DRAG ACROSS BORDERS:
NEGOTIATING 2SLGBTQ+ REFUGEE/MIGRANT BEING AND BELONGING
THROUGH DRAG PERSONAS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study uses drag performance to better understand some of the complexity of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee and other migrant identities and experiences of in/exclusion from (national) belonging in Canada. Racialized Western border regimes and reception frameworks position refugees/migrants along an in/voluntary axis that both denies and fears agency while constructing 'the refugee' as a diminished 'non-person'. Utilizing drag as an analytical lens sheds fresh light on questions of refugee/migrant agency and performativity as well as (racialized) queer/trans self-enactment and belonging. In this study, refugee/migrant drag artists describe materializing through their drag personas a desired 'person' that stakes out spaces of belonging for themselves and for others in their communities. Thus, they push back against dehumanizing social and political forces hostile to their being and belonging.

The dissertation draws on in-depth interviews with twenty-two refugee/migrant drag artist and audience member respondents from across Canada and utilizes an abductive grounded theory approach to analyze the resulting data. The drag artists' narratives counter Western scripts of 'refugeeness' by emphasizing agency and autonomy in their lives long before and after arrival. Through their personas, the work the drag artists do is social, political, and relational. Relationships with their families (of all kinds) and others form a vital part of building collectivity. The sharing of their knowledge and experience with new generations of artists shows how these refugee/migrant drag performers work toward the futures they desire for themselves and others and toward the change they want to see in the world.

Uniquely, this study signals the public pedagogical potential of drag in relation to refuge and migrancy. The study adds to queer/trans migration studies that centre the everyday lived

experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants before and after conflict/arrival. By

focusing on the experiential in and continuity of (queer/trans) refugee/migrant lives, this research

contests the reduction of 'the refugee' to an anonymous category of diminished 'non-person',

stripped of a past and refused a future. In demonstrating how (past) social relations nourish

present and future belonging for 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants through collectivity,

the study also contributes to the theorizing of queer/trans-of-colour futurity.

Keywords: Drag Performance; Refugee; Migrant; Queer Migration; Transgender Migration;

Queer Diaspora; Belonging; Personhood; Political Agency; Social Activism; Abductive

Grounded Theory.

DEDICATIONS

To each of the twenty-two participants in this study.

Without you, of course, no study would have been possible. I am humbled and honoured you placed your trust in me. These are your stories, and I hope I have done due justice to all.

&

In memory of Noel Brennan.

My friend and mentor who passed too soon. An instinctual scholar with endless curiosity and an offer of kind words, gentle humour, and warm company to all who came across his path.
A living lesson in how to laugh, how to love, and how to be good.

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1. Introduction

Borders do not defend human freedom and safety; they are a fortification against the power of solidarity between people. — Chantelle Gallant (Gallant, 2021, para. 32)

Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self; in which case, it is best that the garment be loose. — James Baldwin (Baldwin, 2011, p. 185)

Fabulousness is about the risk of stretching out and expanding when you have been told you don't deserve to exist. — Madison Moore (Elan, 2020, para. 6)

This study concerns the identities and experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants in Canada and how they navigate hostile social, political, and cultural forces that would negate their being and exclude them from belonging.[1] What makes the investigation somewhat unique is that it mobilizes how refugee/migrant drag artists reflect on the creation of their drag

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[1] In this dissertation, I mostly use the initialism 2SLGBTQ+ [two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more] as well as the phrase 'queer/trans/non-binary' as umbrella terms to refer to non-cisnormative and non-heteronormative social identities, positions, locations, etc. Both initialism and phrase are unsatisfactory attempts to reflect a very wide range of gender and sexual alterity. The plus sign used in the initialism does a very poor job of standing for many other subjectivities that circulate in Canada and Western countries, and it does nothing to represent identities, positions, desires, etc. that are specific to languages and cultures around the globe (Chávez & Luibhéid, 2020). Two-spirit is also a contested umbrella term that fails to account for the specific terms used in First Nations and other Indigenous peoples (Vowel, 2016). I use 'queer' sometimes as an identity category and as it is used in academic theory to indicate a denaturalizing of sexual and gender categories. But I join Gentile and Kinsman (2015) in signalling that the term can "obscure class relations and struggles as well as racialized relations and anti-racist struggles and can be complicit in forms of homonormativity and homonationalism" (p. 134). In parallel to 'queer', I use 'trans' and 'transgender' as umbrella identity terms referring to gender alterity and also as framework that interrogates and denaturalizes normative gender (Chávez & Luibhéid, 2020). I try at all times to indicate with specific terms how the participants in this study identified themselves (if at all) in relation to gender and sexual alterity. Thus, I follow Chávez and Luibhéid (2020) in highlighting that "people claim, inhabit, and give meaning to identity categories in ways that must be respectfully explored; and people transit among identities, too" (p. 7).

I prefer to use the phrase 'refugee and other migrant people' (sometimes abbreviating to 'refugee/migrant') cognizant of the long-standing and fraught inclusivist-versus-residualist debate over the conflation of 'refugee' with 'migrant'. The inclusivist position views refugees as migrants; a particular class of migrants, but migrants, nonetheless. The residualist views refugees, given their distinct categorization in international law, as a separate group from the 'residual', i.e., all other migrants (Carling, 2017). As Chávez and Luibhéid (2020) argue, "legal statuses reflect not 'types' of migrants but the workings of power and knowledge that seek to differentiate among migrants; delimit rights and protections that they will be granted or denied; and shape forms of surveillance, discipline, normalization, and dispossession to which they are subjected" (p. 8). I attempt a middle way in the construction 'refugee and other migrant people' as suggested by Carling (2017).

personas and thus interrogate their understanding of what makes them who they are and who they desire to be. I begin this introductory chapter by providing some context for this study and go on to outline the aims and questions that drive it. I conclude with some notes about the study's significance and then a brief overview of this dissertation's chapters.

1.1 Research Context

It is often argued that the past few decades have seen an "unparalleled level of human migration" driven by diverse factors such as the end of the Cold War, continued neoliberal expansion of globalized capital and its demands for both low-wage and highly skilled labour, and access to cheaper, faster transportation (Gold & Nawyn, 2019, p. xxiv). These factors are in addition to abiding reasons for the displacement of people including war, human conflict, economic changes, and environmental disasters (ibid.). Indeed, the statistical trend lines of global migration show consistent and, at times, dramatic growth in the numbers of displaced people around the world. According to the latest report from the International Organization of Migration (a UN agency), estimated numbers of international migrants have increased some 78% over the past two decades to around 281 million (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022). And yet, this figure represents just 3.6% of the world's population, meaning 96.4% of the globe's population is not on the move. Such a contradiction highlights the trouble with focusing on numbers when it comes to migration: which numbers are used and how, by whom, and for what reasons. I could point to recent rises in migration numbers as a motive for this study, although now is no more a moment to examine migration than any other. Instead, as I go on to explain, what concerns me as context for this study is that the response to (any number of) incoming refugee/migrant people is

always rooted in anxieties around borders of 'race' and nation;[2] anxieties that are also gendered and sexual.

Racialized Hostility toward Refugees and Other Migrants

The international movement of people impacts economic, social, and demographic domains in both sending and receiving countries (Gold & Nawyn, 2019); but migration is also political and, as the IOM laments in its report, politicized. Wright (2018) observes, "[a] vicious anti-migrant politics animates many public spheres, especially in the US and Europe" (p. 104). This politicization is, at heart, a racialization of migration. Harsha Walia (founder of Canadian migrant advocacy group No One Is Illegal) explains that the growing numbers of migrants are harnessed by reactionary politicians in Western countries in an anti-migrant rhetoric —'border crisis', 'invasions', 'border surges'— that is profoundly racialized (Beckett, 2021) and hostile (Kushner, 2020). As Wright (2014) points out, media representation of refugees is imbued with an anti-migrant hostility that is figured in dehumanizing terms which suggest nations being submerged in 'tides', 'floods', and 'streams' of innumerable 'illegal' migrants (see, for example, Syal, 2022). Such media reporting is both subject to and influenced by shifting political agendas around race and nation (Wright, 2014). Refugees, for example, have been

> re-labelled as 'undesirable aliens' at the *fin de siècle* and 1930s, 'displaced persons' after the Second World War and then in the last decades of the twentieth century and into the new millennia, as 'bogus asylum seekers' or 'illegal immigrants', the last term shortened to one word in racist populist discourse: 'illegals' (Kushner, 2020, p. 91).

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[2] In this first usage of the term 'race', I use single quote marks to indicate that race is not a biological fact (Miles, 1989; Gilroy, 1987), but in subsequent references I no longer use the single quote marks to thus indicate that it is nonetheless a social fact (Modood et al., 2002; see also Goldberg, 2002 and Omi & Winant, 2011).

Speaking in 1979 about representation in Britain's media of racialized groups (groups always treated as migrant incomers to and thus excluded from the imagined homogeneity of the European nation), cultural theorist Stuart Hall pointed out that "[a]s soon as you start defining black issues in terms of numbers and repatriation, you play straight into the hands of extremist racist groups and their solution of forced repatriation" (O'Hagan, 2023, para. 9). Hall's observation holds true today, that framing migration in numbers risks playing into racist logics of exclusion and bolstering dehumanizing, hostile rhetoric of border 'invasions', etc.[3] Anderson (2020) reminds us that "[w]hen it moves from the border, migration transforms into race" (p. 118).

This point about the intimate relationship between migration and race, as well as the observation that the border is elastic, moving inward and outward to serve racist exclusionary ends, has been well rehearsed from a variety of perspectives in the work of race scholars, including Balibar (1991), Gilroy (1987), and Goldberg (1993). Gilroy (1987), for example, writes that "the limits of 'race' have come to coincide so precisely with national frontiers", so that "[in the UK] the word 'immigrant' became synonymous with the word 'black' during the 1970s" (p. 46). How race defines the politics and practices of Western nations' border regimes leads Anderson (2020) to conclude that "racism is not an unfortunate characteristic of immigration enforcement, but is baked into such controls" (p. 119). When Gallant (2021) notes that "[m]igrants are denied rights to safety and democracy because of who they are, not because they have crossed a border" (para. 12), she highlights the racialization of the 'migrant'; for the wealthy, white 'expat' or 'émigré', borders are largely notional. Migration, race, and nation not

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[3] Racialized anti-migrant rhetoric of 'invasion'/'flood'/'surge', etc., circulating in Western countries conveniently ignores that "the vast majority of the world's displaced and asylum-seeking peoples remain located in the global south" (Luibhéid, 2019, p. 238).

only overlap but are constitutive of one another (Song, 2019, p. 201). Gilroy (1987) underscores that "conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity […] not only blur the distinction between 'race' and nation, but rely on that very ambiguity for their effect" (p. 44). Thus, Anderson (2020) notes the haziness in the term 'nationality': both a legal term homologous to citizenship and a social one "signifying belonging to the nation" (pp. 118-119). Both senses of the term "trace through ancestry", thus "nationality is sutured to race" (Anderson, 2020, p. 119). Ultimately, racialized anti-migrant discourses translate into national and international border policies and practices —"to lock down borders, to build walls, to stop boats" (Doherty, 2023)— that not only exclude but place the already imperilled lives of refugees and other migrants in further existential danger (e.g., Kelly, 2023; Stevenson, 2023). Faced with this script of anti-migrant hostility in the public realm, where they are portrayed within a dyad of 'victim' or 'pariah' (Kyriakides, 2017), some migration scholars assume the responsibility to re-centre refugees and other migrants as speaking and acting subjects (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). This re-centring can be achieved by hearing directly from refugees and other migrants about actions they have taken in their lives "that portray them as creative and knowledgeable actors rather than as victims or terrorists" (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, p. 1174).

This study does not take up an inquiry into migration as a demographic, social, economic, or political phenomenon, since it might risk playing to the racist anxieties Hall highlighted. Instead, following those scholars who centre refugee/migrant agency, my study focuses on the everyday lived experiences of individual refugee and other migrant people to better understand how as agentive actors they negotiate ongoing questions of identity and belonging (inflected by migration, nation, and race as well as gender and sexuality) in contestation to the hostile, exclusionary effects of border regimes. As such, this research adds to the study of refugee (and

other migrant) experiences that broadens attention from (the very real) struggles of migrants with hostile border regimes to the texture of their lives before and after arrival where they exercise autonomy and agency (e.g., Dobson, 2004; Lacroix, 2004; Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013; Häkli et al., 2017; Hirsch, 2019; Kyriakides et al., 2018, 2019; Nguyen, 2019, Sigona, 2014).

Studying the Experiences of Queer/Trans/Non-Binary Refugees and Other Migrants

My study gives particular attention to the complex identities and experiences of gender and sexually non-normative refugee/migrant people. Bamby Salcedo, US-based migrant activist and president of the Trans Latin@ Coalition, highlights that "[t]he relationships between our sexuality and our migration experiences are intertwined. You can't separate one from the other" (Gallant, 2021, para. 18). Scholars concur: "The ways that sexuality shapes and is reshaped by international migration has long been implicitly acknowledged" (Luibhéid, 2019, p. 235). Thus, queer scholars of migration have undertaken work to demonstrate that "sexuality [both normative and non-normative] structures all migration experiences" (ibid.) largely because Western border regimes that control migration flows and processes are imbued with nation-state "logics of 'family' that are (hetero)sexist" as well as "racist, colonialist, and bourgeois" (Luibhéid, 2019, p. 236). Thanks to quite recent interventions from trans migration researchers (e.g., Aizura, 2018; Beauchamp, 2019; Camminga, 2018; Cáraves & Salcedo, 2020; Haritaworn, 2015; Jacob & Oswin, 2022; Shakhsari, 2014; Vartabedian, 2018; Zecena, 2020), questions of gender identity have broadened the narrow focus of queer migration research on sexuality, and important attention is given to how "gender and sexuality inscribe, articulate, co-produce, and transvalue one another" through processes and experiences of migration (Luibhéid, 2019, p. 243). As Jacob and Oswin (2022) observe, "[b]order crossings are particularly fraught for trans people, since gender is naturalized under nationalism, and national belonging is figured through gender" (p. 3).

Much study of migration from a queer and trans perspective rightly focuses on the processes of crossing international borders and navigating border regimes of control that 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants must engage in. Those seeking asylum in Canada on the grounds of persecution due to their sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face particular hurdles. SOGIESC asylum seekers may claim the protection of the Canadian state under national and international legal frameworks as members of a persecuted 'particular social group' (LaViolette, 2009; McGhee, 2001; Millbank, 2009; Rehaag, 2009, 2017). The success of asylum applications depends on proving membership in the 'particular social group'. It, therefore, means negotiating an at times hostile regime of gatekeeping officials who, as I explain in Chapter Two, demand that claimants demonstrate that they are queer/trans/non-binary in ways officials deem 'credible' and align with the gatekeepers' normative expectations of gender and sexual alterity (Ferreira, 2023; Gaucher & DeGagne, 2016; LaViolette, 2009; Murray, 2015; Rehaag, 2009, 2017; Ricard, 2014). Canada is, consequently, positioned in the national imaginary as a liberal 'safe haven' in contrast to 'unsafe' and 'backward' other nations. That is not to say, by any means, that social and political conditions in other places do not produce very real circumstances of persecution and endangerment from which some queer/trans/non-binary people seek refuge. The vital work of community organizations such as Rainbow Railroad in Toronto and Rainbow Refugee in Vancouver attests to the need for "safe equitable migration and communities of belonging for people fleeing Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and HIV+ persecution" (Rainbow Refugee, 2023). But this positioning of Canada as a 'safe' and benevolent, white-majority 'rescuer' state in contrast to 'unsafe', (mostly) Global South 'persecutory' nations demands much examination (Kinsman, 2018). My study offers one avenue to do so by investigating the everyday lived

experiences and reality of life in 'safe' Western nations for largely racialized queer/trans/non-binary refugee and other migrant people. In doing so, I join this study to extant queer and trans migration research and, especially, to studies of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee and other migrant experiences beyond processes of migration and seeking refuge, ones that foreground their own narratives of agentive actions (e.g., Lee & Brotman, 2011; Camminga, 2018; Cantú et al., 2009; Decena, 2008; Jacob & Oswin, 2022; Manalansan, 2003; Murray, 2013; O'Neill & Kia, 2012; Seitz, 2017; Shakhsari, 2014; White, 2012).

Why Refugee/Migrant Drag Artists?

Canada's self-positioning as an exceptional 'safe haven', especially for trans folks, has recently been given a boost by a wave of anti-trans legislative manoeuvres in the USA and UK (Brooks, 2023; Levin & Kamal, 2021). A CBC News report describes a current parliamentary petition that seeks to designate those two countries in Canada's asylum policies as 'unsafe' for trans people (Logan & Vermes, 2023), which, significantly, would posit 'safe' Canada in contrast to not only 'unsafe' racialized-majority countries but now other white-majority ones. The report links US and UK political hostility to trans people with recent moves by violent right-wing extremists to target 'drag storytime' events not only in the US and UK but in Canada, too (somewhat undermining the 'safe haven' positioning). These events, where drag performers read story books to children, often at public libraries, have attracted such aggression that drag artists and event organizers hire armed guards (Brend, 2022; Grant, 2023; Simpson, 2022; Walters, 2022). Conflated with trans folks, drag artists are imagined as a challenge to gender normativity. What's more, the fact that drag performers are now frontline targets of right-wing extremist hostility points to one way they overlap with refugees and other migrants: both represent to conservative forces a 'threat' to the nation, to its borders, in the case of refugees/migrants, and to

'children', in the case of drag artists, or rather to the reproductive cis-heterosexuality on which the nation via the 'family' is figured. Consequently, conservative forces seek to exclude refugees/migrants and 2SLGBTQ+ drag artists alike from (national) belonging. My research takes up this positioning of both refugees/migrants and drag performers as 'threats' to the nation and explores how someone who is a refugee or other migrant *and* drag artist experiences the effects of this exclusion.

Thanks in part to the unwelcome attention from hostile right-wing forces, drag, in a North American social, political, and cultural context, is firmly in public consciousness at the time of writing. But popular awareness of drag is also due to the success of television shows starting with *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009–present; hereafter RPDR), as well as its iterations and the other shows it inspires, meaning drag has become "a household fixture" (Brown, 2018, p. 63). Edward and Farrier (2020) view the popularity of shows like RPDR as part of "drag's shift, mainly (though by no means only) in Western contexts, from underground and counterculture to mainstream culture" (p. 5). The show's cultural impact is demonstrable in that it has also led to "an explosion of aspiring queens in unprecedented numbers" (Crookston, 2021, p. 4). Heller (2020) describes the show's dominance as shaping public understanding of what drag is and is not: "Ask people around you what drag is and very likely you will get a description that would make it onto *RuPaul's Drag Race*" (p. 2).[4] As Crookston (2021) notes, the phenomenon of RPDR has driven a boom in academic attention on drag (e.g., Daems, 2014, Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017, and Yudelman, 2017). Such research often focuses on questions of how subjectivity —racialized and gendered, in particular— is produced in RPDR's performers and their personas (see, e.g., Brown, 2018; Deanda, 2019; Goetz-Preisner, 2022; Jenkins, 2017;

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[4] I engage with this question of defining 'drag' in the next chapter.

LeMaster & Tristano, 2021; McIntyre & Riggs, 2017; Moore, 2013; Upadhyay, 2019; Zhang, 2016). These studies largely critique how the show will often engage with race and gender in ways that problematically naturalize these categories (e.g., Strings & Bui, 2014). Another common theme in scholarly work on RPDR centres on how the show —the stated aim of which is to win the contest to be 'America's Next Drag Superstar'— foregrounds a liberal individualism and neoliberal veneration of competition, commercialism, and entrepreneurialism (e.g., Brennan, 2017; Campana & Duffy, 2021; Cochrane, 2021; Collins, 2017; Goldmark, 2015; Heller, 2018; LeMaster, 2015; Sadler, 2022; Schottmiller, 2021; Yudelman, 2017). For example, Goldmark (2015) notes how RPDR contestants are engaged in another iteration of pursuit of the 'American Dream' since they "are judged on their adherence to RuPaul's formula of success as transformation; throughout the competition they perform prior hardship and present gratitude for the opportunity to advance socially and economically" outside the show (pp. 501-502). Sandoval (2018) concludes that the goal of RPDR is "product-placement-driven" (p. 103) and thus drag performances on the show are de-fanged of any social or political insight.

The themes of the above studies of RPDR suggest that, for some at least, drag does more than 'entertain'. In fact, these themes foreground some of what I view as drag's utility as a lens of inquiry. Since drag involves the creation of another 'identity' (persona), what might this persona tell us about the production of gendered, sexualized, racialized, and other subjectivities of the performer? If drag is in (neo)liberal terms a narcissistic centring of the individual, do drag performers (socially and politically) care for others? To these questions, I would add a further inquiry: if drag performance can tell us about the performer's way of being, what might the creation of drag personas tell us about the performer's everyday experiences (of belonging and more)? Given the tensions we see being played out in those reactionary forces that seek to push

refugees, other migrants, and drag artists outside of (national) belonging, this study plots a course through these tensions with what drag *does* as a compass.

Additionally, I must acknowledge my personal investment in the study and how my own history interplays and moves in tension with this research. Conducting the interviews for this study, I listened to drag performers who had histories and experiences of moving across international borders describe what they had invested in their personas and why. I learned much about how multiply marginalized queer/trans/non-binary refugee and other migrant folks negotiate their being and belonging, especially in the face of the kinds of hostile, exclusionary forces I described above. Their narratives prompted me to reflect more carefully on how my own creation of a drag persona might be illuminated by my history and experiences of migration. I am someone who has performed forms of drag, on and off, for more than twenty years. I am also a queer immigrant to Canada; but with all the attributed agency and privilege attendant on being white and English-speaking, I am seldom positioned as a migrant. Moving to Canada was, in fact, the second time I moved independently and internationally; as a teenager, I moved from Scotland, where I was born, to Ireland. This move was, perhaps, a modest migration given the geographic and cultural proximity. It could also be conservatively framed as a 'homecoming' journey since I was part of a multi-generation Irish diaspora in Scotland. It was in Ireland in my late twenties where I first performed drag, albeit a form of 'clown' drag and what's known variously as 'trash' or 'booger' drag. Securing a job in a small city in western Canada, I was able to cross an international border again with ease and privilege. There I created and established a drag persona, Philomena Flynn-Flawn, who 'works' as a teacher at a private all-girls school, engaging her 'students' (audience) with storytelling and inept puppetry. She's named for a small town on the prairies and for an Irish singer whom I recall my parents listening to when I was

child. Now in Toronto, I have had the opportunity of working with other (queer) migrants in volunteer roles at refugee/migrant reception agencies, once performing as Philomena at an event specifically for queer/trans/non-binary refugees. Even before this study, I met or knew of other drag performers who have refugee or other migrant histories. But now, having had the privilege of listening to the participants in this study recount their stories, I realize in creating the persona of Philomena, I, too, have drawn to some extent on a patchwork of cultural memory and experiences of displacement. This study of refugee/migrant drag person(a)s prompts me to revisit who I think I am, where I am, where I have come from, and where I belong, and what I want the persona of Philomena to do for me and for others.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

Queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants in Canada (and elsewhere in the West) are subjected to hostile, exclusionary forces in social, political, and cultural domains — racisms, nationalisms, gender and sexual normativities— that seek to deny them belonging and diminish or erase their very being (Dryden et al., 2015; Haritaworn et al., 2014; Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). Such forces are prominent in shaping the discourses, policies, and practices of (inter)national border regimes, but they also overshadow the everyday lives and experiences of largely racialized 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant people. The aims of this research project are to further understand the intersectional identities and experiences of queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants (based in Canada) and produce insights into how they negotiate being and belonging. The study does so mobilizing drag performance as a generator of embodied knowledge about self and relations with others. The study draws on, specifically, and interprets the narratives that refugee/migrant drag artists relate concerning what their drag personas mean to them.

Three questions guided the study:

(1) What identities are salient for 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag performers & audiences, and when?

(2) What meanings does drag have for experiences of belonging of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant performers & audiences?

(3) What relationship, if any, exists between drag performance and the 'everyday performance' of identities among 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant performers & audiences?

This research aims to contribute to academic, community, policy, and political efforts that assert (2SLGBTQ+) refugee/migrant agency and personhood and thus counter such hostile, exclusionary forces. The research objectives are (1) to produce insights into how 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants negotiate their intersectional social identities using drag as a lens; (2) to further queer and trans migration research on the social, political, and cultural resources 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants mobilize in their everyday lives and experiences; and (3) to provide informative data on the complex lives and experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants to community workers and policy makers seeking to enhance reception services aimed at this population.

1.3 Significance of the Study

My research posits drag personas as means to examine 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant experiences of being and belonging *contra* hostile forces that seek to exclude. The study centres 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag artists' narratives of what their personas mean to their senses of self and affinities with others. Greater attention to how queer/trans/non-binary refugee and other migrant people experience their complex identities and feelings of in/exclusion can help challenge the construction of refugees as non-agentive 'objects' of Western rescue (Kyriakides et al., 2018, 2019) and other migrants as *too* agentive 'threats' to the nation, suspiciously choosing

to move for nefarious and 'bogus' reasons (Bakewell, 2010). Furthermore, findings from this study demonstrate refugee and migrant people contesting through their drag personas their reduction, in the logics of Western border regimes, to a diminished form of 'person' excluded from public, political life (Agamben, 1995; Arendt, 1951). Importantly, this study joins existing work that reorients focus beyond the interactions of (2SLGBTQ+) refugee and other migrant people with the apparatuses of border regimes to their everyday lived experiences before and after conflict/arrival; it challenges the construction of refugees and other migrants as suspended in the processes of refuge-seeking and migration, stripped of a past and refused a future.

Utilizing drag personas as the lens through which 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant experiences of being and belonging may be examined sheds fresh light on what in (queer and trans) migration literature has been posited as the strategic performativity of (2SLGBTQ+) refugeeness (Häkli et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2019). While it is sometimes critiqued for its neoliberal individualism and consumer entertainment, drag performance is also recently constructed as a 'threat' to children and as such, a 'threat' to the reproductive future of the nation (as outlined above). This study demonstrates, instead, drag's public pedagogical potential and contributions to racialized queer/trans/non-binary relationality, thus signalling how via drag personas 2SLGBTQ+ refugee and other migrant people foster collective belonging and queer futures. Given these contributions, this study may inform future research on 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant experiences beyond refuge/migration. It may inform the ways in which policy makers approach the administration of refuge/immigration regimes and those who work with 2SLGBTQ+ refugee and other migrant people in reception organizations approach the provision of settlement supports. Most importantly, it may offer insights to queer/trans/non-binary refugee/migrant

people on how others like them resist dehumanizing, exclusionary forces through the fostering of collective belonging, including public, political activism.

1.4 Overview of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. In the following chapter, Chapter Two, I explain the theoretical underpinnings of my study while situating it in relation to literatures on drag performance, Critical Refugee Studies, and Queer and Trans Migration Studies. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative methodological approach —abductive grounded theory— that I employed and describes my methods for data collection and analysis. The next three chapters, Chapters Four, Five, and Six, build one on the other to present my findings with a focus on data from eight of the drag artist respondents (from a total of twenty-two interviews conducted). Data from these eight most comprehensively represent the thematic insights drawn from the larger cohort of study participants. In Chapter Four, I argue that faced with hostile, exclusionary forces that seek to deny them being and belonging, these drag artists materialize the 'person' they desire to be through their personas and the various (social, political, and cultural) resources those personas mobilize. Chapter Five explains how the drag artists mobilize resources drawn from their 'given' families, 'chosen' kin, and other 'we' groups of belonging in the materialization via personas of the 'person' they desire to be. In Chapter Six, I contend that the 'person' the drag artists desire to be is a relational one, emerging via persona from the 'we' groups with whom they cultivate collective spaces of belonging and make futures for themselves and others. In the final chapter, Chapter Seven, I consider the study's findings, outline some contributions and limitations of the research, and share final thoughts for future research directions.

2. Theory and Literature Review

Given the objectives I outlined in Chapter One and my focus on how queer/trans/non-binary refugee/migrant drag artists understand their identities and experiences, this study is underpinned, principally, by several theoretical concepts drawn from queer studies of drag performance, Critical Refugee Studies, and Queer and Trans Migration Studies. This chapter explores these concepts in the context of the relevant literatures. These literatures shape my study since a series of openings remain to be addressed, and it is these openings in knowledge which I pursue. First, while some exists (e.g., Jacob & Oswin, 2022; Jordan, 2009; Lee & Brotman, 2011; Murray, 2013; O'Neill & Kia, 2012; Ricard, 2014; White, 2012), more work is needed to understand how queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants mobilize agency in negotiating their being and belonging not only around experiences of border crossings but outside and beyond refuge seeking and migration. Second, while many have suggested how racialized folks (but not necessarily refugees/migrants) foster spaces of belonging through collectivity and relationality (e.g., Allen, 2012; Bacchetta et al. 2015, 2018; Eng, 2010; Garvey, 2011; Rodríguez, 2020; Rosenberg, 2021), much room exists to explore how these spaces of belonging function as ushering queer refugee/migrant folks toward liveable futures. Third, a few scholars have highlighted fertile ideas around (1) the ways drag (and its performed personas) generate collectivity; and (2) how drag generates an educational space for performers and publics to explore actual and potential selves (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Bailey, 2013; Horowitz, 2020;

Khubchandani, 2015; O'Halloran, 2017; Pattisapu, 2014; Penney, 2022; Pensoneau, 2006). But to my knowledge, no one has considered how these drag theories might further our understanding of the ways in which queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants negotiate their being and belonging, with, above all, an eye to liveable futures.

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 2.1 is a form of prologue to the chapter where I attempt to answer a rudimentary but nonetheless slippery question of what drag *is*. The remaining sections comprise various ways of responding to the additional question of what drag *does*. Section 2.2 introduces a consideration of what drag can tell us about the self and about relations with others, or the social self, with an emphasis on (hegemonic) gender and race as mediations of the social self. In this section, I rely exclusively on literature on drag. In Sections 2.3 to 2.6, I place various observations from literature on drag into dialogue with (queer and trans) literature on refuge and migration. In Section 2.3, I borrow the idea of performativity from drag to examine the question of agency for refugees and other migrants. In Section 2.4, I continue my inquiry into the agency question in light of drag persona's relationship to 'person'. In Section 2.5, I posit drag as a public pedagogy of self-enactment and relate this to sociological and philosophical takes on authority and social status. Finally, in Section 2.6, I pivot to a more fundamental question of belonging, and I draw from queer/trans migration studies and queer-of-colour critique an example of exclusionary forces that separate racialized queer/trans/non-binary

refugees and other migrants from belonging. I conclude this section with two forms of addressing (non-)belonging via relationality: drag kinship and queer diaspora.

2.1 Introduction: Defining Drag

What is Drag?

Edward and Farrier (2020) warn that "[t]o offer a definition [of drag] or claim a definitive guide misunderstands and rubs against what drag does" (p. 11), which, in their view, is to interrogate —through parody and subversion— gender and other social categories of identity. Theirs is an important observation because they distinguish between and then relate what drag *is* to what drag *does*. In the next sub-section, I will explore some of what drag does —in terms of an interrogation of gender, race, and other axes of identity— since this drag 'work' forms the basis of drag's utility in my study of the identities and experiences of queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants. But before I do so and while I acknowledge Edward and Farrier's (2020) warning, I will engage with the question of what drag is so that I share with the reader my own (provisional) definition for the purposes of this inquiry.

Cross Dressing

What has historically been meant by and understood as 'drag', as Crookston (2019) points out, is complicated and its definition "often-loose" (p. xi). First and foremost, as Marjorie Garber's (2012 [1992]) landmark study *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*

recounts, histories of drag tend to blur categorical distinctions between gay men, cross-dressers, 'female impersonators', and drag queens; so much so that "slippage and confusion seem to be constitutive" of attempts to define any of these terms (p. 132). Thus, part of what makes drag complicated to define is that it is difficult to disentangle histories of drag from other forms of cross-dressing that can be found both onstage and off, in the realm of theatre and in the social world.

In a contemporary Western context and in the domain of the social, cross-dressing refers to "the wearing of clothing not belonging to one's birth-designated sex" and depends on both "a strict bi-gender system" and "a prohibition, legal and/or social, against gender 'impersonation'" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 65). Now grouped under the umbrella-term transgender, some cross-dressers who were assigned male at birth may engage in the practice of wearing feminine-coded garments for sexual arousal while others spend "days or weeks living and performing as a woman" (ibid.).[5] Meanwhile, in the domain of theatre, cross-dressing appears across cultures. Performance historian Laurence Senelick (2000) recounts the seventeenth-century origins of the all-male Tokugawa kabuki theatre in Japan, where the woman roles were interpreted by cross-dressed teenage boy actors — the *wakashu*— and also adult men actors — the *onnagata* (p. 11). Meanwhile, in China, the Beijing Opera "employed male *dan* performers to enact stylized woman types" (Heller, 2020, p. 21). Around the same time, the well-known

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[5] It is important to note that the earlier term 'transvestite', coined by sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, is no longer preferred by those who identify as cross-dressers (Gilbert, 2014).

theatrical practice existed in Elizabethan England of employing boy actors in woman roles since women were prohibited to work as actors. Cross-dressing in Western theatre cultures traces its roots to a similar prohibition on women actors in Ancient Greece that meant all dramatic roles were interpreted by men actors (Heller, 2020). Heller (2020) refers to this theatrical phenomenon as 'cross-casting'; i.e., in a binary gender system, an actor playing an 'opposite' gender role due to "a scripted plot twist or […] a playwright's or director's vision" (p. 23).

While the early modern and ancient theatrical practices of cross-casting are significant antecedents of drag, insisting that the history of drag performance be tied back to these practices demonstrates how some of the "slippage and confusion" of 'cross-dressing' with 'drag' that Garber (2012 [1992]) identified comes about. Instead, Crookston (2019) suggests focusing on a more recent origin of Western theatrical drag performance: "the dame impersonators" of Euro-American vaudeville and music hall entertainment in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries (p. xii). What distinguishes these dames —and by extension more contemporary drag performers— from theatrical cross-casting was that their performances not only relied on gender-swapped garb but on "cultural parody, musical performance, and comic satire" (Ibid.). These satirical and parodic features are, thus, essential criteria for marking out drag from other forms of cross-dressed theatrical performance.

Drag, Gender, and the Sexed Body

Although theatrical cross-dressing is not coextensive with drag performance, nonetheless the notion persists that 'drag' depends on a divergence between the performer's sexed body and the gender performed and coded in costume. Heller (2020) captures the problem: "A foundational flaw in the definition of drag is in its characterization of the act as […] a binary sex-gender division for which gender flexibility is knowable only in opposition to the performer's stable sex designation" (p. 12; noted, too, by Stokoe, 2020). An assumption that drag rests on inverting the relationship between performed binary gender and bodily sexual dimorphism excludes drag performers who are trans, non-binary, or even those who are cisgender but performing a gender identity culturally aligned with their sexed body (the latter often called 'bio-drag' or 'hyper queens'; see Rupp et al., 2010 and Calderon, 2021). In the literature, it is primarily older readings of drag performance that subscribe to this exclusionary perspective; for example, Tewksbury (1993) and Schacht and Underwood's (2004) edited collection *The Drag Queen Anthology*. But even some recent studies such as Greene's (2020) *Drag Queens and Beauty Queens: Contesting Femininity in the World's Playground* insist that drag "requires an audience aware of the fact that drag queens are not women, but men (or that drag kings are women)" (p. 42).

A Provisional Definition of Drag

Contemporary drag theorizing, however, offers much more expansive (though not yet succinct) definitions. Heller (2020) argues for "a rather broad taxonomy" of drag performance

practices that she calls "bent" acts (p. 7). These are acts where "a performer displays identities, bodies, or actions that are out of sync with hegemonic cultural formations of the normal, natural, or ideal" (Ibid.). Adjacently, Crookston (2019) suggests "with its roots in dame comedians of music halls and pantomime [drag] is a style which contains some element of cultural parody and gender inversion, performance, and/or exaggeration and is connected to queer cultural expression" (p. xiv). Aligning myself with Heller's (2020) broad 'taxonomy' of drag and Crookston's (2019) historically-informed, performance-oriented take, I offer the following as my definition of drag in the context of this study. I acknowledge and expect my definition to be open to contestation. Thus, I view drag as a modality of embodied performance, rooted in queer/trans/non-binary cultures and histories, that deploys in its practice, parody, satire, hyperbole, and other *potentially* subversive techniques to interrogate hegemonic social and cultural formations.

In this prologue section, I have discussed with a contemporary and historical lens what drag *is*; in the next section 2.2 and subsequent sections, I turn to what drag *does*, picking up and expanding on some issues already highlighted, including drag's potential for subversion, especially regarding hegemonic gender and race.

2.2 Drag Persona and the Social Self

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Drag as Subversion

The persistence of exclusionary definitions of drag, such as Greene's (2020), that focus on a disjuncture between the performer's sexed body and the gender of the persona performed may be linked to viewing the parodic function of drag as dependent on its capacity to subvert (gendered) identity. Thus, Greene (2020) writes, "the tension created through this contradiction [between body and performance] affords drag its potential expressive power" (p. 42). The notion that the parodic drag persona reveals how gender as an identity category may be subverted or interrogated is often attributed to Judith Butler's well-known use of drag in *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990]) to briefly illustrate their theory of gender performativity; that the congealing on the body of stylized, iterative acts, gestures, etc. produce the effect rather than substance of an inner-located, core gender identity (pp. 174-176). While many seized on their drag example as evidence of drag's potential for subversion, in fact, Butler, as they later clarified (2011 [1993]), was careful not to overstate such possibilities. On one hand, "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced" (Butler, 2011, p. 85). On the other hand, "drag is a site of a certain ambivalence" because the subjects that perform the drag persona do not stand outside the hegemonic "regimes of power" that their parodic appropriation critiques. (Butler, 2011, p. 85). This ambivalence in drag's effects has long been noted by critics. Brown (2001) writes that "drag queens reveal the non-essential nature of gender but still reinforce the hegemonic gender order through portrayals of emphasized femininity" (p. 37; see also Tewksbury, 1993 and Greaf, 2016 for similar takes). Schacht and

Underwood (2004) summarize that "most drag performances are a combination of both subversive and status quo politics" (p. 12). Thus, Sedgwick (1993) usefully counsels against "straining eyes" to figure out what is parodic and subversive and what reinforces the hegemonic in drag creations since the answer is usually that it's a mix of the two (p. 15).

Nonetheless, many critics remain convinced that drag's potentially subversive capacity, through parody and other techniques, to interrogate hegemonic gender is something that distinguishes drag creations from other performance modalities as uniquely powerful. Edward and Farrier (2020), for example, add nuance to how this attribute of drag works when they write: "[Drag] does not primarily show gender as a construct; rather, it highlights the *power of parody in tackling binary gender*" (p. 8; my emphasis). In fact, Edward and Farrier (2020) go further and make it clear that drag has the capacity to highlight "the instability of all claimed identities […] including race, class, dis/ability and age" (p. 8). Their point is a significant one for my study in that it moves us beyond thinking of drag as solely an interrogation of gender to one that reflects the great range of contemporary drag practices which challenge multiple hegemonic identity formations (see Crookston, 2019 for more on this proposition). Senra's (2021) essay on a Spanish underground party series called *Drag Attack* highlights one of many kinds of subversive styles of performed persona now included under the umbrella of drag: a post-gender and 'post-human' monster drag, which embodies "the capacity to transgress the very concept of identity"

(p. 549).[6] These (potentially) transgressive and subversive forms of drag rightly shift our thinking away from gender and focus on any supposed body/performed persona dichotomy towards a consideration of what drag can divulge about the social construction of gender, sexual, ethno-racial, national, and more identities, and it is this lens my study picks up.

Drag Persona and the Social Self

The idea that drag, through techniques like parody, interrogates the stability of socially constructed identity categories inspires many drag theorists to examine the relationship between the performer's self, the persona performed, and the social world. An early anthropological study of drag performers, Esther Newton's *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1979 [1972]) is often cited as foundational drag literature (Crookston, 2019; Heller, 2020; Stokoe, 2020). Newton emphasized drag's performative or dramaturgical essence: "all drag, whether formal, informal, or professional, has a theatrical structure and style. There is no drag without an actor and his audience, and there is no drag without drama (or theatricality)" (p. 37). But Newton also highlights that drag a performed persona that extends beyond the stage to everyday life; thus, she theorized three categories of drag performer: the 'stage impersonator', the 'street impersonator', and the 'street fairy'.

Something these observations show is Newton's debt to the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1959; 1963; 1976) on how the self emerges from the 'staging' of everyday social

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[6] A similar example of monster drag can be seen in the YouTube show, now streaming on multiple platforms, *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula*. Toronto artist Yovska is a notable performer of the related 'creature drag' form.

interactions. As Goffman (1959) outlines, the self emerges "[w]hen an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions" (p. 16); that is, the self is produced through the individual's performance of a role and its reception by the audience, following "some more or less well-defined cultural and moral scripts" in a wider social 'game' (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 107). Newton (1979 [1972]) surmises that all drag queens are gay men, and thus blurs the distinction between being (gay) and doing (drag) (p. 7). Newton posits gay men extending 'impersonation' beyond the confines of the stage to the Goffmanian everyday when she notes how gay men seek to 'pass' in the straight world as 'man' (1979 [1972], p. 108); by 'acting straight', they are 'dragged up' as men (since in this schema 'man' and 'gay' are exclusive). In Newton's formulation, a voluntaristic consciousness is at work; an essentialized, 'real' self underlies and is at a distance from the impersonation. Here she departs from Goffman since the latter's analysis avoids alighting on the notion of an essential self. In fact, Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of the self "created in interaction and communication with others" has been deemed a postmodern, de-centred conceptualization of the self; the persona or mask conceals but another mask (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 112).

Drag and the Gendered Persona

As I glossed above, Butler does not view drag as unambiguously and always subversive, as always unsettling of the normative; not all invented drag personas trouble gender and sex as categories of identity, and not all parodic creations aim to subvert the hegemonic.

Instead, Butler "emphasizes the significance of context, performer intent, and audience response in a performance's impact" (Stokoe, 2020, p. 4). I want to underscore Butler's reference to "performer intent" as it is a key coordinate in the mapping of my study and a focus of the next section in this chapter. Butler's hesitance in endorsing drag creation as potentially gender subversive for performers and audiences alike is justified, but the troubling of gender identity is, nonetheless, an enduring question returned to repeatedly in the literature (Lorber, 2004; see, for examples, Berg, 2021; Egner & Maloney, 2016; Greaf, 2016; Levitt et al., 2018; Stokoe, 2020).

Some critics of drag argue that select modes of drag —drag kinging, for example, where 'man-ness' and masculinity are performed and parodied in personas— represent an "intentional challenge to binary gender and sexual identities" (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 278; see also Shapiro, 2007), although others downplay the intentionality (Baker & Kelly, 2016). Schacht and Underwood (2004) suggest that drag kings as well as drag performers of colour embody "personal social identities with often very different subversive limits and possibilities" to those of white cisgender male drag queens (p. 12). Seminal studies of drag kinging (Halberstam, 1998; Volcano & Halberstam, 1999; Troka et al., 2003) place the king's "exposure of the theatricality of masculinity" at the centre of the drag persona (Halberstam, 1998, p. 236). Among the king's subversive techniques in the creation of his persona, Halberstam (1998) highlights understatement, which reflects the reticence associated with hegemonic masculinity (p. 239), hyperbole, though it is a performance of the "quietly macho" rather than flamboyance (p. 259),

and 'layering'. The latter Noble (2012) describes as "allowing [one's own gender] identity to show through cracks" in the drag king persona (p. 156). It is argued that 'layering' shows that some kings eschew subversion and "perform masculinity as a means of expressing themselves" (Troka et al., 2003, p. 10), some to the point of "reconsider[ing] their own gender identity as a result of performing" (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 49; also Baker & Kelly, 2016); whereas other kings, in line with Butler, seek to "investigate masculinity by exposing its performative nature" through their personas (Troka et al., 2003, p. 10).

Drag and the Racialized Persona

Rosenfeld (2003) provides a vital reminder to expand the discussion of the gender subversive potential in drag king personas (and drag performance more broadly) to consider what drag has to say about the construction of other axes of identity, such as class, disability, and race, as they intersect with gender, sex, and sexuality: "[w]hile drag is by definition gender performed, it must also by extension be race performed" (p. 210).[7] Various studies have been alert to ways in which whiteness is represented and interrogated by white, Black, and other racialized drag kings (Bailey, 2011; Noble, 2012; Piontek, 2003; Rosenfeld, 2013) and drag queens (Rhyne, 2004) in North America. For example, Noble's (2012) study of Toronto-based drag kings identifies performed personas that uncover white masculinity "as a subjectivity simultaneously hypervisible and invisible", "both vacuous and hyperbolic" (p. 155). Noble

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[7] See, for example, the critique of disability discourses in the work of UK-based drag troupe Drag Syndrome (Megarry, 2019) and Rhyne (2004) on the monstering of white working-class femininity in the performances of the US drag star Divine.

