

**Queering The Migrant Experience: Gay Filipino Workers'
Performance of Gender and Sexual Identities in Bangkok**

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The Philippine migration scholarship heavily focuses on heteronormative issues that depict the migrant workers as heterosexuals. Due to this trend, there is a scarcity of studies on overseas Filipino workers who identify as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) Community. Hence, this qualitative research focuses on eleven documented Filipino workers in Thailand who are males assigned at birth and identify as gay homosexuals. Individual informal interviews were employed to investigate how they practice their non-normative gender and sexuality, given their multiple yet intersectional social identities in a country with vibrant queer cultures. It also probes the relationship between the queer Filipino migrant laborers and the Thai capital Bangkok's queer spaces and how they influence one another. By drawing my analyses on queer theory to simultaneously engage the three disciplines of sexuality, spaces, and migration, the research exposes the critical role of queer spaces in the formation and confirmation of the migrants' gender and sexual identities through their experience in finding acceptance and belongingness as well as satisfying their romantic and sexual pursuits in both physical and online gay-oriented spaces. The investigation led to a realization that their presence in these

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine migration scholarship heavily focuses on heteronormative issues that depict the migrant workers as heterosexuals. Due to this trend, there is a scarcity of studies on overseas Filipino workers who identify as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) Community. Hence, this qualitative research focuses on eleven documented Filipino workers in Thailand who are males assigned at birth and identify as gay homosexuals. Individual informal interviews were employed to investigate how they practice their non-normative gender and sexuality, given their multiple yet intersectional social identities in a country with vibrant queer cultures. It also probes the relationship between the queer Filipino migrant laborers and the Thai capital Bangkok's queer spaces and how they influence one another. By drawing my analyses on queer theory to simultaneously engage the three disciplines of sexuality, spaces, and migration, the research exposes the critical role of queer spaces in the formation and confirmation of the migrants' gender and sexual identities through their experience in finding acceptance and belongingness as well as satisfying their romantic and sexual pursuits in both physical and online gay-oriented spaces. The investigation led to a realization that their presence in these spaces became a contributing factor in the intensification of existing issues on the function and significance of gay spaces, such as its heterosexualization and reinforced gay audience segmentation while homonormalization is happening in heterosexual spaces, which may all have a serious impact on the future of queer cultures that Thailand had cultivated for more than half a century. This observation banks on the idea that although space is helpful in an individual's identity formation, an individual is basically the creator of space because it is social. Queering the migrant experience presents the importance of gender and sexuality as identities in the migration process as the performance of these identities by migrant laborers allows them to be molded by the spaces they consume and, on the one hand, be active stakeholders that influence and manufacture the meanings of these spaces. Hence, being gay, homosexual, and migrant workers are fundamental roles in the flourishing of sexual identities, practices, and communities.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

With nearly ten percent of its population (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022), the Philippines ranks ninth globally and first in Southeast Asia, with the highest number of citizens employed outside their countries of origin (Migration Data Portal, 2022). In this figure, females occupy 55.8 percent of the total Filipino labor migrants (Medina, 2019), a dominance held since 1981, the earliest recording available for the Philippine government agency. Consequently, the labor migration literature that centers on Filipinos has become heavily focused on female migrant workers resulting in the feminization of migrant scholarship and contributing to its heterosexualization (Manalansan IV, 2006). For instance, the ethnographic research about Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong by Constable (1997 & 2007) and those based in Los Angeles and Rome by Parreñas (2001 & 2005) paid attention to the migrants' transnational issues of family relations, parenting, and maternal care because of the socially ascribed gender roles of women being wives and mothers, which painted migration as a heteronormative movement (Lewis & Mills, 2016). Apart from the propagation of stereotypes among female migrant workers, the heteronormative discussions on migration caused an oversight not only on those cisgender heterosexual male Filipinos but especially the ones who identify as part of gender and sexual minorities whose lives, experiences, and identities are all intertwined in the process of migration (Manalansan IV, 2006).

Due to the development of poststructuralist ideas in the late 20th century, research dedicated to merging sexuality and migration has been undertaken to deconstruct the dominant heteronormative notion of migration literature. A part of this effort was exploring the migrant experiences of queer individuals, specifically those who identify as lesbian, gay, and transgender, showing the significance of labor migration to their identity development (Cantú Jr., 2009; Carillo, 2004) and the challenges that they encounter at work because of their gender and sexuality (Lewis & Mills, 2016). The Philippines still has limited studies on Filipinos in the diaspora who defy the

