特別寄稿論文

“Imported” Feminism and “Indigenous” Queerness: From Backlash to Transphobic Feminism in Transnational Japanese Context [1]

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Let me start with some historical background, some personal, others not so much. Just like many feminist and queer academics of my generation, I started my career in the nineties with the exciting theoretical burst of “queer theory” and perhaps equally exciting shift around cultural politics of genders and sexualities. Just like everyone else, I read Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Gayatri Spivak, and all the other “star” feminist academics, although I would have to point out that the Japanese translation of *Gender Trouble* was not out till 1999, nearly a decade after it was first published in English. And this, actually, was the same year the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society came into force in Japan, which evoked an immediate and strong response from moral and religious conservatives, which, then, culminated as a full-blown backlash against feminism and women’s movement in Japan. As I started my first job teaching in universities in the early noughties, although I was certainly excited to talk about Butler or Spivak, I was also trying very hard to figure out how it was even possible that Japan’s national government was arguing in all seriousness against the use of the “ideological” term that is “gender”. As a feminist theorist, I have been reading mostly in English, while, working in Japan, my thoughts and analysis are inevitably both affected by and dealing with Japanese culture, society and politics: it has been impossible for me not to be constantly working in and on that elusive space of translation—linguistically, culturally and politically.

And that is what I would like to take a look at in this essay: that space of various translations, where what is indigenous (or “traditional” if we stick to the Japanese term used in the context) and what is imported and foreign are constantly set and

1 The original version of this essay was titled “Imported Hatred?: Japan’s Transphobic Feminism in Transnational Context” and presented as part of an international symposium “Transgender Questions: Body, Race and Identity” at Ochanomizu University (2019/12/15). An extended version, with the current title, was then written for a lecture at UC Berkeley (2020/1/27), which is here published with minor corrections.

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re-set against each other in an uneasy and jerky connection and disjunction. I am trying to tell a story: a story of feminist/queer struggles in Japan in the last twenty years, which may or may not be related to all those contemporary theoretical concerns and fads in Anglo-European language academia, but exact forms of whose relation to the latter is certainly not obvious; a story where the imported and the indigenous, the transnational and the local, have entwined with each other and been played out to shape a distinctively local and inherently transnational form of politics of genders, sexualities and bodies. This is a story of 20 years of cultural and political struggle that does not necessarily have a clear and exciting narrative, a happy ending, or even an inspirational lesson. It is a story of tedious repetitions, a messy and disorganized "plot-what-plot", and crushing disappointments.

The story consists of three parts: the backlash in the noughties; the use of marriage equality in the 2010s; and the surge of transphobic alliance of the online feminist culture that we are currently witnessing.

1. The backlash in the early noughties

We will start by looking back at the backlash in the early noughties in Japan against feminisms, women's movements and gender studies. What was remarkable about this backlash is that it was just as blatantly and systematically led by the national government as it was fuelled and upheld by the grass-root moral/religious conservatives who are the major constituency of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. In this sense, it was arguably a strange predecessor of the "anti-gender" movements that we currently see elsewhere in the world as well.

The backlash started as a response from moral conservatives to the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society, which came into force in 1999 (Ueno, 2006; Wakakuwa, 2006). The Basic Act itself is by no means a progressive one. It has been criticized by feminists for effectively deflecting the requirements set by CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), which Japan ratified in 1985, and attempting instead to set up a "gender equal society", an official English term chosen by the government. The literal word-by-word translation of the original Japanese term 男女共同参画社会, however, would be something like "a society of coopesrative participation by men and women": the Basic Act, in other words, is not about equality or about anti-discrimination; it is about cooperative joint participation in, and contribution to, society, by men and women.

Still, the majority of feminist and women's groups welcomed and supported the Basic Act, if not wholeheartedly. Nakajima Michiko, one of the early feminist critics of the Basic Act, argued that this was partly due to the increasingly strong voices from the moral/religious conservatives that attacked feminism and women's movements as "destroying human bonds in the name of equality of men and women

”(Nakajima, 2000). Substituting “gender equality” or “anti-discrimination” with “cooperation” and “joint participation” might seem like a clever way to circumvent possible attacks from the moral conservatives, while implementing the legal ground for bringing about social changes.

