

“Will these old men understand me?”

The relation between labor unions
and LGBTQ people in Japan.

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Abstract

Japanese labor unions have the last many decades experienced diminishing union density and loss of political power. In contrast, the group of workers who have part-time or limited contracts, so-called non-regular workers, has simultaneously grown. Meanwhile, Japanese LGBTQ people are overrepresented within non-regular work, the same workers who often cannot join unions, due to a union culture of mostly representing full-time regular workers. This thesis asks the question; is there a possibility that both LGBTQ people and unions can benefit from supporting each other. Because of limited literature in this field, the thesis takes one step back. It simply looks at the relation between non-regular LGBTQ people and labor unions, opening this field for further studies. Through interviews and qualitative content analysis made with LGBTQ people and labor unions, the study finds that Japanese labor unions only recently started to address LGBTQ issues. The conservative image unions have kept LGBTQ people away from joining them, and most unions do not seem like an obvious ally for LGBTQ people's voices to be heard from.

Keywords: LGBTQ, labor union, Japan, precarity, labor movement, non-regular,

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“We live at work, every social problem that we have, whatever it might be, is manifested at work, and that’s where we see it the most, it’s the most powerful institution in our lives, if it’s a company or wherever, it influences everything. The idea that any issue that we care about is not finding its way into the workplace is pretty ridiculous.” - Zenkoku Ippan Tokyo General Union (Tozen).

Japan’s labor union system has been described as “*something typically Japanese*”, because of its structure and paternalistic labor market (Fujimura, 2012 p. 6; Rosetti, 2018). However, since the 1980s, Japan's percentage of non-regular workers has almost doubled, and by 2013, non-regular workers consisted of over a third of the Japanese workforce, and today 40% (Rosetti, 2018; Osawa et al., 2013).

Most Japanese unions are so-called enterprise unions, smaller company-based unions that only represent one company (Fujimura, 2012), different from the industry or occupation unions seen in the US or Europe (Fujimura, 2012). Besides the enterprise unions, there are small community unions that unionize workers across companies but only are locally/regionally based. There are three levels of unions, the enterprise unions and community unions, industrial federations, and the three national workers federations called Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation), Zenroren (The National Confederation of Trade Unions) and Zenrokyo (National Trade Union Council) (Akimoto & Sonada, 2009).

Japanese unions have been in crisis the past three decades, with lowering union density and low collective bargaining (Oh, 2012). To put it into perspective, Japan's union density in 2014 was 17,5 %, but the unions' only cover 16,9 %. In comparison France, a country like Japan, who has had dwindling union density for many years, however still, maintains a high bargaining coverage, and had in 2014 a union density of only 9% but covered 98% of French workers to engage in collective bargaining (OECD.Stat, 2020a; OECD.Stat, 2020b; Oh, 2012). At this point the only way Japanese unions can overcome this issue, is to increase their unionization rate (Nakamura, 2007).

So, what does this have to do with LGBTQ people?

As the quote above so adequately explains, issues we face in society will manifest itself at work and infest our whole existence. Japanese LGBTQ people are overrepresented in non-regular labor (Nijiro Diversity and the Center for Gender Studies at International Christian University, 2015). Workers often are not covered by labor unions. Furthermore, there are limited LGBTQ policies at workplaces, complicating it to be out, or forcing people to hide their LGBTQ identity (Nijiro Diversity, 2018). The one institution that could change this is the labor unions, but as presented above, they are in a crisis of their own. However, this thesis wants to explore whether there is a possible mutual collaboration between precarious LGBTQ people and the struggling labor unions in Japan.

This thesis will first present the literature review connected to the labor market, neoliberal policies, and Japanese unions' downfall while discussing different approaches to the subject, before turning to studies on LGBTQ and labor unions in other countries. Afterwards, the concept of 'precarity' firmly connects precarious workers' job-situations, to the social issues LGBTQ workers face, why unions could be a potential ally for their cause. After the research questions, the methodology and data will be discussed. At that point, the analysis based on LGBTQ people and unions' interviews is engaged into, leading to a summary of main findings and conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature review and the concept of 'precarity'

This chapter will explain the history of Japanese labor unions, starting from the decline of the labor unions in the 1980s, and the essential labor reforms to the rise of non-regular workers, through especially the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout a discussion on the previously made literature in the field is led. However, since studies on non-regular LGBTQ workers, especially in connection to labor unions, are scarce, the focus will be on 'precarity' as a defining concept between non-regular workers in general and the significant issues for LGBTQ people at their workplace.

2.1 The dualistic division of non-regular and regular workers in the Japanese labor market

In Japan, workers are generally defined by two groups, the *seishain* (regular workers), and the *hiseishain* (non-regular workers). Regular workers are hired in one company as full-timers and often work overtime, unpaid, but do hold a high level of job-security. Their job descriptions are often ambiguous. Non-regular workers have clear job descriptions and are not expected to do overtime but are easily fired and have fixed-term contracts or work part-time (Osawa et al., 2013, p. 313; Rosetti, 2018). Following, are three distinctions of what the term non-regular worker covers:

Firstly, *temporary workers* are hired for more than one month, and less than one year, and often through employment agencies that “rent” them out for a company, as dispatch workers.

Secondly, *part-time workers* are working part-time in either a combination of several part-time jobs or as a dispatch worker.

Thirdly, *fixed-term workers* are workers with a fixed contract, or as a project worker. Even if they work full-time, they are not considered regular workers. Their contract entitles easy dismissal, with no opportunities for bonuses or promotions. The common characteristics for non-regular workers are low-pay, no option for job promotions, and little job-security (Osawa et al., 2013, p. 313, Rosetti, 2018; Rebick, 2005).

Before the late 1980s, non-regular workers mostly consisted of students looking for part-time jobs and housewives who did part-time to contribute to the household (Watanabe, 2015a). In the 1990s, this changed when younger and middle-aged men started finding themselves in non-regular employment because regular employment became limited (Osawa et al., 2013). It is peculiar that labor union density in Japan has fallen at the same time, despite that non-regular labor increased. One should note, that this trend is not unique to Japan, but similarly observed in labor unions in the US and the West, where neoliberal reforms gradually have undermined job-security and labor union power (Holt, 2007). Despite the "uniqueness" of the Japanese labor market and union system that Fujimura (2012) stresses, the nature, and effects of Western government's reactions to economic downturns are relatable to what happens in Japan. The interconnected global policy diffusion that Holt (2007) and Watanabe (2015a) address, and see as crucial factors for labor unions decline in the late 20th century, not only in Japan but also globally. These neoliberalist deregulations shaping Japan's present labor market and their effects will be discussed further in the following paragraph.

2.2 Deregulations of the labor market: Increase of non-regular labor and the decline of union power.

Before the collapse of the “bubble economy” in the late 1980s, lifetime employment was the standard for regular workers. Part-time workers were used as a flexible “workforce buffer” for companies (Watanabe, 2015b; Ishii, 2018). There was a call from employers e.g., the *Nikkeiren* (Japan’s Federation of Employers’ Association), for more flexible employment, leading to the deregulation of the “Temporary Agency Law” in 1986. To preserve the lifetime employment custom, and fears that regular workers would be exchanged with temporary agency workers instead, the law had some restrictions (Osawa et al., 2013; Watanabe 2015a; Ishii, 2018).

Despite the foundation of Rengo in 1989, strengthening the collaboration of the labor movement, Japan's labor movement started to struggle because of lowering member numbers (Watanabe, 2015a). Most Japanese enterprise unions are connected to one company and, therefore, are invested in their company's well-being (Akimoto & Sonada, 2009). This made it hard for Rengo to unify the unions' different interests, as many of the enterprise unions were more occupied about their company than class-based interests in society (Watanabe, 2015a p. 419; Fujimura, 2012, Rosetti, 2018). In 1995, the LDP created the "Deregulation Subcommittee" (since 1998 called "Deregulation Committee"), which gave way for increased access and power to business interests and employers. The new Deregulation Committee changed the former "bottom-up" policy process to a "top-down" decision-making process. In essence, the Deregulation Committee wrote the policy, and the cabinet would approve it before it had been discussed in the advisory councils (Nakamura, 2007). By limiting its members to mainly employers, economists, and labor law experts who agreed to the deregulation policies they promoted, the Deregulation Committee considerably diminished union power (Nakamura, 2007 p. 11; Watanabe, 2015a p. 419).

Engaging into some of the discussions in the literature and reasons behind lack of union resistance can be found in Rosetti’s (2018) case-study on the industry federation UA Zensen. Rosetti (2018) stresses that since the 1970s and 1980s, mainstream unions as UA Zensen (one of the biggest unions in Japan and affiliated to Rengo) have broken away from left-wing class-based unions. Thereby, placing themselves on the management side, making them more attractive to management than the radical left-wing unions (Rosetti, 2018). This change shows the deep ideological differences in-between unions and their approach to the labor movement.

Mainstream unions have now, on the downside, limited negotiation tactics, since e.g., striking, is connected to uncompromising bargaining tactics, the leftist unions are known to use (Rossetti, 2018). In several ways, Rossetti (2018) argues that labor unions too late realized the extent of their lost political power. In 1997, Rengo was completely overruled after trying to oppose the reform of the labor ministry. In protest, it associated itself with the DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) since 2001, recreating itself as a broader social movement (Rossetti, 2018). From this point, Rengo, at the top-level, started shifting its focus on organizing non-regular workers. However, Rossetti concludes that despite non-regular workers having been on Rengo's agenda since then, it still has not trickled down to small enterprise unions, where the vast majority still exclude non-regular workers (Rossetti, 2018).

This notion is supported by Fujimura (2012) as he argues, alongside others (Watanabe, 2015a; Rossetti, 2018), that enterprise unions typically are working *for* management. He argues that enterprise union officials are picked by the company and used to have fixed terms of 10 years or more, but since the 1990s, the fixed terms have been shortened down to six, sometimes only four years. These developments make it hard for senior officials to pass down knowledge to upcoming officials, and leads to a loss of knowledge in the unions, resulting in disadvantages when negotiating with experienced management (Fujimura, 2012). Not in dispute of this, Rebick (2005) argues that the decline in labor unions is a sign of heightened individualism at workplaces; Since the 1990s, civil suits against companies have steadily risen, most of them about dismissal or wages. Rebick (2005) further reasons this to be workers' own reaction to weak labor unions, and underlines that labor disputes with no action from labor unions have simultaneously risen. One could reason that the courts, rather than unions, give voices to workers' issues now. Albeit, a lawsuit can take years, even decades, to reach the supreme court. The high toll on time and resources, disadvantages the worker to stay in the fight and inclines them to settle with management or resign (Rebick, 2005).