(2012) argues that the performers "break [white masculinity] down into its parts, and then reassemble those parts to make them work differently, to render them dysfunctional" (ibid.).

Other studies reflect on the impact of representations and performances of racialized personas by Black, Brown, Asian, 'Latinx', and other drag performers of colour in North America (Bailey, 2011; Calderon, 2021; Crookston, 2019; Halberstam, 1998; hooks, 2015; La Fountain-Stokes, 2021; LeMaster & Tristano, 2021; Moreman & MacIntosh, 2010; Muñoz, 1999; Persadie, 2021) and elsewhere in the world (Al-Kadhi; 2019; Bakshi, 2004; Lock Swarr, 2004; Scott, 2021). For example, Persadie's (2021) study of Toronto-based drag artists who identify as queer, trans, and non-binary Indigenous, Black, and other persons of colour, powerfully argues for their recognition as transgressors who "use sound, dance, and the body as a form of radical self-making to rewrite and break the rules of dominant queerness", pushing back against white homonormativity and homonationalism (p. 23). Persadie's work resonates with Calderon's (2021) spotlighting of Vancouver-based non-binary, trans, and queer drag artists of colour, as well as Indigenous artists. Calderon positions them as "revolutionary" disruptors of both white-dominated queer spaces and "preconceptions of drag's connection to gendered illusion" (p. 57).

An important theoretical backdrop to critiques like those of Persadie and Calderon is queer-of-colour theorist José Muñoz's (1999) influential concept of disidentification. Following identification *with* and identification *against* the hegemonic, disidentification is proposed as a

"third mode of dealing with dominant ideology" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 11). Muñoz (1999) explains how disidentification "scrambles and reconstructs" what hegemonic cultural products communicate to expose their "universalizing and exclusionary machinations" and to "account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (p. 31). Disidentification is among the strategies many racialized (drag) performers bring to bear in their personas that work both *on* and *against* racial, gender, and other hegemonies. Disidentification's exposure of how hegemonic constructs pose as universals and produce exclusions is a key concept in my own analysis of racialized refugee/migrant drag.

In the following two sections, 2.3 and 2.4, I go on to address some more of what drag *does* in terms of exposing the social construction of identity and the utility of drag 'work' in understanding the experiences of queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants. At the same time, I introduce several key ideas from literature on non-cisheteronormative refugees and other migrants and from literature on refuge and migration more broadly that overlap with the 'work' drag does. In section 2.3, I take up drag's performativity, suggested by Butler (1999 [1990]), and review the salience of performativity and agency in (queer) literature on refuge and migration. Then, in section 2.4, I consider how drag's performed personas highlight the concept of 'person' as it is mobilized in anti-migrant discourse that positions refugees and other migrants as 'diminished' persons. I also review ways in which (queer) refugees and other migrants resist their diminishment as persons.

2.3 Refugee/Migrant Agency and Performativity

In this section, I introduce and describe a central fault line in literature on refuge and migration around the distinction between those who are displaced by violent, coercive forces ('forced' or involuntary) and those who allegedly 'choose' to migrate ('unforced' or voluntary). This fault line highlights the question of refugee/migrant agency, which is foremost not only in (queer) refuge and migration literature but chief among the concerns of this study as I explain in subsequent chapters. I bring in the concept of performativity from the previous section on drag performance because it seems to deny the presence of an intentional, agentive subject (the performer) in favour of the effects produced in the performance; and yet, as I explain below, performer agency is not discounted. I then turn back to literature on queer and non-queer refugee and other migrant experiences to highlight how in response to border regimes' discursive construction of an acceptable 'refugeeness', queer and non-queer refugees assume 'refugee' as an intentional performative persona.

In/voluntary Refugees and other Migrants

The United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) groups together under the umbrella of the 'forcibly displaced' several categories that for historical, legal, and political reasons are classed as distinct groups: the internally displaced (the largest category), refugees, and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2022). While 'asylum seekers' claim another state's protection when they arrive at or from within national borders (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018), 'refugees' are

mediated by international organizations (such as UNHCR), which select, assess, and adjudicate

whether the individual should be designated a refugee under the terms of the UN's 1951 Refugee

Convention and subsequent international legal instruments such as the 1967 Protocol Relating to

the Status of Refugees (Ibid.). However, even in legal terms, 'refugee' is not a "stable category"

(Firth & Maute, 2013, p. 473) since it is inflected with politics and has shifted historically to

include (or exclude) over time. While "historians recognize that the forced movement of people

has a long history", "many consider refugees as a distinctly modern phenomenon" that followed

the world wars of the twentieth century (Elie, 2014, p. 26). As Scheel and Squire (2014) recount,

the 1951 Convention was conceived in the context of the Cold War and Western nations that

sought to recognize individuals leaving communist East European states as being politically

persecuted; thus, the Convention limited its scope to Europe and excluded those fleeing conflict

and violence due to "decolonization and state formation" (p. 193) elsewhere in the world. The

1967 Protocol largely expanded the definition to address this prodigious exclusion (Scheel &

Squire, 2014). Still, the association of refugees being, primarily, those who seek sanctuary for

political reasons continues to inform some discourses that separate refugees from other migrants

along a political/economic axis: the notion of the political refugee and the economic migrant

(FitzGerald & Arar, 2018). Of course, politics and economics are often enmeshed; "[e]conomic

crises often have political causes, and they can generate political unrest", driving people to seek

sanctuary for a complex mix of reasons (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018, p. 393). The expansion of the

category 'refugee' to, in UNHCR terms, the 'forcibly displaced' is partly a recognition of the

complexity of driving factors and of diverse contexts. Nonetheless, the positioning of refugees as *objects* upon whom (violent) forces have acted to oblige them to move versus other migrants who putatively *choose* to move sets up an enduring distinction in academic literatures, as well as in popular and public discourses, between the 'voluntary' migrant and the 'involuntary' refugee (FitzGerald & Arar, 2018).

The Question of Refugee/Migrant Agency

The involuntary ('forced')/voluntary dichotomy points to an important preoccupation in refuge and migration literature and a question central to this study: the matter of agency. According to Bakewell (2010), agency refers to "the capacity for social actors to reflect on their position, devise strategies and take action to achieve their desires" (p. 1694). Stepputat and Sørensen (2014) note that the idea of a 'forced' migrant "tends to dehumanize people by denying them the role of being 'purposive actors' and thus ordinary people" (p. 88); deliberative, purposive action indicates human agency. It is through this dehumanizing denial of agency that the notion of "a single, essential, transhistorical refugee condition" or 'refugeeness' (Malkki, 1995, p. 511) begins to emerge in the functionalist perspective of refugee studies (Malkki, 1995), where refugees inhabit "a world in which they are simply 'victims'" (Malkki, 1995, p. 518), stripped of their past agentive lives and caught in a suspended future. In contrast, as Bakewell (2010) notes, some migration scholars posit that non-refugee migrants "have a significant level of choice over their decisions to move, [e]ven though they may be working within the confines

of the family or broader social institutions" (p. 1690). In this way, a 'refugee'/'migrant'

distinction is substantiated. Yet, the consequences of insisting on this distinction are to bolster

Western exceptionalist, anti-migrant discourses that portray 'voluntary' migrants who 'choose'

irregular routes to enter a receiving country as 'bogus asylum seekers', 'criminals', 'illegals', and

a 'threat' to national security (ibid.; see also Kushner, 2020; see Kmak, 2015 and McFadyen,

2016 for critiques of the 'bogus asylum seeker').

Following Malkki (1995), several critical refugee studies scholars have problematized

the social and political construction of 'refugeeness', highlighting that refugee subjectivity is

continuously emerging, constituted, and reconstituted in both discursive and material terms, in

relation to an individual's *experiences* of displacement, relocation, and reception (Lacroix, 2004,

p. 163; see also Lee & Brotman, 2011). Lacroix (2004) argues, for example, that the processes of

displacement, relocation, and reception *as experienced by* those who are becoming refugees

entail a concomitant loss of social identity (p. 158), i.e., a sense of agency and status that comes

with ascribed social (professional, familial, etc.) roles. What's more, even if refugees exercise

some agency in these processes, it is against and in spite of political and cultural anti-migrant,

Western exceptionalist discourses that position them as 'victims'. The question of refugee agency

is one that my study takes up, therefore, to contribute to the literature that challenges notions of

refugees as 'victims', without past or future, existing only in the moment of 'rescue', and subject

to greater structural forces within which they have no deliberative, purposive capacity.

Furthermore, this study's focus on other migrants —not only refugees— may help re-examine what kind of choices are actually available to 'voluntary' migrants rather than accept the hostile ones ascribed to them in anti-migrant logics.

Drag Performativity and Intentionality

The question of agency subtends Judith Butler's (1999 [1990]) formulation of performativity in that their theory posits gender as an effect discursively produced on the body rather than the product of an intentional subject-actor. As such, their work has much to say on the relationship of the (drag) performer to their performed persona. Butler forecloses the idea of "subjects as having natural identities" (Weber, 1998, p. 79); instead, "'performativity' describes the *culturally-scripted* character of identity, which is generated by power through repeated citations of norms and their transgression" (Boucher, 2006, p. 113; my emphasis). To illustrate, Butler points to how drag personas "self-consciously parody 'natural' expressions of sex and gender" (Weber, 1998, p. 80). Drag personas reveal that "the original ['natural'] identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin" (Butler, 1999 [1990], p. 175). But since drag involves a performer making *conscious decisions* in the enactment of the persona, this illustration confused many readers, who inserted into their theory of gender performativity a wholly voluntaristic subject that Butler (2011 [1993]) refused. While Butler, following Foucault, certainly rejected the Enlightenment subject with its self-constituting free agency (Barker, 2006), they nonetheless leave open the possibility of agency —limited to that available within a

discursive field that enables and constrains— when they urge against presuming that "to be constituted by discourse is to be determined by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency" (1999 [1990], p. 182). Thus, gender is an act that is "both *intentional* and *performative*" (Butler, 1999 [1990], p. 177).

Performative Personas of the Credibly, Immutably, and Normatively Queer Refugee

In the disciplinary regime of the Canadian border (Foucault, 1982; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Kinsman, 2018; Lacroix, 2004), gender and sexually diverse refugees are produced as legible subjects within a set of enabling and constraining legal/state discourses: credibility, immutability, and LGBT normativity. For their claims to be adjudicated favourably, queer/trans/non-binary asylum seekers must carefully present to gatekeeper adjudicators a coherent narrative of their personal experiences of persecution/threat in the sending country and of the 'safety' the receiving country represents (Millbank, 2009). Consequently, queer and trans refugee studies scholars (from law, anthropology, and sociology) have demonstrated that in the processes of claims adjudication the narratives of queer/trans/non-binary claimants (1) must be found *credible* (LaViolette, 2009; Millbank, 2009; Murray, 2015; Rehaag, 2009, 2017); (2) must represent the sexual or gender identity of the claimant as *immutable* (Dhoest, 2019; McGhee, 2001; Rehaag, 2009); (3) must describe the sexual or gender identity of the claimant in terms that align with *normative* Western notions of 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', and 'transgender' (Fassin & Salcedo, 2015; Gaucher & DeGagne, 2016; Jordan, 2009; Luibhéid, 2008b; Ricard, 2014).

The effects of these juridical/state discourses are twofold. First, as articulated by gatekeeping border officials, the discourses *naturalize* the most normative "forms of representable queer subjectivities" (Shakhsari, 2012, p. 17) —i.e., cisgender, 'gay', and 'lesbian'— which align with queer Western liberal scripts of emancipatory 'coming out' and 'gender dysphoria' (Eng, 2010; Gaucher & DeGagne, 2016). No room is allowed for the range of culturally-specific, contingent identifications and fluid expressions of gender and sexual alterity that exist around the globe. Thus, the discourses serve to position ('gay') refugees as 'objects' of Western 'rescue' (Kyriakides et al., 2018, 2019) —i.e., non-threatening 'victims' for Canada to 'save'— and non-Western sending countries as 'backward' sources of (homo/transphobic) persecution. In this way, discourses circulating among Canadian adjudicators are sites of the nation-state's in/exclusionary power "that privilege[s] and give[s] life to particular racial, gendered and classed formations while rendering others illegitimate, unworthy and ultimately disposable" (Murray, 2018, p. 69).

And yet, many scholars have documented an alternative effect of these same discourses: a performative response from queer/trans/non-binary asylum claimants who, working within what is available to them in this discursive field (as Butler suggests), *intentionally* wield the discourses to their advantage. As documented by Fassin and Salcedo (2015), queer/trans/non-binary asylum seekers are so conscious of the need to perform queerness or transness *credibly/immutably/normatively* that they "embody a part for those who interpret and categorize

them—not only in public, but also in their private lives" (p. 1122). The parallel to Newton's

(1979 [1972]) description of drag performers who extend their performance beyond the stage (as

I outlined in the previous section) is clear. But in making this comparison, I do not mean to

suggest, crassly, that queer/trans/non-binary asylum seekers are engaged in some kind of

'refugee drag', if by drag we understand the theatrical. It is neither artifice nor play-acting; the

stakes for these asylum seekers are much too material. Instead, I wish to underline the

assumption of a performative 'queer refugee' persona as an agentive strategy to contend with the

border regime's challenge to their refuge claim. The discourse of 'credible', for example, recalls

the concept of 'realness' in drag Ballroom culture, where normative gendered, sexual, classed

and raced identities —such as 'business executive'— are consciously parodied (Bailey, 2013).

Butler (2011) argues that these parodic identifications serve to both "legitimate and delegitimate"

the performed social identities (p. 90). As the work of anthropologist David Murray (2015) with

Toronto-based queer/trans/non-binary refugees chronicles, such migrants know that they must

always stay in persona as the credible, immutable, normative, and "grateful lesbian, gay, bisexual

or transgender refugee" (p. 6) to successfully negotiate the in/exclusionary power of Canada's

border regime, and in doing so, they may reinforce but also undermine the discourses.

Performative 'Refugeeness'

The performative persona of 'queer refugee' is echoed in literature (e.g., Nguyen,

2019; Puumala & Pehkonen, 2010; Szczepanikova, 2010) which demonstrates how refugees (in

general as opposed to queer refugees) resist the constraints on their agency that come with

'refugeeness' (i.e., the experiential embodiment of becoming 'refugee'). For example, Häkli et

al.'s (2017) study of asylum seekers in Egypt mobilizes theories of performativity from Goffman

(see previous section) and Butler to delineate various ways in which claimants exhibit a

consciousness in asylum hearings of 'refugeeness' and the figure of the 'refugee', and thus

perform 'refugeeness' to the satisfaction of their adjudicators. While it might seem that

successful performance of 'refugeeness' is about the claimant accessing the aid and assistance

accorded to the 'refugee', the authors argue that performing 'refugeeness' also reveals "the

empowering distance between one's sense of self and the identity of the refugee forcefully

proposed to the asylum seekers to adopt and adjust to" (Häkli et al., 2017, pp. 197-198). Thus,

performing 'refugeeness' is an assertion of agentive capacity in order to "retain[…] humanity in

circumstances that are oppressive and humiliating" (Ibid.). Queer/trans/non-binary refugees, such

as those in Murray's (2015) work, would surely concur.

　　　　This section has highlighted the importance of the question of agency in studies of

refugee/migrant experiences. I borrow from Butler's theory of performativity —and the example

of drag performance— that while gender (and other identity categories) may be discursively

produced as effects on the body, room exists for the intentional and the performative within the

limits of a discursive field. Queer and trans migration scholarship (such as Murray, 2015)

foregrounds the effects of border regimes' discourses on queer/trans/non-binary asylum seekers,

including their agentive assumption of a 'queer refugee' performative persona to push back

against these constitutive discourses. From this work and other broader work such as Häkli et al.

(2017), my study takes up the notion of refugees' and other migrants' performative

consciousness of expectations and assumptions related to 'refugeeness' and migrancy.[8] Anti-

migrant discourses not only deny agency to refugees and other migrants but, as I demonstrate in

the next section, they produce the 'refugee'/'migrant' as a diminished category of 'person'.

However, as is the case with the assumption of 'refugee' as an intentional performative persona

outlined in this section, (queer) refugees and other migrants manifest a range of agentive

responses to this diminishment.

2.4 Refugee/Migrant Diminished 'Person(a)s'

In this section, I expand on the point made in the previous section that anti-migrant

discourses and Western exceptionalism position (queer) refugees and other migrants as non-

agentive 'victims' or 'objects' of Western rescue. I begin by sketching how refugees and other

migrants are configured as diminished forms of 'person', reduced to a 'bare' human existence

and deprived of public, political life. I borrow from Black queer theorizing on the history of the

'person' in Western thought to demonstrate how refugees and other migrants as allegedly non-

agentive subjects are separated from the category of 'person' since it is understood to mean

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[8] At the same time, I also acknowledge that experiences of migration and refuge leave, as Nguyen (2019) argues, their marks on the "way[s] of being in the world" of refugees and other migrants (p. 117).

deliberative, conscious actors. I then examine a series of propositions from (queer) scholarship

on refuge and migration that how (queer) refugees and other migrants challenge their diminished

'person' status via agentive participation in public, political life, building relations of solidarity

with others counter to their exclusion from the polis and the nation.

Refugee/Migrant Diminishment: 'Bare Life' & 'Nothing But Human'

In his essay "We Refugees" (1995) and later in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and*

Bare Life (1998), philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes the difference between the Greek *bios*,

meaning how one lives one's life, and *zoē*, referring to the simple biological fact of life. Using

the example of ancient Rome, only (free adult male) citizens were 'owners' of a public and

political *bios*, whereas non-citizens (of all kinds) were consigned to a socially diminished 'bare

life' and, ultimately, death. Non-citizens, existing in 'bare life', such as the stateless and refugees

(held in a temporary state between naturalization in the receiving country or repatriation to the

sending country) are denied access to the public and political life of citizens (Agamben, 1995).

Similarly, Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) suggests that when refugees

lose their national rights, they seem to lose their human rights. With the protection of the state

removed, refugees and other stateless individuals are diminished as 'nothing but human'; i.e, the

refugee/stateless individual "has lost her *public persona*, her legal status, all distinctions that

require public recognition, and her unique identity. All that is left when we see such a person

[…] is her givenness, her existence as a human being" (Parekh, 2008, pp. 25-26; my emphasis). I

highlight the phrase 'public persona' since it signals a potential link to drag in that drag performers also gain recognition and status through the persona they present to their publics. Anderson (2013) builds on Agamben with their proposition of the 'Good Citizen' —the Western notion of "the liberal sovereign self: rational, self-owning, and independent, with a moral compass" (p. 3)— versus the non-citizen (foreigner, migrant, asylum seeker, etc.), who is in Arendt's terms 'nothing but human'. Non-citizens not only lack the legal status of citizens but, echoing Lacroix (2004), lack "status in the sense of worth and honour" in contrast to the 'Good Citizen' (Anderson, 2013, p. 4). Anderson (2013) designates the public and political *bios* of the 'Good Citizen' as membership in a "community of value", where legal and social status are accorded (p. 4) along with the "public persona" Arendt notes.

Refugees and other migrants may be non-citizens in legal terms, but the dehumanizing anti-migrant discourses, policies, and practices of Western border regimes ensure that even if through settlement processes some are granted legal citizenship, then racist and nationalist logics (Walia, 2021) exclude them from the "community of value" (Anderson, 2013) and will readily eject them from the nation-state whenever expedient (Hansen, 2014). One example is the 'hostile environment' policy instituted in the UK from 2012, which swept up for expulsion many Black British citizens who were postcolonial migrants from the Caribbean along with the 'irregular' refugees and other migrants the policy had supposedly targeted (Goodfellow, 2019; Grierson, 2018). Such policies reflect Western "political consensus on immigration and asylum that

positions 'non-Western' people as victim/pariah, to be 'saved' and 'suspected'" (Kyriakides,

2017, p. 933). The 'victim/pariah' dyad maps onto the polarization of 'non-threatening', 'non-

economic' refugees as 'objects' of Western 'rescue' logics versus 'threatening', 'economic' other

migrants (Kyriakides, 2017; see also Kyriakides et al., 2018). The figures of the 'refugee' and

'migrant' are thus configured in terms of diminishment —Agamben's (1995) 'bare life' non-

citizen and Arendt's 'nothing but human'— and channeled into a 'victim/pariah' polarity.

The Enlightenment 'Person'

Anderson's (2013) description of the 'Good Citizen' —the autonomous, "self-owning",

rational Enlightenment subject— overlaps with the related concept of 'person'. As chronicled by

Black queer theorist Roderick Ferguson (2019; building on McWhorter, 2017), the Western

conceptualization of 'person' traces to Roman law, where it came "to designate those who could

speak at court, who had legal standing" (Ferguson, 2019, p. 5), which necessarily extended only

to Roman citizens, i.e., property-owning adult men. I note, too, that the English word 'person' is

originally derived from the Greek theatrical *persona* (*per-sona* = 'sound through') or mask

through which an actor speaks. However, the Roman legal 'person' was not synonymous with the

individual —a group of citizens could be "recognized by the law as an agent" (ibid.)—, and it

could only be conferred by the state; it was not within the individual's power to assume 'person'-

hood. Thus, the 'person' was an entity granted certain rights and the *authority to speak* in legal

fora. Then, in seventeenth-century England, Enlightenment thinkers, such as Locke, theorized

the 'person' as the legally-recognized, property-owning, rights-bearing citizen as well as the

"owner of rational action" (Ferguson, 2019, p. 6). McWhorter (2017) explains,

> a modern person is an intelligent agent, one who can deliberate before making a decision and taking action—an action that, as a result, is based upon that prior deliberation; a person is a conscious actor persisting through time, making choices, and producing material effects that it recognizes as being in some sense its own (p. 141).

This Enlightenment concept of 'person' has animated Western thought since then. Ferguson

(2019) highlights that US law adopted the Lockean 'person'-as-rational-actor to racially exclude

enslaved Black Americans from personhood —presumed "incapable of rational deliberation and

therefore lack[ing] the ability to own their bodies or actions" (p. 8)— until the 1866 Civil Rights

Act and 14th Amendment to the Constitution attempted to extend personhood as well as

'birthright' and naturalized citizenship to all adults and children. In the context of migration,

denying agency and a public, political status to the figures of the 'refugee' and, arguably, the

'migrant' in Western anti-migrant logics is a similarly racialized denial of the deliberative

choice-making and ownership of choices associated with the Enlightenment 'person'.[9]

Challenges to the Diminished 'Person': Agentive 'Personhood'

A strong vein of literature exists where 'personhood' is, in fact, mobilized as means by

which refugees and other migrants, faced with exclusion from the Western conception of

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[9] Despite its legal meaning as an entity not coextensive with 'human being' or individual, the Western notion of 'person' is often collapsed into the term 'individual', and both terms are used, almost interchangeably, to refer to "a biologically distinct, socially discrete, indivisible being, a unity of body and mind" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 279). It is important to emphasize that this concept of 'person' is certainly not transcultural nor transhistorical. For example, in many late colonial African cultures the 'individual' does not exist, only the 'person', who is conceived of relationally as "an ensemble of [shifting] social roles and relations" (ibid.).

'person', assert their decision-making agency and thus access public, political life. For example, feminist legal scholars Firth and Maute (2013) propose the utility of 'personhood' for women refugees to counter the subordination of their agency during the legal proceedings determining their refugee status (p. 500). These proceedings often result in a failure "to recognise and accommodate the particularities of her existence", instead reducing the woman to her gender or to other markers of her identity upon which the Convention case for refuge is made, such as nationality, race, religion, and political beliefs (Firth & Maute, 2013, p. 486). Highlighting notions of dignity and autonomy, with which 'personhood' is associated in diverse legal contexts (medical, family, company, criminal), Firth and Maute (2013) posit 'personhood' as "how I am to myself (selfhood), how I am to you (autonomy) and how you are to me (dignity)" (p. 500). The authors argue that if such a 'personhood' were to be incorporated into immigration law, then the refugee woman could present a narrative of herself to the court as a holistic 'person' of autonomy and dignity (Ibid.). Thus, agentive 'personhood' would entail "consideration of how one views oneself, one's self esteem and self value" (Firth & Maute, 2013, p. 491).

Challenges to the Diminished 'Person': Queer/Migrant Public, Political Organizing

Building on Isin's (2009) work on the political life of refugees and other migrants, De Genova (2010) argues that queers and migrants share an anti-assimilatory politics in their "incorrigible" insistence on *being* 'here' in spite of the nation-state's in/exclusionary practices. Migrant justice activists, who take to the streets to publicly proclaim both their rejection of 'illegality' and their refusal to be removed from the nation, are positioned as 'queer' by De

Genova (2010) since both 'migrant' and 'queer' are in a "precarious" relation to the nation (Seitz, 2017). Thus, in De Genova's (2010) formulation, migrant politics is queer politics in its "unabashed and unreserved" dismissal of legal or state constructions of migrant subjectivity (p. 120). Inspired by De Genova as well as Chávez (2013) and Seitz (2017), Wright (2018) also sees a challenge to the many legal/state constructions of the refugee/migrant diminished 'person' in the self-organizing and activism of refugees and other migrants (groups such as No One Is Illegal). Such activities, Wright (2018) argues, go beyond a push for liberal 'rights' or inclusion in the national body; instead, they interrogate "controls on the movement of people, constructions of 'illegality' in relation to migrants, bordering practices, colonial and capitalist social relations, racisms and nationalisms, the institution of citizenship and, indeed, the figure of 'the migrant' itself" (p. 104). As I outlined above, dehumanizing anti-migrant discourse seeks to deny refugees and other migrants not only citizenship but 'personhood', and thus access to a public, political life. Yet, Wright sees in refugee/migrant organizing "a challenge to the construction of refugees as outside the bounds of the political" (p. 105). What's more, cautiously following De Genova's political optimism, Wright (2018) suggests queer folk, on the basis of a shared 'precarious' relationship to the nation, might forge coalitional solidarity with migrant justice activism that asserts agency and political life in the face of the state's *deauthorizing* border practices and policies. Work such as De Genova's and Wright's contributes to generating "a queer 'no border' imaginary that fundamentally challenges the structures of nation-states and the immigration and refugee apparatus" (Jacob & Oswin, 2022, p. 13; also White, 2014).

Given how refugees and other migrants are reduced to 'bare life', stripped down to 'nothing but human', and left with a diminished 'person' status, work is needed to respond to this diminishment by demonstrating how refugees and other migrants insert themselves into public,

political life as deliberative, conscious actors. My study follows the direction of Firth and Maute (2013) in positing 'personhood' as "consideration of how one views oneself, one's self esteem and self value" (p. 491). Isin (2009), De Genova (2010), and Wright's (2018) work alerts my study to the challenges (queer) refugees and other migrants make, in their acts of political organizing that claim social justice, to their configuration as diminished 'persons'. Reading these together with the work reviewed in the previous section on refugee/migrant agency and performativity demonstrates that a firm foundation exists in the literature to build on. In the next section, I introduce theories that demonstrate how we might appraise the assertion of refugee/migrant agency, and I consider them in relation to the idea of drag as a public pedagogy in the sense that drag offers a space to rehearse via persona what it means to be a 'person'. In light of this concept, I review two theoretical concepts that may help assess how refugees and other migrants counter denials of agency through assertions of authority.

2.5 Drag as Public Pedagogy of Self-Enactment and Self-Author(iz)ing

Concepts outlined in the two previous sections —of agentive 'personhood' and performative 'refugeeness'— suggest ways (queer/trans/non-binary) refugees and other migrants assert agency in the face of border regimes' diminishment of their being. In this section, I introduce two theoretical propositions that help assess how queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants, through drag, stake out their personal agency and assert their social worth. I begin by introducing drag as a public pedagogy of self-enactment, where in public performance, actual and possible 'persons' are rehearsed. I then review two proposals that examine the significance of authority —authority rooted in the past and the authority to act in the present

based on the past—, and I posit that these models help better understand drag as a public

pedagogical space where not only is agency asserted but social status is affirmed while real and

possible 'persons' are rehearsed, enacted, or author(iz)ed.

Drag as a Public Pedagogy of Self-Enactment

A notable stratum in the literature on drag performance is the linking of drag with

educational theory or pedagogy (Bryde & Mayberry, 2022; Grey, 2009; Khubchandani, 2015;

Pattisapu, 2014; Pensoneau, 2006; Schact, 2004; Whitworth, 2017). What education scholar

Lamm Pineau (2004) writes about 'teachers as performers' could be applied to drag performance,

where "overlapping ensembles of *real and possible selves* […] enact themselves in direct relation

to the context and communities in which they perform" (p. 29; my emphasis). I underscore the

phrase 'real and possible selves' because it resonates with the kind of enactment of 'personhood'

(queer) refugees and other migrants engage in, as I sketched in the previous section, through

their agentive participation in public, political life. This enactment of 'real and possible selves'

by performers for their publics marks drag out, in the terms of Henry Giroux, as a 'public

pedagogy' (Pattisapu, 2014, p. 36). Rejecting education as limited to designated pedagogical

spaces, Giroux (2004) stresses that "learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices

and settings", and is hence a *public* pedagogy (p. 61; cited by Martin, 2022, p. 119). In as far as it

is a public pedagogy, drag may also be considered "a critical [educational] practice designed to

understand the social context of everyday life as lived relations of power" (Giroux, 2000, p.

355). For example, via an ethnographic study of drag culture in a small northern US town, Pensoneau (2006) posits that for many performers, drag is a means to both assert and explore, i.e., learn about, who they are in relation to others, their social relations. Thus, via a performed persona, drag performers and audience together produce knowledge about the embodied limits and possibilities of gendered, racialized, and other forms of subjectivity.

The cultures and practices of drag involve education in other, more obvious ways. Part of a recent volume of essays on teaching and learning derived from *RuPaul's Drag Race* (or "RuPedagogies"; Bryde & Mayberry, 2022), Martin (2022) recalls that "[f]or decades prior to the show's debut, drag was taught via a community-based exchange of ideas, skills, and knowledge" (p. 137). Drag 'families' formed a primary means of this knowledge production and sharing; for example, drag 'mothers' would teach their 'daughters' makeup application.[10] Martin (2022) argues that RPDR and related shows now contribute to the education of aspiring drag artists. In parallel to the rise of RPDR, online video sharing platforms such as YouTube, as documented by Zitzelsberger (2022), are a rich source of tutorials produced by locally and (inter)nationally famous drag artists that teach aspirant performers the techniques of makeup application, wig grooming, costuming, and other essential drag skillsets. Such online tutoring makes drag techniques much more accessible to fans and novice performers alike and no longer confines the sharing of drag knowledge to interpersonal contact. Furthermore, while many traditional drag performance spaces were commercial bars and licensed premises, drag by default excluded

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[10] I return to matter of drag 'families' in the next section of this chapter.

children and younger folk from participating. But the ascendancy of RPDR and the development

of online drag education has seen what one RPDR star calls a 'baby boom' (see Crookston, 2021,

p. 4) or growth in kids of all ages taking up drag in a variety of community spaces for "creative

self-expression" (Edward & Farrier, 2020, p. 5).

The inclusion of children in drag performance returns us to the fairly recent

phenomenon of drag storytime. As highlighted in Chapter One, these educational events are the

current focus of extremist right-wing anxieties, fears, and violence. But the reality of drag

storytime sees drag artists read stories, sing songs, and play with puppets; the audiences usually

include but are not limited to so-called 'rainbow families' made up of queer, trans, non-binary,

and gender-creative children and parents (Campbell Naidoo, 2018). The performer-audience

space of drag storytime events is the kind of public pedagogical context that Lamm Pineau

(2004) envisions for the enactment of "real and possible selves". As studies highlight (Campbell

Naidoo, 2018; Radis et al., 2022), drag storytime invites us to consider what knowledges

between performers and audiences are fostered through the educational playfulness of drag. It

reminds us that drag opens a public and educational space where "real and possible selves"

through the creation of personas may be enacted.

Authority from the Past and Drag Public Pedagogy of Self-Enactment

The public pedagogical space of drag, where "real and possible selves" are enacted,

may be viewed in the light of an Aristotelian theorizing of authority derived from founding

elders, as I now explain. In her treatise "What is Authority?" (1961), Hannah Arendt highlights

how Aristotle compares the private domestic sphere of *oikía*, where the master of the house

governs as a tyrant so that domestic affairs are kept in order, with the public, political sphere of

the *pólis* (Arendt, 1961, p. 116). Once the necessities of existence were 'mastered' in the home,

the household heads —free, property-owning, adult men— could enjoy the freedoms of a *bíos*

politikós or, in Aristotle's terms, a "good life" in the *pólis* (Arendt, 1961, p. 117).[11] The

household was thus where a pre-political authority dominated; whereas, authority, Aristotle

found, was more difficult to determine among the nominally equal household heads. To establish

how authority could be sustained in the *pólis*, Aristotle highlights the "educational" relationship

between the old rulers and the new, younger rulers (Arendt, 1961, p. 118). Arendt (1961) goes on

to describe a Roman conceptualizing of authority as being derived through the elders (or seniors)

of the senate from the ancestral founders or *auctores* ('authors') of the city (p. 122). Sustaining

authority via an "educational" exchange of knowledge from older to newer echoes the

pedagogical aspect of drag 'families'; newer drag 'daughters' derive some of their 'authority' to

publicly perform, enacting real/possible selves, from the mentorship of drag 'mothers' who are

the founders/*auctores*/'authors' of drag houses.

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[11] I recall here how the Enlightenment 'person', to which refugees and other migrants' diminished status relates, is traced back to the Roman formulation of the property-owning adult male citizen as the only legitimate actors in the public domain of the law.

Arendt's reading of Aristotelian authority offers an entry point to examine whether queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants performing drag also invoke their familial *auctores* to effectuate their present self-enactment or, what we might call, self-author(iz)ing. Following in the footsteps of work critiquing the experience of 'refugeeness', Kyriakides and colleagues (2018, 2019) argue for a reframing of 'refugee', from an 'object' of Western rescue, deprived of full 'personhood' and concomitant social statuses to agentive 'persons of self-rescue', who act "to attain a meaningful life beyond refuge" (Kyriakides et al., 2019, p. 296). The authors' work elaborates a theory of "status eligibilities", where an individual's social status derives from the respect and esteem they enjoy, i.e., public acknowledgement of their worth (Kyriakides et al., 2019, p. 282). This status is confirmed when the individual's "eligibility to exist" and "authority to act" are recognized (Kyriakides et al., 2019, p. 283).[12] In their study, Syrian refugees in rural Ontario recount narratives of 'self-rescue', which highlight the importance to them of the social roles they held in their lives pre-conflict (i.e., before seeking refuge), as well as the rational decisions they make to secure their route to Canada. Thus, through agentive choices and autonomous actions, they affirm their status eligibilities and undercut Western scripts of 'rescue'. Crucially, these refugees renegotiate 'refugee' roles ascribed to them —passive, 'victim', 'non-person', 'non-citizen', 'object' of rescue, etc.— by drawing on the resources of their pre-conflict/arrival social status (e.g., their familial roles of parent, sibling, child, or professional or ethno-cultural roles) to assert their "authority to act" in their present

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[12] Recent work by Baert et al. (2022) theorizes what they call "existential milestones", i.e., life events deemed essential by the individual and/or community which must be achieved within a particular timescale to build status or else "lives will be experienced as somehow incomplete" (p. 9). In the context of refuge, Kyriakides et al. (2019) similarly emphasize the importance of publicly-acknowledged social status to lives experienced as meaningful.

Canadian lives (Kyriakides et al., 2018). We might consider Arendt's Aristotelian theorizing of authority alongside this proposal of refugees' status-confirming "authority to act". Kyriakides and colleagues' (2018, 2019) elaboration of how refugees exercise an "authority to act" now in the present based on the roles and statuses they held in their pre-conflict/arrival lives is somewhat similar to how Roman authority in the present was derived from the 'authors' or founders of their city.

Kyriakides and colleagues' (2018; 2019) status-confirming "authority to act" and Arendt's insights into classical conceptualizations of (political) authority rooted in the past/elders provide some scaffolding on which my study of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag artists can build. For example, Arendt highlights that in contrast to the public realm of political affairs, authority is "more plausible and evident in child-rearing and education" since children are being prepared to participate in the democratic *pólis* (Arendt, 1961, p. 119). Tarc (2016) takes up this idea from Arendt, adjusts 'pre-political' to mean 'most important' or 'preeminent', and proposes education as a "transitional pre-political space where one considers and tries out a personhood of 'one's own' in a public world of others" (Tarc, 2016, p. 88). Tarc goes on to note that education "imbues the child with her first experiences of recognition and speaking in a community of peers" (ibid.). If we posit drag performance as a public pedagogical field of self-enactment or self-author(iz)ing, Tarc's (2016) reading of education as an important in-between zone where 'personhood' may be rehearsed before a limited audience of peers is a productive one for my study of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag. Considering Tarc's (2016) proposal along with Kyriakides and colleagues' (2018, 2019) refugee 'authority to act' and Aristotle's authority from the past (via Arendt, 1961), this study may be situated in dialogue with literature that seeks to better understand how (queer/trans/non-binary) refugees and other migrants (1) assert agency, (2)

affirm social status, and (3) rehearse, author(ize), and enact 'personhood'. In the next and final

section, 2.6, I take up the challenge drag poses to accusations of (neo)liberal individualism in its

emphasis on kinship and community. I consider this relational 'work' alongside intersecting

queer-of-colour and queer/trans migration literature that demonstrates how racialized

queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants resist various forces that seek to exclude

them from (national) belonging.

2.6 Queer Refugee/Migrant In/exclusion and Belonging

In the previous three sections, I have been particularly concerned with the question of

refugee/migrant agency; room for its assertion amid anti-migrant logics that diminish and

dehumanize. This section narrows the focus of inquiry to (in particular, racialized)

queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants and how they are in/excluded from (national)

belonging. My understanding of 'belonging' is informed by Hedetoft's (2004) breakdown of the

concept into four areas of inquiry: (1) sources of belonging — place and 'home'/'family'; (2)

feelings of belonging — identification and memory; (3) constructions that seek to regulate

belonging through in/exclusion — nationalisms and racisms; and (4) fluidities of belonging —

migration, globalization, and diaspora (pp. 24-26). In the following discussion, I place particular

emphasis on 'home'/'family', nationalism, and diaspora as they are theorized in drag and

queer/trans migration literatures. I begin with a brief overview of two imbricated literatures from

which key ideas on the question of belonging are drawn: queer-of-colour critique and queer/trans

migration studies. I then look at an important example of how racialized queer/trans/non-binary

refugees and other migrants are excluded from (national) belonging in the concept of homonationalism. Contrary to exclusionary forces like homonationalism, I discuss two ways in which racialized queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants cultivate belonging. First, I outline from literature on drag the idea of belonging being fostered via the racialized drag kinship structures of Ballroom houses. Second, I provide an outline of the concept of queer diaspora and propose this as another strategy of negotiating belonging.

Queer/Trans Migration and Queer-of-Colour Analysis of Belonging

Queer and trans migration research encompasses a range of "disciplines such as anthropology, history, and sociology" (Manalansan, 2006, p. 230); the field is in conversation with migrant justice activism as well as being "an immense site of cultural and intellectual creativity" (Chávez & Luibhéid, 2020, p. 6). Prime examples of two decades' worth of literature include Cantú and colleagues (2009); Cruz & Manalansan (2002); De Genova (2010); Eng (2010); Fortier (2003); Lee & Brotman (2011); Luibhéid (2002, 2008a, 2019); Luibhéid & Cantú (2005); Luibhéid & Chávez (2020); Manalansan (2003, 2006); Murray (2013, 2014, 2015, 2018); Rehaag (2009, 2017); Ricard (2014); Shakhsari (2014); Wright (2018). Within this body, one area of focus, for example, is on those migrants whose sexual alterity is what "directly impels" their (experiences of) migration and its processes (Luibhéid, 2019, p. 239); the so-called "sexile" (Guzmán, 1997). Another examines 'family' from a queer migrant perspective, seeking to understand the transnational ties queer migrants maintain and develop among both 'given' and

'chosen' kinship networks in sending and receiving countries (e.g., Cantú et al., 2009; Eng, 2010; Fortier, 2003; Jakobsen, 2002; Joseph, 2002; Manalansan, 2006). Crucially, queer feminist and queer-of-colour theorists who focus on migration explore how racial, class, gender, and sexual hierarchies interact with geopolitical border regimes to produce differentially queer/trans refugee/migrant being and belonging (Luibhéid, 2019). These scholars drive "an intersectional approach [to the study of migration] that addresses [histories of] racialization, colonialism, […] capitalism", and patriarchy, cognizant that "whiteness is constitutive of sexual and gender normativity" (Chávez & Luibhéid, 2020, p. 7).

In a seminal volume, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick Ferguson (2004) proposed queer-of-colour analysis as a means of addressing the exclusion of non-heteronormative African American culture from examinations of racial formations. Ferguson's work stands alongside that of fellow Black queer scholar E. Patrick Johnson (2001), who, repurposing a Black vernacular version of 'queer', argued for a 'quare' studies that would de-centre the whiteness and discursivity of Euro-American queer studies in favour of centring the everyday materiality of Black queer lives. These scholars, in turn, are indebted to the theorizing of lesbian feminist-of-colour thinkers like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Audre Lorde (1998 [1984]), and Cherríe Moraga (1981). Discussions of queer-of-colour critique regularly indicate the overlap between this analytical approach and queer and trans migration studies as they expand literal and figurative borders of race, nation, gender, and sexualities

(Allen, 2012, p. 228; also, Ly, 2019). Some of the texts central to both are Alexander (1994),

Decena (2008), Eng (1997), Gopinath (2005), Haritaworn (2016), Manalansan (2003), Muñoz

(1999, 2009), and Puar (2007). Together these literatures trace and seek to reckon with the

experiences of racialized queer/trans/non-binary refugee/migrant lives and their in/exclusions

from (national) belonging.

Exclusions from Belonging: (Homo)nationalisms

In Section 2.2, I outlined how a range of anti-migrant discourses effect an exclusion

from national belonging of non-normative and mostly racialized queer/trans/non-binary refugees

(Dhoest, 2019; Ricard, 2014). In this imagining of Canada, white cis-queer citizens serve as

ciphers of the liberal nation's exceptional capacity for inclusion; meanwhile, homo/transphobia is

displaced onto the Global South, thereby "racializ[ing] homophobia and delegitimiz[ing] critical

focus on the continuities of institutional racism within Canada" (Wahab, 2016, p. 925). For

example, Jacob and Oswin's (2022) study of trans and non-binary refugees in Toronto mobilizes

Walia's (2013) concept of 'border imperialism' to trace how the border extends its power through

"systems of healthcare, documentation, employment, and social assistance", separating

according to logics of "global empire and transnational capitalism", trans and non-binary

refugees from other migrants and citizens (p. 9; see also Kinsman, 2018).

The erasure of many non-normative, largely racialized queer/trans/non-binary bodies

(including refugees and other migrants) from belonging in the nation-state while other more

normative, largely white, cis 'gay' bodies are folded into national belonging is the focus of Jasbir

Puar's influential treatise, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007). Puar

develops a theory of 'homonationalism' building on historian Lisa Duggan's (2002) equally

foundational concept of homonormativity. Duggan (2002) proposes 'homonormativity' to name

"a [neoliberal] 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" (p. 179).[13] Puar (2007) argues that in the post-9/11 era of border securitization "an

exceptional form of national heteronormativity is now joined by an exceptional form of national

homonormativity" (p. 2), i.e., homonationalism. In Puar's (2007) formulation, homonationalism

imbricates race and gender in a sexual hierarchy bringing largely white, cis gay men and lesbian

women into complicity (Luibhéid, 2008b) with border regimes that tie migration to race to

nation. For example, Puar (2007) demonstrates how Western nation-states like the US "used its

purported gay-friendliness to justify increased border securitization and violence against

countries that western organizations label as homophobic" (Jacob & Oswin, 2022, p. 5). The

post-9/11 'war on terror' in the US, posited as a state of exception, Puar (2007) links to a 'sexual

exceptionalism', where some (white) cis gay and lesbian identities are 'exceptionalized' *contra*

"Orientalist constructions of 'Muslim sexuality'" and coopted into a 'defence' of the nation (p.