Of course, however, things did not work as the feminists had hoped. Nakajima also pointed out that the then chief of the Cabinet’s Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality repeatedly stressed that the Basic Act was not something that Japan had to implement because of international pressure *from outside*; it was promoted as demonstrating Japan’s autonomous approach to the issue. Japan’s “autonomous” approach, she correctly argued, was put forward here in order to effectively separate the Basic Act from the local feminist and women’s movements which had been working to realize gender equality by sometimes appealing to the CEDAW requirements, and which, therefore, were here characterized and disregarded as part of the “outside” forces.

In other words, while some feminists might hope that the Basic Act could help them achieve gender equality by avoiding the expressive use of the term to appease the moral conservatives, the government side was in fact effectively setting up the kind of legal ground for the authentic and autonomous Japanese version of gender equality, independent of “foreign pressure”, and therefore of the local grass-roots feminist and women’s movements. In that sense, it may not even be accurate to say that the backlash started as a response to the Basic Act, because the Act had already been involved in the LDP government’s conservative and anti-feminist political moves from the start. In 2005, a “Project team for investigating the actual state of the extremely radical sex education and gender-free education” was formed by the ruling LDP, which went as far as to suggest that the government should not use the word “gender” because the definition of the term is not clear enough and also because gender studies denies sexual differences, holds negative views of marriage and family and attempts to destroy traditional Japanese culture.

These official attacks on feminisms and women’s movements were supported strongly, on one hand, by moral/religious conservative organizations capable of considerable grass-roots mobilization (most of which have its membership overlapping with the Japan Conference, the powerful extreme conservative political organization that strongly opposes women’s and LGBT rights and has sent a dozen members to the current cabinet including PM Abe himself). It was also supported by, on the other hand, the emerging online right-wingers, whose attack on feminism seemed to have been rooted more in the frustration and the cynical joy of bullying, perhaps related to the economic recession Japan was experiencing, than in any political beliefs or commitments. This online bully community was formed around anonymous BBS like 2チャンネル, which you could call the original Japanese version of 4chan, one

of the possible birthplaces of the alt-right. In fact, the community could be described as, again, a strange Japanese predecessor of the alt-right, attacking not only feminists and women but also increasingly targeting ethnic minorities living in Japan throughout the noughties.

What I would like to focus our attention on here, however, is not the backlash itself but the way feminist and gender studies reacted to it. In attacking feminist movements and gender studies, the backlashers targeted what they thought was the most controversial and scandalous to the general public, and as such the most divisive for the feminist communities: the issues of sexual and gender minorities. They claimed that feminists and the advocates for what they called "gender-free movements" were denying sexual difference, creating a new generation of "gender-confused" and/or bisexual children, and destroying traditional Japanese families and communities[2]. It is perhaps also worth pointing out that this strategical move was, in itself, clearly taking a hint from the rhetoric of religious rights in the U.S. through the moral panic over sex offenders in the 80's and the Culture War in the 90's. Even though they claimed to be the defenders of the "traditional" Japanese family, culture, and values against the "foreign pressures" and against the resulting "extreme individualism" (which has always been associated with the "West" in the discourses of Japanese rights), the backlasher discourses were, in fact, as transnational as the feminist's.

That feminists are creating queers to destroy families was clearly a false claim: the feminist and women's movements were not always trying to deny sexual difference, even though some of us might have been working on undermining the patriarchal "family" system; and creating a whole new generation of gender-fluid and/or bisexual children was simply beyond our capacity. Still, when the mainstream feminist and women's groups quickly and emphatically denied the claim, repeatedly stressing that "feminists denying or questioning sexual difference is a groundless rumour spread by the backlashers" or that "our way is not going to create androgynous or bisexual kids", instead of owning it up and claiming that feminism could question the binary notions of sexual difference, or stating that we see no problem in having more gender-fluid and/or bisexual kids in society, they effectively failed gender and sexual minorities. In a similar manner, mainstream feminist academics and activists also felt the need, as they tried to argue against backlashers who claimed that feminism and "gender-free" movement negate "manliness" and "womanliness", to stress that they would not do such things. They even tried to stress that feminism would not criticize or question the "traditional" Japanese children's festivals, gen-

2 For example, see an article posted on the website of Japan Policy Institute, which is one of the driving forces of the backlash in the noughties. "Dreadful Harm of Gender-free Education", July 3, 2006 (ジェンダーフリー 教育の恐るべき「弊害」). http://www.seisaku-center.net/node/286

dered between the girls' festival in March and the boys' in May. They believed that criticizing or "attacking" the "traditional" Japanese cultural rituals and festivals would only aggravate the backlash. Their claims, however, did not only undermine the long-lasting feminist criticism of gender roles, but also showed very little concern for queer people, many of whom have been disciplined, ridiculed or reproached for not being manly or womanly enough in one way or another. In order to focus on survival in the difficult political climate of the backlash, mainstream feminism in Japan in the early noughties sacrificed intersectionality and failed feminism.