During Koizumi's administration in the early 2000s, more deregulation labor reforms and, in general, economic reforms in Japanese society were enacted (Watanabe, 2015a). With the mantra *jiko sekinin* (self-responsibility) inspired by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, Koizumi's administration put further responsibility on workers to secure themselves, cutting back on both job-security as well as on core social programs (Osawa et al., 2013 p. 310). By only appointing employers and scholars who supported the neoliberal deregulations, further power was removed from labor unions. It culminated in 2001 when the "Council of Regulatory

Reform” (successor to the Deregulation Committee), completely removed labor unions from policy-making in cabinet committees, opening for more wide-ranging labor reforms (Watanabe, 2015a p. 420).

In 2007 the "Labor Contract Law" took effect, trying to create greater stability for individual labor relationships and workers' protection. Unfortunately, the management reaction was to give less, or no promotions and bonuses, maintaining low labor expenses (Ishii, 2018 p. 479). The Abe administration revised the law in 2013, adding the 5-year rule to give temporary workers an unlimited contract after working for 5 years. As a result, temporary workers now face dismissal before reaching their 5-year mark (Ishii, 2018). Despite efforts to create better working conditions for non-regular workers, Watanabe (2015a) argues that the Abe administration from 2012, has advocated for further liberalization of temporary agency workers and regular workers by allowing fiduciary compensation in situations of unfair dismissals.

2.3 The social reality for non-regular workers and revitalization of labor unions

Social programs in Japan are made on the assumption that non-regular workers still are students or married women, supported by the head of the household and the primary providers' regular job (Broadbent, 2005). However, in today's reality, the social programs are inadequate to cover single parents, people who fell out of regular employment, or never were regularly employed to start with (Osawa et al., 2013). Part of this is that non-regular workers have lower enrollment rates for social programs and insurances. According to Osawa et al. (2013 p. 317), almost all regular workers are part of some social program; for non-regular workers, 60% have unemployment insurance, 48,6% have health insurance, and only 46,6% are in the public pension program. Meaning, that not only do they have low job-security, there is also little security network protecting them. Information at workplaces is crucial for non-regular workers to be aware of the rights they are entitled to. Rosetti (2018 p. 126) points at the unofficial work culture, where such information is given and problems discussed, during after-hours social activities, from which non-regular workers often are excluded. This underlines unions' importance, to impartially hand out workplace information relevant for non-regular workers, including enrollment into social programs.

More Japanese non-regular workers are unionized, where roughly 2% were in a union in 1994 and 5,6% by 2010 (Oh, 2012). Following the trend of these numbers, non-regular workers could end as the majority of Japanese unionized workers, as they account for 40% of the Japanese workforce today, keeping in mind that union density has been around 17% the past many years (Oh, 2012; OECD.Stat, 2020b; Rosetti, 2018). Facing this, Nakamura (2007), positively argues that the majority of non-unionized workers think labor unions are essential, but hesitate to join because they are reluctant to confront management despite violations of their rights. He further argues that the lower-income and lower job-security a worker experiences at work, the more inclined they will be to join a union, as he states, “*These workers are waiting for unions to reach out to them*” (Nakamura, 2007 p. 16). Following these arguments (Oh, 2012; Nakamura, 2007; Rosetti, 2018), the situation for non-regular workers today indicates a demand for labor unions. Succeeding to unionize non-regular workers, would lead to the revitalization of the labor movement as Nakamura (2007) concludes.

So, if unions in Japan need more members and a demand for a stronger labor movement is present, where are the unions pressing for change?

The issue for greater unity and revitalizing the labor movement in Japan, as Watanabe (2015b) and Fujimura (2012) points out, has many sides. Here are some of the main issues; 1) Many enterprise unions focus on their regular workers' rights because they are the core workforce, and non-regular workers are a threat to their union members' job-security (Fujimura, 2012; Rosetti, 2018). This suggests that a compromise has to be reached if they should start to accept non-regulars. The fear of ending in a compromised situation by joining arms with non-regular workers has to be turned into a promise of better labor rights for all. 2) People working in enterprise unions tend to advance to company management posts later in their career, giving incentives to protect the interests of the company, rather than that of the worker (Rosetti, 2018; Fujimura, 2012; Watanabe, 2015b). 3) The "Labour Standards Law" stipulates that a union needs to unionize the majority of workers at a workplace to engage in collective bargaining, and two-thirds to expand the collective bargaining to non-organized workers. To reach this, unions avoid competing with already existing unions or otherwise already represented workers at a given workplace. Furthermore, it makes it challenging to create solidarity and unionize non-regular workers, as these tend to change jobs frequently (Watanabe, 2015b; Rosetti, 2018). While Watanabe (2015a; 2015b) makes it clear that the unions have to step up, and a more equal labor system has to emerge, a more positivist approach comes from Rebeck (2005).

Rebick (2005), concludes in his book *The Japanese Employment System: Adapting to a New Economic Environment*, that the dualist labor-model of Japan will endure, but that it will adapt itself to Japan's social and economic reality, where the gap between regular and non-regular workers will become blurred. This indistinct mixture of regular and non-regular workers is what regular unions continually have feared and tried to protect themselves from.

In the thesis, most of the labor union data come from small community unions. Some of them already started engaging in unionizing non-regular workers after the collapse of the bubble economy, the Koizumi administration, and the financial crisis in 2008. They are often the unions that, in affiliation with Rengo, Zenroren or Zenrokyo, focus on the "working poor" and some degree minorities, and have the most understanding and practical knowledge of organizing non-regular workers (Royle & Urano, 2012, Watanabe, 2015b). However, Watanabe (2015b) argues that community unions are tiny and lack political without support from prominent organizations, such as Rengo. In dispute, Royle & Urano (2012, p. 608), argue that community unions have increased in power despite their size. The media often cite their leaders as labor experts and that they, on the contrary to popular belief, have become important organizations for non-regular workers. Bigger classical unions and federations like UA Zensen and Tokyo Private University Teachers Union were also interviewed, as they, through their size, naturally hold more significant power. The limitation of this thesis and its merit lies upon that there is limited literature that examines the relationship between labor unions and LGBTQ people, in Japan and elsewhere. Of the studies that exist, most are conducted in North America and Europe. Four studies, similar to this thesis in methods and study processes from the U.S and Canada, will be discussed in the following paragraph.

2.4 Studies of LGBTQ and labor unions relations: The importance of middle-man organizations and self-image.

Kelly & Lubitow (2015) made a qualitative study on the U.S based organization called Pride at Work (PAW), representing LGBTQ union members to create solidarity between the labor movement and LGBTQ people. The study is based on interviews with LGBTQ members of PAW, who describe the resistance and discrimination that LGBTQ people still face in the U.S labor movement, but also that it has been beneficial to draw on the resources that the labor movement has. Kelly & Lubitow (2015) argue that LGBTQ and immigration will be necessary for the revitalization of labor unions in the U.S, who like Japan struggle with low union power,

and dwindling union density. PAW is an organization that bridges the overlapping issues that both labor and LGBTQ people face, and have created campaigns that both support general labor issues, as well as e.g., marriage equality (Kelly & Lubitow, 2015). Another study by Bielski Boris (2010a) examines how a U.S union with a majority of blue-collar men, managed to fight successfully for healthcare benefits for same-sex couples living together, during negotiations with General Motors, Chrysler and Ford. Here as for the study by Kelly & Lubitow (2015), the LGBTQ organization PAW also played a significant role in making sure that LGBTQ people were written into the negotiations (Bielski Boris, 2010a). Similarly, the study also demonstrated the importance of having high ranking LGBTQ union members, who were pushing for the change that led UAW to fight for their LGBTQ members (Bielski Boris, 2010a).

The value of these two studies (Kelly & Lubitow, 2015; Bielski Boris, 2010a) exemplifies that queer labor organizations such as PAW, play an essential role for unions to embrace LGBTQ issues. In both studies, the unions relied on the formality, information, and guidance that PAW could provide to strengthen their negotiations (Bielski Boris, 2010a), and overcome inclusion problems that unions face, together with LGBTQ members (Kelly & Lubitow, 2015). However, this is not just a Walz on roses for unions to include LGBTQ people and identity politics into their agendas.

Another study by Bielski Boris (2010b), sheds light on the internal problems by including identity politics into classical unions in the U.S. Because of the classical idea that management is foremost interested in cutting production costs, the purpose of labor unions from the start has been to organize workers around concerns mainly with job-security, working conditions, and wages following the labor for value contract (Bielski Boris, 2010b p. 189). However, this heritage has made it hard for labor unions to deal with the increasing diversity among their members, starting with women, people of color, and LGBTQ people. Furthermore, through their struggles throughout time, unions have created a strong union solidarity identity, a situation of *them and us* between unionized and non-unionized workers (similar to the regular vs. non-regular worker approach observed in Japanese unions). Bielski Boris (2010b p. 186) stressed that for unions in the U.S to prevail and stay relevant, they need to address the different identities that now and only will diversify more in the future. Hunt & Haiven's (2006) study addresses similar issues in a Canadian context. The study is based on two instances of reactions to women and LGBTQ people in Canadian unions, where unions have seen an influx of female memberships since the 1970s and LGBTQ members (Hunt & Haiven, 2006 p. 667). As a result,

these groups have become more active in union work, forcing predominantly white, straight, cis-hetero male unions to better working conditions for minority groups (Hunt & Haiven, 2006 p. 667). This challenged the unions' internal solidarity, where Hunt & Haiven (2006) link the unions' member solidarity directly to success during negotiations. Preserving the union's identity is vital, fitting the argument of Bielski Boris (2010b). The two cases that Hunt & Haiven (2006) present is first; a case on equal pay between male-dominated labor and female-dominated labor, which ended with splitting the union in internal fighting (Hunt & Haiven, 2006). Secondly, a case of a progressive automobile union that went out of their way to support a gay young man in his lawsuit against his school, even though he was not even a union member (Hunt & Haiven, 2006). The last one shows how unions can engage in very supportive actions, especially when it is external and fits with their collective self-image. More importantly, it was less economically costly than the latter.