heterosexual and traditional gender norms (Wright & Villaflor, 2019) due to the lack of government data that negatively impacts the prevalence of academic studies that center on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other non-normative gender and sexual identities or LGBTQ+ migrant workers specifically in doing quantitative research (Wright & Villaflor, 2019). The current data presentation model published by the Philippine government ignores other gender markers because of its usage of sex disaggregation. Due to the binary categorization of male and female, migrant populations who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community are not officially counted and recognized, which creates several concerns. International organization LGBT capital (2018) estimated the LGBTQ+ population in the country at 6.9 million. The absence of official government records about LGBTQ+ migrant workers makes their participation in international labor harder to acknowledge; hence, the issues and challenges they face are not being discussed, resulting in the deficiency of interventions that could have addressed their plight (UNDP & USAID, 2014). In this regard, this endeavor aims to enrich the domain of migration studies that focuses on LGBTQ+ migrant workers' lives by choosing gay homosexual documented overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as research subjects as a way to further understand their situations given their multiple subject positions. Therefore, the research seeks to examine how they, as gay homosexual labor migrants, perform their queer identity and sexuality in their host country.

Contemporary research outputs do not directly attempt to answer this inquiry as they focus on gay men in feminized occupations (Panopio, 2010), internal satisfaction at work (Wright & Villaflor, 2019), and labor rights activism (Lai, 2021) which were all deliberately contextualized in the realm of workplace and employment. Some mentioned the angle of sexual liberation yet were not specifically further elaborated on due to the different primary directions of their respective studies (Galang, 2015; Panopio, 2010). There is also an apparent trend of situating the research either in the Global North or in countries with so much higher income level index than the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries.

This trend also poses a gap that this study wants to fill by setting the research within the Southeast Asian region. Thailand is a sensible area of research as the

destination country of gay homosexual OFWs because it satisfies previously mentioned gaps and because Bangkok, Thailand's capital, is a gay mecca (Dacanay, 2011) and gay cultures are very much alive in the city known as the gay capital in the region. In fact, in 2019, the Tourism Authority of Thailand announced that Thailand was aiming to be the world's top tourist destination choice for LGBTQ+ travelers (Phataranawik, 2019). Hence, promoting Thailand as a gay-friendly country with gay spaces scattered, especially in Bangkok, is expected to attract more LGBTQ+ travelers. With this reputation and strengthened positioning as a safe country for queer people, it does encourage not only LGBTQ+ tourists to come but also those queer employment seekers (Ulla & Pernia, 2022). On the other hand, there is a significant increase in intra-regional migration from the Philippines to Thailand that is yet to receive a thorough academic investigation (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020).

The Department of Employment in Thailand cited the Philippines as the top source of skilled workers and technicians among other countries in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Skilled workers are those in teaching, management, engineering, architecture, and business. In 2017, there were 14,830 regularly employed Filipinos in Thailand which does not include more or less 4,000 who work irregularly, according to the Philippine Embassy in Bangkok. This influx of Filipino professionals is despite the absence of a bilateral labor migration agreement, unlike the Mekong countries comprised of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, which have a Memorandum of Understanding with Thailand (Novio, 2018). The policy of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001 about opening Thailand to teaching professionals in preparation for ASEAN economic integration may have made the country attractive to highly skilled Filipinos looking for jobs outside the Philippines (Novio, 2018).

It is only rational that the massive number of Filipino educators in Thailand led scholars to study their reasons for choosing to teach in a foreign land, the struggles to ensure their employment contracts, and how Filipino teachers face racial and gender-based discrimination in teaching English (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020). One study that partly had gay Filipino teachers in Thailand as informants looked at how they showed resilience as educators amid difficulties at work (Wright & Villaflor, 2019).

Meanwhile, Filipinos aside, LGBTQ+ migrant studies situated in Thailand majorly revolved around sex work, HIV/AIDS, and irregular or “low-skilled” migrant laborers (Utthasit, 2018; Villar, 2017). Although this help reveals various issues of queer migration, there are caveats that we must understand. Examining the migrants inside the domain of employment only reinforces the idea of them being a laborer and nothing more. In addition, the recurring themes about LGBTQ+ labor migrants in Thailand sustain the stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ people for engaging in illegal activity or continuing their portrayal as “low-skilled” workers. Because of these reasons, this research aims to present gay homosexual migrant workers as skilled professionals, as people with an agency of their sexuality, and dignify them for their contribution to elevating the migration scholarship (Paisley & Tayar, 2016).