After the worst storm of the backlash had passed, however, feminist and gender studies in Japan never truly recognized and reflected on this failure. We just moved on. We could argue that this was at least part of the reason why, when "LGBT" became slightly more fashionable and various LGBTQ activisms started to rise again in Japan in the last decade, feminism could not play a major role and almost seemed like it had been left behind.

2. The use of marriage equality in the 2010s

In March 2013, a Japanese lesbian couple held a wedding ceremony at Tokyo Disneyland. The phrasing here is a deliberate choice: they "held a ceremony"; i.e. they did not necessarily "get married". Still, the "Disney marriage", as their wedding ceremony became known in Japan, especially in the on-line LGBTQ+ community, attracted the public's attention in a way no other events, persons or groups, or movements had managed to. It seemed to catch the public's heart: the media were generally positive (on top of the fact that the wedding even made headlines in the national media!), and suddenly people were talking about gay marriage. It looked happily "liberal"; it looked "Western" in a cool, uplifting, and yet non-threatening way. Part of the LGBTQ+ activisms in Japan rapidly and arguably strategically reorganized themselves around the "gay marriage" agenda to seize the moment. And yet, there are others who remain sceptical of the newly established focus on marriage equality.

Let us first take a look at how the LGBTQ+ community in Japan has articulated and explored the necessity and possibility of the legal recognition of same-sex partnership. The wording is, again, important: the difference between "the legal recognition of same-sex partnership" and "marriage" is fraught, in Japan, with the weight of the system so fundamental to the postwar nation that it has almost acquired the power of national religion. I am, of course, referring here to the system of family register.

It is impossible to discuss marriage in Japan, same-sex or otherwise, without discussing the family register, as demonstrated by the still common expression of

(Accessed April 30, 2020).

referring to getting married as *Nyu-seki suru*, which means to enter the family register. While the Constitution does not require anything apart from the mutual consent of both sexes for the marriage to take place (article 24), it is stipulated in the Civil Code (article 739) that "marriage shall take effect upon notification pursuant to the Family Register Act", thus making marriage effectively about the family register: Marriage in Japan only takes place through two people (currently a woman and a man) handing in a registration of marriage to the local authorities, which is followed by deleting their names from the respective former family register (of the family they were born into) and creating a new family register (as a wife and a husband). This is the only way that partnership is "recognized" in Japan.

This almost inseparable connection between marriage and the family register has been one of the major reasons, and arguably the most crucial one, for feminist (especially post-colonial, anti-imperial feminist) objection to the institution of marriage itself in Japan. There are certainly the "usual" arguments against marriage, similar to those you could find in other countries as well: opposition to the regulation and control of personal relationships by the state may be one example. However, the family register, with its undeniable historical roots in the colonial rule of Imperial Japan and especially in the idea of family system (*ie-seido*) based on patriarchal lineage that has the Emperor as its ultimate father/ruler, has unquestionably added extra layers to the opposition. The marriage system in Japan is both based on and intended to support and help prolong the family system. Buying into the marriage system, those opposing the system would argue, you are upholding the family register and therefore, in effect, helping to continue the colonial-patriarchal legacy of Imperial Japan.

When the first serious attempt appeared to explore the possible forms of the legal recognition of same-sex partnership, many of the LGBTQ+ activists who were involved were familiar with, and well-versed in, this feminist opposition to the family register and the institution of marriage. The first book dedicated to the issue and published in Japan back in 2004 was titled *Same-Sex Partnership: Understanding Gay Marriage and Domestic Partnership Laws*, and focuses more on domestic partnership laws than marriage, at times even rather critical of the latter (Akasugi et.al., 2004). The editors claim in the preface that they understand same-sex partnership as "the creation of new forms of relationship (11)" between/among free individuals. It is, in that sense, clearly distinguished from the marriage system, which "deep down, people still think of as a contract between two *ie* (families)" (12).