Bielski Boris (2010b), identifies which unions especially have been good at including LGBTQ people. Public sector unions are more including towards LGBTQ people because they early on had to include a more diverse membership, as public sector jobs in the U.S are low paid, and have higher rates of women, blacks, and people of color. The same goes for unions in female-dominated work (nursing, education, etc.), which Bielski Boris, (2010b) justifies with the possibility that women in these sectors are perceived to be more caring and empathetic, and therefore are more open-minded to diversity. In connection, Bielski Boris, (2010b) states that especially unions in Australia have been incredibly successful in implementing anti-harassment policies against LGBTQ people, but that these unions already had solid feminist elements implemented (Bielski Boris, 2010b p. 189).

Essential to take from these studies is that middle-man organizations such as PAW have been important for linking LGBTQ issues and the labor movement into collaboration. Albeit, it also has its limitations, depending on the self-image, existing membership, and the existence of strong LGBTQ union members. However, concerning this thesis, they hold restrictions to draw directly to the situation between labor and LGBTQ in Japan, which one should bear in mind. Even though there are similarities, it is crucial to understand that the context that Japanese LGBTQ finds themselves in is different for social, historical, or cultural reasons. Even though LGBTQ movements in the U.S see a clear link between labor and their cause, it might not be the same for LGBTQ people in Japan. Therefore, the link between non-regular workers and LGBTQ people in Japan will be examined in the next paragraph.

2.5 LGBTQ people: The connection to labor policies through the concept of 'precarity'

Looking at LGBTQ people in Japan, the majority of them are in precarious, non-regular work. According to the Survey of LGBT Issues in the Workplace Environment made in 2015 by Nijjiro Diversity and Center for Gender Studies, International Christian University (CGS), based on 2154 participants, showed that, on average, 39,3% of LGBTQ people work as non-regular workers. In contrast, only 27% of non-LGBTQ people work as non-regular workers. These numbers diverge, according to the group in question, where FtX (Female to X-gender¹) and FtM² (Female to Male) are the groups in the top, with respectively 39,7% and 40% working in non-regular work. Placed in the bottom are cis-gay men with 29,5% and cis-bisexual men with 31,6% (cis-hetero men have 19,2%, cis-hetero women 30,7%), showing that gender identity and sexual orientation is related to the work status of the individual. The survey is based on a small data sample, however, it does give an indication of the situation for Japanese LGBTQ people.

The overrepresentation of LGBTQ people in non-regular work allows the application of the concept of precarity as this concept allows us to examine the intersectionality between work and the social issues that different gender identity and sexual orientation add to daily life. The concept of precarity is linked to Guy Standing's book from 2011, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, that appeals that a new class of precarious people in non-regular or unusual work has emerged. Neilson & Rossiter (2008), analyzed the concept of precarity and found that people working in precarious jobs can have several precarious identities linked to the precariat, however, divided into different areas of politics, rather than a single political movement. Groups such as immigrants, students, and women often find themselves in similar precarious working conditions, but for different reasons and durations of time, making it hard to define the "precariat" as one group or social class (Standing, 2011). Instead, the argument is that a person's precarity can originate from many sources (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Nevertheless, there is an overlying tendency to describe precarity as only defined by one's job's nature as an objective factor, as in European Commission Reports (McKay, Jefferys, Paraksevopoulou, et al. 2012). However, Gasiukova & Shkaratan (2019) argue for the interpretation that people can

¹ X-gender is a term close to the western word non-binary. People who do not identify with woman or man, or as outside the gender-spectrum.

² FtM (Female to Male), MtF (Male to Female) are other terms for transman and transwoman, often used in Japanese sources.

feel precarious in subjective ways as well, although jobs still are an essential factor. This is the interpretation of the concept used in this thesis, as it allows to take the lived experiences of LGBTQ people into account, not just their job-status. However, it makes precarity a very subjective concept, which makes it crucial to examine how LGBTQ workers perceive their precarity in workplaces and society. Thereby giving answers to the way LGBTQ people relate to the labor movement in Japan.

2.6 Work environment and legal situation for LGBTQ people in Japan

LGBTQ people, in general, face specific problems at their workplaces. 45,8% state that they often hear or see discriminatory behavior, 71,2% that there are no LGBT related policies at their workplace, and that 50,1% of transgender people think about suicide (Nijiro Diversity, 2018). Adding on top of this currently, only 946 municipalities in Japan recognize same-sex partnerships (Nijiro Diversity, 2020, April 22). Only Tokyo out of Japan's 47 prefectures criminalizes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Nijiro Diversity, 2020). In 2003 Japan allowed transgender people to change their legal gender, but only after they had undergone sex reassignment surgery (SRS) and forced sterilization. Japan does not prohibit homosexuality or different gender identities, as well as do Shinto and Buddhism have no definitive ban against LGBTQ people (Tamagawa, 2020, p. 25). On the first of June this year, Japan enacted its first anti-LGBT harassment law under the power harassment law, which requires companies exceeding 50 employees to install measurements to stop different kinds of power harassment. This includes outing, name-calling, and the transgression of LGBTQ peoples' privacy as power harassment (Pitchford, 2020, July 02). In 2022, smaller companies are expected to fall under the same law. Even though it's just been enacted, the law has been received with skepticism. Based on a survey made by Kyodo News for an article on the effect of the law for freelance workers in February, 110 companies were asked if they would follow the new law and implement LGBTQ anti-harassment measurements. Out of the 110, 48 companies said that they had no need, stating that they did not retain any such workers (KYODO NEWS, 2020, May 17).

Outside the workplace, LGBTQ people face a society that does not acknowledge their existence (Tamagawa, 2020). Media representation of Japanese LGBTQ people is generally low, where the dominant is the role of *onee-key*, a flamboyant, and "funny" role often played by MtFs (Male to Female) or cross-dressers (Tamagawa, 2020). The rest of the LGBTQ community are

mostly ignored and underrepresented (Tamagawa, 2020). However, young people tend to be far more accepting of LGBTQ people, than the older generations (Tamagawa, 2018; Frühstück, 2020; Mckirdy, 2020, June 27).

The fear of being reduced to coarse stereotypes can also be why LGBTQ people are not out, or only partially out, at their workplace (Tamagawa, 2020). Furthermore, it can be a contributing factor for most LGBTQ people who do not have any LGBTQ related work policies implemented at their workplace (Nijiuro Diversity and the Center for Gender Studies at International Christian University, 2015). Meanwhile, Japan's government does not push LGBTQ rights forward in Japanese society. Rather, the conservative stance on the topic gives very little room for LGBTQ organizations/groups to engage in national politics (Takao, 2017). As for now, it is the local prefectures and municipalities that have the biggest platform for LGBTQ support. An example of local action can be found in 2015, where Shibuya municipally was the first to allow same-sex partnerships, but this was brought forward by local political entrepreneurs rather than top politicians (Takao, 2017). Actions like this are difficult, as it requires immense energy and a position in the local society from where one is listened to. Being precarious does not help this fact. The pressure to deal with/hide one's LGBTQ identity while also worrying about one's job-security and livelihood takes time and energy. Instead, this energy could have gone to engage in politics, social movements, or just recreational pleasures that are needed for people to change society. This issue correlates with Standing's (2011) idea of the "work and time squeeze". Keeping the precarious worker stuck in their situation because of insufficient energy and time to escape it. As Allison (2012), in her study on suicide and youth in Japan, states it; Social precarity is related to precarious work. It affects and undermines one's daily life; it destabilizes one's general security, material, social, and the core of one's existence (Allison, 2012 p. 349).

Finally, one must address the gendered labor market of Japan that favors men over women. As previously explained, women are expected to rely on the "breadwinner" model, creating an extremely gendered labor market. In 2004 women's part-time hourly pay was only 45,2% of male regular employed workers. Making Japan's gender-gap prominent compared to other OECD countries and has not changed significantly (Broadbent, 2005; Osawa et al., 2013, p. 322; Rebick, 2005; World Economic Forum, 2020). The point is that straight, cis men dominate Japanese regular labor. Therefore to exclude non-regular workers, who mainly are women, is to exclude women in general and maintain inequality between male-dominated work and the

rest of the labor market (Ishii, 2018; Watanabe, 2015b; Broadbent, 2005). The fact that women and LGBTQ people face similar and overlapping issues related to not being a cis-hetero man is an example of how both groups are a part of the same precarity. However, their issues will be understood as different societal problems, and not as a structural pattern that both women and LGBTQ are suppressed by (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008; Standing, 2011).

The lack of both notably political awareness of LGBTQ people's rights and the over-representation of LGBTQ people in non-regular work, makes it clear that both Japanese labor unions and the LGBTQ community have an unspoken link of common interests. If unions can support both non-regular workers and enforce LGBTQ policies, they can potentially stabilize LGBTQ livelihoods, simultaneously increasing their memberships. However, it is crucial to see how LGBTQ people relate to unions. There may be too many difficulties to overcome before involvement in labor unions is attractive.

Chapter 3: Research question and sub-questions

To what extent are there grounds for collaboration between precarious LGBTQ people and labor unions in Japan?

How do Japanese LGBTQ people in Japan relate to the Japanese labor movement?

- *How do non-regular LGBTQ workers identify with the labor unions and the Japanese labor movement, and do they see unions as a potential ally that can help them with pushing forward on LGBTQ rights in Japan?*

How do Japanese labor unions approach LGBTQ non-regular workers in their labor movement and policies?

- *How do unions perceive their position towards LGBTQ and non-regular workers issues at work places, do they see it as a priority and how do they support LGTBQ issues?*

Chapter 4: Methods and data

In pursuit of answering the research questions, the use of semi-structured interviews was chosen, relying on a premade study design with interview guides (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Choices of the study design, process of the data collection, analysis methods, limitations, and ethical considerations will be elaborated and discussed further down this chapter.