Upon enumerating the existing concerns about the landscape of migrant studies and the current condition of Philippine-Thailand labor migration, this research seeks to investigate how gay homosexual OFWs in Thailand practice their non-normative gender and sexuality given their multiple yet intersectional social identities as gay homosexual foreign employee based in a country with vibrant queer cultures. It further probes the relationship between these gay homosexual OFWs in Thailand and space. I believe that host societies become not only a place for employment but an arena where queer migrant workers may restrict or freely live and express their identities; therefore, instead of looking solely at their working conditions, there is a need to examine how the host environment impact their lived experiences as queer labor migrants. This study asks:

How does the performance of gender and sexuality of gay homosexual OFWs contribute to the production and reproduction of queer spaces in Thailand, and what are the impacts of those spaces on their experiences in Thailand?

1.2 Literature Review

The Gay Identity

Although the notion of identity can be framed in multiple contexts and understanding, it is generally described as an individual’s belonging or separation from other

individuals' living positions (Hughes, 2006) based on various social, economic, and cultural elements that have an impact in the shaping of someone's identity such as class, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, nationality, gender, sexuality, and the like. Identities are not innate; they are constructed socially and performed repeatedly through everyday practices, consumer behavior, and personal preferences (Butler, 1990 & 1999; Hughes, 2006; Mitchell, 2000). With these exhibitions, a person can live their identity alongside asserting their existence and position in society (Britton, 1991).

Sexuality is considered one of the essential dimensions in forming one's living identity, especially for gay men (Bell, 1991). Thus, despite the diabolical scientific and academic discussions on homosexuality in the last century that basically revolved around sexual behavior, it has turned into a basis of sexual identity (Hughes, 1997), which triggered the introduction of the gay identity a part of modern sexuality (Adam, 1990). Gay identity now encompasses sexual, cultural, and definitely social relations because aside from the same-sex sexual desire and behavior, gay identity represents a particular system of beliefs, attitudes, rules, and norms attributed to the dynamic and politicized gay culture that results in the advancement of the identity (Herdt & Boxer, 1992). Furthermore, the gay identity is a subject and object of space, also a social product, that makes the sites an essential factor in the construction and affirmation of identity (Cox, 2002) by engaging with others in leisure activities happening in gay concentrated spaces like bars, clubs, and even domiciles and other public sites (Monterrubio, 2009) which has been a struggle.

Gay Space

Conversations on queer space are more commonly anchored on studying gay spaces because gay demography and gay-associated establishments are more visible, tolerated, and well-promoted in urban areas. The virtual monopolization came as an issue of representation when geographers described queer space as a space of opposition of the gays, lesbians, and queers to the space that became heterosexual in form and in practice which undermines other sexual identities like transgender, non-binary, bisexual, and even intersex in the discourse, as well as the importance of how classed and raced these identities, can be (Oswin, 2008). Furthermore, using queer space and gay space

interchangeably becomes problematic because it dismisses the foundation of queer theory that refuses the heterosexual-homosexual binary to which gay as an identity is ascribed according to the politics being carried by the concept of homonormativity (Browne, 2006; Duggan, 2002; Nash, 2005). It also disregards the basic definition of queer, which is not limited to denoting gender and sexual minorities but harps on identity politics to include other social identities as dimensions of oppression that need to be considered. In short, queer is a term to indicate a submissive position due to the circumstances created by the discursive environment (Halperin, 1995; Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, it is essential to remember that queer space is not only about one sexuality or purely sexuality, as other social identities must also be considered because those are not mutually exclusive alongside the exhibition of transgression in various ways to resist both heteronormativity and homonormativity.

Gay Space and the City

It is inevitable that scholars who have dedicated their research to gay spaces banked on their understanding of queer space as a progressive, resistant, colonized, and dissident domain. In this regard, the succeeding literary discussion of either gay or queer space in this chapter becomes a reflection of both because even though they are called differently, the commonalities as a functional concept were evident. Nevertheless, for the sake of transparency, this research kept the terms that were used by previous researchers in defining queer space or gay space.

Dacanay's work on two gay saunas was significant. The clarification on the difference between place and space was important for Dacanay to define gay space. Inspired by William Leap's (1999) distinction that place is an accessible terrain while space is constructed, situated, and claimed landscape, Dacanay (2011) viewed gay space as "created and owned by actors who transgress the heteronormative operations and functions of localities in the urban geography, carving out queer zones in the heterotopic architectures of the city through moments of rebellion and claiming territories for the expression of various transgressive sexual behaviors." (p. 101). In this definition, while there was an emphasis on the role of the actors in producing a gay space, we can observe that there is a lack of characterization of the actors being referred

to, further elaboration on what constitutes transgressive sexual behaviors and what kind of ownership is needed. Despite this, we can only assume that the actors may mean gay men or masculine men who desire other men for sexual and/or romantic engagement because Dacanay came up with the description for research with Thai gay men in determining the strategies and negotiations to perform their gay self that occur inside the gay saunas. In connection to this, transgressive may be equivalent to homosexual acts because of the sexual orientation gay men usually identify with. The requisite of ownership and creation to consider a space a gay space poses a risk of exclusion as establishments primarily catering to gay customers may not be owned and managed by gay entrepreneurs themselves. Thus, Dacanay explained that those are also included because usual spaces like gay bars and gay saunas and establishments promoted in gay media also became cis-heterosexual persons' business endeavors. This is considered an impact on Thailand's economic growth in the queer scene. I guess Dacanay included the word created and owned because Dacanay was able to research the owner of Babylon, who is a gay man.