We should, however, remember that this was at the height of the gender backlash in the early noughties: the "feminist" criticisms of "traditional" Japanese culture were becoming increasingly not only unpopular but "risky". Just as the mainstream feminists were trying to de-

fend themselves by separating themselves from anything queer during the backlash, it appeared to make more strategical sense for lesbian/gay or trans activists to keep distance from anything that may look "feminist". In this political climate, the increasing number of same-sex wedding ceremonies in this century and especially in the last decade, the "Disney marriage" being one of them, could be said to have offered a good, but also convenient cause for the movement to advocate. Publicly claiming a same-sex partnership through a symbolic gesture of wedding performance when it was not legally recognized as marriage, these ceremonies were often as much a form of activism as a personal celebration. We could argue that this was the beginning of the strategic deployment of marriage with the aim of securing legal recognition for same-sex partnership.

When decoupled with the feminist criticism of the patriarchal-imperialist family registry, however, the strategy risks contributing less to LGBTQ+ rights and more to the moral conservative agenda. How does that work?

If the "Disney marriage" can be considered one of the most successful P.R. moves in the strategic recourse to marriage by LGBTQ+ activists, the similarly successful P.R. move in terms of the recognition of same-sex partnership is no doubt the ordinance on same-sex partnership that was enacted in Shibuya Ward in Tokyo, in April 2015. Some obviously welcomed the move by Shibuya Ward. However, again, there were objections not only from the moral conservative side (which is predictable, so to speak) but also objections or at least reservations from some queer/ LGBT people and activists as well.

Shibuya ward's ordinance is the first of a series of similar policies by local governments to officially recognize same-sex partnerships to a certain degree. Setagaya, another ward in Tokyo, almost immediately followed, then cities such as Takarazuka, Iga, Naha and Sapporo. Even though the certificate does not have legal biding when it comes to areas such as inheritance, joint child adoption, or spouse visa for a partner without Japanese nationality or permanent visa, and therefore these policies seem to be a rather "symbolic" gesture, it could be argued that the spread of "symbolic" gestures could help the public get used to the idea of same-sex partnership. What, then, are the problems?

The main problem is that we now have symbolic performances coupled with symbolic policies, but nothing substantial to legally support same-sex partnership. As we have already seen, it is only the national government that can legally "recognize" or "authorize" marriage in Japan, because it is the national government that manages the family register. Since the national government does not recognize same-sex marriage and local governments have no authority to independently determine what can and cannot go into the system, the simple and basic fact is that local governments such as Shibuya Ward *cannot* recognize same-sex marriage, or legally grant a partnership status equivalent to heterosexual

marriage to same-sex couples. Under such circumstances, the same-sex partnership certificates issued by local governments feel a little more like window-dressing than symbolic policy. Still, we could just live with the symbolic policies as something that does not achieve anything real but won't do any extra harm either: if it was not, that is, for the hyper-conservative political turn the national government is clearly taking.

As I have already pointed out, the family register plays a crucial role if same-sex marriage were to be legalized in this country. One will have to change the way the family register system operates, in order for two women, or two men, to be registered as legally married. And this is something that Japanese conservatives would do anything to prevent, especially the current LDP government that's known for enjoying a huge support from ultra-conservatives. In order to understand how difficult it is to try and change the system, you only have to look at what happens to the call for the use of separate surnames by a married couple. For decades people have been pointing out the inconvenience and also the feelings of loss of their identity that are caused by having to change their official surnames in order to get married. This, however, has never been legalized, due to very strong resistance from the conservative side: that would confuse the family register and destroy the family, they have argued. For these people, the family register is the basis of the country. It ties an individual to a family, representing the ideal that an individual puts the family before themselves, and the nation before the family, with the emperor on top as the father of all families.