4.1 Study design

Before embarking on fieldwork in Japan, the initial plan was to conduct interviews with precarious non-regular workers and labor unions, to write a thesis on the 'precariat' and 'precarity' as a new working-class identity in Japan. Furthermore, the study was intended to examine this presumed phenomenon and the union's approach to the growing number of non-regular labor in Japan. As a result, to make sure that the interviews were guided towards answering the original research questions, semi-structured interviews were chosen and set up to follow a study design, which relies on Brinkmann & Kvale's "Seven Stages of an Interview Inquiry" (2018, p 56);

1. *Thematizing*. The purpose of the study and background research of the field, to be able to ask the “what and why” of the study.
2. *Designing*. The study design should be made in a way to obtain the needed knowledge from the interviews by taking into account the ethical and moral purpose of the study.
3. *Interviewing*. Interviews are conducted by following a pre-made interview guide, while reflecting on the interview situations, the knowledge desired and the interviewees personal connection to the interviewer.
4. *Transcribing*. Transcribing the oral interviews into written analyzable data.
5. *Analyzing*. What data comes out of the interviews, and how to approach it analytically according to what is appropriate for the interviews and the nature of the topic.
6. *Verifying*. How reliable are the data, is it possible to access that there is a basis for a generalization of data? Are the data consistent and are the covering the knowledge that was sought after.

7. *Reporting*. Present the data in an academic way that lives up to the scientific criteria, taking ethical considerations into account.

The stages that Brinkmann & Kvale (2018) present are very generally applicable guidelines but need to be put in context to the subject of the study, and the nature of the interviews. Thus, it still provides the framework for this empirical thesis, albeit specifying the focus from the large group of non-regular workers to non-regular LGBTQ workers, needed completely new knowledge and considerations.

4.2 Process of data collection

The use of interviews is argued by some social scientists to be an efficient method for uncovering the underlying notions and ideas of the respondent (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Weiss, 1994). To fully allow the respondents' lived experiences to come forth, also in ways not anticipated, a semi-structured interview guide was made. Starting with few general questions, additional questions were added beneath in case needed. However, reflecting over the interview questions, the study design was adjusted throughout the fieldwork duration, as I struggled to find common ground between the LGBTQ interviewees' experiences and labor unions' awareness of LGBTQ issues. As Brinkmann & Kvale states; "*The linear progression of the seven stages discussed here may in practice be modified into a circular or spiral model where the researcher, with an extended understanding of the themes investigated, at later stages returns to earlier stages*" (2018 p. 63). Through this process, going back and forth between two otherwise not related topics, LGBTQ rights, and labor unions, I relied on conversations with Prof. Motoyama from Waseda University. Leading to exploring the perceptions of LGBTQ people of the labor movement, and the actions labor unions take to include LGBTQ minorities.

In the interview situation, especially on a sensitive topic such as LGBTQ experiences, there is an interpersonal connection between the interviewee and the interviewer to take into account. This means that one interviewer can get different answers, even with the same questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Furthermore, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, and X-gender people all face different issues, which changes the subjects' experience of the lived world. At every interview I had with LGBTQ people, I outed myself and that I frequented the Tokyo gay scene, to give a feeling of familiarity to the interview. The interviews were ended, with the possibility for the interviewee freely to ask me questions, allowing for new conversations and

information that otherwise had not been included. This approach is part of the feminist qualitative research method that tries to break down the interviewer-interviewee power relation, often found in standard interview sessions (Bryman, 2012 p. 491-492; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

The interviews were afterward transcribed into written Japanese or English. A transcription program was used to transcribe the Japanese interviews. The reason for not translating the Japanese interviews to English was to stay true to the information and nuances given and time-saving. The quotes from the Japanese interviews in the analysis are my translations.

4.3 Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

Within QCA, there are different approaches to take. However, the conventional process is especially used when there is not much pre-existing literature on the field, combined with open-ended, semi-structured questions, as in the case of this thesis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Roller, 2019). Because of the lack of literature on the relation between LGBTQ and labor unions in Japan, there were no pre-made analytical categories; rather, I chose to follow what Mayring (2000 p. 4) explains as “*inductive category development*”. This allows the data to form freely into spontaneous categories. By repeatedly going back over the transcripts with increased knowledge, these are formed into main categories. Starting with a rough initial analysis, right after an interview had been done, the inductive categories, later on, started to form into a wider net of categories emerging from the data. These categories are highlighted in the analysis as they are the skeleton upon which the analysis structure is built.

4.4 Limitations, ethical considerations, and challenges

By gathering data through fieldwork, there are several limitations to consider, which were considered using the standards of the Swedish Research Council (2017). Firstly, the language barriers, misunderstandings, and the general issues coming from a Danish person conducting Japanese interviews based on western concepts such as precarity and a culturally different experience of being LGBTQ and its relation to labor rights. Here mainly, it is essential to compose a self-critical analysis and exercise heightened awareness about the differences between being LGBTQ in a European context and the lived experience of LGBTQ people in

Japanese society. Especially when it is a fact about myself that I actively have used to create a safer interview space for the respondents.

Secondly, using qualitative data from a few labor unions and a handful of people from the LGBTQ community limits a generalizable conclusion on the relation between the LGBTQ community and labor unions. Doing this would require a much larger pool of data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Therefore, the thesis focuses on the lived experiences and what the interviewees elucidate on the discourses and narratives circulating in the society surrounding them.

Thirdly, one must keep in mind that to be critical towards society means to break away from the group consensus, which is strong in Japan. Furthermore, if the interviewee feels that this study is critical toward their job or their employer, it could also affect the interviews. Therefore to encourage LGBTQ interviewees to talk freely about their experiences and opinions, they have all been informed with the purpose of the thesis, how their statements are used, guaranteed complete anonymity both in names, workplaces, and where they live. Only in cases where they have said that they wanted to mention their workplace, I have done so. However, all names of LGBTQ people in this thesis are aliases created for animosity, and the specific names of the union staff/officers are also not mentioned. The way I initially approached the interviewees was through personal contacts. Some I have met personally before in the LGBTQ community in Tokyo, telling them about what kind of research I do, others through networks, where the purpose of the interviews was clearly stated and followed up by conversations on what they would feel comfortable talking about. This was done to avoid ethical transgressions by complete transparency about my intentions, and for what purpose the data would be used (Bryman, 2012 p. 134). During some interviews, the recording was stopped when personal issues appeared, as these are not for public exposure, nor for me to keep as data.

Lastly, as discussed previously, hence the limited literature, it was inevitable to use western literature to fill in the gaps. However, there is a conscious aim to use as many Japanese sources as possible. This is the only way for the thesis to relate to the experiences of LGBTQ people in Japan while also explaining the country-specific culture and norms surrounding the labor market.

4.5 Interview Sample

The thesis is based on several interviews with LGBTQ people and labor unions. 8 LGBTQ interviews; three transmen (FtM), one with a cisgender lesbian, one transwoman (MtF), two cisgender gay men, and two X-gender persons one of them also identified as pansexual. In this group, 3 of the interviewees were active in labor unions. Please see the table below for clarity.

LGBTQ interviews

"Name"	Sexual orientation/ Gender identity	Language of interview	Labor union membership (X)	Age	Job situation
Yuuki	Cis gender lesbian	English		20s	Part-time worker. Student
Kenji	Cis gay man	English		40s	Regular worker
Uhei	Transman	Japanese		40s	Freelance worker
Kyosuke	Cis gay man	Japanese	(Former employee, Rengo)	30s	Regular worker
Tamaki	X-gender	Japanese	X	20s	Part-time worker, student
Robert	Transman	English - Person is married to Japanese person, and working in Japan.	X	30s	Contract worker, part-time worker
Wakachi	Transman	English		20s	Full time contract worker
Makoto	X-gender, pansexual	English	X	20s	Part-time worker
Chie	Transwoman	Japanese		20s	Without job. Student.

There were six interviews with different labor unions. One of them is overlapping with one of the interviews made with one of the LGBTQ interviewees as he has been working in Rengo on LGBTQ issues. Besides this, most of them are smaller, so-called community unions or more prominent unions that coordinate smaller company-based unions. Most of them are active within the education industry or service industries, and therefore experienced with non-regular workers. For the sake of clarity, the table below lists the type of union and relevant notes to the interviews conducted with them.

Labor Union Interviews

Labor union name	Type of labor union	Language of interview	Affiliation to labor confederations	Focus of union.
Zenkoku Ippan Tokyo General Union (Tozen)	Community Union	English	Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation)	Non-regular workers within teaching esp. language schools.
General Union (Osaka)	Community Union	English	Zenrokyo (National Trade Union Council)	Non-regular workers within teaching esp. language schools.
Tokyo Private University Teachers Union	Head union of smaller private university teachers unions in Tokyo	Japanese	Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation)	Focus on regular-workers, who have fulltime employment at private universities.
UA Zensen	Industrial Union, for enterprise unions.	Japanese	Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation)	Focus on enterprise unions within the service, textile and leisure industries. Majority of members are non-regular.
Precariat Union, Tokyo	Community Union	Japanese		Most focus on young non-regular workers and LGBTQ issues.
Rengo (Interview with Kyosuke, previously working for Rengo)	Japanese Trade Union Confederation	Japanese		Biggest labor confederation, mixture of representing both community unions and enterprise unions.

Besides these interviews, three experts were interviewed as well. Two labor market professors from Waseda University, and one professor from The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, specialized in Japanese labor unions. These interviews were beneficial to understand the Japanese labor market and its implications on, especially non-regular workers.

The individual interview's length ranges between 40-105 min in duration, depending on the time available and the flow of the interview.

Chapter 5: Analysis

The analysis uses Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to look for the themes and patterns to explore the interviewee's attitudes and perceptions. The chapter is divided into two parts, the first one focusing on the interviews conducted with LGBTQ people; on their perceptions of their work environment and LGBTQ rights in Japan, precarity and future, the LGBTQ community, labor unions, and the labor movement. With the responses from the labor unions,

the second part explores their perceptions towards; LGBTQ issues, including awareness and campaigns, mobilizing non-regular workers, and on the union's role in society and their power.

