcome obstacles for foreigners participating in Japanese society, such as policies related to co-existence that lend to the ideas of participation and thus citizenship through a formal and informal structuring process. *Tabunka-kyosei*, or "multicultural coexistence," is a term that refers to building a multicultural communal society, which could be an exemplification of the perceived unity Yuval-Davis mentioned in her discussion of multilayered citizenship. I will apply this concept to examine *tabunka-kyosei*.

As defined by the Ministry of Internal Affairs,<sup>19</sup> *tabunka-kyosei* refers to the following principle: “People of different nationalities and ethnicities should live together as members of the local community, recognizing each other’s cultural differences and trying to build equal relationships.” [国籍や民族などの異なる人々が、互いの文化的ちがいを認め合い、対等な関係を築こうとしながら、地域社会の構成員として共に生きていくこと] (2006: 5, trans. by Hughes). Although the term is vague, since its release in 2006, it has often been seen in the discourse surrounding the integration of foreign residents. The idea of “living together” as communal society members demonstrates the effort toward and support of the integration of foreign residents by “building equal relationships.” This implies that there are intended developments toward a formal path of integration for migrants at the national level where multiple nationalities and ethnicities become singularized into a layer that is ultimately no different than being *gaijin*. This policy is not encouraging dialogue between positions across the public and private spheres, which multilayered citizenship calls for. Instead, it maintains the status quo of a perceived unity where homogeneity remains on top. At the social level or in informal everyday settings, Japanese society imposes a kind of pressure to assimilate, but this comes with an expectation that foreigners cannot actually assimilate, indicating that equal relationships are only intended for those that fit into homogeneity. Kosmic Sans shows an understanding of how she was not expected to fall in line with the uniformity of her company’s routine work style:

I think in Japan, the thing is, like, you have this thing when, even like in my animation company, “oh they are doing like this, like that, because they are foreigners.” There is card, the foreigner card. They don’t care about you because it’s such a big deal because [you] are foreign.

This demonstrates an example of not recognizing “people of different nationalities and ethnicities” and “each other’s cultural differences and trying to build equal relationships” as *tabunka-kyosei* calls for. It is merely ostracization fortifying an unequal relationship. Therefore, *tabunka-kyosei* as a policy needs careful consideration of its usage of the word “recognize” precisely because there is no actual recognition of queer migrants’ positioning other than that they are foreign, lacking the potential to recognize the difficulties minorities face in everyday life

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<sup>19</sup> “Tabunka kyosei no suishin ni kansuru kenkyukai hokokusho ~Chiiki ni okeru tabunka kyosei no suishin ni mukete~. *Soumusho* (Japan), March, 2006, [https://www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota\\_b5.pdf](https://www.soumu.go.jp/kokusai/pdf/sonota_b5.pdf)



and the workplace. Instead, the policy enhances “the neoliberal logic of self-reliance” by implicitly supporting the logic of the “paternalism of Japanese people towards foreign residents” (Hirano, 2020: 34). If we consider the application of *tabunka-kyosei* to queer migrants, there is no mention of either how sexuality or gender needs to be recognized or how this would affect queer migrants positioning. *Tabunka-kyosei* confirms the invisibility of queer migrant bodies while solidifying the dichotomy between Japanese and non-Japanese. Thus, it places queer migrants in conflicting strategies for survival.

The word *minzoku* in the policy also requires careful consideration. As Mai Ishihara (2020) has discussed, the Japanese word *minzoku*, often translated as ethnicity, is full of ambiguity. In her work, she questions how we can separate the Ainu, the indigenous people from the islands of Northern Japan, from Japanese people if *minzoku* is a group of people who share language, identity, and culture. In this sense, if *minzoku* is more associated with nation or nationalism, it does not necessarily equal the exact meaning of ethnicity. For Jane Yamashiro, the definition of *minzoku* “shifts according to the context; sometimes it refers to the idea of culture and ancestry, while other times it implies the hierarchal ordering of groups of people” (Yamashiro, 2013: 149). Accordingly, *minzoku* should not be understood as equal to race as it does not imply a system of hierarchical division of people based on phenotypical features. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, phenotypical features of whiteness do shape experiences of becoming *gaijin*. A racial bias places white Western foreigners at the top of the *gaikokujin* hierarchy. I would be the target of *gaikokujin-sabetsu* (discrimination against foreigners) rather than *minzoku-sabetsu*, which demonstrates the contrasting ideas of who *minzoku*, and *gaikokujin* exactly are.

*Tabunka-kyosei* urges surface-level toleration of non-Japanese cultures to avoid social conflict with the main culture and its own colonial cultures within its national borders. Therefore, I argue it works to burden queer migrants with the responsibility of minimizing their differences to ultimately prevent them from contaminating the culture. Accordingly, *tabunka-kyosei* aims to accomplish a tolerability of differences in that queer migrants’ differences should be tolerable or *made* tolerable for the dominant culture to endure. Through this, there is no social conflict as the dominant culture is not provoked to have to tolerate the differences. By placing the responsibility of creating a palatable cultural exchange into the hands of foreigners, this perhaps leads those foreigners to make the decision not to assimilate. The minimized differences also create superficial connections creating a barrier to fully understanding each other’s backgrounds and building so-called equal relationships. Le Horla exemplifies such barriers in the following (emphasis mine):

I know a lot of foreigners who just like kind of end up being detached because they don't really, they can't, they find it much harder to make Japanese friends [than] they first realized. And then, you know, a lot of their foreign friends, it's like, besides the fact that they both happen to be foreign and maybe like work in the same place, they don't have a lot of other factors, you know, bringing them together. And so people and then like sometimes those people leave Japan. So I know people who have been in Japan for like 10 plus years, and it's like all my friends are temporary. And I don't know why I'm here, except I married a Japanese woman and now I can never leave, you know, like "I didn't, I never studied Japanese, but I'm married to a Japanese woman." I know a lot of people like that. I think except for they had sort of an interest in Japan, they couldn't really articulate. They just sort of ended up here. And that's a bit like, you know, they don't have anything, you know, *positive anchoring them*, I guess, or anything that they could make into a positive. Whereas I feel like by being queer, like I feel like there's higher risk but higher returns, where I think if you don't find your people and you're queer in Japan, it could be maybe much, much, much more isolating. But if you do find your people, especially if you live in a city and not in *inaka* (countryside), then, you know, you really can like mesh with the other people well.

Le Horla shows that even with difficulties of fitting into the dominant culture, the "positive anchoring" they have is being queer. The shared experience of minimizing difference facilitates participation in something

beyond the borders of the dominant culture. Queer migrants find a way to maintain livable lives in such an indirectly hostile society, which may cause the coming and going of many temporary friends. *Tabunka-kyosei* may be an underpinning of the reason that queer migrants create their “own” structures for financial, emotional, and social support to forge visibility.

The visibility of queer migrants is, however, complex. Drawing on Chapter Four’s discussion of becoming *gaijin*, when queer migrants’ lived subjectivity or sense of self is unintelligible in the mainstream public domain, they become invisible. They internalize the process of invisibilizing their differences. In contrast, emphasizing an identity makes them visible where the difference becomes an advantage. For example, playing the *gaijin* character to gain credibility in the mainstream culture creates visibility but also leads to a more significant possibility of complicity in the oppression of one’s own group as the price of inclusion or acceptance. Simultaneously, it may be easier for me than for Labianna to play the *gaijin* card because whiteness is not othered in the same way as other cultural otherings such as *nikkei*. Whiteness accrues advantages for participation and makes it easier to play the *gaijin* card. Even within queer communities, some non-conforming bodies still experience hostility, such as Maxim and Labianna’s discussion in Chapter Four of how doing drag can make people undesirable in gay communities. Accordingly, I will argue that queer migrants’ displacement and replacement through drag doubly functions to oppose the hostility of the dominant culture and exclusions within the queer communities. At the same time, drag demonstrates that we are also parodying ourselves through the expectations of being *gaijin*, to seek inclusion in the dominant culture.

Drag can emphasize how queer migrants are “on guard”, or place contingencies on their acts of participation, through a presentation of the self, which is curated as a palatable individual for the dominant culture to endure. Belgium demonstrates a sense of being “on guard” when I asked about the degree to which she has assimilated into Japanese society:

I feel like especially when I’m with other foreign friends here who haven’t been here that long. Sometimes I may feel like, you know, if we are in public or whatever, like it’s something that’s so intrinsic to me now that I don’t even think about seems so like, when my family visited and stuff and I was like “don’t do that,” sort of thing. But yeah, I think [I’ve assimilated] pretty well, but I think I went through a sort of period,

maybe, I don't know, three or four years ago where I just sort of almost purposefully went against that. Like I felt like because I mean, it sort of seems a bit redundant, sometimes like it seems like what's the point of...I think realistically there's only a certain point you can get to in Japan, where regardless of what happens, you're still going to be a foreigner here. It's just reality. I don't think it's actually a bad thing at all because it gives us a lot of freedom [...] And if you I think if you're in the right headspace, you can sort of create your own little world a bit. But I think in lots of ways, obviously, we're a little bit, I guess [...] But I mean, people, often people will sort of say to me, like, like, Japanese friends or just people like me or whatever, like, I think I disappoint them because I'm not foreign enough for them anymore. Like it is, it's not entertaining for [Japanese people]. I think I get that impression quite a bit, especially if I go out with people that are either new to Japan, it will always end up that they're the ones that like, that's who everyone wants to talk to because everything is still so fresh and new.

Belgium is particularly “on guard” around other foreign friends and when her family visits Japan. Although she demonstrates hegemonic ways of seeing foreigners as never really quite assimilating by informally “creating their own little world,” she also posits herself as a hegemonic spectator who accepts and complies with these perspectives’ requirements. I wonder if this is made easier by whiteness, which also tends to claim a place of hegemony. I would argue that being on guard is part of the tended space of beyond assimilation. Queer migrants create a functioning self as a coping mechanism by calibrating their surface of the self, which is exposed to and negotiates with the main culture, to gain a foothold in a larger public domain that is in some cases hostile, ignorant, and dismissive.

Being on guard is also essential for queer people in heteronormative society to persevere. We can relate this to the idea of “passing.” Passing is a presentation of self that allows a subject to be perceived by the dominant culture as a regular member. I present as male. I wear men’s clothing. That is enough for me to “pass” as a heterosexual man because heteronormativity is so deeply ingrained in society that it does not see other sexualities. This filters through to everyday situations in which people ask whether I have a wife, kids, or a girlfriend (Hughes, 2020). To “pass” assumes an authentic original relying on a binarized understanding of gender that the spectator considers a person to be part of. As Tanaka Ray (2006) mentions, the first thing we notice when passing people in the street is the upper body to confirm our assumptions about gendered bodies. This can be assisted by clothing, pads, straps, binders, etc. to transcend assumptions from one side of the gender binary to the other. However, to “pass” as a conforming gender when identifying as non-confirming is far more complicated. In Japan, Le Horla is passing as female:

I know that my American ID says I’m gender X. Well, actually sex X which is not scientifically correct so I don’t really know why they did it that way but technically speaking, I have legally transitioned in America, so that’s nice. If that eventually becomes a thing in Japan, I would do it in Japan. But if it gives me permanent residency...I don’t have it the worst so I don’t feel I should be going “wah” online or anything. I think especially Japanese people who want to transition to the opposite gender, they probably have it the worst because they don’t have the option of zipping off to a different country like I do. Then, it’s so hard legally to transition in Japan and you have to be labeled as having a mental illness...

Le Horla, who was assigned female at birth, highlights that they can “zip off to a different country” at any time if they were to experience extreme hostility from the dominant culture because of their non-conforming gender. Because of the temporality of occupation of space and participation, some queer migrants may not feel the need to address inaccurate perceptions of themselves or oppose misrecognition. I would argue that in the temporal space

beyond assimilation, a privilege is constructed in which queer migrants do not have to contend with hostility from the mainstream culture because they can imagine possibilities of just “going home.” While particular forms of queerness have become increasingly normalized in queer migrants’ own cultures, these identifications remain distinctly non-normative in Japan, which is a crucial difference. Le Horla compares their situation to the profoundly discriminatory problems binary transgender people in Japan have to deal with to change their gender. For legal documents in Japan which require you to state your “sex,” Le Horla selects the check box for “female” because “X” is not a possible option. If they were to naturalize, they would have to “become female (again).” Le Horla’s unrecognized gender is not simply a derivative of heterosexualism or cisnormativity and does not fully reinscribe these systems. Assimilating to models of queerness in Japan to acquire citizenship is also not a requirement for negotiation. Le Horla’s passing is complicated because although they are not exactly burdened to the extent that binary transgender people are by blatant and disrespectful misgendering, there is a sense of imposition or lack of validation of how their gender should be recorded on documentation. However, they do participate in queer communities. As Le Horla mentioned previously, many of the issues surrounding conflicts related to being foreign are alleviated by sharing experiences of being queer.

### **5.3 From participating in queer communities to drag families**

The shared experience of having the positive anchor of queerness allows some level of visibility for queer migrants. Queerness may not be the only positive anchor. Queer migrants in Japan move between multiple communities, and their participation and encounters will vary. For example, one community may be a recreation of their participation and interactions symbolically closer to the country of origin. Here we can be reminded of familial relations, local dialects, subcultures, etc., and we can find a positive source of support and recognition. In other communities, queer migrants may experience varying levels of misrecognition or misunderstanding of various aspects of their identities, culturally specific gestures, or communication among people from (dis)similar backgrounds.