And yet, the dilemma for the national government is that they cannot appear as inconsiderate to LGBTQ+ rights, especially in the face of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Under such circumstances, if the government can demonstrate, to the international community, that it is making efforts to protect and promote LGBTQ+ rights and diversity, without actually making any effective legal or systematic changes that may offend the conservative constituency, that would be ideal. In this light, the basic policies of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party regarding this matter makes perfect sense. A 2016 LDP paper, titled "Our Basic Views Towards the Society That Accepts Diverse Forms of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity", basically states that society has to understand and accept LGBTQ+ people but absolutely no legal actions or changes should take place in order to protect their rights. Interestingly, this emphasis on acceptance over rights is also supported by their claim that Japan has traditionally always been open and tolerant to diverse forms of genders and sexualities. I have pointed out how the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society allowed the government to surreptitiously substitute gender equality with cooperative participation: Japan's "autonomous" approach to gender equality, while keeping up the appearance of promoting gender equality, in fact alienated feminist and women's move-

ments and served as a distraction from anti-discrimination attempts. The claim of "traditionally tolerant Japan" put forward by the LDP serves exactly the same purpose: the alleged openness and tolerance of "traditional" Japanese culture gives the government an excuse to propose a Japanese version of a diverse society to the International community, where in fact people with diverse genders and sexualities may be culturally "understood" and "accepted" but not necessarily granted full and equal legal rights.

Ironically, this is exactly where the non-legally-binding same-sex partnership certificates issued by local governments comes in handy: the national government can financially support the promotion of the understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people by local governments, which won't affect the fundamentally crucial family register system. This allows the government, both national and local, to claim that they are doing their job to accept queer people—if not their rights. It means that both the national and local governments will be able to put all the efforts and resources in window-dressing, without having to go through the difficult task of tackling systematic sexism, homophobia and transphobia, of reconstructing new and more diverse forms of the family, of actually leading the change to enable diversity in society. In a way, the brilliance of "partnership certificate" lies in that it could sell the fantasy of marriage, but not the actual marriage; the official recognition of partnership that feels almost as legally binding as marriage but never actually is.

What aggravates the situation is that, as the term "same-sex marriage" becomes more familiar to the general public and as the local governments' same-sex partnership certificates keep being reported, mistakenly, as recognizing same-sex partnership as "equivalent to marriage", it has started to be strategically deployed by the moral conservatives to their political end. For example, *viewpoint*, an online media run by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (formerly known as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity), a powerful moral conservative organization, has started to warn its readers in the last couple of years that same-sex partnership will lead to gay marriage, and therefore to the destruction of the traditional "family". So has *Nihon Jiji Hyoron*, a political publication issued by another moral/religious conservative organization Shinsei-Bukkyo-Kyodan (this time not Christian, but Buddhist). They also repeatedly stress how gay marriage goes against natural order and will harm social stability. Japan Policy Institute, a right-wing think tank known to have strong influence on the LDP and especially on the current Abe cabinet, had its senior member publish articles on an online journal by a right-wing national paper, strongly arguing against same-sex marriage.

At least two of the above three, the Unification Church and *Jiji Hyoron*, have already started to mobilize their supporters

for an anti-LGBTQ+ rights campaign: a few years back, they effectively prevented LGBTQ+ issues from entering junior high school curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, by mobilizing people to submit public comments. It is also important to point out here that all three organizations are among the most powerful and crucial driving forces in the gender backlash in the early noughties. The way they're starting to mobilize their readers and supporters around the purported threat to the traditional family brought by gay marriage has a worrying resemblance to their moves back in those days.

3. The surge of transphobic alliance

It is against this political backdrop that the current surge of transphobic online feminism takes place. The trans-antagonist claims by women and feminists became increasingly noticeable in the Japanese twittersphere in the summer of 2018, when one of the oldest and the leading women's universities in Japan, Ochanomizu University, announced that it would accept applications from transgender girls (most of whom, under current Japanese law, cannot have changed their legal gender status because of their age, and therefore are "male" on paper at the time of application). The trans-antagonists claim that this is part of a trend of misogynous transgenderism that seeks to invade women's space, threaten women's safety, and usurp women's rights and opportunities. Although such blatantly transphobic feminist discourses are still mostly observed online, as I will point out, this by no way implies that the majority of feminists are necessarily supportive of trans-rights in "real life".