At a glance, it seemed like Dacanay's definition is not aligned with Chauncey's (1996) belief that queer space does not exist because the latter regards accessibility by queers alone as enough to queer space but not to make the space queer. Queering a space means the performance rejecting its established purposes which involves heteronormativity without the intention of dominance or subjecting the whole space as a queer space. Hence, by just fracturing and rupturing, queering becomes moments of transformation while the sites are the platform for resistance that transcend the ghetto image of queer space into public domains (Avery, 2016). Another thing to be mindful of about queering is the disruption not only of heterosexual space but of gendered, classed, and racialized space (Puar, 2002). I believe Dacanay sees the performance of queering as an opportunity to create and own the space in the long run, not only in the sense of being a commercial establishment, and Dacanay looks at these principles within the context of a bigger-scale of space like the city. Through the presence of queer spaces, geographer Lawrence Knopp (1995) believes the eroticization of metropolitan cities is practiced because these spaces reflect the modern urban life experiences such as anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and authority, which make the cities both

shifting signifiers and signifiers of shifting desires. Chauncey's idea is the first step to situating a queer group. At the same time, Dacanay pushes the boundary of rebellion to a broader layer of possession to locate the queer group with much freedom and security. However, Dacanay also echoes Chauncey's belief that a gambit is necessary to execute queer acts based on Michel de Certeau's (1984) framework of tactics which Dacanay described as appropriation. Because a gay space is a terrain, it does need a formally recognized concrete establishment to perform its function in appropriating dimensions from its heteronormative role. Appropriation can happen through "cruising" or "male to male erotic rendez-vous" (Dacanay, 2011) in public toilets in shopping malls and public parks such as Lumpini Park and Saranrom Park (Atkins, 2012). Therefore, gay spaces are not solely those that are created specifically for gay people's consumption but those that are transformed and accessed by gays to practice their sexuality.

LGBTQ+ Migrants in their Host Society

As migration and social norms are mutually constitutive (Lewis & Mills, 2016), the movements of people can shape and reshape both the home and host societies. Although universally, this phenomenon is visible whether queer or non-queer migration, I will take this opportunity to zoom in on the impacts LGBTQ+ migrants have done intentionally or unintentionally. This sector of migrant workers produces spaces that function as community stages for the performance of the workers' culture that is different from their nationality-dependent identified migrant community and the established community for queer people in their host society (Manalansan IV, 2006). In this way, they can proactively deal with and evade possible marginalization that can happen even within groups of similar gender but different nationalities and the same nationality yet have diverse gender identities. LGBTQ+ migrants also form non-normative family arrangements to redesign the dominant configuration of social networks. Lastly, in relation to what I mentioned above about the critical role of the host society's space for the performance of gender and sexuality can contribute to the identity fragmentation of labor markets where those who have similar social identities such as gender may opt to go to countries or work in companies where they are sure to interact with the same-gender identity that eventually creates a feeling of belongingness (Lewis & Mills, 2016).

1.3 Conceptual Framework

This research draws the analysis on queer theory to simultaneously engage the three disciplines of sexuality, spaces, and migration, which are all related to the multiple subject positions of gay homosexual OFWs. Queer theory is believed to be a product of the post-structuralist movement because it rejects structuralism's notion of identities as naturally designed and settled (Evangelista, 2013). As it was initially applied to probe prevalent ideation and understanding of gender and sexuality, the queer theory was heavily framed within the discursive and performativity trends. The discursive trend was initiated by Michel Foucault (1978) in the book *History of Sexuality*, where Foucault traced how acceptable norms and given knowledge changed in the course of history, which affected the diffusion of societal discourses, particularly about sexuality and body. Meanwhile, Judith Butler (1990 & 1999) introduced the theory of performativity. Butler argued that identity is socially constructed and gender is performative because its existence is through a series of acts that can be manufactured, continued, and discontinued by prominent discourses and cultures. These trends pave the way for queer theory's conceptualization and flourishing as a social science framework.