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[13] Trans studies scholar Susan Stryker (2008) extends the normative assumptions of homonormativity to a cisgender normativity —or indeed a cis-homonormativity— that "marginalizes and disqualifies trans* and gender-nonconforming identities and experiences" (Bailey, 2019, p. 166).

4). Wright (2018) highlights this Islamophobic counterpointing of 'gay' to Muslim in national

security narratives as a key outcome of homonationalism. Opposing this sexual exceptionalism,

Puar (2007) suggests a 'terrorist assemblage', that is, a grouping of various queer bodies (and

their accoutrements) regularly cast as monstrous in Orientalist and homonationalist imaginings:

suicide bombers, the woman in a burqa, the Sikh man in a turban, "the tortured Muslim body",

and, notably, "the South Asian diasporic drag queen" (p. 222).

Since Puar proposed the concept, homonationalism has been taken up and expanded on

by many scholars. Aizura (2018) suggests "transgender exceptionalism" as a corollary to

homonationalism. Like the latter, transgender exceptionalism posits Western nations as

'exceptional' for their tolerance of trans populations versus the 'backward' transphobia of non-

Western cultures; but it acknowledges the different relationships and histories trans (versus LGB)

lives have to Western liberal rights regimes (Jacob & Oswin, 2022, p. 5). Another expansion is

Bacchetta and Haritaworn's (2016), who argue that homonationalism has three primary

iterations. The first is how states operationalize homonationalist ideas: racialized subjects are

separated into those who assimilable into the nation-state and those who not (the burqa-wearing

Muslim woman being a prime example; p. 133). The first version also separates racialized

queer/trans/non-binary subjects, particularly refugees and other migrants, into assimilable and

not, the former being "constructed as persecuted in the Global South and finding freedom" in

Western countries (Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2016, p. 133). The second iteration of

homonationalism is articulated by white feminist and queer subjects who position the state as "protect[ing] their rights against hyper-sexist and hyper-queerphobic racialised others" (ibid.).

But Bacchetta and Haritaworn (2016) also propose a third variant they call *homotransnationalism*, which entails "the production and specifically transnational circulation of neocolonial, orientalist, sexist and queerphobic discourses, such as about persecuted Muslim women or queers" (p. 134). As an example, the authors point to how local hate crime laws — ones that pit white queer 'citizens' "worthy of protection and belonging" versus racialized Muslim migrants (Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2016, p. 136)— are globalized by supranational bodies such as the EU. One other important variation to the concept of homonationalism, and adjacent to Bacchetta and Haritaworn's (2016) second category, is Wahab's (2016) proposal of 'queernationalism'. In Wahab's (2015) reading, a queer counterpublic (a Toronto fetish community) positions itself in online debates as worthy of inclusion in national belonging for being "properly dissident subject[s]" (p. 37) in contrast to an improper dissident figure "whose dissidence is informed by intersections of gender, sexuality, and race" (p. 36), such as the veiled Muslim woman.

Making Spaces of Belonging: Drag Kinship and Relationality

Faced with multiple hostile forces —(homo)nationalisms, racisms, various gender and sexual normativities— that work to exclude racialized queer/trans/non-binary (refugee/migrant) folks from belonging, forms of relationality (including alternative kinship networks and other

collective social organizing) produce vital spaces of belonging and inclusion. Drag is relational

in the first instance because it is performed for others (Newton, 1979); but as several scholars

have highlighted, drag also generates forms of relationality that can be compared to familiar or

kinship structures or 'communities of care' (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Crookston, 2018; Hopkins,

2004; Martin, 2022; O'Halloran, 2017; Penney, 2022). It is in these 'communities of care'

(Penney, 2022) that some contours of belonging can be delineated.

Marlon Bailey's (2011 & 2013) indispensable studies of drag Ballroom culture among

predominantly Black and 'Latinx' queer/trans/non-binary communities in North America identify

three dimensions to the culture: (i) a system of non-hegemonic gender and sexual subjectivities;

(ii) the 'houses', i.e., a kind of 'chosen family' formation; and (iii) the balls, where house

members 'walk' (compete) using drag, fashion, dance, body posing, and performance to win in

various 'runway' categories (Bailey, 2013). Arnold and Bailey (2009) relate that houses

"function as families" (p. 174) but are "configured socially rather than biologically" (Bailey,

2013, p. 5), and work in a disidentificatory way both within and against cis-heteronormative

scripts of 'family'. Houses come complete with designated house 'mothers' and 'fathers', i.e.,

experienced (often but not necessarily older) Ballroom participants who fulfill largely normative

parenting roles —an idealized "feminized mothering and masculinized fathering"— to newer

(often but not necessarily younger) participants or 'children' (Arnold & Bailey, 2009, p. 179).

'Nurturing' mothers are usually trans women ("femme queens") or feminine-identified cis queer

men ("butch queens up in drags"), while 'expectation-setting' fathers are usually masculine-identified cis queer men ("butch queens") or non-queer-identified cis men (Arnold & Bailey, 2009, p. 177). As family-like formations, the house "revises" Black cis-heteropatriarchal kinship structures and family ideologies (Bailey, 2013, p. 5). Further, Arnold and Bailey (2009) find that the house provides love, care, emotional and practical supports —a space of belonging— for younger/newer members who may be in vulnerable, precarious situations due to their queer/transphobic exclusion from 'given' family homes as well as the impacts of various racist violences in the wider social world.[14] In *Bodies That Matter* (2011 [1993]), Butler similarly makes the case that in Ballroom, "the resignification of the family […] is not a vain or useless imitation, but the social and discursive building of community, a community that binds, cares, and teaches, that shelters and enables" (p. 95). It is in this way that, as Bailey (2013) argues, normative Black kin and family are 'revised', and spaces of belonging are opened up for otherwise often excluded Black (and racialized) queer/trans/non-binary folks.

The model of the Ballroom 'house' as an alternative Black (and racialized) kinship structure is emulated in (and possibly appropriated by) wider drag cultures that are not restricted to racialized groups. Adjacent to the queer cultural concept of 'chosen' family (Weston, 1997), drag cultures exhibit a "longstanding tradition of having a drag 'family' of non-biological drag parents, siblings, aunties, etc., who help new drag artists learn the craft" (Martin, 2022, p. 126;

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[14] While conscious of 'home' as an "icon for nationalism and exclusion", Jacob and Oswin (2022) show how trans/non-binary refugees (re)negotiate 'home' as "a necessary, intimately-felt mode of belonging, safety, and freedom" (p. 13).

see also Crookston, 2018). The Ballroom discourse of family —'mother', 'father', 'sister', etc.—

is reflected in usage of these terms among drag communities and broader queer ones, likely

reflecting "a strong desire for solidarity" and belonging among minoritized groups (Goetz-

Preisner, 2022, p. 48) as well as a critical disidentification with these terms. However,

Horowitz's (2020) study of a Cleveland, Ohio, drag performance venue contests such a felicitous

'family' narrative and suggests, instead, that patterns of racialized, sexualized, and gendered

conflict undermine drag and queer notions of solidarity-building and belonging. Nonetheless, the

drag Ballroom house represents a prime site where racialized queer/trans/non-binary folks,

including refugees and other migrants, foster spaces of belonging to counter exclusions.

Making Places of Belonging: 'Liveable Space' in Queer Diaspora

If drag kin offers one possible space of belonging for racialized queer/trans/non-binary

refugees and other migrants against exclusion from the nation, another site may be within

diaspora. Diaspora highlights not individual experiences of migration but collective ones. A

conventional understanding of diaspora points to narratives of an exclusive ethnic group

displaced from their 'homeland', holding onto and transmitting through kinship lines of descent a

'pure' sense of their originary culture (Hall, 2017, p. 163; see also Tölölyan, 2007). The work of

Black British cultural theorists Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall reoriented analysis of diaspora away

from these conservative, nationalist, and exclusionary notions of 'pure' cultures toward diaspora

as cultural hybridity and creolization. As diaspora theorist Avtar Brah (2005) notes, the many

forms of migration attendant on globalizing capitalism produce an understanding of diaspora as much more than a 'dispersal from' a 'home' (routes) and 'situating in' a new 'home' (roots). Instead, the concept of diaspora "places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins" (Brah, 2005, p. 189). By 'homing desire' Brah does not mean the diasporic subject's desire to return 'home' but rather, it recognizes the "multi-placedness of home" and the possibility of multiple belongings (2005, p. 194). And yet, even if the diasporic subject experiences a 'feeling of home', the various axes of social relations — class, race, gender, etc.— regulate in/exclusion from belonging and "inhibit public proclamations of the place as home" (Brah, 2005, p. 190). Theories of diaspora, thus, highlight how diaspora, in conservative logics, depends on nationalist exclusions for belonging in its formation and, in more critical analyses such as Brah's, on negotiating interstitial spaces for belonging within and against various in/exclusions.

As a further counterpoint to conventional, nationalist logics of diaspora, queer feminist scholar Gayatri Gopinath's (2005) theorizing of a 'queer diaspora' framework seeks to "unsettle the ways in which […] diaspora shores up the gender and sexual ideologies of dominant nationalism on the one hand, and processes of globalization on the other" (p. 10). Queer diaspora addresses the failing Gopinath identifies in 'South Asian' diasporic feminist scholarship to "interrogate heterosexuality as a structuring mechanism of both state and diasporic nationalisms" (ibid.). Through a queer diasporic reading of 'South Asian' cultural forms and practices,

Gopinath (2005) illuminates "other forms of subjectivity, culture, affect, kinship, and community that may not be visible or audible within standard mappings of nation, diaspora, or globalization" (p. 12). Like Brah (2005), Gopinath re-evaluates meanings of home and belonging but from a queer diasporic lens; thus, her work casts light on "the ways in which migrants who seem to occupy impossible life circumstances turn them into *livable spaces*, unsettled and complicated as they may be" (Rouhani, 2019, p. 127; my emphasis). Some scholars have, however, challenged Gopinath's insinuation that queer diaspora is as challenging to conventional diasporic notions of nation/home/family as it seems since "queer desire is necessarily constituted in relation to such categories [nation/home/family] and can offer us no assurance of their disruption" (Wesling, 2008, p. 34).

Nonetheless, this queer diaspora framework has been productively pursued by a number of queer migration scholars (Allen, 2012; DasGupta, 2014; Davis, 2021; Garvey, 2011; Lord, 2015; Ly, 2019; Rodríguez, 2020; Rouhani, 2019) to investigate "how people in diasporic contexts create new systems of kinship, relationship, and belonging beyond what is assumed of them" (Rouhani, 2019, p. 127). A prime example of this undertaking is Garvey (2011), whose reading of the work of Trinidadian-Canadian writer Dionne Brand sees an assertion of "the positive potential of spaces of queer (un)belonging", i.e., spaces that challenge non-queer, conventional diasporic spaces of belonging while "not leading to the destructive erasure of not-belonging" (p. 758). Queer diaspora theory, thus, foregrounds how queer diasporic subjects push

back against various exclusions from belonging through the production of liveable spaces, of, in

Garvey's terms, (un)belonging. Key to these spaces is, as Rouhani (2019) suggests, new forms of

kinship and relationality. Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir (2018), taking a universalist stance, reminds

us that while "a need to form social attachments and find a sense of belonging is a fundamental

human motivation", necessary for "positive identity formation and for individual psychosocial

wellbeing", it is also directly linked to "one's level of civic engagement" (p. 34). Eguchi and

Long (2019) submit that queer relationality encompasses not only the "sexual, romantic,

platonic, familial" but also "political, and/or intellectual" endeavours to generate belonging (p.

1602).

 Taking queer relationality as the production of *liveable spaces* of belonging via new

queer forms of social, political, and familial relations, one of the most prominent proponents was

queer-of-colour theorist José Muñoz. While some (white) queer thinkers pessimistically rejected

queer relationality as antithetical to the radical individualism of desire (see Shahani, 2013),

Muñoz (2009) insisted on "the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity"

and argued that "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope" (p. 11) rather than "limited to

the here and now of the present" (Shahani, 2013, p. 552). The framework of queer diaspora as

well as drag kinship structures represent in their embrace of collectivity and relationality,

hopeful, future-oriented rejoinders to erasure and exclusion from belonging of racialized

queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants.

Pivoting from the previous three sections' focus on the question of agency, in this final section I have, with theories from queer-of-colour critique and queer/trans migration studies, reflected on how largely racialized queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants are excluded from (national) belonging via forces such as homonationalism (with its racist, Orientalist underpinnings). I then recounted how the same racialized queer/trans/non-binary folks respond to these exclusionary designs by fostering relational belonging spaces, such as drag kinship structures, and queer diaspora liveable spaces of (un)belonging. Given this theoretical and existing literature context, I set out in the next chapter the methodology and methods this study uses in pursuit of my research questions on the identities and experiences of refugee/migrant drag artists to better understand how such folks negotiate their being and belonging via drag and in doing so, make liveable futures for themselves and others.

3. Methodology: Theory, Data Collection, Methods, Analysis, Limitations, Reflexivity

3.1 Theoretical Approach: Introduction

Chapter Two reviewed theories and literatures that contour this study. The review highlighted questions surrounding the complex subjectivity of queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants that this study seeks to contribute to and address. I began by highlighting from literature on drag the kinds of work drag does toward the construction of social categories of identity. Mobilizing drag as a lens of inquiry into the lives and experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants, I explored several ways in which the question of performativity and intentionality in drag relates to similar concerns around agency and performativity regarding refugees and other migrants. While some literature exists, more work is needed to better understand how (queer/trans/non-binary) refugees and other migrants assert agency, affirm social status, and enact 'person'. Ontologically and epistemologically, the question of who a 'person' is —since refugees (and, I argue, other migrants) are constructed in Western rescue logics as diminished 'persons'— may be cast in new light when the invented persona of drag performance is counterposed. Contributions to queer/trans migration studies and queer-of-colour critique may be possible by exploring how queer/trans/non-binary refugee/migrant drag artists work together to foster queer diasporic, relational, and liveable spaces of (un)belonging.

In this chapter, I explain the methodology and methods used to operationalize this study's lines of inquiry. I begin with discussion of my theoretical approach (Section 3.1); I move on to outline how participants were recruited and data collected (Section 3.2); which methods were used to collect data (Section 3.3); how the data were analyzed (Section 3.4); what issues and

challenges arose and how the study is limited (Section 3.5); and, finally, how reflexivity and positionality are integral to the study (Section 3.6).

Given the critical alignment of the theories I outlined in Chapter Two, I approached this study from a transformative outlook, which aims to "serve the needs of those who have traditionally been excluded from positions of power in the research world" (Mertens, 2007, p. 212). A transformative perspective is one that seeks to contribute via research to social change and the pursuit of social justice (Mertens, 2007). As such, addressing unequal relations of power is at the heart of the transformative paradigm. The research process must be guided by this tenet. A crucial epistemological element is, therefore, recognizing that knowledge is co-constructed by researcher and participants, and the researcher must interrogate their role in its production. Thus, I reflect on my positionality in this research in Section 3.4. Ontologically, the transformative outlook acknowledges that "realities are constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and ethnic values and that power is an important determinant of which reality will be privileged" (Mertens, 2007, p. 217). Similarly, categories of the social world, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and disability, are also viewed as constructs. In short, the study's orientation and mine as researcher is constructivist.

This study set out to explore, sociologically, what bearing drag performance has on the complex subjectivities and experiences of queer/trans/non-binary refugees and migrants. As laid out and explained in Chapter One, three questions guided the research:

(1) What identities are salient for 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag performers & audiences, and when?

(2) What meanings does drag have for experiences of belonging of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant performers & audiences?

(3) What relationship, if any, exists between drag performance and the 'everyday performance' of identities among 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant performers & audiences?

The study was single-phase and qualitative. The research questions sought to expand on and add new insights to existing theory, and so I selected a grounded theory approach to the analysis that employed abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Theoretical Approach: Grounded Theory and Abductive Analysis

First established in a series of tracts by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is "a systematic method consisting of several flexible strategies for constructing theory through analyzing qualitative data" (Charmaz, 2017a, p. 299). The theory is 'grounded' in and generated from the data through a process in which repeated rounds of analysis to identify themes take place while data is being collected (Charmaz, 2017a). In the early 1990s, Strauss's conceptualizing of how theory was elaborated from 'grounded' analyses diverged from Glaser's. The latter insisted that theory should emerge solely from the data, using an inductive logic where results are examined, and an inference drawn. Strauss, instead, recognized that the researcher's pre-existing knowledge of theory played an important role in interpreting the data and subsequent theorizing (Reichertz, 2007). The researcher's existing knowledge (of theory and more) as well as their prior experiences are what grounded theorists call "sensitizing concepts" that "guide how the researcher thinks about and organizes the data" (Jamison, 2018, p. 144). Since I was following the grounded theory approach of simultaneous collection and analysis, I noticed early on that in the second of the research questions, my original phrasing of "life experiences" was too broad; it was not attuned to what I was hearing from respondents about their relationship to Canada as migrants/refugees. Grounded theorists note that the approach allows for "reworking of a research question in response to insights about the data" (Charmaz,

2014; cited by Jamison, 2018, p. 143). I altered the second research question – what meanings does drag have for the life experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant performers & audiences? – by replacing "life experiences" with "experiences of belonging". What respondents were telling me about their relationship to Canada as migrants/refugees reminded me how sociologists concerned with affects of place highlight that both migration and (liberal) conceptualizing of selfhood (attendant on processes of globalization and modernity) "disrupt[…], and increase[…] the desire for, 'locally-based' belonging" (Wood & Waite, 2011, p. 201). Furthermore, while literature on belonging foregrounds national and ethno-racialized belonging, less attention is given to forms of gender and sexual belonging as well as how these intersect with other forms of belonging (ibid.). I saw an opportunity in this study centring on queer/trans/non-binary migrants and refugees to explore intersecting forms of belonging, from national through to gender and sexual and more; therefore, I adjusted the second research question's phrasing to sharpen the focus on various ways belonging (or indeed, non-belonging) is experienced by respondents.

In this study, I followed in Strauss's vein of grounded theory and drew on abductive logic as well as induction in the data analysis. Developed by pragmatist thinker Charles S. Peirce (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), "abduction relates an observation to a theory (or vice versa), and results in an interpretation" (Dey, 2006, p. 92). As Dey (2006) explains, while induction examines a series of results or consequences and from them infers a generalizable 'rule', abductive reasoning uses theory "together with observation in order to produce an interpretation of something specific" (p. 92). Reichertz (2007) describes abduction as "a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another" (p. 218). The abductive analyst needs to be primed to observe the "unanticipated and surprising" by theories that have "sensitized" them (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 173).

In my process of analysis, some observations required more of a "mental leap" than others to connect my knowledge of theories to what I was hearing from respondents. For example, queer diaspora perspectives on 'belonging', 'home', and 'kinship' appeared readily adjacent to what I was hearing from many respondents on these concepts. Whereas Kyriakides et al.'s (2018, 2019) concept of 'authority to act' did not come quickly to mind until I noted how respondents narrated the decisions they made (and the desires underlying those decisions) before, during, and after migrating. Ignoring 'decisions' would have created an absence in my interpretation of the centrality interviewees gave to self-authorization. Abduction relies on the "cultivated position" of the researcher, i.e., knowledge of theory and social positionality, to help the researcher make sense of the "unanticipated and surprising", build possible new explanations, and thus enhance the existing theory (ibid.). While "induction looks for the corroboration of generalizations, patterns, outliers, and salient themes in the data", abductive analysis produces (new) theory by bring the data into an "iterative dialogue" with current and emerging concepts (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 180).

3.2 Sampling and Recruitment

In this section, I describe how I identified and recruited participants. Before any fieldwork began, I submitted my dissertation proposal and application to York University's Office of Research Ethics. Ethics approval for the study was received for a one-year period starting December 18, 2020 (Appendix B). The study's aims and guiding research questions were operationalized in the selection of participants who self-identify as (1) drag artists or drag show audience members; (2) LGBTQ+; (3) having migrant or refugee backgrounds. Sampling was purposive (not random) to the extent that I had criteria (derived from the research questions) on the basis of which I recruited participants who could "provide rich data" (MacDougall &

Fudge, 2001, p. 120). Recruitment began in January 2021 and ended in October of the same year. Interviews followed the same timeline.

The study used a two-prong approach to recruitment, utilising relevant community organizations as gatekeepers and snowballing through interpersonal networks. I relied for recruitment on 'champions' in community-based organizations as well as on my personal networks because (1) while a few closed groups exist on social media where some drag artists connect, no database of drag artists in Canada exists from which I could recruit interviewees; and (2) the sensitivity and trust-building required by the population being studied necessitated sympathetic word-of-mouth snowballing.

Recruitment: Community Organization 'Champions'

I approached key contacts in several community-based organizations in my social network to share the aims of the study and ask for their help. MacDougall and Fudge (2001) describe key contacts as "champions" when they "take an active interest and become involved in recruiting either directly or by allowing the researcher to use the champion's credibility or authority in the community" (p. 121). Three respondents were recruited through a 'champion' at Aluna Theatre, a Toronto-based company that has roots in 'Latinx' communities, an orientation to supporting migrant artists, and with which I have a longstanding relationship as a volunteer. Another two were recruited with the help of the organizer of a queer film festival in Edmonton. A contact at an umbrella organization of settlement agencies tried to help recruit but with no luck. Two other contacts in organizations in my network were also unable to help. One was at a queer refugee agency, but they could not assist due to client confidentiality. The other was at a Toronto queer community organization. The contact here would only proceed if I provided

interpreters. I ascertained possible funding and located interpreter companies working with non-profit organizations in the sector, but when I returned to the contact, they no longer responded. I can only speculate as to the reasons for the loss of this contact; it could have been due to their not having enough confidence in me and my experience as researcher since I had not set up the study with the option of interpreters from the outset. The 'champions' I enlisted in community-based organizations acted as gatekeepers who screened me as researcher and the research itself before deciding whether or not to lend their credibility to the process of recruitment.

Recruitment: Snowballing via Interpersonal Networks

Participants were also recruited using a snowballing technique (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) that expands outward from the researcher's personal social networks (Browne, 2005). One advantage of engaging primarily personal social networks is that it helps avoid depending on rigid "categorization of [social] groups" (Browne, 2005, p. 49) and, instead, acknowledges the discursive construction of (gender, sexual, and other) subject positions (Kong et al., 2002). Another is that potential participants can make some assessment of the researcher and the research through the same network intermediaries (Browne, 2005); they know someone who knows me, the researcher. A notable disadvantage of snowballing based on personal social networks is that the sample is contoured by the researcher's subject position and the exclusivity of their social network (Browne, 2005). In this study, I began by relying on (queer) family and friends to introduce me to potential participants in their networks with the criteria derived from the research questions in mind. Factors relating to my subject position —such as my being older, being white, and moving in a middle-class (academic) milieu— shape my social networks and will have had some bearing on the sample but not wholly determining. For example, the

migrant/refugee criterion allied with my personal social network being located in ethno-racially diverse Toronto meant the sample almost entirely comprised individuals who are racialized other than white.

Due to the restrictions on in-person research during the Covid-19 pandemic, all introductions were made (and correspondence maintained) via email (Appendix D). When possible, these email introductions were made by one respondent copying me on the same email to a potential participant. One early respondent asked me for a short text introducing myself and the study that they could share with potential participants they knew. I prepared a reduced text version of the email solicitation for respondents to share with contacts. Also prompted by respondents who saw I did not have any social media presence, I created a Facebook page and posted photos of me performing as Philomena and some short text introduction as a reference point that respondents could direct their contacts to. One respondent contacted me initially via Facebook private message, having been directed there by another respondent, and I followed up by email. Browne (2005) notes that these kinds of snowballing introductions mean respondents, similar to community organization 'champions', also acted as gatekeepers who "screened those to whom I had access" (p. 51).

Recruitment Results

In total, twenty-two individuals were interviewed in the study. All were drag artists bar three. These three had not performed drag but, as aligned with the study's aims, were drag show audience members. Of these three, one was an actor/performer who also planned to take up drag performance; another was someone who fulfilled a key role in organizing community-based drag shows over many years. One of the twenty-two interviewees was not LGBTQ+ identified, and

another had no migrant/refugee background. Conscious of the study's aims, I treated these two interviews separately in the analysis, and I comment on them as issues in Section 3.5.1.

At the time of interview, all respondents resided in Canada; principally in Toronto, with two in Edmonton, one in Winnipeg, and one in Montreal. Accordind to details disclosed in the interviews, six entered Canada as refugees; twelve entered Canada under some migrant class (student permit, work permit, permanent resident, family-sponsored permanent resident, or unspecified); three are 'second-generation' (they were born in Canada, but their parents were migrants or refugees). I did not ask respondents their age, and age was not a variable in my analysis; but solely as additional information and calculating approximately from details disclosed in interview, respondents ranged from seventeen to over sixty years old.

Consent forms were provided to all in advance of the interview to allow time for it to be read, signed, and returned to me (Appendix C). Thirteen correspondents signed and returned the consent form by email. But given difficulties some had in adding electronic signatures and/or access to printers, nine participants, instead, were recorded responding verbally to my reading of the three consent questions (participation in the study; audio/video recording; and use of names or pseudonyms) at the start of our video conference. Most respondents consented to my using their drag names and/or their everyday names.[15] Where respondents chose to not use either their drag and/or their everyday names, I use pseudonyms, including some suggested to me by respondents, and remove some further identifying detail such as place names.

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[15] The reasons why respondents consented to use of their names is worth further reflection. I speculated that many had public profiles, at least in their drag names. I also formed the impression that many wanted to mark ownership of the narratives they shared with me by including both drag and everyday names. Space in this chapter does not permit to explore this issue, but I would like to address it elsewhere –perhaps as a methodological paper– as an issue of authorship.

Participant recruitment continued until reaching a point of 'saturation'. As noted by Bryant & Charmaz (2012), grounded theorists Glaser and Strauss recommend continuing data collection until 'theoretical saturation'. But the definition of such saturation is "is left ambiguous in their writings" (Johnson, 2002, p. 114). So, on the question of when to stop collecting data, many qualitative approaches, including the abductive grounded theory one I was pursuing, point to being led by the data rather than the number of sources. That is, if themes and theories are identified repeatedly when analyzing concurrently with collection each data source (the interviews in this case), then the researcher should make a judgment as to when saturation has been reached.

3.3 Method: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview

Forsey (2012) explains that "the research interview provides an opportunity for creating and capturing insights of a depth and level of focus" other quantitative instruments such as surveys and observation cannot achieve (p. 364). The specific format of the interviews I conducted was semi-structured and in-depth (Campbell et al., 2013; Morris, 2015). An in-depth research interview is quite distinct from an everyday conversation between two interlocutors in that the interview is mostly one-sided and is conducted with purpose and by design (Wheeler, 2021); but the in-depth interview shares with such conversations a necessary "topic of mutual interest" and is ideally "relaxed, open and honest" (Morris, 2015, p. 3). Morris (2015) highlights that "the strength of the in-depth interview lies in its ability to create a research space in which the interviewee is able to tell their story and give the researcher a range of insights and thoughts about a particular topic" (p. 5). Methodologists suggest in-depth interviews tend to be on the long side —60 to 90 minutes— and may be multiple (Johnson, 2002; Wheeler, 2021), the better to cultivate a measure of rapport and intimacy between interviewee and interviewer that

disclosures of personal matters require (Seidman, 2019). Such matters include "an individual's self, lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective" (Johnson, 2002, p. 104). In general, the in-depth interview is seen as best for approaching "sensitive topics" and "difficult material" (Morris, 2015, p. 8; also, Wheeler, 2021). Given the focus on subjectivity and experience in my research questions, the interview as instrument appeared ideal. As Morris (2015) explains, "[t]he interview gives the researcher access to interviewees' thoughts, reflections, motives, experiences, memories, understandings, interpretations and perceptions of the topic under consideration. It gives the researcher the opportunity to establish why people construct the world in particular ways and think the way they do" (p. 5).

My research plans had initially envisioned some observation of drag artists in performance. However, as I began field work in late 2020, restrictions on public assembly amid the early waves of the Covid-19 pandemic had closed theatres and other performance spaces. Over the course of my fieldwork, I learned from respondents and from online searches that some performances were taking place via online platforms (such as Twitch[16]; see Crookston, 2022 for accounts and analysis of such performances by Toronto-based artists). The data I was collecting via interviews, however, was already proving detailed and extensive. I found respondents' narration of how they understood their everyday and performative subjectivity more than compelling. Therefore, I decided to postpone indefinitely the idea of performance observations and concentrate my efforts on the processes of recruiting for and conducting interviews.

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[16] Twitch is an online video live streaming platform owned by Amazon (Ewalt, 2013).

The interviews (initially) followed a semi-structured set of topics and questions, or interview protocol, that I had developed in advance (See Appendices E & F for examples). Before I began recruiting and interviewing respondents, I conducted a (mini) pilot of the study to test the viability of the protocol (Billups, 2021). Using a version of the intended topics/questions, I conducted 'mock' interviews with two personal acquaintances, who were artists but not drag artists and who were queer (cis and non-binary). One was a migrant to Canada; the other had no migrant history. While these two individuals did not overlap with the target population of the study, they were somewhat similar to the criteria for participation in the study (Billups, 2021), and they were able to provide valuable feedback on the kinds of questions I asked. They prompted me, for example, to think more carefully about why I asked certain questions and what relationship the questions had to the study's objectives and guiding research questions. The resulting protocol was the one I used in first round of interviews (the first six respondents). But part of the abductive grounded theory approach involves modifying questions in response to emerging themes in the analysis. So, for example, as I began hearing from respondents some of the reasons *why* performing drag was important to them, rather than ask an oblique and quite clumsy question about performance I had in the initial protocol ("is there one thing you could not do your drag performance without?"), I began to ask directly, "why do you perform drag?". Questions like this were more effective in eliciting a range of thoughts from respondents; they also helped condense my interventions. The interviews were, thus, semi-structured; I had questions relating to the topics I wished to cover (and stemming from the research questions), but "plenty of scope for digression" was possible, and the interviewee could "'ramble' to an extent" (Morris, 2015, p. 10). Almost never were all questions used. Semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewee to go into to detail and allow the interviewer to probe further on a matter of

interest that emerges unexpectedly (Morris, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Having topics and question stimuli is what distinguishes the semi-structured interview from the unstructured, while its openness contrasts with the structured interview that is more akin to a survey (Morris, 2015).

Method: Interview Recordings

Since pandemic-related restrictions on research did not allow for in-person meetings, each of the interviews in this study were recorded using the video-conferencing platform Zoom. Using Zoom meant an audio track, a video file, and an AI transcript file were produced. All respondents gave consent to audio and video recording, except one who allowed audio only, and so I immediately deleted the video file for this respondent. All interviews were conducted on a single occasion except one, which involved two meetings, and they lasted a minimum of 50 minutes and an average of 75, with two interviews extending to 120 minutes (all timings approximate). Since respondents were often describing to me sensitive details concerning experiences of what I call in the subsequent analysis 'disconfirming forces' (e.g., racisms, (homo)nationalisms, trans and homophobias, (trans)misogyny) in relation to their positionalities as racialized queer, trans, and non-binary migrant/refugee folk, longer interviews were necessary to make space for these complex accounts. At the same time, I was conscious from the recruitment process how much I had already asked of interviewees' time —in outlining the project and asking them to read the consent form— so I tried to strike a balance between making time for all that interviewees wanted to relate to me and keeping within the agreed upper limit of 90 minutes. I did this by interjecting time checks during the interview. On the two occasions when interviews exceeded 90 minutes, I was following interviewees' expressed wish to continue.

Zoom as a platform and means of communicating understandably entailed both advantages and disadvantages. Building rapport is essential to an interview (Seidman, 2019), and video means non-verbal forms of communication that help establish that rapport (e.g., smiling, eye contact, nodding) are present almost as much as they would be in-person. In this way, video overcomes some of the losses of human visual communication noted in telephone interviews (Azad et al., 2021). One clear advantage to video conferencing was that it eliminated travel time for both researcher and more importantly respondent, thus reducing —significantly given distance and transit issues in a city the size of Toronto— the commitment of time being asked of respondents. Further, video interviews meant I was able to include respondents from across Canada, thus widening the pool of potential participants who may be recruited. Using a version of Zoom software licensed to the university also meant that the AI-generated transcript was protected by the privacy provisions of the university's contract with Zoom, as I confirmed via inquiry to the Ethics Board. These transcripts were, however, peppered with errors —typical in online interviewing (Hooley, 2012)— due largely to many respondents and myself not speaking a North American variety of English that the software was trained to recognize. Thus, transcription remained a significant part of my analytical work as I describe below in Section 3.4.1. Some disadvantages to video interviewing were being unable to provide interviewees with some basic hospitality; the distancing effect that screens generate; being dependent on the respondent to secure a suitable environment (no interruptions or others present); sensing an abruptness to the beginning and ending of the call; and experiencing technical difficulties (similar to those in telephone interviews noted by Azad et al., 2021). Since the pandemic obliged many people to acclimatize to video conferencing –Zoom, in particular– none of the respondents had difficulty using Zoom nor with logging in to the call. However, on a couple of occasions

unstable internet connections caused some audio problems and distortions that meant requests for repetition that inconvenienced respondents.

3.4 Data Analysis

As is consistent with grounded theory approaches, I undertook analysis of the data while I was collecting. My approach was abductive in that I brought to bear my prior knowledge of theories on the interpretation of the data with the goal of elaborating further (new) theory. Ideally, analyzing while collecting results in "the collected data [becoming] progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012, p. 44). The relationship between prior theory knowledge and the data ought to be a constructive one; so, prior theory should not stand in the way of developing interpretation and (new) theory.

Data Analysis: Transcription

Morris (2015) sketches four 'stages' of in-depth interview analysis. I followed these not prescriptively but as loosely descriptive of my analytical process. The first stage revolved around transcription of the interviews. Since interviews were recorded on Zoom, an AI transcription was automatically generated. However, given the language issues I noted above, I needed to carefully review each transcription, doing much work to correct errors, paginate, fill in gaps, and tidy up (removing extraneous material such as preliminary chit-chat). Transcribing helps analysis in that it "intimately acquaints you with the material" (Morris, 2015, p. 122). Once a complete transcript is rendered, reading the transcript closely several times "without the distraction of worrying about coding" is recommended since it will provide "a good sense of what are the important themes" (Morris, 2015, p. 127). I found this to be true in that themes of family, community-forming, and elements critical to the construct 'persona' stood out from my readings of the first

few interview transcripts onward. At the same time, I noted which questions respondents readily understood, which they asked me to rephrase, and which questions produced more detail and more narrative. I used these notes to fine-tune the interview protocol. I was conscious, however, that I was already forming some early interpretations and that I would need to undertake repeated readings of the transcripts since interviewers "don't necessarily 'hear' what their informants tell them, but only what their own intellectual and ethical development has prepared them to hear" (Johnson, 2002, p. 105). Morris's (2015) second 'stage' is compiling a file with "striking quotes that capture key points/themes" (p. 127). I did not do this until later in the analysis because I was sure neither of themes nor of what would be significant. Nonetheless, some phrases were immediately memorable not only from the transcripts but sometimes in the moment of the interview, and I made note of these.

Data Analysis: Coding

The next 'stage' for me was coding (Morris's third 'stage'). According to Bryant and Charmaz (2012), codes are" short-hand analytic labels that define data, synthesize and sort them, and initiate the analytic substance and direction of their study" (p. 45). The purpose of coding is to analyze the data for concepts and add descriptive abstract labels that synthesize the concept (i.e., codes) to track these concepts through the data. These labels or codes usually reflect the researcher's interpretation but may sometimes be a word or short phrase the interviewee uses; the latter codes are known as "in-vivo" because they stem directly from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Writing about grounded theory analyses specifically, Corbin and Strauss (2008) distinguish between higher- and lower-level concepts. The former are called "categories" or "themes" and "tell us what a group of lower-level concepts are pointing to or are indicating" (p.

159). In contrast to the first 'stage' readings of the whole interview transcript, at the 'coding'

stage, Corbin and Strauss (2008) advise identifying breaks in the flow of the conversation, thus

breaking down the interview into sections that may or may not be speaking to a particular topic.

Next, the researcher would examine the sections for key ideas based on their interpretation and

label/code them with "conceptual names that stand for and represent the ideas contained in the

data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160).

I began coding, following grounded theory practice, after I had transcribed the first two

interviews (which took place in the same week). Examples of these codes are 'gender identity';

'ethno-racial/cultural identity'; 'family'; 'community'; 'home'; 'Canada'; 'migrating'; 'persona';

'meaning of drag'; 'mental health'. The nomenclature evolved and was modified as I went on

interviewing and analyzing. I chose not to use qualitative data analysis software (such as NVivo

or Dedoose) in the coding process since I had used such software before as a research assistant

on another study, and did not find, overall, that it substantially aided my analysis. The software

made manipulating coded excerpts easier —being able to summon or isolate all excerpts under

one code rapidly— but I also found that the software fragmented the data, placing it much

removed from the context of the original interview. As Morris (2015) notes, even if a researcher

uses such software, "[u]ltimately it is you who has to do the coding and the analysis" (p. 136).

Instead of analytical software, I used Word documents of the transcripts, recording codes with

the comment feature and highlighting in different colours according to category/theme. I also, at

one point, printed out colour-coded excerpts from individual interviews, cut them up, arranged

them on a very large sheet of card, and manipulated them to help me visualize possible

relationships between the content. Like Jamison (2018), "to [identify a meaningful concept]

without losing the multiple meanings within a passage, I often assigned more than one code to a section of text" (p. 145).

Data Analysis: 'Framework of Significance'

As interview transcripts mounted up, I developed from the codes what I called a 'framework of significance'; essentially, this analytical 'framework' comprised categories/themes (I called them 'themes') into which I was grouping the codes. To help me establish what was (a) 'significant' to the interviewees and (b) an elaboration of significance within a 'framework' of codes, I considered (i) theories I was familiar with —for example, queer diaspora—; (ii) the research questions —which had driven the topics in the interview—; and (iii) other probing questions to help me interpret the data. These additional questions included 'how do respondents articulate a relationship between drag and migration?'; ''what impact does drag persona have on respondents' other identities?'; 'what import would my themes have for respondents?'. In identifying themes from the codes, Morris (2015) notes that repetition among respondents is an essential indicator (p. 128). The resulting 'framework of significance' comprised five themes: Self (gender/sexual/ethno-racial/cultural); Others (family/kin/community formations); Migration and Nation; Drag (persona/performance/meaning); Mental Health. As Jamison (2018) notes, Strauss, one of the grounded theory originators, along with colleague Corbin, loosened their earlier, slightly more prescriptive strategy for coding —open coding to axial coding and so on— to emphasize that the "actual procedures used for analyzing data are not as important as the task of identifying the essence or meaning of data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). My own experience of defining codes and themes meant at times I was not sure if a concept should be called a code or considered an overarching theme. Dey's (2006) experience

resonates with my own when they argue that coding "favours 'interrogating' data over 'interpreting' it"; instead, Dey uses "headings" to assist in interpretation and "not isolated 'codes' but related concepts connected to and informed by a more complex and holistic account" (p. 86).

Data Analysis: Memos

Using the 'framework of significance', I wrote memos for each interview in relation to the five themes. Memos are short written reflections of ideas derived from the coding of the data. In my case, I would take an example or two from the data —direct quotes— and write a short reflection on what ideas and concepts I could distinguish in the quote, noting questions I might have and any links I could see to other respondents' narratives. Memo writing corresponds to Morris's fourth 'stage' of analysis, but following Corbin and Strauss's (2008) example, I undertook memo writing early on as soon as I had my thematic 'framework of significance'. Grouping these memos together under the themes as headings, I could immediately see that, for example, the theme of mental health (as it related to respondents' drag performance) was far less prominent in the data than the other four themes of the 'framework'. I would later drop this theme as an angle to explore in the next phase of the analysis. This study being qualitative and not quantitative, it was not so much that fewer respondents spoke to the mental health theme that led to my not pursuing it, though repetition is an important indicator. But rather that what respondents were saying, firstly, corresponded to what literature on drag and mental health had already explored (for example, drag performance entails "protective" factors such as "glamour" and "empowerment", and "stressors' such as "anxiety" and "discrimination"; Knutson et al., 2018). Secondly, what respondents said about mental health and drag could be viewed from a

sociological and philosophical perspective rather than a psychological one (for example, "community involvement" and "service", or "loss of self"; Knutson et al., 2018). The sociological and philosophical aspects were what I wanted to explore since I could see some gaps in the literature in these regards. Jamison (2018) reflects on the fact that, to be realistic, in qualitative analysis the amount of data (and concepts presented therein) almost always exceeds researchers' capacities and therefore hard decisions must be made about what avenues of inquiry to pursue (p. 150).

Data Analysis: 'Tri-Angular' Analysis

The processes of coding, elaborating a thematic framework, and memo writing aligned for me with what Timmermans and Tavory (2012) describe as maximizing abductive analysis "where we force ourselves to remain with the phenomenon and try to form as many links and hypotheses as possible in light of our theoretically positioned knowledge" (p. 177). After this phase of writing, my memos felt too thin, too descriptive, or too narrative in terms of the resulting analyses. I needed to drill down further, ask more questions of the data, if I was going to form (new) theories. I chose three transcripts that felt to me thematically rich (where respondents had much to say about each of the themes); three others that I felt had enough thematic content; and three more that felt 'thin'. I chose just these nine, initially, to provide me with a manageable number than the full set of twenty (but later extended the analysis to all once I had established its utility). Based on Kyriakides and colleagues' (2018, 2019) theory of status eligibilities, I set out three vectors of inquiry, which I called 'angles' (thus forming what I called a 'tri-angular' analysis). These three 'angles' sought to pinpoint (1) decisions respondents made (indicating their desires); (2) continuity and/or change from pre-arrival in Canada to post; (3)

spaces of (non)belonging for respondents. In identifying 'decisions' for the first angle, I noted any social, political, economic, or cultural impacts of these decisions. The second angle I expanded to include continuity and/or change from childhood to adulthood, given that some respondents were born in Canada, and some entered Canada as infants. The third angle was somewhat imprecise, at first; but as I dug down, I noted the strong correlation between the importance of collective forming for belonging.

Ultimately, these three angles evolved into the approximate basis for the present Chapters Four, Five, and Six where I set out my analysis and findings. The first angle spoke to how respondents articulate the relationship between self, desired 'person', and the persona that materializes the desired 'person'. The second spoke to the significance of 'given' family or family of origin alongside other kinship relations for the persona. The third spoke to the kinds of renewable futures respondents make possible through collective-making. For each of the nine selected respondents I wrote memos under each of the 'angle' headings. Seeing the benefit of these memos in terms of elaborating theories, I went on to complete 'tri-angular' analyses of each of the twenty respondents. I undertook smaller analytical exercises during this process, including selecting one respondent who identified as 'refugee' and one as 'migrant' and compared their three 'angles' to identify any differences. During this phase, I also compiled lists of key quotes from across the data set. These lists were divided into first and second order quotes (according to which most strongly demonstrated a point supporting an analytical 'angle'), plus some additional quotes I thought might be useful.

Although the 'tri-angular' analysis moved me much further along, digging deeper into the data to elaborate my interpretation and theories, the process of writing what are now chapters of this dissertation represents the final phase of the data analysis process. Like Jamison (2018), it

was only the writing of several drafts of the chapters that "highlighted gaps in logic and areas where my impressions were not adequately supported by the data" (Jamison, 2018, p. 150). Thus, the process of analysis continued well into the writing of the dissertation and was open to questioning and revision at each 'stage'.

3.5 Issues, Challenges, and Limitations

In this section, I highlight and discuss some issues and challenges that arose during the study as well as some of the study's limitations.

Issues and Challenges: Defining the Sample

At the outset, the research questions appeared to delineate characteristics of participants in this study, i.e., the sample: individuals who identify as migrants or refugees; who identify as gender or sexually diverse (LGBTQ+); and who either perform drag (artists) or regularly attend drag shows (audience). Aligning participants with the research questions ought to determine criteria for who should be included in the sample. However, I encountered allied challenges in (1) *defining* who should be included in the sample, and (2) positioning my subjectivity as researcher in relation to those of the study's participants (as I explain below in Section 3.6). These challenges were understandable, though, given the study's prime concern with subjectivity, and somewhat expected; in my proposal for the study, for example, I had reflected on my positionality vis-à-vis participants as a partial 'insider' (member of the groups in the study) and partial 'outsider' (see Section 3.6).