First, however, it may be necessary to point out here that, until recently, strongly transphobic sentiments coming from cis-women (feminist or not) against trans-women were not necessarily visible in Japan. Cross-gender expression and/or identification has often been allowed a certain place, although quite limited and limiting, in Japanese culture and society. This is not to say that Japanese culture and society is less transphobic than, for example, a "Western" one, or that trans-, gender-nonconformist or non-binary people have been enjoying full and equal rights in Japan. Still, there has always been a small but stable demand, especially for male-to-female crossdressers and/or trans folks in mainstream entertainment, presenting themselves sometimes as comical, sometimes as sympathetic, sometimes even as exemplary, but never as threatening. It is not even uncommon that certain "celebrity" trans-feminine figures, whether they are male actors of traditional theatres known for playing women's roles, gay male performers who cross-dress (not necessarily drag-queens), or media personalities who are trans-women, to be set up against cis-women audience to criticize and reproach, or sometimes give advice and guidance to the latter, as the "experts who know both sides". In other words, in the limited world of media and entertainment in contemporary Japan, while trans-feminine figures are sometimes repre-

sented as a joke, at other times they could be exploited as a convenient tool for the patriarchal control over women. And yet, blatant hostility or phobia against trans women from cis-women has never manifested itself as among the main problems regarding transgender rights in Japan that need urgent attention.

Moreover, trans-activists have worked hard to expand the field of "acceptance" beyond the narrowly confined world of entertainment. The highly problematic 2003 "Act on Special Cases in Handling Gender Status for Persons with Gender Identity Disorder" hugely divided the community over its hyper-strict conditions imposed on those who wish to legally change their gender (i.e. one must not be currently married; one must not have a child who is a minor; one must have no reproductive glands or one's reproductive glands must have permanently lost function; and one must have genital organs that appear similar to those of the opposite gender). But it at least served to appease public hostility against those who are diagnosed as "suffering" from this disease that is "GID" during the time of severe gender backlash, when to appear as claiming the minority rights or as criticizing/threatening the "traditional" Japanese family might be politically suicidal. The first out transgender politician, Kamikawa Aya, was elected as an assembly member for Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, in 2003: the same year the first out lesbian politician (Otsuji Kanakao) won a local assembly election in Osaka, and years before the first out gay politicians got their seats (i.e. Ishizaka Wataru and Ishikawa Taiga in 2011).

The recent rise in online transphobia or transmisogyny, therefore, came somewhat as a surprise to many LGBT activists and academics. Where has this sudden hostility come from, one may wonder; has the hostility been smouldering among women all this while, or perhaps has it recently been transplanted from elsewhere? There are, in fact, some clear similarities between the anti-trans "feminist" discourse in the Japanese twittersphere and in certain other countries—most notably in the U.K. and perhaps also to a certain degree in South Korea: for example, the emphasis on "biological and innate women" as opposed to "male-bodied persons" and "penis-bearers"; the alarmist "concern" that trans-women with all their "male" privileges intact would usurp cis-women's hard-earned rights and opportunities; the scaremongering call for alert that allowing "penis-bearers" into a women's space would severely threaten women's safety; and the accusation that treating trans-women as women and advocating their rights is tantamount to ignoring and oppressing the pain and trauma of women who have been exposed to sexual violence and threats. These patterns of discourse were hardly noticeable, if any, in Japanese language SNS before 2018, and some of their earliest conspicuous distributers were SNS accounts that are also known for actively translating and introducing transphobic rhetoric, trans-related "incidents" and "hot topics" from English- or Korean- language SNS.

However, if strong hostility and phobia against trans-women were not that common among cis-women in Japan, how could these accounts be successful in spreading transphobic messages in the first place? One explanation may be found in the strategic use of up-front and sharp-tongued expression of feminist anger and resentment by these accounts.

While Japan was late to notice what may be called the revival of feminism in Anglo-European countries led by a new generation of feminists in the last decade, a series of accusations of sexual violence against powerful male journalists and artists in 2017 and 2018 finally brought the nation into the era of #MeToo. If an outspoken feminist voice were still most likely to be simply mocked, harassed, and silenced in the Japanese twittersphere (as much as in "the real life"), the anger, frustration and fear of women started to get increasingly voiced, shared and circulated in the last couple of years, urging others to join in. In fact, when Ochanomizu University made the announcement regarding transgender applicants, the biggest topic among feminists in the Japanese twittersphere was a BBC documentary about a Japanese female journalist who accused her powerful male colleague for sexually assaulting her, and the fact that a female LDP politician blatantly victim-blamed the accuser in the program. This was, in itself, a welcome change in a society where conformity is the norm and where women have found it so difficult to express their negative feelings and be taken seriously.