The term queer theory was first mentioned by Teresa de Lauretis in the introduction of the 1991 *Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, which was also used as the edition's main title to reflect the relationship of the collected essays with the newly coined theory. de Lauretis (1991) described queer theory primarily in two ways; first is the deconstruction of learned and existing discourses and constructed silences, and second is the conceptualization of new and emerging discourses that challenge discursive construction. Hence, queer theory is an act of transgression, a form of resistance against the established distinctions, social norms, and cultural homogenization to address the problem of representation in contemporary sexual discourses. Queer theory encourages the construction of discursive horizons to remodel the terms of sexualities by challenging the heterosexual-homosexual binary and advocating for gender fluidity (Giesecking, 2008). In this regard, queer theory no longer considers homosexuality as the opposite and marginal form of sexuality against heterosexuality because homosexuality can be reconceptualized in different ways through cultural and social

processes and spaces. In contrast, the formation of sexuality is not dependent on heterosexuality.

de Lauretis' presentation of the theory's tenets posited an opportunity to look at other social identities of gays and lesbians to better examine the impact of their sexualities in their lives, particularly in their decision-making, thought processes, and socio-political relations. This is to prevent seeing lesbians and gays as a homogenous group of people because of their sexuality; therefore, queer theory suggests confronting inquiries about the relationship of sexuality not only to gender but to the person's race, class, ethnicity, culture, generation, and socio-political formation. By investigating the intersectionality of their social identities, queer theory can continually question and identify the ruling socio-political system and prevailing culture because, in any given time and society, there will always be a marginalized position (Tattelman, 1997). Thereby, the function of queer theory is to represent the ostracized and disregarded subjects as a reminder that dominance is inevitable and there is a need to resist. Even though de Lauretis did not attempt to define queer, de Lauretis viewed queerness as an act of social change because, again, queer theory's purposes are reinvention and intervention to provide another way of living our sexualities by defying the discursive sphere.

The works of Jen Jack Giesecking (2008) on the theory figured that it is a way to fight homophobia and transphobia because it provided rights activists and academic scholars with avenues to converse about identity formation disregarding the heterosexual-homosexual binary. For Giesecking, queer theory is a discourse model as it seeks to disrupt heteronormativity, both its assumptions and privileges, while continuously politicizing the ways of theorizing identity, most especially by recognizing its fluidity and instability, which makes the theory a framework of ideas as well. Using fluidity as a framework, Giesecking argued that queer theory is not solely focused on gender or sexuality studies per sé but can be used to examine the politics of ethnic, class, and racial identities because these too are fluid and must not be viewed as rigid subjects hence the phrase "queering the subject."

In a nutshell, queer theory is a product of post-structuralist principles, which has been capitalized by scholars to “queer” numerous bodies of scholarship by introducing sexuality as an essential element of analysis in deconstructing normative philosophies, including migration and spatial studies that eventually gave birth to queer migration and queer space literature.

Queer Space

The publication of *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* by David Bell and Gill Valentine (1995) was highly revered for being the first attempt to theorize the relationship between space and sexualities by finding out how spaces can manufacture, command, and obliterate the flourishing of sexual identities, practices, and communities and in reverse, how these sexual elements can influence and structure spaces (Avery, 2016). The book did not define what queer space is; however, it gave scenarios on how a space can be queered which is through the presence and visible activities of queer individuals in specific locations because spaces are produced as “heterosexual, heterosexist, and heteronormative” (Bell & Valentine, p. 16). Therefore, the mere active participation of queered bodies in a space is a way to deconstruct the “prediscursively straight” space, a relational concept from Judith Butler’s (1990 & 1999) performativity in which the dominant identity performance, in this manner heterosexuality, is perceived as natural and its dominance was due to the repetition of the acts and institutionalization of its control. In this sense, space does not have a pre-existing sexual identity that is genuinely and naturally viewed as “straight”; it only results in that because there is an intense production and heterosexualization (Oswin, 2008).

Because space does not have a natural character that carries an innate value and poses an inherent position, whether private or public, Chauncey (1996) believes that there is no such space as a queer space, only spaces that are utilized and situated by queers to queer purposes. The scholar was inspired by Michel de Certeau’s (1984) framework of tactics, defined as mobility that takes on the chance to seize the possibilities being offered for a specific moment. With this, users develop tactics that would allow them to alter the purpose of the space they are accessing, which the creators have initially

defined. Therefore, space does not only acquire its meanings from the creators who have the power to institutionalize or formalize its value but also from the users who can deconstruct the established value. Chauncey argues that tactics helped the generations of lesbians and gay men to queer the spaces of the dominant culture that does not tolerate homosexuality and homosexual acts.