Regarding the first challenge of defining who would be included in the sample, I relied principally on my description of the study's aims and objectives in the consent form and

accompanying email solicitation (Appendix D) that I sent individually to potential participants to establish criteria for who it was I sought to interview. I used the term 'migrants and refugees' and the umbrella initialization LGBTQ+ to indicate criteria, and deliberately left it to participants to identify themselves as such. This strategy aimed to eschew notions of a unitary subject and acknowledge the diverse and multiple subject positions of participants' social relations. The descriptor 'LGBTQ+' sought to represent a range of sexual and gender non-normative subjectivities but was, as I noted in my proposal, always incomplete and implicated in Western experiences and power/knowledge regimes. As Kong et al. (2002) point out, the notion that a discrete category of individual under the signifier 'lesbian' or 'trans' or 'queer' could "simply be called up for interviews" is "a key problem in itself" since it denies the contingency of these subject positions (p. 244). Furthermore, 'identity' markers might align well with Western liberal individuating and essentializing notions of the self, but postcolonial queer thinkers have highlighted how categories such as 'gay' pose as transhistorical, rather than situated, and are underpinned by normative, nationalist, and imperialist logics (see, for example, Cruz & Manalansan, 2002; Decena, 2008; Gopinath, 2005; Shakhsari, 2012). Homogenizing gender and sexually diverse experiences into discrete, essentialized identity categories often leads to "mere reproductions of white, middle-class, Western gay men, as if there were indeed no other subjectivities to consider" (Kong et al., 2002, p. 244). I saw it as imperative to the study to seek to include as many subject positions, desires, and relationalities as possible to reflect varied cultural constructs of sexual and gender difference and therefore welcomed self-identification. In large part, the strategy worked. In interview, respondents positioned themselves as diverse gender and sexual subjects; this information emerged directly or indirectly during their accounts. However, on one occasion a respondent, who was a migrant and a drag show audience member,

made clear during the interview that she did not identify as gender and/or sexually diverse. I bore this fact in mind when analyzing the interview data and looked at this interview separately.

One other challenge to my use of 'LGBTQ+' arose when a respondent identified herself in interview as two-spirit. I had not included the initials '2S' in the 'LGBTQ+' descriptor, even though it is common to do so in Canada, since I believed it to be an umbrella term used only by *Canadian and US* Indigenous people to index gender and sexual diversity; I had assumed Indigenous 'migrants and refugees' from countries other than these North American ones would not use the term. I assumed wrongly. Instead, I should have anticipated that Indigenous 'migrants and refugees', like the one I interviewed, who live in Canada might adopt 'Canadian' Indigenous identifiers. My not including the '2S' in the LGBTQ+ descriptor may have meant other migrant/refugee Indigenous individuals who could have taken part in the study felt excluded, thus limiting the sample in an unintended way. I proceeded with the study despite my failure to make explicit the inclusion of two-spirit folks because, firstly, I had already interviewed thirteen respondents when the two-spirit drag artist participated and made clear her two-spirit location in interview. Secondly, from the interviews I had already conducted, I could see the possible import of the study for questions of how queer/trans/non-binary subjectivities intersect with migration and refuge and performance. If I were to continue or expand on this study in the future, I would need to reassess how the study would attend to potential non-Canadian/US Indigenous participants and if as a non-Indigenous researcher, it would even be appropriate for me to conduct such a study.

The issue of defining who were 'migrants and refugees' was also a challenge and necessitated some rethinking on my part. The signifiers 'migrant' and 'refugee' are contested ones, as I outlined in the previous chapter. One respondent introduced me to another potential

participant; someone who was currently quite a big name in Toronto's community drag scene. But on reviewing the consent form, this possible participant advised me that they would exclude themself since they were a 'second-generation' migrant (their parents had migrated, but they were born in Canada). I reflected on the incident and realized that I did not have clear grounds on which to exclude experiences of (non)belonging that derived from migration even if the person was not the one who had migrated.[17] Consequently, I composed and added a note to my email solicitation defining the term 'migrant' expansively to include 'first'- and 'second-generation' migrants (as well as other commonly circulating terms such as 'seasonal worker', 'newcomer', 'immigrant'). The resulting sample thus includes 'first'- and 'second-generation' migrants and refugees. The issue of who counts as 'migrants and refugees' was salient on another occasion when a respondent disclosed, after reading my introductory email and consent form, that they were born in Canada and that their parents had not migrated to Canada. Considering my earlier stumble over 'second-generation' migrants, I agreed to continue with the interview thinking that I wanted to understand how this respondent related their experiences to the purpose of the study since they made clear that its aims resonated with them. I thought —attesting to my inexperience as a researcher— their account would expand on the data I was collecting in a generative way. But since this respondent was the only one with no migrant history, I treated this interview separately in the analysis. The issue of who to include in the sample is one that bears on what became a central concern of the subsequent analysis and findings (expounded in Chapters Four to Six): subjectivity, its formation, and its relationship to performance.

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[17] For example, Hirsch (2019) shows that 'first-generation' experiences of various racisms and the effects of anti-refugee/migrant hostility are "adapted into the experiences of the 'second generation' refugees" (p. 102). Thus, I was prompted to expand my recruitment criteria to be more inclusive of such experiences.

Issues and Challenges: Interviewing and Gaps in the Narratives

Being new to interviewing research participants, my inexperience showed up in a few ways. For example, some interviewees spoke quickly, without much pause nor prompting, and I needed to interrupt more forcefully but failed to. Other respondents made me work harder to keep a conversational flow going. For example, one respondent who has worked professionally as a drag artist for some time in the commercial Toronto drag scene responded to my questions with a succinctness that I supposed came from having been frequently interviewed (by journalists?) about his drag performance. I also realized — too late, after the interview was conducted— that I had not probed a few respondents enough about the details of their migration so that when I was reconstructing their narratives, I could have that detail to hand. For example, one respondent narrated how they arrived in Canada but was (deliberately?) ambiguous on the matter of whether they entered as a refugee or in another migrant category. This occasional gap in detail or imprecision may also be related to a common and significant limitation methodologists identify in the in-depth interview format "that the interviewee has the ability to construct a world the veracity of which is usually difficult to check" (Morris, 2015, p. 7; Johnson, 2002). This is not to say that interviewees deliberately include inaccurate details — interviewees will generally do their best to be accurate (Rubin & Rubin, 2004)— but rather potentially speaks to issue of memory incompleteness or faultiness (Forsey, 2012; Kong et al., 2002).

Limitations: Lack of Generalizability

I want to emphasize that in this qualitative study, no generalizability can be derived from the data and its analysis. Two issues related to the sample bear on this lack of generalizability.

One, as I noted above in Section 3.2.1, relying on my personal networks for recruitment meant the sample was inevitably shaped by my social location. Two, my conclusions in this study have very limited extendibility beyond the sample. The following chapters where I set out my findings form a cohesive argument based on the narratives of a selected eight interviews. I chose these interviews because each of them provided narratives that addressed in detail the three 'angles' of my analysis; these eight were largely reflective of the themes that manifest from other interviews, but where the other interviews may have made explicit one or two angles, all three were encapsulated more holistically in the selected eight. I do not posit these eight as representative of more than the data collected, and my findings cannot be simply extended to any population that is the intersection of queer/trans/non-binary, migrant/refugee, and drag artist.

3.6 Reflexivity

Since a shift toward reflexivity in methodologies propelled by feminist researchers in the 1980s as well as works like Bourdieu's (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Kong et al., 2002), any ethical approach to qualitative research requires an ongoing examination of the subjectivities and positionalities of researcher and participants (Court & Abbas, 2013). Researchers need to "examine their personal characteristics, positionality, and the intersubjective elements in the research encounter that shape and to an extent transform the research enterprise and findings as a whole" (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020, p. 583). This commitment entails a readiness on the part of the researcher to self-interrogate their actions throughout the research process. Kong et al. (2002) suggest some elementary questions: "Am I describing the research correctly? Does this [respondent] understand the concepts/language I am putting forward? Am I presenting enough information about myself and my research for this [respondent] to make an informed choice?" (p. 252). Such self-questioning is even more necessary when the research,

implicates multiple marginalized groups, such as this present study and its focus on queer/trans/non-binary migrants and refugees. Further, the research questions that drove this study were very much concerned with subjectivity and its contingency. As researcher, I had to take account of the "personal, cultural, academic, intellectual, historical" spaces I occupied in the process of knowledge production (Kong et al., 2002, p. 249).

Reflexivity: Researcher Positionality

Positionality entails a "self-consciousness" (Charmaz, 2017b, p. 36) of how power intersects and situates me in relation to respondents in the study and them to me in terms of privilege and marginalization. My experiences of migration, queerness, and drag performance steered me towards this study; yet these experiences are mediated by being white, speaking English as a first language, working in a middle-class academic milieu, and not depending on drag as a source of income. In signaling that these experiences position me, I am aware that reflexivity and self-positioning can end up drawing the (especially, white) researcher into a narcissistic, confessional modality that rather defeats the purpose (Dunbar et al., 2002). What's more, there is a risk that such "self-consciousness" may result in an "oddly nonreflexive, a kind of semiautomatic juxtapositioning of the researcher's narrative alongside the participants'" (Court & Abbas, 2013, p. 487). To counter these tendencies, I sought to view myself in the research process as what Rothberg (2019) calls an "implicated subject"; that is, someone who "is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles" (Rothberg, 2019, p. 1). The interaction between a respondent and me at any given moment in the interview positioned and re-positioned each of us repeatedly; as Pitman

(2002) notes, power is "diffuse and insidious" (p. 286). My subjectivity in the interviews could be alternatively 'insider' or 'outsider' (with respect to the respondent's social location) or both simultaneously, which aligns with Adu-Ampong and Adams' (2020) finding that researcher insider-ness/outsider-ness "is never a settled status but one in constant flux and negotiation" (p. 591).

Reflexivity: Positionality and Self-Disclosure in the Interviews

Interviewing as a practice reflects the production of the modern self, offering "a relatively new sense of who and what we are as human beings" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 8) and thus exemplifying what Foucault referred to as 'technologies of the self'. By investigating subjective experiences, the interview is "one more technical display of a disciplined regimen of interviewer/author power over subjects" (Kong et al., 2002, p. 245). In the questions and responses of the interview, subjects are discursively produced and positioned by a knowledge/power regime. Where the interviewees are racially, sexually, or otherwise minoritized, the interviewer/researcher, therefore, needs to adopt a "pragmatic ethical strategy" (Kong et al., 2002, p. 251) that makes explicit their own positionality and "accords the subject all the humanity he or she deserves" (Dunbar et al., 2002, p. 281). Such ethics are attentive to the racialized, sexualized, etc. subjectivity of the interviewee, and are thus vital for the "interviewer's understanding of what the respondent is saying, why he or she might remain silent in relation to particular interview topics", and how the interviewer should work to create conditions in which the respondent feels open and willing to speak candidly (ibid.). Histories of white interviewers exploiting racialized interview subjects as well as others "who have not traditionally been accorded viable subjectivities in their own right" stress the necessity for

greater "procedural consciousness" on the part of interviewers who are white or from other socio-culturally dominant groups (ibid.).

One specific ethical strategy that I employed in the interviews was self-disclosure. Thanks especially to feminist methodologists, it is now quite common for researchers to employ a "interactive" style of interviewing, where the interviewer acknowledges any shared feelings and identification with the interviewee (Ellis & Berger, 2002). In-depth interviewing encourages reciprocal disclosure as essential to fostering dialogue (Johnson, 2002). Reciprocity engenders trust, and self-disclosure is integral to subject-making and (ethno-racial and other) positioning within the interview process. An exchange of experiences and stories influences the "kinds of subjects [interviewees] will be, as well as what kind of subject they take me to be as the interviewer" (Dunbar et al., 2002, p. 294). Therefore, I began each interview by asking respondents if I could take a few minutes to share something about myself as it relates to the research. I briefly spoke about how I came to Canada and how I came to drag performance. Dunbar et al. (2002) propose that "[w]hen I pull from my own experience as it relates to the subject, it conveys to them the message that I 'really' understand" (p. 294). I did not go as far as suggesting I "'really' understand"; but I did want to convey that "I have been sensitized through lived experience to [at least, some of the] issues I'm asking participants to talk with me about" (Allen et al., 2018, p. 218). Again, my ethno-racial, class, sexual, and gender positions situate me variously as an outsider and insider in terms of migration, queerness, and drag.

Two examples are illustrative of the ongoing negotiation and fluidity of my positioning vis-à-vis respondents in the interview process. One was when I asked one respondent if he would like any of his Iranian family to see him perform in drag. He recalled how positively his parents responded to his coming out to them: "I had monologues ready to go, to defend my honour, and

they're like, 'we love you!' I was like, 'this is not fair.'" (Ramin, 2021). We both laughed, recognizing the humour in how his parents had flaunted a script of homophobic rejection. At that moment —and I am surmising here— we seemed to access a complicity as two English-speaking, queer-identified individuals in Canada that depended on how we instantly recognized that well-worn, culturally-scripted queer family drama. But this respondent was, perhaps, also teasing me as a white interlocutor with reference to equally widely circulating homonationalist assumptions that tag 'Iranian' with homophobia.

Another example is how a respondent repeatedly brought attention to and rejected the power dynamic of interviewer/interviewee. When she was describing to me how she saw the relationship between her drag persona and everyday self as an ever-present duality, she paused briefly to find the right words: "Oh, my God… you have the words… But it's not your interview, it's my interview" (Samantha, 2021). Making sure I knew she was the one in charge and that this was her story to tell as she liked, she positioned me as a colonial white researcher who spoke English as a first rather than her additional language, or as she put it earlier in the interview, an immigrant who "look[s] like the ones, like the ones that are okay here" (Samantha, 2021). At another point, the respondent described how the owner of a cabaret club she used to perform in tried to insist that she and her drag colleagues mingle with the audience following the show, forcing them to work unpaid and against their will. The respondent exclaimed, "no one tells me what to do! Not even in this interview!" (Samantha, 2021). These interventions that the respondent made in the interview process also alerted me thematically to the importance she placed on asserting her will in the face of what I call in my analysis 'disconfirming forces'. It was possible, that I, as interviewer, could be experienced as a disconfirming force.

Reflexivity: Respondent Reticence and Silence

I want to call attention, too, to some of the instructive silences in the interviews, or if not silences, then the fact that some respondents were much more succinct in their responses than others. Some reasons for this may have been to do with how comfortable respondents felt with me personally, how much affinity they felt with me in the interview environment I tried to create. For example, a few respondents who are currently commercially successful and have high profiles in the Toronto commercial drag scene may have viewed me as too much of a drag outsider, given that I perform infrequently, part-time, and have a community rather than commercial orientation. Further, given their commercial success, they may have viewed me as more of a journalistic rather than academic interviewer (as I mention above in Section 3.5.2), and their brief responses could have been due to their professional experience with interviews. Another reason may have been my whiteness since "interviewers must always be vigilant for the ways [race] becomes insinuated into all aspects of identity and self-presentation, either by assertion or through silence" (Dunbar et al., 2002, p. 280). Some respondents may have been more reticent and "thoughtful subjects" (Dunbar et al., 2002, p. 290), especially in naming race or not naming it, as a way of negotiating an interviewer's whiteness. Such issues also highlight the problem of representation —especially when a white researcher is writing about what racialized subjects tell them in interview. How respondents presented and represented their selves was the very focus of the interviews, and so how I re-present those selves was and is my primary concern. In the following chapters, my analysis, findings, and discussion seek to "do justice to their experience" by "reflexively engag[ing] subjects in terms that can capture these complexities of their lives" (Dunbar et al., 2002, p. 296).

I turn now to setting out the findings from my analysis of the data and discuss their implications in the following Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Through each chapter, I argue, based primarily on the narratives of eight selected respondents, that the migrant/refugee drag artists in this study authorize through their drag personas —and across time and space— a desired (but often denied) 'person' that extends beyond their internally located self. This self-authorization draws on many resources, but 'given' family or family-of-origin is a significant one. Ultimately, the drag artists' desires are for more than an individual 'person' but for collectivities through which queer futures of relationality and intergenerational renewal can be glimpsed.

4. "The Person Inside That Dress": Author(iz)ing the Self Through Drag Persona

4.1 Introduction

The following three chapters present and analyze data generated from the twenty-two interviews. Unfolding in this analysis is a view of drag personas as significant inner resource for participants affected by forced migration. Participants narrate their adult drag in their newcomer Canadian present with a palpable sense of how the past —before migration and/or before adulthood— and the future are materialized in their drag creations. Each of the three chapters is broadly oriented toward the temporal direction taken in these narrations. The first data analysis chapter centres on participants' current circumstances. In the second, participants recall past lives. In the third, participants narrate the present present toward future be(com)ing. Organizing the chapters this way, I invite respondents to narrate self-conception temporally without linearity. I follow Bacchetta and colleagues (2015) in affirming that racialized queer, trans, and non-binary persons, as are the respondents in this study, pose translocal and transnational challenges to "the dominant temporality of the nation" with its gestures toward (white queer) linear 'progress' arraigned in contrast to "racialized immobility" (p. 771).

In this first chapter, I begin by introducing eight of the twenty-two respondents. These eight serve as representative illustrations of how drag personas incorporate a multitude of social, cultural, political, and other resources that respondents utilize to author(ize), or validate, their 'person'. I introduce each of the eight representative respondents with a short biographical sketch. Sections 4.4 through 4.7 focus on the kinds of negating social forces respondents face; the kinds of self-authorizing responses —decisions respondents make— that counter disconfirming forces; the way respondents authorize the self through the cultivation of 'we'

groups or collectivities; and the significance of respondents' desire to unite self with 'person'. Before turning to the participants, I outline some contextualizing theoretical concepts from relevant secondary literature.

4.2 Context: From the Refugee 'Object' to Self-Authorization and the Queer Diasporic Subject

Scholars of critical refugee studies repeatedly highlight how the discourse of 'refugeeness' denies agency to subjects forced to assume the juridical marker 'refugee'. They note that the category 'refugee' fails to account for the multidimensionality of belonging(s) that refugee persons experience (Lacroix, 2004; Malkki, 1995). Nationalist narratives and border regimes position refugees as 'diminished' persons —not subjects but 'objects', who are 'saved' or 'rescued' by liberal democracies. Queer critics also note how LGBTQ+ refugees are coopted by homonationalist discourses (Wright, 2018). As a counter to these Western 'rescue' logics, Kyriakides and colleagues (2018, 2019) propose a framework for reading refugee experiences as narratives of 'self-rescue'. In this framework, subjects narrate how they renegotiate ascribed 'refugeeness' by drawing on the resources of their pre-conflict social selves, asserting their "eligibility to exist" and "authority to act"; that is, they narrate decisions made that evince social status or esteem, thus affirming their agency or "existential authority". In this chapter and the two subsequent, I seek to extend Kyriakides et al.'s framework by attending to the ways racialized refugee *and other migrant* respondents in my study variously contest racist, (homo)nationalist, and cis-hetero or homonormative forces that disconfirm their social selves. I argue that they do so by narrating how they authorize their 'person' across spatial and temporal borders through drag personas that draw on sexual, gender, ethno-racial, and cultural resources to assert their agency and their multidimensional belonging. This self-authorization is manifest, as

respondents narrate, in decisions and choices they make in response to multiple disconfirming forces; deliberative decisions that are embodied in their drag personas.

I situate participant narratives of racialized refugee/migrant self-authorization via drag in relation to the concept of queer diaspora (Allen, 2012; Brah, 2005; Davis, 2021; Eng, 2010; Fortier, 2003; Garvey, 2011; Gopinath, 2005, 2018; Rouhani, 2019; Lord, 2015; Ly, 2019; Rodríguez, 2020; Walcott, 2016; Wesling, 2008). In traditional conceptualizations of diaspora, exiles are from a "lost homeland". Dominant nationalist ideologies are thus supported by fantasies of an 'authentic' culture, "racial purity", and "filiation", as well as by "the structuring heteronormative logics of gender and sexuality" (Eng, 2010, p. 13). These conventional diasporic notions position the dyad 'queer/diaspora' as a poor facsimile of 'heterosexuality/nation' (Gopinath, 2005). The disconfirming forces queer diasporic subjects face are entwined with the ideologies of conventional diaspora (family, nation, etc). Queering diaspora exposes racist, (homo)nationalist, cis-heteronormative, & cis-homonormative logics of authenticity, purity, and reproduction to direct contestation from "the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive" queer (Gopinath, 2005, p. 11). But Gopinath (2005) warns that positioning racialized queer migrant subjects as simply a "threat" to home, family, community, and nation and "perennially outside the confines of these entities" must be avoided (p. 15). Long histories of resisting racisms and colonialisms mean that home, family, community, and nation are weighted differently for racialized queers than for white queers; the relationship of racialized queer migrants to these categories is complex. When racialized queer diasporic refugees/migrants contest these ideologies, they reshape them according to their existence. As I begin to outline in this chapter and flesh out in the two subsequent, I suggest that when it comes to belonging for (racialized) refugee/migrant drag artists, the authentic coincides or cohabits with the inauthentic, filiation

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with affinity, and family with relationality in their processes of self-creation. My premise is adjacent to Muñoz's (1999) influential concept of racialized queer disidentification, i.e., identifying simultaneously within and against the hegemonic in cultures. Similarly, I suggest the spaces of belonging opened up by racialized refugee/migrant drag artists in their self-authorizing performances exceed binary oppositions in traditional and queer diaspora frameworks.

4.3 An Initial Note About 'Person' and 'Persona'

The quote embedded in this chapter's title comes from Samantha, one of the eight representative respondents around whom the chapter is organized (each is introduced below).[18] The full phrase she uses is the "person inside that dress that wants more than just applause" (Samantha, 2021). The 'more' refers to the various forms of social justice that Samantha seeks to achieve (see Section 4.7). This utterance indicates something of how Samantha views the relationship between the 'person' (internal) and the 'persona' (the externally located "dress"). Samantha's narrative is instructive on many levels, but at this point, the most salient fact is that she posits no effective separation between Samantha and [non-drag name]; she suggests that one *is* and/or *equals* the other. But in this quoted utterance, she, nonetheless, makes an internal/external distinction between 'person' and 'persona'. This uncoupling reveals how Samantha internally understands her self is not yet the 'person' she desires to be. The 'persona' is a materializing of the desired 'person'. The 'person' she desires is not yet possible because the external conditions of the world in which Samantha lives are far from what is desirable and, indeed, they conspire to negate her self. These negating social, political, cultural, etc., conditions I refer to as 'disconfirming' in that they seek to deny 'personhood'. Respondents like Samantha

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[18] Interview conducted on May 17, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

pursue (across time and space as I intend to make clear in these chapters), to use her own term, a desired "unity" between the (internal) self and the desired but externally denied 'person' *through* the creation of a drag self/persona. To sum up roughly, Samantha's internal self is not yet reconciled with the 'person' she desires to be because external conditions place pressures on how one is viewed and recognized; however, the creation of a 'persona' (in this case, Samantha) is means to externally validate (I use the term 'authorize') what external forces seek to deny. Specifically, these forces take in racializing and sexualizing processes, various racisms, various nationalisms that include homonationalism and homotransnationalism (Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2011), cis-hetero and homonormativities, and more as I will illustrate.

Respondents were asked, in one way or another, to reflect on how they viewed the relationship between 'person' and 'persona'. Among the respondents in this chapter, KeroPatra/Kero seemed to echo Samantha when they stated that "[the persona] is not a different identity, it's just KeroPatra; it's Kero on the *inside* of who [they are]" (my emphasis).[19] Hernando/Alejandra posited the utility of her persona as a" cover up" since she does not wish to disclose her lesbian sexuality to her parents, but at the same time, it is a 'cover up' "that lets you be fully who you feel *you truly are inside*" (my emphasis),[20] echoing Core's (1984) well-known dictum about camp being 'the lie that tells the truth'. Another respondent, Masha/Ruslan, narrated how their husband left them because the persona Masha inhabited much of the couple's everyday lives. Masha/Ruslan attributes their husband's desertion to their desire to erase any boundary between 'person' and 'persona':" I realized I wanna be myself! We cannot live these two lives".[21] Chabuca/Rico jokingly describes the relationship between his 'persona' Chabuca

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[19] Interviews conducted on March 5 and 25, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.
[20] Interview conducted on February 2, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.
[21] Interview conducted on January 17, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

and the 'person' Rico in sexual terms: Chabuca's the top, Rico's the bottom. Notably, Chabuca/Rico equates the "wig" with a "permission" and "freedom" that his everyday 'person' does not quite have.[22] One more respondent, Naomi/Victor, narrates multiple moves from country to country and away from conflict and other disconfirming conditions as a shifting of desired 'person' to desired 'person'; ultimately, "coming here [to Canada], I had to be a whole different person all over again".[23] As I continue with the discussion in this chapter, I will explore further the relationship respondents saw between desired (but denied) 'person' and the 'persona' that seeks to materialize the 'person', and I will return to this tension repeatedly in these chapters.

4.4 Conditions that Disconfirm the Self

In this section, I engage the situations of two of eight representative respondents. These participants illustrate how they experience their internal sense of self disconfirmed by external social forces related to their (forced) migration and resettlement. Symbolic interactionists posit the self as contingent on social —that is, interpersonal— processes (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1962; Mead & Carreira da Silva, 2011; Goffman, 1959). These processes are situated within larger social structures and contexts (Suter et al., 2008). Individual actions present a self that others may validate or may deny (Suter et al., 2008, p. 29). As this chapter will elucidate, respondents seek unity between the self that they understand themselves to be and a desired 'person', which they experience as externally denied, by social, cultural, political, and economic factors. These factors encompass inequitable social conditions and power disparities in the categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, and more. When I refer to disconfirmation, I mean the negation or denial

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[22] Interview conducted on May 10, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.
[23] Interview conducted on June 26, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

of a desired 'person' by external social, cultural, political, etc., forces. Again, these forces include various racisms, nationalisms, cis-hetero and homonormativities, and more.

KeroPatra/Kero

KeroPatra InDeNile AKA Kero moved to Canada from Egypt with their parents and extended family in the late 1980s when they were three years old. A grandfather and two aunts were already in Canada. Their family are Coptic Orthodox Christians. They describe their reasons for leaving Egypt as due to religious (Muslim/Christian) tensions in Egypt at the time. The desire to secure better (educational) opportunities for their children were also factors in their parents' decision to move. Growing up in Montreal, Kero and their family were entirely centred on faith and the Church. Still in high school, Kero came out to their parents and priests, who responded with violence. They subsequently left home for Toronto to live with a partner and completed post-secondary studies. A series of traumatic events led them to experience homelessness. On the invite of a Coptic priest cousin, Kero moved to Kenya, where they worked in orphanages for HIV+ children. There they met and married an American man, with whom they relocated to Washington DC. Kero became a priest in the Old Catholic Church and worked in the HIV/AIDS field. Following a divorce, they relocated to Toronto where they continue to work in the sexual health sector.

Kero narrates interactions with Canadian state bureaucracy where their ethno-cultural location as a Coptic Egyptian is elided: "You're either placed [on forms] as an Arab or a Middle Eastern. But we're actually neither; we're North African" (Kero, 2021). Such experiences demonstrate how Kero's belonging in the nation is foreclosed by racializing processes since they are (dis)placed within what Tenorio (2019) calls diasporic "cartographies of erasure" (p. 64).

This displacement or misplacement, where the specificity of Kero's Coptic Egyptian-ness is erased, is similar to the experiences of queer diasporic Armenians in the United States. Sargsyan (2021) chronicles how the "racially ambiguous ethnolocality" (p. 53) of diasporic Armenians means they are subject to "a collective policing (who can belong and under what conditions) through (dis)placement" (p. 52). When ethno-culturally positioned with inaccuracy by the state, Kero experiences an erasure and an exclusion from belonging. Kero desires that their ethno-cultural location be included in national belonging, but the racist structures of the Canadian state that so readily conflate and elide incongruent ethno-racial and ethno-cultural locations deny inclusion to them. Such experiences that deny Kero's belonging are a prime example of how the desired self is here negated, i.e., disconfirmed, by external social and political conditions. What's more, Kero identifies their experiences as a neocolonial disconfirmation of self: "Egypt has been colonized so many times to the point of erasing our history, that when I call myself Egyptian *Canadian*, I feel like I'm colonizing myself" (Kero, 2021). Kero experiences the possibility of a hybrid ethno-cultural location as Egyptian *and* Canadian as a disconfirming negation of Egyptian-ness; one that extends, as they state, the compound colonial erasures of Egypt's history. Kero, instead, locates themself vis-à-vis the Canadian nation as a diasporic Egyptian and refuses the ascription of 'Canadian'.

Kero's sense of Egyptian-ness is intertwined with their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith, which they position as an ethnic 'purity' ("I'm 100% pure Coptic Egyptian"; Kero, 2021). Like the queer diasporic Armenians of Sargsyan's (2021) study, the racist erasure of Kero's ethno-cultural location in Canada and their exclusion from the nation is complemented by the cis-heteronormative Coptic diaspora's erasure of Kero's queerness and gender identity. Specifically,

both Kero's Coptic parents and their Church responded with homophobic violence to Kero's disclosure of their queerness:

> [My dad] held that [spatula with hot oil] close to my face, and was like, 'you're an embarrassment, a disgrace to the family.' And then all of a sudden, the priests pinned me down to the ground, and... [*voice breaks*] sorry, and they tried to do exorcism on me. (Kero, 2021)

This anti-queer violence, propelled by a religious homophobia, Kero rightly identifies as "trauma after trauma" (Kero, 2021). As a queer member of the Coptic Egyptian diaspora in Canada, experienced a kind of double exile: a migration forced on their family (due to Muslim-Christian conflict in Egypt) and an exile from family and Church (Kero was ejected from the family home and the Coptic community). This second homophobic exile from family/Church, in fact, engendered a third exile; one of Kero's sense of alienation from their Coptic Egyptian location: "I wasn't okay with [being Egyptian]. I was always pretending to be something I'm not" (Kero, 2021). However, Kero's sense of exile from Coptic Egyptian-ness evolved. An encounter with an Indigenous two-spirit person prompted Kero (1) to identify their gender as non-binary and, since this two-spirit person hailed them as an 'Indigenous' Egyptian, (2) to re-assert their Egyptian-ness ("that's when I start taking pride in being Egyptian"; Kero, 2021). This affirmation was all the more essential to Kero, who not only faced conditions of homophobia and cis-heteronormativity from their family and Church, but what's more, "toxic masculinity [...] and the misogyny among gay men, cisgender men" (Kero, 2021) in queer collectivities combined to further disconfirm their self. Kero's gender repositioning as non-binary and ethno-cultural repositioning as an 'Indigenous' Egyptian seek to negotiate a desired 'person' in the face of a multitude of negating forces. These included diasporic conditions of exile; racist exclusion from

the nation; homophobic violence as well as cis-heteronormative erasure and exile from their family and Church; and misogyny from cis gay men.

Masha/Ruslan

Masha Dick'son AKA Ruslan is a bigender Kyrgyz Russian person. They were born and grew up in the Kaliningrad enclave between Lithuania and Poland. Following school, they trained as a professional dancer and worked as a dancer with touring companies and as a fitness trainer in Moscow. In Moscow, they engaged in LGBTQ+ activist work that made them a target of police harassment and persecution. In 2009, the fitness company they worked for sent Ruslan to Canada to train in a Pilates technique that they were to bring back to Russia. On arrival they applied for asylum based on their history of persecution in Russia.

In Canada, Ruslan experiences the effects of Orientalizing tropes that position and sexualize Eastern European refugee/migrant women in Western imaginaries as hyper-feminized, exploitative, gold-digging sex workers: "I inherited that image of Eastern European women abroad in the Western countries" (Ruslan, 2021). Such 'images' pose a threat to Canadian heteronormative and nationalist constructions of family, reproduction, and monogamy (see, for example, Connolly, 2018; Erentaitė, 2010; Spyrou, 2013). Ruslan 'inherits' or receives these racializing stereotypes as responding to a certain "reality" (Ruslan, 2021) they experienced following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s where migration to Western countries in pursuit of marriage to a wealthy man was "the only way they [Eastern European women] know how to survive" (Ruslan, 2021). Indeed, Ruslan's drag persona, Masha —as I explain in the next two chapters— responds to, incorporates, and re-signifies these self-disconfirming tropes of Russian and Eastern European migrant/refugee women as a re-imagined representation of

Ruslan's combined histories of seeking refuge and feminine gender identity. Nonetheless, this racist sexualization of Eastern European women is of apiece with what Ruslan experiences as disconfirming external conditions in terms of their ethno-cultural and gender locations. For Ruslan, racial inequities (alongside other unequal social and economic relations) in the West contrast with a putative 'Soviet' racial equality: "at least [in] the Soviet Union they taught us Black people are our friends, our brothers. […] When I came here, and I'm like, 'What is going on in this world?'" (Ruslan, 2021). The many inequities of the Canadian 'world' where Ruslan sought refuge from anti-queer persecution, coupled with the racist stereotyping, alert Ruslan ("'What is going on…?'") to white homonationalism that excludes them from belonging.

In addition to sexualized and gendered racism, Ruslan experiences sexual marginalization and transmisogyny among gay men in Canada due to their feminine gender location:

> when I came to Canada, [I'm] in a free country, and I feel still kind of disconnected with myself. Disconnected with the gay community based on that feminine gay guys are not desirable as are macho type of gay guys. […] It was very, very, kind of surprising for me. You live in a free country; you can express the way you want, blah, blah... But I realize that I'm still living that stereotype of being a gay male, which is a male still, like, [*lowers tone of voice*] a man man, like you have to be. (Ruslan, 2021)

In Ruslan's account, Canadian gay male collectivities revolve around an economy of desire that privileges masculinity and generates (trans)misogyny, and so Ruslan's experience as a femme-identified person is one of disconfirmation of self ("disconnected with myself"). What's more, Ruslan's positioning of Canada as a "free country" is shaped by queer liberal (Eng, 2010), homonationalist (Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2011) discourses that configure Western countries in terms of their sexual exceptionalism. Canada as a "free country" is also juxtaposed with Ruslan's own experience of Soviet/Russian illiberalism toward sexual dissidents. And yet, the gender 'freedom' that Ruslan desired is denied in disconfirming conditions of queer (trans)misogyny and gender normativity, undercutting any putative Canadian sexual exceptionalism. Ultimately,

Ruslan's experience of gendered exclusion among Canadian gay men culminates in their separation from their husband since he denied and rejected Ruslan's femininity (expressed through their drag persona, Masha) in their everyday relationship. The husband's response to Ruslan's femininity may be viewed as an example of aggression toward trans and gender non-binary people —bigender people specifically—, stemming from "binary normativity" (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2020) and a further disconfirmation of Ruslan's desired personhood.

In this section, I have outlined, through Kero and Ruslan's narrations, some of the ways respondents in my study face a disjuncture between external and internal conditions of their existence; experiences that deny their desired 'person', that negate or, rather, *disconfirm* the self. Both Kero and Ruslan experience racist social forces that seek to exclude them from belonging in Canada and erase the realities of their ethno-racial and ethno-cultural locations. Both non-binary Kero and bigender Ruslan also experience misogyny and cis-heteronormativity from cis gay male collectivities that disconfirm their selves. In Kero's case, these negations of self are compounded by their family and Church's homophobic violence. As I will show, this rejection of queerness within an ethno-cultural diaspora of exiles is echoed (less violently) in the narration of another respondent, Haresh. The kind of sexualization and racialization (Omi & Winant, 2019) experienced by Ruslan via racist stereotyping of Eastern European women is reflected in a more embodied way by Samantha, the final respondent of the eight representative ones. Samantha identifies how racist conditions of disconfirmation shaped her sexualized consumption ("I was a piece of meat; I was wanted"; Samantha, 2021) in Toronto's homonationalist 'gay' Village and her racialized exclusion from a white national polity ("outside the bed, we're not wanted"; Samantha, 2021). In the following section, I introduce Ramin and Alejandra to illustrate ways

these representative respondents engage their drag personas to counter external conditions that disconfirm their self.

4.5 Author(iz)ing the Self

Dina/Ramin

Dina AKA Ramin arrived in Canada as a five-year-old in the 1990s. His family (parents and older sister) left Iran a decade after the revolution. Ramin was born in a refugee camp in Germany, and through Canadian sponsors, the family settled in a western Canadian city, where he went to school. He moved to a larger city as a young adult to pursue acting school and acting as a profession. Ramin decided to write his own scripts and created a show built around an Iranian immigrant persona, Dina. He relocated to Toronto in 2014 to continue developing his performance career.

When seeking acting work, Ramin regularly experienced the neocolonial, Orientalizing assumptions of Islamophobic discourse. He was offered "tokenizing, terrorist parts"; "getting asked to do all these weird accents" that disconfirmed the self.[24] Describing the roles he would be offered as 'weird' provides insight into how Ramin experienced this Islamophobia as conditions of an alienating exclusion from the nation. Ramin's Persian ethno-cultural location is obscured, erased, and silenced amid white racial fears that lump together disparate ethno-racial and cultural identities into a vague but threatening racialized 'other'. Faced with such a negating disconfirmation of self, Ramin countered by writing his own material and building a show around a drag persona, Dina. The one-person show Ramin created was a space where he would

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[24] Interview conducted on February 9, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto. Dina and Ramin are pseudonyms.

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have complete authorial control, where he would both *author* ("write") and thus *authorize* (i.e,

validate) his own cultural scripts of the 'person' he desired to be. As he explains,

> [Dina] was the first time where I was able to write something and be like, 'this is what I think about immigration. This is what I think about straight people, this is what I think about racism and homophobia […] and nobody can tell me that this is incorrect. (Ramin, 2021)

Ramin's persona of Dina directly contests the disconfirming conditions of Islamophobia he

experienced as a working actor. Dina is a vehicle through which Ramin overwrites the scripts of

Islamophobia and educates white, non-migrant, and heteronormative audiences about Ramin's

experiences of queerness, Persian-ness, and 'refugeeness'. With these agentive acts of self-

authoring, Ramin *authorizes* the self and locates himself within queer and Persian diasporas in

the face of white Islamophobic attempts to disconfirm. Indeed, Dina satirizes and ultimately

defuses white Islamophobia. Commenting on Dina's performances in a very white, rural venue,

Ramin narrates: "by the end, some of these old men were like grabbing me and […] giving

[Dina] kisses on the cheek. […] I think they just were like, 'Oh, you're not a terrorist! You're not

going to kill us'" (Ramin, 2021). Thus, Dina transmutes white fear into white relief. What's

more, the resources Dina draws on to effectuate this transmutation are primarily ethno-cultural

ones. For example, Dina's interactions with her audiences are modelled after *taarof*, a Persian

politeness etiquette that prioritizes guest comfort over host: "if people are in your house, you

serve everyone before you serve yourself; you take care of everyone before you take care of

yourself" (Ramin, 2021). This host willingness to please is not gendered (although potential

gender differences in the deployment of *taarof* have been researched; see Mahdavi, 2013). But it

is notable that in the above quote, old white (and likely predominantly heterosexual) men in

Dina's audience are disarmed by a bearded drag performer to the point of embracing her

performance of woman-ness, so invested are they in her Persian 'charms'. As the quote illustrates, Ramin's understanding of *taarof* emphasizes a de-centring of the self in favour of the other. Deployed in Dina's performances, the de-centred self of *taarof* functions to re-centre ethno-culturally the self that Islamophobia had disconfirmed; Ramin's desired Persian-ness that was externally denied. The deliberate decision Ramin makes to fold resources from his ethno-cultural inheritance into the persona Dina demonstrates a self-authorization that contests the disconfirming Islamophobia he experiences. In fact, Ramin also draws on familial resources to realize this re-centring of Persian-ness via Dina as I detail and explain in the next chapter.

Although queerness is not a site of disconfirmation when it comes to his immediate family in Canada, Ramin does not feel this affirmation would extend to other family in Canada and Iran. Ramin's perceptions of Iranian attitudes to dissident sexualities are circumscribed both by homotransnationalist (Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2011), Orientalizing discourses about queer Iran in the West (see, for example, Rouhani, 2019) and by heteronormative and nationalist (mis)representations of Persian cultural attitudes in Iranian diasporas (see Shakhsari, 2012). Thus, when Dina's audience includes other Persians, Ramin's experience of performance can be an invalidating one: "there's also always this bit of fear of like are Iranian people going to try to hang me or start, you know, harassing me or whatever" (Ramin, 2021).[25] As means to contest these disconfirming conditions, Ramin places Dina's performances online so that they are accessible to young, queer people in Iran. This decision highlights how Ramin cultivates self-authorization and representation in the context of a transnational queer Persian audience. He receives affirming messages from her queer Iranian fans who "tell me like, how much hope they

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[25] Karimi's (2021) study of gay male Iranian refugees' experiences of reception and integration in Canada highlights respondents' perceptions of homophobia among non-queer Iranian diaspora as a "barrier" to "feelings of belonging" in diasporic Iranian communities and, in turn, belonging in Canada (p. 2869).

get from me and how like, 'thank you for making content for us'" (Ramin, 2021). Cyberspace offers a domain of exchange where the diversity, including sexual diversity, of young Iranian and Iranian diasporic lives may be mutually affirmed (Graham & Khosravi, 2002), despite conditions that disconfirm queerness. Indeed, Dina online opens virtual space of collectivity for Ramin to authorize the self in queer terms which belie Orientalist scripts that contort or deny the reality of queer existence in Iran (Shakhsari, 2012). In the next section, I develop this point about building queer (trans)local and transnational collectivities as a further self-authorizing strategy, and in Chapter Six, I focus on the significance of these collectivities for queer future-making.

Hernando/Alejandra

Hernando AKA Alejandra worked in the arts sector in her home city in Mexico. Her sister was already living in Canada when Alejandra decided to move to Canada, too, to attend film school. She cites desiring to assert her lesbian identity, avoiding local cartel-related violence, and pursuing her career as motives for moving. She has not disclosed her sexual orientation to her parents, with whom she enjoys a close relationship (as with all her family). The sister of her then-boss in Mexico was moving to Canada at the same time, and the two moved in together as roommates. Alejandra's work in Canada is performance-centred (including drag and stand-up comedy). Her performances draw on singing and dancing skills she trained in as a child in Mexico. Connections within Canadian queer 'Latinx' communities have facilitated the pursuit of her arts career.

Hernando/Alejandra performs as part of a 'boyband' trio of drag kings; the other two members are of other queer 'Latinx' diasporic locations (Colombian and Peruvian). Audiences are largely (not exclusively) cis and trans women and non-binary people in queer 'Latinx'

diasporas along with other queers of colour in venues that are more community focused than commercially centred. Through their original and lip-synced songs, the band have a strategy for addressing the political concerns of their audiences: "we're going to talk about consent and we're going to talk about *machismo* culture. And we're going to do it in Spanglish".[26] Moreman & McIntosh (2010) argue that 'Latinx' performance "carries resistant potentialities into community lives" (p. 117) in that it typically extends beyond the stage to critique hegemonic social and cultural forces that impact 'Latinx' diasporas. Hernando draws on a repertoire of songs that appeal to a wide range of Latin American national cultures. Alejandra recognizes the impact this choice of songs (decisions she makes) has on her queer diasporic audience: "I love when we have Latinx people who are immigrants […] and we play that ['Latinx' boy band megamix]; you can see them in the audience be like, '[*gasps*]!' Cuz it's like we're playing to their nostalgia" (Alejandra, 2021). Tenorio (2019) believes such drag performances, which involve the repetition, especially lip-syncing, of popular songs, both contemporary and remembered, point to "nostalgic nationalism, intermixing temporality, experience, and queer cultural production" as means to generate "belonging mediated by a sonic affectivity within global queer imaginaries" (p. 55). Hernando/Alejandra's decision to play to the national nostalgias of queer audiences drawn from plural 'Latinx' cultural locations in the diasporas responds to the racializing 'Latinx' positionality forced on Alejandra by re-writing (authoring) it in her own terms.[27] Choosing to perform Hernando as a pan-'Latinx' boyband star is Alejandra authorizing the 'person' she desires to be in the context of the local queer 'Latinx' diasporas. She reflects that, in fact, "I

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[26] Interview conducted on February 2, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto. Hernando and Alejandra are pseudonyms.
[27] Moreman (2019) argues for the inclusivity of the term in that "'Latinx' acknowledges fluid citizenship, gender, and sexuality—but without an over-determining specificity" (p. 190). The final 'x' stands for a gender openness that the grammatically gendered endings 'o' and 'a' foreclose. Yet, despite the term's challenge to the gender binary, Acosta (2018) warns scholars to be wary of the very elision of diverse ethno-cultural and racial (as well as sexual, gender, class) categories Alejandra indicates in her narrative (p. 413).

think, yes, I'm part of the big Latinx community" (Alejandra, 2021). Hernando/Alejandra's strategic adoption of a 'Latinx' location echoes Chalupa Young's (2022) study which finds Peruvian, Colombian, and Argentinian migrants in the US viewing "their panethnic ['Latinx'] identity as empowering, positive, and protective against racism" (p. 169) and contrasts with other studies which suggested the signifier "may be unconscious consent to [white] hegemony" (Rinderle, 2005, p. 308).