There were two problems here, however. Firstly, when voicing their frustration and justifying their anger, women naturally turn to what resource they could get—they looked to the latest feminist and/or #MeToo movements overseas. Those who were familiar with overseas feminist discourses translated articles and tweets, showed images and videos, and introducing various "feminist" logics and rhetoric that could be deployed when talking back to and fighting against patriarchy and misogynists. This again should not, in itself, be a problem— feminist and queer politics, or arguably most political movements and arguments advocating equal rights and social justice in Japan, have always sought help, ideas and inspirations from "outside" as well as from their own tradition. The problem is that along with fearless, in-your-face rhetoric of feminist response, rebuttal and criticism, some highly problematic ones—for example, those using homophobic, racist, or ablist slurs in order to attack a "male" they are in disagreement with—were introduced, shared or overlooked without much criticism. The second problem is that, once thus introduced, such problematic rhetoric proved to be a powerful tool to attract followers: anger, frustration and fear, when suddenly let out after being repressed so much for so long, could easily be led to find its way out in a misguided attack and hostility towards an easy target.

And this is exactly how transphobic discourses were imported: scattered among outspoken "feminist" rhetoric and intro-

duced by “feminist” accounts that were gaining more and more popularity for fiercely attacking the misogynist society and protecting the women’s rights at all costs. They were arguing that women—the majority cis-gendered women—should not stand having their rights put off any more. “Women are so oppressed, so discriminated against and suffering from inequality,” they would argue, “that asking women (i.e. cis-women) to accept and care for those who have grown up enjoying the male privilege, asking women to share with trans folks what little rights and opportunities they have earned and what little safe-space they have secured, is in itself a form of misogyny”. They appealed to the women’s fear of sexual harassment and violence, and to their anger and resentment towards the misogynous society; they moulded it into the kind of hateful anger that women are not usually allowed to express, and re-directed it towards trans women. Some estimate the number of active trans-antagonist twitter accounts to have come up to about 1000, which is not a small number considering they have only become visible for a year or so.

This also implies, we could argue, that even though blatant expression of transphobia was not that common among Japanese cis-women and feminists, and even though some crucial rhetoric of transphobic feminist discourses seem to have been imported from “outside”, things are clearly not that simple. There were grounds that prepared for, required, and welcomed the import of these discourses. One of them is, as we have seen, the deep-rooted misogyny and disregard of women’s sexual (and reproductive) rights in this society; another can be found in the way feminists in Japan have tried to fight misogyny. The mainstream feminist and women’s movements in the early noughties, trying to protect themselves from the severe backlash, set a direct precedent for the current online attack on trans women by mainly cis-women and feminists; even though the former never expressed phobia and hostility as blatantly as the latter, its indifference in effect had already cut off minority women from feminist concerns.

In fact, in spite of the tireless effort by trans activists to gather evidence of online transphobic hate speech and the repeated appeal by queer activists and academics to pay closer attention to the rise of transphobic “feminist” discourses, most feminist SNS accounts, including those of legal experts, journalists, and academics, have been avoiding to even touch on this issue, much less voicing a clear criticism or opposition of those discourses. Well-known women’s activist groups and academic feminist centres have planned public lectures by a “Western” academic feminist who happens to be visiting Japan for research and is also a known trans-antagonist, in spite, again, of the repeated alerts from queer activists and academics. At best, they just are not interested at all in trans issues: they do not care because it has nothing to do with them. At worst, they agree with, or at least feel sympathetic to, the trans-antagonistic discourses.

The irony, however, is that some among the trans-antagonists are starting to seek alliance with anyone with similar views, and therefore with the moral conservatives and the ruling LDP government. Here again, we are witnessing transnational similarities: it has been repeatedly pointed out how some Anglo-American trans-antagonist "feminists" do not seem reluctant to team up with extreme moral/religious conservatives. In the Japanese twittersphere, some have started to argue that they have no other choice but to support the LDP and the moral conservative's view as more agreeable to "ordinary women"; some argue that a person's gender recorded on the family register is their only "true" gender and that trans women should always be prepared to prove what their gender is on the family register in case they raise suspicion in public toilets (it would perhaps be unnecessary to point out here that the idea of requesting surveillance and control of women's bodies based on the family register is so out of sync with anything Japanese feminist and women's movements have stood for that if one is even remotely familiar with them it is almost unthinkable); some even go as far as to argue that "gender backlash" in the noughties was justifiable, for they have come to the understanding that the concept of "gender" actually is, just as the LDP "Project team" put it, a mere ideological device without a clear definition. When they are not as overtly supportive of LDP and the moral conservatives, they tend to express concerns over the possibility that "radicalized transgenderism" is inviting backlash against feminism and against transsexual people by pushing "ordinary women" too far, forcing them to take sides with the extreme rights. As might be clear by now, both of these trans-antagonist "feminist" approaches are the direct descendants of the backlash in the noughties: the former blatantly repeats and supports the anti-trans sentiment used as a tool to attack feminism; and the latter repeats the feminist gesture of cutting off the "weakest link" to defend against the backlash.

