DRAG AS *CRIME* OR DRAG AS *QUEER*?

– THE AFFECTIVE PROXIMITY BETWEEN ANTI-DRAG BILLS AND MAINSTREAM DRAG IN THE NEOLIBERAL U.S. NATION-STATE

By
Loki Klister

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Supervisor: Eszter Timár

Second Reader: Hyaesin Yoon

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies current public discourses around drag in the U.S., namely the so-called "anti-drag bills" issued by local governments and the drag mainstream of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. While anti-drag discourses are criminalizing drag for sexualizing children, mainstream drag discourses are claiming to represent queerness itself. By comparing these two drag discourses that seem to counter each other, the thesis tackles an important similarity between them: Both discourses on drag – "drag as crime" and "drag as queer" – are informed by nationalist ideologies that reproduce narratives of U.S. exceptionalism. This exceptionalism is, on the one hand, producing the ideology of the white, heterosexual, and gender normative U.S. citizen, and on the other hand, the ideology of the neoliberal, multicultural, and LGBTQI+-friendly U.S. nation state. Using Affect Theory and Queer Theory of Color, the thesis provides new ways of tackling these interdependent varieties of nationalist ideologies that reproduce themselves by endlessly abjecting forms of "queerness" that remain unrecognizable to the nation-state and to neoliberal market structures. The thesis argues that one the one hand, the anti-drag bills' investment in the affect of disgust are not only criminalizing drag but imply the criminalization of trans people as well as the criminalization of racialized immigrants. By doing so, they not only specifically racialize sexual and gender non-conformity but use the molding of non-normative sexualities and genders as a backdrop against which the ideology of white heteronormative/sexist citizenship is reproduced. On the other hand, *RuPaul's Drag Race*'s investment in the affect of pride is, while wary about "intersectionality," producing neat categories of sexuality, gender, race, and class whose non-conformity can be "overcome" by hard work and fighting for recognition and acceptance from the U.S. nation state. To highlight the inclusionary and assimilationist logic of such a mainstream drag discourse, this thesis studies the U.S. president's "Proclamation on Transgender Day of Visibility, 2024" and argues that it is symptomatic of the government's appropriation of nationalist ideology informing mainstream drag discourses. Against the backdrop of mainstream drag, the U.S. nation-state is not only appropriating the notions of racial, sexual, and gender pride, but thereby able to "free" itself of the shame in the face of exclusionary civil rights that are – in the moment of uttering pride – turned into "past" failures. In the discursive interdependence of anti-drag and mainstream drag, staged on the national scene, the U.S. governments' racist border regime, the maintenance of settler-colonialism, global military operations and capitalist destructions are effectively concealed.

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To my comrades,

known and unknown,

who will never be defeated.

To the end of occupation

and the liberation of all.

From The River To The Sea,

Palestine Will Be Free.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 28,813 words
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Signed L. Klister Loki Klister

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION: WHY DRAG?

Drag's Flamboyance Being Targeted

From the U.S. over the UK to Austria – far right anti-gender politics increasingly criminalize the visibility of drag in public cultural and educational spaces in the name of the "protection" of children. The U.S. is at the forefront of this moralizing discourse in Western countries. Alone 417 anti-LGBTQ[1] bills were introduced in the first three months of 2023 (Gabbatt 2023). Activists emphasize that the discourse of "drag as crime" in the so-called "anti-drag bills" specifically aim at accumulating hate against and restricting the rights of trans people (Factora 2023). Moreover, the discourse of "drag as crime" complicates the understanding of differences and similarities between drag performers and trans people on a social, experiential, material, juridical, and representational level. Although "transgender" as well as "trans*" (Halberstam 2018) are often understood as umbrella terms including drag and other forms of gender non-conformity, many scholars and activists warn against the erasure of gender, racial and class differences through the institutionalization of the category of "transgender" during the 90s in the U.S. (Valentine 2007). On the one hand, trans embodiment stresses the intensity of a daily gendered embodiment that circulates around, among others, humanization and survival (Butler 2004b), social gender expectations (Davis 2009; Connell 2010), security (Camminga 2019), basic rights (Meadow 2010), and health care (Lane 2009). On the other hand, drag can be understood as a performance practice – historically emanating from homosexual subcultures – that dwells on the parodic power of gender and body performativity (Newton 1979; Butler 2007; Halberstam 2018). While drag becomes more and more commercialized (Buck 2019) and "trans visibility" becomes more and more important in public discourses in the U.S., Europe and beyond, also due to the representation of trans people in media and film (Koch-Rein, Haschemi Yekani, and Verlinden 2020), both forms of gender non-conformity are also more and more criminalized by concerned parents, right-wing parties, and trans-exclusive (anti-)"feminists" (Hatfield 2023, 814). While discourses of criminalization spread, shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race* incorporate a "liberal" discourse of

[1] Terms highlighting identities with non-normative genders and sexualities are used in different variations (LGBT, LGBTQ+, LGBTQI+, LGBTQIA+, LGBTQ2SIA+) in different contexts and therefore have different functions. In this thesis, I don't argue for a specific usage of the terms and rather focus on their usage in the discourses I am analyzing. In this thesis, the terms "LGBTQ" (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer identities) and LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and other identities) will appear. I cannot dive into a discussion of the usage of the term itself and will rather focus on analyzing the liberal dimensions of non-normative gender and sexuality discourses in the U.S.

the global dissemination of LGBTQ rights that defend the "democratic nation." In an article on the "recent wave of anti-drag and anti-trans legislation introduced by Republican lawmakers in the U.S.", RuPaul herself formulates this as follows: "Drag queens are the Marines of the queer movement. Don't get it twisted and don't be distracted. Register to vote so we can get these stunt queens out of office and put some smart people with real solutions into government." (Tangcay 2023) In a similar way, Joe Biden formulates in the "Proclamation on Transgender Day of Visibility, 2024" that "Transgender Americans are part of the fabric of our Nation." (Biden 2024) Biden as well condemns the anti-LGBTQI+-bills that "attack our most basic American values: the freedom to be yourself, the freedom to make your own health care decisions, and even the right to raise your own child." (Biden 2024) How come that both anti-drag/trans and mainstream drag/trans discourses locate sexual and gender non-conformity within the framework of the nation-state? Be it as sexualized criminal threat on the one hand, or, on the other hand, as "Marines" and "fabric," both discourses act on the assumption that sexual and gender non-conformity do something to nationhood. Instead of uncritically accepting the celebration of the flamboyant visibility of drag or the visibility of trans people as the counter discourses of interrelated anti-drag and anti-trans discourses, this thesis critically addresses their discursive relationality: What is the relation between the "liberal" discourse of drag/trans and an "illiberal" discourse of anti-drag/trans? How does the "illiberal" discourses and the "liberal" discourses play into each other's hands through acting on the notion of national "visibility"?

Throughout my thesis, I will study how the historical-discursive proximity of drag and transness is informing both anti-drag/trans discourses and mainstream drag/trans discourses. I hypothesize that both discourses invest in a gendered, sexualized and racialized[2] politics of

[2] In using the term "racialized," it must be considered that "racialization" implies the construction of one "group" as superior to another. Phenomenologically, whiteness poses white people as the superior, but non-racialized "group" in differentiation to racialized people (Ahmed 2007). Ahmed uses the term "non-white" to designate this form of whiteness and how it racializes "othered" people (Ahmed 2007, 149). However, the use of the term "non-white" to designate forms of racialization can be problematic as it, again, centers whiteness. Similarly, racialization can be accused of erasing how racialization manifests in racial differences that inform different experiences and forms of racism which Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPoC) are facing globally. These experiences and forms of racism might have similarities but cannot be equated to each other as they stem from different historical and present conditions and, while being mostly stable, have shifted and are shifting over time. Even if the U.S. claims to be "postrace," racism materializes racial differences on a daily basis in the U.S., not only because of biopolitical regulations, systematic incarcerations, and neoliberal, racial capitalism but because of the daily racist violence and police brutality against and murder of individuals and communities (Mukherjee, Banet-Weiser, and Gray 2019). As I am specifically analyzing how whiteness, white supremacy, and white normativity reproduce themselves within U.S. national narratives – despite attempts of acknowledging racial differences and affirming diversity and multiculturalism –, the term "racialization" can help to study gender and sexuality along with capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, settler-colonialism, and other

nationhood that aligns different "othered" figures with each other or separates them when needed. I will show how current anti-drag/trans discourses fuse the figure of the "drag performers" with "other others" (Ahmed 2004, 117), like trans people. All the while, mainstream drag/trans discourses work on neatly separating drag performers from trans people. I will argue that in both discourses, specifically the imagination of the "drag queen" and/or the "trans woman" become symbols for defending ideological national frameworks. On the one hand, "illiberal" anti-drag/trans discourses pose the "drag queen" as a threat within the white supremacist ideology of the U.S. nation-state by virtue of aligning her to trans women and racialized feminine sex workers. On the other hand, "liberal" mainstream drag/trans discourses invest in the separation of the figure of the "drag queen" and the "transgender American" (Biden 2024) in tropes that are recalling homonationalism, also known in connection with the term pinkwashing (Puar 2013a; 2013b).[3] Such discursive strategies are stabilizing colonial, imperial, and neoliberal, bio- and necropolitical economic structures of capitalism through "war machines" (Mbembe 2003, 32) to extract resources in presumably "empty" or "underdeveloped" land. To argue for the proximity of the interdependent "liberal" and "illiberal" discourses, I will analyze current representations of "drag" through a framework that acknowledges rather than invisibilizes the interrelatedness of global structures of oppression that constitute different strata of identity formations. Understanding categories of "gender" or "sexuality" as "identity" categories stemming from a "liberal" discourse of LGBTQ rights does not allow to critically understand current representations of drag in relation to these global structures. Rather, following queer of Color theorists Roderick Ferguson (2003; 2005) and Jasbir Puar (2005; 2007; 2013a; 2013b; 2017),

global power structures. In this thesis, I will use "racialization" to designate that the othering at hand stems from a hegemonic U.S. national perspective that racializes people along the violent maintenance of national borders.

[3] As I will elaborate on later, Puar argues that most significantly since the U.S. "war on terror," the U.S.'s homonationalism and its racist Islamophobic designation of Arabs as "homophobic" are "pinkwashing," that is, justifying military strikes and killings in the name of a supposedly liberal, gay friendly democracy. This designation is ever present in the U.S.'s endless military support of israel as a settler-colonial nation-state that forces the genocide of the Palestinian people. Since October 2023 and until the date of finishing this thesis on September 1, 2024, more than 41.266 Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank have been – with the heavy support by the imperial cores of the U.S. and Europe – directly killed by the israeli state, military and settlers, with more than 10.000 missing, and more than 100.000 injured (AJLabs 2024). As Puar argues, israel is after the U.S. the "greatest benefactor of homonationalism, for reasons in part because of its entwinement with the U.S." (Puar 2013a, 32). Similar to the U.S. and its scandal around the Abu Ghraib torture prison in Iraq (Puar 2007, 3–4), it can be argued that the israeli soldiers who are raping Palestinian male (and female) prisoners (Cordall 2024) are using practices associated with homosexuality to exploit the racist, Islamophobic, homonational imagery of "homophobic" Palestinians (Puar 2013a, 32). That israel itself is pinkwashing its continuous genocide of the Palestinian people has also been argued in the light of an israeli soldier holding a pride flag in destructed Gaza in November 2023 when the genocide intensified (Assaly 2024). However, Walaa Alqaisiya argues that for a more thorough application of the concepts of homonationalism and pinkwashing to israel, the specific violence of the settler-colonial context of Palestine needs to be taken into account (Alqaisiya 2020). See also a similar argument by Mikki Stelder (2018).

I analyze regulations of gender and sexuality within racial neoliberal capitalist structures in the U.S. nation-state that are deeply related to a history and present of white supremacy, nationalism, (settler-)coloniality, slavery, apartheid, and occupation. With the help of affect theory, I will argue that both the anti-drag/trans and the mainstream drag/trans discourses draw affective national borders and inner-national connections between drag theatricality, gender performativity, sexual non-conformity, and racial differentiation that serve the fiction of the U.S. as superior and exceptional nation-state. I will analyze the nationalist hostility of anti-drag/trans discourses through looking at the affect of disgust, and the nationalist inclusion of drag/trans discourses through the affective relation between shame and pride. Before theorizing the relation between gender and sexuality in the first chapter, I want to elaborate on the reasons for analyzing U.S. drag discourses. The question of "Why Drag?" is threefold: Why has drag become so popular? Why is there a ban on drag in the U.S.? How are both popularity and ban connected to each other? Before addressing these questions in the trajectory of this thesis, it is vital to acknowledge "drag" in its different facets.

"Mainstream Drag" vs. "Terrorist Drag"

In the following I will lay out an important distinction between different forms of drag that is building parts of the fundament of this thesis. In the article "The White to Be Angry: Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag" (Muñoz 1997), José Esteban Muñoz draws the distinction between representations of commercialized drag and what Muñoz calls "*terroristic drag*." (85) Muñoz's concept of "terroristic drag" is a radically political, explosive, and messy form of drag inspired by the U.S. drag performer Vaginal Crème Davis. Primarily, the term "terrorist" is used by Muñoz to investigate Davis's form of drag as opposed to "mainstream drag" (83). While mainstream drag bought into the dominant culture of the U.S., and some forms of queer drag only restrictedly "mobilize" desires, Davis's terroristic drag manages to unfold drag's "potential political power" (85). According to Muñoz, Davis "terroristic" (85) drag is so politically powerful because of its complex "*intersectional strategy*" (84). Being both Black and queer in a racist and homophobic (and transphobic) environment, Davis uses her positionality as a strategy against assimilationist identity politics: She both resists to fully identify herself with the dominant white heterosexual culture *and* with the male dominated Black counterculture. Muñoz therefore understands Davis's drag as a form of "*disidentification*" (84) that unravels the desires to fully pass within dominant cultures and

within Black countercultures. In her performances, Davis is not even trying to pass but parodies the aim of passing and achieving realness (92). Instead of passing, her drag is

> terrorist insofar as she is performing the nation's internal terrors around race, gender, and sexuality. It is also an aesthetic terrorism: Davis uses ground-level guerrilla representational strategies to portray some of the nation's most salient popular fantasies. The fantasies she acts out involve cultural anxieties around miscegenation, communities of color, and the queer body. (Muñoz 1997, 91–92)

Davis for example imitates the white, masculine, heterosexual supremacist militiaman "Clarence" – a figure that symbolically "terrorizes" the US culture, but especially Black people. Through openly desiring him, she refuses to simply reject the white culture through a Black counterculture that dismisses "cross-racial desire" (89). At the same time, she identifies with him through performing his masculinist homophobia (89). What Davis practices here, Muñoz calls a "tactical misrecognition" (90): Through misrecognizing herself as the figure of the militiaman, she is actively "invading its sense of essentialized white purity" (Muñoz 1997, 93), masculinity, and heterosexuality. It is precisely this "terroristic" appropriation of a threatening figure of the dominant white culture that exposes this culture as a "joke" (93). The racial, gender, and sexual imageries within the U.S. culture that anxiously keep white and Black identities distinct and police the representational mixture of their symbolics (93) are literally "exploded" (94) by Davis's "terroristic drag." By allowing the performance to take up this violence and bring discomfort, her performances work through explosive emotions, desires, and narratives the U.S. society is haunted by.

Muñoz wrote his article in 1997 before the term "terror" was fully appropriated by the U.S. government and military after 9/11 to proceed with the racist othering and killing of Muslims.[4] This discursive shift is grasped by Jasbir K. Puar in her article "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages" (Puar 2005). Since 9/11, the meaning of the word "terror" has changed according to the U.S.'s Islamophobic, racist, orientalist construction of the "terrorist." Puar critically assesses how the so-called U.S. "war on terror" is embedded in "problematic conceptualizations of queer corporealities" that serve U.S. exceptionalism (Puar 2005, 121) – a belief that the U.S. is superior in comparison to other nation-states and regions. This queer exceptionalism takes the form of liberal queerness: Genealogically, according to Puar, the liberal queer subject incorporates the "queer consumer-citizen" (122) that rose in the late 80s

[4] Puar argues that the "war on terror" is not the original incident of homosexuality serving nationalism, as homonationalism, "is also a process, not an event or an attribute. It names a historical shift in the production of nation-states from the insistence of heteronormativity to the increasing inclusion of homonormativity. This process coheres not through 9/11 as a solitary temporal moment: 'this' did not begin with 9/11." (Puar 2013, 26)

and 90s. With its sexuality being decriminalized in 2003, this queer liberal subject became integral to an ideological nationalistic "sexual othering" (Puar 2005, 122): Queer liberalism is exceptionally harbored in the U.S. in opposition to an "Islamophobic construction of sexuality in the Middle East." (Puar 2005, 122) Puar refers to this as "homonationalism."[5] In a homonational framework, the figure of the "terrorist" is not only racialized as "outsider" to the nation-state but also posed as "non-homosexual" and therefore sexually repressed in opposition to a supposedly "freed" national white gender normative queer located in the U.S. (126). It is this form of "Arab/Muslim/Islamic […] cultural difference that military intelligence capitalized on" (123). In this climate, according to Puar, Davis's performance of the white militiaman literally "brings terrorism home […] and in doing so dislodges, at least momentarily, this orientalist legacy." (126) In her performance, it is the white supremacist militiaman that is exposed as the actual terroristic figure within the U.S. nation-state.

Davis's drag is a rather unpopular form of drag that critically reflects the relation between a racist nationalism and the (white) queer liberal subject that opts for the "assimilationist option" (Muñoz 1997, 84). This option though, described by Davis as "the snow period", "is not a viable option for people of color. More often than not, snow melts in the hands of the subject who attempts to acquire privilege through associations (be they erotic, emotional, or both) with whites." (84) On the contrary, commercialized "mainstream drag" tends to feed into the idea of queer liberal subject itself: It is – by virtue of being sponsored by labels and advertisers – not only speaking to a "viewership with discretionary income" that is the "cultural elite," but is also specifically "sell[ing] 'gay culture' to a mixed audience of gay men and heterosexual women." (Goldmark 2015, 504) A contemporary representation of mainstream drag in the U.S., also mentioned by Muñoz in its beginnings as a Talk Show (Muñoz 1997, 85), is *RuPaul's Drag Race* – now, a reality TV show that airs since 2009 and

[5] Since Puar introduced the concept of "homonationalism," it has been applied, critiqued, and advanced in various ways (Puar 2013b). However, within the scope of this thesis, I won't be able to elaborate on how the concept itself has changed. C. Heike Schotten argues that the earlier concept of homonationalism in Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), implies a broader analysis of U.S. sexual exceptionalism and "queer as regulatory" (Schotten 2016, 356). Schotten importantly mentions that without an analysis of U.S. sexual exceptionalism, homonationalism is dismissed in its imperial force, and without queer as regulatory, homonationalism is not seen as a "project of race, racism and racialization" (356). As both these forces of homonationalism are important for my analysis, I focus on Puar's earliest conceptualization (2005; 2007), while also looking at its relation to "transnormativity" (Puar 2017), elaborated on in 1.1. What I will not be able to investigate, is the U.S.'s past and current settler-colonial and military operations, and how homonationalism in the U.S. is pinkwashing them, see also the footnote on page 3. For a further analysis, it would be important to study the connection between settler-colonialism and homonationalism. Morgensen for example argues that modern queer subjectivity in the U.S. defines itself against Native peoples and is thereby contributing to the normalization of settler-coloniality (Morgensen 2010).

until now. Jonathan Buck argues that it is known for its "diverse display of drag performers" (Buck 2019, 2) that represent different forms of drag. While the show allows for gender, sexual, racial, and class differences to appear, Buck nevertheless cautions against the show's embeddedness in structures of commodification (sponsoring, ads, product management) and neoliberal narratives of individual success, competition, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the show is criticized for its "racial bias and its transphobic tendencies" (Buck 2019, 12). Contestants are asked to suppress their racial differences – as "American life is postulated as being past oppression" (Buck 2019, 4) – and adhere to white American norms of economic thriving. This adhering implicitly rests on the naturalized white gender binary[6]: "'Otherness' is sublimated into hollow tokenistic gestures which the show repeats ad nauseam, so that race, gender, and sexuality become presented as a lifestyle choice, while a centrally white gender binary is reified." (5) Along these lines, open trans identifications are "continually repressed" (10) as well. Drag performers' "real" male gender is centered off stage: The goal is to "pass as a *performer* of womanhood" (Buck 2019, 10), not as a woman. Open trans identifications therefore challenge the understanding of drag as being "only a 'play' upon the reality of womanhood to a mainstream audience" (Buck 2019, 9). This is because trans identifications, according to Buck, show that gender performativity – the compulsory repetition of gendered norms – can materialize gender not necessarily according to the gender assigned at birth. Following Buck, the transphobic narratives in *Drag Race* showcase the well-known conflict among the LGBTQ audience in which the inclusion of "T" for "trans" in LGBTQ continues to be criticized by gays and lesbians (12).