5.1 Part 1: LGBTQ people

This part of the analysis will go through the LGBTQ respondents' perceptions of their work environment, precarity, and feelings of instability, their LGBTQ community, and their images of labor unions. The literature review discussed the different factors that are apparent in the field. From cis-hetero-sexism statistics that exist at workplaces, to media representation, and a very gendered labor market, excluding towards non-cis-hetero men. We can expect to see similarities to the issues discussed in the interviewees' responses. It will give a clear understanding of the subjectivity of precarity, as even regular LGBTQ workers are feeling precarious. Precarity entangles into the interviewees' work environment, as a feeling of anxiety, but also overlaps with sexism and general exclusion at work. Their reflections on the labor movements will give clues to what labor unions need to change, as well as changing the culture that not only surrounds the labor market but socio-political spheres in general, a barrier holding people back.

5.1.1 Perceptions of work environment

According to their personal experiences, responses to their work environment varied according to whether they were trans, X-gender, or a cis gay man. However, they agreed that daily interactions, such as office chit-chat, made it hard to be or come out at their workplace.

In the interview with Makoto, pansexual, and fluid gender identity, is an LGBTQ activist and active in a labor union. On the side, Makoto works three part-time jobs. She said when asked about what the main issues LGBTQ people face at their workplace;

“People who are straight, and don't know LGBT people... don't know what kind of words or action could be bad for us... They should know that unintentionally they hurt us at workplaces.. I don't think we should educate them, but we should let them know the problem. So I think ignorance is the biggest issue here”

Tamaki, is X-gender and works several jobs as a teacher and counselor, and grew up in the

countryside with experiences of harassment and bullying. They³ spoke about the issues of *nomination*, after-hour drinks with colleagues which is very common, but creates a very unpleasant environment for LGBTQ people, also when coworkers do not intend to do so; “*This “alcohol communication” is very normal, and they’ll ask you “are you a homo?”... The alcohol makes them say it more directly, which hurts... You cannot come out and just say “that’s right”, you might not have the courage, and it hurts. I think that in many cases this can lead to depressions afterwards*”

What Makoto and Tamaki point out here, is that the source of their anxiety at work is not necessarily done with bad intentions. Instead, it is the absence of understanding the effect it has on the LGBTQ person. The education of cis-heteros that Makoto suggests and Tamaki’s issue with *nomination*, connects to what Rossetti (2018) talks about in the literature review; labor unions must enforce guidelines for conduct with LGBTQ coworkers, as well as handing out impartial information. The exclusion of LGBTQ people and non-regular workers in the after-hours activities is cutting them from vital workplace information, which harms their networking options and virtually their awareness of social programs and general labor rights as Osawa et al. (2013) stresses.

5.1.1.1 Gender and sexism

In the interview with Yuuki, a young student working two part-time jobs. She hesitates to disclose her sexuality at the workplace. However, the main issue is the daily sexism she experiences, both from customers and colleagues, while managers fail to take it seriously. The sexism she encounters makes it harder for her to be out at her workplace. Yuuki has recently moved to another restaurant run by the same company. She used to be out at the old place, and when asked about how she perceived coming out at the new place, she answered:

“...Some people asked me, in front of other people “like hey, are you lesbian?”... I thought they wouldn’t judge me by that, so I could say it (at the old place). Right now I feel like the boys are more sexist and they make a lot of disgusting jokes... So, I wouldn’t (come out now)... If other people ask me, I answer. But I would not say that I have girlfriend.”

³ Tamaki uses the pronouns they/them.

Later, she said that the only thing she wanted to change at her workplace was her male colleagues' sexism:

"...Seriously, I don't like that part about my work... how much we are earning at the wage, I don't have complaints for."

Yuuki indicates that sexism, especially against women, still is of high priority plus fetishizes her same-sex relationship. Wakaki a transman working as a contract worker, also states when asked about his image of LGBTQ rights in Japan:

"It's very delayed... Probably because women's salaries are not fair and so on. I imagine that before LGBT rights can be dealt with, women's concerns need to be tackled first."

Staying on gender equality, Kenji, who is a regular employed cis gay man, stated that from his perspective;

"Especially lesbians who tend to have kids, rather than gay people, in especially in a country with a huge gap between men and women, lesbian with family and kids, are the weakest in society."

It is telling that women's rights and LGBTQ rights are interlinked. When talking about precarity, the intersection of gender plays a significant role in how people are placed in society, as Neilson & Rossiter (2008) point out, but that the divide between feminist politics and queer politics, stalls LGBTQ rights to move forward. Referring back to Bielski Boris (2010b), the unions that were especially good at including LGBTQ people, were unions either with a majority of women or had significant feminist policies installed. The two issues seem to go hand in hand.

5.1.2 Precarity and future - the feeling of insecurity and instability

One of the interview guides' main questions was, *"are you feeling secure about your future"*. Almost all interviewees said that they do not feel safe or secure; they feel *fuan* (anxious, insecure) or *fuantei* (insecurity, instability). The main reasons were related to work; some felt an exact feeling that the system would not catch them if they fell through the labor market. Others tied it to their gender identity or sexual orientation, or a mixture of all of the above.

Uhei, a transman, states that he is insecure about his work as a care worker and a social worker. He changes his work often and is working for several institutions and organizations. He calls it “*close to a freelance job*” and struggled to join a union, despite having needed a union. In the interview, he later described the stress that being or becoming a non-regular worker adds to a person; “... *When a person happens to slip into a non-regular job, their lives become too much, and even things you rely on, can become too much to handle inside your head. At this point it’s all over. I mean, you can’t do anything at all.*” The statement exemplifies the heaviness that precarious jobs entitle, when depressing insecurity takes over, disabling a person to take control over their situation. Uhei said this in connection to workers' awareness of unions and their rights. Educating oneself when in a precarious situation, can simply be too much, despite being necessary.

Chie, a young transwoman, and student without a job, said that she felt anxious about graduating from university. Albeit she was sure to get a good job, she was worried about having to join a company and wanted to finish her transitioning before this. Wakaki, a transman, expressed similar attitudes, that it was better not to transition at work to avoid problems.

Tamaki talked about the Japanese pension system as a significant concern; “*I am in the lowest pension category... Right now, the retirement age is 65 years, and the money you get afterward is only 60.000 yen per month, and in that case you can’t live from that.*” However, when it comes to LGBTQ rights in Japan, Tamaki seemed more positive; “*Japan is changing... More global awareness or political things will increase, yeah I think it’ll change fast, I believe so.*” Disagreeing with most interviewees, who said that Japan changed too slowly.

Essential here is the feeling of *fuan*, that as a red thread runs through their existences. The thread of precarity can destabilize one to the core of one's existence (Allison, 2012). Whether it is mental issues following the loss of stability, fear of falling through society's cracks, or anxiety on whether one's future job will welcome a person like oneself? They are subjective, but all related to work and confirm Gasiukova & Shkaratan (2019) definition of precarity.

5.1.3 Is there an “LGBTQ community”?

As in the studies on unions in the U.S and Canada, explained in the literature review, show the importance for LGBTQ people to have solidarity across LGBTQ groups (e.g., the example of Pride at Work) (Kelly & Lubitow, 2015; Bielski Boris, 2010a). The expression “LGBTQ community” is used in Japan; however, it is essential to look at the attitudes towards it in a Japanese context.

The majority of LGBTQ interviewees talk about the LGBTQ community, but most express notions of a limited or no community, when asked further into it.

Very bluntly, when asked about the LGBTQ community in Japan, Kenji said *“what community? There is no LGBT community.”*

Uhei, said that he did feel he could go and talk to people in the LGBTQ community, to receive sympathy and emotional support, but he also said that the LGBTQ community still is *“mada mada (still has some way to go)... It’s getting slowly better and better”*. He did seem to see the community as a source of understanding, rather than a place that holds power.

Tamaki, an activist and has access to different communities, explains that there is no LGBTQ community for people who are not activists like themselves; *“At this point there are only your friends and maybe your family... However I think that most people don’t have those kinds of resources. They are fighting alone and isolated.”*

Tamaki said that LGBTQ resources are mostly located in Tokyo. They stressed the need for more significant outreach to the LGBTQ people, who cannot move to the capital and explained; *“...When I was living in my hometown, I had no pride and there were traumatic experiences... Tokyo is very “Okay”, but the place I come from is very bad... people suffer and do not have access to Tokyo... I want to make it livable for those people, and give them support where they live.”*

There is an LGBTQ community in Japan. Albeit, it has limitations, such as Tokyo centric and group divided; the gay men are keeping to themselves, transmen have their spaces etc. There seems to be a narrow intersection to do activism from. It has to be noted that this is not specific

to Japan. In European contexts, fractions in the “LGBTQ community” are also observed, with internal disputes or little communication between the groups.

5.1.4 Perceptions of labor unions and the labor movement

There is a clear pattern that emerges when looking at LGBTQ people's perception of labor unions. They either do not know what unions do, do not see them as essential, or have not considered joining one. The LGBTQ people who are in unions, however, do have a completely different perception. Common for them was the motivation to join, which came from friends and colleagues, and not through their own spontaneous will nor labor union activities.

As an interviewee that never joined a union Uhei, said that despite having options, however, limited, to join a union, there always was “a psychological hurdle” for him to join. He points out that the image of unions needs to change before unions can have a more substantial role in society: *“I think to raise the unionization rate, unions need to speak to companies on behalf of workers. There is this image that unions work for the companies, and they need to get rid of this image first.”*

There is a truth to this image. According to several scholars, unions in Japan have tendencies to work *for* management (Fujimura, 2012; Watanabe, 2015a; Rosetti, 2018). Naturally, non-regular workers will hesitate to join unions, when there is a well-founded expectation of not being represented.

When asked if it would be better with a union, just for LGBTQ people, or a union with more LGBTQ people, Uhei said; *“It’s hard to join unions just for Japanese generally... But even if you make an LGBT union, or make a part of a union for LGBT people... it is hard for people to join because they are afraid of having to come out, if they are not out... because it is scary to be known.”*

The statement shows the need for a greater change in society to encounter this fear. It is a snake biting its tail. Without being out, there is limited visibility of LGBTQ people, contributing to e.g., the 48 out of 110 companies saying that they do not employ LGBTQ people (KYODO NEWS, 2020, May 17).

5.1.4.1 The cultural barrier

Several interviewees connect the disinterest in unions to a culture, where people generally know about labor rights, but do not use them or stand up for themselves. Moreover, some describe politics as a taboo in their daily lives.