What is worse, while the majority of feminist activists and academics, even those who are quite active online, are more or less ignoring the transphobic attack as peripheral events not worth their passing comments, the conservative side have been paying attention. For example, MATSUURA Daigo, a former member of the House of Councillors from the Democratic Party of Japan and who came out as a gay man after he lost the seat in the House in 2017, was quick to notice that a transphobic attitude may rebuild his declining political career. On an internet TV program aired in early January, 2019, he criticized the bill for the elimination of discrimination targeting sexual minorities, submitted by five opposition parties in December 2018, claiming incorrectly that the bill, if passed, would mean that denying entry of a trans person with a male genital organ into "women's" public baths constitutes discrimination. His comment was quickly circulated not only among tans-antagonist feminists but also by the conservative sec-

tion of the gay community who have become more and more vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with what they see as the over-politicization of LGBT issues. As if in response, *viewpoint*, a website run by Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, which is one of the major players in the backlash fifteen years ago, published an article in January 2019. Discussing the safety of cis-women in public toilets and baths, the article suggested that "current LGBT movements" could "result in the violation of human rights for women". *Viewpoint* had already criticized, in an August 2018 article, the decision by Ochanomizu University to accept transgender girls as applicants, hinting at the fearful possibility of a "fake male student"; *the Sekai Nippo*, a paper also published by Family Federation, published an article in July 2019 about transwomen athletes, arguing against the participation of a "male" athlete in women's sports.

Both *Sekai Nippou* and *viewpoint* are choosing the right timing to translate and introduce to the Japanese readers the transphobic argument that have been circulating in English, which was exactly the same role the media owned by Unification Church played during the backlash. So far, extreme conservative media like *viewpoint* have not started a full-on campaign against trans rights like they did against feminist and women's movements in the noughties. However, considering the crucial role these media played back then by introducing discourses of U.S. religious rights to fuel backlash, how successful they turned out to be, and how Anglo-American religious rights and trans-antagonist "feminists" have started to cooperate, it is not too far-fetched to assume that the fear and hatred against trans women would be fuelled and exploited, at any time when it becomes necessary, to start another "backlash".

Conclusion

So, that was the story: the story so far of feminist and queer struggle in Japan in the last two decades. As I hope to have demonstrated, it is a story of how feminists have kept feeling forced into concession to the moral/religious extreme conservatives operating hand-in-hand with the national government, and how the concession has effectively eroded and undermined feminist politics to the point where not only have we, Japanese feminists, failed to provide for the queer communities enough theoretical and political tools to secure legal protection for same-sex couples, but failed to stop some women, including feminists, from sharing a political goal with, and sometimes actively cooperating with, the extreme conservatives. There is no happy ending to the story, and we cannot take an inspirational lesson out of it.

The story shows what we, as feminists, as queer, and/or as academics, have to work with, and it poses questions: questions to which I do not have answers at hand. How can we effectively relate these highly transnational and yet stubbornly local political struggles in the last two decades to feminist and/or queer theoretical

discussions in Anglophone academia and to the transnational and local politics that have informed them? How can we do that, as feminist/queer academics working outside the Anglophone world and outside the global metropolis, in a manner that is more engaged in the local politics than trying to contribute first and foremost to the Anglophone academic discourses and knowledge? How, just as we struggle to figure these out face to face with the global/international/Euro-Anglophone academic discourses, do we resist on the one hand the othering by the conservatives that undermines the local feminist efforts as "foreign pressure" and on the other hand the temptation to go "traditional" at the expense of local minority women? And perhaps most importantly, how do we best navigate the incessant and increasingly rapid flow of transnational feminist, queer, and also anti-gender movements and discourses so that we can learn from and work with each other, without losing sight of our respective local, distinctive, and messy amalgam of translational politics between the imported and the indigenous, the transnational and the local?

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