For developing the relation between drag and transness in the second chapter, I want to follow Buck's argument that – in mainstream drag – "The historical alliance between drag and trans communities is disavowed." (Buck 2019, 15) This is especially problematic concerning the racial differences between different drag and trans communities: Especially the African American and Latinx ballroom community in the U.S. and beyond had and has much more "complicated and fluid" (15) understandings of the relation between sexuality and gender. But in shows like *Drag Race*, intersecting gender, sexual, racial, and class civil rights struggles "are relegated strictly to the past." (15) My thesis builds on this argument. Looking at the

[6] Maria Lugones famously argued that the violence of the gender binary can be traced back to colonial contexts in which whiteness introduced the binary along heterosexuality in a new form. Applying the gender binary as an isolated category is therefore always reproducing this colonial violence. (Lugones 2010) While I cannot go into detail concerning the coloniality of gender, it is important to acknowledge the colonial dimension of the racist naturalization of the white gender binary.

shifting proximity of drag and transness helps to expose the gender, sexual, racial and class exclusions of current liberal mainstream forms of drag that claim to represent the bigger LGBTQ movement. Such claims to representation explicitly act upon the contemporary climate of anti-LGBTQ discourses in the U.S., and particularly to the current introduction of anti-drag bills that are criminalizing drag. As mentioned above, RuPaul and other drag performers of *Drag Race* respond to the anti-drag discourse and connect it to anti-queer and anti-trans discourses. Such oppositions of anti-drag from the perspective of mainstream drag bears interesting insights, both on the current politics informing the commodification of drag, the visibility of transness, and the current politics of white supremacist movements in general. How can the analysis of mainstream drag discourses against the backdrop of anti-drag discourses expose the nationalist and neoliberal discourse of commodified drag and of U.S. sexual and gender exceptionalism? Another important question that I won't be able to tackle in this thesis is how "terroristic drag," in turn, can expose the anti-drag discourses as the actual internal terrorism of racist white supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriotism – instead of playing into the U.S.'s homonational narratives of sexual and gender exceptionalism and into the U.S.'s biopolitical and neoliberal regulation of queerness and transness in the consumer culture? This question opens my analysis towards the U.S. nation-state itself: How does the U.S. securitize its borders through providing the stage of the nation's internal discussion between "illiberal" and "liberal" discourses as a means of sustaining nationalist ideologies that inform the racist structures of U.S. exceptionalism, neoliberalism, and biopolitics?

To begin approaching these questions, I want to draw on Puar's critical view on theorizations of sexuality and gender in the U.S. On a theoretical level, Puar critically addresses a form of queer theorizing that "fails to interrogate the epistemological will to knowledge that invariably reproduces the disciplinary interests of the U.S. nation-state." (Puar 2005, 122) One implication of such theorizing is that sexuality as a category is separated from race so that it appears as if "sexuality" can be studied without race (or, in a different way, gender). Puar diagnoses that this form of theorizing can also be found in some applications of the concept of intersectionality[7] that is, in practice, often applied in a way that separates the

[7] The term "intersectionality" was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1998. Being informed by a long history of Black feminism, the concept challenges singular concepts of identity and the separation of race and sex in legal frameworks (Crenshaw 1989). Such frameworks tackle the gendered inequalities on the one hand and racial inequalities on the other hand but are not able to legally grasp the discriminatory experiences Black women face. This is especially relevant in the context of sexual assault and rape (Crenshaw 1989, 157). Intersectional perspectives, following Crenshaw (1989), study not only race and gender together, but they link them to the

categories of gender, sexuality, race, and class in order to study their intersections. Her alternative conceptualization is "queer assemblage" (Puar 2005, 121) – a concept that allows to study "affect in conjunction with representational economies." (121) Following Puar's concept of assemblage, I would like to understand how the figure of the criminal drag performer produced in white supremacist, heteronormative right-wing discourses can be analyzed from a queer theoretical perspective that does *not* reproduce a (neo)liberal nationalist queer discourse within the U.S. The theoretical framework I will develop for this thesis aims at acknowledging the strategic transmission of affects through the discourse of "drag as crime." The framework seeks to not only critically address the criminalization of drag itself but also to critically address its possible counter-discourse. In line with Muñoz and Puar, I refer to this counter-discourse as "mainstream drag" – a drag representing "the queer movement" (Tangcay 2023) that invests in the commercialization of drag as the materialization of queer liberal subjectivity. I hypothesize that such mainstream representations of "drag as queer" are compatible with an U.S. exceptionalism that produces an abject "sexual other" while failing to address the nation's internal terrors of white binary gendered heteronormativity, as suggested by Muñoz, and the structural racism implied in the neoliberal order of U.S. nationalism.

The focus on the U.S. is justified by various reasons. Not only does the U.S., as indicated, act as global police that produces and significantly influences, along other hegemonic nation-states, present forms of global capitalism, militarism, and settler-/neo-/colonialism (including its own settler-colonialism), but it at the same time dominates a national civil rights-based

categories of sexuality, class, nationality, ability and other social categories. Therefore, they enable a much more complex understanding of what it means to study gender and race through a feminist lens. Patricia Hill Collins famously elaborated on intersectionality as the relations between "race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity" (Collins 2015, 14). Following Collins, the disavowal of intersecting identities in politics, institutions, social movements and other societal contexts potentially renders the different forms of discriminations and violations of people, that is their "unequal material realities" and different experiences within "intersecting systems of power" (Collins 2015, 14) inexistent. In the context of social movements, the differences between/within movements as "interpretive communities" (Collins 2015, 3) and their different "knowledge projects and/or political engagements" (Collins 2015, 14) have to be considered. However, the U.S. nation-state is choosing specific institutionalizable "interpretive communities" to represent "one community," or even the "diversity" within one community. As I will elaborate later in the U.S. context I study, while identity positions that face intersecting forms of discrimination are symbolically acknowledged, there is no analysis of the intersecting power structures that produce intersectional identities and are actually distorting the representationability of identity altogether. This means that while intersectionality can represent identities and communities, and even analyze them in relation to intersecting power structures, according to Puar, assemblage is escaping representation because it "is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency." (Puar 2007, 212) At the same time, "intersectional identities are the byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility." (213) In this thesis, too, I study how the representation of intersectional identities and the affects created around gender, sexuality, and race are related to each other.

discourses based on the fiction of the U.S. being an exceptionally "free" nation – a "freedom" for some that causes the death of other.[8] Despite narratives of exceptional freedom, looking at the unequal living conditions of the people the U.S. claims as "its people" and looking at how the U.S. disregards peoples *as* peoples altogether[9], the U.S. is openly contradicting these narratives. In a renewed, but not new, anti-LGBTQ climate in the U.S., I see an exposure of both the internal racial exclusivity of national civil rights and, to some extent, the disparity between national civil rights and the violent execution of global superiority. While it is important to connect the analysis of anti-drag and mainstream drag both to global sexual and gender discourses *and* to the global political economy, this thesis focuses on the context of the U.S. My aim is to thoroughly expose how the internal discussions around the repression of sexuality/gender vs. the freedom of sexuality/gender are carefully staged on the national scene. Both the anti-drag and mainstream drag discourses are invisibilizing the setting in which they are staged, namely the U.S.'s border regime and U.S. military operations, settler-/neo-/colonial violences, and capitalist destructions, deeply engrained in structures of racism. In my analysis it will get clear that both the "illiberal" and "liberal" discourses of non-normative sexualities and genders, through being affectively charged by similar forms of national belonging, actually point towards what they are trying to displace from the national scene.

"Anti-Gender" vs. "Anti-Trans"

The phenomenon of anti-drag/trans could arguably be analyzed in relation to the broader phenomenon of anti-gender, not only in the U.S. and Europe, but globally. However, before developing the theoretical framework of this thesis, it is helpful to show why previous explanations of anti-gender are not enough to understand the relations between anti-drag/trans

[8] Gay civil rights are only one example for this cruel contradictory exceptionalism. Puar notes in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007) that gay normativity made itself not only "complicit with heterosexual national formations" (4), but in "stagings of U.S. nationalism via a praxis of sexual othering, one that exceptionalizes the identities of U.S. homosexualities vis-a-vis Orientalist constructions of 'Muslim sexuality.'" (Puar 2007, 4) Puar suggests that this discourse "suture[s] spaces of cultural citizenship in the United States for homosexual subjects" and at the same time enables the U.S. to "secure nationalist interests globally." (4) Therefore, there is not only an internal racial exclusivity of national civil rights within the U.S. *but also* a significant disparity between national civil rights and the global violence following the U.S.'s proclaimed superiority. It is this exclusivity and disparity that makes it especially important to expose the current, ever-changing bio- and necropolitics of not only sexuality, but also of gender *within* the neoliberal U.S. nation-state.

[9] Not only are the U.S. government the greatest supplier of weapons for israel, aimed at directly and immediately killing Palestinians, but they also do so in the very moment of having "ceasefire talks" (Al Jazeera 2024) while systematically failing to live up to its self-praised humanitarian aid practices that, anyhow, do nothing else than sustaining Palestinians as "refugees, evacuees, the living dead, the dead living, the decaying living, those living slow deaths" (Puar 2007, 35).

and mainstream drag/trans discourses. To show this, I will look at two different analyses of anti-gender. A first strain of analysis draws a connection between the proliferation of "anti-gender" and the co-optation of feminist, queer, and trans identity politics by the neoliberal order and nation-states (Kuhar and Paternotte 2018; Hansen 2021; Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill 2023).[10] In such explanations, right-wing anti-gender positions are credited for their "critical" view on identity politics, neoliberalism, and colonialism. Malte Breiding Hansen, for example, argues that Denmark's homonationalism – a nation's promotion of gay rights as a justification for racist, militaristic, and colonial projects – has been implicitly critiqued by anti-gender movements (Hansen 2021). Another example is the article "The Enemy's Enemy: Feminism at the Crossroads of Neoliberal Co-Optation and Anti-Gender Conservatism" (2023) by Jenny Gunnarsson Payne and Sofie Tornhill. In this article, Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill study the Christian webpage *LifeSite* in the context of anti-gender discourses. They analyze how the articulation of anti-gender discourses on *LifeSite* supposedly critiques the neoliberal co-optation of gender equality and LGBTQ rights by the global capitalist economy. Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill argue that these anti-gender critiques re-politicize the de-politization of gender equality and anti-discrimination policies (Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill 2023, 63). While the authors claim that recent "feminist and queer scholarship" (62) also addresses this de-politization through frameworks like "pinkwashing and window dressing" (62), I argue that their argument risks portraying feminist, queer and trans struggles as *inherently* leading to their own neoliberal co-optation. Moreover, such struggles seem to be complicit in their own neoliberal co-optation and the rise of anti-gender politics itself. On the one hand, I agree that the analysis of anti-gender politics can bear some insight for feminist, queer, and trans theory, politics, and struggles. On the other hand, I am questioning to what extent anti-gender discourses' articulations of a "critique" of neo-liberal co-optation of gender equality and anti-discrimination can tell us something about the failure of feminist, queer, and trans struggles. My point here is that the analysis of the neoliberalization of feminist, queer, and trans struggles vis a vis anti-gender discourses lacks an understanding of the complexity of these struggles and does not differentiate among and within them. It accepts a specific framing of

[10] It is famously argued by feminist positions that the focus on the recognition of marginalized identities in neo-liberal structures led to an abandonment of other, more important issues like class structures (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019). While these are important critiques, this thesis focuses the analysis of identity politics and neoliberalism in relation to their situatedness in the racist project of the nation-state.

feminist, queer, and trans struggles as they are represented through anti-gender discourses that needs to be critically addressed.

In a second explanation of anti-gender, it is argued that anti-gender discourses are co-constitutive with racist discourses. Such racist discourses see the so-called "gender ideology" promoted by feminist, queer, and trans struggles as a global contestation of white supremacy (Evang 2022; Mos 2023). Following this, I suggest that anti-gender discourses are not the sole effect of feminist, queer, and trans struggles' complicity in the co-optation by the neo-liberal order and nation-state. Gender and sexual identity politics don't *inherently* lead to a co-optation of gender and sexuality by the neoliberal order and nation-state, although the capitalization on and nationalization of women's, gay and trans rights surely produce and, at the same time, erase racial exclusions. While it makes sense to problematize corporations' and the nation state's appropriation of gender and sexual identity politics, right-wing anti-gender discourses don't offer a valid critique of these appropriations, precisely because of the nationalistic and racist implications of right-wing narratives. According to Hemmings, anti-gender discourses (both right-wing and "feminist"/left-wing) make it appear as if there were two different, but similar threats for white supremacy: on the one hand, the internal white queer and trans subject and on the other hand, the racialized immigrant. Both are posed as violent invaders of the family, the nation-state, and tradition (Hemmings 2022, 598–600). However, it does not make sense to take anti-gender discourses as "legitimate" critiques of liberal queer and trans discourses' complicity in the neoliberal order and nation-state as this would buy into the default racist assumption of the *white* queer and trans subject without paying attention to its ideological construction. This subject needs to be viewed from a perspective that acknowledges the material conditions of its construction and the theoretical investments that sustain it.

In the context of anti-drag bills in the U.S. that I will study in the third chapter of the thesis, I suggest that neither anti-drag/trans nor mainstream drag/trans discourses can sufficiently be explained by the inherent "complicity" of queer and trans identity politics in their own neoliberalization. In this view, anti-drag/trans becomes just a reaction to identity politics. This takes away the focus from forms of racialization in both anti-drag/trans and mainstream drag/trans discourses that both need to be situated in a politics of what Jodi Melamed calls "neoliberal multiculturalism" (Melamed 2006). Such politics allow only some bodies to be integrated into neoliberal structures of the nation-state along specific conditions of commodification, effectivity, and productivity. Therefore, I would like to analyze anti-

drag/trans in a way that shows how anti- and mainstream drag/trans discourses circulate not only around gender and sexual identity politics, but *by doing so*, are informed by the tension between neoliberalism, capitalism and ideological racist nationalism. As I will show throughout the thesis, the discourse of anti-drag – and its relation to anti-trans – is as intertwined with the openly racist retention of white supremacy as is the broader anti-gender discourse. In a slightly different way, however, mainstream drag/trans discourses – by answering to their anti-counterparts – are implicitly buying into U.S. national ideologies of citizenship. I will therefore analyze the relations between a "liberal" discourse of mainstream drag/trans that seems to counter the "illiberal" discourse of anti-drag/trans. To do so, I will first lay out the theoretical relations between neoliberalism, multiculturalism, nationalism, and non-normative genders/sexualities that inform my analysis of anti- and mainstream drag/trans discourses. I will then continue to expand the theoretical framework to the analysis of the affective interrelations between both discourses to be able to tackle the following: What affects do the anti-drag/trans and mainstream drag/trans discourses produce? How is the discourse of anti-drag/trans affectively related to the discourse of mainstream drag/trans? In the second chapter, I will tackle the discursive relation between drag and trans to be able to analyze the proximity of drag and transness that helps to analyze the anti-drag/trans discourses in the third chapter and the mainstream drag/trans discourses in the fourth chapter. In the third chapter, I will analyze four different interrelated anti-drag bills from Texas, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Montana. In the fourth chapter, I will analyze two drag performers' responses to anti-drag bills and compare them to the U.S. president's "Proclamation on Transgender Day of Visibility, 2024." In the conclusion, I will open the discussion within this thesis to suggest that feminist, queer and trans struggles need to build on an anti-racist, anti-colonial/imperial, and anti-capitalist foundation.

1. THE AFFECTIVITIES AROUND NON-NORMATIVE GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES IN U.S. NEOLIBERALISM AND NATIONALISM

1.1. Homosexuality and Transgender

Rather than isolating the issue of the neoliberalization of non-normative gender and sexuality politics from structures of racism in the U.S., as often done in research on anti-gender, my analysis builds on the understanding of the inherent relation between neoliberalism and racism, as suggested by Jodi Melamed (2006). Melamed argues that in the U.S., "neoliberal multiculturalism" has superseded "racial liberalism" as a mode of navigating racial

differences and racism (Melamed 2006). While after World War II, anti-colonial and civil rights movements challenged white supremacy, liberal ideologies transformed these challenges into "equality, market individualism, and inclusive civic nationalism" (Melamed 2006, 1–2). Since antiracism became an "official" (2) strategy of the U.S. government, it was inherently tied to U.S. nationalism. However, according to Melamed, in the development from racial liberalism to neoliberal multiculturalism, racism is assumed to subsequently disappear from the national strata. In multiculturalism, "neoliberal policy [is portrayed] as the key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity." (Melamed 2006, 1) In this ideological form of nationalism, that turns antiracism into "nonracialism" (Melamed 2006, 3), it has become impossible to tackle the inherent racism implied in global neo-/settler-/colonialism as a means for biopolitical and necropolitical capitalism (3).[11]

From a queer of Color theoretical angle, Ferguson argues that racialized gender and sexual differences also need to be studied in relation to broader capitalist economic structures and nationalism (Ferguson 2003). Ferguson looks at how "intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital." (4) Ferguson's queer of Color analysis reveals the "intersecting saliency of race, gender, sexuality, and class in forming social practices." (4) For this analysis, he concentrates on a cultural representation of a Black drag queen prostitute (for instance in American sociology, literature, and documentations). He argues that her positionality, turned into a figure by cultural representations, exposes how the discrete categories of gender, sexuality, race, and class are intersecting and need to be studied together (Ferguson 2003, 1). Because drag is a racialized gender and sexual practice – meaning that there are racial differences among the people practicing drag as a performance of gender and sexual non-conformity – it also needs to be studied in relation to the nation-state and to capital. However, as I will argue in 2.2., the white liberal categorization of gender and sexuality "occludes" (4) the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class as well as their regulation in national and capitalist structures. The position of a Black drag queen prostitute is erased by "those who wish to present or make African American culture the embodiment of all that she is not – respectability, domesticity, heterosexuality, normativity, nationality, universality, and

[11] On a broader scale, the biopolitical U.S. nation-state relies on the racialized colonial power of capitalism in necropolitical spaces, as McIntyre and Nast suggest: "*Race* has always been the primary indicator of necropolitical bodyspace. The racially marked body is, first and foremost, *geographically* marked and economically cheapened (Nast and Elder 2009). Race inscribes the coloniality of power and place onto the body. Colonial projects of conquest commanded 'race'into existence, creating worlds for hyper-exploitation." (McIntyre and Nast 2011, 1473)

progress." (Ferguson 2003, 2) One reason for this erasure, as argued by Ferguson, is that the social regulation of gender and sexual norms is also formulated as a "racist practice" (3): Communities of Color are demanded to conform to white heteronormative and heteropatriarchal gender and sexual norms of the nation-state (4). At the same time as these ideals are formulated on the level of the nation-state, however, on the material level of capital the white gendered and sexual norms are challenged:

> Ironically, capital helps produce formations that contradict the universality of citizenship. As the state justifies property through this presumed universality, through claims about access, equivalence, rights, and humanity, capital contradicts that universality by enabling social formations marked by intersecting particularities of race, gender, class, and sexuality. (Ferguson 2003, 12)

Ferguson's analysis can be transferred to the genealogy of "homosexuality" and "transgender" in the U.S. in which the material "multiplications of racialized discourses of gender and sexuality" (Ferguson 2003, 12) were and continue to be suppressed by the U.S. nation-state. Historically, the U.S. nation-state's understanding of citizenship was based on "racial exclusion" (Ferguson 2005, 56) through sexual and gender norms. The definition of "ethnicity" along white American heteronormative ideals in the 20th century, through racializing Europeans as white, racially excluded non-Europeans from American citizenship – only gained by assimilating to and sexually reproducing white heteronormativity:

> Ethnicity, therefore, did not suggest the absence of racial difference but named the process by which European racial differences were rearticulated and managed to comply with the normative itineraries of heteropatriarchy. In doing so, ethnicity promoted identification with the racialized ideals of the American citizen-subject. (Ferguson 2005, 57)

In this context, American sociologists used the argument of race and sexuality being social constructs, while at the same time theorizing them as being a defining part of culture so that white American culture was able to incorporate the European "newly racialized whites." (Ferguson 2005, 56) This "racial identification [was] predicated on heteronormativity" (56). To analyze the anti-drag and mainstream drag discourses in the U.S., it is important to situate them, on the one hand, in the historical continuation of inherently racist discourses of white heteronormative citizenship in the U.S., and on the other, in the erasure of racialization and racism in liberal and neoliberal discourses of multiculturalism. For my theoretical understanding of non-normative genders and sexualities, it makes sense to locate the separation as well as proximity of non-normative sexualities and genders in the continuation of these racialized national discourses. While mainstream drag as a representation of the

"queer movement," as mentioned in the introduction, can be critically approached in the framework of homonormativity and homonationalism, mainstream transgender discourses can be critically approached by the normative dimensions of "transness."