Notably, queer communities offer more positive forms of recognition for queer migrants. According to Jack Halberstam, “queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (Halberstam, 2005: 2). Queer neighborhoods like Ni-chome in Shinjuku, Tokyo, have been attractive to new queer migrants because they provide social resources that make adjusting to life in Japan slightly easier offering a small step toward social mobility. These physical spaces provide

a level of social support and a familiar social and cultural setting, which helps queer migrants adapt to a new environment. For example, queer migrants can find recognition and support within communities brought together by globalized and mainstream queer cultural products, such as what drag is becoming, which can be experienced in Ni-chome. The recognition of queer migrants' self will vary by context even within the queer community. Within this, drag is a way of bringing people together in differentiated ways of like-mindedness. As discussed in Chapter Two, queer people are choosing their families (Weston, 1997). Drag families, I would argue, are an extension of this in that the choice becomes a way of detaching oneself from normative family ideologies while also simulating the normativity of these ideologies. It is a way to create a network of people to make sense of the disorientation of becoming *gaijin*. I asked Le Horla about their drag family:

They are brilliant. I like that we have really diverse backgrounds. So, I met Angel at IUC, at our Japanese language school, as we both sort of started doing drag together. She was one of the first non-binary people I met in person since I myself came out so that was very fun. She just kind of announced it to me. When I introduced myself to the school, I introduce myself as x-gender and stuff. And then the next day, we were hanging out together and she was like "oh yes I find it so inspiring that you just announced that yourself. I hope I can do that too someday." I was like "wait, what?" And she was like "I'm non-binary." I was like "oh, you could have started with that." But, so, we started doing drag together. We both really like Yukiro's sort of, you know, crazy witch aesthetic and so, and Phuc and I go way back to when I lived in Kyushu. We kind of just started the family as I think with me, Phuc, Angel with Yukiro as mother. And Ross, we started living with Ross in the share house after I moved back to Japan and he taught us a lot of the really professional-level makeup because he's quite good.

He taught us how to block the brows, as he and Yukihiro are already former bandmates and really good friends, it was quite easy for them to adopt father and mother of the house roles. And since then, Summer Valenciana joined. We are all people who were kind of friends before but I think being in the house really deepened our friendships.

Le Horla still uses the analogy of a “father” and “mother” to describe and explain their sources of support in other queer people. Arguably, these are symbols of a heterosexual union, connoting procreation for the “father” and “mother” to have drag “babies.” It does make sense to argue that the drag family could be an alternative form of the family, but within this still lies the contradiction of using words embedded in hetero-patriarchal meanings. Drag families use cultural frameworks of the ideal family for configuring kinship of fellow queer people. The shared experience of being queer determines kinship. Drag brings a shared interest in recognizing each other, strengthening community cohesion, and altering their attachment to other institutions such as family and everyday lives. Therefore, *the drag family is a parody of a family* that breaks down norms by performing reconfigured identities, symbolizing the paradox of an alternative framework while simultaneously mimicking and being outside the heteropatriarchal family ideology. Speaking from my experiences in the field, drag does not provide vast economic advancements such as substantial financing, or stable employment opportunities; it does provide social mobility for overcoming the troubles with coexistence and invisibility by providing an alternative to the institutional frameworks they are excluded from. However, kinship related to being queer is theoretically not monolithic. Yet, there is a sense of perceived unity within queer communities based on positioning. Queer communities are a microcosm of the “real world.” There are subgroups of people who have conflicts with other groups of people. Drag, however, could be the thread that brings some of the groups of people together. I asked Kosmic how drag changed her experiences in Niche:

Yeah, like I said, there are the twinks who always go out with the twinks. The bears only go out with the bears. We have the foreign community. And the fashion community. Ok, before doing drag, I hated the Fancy-Him people. The fashion. Like



very...looking at you from the bar. But since I started drag, they are more friendly with me, much more friendly with me. They accept me much more because I dress up.

Drag, in a sense, becomes a queer practice that is also rewarded with friends or, as mentioned in Chapter Four, afflicted with perceived undesirability. Kosmic's experience demonstrates that Ni-chome normalizes and incentivizes drag as a practice that comes with a reward of acceptance. To gain this reward, Kosmic does not have to confer with the dominant queer culture to "learn" drag or do drag. I would argue that the influence of RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR) has given drag in community spaces like Ni-chome some credibility which has glossed over its stigmatization with cautious commendation. Sexually, gay-identified drag performers are still undesirable within the masculinist views of the gay men in Ni-chome. Therefore, RPDR and its globalized impact on the queer community make drag an initial entry point for queer migrants in which they can adjust, gain membership, and thus participate. I will develop the argument related to the consumption of drag and its relationship to belonging in Chapter Six. Supposing drag is an entry point into the queer community for queer migrants, this raises questions of the implications of participation in drag by queer migrants in the Japanese context.

#### **5.4 Challenging, conforming to, and distorting productivity**

If LGBT people have already been determined as "unproductive" by the LDP because of their lack of contribution to reproduction, then drag performance by queer migrants could well be implicated as contributing to such unproductivity within the nation-state. Halberstam has argued that to have "success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation" (Halberstam, 2011: 2). Accordingly, drag may be a way of assisting queer migrants to challenge, conform to, and distort such success in line with reproductivity and wealth accumulation. An exemplification of this can be seen in the aforementioned idea of drag families. In this section, I argue that although the use of the concept of family in the drag family is ironic, it articulates "an alternative vision of life, love, and labor" (Ibid.), which becomes the network for queer migrants to make sense of the disorientation of becoming *gaijin* that challenges, conforms to, and distorts productivity.

Kazue Muta (2012) argued that the family has become responsible for reproduction and labor based on the fiction of "natural" gender under the management of the nation-state. Muta called this structural concept the "gendered family." Building on Emiko Ochiai's definition of *kindai-kazoku* (the modern family), Muta argues that

the gender dualist and heterosexist hierarchy of the gendered family has many consequences for the ideology of the family. For example, upholding the nuclear family ideal perpetuates the separation of the domestic sphere, which women occupy, from the public sphere, which men occupy. Thus, the division of labor remains. Furthermore, urging affectionate and emotional relationships to uphold and support a strengthened children-centered familial collectivity has resulted in an exclusion of non-family members and a decline in social interaction outside of the family unit (Muta, 2012: 106). The drag family is a deliberate imitation of Muta's gendered family in relation to reproduction and the labor of love. The function of the modern family is reproductive labor. Labianna distinctly links the family ideology to why she is sometimes ostracized for not falling in line with "the desire to be like everyone else" (emphasis mine):

The desire to be like everybody else is...the desire to be similar comes from the beauty in Japanese philosophy that we have to all be similar to make society works. To make society going on, as a group, as a whole. *So anything that deviates from that is erased.* So like male should have male roles and female should have female roles. Japanese has Japanese roles. Non-Japanese has non-Japanese roles [...] so men get married, have two kids, buy a house by the age of forty. Go to snacks and *fuzoku* (adult entertainment) and cheat on their wives. And the female will get married, have two kids, their husband will get promoted, they have a house, and be a housewife. It's pretty easy for them to understand. And it works for so many years so why to deviate from that.

Labianna demonstrates her knowledge that anything that deviates, such as from the ideology of the gendered family, is erased. Labianna's role as a queer person exemplifies an instability in her membership in society at the institutional level of familial relations. Drawing on Muta's concept of the gendered family, I would argue that queer migrants' drag families highlight the instabilities and inequalities in the politics of the gendered family that

create a mechanism for productivity through reproduction and labor. Reproduction includes emotional support and caring familial relations which the drag family parodies. Parody, however, also reveals the absurdity of assumed naturalized gendered roles, which enables drag families to possibly create “new” intimate relations. Therefore, the drag family revolts against the “productivity” of the gendered family but are also compliant with this norm, while at the same time distorting it. This can be clarified further using the concept of chrononormativity to define productivity.

Chrononormativity uses time to (re)organize bodies for “maximum production” (Freeman, 2010: 3). In turn, the social expectation of “a normal life” in which certain events should occur at a certain time in a certain order—education, entering the workforce, getting married, childbearing, and buying a house—becomes an organization of time rendered natural or normative. Lisa Guenther explains how all structures are permeated with such naturalized or normative attitudes:

These are not things to be seen but rather ways of seeing, and even ways of making the world that go unnoticed without a sustained practice of critical reflection. There is nothing necessary or permanent about these structures, and they don’t even operate in stable, consistent ways across all contexts; even within a given historical moment, differently positioned subjects are likely to have divergent relations to overlapping structures. And yet these structures generate the norms of the lifeworld and the natural attitude of those who inhabit them. (Guenther, 2019: 12)

In other words, chrononormativity suggests that individuals are grouped together or made to feel a sense of collectivity towards success through organizations of time in line with production of doing activities under certain structures—cooking, cleaning, and providing emotional support and care—that often go unnoticed without critical reflection. Accordingly, successful production even by queer drag families cannot be separated from heterosexual reproduction and labor. These events that should occur in a certain order give meaning to life or at least give a hierarchy of respectability. If queer migrants do not have, for example, reproductive agency, as the LDP says, such an incapacity to reproduce institutions of the family preconditions their participation. Yet, this is not necessarily the case in line with chrononormativity. Therefore, queer migrants queerly rearticulate heteropatriarchal kinship, forming emotional support networks of drag families which place them back into the order of life events requiring reproduction and the labor of love. However, the irony is in the parody of the family ideology itself. Queer migrants and their drag families still define their relationships based on an internalized morality that encourages people to

commit to a significant other, exemplified in the heterosexual union of the “mother” and the “father.” However, institutions do not impose it onto queer migrant bodies to uphold such morals in an overt manner. Instead, queer migrants are compliant with the social organization of productivity in the systems of chrononormativity. In the eyes of the nation-state, queer migrants may be “unproductive” because reproduction sustains the whole idea of productive labor. Queer migrants are not reproducing the labor force of the next generation, but they are contributing to the production of economic labor in which they balance individual autonomy by mutual engagement in the labor force. The difference between gendered families of Japanese nationals and drag families of queer migrants is therefore their contributions to the labor market under the nation-state.

There is an institutionalized pattern of xenophobia against foreign workers in which the Japanese government maintains a strict immigration policy for foreigners coming to work in Japan. According to Hideo Aoki, “Japan’s policy on foreign workers learned from the failure of the Western countries’ policy of an open door to foreigners during the 1960s and 1970s” (Aoki, 2021: 12). According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the current statistics of foreign workers in Japan are as follows: the number of foreign workers was 1,724,328 in 2020, an increase of 65,524 (4.0%) over the previous year. By residence status, the number of workers in the “Professional and Technical Fields” was 359,520. The number of those in “Technical Intern Training” was 402,356. On the other hand, workers with “Activities Outside Permitted Status” [資格外活動] (including those who hold study abroad permits and doing part-time work) totaled 370,346.<sup>20</sup> The queer migrants who participated in this study are performing while holding residency permits for a variety of purposes (detailed in Chapter Three), such as student or working, which raises the question of whether their performances, especially in bars, would be considered activities outside of their permitted status. I have yet to encounter a drag performer who came to Japan for the purpose of doing drag.<sup>21</sup> Drag is not legitimized as a type of “real work.” For most drag performers, “financial reasons alone do not explain why they continue with their performance career, as drag is not usually a lucrative profession” (Berkowitz and Balgrave, 2010: 178). From my own experience and discussion with participants in Tokyo and Osaka, performers are not permanently and legitimately employed by the bars to do drag. Although it might not always be the case, this demonstrates that queer migrants who do perform drag to earn money have little or no control over their employment conditions.

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<sup>20</sup> Summary of Reports on Employment Status of Foreign Nationals (as of October 31, 2020). Available at: [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_16279.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_16279.html)

<sup>21</sup> This is a completely different situation to, for example, Filipina workers working at cabaret style shows in the sex industry who came to Japan on Entertainer visas for economic reasons.

In the broader social context, however, labor also heterosexualizes queer migrants to legitimate their participation. Aoki notes that labor culture in Japan is framed by paternalistic capitalism:

The basis for this docile workforce was also the product of Japan's labor culture—that is, the paternalism rooted in a patriarchal family principle where the employer serves as the symbolic father and the employee as the child, structuring [the] labor-business relationship in Japan. The resulting seniority and lifetime employment systems, supported by this paternalism, were established during the period of high economic growth. The belief that a company is akin to a family and that employers and employees comprise a community became an effective ideological tool for controlling worker demands. (Aoki, 2021: 10-11)

The conflict arises here in the clash between paternalism rooted in the patriarchal family in the workplace and queer migrants' inability to subscribe to that ideology. Within the assumption in the logic of heteronormativity—the default attribution of the patriarchal family to everyone—to account for the “reality” of sexualities as well as migrant lives conflicts with the principles of governing individuals in the workplace in a controlling or discriminatory manner. Foreigners are not considered part of this paternalistic patriarchal family which means they are likely to be ostracized in the workplace, as Maxim and Kosmic discussed in Chapter Four. For Maxim, their success in the workplace relies on forging an identity through a reflexive understanding of her passions and skills. However, this was met with hostility, forfeiting their stake of being part of the family. At the same time, a privilege is constructed for foreigners because they do not have to assimilate to the patriarchal ideology within the workplace unless they decide to be compliant. Additionally, there may be some legal constraints regarding foreign workers' rights and protections, which do not allow them to be fully incorporated into the company (family) structure. Foreign workers often work under different conditions from Japanese workers such as fixed contracts, lack of flexibility to change workplace, and restrictions based on residency status and acquiring new visas, which may lead to other issues related to housing and social securities. Accordingly, queer migrants occupy a precarious space at the margins of production based on heteronormative success. It is essential to consider that citizenship is related to the boundaries that define who is the object of heteronormative success. Citizenship also sets the boundaries for protection of who can be successful. As seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan wasted no time in 2020 before and during the state of emergency to mark foreign bodies as outsiders and exclude them from the nation.