As Hernando code switches between English, Spanglish, and Spanish and draws music from the diverse national and cultural traditions of Latin America, Alejandra negotiates a disidentificatory position within but also in tension with diasporic 'Latinx' Canada (Muñoz, 1999).[28] The linguistic code switching Hernando engages in highlights that self-authorization resides in conscious decisions Alejandra makes to assert the personhood she desires in the face of negating conditions (i.e., disconfirmation). Hernando's code-switching performance demonstrates Alejandra deciding consciously to locate her self within (and in tension with) the pluricultural, multi-generational queer 'Latinx' diasporas of her city in Canada —ones that link Alejandra to other queers of colour among the many ethno-cultural diasporas of urban Canada— in spite of the elision of specificity. This localization within broader queer of colour collectivities assists Alejandra in what Bacchetta et al. (2015) identify as a queer of colour survival tactic of creating "locally grounded" sites from which (non)belonging in spaces "shaped by intersecting vectors around race, class, religion, sexuality, gender [and] colonialism" may be successfully negotiated (p. 773). Indeed, Hernando and bandmates' sexual consent re-coding of misogynist

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[28] Also referring to Muñoz's concept of disidentification, Camminga and Marnell (2022) highlight that "[c]ode-switching and dis/identifications with communal meanings of gender and sexuality are not new to racialized queer bodies who have had to constantly negotiate their intersectional identities at the margins of racialized, gendered and sexual normalities" (p. 144).

reggaeton lyrics locate Alejandra within the critical, politicized resistances that queer and feminist 'Latinx' collectivities cultivate. Thus, Hernando's drag performances are Alejandra's agentive (decision-making) acts of self-author(iz)ing, which assert the 'person' she desires to be in opposition to the disconfirming forces of *machista* misogyny and cis-heteropatriarchy within 'Latinx' cultures (Moreman & McIntosh, 2010).

These two representative artists illustrate how respondents in this study counter social conditions that disconfirm the self, such as racialization and Islamophobia and attendant elisions. Both Ramin and Alejandra respond to these conditions through their drag personas and the conscious (agentive) decisions they make in the rendering of these personas a form of authoring and authorization (or validation) of the self. For Ramin, these (drag) acts of self-authorization include his mobilizing of Persian cultural resources to have Dina satirically defuse Islamophobia in white audiences. Alejandra deploys song choice and linguistic code switching to enable Hernando to negotiate a queer disidentificatory position vis-à-vis Toronto's pluricultural 'Latinx' audiences. In both cases, the artists respond to the disconfirming conditions of their worlds-as-they-are by self-authorizing via drag personas the 'person'-they-desire-to-be.

So far in this discussion I highlight authorizing the (internal sense of) *self* in the face of disconfirming external conditions, which reinforces the contested notion of an autonomous Enlightenment subject. Certainly, drag performance, especially in its commercial and popularized TV iterations, is often critiqued as placing too much emphasis on the (liberal) individual and (neoliberal) competitor (for example, Goldmark, 2015). But I would add that since the literature on refugee subjectivity attests to the stripping of agentive autonomy from persons who seek refuge, it is no small matter to re-assert refugee (and, I argue, also migrant) drag artist decision-making as a demonstration of these individuals' existential authority. In the

next section, I expand the concept of self-authorization from its focus on the 'I' to a focus on the 'we'. In other words, I present examples from the narratives of two more representative respondents which show how these artists through their drag personas cultivate not just an authorized 'I' but new forms of belonging through the production of 'we' groups or collectivities. These 'we' groups/collectivities provide them with resources to materialize their self-authorization and resist disconfirming forces.

4.6 'We' Groups: Self-Authorization in Collectivity

Naomi/Victor

Naomi AKA Victor left Sierra Leone at the age of six during the 1991-2002 civil war to live with his (Ghanaian) grandparents in Ghana ("otherwise I could have been dead or be a child soldier"; Victor, 2021). His father had died, and his mother was left behind in Sierra Leone. The family —except for his mother— subsequently applied for refugee status to move to Canada and settled in a city in western Canada. Following high school, Victor relocated to Toronto to pursue studies and a career in fashion. He cites a desire to assert his queer sexuality as an additional motive for the move to Toronto. His family —now including his mother, who was later able to join them— continue to live in western Canada.

In a predominantly white western Canadian city, Victor experienced compound anti-Black racism and homophobic conditions that disconfirmed his self. In response, Victor made the decision to move to Toronto where Victor sought out spaces —that is, groups— of belonging to both "be my gay self" and "be that African person" (Victor, 2021). The kind of being or existence that Victor proposes in these two phrasings highlights a desire to validate —to authorize— the sexual and ethno-racial/cultural aspects of his self that faced disconfirming conditions. But it is worth dwelling, too, on the words 'self' and 'person' since I have been using

them thus far without too much interrogation. The work of Black queer scholar Roderick Ferguson on the concept of personhood (as it pertains to questions of Black and same-sex marriage; 2019) provides much useful guidance. Drawing on McWhorter (2017), Ferguson traces the concept of 'person' to its roots in Roman law where *persona* applied only to a very restricted category of humans; adult male property-owning citizens, who were granted in public (legal) settings the agency or *authority* to speak. In fact, *persona(e)* could be applied to non-human entities, notably in its original usage in drama to signify the (multiple) masks through which an actor speaks (Ferguson, 2019, p. 5). The legal and highly restrictive meaning of 'person(a)' expanded in seventeenth-century Europe to sometimes refer to individual humans while also retaining the strictly legal sense of a property owner. Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke developed the concept of 'person'-as-owner to mean a rational actor, i.e., someone who 'owned' one's actions since "a modern person is an intelligent agent, one who can deliberate before making a decision" (McWhorter, 2017, p. 141). Ultimately, as Ferguson (2019) chronicles, the rational person-as-owner-of-one's-action was the sense that was primarily mobilized to exclude enslaved Black Africans and their descendants in North America from 'person' and reserve this status for white property owners and then whites more broadly. Victor's proposal to be "my gay self" and "that African person" wrests 'person' status from disconfirming conditions that would deny it to him, positing it as what he desires. When Victor moves to Toronto he creates the drag persona, Naomi, through the deliberative decisions Naomi makes, Victor assumes the *authority to speak* as the 'person' he desires to be —queer and African— as his contestation of disconfirming racist and homophobic exclusions.

In Toronto, Victor entered queer and also drag collectivities; however, as these groups are white dominated, his experience of disconfirmation is unabated: "it's always been very like,

always the white people [who] are doing the most and supporting each other versus having a Black person come in and maybe steal the show or something" (Victor, 2021). Victor counters disconfirming white exclusion by cultivating a Black queer 'we' group comprised of (commercial) Black drag artists. Naomi/Victor is adopted as a drag 'daughter' of Devine Darlin, who in turn is a daughter of the late, iconic Michelle Ross.[29] Victor narrates this experience of Black drag filiation as pedagogical: "watching Michelle Ross, learning from Devine, and looking up to these Black queens. Because I'm like, who, what white queen am I gonna look up to that I can feel them represent[…]?" (Victor, 2021). Victor's decision to, initially at least, align himself politically and culturally with Black peers among Toronto's drag collectivity —to embrace them as a kinship group— served to resist white exclusionary disconfirmation.

Yet, Victor's alignment with Toronto's Black drag performers did not remove his sense of marginalization since he is a Black African amid a Black drag collectivity dominated by Black Caribbean folk. Victor asserts a wish to "be an activist in a way to change that, [so] that Africa is on the map" (Victor, 2021), that is, re-position himself within the cultural geography of Toronto drag and posit to his Black (and other) drag peers that "it all start from Africa" (Victor, 2021). Here Victor re-articulates the desire "to be that African person". Akan Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (2009) explains that the "normative conception of personhood" in many African societies is an adult who demonstrates ethical soundness in upholding their responsibilities to immediate and larger kinship groups, to lineage, clan, and wider society (p. 16). Personhood is an attribute someone achieves or gains (and conversely may fail at or lose) when they fulfill

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[29] Michelle Ross, who passed in 2021, is recognized as "a trailblazer, a philanthropist, a community advocate, a source of upliftment, and a world-renowned entertainer" (Armstrong, 2021; see also Walcott, 2008). I use the descriptor 'iconic' in both its common sense and as the title in ballroom culture 'deemed' (i.e., awarded) to someone with longstanding recognition in ballroom and wider (Black) queer communities (Street, 2018).

obligations to the group, and it depends on reciprocity; what the individual does for the group, the group does for the individual (Wiredu, 2009). Through Naomi and her positioning in a Black drag 'we' group, Victor author(ize)s the self, and he enters into (queer and African) personhood.

The persona of Naomi incorporates multiple ethno-cultural resources by which Victor self-authorizes. Naomi's drag performances then embody an educative mission to "explain to [audiences] where I'm from" (Victor, 2021). This education involves deliberative choices of music (contemporary "African" pop; Victor, 2021) and costume design (Kente cloth[30]). Naomi also employs linguistic code switching between English and the Sierra Leonian creole, Krio ("Speaking in my language sometimes"; Victor, 2021). Naomi/Victor's pedagogical strategy expands on Hernando/Alejandra's use of a Spanish/English/Spanglish mix since it involves a balancing of linguistic with cultural codes (music and costume). Virdee and colleagues' (2006) study of an ethno-culturally diverse Scottish neighbourhood identifies how hybrid codes of cultural and national belonging are materialized in speech and dress and racialized. I will borrow and extend these hybrid codes of belonging to include social, sexual, gender, class as well as ethno-racial and cultural codes. Together Naomi's linguistic and cultural code switchings are enough to "educate" (Victor, 2021) and to demonstrate Victor's self-authorizing through the selections he deliberatively decides on. The switching in (and out) of African elements in Naomi's performance are also judicious since she wishes to "get my audience to understand and not los[e] them" (Victor, 2021), where "them" stands for non-Africans. Naomi, nonetheless, recognizes the impact of her African stylings on African members of the audience; she knows

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[30] Most associated with the Asante people of Ghana (Entsie, 2020), Kente cloth outside of Ghana has a global standing among African diasporas and for some carries Pan-African valence (Entsie, 2020). Used primarily for ceremonial purposes, its colours and patterns convey a range of philosophical and other meanings (Ayesu et al., 2021). Kente cloth's origins in Ghana link Naomi/Victor with their Ghanaian grandparents.

that often "there's someone in the audience, who is also African that likes it, that loves it" (Victor, 2021). Drawing on these ethno-cultural resources, Naomi authorizes Victor's African 'person' by generating collectivity with their queer African diasporic 'we' group and their Black drag kin. Naomi's self-authorizing work is thus an example of racialized queer diasporic relationality between performer and audiences. Together, Naomi's self-authorizing *acts* that generate 'we' groups contest the multiple disconfirming forces in Victor's present.

Chabuca/Rico

Chabuca La Grande AKA Rico moved from Peru in the late 1970s when he was in his late teens. His father had recently passed away, and Peru was undergoing dire economic conditions at the time. Given these circumstances, Rico left Peru with his mother to join his sister who was already in Canada. The move dovetailed with Rico's assertion of his sexuality and a realization that his sexual location would have restricted what life options were available to him in Peru. In this sense, Rico's decision to migrate is tinged with his understanding of sexual exclusion in his homeland. Rico's family are English on his mother's side, and he attended an English-language school in Peru. In Canada, Rico attended post-secondary school and began to assert his queerness when a student. He came out to non-'Latinx' friends first, then 'Latinx' peers, and to his immediate family much later.

Rico's light skin, maternal British heritage, and command of English juxtapose with his Spanish name, non-Canadian accent, and occasional lapses in English to push him in and outside national belonging. In addition, Rico's inclusion within 'Latinx' diaspora is complicated — reminiscent of how Alejandra experiences being 'Latinx' in Canada— since the signifier 'Latinx' elides and encompasses a wide range of Latin American cultures and ethno-racial

locations. Rico resists this disconfirmation of his ethno-racial/cultural location with his own concoction: "I'm Latino-lite, that's what I say, I'm Latino-lite" (Rico, 2021). Positioning himself in this way, Rico includes his self in 'Latinx' diaspora in Canada while acknowledging the access he has to whiteness. "Latino-lite" represents a strategic *fusion* of his 'Latinx' location and whiteness; as Rico attests, "I've been able to successfully weave […] the both of them" (Rico, 2021; I will explore the concept of 'fusion' in more detail in the next section).

This 'weaving' is materialized in his drag persona, Chabuca. To Chabuca, Rico brings his proximity to whiteness and English fluency as a means to negotiate belonging and self-authorize within conflicting queer Latinx collectivities. As a 'Latino-lite' queen, Chabuca takes up a location that straddles political antagonism between wealthier, white, homonormative 'gays' and poorer, Brown/Indigenous drag queens and queers. Performing drag while looking and sounding 'white', Rico subverted both groups' expectations: "I saw it in a way as a revolutionary, because certainly I moved in both circles easily […] And I'm going to try to bridge the divide. Because I can" (Rico, 2021). The "revolutionary" capacity Rico sees in Chabuca's unique location is meant politically; Chabuca (with her command of English) was invited to host drag events that sought to raise funds for queer 'Latinx' social justice ends, especially for other refugees and migrants and for people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, Rico as Chabuca mobilized his 'Latino-lite' resource to counter exclusion from white performance spaces ("there was a moment when they say, 'you're a Latina drag queen? ['Latinx' drag club El] Convento [Rico]. That's it. That's where you belong'"; Rico, 2021). But Chabuca extended belonging to wherever she chose to go: "I've had this attitude that wherever I am, there I am; I am going to make it, make it my own" (Rico, 2021). Chabuca's refusal to be ethno-racially/culturally delimited is a prime act of self-authorization for Rico. Furthermore, Chabuca consciously undertook a necessary

cultural/racial code switching to bend capitalist consumer and white racializing fantasies of 'Latinx' cultures to the benefit of her drag 'we' group: "We […] knew with all the Latin stuff, and the colour and the costumes and all that […] we sold beer" (Rico, 2021). Acosta (2018) describes such a self-authorizing strategy as an example of Muñoz's (1999) disidentification. Thus, among other resources I will elucidate in subsequent chapters, Rico's 'Latino-lite' positioning and Chabuca's cultural code-switching strategies were deployed to author(ize) and materialize the 'person' Rico desires to be, i.e., a "bridge" over divides among his queer diasporic collectivities.[31]

The narratives of Naomi/Victor and Chabuca/Rico illustrate their pursuits of self-authorization —authorizing the 'I'— via cultivation of racialized queer 'we' groups or collectivities. They reveal how their drag personas draw resources from these 'we' groups to self-authorize and materialize the desired 'person'. Both Victor and Rico demonstrate African conceptualizations of personhood expounded by Wiredu (2009): to be a 'person' is to cultivate one's (social, political, etc.) responsibilities to and enjoy reciprocal support from the collectivity. Both Victor via Naomi and Rico via Chabuca are the authors and 'owners' of the deliberate choices they make to self-authorize and materialize their desired 'person' in the face of disconfirming external conditions. Rico's strategically moves to locate himself between a 'Latinx' positionality and whiteness in his 'Latino-lite' formulation and then take advantage of this 'weaving' together of locations to serve as a 'bridge' in his queer 'Latinx' drag collectivity. His strategy foreshadows my focus in the final section of this chapter examining 'fusion' as a

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[31] I will explore Rico's use of the term 'bridge' and how it relates to the work of Chicana cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) in Chapter Six.

self-authorizing strategy that seeks, again via persona, to reconcile or 'unite' the desired 'person' with the reality of their (often negating) conditions of existence.

4.7 Uniting the Self and Conditions of Existence: 'Fusion' as a Self-Authorizing Strategy

Kiki/Haresh

Kiki Karachi AKA Haresh was born in Singapore and moved to Canada over thirty years ago when in his late twenties. His family are part of the Sindhi diaspora in Singapore, who migrated there following the 1947 Partition of India. He grew up, in Singapore, among an extended family group, including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Haresh emphasized that he always enjoyed a close, supportive relationship with family and friends. He grew up speaking Singlish as a first language as well as English and Sindhi and with a knowledge of other local languages. Haresh attended Christian schools and has a degree in engineering. He worked for multinational IT companies before moving to Canada. Haresh cites his sexuality as a major factor in desiring to move to Canada ("a big part of me was hiding in Singapore");[32] he applied for and secured Canadian permanent residency under the points systems. In his twenties, while working in Singapore and in Hong Kong, Haresh experimented with drag performance among his (queer) friend groups.

In Canada, Haresh's queerness is rejected by nationalist and heteronormative 'South Asian' diasporas ("I think the acceptance in those communities came later in Canada"; Haresh, 2021).[33] Faced with disconfirming heteronormative exclusion from 'South Asian' diasporas but also homonationalist exclusion from white Canadian queer collectivity, Haresh counters these

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[32] Interview conducted on May 6, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.
[33] As I do with 'Latinx', I follow Verma (2015) in signalling the contested and unstable status of the phrase 'South Asian' by placing it in single quotation marks (p. 9).

conditions by deciding to be part of a queer diasporic collective space that draws on both queer and ethno-cultural resources: the queer 'South Asian' group, Khush.[34] Haresh's participation in Khush meant "reintegrating the Indian part of me" (Haresh, 2021) that he had been excluded from in Singapore. Placed in charge of entertainment in the group, Haresh was urged to revive drag performance skills he had essayed in Singapore and create a new drag persona.

In initial discussions with his Khush friends, Haresh proposed naming his persona by combining the names of two assassinated women central to Indian and Pakistani history: "Indira Bhutto" or "Benazir Gandhi". Haresh, from a Sindhi community exiled in Singapore due to the Partition sought to repair this national, ethno-cultural shattering through a *fusion* of Gandhi and Bhutto's names. His strategy to 'fuse' together in his drag persona's name what Partition had sundered reflects a desire to self-authorize in the context of multiple disconfirming forces. The 'fused' name intentionally cites historical ethno-cultural resources to counter (1) disconfirming past experiences of a previously denied Indian cultural location and of inherited Sindhi exile; and (2) disconfirming experiences in the present context of nationalist and heteronormative 'South Asian' diaspora. However, Haresh's provocative drag name experienced pushback from the group: "everybody thought the backlash will be too huge. […] I thought it would be integrating" (Haresh, 2021). On one side we have Haresh's desire for 'integration'; that is, a desire to pursue the self-authorizing he experienced when he joined Khush and 're-integrate' his sense of Indian-ness with his queerness. But on the other, we have the fears of Haresh's queer 'South Asian' peers in Khush that the blended name would generate too much opposition among wider 'South Asian' diasporas. While Haresh views his persona name as ethno-culturally 'integrating' or

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[34] Dasgupta (2019) explains that the term *khush* (meaning 'happy') is widely used to refer to LGBTQ+ identities among 'South Asian' communities.

'fusing', his Khush peers reject the name to 'de-fuse' political tensions. Haresh experiences their

reaction as disconfirming, and, in an act of self-authorization, Haresh 'refuses' their rejection. He

decides to change strategy; instead of a sweeping political reformulation of Indian history, he

selects elements of his personal and familial histories to create the persona, Kiki Karachi. Kiki is

the name of a Sindhi relative of Haresh, and Karachi is, of course, the major city of Sind

province. This choice of name may indicate a traditional diasporic desire for a 'rooted' past via

Kiki's name, to family and 'home'; the Sind province 'home' where Haresh as a member of an

exilic diaspora in Singapore never lived. Alternatively, the familial and ethno-cultural codes

embedded in 'Kiki Karachi' may be responding to what Brah (2005) calls a 'homing desire',

which "is not the same as the desire for a 'homeland'" but rather an acknowledgement of

multiple (un)available belongings (p. 194).

Haresh continues to defy others' expectations and authorize the person he desires to be.

After three decades of living in Canada, he decides to reposition himself as a 'fusion' of Indian,

Chinese, and a third culture termed 'Western' and 'Canadian' (which he situates as exclusive of

the former two):

> I would say 'fusion' is a big word. Like I think 'fusion' comes to me rather than
> 'separateness'. […] If that makes any sense? So, it would be […] Singapore, Indo —like,
> Indian— and then Canadian. And […] you could also say, and it's actually how I feel it,
> Eastern. You know, […] the two big Eastern cultures, India and China. And then, of
> course, Western has dominated society for so long. But I feel a complete fusion of the
> three... these three distinct cultures. (Haresh, 2021)

As he did with his drag name, Haresh again posits 'fusion' as a self-authorizing strategy in the

context of a queer, pluricultural 'South Asian' diasporic existence in 'multicultural' Toronto.[35]

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[35] I place 'multicultural' in single quotation marks to signal, again, that it is very much a contested concept (see, for example, the racism of Canadian 'multiculturalism' in Fleras, 2014 and James, 2010), and as such I use the term

This 'fusion' strategy is perhaps adjacent to Homi Bhabha's (2004 [1994]) concepts of hybridity and Third Space. While many postcolonial critics have rightly contested Bhabha's formulations of these related concepts, one aspect may be pertinent to what Haresh narrates. In contrast to "unconscious processes of hybrid mixture" such as creolization, hybridity in Bhabha's Third Space offers "a conscious and politically motivated concern with the deliberate disruption of homogeneity" (Mambrol, 2016, p. 5, glossing Young, 1995). Importantly then, Haresh's conscious 'fusion' of cultures highlights agentive decision making and attention to multidimensionality in his self-authorizing. For Haresh, 'fusion' resists homogeneity, as we saw in his tussles with his Khush peers over the drag name. Given the context of the many ethno-cultural and social groupings that intersect in Haresh's person, Kiki Karachi's performances braid elements of 'Western' and Indian cultures. Like Hernando/Alejandra and Naomi/Victor, Kiki engages in cultural code switching by selecting consciously from a musical range that includes Bollywood and North American pop or features ethno-cultural items of clothing in her costume. Sometimes she combines two elements in, for example, costume changes ("I had two friends hold a sari in front... like a curtain in front of me, and I changed [into…] like a miniskirt or whatever, and then I did that, sort of a Western number, or whatever"; Haresh, 2021), or she might perform to a 'fusion' version of Madonna's "Vogue" sung in Hindi. She explains her intention thus: "I would just make sure that I have enough of something that they [her pluricultural audience] also recognize, […] so it doesn't just feel something too foreign to them" (Haresh, 2021). Haresh signals a desire through Kiki to contest ethno-cultural homogeneity and self-authorize by cultural code switching between forms and sometimes fusing forms together.

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cautiously. Wahab (2016) identifies 'multiculturalism' alongside homo(trans)nationalism as "assemblages that effectively silence talk about race in Canada" (p. 911).

Samantha Trench identifies as two-spirit. Her father is Pipil, an Indigenous people of El Salvador, and a Baptist minister. When she was fourteen and accompanied by her parents and younger brother, Samantha sought refuge in Mexico from the 1980s civil war in El Salvador. After a year in Mexico, she moved to Canada. Samantha's parents had been involved in social justice work in El Salvador, where they ran a school and an orphanage, and these ventures made them a target during the conflict. In Mexico, her parents worked to support other refugees. Following a further move to Toronto, Samantha completed high school and then briefly entered Baptist college to train as a minister like her father. She left the college after one year and attended university instead. Alongside her sibling, Mariana Trench, she founded a ballroom House by the same name of Trench. In addition to drag and to her community work, Samantha works as a professional translator.

In Toronto's downtown (white) 'gay' Village, a gentrified urban space of consumption and "assimilationist sexual citizenship" hostile to racialized queer subjects (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1818), Samantha encountered compound disconfirming conditions of racist and sexualized exclusion from belonging. In response, Samantha self-authorized by founding her own queer 'Latinx' space, the (social) group Hola. Her strategy aligns with what Rosenberg (2021) has registered as the placemaking of Black LGBTQ+ youth in resistance to the Village's racialized 'inhabitability'. It also echoes Naomi/Victor and Chabuca/Rico's cultivation of 'person' through racialized queer collectivities. Hola quickly became dominated by and focused on "drag queens" (by which Samantha refers to a range of cis- and transfeminine folk who wear feminine-coded clothing on and off stage; Samantha, 2021) and their political objectives, such as protesting police violence that targeted them. Samantha's response to this "drag queen" dominance was to

take up drag as a politics of protest and align her experience with that of her Hola peers: "I'm going to find out what it's like to be a drag queen. And I put my heels on and hit the pavement and joined the protest" (Samantha, 2021). This statement indicates that Samantha was conscious that the route to the 'person' she desired (in refusal of negating conditions such as police anti-migrant, anti-Brown, and trans/homophobic violence) was via the creation of a persona.

Nonetheless, Samantha's experiences in Hola felt somewhat limited by this drag focus. She desired to address an broader range of intersecting social and political issues pertinent to queer 'Latinx' folk, ones that reflected and authorized her own location, such as advocating for queer 'Latinx' refugees or those living with HIV/AIDS: "I was into the social justice; I wanted them to see that there is a person inside that dress that wants more than just applause" (Samantha, 2021). The "person inside that dress" that Samantha refers to is the self that she authorizes via a mobilizing of drag as a social and political 'act', one that opposes exclusionary and disconfirming conditions of cis-hetero/homonormativity, racism, neocolonialism, and (homo)nationalism and an 'act' that materializes the desired 'person'. Samantha, her drag persona, is the emergence of accumulated historical, familial, social, and cultural resources that underpin the decisions she makes to authorize the self in the face of those forces. In fact, Samantha understands her two-spirit location as an embodied 'fusion' of self with persona, a union of the everyday with the performative: "[Non-drag name] and Samantha is me. Period.[…] It should be [non-drag name] equals Samantha. […T]here's no separation, right? Only on the outside [does] it happen" (Samantha, 2021). So, Samantha views her self as internally united. But although she desires the internal self to unite with the external desired 'person' by means of the 'persona', still outside conditions –vis-à-vis her gender, sexual, ethno-racial and cultural locations— remain a site of cis-heteronormative, racist, and (homo)nationalist disconfirmation

("Only on the outside [does separation] happen"). Therefore, beginning with Hola, Samantha contests these compounding negations of self through her social and political activism that generates 'we' groups of belonging. She seeks to change the present in pursuit of the future she desires where her internal 'unity' spreads to the external world. This future-oriented goal of collective 'unity' that Samantha (and other respondents) advocates is the focus of Chapter Six.

4.8 Conclusion

Mango/Humza, the drag mother of KeroPatra/Kero, is a well-established artist online and in Toronto's drag performance circuits. In an interview for this study, Humza told me of another interview experience he had had with the Canadian national broadcaster CBC. The journalist had zeroed in on how he navigates his Muslim parents' not knowing about his queerness and his public drag persona and thus positioned Humza as "living a double life". Humza strenuously objected to this characterization: "I'm not 'living a double life'. It's just the one life, and I have to be careful with what I… how I present in front of certain people".[36] Here, Humza rejects the necessity and whiteness of Western 'coming out' narratives. Instead, his emphasis on "the one life" where the self is presented selectively and differentially to distinct audiences. Humza's strategy recalls not only Goffman's (1959) concept of the everyday presentation of self but, I would argue, a desired 'unity' between his internal sense of self and an external (desired but denied) 'person' via 'persona'; the sort of 'unity' Kiki/Haresh and Samantha in the preceding section demonstrate.

The various historical, social, ethno-racial, ethno-cultural, and other 'fusions' that artists like Haresh, Samantha, and, I add, Humza give embodiment to in their drag personas are

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[36] Interview conducted on April 15, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

strategies of self-authorization within complex disconfirming conditions. These conditions are shifting external social structures and forces —various racisms, nationalisms, homo/bi/transphobias, cis-hetero and homonormativities participants negotiate between past and present locations— that seek to deny (or disconfirm) the self as I explained in the narratives of Kero and Ruslan. Through drag personas – like Dina and Hernando – and evinced in the agentive (self-authorizing) decisions they make in the rendering of these personas, artists such as Ramin and Alejandra contest those disconfirming forces. The self – the 'I' – is further authorized via the cultivation of queer 'we' groups or collectivities; Victor and Rico demonstrate how they draw resources from such 'we' groups to materialize the desired 'person' via their personas Naomi and Chabuca.

On a final note, Humza's "careful" uniting of self with a desired 'person' ("the one life") via the persona of Mango and management of his everyday presentation of self to family anticipates the focus of Chapter Five. In this next chapter, I follow the artists' narratives as they look back to past lives (as children and/or before arriving in Canada), where family and other networks provide resources of self-authorization that mobilize and merge into drag personas, thus demonstrating continuity of their desire for 'person' across time and space.

5. "Mama was so pleased that people saw me as a girl": Family and Self-Authorization

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced eight respondents as representatives of the cohort of interviewees. Their narrations demonstrated how they sought to unite their internal self-conception with a desired but denied 'person'. This self-authorization materialized externally via the creation of their drag personas in the present. In this chapter, I return to the same eight respondents' narrations as they look back to past lives: before migration and/or before adulthood. Respondents lean on (heterosexual) 'given' families as resources with which they effectuate their self-authorizations (via persona). I examine how respondents excavate familial/kinship (and other) resources from past lives and re-deploy them in their drag personas to facilitate their self-authorization. I show how respondents narrate a *continuity* of self-authorization in the face of multiple disconfirming conditions, some of which persist but take new forms in the present. The turn to the past in the respondents' narratives performs an essential function in aiding their drag realization of the 'person' they desire to be. It "helps to recuperate a sense of the self not dependent on criteria handed down by others" (Ganguly, 1992, p. 40; cited in Kaya, 2002, p. 44).

The quote opening this chapter's title comes from Masha/Ruslan. At this point in their narration, Ruslan falls back to their childhood in Russia. Despite many disconfirming forces outside the family home, within family, Ruslan experiences not just a tacit acceptance of their expressing their gender difference but also their mother's explicit approval. Ruslan's finds their desire for femininity aligned with their mother's desire for a daughter. Examples like this one form the basis of this chapter's discussion. In one form or other, almost all the artists in this

study recounted experiences with 'given' family that, whether affirming or not, became resources that were harnessed via persona to self-authorize. To demonstrate the range of such experiences, I will introduce in this chapter supplementary examples from some of the other respondents' narratives beyond the primary eight. (Short biographical summaries for these other respondents can be found in Appendix A.)

In this chapter, I illustrate the kinds of negating social forces respondents faced in the past and how these relate to family and the self-authorizing responses via drag personas that draw on affirming familial resources. I highlight the way respondents narrate self-authorization through expanded 'we' groups, kinship, and other collectivities. Finally, I discuss how respondents desire to re-unite 'family' with self via a 'fusion' of familial resources to their personas. To situate this analysis, I sketch some theoretical concepts from secondary literature as context for the discussion.

5.2 Context: Queer-of-Colour and Queer Diasporic Configuring of Family and Kinship

In Chapter Three and in the previous chapter's context section, I outlined how critical refugee studies scholars have challenged the positioning of the 'refugee' in Western liberal logics as 'objects of rescue'. In that discussion, I expanded on the 'self-rescue' framework proposed by Kyriakides and colleagues (2018; 2019), which emphasizes how refugee subjects (not 'objects') draw on resources from their pre-conflict social selves to assert and affirm an agentive "experiential authority" through the decisions they make. I argued that the narratives of refugee (and migrant) drag artists reveal how they also draw on multiple resources to self-authorize and materialize a desired 'person' via their created personas; one that seeks alignment with their internal conception of self and *contra* a range of external disconfirming (social) forces. In Western liberal humanist thinking, the 'refugee' is positioned as a diminished 'person', one

that is "rejected from and desire[s] admittance to the property owning, heteropatriarchal family of Canada's liberal, multicultural society" and to liberal personhood (Ly, 2019, pp. 58-59). Indeed, Ly (2019) goes as far as to suggest that "the refugee figure is already queer insofar as it is used as a trope for exclusion from liberal personhood and its related normative kin, gender, sexuality, and property formations" that secure the nation (p. 65). Thus, the figure of the queer refugee poses a challenge to the heteronormative family and wider 'family' of the nation such that we might "consider other ways of naming our relation to each other, beyond the blood and property relations that undergird filial and national belonging" (Ly, 2019, p. 65). As Ly (2019) contends, such challenges to liberal humanist conceptualizations of 'person', 'family' and 'nation' highlight objectives that are shared by critical refugee studies (Espiritu, 2021), queer diaspora thought, and queer-of-colour theorizing, which seek to "illuminate the colonial and militarized underpinnings" of (homo)nationalisms that determine who gets to belong (p. 56). In this chapter, I seek to build on what I proposed in the previous: that the racialized queer diasporic drag artists in this study conceive of self not simply as another rational liberal subject but as a 'person' defined by relation to larger 'we' groups or collectivities. Thus, I turn in this chapter to meanings of familial and kinship groups in the past lives of respondents and how these bear on their past and present self-authorizations.

My analysis of the meanings 'family' and kinship groups held by refugee/migrant drag artists in this study is informed by queer-of-colour (for example, Bacchetta et al. 2015, 2018; El-Tayeb, 2011; Ferguson, 2004; Ferguson & Hong, 2012; Puar & Rai, 2002; Puar, 2007; Reddy, 2011) and queer diasporic (for example, Allen, 2012; Eng, 2010; Fortier, 2003; Gopinath, 2005, 2018; Ly, 2019; Rodríguez, 2020) readings of these concepts. As I outlined in Chapter Four, a web of notions related to 'family' —such as 'homeland', filiation, descent, (racial) purity— in

the cis-heteronormative and nationalist ideologies of traditional diaspora are contested by queer diasporic critiques. Racialized queer diasporic subjects, as are the drag artists in this study, counter the negating forces produced by these ideologies. They also destabilize disconfirming racisms and other exclusions (such as (trans)misogyny) generated by white 'gays' through cis-homonormativities and homonationalisms. Queer-of-colour and many other critical approaches have highlighted how "the family formation has historically been a source of violence in both white settler states and postcolonial states" (Ly, 2019, p. 63). And yet, while queer-of-colour and queer diaspora critics contest and complicate nationalist diasporic notions of 'family', they do not simply discard them. Rather, as Gopinath (2005) makes clear, queer diaspora readings re-signify 'family' given the importance this category —alongside related ones like 'home'— have as sites of refuge (I use the term deliberately) from racisms and colonialisms.

The meaning of 'family', especially, has been re-evaluated from Black feminist perspectives. Stack's (1975) anthropological study positions Black formulations of family that expand kinship beyond blood relations as "survival strategies" when faced with racist negations. Hill Collins (1990) explains, for example, that Black "women-centered networks of community-based childcare have extended beyond the boundaries of biologically related individuals", including the concept of "othermothers" (p. 179). Queer approaches to 'family' that move beyond the cis-heteronormative are indebted to Black (and other racialized) expansion of kinship outward from the heterosexual nucleus. Weston's (1997 & 1998) seminal ethnographies, which introduced the idea of lesbian and gay "chosen families", recognize these Black as well as 'Latinx', 'South Asian' and other racialized antecedents. Weston's work also contests the earlier anthropological concept of 'fictive kin' (that Stack relied on). In contrast, the families Weston documents represent very real systems of care and affirmation. These informal webs of care and

support are given imaginative names by queer respondents in Jackson Levin et al.'s (2020) study of "framily" (friends who are family) and "found family". Such 'families' represent "kinship practices" which have become unmoored from biogenetic family and reproductive heterosexuality (Butler, 2002, p. 37).

Nonetheless, for queers of colour, these expansions of 'family' and kin do not necessarily replace but, rather, complement families of origin since the latter are sites of "security" and "sources of material and communal well-being" amid white hostility (Gupta, 1989, p. 176; cited by Rodríguez, 2020). As attested to by respondents in this study (e.g., Victor, James, and Samantha), Black Ballroom houses and their associated 'families' provide means of "survival, safety, health, and well-being" (Rutledge, 2019). They show how Black queer/trans/non-binary folk "have always revised kinship by engaging family as a social practice" (Bailey, 2013, p. 19). The revision of 'family' represented by Ballroom houses shows how racialized queer re-inventions of 'family' (and 'home') are necessary even if the family (and home) of origin are not sites of rejection and disconfirmation. The drag artist respondents in my study narrate various racialized queer diasporic re-imaginings of 'family' and "kinship practices" in their present lives. I will touch on these re-imaginings in this chapter, but they will become a primary focus of the Chapter Six when I discuss the significance of "queer relationality" (Jakobsen, 2010). In the present chapter, I examine the ways respondent memories of 'given' families become resources from which the artists draw in their drag persona to self-authorize against and within (dis)confirming social, cultural, political, and economic forces in the past and the present.

5.3 Family and (Dis)confirming Conditions in the Past

Stuart Hall (1993) suggests that diasporic identity "moves into the future through a symbolic detour through the past […] It produces new subjects who bear the traces of the

specific discourses which not only formed them but enable them to *produce themselves anew and differently*" (p. 392). In this section I return to two of the eight representative respondents — Chabuca/Rico and Naomi/Victor— to highlight episodes from their pasts that they narrate as disconfirming the self. These episodes centre on formative interactions with family members as well as other contexts. The episodes depict respondents' negating experiences of cis-heteronormativity, racism, nationalism, and other forces and show how they are akin to the formative discourses of which Hall writes.

Rico's drag persona, Chabuca la Grande, is named so for the Peruvian popular music composer and singer 'Chabuca' (María Isabel) Granda (1920-1983). Granda's best known work emerged in the 1950s and 60s. Her music formed part of Rico's childhood in the 1960s alongside the singers and entertainers, from across the Americas, he watched on television. On weekends, Rico would stage little shows for his grandmother and sometimes parents, in the private space of the family home, featuring his impersonations of these male and female English- and Spanish-language musicians. These impersonations involved some cross-dressed elements: "I put [on] wigs and frocks and high heels. […] And sometimes I'd put a little bit of makeup […] I really loved doing that part, more than the boy stuff" (Rico, 2021). But these early gender transgressions did not meet with Rico's father's approval. On one occasion his parents returned home early, and "I was in the middle of the performance, and they come in, and my dad was so furious! Oh, he was so upset!" (Rico, 2021). His grandmother defended him ("[she] loved it"; Rico, 2021), framing the incident as harmless 'entertainment' and pointing to the male impersonations as a pretext ("he did Frank Sinatra before"; Rico, 2021). The angry response of Rico's father to his son's gender transgressive performance evinces a Peruvian *machismo*, one that according to Ellis (1998), the Peruvian novelist and conservative politician Mario Vargas

Llosa links to imbricating sexual, gender racial, and class hierarchies. In an autobiographical

portrait of his father, Vargas Llosa "equates the facticity of maleness with masculinity, and in

turn posits masculinity as synonymous with male heterosexuality" (Ellis, 1998, p. 224). By

inhabiting a femininity, even in the frame of performance, Rico calls forth a queerness that

unsettles his father's *machista* gender and sexual normativities; ones that are bound up with

(white) nationalist and colonial notions of masculinity in opposition to a racialized and

Indigenized femininity (Ellis, 1998; see also Hernández, 2021).

It is important to note that Rico's childhood experiences of (dis)confirmation within his

family were not exclusively negative (given his grandmother's affirmation), and that these early

experiences carry forward into Rico's adulthood. As he grew up, Rico's sexuality may have

been, like the Dominican queer migrant men in Decena's (2008) study, tacitly understood within

the family. But when by accident, his mother encounters him in drag at a public event in

Toronto's 'gay' Village, Rico decided to disclose unambiguously that he was gay.[37] And yet,

despite being publicly in drag, he did not want her to know that he was performing regularly as

Chabuca since the cross-dressing might "confuse her" (Rico, 2021). Rico is anxious to separate

for his mother an explicit identification of queerness from gender transgressive performance.

Peña (2013) identifies agentive "strategies of nondisclosure, which is not the same as saying they

are in the closet" as common with Cuban American queer men in Florida (p. 131).[38] In this,

therefore, judicious mediation of how family members locate him in gender and sexual terms,

Rico's childhood experience of gender and sexuality in Peru simultaneously negated by his

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[37] Cashman's (2017) ethnography of LGBTQ+ Mexican/'Latinx 'folk in Arizona attests to the greater emphasis subjects placed on "family loyalty and maintenance of family ties and community ties" over a desire to make an explicit disclosure (p. 132).

[38] Acosta (2008; 2013; 2014) documents a similar negotiation among lesbian Latinas in the US about what their families need to know, tacitly or not, about their sexualities.

father but defended by his grandmother is summoned to his adult existence in Canada. While his father invalidated his gender location, his grandmother deflected and authorized it as 'entertainment'. This defence allowed the child Rico to detach gendered impersonation from implied sexual otherness. As an adult in Canada, Rico uses this detaching strategy to authorize his adult self. For his mother, he strategically detaches sexuality from implied gender variance, and like his grandmother, positions his gendered persona as 'entertainment'. Thus, past (dis)confirming (private) familial experiences provide Rico with building blocks of (public) social affirmation in the present in Canada. Ultimately, these resources will aid his self-authorization via his drag persona.

As a refugee from civil conflict, Naomi/Victor's childhood was shaped by much more existential disconfirming conditions than those of Rico where Naomi/Victor's physical survival was at stake: "In the war, it was crazy; like literally, nighttime, ran away from the war" (Victor, 2021). Victor faced very material circumstances that sought to erase his existence; later disconfirming forces, while injurious and negating, are secondary to these. Referring to the turn in queer theory towards anti-futurism and the "politics of refusal" (e.g., Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011), Ly Thuy Nguyen (2020) usefully reminds that "[f]or racialized refugees, 'failure' is never symbolic: it means to die in war, go missing in the refugee passage, or to succumb under racist violence after resettlement. There will literally be *no future*" (p. 221). The conditions of Victor's flight from Sierra Leone were bound up with familial loss and trauma; "leaving my mom behind" (Victor, 2021), he was able to escape to Ghana thanks to his Ghanaian grandparents. Since "[i]n both queer theory and critical refugee studies, trauma is recognized as a productive site of knowledge" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 221), it is significant to note the impact on Victor's sense of self that separation from his mother (and earlier death of his father): "that

childhood part, I would say messed up a lot [being able to] say at that time I was who I am"

(Victor, 2021). Victor's multiple dislocations —forced moves from Sierra Leone to Ghana and

then to Canada— result in a fragmented self ("messed up… who I am"), a self that may be better

understood through the notion that in many African languages (including the Akan language of

Ghana) "existence is locative, that is, to be is to be at some place" (Wiredu, 2009, p. 14). So,

Victor's self-conceptualization rests not only on time ("at that time") but on location and is

challenged by disconfirming experiences of traumatic displacement common to repeated refuge-

seeking moves forced on him in childhood.

As expounded in the previous chapter, Victor experienced anti-Black racist and

homophobic bullying as a child in western Canada from his white peers. These alienating,

exclusionary conditions that Victor experiences in white Canada illustrate "the inadequacy of

liberal claims of [refugee] safety" (Ly, 2019, p. 57). But they also point to the leading role of

family in providing Victor with "intimacy as a source of refuge and […] safety found in human

connection" denied to him by racism and homophobia in white 'multicultural' Canada (Ly, 2019,

p. 56). Early indictors of Victor's gender difference were hidden from his family: "dressing the

Barbie dolls, you know, styling them, fixing the hair. So, all of that, too, […] none of my… my

mom didn't know at that time that I was doing that" (Victor, 2021). He does not mention why

this gender transgressive play took place without his mother/family's knowledge, but it is

significant that these activities were done in private, perhaps with a consciousness of its gender

non-normativity in terms of (Western) parental/familial socialization processes (Endendijk et al.,

2014; Jadva et al., 2010) that steer boys away from dolls. What Victor does make clear is that his

adult interest in fashion and (public) drag performance traced roots both to this doll play

("dressing… fixing the hair") and to a history of live performance as a child that his family

tacitly accepted. For example, he speaks of a photo his grandmother keeps of his leading a bunch of kids on stage while playing a guitar: "I've always had that, like, performance in me, and that talent. […] So, I feel like it was shadowing who I am already, but still wasn't sure then yet" (Victor, 2021). Family provides intimate affirmation for Victor's embryonic self-authorizing performances. Notably, Victor conflates this self-authorizing and internally located desire for performance ("in me") with who he is now, the persona, Naomi ("who I am already"). It is through Naomi, as I argued in the previous chapter, that Victor self-authorizes in Toronto within and against white racism and some Black Caribbean exclusion that disconfirmed. To recap: as a child, Victor experiences disconfirming forces originating outside the family —racism and homophobia from peers in the "white world" (Victor, 2021)— and within family, to the extent that his gender transgressions needed to remain private. But family also provides important *intimate* resources he draws on to self-authorize via public performance as a child and later drag performance as an adult when he aims to recreate in Naomi the "beautiful [African] woman" (Victor, 2021) his grandmother (and mother and auntie) is.