It can be argued that normative discourses of "transgender" are, similar normative discourses of "homosexuality," producing the ideal white trans citizen. Trans people in the U.S. are required to assimilate to white gendered and sexual norms of the nation-state in order to "serve the nation." This issue, however, is often dismissed by theories on transness themselves. In his article "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transsexual Body as Productive" (2008), Dan Irving addresses the "complicity of trans theorists and activists in naturalizing the exacerbated gendered labor relations" (Irving 2008, 40) of the neoliberal capitalist order. Irving stresses that theorists and activists are complicit in reproducing or failing to critically address the neoliberal order while theorizing trans identity. However, this does not mean that trans people's articulations of self-identifications are inherently infused with the neoliberal order so that researchers must always re-articulate trans identity through the gendered structures of inequality. Rather, Irving highlights that both scholarly articulations of trans identity that naturalize the neoliberal order and individual narratives of trans identity by trans people that deploy neoliberal articulations of identity need to be historicized: First, the attempts of de-pathologizing medical articulations of trans identity and overcoming their default exclusion from the discursive practices of "sociopolitical, legal, and economic validation" (Irving 2008, 40) are likely to play a role in scholars' and activists' grappling with the neoliberal order. Second, when it comes to individual trans people, their formulation of narratives about being a productive citizen can be tied to the constraints of medical discourses that define trans identity in a normalizing contemporary neoliberal framework (Irving 2008, 48). However, even if individual trans people produce these narratives in their becoming, it does not reflect their inherent nature or autonomous choice, but rather the "rearticulation and circulation of these narratives [that] serves to embed transsexuality within a discourse of productive citizenship" (Irving 2008, 49). What I draw from this is that, rather than trans identity being *inherently* infused with the neoliberal order, the subject of study is the historically continuous (re-)articulation of trans identity through the lenses of "heteronormative sex/gender binary system" (51) and "heteropatriachal and capitalist relations" (50). These (re-)articulations require the trans body to be "'normal,' 'healthy,' 'able-bodied,' and 'productive'" (50) and produce a specific theoretical framing and individual narrativity of trans identity that can be referred to as "neoliberal." What Irving criticizes is

how specifically scholars' and activists', in answering to these re-articulations, adhere to the "reactionary approach to achieving trans visibility, accessibility, and inclusion" (50). This approach privileges narratives of trans people who are portrayed as potentially "[becoming] respectable social subjects." (Irving 2008, 51) To counter such approaches, Irving calls for a "politics of resistance" (55) that considers how discourses of productivity privilege certain trans people over others and are likely to split trans communities along the lines of "class, race, citizenship status, and ability (to name a few)" (55). Irving considers how specifically trans identity keeps on being re-articulated by historically complex power structures which a discourse on identity alone cannot grasp.

While the discourse of trans visibility in the U.S. – for instance represented by Joe Biden's "A Proclamation on Transgender Day of Visibility, 2024" – claims to speak for all trans people, it is highly exclusionary concerning racial and racialized differences, both within the U.S. and in relation to the American border regime. In the chapter "Bodies with New Organs: Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled" of her book *The Right to Maim – Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017), Puar argues that transness and disability need to be analyzed together to develop a critically informed political assessment of the racial and racialized hierarchies within current discourses on transness. Puar looks at the connection between transness and disability in the legal context of law, the academic context of trans and disability studies, and the economic context of neoliberal market structures (Puar 2017, 36). Through the exclusion of gender non-normativity from the medical definition of disabled bodies, transness was refrained from becoming recognized as a disability. This had several consequences: Only bodies understood as *either* disabled *or* as trans have a minimum capacity to be incorporated by the law, to be separately accounted for by trans and disability studies, and to be integrated into the labor market. (36–41) Puar understands this as the production of an "exceptional" white transnormative body and an "exceptional" disabled body (Puar 2017, 41). These exceptionalizations of bodies can't think through an intersection of transness and disability: The disabled subject is casted as gender normative, and the trans subject is casted as able-bodied. (41–42) For her critique of transnormativity, Puar focuses on the consequences of transness relying on the disavowal of disability (45). For a further understanding of the notion of transnormativity, the term "piecing" is crucial. Puar understands the "piecing" of bodies as a "capacity" that "enables" the recognition of transgender bodies (Puar 2017, 49). By foregrounding the capacity of bodies to be mobilized and transformed (45), an ableist and exclusionary framework is constructed that ultimately results in "disabling" other bodies to be

recognized. Most often, Black trans people, Indigenous trans people, and trans people of Color don't have the privilege to transform themselves in a trajectory that is "victorious, empowered by choice, or ultimately capacity building" (Puar 2017, 48). But precisely by remaining unrecognized, their bodies build the backbone of a white transnormative body invested in "fluidity" "futurity," and "flexibility" (46) that is "able" to be recognized as "trans" in the first place. Puar understands piecing as the biopolitical necessity of the differently distributed capacity for different bodies to be integrated into the medical production of their transness. Within the biopolitical realm of control, it is thus the "passing" *as* trans through the process of piecing – the integration of its pieces in a whole through medicalization – rather than the passing *as* female or male that is at stake (49). These biopolitical technologies of distributing capacity therefore constitute which bodies are fundamentally constructed as subjects in an ableist sense, both as abled disabled and as abled trans bodies.

Puar also distinguishes between "transgender rights movement and trans justice organizing", for the latter is mainly addressing "political issues that trans of color folks face, including better access to jobs, housing, and education; the need for trans-sensitive health care, HIV-related services, and employment training programs; and resisting police, government, and anti-immigrant violence." (Puar 2017, 46–47) Trans justice movements mainly focus on trans women of Color, and especially Black trans women, because they are at a higher risk of violence, discrimination and murder. For them, as Puar addresses, the desires for and attempts of "passing" are often forms of resisting "police harassment, community stigmatization, and familial rejection." (47–48) The critical approach to neoliberal and nationalist framings of queer and trans identity through commodification and governmental appropriation needs to acknowledge these differences between movements. In the analysis of anti- and mainstream drag/trans discourses, it is also necessary to take the normative dimensions of trans discourses into account, especially concerning the sexual, gender, racial and class differences within the broader "LGBTQI+ community" in the U.S., under whose name Biden addresses "all transgender Americans." (Biden 2024) While for current mainstream drag, as argued above, transness signifies a crisis, it can also be argued that drag signifies a crisis for mainstream transgender discourses. This is, however, not because there are, as the mainstream discourses suggest, a separation between gender and sexuality. Rather, white supremacy and white normativity that builds on racial and class hierarchies secured that white gendered and sexual norms constitute and privilege inclusion into the nation and into the neoliberal market. This is,

in part, tied to the separation of "homosexuality" and "transgender." To make sense of the proximity between drag and transness in the anti-drag bills, I will look at their historical-discursive development in the second chapter. For a deeper analysis of the racialization of non-normative gender and sexuality in the anti-drag bills as well as their separation in mainstream drag and trans discourses, I will deploy affect theory.

1.2. Affect Theory

In my analysis of anti-drag bills in the U.S., I will show that the discourse of "drag as crime" uses both transphobic and racist tropes to 1. approximate drag to transness and 2. to approximate gender non-conforming body to racialized immigrant bodies as threats to the nation-state. With the help of Sara Ahmed's term "affective economy," (Ahmed 2004) it is possible to reveal how the different figures are put in proximity with each other. The "affective economy" around the queer body – that is the non-normative body in terms of sexuality, gender, race, and class, ability, and other social positions – invests in the representation of this body as "non-(re)productive" (Ahmed 2014 [2004], 146). The representation of different bodies as being unable to reproduce themselves rests on the connection and intersection of othered figures with "other others" (144):

> It is this narrative of coupling as a condition for the reproduction of life, culture and value that explains the slide in racist narratives between the fear of strangers and immigrants (xenophobia), the fear of queers (homophobia) and the fear of miscegenation (as well as other illegitimate couplings). (Ahmed 2014 [2004], 144–45)

To this I would add the fear of trans people that are commonly portrayed as "deceivers" (Bettcher 2006, 204), for example by anti-trans feminists that especially portray "trans women, gender-nonconforming people, migrant men, Muslim men, Black men, etc." as "pervert other" (Tudor 2023, 293). To show how affects are sliding from the figure of the drag performer to the trans person, I will look at their historically shifting proximity in chapter 2. As indicated above, this will allow me to address the racial exclusions, class differences, as well as racialized ideological constructions implied both in aligning as well is in neatly separating drag performance and trans identifications. In the discourse of anti-drag, I argue that an affective economy of anger, fear, and specifically disgust invests in approximating drag, trans, queer, and racialized immigrant bodies with each other. Through connecting the figures along "'sticky' associations" (Ahmed 2004, 120), their presumably "visible" "otherness" is sexualized and criminalized – precisely because they are portrayed as opposing or threatening white heterosexual family norms of the nation-state. After analyzing the anti-

drag discourses along these lines in chapter 3, I will go on to analyze the mainstream drag response by RuPaul and another drag performer from *Drag Race* in chapter 4 and compare it to the transnormative discourse of "Transgender Visibility" in Biden's Proclamation (Biden 2024). I will analyze these responses within the affective relation between (national) shame and (national) pride (Ahmed 2014) and diagnose the following: While the production of "otherness" in anti-drag discourses can produce shame for the othered bodies, this shame is countered with an affective response of pride. However, I argue that this affective response is likely to erase the gender, sexual, racial, and class exclusions in liberal discourses of LGBTQ that are easily appropriated by U.S. nationalism.

To approach shame as an affect in my analysis means to acknowledge the power of anti-drag discourses to shame bodies and the capability of bodies to feel shame. To frame this theoretically in relation to gender and sexuality politics, Eve Sedgwick's concept of shame is useful (1990; 2003). Sedgwick's framework acknowledges the continuous transformative potential of shame as a social force (2003, 62). Understood as an affect that marks the individual as an inherently social being, shame allows to study the bodily dimension of discursive powers that construct notions of normalcy and deviation. Sedgwick's theorization of shame in relation to non-normative sexuality enables to complexify readymade notions of "deviated" identities in their affective formation. Sedgwick discusses shame with the help of Tomkins' affect theory and Basch's psychoanalytic theories. She traces the ability to feel shame back to the lack of a child's recognition in the "circuit of mirroring" (Sedgwick 2003, 36) through which it communicates with its parents. Being humiliated by the loss of the other's response is a potential disruption of the child's identity. But Sedgwick argues that shame itself is an identificatory force of the individual, on the one hand because of the performative embodiment of shame in "the 'fallen face' with eyes down and head averted" (36). On the other hand, because shame is inherently social: An individual can feel ashamed of both one's own and others' behavior. Through identification with others' shameful behavior, the individual gets isolated from the others while at the same time being bound to them (Sedgwick 2003, 37). Shame therefore constitutes both the self and the social relation to others. In the context of non-heteronormative sexualities, shame can have a specific identificatory force as non-heterosexuals are, for example, confronted with homophobia. As a strategy to oppose shaming, homosexuality is often posed as an essential identity in need for social recognition. As an alternative to a focus on sexual identity, Sedgwick argues that it is also possible to concentrate on the notion of shame: "Queerness" could delineate people

"whose sense of identity is for some reason turned most durably to the note of shame." (Sedgwick 2003, 63) Precisely because of unravelling identity in its performative and affective formation, shame opens a political space for addressing the "misconstrual and misrecognition" (64) of certain people. Addressing shame therefore makes it possible to critically approach politics that essentialize identity as stable, fixed, and in need for recognition, assimilation, and inclusion.

Sedgwick's concept of shame also discusses how hostile discourses themselves regulate how and who is made likely to feel shame in the first place. This can be transferred to the power of anti-drag bills in shaming and thereby regulating bodies. On the one side, I suggest that current anti-drag and anti-trans discourses introduce a nuanced type of transphobia that discriminates against trans people's "fakeness" and "fraud" (Bettcher 2006) through aligning them with the figure of the drag performer. Such "illiberal" anti-drag/trans discourses actively shame gender non-conformity through capitalizing on – through the performative act of introducing an anti-drag-bill – sexualized representations of gender non-conformity, forced onto the figure of the drag performer. Moreover, the sexualization and criminalization of queer and trans bodies through the figure of the drag performer is informed by an actively racializing politics of sexuality and gender that exposes the racist national framework of anti-drag bills. I will argue that such politics exploit the social force of shame to publicly and normatively regulate gender and sexual non-conforming people, especially Black trans and queer people, Indigenous trans and queer people and trans and queer people of Color. In locating what the queer answer to such hostile discourses which shame gender and sexual non-normativity could be, I follow Ahmed's direction of thought:

> Do queer moments happen when this failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative? Such affirmation would not be about the conversion of shame into pride, but the enjoyment of the negativity of shame, an enjoyment of that which has been designated shameful by normative culture (Ahmed 2014, 146).

Following Ahmed, it is logical to argue that liberal mainstream drag/trans discourses' notion of "pride" disavows shame as a continuous affect shaping social positions. Through the disavowal of shame, liberal drag/trans discourses are likely to essentialize gender non-conformity as an identity whose shame can be overcome by proudly, visibly, and openly embracing one's self-identified gender expression. What I want to problematize here are not such expressions themselves, but rather how neoliberal order of the U.S. nation-state is ready to integrate and embed them. At the same time, there is the potential of re-essentializing trans

identity as being separated from drag, that is, from everything that is construed as "expressively visible" and "flamboyant." This might heighten the pressure for trans people, especially Black, Indigenous trans people and trans people of Color, to medically transition, and pass even more – all the while it is only possible for some, mostly white trans people, to remain invisible by virtue of becoming a citizen that serves the nation-state. Theoretically, liberal and national expressions of transnormativity also distance the understanding of trans embodiment from theories of gender performativity that highlight the ongoing violence of sexed, gendered, and raced materializations in general (Butler 1993; 2004b). Therefore, rather than understanding gender non-conformity as an overcoming of shame or, on the opposite, as essentially shameful, I am interested in how representations of drag and trans in mainstream drag discourses – increased by responding to the hostility in anti-drag discourses – are transforming shame into other affects like pride. Moreover, I am interested in how these affective transformations are allowing U.S. neoliberal and nationalist ideologies to be reproduced in terms of sexual and gender exceptionalism, as already indicated in the introduction. For the analyzing texts with the help of affect theory, the method of discourse analysis is essential.[12]

1.3. Methodology

To approach the textual foundation of the affective dimension of anti-drag/trans and mainstream drag/trans discourses, I will use the method of discourse analysis. I will integrate Norman Fairclough's systematic discourse analytical method for the analysis of texts throughout my thesis. Additionally, I will formulate my approach to the normative power of discourse as theorized by Michel Foucault (1988) and Judith Butler (1993; 2007 [1990]) to build the methodological framework of my thesis. The discourse of "drag as crime" can be analyzed through studying its language and the way how language constitutes social life. In *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (Fairclough 2003), Fairclough

[12] Not everyone agrees with the combination of Affect Theory and Discourse Analysis. In the field of Political Geography, for instance, the concept of "Affective Nationalisms," coined by Elisabeth Militz and Carolin Schurr (Militz and Schurr 2016) has a critical understanding of affect and discourse. Militz and Schurr criticize Ahmed for only focusing on "the affective impact on bodies and the production of national feelings through texts" (56) while not thoroughly theorizing "how affections work" (56) between bodies and objects. As an alternative, they look at situated "affective encounters that trigger nationalism" (57) between bodies and objects through the method of autoethnography. While it is vital to take situated and situational affective relations between bodies in specific events into account, it is not necessary to make sense of the affective dimension informing nationalist discourses. In this thesis, I am more interested in analyzing the guiding gendered, sexual, cultural, racialized textual principles of national and nationalizing affects in anti- and mainstream drag discourses.

describes language as "an element of the social at all levels" (Fairclough 2003, 24). These levels are "social structures", "social events", and "social practices" (24). The social event in the context of "drag as crime" is the "Drag Queen Story Hour" (Factora 2023) for children that sparked the debates around the "protection" of children from sexualization through attending such events. What followed was the introduction of several "anti-drag bills" in different states in the U.S. The language required by the different juridical structures in these states constitute the powerful ways in which a "social agent" (Fairclough 2003, 22) – here, a politician – formulates a bill, its violation, and the punishments following a violation. The juridical language of the bills and their introduction mediates the social event of a drag queen story hour that appeared and appears to be a "crime." The text of an "anti-drag bill" becomes an "element" of the social event of the drag story hour which thereby becomes a "violation" of the bill. However, the bill can only repress the possibilities of drag through the social practice of introducing a bill: It is the introduction of the bill in the first place that turns the drag queen story hour into a crime, not the inherent criminal nature of the event itself.

To analyze how the social practice of introducing a bill mediates between the juridical language of the bill and the social event of a "crime", Fairclough introduces the term "order of discourse" (24). The social practice can be understood as an order of discourse that constitutes the "social organization and control of linguistic variation" (24). Following this, I suggest that the order of discourse socially organizes and linguistically controls the definitions of drag within the bills in a way that produces – with the help of juridical language – the social event of "drag as crime." The analysis of the order of discourse introduced by these bills helps to understand how the language used in these bills limits the ways in which the social practice of drag itself can be done. Moreover, I argue that it allows to make sense of how the social event of a "crime" applies not only to doing drag but – by virtue of failing to explicitly exclude trans people from the bills – to some extent to doing transgender.

For the analysis of the order of discourse, Fairclough divides it into "genres", "styles", and "discourse" (Fairclough 2003, 24). The genre of the bill functions as a performative action that aims at defining drag performances within a legal context. Through the genre of the bill, a discourse is put forward that carries certain representations of the social practice of drag as well as drag performers themselves with it. In this thesis, I will focus on how the discourses within "anti-drag bills" redefine drag as a form of sexual entertainment. What Fairclough defines as "style", is here helpful to understand the social practice of introducing the bill by building a "genre chain" (Fairclough 2003, 31) between the bill and the parliamentary

meeting where it is introduced. The introduction goes along with a specific social identity of the politician who introduces the bill: The politician becomes the "voice" (Fairclough 2003, 41) of the state as a protector of children and their concerned parents. Following Fairclough, I therefore locate the discourse of "drag as crime" within the dialectical relations between genre, style, and discourse: The bill's genre performatively enacts the criminalization of drag through producing a discourse that represents drag as sexual action. The bill's style identifies the state as a protector of children from the "crime" of drag (27–28).

It is important to notice that the different bills of different states of the U.S. constitute what Fairclough calls, a "genre of governance" (Fairclough 2003, 32): The institutional genre of governance, so my suggestion, eventually transformed drag as a social practice – including the story hour – into a "crime" within the U.S. Through "recontextualization" (32), the social practice of drag is put into a legal context that criminalizes it. Fairclough formulates the mechanism of recontextualization within genres of governance in the following way: "appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways in the process" (32). Moreover, individual bills from individual states of the U.S. correspond with other bills from other local governments in the U.S. This is particularly interesting in terms of how a bill's "syntagmatic relations" (37), specifically in terms of the "internal relations" (37) it draws between drag and other forms of sexual entertainments, is reiterated, redefined, and slightly changed by other bills. The discourse of "drag as crime" therefore harbors "intertextual relations" (40), e.g., unmarked quotations, between different "anti-drag bills" that help circulating their ideological "assumptions" (40), e.g., "presuppositions" and "logical implications" (40). The assumptions of drag being sexual and the implications this has for the regulation of trans identities show how bills "exercise social power, domination and hegemony" (Fairclough 2003, 55) by constituting the ideological "common ground" (55) of "drag as crime." In the scope of this thesis, I will critically analyze the definitions of drag in the legal genre of the bill: They are constituting a discourse that represents drag as sexual doing. This representation produces an ideological meaning of drag that inevitably includes trans people in the definition of drag. It is this discursive representation that I would like to dissect according to its affective investments in excluding, policing, targeting, and discriminating against public racialized, sexualized, and gendered "deviance" according to hegemonic white heteronormative/sexist national norms.