Being a queer migrant beyond assimilation offers the possibility of a potentially liberatory relationship to the idea of productivity. At the same time, as migrants are constructed as expendable to the nation, it is important to consider how the economic conditions of Japan produce a temporal logic of the organization of productivity. Although for the nation-state, disposable foreign workers may be of service, they are still expected to assimilate to such organizations of productivity.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Contributions to productivity codify participation in the conditions of society in which objects are attained through specific acts, with the attainment of these objects more dependent on meeting formalized criteria of membership, i.e., citizenship. Participation conflicts with the constraints of normative discourse surrounding migration with queer subject formations, which places queer migrants in a temporality of meaningful moments across time and space situated beyond assimilation while negotiating participation on different layers. Indeed, participation can be leveled, demonstrating the need to exemplify differences within queer migrant communities, particularly when the foreigners in Japan are presented as having a coherent/stabilized subjectivity.

Queer migrants go beyond assimilation by reflecting on the structures that attempt to give meaning to and form their experience in Japanese society. Engaging in the practice of drag offers a way to restructure their perceived unity, leading to alternative possibilities of meaningful experiences for queer migrants by initiating dialogue in multiple positions. In this way, queer migrants live a life beyond assimilation as a resistance to, a compliance with and a distortion of the maximum production in a normalized life. Beyond assimilation allows queer migrants to queer the given trajectory of living as a foreign resident as implied in the *tabunka-kyosei* policy, limiting their experience as a palatable *gaijin* for the main culture. Some orientate themselves to reproduction, the labor of love, and economic wealth accumulation by aligning with systems of chrononormativity. From this, certain privileges are constructed: first, they do not have to fully assimilate to survive. Second, they thrive in queer communities, which offer an alternative means of support due to experiences of incomprehension, confusion, and disintegration. Beyond assimilation provides a way of also admitting the kinds of “distanced” assimilation that characterizes experiences of queer migrants. However, it raises the question of whether queer migrants have assimilated a globalized queerness into the Japanese context, creating a position of power. In Chapter Six, I will look at how their participation in communities creates a sense of belonging and power. In the words of Michel Foucault:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body. (Foucault, 1980: 119)

As I will demonstrate subsequently, a kind of power that produces queer knowledge and discourse is circulated by queer migrants. This is alluring to queer migrants because it enables them to construct a sense of belonging in which they can decide who is included and who is excluded.

## **Chapter 6: Politics of belonging and power in transnational queer communities**

Building on the previous chapters' discussion of how drag demonstrates alternative ways of identification and participation, this chapter focuses on how migration has transformed queer communities, bringing about a sense of belonging and constructions of power. To develop my argument for this, I begin with a theoretical understanding of belonging, imagined communities, and representation to show how identification and participation relate to the politics of belonging. Then I move on to my observation in the field at a drag event held in Tokyo and Osaka, Beauty Blenda, to demonstrate the inclusions and exclusions brought about by belonging within the queer community. I also undertake a critical examination of how queer migrants link their countries of origin and settlement to local, national, and international practices through their belonging. I demonstrate that through the transnational drag culture, queer migrants can find a sense of belonging in which they can grasp some control to be politically active despite the divisions and hierarchies within the groups of international and Japanese performers, resulting in a transformation of local experiences. I argue that the multiple identities and space beyond assimilation have given queer migrants a sense of belonging and construction of power which creates a power dynamic that fortifies political activism in queer communities, and poses the risk of neo-colonizing local experiences of queerness. I use the concept of queer performativity to theorize queer migrants' strategy for the production of meaning and being in their queer kinships brought about by the commercialization of drag.

### **6.1 Understanding the politics of belonging**

I use the term belonging because it positions the fluid and constructed nature of the processes associated with identification and participation (discussed in previous chapters) to be brought forward and understood more rigorously. "Dragging" up the readily understood proxy identifications in everyday life and queer migrants' participation in Japanese society beyond assimilation is also deeply connected to migrants' sense of and politics of belonging in multiple layers. Belonging is "the making of lives that we feel are worth living" (hooks, 2009: 1) which is often understood as a way of contextualizing identification or participation. That is, "belonging can be considered a process whereby an individual in some way feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a personalized identity and a collective one" (Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2008: 44).



In this regard, belonging describes how individuals interpret a vast range of imagined and lived attachments and memberships in groups. It is precisely the congealing of imagined and lived senses of belonging that shapes embodiment as a member of a queer community and allows you to make that experience narratable. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), communities share an imagined sense of belonging based on experience—even if their members have never met each other—by perpetuating coherent narratives of such “imagined communities.” Anderson gives the example of the critical role the media plays in how nationhood is formed for the imagined community of the nation itself through its promotion of and assumptions about the idea of nationhood. The nation “is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 2006: 7).

Queer migrants have several imagined, lived attachments and memberships in groups. These are different from the “comradeship” of which Anderson speaks because they are not horizontal. In queer migrants’ experience, there are several layers to their sense of belonging to multiple communities because of the diverse range of individuals within the communities. Within each attachment to their multiple communities, queer migrants interpret themselves differently based on a narratable subjecthood. Accordingly, queer migrant subjectivity becomes inseparable from the construction of the “we-ness” of each attachment in different communities. I will focus specifically on the imagined and lived attachments and membership in communities through drag in which the media has played a vital role.

To build on the argument about the commercialization of drag in Chapter Four, RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR) has created a “we-ness” to the attachment of drag that makes sense of queerness, expresses it, and communicates it. This “we-ness” created by the media can be found at drag shows worldwide thanks to the commercialization of RPDR. Appropriating Michel Foucault (1980), RPDR traverses and produces drag to produce the “we-ness” which creates productive network in the social body of queer communities to induce pleasures of drag, forms of knowledge about drag, and discourse on drag. Arjun Appadurai (1990) indicated that “cultural flows” of fluid sets of cultural dimensions can circulate the world itself, and the individuals, ideologies, and capital follow these flows. Drag is an example of a process in which the origin and settlement are continuously transmitting culture but with some extra weight provided by the productive network of RPDR through its dominance in the representation of drag. Stuart Hall defines representation as “the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” (Hall, 1997: 17). Connecting this to Michael Lovelock, “drag, and the queer kinship structures which surround it, become[s] a mechanism of survival, for coping with layers of marginalization and for forging a

selfhood with worth and value in the face of a hegemonic sociality which often asserts the opposite” (Lovelock, 2019: 157). In this way, RPDR has created a sense of belonging and representation of queerness in the social body of queer communities which queer migrants have appropriated for their benefit. The representations of drag have permeated queer and even broader popular culture, which extends to the social interactions of the everyday lives of queer migrants. As Kosmic mentioned in Chapter Five, doing drag can help you overcome the boundaries between subgroups within the queer community through a shared interest in drag. Kosmic is visually pleasing, aligning to the high fashion category of drag often seen on RPDR. This demonstrates an individual’s knowledge of or taste in drag, giving us a form of “cultural capital.” However, this requires compliance with the norms that surround RPDR and its fandom.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) developed the concept of “cultural capital” to explain a form of capital that is non-economic. For drag, having a particular taste in aesthetically pleasing wigs, makeup, and outfits would confer a form of cultural capital. Different social groups have different identifications of taste, which reinforces class relationships based on “symbolic capital.” Typically, the upper class enjoys high culture such as art and theatre, whereas the lower class partake in low culture such as reality TV or popular music, thus creating class division based on the consumption of culture (Adorno, 1975). As mentioned in Chapter Two, drag was considered a stigmatized practice within the homosexual community, an already stigmatized part of the broader social world. Through the commercialization of drag, having knowledge of drag and doing drag may facilitate obtaining status in the queer community. High or low forms of culture are socialized into our “habitus,” or the way our backgrounds in life have shaped and structured our understanding of the social world (Bourdieu, 1977). Drag has gone from being a stigmatized culture in the queer community to being a structured structure that can be regulated. I would not go so far as to say that class determines taste in drag, but there is an expression of taste that creates affiliation with class, which is why there are archetypes of drag that are regulated into structures with rules to follow, such as the comedy queen, glamour queen, fashion queen, beauty queen, pageant queen, etc. Thus, the representation of drag from RPDR is creating a structure that attempts to form the taste of drag. The audience may use these types of drag to define themselves, which means that taste in drag results from consumption, particularly of RPDR. The commercialization of drag has brought about rules for drag that put economic pressure on drag performers to have the best wigs, makeup, and outfits. If performers are not obedient to these norms of RPDR, they may lose their stake in having cultural capital. Even if there is a commodification of drag, taste in drag still contributes to the idea of “we-ness.” Labianna discusses the taste in drag that RPDR has solidified in the following:

I think RuPaul's Drag Race, they have a very limited representation of drag queens. It's really a thing. They have a specific portrayal of a queen. So people think, everything that's not look like them, is not a queen it's not a drag. Even RuPaul being a black person, she doesn't see, as a black person. She's rich, she has money, she has privilege, she's married to a white guy. She's not in the position of a lot of black people in America. In the past, she was. But now, she's not. And how can she represent all those people who look up to her, like seeing themselves. It's so different right now. Just because you are a "certain thing" doesn't mean you can be representing the whole community for being this "specific thing." I think it has a lot of racism as well, in Drag Race. I don't feel like it's RuPaul's fault or RuPaul's job to represent all kinds of drag. She represents her kind of drag. So people have to understand...there's some other different aspects of drag as well. You never seen a drag king on the competition, a bearded queen, a hairy queen. They always have to be like boobs, paddings. They are read<sup>22</sup> [for] just not wearing padding. Not all women have big ass. And also I feel there's so many misogyny in the gay scene, especially from gay males.

The "we-ness" produced by RPDR is constructed by a very limited representation of drag. But even with this limited representation of drag, there is still a mobilization of queer bodies. The queer kinships of the above "we-ness" would be better described using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of "queer performativity," which "is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being" (Sedgwick, 1993: 11). The assemblage of drag forms a collective power to disrupt assumptions about identity and subjectivity. Through such bonds of solidarity, we can

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<sup>22</sup> Read means to wittily insult someone verbally, often based on exaggerations. The term was first popularized by the film *Paris Is Burning*.

protest. Accordingly, the “we-ness” in the queer performativity of drag is subversive but almost remains attached to hegemony. Even though the culture of drag that queer migrants are appropriating may result from globalization, the fact remains that the queering of space to make way for different genders and sexualities from drag unsettles supposed or assumed neutrality by exposing the regulatory discourse that reproduces norms.

Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that the commercialization of drag may limit the possibilities and the meanings of reorganizing the repetition of performances within gender. The medium of a TV show becomes a mode of power to constitute what drag is. The circuit of culture that allows the culture of drag to be consumed, distributed, and produced is part of a regulatory system deeply embedded in heteronormativity that reproduces certain meaning-making paradigms. More significantly, it has great symbolic power and generates economic power. Drag as the subject of a TV show, therefore, subverts queer migrants’ subjection to meaning-making paradigms within regulatory systems by giving substance to the production of meaning and being through queer migrant bodies.

The queer performativity of drag can be extended into Nira Yuval-Davis’ definition of belonging as a “politics of belonging” which does not reduce “we-ness” to a matter of identity but also includes the multilayered nature of participation in queer migrant drag performers’ strategic subjectivities within boundaries and how this is affected by power relations. For Yuval-Davis, a politics of belonging is “not only the construction of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries by those who have the power to do so” (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 18). It is necessary to add the dynamic of negotiating power into belonging because queer migrants’ inclusion in and exclusion from queer communities within the broader context of the dominant culture is also full of complexity. For example, queer migrants are confronted with negotiating identifications based on meaning-making paradigm which limit their subjectivity as we saw in Chapter Four. Additionally, they are faced with issues of participation because their queer bodies do not allow them to extend into the space to find a sense of belonging when their bodies are disoriented in a heteronormative society. However, by participating in the transnational queer communities, they can align their bodies with the direction of drag as a cultural flow, obtain cultural capital and find a sense of belonging. To some extent, whether they feel like they belong is not always necessarily the most crucial factor. What is vital for queer migrants is being recognized, acknowledged, and seen.