Yuuki when asked about what she thinks labor unions do, said: *“... like they should know what is going on in the working place, and if you have a problem, we have the right to say something, but we don't really use this, so we are not really interested in, like, learning about them...”*

When further asked about the reasons for the reluctance to learn about labor unions she replied; *“Because nobody does it... I think it's culture, because it wouldn't even be like the topic. And you are the first person to say labor union in front of me. Seriously.”*

When asked about whether she never heard about labor unions: *“Like we see it, we heard it or we see it on the TV, but that's like it. It is really really apart from my daily life.”*

Notable here is that Yuuki does not see labor unions as even a part of her world. Adding to this, she uses “we”, assuming that others feel the same way as her, or at least the people in her surroundings.

When Uhei, who is older than Yuuki, was asked why people do not use labor unions, he pointed to Japanese education: *“I think it's because this is never taught through education... I think there are very few workers who know how to use, and that they can change their company through unions.”*

An adding point to the limited awareness of unions, and what they can do, is also because there seem to be hesitations about discussing politics, which Yuuki also brushed upon. Makoto states that it is a taboo to talk politics among her friends and that they seem annoyed with the topic; *“We have like an atmosphere, that talking about politics, is kind of taboo. My friends, Japanese friends, they complained “oh, recently my dad retired and then he suddenly started talking, got more interested in politics, he is so annoying”, like it's normal right? People around me, they hate politics, they think it's taboo to talk about.”*

The answers from Yuuki, Uhei and Makoto, are not limited to only LGBTQ people. They can be read as more comprehensive statements, covering cis-hetero people's attitudes as well, as they are generic in their expression and do not live in a vacuum.

The perception of culture and tabooed discussions as a barrier for joining unions, is underlined with Kenji's opinion on the hesitation for LGBT people to raise their voice in general;

"... Bottom up movement in Japan is very very weak, grassroots movement, social activities, joining democracy, raising their voice up... Only a very few limited LGBT people in Japan, who have very very serious problem, only then raise their voice, so far."

Cultural barriers for expressing or raising one's voice when it comes to labor issues and politics, in general, constitute a substantial issue for more awareness and inclusion of LGBTQ people.

5.1.4.2 Image of unions and motivation to join unions

Wakaki said that he hesitated to join a union, because of the image of unions run by conservative old men; *"Will these old men understand me?"*, placing unions as another sphere where he could face problems based on his gender identity. Yuuki also said that her image of unions is *"men. older, stubborn"*, but later states that she would join, given more information and a broader representation of women and LGBTQ people in the union. Interestingly during the interview with Wakaki, I was accompanied by a person from the same workplace who had introduced us and was a union member. When invited to a union meeting, Wakaki said yes. His immediate response shows that relations to familiar people who are aware of a person's situation, are a clear motivation for people to join a union or learn more about them.

When Makoto was asked why she joined a union, she also said it was through a personal friend who already was a member. When asked about what she thought about unions before joining, she explained: *"First I didn't know about what labor union is... even after I got to know a bit, I wasn't interested... I also thought they are crazy people, and radical and why do you have to put lots of energy and time for the union activity... why do you have to do it as a volunteer."*

Makoto also explained that the image of unions for other people, according to her experience is; *"... like radical, violent. It's actually not, maybe for some unions maybe, but for us... we are against violence.... people have a bad image of unions because most radical unions..."*

Japanese people have a bad image of activists, so it makes people not take action, they think strike is a bad thing.”

Kenji, who shortly was in a union when he was young, responded to the possibility of acquiring LGBTQ rights through labor unions:

“I doubt that LGBT claimed and try to get this through trade unions. Already Japanese workers don’t join trade unions... They seem powerless to me.”

Powerless unions. This is a contributing factor for why union might not be an attractive ally for LGBTQ people. Meanwhile, labor unions are perceived to be too conservative or too activist. Issues that labor unions themselves address, as we will see in the following part of the analysis.

5.2 Part 2: Labor unions

This part focuses on the unions' attitudes towards LGBTQ issues, non-regular workers, their self-image, and power. By looking at both sides' issue, it will be apparent if precarious LGBTQ people are taken into account in the unions, thereby assessing if a relation between the labor movement and LGBTQ activism is evident. The labor unions part explores the unions' attitudes towards dwindling labor unions density, how they challenge this in each their way, and whether labor unions is a potential ally for LGBTQ rights.

5.2.1 Attitudes and awareness on LGBTQ inclusion

The attitudes towards LGBTQ people varied widely from union to union. However, the most active ones were the Precariat Union, the General Union in Osaka (From now on General Union), and Zenkoku Ippan Tokyo General Union (From now on Tozen) are smaller community unions. Of the three big unions, UA Zensen and Rengo did have written statements and materials, guideline pamphlets for the treatment of SOGI⁴, but nothing that was obliged for their unions to use. Tokyo Private Teachers Union had of all the least material on LGBTQ issues.

For the General Union based in Osaka, I interviewed the Chair of the union and the Assistant

⁴ SOGI stands for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, often used by Japanese NGO's

General Secretary. They stated that they had transgender members and have been recommended as a good union on Facebook sites for LGBTQ people. When addressing this to them, they replied;

“So it’s not like there are hundreds and hundreds of transgender members, but for the ones who exist, we have often talked to the company first... we don’t want to hear any complaints about it... and so far, you know touch of wood... no one’s been fired, and no one had to change their workplace.”

This statement demonstrates the effect labor unions can have for a union member transitioning at their workplace. It also implies that General Union experiences a positive effect as people join them because of their great reputation. However, when asked if they do specific campaigns to reach LGBTQ people, they said they mostly do campaigns against harassment in general, that people approach them through. LGBTQ issues were not pushed that hard. Except on cases with transgender members, where they would use campaigns to pressure management;

“... with transgender members, particularly... there is a lot of fear that they are just not going to allow this... I think the employers that we deal with are afraid that we would target them over discrimination of the LGBT community, and we are very open that we would run a campaign...”

Tokyo Private Teachers Union, which coordinates private teachers' unions in the Tokyo region, gave another example of a union that has produced work environment improvements for LGBTQ. One of their unions, Waseda University Teachers Union, negotiated for gender-neutral toilets at campus. However, Tokyo Private Teachers Union staff members said this only was possible because it was a cheap demand to negotiate, as they converted disabled toilets to "all-gender" toilets. It can be considered problematic for both disabled and transgender people, but gender-neutral toilets are rare in a Japanese context. Therefore, it is relatively progressive. Even the simple gesture of have signs saying "gender-neutral" or "both genders" hanging in campus corridors, put X-gender and transgender people into existence in an otherwise gender binary world.

General Union clarified that they did imagine that the labor movement could give a stronger voice to LGBTQ rights; *“the labor movement is one of the best already established areas in*

society where LGBT people's voices would be heard". There is a truth to this statement, because unions do have a bigger platform and more resources that LGBTQ issues could be amplified from, which Kelly & Lubitow (2015) also argued for in their study on LGBTQ and labor unions in the U.S.

Tozen emphasizes that labor unions should have more awareness of LGBTQ issues and that general solidarity at the workplace means a lot for the work environment. Laws that protect workers do not mean a lot if there is no union or coworker solidarity to enforce it at the workplace, and that this also needs a greater change in culture:

"If you want to pass a law saying no, no you can't discriminate against LGBTQ people... sure pass that law, but don't expect it to do anything. Especially if LGBTQ people don't have solidarity, or workers don't have solidarity with LGBTQ people, LGBTQ people are screwed... Laws are meaningless without popular public pressure.., It's so good that the culture is changing, I think it's less likely that the unions are not going to have the back on one of their gay members, but it's still possible. Very possible."

It indicates that the culture is changing. However, it is troublesome that the possibility of unions abandoning their gay members is present. Further public pressure and a sense of solidarity are vital following Tozen's train of thought. Tozen also stresses that LGBTQ people need internal solidarity to create a better work environment. It speaks into how important it is that the feeling of an "LGBTQ community" needs to grow, as previously observed in the LGBTQ statements.

The Precariat Union, a small community union based in Tokyo, who from their foundation included LGBTQ people and non-regular workers, backs up the statement of Tozen. Throughout the interview, they linked several of the issues that non-regular workers face directly to LGBTQ issues. The union staff member interviewed expressed that not only was he worried about the development of the Japanese labor market but explained it as a "*feeling of crisis*", if things did not change for non-regular workers. When asked to specify why, he said:

"There are many reasons for this, but the main one is that there is no awareness of actually changing this... We don't think that we can change ourselves".

He, later on, pointed to the Japanese media as one of the underlying reasons, and their reluctance to challenge the status quo, and related it to the media's power on how LGBTQ people are being perceived in society;

“For example, transgender people, 10 years ago nobody understood that there is a difference between the L, G, B and T... Transgender people were depicted as double gendered monsters, only existing in Nichome (the gay district of Tokyo) walking around attacking people. Seriously”. Then continued to show me manga and anime characters of exaggerated trans women who would attack men, adding that this was a socially accepted idea, not that long ago.

This stigma and fear of these coarse stereotypes were also present in many LGBTQ interviews, as a notion of a conservative cultural barrier that only slowly gets smaller. Reminding us of the media's misrepresentation of LGBTQ people, discussed in the literature review, that stops people from coming out of the closet (Tamagawa, 2020).

The Precariat Union was the union that had the most to say about LGBTQ issues. However, they simultaneously were the most critical towards labor institutions and the government's handling of harassment against LGBTQ people and women. When addressing labor unions' image consisting of old, conservative men, the answer was swift; *“Because there are many unions like that... people might only know their union as a drinking party for old men”*, and that unions don't tend to see LGBTQ issues as a priority.

5.2.1.1 Attitudes towards the new power harassment law

The power harassment law (enacted 1st of June 2020) as previously discussed in the literature review, includes Japan's first anti-LGBT harassment policy (see; Kyodo News, 2020 May 17; Pitchford, 2020 July 02). Questions to this law were never in the interview guides, but several interviewees spontaneously mentioned the new law. As previously explained, it is a big step for Japanese society to include LGBTQ people in this law, but how do unions who engage in LGBTQ issues perceive the law's potential?