As I have already indicated in the previous subchapters, there is an implicit and explicit relation between anti-drag and mainstream drag discourses that bears some insight on the

relation between liberal and illiberal discourses on gender, sexuality, race, racialization, class, and other social formations. I suggest that analyzing the language of the discourse of "drag as crime" helps to understand the problematic implications as well as the practical consequences of anti-drag bills for the normative representation and nationalization of trans people in liberal LGBTQ discourses. The relation between anti-drag and its visibly flamboyant, liberated, loud, and proud opposite form of mainstream drag can be analyzed with Foucault's idea of "repression." Foucault introduces the "repressive hypothesis" to describe the liberal idea that sexuality has been repressed all along and needs to be freed, talked about, and studied. According to Foucault, this discursive phenomenon is stemming from the following interpretation of history: Since the Victorian Age, sexuality was not only restricted by prohibitions, laws, and penalties, but also repressed by the silences and inabilities to speak about it (Foucault 1988, 3–4). This hypothesis thinks of sexuality as never being more vanquished than during the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century (8). From this hypothesis follows that, for sexuality to be truthfully liberated, the progressive forces of society must oppose the negative powers which had restricted and repressed sexuality. One aspect of this is that sexuality is meant to be freed by the right to speak and the ability to produce knowledge about it, eventually transgressing the discursive repression that emphasized sexuality's absence. (4) Talking about a "repressed" sexuality goes hand in hand with the criticism of capitalism: The "intense work imperative" (6) is complicit in the stabilization of sexual repression that made it impossible to think about sexuality in other terms than the reproduction of workforce. (5-6) However, Foucault shows that both assumptions, the repression as well as the liberation of sex, are "mutually reinforcing" (8) themselves: One cannot rightfully "sermon[ize, L.K.]" (8) about the truth of sex without assuming it was repressed, that is, the liberated talk about sex is dependent on it being previously repressed. Despite of the appealing sense of future freedom and liberation following from the hypothesis of a repressed sexuality, Foucault casts doubt on the justification of the hypothesis: He questions 1. Its historical evidence: Was there really such an intense repression of sexuality aside from certain historically evident restrictions? 2. Its analysis of power: Does the power being addressed in the idea of "repression" really function so negatively and restrictively? 3. The political scope of resisting the supposed repression: Does the resistance against repression really opposes the power in work or couldn't it be that the resistance is part of the very power structure it wants to address? In *History and Sexuality Vol. 1* (1988), Foucault is therefore analyzing how, what he calls, a certain "will to knowledge" (12) rather than a previous repression is the motivation of producing present

truths about sexuality (and its liberation). In liberal LGBTQ discourses, there is a similar assumption of sexuality being repressed and therefore in need of liberation. If mainstream drag performers explicitly address the anti-drag-bill legislation and the idea of "drag is a crime," it implies that they have a repressive force which non-normative sexuality (and gender presentation) must free themselves from. I will therefore analyze the "repressive" anti-drag discourse of "drag as crime" in relation to its "liberatory" mainstream counter discourse that I earlier already named "drag as queer." With the method of discourse analysis, I will look at the language of anti-drag-bills and how this language produces an ideological meaning of drag and analyze, as earlier introduced, its affective economy of othering bodies. This will allow me to understand how this ideological meaning and affective economy influences the drag performers' responses to "anti-drag" and the U.S. president's response to "anti-trans."

Using the method of discourse analysis implies that this thesis does not aim at coming to terms with what trans "really" *is* or what drag "really" *is*. While studying anti-drag/trans discourses and their mainstream drag/trans responses, it is important to focus on how they invest in ideological and normative representations of "trans" and "drag." The method of discourse analysis allows to refrain from the attempt of representing what trans people or drag performers "truly" experience, feel, or embody. However, as indicated in the previous subchapter, I see the affective dynamics within the discourses on transness and drag as powerful modes that potentially constitute the exclusive possibility of recognizing someone as trans person or drag performer, of coming to identify as trans person or drag performer, and of shaping the imaginations of bodies who come to identify as trans people or drag performers, or not. I study these affective dynamics as a part of what Judith Butler, following Foucault, famously calls the "power of discourse." (Butler 1993, 2) In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler theorizes discourse as a performative power that enables, forms, and limits the materialization of bodies: Performativity is "the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (1993, 2). I understand this as follows: If bodily matter is always already produced through the performative power of discourses of sex, gender, sexuality, race, citizenship, ability and other social categories, then these categories are not constructs that are "artificially imposed" (3) on a neutral body. Rather, these categories describe the normative specificity of *how* bodies are materialized, become visible, and are addressed. I connect Butler's understanding of the power of discourse to the understanding of "trans" and "drag." Any discursive production on transness or on drag – be it in academic texts, anti-drag bills, medical definitions, the media, TV shows, activist perspectives, social movements – virtually

has the power to structure the "recognizability" (Butler 2004b, 2) of transness and drag and the usage of their representations for ideological purposes. In claims of "truly" representing "drag" or "trans," I see a danger to reduce the complexity, contradictions and conflicts of a lived embodiment that is not only shaped by (trans)gender and sexuality, but also by other social factors like class and race – positionalities that might question the ability to speak of "one" trans community or "one" LGBTQ community at all.

In the introduction of this thesis, I have laid out the distinction between mainstream drag and what Muñoz calls "terroristic drag." This distinction located where my analysis of contemporary representations of drag can hook in: *RuPaul's Drag Race* and its commodification of queer identity. To critically analyze this form of drag in the recent political context in the U.S., it is important to situate it in the anti-drag/trans and racist climate and systematic racisms in the U.S. in general. The so-called anti-drag bills have made, it seems, visibility of queer and trans identities more important. At the same time, as also suggested in the introduction, anti-gender discourses are picking up this visibility and conflate as well as generalize feminist, queer- and trans struggles. While there seems to be a connection between the commodification, neo-liberalization, and co-optation of feminism, queer- and transness on the one hand, and the rise of anti-gender discourses in Western countries on the other, the analysis of this connection cannot be limited to Western epistemic spheres. Concretely, this means that an analysis of mainstream representations of drag as well as the "drag as crime" discourse shall not fall into the trap of an essential "queer"[13] and "transgender"[14] that is only threatened to thrive because of the conservative illiberal counterparts and is otherwise liberated. I suggested that the focus on "anti-gender" is insufficient to understand the racialized implications of anti-drag/trans discourses and the racial and racialized exclusions of mainstream drag/trans discourses. Instead, a queer of Color critique exposes the nationalistic framing of both anti-drag/trans and mainstream drag/trans discourses. Throughout the thesis, I will argue that both are likely to proclaim different forms of racial(ized) exclusions: While anti-drag/trans discourses justify white supremacy, mainstream drag/trans discourses are likely to fall into a liberalism that positions itself as more progressive in comparison to a unified, seemingly less progressive imagery of "non-Western" countries. To analyze this complexity, I will deploy queer affect theory to link both discourses with each other and show how they play in each other's hands. The method of

[13] By "queer," I mean here what RuPaul calls queer: Drag as *the* representation of queerness.
[14] By "transgender," I mean here what Biden calls transgender: "All transgender Americans" as *the* representations of transness.

discourse analysis will help to work out the connection between the idea of an "illiberal" repression of drag- and transness through anti-drag bills and the supposed necessity to capitalize on queer and trans visibility to work against this repression. In the following chapter, I will first lay out the historical context in which the ideological conflation of drag and transness in anti-drag/trans as well as the separation of it in mainstream drag/trans discourses needs to be situated in.

2. THE HISTORICAL-DISCURSIVE PROXIMITY OF DRAG AND TRANSNESS

2.1. Relation between Drag and Gender Non-Conformity

As theorized in the first chapter, my analysis of anti-drag and mainstream drag requires problematizing the analytical distinction between gender and sexuality as analytical categories at the cost of other social categories: The criminalization of drag and of trans bodies is most often conflated with a fear of the sexualization of the white innocent child. I suggest that in liberal responses to anti-drag, there is the danger to erase the history of drag as a homosexual subcultural phenomenon, as a gendered public practice, as well as a practice of gender non-conforming racial minorities. Drag is further commodified through depriving it of its critique of white heteronormativity, homonormativity, and transnormativity. At the same time, the historical role of drag in dissecting gender non-conforming from homosexual subcultures gets erased. How to adequately respond to the conflation of gender and sexuality in anti-drag bills without de-historicizing drag's complex relations to gender non-conforming and homosexual subcultures? This is important to ask, as the institutionalized distinction of sexuality and gender discursively, socially, and historically "reproduces … class and racial hierarchies" (Valentine 2007, 18–19). I suggest that studying the historical relation between drag and trans helps to understand current anti-drag discourses and their mainstream drag response. Analyzing their relation, gives historical context to the current racialized and classed politics around gender and sexuality in the neoliberal structures of the U.S. As I will show later in the thesis, current anti-drag discourses are shaping transphobic and racist discourses by portraying drag as a sexual doing, by expanding "drag" to all trans bodies, and by associating them with racist tropes. This discursive strategy of shaming stems from a historically informed heightened sexualization of Black people, Indigenous people and people of Color, designating them as threats for the institution of the white family, the safety of children, the white settler-colonial nation, and other concerns which are ideologically evoked by the (far) right white discourses to the present day.

In the following, I will crystallize the historical proximity between "drag" and "trans" by looking at how the meaning of the terms has changed over time in the context of the U.S. Different perspectives on drag and transness in ethnographical texts by Esther Newton (1979) and David Valentine (2007) will help to see how both terms have been differently theorized in relation to each other. The questions that are guiding this chapter are: What is the historical relation between "drag" and "trans"? How was drag situated in different non-normative gender and sexual subcultures? How has drag become a significant feature of queer culture? What I want to focus on in this subchapter is the shift from a struggle revolving around non-normative sexuality to a struggle revolving around non-normative genders, and, eventually, how they are put in crisis again in the notion of drag. I will elaborate on the historical dimension of the following argument: In the process of the development of a mainstream struggle around non-normative sexualities *and* non-normative genders, "drag" played a double role: "Drag" shaped the meaning of the LGBTQ discourse while the meaning of "drag" itself stemmed from and was permanently re-shaped by different communities within the U.S. First, "drag" delineated the expression of white non-normative sexuality from "real" gender variance in communities of racial minorities. Secondly, drag came to represent not only homosexuality, but gender performativity. Thirdly, drag was put under the umbrella term of "transgender" by virtue of invisibilizing the sexual, gender, racial, and class differences between different forms of drag. Following this historical trajectory, as I will argue later in the thesis (chapter 4), drag came to represent what RuPaul vaguely calls the "queer movement" (Tangcay 2023) that replicates a nationalist, neoliberal discourse. In this subchapter, I will focus on the shift from the first to the second and to the third formative force of "drag."

In Esther Newton's ethnography *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1979), important distinctions are made between the terms "drag" and gender non-conformity. Newton elaborates on the derogative term "transy drag" used by some of the drag queens she was in conversation with. Her study focused om the white centered, strictly "homosexual" or (mostly male) "gay" defined subculture of drag queens in the 60s in the U.S. By "white centered" I mean here that the subculture centered white bodies along racist demarcations that Newton uncritically reproduces in her analysis.[15] In this subculture, any kind of gender

[15] An example is the following term Newton picks up and uncritically reproduces as a racialized given of the subculture she studies: The term "dinge queens" designated a (white!) queen who "likes sex" with Black males (27). Newton herself variously produces comparisons that expose her ethnography as a white centered that does not look at the intersection of sexuality, gender, class, and race. I will problematize this further with the help of David Valentine's ethnography that specifically looks at the racial(ized) exclusions the white centered homosexual subculture produced.

variance that went beyond the theatricality of drag performances was implicitly or explicitly excluded from those groups who adhered to, as Newton calls it, the "glamour standard" (Newton 1972, 51). The drag queens who were doing drag for their profession were only "*imitating*" (51) women. They demarcated themselves from the queens who were doing drag, as Newton calls it, in the "private compulsion" (51) to "*be*" (51) a woman. Here, it already becomes clear that non-audience oriented "drag" practices were considered as more deviant than the glamourous drag practices: These practices had an element about them that introduces splits between a performance of non-normative sexuality (glamourous drag) and a performance of non-normative genders ("transy drag"). In Newton's analysis, differentiations are made between drag as a practice that represents the (white) homosexual subculture and practices that represent embodied gender variance. Although the term "queen" was the term used for male gay homosexuals at the time – suggesting that homosexuality aligns with gender variance – there are significant gender, sexual, class and racial differences between different queens. While "butch queen" (127) – a masculine gay male – is an accepted member of the community, "hormone queens" (27) – by virtue of taking hormones – "are placing themselves outside of the homosexual subculture." (102) In the realm of drag, "transy drag" as one representation of gender variance, according to Newton, "makes one look like a woman, and ordinary women are not beautiful." (51) As "transy drag" is being differentiated from glamourous drag, a sexual difference is made: It is explicitly assumed that the male-to-female "transvestite" is aroused by wearing female clothes and only sleeps with women (Newton 1979, 52). Implicitly, there is also a class difference made: It is assumed that it is first and foremost the professional glamourous drag that enables the performers to make "legitimate money" (51) while any "private" practice of gender variance is rather embodied and not performed before an audience (52).

The aspect of performing for an audience is as important to the professional drag queens as the aspect of camp: According to Newton, camp allows the drag queens to connect glamour with humour (Newton 1979, 57). Moreover, it is the style of glamour that allows the most humorous camp (57). Newton suggests that glamour is "stylized pornography" (57), mostly represented by clothing, and turned into prostitution as soon as the performer uses the practice of stripping. Both representations of womanhood are "declassé" by virtue of their opposition to the female ideal of the "housewife-mother" (57). Camp can be understood as a gesture that marks the marker of homosexuality itself. With various strategies, camp humorously and theatrically marks the knowledge of being marked as "homosexual." This answers why the

drag performers Newton worked with explain their different usages of camp according to the audience: In a gay audience, more camp will be deployed, while in a straight audience, camp will be less understood and therefore less used (Newton 1979, 61). An audience familiar with camp will, according to Newton, demand the cracks in the beauty of the performing glamorous drag queen. However, in its broader meaning, drag can also be applied to the "role playing" (108) of homosexuals who need to "pass" as straight in public settings. This is due to the fact that, in the homosexual subculture of the 60s, the theory of sexual inversion started to be challenged by homosexuals: In the preface of the new edition of "Mother Camp", Newton states that – since she did her fieldwork – the stigma of male homosexual's "effeminacy" (Newton 1978, xiii) was a central issue in the gay pride movement. I will come back to the notion of "pride" culture later in chapter 4. For now, it is important to retain the following for some drag queens in the white centered homosexual subcultures in the 60s: The importance of "passing" as homosexual (instead of "trans") *inside* subcultural spaces, and at the same time, "passing" as heterosexual (instead of homosexual) *outside* subcultural spaces, was a way to demark themselves from other drag queens that did not comply to these notions of passing.

Judith Butler – inspired by Newton's ethnography – famously argues for drag's capacity to subvert gendered and sexual norms of heterosexuality in their book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 2007 [1990]). In more explicit ways, Butler's essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (Butler 2004a) uses drag to make sense of the relation between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Butler stresses that homosexuality is often seen as a copy or a "miming" (127) of an original initial heterosexuality as *the* natural sexual identity (127). For them to work, homosexual relations are seen as reliant on the imitation of a heterosexual relation between a male and a female "sex." To deconstruct the image of a prior natural heterosexuality, Butler looks at the practice of drag, that is, the performance of masculine and female genders that are associated with the male and female "sex." Through the impersonated theatrical imitation of masculine and feminine genders, drag performances show that "sex" is not the determinant of male and female genders: There is "no original gender or primary gender" (127) prior to *any* gender performance. Rather, male and female genders themselves are copied imitations of a "phantasmic ideal of heterosexual identity" (127–128). For Butler, the performative imitation of male and female genders is therefore always already connected to the sexual identity of a compulsory heterosexuality: Precisely because the imitation of male and female genders produces seemingly *natural* "heterosexualized genders" (127), the heterosexual identity is rendered as original. But,

according to Butler, even if the homosexual identity appeared as an "imitation" (Butler 2004a, 127) of heterosexual identity, this imitation would not imply that heterosexuality is the original. Heterosexuality itself must be repeated and imitated in an "endless" way because, as every imitation, it is only "approximating" a phantasma and is therefore "bound to fail" (128). The repetition is "compulsive and compulsory" (128) precisely because the "project of heterosexual identity" (128) is never really fulfilled. Moreover, the "original" heterosexuality is dependent on homosexual copies that are seen as "derivations" (128). Butler turns this relation around: Instead of the "copy" being introduced after the appearance of the "original", an "original" is demanded after the appearance of a "copy." For Butler, this is a reason why the whole system of "original vs. copy" is insufficient if applied to the connection between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Following this argument, Butler sees drag as a practice that can expose this relation: The joy about a drag performance, according to this view, lies in understanding the following: Every gendered expression does not represent a gender identity, but is only compulsively performed by virtue of being able to replicate the gendered dimension of a normative heterosexual relation between male/female.

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), the work following *Gender Trouble*, Butler also looks more closely at the racialized violence of heteronormative gender. According to Butler, the process of subjectivation through gender produces "a domain of abject beings" that remains the "constitutive outside" of intelligible subjectivity (Butler 1993, 3). However, this does not mean that this "outside" is just a "thereness" (1993, 8) that resists the discourse of gender. Butler sees gendered "scenes of reproduction, and hence, of sexing practices not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested." (Butler 1993, 18) Butler's concept of the materialization of sexual difference through the power of heteronormative discourse therefore always needs to consider a historical performativity of race that reifies the naturalizing effects of race in relation to sexual difference. This means that the body is performatively materialized through racialized discourses of gender and sexuality. Hegemonic discourses of gender, sexuality, race, racialization, and ability always need abject, unintelligible positions "outside" of society. However, such positions are not fixed, don't produce the same identity formation over time, and can therefore change. Following this, I want to address some important points Newton does not address thoroughly. An analysis of drag that centers homosexuality as the pre-dominant deviation from white heteronormativity in the U.S. culture reproduces the abjection of intertwined non-normative gender, sexual,

racial, and class positions. This also shows in how Newton, while portraying drag in its relation to the white centered homosexual subcultures, dismisses the positions of queens who embody a daily lived gender variance on the street level. By doing so, she doesn't fully address the exclusions the homosexual drag subculture produced and continues to produce in relation to intertwined gender, sexual, racial, and class differences in the context of the U.S. To address these exclusions, I will look at another ethnography, namely David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender – An Ethnography of a Category* (2007).

2.2. The Category of "Transgender"

Valentine looks at how the discursive formation of the term "transgender" in the U.S. in the 1990s was shaped by the institutionalization of the analytical differentiation between "gender" and "sexuality." For his ethnography, Valentine conducted 18 months of fieldwork from 1996 to 1997 in different spaces in New York City associated with the term "transgender." He did fieldwork in support groups, drag balls, events for cross-dressers, bars, clubs, sex work spaces, activist spaces, congresses, and conferences. Initially planned as an ethnography of "the transgender community," Valentine soon realized that the contexts he wanted to study rather suggest writing an ethnography of the *category* "transgender" itself (Valentine 2007, 14). In *Imagining Transgender*, Valentine describes how the community he sought to find both as a safer sex outreach worker for "trans people" and as an ethnographer was only created through his own "mapping" (Valentine 2007, 7) as he cycled between the different spaces. In letting the contradictory and conflictual usages or lack of usages of the term "transgender" in these spaces emerge, Valentine critically assesses how "transgender" as a category fails to incorporate the people that are said to be part of the community. The people's experiences are, apart from a form gender variance, also marked by class and racial struggles. Valentine's overall argument, then, is most precisely formulated as a main concern:

> Above all, I am concerned that the unquestioned use of 'transgender' in activist, academic and other contexts, while progressive in intent, actually reproduces, in novel and intensified forms, class and racial hierarchies. Thus, my concern is to open up what 'transgender' might mean in order to think about both its possibilities and its political, theoretical, and ethical limits. (19)

Valentine's argument is structured as followed: First, he argues that the historical formation of the term "transgender" goes hand in hand with a development in homosexual communities: White middle-class gays/lesbians disavowed the overtness and visibility of public gender variance, especially if embodied by people of Color that were and are already affected by

systematic racism and class disadvantage. Homosexuality problematically came to be privatized, gender-normative and assimilated to sustain structural privileges. At the same time, the institutionalization of the category of "transgender" asked of people with non-normative genders who may have seen themselves as part of homosexual subcultures to disidentify with "homosexuality." (Valentine 2007, 62–65) However, Valentines argues that the analytical distinction between "transgender" and "homosexual" can't account for the "situated, contextual experience" (61) of many people he met. In the second part of his book, he describes some of his encounters more closely. In line with his institutional agenda as a safer-sex outreach worker, he came to refer to some people as "transgender" although they didn't identify as such. He suggests that the experiences of his interlocutors can only be made sense of if class and race differences are considered: Valentine encounters mostly feminine presenting Black and Latinx people who were assigned male at birth, are attracted to men and identify as gay. This contradicts the institutionalized understanding of "transgender" which suggests that their claimed gender would make them "heterosexual" (132–137). Valentine stresses that the institutionalization of "transgender" as a category has consequences for the understanding of such experiences: People claiming these experiences are either considered as having a "false consciousness" (99) or as lacking education about the analytical distinction between "gender" and "sexuality" (124).