Phenomenologically speaking, being recognized, acknowledged, and seen are connected to the individual’s needs within their embodiment. Bodies are sites of sensory perception which see and are seen. As a foreigner, queer migrants are recognized, acknowledged, and seen as thus becoming the *gaijin*. As discussed in Chapter Four, this

is because the structures of the world (Japan) that we (as *gaijin*) inhabit attempt to form our experience. Queer migrants respond to this by modifying the space to make it more “familiar.” As Sarah Ahmed (2006) notes, a norm is inhabited “as giving residence to bodies.” Belonging is connected to conforming to social structures which perpetuate these norms. Not conforming to norms could affect our sense of belonging. The disorientations, however, do not necessarily dismantle the connection or allow us to abandon connections to the norms completely but they do present a new direction. The new direction in the drag community is forging relationships with other drag performers to become a “drag family,” as Le Horla explained in Chapter Five. The sense of belonging in the strategic production in the parody of a family gives meaning to their being in Japan. It symbolizes the paradox of being outside the dominant culture and being part of a microcosm of that world. Accordingly, this allows them to engage with others who occupy the same “familiar” space. The creative outlet of doing drag allows queer migrants to make their everyday lives more livable. Practices in their daily lives become part of drag and drag becomes part of those everyday practices which help them “feel at home.” Mark Edward shows how drag can be a way to assemble shared experiences and bonds of solidarity after experiencing hardships in a heteronormative environment:

I have witnessed, and experienced, the hardship and struggles many queens and kings have gone through, and go through, because of financial difficulties, family rejection, homophobia and/or insecurities of work. But at the same time I have seen the younger ‘draglets’ welcomed into experienced and matured drag communities that have given young LGBTQIAA, and D, a sense of belonging, a family life and much-needed support through acts of kindness, mentoring and positive role modelling. (Edward, 2020: 167)

In other words, drag families forge an environment that allows a sense of care, comfort and belonging. However, as I have argued that queer migrants are in a space beyond assimilation, it could be that their sense of belonging in drag families is more of a privilege constructed of feeling as if one is at home. Still, as a matter of fact, they are not at home. Wim Lunsing (2001), who conducted in-depth anthropological research in and on Japan using participant observation and interviews, applied his experience in the field to his groundbreaking work *Beyond Common Sense: Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Japan*. He examines how marriage fits into mainstream lifestyles of Japanese people and how this comes to be understood as “common sense.” Lunsing openly discusses his sexual relations with participants, arguing for resistance to Western normative ethical approaches to subject-object relationships in academia that could impede understanding the diversity of local values related to love, sex,

and marriage (Lunsing, 2001). Although his body signals temporality because he is a foreigner, he is also consciously temporary in Japan for the purpose of research with no intention of assimilation or integration, which would create proximity between him as a researcher and his objects. There is a consciousness of his whiteness affording him advantage as a researcher when he notes, “I feel quite at home in Japan and Japanese seem to agree that I fit in quite well. Not looking like a Japanese to most people makes my position different [...] and possibly gave me more latitude in what behavior was allowed” (Lunsing, 2001: 64). However, to claim that he feels at home lacks awareness of the complexities of, for example, the bodily, cultural, and racial differences that are embedded in power relations and how this is connected to the politics of belonging.

It is precisely that there is a lack of pressure applied to foreign bodies to conform to familial structures related to reproducing the population that creates an alternative sense of belonging. Lunsing demonstrates that this belonging is glazed over by the freedom to be non-conforming which constructs power and privilege. Compared to the queer migrants’ social location in the dominant culture in which they may feel like they are at the margin of society in everyday life, so to speak, the sense of belonging in queer communities and drag families would become central to their being-at-ease. In this sense, the drag family has a sense of power which is situated in its possibilities for providing a sense of belonging to queer migrants. The “family life and much-needed support through acts of kindness, mentoring and positive role modelling” that Edward mentions is also guarded by strategies of chrononormativity, as mentioned in Chapter Five, and other strategies of power. Family ideologies have ways of normalizing queer bodies. Thus, the queer performativity of the drag family does not necessarily work to necessarily displace hegemonic systems of power that attempt to form experiences such as the hardships and struggles that Edward mentions. The notion of family itself is also deeply embedded in normative ideologies which are reproduced in drag families to create power.

Within this power granted through belonging, however, comes an opportunity to create spaces for queer people (and consumers of queer culture). I would argue that although a position of power is granted to globalized drag culture through the consumption, financial success, distribution, and production of RPDR, it is the queer performativity in the “we-ness” that allows bodies to assemble, phenomenologically speaking. However, within the new belonging and assemblage of drag, queer migrants have set a new boundary, as communities always do; this time, it is the queer migrants themselves who construct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion which result in the regulation of local experiences of sexual minorities and distortion of the representations of the drag scene. The next section will demonstrate how they do this and how power in belonging works for inclusion and exclusion within the drag venue itself.

## 6.2 Inclusion and exclusion

The drag performance is affected by the venue and the audience. The venue sets boundaries for the performance and the audience. The audience is essential because their relationship with the performer makes the performance “good” or “bad.” RPDR has provided opportunities for more venues to have drag performances where performers can express their, in the words of RuPaul, “charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent.” Such opportunities create communal experiences of queerness that cultivate a supportive audience and positive interactions between individuals. RPDR “has played a major role in making drag, or a particular understanding of drag, intelligible for mainstream media consumers. These are consumers who may well not experience drag in ‘real life’ scenarios like queer night-life spaces or pride parades” (Lovelock, 2019: 158). In what follows, I will investigate Lovelock’s claim by introducing descriptions from my fieldwork in Osaka and Tokyo with a particular focus on an event held at two venues, Beauty Blenda, and interactions with audience members.

Generally speaking, the drag performance is zoned around queer venues. In Osaka, typically you can find a drag show at gay owned venues in Doyama such as EXPLOSION, Jack in the Box, and Village which cater mostly to Japanese gay men. In Tokyo, drag shows are performed frequently at Aiiro Cafe, Aisotope Lounge, and EAGLE Blue, which cater to a mixed audience of Japanese and international customers. There are many “snack bars” or cabaret shows where *josoka* (performers of *joso*, or cross-dressing men) perform. There are also drag events run by queer migrants adjacent to these Japanese-run locations. These include Beauty Blenda and Closet Ball in Tokyo and Gyag Reflex in Osaka.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, I was involved in creating the event Beauty Blenda, which I started with my drag family at the time, Haus of Gaishoku. According to Haus of Gaishoku’s current website, “Haus of Gaishoku is Tokyo’s international, multilingual, queer-run collective of queens, kings, performers, and artists. We play, we slay, we run late and that’s okay.”<sup>23</sup> Beauty Blenda welcomes “Queer, straight, black, white, big, small, fat, fatter, fattest. Everyone is welcome at Haus of Gaishoku’s crazy, inclusive, groundbreaking, mind-numbing, nausea-inducing cabaret party, Beauty Blenda.”<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the invitations, the boundaries used to understand including and excluding at this event are already gendered, sexualized, and racialized by their welcoming statement despite their claim of being an inclusive party.

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<sup>23</sup> Haus of Gaishoku, October 20, 2021, <https://hausofgaishoku.com>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The venues used for Beauty Blenda in Osaka and Tokyo, Bar Theatre LUDO in Shinsaibashi and Gyoen ROSSO 198 in Shinjuku, respectively, are both non-queer venues. The reason I am emphasizing non-queer venues in my analysis is that in a “traditional” sense, queer venues have historically provided “safe spaces” for queer people who face societal ostracization based on gender and sexuality. Gay venues played a vital role in drag culture’s early development (Newton, 1972). Queer venues are more likely than non-queer venues to provide gender-neutral bathrooms to ensure that people of all genders can enjoy the venue in the same way. Bar Theatre LUDO is a multi-use art and entertainment space. At LUDO, you can expect to see cabaret shows, musicals, fashion shows, pole dancing, and an array of live performances. Gyoen ROSSO 198 is a live venue, at which you can also expect to see a wide variety of live performances. ROSSO also houses the Tokyo Closet Ball, another drag event run by queer migrants. Both venues could be considered “alternative” and “foreigner-friendly.” Arguably, the venues’ alternative status and openness to foreigners could be the affirmation of these being “queer venues.” As mentioned in Chapter One, queer functions to describe the possibilities outside of the normative. However, the question of what makes a venue queer is beyond the scope of this thesis and so for the purpose of this thesis, I label them as non-queer venues. The design of both venues’ interiors directs us towards the establishment of recognizable codes such as seating to face the stage, tables to place drinks, and space for interacting with others, all of which are integral to the experience of watching a live show. Nothing was striking about the layout of the venues. Both had a large stage with lighting systems to create a particular visual spectacle most suitable for the drag performance. Both also had very small dressing rooms.

The reason for using Bar Theatre LUDO was that we were not able to perform at Japanese bars or clubs. We asked to perform at EXPLOSION’s Global Kiss, an international “mix” event, but we were told it was not possible unless we built relationships with the already established performers. This is because there is a social hierarchy of Japanese drag performers, which I will discuss in detail subsequently. Since we were not able to perform at the established queer venues, we took it upon ourselves to start a new show. At first, the show was once a month in Osaka on a Saturday night, which soon became twice a month. As the pressure to perform twice a month became unsustainable due to financial reasons, the show went back to one performance per month. Some of the more ambitious members of our drag family took the event to Tokyo the year after Beauty Blenda started. This is when the success of the show was truly realized.

Regarding inclusion, using non-queer venues like LUDO and ROSSO, provides more opportunities to attract a diverse audience than using queer venues. In my observations, gay bars in Tokyo and Osaka often have exclusive door policies of “men only,” particularly for club events, catering to a specific clientele of gay men. One



example of this is EXPLOSION's *onigiri danshi* night for bald or short-haired men as subjects who are interested in the same thing as an object of desire. As discussed in Chapter Four, sexual desire in the Japanese gay community is often based on sameness (Moriyama, 2012). When venues hold an event with drag, it often becomes "open to all," such as the "mix" event Global Kiss also at EXPLOSION, adding diversity to the venue. Still, some smaller venues maintain an exclusive policy to keep their regular clientele of gay men happy. Therefore, drag in queer/non-queer spaces potentially adds an inclusive door policy to an often-exclusive space, thus providing a "safe space" sensitive to non-conforming genders and sexualities and people from diverse backgrounds. This creates a culture of inclusion that may not exist in other "Japanese" events and venues, such as at show pubs or cabaret shows where *nyu-haafu* or *josoka* perform. Indeed, even if these venues are adding drag to their events as an extension of the globalized form of queerness from RPDR, there is a domino effect of bringing about the roots of queer liberation in the politics and protest of the ostracization of marginalized genders and sexualities within "our own" queer community. In the end, it opens doors for a wider range of drag and adds diversity to a community that is already marginalized while also being male-centered and masculinist (Moriyama, 2012).

Although the increasing representation of queer liberation and creating an inclusive social and physical space are necessary, some criticisms can be made. We started Beauty Blenda off the back of a successful television show which allows drag to be consumed, distributed, and reproduced. This has a danger of creating a show of drag for "tourists." By tourists, I mean those who are not invested in queerness but consume it on their own terms for entertainment and see it as something outside of their regular lives. Framing Beauty Blenda as an inclusive party for specific categories of people, such as queer, black, etc., capitalizes on the desire to find a safe space for minoritized social locations. Taking advantage of the globalization of drag, the event capitalizes on queer people living in Japan and queer people visiting Japan looking to find comfort in queer kinships they can make sense of and fit into. Pandering to an American audience, the show even goes as far as introducing a tipping system. It is not the case that the performers are performing to make a living doing drag. Chapter Five mentions that most queer migrant performers who do drag in this study came to Japan on visas for other purposes outside of entertainment. Hence, introducing a tipping system is purely for a supplementary form of income. At the same time, it does cost money to do drag—drag performers must purchase wigs, makeup, and garments—so, arguably, tipping contributes to making a "better" performance. If we consider the parody element of drag that subverts the subjection of regulatory gender, then their performance is not motivated by economic reasons. In conversations I have had with performers at Beauty Blenda and other events, they have said that drag is an alternative way to do things "they can't do professionally," such as singing, stand-up comedy, and dancing. In Chapter Four, I argued that the

commercialization of drag was one of the primary reasons for queer migrants to start doing drag. It raises the question of whether queer migrants are co-opting non-queer venues for a queer show for doing “things they can’t do professionally,” making money, or creating queer spaces. Events like Beauty Blenda create a space to alleviate a lack of belonging for queer people who fall into the identity markers they claim to cater for as demonstrated in their welcoming statement. However, there is a possibility that this is glossing over a means of profitable income with inclusion. Even though it creates a queer “safe space,” there is no option to contest its “unsafety,” as non-queer people enter queer spaces for the purpose of entertainment, a phenomenon that is rooted in the popularity of RPDR. Within the money-making circuit of culture provided by RPDR, there is the regulation of what type of drag should be performed and what kind of drag becomes the representation of the local scene. As I will demonstrate subsequently in this chapter, these reasons make it possible for queer migrants to neo-colonize local queer experiences.

The local drag scene in Tokyo and Osaka is different in various ways. Beauty Blenda in Osaka tended to showcase a messier, more grass-roots style of drag that relies on comedy and sight gags, perhaps more in harmony with the *ero guro nansensu* of drag that Simone Fukayuki spoke of in Chapter Two. In Tokyo, Beauty Blenda was more about choreographed dancing, beauty, and fashion. As the Tokyo show garnered more success, the Osaka part of Haus of Gaishoku separated from the Tokyo team in January 2020 for issues that are not relevant to this thesis. Another interesting difference was the way the audience in Osaka and Tokyo reacted to the performances. In Osaka we often talked backstage about how it seemed as if “the audience did not know how to react.” It was a much bigger reaction in Tokyo of screams, clicks, and people shouting “yas,” precisely what you would expect from an audience “trained in drag” from RPDR. This could be related to the demographics of the audience. My field notes describe the audiences in Osaka consisting of mostly straight ciswomen. In Tokyo, they were more queer-identified people in the audience, including those who live in Tokyo and many tourists from overseas. Although it is problematic to assume that the audience is of a specific demographic, my assumptions are based on interactions with the audience and observations of other performers during and between the performances.