When asked about the handling of criminalizing LGBTQ harassment through the anti-power harassment law, the Precariat Union replied; *“We still need to see the effect of this... On whether this will be reliable, I don't think it's being handled well, because things besides LGBT*

have not turned out to be solid either. Everything considered.” This skepticism was further underlined when he pointed out that there still are people in government, who fundamentally don’t believe that women (and LGBTQ people) are equal to cis men.

Kyosuke, a cis gay man who, until recently, was an officer at Rengo, working on LGBTQ awareness and guidelines, also understood why young LGBTQ people did not engage in political questions and hesitated to join labor unions. He explained;

“Japanese LGBT people have never experienced any success with the system. Why? For example, there are strict laws for changing gender... The law is so strict, you have to have surgery, and if you want SRS (Sex Reassignment Surgery), you can’t if you have children, you can’t be married... When that law was passed it created a huge debate, to the point were some people committed suicide”... “From then until the power harassment law now, through 15 years, there has been nothing, so I don’t have a sense that the law protects me. So I don’t have a feeling of great changes”... “There has been an atmosphere of things getting better because of a company survey from 2015, but it has not changed the system... there is a clear notion that it does not mean that good things will necessarily happen.”

Across the interviews with the unions, the general answer was that unions, generally, do not do much to include LGBTQ people. However, the majority of unions interviewed have, in various degrees, included LGBTQ into their principles, and do seem to be aware of the issues that they face. Big unions like UA Zensen, Rengo, and Tokyo Private University Teachers Union have guidelines for better work environment policies for LGBTQ people. However, they do not pressure or control whether and how their unions implement these guidelines. Contrarily, the small community unions are better at creating a direct impact for LGBTQ and non-regular workers through their local engagement. Albeit, their limited size diminishes the broader impact of society and tends to stay at a local level as Watanabe (2015b) did argue for. However, bigger unions definitely could become better at enforcing LGBTQ guidelines to the unions they’re affiliated to.

5.2.1.2 LGBTQ awareness, campaigns, and tokenism

Tozen is affiliated with Rengo and states that Rengo does address LGBTQ awareness both in their work with unions and with management in companies: *“They are issuing statements to*

educate both labor and management about the possibility that you might have a person who is LGBTQ in your union, and here is what is not okay to treat them with.”

Nevertheless, the field director with whom the interview was conducted also added that “...at least they are talking about LGBTQ issues. And I mean talk is cheap but it’s better than nothing right now” and later expressed that he saw it as a form of tokenism; “There is something a little bit paternalistic about it... straight men lecturing people about how to be nice to the gays... and a lot of it is, to be honest, a kind of tokenism that we are accustomed to in big organizations...”.

During the interview, it became clear that this tokenism is not only covering the approach of LGBTQ issues at workspaces, but also non-regular workers and foreign workers in general. Tozen explained that it was evident during the *Shunto* (unions annual wage negotiations), and Rengo’s press conference. To focus on non-regular workers and LGBTQ workers, they sorted all the unions for non-regular, foreign and LGBTQ active unions from the “normal unions” and into separate location:

“... And the other location, all the other workers, and in our location, the foreign workers and the people they are highlighting... We want to show the management (...) that all the workers, the seisyain (regular workers) and the hisekiroudousha (non-regular workers) and the gaikokuroudousya (foreign workers), that everyone is katsudoushitein (actively working) together. That’s the point.”

What is important here is the choice of dividing workers up in different groups, in a way to make them stand out. However, doing this alienates LGBTQ, foreigners, and non-regular workers from the rest of the workforce. It makes them seem not-normal.

General Union, which is a very similar kind of union as Tozen in Tokyo, addresses tokenism in their own words; “They talk a lot about irregular workers, oh if you go to their meetings, you would think that is all they do is irregular workers... About women workers who are most irregular, foreign workers who are mostly irregular, but they are not organizing irregular workers.”

The “they” that is being called out here is Rengo, the most significant labor union federation

in Japan, who increasingly over the past two decades has focused on non-regular workers. Both Tozen and General Union, seem to want a more assertive and more confrontational labor movement in Japan that critically engages management.

The fact that Rengo does address and seem to try to engage in a dialogue about the needs for precarious workers through their LGBTQ awareness campaigns, does show some action. When asked if this was not a good start in some way, Tozen's field director answered in a very thoughtful way;

“Yes and no. It's going to be up to us to determine if it's going to be a steppingstone... it's not up to Rengo, it's not up to unions. If I can go to the next Rengo meeting and convey some of my colleagues that we need to do something about this together... I am cis gender, I am not really the one who should raise these questions. I think we should be listening more than talking... but we have to make that happen. and not wait for an old labor institution or any institution to do something about it, because that is not how these institutions work...”

Tozen is locally based and does believe in the bottom-up process in labor unions, but also takes much responsibility away from labor institutions. Saying that it is them, the small unions, who should not sit on their hands, instead act now, and not wait on e.g., Rengo.

5.2.1.3 Gender equality before LGBTQ issues

UA Zensen started to do seminars for awareness of LGBTQ issues at workplaces some years ago. It is all relatively recently that they and Rengo have started to tackle work environment issues for LGBTQ people, and the focus instead, is still on equality between men and women; *“For us the real tough issue right now, is the continued fight for gender equality... we struggle with that women don't involve themselves in union work... For example, if the disparity between men and women's jobs are gone, then in this situation, the pay gap between men and women also should disappear.”*

The important thing here is that UA Zensen has a majority of women in their membership (60%). However, the leadership of the union consists disproportionately of men; *“Afterall, whatever you do, unions tend to have a majority of men in them, and for us, we mostly have male-dominated leadership and focused a lot on regular workers as well.”* There is a clear notion among both unions and the LGBTQ interviews that before LGBTQ issues can be dealt

with properly, Japanese society and its labor institutions need to address gender inequalities in the labor market. If a union with a majority of women, still struggles to represent women in their leadership, then there indeed is a long way to include other minorities.

5.2.2 Perception of mobilizing non-regular workers

Because of most Japanese unions' enterprise structure, most unions lose their members as soon as they change their workplace or have to move - the same problem that Uhei faces as a freelance worker. This is especially true for non-regular workers, who are prone to change jobs frequently or work at several workplaces. From the start, General Union had a different structure of their union and has steadily grown in members over the years.

“The way our union is organized is maybe a little different from most unions in Japan. As it is not organized on what workplace or industrial grouping... a good percentage will stay in the union. When they change workplaces, as long as they are in the same kind of industry. So basically... we have a rather fluent membership... a very good percentage of them remain in the union regardless of what company or what school they are at. In that sense we are fortunate.”

They further elaborate one of the reasons for their growing membership are the so-called due check agreements at the workplaces that they are active at, in other words the dues to the union are paid through the worker's salary. Interestingly they said that these agreements made their union look less “...like an underground “terrorist” organization” placing emphasis on that many in non-regular work, are afraid of joining unions like General Union; “...because people are in unstable employment, so people are more afraid of joining, so the more we make the union look very common, the better is the chance to attract them... So things like the dues check off agreements, things like agreements over standardized grievance procedures... all these things make the union look normal.”

Recalling some of the images that LGBTQ people had towards unions, as e.g. radical, it seems to be very important for unions to be perceived as *normal* as possible, and to not scare people away by being too activist. At the same time, people are joining unions like General Union, exactly because they are very active. The balance between the two sides, activist/not activist,

could be a factor for why unions do not engage into identity politics or are more confrontational with management.

The unions agreed that people join their unions, through connections to people already members of the union. When bringing up the general awareness of unions, especially among young people, General Union replied that it was not the young people who are at fault but instead the unions;

“... We have never seen a union, seriously trying to organize, for example young people... the number of workers in general is increasing, and the percentage of irregular workers is increasing and there you really see the difference between regular and irregular workers. However, unionization rate is decreasing... seeing that kind of situation, at least among irregular workers there must be a demand, for an improvement of their working conditions. But no major union seriously try to reach them and organize them...” This is exactly Nakamura’s (2007) point, as discussed in the literature review; people are willing to join unions, but unions don’t reach out or capitalize on the labor situation in Japan.

General Union has always recruited non-regular workers, and therefore have the upper hand in reaching non-regular workers. Big company unions that primarily favor regular workers and now have to unionize workers again, face difficulties. General Union explains the relationship between these big, older unions and non-regular workers as a disposable workforce; *“...For a union for regular workers, “if my company does not have that pressure-release (of cheap non-regular workers), then that will affect us. So we are basically taking care of ourselves, that irregular workers are something to a certain extent prop up our situation too.”*”

And go to the heart of what they see as the issue for big labor unions today.

“...they (big unions established unions) come out of culture of 30 or 40 years of not organizing, just to learn it overnight... they don’t know how to reach out to their irregular workers, they still have that mindset around the constitution that they only organize regular workers.”

The crucial points here are that especially community unions (Tozen, General Union, and the Precariat Union), actively try to change some of their images by looking less activist. However, on the other hand, community unions do have a better platform to reach workers, as they are not limited to one company, and people tend to stay in the unions. At the same time, they have

more experience of unionizing non-regular workers, because they have done it from the very start of their establishment. Furthermore, non-regular workers need unions, but unions are not good enough to reach out to them.

5.2.2.1 Non-regular workers and the future of the dualistic labor market

UA Zensen is a vast labor union with about 1.800.000 members, through 2330 affiliated unions, and is directly under Rengo. 60% of their members are non-regular. The interview was conducted with one of their officers working on policy-making, labor rights, and working conditions. According to her, UA Zensen especially tries to establish unions at workplaces without a union that is supposed to represent non-regular workers. Besides this, UA Zensen also tries to nudge regular workers' unions, affiliated to UA Zensen, to open up for non-regular labor. Because of their size, it would have a tremendous impact, if they succeed.