Valentine extensively elaborates on the various meanings of "drag" in different subcultures. The different meanings of "drag" in the 90s of New York derive from the different contexts in which they are situated: In white centered (female and male) homosexual subcultures, "drag" demarcates the white homosexual space from a daily embodied gender variance as well as from "racially- and class-marked drag" (Valentine 2007, 54). Despite this demarcation, "transgender" allowed even a "splendid drag ball at the Hilton in midtown" (7) to be theoretically conceptualized as being part of the "transgender community." In practice, however, the "historical association of drag with male homosexuality complicates the inclusion of 'drag' in transgender for these same people." (74) To acknowledge the clash between the different meanings of "drag" helps to understand the "constructedness of a transgender community and how it is contrasted to a gay community" (74). One important difference between these meanings exposes racial and class differences: In homosexual subcultural spaces that centered and center Black people, Indigenous and People of Color, like the weekly balls in Hell's kitchen (75), "drag" is an element that merges homosexuality with different non-normative gendered practices and embodiments.

Since its beginnings, balls center especially the African American and Latinx community. The balls revolve around competitions in different categories that allow the participants to create a space that reclaims and subverts societal gendered, sexual, racial, and class norms. Some of the participants are part of houses that "serve as alternative families and support networks […], as well as forming competing teams during balls" (Valentine 2007, 75–76). In such balls, the term "drag" is used to mark gendered embodiments of passing. The category "butch queens in drag," for example, refers to an assigned male at birth who dresses up in a feminine way. Here, drag marks a difference between "butch queens" and "fem queens," that is, between masculine presenting (but dressed up as feminine) and feminine presenting people. While butch queens try to pass as feminine for the sake of the competition, fem queens' feminine presentation goes beyond the balls. At the same time, "drag" builds some kind of overlap between butch queens and fem queens. Precisely because the drag of butch queens is inspired by the fem queens and revolves around passing during the performance, it is different from a drag queen performance in white centered homosexual subcultures – as indicated earlier. In the emerging "transgender" subcultures in the 90s, for example in an event called "Tranny Chaser" (12), "drag" is an element that produces conflicts of identification on the level of visible gender variance: In these emerging transgender spaces, "no one can be quite sure of how another may identify from their appearance." (12) What Valentine draws from the different meanings of "drag" in the different contexts is the following: While the category virtually should enable to host "all" forms of gender variance, including the different forms of "drag," it doesn't enable to make sense of the conflicting self-understandings within the imagined "transgender community" and reifies racial and class hierarchies. It is despite this problematic dynamic of "transgender" as a community that activist practices and academic knowledge production developed in relation to it.

In Valentine's own critique on the analytical distinction "gender" and "sexuality," he mainly focuses on the relation between a gay identification and a form of gender-variance that came to be regarded as "transgender." The most important position he addresses in his argument is a female-identified person who was assigned male at birth that also sees herself as gay because of being attracted to men. This position constitutes a crisis for the analytical separation of "gender" and "sexuality" and is important for Valentine's argument. Valentine describes how – in the time of his fieldwork, lasting over eighteen months in 1996 and 1997 (Valentine 2007, 6) – the dispersion of the term "transgender" was a "way for external agents to try and sort out what appears to be a confusing conflation of gendered and sexual identities for the purposes

of social service outreach and documentation." (Valentine 2007, 81)[16] Instead of, however, assuming that different experiences can be integrated into the epistemic sphere of academia without reproducing epistemic violence, it is therefore crucial to not focus on representing these experiences truly but rather to focus on and problematize the mechanisms of the liberal white discourses of "transgender" and "drag" for erasing sexual, gender, racial, class and other social differences. It is important to notice, however, that liberal LGBTQ discourses in the U.S. try to disavow these differences not only by trying to assimilate to white gendered norms, but also, as mentioned in the introduction, by adhering to the productivity, individual success, and privatization demanded by the neoliberal order. In order to analyze such "liberal" discourses in relation to the recent so-called "illiberal" developments and repressions in the U.S., it is necessary to look into the exclusionary and repressive force these seemingly liberal discourses reproduce themselves because of being situated in the neoliberal order.

2.3. Public Gender and Sexuality

According to Alexa DeGagne, the distinction between public and private is of particular importance in the neoliberalization of mainstream LGBTQ discourses in North America. As an example, Canadian laws against public sexual acts, executed by the police, have merged the private with the domestic, allowing only some acts of homosexuality to be legalized while other acts kept on being criminalized (DeGagne 2023, 230). Such policies go hand in hand with the advocation of same-sex marriage that "was understood as a vehicle for privacy, social

[16] Being an outreach worker himself for the purposes of his fieldwork, Valentine himself is part of the very structures of institutionalized social service he is trying to expose. Valentine's argument, while trying to formulate an ethnography of the category "transgender," still needs to be situated in his field work as an academic researcher. His argument rests on his observations within contexts in which he is, as Sara Ahmed formulates it, both a "stranger" (Ahmed 2000) to his interlocutors and in which he continuously produces his interlocutors as strangers. According to Ahmed, the epistemic role of ethnography is to bring the "stranger" into the academic's "*institutional home*" (Ahmed 2000, 52). Instead of being 'outside' academia, the "strangers" – here, African American and Latinx people with non-normative gender presentations – are permanently reproduced as known marginalized figures *within* the feminist ethnographic academic community which stabilizes its "epistemic privilege" (Ahmed 2000, 53) over non-academic interlocutors. Valentine reiterates such a discourse of "known strangers" within academia while trying to expose the institutional structures that produce the category "transgender": He positions some of his interlocutors as known strangers (racially, sexually, economically marginalized subjects with non-normative gender presentation) vis a vis the known knowledge of "transgender" that he tries to criticize and ends up centering in his ethnography. However, he not only knows about the institutional structures and holds epistemic privilege over his interlocutors but is part of these structures by virtue of him being an outreach worker. While he reflects on the epistemic violence produced by his research, his understanding of marginalized identity is reproducing the positioning of his interlocutors as known strangers within academia. Even if these known strangers expose the shortcomings of the institutionalized category "transgender," their own knowledge, as Ahmed problematizes, is stuck in the academic framework (Ahmed 2000, 53): The knowledge is extracted by the researcher and framed within hegemonic epistemologies and thereby made "strange" in the sense of "different" and "interesting."

acceptance, and recognition, legal protection, emotional fulfilment, and economic stability." (230) While the notion of privacy initially promised gay couples "freedom from state surveillance, harassment, violence, and criminalization" (230), the actual efforts of privatization like same-sex marriage were compatible with neoliberal governing mechanisms that invest in the economic self-governance of citizens. Privacy turned into recognition by the state, rather than freedom from the state regulations. Instead, the state keeps on "regulating public, 'deviant' sex and sexuality" (231) that remain vulnerable to police violence. The conflation of domesticity with privacy also shows in the neoliberal mechanism of gentrification: Through investments in the "development" of urban spaces by corporations and the neoliberal state, areas with "affordable housing, and local organizations and businesses were squeezed out" (231). These areas – who used to be "seen as dilapidated and dirty, and as harbouring society's poor, sexually deviant, violent, criminal, and undesirable people" (231) – were more targeted by police repression. Through community projects that happened to comply with the neoliberal mechanism of gentrification, these areas ended up offering a selective protection for mostly white gay people who can afford living there. While the neoliberal state, as DeGagne argues, furthered these exclusionary developments, it also increased the criminalization of more marginalized people: The reduction of market regulations made it necessary for governments like the U.S. to intensify "their regulation of the public through intensified policing of everyday life, the criminalization and incarceration of more people, and the development of more prisons." (DeGagne2023, 232) To describe this, DeGagne borrows a term by Dean Spade: "detention state" (Spade 2009, as cited in DeGagne 2023, 232). This neoliberal state is mostly interested in a market that functions and tends to label those who don't invest in its efficiency and productivity as "criminal" or "deviant." By doing so, the government's responsibility for increasing poverty and crime through disinvesting in welfare and deregulating the market turned into individual responsibility. What the police turns into a threat in the public space are, seemingly, "offences that emerge from poverty and marginalization, including panhandling, selling legal and illegal substances, sex work, homelessness/loitering, having large objects (mattresses, furniture, tents) in public spaces, riding public transportation for free, public drinking, and public sex" (233). This criminalization of marginalized and poor people in the public space, as DeGagne argues, contributes to its privatization and neoliberal gentrification. What the government of the detention state with its policing and criminalizing practices needs for neoliberal economic structures to continue functioning is its image as "'liberal, tolerant, and welcoming'" (233). This is important to make individuals, including LGBTQ people, who assimilate to these

structures indirectly or directly legitimate repressive practices of the police and prisons (DeGagne 2023, 233). As DeGagne states, some LGBTQ people "are measuring their citizenship statuses, inclusion, and freedom not just by whether the state will protect them, but also by whether the state will incarcerate other citizens on their behalf" (234).

As stated earlier, I want to further analyze the erasure of already marginalized people in and through liberal discourses of specifically "drag" and "transgender" in the U.S. in the context of so-called "illiberal" discourses. A crucial part of these discourses is the introduction of anti-drag bills. How does the image of a liberal, tolerant and welcome state change in the face of this seemingly "new" repression? Who is affected by these repressions? How do liberal LGBTQ discourses take this repression up? As I will argue, "illiberal" discourses criminalize public gender variance and non-normative sexuality through merging them with other "threatening" public figures to produce a common enemy for the white nuclear family. Does this more apparent criminalization of public sexualized figures through right-wing and conservative voices reinforce or challenge the investment in the liberal, tolerant, and welcoming nation state? I suggest that the recent developments ask for a re-assessment of policing strategies of the state and their legitimization by liberal LGBTQ discourses. As I will argue in chapter 4, the liberal size of the nation's fabric, as formulated by the current president of the United States, might be reduced: Precisely *because* of the rise of the right-wing and conservative voices and repressive legislations, liberal LGBTQ discourses' compliance with the neoliberal order of the nation-state increases to ensure exclusionary protection. Before looking into this, I will look at the legislations that introduce the discourse of "drag as crime" which redefines the national boundaries of "criminal" public sexuality and gender variance.

3. "DRAG AS CRIME" – THE AFFECTS AROUND ANTI-DRAG

3.1. Analyzing "Anti-Drag-Bills" in the U.S.

In this chapter, I will analyze how the discourse of "drag as crime" articulated by "anti-drag bills" on the regulation of drag introduced in the U.S. in 2023 erases and ideologically exploits representational similarities and differences between drag and transness. I choose to do this because, as indicated in the introduction, I argue that these bills ideologically exploit the historical-discursive proximity between drag and transness. Yet, by doing so, they uncomfortably expose the racial, racialized, and classed exclusions in present liberal discourses around non-normative sexualities and genders. In my analysis of the historical-discursive proximity between drag and transness in the U.S., it got clear that, due to structures

of racism, there were different understandings and practices of drag that kept white homosexual subcultures and Black and Latinx homosexual communities separate from each other. While the institutionalized definition of "transgender" distanced itself from homosexuality – informed by the rise of white assimilationist homonormativity – the definition's implicit separation of gender and sexuality did not, historically, account for non-normative gender presentations in Black and Latinx homosexual communities. Moreover, it did not account for the class inequalities between white and Black and Latinx communities. As indicated in the introduction, until now, non-normative gender presentation in homosexual subcultures is represented by drag, while lived non-normative gender presentation seems to be troubling. In this environment, trans identified people or trans drag performers, especially trans people and trans drag performers of Color, introduce actual gender trouble. Precisely because the historical-discursive proximity of drag and transness implies racial and racialized exclusions, it not only troubles dominant homosexual spaces, but it also informs transphobic and racist tropes in current anti-drag bills. In this subchapter (3.1.), I will analyze and compare four different interrelated bills from Texas, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Montana that reflect the historical-discursive proximity of drag and transness. I argue that, through the definition of public drag as sexually oriented doing that is criminalizable, the bill's interrelated discourses represent ideological meanings of drag. By implicitly subsuming trans people under drag performers, these meanings inevitably sexualize and criminalize specific forms of public gender variance and articulate normative expectations of trans identity and drag. In the second and third subchapter (3.2. and 3.2.), I will analyze the racialized language of such anti-drag bills and how the discourse of "drag as crime" poses trans people as a threat to the "purity" of the white child, the family, and the nation-state and thereby specifically targets Black trans women, Indigenous trans women, and trans women of Color.

The first bill I will analyze was introduced in Texas ("Texas HB1266 | 2023-2024 | 88th Legislature," n.d.). This bill performs the act of (re-)defining the term "drag performance." It required to be "enacted by the legislature of the state of Texas" (HB1266) but ended up being rejected. However, as the genre of parliamentary decision making, the bill's discourse represents how sexuality is viewed by the legislator who introduced it. As mentioned in the methodological subchapter 1.3., the genre of the bill functions as a normative relational framework in which the discourse of "drag performance" is "enacted" (Fairclough 2003, 29). The Texian bill defines the meaning of "drag performance" by relating it to "the definition of

sexually oriented business" (HB1266). I argue that the discourse in this bill represents an *ideological* meaning of "drag performance" that implicitly subsumes trans people under the term of drag performers and thereby sexualizes them inevitably. As I have already indicated in the methodological subchapter (1.3.), the discourse of "drag performance" is enacted in the bill through a recontextualization: The term "drag performance" is integrated into the context of sexually oriented business as articulated in (1) the "Business & Commerce Code" and (2) the "Local Government Code" (HB1266). The Local Government code defines "drag performance" as "a performance in which a performer exhibits a gender identity that is different than the performer's gender assigned at birth using clothing, makeup, or other physical markers" (HB1266). Moreover, the drag performer, who is said to be located on stage, "sings, lip syncs, dances, or otherwise performs before an audience for entertainment" (HB1266). According to this definition, the problem is not only the theatrical performance of a gender other than one's assigned at birth, but the *exhibition* of a gender *identity* other than one's assigned gender at birth. This identity is assumed to be visible to others through certain gendered practices, vaguely defined as "clothing, makeup, or other physical markers". The performance of a gender identity other than one's gender assigned at birth, then, also applies to any trans person who identifies differently to their assigned gender at birth and entertains an audience, but who does *not* identify as a drag performer.

The definition of "drag performance" is ideologically recontextualized by its adding as a subcategory to what has been previously defined as sexually oriented businesses in the Local Government Code, namely a particular form of businesses that is "intended to provide sexual stimulation or sexual gratification to the customer" (HB1266). However, by not naming what is "sexual" about drag performances themselves, a propositional "assumption" (Fairclough 2003, 40) is implicitly at work that warrants the subcategorization: The performance of a gender identity other than the performer's gender assigned at birth is sexual because it is used as a way of entertaining an "audience of two or more individuals" (HB1266) that might look for *similar* sexual stimulations and gratifications as the consumer of *other* sexually oriented businesses. This assumption, then, produces a definition of drag performances being comparably sexual as other performances in sexually oriented businesses. The meaning articulated in the Local Government Code of the bill therefore represents "drag performance" in a way that implicitly *sexualizes* a gender variant or trans person who entertains an audience but does not identify as a drag performer.

The definition of "drag performance" articulated under the Local Government Code is extended by the Business & Commerce Code: Drag is subsumed as one possibility of what a sexually oriented business – meaning here "a commercial enterprise" – "provides for an audience of two or more individuals" (HB1266). The other possibility is "live nude entertainment or live nude performances" (HB1266). Here, the meaning of "drag performance" is formulated in a syntagmatic relation to nudeness and entertainment. As the vagueness of what is sexual about drag performances formulated in the Local Government Code is recontextualized in the Business & Commerce Code, another propositional assumption is produced: It is not made explicit if a drag performance can include nudeness, but the propositional assumption that it is comparably sexual as *nude* performances in sexually oriented businesses makes it likely to include nudeness. This propositional assumption, then, does not explicitly exclude a trans person performing nude before an audience and deploying the same practices as defined by the drag performance ("using clothing, makeup, or other physical markers") from the category of a drag performer – although they might not identify as such.

The definition of drag performance in this bill can be analyzed in relation to the discourse of public vs. private sex and sexuality. The attempt to sexualize drag reflects the challenge of subsuming "drag" under the umbrella "transgender" that I discussed earlier. In the previously analyzed bill, the difference between a staged performance for an audience and a daily lived gender variance is diminished. In other words, the historical proximity of "drag" and "trans" is ideologically used by sexualizing gender variance for which drag becomes the main signifier. It seems that the homosexual connotation of drag seeps into representations of "transgender" to 1. sexualize any public and visible gender variance, 2. assume the non-normatively gendered visibility of homosexuality. This not only reproduces homophobic tropes, but has problematic consequences for gender variant/trans people, and especially gender variant/trans sex workers. The ideological limitations of this bill are for example reflected in the exclusion of gender variant/trans sex workers: The collapse of "trans" and "drag" allows no distinction between gender variant/trans sex workers and drag performers. Arguably, this also implicitly formulates the normative expectation that gender variant/trans people do not engage in sex work and that the only gender variance within sexually oriented businesses is, by the bill's definition, covered with the term "drag performer." I will come back to the broader paradigmatic implications of these ideological discourse beyond its syntagmatic relations in the following subchapter (3.2).

A bill introduced in the Senate of South Carolina ("South Carolina S0585 | 2023-2024 | 125th General Assembly," n.d.) defines drag without ever mentioning the term "drag." Rather, it redefines the term "adult cabaret" by adding the category of "male or female impersonators" (S0585) to it: "'Adult cabaret' means a commercial establishment which features as principal purpose of its business entertainment of an exotic nature, including exotic dancers, strippers, male or female impersonators, or similar entertainers" (S0585). The racist and orientalist category of "exotic" has here the function of ideologically racializing non-normative sexualized and gendered practices – without distinction among them – as "foreign" to the nation, as well as criminalizing them in the public as "deviant" and therefore punishable. The vague formulations of "impersonator" as well as "similar entertainers" carry ideological meanings with it as well. First, it is discursively rather misleading to use the term "male or female impersonators" as "impersonation" is a term for theatrical performances that had been used long before the term drag started circulating in today's meaning (Halberstam 1998, 232). As the bill performs the action of "prohibit[ing] adult cabaret performances on public property and in places where such a performance can be viewed by minors" (S0585), the prohibition of male and female impersonation also prohibits theatrical performances (for example in theatres for children) that feature the practices of gender variance and transgression while performing. Second, the notion of "impersonator" can be interpreted in relation to its semiotic similarity to a common transphobic trope: Trans people are "impostors," they only impersonate the gender they identify with and master their life with and need to be revealed in their disguise. As the female and male impersonators are defined along with "similar entertainers who provide entertainment that appeals to a prurient interest" (S0585), the similarity this term has to the transphobic trope is openly sexualizing – not only the general practice of gender transgression while theatrically performing, but in general any kind of gender transgression in the realm of "adult cabaret" that seems to fail passing as "real" instead of "fake" as in impersonation/imposture.