The sociality of watching a drag performance encourages the audience to cheer, laugh, scream, and shout, which the performance implies is a way of engaging with and extending the performance as part of the audience’s own social interaction. This was exemplified in my experience of watching the RPDR touring show Werq The World, which came to Tokyo for the first time in March 2020. Despite the worsening of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the show still went on, and I took myself to Zepp Tokyo on March second to attend. The queens from RPDR noted that they did not want to disappoint the Japanese fans because this was their first time bringing the

world tour to Asia. Tokyo was the last leg of the world tour. The audience was primarily Japanese women along with a large international crowd. Among all the cheering, laughing, screaming and shouting, there was a moment when Monét X Change, the host of the show at the time, made jokes about race, particularly from the perspective of the black experience. Monét, born in the West Indies and raised in New York, often satirizes white people, which would be well-received in an American context. Such jokes are predicated on the audience having knowledge of racism, particularly in the context of countries where black people have been historically and systemically discriminated against socially and legally by powers constructed by the white world made by colonialism. Interestingly, Monét assumed that because the Japanese audience members were “Asian,” they would somehow have a similar experience of ostracization and found solidarity in this type of humor. Although the language barrier may be at the core of this misunderstanding, jokes about white people did not translate to the entire audience, only to the international side. Most people who were laughing were the actual targets of the joke: white people, raising the question of whether their laughter was merely virtue signaling. As queer liberation has been globalized, it could be argued that so has an insincere sentiment of pretending to show solidarity with oppressed people. Arguably, this may be because they experience oppression themselves as queer people. It could be that the audience is performing a good, liberal character. Or, their laughter may well just be a demonstration of their characteristics of liberal political and social leanings. Would the Japanese audience have laughed if the joke was made in Japanese? In my observations, the majority of supporters of RPDR in this audience did not understand the history of racism and how it ties in with queer liberation politics. As a performer representing the brand of RPDR, Monét also did not understand the cultural context of Japan in her assumption that she would find solidarity in the much-needed battle against racism with an “Asian” audience. Arguably, my perspective as the one that problematizes this is also full of contradiction, but it seems that there is a liberal way of thinking that is part of the norms of RPDR and its fandom that is also becoming globalized. Based on this, I would argue that it is not only the globalization of drag that allows queer migrants to connect with audiences at their events on differential levels but also their experiences of (not) belonging in some form of localized nuance. For example, at Beauty Blenda, the performers use drag as a way of pandering to Japanese audiences whose understanding is configured by the assumption of a deep division between Japanese and non-Japanese. Like in Monét’s hosting, satirizing majority populations is often a source of humor in drag. By aiming at the majority whose normative structures place minorities in opposition, satire exposes these structures that are assumed to be invisible, which usually pass without comment. The difference is that queer migrants have developed their own histories, inscribed by the multiple identifications, boundaries of participation and sense of belonging, providing them with knowledge of how their bodies are perceived in the Japanese context.

Focusing on just race to decide who is at the margin and who is in the mainstream can be precarious because race is supported, or realigned, by different signifiers, such as class, gender, and sexuality, under different cultural contexts.

Like at Werq The World, the audience at Beauty Blenda was often mostly straight-identifying ciswomen. This raises the question of why straight ciswomen constitute the majority of drag show audiences in Japan. Of course, I do not actually know everything about these people, but I can only base this on the interactions I have had with audience members as a performer myself and as an audience member at drag shows. This is the downside of doing ethnography, as all I can do is provide descriptions of the cultural settings. Still, classic phenomenology is concerned with first-person accounts of experience and using that as the starting point for a meaningful experience. Phenomenology becomes critical when we add the layers of social, political, and historical situated relations. Based on such phenomenological thinking, it is essential to recognize the women I spoke to at drag shows as a marginalized group in Japanese society. At the same time, they hold majority positions due to being mainstream Japanese, in contrast to *gaijin* performers, and having the neutral status of heterosexuality. This raises the question of how these situated relations intersect with the interactions in the sociality of watching a drag performance and how the geographic location of Japan shapes this with the meaning-making paradigms of race, gender, and sexuality. A possibility is that straight cis women may particularly enjoy drag by queer migrants due to their lack of diverse experience of the world because of how women are structured in Japanese society as a marginalized subject. Their agency is used to treat their relationality unfairly. Such first-person experience could be the chief influencing factor in their situated relations with others like *gaijin*. Layered onto this, queer migrants as *gaijin* have an ontological status as the other, like women. Therefore, the drag show is a bodily presence of other marginalized groups of people, allowing women to share their subjectivity with a paradox of undermining other subjectivities through their desire for encounters with difference. According to bell hooks, majority populations “see their willingness to openly name their desire for the Other as affirmation of cultural plurality” (hooks, 1992. 368). Events like Beauty Blenda end up commodifying differences of queer migrants for majority populations and serving them as entertainment. As mentioned in Chapter Four and Five, queer migrants who perform drag parody norms of reinscribing, maintaining, and challenging the status quo; thus, the objectification of queer migrants as a commodity is perhaps more willing or intentional than not. In this sense, it is not necessarily domination of queer migrants as racialized beings in the context of Japan, as hooks argues. Yet, there is an element of dominating an essentialized group of *gaijin*, who do not have full membership in the status quo. The audiences’ desire to come to the show is not necessarily rooted in support and positive recognition as found in the sense of belonging of queer kinships. Based on the type of

performances I saw at Beauty Blenda where performers pander to the division of Japanese and non-Japanese, I would argue that the mutual recognition of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia is necessary for these interactions. Although it would seem that there would be crossovers in the worries of Japanese women and queer migrants, essentially, they are not given the same warrant. This would explain why audience members can “get away” with asking questions such as “Is she really a man?” when talking about an assigned female-at-birth performer who does drag. This demonstrates how drag is a phenomenon that has brought the majority—as Japanese and heterosexual—population’s attention to queer culture via watching a television show and interacting in queer spaces.

In an online article from the British weekly listings magazine Radio Times, Thomas Ling (2019) queried whether non-queer viewers should watch RPDR and use the language from it. As the show is for entertainment, it is undoubtedly for anyone to consume. In an extreme sense, the difficulty comes when queer spaces that have been reshaped to allow certain people—queers, or other marginalized groups of people—to occupy it are “infiltrated” by those who “forced” them out of the dominant space in the first place. Although drag may be providing an opportunity for solidarity rather than separating people by communities, this does come with a risk of non-queer people appropriating queer spaces. But if drag is a parody of normalized gender binaries, drag is an appropriation of heterosexual/mainstream culture for minority subjectivities. The problem lies in that as part of the status quo, majority populations can decide how to exclude everything outside themselves, including the “worries” of queer migrants mentioned in Chapters Three and Four. What falls outside of those boundaries provides entertainment for the status quo. That is why audience members from a majority community feel they can ask performers, often from minority communities, if they are really a “man” or not. They can be the spectator of people performing outside the norm of gender because of their stake in the status quo. They are there to see a non-Japanese performer that perhaps they would not have the opportunity to interact with in their everyday lives. As Japanese, straight, and cisgender, their stake in the status quo makes them feel entertained because drag and the queer migrant body go against the status quo. It is not the palatable “multicultural experience” of *gaijin* that *tabunka-kyosei* promises in Chapter Five. However, if most of the audience is women, it raises the question of whether they share some affinity with performers on the basis of experiences of being excluded, particularly in a chauvinistic society. In this context, there can be unpleasant interactions between performers and audience members. However, as this all varies so much by context, it is difficult to say that only a single form of interaction occurs between performer and audience. The audience member may have power to silence the performer in one occurrence; in another, the performer may have

the power to misapprehend the audience member. However, these interactions are often as a result of the venue's culture rather than the event itself.

This can be exemplified in the mainstreamification of drag in club events. As drag becomes more prevalent in non-queer venues as entertainment for heterosexual audiences, it can be co-opted for maintaining misogynistic and chauvinistic club cultures in the Japanese context of women's oppression. Labianna talks about the time she was hired in such a situation:

I was working at this club as a drag queen. And we have to be in the VIP lounge to entertain people, you know, to drink with them. That club was purely, solely, supported by rich males. Male customers. So what did we have to do? Bring girls [female customers]. So they [male customers] could pay drinks and get them drunk. I thought it was terrible so I acted a real fool. And I was interacting with the girls that were already there. And they...I was getting so much fun with the girls. Kind of like, the male side, they went back home, the guys just left the club. After the shift, in the morning, they get really angry, the manager get really angry with me, pissed with me because I was only giving attention to the girls [customers]. And not getting them drunk enough for the men to be able to take them out to have sex or whatever. I almost fought with them but I didn't. I was holding because another fellow queen that invited to work that gig...I didn't want to make her look bad or anything because she was fully working for that club. I didn't want to take her out from that job she's dependent on. I was like, just hold back, and I never went back to that club, not even as a customer or whatever because they were supporting rape culture. So that was

something really traumatizing to see...and the manager was a female, a woman...And you see woman supporting those kind of actions, it's so fucked up. And everyone who asks me about the club, I feel like that's terrible don't go there. That's everything I say. If you wanna work there, go work there. If you wanna go there, go there but...'Cause I think drag queens kind of raises the, how do you say, the barrier for the girls. If you're a gay or drag queen, they will be more, they will feel safer with us. If you're only like another woman, another girl. Like, ok, let's go drink with those guys. They will kind of feel rivalry or something...I don't know. And if you're just men, they will just feel skeptical and they will not follow them. But if you're gay or drag queens, then they will say, oh yeah let's have some fun. I think they use that as an advantage to give girls...it's almost like sex trading. Bring girls to the VIP lounge to drink with them. Get them fucked up and you know rape them. That's like a huge thing...So I will never went back there. Everybody who asks me how's there, I just say don't go there. That's the reality and I think it happens everywhere.

Labianna demonstrates here that it is precisely the perspective from the queer migrant that reveals the misogyny and marginalization of women in Japanese society. Taking advantage of women's trust in gay men who do drag—for not only money-making schemes but also for objectifying and sexualizing women—is a gross appropriation of the audience of drag by the venue. David Halperin (2012) asserts that gay men appropriate and exaggerate identification with women in their experience of strength and suffering, glamor, and abjection, as well as disempowerment and vulnerability in gay femininity. Gay femininity is a cultural and social practice that can challenge the authenticity of “serious” masculinity by hybridizing it with “trivial” femininity. Based on Halperin's argument, drag performers who are gay men could share a similar subject position with women, a socially and

culturally marginalized position; this could be why Labianna could have so much fun with the women at the club and why they place some kind of trust in her, as she said. However, Labianna is a “man,” thus retaining a certain degree of masculinity, particularly from the perspective of the event organizer. So, if a drag performer is symbolically feminine under such a regime of “getting girls for drinks and sex” for heterosexual men, it becomes disguised misogyny reinforcing the devalorization of women under the deep-rooted patriarchal system.

The system of becoming familiar with patrons and offering them drinks is popular in Japanese bars and clubs. At Japanese *josoka* shows, performers foster a familiarity with their audiences, drink with them, and listen to their problems, much like in the “snack bars” and hostess club cultures. Unlike the other performers I interviewed, Labianna’s experience as a drag performer often had an added requirement besides being on stage. Even though she is seen as a *gaijin*, she has Japanese lineage, so there is a different regulation inscribed onto her body than on other queer migrants, making it easier for her to be included than excluded. Particularly when she works for non-queer venues and non-queer events, she is expected to be a party promoter like in the event described above and she is also expected to encourage people to drink. This could cause extra “worries” for the performers for whom drag becomes productive labor. Accordingly, Labianna’s Japanese lineage works not only as a productive capacity as a laborer to be exploited but also in the materiality of her body as a Japanese resource to be exploited. In contrast to Labianna, queer migrants of European descent do not have the same inscriptions onto their bodies.

Maxim demonstrates how she experienced trying to fit into the inclusionary and exclusionary environment of the Japanese drag hierarchy. A meaningful sense of being in Japanese queer communities is to exist in the fictions of hierarchy, which creates a circuit of embodiment through a logic of control. Maxim explains in the following:

It’s like rules that, for example, you should, you shouldn’t come later than one of your *senpai* [senior] queens. Uh, you should be there [early]. Like if you’re the youngest, you should be better first, but you should use the worst, uh, space in the club. And, uh, in the dressing room, you can’t have the best part. You should have the worst. You should know where your place is. Even if there’s no mirror or if there’s no air conditioner and you’re going to sweat and do your makeup in the dark, you can’t



have the good places, even if there's no one. Yeah. I mean, that's this kind of stuff.

And it's, I understand that people don't want to deal with this because it's stupid.