Both notions of heterosexualization and queering of space through tactics are aligned with Henri Lefebvre's (1991) claim on how humans produce social space. In the book *Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that "each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space, and it also produces that space" (p. 170). By being a space themselves, humans can form social relations and determine use-values, which refers to the perceived tangible features of activity or commodity that can satisfy a human need or want. However, as Lefebvre continued, these elements will only be abstractions if these would not translate into the inception of social spaces that serve as domains of interactions and exchanges, but this does not mean that space is a container; instead, it should be viewed as a product and a means of production. In this regard, spaces can be perceived, conceived, and lived by representations and practice. This capability allows humans to configure social and physical spaces by having physical boundaries or producing signs that symbolize demarcations of territories and constructed identities such as citizenship and sexualities.

Lefebvre also presented an interesting exploration of the differences between domination, appropriation, and diversion of spaces related to the techniques of production of spaces. Dominated space was described as a master's project because it is a work of construction. This space was transformed and mediated by technology under political power, such as dams and roads. On the other hand, appropriated space means having a sense of possession, like residences or even streets, as long as it addresses the needs of the occupants without the need for domination. At the same time, diversion reappropriates a space from its original purpose. Despite Chauncey's idea of the non-existence of queer space, Lefebvre's theorization of space is a springboard to identify queer space as an appropriated or diverted space because it qualifies in the criterion of usage of queer individuals of a space. It may not be referred to as queer

space but can be distinguished by the degree of defiance the group of people has exerted in occupying a particular space and subjecting it to the values and social relations the group has.

Queer Migration

Another contribution of queer theory is in the field of migration scholarship. In Martin Manalansan's (2006) work on intersecting gender and sexuality in migration studies, Manalansan identified a few of the purposes of having queer perspective in researching migration since there is predominant literature that focuses on heteronormative assumptions on migrant individuals surrounding the family, marriage, and other heterosexual reproduction and heteronormative institutions. Aside from academic research, as argued by Eithne Luibhéid (2008), the advancement of queering is helpful in activism, policymaking, and socio-cultural interventions for migrant workers because the current ones are built on the premise of heterosexual migrants.

By queering migration, Manalansan means emphasizing that migrants are not solely displaced laborers or mothers as there is a trend of feminization in migration research but also desire and pleasure-seeking individuals, a facet that can play a significant role in the migrants' decision to relocate and for the scholars to further understand their migration experiences. Manalansan was inspired by Hector Carillo's (2004) introduction of sexual migration, which highlights the importance of sexuality and sexual identities, practice, and desires for international relocation and movement. Carillo posited that migration is no longer about biological and heterosexual reproduction but the enabling of queer subjectivities. The emergence of this discourse helps in looking at migration as an avenue to introduce additional identities in the destination country that can be enriching and transformative yet, at the same time, can intensify division amongst social identities, which might impact the social spaces. Hence, sexuality impacts all migration (Peña, 2011). Luibhéid (2008) highlights that sexuality does not only expand the meaning of migration but shifts the understanding of gender and the reliance of migration studies on heteronormative meanings, practices, and institutions.

In this sense, by acknowledging the sexual desires and erotic practice as reasons behind migration, Manalansan believes that queering widens the discussions about asylum seekers and refugee movements and the conceptualization of recruitment and assimilation in the migrant's home and host societies. However, inserting sexuality into the domain of migration should not be considered a stand-alone subject because queering, as one of its lessons, aims for sexuality to be closely reflected on and intersect with and through various social identities of power, class, race, gender, ethnicity, geopolitical location, and even citizenship status.

Upon examining the foundations of queer theory and how it has influenced various bodies of knowledge, such as space and migration, it is apparent how closely connected and significantly helpful the framework is in navigating the subject matter of this research and answering the questions it presented above. Queer migration offers an opportunity to investigate the lived experiences of labor migrants who do not conform to the traditional expectations of heterosexuality. It leads to the idea of acknowledging the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals in international labor migration and the challenges they face concerning employment that is different from their cis heterosexual counterparts. Moreover, it acknowledges the critical role of their gender and sexual identities in their migration stories, particularly the motivation and interest in overseas employment. In addition, queer migration helps recognize that gay homosexual Filipinos need to express their queer identities and satisfy their non-heteronormative desires, which queer space can assist in magnifying the discussion, especially since social identities are performative and having a space is necessary to do so. Therefore, the lessons of queer space provide guidance in understanding the relationship between LGBTQ+ migrant workers and their host societies and how they influence and impact each other. Queer space paves the discussion on how Thailand's queer spaces became instrumental in the gay homosexual OFWs' decision to emigrate and how the former's presence allowed the latter to express their gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, queer space presents a conversation on how the consumers of the queer spaces in Thailand, mainly the queer labor migrants, are being shaped by these spaces and how they, as consumers, shape these spaces simultaneously.