The term "impersonation" also appears – through an intertextual relation between the bills within the broader discourse of "drag as crime" – in the discourse of a bill introduced in West Virginia ("West Virginia SB253 | 2023 | Regular Session," n.d.). However, in redefining "adult cabaret performance", this bill uses a slightly different formulation: "male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to the prurient interest, or similar entertainers, regardless of whether or not performed for consideration." (SB253) Not only is the prurient interest here in a closer syntagmatic relation to the female and male

impersonators, but it also does not seem to matter if the "entertainer" deliberately performs for others or not. In this formulation, the existence of a female and male impersonator – who is seen as always performing – offstage on "public property" where minors could be present is already considered a "criminal offense" (SB253). This does not only exclude minors from any space where "female and male impersonators" are present, but also, again, does not explicitly exclude gender variant/trans people from this definition. In the next subchapter, I will argue in more detail that one reason for this implicit inclusion of gender transgression is the sexualization of its assumed visibility in spaces the bills define as "public" or "private." In the following subchapter, I will analyze in detail how this allows for the legitimization of publicly policing, discriminating against, and violating people who transgress white gendered norms, especially people who already face racism and other forms of direct, cultural, and structural violence.

In a bill introduced in Montana ("Montana HB359 | 2023 | Regular Session," n.d.), two other terms are recontextualized in the legal context, namely "Drag king", "Drag queen", both put in quotation marks: "'Drag king' means a male or female performer who adopts a flamboyant or parodic male persona with glamorous or exaggerated costumes and makeup." (HB359) Drag queens are defined in the same way, except that they adopt a "feminine persona." At first, these definitions seem to be more elaborated. However, I want to highlight that they nevertheless draw on an ideological vagueness: The distinctions between flamboyant *or* parodic, glamourous *or* exaggerated become problematic as it defines the public confines of gender transgression. A gendered transgression that adopts a "too" flamboyant or glamourous persona, read as parodic or exaggerated, is always judged from an outsider perspective that is, in the context of the bills, the state and the police, but also any ordinary person reproducing homophobia and transphobia. Moreover, as drag kings and drag queens are both seen to be performable by both males and females, this produces seemingly endless combinations where gender transgressions other than "drag performance" are included in this definition – only because of having the common denominator of some kind of gendered performativity that is assumed to be "too much."

3.2. The "Affective Economy" of Anti-Drag

In this subchapter, I will analyze the implications of anti-drag discourses for legitimizing violence against gender non-conforming bodies, especially gender non-conforming bodies of Color. For this, I will deploy Ahmed's understanding of "affective economy" introduced in

1.2. I argue that the relation between "drag" and "trans" in the analyzed anti-drag bills that are re-criminalizing drag carry racist imageries with it. As argued in 1.2., sexually and gender non-conforming bodies need to be situated in a broader understanding of the racializing forces of othering and difference constructed as "visible." Through formulations like "entertainment of an exotic nature," anti-drag discourses explicitly racialize this difference. Specifically, Arabs and Muslims are exotified by virtue of locating them "outside" of the hegemonic Western nation-states and by connecting them to orientalist, Islamophobic, sexual colonial tropes and "terrorism" (Puar 2007, 4). However, in racialized narratives of U.S. sexual and gender exceptionalism, not only Arab and Muslim immigrants are targeted with this form of racism. Brenda N. Sanya argues that Black African immigrants, even though Black Americans are centered in nationalist liberal and multicultural discourses of racism, face similar structural forms of racism: These structural forms of racism stem from the longer history of slavery, the whiteness of U.S. citizenship and from, in the case Sanya studies, racist narratives around U.S. military operations against "terrorism" in Kenya:

> While the experiences of Black immigrants are rarely visible in popular discourse – and then, frequently framed as exceptional stories of triumphant assimilation […] or imputed crypto-terrorism […] – nonetheless, these experiences provide key insights on not only national frontiers (and what kinds of bodies cross easily or not), but also on the queering of bodies as suitable (or not) for national identity. Keeping these experiences and locations of Blackness within global and local contexts, one turns to the immigrant as a figure of hybridity – but one not only (or not simply) "based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, […] on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha 1994, 38), but also in the way that Black immigrant experiences hinge on that paradoxical simultaneity of valorization and terror […]. (Sanya 2021, 1542)

The positions of, on the one hand, Black people, Indigenous people, as well as people of Color, and on the other hand, queer and trans people not only need to be studied in a framework that acknowledges the homonormative, homonational and transnormative invisibilization of their intersection, but in a framework that acknowledges how anti-drag-bills approximate both positions. In this proximity, both positions – Black people, Indigenous people, and people of Color *and* queer and trans people – *together* are sexualized and criminalized and seem to invade the family and the nation-state anti-drag discourses want to "protect." However, it is the invisibilization of positions that distort the racist separation between white queer and trans people and Black people, Indigenous people and People of Color that needs to be centered in discussions around the effects of anti-drag bills.

My analysis of the anti-drag-bills focused on the ideological meaning of drag performances/female and male impersonation which all carry similar propositional assumptions with them: These performances and impersonations are as sexual as other entertainments that are confined to sexual businesses or adult cabaret. However, rather than describing the inherent nature of drag, it is the defining action performed by the genre of bill that normatively prescribes drag's confinement to spaces that host "similar" sexual performances. The relation between sexual/prurient entertainment and drag performances/female and male impersonations within the bills is syntagmatic. In contrast, the "significant absence" (Fairclough 2003, 37) of trans people can be described as a "paradigmatic" (37) relation. This paradigm of absence can be further analyzed in relation to the default exclusion of discourses of transness (Zanghellini 2020) from contexts where their inclusion – even in this case, the included exclusion – would be needed to acknowledge the specificity of their existence. The bill's definitions of drag performance/female and male impersonation are therefore ideologically "suppressing" (Fairclough 2003, 42) the "social difference" (40) between drag and trans identity that would require some distinctions to be made meaningful in the bills' contexts – given that one acts on the assumption of drag performance/female and male impersonation being indeed sexual entertainments which is problematic in itself. This paradigm of absence – the absence of explicitly including the exclusion of trans people from anti-drag bills – needs to be studied in relation to the heightened sexualization and criminalization of both gender conforming and gender non-conforming Black, Indigenous and People of Color.[17] The problematic dimension of such ideological definitions is, on the one hand, reflected in the exclusionary force of the term "transgender," as argued with Valentine earlier in 2.2. If "drag" is foregrounded in its non-normative display of gender, the performativity of "drag" is limited to the category of "gender." This overshadows the fact that "drag," especially in subcultures that center(ed) white homonormativity, is exclusionary towards "real" daily lived gender variance. This exclusion happens often along sexual, racial and class differences. Moreover, the only way these bills allow for a merging of "drag" (gender variance) and sexuality is by sexualizing the gender variant body altogether and portraying it as a criminal. This especially targets gender variance that does not/cannot adhere to forms of passing, both medically and on the streets. Yet, this gender variance is only hyper-visibilized *by virtue of* the prevalence of white gender heteronormativity in public spaces. Puar's term "transnormativity" precisely grasps here how

[17] A thorough analysis of the genealogy of these discourses needs to be centered in further analyses.

even the white gender non-conforming body is, due to national ideologies and neoliberal market structure, more likely being enabled to adhere to normative gendered medical practices that make assimilation to white gender heteronormativity easier. However, this nationalizable gender non-conformity is positioned against a gender non-conformity that is sexualized and/or faces racism and/or might not be able to adhere to normative gendered medical practices.

Following these thoughts the discourse of "drag as crime" needs to be analyzed in a framework of the interrelated powers of racialization, sexualization, and criminalization in which narratives of the "invading other" that threatens the nation are produced. No matter if this "other" is perceived as openly pushing their gender non-conformity on children to "convert" them, or if this "other" is perceived as endangering the supposed "purity" of the "white race" – both threats are posed in relation to the innocent white gender and sexually conforming child (Evang 2022, 377). Without disregarding the differences and intersections between gender variant positions and racialized positions, that both are being positioned as "threats" is the product of sexualizing and criminalizing supposedly *visible* "otherness." This supposed "visibility," as I argue with Ahmed's "affective economies," is mainly (re-)produced through emotions. Importantly, these emotions are not located "in" bodies but rather "circulate between bodies and signs." (Ahmed 2004, 117) It is through the movement of emotions between different bodies and between different signs that "surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (117) are constituted. The crucial question to ask here is formulated by Ahmed in the following way: "How do emotions work to align some subjects with some others and against other others?" (Ahmed 2004, 117) In the discourse of "drag as crime," the subjects aligned with some others are the white children in need of protection, concerned parents, the Republican legislators, the anti-gender positions, the trans-exclusive (anti-) "feminists," and other subjects on the forefront of protecting the nation-state. These subjects are positioned against other others: the drag performers, female/male impersonators, strippers, "exotic dancers" and so on. I have already argued that the re-definitions of drag performers as sexually oriented doings – among other forms of entertainment in sexual businesses or adult cabarets – are ideologically including people who might deploy similar gendered practices but neither identify nor present as nor look like drag performers. How do emotions work to align the "othered" drag performers – through the formulation of anti-drag bills – with other others: trans people, Black people, Indigenous people, People of Color, and racialized immigrants?

Ahmed suggests that emotions like fear, hate or anger can, on the one hand, jump from one body to another body: The subjects of the nation-state who are positioned against other others become one collective body. The effect of "coherence" (Ahmed 2004, 119) within a collective body, however, is only produced through the emotion's mobility. Emotions become stronger through them being projected on *different* objects at once that all appear as the cause for this emotion: "emotions work by sticking figures together" – a mechanism Ahmed calls "adherence" (119). Ahmed further explains this adherence as the "rippling effect of emotions; they move sideways (through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures, and objects) as well as backward (repression always leaves its trace in the present—hence 'what sticks' is also bound up with the 'absent presence' of historicity)." (Ahmed 2004, 120) Following Ahmed, I argue that the discourse of anti-drag "accumulate[s]" (Ahmed 2004, 120) emotions like fear and anger and affects like disgust and shame towards the sexualized and criminalized drag, trans, and racialized immigrant other. The drag performer not only appears as a criminal because of being portrayed as a sexual threat, pervert, or pedophile, but also by virtue of the racialization of these sexualizations as well as their discursive location outside the nation (as argued in 3.1. with the "exotic nature" of male and female impersonators).

The drag story hour becomes the staged bodily appearance of the drag performer in which the non-normatively sexualized and gendered performance gets criminalized because of supposedly sexualizing and transgendering the default white heteronormative child. In the affective economy of the sexualized gender non-conforming performer, disgust travels from one figure to another along chains of associations. As indicated with Ahmed in 1.2., there is an association with the non-reproductive queer body and the racialized immigrant which is always already positioned against the white American citizen.[18] The "stickiness" (Ahmed 2004, 130) of emotions and affects is attached to a body *because* its appearance is staged by a chain of associations. As analyzed in the bills, the figure of the drag performer is associated with the figure of the trans person, which is associated with the figure of the sexual criminal, which is associated with the figure of the racialized immigrant etc. (adherence). Along this chain of associations, emotions and affects can move sideways to project themselves on

[18] As indicated in the introduction, a queer of color analysis like Puar's argues that the figure of the racialized immigrant becomes queer in the face of the U.S. liberal queer, homonational war waging machine. Puar writes in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007): "Queer times require even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression in order to elaborate upon nationalist, patriotic, and terrorist formations and their imbricated forms of racialized perverse sexualities and gender dysphorias." (Puar 2007, 204) I am following Puar's analysis here by comparing the nationalist frameworks of the gendered, racialized, and sexualized language of anti-drag bills with liberal queer discourses on mainstream drag in the U.S. in the following chapter 4.

different appearing signs like make up on the "wrong" body, clothing on the "wrong" body, physical markers on the "wrong" body. Ahmed calls this an "accumulation of affective value" which "shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds." (Ahmed 2004, 121) Because of such accumulations of affective value along different signs, figures, and objects, the same emotions and affects can be felt by different subjects at the same time. Thereby, the affective value produces the supposedly heightened visibility of these signs, figures, and objects. Only through an affective economy, emotions and affects produce the common enemy for the collective white, heterosexual, national body (coherence). The affective value neither "reside positively" (Ahmed 2004, 120) in a sign, figure, or object nor in the body that "feels" them but are only produced through the discursive circulation of otherwise unoriginal emotions and affects.

3.3. Drag, Femininity, and Disgust

Until now, I argued that the accumulation of affective value works to align the subject of the white, heterosexual, gender conforming citizen with some other white subjects and against the racialized and/or gender and/or sexual non-conforming "other." Through the production of emotions and affects, the discourse of "anti-drag" has the power to shape what objects and bodies are sexualized, criminalized, and racialized in what way. I now want to specifically address how the association between drag queens, trans women, and racialized immigrants is evoked through what Ahmed calls "the performativity of disgust" (Ahmed 2014, 84). How does disgust criminalize and sexualize bodies to normatively sanitize a nation's public? According to Ahmed, disgust is especially forceful because of its ability to reject bodies and create borders between people. While disgust is no inherent feature of things, the feeling of it can "affect" (Ahmed 2014, 85) the body. It is the feeling itself that constitutes an object as disgusting, not the object itself. At the same time, this feeling does not originate from "within" the body. Rather, as Ahmed suggests, disgust implies closeness that is felt as "unpleasant intensity" and gives others "the quality of 'being offensive'" (85). If it is not the others themselves who are offensive, but the closeness to them, the question is how the hegemonic white heterosexual perspective constitutes not only proximity to some bodies but also casts this "proximity" as "invasion" (86) of its "own" space. Here, the objectification of borders becomes relevant: From a nationalist perspective, the fiction of existing borders is "maintained" (87) *because* of the imagery of them being "transgressed" and therefore "threatened" (87) by "outsiders." In this imagery, Ahmed argues that "disgust engenders

border objects" (87), that is, objects signified as "disgusting" which replace the lack of borders. This also has a timely dimension. In Ahmed words:

> As a result, disgust involves a 'time lag' as well as being generative or futural. It does not make borders (out of nothing), but responds to their making, through a reconfirmation of their necessity. So the subject feels an object to be disgusting (a perception that relies on a history that comes before the encounter) and then expels the object and, through expelling the object, finds it to be disgusting. *The expulsion itself becomes the 'truth' of the reading of the object.* (Ahmed 2014, 87)

The "history that comes before the encounter," also entails that some bodies are seen to be in contact with specific border objects (87). Ahmed suggests that disgust produces a stickiness of objects. I argue that in the anti-drag bills, the drag performer's body is transformed through attaching to it the stickiness of gendered objects. In the bills, the gendered objects are make-up, clothing, and "other physical markers." Through reading the non-normative usage of gendered objects as "disgusting," the surface of sticky objects like make-up are "re-surfacing." (91) Here, disgust can work to abject the body who uses this make-up through both transforming gendered objects into border objects and finding them "disgusting." These gendered objects literally seem to stick to the performers, and in turn, make their performance appear "exaggerated" and "flamboyant." What also sticks to the supposed "exaggerated" and "flamboyant" appearance, however, is the bill's usage of the terms "sexual stimulation or gratification," "nudeness," "prurient interests," and "exotic nature." Disgust towards the stickiness of the performers' make-up implies the racialized sexualization of their bodies. This is reflected in the drag performer's association with "nudeness" and "exotic nature" that seem to "naturally" evoke "prurience" and "sexual stimulation and gratification."

Here, it is important to notice that, for something to be designated as "disgusting," the word itself does not have to be used. As Ahmed argues, "the word 'disgust' is itself a sticky sign, insofar as other signs stick to it" (Ahmed 2014, 93). In the context of the anti-drag-bills, the stickiness of disgust can take up the signs "nudeness" and "exotic nature." Ahmed takes the example of Darwin indicating his racist disgust towards an Indigenous man he describes as "naked," and analyses Darwin's racism. She argues that disgust towards perceived "nakedness" reflects a "risk of proximity" and the "possibility of desire" (88). This proximity through desire that the white man violently projects on the body is needed for the racist movement of taking distance through indulging in the feeling of disgust. However, disgust is not an actual description of the Indigenous body and does not find justification in the white body who "feels" disgust: It recalls the racist, colonial, historically reiterated, but contingent,

association of the Indigenous body with "dirt." The association of the body with dirt, or the sticking of the object of dirt to the body, is constructing a "border" for the white man – a border he needs in order to install his power over the ones he sees as "lower" (89). Ahmed therefore concludes that positions of dominance harness both disgust and sexualization to signify lower positions:

> Lower regions of the body – that which is below – are clearly associated both with sexuality and with 'the waste' that is literally expelled by the body. It is not that what is low is necessarily disgusting, nor is sexuality necessarily disgusting. Lowness becomes associated with lower regions of the body as it becomes associated with other bodies and other spaces. (89)

The dominance of the white, heterosexual gaze is reflected in the West Virginian bill where it does not even matter if the "performer" themselves want to "perform" for an audience or if it is the position of the observer who turns it into a "performance." It states: "regardless of whether or not performed for consideration." (SB253) Following Ahmeds analysis of disgust, it is the racist, heteronormative, and sexist imposition of violent disgust that produces not only proximity to the other body, but the stickiness of its skin to attach "exaggeration," "an exotic nature," and "nudeness" to it, all the while sexualizing and abjecting it to install its own power. It can be further argued that the discourse of anti-drag bills constructs especially the feminine drag queen as disgusting by putting her into "contact" (87) with bodies who are already – through a longer history of abjection – outcasted as "disgusting" in the public sphere, feminine sex workers, especially Black and Indigenous sex workers and sex workers of Color who are already exotified by the white gaze. However, the bills' implicit designation of some bodies as "disgusting," can target any feminine presenting person and especially Black feminine presenting people and feminine presenting people of Color in the public sphere, regardless of their actual profession. Overall, because of the alignment of sexist, homophobic, transphobic, colonial, and racist tropes, the bills' definitions are especially hostile towards the positions of Black gender variant/trans women, Indigenous gender variant/ trans women and gender variant/trans women of Color that are casted as "foreign" from the perspective of nationalist heteronormative/sexist white supremacy.

Elspeth Probyn's chapter on "Eating Disgust, Feeding Shame" (2003) helps to critically address the affective backdrop against which a collective white heterosexual gender conforming national body through the circulation of emotions is produced. Probyn's thoughts about disgust and shame can be used to complicate the ideological proximity created between the definitions in the anti-drag bills. According to Probyn, one's continuous relation to shame

and disgust can't be healed. Instead, one constantly shifts between being either ashamed/disgusted of one's own body or of other forms of bodies or body images. Acknowledging the constant shifting relation of shame/disgust between oneself and others reveals that bodies are likely to project0 their shame and disgust on others. At the heart of this argument lies the question of how shame and disgust separate communities from each other: To what extent does the normative framework of the white, heterosexual, national body rely on the construction of "shameful" bodies on the one hand and "disgusting" bodies on the other? Probyn argues that shame and disgust are working differently: Disgust violently wants to create distance from the "other" that already came too close. It is indeed the closeness to the "drag performer" that is already created in events like the drag story hour that the affective economy in "anti-drag" reacts to: The figure of the drag performer is explicitly rejected and outcasted from the public sphere.

However, as analyzed in the drag bills, the ideological proximity that is discursively produced between a drag performer, any other gender non-conforming person, and racialized immigrants is implicitly also, following Probyn, a source for the feeling of shame. In the promotion of a multicultural, liberal, queer-friendly nation, white heterosexual and gender normative people can still feel ashamed for these "other" bodies that might pass by as "one of us" and that are around "us" without necessarily seeing them in their "disguise." In feeling shame for these bodies, however, these white normative bodies would surrender to the proximity created to this "other" and the "other others" it carries with it: Having been too close to them can't be denied anymore. Similarly, white homonormative and transnormative subjects might have it easier to surrender to this closeness, precisely because of being more likely to be enabled to pass and to overcome being shamed by white gender heteronormativity. On the contrary, in the white, openly racist, heterosexual, nationalist anti-drag discourse, disgust provokes a disruption of the more subtle affect of shame and transforms it into open disgust. While shaming exposes the ashamed self to itself, disgust stays focused on the "other" and entering their bodily integrity: These "other" bodies should not come too close to "us," they must be violently rejected (disgust) through an entitlement of exposing them in their disguise and through sexualizing their bodies. The message of the affective economy of disgust is clear: Even *if* you pass by as one of "us," your disguise shall be revealed, and exposed in its "sexual and criminal nature." In a nationalist discourse that favors the white, heteronormative family, passing is not only dependent on passing as white, that is, on being read as white, but also on adhering to white heteronormativity. Thereby, the

anti-drag bills especially target positions in which public non-normative gender performativity is related to sexual, racial, and class positions that are already facing discrimination, criminalization, and sexualization in the public of the neoliberal nation-state. That means, as argued above, the affective economy of disgust especially targets feminine presenting Black people, Indigenous people, and people of Color. How does such a discourse "affect" the public and its regulations of normative gendered, sexual, racial, and class structures?