No one is overtly “making” younger performers “use the worst space” or “do [their] make up in the dark.” Yet, hierarchy is making younger performers’ bodies sites of exploitation. Recalling Martin Heidegger’s analogy of the ready-to-hand hammer, Maxim’s body is not ready-to-hand in the same way that Labianna’s is. However, Maxim has managed to carve out a place in the hierarchy which allows the materiality of her body to be placed, allowing her to be exploited as a resource. With this exploitation comes the possibility of resistance. Maxim has started her own event to break through such exclusionary practices:

Well, I started my, um, event, uh, last year with, in which I decided I would book A Japanese queen and a less established, foreign queen every time. So that's, uh, and would be two every time, cause it's like, I don't have much money to, to book. I can't book many people and it's Aiiro-Cafe, it's outside. There's no stage. It's only for like four or five hours where I DJ and they do a show and I think it's good. The crowd there is mixed as well. It's like, half foreigner half Japanese people, so you can enjoy the best of both in one night. And, um, yeah. I also remember that when I started, I wouldn't get booked nowhere, except that the few events that would call me regularly, but it was like once a month or once every two months. And it wasn't much when I was hungry. Um, um, so I remember like for me it was so hard to get booked and get trusted and meet the organizers. So, I, I think I, I wanted to make like that place for those like young queens, uh, who need like a spot.

By creating a new space for performers that is more inclusive, Maxim is negotiating a belonging for performers, which opens possibilities to resist the hierarchies of who can use what space. In a sense, this expansion of space for drag becomes a political act, whether the politicism of creating a new event is intentional or unintentional. At the same time, creating a new space may mark another division within the drag community. The decision of who performs stills needs to be made by someone, which thus creates a form of power for Maxim. Since Maxim started performing drag at Japanese venues, it is no wonder that she is conscious of the exclusions and inclusions stemming from the hierarchies.

On the other hand, for Beauty Blenda, the same blueprint for hierarchy did not exist. One of the founding members had already built a trustworthy relationship with the owner of Bar Theatre LUDO, so we did not have to endure the hierarchies that structure the Japanese drag scene because the event was not established in a queer venue. Accordingly, there was no hierarchy until one came about because of the event's success. As we started to hire queens to perform, it became clear that we had created a form of power of exclusion and inclusion to say who could perform or not. Additionally, with this power comes the complications of handling the event's economic situation. Unfortunately, this is where my fieldwork ended at Beauty Blenda. Our relationships became tense after the Osaka performers separated from Haus of Gaishoku. However, it is clear that inclusions and exclusions arise within drag in both queer and non-queer venues. Consequently, there is a knock-on effect from this expansion of space for drag in terms of political activism.

### **6.3 Contribution to political activism amidst neo-colonization**

There may be contradiction and incoherence in the drag events demonstrated thus far; however, there is still a mobilization of queers, both Japanese and migrants, who collectively work to expose the ruptures in dominant structures based on a politics of belonging largely as a result of RPDR. Phenomenologically speaking, using drag in political activism only becomes meaningful in the context of power relations. Recalling Judith Butler and the discussion of drag as a parody from Chapter Four, drag is parodic because, through the repetition of so-called naturalized gender, it reveals the dislodgement of sex (as anatomy) and gender (as identity). This is political precisely because the parody done through drag demonstrates that naturalized norms associated with gender and sex can be parodied and thus challenged by anyone. Butler suggests that “if identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old” (Butler, 1990: 203). Drag enables continuity of unpacking of gendered controlling representations,

such as trivialized hyper-femininity, that rationalize the marginalization of women, for example. Labianna mentioned in Chapter Four that she strategically uses her drag to invoke the political situation in Japan, which indicates recognition of the power of the image of a drag performer. Having a drag performer like Labianna fight for women's rights enables women to consider ideas of what they should do or how they should act in Japanese society by urging a transformative understanding of their histories and the present. In a sense, it enables women to engage with the superficiality of cohesion in femininity and use it to change policies and safeguard their rights. Thus, drag works to queerly change the futurity of gendered experiences. Disrupting the hegemony of gender through parody challenges the representations and power relations of those who have authority to say what gender is. However, such political activism by queer migrants may come with complications and risks in the globalized era. I will demonstrate the risks and complications by linking the politics of drag to globalized LGBT discourse.

### **6.3.1 How to be LGBT**

There have been numerous agendas by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to promote the protection and recognition of human rights of sexual minorities by addressing discrimination and violence in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).<sup>25</sup> SOGI applies to all populations as a means to include everyone in conversations about diversity, inclusion, and harassment, regardless of their gender or sexuality. Within this discourse, the acronym of LGBT, which groups together Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people, is a collection of identities used as a worldwide movement for human rights and has become part of everyday language (Richardson, 2018: 18). The purpose of using LGBT discourse is to protect individuals from discrimination and violence, recognize a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities that are excluded from access to protection, defense or recognition of their human rights, and advocate for equality in civil society. LGBT was first introduced in Japan during the mid 2000s (Yanagisawa et al, 2015). Recently, LGBT is catching the attention of businesses in the consumer market (Aoyama, 2021). Here, I will focus on how queer migrants compare the realities of sexual minorities in Japan to their standards of LGBT rights.

Efforts by the UNHRC have encouraged a global adoption of laws for minority protections. Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink argued that a “central core of rights,” must be established for “the right to life” (Risse and Sikkink, 1999: 3). The right to life is “the right to be free from extrajudicial execution and disappearance” and “the freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest and detention” (Risse and Sikkink, 1999: 2). LGBT rights, therefore, are

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<sup>25</sup> “LGBTI | Ten years since the first SOGI resolution, LGBTI history continues to be made at the United Nations” International Service for Human Rights, June 25, 2021, <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/lgbti-ten-years-since-the-first-sogi-resolution-lgbti-history-continues-to-be-made-at-the-united-nations/>.

the rights to a life free from punishment related to SOGI and to legislation in favor of their subject position such as anti-discrimination laws and protection and recognition of their non-heterosexual “family” formations. Based on Risse and Sikkink’s wording, queer migrants’ “socialization of international human right norms into domestic practices” suggests that there is a globalized way of “being LGBT.” Assuming a universalized standard of “being LGBT” disavows a society’s history and culture related to non-conforming genders and sexualities. In addition, it perpetuates Western hegemony, colonization, and the domination of “the Other” (Plummer, 2003: 91). Arguably, those who fall into the categories of LGBT in non-Western countries are victims of ostracization. I discussed Japanese localized identifications that fall outside of Westernized queer identities such as *okama*, *nyu haafu*, and *joso* in Chapter Four. In contrast, Gary Leupp in *The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* argues that “today’s Japan is not the bisexual world of the Tokugawa townspeople”<sup>26</sup> because of Westernization in Japan:

The changes are due in large part to the nature of Japan’s incorporation into the world system since 1859, when the first treaty ports were opened to foreign trade. A consensus developed within the Japanese ruling elite that Japan must absorb Western learning in order to obtain the respect of Western nations and to reverse the terms of the unequal treaties. Such ‘learning’ included the hitherto unknown concept of ‘illegitimacy’; a new conviction that phallic religious images were shameful and deserving of destruction; and homophobia. (Leupp, 1995: 202)

If Leupp is correct then Western ideals have assimilated into Japanese culture which has then set the scene for today’s heteronormative structure, which is exclusionary to sexual minorities as discussed in Chapter Five. However, this raises the question of whether Leupp is assuming a transhistorical way of being “bisexual” and “homosexual” based on Western ideals. Are queer migrants also carrying a transhistorical way of being LGBT in Japan based on the global fight for human rights?

From the perspective of queer migrants demonstrated in the politics of belonging thus far in this chapter, it would seem that Japanese LGBT people do not have access to sexual rights in terms of protection and recognition or access to equality in representation; thus, advocating for their rights is essential to the pursuit of justice and fairness. At the same time, however, this is tied to a universalized Western hegemonic model of civilizing culture as a global regime that assumes a linear timeline of before and after Western dominance, such as in Leupp’s work. I would argue that there is a risk that the queer migrants’ politics of belonging highlights a neo-colonial factor. It

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<sup>26</sup> Tokugawa refers to the time period from the year 1603 to 1867 known as the Tokugawa Period or Edo Period.

would be much better to listen to culturally nuanced experiences that highlight power imbalances. Weaved into these are differentiating histories that also need to be considered. However, it may be the case that local particularizations, such as *danshoku* (male-male sexual relations) are voided in favor of universalizations (Someya and Hatanaka, 2017).

### 6.3.2 Neo-colonization through queer migration

Although contradictory to the parodic element of drag, the politics of belonging thus poses the risk of how a colonial lens is involved in understanding LGBT visibility in Japan. For example, through an authoritarian deployment of homonormativity, particularly from queer migrants in dominant social locations such as white cis gay men, who often dominate the discourse, LGBT visibility is problematized through a lens of Western liberation and neoliberalism. Homonormativity, a term coined by Lisa Duggan, refers to “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003: 50). In other words, homonormativity is based on the political approach of neoliberalism that blurs the lines of “public” and “private”. For Duggan, neoliberalism is in favor of the responsibility for success in terms of wealth accumulation and financial stability to be in the hands of the individual rather than the state (Duggan, 2003).

Particularly to this study, homonormativity regulates Japanese sexual and gender minorities’ “public” life in civil society by promoting visibility, or “coming out,” to give their life a better “structure.” Chapter Five demonstrated that because queer migrants are in a precarious space “beyond assimilation,” creating a privilege that allows them to ignore structures that may be ostracizing. Returning to the family structure as a prime example, the *koseki*, or family registration system, considers all as part of the family unit. Masami Tamagawa’s “Coming Out of the Closet in Japan: An Exploratory Sociological Study” explains that:

[It] requires all Japanese households to report various items of private information regarding their family members to their local authority, including each family member’s relationship to the head of the household, for example, ‘second son.’ Also, the family registration system requires that every family member of a household adopt the same family name, thereby perpetuating the idea of the family as the basic unit of Japanese society. In other words, the family registration system ideologically maintains Japan’s traditional patriarchal family system. (Tamagawa, 2017: 493)

Queer migrants in a space beyond assimilation are not obliged to be included in the family registration system, which is glossed over with a heteronormative reinforcement of binarized gender roles and heterosexualized sexuality. Queer migrants have no connection to this deep-rooted symbol of belonging in Japan that is the *koseki*. They do not have to deal with the complexity of coming out in a Japanese family unit. This disconnection allows them to encourage visibility based on a globalized understanding of a “right to a better life,” which focuses on visibility of LGBT people without dealing with the related localized issues. Thus, their authoritarian deployment of homonormativity to encourage Japanese queer people to “come out” as LGBT is somewhat contradictory and therefore contributes to a neo-colonial factor in the regulation of Japanese queer bodies.

Another contradiction also comes from drag and its commercialization. As mentioned before, drag is in danger of depoliticizing the queer space through its consumption, financial success, distribution, and production. Despite its parody of gender, drag could also be used to contribute to a normative brand of “being LGBT” in which we all are the same and want the same things through its commercialization. Something that “was queer” is now being reconfigured as something stable that could fit into LGBT. LGBT, although a symbol of activism, has become normalized and is used by the consumer market to target specific audiences. If companies show that they support LGBT, such as during the Pride seasons, they can reap the benefits of sponsorships, which creates more profit for them. Drag is often the face of both activism and consumerism. As Edward and Farrier note, “drag is deeply related to protest and activism,” in which “the confrontational, oppositional and performance nature of drag has been at the forefront of politically charged arenas” (Edward and Farrier 2020: 10). Drag has significant “tactics of protest” in performances that are “collective, contentious, and subversive of the sex and gender systems” (Verta Taylor et al, 2005: 128). Building on Chapter Four’s usage of the concept, “temporal drag,” queer migrants who are heavily involved in activism, such as Labianna, are bringing the history of activism into the present moment in Japan. They are rearticulating political ideas from a queer history that challenge conventional understandings in the present. With this comes a risk of homogenizing LGBT people as a global universal off the back of the mainstreamification of drag, which misses localized differences. Referring to the citizenship discourse discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Five, Richardson notes an “assimilation of heteronormative values and practices in LGBT culture and identities,” claiming that “[i]t is through ‘mimicking’ heteronormative standards as homonormative individuals that (some) LGBT people are deemed worthy of state recognition and access to certain rights of citizenship” (Richardson, 2018: 87). Through their transnational mobility, queer migrants foster an understanding of the current conditions of legislative and policy measures, which still exclude their existence, by comparing origin and settlement. Their

intersectional differences clarify that equality is based on sameness and the worth of each individual differentiates when they are the ones who become different.

We must understand that the importance of social location of queer people using LGBT discourse relates to a critical understanding of how institutional belonging is tethered to a compulsory status of heterosexuality. This is precisely why the homonormative agenda is fixated on marriage equality, family, and wealth to gain some form of class mobility: because these provide a better “structure” of life as contextualized by the narrative of “love is love.” LGBT enacts stabilized identities that marginalized people can find comfort in, which has advantages and disadvantages. Ken Plummer makes an important note that “the word ‘homosexual’ was and can really only be used for a limited range of Western experiences in the mid-twentieth century: there are hundreds of other terms for allied phenomena across the world and across history but they are most certainly not the same” (Plummer, 2015: 126). However, recalling the queer performativity of mobilizing queer bodies due to a politics of belonging as discussed earlier, there is a possibility for a global allied phenomenon of shared experience based on exclusion due to sexual orientation or even based on a shared taste in cultural products.