In this section, I returned to the narratives of two of the eight previously discussed respondents to discuss how familial resources are harnessed to self-authorization via drag. In Peru, Rico experienced disconfirmation and negation of his gender (and implicit sexual) location from his father. This disconfirmation was partly attenuated by his grandmother's defence. Victor experienced traumatic threats to his survival as he sought refuge from war in Sierra Leone with his grandparents but without his mother. Then, in Canada, Victor's negating experiences of racism and homophobia among peers were somewhat tempered by his family's public validation of (gender normative) performance, although in other private play, his gender difference necessitated strategic isolation. In both cases, family largely encourages childhood interest in

performance but only when separated from an unrecognized or unvalidated gender dissidence. Rico and Victor's disconfirming experiences may, on first glance, appear to sustain some queer depictions of the heteronormative 'family' of origin as site of rejection and exile for queer migrants/refugees (Sinfield, 1996). And yet, Rico and Victor's experience of 'family' is more complex, containing disconfirming elements, certainly, but also instances of affirmation. What begins to emerge in these narratives is the significance to 'family' in forming and consolidating private and public identities for drag artist respondents affected by migration and forced displacement. Glossing Moore (2011) on Black lesbian (in)visibility, Acosta (2014) notes "families of origin are more concerned about the public aspects of their kin's sexual nonconformity than they are about their same-sex intimacies" (p. 48). In Rico and Victor's narratives, gender (queer) performance begins in the seemingly private 'family' domain but experiences of familial (dis)confirmation will nourish future self-authorization via public drag performance.

Several other respondents —outside the eight representatives— reported childhood and familial responses as resourcing their strategies of self-authorization in adulthood and post-migration. For example, Andrea is obliged to perform drag in secret, hiding in her bedroom while performing online, or dressing publicly in drag only outside the family home. Her Salvadorian family is "very religious" and their ethno-cultural location "homophobic and a little misogynistic".[39] To contest these disconfirming conditions, Andrea relies on her queer and drag 'we' groups "when I can't fully rely on my own, like, relatives" (Andrea, 2021). Thus, Andrea points to what I elaborate on in the following sections: that, despite complicated, socially (dis)confirming relationships with their 'given' families, the artists in this study draw on

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[39] Interview conducted on May 25, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

resources from family (and/or other 'we' groups) in the past to self-authorize via drag personas in the present.

5.4 Familial Resources for Self-Authorization via Drag Persona

In this section, I examine how KeroPatra/Kero and Masha/Ruslan mobilize affirming familial and other resources from the past and deploy them via their drag personas to self-authorize and contest past and present disconfirming forces.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Kero's assertion of their queer sexuality was met with violent negation from their parents and Coptic Church. The homophobic violence Kero experienced at the hands of their parents when they 'came out' traced long roots into Kero's childhood familial life in the form of transmisogyny, i.e., a diminishing and pathologizing prejudice directed toward femininity in persons who were assigned male at birth (Serano, 2021). As a child, Kero's femininity "embarrassed" (Kero, 2021) their father and brother; the brother abandons Kero to bullying at school, while the father bullies them at home. Any sign of femininity was roughly policed, e.g., drawings by this "artistic and introverted child" (Kero, 2021) were thrown in the garbage. Gender dissidence was treated as a sign of queerness long before Kero experienced queer sexual desire. "You need to start *behaving like* a man" (Kero, 2021; my emphasis), Kero's father told them, emphasizing masculinity as performative and conditioning. Kero's father's gender policing included, perversely, a threat to non-consensually "take me to the hospital, and get me turned into a woman, like, to have surgery" (Kero, 2021). As an adult and via KeroPatra, Kero contests some of the violence in these paternal menaces to their bodily integrity and other attempted negations through a reappropriating, subversive dark humour that functions to self-authorize:

[my dad] would like tie us up to the bed and beat us with a belt. And I say, 'it's funny, here I am [as KeroPatra] and nothing has changed! They tie me up and put a gag on me, and I'm having a good time!' [*laughs*] (Kero, 2021)

While Kero's father was responsible for much the violence directed at them, their mother failed to help them and, like many mothers subject to patriarchal control, re-enforced the homophobic and transmisogynist rejection of Kero in childhood. Therefore, in the present, Kero self-authorizes by employing a strategy of humorous resignification that defuses their mother's rejection in a manner similar to how KeroPatra punctures their father's violence. When they meet others for the first time, Kero now introduces themself saying, "'Kero... it's like 'hero' but with a 'k', or as my mother would say 'zero' with a 'k'!' [*laughs*]" (Kero, 2021). In such ways, Kero self-authorizes *contra* their parents' disconfirming violence.

But their mother's literal negation of Kero ("'zero' with a 'k'") was not their only experience of her. Kero narrates early childhood experiences of her as "tender" and "kind" (Kero, 2021), with them lovingly watching her as she worked in the kitchen, as well as her being "a very confident woman" (Kero, 2021). These qualities Kero seeks to emulate in their performances as KeroPatra, and they cite their mother as one of the "biggest influencers on the character of KeroPatra" (Kero, 2021). Via KeroPatra, Kero re-signifies their mother's rejection of their femininity and materializes a self-authorization when they imbue the persona with "maternal" and "matriarchal" attributes (Kero, 2021), positioned as an inheritance from their mother: "KeroPatra was created to bring my inner feminine side out, outwards"; "she really cares about the people, her people" (Kero, 2021). In fact, KeroPatra is more than a manifestation of Kero's mother's best qualities. As the regal formulation of "her people" signals, Kero views KeroPatra as a recuperation of ancient Egyptian transgender and queer royal lineage: "I see myself as bringing something back that the Church killed kind of thing. So, like men wearing

makeup is normal. To have extravagant outfits in Egypt for the kings and the queens, it's normal" (Kero, 2021). The name KeroPatra is, of course, an adaptation of that of the first-century BCE queen of Egypt, Cleopatra VII, whose history has been subject to extraordinary Orientalist appropriation by colonizing western cultures; a prime example of how, for the west, Egypt is "saturated with meaning" (Said, 1979, p. 84). Kero's affirmations of "men wearing makeup" and "extravagant outfits" reads early Egyptian royalty, like Cleopatra, as literal queens in drag, and it aligns with contemporary archeological assessments of (trans)gender variance among ancient royals such as Hatshepsut, Akhenaten, and others (Diamond, 2020; Matić, 2016).

In KeroPatra, Kero refuses multiple disconfirming conditions: their parents'/Church's violent rejection of their queerness; a subsequent disavowal of their Coptic Egyptian location (outlined in the previous chapter) as their initial response to that rejection; and the transmisogyny they experience in their family (and later among queer men). KeroPatra's harnessing of an ancient Egyptian royal and genderqueer lineage, her re-positioning of Kero the "zero" as KeroPatra, the queen of her (Middle Eastern queer) people, her humorous resignification of parental trans/homophobia, and her embodiment of Kero's mother's best personal qualities represent a complex self-authorization as the 'person' Kero desires to be. Using familial resources, Kero materializes in KeroPatra a "bringing […] back [what] the Church killed" and what their parents attempted to violently erase.

When Masha/Ruslan left Russia in 2009, it was to escape the police harassment they were experiencing due to their queer political activism. A "hostile environment" toward LGBTQ+ people in Russia evolved since the early 2000s and continues to the present (Buyantueva, 2018; Kondakov, 2021). But growing up in Kaliningrad in the previous two decades, Ruslan's experiences of being gender and sexually queer were more mixed. Certainly,

at school, Ruslan's experiences with peers were shaped by national cis-heteronormativity, homophobia, and transmisogyny: "[at Christmas parties] during the Soviet Union there's only two options: guys are bunnies; girls are snowflakes. There were not many options. And then, I always wanted to be a snowflake, [but] I was dressed as a bunny" (Ruslan, 2021). Reproductive heterosexuality and gender normativity underpin conservative Russian fantasies of family and nation (Stella & Nartova, 2016). Yet, despite this disconfirming social environment at school, Ruslan's emerging gender dissidence is explicitly validated within the (heterosexual) family: "My family never actually was limiting me in my choices. Like they kind of loved me, and loved me, unconditionally" (Ruslan, 2021). These two accounts in Ruslan's narrative —of a 'one or the other' gender binary and unlimited choices— highlight an apparent public/private conflict of structural forces that seek to disconfirm the self alongside agentive decisions (or "choices") that authorize the self.

While the Russian national imaginary constitutes the family in hyper-normative terms, Ruslan's actual family unit —Ruslan, an older brother, mother, and stepfather— rewrote the terms of what was possible. Their responses to Ruslan's gender difference (dressing in feminine-coded clothing) varied from tacit affirmation to their mother's wholehearted embrace. Sometimes the response was to ignore: "whenever they came in, I just run away, change my clothes, and everybody pretended nothing happened" (Ruslan, 2021); or to frame the crossdressing as playful: "They laughed, ok, 'hahaha, now he's dressed up again'" (Ruslan, 2021; compare these to Rico's experiences). But Ruslan's mother went further; she expressed a desire for them to be seen as the daughter she did not have: "she let my hair grow, then everybody was like, 'such a cute girl!' […] Mama was so pleased that people saw me as a girl" (Ruslan, 2021). This deliberate gendering of Ruslan "as a girl" happened in the street, in public,

and without negative repercussions. So, ultimately there was no neat (liberal) distinction between private and public, nor containment of Ruslan's gender queerness.Their femininity marked them as publicly queer before any same-sex desire. Ruslan's narration indicates that their mother's deep-rooted desire for a daughter contrasts with the experiences of other mothers of trans and gender diverse children for whom affirmation comes as the result of a *process* of acceptance (Kuvalanka et al., 2014).[40] Instead, Ruslan's positive experiences of gender affirmation within their family are evidence of "fissures" in cis-heteronormativity from which "the heterosexual nuclear family home can be *queered*" (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p. 41). As a child, Ruslan drew on their mother's (and immediate family's) affirmation as a social (public) resource to self-authorize in the context of Russian national transmisogyny and cis-heteronormativity. Notably, given their experiences of transmisogyny as an adult in Canada, Ruslan was later able to draw on these same resources to self-authorize via Masha.

As a child, Ruslan has familial resources to draw on in public to contest disconfirming conditions. As an adult, now living away from the family home, Ruslan cultivates other resources to self-authorize the 'person' they desire to be within what is available. As a professional dancer, Ruslan works for several touring dance companies and later as a dance-oriented personal fitness instructor. This (public) work permits Ruslan to wear feminine-coded clothing and shoes (e.g., high heels), and their gender variance was "covered by professional needs" (Ruslan, 2021). Ruslan was explicit that these acts were self-authorizing decisions: "[it was] my way to connect with my feminine part, back in Russia, without being judged or being abused" (Ruslan, 2021). Avoiding abuse, Ruslan's strategic choices of feminine attire for

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[40] Ruslan's experience of family affirmation in Russia is also at odds with the challenges reported by some families with trans/gender-diverse children in North American contexts (Kuvalanka et al., 2019)

professional purposes demonstrate how they navigated the prevailing (national) disconfirming conditions of trans/homophobia and transmisogyny. In Canada, Masha's performances provide Ruslan with a public 'we' of self-confirmation: Ruslan invests in Masha the feminine-coded dance skills (especially pole dancing) that they had developed in Russia within the more limited space available there ("That was kind of my connection to the drag"; Ruslan, 2021). Ruslan via Masha draws on both the familial resources that affirmed their gender variance and the professional resources that folded gender expression into performance to self-authorize, thus countering some of the same disconfirming conditions they continue to experience in Canada. In other words, (private) familial affirmation of self is extended to (public) professional affirmation of self, cumulatively providing building blocks of social affirmation of self; ultimately, these affirmations provide Ruslan with pathways for self-authorization via choices they make in the rendering of their drag persona, Masha.

Through Kero and Ruslan's narrations, I have outlined how respondents mobilize, via their drag personas in the present, affirming familial and other resources from their pasts to self-authorize. Kero and Ruslan face some similar disconfirming conditions: Egyptian and Russian nationalist cis-heteronormativity, trans/homophobia, and transmisogyny. Their responses counter these forces by drawing on affirming experiences with family members. On the face of it, Kero's family history contrasts markedly with Ruslan's. But even in Kero's case, where violence predominates, they *choose* (and here is an indicator of self-authorization) select elements of their mother's character to invest in the development of their persona. Ruslan's narrative aligns with those of other queer refugees and migrants who attest to the centrality of their affirming families in their migration experiences (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Luo, 2022). Indeed, Ruslan looks beyond their affirming family, when these are no longer immediately available, to their professional

experiences from which they carve out public space for their socially disconfirmed femininity. These resources are carried forward into their Canadian lives, where both Kero and Ruslan continue to experience negating conditions (some the same, some different), but where they self-authorize via their drag personas. Some other respondents, like Ruslan and against prevalent scripts of a fraught queer relationship to 'family' (Weston, 1997), emphasized how affirming and sustaining their families were of their queerness and their drag. For example, Devine Darlin (drag 'mother' to Naomi/Victor) recounts: "My siblings, my mom supports me. My dad took some while to come around, but now he's the biggest fan of Devine […]!"[41] In the next section, I turn to the narratives of Kiki/Haresh and Samantha to explore how 'family' expands into other kin, other 'we' groups or collectivities as resources through which a relational 'I' is authorized.

5.5 'We' Groups: Self-Authorization in Kinship and Collectivity

Kiki/Haresh traces his experience of drag performance to his early childhood days in Singapore. He recalls, as an infant, giving impromptu performances at home when the local Tamil radio station would play Hindi songs in the afternoon:

> One day, at four o'clock, the music came, a certain song came [on], I knew it... I was, I don't know how old I was, maybe three, maybe four? […] And, and I suddenly... it was a female singer… And I just got up. I pick a straw broom, and I started dancing with this mop. At first, I don't think I even had it. I was just dancing. And the servant, who was maybe sweeping at some point, she stopped, and she looked at the... They were all fascinated. (Haresh, 2021)

Haresh views these childhood performances as a kind of embryonic drag since they involved lip-syncing to female singers and dance movements and gestures that were culturally coded as feminine. Da Rosa and Felipe (2021) suggest that in drag, young children intuitively grasp the

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[41] Interview conducted June 17, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

performativity of gender through gender scripts that they 'read', learn, and (re)produce (see also Keenan & Hot Mess, 2020). The young Haresh's audience extended outward from his Sindhi family 'we' group. It includes the family's Hindi and Malay-speaking servants, as well as mostly Mandarin-speaking passersby who could view through a gate the performance in the courtyard of the family's Singaporean home. Haresh's family tacitly endorsed his desire for cross-cultural, semi-public, and gender-playful performance ("I was doing something fun and enjoyable for people"; Haresh, 2021). Such conditions around Haresh's performance indicated an early self-authorization in the context of an affirming familial 'we' group.

As an adult drag artist in Toronto, Haresh draws on these resources in his performance: (i) the childish gender-playfulness with a broom/mop is now a sophisticated drag reading of gender's constructs; (ii) Kiki's Toronto audiences are similarly 'multicultural'/lingual and "enjoyable for people", although rooted in (queer) 'South Asian' collectivity; and (iii) many of Kiki's performances continue to be semi-public in that they take place in domestic venues of friends' birthday and anniversary parties. Thus, as Kiki, Haresh evokes his early childhood for and finds self-authorizing resources. In fact, when a little older, Haresh's enjoyment of dance and song was explicitly affirmed by his father: "[my father] said, 'put [your dancing] to good use, and raise, maybe, raise funds for a little charity? Invite all your parents' friends, people contribute, and you [...] put on a number?'" (Haresh, 2021). Notably, this altruistic orientation to Haresh's childhood performances continues to the present when Kiki is created within Khush to become a lynchpin feature of their fundraising community events. What's more, his father's encouragement of Haresh's feminine-coded performances contrasts directly with Rico's father's angry rejection of feminine-coded 'entertainment'. Indeed, Haresh's affirmative experience of

gender play within family is closer to the loving affirmation Ruslan experienced from their mother (and family).

The gender performance affirmation Haresh experienced in his familial 'we' group was, however, in the context of larger social and political disconfirming conditions. His family may have endorsed his gender-playful performances, but he could not disclose his sexuality to them. His same-sex desires placed him at risk of prosecution given both Singapore's colonial legacy law criminalizing sex between men and a prohibition continued by an illiberal national government on the grounds of an alleged cultural incompatibility (Ramdas, 2021; Yue, 2007). Haresh reported experiencing mortal fear of being publicly exposed as queer, including the risk to his job in a multinational technology firm. Haresh's queerness alienated him, too, from the local Sindhi diaspora, who he described as a "very close knit, very gossipy" community "in siege" (Haresh, 2021), alluding to their conservative diasporic nationalism. Specifically, Haresh feared the hurt it would cause his parents should his queerness be the source of their gossip. In this way, Haresh experienced the double exilic condition of a queer diasporic subject, whose queer location positions them *contra* the traditional diaspora.[42] However, Haresh had a self-authorizing response to these national and ethno-cultural disconfirming conditions in the form of a cultural and linguistic code-switching strategy.

Haresh recalls moving easily between the domestic sphere of his middle-class (Sindhi) family, their 'multicultural'/lingual domestic staff, and his equally diverse friendship circles in the city-state. These were Haresh's Singaporean 'we' groups: "I just considered myself Singaporean, with my Singapore friends, most of whom were Chinese, a couple Malay, or maybe

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[42] Shahidian (1999) similarly notes some queer Iranian migrants in Canada experience "a double migrancy/exile; once with respect to the homeland, the second with respect to the Iranian community in Canada" (p. 195).

a couple of Indian; but none [were] Sindhi" (Haresh, 2021). His sexual location denied by the Sindhi community and not disclosable to his Sindhi family, Haresh positioned himself within a 'multicultural'/lingual Singaporean polity: "we just knew with whom to speak which language" (Haresh, 2021). In fact, Haresh's ease of movement among ethno-cultural groups in Singapore was thanks to his command of Singlish. The creole Singlish fuses elements of English, Malay, Chinese languages, and Tamil into a distinct language spoken by almost all Singaporeans (Tan, 2017). Despite its being so widely spoken, the Singaporean state discourages use of Singlish in favour of English as part of their attempts at nation building (Tan, 2017). Therefore, Haresh's choice to use Singlish (before English and other local languages) was a self-authorization that drew on an imagined (Anderson, 2006) Singaporean 'multicultural' identity defined by the popular use of Singlish *contra* the national political favouring of English.[43] What's more, Haresh often deployed code switching, i.e., a capacity to mix linguistic sign systems and lexis within and between utterances, from Singlish to English and other local languages. David (2006) notes that, unlike Haresh, the Singaporean Sindhis tended to use English in all social domains while code switching Sindhi (not Singlish) lexis into their speech. Haresh's pragmatic choice of Singlish within the Singaporean context positioned him in a national 'we' group. It was a self-authorization in collectivity within the limits of what was available to him given the disconfirming conditions that centred on his sexual location. Ultimately, the 'fusion' language of the creole Singlish and Haresh's 'multicultural' self-authorization anticipated his assertion of a queer 'South Asian' cultural 'fusion' in Toronto through his drag persona, Kiki.

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[43] This is not to say that the Singaporean self-imagining as 'multicultural' with which Haresh aligns himself is not, as with other multiculturalisms, unproblematic. Ang (2018), for example, documents 'new' racism from local Chinese-Singaporean populations directed toward Chinese migrants, who are racialized and 'othered'.

Samantha's relationship with her parents was a fraught one from early childhood. Her father was a Baptist pastor, and, with her mother, they founded an orphanage and school in El Salvador. Samantha's parents' energies were invested in such "social justice"-oriented work. Ultimately, it was this work that made them political targets in the civil war and led to their seeking refuge in Mexico, then Canada. As a result of their attention being elsewhere, Samantha experienced neglect; the care her parents demonstrated to other children was expansive, "but not at home" (Samantha, 2021). The neglect led to Samantha experiencing some trauma at a young age "from […] not having parents around" (Samantha, 2021). And yet, despite these familial conditions of disconfirmation (on top of the social and political ones that pushed the family to leave El Salvador),[44] Samantha's assessment of her father, from the present looking back, is one of admiration "for the work he did". Indeed, Samantha denominates herself "a PK, a pastor's kid" (Samantha, 2021); a child who takes after her father.

Even with her history of disconfirmation in the family and her emergent queer sexuality, when she graduated high school in Toronto, Samantha entered a Baptist ministry college to train to be a pastor like her father. She frames this decision to do what her father did as a genetic inheritance: "that runs in my blood" (Samantha, 2021). Although she dropped out of this college after a year, Samantha pursued social and political work, as her parents had, in forming queer 'Latinx' collectivity through drag with Hola and supporting other HIV+ 'Latinx' refugees via Latinos Positivos and the HIV prevention program at the Centre for Spanish-speaking Peoples. Thus, similar to how Kero drew on their mother's best characteristics in creating KeroPatra, Samantha selected the most positive quality of her father (and mother) —an orientation to social

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[44] Alessi et al. (2016) document, alongside many negative consequences, "extraordinary levels of resilience" among queer and trans forced migrant adults who experienced multiple forms of abuse as children (p. 102).

justice— and folds it into her self-authorization. Notably, Samantha refers to the three social initiatives she founded as "my three children" (Samantha, 2021). While her parents' efforts to create spaces of collectivity for orphaned (and in Mexico, refugee) children was to the detriment of their own children, Samantha's attention on her 'children' —spaces of collectivity for her queer, positive, 'Latinx', refugee kin— is an expansion of 'family', forging 'we' groups beyond the confines of the heterosexual nuclear one. Samantha's parents are resources from which she materializes a self-authorization in these larger collectivities.

Acosta's (2013; 2014) ethnographic work with lesbian, bi, and queer Latinas in the US highlights the efforts queer 'Latinx' folk make "to integrate their parents, siblings, partners, friends, children and community members into one kin network" (2014, p. 45). Samantha's self-authorization in collectivity provides an excellent example of this kind of weaving together of family, friends, 'children', and community. Aside from her parents, Samantha's other immediate family member was her late sibling, Mariana. With Mariana, Samantha created the House of Trench (from their shared persona 'family' name), a Ballroom kinship group, where both siblings took the role of house 'mother'. 'Ballroom' is a North American cultural performance modality centring on dances and catwalk-style competitions, which are created and performed by Black and Latinx/a/o queer, trans, and non-binary folk (Dalton, 2021). Two features are essential: "anchoring family-like structures, called houses, and the flamboyant, competitive balls that they produce" (Arnold & Bailey, 2009, p. 174). The houses enter competition with one another at the balls, and each house comprises a 'family' of experienced performers who take on the roles of house mother and father with younger and newer members being the 'children' that they recruit, mentor, and nurture (Arnold & Bailey, 2009). Passa (2021) notes that the "use of kinship terms (i.e., sisters, mother) helps construct a sense of belonging" (p. 134). The seemingly

heteronormative configuration reflects an appropriation and resignification of culturally dominant "kinscripts"; a term borrowed from the ethnographers Stack and Burton (1993) that refers to an intergenerationally inherited "interplay of [Black] family ideology, norms, and behaviors over the life course" (Arnold & Bailey, 2009, p. 173). The kinship system created provides both emotional and material support —'houses' also sometimes mean physical homes— to Black and other racialized queer and gender diverse youth who have been expelled from families and homes of origin (Dalton, 2021; compare also Passa, 2021). Thus, Black and 'Latinx' ballroom houses blend the caregiving supposed of an idealized (heterosexual) family and an authorization of gender and sexual queerness in a 'chosen' family (Weston, 1998). As Rodríguez (2020) notes, 'family' "often bleeds into" (queer) kinship (p. 215). Ballroom houses supplant and exceed 'given' families/homes while rewriting them to incorporate their desired social functions. Samantha's desire to foster collectivity, seen in her three 'Latinx' community initiatives, is expanded via the House of Trench to construct the family she desires and through which she self-authorizes.

In this section, I have emphasized in the examples of Kiki/Haresh and Samantha that self-authorization in the past and present draws on resources of family, kinship, and collectivity of various kinds. As I suggested in Chapter Four, while drag performance is sometimes interpreted as an emblematic process of (neo)liberal subjectification, the narratives in this study point instead to a relationally produced subject; the desired 'person' emerges through collectivity within the domain of what is (socially) available (I expand on this observation in the next chapter). The examples of Haresh and Samantha expand the familial 'we' group to other kinds of 'chosen' family (Weston, 1997) and "kinship practices" (Butler, 2002). Furthermore, the impact of 'given' families as they emerge through a looking back to the past from the present as

resources from which the persona elaborates a desired (but denied) 'person' is significant. 'Given' families for these racialized drag artists are more than sites of (past) refuge and "security" (Gupta, 1989); they are sources through which (present) self-authorization is effectuated. Almost all of the artists in this study linked memories of family members to their drag personas and performances. In one way or another, all emphasized how they generated other forms of "queer relationality" (Jakobsen, 2010) through their drag, which I further examine in the next chapter. And yet, that is not to say that all respondents 'fused' histories of families of origin with their present-day personas in the ways Kiki/Haresh and Samantha do, nor do all expand on the heteronormative 'family' to include queer/drag kin and collectivity. For example, Malika/Shafik presents his female family members as his only drag 'family': "I guess I don't have a drag family because my real family is my drag family".[45] Shafik traces his family's influence on Malika back to experiences as a child in Kenya, where his aunt dressed him in drag to attend a children's fancy dress party. So, although the manner varies, almost all the artists highlight that family of origin had and continues to have a formative impact on the persona through which they self-authorize. The 'fusions' of familial and ethno-cultural elements in Haresh's Kiki and the family reunification (and expansion) Samantha materializes in the House of Trench signal the focus of the next section, where I elaborate, with examples from the narratives of Dina/Ramin and Hernando/Alejandra, on the ways respondents render personas that are 'fused' with kin, and which re-unite self with desired (but denied) 'person'.

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[45] Interview conducted May 28, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

5.6 Family Re-Unions: Self-Authorization by 'Fusing' Kin to Persona

As sketched in Chapter Four, the writer/actor Ramin turns to drag and creates the persona of Dina in response to compound disconfirmations of his queer, refugee, and ethno-cultural locations. Dina is the site of his contestation of (Iranian) homophobia and white Islamophobia. Ramin recounts how the persona interlaces his Persian family's refugee/migrant history. The name, Dina, is borrowed from a Persian pop diva who Ramin came to know via his sister: "when my sister would blast [Persian pop] in the shower, I would secretly dance along to it" (Ramin, 2021). The need to dance in secret Ramin associates with the conditions of racialized disconfirmation he experienced as a refugee child in an overwhelming white Canadian city. Ramin's response was to obscure his ethno-cultural location, to "try[…] to be the cool white kid" and "not bring any attention to myself" (Ramin, 2021); his Persian-ness was the "secret" (Ramin, 2021).[46] But as the persona of Dina was to be a migrant Persian woman, Ramin used his professional training and studied the styles and speech of other migrant and non-migrant members of his family, such as an aunt who is so "loud" when she speaks to him via video call from Iran "you would have to shield your ears" (Ramin, 2021). Therefore, Ramin selects various cultural codes of Persian femininity filtered through his family 'we' group to embody in Dina: "I listened and watched everything. And when I would put that scarf on [Dina], I totally felt like I became her" (Ramin, 2021). Family completes, or unites, Ramin's embodiment in Dina of his desired 'person' ("I became her"). Furthermore, Dina summons a family inheritance to contest both the cultural rupture of exile Ramin's parents experienced seeking refuge and his own

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[46] Karimi (2021) notes a preference among queer Iranian refugees in Canada for the ethnonym 'Persian' rather than 'Iranian' as a means of "negotiating racial boundaries and seeking proximity with white citizens" (p. 2865), especially following the explosion of Islamophobia post-9/11. Ramin told me, "I feel like 'Persian' sounds nicer; more fun and less threatening in some areas".

disconfirming conditions of ethno-cultural erasure. Thus, Ramin via his creation of Dina and the help of family self-authorizes as the (denied) Persian he desired to be: "this culture that I ran away from, […] I'm now like really embracing" (Ramin, 2021). By fusing select elements of his family's personas to Dina, Ramin re-unites his self with his ethno-cultural location and his history of refuge with his present (queer) diasporic subjectivity.

As a child (and adult), Islamophobic exclusion, especially following 9/11, was foremost among disconfirming conditions Ramin experienced. He was conscious, too, that queerness and being Iranian are often represented as incompatible by dominant Iranian national and diasporic cultures (Shakhsari, 2012) as well as in Western homonationalist imaginaries linked to post-9/11 discourses of securitization (Rouhani, 2019). However, Ramin's immediate family —parents and sister— are very affirming of his sexual location. Ramin's family back him unconditionally: "they're very supportive of me, and when I came out, they were like, 'cool!'" (Ramin, 2021). Ramin is not alone among respondents in this experience (e.g., Ruslan); such 'given'-family love and affirmation contests widely circulating narratives of the heterosexual nuclear family and 'home' as sites of rejection and violence (Sinfield, 1996; and for more discussion, Fortier, 2003). Undeniably for many, these narratives are rooted in reality; Kero's experiences attest to them. And yet, Ramin's experience upsets normative expectations —especially in the context of his Persian diaspora— and aligns with studies that emphasize the important role of 'given' family for many queer migrants (for example, Gorman-Murray, 2008; Wimark, 2016). In interview, Ramin underlined the humour in these subverted expectations: "I had monologues ready to go, to defend my honour, and [my parents] are like, 'we love you!' I was like, 'this is not fair'" (Ramin, 2021). Indeed, Ramin's parents' support extends to his performances as Dina, with, for example, his mother's suggesting to him that Dina's shows be advertised in Farsi to reach a Persian

diasporic audience. While his parents may be comfortable with his engaging of diaspora, the matter of Ramin's queerness within their extended family is one of deliberative choices, recalling the treating of queerness as a "tacit subject" (Decena, 2008); it's understood but not explicitly: "They're not parading around with Pride flags or anything, or you know calling up our very religious Islamic relatives and bragging about their gay son, but they're really supportive and wonderful" (Ramin, 2021). This familial affirmation is an additional resource that Ramin fuses to his persona Dina to self-authorize.

Ramin's parents assist him in managing the potentially negative responses of his wider family to his sexual location. Other respondents engage in their own management strategies. Haresh responded to his experience of a 'gossipy' Sindhi diaspora potentially outing him to his family by drawing on the support of his ethno-culturally diverse friendship 'we' group. Meanwhile, his family's validation of his childhood gender performances pointed to 'entertainment' as a cover for his sexual difference. Similarly, Victor drew on the "intimate" resources of his family's support for his childhood performances to deflect his gender play as 'entertainment'. For Rico, drag was also positioned to his family as 'entertainment', deflecting attention from gender normative transgression. Alejandra narrates a comparable experience in how she manages her family's knowledge of her lesbian location. While Alejandra acknowledges that her internet presence means her family may know tacitly that she is queer, she positions her drag persona as a professional 'entertainment' that, like these other respondents, deflects questions about her sexuality. Alejandra recalls, on a festive visit from Canada to her Mexican home, revealing her drag performance to her father: "I was like dancing with [my dad], and he was like, 'you're really good... Wow! You should really dance.' And I'm like, 'I do that.' […] 'I charge, and I sing, and I dress like a man and do it'" (Alejandra, 2021). Alejandra chooses

to present her drag (her dancing, singing, and "dress[ing] like a man") as her job as an artist ("I charge [i.e., earn money]"). Drag is more than 'entertainment', it's work; any other implication is unspoken. This economic positioning means Alejandra can indicate to her father an implied gender and sexual difference without naming queerness explicitly. Alejandra's choices here exemplify Cashman's (2017) observation that the homonormative Euro-American narrative of the closet is a "problematic metaphor that ignores the possibility of a different relationship between individuals and families in Mexican/Latinx communities" (p. 131). Alejandra consciously selects what aspects of her (desired) identity she wishes her family to know. The various strategies of Alejandra and the other respondents mentioned above represent "a continuum of orientations toward disclosure" (Cashman, 2017, p. 130). Throughout, these artists, like Alejandra, present themselves in their narrations as responding with deliberative acts to align desires for queer and non-queer family relationships. As she narrates, Alejandra's now transnational relationship with her parents is a lovingly close one, and so her "agentive silence" (Cashman, 2017, p. 106) balances the importance of their kinship bonds with an assertion of her gender and sexual differences. Other studies of queer 'Latinx' migrants (Acosta, 2008; 2013; 2014; Decena, 2008; Peña, 2013) attest to these kinds of agentive decisions vis-à-vis family reception of queerness as demonstrated by Alejandra. Drag aids Alejandra in her negotiation of her familial and sexual locations.

In fact, Alejandra's construction of her drag persona, Hernando, is where she incorporates her family in ways that facilitate her self-authorization. As she narrates an imagined history for Hernando, Alejandra summons memories of her father and grandfather:

> [Hernando] is a farm boy who wants a love that lasts forever, and [...] he wants a big house with two kids, a dog. Just a really regular, normal life. [...] I wouldn't like the farm. Like I've never been to a farm. I don't care about farms or stuff like that. [But] I have

stories from my dad that my grandpa used to have a farm. So, I prefer to use things that are kind of nice things that I have seen from male people in my family who I admire and I love [and] put [them] into Hernando. (Alejandra, 2021)

Amid the normativity of this outline ("regular, normal life"), Hernando is in-fused with authenticating detail drawn from family ("my grandpa used to have a farm"), generating a genealogical rustic rootedness that was neither available nor necessarily desirable ("I don't care about farms") to Alejandra in her urban Mexican life. Now, through Hernando, she folds this real and imagined familial history into her self-authorization in a queer 'Latinx' diaspora in Canada. In her authoring of Hernando, Alejandra fuses him with the character of a real brother she never had; a baby boy her parents lost: Hernando has "traits that I knew the brother I never knew had. And also traits that for me were thought too masculine" (Alejandra, 2021). Hernando sutures together lost male family members (brother and grandfather) with a model of Mexican masculinity that is unavailable to her as Alejandra, a gendered location she may have desired but could not access in a cis-heteronormative economy since such "traits" were "thought too masculine". What's more, Alejandra's queer fashioning of Hernando is spliced with what may be her own desire for "a love that lasts forever".

How Alejandra fuses elements of her real (and imagined, in the case of her dead brother) histories together in Hernando brings to mind Rico's assertion that he has been able to "weave" together his Peruvian-ness with a Canadian-ness, his whiteness with his 'Latinx' location (see Chapter Four). Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) borrows a Nahuatl word, *nepantla*, which she posits as a transitory space of in-betweenness inhabited by the queer border figure of the *mestiza*. In Anzaldúa's conceptualization, *nepantla* involves processes of becoming, horizons of possibility, and zones of liminality. While Anzaldúa's *nepantla* has proven invaluable to political revolutionaries and scholars from many critical fields alike, a recent study has added a

more culturally and philosophically accurate understanding of the concept. As Antuna (2018) explains, *nepantla* is etymologically related to Nahuatl words for 'weaving'. In Aztec ontology, it refers to the permanently weaving movements of *teotl*, i.e., the energy that permeates the universe. Antuna highlights another motion in *teotl* that may be even more generative, from a queer perspective, than *nepantla*: a re-orienting twisting called *malinalli*. The effect of *malinalli* is queerly and dragishly transformational since it indicates "processes that can create novel representations from the old" (Antuna, 2018, p. 161). I want to suggest that in creating Hernando with strands of her family's history and her own (gender) queer desires, Alejandra harnesses a *nepantla* (weaving) and *malinalli* (twisting) through which she achieves a self-authorizing uniting of self with the 'person' she desires to be, a re-union of her Mexican (heterosexual) family past with her (queer) Toronto present/future.

In this section, I have built on the previous section's exposition of how respondents deploy resources of familial and other 'we' collectivities to self-authorize through persona. With the help of Dina/Ramin and Hernando/Alejandra, I have indicated some of the ways family is 'fused' with, 'twisted' and 'woven' into the persona to materialize a (re)uniting of self with the desired (but denied) 'person'. While Alejandra, like several other respondents, negotiates a tacit familial understanding of her queerness (Decena, 2008), Ramin experiences a familial affirmation of queerness that contests expected narratives of rejection and disconfirmation that some queer critics have interrogated (Sinfield, 1996; Fortier, 2003) and others deflate (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Wimark, 2016). What is particularly important to note in these two cases is that both Ramin and Alejandra summon select real and conjectured facets of family, remembered from their past lives and their 'home' countries, as self-authorizing resources in fashioning their drag personas, demonstrating how 'family' re-unites self to desired 'person' through drag.

Emphasizing a 'family' re-union in these drag artists self-authorizations is not an endorsement of liberal humanist nor conservative/nationalist concepts of normative 'family' (glossed by Lewis, 2019; see also Weston, 1997). Both Rodríguez (2020; building on Weston, 1997) and Lewis (2019) view any boundary between 'given' family and queer 'chosen' family/kinship not as oppositional but as blurred and insubstantial. Given the experiences of artists like Ramin and Alejandra, I would concur with the idea of complementarity between 'given' and 'chosen' families. I would, further, suggest that a polyvalent 'family' is a central organizing thread in the narrative weavings of drag self-authorizations.

5.7 Conclusion

One of the first interviews I conducted was with St. Lucia-born Trinity/Dunstan.[47] He alerted me to what would become a theme recurring in the narratives of many more respondents: the centrality of family to his drag persona and performance. Dunstan spoke of seeing, as a child, his mother on stage and desiring to *be* her. Other (female) family members were foundations for Dunstan to develop proto-drag mimetic skills of lip-syncing, posture, and style. As I have argued in this chapter, familial experiences like Dunstan's became resources through which personas were created for self-authorization. The persona is where, through skills of mimicry first exercised as a child among family, through corporeal stylings modelled on family members, and through select real and imagined family (hi)stories, 'given' family —as supportive or rejecting as it may be— is re-united with the self. These family re-unions are anchored in powerful memories of desires to be a 'person', with all the self-authorizing inspiration of the family member. Dunstan recalls watching his mother perform on stage, "I wanted to *be* her" (Dunstan, 2021). But

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[47] Interview conducted January 26, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

Dunstan also apprised me of how in his experience, drag personas and performances offer queer refugees and other migrants access to a desired *space* of belonging: "when we're then an immigrant or refugee, and we land […], in Canada, in Toronto, New York... […] that's the identity that we have already. […] When we find where the stage or the shows happen, 'Ah! I'm home!'" (Dunstan, 2021). Here Dunstan invokes his experience of securing both kinship and a space of belonging after migrating to Canada within queer Black community via drag performance; a belonging he frames in terms of arrival at a familial/familiar 'home'. When Dunstan takes to the stage as Trinity, the diminished 'person' of the refugee/migrant (in Western rescue logics) is contested and overturned. What is striking in the narratives of Dunstan and other refugee/migrant drag artists is the way 'family' is summoned to bring self into alignment with place, an establishing through family-inspired personas of a home-space. In the next chapter, I take forward such drag re-imaginings of 'home' as a space of belonging within queer diasporic communities, and I explore how refugee/migrant drag opens up queer forms of collectivity and relationality that expand on 'family' and kinship.

6. "Beyond our wildest dreams": Drag Futures, Relationality, and Space for Belonging

6.1 Introduction

Melissa White's (2014) proposal of a queer politics of no borders highlights how both queer theory and migrant activism for a future without borders "focus on potentialities and becoming rather than the apprehensions of 'being.'" (p. 993). As outlined in the two previous chapters, the respondents in this study navigate as both drag artists and displaced people many "apprehensions of 'being'" or, rather, disconfirming conditions in their past and present lives before and after migration. But what they also do is self-authorize in the face of these conditions to materialize via persona the 'person' they desire to be(come). Thus, they signal queer and migrant futures of "potentialities and becoming". In this chapter, I follow Chapter Five's focus on the past in the drag artists narratives —on how ('given') family becomes resources with which these artists materialize the 'person' they desire to be(come) by means of a drag persona— with a (re)orientation toward the future. In doing so, I suggest the significance of 'tomorrow' to the artists as some time beyond survival and toward a queer and migrant future of be(com)ing, however riskily utopian that may sound. I argue below that the eight representative artists work in collectivity, in relationship with others, to transform the social, political, and cultural conditions in the present that deny them (and their collectivities) belonging, thus enacting and (re)producing queer/drag/diasporic futures for their selves and others.

That this future-oriented work is a collective one is suggested by repeated instances in my respondents' narratives where they emphasize themselves as relational beings; as subjects who emerge from and work in collectivities. Amir, a respondent from outside the core eight,

understands drag performers within the familiar queer affective dyad of pride and shame, as seekers of "freedom" from the oppressive conditions of shame: "I [the artist] want to break free of the shackles of shame, but also because I want people who are breaking free or want to break free […] to identify and connect to me".[48] What caught my attention in Amir's statement is not so much the pride/shame focus but the annunciation of *desire* to "break free" and its purpose to *connect* the artist with others through identification. The desire to "break free" speaks to a, perhaps, utopian hope for complete social and political autonomy, while the goal to connect speaks to how central collectivity was in the narratives I heard. Such desires and hopes for future (belonging) in collectivity are what I set out to elucidate in this chapter. I contextualize my discussion in this chapter within theories of queer futurity defended, perhaps most prominently among others, by José Muñoz in his 2009 *Cruising Utopia*. As Brown (2020) summarizes, Muñoz "does not propose a future to be realized, but rather indexes the failure or negation of what is in the present while also acknowledging the existence, in that very present, of *what could and should be*" (p. 156; my emphasis). In my discussion, I argue that the artists in this study not only counter negating forces and indicate "what could and should be", but indeed, set out, in collectivity, to enact their futures.

The chapter is organized thus: first, I provide some context from secondary literature for my discussion of the themes. I then present my analysis and argument built around three thematic areas. The next section uses examples from the narratives of Haresh and Ramin to expand upon and clarify the idea of a relational subject emerging from 'we' groups or collectivities. I argue that artists like Kero, Victor, and Samantha cultivate collective spaces of belonging, and in doing so are committed to future making for themselves and others. Finally, I

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[48] Interview conducted March 12, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

present examples from Alejandra, Ruslan, and Rico's narratives of collective social and political activism that produces queer/drag/diasporic futures through, ultimately, generational renewal.

6.2 Context: Queer Futures in Relationality and Collectivity

Respondents in this study authorize the 'person' they desire to be by means of resources from the past and present which their drag personas materialize. They are conscious of how much the undertow of their past (child) lives tugs on their present (adult) existence. As such, they are attuned to what Freeman (2010) calls "temporal drag"; that is, thinking of drag not only as the "excess that calls the gender binary into question" but an excess "of the signifier 'history' rather than [only] of 'woman' or 'man'" (p. 62). They look backwards to "enact a future vision" of queer potentiality as Muñoz argues (2009, p. 4). Shane Moreman (2019) explains how by drawing on the past and present this future-vision enactment occurs:

> The act of remembering oneself as a queer child is an act of re-imagining and re-performing one's childhood by imagining its links to the queer future one occupies, simultaneously projecting additional queer futures of continuity between the reclaimed past, the present act of imagination, and a future made more survivable. (p. 189)

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate such a continuity of self-authorization from past to present to (queer) futures by building on what the analysis of the previous two chapters has highlighted. In the last chapter, I indicated how central ('given') family is to the artists past and present and how these familial resources help establish personhood within and through broader kinship 'we' groups. I note again, as I argued in Chapter Four, the 'person' the artists desire to be (but are denied by disconfirming forces) is materialized via 'persona' that draws on resources from their multiple 'we' collectivities. In effect, 'given' family (with all the limitations of its traditional, heterosexual configuration) in the artists' narratives expands into queer and drag communities or 'chosen families' (Weston, 1997).

Nonetheless, the categories of 'family' and 'community' need prudent handling. In traditional diasporic thinking, 'family', alongside 'home', and 'community' are politically and socially conservative notions. Referring to the movement of queer people in mid-to-late twentieth-century North America from rural areas to metropolitan ones, Weston (1995) memorably depicts the "Great Gay Migration" as a "quest for community in Benedict Anderson's sense of the term [i.e., an 'imagined' community]" (p. 262). This migration conjures the search for 'community' as seeking an imagined 'we' group organized around a geographical urban space and fantasy of a unitary identity. But the experience of seeking a queer 'home' in the city, escaping the supposed site of (heterosexual) family rejection, was one that produced "more questions than it answered" (Weston, 1995, p. 274) since 'community' with those allegedly alike turned out to not be so harmonious. Desires for togetherness and belonging may be attractive and romantic, but are equally likely to "create social divisions, encourage prejudice, and provoke violence" (Wood & Waite, 2011, p. 201). Therefore, Halberstam (2005) casts 'gay' quests for 'community' as ultimately conservative and "always nostalgic attempts to return to some fantasized moment of union and unity" (p. 154).