UA Zensen has a vision that until 2025, the gap between regular workers and non-regular workers will be closed, or at least the system will loosen up so that it will be easier to jump from regular worker to non-regular worker and vice-versa; *“... With focus on individuals life plan and life circle, we want to make a system where you can choose between both full-time and part-time... E.g. If you get married and have children and want to go down to part-time, you can also come and go between full and part-time.”*

As an argument for this new system's durability, UA Zensen's officer points to the most recent labor reform. The *doitsroudou doitsuchingin* "equal work, equal pay" law that was enacted April this year; *“Most of the companies are not ready yet, it will take some time to be enacted... But it will change things for non-regular workers”* And further explains, when asked if this law might lower regular workers' pay to that of non-regular workers; *“For example, I think that expenses for commuting, household and living expenses will become more equal because it says so in the law. Well, to say become more equal, if there are no regular workers, maybe the treatment would become the same.”*

What especially struck about this statement was the choice of the example of getting married and having children. This scenario seems hard to do in the current system, especially for LGBTQ people who do not have these rights. However, it also plays on the idea that the salaries only will become higher for non-regular workers and not take a dive for everyone on the labor market, because of the influx of workers entitled to higher salaries. The idea that the gap will

close between regular and non-regular labor is very similar to Rebeck (2005) discussion, who predicted this 15 years ago. Meanwhile, scholars like Watanabe (2015a) and Osawa et al. (2013) would see this law as yet another neoliberalist reform. Instead of raising non-regular workers' living standards, it could pull regular workers down to non-regular workers' level to the benefit of Japanese companies' profit.

5.2.3 Unions' role in society and the perception of their power

On labor laws in Japan, and whether there need to be better labor reforms in Japan, General Union said: “... *what we found in Japan is that the laws are wonderful... but they are unenforced... recently, they made changes to the five-years and you get an unlimited contract, they lowered the threshold for enrollment into hoken, they're introducing equal pay for equal work... but the only people who are enforcing and making progress in enforcing them are the unions.*”

Moreover, it is clear that it is the union's responsibility to make sure that these reforms are being enforced. Otherwise, employers will not apply them to their workplace: “*So the clever employer knows, even if the law exists we ignore it. Who cares? So therefore, the good law should be supported by the union, enforced.*” This thought could also be expanded to the recent power-harassment, where the unions will be crucial to LGBTQ people's effect.

When asked about why unions were not taking this responsibility to heart, they pointed at the Rengo unions as one of the structural problems keeping the status quo in the labor market; “... *they are not labor unions, they're associations, that discusses with the employer from time to time... the companies rely on the Rengo unions, they rely on them to keep other unions out of them. And they allow the Rengo unions to become radical sometimes, as long as when the company is ready, that they turn down the heat on the stove.*”

UA Zensen, as a significant force in the labor movement, interestingly was very modest about their power, pointing to that it is through negotiations, not confrontation with management that their power is, indicating a limited power. This especially came up when striking and demonstrations came up as a topic in the interview, where the officer said: “...*When negotiations go bad, we have the right to strike, and we make it clear that this is what we'll do, but lately there has been no strikes...*”

When asked about why this was, the officer explained it was because it had become harder to strike; “... to say that all of the distribution companies should strike (is hard).. It’s not the same for factory or let’s say a train industries. I don’t think we will see more strikes in the future.”

It indicates a coordination problem that smaller, local unions do not seem to have. More interesting was the UA Zensen’s officers personal opinion on strikes as a negotiation tool; “*The most important is that we have the constitutional right to strike if negotiations turn bad. It’s important to have the awareness of this right and make it clear, but in reality to say “well, let’s strike then” is not good, and I don’t think it’s necessarily good that there will be more strikes in the future. Rather, I think having this right is what is important.*”

So, to have the right, but not exercising it, seems most important for UA Zensen. It is very similar to the cultural barrier, discussed in the above LGBTQ part, where people tend to know their rights, but do not speak up. In the case of UA Zensen, they are very hesitant actually to confront management. They constrain their power in favor of management. It makes one wonder if they would then be able to take a stance for LGBTQ rights.

5.2.3.1 Labor unions as a steppingstone for LGBTQ rights

Kyosuke, a former union officer at Rengo, said when asked if the Japanese government listened to the unions, he replied; “*The last 15 years it has become difficult... I think that the government is making clear distinctions of who is a friend and who is a foe, unions are seen as enemies, because union members are disappearing from the meetings.*” The disappearance of labor unions in policy-making was also stressed by Nakamura (2007) and Watanabe (2015b) in the literature discussion, as one of the final blows for the decline of labor unions in Japan.

When it comes to pushing forward on LGBTQ issues, he was asked whether the government then listens to LGBTQ activists. He replied that at least when it comes to labor and welfare politics, LGBTQ issues have slowly been broad up the last 1-2 years, through the discussions on the power-harassment law and new surveys on the subjects. However, if this will grow to include other political spheres is unknown, for now, there is no space for LGBTQ activists to be heard.

These statements show a problematic relationship between the fact that the government is taking up LGBTQ issues in labor politics, but at the same time, the unions who are supposed to take care of workers and enforce these politics at a local level, are not present at the policy-making table.

Lastly, he made it clear that he did not see unions being the ones pushing LGBTQ rights forward, rather *“I have many examples of companies pulling this forward, examples of unions and companies doing it together. But I have never heard about a case where unions were the ones fighting for it.”*

Kyosuke continued to give another example of that companies are the ones creating change; *“This does not only go for LGBT issues. Take gender issues, here you see unions following what the company does, and from there work on it together, rather than unions doing out of themselves. I am not saying that unions cannot do great things, but there just hardly are any such cases.”*

Kyosuke’s statements are disheartening for unions in Japan. It means that unions are *powerless*, as Kenji also described them and that the commercialization of LGBTQ rights, with companies branding themselves as diverse and queer friendly, is a more effective way forward.

This thesis aims to study if there is a mutual ground for collaboration between LGBTQ issues and the labor movement. Throughout the analysis, voices of both LGBTQ people and labor unions have been presented, analyzed, and discussed in the light of the literature review. Fractions of a puzzle slowly getting together, ready to be summed up and assessed in the following conclusive chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis finds there to be many issues, on both sides, that have to be overcome before the Japanese labor unions can encompass and support precarious LGBTQ peoples’ rights and calls out for further studies on the field regarding LGBTQ and labor rights in Japan.

In this study, the underlying feeling of *fuan*, insecurity, was present throughout the LGBTQ interviews, as an overwhelming feeling of no future, or a better future. They expressed how

hard it is to change one's situation once in a precarious situation. How being LGBTQ adds to the daily anxieties they have at work, and that the majority of them did not expect this to change significantly in the future. Their responses remind of Edelman's (2004) queer theory presented in the book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Living in the margins of a heteronormative society that does not give one a voice or political priority, to the point where there is "no future". As Edelman (2004) argues, if society scorns queer people, then queer people might as well sign out of society altogether, both politically and socially. To explore this would, however, require a whole different study.

Based on the feeling of insecurity, it should indicate that precarious LGBTQ people are interested in joining labor unions, based on the notion that the more precarious a worker is, the bigger the interest in labor unions. However, unions face several image problems.

Unions are perceived as conservative, male-dominated, not representing workers, and seem very far from peoples' lives. Which is true, as even a union like UA Zensen, who have a majority of female members and non-regular workers, still have a male-dominated leadership and continually focuses on regular workers. Meanwhile, community unions like Tozen, General Union, and the Precariat Union all want to change the labor unions' images, wishing for a more confrontational stance towards management. However, they also struggle with finding the balance of being active and not too activist. The struggle of seeming like a "normal" union, combined with UA Zensen's reluctance to confront management, does put into question whether unions also would be reluctant to be associated with identity politics. Would they go as far as participate in a demonstration, e.g., marriage equality, when many unions hesitate to strike for their workers' rights?

There were several limitations to the degree labor unions include LGBTQ issues into their policies, albeit there is an awareness of LGBTQ issues, which all but one union clearly expressed. Even though big unions, like e.g., Rengo does have guidelines for LGBTQ, they do not oblige their unions to use them. Moreover, tokenism does seem to alienate LGBTQ and other minorities from the rest of the labor force, rather than bringing them together as equals with the right to equal treatment. This development, both with the enforcement of LGBTQ guidelines and separation of non-regular minority workers, will be crucial to observe in the future. It will be vital for the success of the new anti-LGBTQ harassment law. Furthermore, except for the Precariat Union, none of the unions did have specific LGBTQ campaigns. Albeit,

both Tozen and General Union were very active towards awareness of LGBTQ issues and explicitly saw a direct link between LGBTQ rights and labor rights, as well as having success in dealing with management on LGBTQ issues

A hinderance for Japanese LGBTQ people to use labor unions as a platform is that they do not have a strong community, despite activist working hard to push LGBTQ issues forward. Based on studies that show that middle-man LGBTQ organizations are key to combine labor and LGBTQ activism, it is essential for a similar constellation in Japan. As the LGBTQ statements showed, the Japanese LGBTQ community is mainly in Tokyo and does not appear to be organized to carry organizations to the degree as, e.g., Pride at Work in the U.S.

Gender inequality also showed to be a more pressing matter than LGBTQ issues that have to be dealt with in Japanese society and the labor market. Unions who have women involved in labor union work, tend to be better at including minorities, which still has a far way to be realized in most Japanese unions. However, using the concept of precarity has shown how women's rights and LGBTQ rights are interlinked, and that the two issues are not necessarily separate fights. Rather, the source of the problem is the power of cis-hetero men, who are overrepresented in both regular work, labor unions, and politics. For unions to become an ally of labor unions, they need to address gender inequality, as it will open the door for further inclusion of LGBTQ people.

This study examined the inclusion of non-regular workers, as LGBTQ people are overrepresented in non-regular labor. What was striking here was the notion that big (Rengo) unions have forgotten how to organize workers and that community unions are better at reaching out to non-regular workers. It is important because if more non-regular workers are enrolled in unions, the greater chance for more diversity, not just in union membership and leadership, but also in the issues dealt with at workplaces and more people enrolling in social programs. It could be a stabilizing factor for precarious LGBTQ people. However, it is also evident that because of the limited awareness of labor union work and bad images of unions, most LGBTQ people join through personal contacts. Furthermore, the cultural barrier of speaking up and enforcing one's rights, or fear of standing out, is a hindering factor for people to approach labor unions.

Japanese precarious LGBTQ people need more societal representation, political priority, and platforms to be heard from for significant changes in both work culture and greater society to happen. However, based on the statements from Kyosuke, companies, and not unions, might be a better ally for LGBTQ rights in a Japanese context. For Japanese labor unions to become the champions of LGBTQ rights, they need to do considerable work on their images and take an active political stance on why it is them, and not companies, who are supposed to take care of workers' rights. Including *all* workers' rights.

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