1.4 Research Methodology

This qualitative study employed a snowballing technique to gather participants who may be interested in having informal interviews to talk about their stories before and after migrating to Thailand. I conducted the interviews in May 2021 with some of the gay Filipinos I knew way before the start of my research process, while additional informants were introduced to me through referrals. They were asked about their lived experiences as a gay migrant worker in Thailand, which led to their stories on the role gay bars play in their migrant lives. Eleven documented and skilled gay overseas Filipino workers participated in the online interview; six reside and work in Bangkok, two in Nakhon Ratchasima, and one each in Nonthaburi, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, and Chumphon. The average number of years working in Thailand is three and eight months, where eight years is the longest while five months is the shortest. Seven are in the education sector, and four are in corporate fields. The pool covered three age brackets: one 18-25, four 26-35, and six 36-45. All of them declared that they are self-identified gay homosexuals.

Research Setting and Data Gathering

The informants were skilled Filipinos who are males assigned at birth, self-identified gays, who are romantically and sexually attracted to the same sex, and who have migrated to Thailand for work opportunities. The selection of professional gay Filipino demography is consistent with the goal of queering the literature about migrant workers, which is dominated by heterosexual and unskilled labor discussions. And regarding the works on queer space, the perspective of migrant workers on the subject still needs more exposure. Length of stay in the country was highly considered in identifying the informants to ensure their responses and experiences were not yet within the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the informants had worked in Thailand for more than a year before the pandemic struck. However, it was a conscious decision to include an informant who recently migrated for work because he had been in the country countless times for leisure purposes, making him a valuable informant and having witnessed the queer scene too. To capture the diverse experiences of the informants regardless of their locations, the research setting accommodated both Filipinos in Bangkok and other cities and provinces of Thailand.

I am also gay; therefore, it made the pooling of informants less challenging, primarily done through my network of friends in Thailand, with whom some I had been engaging before the commencement of the research itself. Access to the gay community was not a problem. The requests for an informal interview were agreed upon, and the interview proper happened on the same week of 3 May and 8 May 2021. Each interview ran for an average of 60 minutes and was done individually through a video call. There was no need for a language interpreter because the informants' preferred languages of response were the languages I am articulated in using: Filipino, English, and Bisaya. Aside from less likelihood of getting lost in translation, I have a better understanding of the target group as I identify with the same gender identity, making the informants feel more comfortable sharing intimate information for this research.

Research Instrument and Data Treatment

I audio-recorded each interview using a phone and simultaneously handwrote parts of the conversations. The data collected from the interviews were later transcribed in Microsoft Word and categorized based on the similarities and dissimilarities of responses, forming the thematic issues that warrant analysis. The transcriptions only registered the informants' preferred pseudonyms, which were asked at the beginning of each interview.

1.5 Limitations

The biggest issue that resulted in the limitation of the research was the health crisis brought about by the spread of COVID-19. The data gathering was done in the middle of the pandemic, during the imposition of various policies to restrict and discourage the movement of people in the whole of Thailand. The government ordered the closure of commercial establishments which were not considered essential services, while a no dine-in policy was placed in restaurants, cafes, and other food-related stores. The situation made the face-to-face interview impossible because of the higher risk involved, as there was a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases when the interviews were being arranged. In addition to that, my trip to personally meet some informants who are based outside Bangkok did not push through. Even though the interviews were

done through a video call wherein I could still take notes of the non-verbal cues, an on-site interview could have been better for attending to these cues.

The research setting also posed some limitations that the readers must be aware of. First is the group that the results of the research drew on, which is gay Filipinos whose sex assigned at birth is male, making the data harvested and shared should not in any way be considered a reflection of other migrant workers with different sexual and gender identities and sexual orientations, e.g., lesbians, transgender people, bisexuals, as they may have different lived experiences as migrant workers. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity of another study dedicated to gays of different nationalities, especially those from labor-sending countries. Despite my attempt to be inclusive regarding location, the informants only come from five localities, including Bangkok. Therefore, the results should not be used to generalize the character of queer spaces in other parts of Thailand with a large concentration of migrant workers who are queers or members of the LGBTQ+ community. Although this can be a good start to looking at similarities and differences among gay demographics accessing queer spaces in the areas that this research was unable to cover.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

I set up an interview protocol to ensure that the data collection follows ethical standards. During the correspondence requesting the informants to be interviewed, they were all properly informed about the research, its objectives, the set of questions, and the way the interview would be organized. The informants were encouraged to ask questions in case of confusion and need for clarification before they agreed to be a part of the endeavor. At the start of the interview, before the questions were asked, I had to read the interview protocol to inform them once again the informants of the objectives of the research and how the data that would be collected from the interview would be treated by ensuring their confidentiality and the informants' identities, and ultimately their rights as informants during and even after the interview such as ending the interview anytime without giving a reason, skipping questions, revoking their consent to be included in the research, and disallowing the inclusion of any of their information in the findings before publication. More so, they will be able to review the interview

transcript, and the results draft upon their request. They were also informed that the interview would be audio recorded.