Since the conservative project of queer 'community' founders in the political reality of power inequities and differences of gender, race, class among queer subjects, some (often white, North American) queer theorists embrace the negative and propose an anti-relationality (Shahani, 2013). Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995) espoused the failure of gay male 'community' in the face of individual sexual desire as "an anticommunal mode of unbelonging" (Shahani, 2013, p. 546). Equally anti-relational is Lee Edelman's (2004) polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, which pitched the queer against reproductive futurity as condensed in the figure of the Child. But other queer critics, especially queer-of-colour thinkers, refuse to concede the

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future and, if not 'community' then, relationality to the heteronormative. Most prominent among voices for futures where queer relationality or collectivity flourishes is José Muñoz. In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz makes the case that "[q]ueerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1). While utopian queer futures may seem another romantic gesture for some, Muñoz and others, like Ahmed (2010), see a promise of future happiness in collectivity as a political necessity that queers of colour know only too well. Utopian queer collectivity offers to "make impossible the belief that there is no alternative" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 163). Importantly, these futurist queer forms of relationality "work on and against hegemonic, heteronormative, and [equally] homonormative paradigms of relating" (Eguchi & Long, 2019, p. 1606).

Queer futures of relationality require space. For Jack (Judith) Halberstam (2005), 'queer space' means "the place-making practices with postmodernism in which queer people engage" (p. 6). Such places are formed by queer counterpublics that emerge when queers are squeezed out of spaces of 'gay' consumption and are precariously always under threat from homonormative and gentrifying forces (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1811). Queer space hosts anti-heteronormative subcultures, which "suggest transient, extra familial, and oppositional modes of affiliation" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 154). The diversity of drag cultures is an example, however, of what some see as a queer subculture with its own queer (of colour) spaces and counterpublics (e.g, Calderon, 2021; El-Tayeb, 2011; Persadie, 2021). For others, drag —in its *RuPaul's Drag Race*-style iterations— is folded into (white) 'gay' consumption and normativity (e.g., Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017; Heller, 2018; LeMaster, 2015). The racialized divergence in drag spaces, publics, and cultures that I allude to here relies on DasGupta and Dasgupta's (2018) assertion that "queer space is formed through racial erasures" (p. 37), where queers of colour are

physically and symbolically pushed out of white-dominated 'gay' places. Yet, as hooks (2014) has theorized, when faced with exclusion, people of colour re-signify the margin from site of rejection to site of resistance, which is where a futurist "radical openness and possibility" is to be found (p. 153). Recalling Moreman's (2019) suggestion cited above, which linked a reclaimed past with present imagination and a more liveable future, queer-of-colour resistance "may also involve a sense of remembering and of dreaming of something better" (Pile, 1997, p. 30).

In the previous chapter's discussion of Samantha and her sibling's House of Trench, I sketched how Ballroom houses reconfigure traditional (heterosexual) 'family' descriptors — mother, father, children— as "markers of queer recognition and insider status" (Lewis, 2019, p. 36). The Ballroom house offers a clear example of queer-of-colour place-making. In Ballroom place-making (or house-making), racialized queer, trans, and non-binary folks find means "of creating an alternative world altogether" (Bailey, 2013, p. 19) I use the term 'place-making' here not as Halberstam does (above) but specifically in the sense of a "reconceptualization and materialized production of space as QPoC [i.e, queer people of colour] place by QPoC subjects" (Bacchetta et al., 2015, p. 775). This place-making summons "concrete strategies of resistance and disturbance that disrupt, however momentarily, the exclusionary coherence of spaces assumed to be white and/or straight" (ibid.). It makes spaces that would otherwise be inhabitable for queer people of colour not only survivable but liveable and with the potential for thriving. My analysis of respondents' narratives in this chapter aligns with Bacchetta et al.'s (2015) queer-of-colour placemaking and, more broadly, with Muñoz's (2009) vision of queerness as "a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (p. 16). I do so following the lead of my drag artist respondents, who, as queer refugees and migrants of colour, spoke in numerous ways about their

contributions to envisioning and creating political collectivities and relationalities. As such, I view with my respondents the productivity of drag —producing a desired 'person' in a relational or collective space— as acts of political optimism central to the queer futurities espoused by Muñoz (2009) and others.

6.3 Relational Subjects: Be(com)ing 'I' Through 'We'

In the two preceding chapters I presented examples of how self-authorization —an authorizing of the 'I'— emerges through 'we' groups or collectivities that are foregrounded in the narratives of Naomi/Victor and Chabuca/Rico (Chapter Four) and Kiki/Haresh and Samantha (Chapter Five). I return in this section to the concept of how an 'I' emerges through 'we' groups or collectivities and flesh out its significance. My analysis in this section is informed by the work of trans feminist geographer Sage Brice (2020), who uses the lens of trans experience of body and social dysphoria to re-think the relationship between individual identity and collective (political) resistance. Brice's meditations draw on Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of transindividuation. Unlike schemas of subjectification —such as the Cartesian body/mind dyad— which "render identity as necessarily either prior or subsequent to individual existence", Simondon's subject emerges from and "exists in the space of tension between individual and collective potentialities" (Brice, 2020, p. 674). Thus, "individual and collective come into being only through their mutual constitution" (Brice, 2020, p. 668). In Simondon's theory, any "binary distinction between passive [i.e., structural] and active [i.e., agential] subjectification" is rejected in favour of "the subject as a site of always relational becomings" (Brice, 2020, p. 666). Thus, "relation itself [is] the constitutive principle of existence" (Brice, 2020, p. 667). I suggest that the 'person' the drag artists desire to be(come) is just such a relational subject, neither exclusively structural nor agential, but constituted in the space between them. I turn, now, to the narratives of

Haresh and Ramin to illustrate how drag relationality is, following Brice (2020), a space of being and becoming, 'I' through 'we'.

It was within the queer 'South Asian' collective Khush and because of Khush that Haresh developed his drag persona, Kiki. Via Kiki, Haresh took up the key role of group entertainer and fundraiser for Khush and for other, allied queer 'South Asian' ventures, such as the arts festival Desh Pardesh that ran from the late 1980s to 2001. Since his employment in technology corporate sales provided him with ample economic resources, Haresh never considered drag performance as a profession ("I've never performed for money […] I don't see myself making money from this"; Haresh, 2021). Instead, he viewed his work as Kiki as a means to support his queer 'South Asian' collectivities. I refer to Kiki's performances in these spaces as 'work' for several reasons. First, to acknowledge the labour undertaken by any (drag) artist, paid or unpaid; and second, as a nod to the (Black) drag vernacular *werq.* As Ellis (2020) glosses, drag performances "have always been laborious" and to 'werq' "is to show how much you care; and it is what you will always, always have to do, easeful entitlement not being your [racialized queer] lot" (p. 161). Kiki's work with Khush and Desh Pardesh was thus Haresh's means to show how much he cared or was invested in building a collective space of not only be(com)ing but belonging. Fernandez (2006) highlights that the longing-running festival of queer 'South Asian' diasporic cultures, named, significantly, after the Hindi expression *desh pardesh* meaning 'home away from home', contributed greatly to generating conditions for "diasporic belonging" (p. 32). In the next section, I take this idea of cultivating collective spaces of belonging —including queer diasporic renderings of 'home'— as my focus. For now, I emphasize how Kiki's work with queer 'South Asian' collectivities, such as Khush and Desh Pardesh, indicates how the

'person' Haresh desires to be(come) emerges through the relational space generated between Haresh and his 'we' groups.

In Singapore, Haresh sidestepped exclusions due to his sexual location from Sindhi diasporic and Singaporean national collectivities by cultivating his diverse circle of friends. He was secure, too, in the love of his immediate family to whom he did not disclose his sexuality. In Toronto, Haresh's economic and political (vis-à-vis immigration) statuses were secure, and he cultivated a queer 'South Asian' 'kinship' group with Khush ("the acceptance here was first, within this group"; Haresh, 2021). But as was the case in Singapore, Haresh refused to be "limited" (Haresh, 2021) by either his sexual or his ethno-cultural location: "I feel like, why should we be different? Like we're not that different" (Haresh, 2021). Moving outwards via Kiki from the nucleus of his Khush 'we' group, Haresh cultivated other collectivities. From Kiki's performances for Khush to entertainment and fundraising for Desh Pardesh and club night Funk Asia, Haresh joined non-'South Asian' queer groups such as the hiking/outdoors collective, Out and Out. Ultimately, Haresh positions himself as "much more integrated within, I guess, Canadian communities" (Haresh, 2021), including "the white lesbian and gay" and his "mostly very white" neighbourhood (Haresh, 2021). In this desire to extend himself beyond sexual and ethno-cultural 'limits', Haresh echoes an assertion made by another study respondent, Amir, when he notes that "queerness becoming your entire identity is a problem. […] Queerness is a part of your identity" (Amir, 2021). Amir believes, however, that "this is what drag performers do very successfully. They highlight that [queer] part of their identity, and then they go back to their full identity" (Amir, 2021). With the notion of "back to their full identity", Amir is, perhaps, gesturing towards how personas like Kiki materialize a desired (but denied) 'person'. Kiki is central to cultivating Haresh's 'we 'groups since her performances support the

celebrations of his immediate friendship/queer kinship circles —weddings and birthdays— and, above all, fundraisers. For Haresh, the desired 'person' emerges via Kiki's ever-widening circles of relationality. Another drag artist in this study, Andrea, summarizes how drag relationality opens up self-authorizing space for the desired 'person' to emerge via persona: "for me, that was drag: […] finding this group of people, and finding this community that fully allowed myself to be whoever I wanted, […] whether that's a character, or just myself" (Andrea, 2021). In Kiki, Haresh's subjectivity is relational as Andrea describes; it is in Kiki's works of collectivity that Haresh is "fully" who he desires to be(come).

Previously I examined how Ramin folds an ethno-cultural orientation towards service to others into his performances as Dina. The Persian tradition of *taarof* prioritizes guest comfort "before you take care of yourself". Ramin emphasized that the de-centring of self materialized in *taarof* "started to really come across in the show" (Ramin, 2021). Dina would not only help audiences to 'feel welcome' in her ethno-cultural domain, but, I argue, in doing so, re-centre Ramin's desired but denied Persian-ness. The 'person' Ramin desired to be(come) emerges in Dina from a self de-centred in favour of a relational (between audience and persona) subjectivity. And Ramin's relational subjectivity is an expansive one. Much like Haresh as Kiki, Ramin as Dina stretches outward from her first 'we'(audience) group to cultivate collective spaces of be(com)ing where the desired 'person' is instantiated. Via the persona of Dina, Ramin authorizes a queerness (that conditions external to his family deny); a Persian-ness (that the whiteness of his childhood and ongoing Islamophobia conspire to erase); and a refugeeness (that Western scripts of a diminished 'person' restrain). Therefore, Dina's orientation of service to others extends beyond the stage to, for example, hosting fundraising for a queer support group and facilitating (as Dina) storytelling workshops for other racialized refugee/migrant women where their

personal narratives of be(com)ing are foregrounded. Indeed, Dina/Ramin's disposition to service

is like that of another respondent, James, who recounts that "part of [my drag name] brand is

whatever she does has to have meaning, has to have connection. [...She's kind of serving the

people] as an extension of who I am".[49]

Dina/Ramin's be(com)ing in collectivity is not limited to Canada. Karimi's (2020) study

of Iranian male refugees in Canada who left Iran because they are gay highlights how they

cultivate transnational queer social connections and friendship groups to counter a lack of

"extensive financial and cultural capital" (p. 83) enjoyed by other Iranian migrants. Ramin's

experience is somewhat different but with some resonances. Ramin was born into refugeeness

outside Iran, and so is not a queer refugee like those in Karimi's research. However, Ramin

cultivates a transnational Iranian queer collectivity through Dina's presence in online social

media form. Ramin attests that "some of [these online fans] are like my friends now" (Ramin,

2021). Any risks to Ramin from Dina's online presence in Iran are obviously not physical ones,

but nonetheless occasionally the response from within Iran (comments where "people were like

telling me to kill myself"; Ramin, 2021) feeds into the dominant homonationalist and

Islamophobic discourses (that Ramin is all too conscious of) that position Persian-ness and

queerness as incompatible. Despite these (infrequent) responses, Ramin is sustained by "all the

young, cool Iranian people [who] were like, 'You're amazing! Keep going!'" (Ramin, 2021) and

especially by gratitude from queer Iranians (for "making content for us"; Ramin, 2021). This

experience aligns with the findings of Ayoub and Bauman (2019) who, writing about LGBTQ+

organizing across borders, assert that "migration serves as an impetus for more enhanced and

transnationally-oriented queer activism" (p. 2773). Such activism helps "complicate the

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[49] Interview conducted on January 20, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto. A pseudonym is used.

[homonationalist] narrative of Western progress by showing that migrants are pivotal champions of LGBT rights" (ibid.). Ramin via Dina fosters a self-authorizing space of be(com)ing not in a solely individual sense nor a collective one but as a relational 'person' making. In a different cultural context, Asante (2022) suggests online queer collectivity "give[s] the queer African migrant identity a form of coherence that is not achievable offline" (p. 142). For Ramin, both online and in physical form, the desired 'person' emerges via Dina's queer, Persian, refugee/migrant 'we' groups.

I have re-visited Haresh and Ramin's narratives in this section to demonstrate that in the work their drag personas do to foster (expansive) collectivities, Haresh and Ramin open spaces of be(com)ing from which their desired 'person' emerges. I use the term 'collectivity' deliberately to separate the kinds of coming together as a 'we' group depicted in these narratives from the conservative conception of 'community' found troubling and troubled by queer thinkers of (migrant) relationality (e.g., DasGupta & Dasgupta, 2018; Gopinath, 2005; Halberstam, 2005; Weston, 1995). Asante (2022) reminds us of the "the duality of queer communities" since they are both "spaces for exploration, identity construction and visibility" as they are "spaces where forms of normalization and social boundaries are drawn" (p. 148). Instead, I would align the 'we' groups or collectivities cultivated in the work of Kiki and Dina with the generative relationality of queer futurist thinkers like Muñoz (2009) and Ahmed (2010); a vision of becomings (together), of potentialities and possibilities. Some of these possibilities are the focus of the following section where I examine a shift from spaces of be(com)ing to productive and collective spaces of belonging.

6.4 Cultivating Collective Spaces of Belonging

The previous two chapters presented examples from several artists' narratives of how the self is authorized through 'we' groups or collectivities. The preceding section served to clarify that the desired (but denied) 'person' emerges via persona from a relational space (between 'I ' and 'we') of be(com)ing. In this section, I demonstrate that the various 'we 'collectivities identified by the artists have greater utility than existential self-authorization; than making the disconfirming conditions of the drag artists 'worlds survivable. I argue that these 'we 'groups also have a generative quality; they make a 'home away from home' (recalling Kiki and Desh Pardesh) through relationality and collective spaces not only of be(com)ing but belonging. Collectivities in the narratives of Kero, Victor, and Samantha point to a productive quality since they enable Kero and the other artists not just to survive or exist but to make an expansive space of belonging for themselves and their 'we' groups that contests conditions of non-belonging. The fact that they wish to create these collective spaces of belonging suggests such spaces do not yet exist. The artists' desires create these spaces of belonging that indicate a commitment to building queer/drag/diasporic futures for themselves and others.

As KeroPatra, Kero is the founder of a regular monthly club night space in Toronto's 'gay' Village, originally called Arabian Nights, now known as Middle Eastern Nights (and not, say, 'Egyptian' Nights). Recalling Hernando/Alejandra's strategic alignment of her specifically northern Mexican location with Canada's pluricultural queer 'Latinx' collectivity, Kero as (Coptic) Egyptian KeroPatra convenes a performance and social space for, primarily, a pan-'Middle Eastern' public. This space is not even exclusively 'Middle Eastern' and attracts many other racialized as well as white queers. But Middle Eastern Nights is firmly KeroPatra's domain or 'realm', where she as queen holds court and ensures that white queers understand the space is

foremost for Brown and other racialized folks. In performance, KeroPatra disrupts Orientalizing forces and punctures white (homo)nationalist fears of Puar and Rai's (2002) monster-terrorist-fag: "[I] do the whole [*makes ululating sound*], followed by 'don't worry, white people, we're not going to explode... yet'" (Kero, 2021). Kero is clear in their intent to re-signify: "me taking something that is always used against us or, you know, that's oppressive" and "jok[ing] around with you about it, but make you feel awkward about it at the same time" (Kero, 2021). Ultimately, though, KeroPatra's goal in this space is to "bring the people together" (Kero, 2021). These are "her people" in the regal sense (Kero, 2021), and she wants to "make everyone feel like *at home* and welcome" (Kero, 2021; my emphasis). Queen KeroPatra's collective 'realm 'of Middle Eastern Nights cultivates, in the words of another respondent, Erin/Aleks, "that sense of belonging and community and, and like warmth that, that drag brings me, […] that like are inaccessible in other parts of my life".[50] Kero's collectivity building is underpinned by a desire to similarly transform the exclusions from belonging (the "inaccessible") they experience in Canada.

Kero recalls, performing as KeroPatra at a Pride event attended by lots of queer refugees, they were moved to imagine extending a welcoming sentiment to this queer refugee public: "it's like, this is your home now". Kero meant 'Canada is your home now', but the sentiment is one they also associate with Middle Eastern Nights: this is (y)our space of belonging. Fortier (2003) argues that for queers, 'home' is "a contingent space of attachment that is not definitional or singular" (p. 131). Wherever 'home' is to be found —in whatever "in-between" spaces (Fortier, 2003)— the concept of 'home', as a metonym of belonging, remains a site of "enduring queer affiliations" (Eng, 1997, p. 32) for sexual and gender diverse (diasporic) folk. Kero is someone

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[50] Interview conducted February 12, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

who self-authorizes via drag a desired non-binary 'person' in the face of transmisogynist violence from not only cis-heterosexual family but among cis gay men. Thus, Kero considers it KeroPatra's "mission" to make Middle Eastern Nights a collective 'home' for trans and non-binary folk, which, invoking 'home'-as-security, they frame as "mak[ing] a place that's safe for them" (Kero, 2021). Significantly, Kero chose as a venue for Middle Eastern Nights a Village bar that has historically positioned itself as catering to a men-only public. However, the management of the bar —to whom Kero was a well-known regular— "wanted to learn how to be inclusive" (Kero, 2021). The desire for inclusion aligned with Kero/KeroPatra's mission of making a collective space of belonging ("we need to stop being divided"; Kero, 2021) as well as their desire to challenge hegemonic Arabic and Middle Eastern masculinities and to address "toxic masculinity" (Kero, 2021) and (trans)misogyny among cis gay men.

In an essay exploring the impacts of cis gay male misogyny on queer and trans femininities, Hale and Ojeda (2018) propose that the desire for and to be 'straight-acting' ("that most socially lucrative form of masculinity" p. 319) leads to gay male rejection of femininity (on all bodies), as well as "hostility to, disinterest in and degradation of women" (p. 315). By creating a collective space of belonging for queer 'Middle Eastern' cis, trans, non-binary people with a spectrum of feminine and masculine expression, Kero responds to Hale and Ojeda's (2018) call to (especially white) cis gay men that they repel "the lure of hegemonic masculinity and casual misogyny" (p. 322). Thus, the queer 'Middle Eastern' collectivity that KeroPatra/Kero worked to build is not just collectivity for the sake of coming together; it is a means through which belonging is cultivated in contestation of forces of non-belonging (such as transmisogyny, hetero- and homonormativities, and homonationalist and various racist

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exclusions from belonging). Furthermore, drag is how Kero makes a collective space of belonging and, ultimately as I go on to argue in the next section, makes social change.

Just as Kero locates themself in Toronto within a broader 'Middle Eastern' location than Egyptian, Victor often refers to himself as 'African' rather than specifically Sierra Leonian. Such self-positioning responds not only to "contexts of white domination" (Brown, 2020, p. 168) but to his sense of ethno-racial and cultural marginalization in other queer spaces. In one example, Victor describes competing against mostly 'Latinx' artists at Toronto's foremost 'Latinx' drag venue, El Convento Rico. After a first failed attempt, Naomi won the contest at El Convento when "I did an African set [of songs]", which Victor positions as "staying true to myself" (Victor, 2021), i.e., foregrounding a posited 'authentic' ("true") ethno-cultural location. Another example is Victor's experience trying to make space for Naomi in white-dominated drag performance venues amid other non-African Black artists: "I always feel like I don't get included. I was like, 'yo, I'm Black too, like... Look at me over here'" (Victor, 2021). Perhaps because of such exclusions, Victor cites a desire to foster "shared experiences" with other queer diasporic Africans (Brown, 2020, p. 168) through the cultivating of a collective space of belonging. The contemporary African pop songs Victor used to win the competition at El Convento also serve to connect Naomi to the queer person in her audience "who is also African, that likes [the African song I'm performing], that loves it!" (Victor, 2021).

Glossing Gilroy (1990), Freeman (2008) notes that "belonging is enacted among those oppressed by racism […] by tying diasporic subjects to one another through bodily or kinetic means, forming interpretive communities who speak in sound or movement" (p. 303). Through Naomi's musical performances, Victor carves out a 'home' space and feelings of queer kinship that contest multiple exclusions; a notional 'home' for those in the audience experiencing

exclusion from belonging "to feel that they're loved and […] feel connected within […] anything that I'm doing" (Victor, 2021). Asante's (2022) study of queer migrant African collectivity via Facebook in the US suggests "home manifests itself as desire based on separation and its potential antagonism; the split between the wish to return and the impossibility of its satisfaction shapes queer African migrants desire for a queer safe space" (p. 137). The collective space of belonging for queer diasporic Africans generated in Naomi's performances shares with Asante's description desires for 'home' but is not predicated on a wish to return (nor an illusory sense of 'safety'). Instead, Naomi's cultivating a space of belonging is "locally grounded space-making", not just as "a necessary strategy of survival" (Bacchetta et al., 2015, p. 773) but, for Victor, as a materialization of a desired queer diasporic African 'I' through 'we'.

Psychologist Augustine Nwoye (2007) proposes an African conceptualization of the 'person' constituted by eight dimensions. Three of which are pertinent to Naomi/Victor's narrative. The first is the embodied aspect of 'person', i.e., everything that is observable on the surface of the body. For Victor, this means "African wear; culture that you can see", Naomi's wearing of identifiably African fabrics and styles. This speaks to his desire *to be* a beautiful (African) woman, like those he admires from afar as an aspiring fashionista; supermodels like his namesake, Naomi Campbell, and the women of his family in Canada and in Sierra Leone (grandmother, mom, auntie). The second and third dimensions are ones that Nwoye positions in close relationship with one another: the generative and the communal. The generative aspect manifests in a desire to "grow from subsistence to wealth or from receiver to provider" (Nwoye, 2007, p. 125). The communal refers to "the relational or dialogical and inclusive character of the African self", manifest in "social solidarity or the factor of mutual dependence of [beings], including the living and the dead (that is, the ancestors)" (Nwoye, 2007, pp. 128-129). This

communal dimension of 'person' recalls Brice's (2020) relational subject, the 'I' through 'we'. The generative and communal aspects are closely related since the generative dimension is a desire "to accumulate the distinctions of worth as perceived in one's community", i.e., it is only in relation to others that the aspirations ("distinctions of worth") of the generative aspect of 'person' are realized (Nwoye, 2007, p. 125). Self-esteem comes through accrual of socially recognized markers of worth/wealth. In short, Nwoye (2007) underscores "a dialectical interpenetration of the individual and the community in which neither has full primacy" (p. 129).

Naomi's 'community' work, fundraising and cultivating collectivity with other queer diasporic African 'kin', reflects the communal dimension of African personhood and is articulated in Victor's assertion that "everything's for the community, all the time" (Victor, 2021). Naomi's fostering of a collective space of belonging for subjects who are queer and African and diasporic counters the notion that "often one part of [an] identity needs to be suppressed in order for there to be a single rallying point of unity" (DasGupta & Dasgupta, 2018, p. 34, glossing Johnston & Longhurst, 2010). As I sketched in Chapter Five, Victor reaches back to memories of family of origin, from whom he was separated by his migration (mother left behind, initially, in Sierra Leone; his dead father; and his grandmother still living in Sierra Leone), as resources with which he constitutes Naomi. Thus, via Naomi, Victor's cultivation of queer diasporic African collectivity demonstrates the communal notion of "mutual dependence" of self and others, including living or dead ancestors, that Nwoye (2007) describes. Moreover, Victor's drag is underwritten by a generative aspiration of providing for his (living) kin that Nwoye links to the communal dimension. Victor imagines soothing his mother's qualms about his drag performing: "I'm making money, and the money sometimes I send to you. Shh!" (Victor, 2021). Thus, as a professional, money-making drag artist, Victor asserts his status as

provider for his family. In fact, one of the "distinctions of worth" that Victor foresees accruing

by means of his drag is the purchase of a house for his mother; so, he tells her: "when I become

rich, you're gonna have a big ass house! [*Laughs*]" (Victor, 2021). If as Parekh (2000) suggests,

belonging "is about full acceptance and feeling at home" (p. 342), Victor looks to a future where

he imagines gathering up his family and culture from whom he has often been separated into a

drag-built 'home'. The collective space of belonging constituted by Victor through Naomi's

works encompasses both a 'home' space for his diasporic African queer kin and a literal,

physical home for 'given' family.

Victor envisages a physical home for his 'given' family as one of the collective spaces of

belonging cultivated through Naomi. Samantha, as I explained in the previous chapter, founded

the ballroom House of Trench as a collective 'home' space of belonging for both her 'given'

family (since the House is co-founded by her sibling Mariana) and her migrant/refugee 'Latinx'

queer kin. Samantha was re-united with Mariana after the latter's undocumented exile in the US;

to escape being 'disappeared' (i.e., murdered) in the Salvadorian civil war, "we made my brother

'disappear', and he went to the US" (Samantha, 2021). Meanwhile, Samantha emphasizes the

disruptive impact on fostering belonging in her own narrative of forced migration from El

Salvador to Canada via Mexico and then internally from another Canadian city to Toronto: "I

ha[d] to leave my connections [to others] every year" (Samantha, 2021). The House of Trench,

thus, offers a collective and kinship space that counters Samantha and her sibling's histories of

non-belonging. Like other ballroom houses (Arnold & Bailey, 2009; Dalton, 2021), the House of

Trench represented both a notional and a physical 'home' space of belonging for its 'family'

members. Lewis (2019) compares queer 'families' to Anderson's (2006 [1982]) concept of

'imagined communities' in that such a kinship arrangement "encourages among members

powerful feelings of belonging and acceptance" (p. 36). Furthermore, Samantha's social and political activism generated other collective spaces of belonging through her community-based initiatives, the social group Hola, Latinos Positivos, and the HIV-prevention program. As I highlighted in Chapter Five, Samantha positioned these social and political spaces also as her kin: "my three children" (Samantha, 2021).

The "three children" are the fruit of Samantha's desire to create collective spaces (of belonging) where there were none. One example in Samantha's narrative of the transformational nature of her desire for spaces of belonging where none existed is especially illustrative. In the early nineties, Samantha witnessed the impact of direct action by emergent (white) queer political collectivities such as Queer Nation; e.g., sit-ins and kiss-ins. Along with her sibling, Samantha adopted these forms of action for the purpose of carving out new space for her queer 'Latinx' peers in formerly hostile (heteronormative) territory: "I was transferring [that] knowledge to the Latin community" (Samantha, 2021). Goori scholar and activist Aileen Moreton-Robinson (from, in settler terms, Queensland, Australia) underscores the inextricability of ontology and epistemology in Indigenous thought systems when she uses the term "Indigenous subject/knower" to signify the embodied relationship between them (Moreton-Robinson, 2007, p. 2). Re-appropriating strategy from (white-dominated) queer political groups, Samantha enlisted dozens of queer 'Latinx' peers to "invade" (Samantha, 2021), occupy, and 'colonize' non-queer 'Latinx' business spaces. Since Samantha had experienced exploitative work conditions performing drag in a non-queer 'Latinx' cabaret space, one target of their agentive actions was to take over the non-queer 'Latinx 'club that became El Convento Rico. A collective space of queer 'Latinx' belonging was founded, or, in Samantha's words, "El Convento Rico was born, by popular demand" (Samantha, 2021).

In her narration, Samantha attributes much of her social and political energy to her location as a two-spirit person: "It's beautiful to know how much power we have by being two spirited. Because we're able to identify what others don't see in ourselves" (Samantha, 2021). Here Samantha indicates what I outlined in Chapter Four: a desired (but denied) 'person' inside the dress, what "others don't see in ourselves". But there's more to it than that. What "they" also fail to see is the "power" of a two-spirit person who embodies a relational subject ('I' through 'we') that seeks social and political transformation. Concepts of Indigenous sovereignty help to explicate. As Moreton-Robinson (2007) points out, "our sovereignty is carried by the body" (p. 2). In contrast to Westphalian nation-state sovereignty (with its liberal notions of "territorial integrity and individual rights" Moreton-Robinson, 2007, p. 2), Samantha's two-spirit embodied sovereignty means who she is and desires to be is grounded "in good relationships, responsibilities, a deep respect for *individual and collective* self-determination" (Simpson, 2015, p. 19; my emphasis).[51] It is worth recalling Brice's (2020) assertion (with respect to Simondon's transindividuation theory) that "individual and collective come into being only through their mutual constitution" (p. 668). Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd recalls that Indigenous sovereignty "is found […] through relation, kinship, and intimacy" (2011, p. xvi). In carving out her various collective spaces of belonging, Samantha in relationship with (intimate) others —her queer migrant/refugee 'Latinx 'kin— asserts an *individual and collective* means to resist social and political forces that seek to erase and expel her and them from belonging. Samantha's House of Trench, her "three children", and her other forms of activism not only cultivate collective spaces of belonging against forces that would deny belonging, but in line with ideas of Indigenous

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[51] Indigenous sovereignty has been mobilized in struggles against settler-colonial violences (Brown, 2018; Ross-Tremblay, 2020) and to reject settler sovereignties (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Furthermore, questions of Indigenous sovereignty are at the heart of anti-racist as well as decolonizing efforts to build solidarity between those working for migrant and for Indigenous justice (Chatterjee & Das Gupta, 2020; Johnston, 2015).

sovereignty, these spaces serve as means to bring about social and political change. In the next and final section, I expand on how the representative drag artists embody the kinds of social and political change they desire.

In this section, I have demonstrated with the narratives of KeroPatra/Kero, Naomi/Victor, and Samantha how these migrant and refugee drag artists make *collective spaces of belonging* for themselves and their various 'we' groups that represent not just survival but, as I now go on to argue, future making. Wood and Waite (2011) define belonging as "a dynamic emotional attachment that relates individuals to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience" (p. 201). Individuals' feelings of being 'at home' and concomitant sensations of safety are part of this affect of belonging (Ahmed, 2000). Yuval-Davis (2011) makes a distinction between individuals' senses of belonging and the many politics of belonging, of which homonationalism is one pertinent example. Much literature exists on how belonging is experienced by queer migrants and refugees (e.g., Asante, 2022; Eng, 2010; Fortier, 2003; Klapeer & Laskar, 2018; Rodríguez, 2020; Sólveigar- Guðmundsdóttir, 2018). Glossing Avtar Brah's (2005) concept of 'homing desires', Fortier (2003) writes of queer "desires to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration" (p. 115). This chapter contributes to the literature by asking *how* do queer migrants and refugees "(re)constitute" spaces of belonging? For the respondents in this study, spaces of 'home' and belonging are collective ones symbolically and/or physically materialized through their drag personas and performances. They do so by drawing on various concepts such as African communal dimensions of 'person' and Indigenous individual and collective sovereignty. Ultimately, these collective spaces of

belonging are constitutive of the future they want to bring into existence, as I now turn to illustrate in the final section.

6.5 Being the Change We Want: Future Making Through Drag Acts

In his advocacy of a queer futurity, Muñoz (2008) notes that "the field of utopian possibility", e.g., hope, desire, and relationality, "is one in which multiple forms of belongings in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity" (p. 453). In the previous section, I highlighted how the three artists make collective spaces for their various belongings-in-difference. The spaces they construct, within and against forces of non-belonging, are based on conditions they desire to exist, but do not yet exist. In their desire to bring such worlds into existence lies future making. In this section, I outline how three more artists —Hernando/Alejandra, Masha/Ruslan, and Chabuca/Rico— delineate an activist orientation to future making, especially through forms of queer kinship and relationality additional to what I have hitherto described. Their futures anticipate (utopian) social, political, and cultural conditions that, as Muñoz argues of queerness itself, do not *yet* exist but are, nonetheless, desired and hoped-for possibilities.

Gloria Anzaldúa's (2009) conceptualization of *nepantla* is the state in which *mestiza/o* border artists thrive since they draw on "the traditions of two or more worlds" to "create a new artistic space" (p. 181). For Alejandra, *nepantla* indexes the collective artistic space that she generates through Hernando's performances with his 'boyband' colleagues for, as I described in Chapter Four, her multiple queer diasporic belongings-in-difference. Additionally, Anzaldúa's (2009) depiction of the artist in the creative space of *nepantla* emphasizes a constant "reinvent[ion]" of self (p. 183). As I discussed in Chapter Five, other interpretations of *nepantla* underscore the etymological roots of the word as 'weaving' (Antuna, 2018). Here is where some

overlap lies. Anzaldúa's emphasis on constant 'reinvention' in a *nepantla* state aligns with the

function of *nepantla* in Aztec cosmology where 'weaving' together of the universal energy *teotl*

reflects a permanent condition of productive and ordering transformation (Antuna, 2018). This

continual, ordering, and transformative 'weaving' could describe Alejandra's cultivation, via

Hernando's boyband performances, of queer feminist 'Latinx' collective desires for change. As I

set out in the first chapter, the boyband, in performance, seeks to address the (future-oriented)

social and political concerns of their largely queer and feminist audiences around changes to

cultures of *machismo* and sexual consent. This objective requires the boyband to reflect and

devise a shared agenda:

> Even when we really like a song that we want to do, we question where the song came
> from, is there anything appropriation in the song? Why do we want to do it? Like we are a
> boy band who doesn't take things lightly. […] If we're taking up the space, then why is it
> important or what message are we doing?" (Alejandra, 2021)

This not "tak[ing] things lightly" when it comes to the lyrics of the songs they draw on in

performance from across Latin America substantiates Alejandra's commitment, via Hernando, to

transformation of the terms of masculinist, nationalist, and colonial violences. The careful and

iterative examination of who and where the band are in relation to their audiences and what they

wish to communicate reflects a 'weaving' together of their and their audiences' (utopian) desires

for social and political change.

Alejandra's cultivation of queer feminist 'Latinx 'collective space *between* Hernando, the

boyband, and their audiences is a future-oriented space of belonging, 'woven' from the fabric of

such mutual desires. Like another ('Latinx') respondent, Selena, who says her drag persona

"definitely brings out my more political side",[52] Hernando is the means through which Alejandra

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[52] Interview conducted October 28, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

fosters a coherent, collective, political vision for the future. Hernando and the band's socially and politically committed performances, thus, share with Anzaldúa "her vision of engaged reflection for a more inclusive tomorrow" (Antuna, 2018, p. 162). Significantly, the 'woven' together fabric of the boyband and audience's desires may be viewed proximate to Puar's (2007) proposition —as an alternative to intersectional identity formations— of queer assemblage. Based on her reading of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept, Puar offers 'assemblage' as "an affective conglomeration that recognizes other contingencies of belonging (melding, fusing, viscosity, bouncing)" in contrast to "what is sometimes denoted as reactive [identitarian] community formations" (2007, p. 211). Gogul (2018) posits such queer assemblages as a "non-normative" form of reproductive futurity (juxtaposed to the normative reproductive futurity of the "Child typically born of white, heterosexual parents") that queers might invest in (p. 348). If the social and political desires and hopes of Hernando, boyband, and audiences can be viewed as 'woven' or fused together into an assemblage, then this queer feminist 'Latinx' assemblage embodies the future they wish to engender.

Muñoz (2008) underscores that queer futurity "is all about desire" (p. 460). This desire may be for "larger semi-abstractions like a better world or freedom" (Muñoz, 2008, p. 460) such as the social and political changes Hernando/Alejandra wishes to produce with her boyband and audiences. But queer futures, perhaps ones closer to actuality, also foresee "better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure" (Muñoz, 2008, p. 460). As I outlined in Chapter Four, Masha/Ruslan faces sexual exclusion among Canadian cis gay men due to their (trans)feminine expression in the context of masculinist and transmisogynist economies of desire. But Ruslan refused to "pretend to be masculine to feed the gay community" (Ruslan, 2021). Accessing a desired personhood via their persona of Masha is not limited to stage

performance but an everyday transformation ("if I put on makeup, and I put on my thongs and heels [*snaps*] […] that completes me"; Ruslan, 2021); thus, a new horizon of desire opened up for Ruslan. Using the dating messaging app Bumble, Ruslan added photos to their profile of them in "fem expression" and was overwhelmed by the response ("I received like over a hundred messages. Overnight"; Ruslan, 2021). By embodying "fem expression" (Ruslan, 2021), i.e., feminine self-presentation, in their everyday sexual existence, Masha positions Ruslan at a new latitude of desire that contests the exclusion of (trans)femininities within masculinist desire frames and the (trans)misogyny of cis gay male collectivities: that of the sissy. The sissy fuses hyperfeminine gender play with a sexually desired location encompassing both trans embodiment and cis-hetero fetishization (Gilbert, 2020). Further, Masha/Ruslan's vindication of sissy femininity aligns them with Decena's (2012) reading of the sissy as a site of disruption to "hegemonic masculinities (heteronormative or homonormative)" (p. 62). I suggest that in doing so, Ruslan inaugurates queer futures on two levels. First, the desiring response from men to their self-positioning as "dick in the female expression" (Ruslan, 2021) opens up future possibilities of, in Muñoz's terms, "better sex and more pleasure". But more than that, Ruslan's transformation, via Masha, into a "sissy boy" (Ruslan, 2021) indexes a desire for social change, a "better world", for all transfeminine people within and against the masculinist desire economies of cis gay men, where sissies and other transfeminine people are the desirers and the desired.

Ruslan is broadly committed to "fight with all the social injustice" (Ruslan, 2021), and Masha gives them a public platform from which to materialize their activism. They share with another respondent, Mango/Humza, a desire to bring others who, like him, have experienced marginalization along with them into the future: "visibility is important to me […] that's my form of activism, and if I'm able to uplift other […] desi queer people, then I will" (Humza,

2021). However, Ruslan recognizes that their political goals exclude them from commercial success as a drag artist on the bar scene or in corporate-sponsored competitions and events: "who would invite a drag queen who would come in a dress which says, 'The minimum wage is modern slavery'?" (Ruslan, 2021). Fortunately, Ruslan's professional career in fitness training means they have the income ("like in six figures"; Ruslan, 2021) and economic resources to work as an "independent" performer (Ruslan, 2021). So, Ruslan, as Masha, undertakes fundraising work to support the various "social issues" (Ruslan, 2021) that align with what they position as a "Soviet" commitment to "strong unions […] Free health care. Free education. […] Women's rights" (Ruslan, 2021). Looking back to the 'we' building of their "Soviet" past, Ruslan summons what Muñoz (2008), borrowing from the critical utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch, refers to as the "No-Longer-Conscious" to understand "the work the past does" to help us glimpse futures of the "Not-Yet-Conscious" (p. 452).

One aspect of Masha's work is to underwrite Ruslan's sponsorship of another queer refugee, a woman from Uganda, by way of a government subsidized partnership between private individuals and a Canadian non-profit group dedicated to supporting queer, trans, and non-binary refugees. Ruslan engages a network of resources to stage Masha's fundraisers and support the Ugandan refugee; from the people who buy tickets to the fundraisers, the fellow artists who Ruslan recruits to perform alongside them, to the other sponsors and the non-profit queer refugee organization, all extending, ultimately, to the refugee herself. This network represents a form of what Bourdieu (1977) calls 'practical kinship', which entails "the 'utilization of connections' or, we can surmise, the calling in of various favors and debts" (Freeman, 2008, p. 308). 'Practical kinship' reflects an expansive form of dependency on others that ranges from the care-of-last-resort a child might expect from parents to the casual kind act of one acquaintance on behalf of

another (Freeman, 2008). Via Masha and 'practical kinship', Ruslan's sponsorship of other queer refugees represents their social and political investment in generating futures for others who, like them, faced existential threats to their continued survival.

If Masha/Ruslan's work supporting queer refugees could be considered as generating futures for those whose lives are threatened, Rico, as Chabuca, was similarly committed to social and political interventions that were transformative for other queer 'Latinx' refugees. As a fluent English-speaker, Chabuca/Rico was frequently called on to advocate for others in the queer 'Latinx' diaspora who were held in transit lodgings at the very edge of being deported: "Chabuca would get a call saying, 'come and get me; help me [get] out'" (Rico, 2021). While some last-minute appeals would be successful, many others were not. One queer Venezuelan deportee who requested Chabuca's aid was ejected in 1999, anticipating the spectacular tightening of border regimes in the post-9/11 climate of securitization that targeted Brown and other racialized (queer) migrants (Puar, 2007). But within three years and despite this climate, Chabuca with her 'Latinx' drag collectivity had raised tens of thousands to fund and successfully secure the deportee's return to Canada (for more on the story, see Wagner & Cabrera, 2013). Conscious of the politics of 'rescue' (De Genova, 2010; Jordan, 2009; Puar, 2007), I do not cite this narrative to suggest Rico as a 'white'-ish saviour. Instead, like Masha/Ruslan, I view Chabuca/Rico's drawing on 'practical kinship' resources to work in collectivity as realizing futures for others in the same collectivity. Indeed, the social and political orientation of this pro-queer migrant work is part of Chabuca/Rico's broader commitments in collectivity to the needs of queer and trans 'Latinx' youth, which included fundraising for the nutrition initiative at an LGBTQ+ alternative school, and to the needs of HIV-positive 'Latinx 'drag artists and friends. As a high school educator by day and drag artist by night, Chabuca/Rico's social justice activism also reaches

back to the No-Longer-Conscious in the form of his parents, who were progressive educators, in his desire for a Not-Yet-Conscious queer future in collectivity for himself.

It is, perhaps, somewhat easy to frame Rico's (and Ruslan's) social and political works as dependent for success on queer or drag kinship, 'practical' or otherwise. While the assemblages and collectivities of belonging in these artists' future-oriented work do summon 'family' and kinship, I want to emphasize the non-normative (re)productivity of these futures (Gogul, 2018). Rico, as Chabuca, was initially adopted by Samantha for the House of Trench, but she 'rebelled' and declared her autonomy, assuming her own moniker, La Grande. What's more, Chabuca took no drag daughters of her own. However, Chabuca, with others in her drag collectivity, made critical interventions in the life of a young drag artist in the queer 'Latinx' diaspora, Isabel,[53] who had been ejected from her 'given' family's home and was then street-involved. For example, on one occasion Chabuca persuaded Isabel to return a wig she had purloined from a drag 'sister', firmly establishing an expectation of 'familial' care and respect. On another, Chabuca and Omar (a key organizer of 'Latinx' drag events) stepped in to prevent Isabel from ending her life and provided her with somewhere to stay and funding for school. Thus, an existential threat to Isabel was transformed into a queer future.

Rico narrated how the same Isabel, more than twenty years later, now living in another province, established and built her own drag collectivity where she engages in the kind of socially and politically committed work ("bringing all these people together"; Rico, 2021) that she experienced as part of Chabuca's collectivity. Theorist of queer temporalities Elizabeth Freeman (2008) says that queer belonging "names more than the longing to be, and be connected

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[53] A pseudonym.

[…] It also names the longing to 'be long,' to endure in corporeal form over time, beyond procreation" (p. 299). Isabel is not Chabuca's drag daughter in the conventional drag sense, but in her work uplifting queer and drag lives in her new home province, Isabel ensures that Chabuca's work endures over time —is long lived— and generates futures for others. Isabel's (non-normative) reproduction of the social and political work of Chabuca also demonstrates Freeman's (2008) argument that at the heart of 'family', kinship, collectivity, and other relational belongings —queer or otherwise— is *renewal*. Thus, while I do not frame Isabel and Chabuca's relationship in normative reproductive terms as a child following in their parent's footsteps, I see Isabel's *renewing* of Chabuca's commitment to a "better world" as working, through drag, toward renewable futures of collective belonging for queer diasporic subjects.