Returning to my observations of performances at drag events, queer migrants tend to utilize the work of famous female singers such as Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, etc. This is a modern version of what Esther Newton saw in 1960s America. Japanese performers also tended to perform to Western divas, raising whether there is a shared experience in taste or a neo-colonial influence on performances. Both performances by queer migrants and Japanese performers often include famous quotes by Hollywood actresses. Queens also pull from local cultures, such as the local Osaka *obachan* giving out candy to the audience, a prototypical depiction of a middle-aged woman as Osaka’s symbol, to get a cheap laugh. Queer migrants create an interesting diasporic element here by crossing cultures. As an audience member, however, this requires you to have knowledge of multiple cultures. Such performances can transcend the transcultural barrier and simply make the viewer laugh. However, this raises the question of whether using audio of English-speaking divas or songs is taking away Japanese performers’ localized voice. I would argue that the parody of reinforcing, undermining, and subverting the conventions creates a distorted voice that only comes into shape through local knowledge. Therefore, it is not colonizing the voices of Japanese performers, so to speak. Instead, it provides alternative channels to be heard, presented by the performer’s own volition and appearance. Before queer migrants took advantage of the global success of RPDR, Japanese performers were using Western songs for their lip-sync performances. The pulling of, for example, American culture into the present moment in the performance becomes locally nuanced in the process. Through this process, both queer migrant and Japanese performers can create a sense of meaningfulness in a

temporal moment of belonging. It also exemplifies the queer performativity in assembling bodies as a strategy for belonging.

Queer migrants do have a sense of belonging in queer communities and in the moment of the performance. Still, the broader context of a social location to distinguish their belonging is lacking because of their lack of connection to history and formal institutional belonging. Despite the division between the international and Japanese performers, there is some affinity in activism. It seems that each side of the drag community evaluates attitudes toward how to be queer and engage in activism in very different ways. Even within the “Japanese” side, there are younger queens who are returnees or have roots from other countries who have been influenced by mainstream queer discourses and events like Beauty Blenda. Accordingly, as one example, “Western” models of “how to be LGBT” are transformed and reworked to accommodate the hegemonic structure within another hegemonic structure. The Werq the World tour mentioned previously was “brought” to Japan by the organizer of DragMania, a cis white gay man. He used his power as a queer migrant to bring the biggest platform in the world of drag to Japan, which provided an opportunity for the local performers (both Japanese and non-Japanese) to get more gigs around the tour date. Queer migrants’ tendency to introduce a political agenda into their performances indicates a political inclination to queer spaces bringing about an array of advantages and disadvantages for not only themselves but also Japanese people.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

Many of the queer migrants in this study became drag performers because of drag’s commercialization; as a result, drag may have a way of depoliticizing space. RPDR has created a queer space for non-normative subjectivities to be normalized. In this space, queers are bound specifically through their queerness, which is usually excluded by the norms of subjecthood. Queer migrants have created such spaces in Tokyo and Osaka in drag performances at non-queer venues. Adopting the representation of drag from RPDR as a form of shared experience and identification creates a space where those who experience marginalization or ostracization can resonate with one another. In a sense, drag venues create a cultural site for queer migrants (and audience members), forging a mode of expression that connects transnational elements and cultural flows. Accordingly, this mode of expression is circulated in such a space to create a sense of belonging which results in inclusion and exclusion within the venues themselves and in the political arena.

Without critical engagement, the deployment of drag—mainly drag that fits within the almighty RDPR paradigm—into spaces for capitalistic purposes can result in a form of neo-colonization. I use neo-colonization to



describe a process of colonizing local values in which narratives of sexual liberalism are imposed on Japanese queer people. Queer migrants impose a dominant narrative of “how to be LGBT” in order to create an imperial vision of how queer spaces should be organized. Queer migrants have created a space that offers sites of resistance and facilitation of wider social antagonisms that become amplified through drag. Drag, through its queer performativity, could be a possibility for coalition building through the process of its commodification that enables queer culture and thus a wider political influence on social progress. However, queer migrants’ appropriation of identity politics in their advocacy for LGBT rights which extends from neoliberal philosophy may compromise the essence of queerness itself. Duggan remarks:

Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics and cannot be undone by a movement without constituencies and analyses that respond directly to that fact. Nor will it be possible to build a new social movement that might be strong, creative, and diverse enough to engage the work of reinventing global politics for the new millennium as long as cultural and identity issues are separated, analytically and organizationally, from the political economy in which they are embedded. (Duggan, 2003: 3)

In other words, neoliberalism appropriates individual freedom and choice and exploits identity politics. Drag by queer migrants may negotiate neoliberal hegemony at the community level through protest and advocacy for human rights based on universalized standards of LGBT politics. In this sense, the assemblage of drag as a politics through an expression of a group of individuals may not just be an outcome of a neoliberal construct that produces a desire for queer kinships or consumption of queer culture. However, as Duggan contests, the reinvention of global politics requires us to combine cultural and identity politics with economic justice. Thus, the question remains whether the LGBT politics that queer migrants advocate for is somewhat preoccupied with consumption and domesticity for a “better life,” and whether the freedom that queer migrants are fighting for may just be an illusion which requires capital.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have endeavored to rethink the subjective experiences of queer migrants in Japan by addressing identification, participation, and belonging through the lens of drag performance. The introduction of this chapter demonstrated my own lived experience as a queer migrant and introduced possible ways of theorizing the realities of queer migrants using a methodology that can carry through queer theory to migration studies. Here it remains to draw together some of the loose ties in this thesis. While a multitude of different themes have emerged from the preceding chapters of this thesis, bringing them together into a single concluding remark is not a simple task. That is because queer theory is complicated and thus queer migration follows the same pattern of not being straightforward. Essential to this thesis was the discursive approach to understanding the subjective experience of queer migrants to reach the conclusions. In what follows, I will reiterate why the approach and structure of this thesis was necessary.

In Chapter One, I demonstrated the research problem for this thesis through my own lived experience in Japan, and how it fits into scholarship of queer migration research. Queer migration research argues for an approach that is critical of positionality. Using the method of *tojisha-kenkyu*, I problematized my positionality from the marginalized standpoints of being queer and foreign in Japanese society. *Tojisha-kenkyu* is a method for locating standpoints and meta-methodology for understanding situated experience. From these standpoints, I detailed my experiences of being “at the margin.” It was here that I noticed how being gay and foreign had a way of delivering different worlds (the UK and Japan) to me in a conflicting manner, demonstrating the need for an approach that helps understand how these worlds are delivered to certain standpoints. However, it soon became clear from using *tojisha-kenkyu* that the standpoints of queer and foreign perhaps could be misconstrued to victimize myself in Japanese society. My stake in whiteness also needed to be accounted for. Whiteness provides structural advantage and race privilege. It is also deeply embedded in unmarked cultural practices which can create a so-called “neutrality,” particularly in the research process. Part of my investigation, therefore, needed to examine how such a neutrality is possible in the Japanese context. It was through subversive drag performance that also made me realize how certain identity markers situate me in certain position in service to the neutrality of the status quo, for example whiteness and gender norms, but also attempt to challenge it, for example queer and foreign. Accordingly, it was essential to understand what places of power and privilege “in the center” I stand in at the same time as being “at the margin.” Here, I began to problematize my standpoint as a white Western male researcher in Japanese society. As the word *tojisha* in *tojisha-kenkyu* generally is understood as a gloss to refer to a discriminated class of people, it became clear that theoretically it was going to be difficult to argue for *tojisha* in a place of power. For this

purpose, I employed critical phenomenology. Critical phenomenology builds on classic phenomenology by looking at first-person experience to understand how the world appears to us through our perceptions while adding a critical focus on how power relations attempt to form intersubjectivity particularly in terms of gender, sexuality, and race. Using critical phenomenology, therefore, allows myself to also be critical of my first-person experience by acknowledging how it is affected by intersubjectivity that is formed through power relations. Accordingly, critical phenomenology provides a means of understanding how the world is delivered to the white perspective in Japan. I can address dominant standpoints, such as white and male, by addressing how there is a world before (specifically made through colonialism and racism) the world I am in (in Japanese society) that maps out a trajectory, allowing my body to do certain things and others not. Therefore, the concept of the body, as a site of affect and a vehicle to see and be seen, was important to this research. Migration highlights the process of the body maneuvering between “moving away” from the familiar and “arriving” at the unfamiliar. Drag also highlights the shift of conforming and not conforming to gendered social norms. Based on this, I developed my research questions surrounding how drag performance, as an exemplification of a continuously shifting and negotiating queer being, could be a way of rethinking identification, participation and belonging of queer migrants in Japan. My experience alone was not enough to answer the research questions. Therefore, it was clear that I needed to explore other queer migrants’ experiences of being in Japan and engaging in drag performance to see if they experience the same phenomena as myself. Additionally, I needed to develop cultural descriptions of drag performances to support my argument. For this purpose, it was necessary to explore the phenomena through interviews and ethnography.

Although there is a fragment of research on queer migration in the context of Japan, there is no research that connects queer migration and drag performance. This presented a challenge for the literature review of this thesis in Chapter Two. I situated this thesis in scholarship by drawing on previous research from queer migration studies, frameworks for researching queer migration, queer migration in the context of Japan, and studies on drag performance. It became clear that the gap to fill in scholarship was more like a crater. What I understood from previous queer migration research was that adding queer theory to migration studies opens the possibility of deploying fluid and unstable identifications of continuously moving bodies. The purpose of using queer in this thesis was precisely to avoid stabilizing identities and allow myself to argue how identity markers, or meaning-making paradigms, are what place or displace queer migrants’ moving bodies. Queer migration research calls for a critical understanding of how migrant communities are often represented in the light of heteronormativity. Drag, as a subculture, is also represented in the light of heteronormativity. On top of this, however, it is also represented in light of the homosexual community. For heteronormativity and even queer communities to be a point of critique

requires an interdisciplinary dimension to existing methods to highlight the possibility of destabilizing the social locations in layers of intersectional and structural factors. By combining queer migration studies with a reinterpreted framework for understanding the experience of queer migrants, this research has attempted to bring a new lens of drag to this field and contributed to the discussion of research methodologies.

Throughout the thesis, I have aimed to show a radical methodology that contributes to the queer studies approach to migration studies. In Chapter Three, I argued for a “stronger” standpoint, which places shifting standpoints from meaning-making categorized discriminations from the “margin” and “center” into continuous negotiation, as a way for research to be more methodologically engaging and accountable by adapting *tojisha-kenkyu*, feminist standpoint theory and critical phenomenology. Using myself, a researcher in Japan, as a paradigm, I demonstrated in Chapter One how multiple positional experiences, as a majority in the center or minority at the margin, can exist in relation to one another and in what way, as well as the implications of speaking for these multiple positions. This is further dislodged by the layer of drag which also allowed a shift between the center and the margin of gender and sexuality norms. Externalizing the issues related to the meaning-making paradigms that position myself in certain standpoints using *tojisha-kenkyu* showed that doing research, we are not exempt from being a discriminator (being white and presenting male) or being discriminated against (being gay, and being foreign). I introduced previous research surrounding *tojisha-kenkyu* to demonstrate the complexities behind asking “who are the *tojisha*?” The school of thought from Bethel Houses’ *tojisha-kenkyu* is that *tojisha*, as people who use health and/or social care services from service providers particularly related to psychiatry, do not understand why they experience certain problems, which is why externalizing their experience and finding solidarity among people who share the same burdens is important as method to make sense of them. On the other hand, the school of thought from activism and academia from Shoji Nakanishi and Chizuko Ueno argues that *tojisha-kenkyu* is research done by the *tojisha* who do understand why they experience certain problems which is why they should be the ones to do research on it and define the problems themselves. An exemplification of this is the gay researchers using *tojisha-kenkyu* to create a new source of information from the person who has situated knowledge and experience of being discriminated in society as a gay person that contrasts the knowledge created by people outside of the gay experience. It becomes clear here that there is a danger in appropriating *tojisha-kenkyu* as, arguably, anyone could be the *tojisha*. For example, if we ask, who is the *tojisha* in a family unit? Who is the *tojisha* in schools? Who is the *tojisha* in prison cells? It becomes clear that there can be a multitude of *tojisha* and its definition is difficult to pinpoint as a specific group of people who are discriminated against or defined by specialists. For this thesis, I maintained the definition of *tojisha* as the discriminated position, but I also acknowledged that the discriminator

can also be a *tojisha*. Accordingly, it is not a matter of asking who the *tojisha* is but rather how one becomes the *tojisha*. Thus, the *tojisha* can be constructed as either the discriminator or the discriminated as I have demonstrated using myself as a paradigm. I solidified this theorization using Ueno's theory on complex discrimination to demonstrate that discrimination is multilayered. On top of this, feminist theory highlighted that, in a mesh of multilayered positions, we can be accountable for how we proceed in verifying our research. Thus, we alleviate the idea that researching certain phenomena can be problematic from one perspective but not another because it is all problematic. By myself shining a light on researchers in Japan who do not take accountability for their positionality, in a sense, become constructed as the *tojisha*. I argued that critical phenomenology helps theorize how "meaningfulness" appears to the *tojisha* and criticizes the hegemonic perspectives constructing and existing within the world of research. By meaningfulness, I mean the multilayered twists and distortions of the meaning-making paradigms. As an exemplification of critical phenomenology, I also largely relied on Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), which questions the orientation of phenomenology as well as the concept of orientation itself. Ahmed suggests the body that "can do" certain things because of the orientation of heterosexuality and whiteness. Thus, intersubjectivity created by power relations may actually be before subjective experience. For example, the orientation of heterosexuality and whiteness is neutral rather than specifically oriented like homosexuality or racialized bodies. Because of this, I also relied on the concept of the body to understand a "point of view" which sees and is seen but also is a site of affect and site of queer migrants for "facing" or "facing away from" issues that accrue meaningfulness around their *tojisha* bodies. I used this to show how the queer migrant body appears and is thus regulated within Japanese discourse, according to different discursive formations of power and knowledge. I argued that power and knowledge in the dominant culture form meanings and effects onto the body. Accordingly, a phenomenology of queer embodiments is based on how the body becomes racialized, gendered and sexualized within these contexts because of how it "appears" and thus takes up or extends to space. The term appears in this thesis was meant in both an ontological sense, as something existing in front of our eyes, and an epistemological sense, as being known. The space, however, is already oriented by the bodies who already take up the space. The term space was meant as an abstract idea, a system of connecting ideas, and as an ordering of physical and tangible objects. Queer bodies thus are disoriented in the attempt to orientate to normativity but nevertheless appear. Here, bodies take the shape of what they do in this disorientated space they inhabit—this is where I deploy drag as a kind of "package" to make sense of the disorientation and the reachable or unreachable objects. I argued that although disoriented, there is still some kind of repetition of acts in attempts to align to normativity, exemplified through the parody of gender in doing drag, which in turn shapes the space they appear in. Queer phenomenology

then allows us to acknowledge the embodied dimensions without essentializing differences of sexuality and gender because we look at the queer moments of disorientation and how repetitions and reciprocations of something allow us to have the space reshape to “fit.” Although discursive, this queer methodology was appropriate to reach the conclusions in Chapter Four, Five and Six.