Ahmed argues with Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, that through the affect of sentimentality, national culture – here, the U.S. – sanitizes its public and private spaces to adhere to the limits of a white heterosexual fiction (Ahmed 2014, 147). With the specific affective formulations of gender, sexuality, and race produced in the anti-drag bills, what is publicly "acceptable" at the same time – through the affective economy of disgust – sexualizes and racializes non-normatively gendered bodies from the perspective of the white gaze – sexualized by virtue of homophobic, transphobic and racist tropes. The sentimental space of this national culture exotifies any performativity, though in different ways, that transgresses white heteronormativity publicly and puts it beyond national borders. Ahmed attests that white heteronormativity formulates norms that render only some bodies comfortable in public spaces (148). There is a mutual relation between bodies that always already "fit in" and shape these spaces, and public spaces that always already invite these bodies in and shape them: "Those spaces are lived as comfortable as they allow bodies to fit in; the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape of such bodies […]. The impressions acquired by surfaces function as traces of bodies." (Ahmed 2014, 148) As these impressions on the space are normative, and as these norms are compulsory, public spaces can make impressions on sexual and gender non-conforming people, and especially on sexual and gender non-conforming Black people, Indigenous people, and people of Color, in different forms of discomfort. The politics around non-normative sexualities, genders, and race therefore revolve around assimilation to these nationalized norms on the one hand and resistance against normativity itself on the other (Ahmed 2014, 148). What I will analyze in the next chapter is how the discourse of anti-drag and its affective economy shapes a "liberatory" counter-discourse of mainstream drag. The discourse I call "drag as queer", as I will argue, fails to address the interrelated homophobic, transphobic, racist and nationalist implications of anti-drag discourses by buying into the commodified neoliberal version of nationalizable mainstream drag. The neoliberal narratives that shape this form of drag not

only capitalize on diversity but fail to include what they claim to have included, if claimed at all.

4. "DRAG AS QUEER" – THE AFFECTS AROUND MAINSTREAM DRAG

4.1. Mainstream Drag as a Response to Anti-Drag

Famous drag queens like RuPaul have spoken out about the increase of anti-drag legislations in the U.S. I want to further former analyses of mainstream drag by looking at anti-drag legislations and by asking how they influence mainstream drag and trans discourses. As already indicated in the methodological chapter with Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," I suggest that there is some proximity between discourses criminalizing drag and discourses acting on this "repression." The idea of anti-drag bills being a form of "repression" that constricts the supposed freedom the LGBTQ community enjoys in the U.S. carries some ideological assumptions with it. As I will show, the assumption that the U.S. is a haven for LGBTQ people and needs to be protected from right-wing anti-liberals is informed by the ideology of the U.S. being an exceptional nation superior to others. While mainstream drag claims to radically disrupt heteronormativity in the U.S. and free the nation from its conservative history of repressed sexuality, drag's commercialized features have to be situated in neoliberal market structures and national ideologies. Matthew Goldmark calls *RuPaul's Drag Race* a form of "National Drag" (Goldmark 2015) in which "success" in the television show functions along narratives of success in the "U.S. market" (501). What seems like "an indefatigable work ethic mixed with humor, hardship, and spectacular display transforms the underprivileged initiate into a (super)model of success." (501) In his analysis of the use of language in *Drag Race*, he argues that it produces a discourse of U.S. centrism and exceptionalism. He attests that some contestants struggling to appeal to linguistic standards are marked as "outsiders to the nation" (Goldmark 2015, 502). This produces paradoxical relations between sameness and difference in and around the U.S. nation: While *Drag Race* presents the U.S. as being inclusive of differences, success in the show is determined by overcoming them – be it through assimilation or capitalization. According to Goldmark, *Drag Race* "therefore illustrates how unequal access to cultural economic and linguistic capital continues to be a drag on the flawless execution of this national fiction." (502) How exactly is this fiction produced in *Drag Race* and what are the implications of this?

The "language of inclusion" (Goldmark 2015, 506–7) *Drag Race* produces, operates in a framework that celebrates U.S. nationhood: "Despite the global aspirations of its call for change, *Drag Race* posits the United States as its unmarked and privileged locus; contestants strive to prove their value to a nation that has deemed them worthy of inclusion." (510) Goldmark describes this as a "critical paradox" that both centers the U.S. as the active integrator of gay subjectivity – towards which the drag queens are presumably working for – and as a nation that "embraced it gay subjects already." (510) However, when it comes to the portrayal of the U.S. as the most exceptional nation regarding queer rights, racial differences and process of racialization are erased. To uphold the image of the U.S.'s generosity, as Goldmark argues, *Drag Race* puts "'foreign' competitors" in the foreground while the discrimination they face is associated with the countries outside the U.S. that are devalued and portrayed as failing to integrate gay subjectivity (510). While *Drag Race* does thematize social, racial, gendered, and class differences, it puts them into the context of U.S. multiculturalism and capitalizes on them through neoliberal narratives of individual success – achievable no matter who you are and where you come from. Contestants are asked to sell their identity, no matter how their social position is constituted by systems of oppression and exclusion, in front of sponsors in the jury that rates their performances (509). Goldmark argues that "racial and economic divisions are necessarily forgotten under queer liberalism in order to abstract the US queer community into a coherent group that uniformly achieves integration based on individualism and merit." (507) In *Drag Race*, as Goldmark suggests, this can be seen in the way drag history is portrayed in one of the episodes, namely as "officially color blind and nationally unmarked, with a discursive 'us' that slides into the universalized United States." (507) While the narratives around and representations of drag always take up actual struggles, they fall into a framework that either highlights their individual overcoming or their pastness (507).

Following Goldmark's analysis of *Drag Race*, I want to analyze how the discursive patterns I detected in the anti-drag legislations influence *Drag Race*'s discourse around the U.S. inclusivity. I argue that, through opposing the "repressive" discourse of "drag is a crime," *Drag Race* not only reinforces its own nationalist framework but also reproduces language patterns of the same anti-drag discourses it seems to oppose. In an Instagram video (RuPaul [@rupaulofficial], 2023) that reacts on the anti-drag legislations, RuPaul states that "Drag queens are the Marines of the queer movement" (Tangcay 2023). In the video, she appears in front of a virtual American flag that is moving in the background while her own song

"American" is playing in the background. She looks straight into the camera and says the following:

> Hey, look over there. A classic distraction technique distracting us away from the real issues that they were voted into office to focus on. Jobs, health care, keeping our children safe from harm at their own school. But we know that bullies are incompetent at solving real issues. They look for easy targets so that they can give the impression of being effective. They think our love, our light, our laughter, and our joy are signs of weakness. But they are wrong because that is our strength. Drag Queens are the Marines of the queer movement. Don't get it twisted and don't be distracted. Register to vote so we can get these stunt queens out of office and put some smart people with real solutions into government. And by the way, a social media post has never been as powerful as a registered vote. (RuPaul [@rupaulofficial], 2023)

While RuPaul addresses crucial issues within the neoliberal economy of the U.S., like health care, her statement remains vague concerning the causes of these issues. Instead, the discourse she puts forward solely seems to point to the problem of having individual conservatist people in the government as well as the lack of people voting. All the while, the queer movement's and drag queens' "love", "light", "laughter", and "joy" are forms of "strength" that can be turned into shields against this individualized hostility: RuPaul interprets the anti-drag legislations as coming from "bullies" who are not doing anything to contribute to the effectivity of the nation. In contrast, "Drag Queens are the Marines of the queer movement", ultimately portraying them as serving the nation better than "stunt queens" – a term for people (especially gay men) who make their living and their life by engaging in "fraudulent" activities.[19] Thereby RuPaul suggests that the "men" currently in office are corrupting the nation, on the one hand by bullying drag queens, the ones defending the waters around the queer movement in the U.S. On the other hand, the stunt queens are distracting everyone from their own political responsibility of defending the nation's queer rights from within. Through their internal corruption, they are working against the "queer" border control performed by the drag queens. In other words, the individual "bullies" are not only harming the queer movement from within by depriving them of their rights and freedom but are also sabotaging the work of drag queens as defenders of the "queer" nation. This discursively reproduces the sexual and gender exceptionalism of the U.S.[20] However, at the same time, the drag queens as "Marines" are located in the liminal space of the sea. This reflects, as earlier mentioned, their paradoxical position in their own fight for "inclusion" on the land of America, also

[19] https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Stunt%20Queen

[20] The term "Marines" also recalls the Haditha massacre on November 19, 2005 during the U.S.'s imperial "Iraq war" where U.S. Marines deliberately killed 24 Iraqi civilians (Baran 2024).

highlighted by the lyrics of the song "American" that is played in the video's background: "Everybody came here wantin' to be free / New York to California, sea to shining sea." In this song, fight for inclusion is the way to become a real free "American":

> … I am American, American, Red, white, and blue / Am-Am-Am-Am-Am-American, American, American / I am American, American, just like you too / You-ou-ou, you got the right / Stand up for yourself, we've just begun to fight / Ain't no way we're going back in time / Forward to the future baby, yours and mine / Everybody came here wantin' to be free / New York to California, sea to shining sea … (RuPaul 2023, at 0:50–1:32)

Not only RuPaul herself spoke out but also some drag performers of *Drag Race* raised their voice against the recent legislations (Vasquez 2023). One of the participants of season 14, Kerri Colby, dedicated an essay to the increased hate against drag performers where she states her position as a Black drag queen who also identifies as a trans woman (Colby 2023). In her statement, she expresses how helpful it was to see *RuPaul's Drag Race* as a teen: "Seeing so many gay, trans and nonbinary people on television, doing what they love, gave me hope that I too could have a future living as my true self." (Colby 2023) She states that drag made her "discover my truth as a trans women." By reciting RuPaul's famous quote "We are all born naked and the rest is drag.", Colby offers a framework in which her gender presentation is highlighted in its performativity, that is, in the production of gender through the *constrained* repetition of norms. With this, she not only challenges *Drag Race*'s focus on the cis-male gay identity of its contestants and audience, but she also expands drag to a search for the self rather than individual success. In her analysis of anti-drag bills, she argues that the anti-drag bills are not necessarily a technique to distract people from other issues, but that they rather work along chains of associations that target specific members of the "community":

> These proposed bills and those like them across the country expose themselves as blatant attempts to attack and criminalize speech while continuing to marginalize "other" members of our community. They play on long-held anti-LGBTQ tropes and hurtful stereotypes that equate members of our community as dangerous. Bills like these create more stigma discrimination and ultimately violence against LGBTQ folks — particularly transgender and nonbinary people. (Colby 2023)

While I share her analysis of these drag bills targeting "other" people than only drag queens, especially trans people, I add that this targeting of "other others" is based on racist tropes and a racist nationalist framing of who belongs to the white heteronormative/sexist nation and who does not. However, as indicated in the analysis of Rupaul's answer to the anti-drag bills, exclusive forms of nationalism do not only apply to the anti-drag bills or other respective anti-

LGBTQ bills. As I will now argue in the following subchapter, the liberal take on the inclusion of transgender by the U.S. government – to which, according to the umbrella term "transgender", as argued in chapter 2.2., drag belongs – not only shares similar nationalist understandings of what it means to be "American" with the anti-drag bills, but it is also ready to appropriate the inclusionary discourse of mainstream drag for its purposes.

4.2. National Transgender Visibility

To analyze the nationalist framing of LGBTQ discourses and their relation to current anti-drag legislations, I will now look at Biden's "A Proclamation on Transgender Day of Visibility, 2024" (Biden 2024). Throughout this and the following subchapter, I will carve out the production of affects and the relation between (national) pride and (national) shame that connects LGBTQ visibility with nationalism. In his proclamation, Biden speaks from the perspective of the U.S. to acknowledge "transgender Americans" within the nation: "we honor the extraordinary courage and contributions of transgender Americans and reaffirm our Nation's commitment to forming a more perfect Union" (Biden 2024). The president utters his pride for the U.S. government's achievements for the "LGBTQI+ community":

> I am proud that my Administration has stood for justice from the start, working to ensure that the LGBTQI+ community can live openly, in safety, with dignity and respect. I am proud to have appointed transgender leaders to my Administration and to have ended the ban on transgender Americans serving openly in our military. I am proud to have signed historic Executive Orders that strengthen civil rights protections in housing, employment, health care, education, the justice system, and more. I am proud to have signed the Respect for Marriage Act into law, ensuring that every American can marry the person they love. (Biden 2024)

Similarly to RuPaul, Biden too speaks of ending "the bullying and harassment of transgender children and their families". He condemns the "extremists [who, L.K.] are proposing hundreds of hateful laws" that "attack our most basic American values: the freedom to be yourself, the freedom to make your own health care decisions, and even the right to raise your own child." (Biden 2024) The heightened rate of trans people committing suicide in 2023 he mentions is blamed on the "bullying and discrimination that transgender Americans face" (Biden 2024).

While the "epidemic of violence against transgender women and girls, especially women and girls of color" is acknowledged by Biden, each of these "attacks" are designated as "un-American", that is, they are breaking with the presumed consistency of the nation. In other

words, the ones committing these "attacks" are un-becoming American or have never been American by virtue of threatening the nation's values. Biden does not make a difference between racist attacks, that are without question very American, and attacks by the "extremists" that are most often part of local governments within the U.S. American citizenship and national belonging is here, on the one hand, marked as already having included "transgender." On the other hand, "transgender" is formulated as the condition of "Americanness."[21] This can be understood as "transgender" being omnipresent – literally every American can be transgender. However, the notion of "visibility" that this proclamation proudly celebrates, begs the question of what the conditions of visibility are: Either transgender means disappearing in the nation – already part of its fabric – or it means proudly coming out as transgender, as long as one is part of the whole LGBTQI+ community (for which drag claims to be a symbol), or working in Biden's Administration, or "serving openly in our military", or married. It doesn't matter if one is transgender – if one is already part of the nation or stepping up on its field. At the same time, "transgender" is defined in a way that is exceptional to the U.S. The attempts to make "more inclusive passports" relies on the idea of making the definition of "transgender" more inclusive for people without American citizenship. However, the discursive power of defining "transgender" citizenship along Americanness continues to rest in the hands of racist U.S. local governments and the Biden Administration. While Colby already expressed finding her "true self," the "real" freedom to be one's "real true self" needs to wait for "the Congress to pass the Equality Act, to codify civil rights protections for all LGBTQI+ Americans." (Biden 2024) Biden's formulation reflects the extent of individualization inherent in the nation-state's appropriation of and normative transformation of formulations that actually represent *non-normative* sexualities and genders in the U.S.

Acknowledging and re-narrating the violence towards trans people is a crucial part of trans activism (Westbrook 2020). Especially Black trans women are targeted by transphobic racist police and other forms of violence (Valentine 2007, 101–102). While Biden takes up this important analysis, the specific form of violence it evokes is not sufficiently addressed by acknowledging that "all transgender Americans" are "part of the fabric of our nation" (Biden 2024). On the contrary, this formulation sounds like a threat towards forms of resistance and

[21] Melamed implicitly suggests that "Americanness", if attached to neoliberal multiculturalism, obscures the racist structures implied in it (Melamed 2006, 2–3). Greene et al. argue that "Americanness" is a "racialized norm that is primarily applied to those racially identified as White" (Greene et al. 2020, 396).

justice movements that unravel the fabric of the nation. When Biden talks about "transgender people" being "entitled to, the same rights and freedoms as every other American, including the most fundamental freedom to be their true selves" this goes hand in hand with making America a "thriving" nation, formulated in the sentence before: "Whether serving their communities or in the military, raising families or running businesses, they [Transgender Americans, L.K.] help America thrive." The freedom to be truly oneself is equated to the freedom of running businesses. Through the framework of Melamed's neoliberal multiculturalism, such equation can be understood as "transforming economic freedoms into multicultural imperatives by rhetorical transference." (Melamed 2006, 16) This transformation along the lines of "multicultural inclusiveness" can be transferred to "transgender inclusiveness," that is only able to speak for "all transgender Americans" because it prescribes a postracist society that denies and invisibilizes racism.

The appropriation of "pride" in the framework of nationhood makes it theoretically necessary to look at the affective dimension of Biden's "transgender inclusivism" and "transgender Americanness." In the production of national affects, or rather in the production of the nation through affects, Divya P Tolia-Kelly (2020) suggests that it is necessary to acknowledge the consistent exclusivity of national belonging, even if it is only contingently and contextually produced:

> For Brubaker et al. (2006: 206), nation is conceived as a contingent and contextual discursive resource, not a continuous phenomenon. However, without being reductive about the agency of individual bodies or indeed collectives of communities, the 'discursive' positioning is not one available to all, at all times. There is a visual economy of recognition and misrecognition (Antonsich, 2018) that encounter 'others' as outside of the sensibilities or indeed moral geographies of nation and nationalism when evoked. Black bodies are violently erased every day (Erfani-Ghettani, 2015) through structures of policing (Dearden, 2017) the judiciary, mental health agencies and racial violence. Racialised figures are dehumanised and targeted as erasable. There is a persistence within the logics of signification that is reproduced, in formats of cultural expression in the public sphere. (Tolia-Kelly 2020, 589–90)

What I take from this is that, even if a dominant commodified and nationalized discourse of LGBTQI+ claims to either having overcome or to fight racial hierarchies within the community through securing their rights and ensuring their visibility, the affective production of the nation is not capable of challenging daily encounters of racial violence. In Colby's analysis, this problem is addressed through acknowledging the harm of "anti-LGBTQ tropes and hurtful stereotypes that equate members of our community as dangerous." As I have argued, not only trans and non-binary people are specifically targeted through these tropes,

but any form of gender and sexual non-conformity, specifically of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of Color. This targeting is evoked by a racialization, sexualization, and criminalization of non-normative gender presentation that is made hyper visible through affective economies of disgust. Disgust is precisely working through the association of differently targeted figures, symbols, and objects, as well as through their increased circulation in different contexts.

As already argued in 2.2., according to the institutionalized definition of "transgender," drag would fall under the term "transgender." The recognition of "transgender" individuals not only implies the distinction between non-normative gender identity and non-normative sexuality, as argued by Valentine. Moreover, it also rests on the assumption that, "to work toward eliminating violence and discrimination based on gender identity" (Biden 2024), it is enough to increase the visibility of transgender Americans and secure their needs through lawful recognition. Moreover, to establish a "nationwide suicide and crisis lifeline" for "any young LGBTQI+ person in need" isolates the issue of violence and discrimination from other structural issues. The "love" expressed in Biden's proclamation pinpoints the incorporation of "transgender" by the U.S. nation along an affective outburst of love: "You are loved. You are heard. You are understood. You belong. You are America, and my entire Administration and I have your back." (Biden 2024) By saying "You are America," the condition of the possibility for the nation to exist is not only the inclusion of trans people, but, and this is the issue at hand, the condition of the possibility for "transgender" to exist freely is the United States of America. If the neoliberal, multicultural, LGBTQI+-friendly national government needs to stay in power to limit the power of extremists and bullies that attack the image of an "all-inclusive" Americanness, then RuPaul's demand to vote "people with real solutions into government" is serving the same nationalist logic.