6.6 Conclusion

The collectivities cultivated by Alejandra, Ruslan, and Rico in the service of social and political change and queer future making I view as logical extensions of the forming of the relational subject and collective spaces of belonging discussed earlier in this chapter. In Sections 6.3 and 6.4, I outlined collectivity as the space from which a relational subject emerges and as the basis of how the artists establish belonging. These collective spaces of belonging indicate the artists' desires to make futures for themselves and others. In Section 6.5, I expanded on this future orientation by showing how the artists generate hopeful queer/drag/diasporic futures through a desire for change, through social and political activism. Whether it is via Alejandra's 'weaving' of a queer assemblage, or Ruslan's mobilization of 'practical kinship', or the intergenerational renewal of Rico's activism, these three drag artists represent, in their desires and hopes, futures of collective belonging. Although I have separated the eight representative artists into three sections for the purposes of building my analysis, the work that Haresh does

with Khush and Desh Pardesh, the work Ramin undertakes with migrant women in Canada and young queer Iranians online, Kero's work with Middle Eastern Nights, Victor's work with queer African diaspora, and the many initiatives —like the take-over of El Convento Rico— Samantha leads, all this work represents future-oriented desires to reshape the social, political, and cultural conditions in the present that would deny these artists and their collectivities belonging. Thus, the respondents in this study put some flesh on the theoretical bones of Muñoz's (2009) vision of queer futurity, enabled by possibilities that originate in the past and social and political acts in the present (p. 16).

The temporal orientation of this chapter, toward the future, follows Chapter Four's focus on the artists' self-authorizations in present-day conditions that disconfirm and Chapter Five's turn to the past to identify the familial (and other) resources that assist their drag personas in materializing the 'person' they desire to be. As I indicated in introduction to Chapter Four, I wished to avoid reproducing a script of white liberal queer linear 'progress', following Bacchetta et al.'s (2015) guidance. But I know in organizing the three chapters thus, I may be accused of such linearity. Migrant and diasporic narratives are often transcribed in terms of an immobilizing nostalgia for a 'lost' homeland planted in an irrecoverable past, while the movement implied in migration lends itself to racialized scripts of 'escape' from 'backward' lands to 'progressive' white states (Bacchetta et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the objectified, 'rescued' refugee, stripped of agentive authority and cast as a diminished category of 'person' (Kyriakides et al., 2019), is concomitantly denied a history. And yet, the narratives of the drag artists in this study clearly demonstrate that when agency is denied, and with it, a relationship to the past, present, and future, these subjects assert the 'person' they desire to be, mobilize various resources from their

past (and pre-arrival) lives in the materializing of that 'person', and work in collectivity toward making desired futures of belonging.

I return, once more, to the words of Trinity/Dunstan, who in one of my earliest interviews, already captured the past, present, and future orientation of the desires piercing many other respondents' narratives. Speaking about what the 'craft' of drag meant for him, Dunstan reflects, "we come from oppression and rejection and ridicule, and that craft […] it unifies us when we are coming into our fixities and we find each other. [Drag] is what unifies us and takes us beyond our wildest dreams or imagination" (Dunstan, 2021). The (pre-arrival) past (where "we come from") may be a site of rejection and disconfirmation, but equally, as Dunstan himself narrates, it may be a place of familial resources which help assert through persona the 'person' we desire to be(come). The present ("when we are coming into") may be a locus of "oppression and rejection", but as the artists' narratives attest, it is also where through drag persona, a desired 'person' ("our fixities"?) is author(iz)ed and where through 'unifying' drag, collectivity is formed ("we find each other"). Ultimately, drag that 'unifies' (brings us together in 'kinship' and more) is the means through which those "wildest" desires and hopes and "dreams" of queer/drag/diasporic futures are always imagined, often materialized, and constantly renewed.

7. Conclusion

[My drag persona] is the fulfillment of every single thing that I wish to do in the moment but cannot because I'm restrained by the chains that bind me to society and to the world.

(Sachit, 2021)

[F]or me, that was drag, […] finding this group of people, and finding this community that fully allowed myself to be whoever I wanted, … whether that's a character, or just myself. So, that I think is a really, really important thing of drag. And I think a lot of that is kind of lost sometimes.

(Andrea, 2021)

Both Andrea and Sachit speak to what drag means to them. Sachit positions their drag persona as materializing their desire to *do* what is restrained by the social world.[54] Andrea emphasizes, like Sachit, that drag permitted her to be "fully" who she desires to *be*. What's more, Andrea foregrounds the relationality of drag; performing drag generates community. Even though, thanks to the Covid-19 crisis, performances had moved online, her drag 'chosen' family still represented (what she elsewhere called) "a huge blessing" that provides her with "safe" space away from her 'given' family's homophobia and misogyny (Andrea, 2021). Sachit and Andrea's comments capture some of what this study set out to do: explore how 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant folks understand their identities and experiences through the lens of drag; and explore the relationship their drag personas have to their everyday navigating of being and belonging in Canada. In the previous three chapters where I laid out my analysis, what the group of eight respondents that I focused on helped me understand was that 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag artists are agentive actors who self-authorize, i.e., validate, their own being and belonging, drawing on familial, social, political, and (ethno-)cultural resources from the past

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[54] Interview with Sachit conducted June 12, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

and the present to engage in public, political future making. This study centred the experiences

of queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants, elaborating on theories of drag as an

engine of embodied knowledge about self and others. Thus, my study makes important

contributions to the flourishing field of queer and trans migration studies as well as critical study

of refugeeness and migrancy, more broadly, and to queer/trans studies of drag performance. This

final chapter reviews insights from the study, highlights this study's contributions, indicates some

complications and limitations, and considers future directions of inquiry.

7.1 Insights and Contributions

Self-Authorizing of the 'Person' They Desire to Be

Analysis of data from this study shows 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant drag artists resisting

hostile forces (racisms, nationalisms, cis-hetero/homonormativities, and more) that disconfirm

their "eligibility to exist" (Kyriakides et al., 2018, 2019) and continuously threaten to exclude

them from belonging (Luibhéid, 2019). I highlighted examples of racializing conditions that

threaten to exclude Kero and Ruslan from (national) belonging in the present (Chapter Four) and

Victor in the past and continuing into the present (Chapter Five). I also foregrounded ways in

which these (nationalistic) racializing forces intersected with misogyny and cis-

hetero/homonormativities in the past and present for Kero, Ruslan, Rico, and Victor. These

forces threatening exclusion compound in Victor's case with his history of refuge-seeking from

the existential threat of conflict-related violence, and in Kero's case with existential threats of

homophobic/transmisogynist violence from their family and church. But the first insight running

through the three preceding chapters is that all these hostile forces threatening exclusion are

contested through the drag artists' self-authorizing (i.e., self-validating) of the 'person' they

desire to be. This 'person' they desire to be (which the hostile forces would deny) is materialized

or embodied in their drag personas. The examples of Ramin and Alejandra (Chapter Four) demonstrate how hostile forces are contested through a self-authorization effectuated in the conscious, agentive decisions they make in the rendering of their drag personas. This rendering draws, in these cases, on ethno-cultural resources; for example, Persian hospitality codes (Ramin) and linguistic and cultural code switching (Alejandra). Here I underscore an important contribution my research makes to the sociological study of refugeeness (which I extend to migrancy). The deliberate, agentive choices the artists make in their self-authorization via persona push firmly back on both dehumanizing, anti-migrant discourses and the construction of the 'refugee' as a diminished "bare life" non-person (Agamben, 1995; Arendt, 1951) —a non-agentive 'object' of Western rescue (Kyriakides et al., 2018, 2019)— and of the 'migrant' as exercising *too much* agency (Bakewell, 2010). Instead, this study hears directly from refugee and other migrant folks as knowledgeable, agentive actors about how they negotiate their being and belonging —asserting the public, political 'person' they desire to be— in the face of hostile forces.

The Familial, Social, Relational are Critical Self-Authorization Resources

The ethno-cultural resources that the drag artists draw on in self-authorization via their drag personas are substantial and vital. But a second insight my study delivers is the significance of relational resources —familial and social— from past and present that secure their belonging and make their non-cisheteronormative futures liveable. In Chapter Five, I trace how carefully selected elements of family history are woven into the drag personas of Ruslan, Kero, Ramin, and Alejandra. While Alejandra is obliged to veil her lesbian location from her family, she, nonetheless, sutures affirming role models of Mexican masculinity from family members into her rendering of Hernando. Even though Kero experiences much violence within their family, they,

nonetheless, imbue KeroPatra with select, affirmative maternal qualities. Both Ruslan and Ramin's families offer affirmations of their gender and sexual alterity that fortify their self-authorizations via Masha and Dina and contest the construction of the 'family' as site of queer rejection. Other relational resources are evident in the cases of Haresh and Samantha whose respective works to build collectivity among their 'South Asian' and 'Latinx' queer kin represent what is effectively a 'we'-authorization as much as a self-authorization. Familial and other relational resources help 'we'-authorize through persona the 'person' the artists desire to be(come). The fact that these familial and social resources of collectivity extend from the past into the present indicates a biographical continuity that further stabilizes their self-authorizations. As I then outline in Chapter Six, the artists' self-authorization of the 'person' they desire to be(come) follows Freeman (2008) in her suggestion that belonging is more than a desire to be connected with others (though it is certainly that). It is also a desire to 'be long', to endure over time and project into the future. The example of Chabuca and Isabel gestures toward how a queerly (non-normative) reproductive futurity may be realized: through intergenerational renewal of bonds of care and collectivity. Thus, the social and political activism fostered by Rico, Haresh, Samantha, Alejandra, and the others not only produces collective spaces of belonging, but fosters an intergenerational 'be longing' or reproductivity, and, thereby, plots a trajectory for their liveable queer/drag futures.

This study's evaluation of the importance of 'given' and 'chosen' family —the various 'we' groups salient in the drag personas— as relational resources in self-authorization contributes to queer and trans studies of refugee and migrant experiences (e.g., Lee & Brotman, 2011; Murray, 2013; Jacob & Oswin, 2022) by furthering our understanding of the work queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants do to negotiate belonging. The study, thus,

adds to the theorizing of queer diaspora (Gopinath, 2005) by contesting conservative diasporic

ideologies that position racialized queer diasporic refugees/migrants as threats to 'home',

'family', 'community', and nation and always outside of belonging. Data from this study

provides examples of how, via drag personas, racialized queer diasporic subjects revise and

reinvent their multiple kinship formations (Bailey, 2013). Furthermore, this study's ultimate

focus, in Chapter Six, on collective spaces of belonging and liveable queer/drag futures begins to

flesh out queer-of-colour theorizing of relationality and futurity (e.g., Bacchetta et al., 2015;

Muñoz, 2009).

Drag Generates Embodied Knowledge about Queer Refugee/Migrant Experiences

The third unique insight this study delivers is that drag is a generator of embodied

knowledge about the everyday experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees/migrants negotiating their

being and belonging. Through their personas, the drag artists featured in this study tell us about

the 'person' they desire to be, and they build futures of belonging for themselves and others in

collectivity. While many queer and trans migration studies have rightly focused on the effects of

border regimes on queer/trans/non-binary folks migrating and seeking refuge, more work is yet

needed on the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees/migrants beyond border crossings (Held,

2022). This study, uniquely, took up drag as a lens to inquire into the fabric of 2SLGBTQ+

refugee/migrant lived experiences (long) before and (long) after the decisions that led them to

seek refuge or otherwise migrate. As such, this study makes a contribution not only to the field of

queer and trans migration studies but to queer/trans studies of drag.

For one, this study demonstrates drag's potential not only to generate queer kinship,

collectivity, or 'chosen' family, among racialized refugee and other migrant populations, whose

belonging is continually challenged, but to foreground the salience of 'given' family in constituting a relational self that enters and shapes public, political space. In this way, my study adds to work that counters the instantiation of drag in popular consciousness (thanks to shows like RPDR) as a de-politicized art form, in thrall to liberal individualism and coopted by neoliberal commercialism (e.g., Sadler, 2022). Additionally, while drag's capacity to interrogate naturalized (gender, racial, etc.) subjectivities continues to be debated (e.g., Heller, 2020; Stokoe, 2022), this study will bolster research that identifies in racialized drag the opportunity to challenge white homonormative dominance of queer public spaces (e.g., Calderon, 2021; Persadie, 2021). My study illustrates some of the 'werq' drag does (similar to public 'fabulousness'; Ellis, 2020) in the hands of marginalized, racialized queer folks to "seiz[e] visual space on your own terms as an act of resistance, right now and in real time, even if that visibility is risky business. If no one gives you the space you need to thrive, make your own" (Moore, 2018, pp. 73-74; cited by Ellis, 2020, p. 161).

In addition to the contributions to theory and literature I have suggested, one of the aims of this study was to generate knowledge that would be of use to community workers, policy makers and actors, and political activists who labour to address the needs and demands of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and other migrants. Thinking of policy actors and political activists, I offer the insights of this study as a contribution to what Deborah Stone (2012) in her classic volume, *Policy Paradox*, calls "the struggle over ideas" (p. 13). This struggle, Stone suggests, is at the heart of the *political* model of policy making (in contrast to the rational model where problems are identified, and a logical sequence of actions is followed to devise a solution). The political model boils down to establishing "shared meanings [that will] motivate people to action and meld individual striving into collective action" (ibid.). It is my hope that the findings of this

study will be of use to those who act alongside 2SLGBTQ+ refugee and other migrant folks to persuade and prevail in policy/political struggles.

7.2 Complications

The Relationship between Performer and Persona

The above insights and contributions can be read alongside three notable complications. Challenging my proposal that the drag artists in my study self-authorize by materializing in drag personas the 'person' they desire to be is one instance in the data where a respondent rejected the notion that there could be any correspondence between his self and the persona. Yury is a professional actor and clown from Russia, who trained in two professional schools before moving to Canada.[55] One of his self-created touring shows features a compendium of impersonated celebrity singers; men and women. His impersonation of women involves crossdressing or rather, as Heller (2020) has it, cross-casting. This cross-cast impersonation was viewed as drag by another interviewee, who had seen Yury's show many times. Yet, right from my first outreach to him, Yury made it clear to me that given the study objective of exploring the relationship between the everyday self and the drag persona, he did not think he was the kind of respondent I was looking for; he wasn't a drag queen. But at this point in the fieldwork, I had not narrowed down my definition of drag. Instead, I was interested to find out how others defined drag, and Yury's conception of the distance between performer and persona seemed significant to me.

We went ahead with the interview, and Yury explicated, "a show is a show; me is me […It's] always a guy at the end, who takes the wig off, reveals that he is a man, his name is Yury,

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[55] Interview conducted January 26, 2021, via Zoom from Toronto.

and he did these divas for you" (Yury, 2021). So, for Yury, there is no relationship between him, the performer, and his gender identity as cisgender man and the gender identity of the performed persona. Yury's clear delimitation of drag as a professional (gendered) impersonation returns us to the Greek concept of an actor's interchangeable role or mask, separate from the body of the performer. In fact, Yury had performed drag in the way the other respondents (and I) understand it, creating two personas called Zinka Moroz (the first name a diminutive version of his grandmother's name) and Penny Hose. He also had applied unsuccessfully to appear on a television drag competition. So, Yury understood exactly the distinction between drag that *does* something related to subjectivity and more (as my findings expound) and cross-dressed or cross-cast performance. Speculating on what other interviewees were telling me, Yury reflected, "when they say, 'oh, I discovered a new persona... This has totally freed me... I feel liberated.' I never really had that. Because probably I haven't [yet] discovered my real drag" (Yury, 2021).

Yury's distinct view of impersonation versus "real drag" was an instructive counterpoint to my emerging thesis. Given my research question about the relationship between theatrical and everyday performance, I underscored, via the eight illustrative respondents, how intimate and productive connections existed between the performed persona and the Goffmanian everyday performance of self. Yury's narrative pushes back against my analysis by emphasizing that he is engaged in *impersonation* and not persona performance. This distinction is one that Goffman (1959) makes when explicating the difference between reality and contrivance:

> there seems to be two common-sense models according to which we formulate our conceptions of behaviour: the real, sincere, or honest performance; and the false one that thorough fabricators assemble for us, whether meant to be taken unseriously, as in the work of stage actors, or seriously, as in the work of confidence men (p. 70).

Yury's impersonations are the "unserious" devices of a professional stage actor, whereas the personas performed by the drag artists in this study share with Goffman's everyday performance of self a realness or sincerity in their materialization of a (denied but) desired 'person'.

'Given' and 'Chosen' Families

Another complication in the data concerns how I identified 'given' families and 'chosen' families as resources for self-authorization (Chapter Five). I highlighted the examples of Ramin and Ruslan, which give complexity to the normative narratives of heterosexual family rejection and (homo)nationalist scripts of Persian and Russian trans/homophobia when they recount their 'given' families' broad support for their gender and sexual locations. I went on to describe forms of 'chosen' family kinship formations in examples from Kero, Victor, and Samantha, which emphasized the work they do in nurturing 'Middle Eastern', African, and 'Latinx' collectivities via their personas. Although my argument may have presented these formations as relatively happy 'chosen' families, that is not the full story. The sense of 'happy chosen families' I may have given is muddled by Shafik's narrative. When in his twenties, and before he took up drag, Shafik relates being part of a 'multicultural' 'chosen' family, who he jokingly refers to as the 'Benneton boys': "about six of us, and we were a racial every colour of in between" (Shafik, 2021). In this multiracial group, Shafik recalls not being particularly conscious of the Toronto Gay Village's whiteness. That consciousness arrived when he took the stage as Malika: "I was like, 'oh, I'm in a sea of white!'" (Shafik, 2021). When I asked him about any drag 'chosen' family, Shafik told me he was never interested in forming any and pointed instead to his 'given' family: "I don't have a drag family because my real family is my drag family. Like I wore my sister's wedding dress down at Pride. Like I didn't have to go looking for drag family because I live with a bunch of drag queens! [*laughs*]" (Shafik, 2021). Thus, when Shafik's ethno-racial

location was not salient in company of the 'Benneton boys', the idea of 'chosen' family was embraced. Whereas, when racialized as Malika, Shafik eschewed a drag 'chosen' family for his 'given' one. Shafik's example, first, reminds us of what Eng (2010) calls the "racialization of intimacy" or how race structures "the private space of family and kinship relations" (p. 2). Second, it complicates Eguchi and Long's proposal of queer relationality (2019) and 'chosen' family caregiving (Jackson Levin et al., 2020) to align with more nuanced appraisals of the importance of 'given' family to (racialized) queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Luo, 2022; Wimark, 2016).

Boundaries of Collectivity

When I analyze, in Chapter Six, various ways in which the drag artists cultivate collective spaces of belonging, more intricacy within these collectivities needs to be acknowledged. One example is that of Agnes/Sachit. Based in a very white, western Canadian city, Sachit narrated a marked counter-identification to the "[young, white] gay men in little things, mesh crop-tops, who can't, who just don't know what Brown people look like" (Sachit, 2021). Sachit saw her performance as Agnes cultivate a complex audience that brought together older (white) gay men with a constituency of "Indians", since Agnes acts "like a desi idiot on stage, sometimes, which they enjoy" (Sachit, 2021). Agnes's bipartite older/white and Brown audience was one with which Sachit could (dis)identify. But, as she recounted, within their local drag community, Sachit experienced exclusion —feeling "completely disposed of" (Sachit, 2021)— such that she no longer had the opportunity to perform in local venues. Sachit made clear to what she attributed their exclusion from the local drag collectivity: "partly race, it's partly... it's the neoliberal industrial gay rights complex" (Sachit, 2021), perhaps embodied by those young, white gay men whose imaginary is monochromatic. Sachit's experience speaks clearly to the kinds of racialized

exclusion from belonging many of the other artists in this study exposed. But it also points to rifts in the fabric of drag collectivities of the kind Horowitz (2020) documents, where lines of race, gender, and age are transfigured by a "radical (in)difference". Thus, while I found a preponderance of evidence in respondents' narratives to support the idea of cultivating collective belonging, the constitution and internal/external boundaries of these collectivities do not map neatly along lines of ethno-racial or other identification.

7.3 Limitations

As the above complications suggests, to argue my thesis I may have flattened out some of the tensions in the data. These tensions also gesture toward limitations to the study. Foremost is the fact that my findings and insights are not generalizable to wider drag, 2SLGBTQ+, and/or refugee and other migrant populations. Nonetheless, it is my hope that insights from the study enhance theories and literatures on drag and queer/trans migration and be informative to those who work with queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants in communities in Canada and elsewhere. Yet, not being generalizable is not necessarily a disadvantage in that as I highlighted in Chapter Three, the interview method used to collect data produces "insights of a depth and level of focus" rarely obtainable via other qualitative methods (Forsey, 2012, p. 364); inquiring into the specific and individual experience is what interviewing does best. Relatedly, respondents in this study varied in how they identified with refuge and migration: from recent arrivals to second generation; from those who moved as adults, to those who were brought as infants or were born in Canada; from those who entered Canada and claimed asylum, or who already had refugee status, to international students, permanent residents, and other classes of migrant. They varied, too, in their experiences and practices of drag: from those who had retired from performance, to established, commercial performers, to much more community-oriented

artists, and those who are relative novices, as well as those who are more consumers than practitioners of drag. All this range forecloses generalizability but underscores how remarkable it was to find solid thematic threads running across the participants' narratives.

One of those themes — the importance that family, kinship, and collectivity assumed in this study— I feel may not have been so prominent if I had used methods other than the interview. In my original plans, I had hoped to engage in observation of the drag artists in their performances. Here is another possible limitation. Readers may be surprised that for a thesis so anchored in drag and what it means, I did not focus on drag performance so much as (the meanings of) drag personas. As I explained in Chapter Three, restrictions due to the Covid-19 crisis meant that during the period when I was interviewing, most live performances were closed down, although many drag performers moved their work to online platforms, and so I could have engaged with those. My decision not to was mostly informed by my finding in the interview data several very focused thematic areas —such as that around family, kinship, and collectivity— that caused me to believe asking respondents directly about how they conceptualized their drag was the best way forward. Nonetheless, by not including notes from observation of performances as data sources, my study does not attend to the ephemeral "subtleties, elisions, and elusiveness" in the embodiment and emplacement of queer(-of-colour) performance (Ellis, 2020, p. 156).

7.4 Potential Future Directions

The second limitation prompts me to consider how this research would have taken shape if I had interviewed as many drag show audience members as I did drag artists. Although I set out looking to interview both performers and consumers of drag, in the end just three of the twenty-two respondents engaged with drag as audience members rather than artists. One

immediate way to expand on this study would be to seek more such participants. As well as offering insight to the abstract question of whether drag requires an audience or if it can be a solitary activity, interviewing drag audiences could help flesh out my findings in Chapter Six around the kinds of collective spaces of belonging drag might generate. Questions around the collective spaces that drag produces, such as 'activist drag' (Edward & Farrier, 2020) and drag on social media (Sandoval, 2018), are being posed, and the expansion of my study to consider more in depth the space generated between audience and performer would be a welcome addition.

In the first round of interviews I conducted, one respondent was someone who was born into refuge and, consequently, highlighted to me their everyday sense of displacement. The respondent eschewed any attachment to geographical location or place, and at the end of the interview wondered why I had not asked them more about 'place'. As much as this study has been concerned with belonging — and therefore relationships to 'Canada' and 'home'—, I think much room exists for me to follow feminist (e.g., Silvey, 2004) and queer and trans geographers (e.g., Binnie, 2004; Brice, 2020; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010) in mapping what refugee/migrant drag might contribute to "geographies of resistance" (Pile & Keith, 1997). If I were to do so in a Canadian setting, as a settler-colonial state, I would need to situate the study better within Indigenous calls for "land as pedagogy" (Simpson, 2015) and "unsettling citizenship" (Johnston, 2015). Work that points the way to possible migrant solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty (Chatterjee & Das Gupta, 2020) would help me rethink some of what this study has outlined as the future-making work of drag.

One other possible direction that would extend this study is on the question of the relationship between drag performance and 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant mental health. Several

of this study's respondents emphasized to me the importance of their drag in sustaining good mental health, and initially I coded these comments as a thematic area in my analysis. A recent systematic review of qualitative studies of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee mental health concluded that negative impacts on the mental health of multiply marginalized queer/trans/non-binary refugees is deeply rooted in systemic discrimination in receiving countries (Nematy et al., 2022). The authors recommended that service providers "address the authentic accounts of resilience and resistance of LGBTQI + forced migrants" (Nematy et al., 2022, para. 5). The narratives of my study could serve as such accounts. The significance of collective belonging and relationality in my study echoes Kahn et al.'s (2018) finding that 2SLGBTQ+ refugees in Canada experiencing poor mental health benefitted from supports provided by community organizations; however, systemic and structural barriers due to socioeconomic status and racialization can prevent access to community groups. A way forward might be to explore further the vital work that 'chosen' families —such as the kind my study highlights— do in providing systems of care, as Jackson Levin and colleagues (2020) have done with respect to queer/trans young adults. Some research also exists on how drag ameliorates depression, gender 'dysphoria', and "minority stress" among cis queer men (Knutson & Koch, 2019). Thus, taking forward my findings around what drag collectivity and relationality mean for 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant belonging into questions around mental health could be a productive avenue.

7.5 Final Thoughts

If I would have to […] explain drag to […] my grandma in Africa, I would be like, 'it's just me expressing me as a woman, as a beautiful woman, just like you were back in [those] days, and just, you know, all those [times I'm] looking at your photos'. (Victor, 2021)

Listening to these words of Victor as he told me how he would explain his drag to others, I was deeply moved. Moments like this during the interview process pulled into sharp relief the

immense privilege participants in this study had afforded me in sharing their thoughts about drag, migrating, and their lived experiences. How moving these words were to me signalled their importance to my eventual thesis on a gut level. Here was Victor cutting across borders of time and space to bring together his memories of this beautiful African woman, his grandmother, with his drag persona, Naomi; to desire this persona Naomi in his Canadian present/future to embody the longed-for beauty and woman-ness of his grandmother in Africa as she was, transfigured in photograph. Victor encapsulates what I mean by self-authorization via drag persona. Through his rendering of Naomi as a beautiful African woman in the mold of his grandmother, Victor authors and authorizes the 'person' he desires to be(come). The Canadian (and Western) social and political context in which I find myself writing this dissertation remains a deeply antagonistic and exclusionary one toward migrants, whether it's rhetoric of 'building walls' and 'stopping boats' or policy manoeuvres that shut down irregular routes of crossing borders. The current violence —rhetorical and political— aimed at trans folks in North America that has swept drag artists into the firing line highlights the urgency of hearing directly from drag artists who are also refugees or other migrants about their desires, hopes, and dreams. This research has sought to counter the reduction of refugees to 'bare life' non-persons and other migrants to the spectres of 'illegal' and 'bogus' invaders threatening the nation. It has sought to foreground the reality of 2SLGBTQ+ refugee/migrant lives and experiences when their 'credibility' and legitimacy is always doubted. This study has sought to demonstrate, with the help of Naomi/Victor and all the drag artist respondents, how queer/trans/ non-binary refugee and other migrant people establish a public, political 'person' through their drag personas, thus staking their claim to a future for themselves and their many 'we' groups. My study, therefore, asks us to re-examine the utility of

drag as source of embodied knowledge about who we are in the world and how we wish that world to be.

As I move forward, I seek out other ways to mobilize the insights I have been entrusted with, and I hope my interpretation always honours what was shared with me. I hope that this research will inspire other researchers, community workers, policy makers and actors, and political activists to attend further to the experiences, desires, and dreams of queer/trans/non-binary refugee and migrant folks. I join with others in urging that the autonomy, agency, and belonging of queer/trans/non-binary persons be centred in all migrant justice work. This study, ultimately, underwrites Trinity/Dunstan's vision of drag as a unifying force that "takes us beyond our wildest dreams" (Dunstan, 2021) and a force for imagining a future big enough for all. The last words I leave, again, to Trinity/Dunstan, who had a knack for putting his finger on the import of drag for queer/trans/non-binary refugees and other migrants: "I think Dunstan is the outsider, and for many of us refugees that's the case. You're in this culture, but you're not really part of it. Um, but then, suddenly, when you're an entertainer, you have an identity" (Dunstan, 2021).

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APPENDIX A: Additional Participant Biographical Introductions

The following are brief biographical introductions to the respondents in this study, other than the eight I presented in Chapters Four to Six, based on information they shared in the interview. They are listed in alphabetical order using either or both drag/non-drag names in accordance with the names they wished me to use in this study.

Agnes AKA Sachit moved to Canada from India to study. She switched programs after two years to pursue a double major in sociology and women's and gender studies. She identifies as agender or post-gender and lives in a western Canadian city. She views her persona Agnes as a vital access point to her femininity and position Agnes as a third important woman in her life along with her mother and maternal grandmother.

Amir moved to Canada in 2009 from Lebanon along with his mother and brother, who were sponsored by his aunt. For Amir, the move to Canada was to pursue studies in music theatre, and he is now a professional music theatre performer. He is also a big fan of drag performance. He traces his interest in 'drag' back to watching extravagant women in Egyptian performance-art theatre TV shows he watched as a child. He particularly enjoys the work of Toronto-based artists Priyanka and Beardra. Amir has plans to create his own drag persona.

Andrea Mercury is based in a western Canadian city. Her father moved to Canada from El Salvador in the late 1980s seeking refuge from the civil war. Andrea started performing drag two and half years before being interviewed for this study when she was still in high school. She stresses the importance of her queer/drag community to her well-being, especially her drag mother and mentor. Andrea describes her drag as having a club kid aesthetic, but she also imbues her persona with inspiration from her Latin culture including women in her family.

BiG SiSSY AKA Athena is an award-winning singer-songwriter based in Quebec, who when performing in drag uses their own original material (rather than lip-syncing). They see their persona BiG SiSSY as a way to express what they have less access to in the everyday and to play with and explore a femme identity. In 2019, Athena created a space for other Black performers to explore working with a drag aesthetic. Athena is not a migrant and was born in Canada.

Devine Darlin moved to Canada in 2002 from Guyana along with her two sisters to live with her aunt and uncle and to attend university studying microbiology. She was finishing her training as a nurse at the time of interview. Devine's drag mother, the legendary Michelle Ross, mentored and supported her, alongside other well-known Toronto artists. Currently Devine is an established performer in Toronto, who sees drag as her job (not who she is), and fosters community as drag mother to other, newer artists, including Naomi (in this study).

Erin AKA Aleks arrived in Canada as a four-month-old baby with his parents, who were fleeing the Bosnian war. Aleks was born in a Serbian refugee camp and views himself as a 'citizen of the world', whose identity is not connected to a specific place. Aleks is conscious of never quite sharing the same sense of place as his audiences. He does, however, like to foreground his

Serbian culture through Erin. In performance, Erin's comedy takes inspiration from comedians like Kathy Griffin and Joan Rivers; others compare Erin's comedy to Trixie Mattel's.

James moved to Canada from Trinidad and Tobago four years before the interview. In Trinidad and Tobago, James was an LGBTQ/HIV activist. When visiting Canada to speak about that work, James decided to stay. James continues to be involved in community work in Canada, including performing in drag at fundraisers. James's drag persona is "warm" and "friendly", is passionate about doing meaningful community work, and foregrounds an "Indian aesthetic" in her style.

Malika AKA Shafik arrived in Canada with his family from Kenya when he was ten years old. His parents wanted to improve the educational opportunities for their children. Shafik feels his life as a queer Brown Muslim would not have been so possible in Kenya as in Canada. Through Malika, Shafik foregrounds his 'South Asian' identity and both Malika and Shafik share the same work ethic, hers in her performances, Shafik's in his professional design career. Shafik also hosts a podcast series that explores commonalities in people's life experiences.

Mango AKA Humza was born in Canada; his father and mother had relocated from Pakistan. Humza is a visual artist as well as a makeup artist and was inspired to get into to drag by RPDR. Drag, for Humza, is a form of artistic expression that also facilitates expression of femininity. Mango is thoroughly imbued with Humza's 'South Asian' culture in terms of aesthetic, music, and audiences. Through Mango, Humza is engaged in "social activism", uplifting other queer desi people.

Omar has lived in Canada for more than forty years having left El Salvador due to the civil war, first for the US and then Canada when he received refugee status. Omar has no interest in being a drag artist, but his community work in Toronto, starting with being president of the queer 'Latinx' social group Hola, introduced him to many 'Latinx' drag artists. From there, Omar organized community drag shows and supported drag artists in multiple ways. He firmly believes in the "power of the wig", i.e., that drag artists are ideally placed as community leaders.

Orla moved to Canada in 1989 from Ireland, initially as a trained Montessori teacher, and now runs her own life coach business. Orla enjoys drag shows, and is a particular fan of Yury's Diva show, which she has seen on multiple occasions. Yury and Orla have cultivated a close friendship, and she is a firm admirer of Yury's performance range and capabilities. Yury gave a special performance impersonating Marilyn Monroe for Orla's fiftieth birthday.

Selena Vyle was born in Canada. Her father is Lebanese, her mother Mexican-Lebanese, and they moved from Mexico to Canada. Selena loved musical theatre and comedy growing up, and performed comedy before she took up drag. She has performed drag since 2016 when she joined the House of Lix. Selena takes inspiration from many "bad-ass women". She often performs using Spanish and Arabic and voices feminist and political messages in her act. Selena supports the work of community organizations through fundraisers and produced a show for culturally diverse drag artists called 'Queens of the World'.

Trinity Ross AKA Dunstan initially moved to Canada when he was twenty from St. Lucia to attend university. Dunstan first performed drag in a pageant at his A-level college in St. Lucia. The women that raised Dunstan, his grandmother, mother, and aunties, were role models for both Dunstan and Trinity. Trinity is the product of Dunstan's involvement with and commitment to Black queer community in Toronto, and she is a drag daughter of Duchess and granddaughter of Michelle Ross. One way Dunstan explains Trinity's name is the inspiration she draws from three superstar singers whose songs she often performed: Patti LaBelle, Tina Turner, and Whitney Houston.

Yury moved to Canada from Russia in 2009 and describes himself as a "recovering Russian". He is a professionally trained theatre actor and clown and in the future hopes to work more as an acting coach and director. Yury's performance work is centred on impersonation rather than drag. He impersonates a range of superstar entertainers, women and men, in his own show that tours North America and Europe called Divas: from Liza Minelli to Madonna, Edith Piaf, Tina Turner, Ella Fitzgerald, and Kylie Minogue, as well as Elvis Presley, Freddie Mercury, Prince, and Michael Jackson.

APPENDIX B: Ethics Approval Certificate

YORK
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UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
ETHICS (ORE)
309 York Lanes

4700 Keele St.
Toronto ON
Canada M3J 1P3
Tel 416 736 5914
Fax 416 736-5512
www.research.yorku.ca

Certificate #:	STU 2020-141
Approval Period:	12/18/20-12/18/21

ETHICS APPROVAL

To: **Paulie McDermid**
Graduate Student of Education
pmdermid@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics
(on behalf of Veronika Jamnik, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Friday, December 18, 2020

Title: **Pride, persona, pedagogy: What identity performance drags up for LGBTQ+
refugees and migrants**

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk   ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review   ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, **"Pride, persona, pedagogy: What identity performance drags up for LGBTQ+ refugees and migrants"** has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, **"RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE"**.

Please note that prior to commencing any research activities, researchers are advised to review the latest updates on research involving human participants at:
https://www.yorku.ca/research/researchers-faqs/

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416-736-5914 or via email at: acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,
Office of Research Ethics

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form

Date:

Study Name: "Pride, persona, pedagogy: What identity performance drags up for LGBTQ+ refugees and migrants"

Researcher name:
- Principal Investigator: Paulie McDermid, doctoral candidate, Faculty of Education, York University
- Contact: Graduate Program Office, York University, Faculty of Education, Winters College, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto ON M3J 1P3; email: pmdermid@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research:

This research aims to better understand how multiply marginalized LGBTQ+ migrants and refugees navigate and make meaning of their various different identities by exploring what performing drag tells us about performing identity.

The goals of the study are (1) to provide insights into the specific identities and experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees/migrants; (2) to explore any relationship between drag performance and identity performance among LGBTQ+ refugees/migrants; & (3) to assist community organizations in designing programs that serve the complex needs of LGBTQ+ migrants/refugees.

The researcher will collect information by interviewing people who perform at or attend drag performances and who have refugee/migrant histories about their identities and experiences. The researcher will analyze this data to formulate some theories about performing identities.

Findings of the research will be presented in a PhD dissertation, will be published in academic papers, reported at academic conferences, and will be presented in written form in community forums (including publications for LGBTQ+ and refugee/migrant communities). The researcher will also organize 1 or 2 accessible workshops with the support of community organizations to explore the findings and ideas about LGBTQ+ refugee/migrant identities.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

- You will be asked to discuss your various identities and experiences in relation to drag performance in a one-to-one interview via online video conference (Zoom). You may be invited to participate in a second interview if needed.

- Interviews are expected to take about 60-90 minutes and will be audio or audio/video recorded. You will be asked to read and sign a consent form sent to you by email *before* the interview; this will take an additional 5-10 minutes. Within 2 months of the interview, the researcher will email you a transcript of the interview for your review and you may submit feedback that the researcher will use to modify the transcript as needed. Reading the transcript and providing feedback will take about 30 minutes.

- Participants are offered a gift certificate for a small monetary amount as an honorarium for their time and participation.

Risks and Discomforts:

- You may view the questions before interview. During the interview you may feel uncomfortable or upset when answering or thinking about your answers to questions. You can stop the interview at any point. You will then be offered information on counselling services and other supports.

- You may be concerned that by participating in an interview other people will presume you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or another sexual or gender identity. Other people may also infer your status as a migrant, asylum seeker, or other immigration/citizenship status. To avoid other people identifying you, you can meet with the researcher via a secure one-to-one video conference at a time of your choosing when you are certain of the privacy of your location.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

By providing as part of this research information on your identities and experiences in relation to drag performance and migration, you

- will contribute to our understanding of how multiply marginalized LGBTQ+ refugees and migrants navigate and make meaning of their various different identities;
- will receive a short report by email on the findings of the study from the researcher;
- will assist community organizations in designing programs that focus on the specific needs of migrants and refugees who are LGBTQ+ and other marginalized identities;
- may find some useful personal insights by exploring in conversation your various identities and experiences in relation to the way drag performance channels identities and experiences.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

You will be given the opportunity to read and comment on the interview transcript. You may withdraw or revise anything you may have said and also have the option to withdraw your consent. If you decide to stop participating, you may withdraw without penalty, financial or otherwise, and you will still receive the promised inducement.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality:

- This study will use Zoom to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP address or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the researcher. If you are concerned about this, I would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact the Principal Investigator, Paulie McDermid, for further information.

- Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to the researcher's local computer, not the cloud-based service.

- Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting / data collection session.

- All consent forms will be in electronic format (Word/PDF). Emails and consent forms containing identifying names and/or details will be kept separately from the interview data.

- Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. In any presentation, report or publication, a fictional name and fictional identifying details will be used instead, unless you explicitly indicate your consent otherwise on the consent form. Your information will be anonymized (fictional names and details will be used), unless you explicitly indicate your consent otherwise on the consent form.

- Any hard copies (paper) of your data will be safely stored in a locked file box in the researcher's home

office and electronic data, on a password-protected laptop / external hard drive for audio, video & text files. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this information.

- Data will be stored until August 31, 2030 and will then be deleted (electronic), overwritten (electronic – hard drive), or shredded (paper).

- Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at pmdermid@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Professor Christopher Kyriakides at ckyriak@yorku.ca and/or 416-736-2100 Ext: 60305. You may also contact the Graduate Program in Education at gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca and/or 416-736-2100 ext. 22051.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review   Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I,_____, consent to participate in "Pride, persona, pedagogy: What identity performance drags up for LGBTQ+ refugees and migrants" conducted by Paulie McDermid. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. **Audio recording**

    ☐   I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

OR

2. **Audio/video recording**

    ☐   I consent to the audio/video recording of my interview(s).

Signature: Date:

_____   _____
        Participant: (name)

3. **Consent to waive anonymity**

    I, _____, consent to the use of my name / my performance name [delete as appropriate] in the publications arising from this research.

Signature: Date:

_____   _____
        Participant: (name)

APPENDIX D: Request to Participate Email

Dear ,

I am a doctoral candidate at York University currently working on my PhD dissertation entitled "Pride, persona, pedagogy: What identity performance drags up for LGBTQ+ refugees and migrants."

In this study, I hope by exploring drag performed by and for migrants, we can better understand how LGBTQ+ migrant persons navigate and make meaning of their multiple, complex identities and thereby help community organizations better offer supports.

I am also a migrant to Canada, and I've performed drag, part time, for many years. Doing drag has helped me explore and understand my own identities in different ways. I want to interview other drag performers (as well as people who love drag shows) who are migrants to Canada about their many identities and experiences of belonging.

Your knowledge and insights around drag performance and your thoughts about belonging in Canada would be of great help to me. Your contribution would make my research more powerful as I work to reflect the diversity of LGBTQ+ migrant identities.

Although the immediate goal of this project is to help me fulfill requirements for my degree, I intend to transform results of my research into workshops on drag and identity for community members as well as written articles that will be accessible to a wide audience.

If you agree, I will ask you to participate in an audio or audio/video recorded interview, for about 60 minutes, answering a series of open-ended questions. If you wish, I can provide you with a copy of the questions in advance of the interview. So that you will not be identifiable, I will use fictional names in my research unless you explicitly consent to use of your real name. We can meet online at a time that is convenient for you via Zoom, and you will receive a gift card for a small monetary amount to thank you for your participation.

Please note that my research has been approved by the Office of Research Ethics at York University.

I can send you further details on my research if you wish.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Warm regards,

Paulie McDermid
PhD candidate
Faculty of Education
York University

APPENDIX E: Interview questions for drag artists

Some background questions:

e.g., How did you come to live in Canada? How do you feel about living in Canada? Have you lived in other places? Would you describe yourself as Canadian or another nationality?

YOUR SELF, YOUR DRAG SELF, AND YOUR PERFORMANCES

- Did you do drag before you moved to Canada? When did you first do drag and why? How do you define "drag"?

- How did you come up with your drag name? How, if at all, is X different from [non-drag name]? What do they have in common? How would other people describe X or you, [non-drag name]? If I went to a show with lots of artists performing, how would I recognize X if I saw them performing?

- How do you feel when you are performing in drag? Has doing drag affected how you view yourself? Do people interact with you differently when you are in drag?

- Why do you do drag? If you did not perform drag, or drag was not part of your life, how would your life be different?

- Where have you performed? Who do you perform for? How would you describe your audiences?
    - ⇒ Are there audiences you feel more comfortable performing for? Why?
    - ⇒ Would/Do you feel comfortable performing in the place where you grew up?
    - ⇒ Are audiences in [your location] the same as audiences in other places? If different, what are they like in [place X]?

YOUR INSPIRATIONS AND YOU AS AN INSPIRATION TO OTHERS

- What / who has inspired you to do drag? Why do they influence / inspire you? Do you have a drag mom?

- If someone told you they wanted to be a performer *just like you*, what would you say to them? Is there anything you've learned about drag that they must know? Are there any challenges they would face? What would your advice be to 'baby' X?

THE FUTURE

- How do you imagine your drag self in the future?

WRAP UP:

- Is there anything you'd like to add (something I should have asked you about)?

APPENDIX F: Interview questions for drag audience members

Some background questions:

e.g., How did you come to live in Canada? How do you feel about living in Canada? Have you lived in other places? Would you describe yourself as Canadian or another nationality?
When and where did you first see drag performed? What does "drag" mean to you? / How do you define "drag"?

THE DRAG PERFORMERS YOU'VE SEEN PERFORM

- Which drag performers/artists have you seen perform?
- How would you describe [drag name]? How would I recognize [drag name] if I saw them performing? What makes [drag name] different from other performers?
- How do you feel when you watch [drag name] perform?
- Do you know [drag name] when not in drag? What are they like?
- Is [drag name] very different from you? Do you have anything in common with [drag name]?

THE PLACES YOU SEE DRAG & THE PEOPLE WHO GO TO SEE DRAG

- Where do you see drag performed? Who are the people who go to see the performances you attend? How would you describe the audiences? Is the venue important?
- Are audiences in [your location] the same as audiences in other places? If different, what are they like in [place X]? How would you describe them?
- Would/Do you feel comfortable going to a drag show in the place where you grew up?
- If a drag performer asked you to go up on stage with them, would you go?

YOUR DRAG INSPIRATIONS

- If you could choose any drag performer in the world you like to see perform, who would that person be? Why that performer?
- If someone had never been to a drag performance before, which performers would you advise them to see?
- If you were a judge in a drag talent competition, what would the winner be like?

YOU AND DRAG PERFORMANCE

- Would you like to perform drag? Why (not)?
- If you did, what would your drag persona be like?
- Do you have a name in mind? Why that name?
- How would you describe [your drag name]?

WRAP UP:

- Is there anything you'd like to add (something I should have asked you about)?