This brings me to the first part of my findings in Chapter Four based on the phenomenological interviews I carried out. This chapter focuses on rethinking queer migrant identification processes as a kind of by-product of doing drag. I began by looking at the daily lives of queer migrant performers, which revealed how the meaning-making paradigms assigned to their foreign bodies by the dominant culture place them into the boxes of *gaijin* (the foreigner) outside of the main culture. As queer migrants become *gaijin*, they experience ostracization resulting in an internalization of otherness. Although inequality is maintained for the foreigners on the outside of the dominant culture, at the same time, some advantages are constructed, allowing them to explore stigmatized identities and practices. One exemplification of this is drag performance. Drag is easier for queer migrants to explore because they are placed in a distanced proximity as *gaijin* to the main population. Furthermore, drag is becoming globalized and enables queer migrants to thrive on this culture rather than Japanese culture. Notably in this thesis, drag demonstrates the misrecognitions and complexities within queerness as exemplified in *gaijin* bodies appearing to fit the sociality and materiality of Japanese localized identifications such as *okama*, *nyu haafu* or *joso*. It also brings to the surface the normative patterns of desire within gay communities in which queer migrants are undesirable for being foreign and doing drag. Thus, I argue that drag can be a way of making sense for such worries of ostracization, fitting in and confinement within Japanese society. These worries extend through to all the chapters of this thesis as queer migrants’ worries are not only subjective, but they are also imposed which makes queer migrants powerless in how certain things affect their bodies. For example, Labianna was able to hide her *gaijin*-ness through drag, passing as a member of the dominant culture. This has a domino effect on her participation and belonging in Japanese society. Reappearing as drag performers allows queer migrants to see “slantwise,” as Ahmed argues, but as I demonstrate with stronger standpoints, queer migrants also can shift from seeing from the bottom and from the top thus shift from informal and informal settings of participation and belonging. This queer way of seeing the world allows them to deal with the worries that are delivered to queer migrants from becoming *gaijin*. Drag allows them to rearticulate multiple identities on their own terms. However, drag requires some attention in terms of its globalized nature. I started to develop my argument for the commercialization of drag in Chapter Four to show that having access to globalized culture also creates another advantage for queer migrants. The commercialization of drag is related to all the chapters of this thesis because RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR) has become a global

phenomenon. From this, it provides spaces to participate in. The queer kinships from participating develop into a sense of belonging. This is precisely why I used the term “dragging” up. Drag as a verb means to pull. Therefore, I am emphasizing the push and pull factor of meaning-making categories. Accordingly, they are contributing to the reciprocation of, for example, repeating gender norms that are required for the status quo. But by doing this, queer migrants are also highlighting the contradictions of sex and gender through the performance of drag.

I relied on the concepts of parody, temporal drag and performativity to assist in theorizing drag. Queerness is complicated by its obliqueness and how this is everchanging by continuously altering social, racial, gendered, sexual, cultural, and economic factors. Drag is also constantly changing because it plays on the reciprocation of identity markers of the above altering factors. Drag is performative because it is a repetition of gender with a different style of repeating the gender norms. It is a parody because it is always an imitation *of an imitation* which is full of irony, satire, and exaggeration. The performative and parodic dynamic of drag is exactly why it is disruptive. It shows that anatomy and gender identities are injunctions that have been naturalized. Drag could be argued as lacking the seriousness needed for political change as it is a parody in the moment of performance in time and space. However, as the concept of temporal drag demonstrates, queer migrants pull histories of activism, often from the political standing of their country of origin, into the present moment of performance which then has conflicting effects on the wider political context of the queer community in Japan. At the same time, it could be argued that drag is a silly practice of just dressing up and it is too far away from the lived experience of everyday regular life. When queer migrant drag performers get out of drag, or step off the stage, or stop performing, they may have some level of assimilation or accommodation into the sexual and gender norms in Japan. In the performance, there is the expectation of something parodic, performative and queer. In their everyday lives, they are negotiating gender and sexuality norms as a foreign resident. It seems the conclusion might be that the queer migrant is localized in the temporal moment of the performance, after that they go back to negotiating being a *gaijin*. However, it is important to remember that by highlighting the idea of parody reveals the reciprocation of mundanity which exposes gender and sex, and thus other meaning-making paradigms, as a mere repetition having no “original.” This could result in a political change whether it is immediate or not, and intentional or not. The bulk of my theoretical conceptualization of drag especially in Chapter Four is necessary to understand Chapter Five and Six in relation to how the parody, temporality and performativity of drag lends itself to the “package” of making sense of not only their identifications but also their participation and belonging in Japanese society.

In Chapter Five, I demonstrated that queer migrants’ distanced proximity affects their participation in Japanese society resulting in a choice to not fully assimilate. I theorized this as “beyond assimilation.” In the space

and time of beyond assimilation, queer migrants forge a livable life by shifting positions of participation in Japanese society which is met with exclusionary measures of nationalist and heteronormative regimes but also their bodies accrue advantages. I began by asking what participation is. Participation can be understood both formally and informally. For looking at formal participation, I borrowed from the concept of citizenship. Citizenship is the boundaries that confers identifications, and determines formal participation, such as work and family, and the rewards of these. The rigidity of citizenship in terms of social, political, and civil rights in T.H Marshall's (1950) definition was not appropriate for understanding queer migrants because foreigners in Japan are placed outside of these boundaries of rights. For this reason, I introduced multilayered citizenship, a concept that understands citizenships based on formal and informal membership due to positioning in social contexts, and how the individual's country of origin may affect the power dynamics of their positioning. I used this concept to analyze attempts by the government to introduce co-existence policies, such as *tabunka-kyosei*. However, this works to govern queer migrant bodies as a palatable experience for the dominant culture. Therefore, *tabunka-kyosei* supports the distanced proximity of queer migrants solidifying their lack of access to citizenship and visibility as a diverse population. The dominant culture encourages queer migrants to be at a distanced proximity and minimize their differences. Thus, their subjectivity is oversimplified. This works to serve the status quo and provide foreign bodies as a palatable experience for the dominant culture. The concept of multilayered citizenship also revealed that whiteness affects certain queer migrants advantageous positioning in Japanese society. However, as Maxim demonstrated, sometimes it can hinder sexual relationships in the gay community. These factors contribute to the distanced proximity from the dominant culture that encourages queer migrants to find some other source of social mobility and social support. The globalization of queer culture enables queer migrants access to a "ready-made" queer community, where they can participate in drag. Although sometimes drag creates obstacles for the dating scene, queer migrants can find emotional support in drag families. Drawing on Kazue Muta's concept of the gendered family—which is the gender dualist and heterosexist hierarchy of the family—I argued that queer migrants' drag families highlight the instabilities and inequalities in the politics of the gendered family that create a mechanism for productivity through reproduction and labor. My usage of reproduction alludes to the emotional support and care within familial relations that the drag family parodies to create "new" intimate relations. Drag families challenge the productivity of the gendered family but are also compliant with norms related to it, while at the same time distorting it. To clarify this point, I used the concept of chrononormativity to define productivity, in terms of labor and productivity, of queer migrants who perform drag. Chrononormativity uses time to (re)organize bodies for "maximum production" (Freeman, 2010: 3). In turn, the drag family grants queer migrants the social expectation



of “a normal life” in which certain events occur at a certain time in a certain order. The boundaries of participation in informal and formal settings demonstrated in Chapter Five provides the foundation for understanding the context of belonging for the final chapter.

In Chapter Six, I demonstrated that based on their queer identifications and participation in the previous chapters, queer migrants develop a sense of belonging. However, in this belonging, there is also a construction of power. For that reason, I argued for a politics of belonging, borrowing from Nira Yuval-Davis’ concept. This argues for an understanding of the inclusion and exclusion of social categories by those in powered positions. I also argued that their belonging is based on queer performativity, an assemblage of bodies for the strategy of meaning and being, from the queer kinships enabled by the globalization of drag. I investigated belonging based on queer kinships through an ethnographic investigation at a drag show called Beauty Blenda created by queer migrants. The queer kinships create a politics of belonging, i.e., boundaries of both inclusion and exclusion. In terms of inclusion, drag brings a political incline to the venue of inclusion which provides safe spaces for a variety of genders and sexualities. This is particularly evident in gay clubs catering to men only and non-queer venues that hold drag events. However, in their attempt to be inclusive, it also sets boundaries for their expected audience thus marking the exclusionary boundaries. At the same time, drag shows run by queer migrants construct a power to say who can be included as a performer. The thinking behind their boundaries to set inclusion and exclusion is rooted in political beliefs that are based on Western models of queer liberation that have already formed their perceptions in the country of origin. Although it may seem like they are providing an inclusive space, rather, their attempt at being inclusive is capitalizing on queer people’s desires for inclusion. The rhetoric of this inclusion is based on neoliberal identity politics. I demonstrate that queer migrants’ affirmation of LGBT politics, which ultimately is another form of homonormativity, attempts to form the experiences of Japanese queer people. Accordingly, queer migrants’ advocacy for LGBT rights to give a “better structure of life” for queer people in Japan has a neo-colonizing factor. RPDR has created a neoliberal power dynamic that queer migrants are appropriating in Japanese queer communities that predicates queer Japanese people as having a liberal social leaning. For example, I demonstrated this with an expectation of shared solidarity of advocating for human rights particularly in the act of protest, which drag is often the face of. Drag, through its parody, also amplifies protest and has historically been part queer liberation in a Western context. Thus, through the concept of temporal drag, queer migrants are pulling the history of activism into the present moment in Japan.

When queer migrants enter the queer community from different trajectories which are differentially positioned in relation to their attachments to their communities, their identifications become highlighted in its

paradoxical redundancy. In this paradoxical redundancy, queer migrants come to the queer community to find people who are alike to them, but the reality is that the queer community consists of people who are far more different from yourself even though you have the same “queer identity.” It is precisely because of this that queer migrants attempt to impose a logical way of being LGBT and do not find discomfort in bringing the history of activism into the present moment. In queer communities, precisely because there is so much diversity, we are continuously reevaluating ourselves in our attachments to community and how we collectively call ourselves. However, the question remains as whether queer migrants are continuously evolving through their demonstrations of LGBT activism or are they participating in the act of transnational virtue signaling that show a liberal social leaning to gain some kind of power as a result. In conclusion, this power allows them to moralize “how to be LGBT.”

Ultimately, what I wanted to emphasize in this thesis is that the “stronger” standpoint of queer migrants—shifting between margin and center—reveal places of power and non-power. Drag shares a similar function of serving the status quo and challenging it. Together, these expose the underlying structures of Japan that attempt to form experience of queer migrants.

There are several ideas of exploration that could take this study further. First is the idea of undocumented queer migrants who perform drag. Although I did encounter one performer who was a refugee during my time in the field, I decided not to pursue them to participate in this study due to their precarious situation. Another missing link could be analyzing drag as a migration trajectory. As this thesis has shown, drag could be a way to provide experiences to new environments, possibly improve economic status, resist oppressions, express oneself sexually and emotionally, which all interact with their being. In addition, I did not consider the full impact of the international franchises on queer migrants in Japan. I also did not consider the perspective of Japanese gay men and their desire to not date queer migrants particularly because they perform drag. Finally, I did not take into full consideration the relevance of the perspective from the owners of the club are their intentions of holding drag performances at their venues.

As a closing remark, it is clear that the complexities of drag may be difficult to express in writing as the true “meaning” may only be resonated in performance. This is why drag is a lens for this thesis. There have been great efforts to theorize drag and its effects on queer migrants’ lives. The sample of participants was very limited due to the obscurity of this thesis. Truthfully, there are not so many queer migrants who perform drag. In this way, the full essence of drag, of the lives of queer migrants, may be compromised. That is why I put emphasis on the doing, knowing and being a queer migrant through the lens of drag with an aim to represent the queer migrant lives in the glory of their messiness and contradictions. I thank the drag performers who participated in this study:

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