4.3. Shame vs. Pride

How can this nationalist logic be further understood through the dynamic relation between shame and pride? As already introduced in the first chapter, Sedgwick sees shame as an important factor in the transformative force of the performativity of identity. In a nationalized discourse of LGBTQI+, the notion of "pride" is tantamount to a discourse of "overcoming" shame that is attached to the abject position. However, shame implicitly continues to inform the notion of "pride" that calls for an assimilation to the ideologies of hegemonic discourses

of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. Following Sedgwick's understanding of the transformative force of shame, shame continues to disable some bodies from being performatively assimilated to white, gender and sexually normative ideals of the nation-state – *by virtue* of their "failed" overcoming of an embodiment of shame, that is, a "failure" of passing within the frameworks, practices, and definitions laid out by the nation-state. This passing needs to be further understood in terms of its racialization. Ahmed understands the function of passing as "a technology, which relates physical movement with identity formation: to pass through a space requires passing as a particular kind of subject, one whose difference is unmarked and unremarkable." (Ahmed 2004, 122) It can be said that the (white) national space is reborn through a self-shaming of the former exclusion of people of Color and through proudly praising itself for their present "inclusion." Thereby, such hegemonic discourses undermine how racism and affective economies of disgust continues to reproduce itself through the regulation of gender and sexual conformity, suppressing the gender and sexual diversity among communities of Color (Ferguson 2003, 14). The white-washed national discourses of passing (either passing as productive sexual/gender conforming citizen of Color or as productive white sexual/gender non-conforming citizen through the nation) are inherently excluding the position of non-passing, sexual and gender non-conforming Black people, Indigenous people, and people of Color. The specific public shaming of or abjection of this positions through disgust produce a body's hyper visibility and is central to critically address these hegemonic discourses.[22] The importance of shame to counter "Gay Pride" is also addressed by Muñoz in "'The White to Be Angry': Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag" (1997). In opposition to the "Gay Pride," Muñoz suggests a "gay shame day parade" (1997, 96). This parade would be an "antigay" critique of "white gay male normativity and its concomitant corporate ethos" (Muñoz 1997, 97). Davis' drag manages to tackle this critique by exposing the new form of closet gay male normativity has put itself into: This normativity is informing the investment in a specific closeted lifestyle that allows the white gay men to escape his age, change his appearances, and naturalize his "anatomy (physical, behavioral,

[22] As Frantz Fanon describes it in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle." (Fanon 2008, 88) The "infernal circle" is a feature of shame that Sedgwick describes as being "burningly aware" of one's individual skin. (Sedgwick 2003, 37) However, in what Fanon describes, racism and racialization make the skin itself the object of shame which produces an infernal circle: It does not matter if Fanon's skin color is made irrelevant or is highlighted, in the white spaces in which he moves it is potentially made to burn in shame by structures of whiteness. It can be argued that discourse of gay or trans "pride" tries to overcome shame induced by heterosexual, gender normative white spaces through forms of assimilation, but thereby does not take into account how shame is racialized, inherently not accounting for forms of shame felt by gay and/or trans BIPoC.

and socio-economic" (Muñoz 1997, 98). While homosexuality itself is carried out in pride, white gay male normativity also implicitly defines what is "shameful" and belongs to the closet in order to physically, behaviorally, and socio-economically "pass" in white spaces. How is the white gay male normativity, on which "gay pride" is based, connected to national discourses by virtue of determining what is "shameful," what is "disgusting", and what is "acceptable"?

Ahmed suggests that to analyze shame can help to make sense of the production of national belonging. Shame works on the one hand as an exposure of the (presumed) self to oneself and to others. On the other hand, shame works to conceal this exposure from others through masking the feeling of shame itself. (Ahmed 2014, 103–104) However, shame is only produced when the relation to the other, in whose eyes shame is felt, is desirable and loved (Ahmed 2014, 105). Importantly, shame moves in the realm of the visible, not only because one's prior concealment is removed in the moment of exposure, but also because one's own gaze on oneself has been dictated by the other's gaze: "The view of this other is the view that I have taken on in relation to myself; I see myself *as if I were* this other. My failure before this other hence is profoundly a failure of myself to myself. In shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other" (Ahmed 2014, 106). This other's gaze, or its imagination, must not only be hating or condemning difference (for instance non-normative sexualities or genders), but can also be loving and demanding sameness (for instance national belonging). While an individual's capacity to feel shame can produce a crack in the relation to the self, national shame is capable of "transform[ing] shame into an identity" (107–108) of national belonging. Thereby, national shame is lifting individuals from their capacity to feel guilt for a shameful past. However, this does not mean that the expression of (national) shame is capable of incorporating the "whole" past: "Despite its recognition of past wrongdoings, shame can still conceal how such wrongdoings shape lives in the present. The work of shame troubles and is troubling, exposing some wounds, at the same time as it conceals others." (Ahmed 2014, 102) This means that every recognition through shame is a misrecognition of something else. Ahmed suggests that national shame can work in two ways: Shame can be put on the nation through "illegitimate others" who are seemingly threatening the project of the ideal nation-state. Here, Ahmed brings the example of queers or asylum seekers (108). Otherwise, "the nation may bring shame 'on itself' by its treatment of others" (Ahmed 2014, 108). Ahmed brings the example of the nation being "exposed as 'failing' a multicultural ideal in perpetuating forms of racism" (108). The second form of shame "may even express

shame about its treatment of others who in the past were read as the origin of shame." (Ahmed 2014, 108) Ahmed suggests that it makes sense to analyze how the white subject incorporated by the nation utters this form of shame. In the following I will show how Biden as the president of the U.S. transforms the second form of shame into pride by virtue of appropriating queer and trans discourses acknowledgement of intersecting forms of violence.

Colby recounts the past of drag to position it against the present attacks against drag performers:

> In the U.S., an African American born into slavery, William Dorsey Swann, was the first-known person to identify as a "queen of drag." Swann survived slavery, racism and the Civil War, serving as a civil rights leader who was active in the underground queer community in Washington D.C. Swann risked it all not just for individual freedom, but for the liberation of so many others. Cut to the present, and drag performers are everywhere: they're a staple on reality television shows, appearing in mainstream movies and commercials, at city brunches, in library readings and more. The backlash to all of this queer visibility is a convenient distraction for politicians and right-wing extremists to fire up their base and not address the issues that truly impact people's daily lives. (Colby 2023)

The word "backlash" implies that queer and trans visibility has already been "everywhere" prior to the attacks by individual politicians and extremists. This can be understood in two ways: In visibility, there is on the one hand the bodily hyper visibility produced through having been shamed and being ashamed of oneself/being made to feel disgusted by others and oneself – both achieved by racialized gender and sexual normative regulations. On the other hand, there is the transformation of this hyper visibility into proud visibility nation-wide. At the same time, Colby hints towards other "issues that truly impact people's daily lives" and later gives an example of it, namely "gun violence." (Colby 2023) The issue of racism is only explicitly named in relation to the past narrative about the first drag queen while "gun violence" has become a metonymy for present forms of racism. Nevertheless, it gets clear that past forms of violence are still present and informed by the past but are not addressed by people in the government. Similarly, RuPaul paints the picture of unaddressed issues by virtue of this distraction tactic. It is important to acknowledge that on the one hand, drag raises these issues of violence, erasure, and exclusion and answers to it through forms of flamboyant visibility that acts on the public hyper visibility that racialized sexual and gender non-conformity is put in anyway. At the same time, this flamboyant visibility, as already argued, can be commodified, for instance through selling drag performances in "reality television shows, […] in mainstream movies and commercials, at city brunches" (Colby 2023). While it

is true that this commodification does not only allow more national visibility for drag performers, but explicitly for Black drag performers and drag performers of Color, it can be easily incorporated by the multicultural neoliberal nation state. If such forms of commodified visibility have the capacity to incorporate the "queer movement" itself and represent, as RuPaul said, its love, light, laughter, and joy, then these affects are at risk of being appropriated by the nation state.

Such forms of appropriation can be read as a symptom of visibility in multicultural neoliberal U.S. narratives on the one hand: Melamed argues that, in times of neoliberal multiculturalism, it is a common strategy of corporations and the nation-state to misuse empowering anti-racist terms (Melamed 2006, 13).[23] At the same time, as argued with Puar (2007), the U.S. invests in homonationalism, that is, the appropriation of the "lingua franca of gay liberation" (Puar 2007, 1) in nationalist and militarist frameworks of a "proud American empire" (Puar 2007, 1). The narrative of pride and love that RuPaul and mainstream drag produce – affectively intensified in the face of the hate of the right-wing – are appropriated by the nation state in Proclamations like Biden's that explicitly exceptionalize gender non-conformity by virtue of its inclusion into the military and Americanness in general. However, there are significant differences between the drag performers' and the president's investment in (national) pride: While Colby addresses present issues like gun violence, Biden's proclamation only speaks of discrimination, violence, and hate based on gender, and gender presentation, and not based on both gender and racism, or on other issues, like class and the respective inaccessibility to health care, and not the already granted "freedom" to get to it. I argue that, for such Proclamations to resonate with the image of the nation-state, it is necessary to isolate "transgender" from sexuality, race, class, ability and other factors that constitute different social positions. While these intersectional positions are vulnerable to different forms of structural violence and discrimination, criminalization, and sexualization, as well as exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation, the nationalist framework only holds together by virtue of dissecting them. This implies that the nation is already seen as having included "other" identities, apart from "transgender" – which also shows in the continuous interpellation of the LGBTQI+ community in Biden's Proclamation. However, this is based on the exclusion of race, racialization, and racism in addressing violence and discrimination.

[23] Melamed's example is the term "brown" that "emerged as an antiracist coalition- building term among people of color, a shorthand for racial pride and solidarity, short-circuiting restrictive 'black or white' notions of race relations." (Melamed 2006, 13) The positivity of the term got appropriated by the corporation UPS (United Parcel Service) in the marketing sentence "What can Brown do for you?" (Melamed 2006, 13).

If the inclusion of "transgender" into the nation by virtue of "feeling" pride follows the model of the inclusion of non-normative sexuality into the nation, both forms of inclusion are "demarcating the least welcome entrants into this national revelation of pride to be queer [and trans, L.K.] people of colour" (Puar 2007, 2). Puar's theorization of "transnormativity," as I elaborated on in 1.1., specifies how the inclusion of trans people follows the "well-established civil rights era teleology: first the folks of color, then the homosexuals, now the trans folk." (Puar 2017, 33) Indeed, Biden does not only appropriate transgender pride, but he implies that gay pride and racial pride have already been incorporated into the nation.

Even if past national failures are acknowledged, it is, according to Ahmed, a confirmation of the "subject's love for the nation." (Ahmed 2014, 108) Even if Biden addresses the hate and violence transgender Americans are facing, the acknowledgement of this failure happens in the name of the ideal nation. This nation already legally gives them – thanks to the Biden Administration – the rights they "deserve," implying that the government has been doing everything to ensure that the lack of transgender rights is a past issue. The present threats against these rights are declared un-American, and therefore belonging to a past the U.S. nation-state has already passed. For Ahmed, the nation "being moved" (2014, 102) by such past failures always need people who "witness" (109) through also feeling shame towards the nation's past. Ahmed argues that it is the feeling of shame in the face of a past failure, however, that produces the nation in the first place. Moreover, the "exposure" of a failure, as argued earlier, implies the existence of an ideal and "becomes the ground for a narrative of national recovery" (109) towards this ideal. While Biden speaks for the ideal nation that has already done a lot to include "transgender Americans", he invites every American to "witness the past injustice through feeling 'national shame'" (108). By virtue of feeling national shame, Americans are, in Ahmed words, "aligned with each other as 'well-meaning individuals'" (Ahmed 2014, 108). In the Proclamation, Biden acknowledges that "There is much more to do." (Biden 2024) and implies that the national ideal – "civil rights protections for all LGBTQI+ Americans" – is ahead of time. It is through witnessing the "past" – a "past" turned into "past" through centering a future national ideal – that shame is turned into a form of "reconciliation" (Ahmed 2014, 108). This reconciliation even allows for the feeling of pride to arise. As already cited, Biden is proud of having overcome these past failures through him signing documents that secure (some) transgender rights. Even if transgender Americans have been and are struggling, the nation is witnessing these past failures. It is time to join the feeling of pride they are (presumably) indulging in – thanks to us being witnesses to us

shaming ourselves. Biden is not only asking Americans to witness this on "Transgender Day of Visibility," but "call[s] upon all Americans to join us in lifting up the lives and voices of transgender people throughout the Nation" (Biden 2024).

Ahmed argues that the performativity of shame and pride involves addressing others who can align themselves with the "we" implied in acknowledging national accomplishments or failures. However, only some others can align themselves with the ideal implied in the utterance of shame/pride towards the past failure of disregarding "transgender." Some addressees can even align themselves with the nation if they continue to "fail" to live up to the ideal of accepting "transgender Americans." Ahmed argues that the nation's ideals has often already "taking some bodies as its form and not others." (Ahmed 2014, 109) In the case of Biden's proclamation, the addressee on the one hand takes the form of "all Americans," that is, all non-transgender Americans, who become responsible for the inclusion and tolerance of "transgender Americans." On the other hand, "all transgender Americans" themselves are addressed. Both non-transgender and transgender addressees are asked to align themselves in a "we" that transcends the differences between "all Americans", "transgender Americans", "transgender leaders", "transgender youth", "transgender children and their families" "transgender women and girls, especially women and girls of color", "the LGBTQI+ community." The question is who cannot align themselves in this "we."

It is important to say that the content of the nation's ideal is dependent on who "read[s it] as absent or present, or as having been failed or achieved, in the emotions of shame and pride." (Ahmed 2014, 109) If liberal LGBTQI+ discourses are becoming an aligned witness of Biden's national shame turned into pride for the ideal nation, they make themselves complicit in the nationalization of queer and trans struggles. In both RuPaul's address to the voters, Colby's essay, and Biden's Proclamation, there is – in different ways – the deflection from a shameful racist and queer- and transphobic "past" (that is a present, especially because of the U.S. immigration policies) and the focus on a proud postracist, multicultural, queer-and trans-friendly present. However, this proud present is under threat by the hate, discrimination, and violence of "others" who – by virtue of their actions or prior to their actions – don't belong to the American nation in which queer and trans pride is representing the freedom of everyone to be one's true self, no matter what identity one holds. Following my analysis of the relation between shame and pride, I conclude that it is the affective language itself that is producing the ideal of an "all-inclusive" U.S. nation-state and its fulfillment – but always in the terms

defined by the government and, as already argued, its incorporation of neoliberal narratives of individual success and inclusion. This also shows in the way the anti-drag bills and other anti-LGBTQ bills stemming from *within* the government are understood as un-American, as an exception of the rule: The rule of Americanness that offers freedom, equality, and safety for everyone – worthy of being "American."

CONCLUSION: QUEER AS ANTI-NATION

> *Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred.*
>
> – Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender* (2004b, 3)

After analyzing the discourse of "drag as crime" and "drag as queer" separately, I want to concludingly synthesize the analyses of both discourses in the following last part of my thesis. What can be drawn from an analysis of contemporary discourses of mainstream drag and trans against the backdrop of anti-drag/trans discourses? What is the relation between the drag queen becoming a central figure for "the queer movement" and becoming a figure of its respective criminalization? I have shown that the analysis of contemporary mainstream discourses around drag can not only focus on gender and sexual non-conformity without looking at how capitalist economic structures allow for the diversification of racial and racializing discourses and how, in turn, the nation-state suppresses these diversifications by virtue of racial and racialized exclusions. In chapter 2, I analyzed the historical relation between "drag" and "trans" and the major discursive shift from a formulation of non-normative sexual identities to a formulation of non-normative gender identities. This shift resulted in the implantation of the category "transgender" that replicated the existing racial and class exclusions within white-centered homosexual subcultures. However, in a nationalist framework of the universal white citizen and in selling drag as the representation of "the queer movement," the proximity of "drag" and "trans" is troubling: Any association of "transness" with the flamboyance of drag jeopardizes the integration of the (white) transnormative citizen into the nation and into the neoliberal market structures of the U.S. I conclude that it is this troubling proximity that is ideologically used by anti-drag bills to criminalize and sexualize any "otherness" deviating from white heteronormative citizenship

that tries to pass through the nation. The analysis of anti-drag discourses revealed, however, that especially sexual and gender non-conforming Black people, Indigenous people, and people of Color, as Ahmed formulates it, are construed as bringing shame "onto" the nation (Ahmed 2014, 108). This criminalization, as already argued, works through an affective economy of disgust that sexualizes and racializes sexual and gender non-conformity. This is why, in the analysis of the language of the anti-drag discourse, there is a discomforting possibility of addressing the exposure of the racialization of gender and sexual non-conformity: Addressing the racist affective economy of disgust aligning drag performers, trans people, Black, Indigenous, and people of Color, and racialized immigrants can disrupt the nationalist fiction of "illiberal" white heteronormative gender conformity on the one side and "liberal" homonormativity, homonationalism and white transnormativity on the other. The analysis of anti-drag makes it necessary to look at the global relations between nationhood, gender, sexuality, race, racialization and class. Because the national politics of gender and sexuality already imply racial and class exclusions while capitalist formations keep on producing new racialized and classed formations, it is 1. necessary to further analyze the implications of anti-drag discourses' racialization of gender and sexual non-conforming immigrant bodies as a threat to the nation-state, and therefore "outside" of it. 2. It is necessary to look at how U.S. sexual and gender exceptionalism is not only reinforced by mainstream drag and trans discourses, but how it manifests in present military operations, neo-/settler-/colonialism, biopolitical and necropolitical regulations, and capitalist destructions globally.

In anti-drag bills' distortion of what is – in mainstream LGBTQI+ discourses – understood as gender *or* sexual *or* racial "identity," there lies a challenge of applying the concept of "intersectionality." This is why I suggest that affect theory can help to address how this distortion affects mainstream LGBTQI+ discourses themselves and makes them, in an attempt to counter the bills, reproduce an exceptionalism inherent in racialized national politics of gender and sexuality that, again and again, open fire against the oppressed within and outside the U.S. To open this challenge for future analysis, I address the open-endedness of what Jasbir Puar calls "affect analyses":

> While dismantling the representational mandates of visibility identity politics that feed narratives of sexual exceptionalism, affective analyses can approach queernesses that are unknown or not cogently knowable, that are in the midst of becoming, that do not immediately and visibly signal themselves as insurgent, oppositional, or transcendent. (Puar 2007, 204)

Rather than falling into the traps of representational national politics of visibility, perfected in Proclamations like Biden's on "Transgender Day of Visibility," my affect analysis pointed towards what is concealed by the nation – the nation that praises itself for proudly addressing its shameful past and its present hateful un-American enemies: Concealed are structural issues of daily racism, supported by neoliberal racial capitalism, producing the biopolitics of health care, the necropolitics of extractivism, the violence of the border regime, the war and genocide waging colonial and settler-colonial global forces, and other conditions that make the U.S. in collaboration with other settler-colonial nation-states like israel what it is: Deadly. How can unknown queernesses that resist this concealment be approached through further affective analysis?

To understand the disavowal of certain affects in liberal LGBTQI+ discourses, I follow Sedgwick's problematization of "strategies" that try to get rid of shame: "therapeutic or political strategies aimed directly at getting rid of individual or group shame, or undoing it, have something preposterous about them: they may 'work' – they certainly have powerful effects – but they can't work in the way they say they work." (Sedgwick 2003, 62) It is these "other" ways in which shame is working that I am interested in. To what extent does shame continue to inform formulations of pride, celebration, and fearless visibility? To answer this question, I recall Probyn's understanding of the relation between shame and disgust. It is likely that the othered body and the other others who are produced as disgusting in the discourse of "anti-drag" are feeling shame or disgust towards themselves. Feeling ashamed or disgusted for one's body not only implies the shaming or disgust of others towards one's body – them having been too close to "me" – but also one's own proximity to one's body. How can this heightened awareness of one's own body be incorporated into what Probyn calls a "corporal politics" (Probyn 2003, first page)? Rather than expanding the affective field of body pride, Probyn suggests that the ones who are ashamed or disgusted of other bodies, in turn, can be shamed for depriving these bodies of their possibility to mind one's own business without being made hyper visible.

Affects are, again, not understood as psychic attributes, but rather as social formations that have the power to shape the perceptions of the structures of reality. Analyzing the discourses of mainstream drag and trans through the affective dynamics of (national) shame and (national) pride allowed to acknowledge the exclusivity produced by these discourses. I have shown that incorporating affect into the analysis of drag discourses exposes their power to shape identity formations through drawing a line between "shameful," "disgusting" and

"acceptable" bodily appearances. Such identity formations have heightened exclusionary effects for bodies who are already facing shame-inducing narratives or narratives of disgust about their bodies. The notion of "pride" in mainstream drag as well as national transgender discourses, while countering the anti-LGBTQI+ bills, work discursively to suppress the broader implications of gender, sexual, racial and class intersections. In light of these discourses, the unknown queernesses in the anti-state of becoming are the ones that are not appropriable by the nation-state, but rather penetrate, threaten, distort and disrupt the nation and are, by virtue of their inability to represent and be represented by the nation, labeled as "terrorists," "public enemies," or "deviants." However, after analyzing both "illiberal" and "liberal" discourses of gender and sexuality, I conclude that what terrorizes the nation are not the queernesses ungraspable by the nation, but the structures informing the circulation of affects: Affects that make it possible for both "illiberal" anti-drag bills and "liberal" LGBTQI+ discourses to exist within, incorporate, and speak for the same violent terror nation-state of the U.S.

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