Furthermore, they were briefed about the steps to protect the privacy of their data, such as using a pseudonym in data collection and writing the research findings, non-disclosure of participation amongst the people in the group, complete deletion of the file that contains the pseudonym after the final research output and making sure that there will be no identifiable information that would link to their participation to the research without their additional permission. Aside from the pseudonym, the informants were asked for their preferred pronouns as it helps ensure the findings are gender-sensitive and confirm on the record that they are gays.

After reading the interview protocol, I asked the interviewees to say “yes,” which served as their agreement to understand the protocol and consent to the interview to proceed and allowed me to use the information they were about to share. The informants’ “yeses” were part of the recordings. The interviews were arranged according to the time and online platform the informants preferred while, because these were via video call, the location of the informants was their prerogative too.

1.7 Significance of Study

The research poses some contributions that reflect its significance as an academic work. To reiterate, this present investigation on the gender and sexual dimension of gay overseas Filipino workers’ labor migration experience is a push to accelerate migration studies that revolve around queer subjects veering away from the prevailing heterosexual discourses. Furthermore, the findings seek to figure out the negotiation process between their sexual identities and desires within their host society in general and not only in the workplace. In this way, it can deliberately show a facet of queer migrants who are responsible sexual beings and have agency in addressing their sexual needs. On the other hand, the usage of queer theory is a promotion of its utility in various bodies of knowledge. I established a relationship between the three disciplines of sexuality, space, and migration. Existing pieces of literature show bonds between sexuality and freedom, which paved the way for queer space study.

In contrast, queer migration was figured by combining the domains of sexuality and migration. However, a clear and definitive attempt to explore the association of the three from each other and simultaneously produce their interaction within one study was seen as a gap that prompted this research. This is highly encouraged by migrant researchers as we should be aware that involving queer individuals as subjects is not enough, but we also must harness the tools of queer studies (Manalansan IV, 2006). This approach triggers the reconceptualization of mainstream understanding of gender and migration research. It complicates the reexamination of concepts and assumptions that unconsciously supports the normative ideals of gender and sexuality. Also, by queering, discussions on space with the sexuality of individuals in mind shall be amplified as spatial studies often forget the intersectional social identities such as gender and sexuality. Thus, by connecting these needs, the research addresses the scarcity of literature that focuses on migrant workers' determination, production, and consumption of queer spaces in Thailand, as recent scholars who have researched queer spaces only provided observations in gay bars and gay saunas and perspectives from either tourists or Thais. This research alerts the readers not to perceive queer spaces as monolithic as there are identity groups that access these spaces with different intentions and purposes. It is an effort to insert the lens of foreigners, not the tourists who only access the spaces temporarily but workers who stay in the country longer and become staple consumers of these spaces or even likely producers of new queer spaces.

Another significant addition of the research would be on the region's gay labor migrant literature, especially that, aside from the Philippines, all countries in the region, including Thailand, do not have a mechanism to count as part of the official migrant statistics, the LGBTQ+ workers. This can eventually pave other academic scholars to assess the lived experiences and situations of the intra-labor migration of gender and sexual minorities. Lastly, but most importantly, this research is the fruit of a queer scholar's dedication to advancing queer scholarship written by queer scholars themselves.

1.8 Research Outline

This research is divided into five chapters, including this introduction which serves as Chapter 1, and Chapter 5, which is reserved for the conclusion. Chapter 2 aims to contextualize the LGBTQ+ Filipino labor migrants' experience through a brief history of Filipino international labor migration, covering the push and pull factors that encouraged the citizens to seek employment outside the Philippines. It then supplies information about the struggles of LGBTQ+ Filipinos in the country, which are correlated with the interest to emigrate. In connection to this, Chapter 2 thoroughly discusses why the research informants chose Thailand to work.

From identifying the drivers of the informants' relocation, Chapter 3 lays out the stories of living in Thailand, specifically focusing on how they can freely and safely exhibit their non-normative gender and sexual identities. By harvesting their responses, this chapter is segmented according to the kind of spaces they usually access to address their need to perform their gender. This is followed by Chapter 4, which revolves around the impacts of the attendance of gay homosexual Filipinos in Thailand's queer spaces and their presence in Thailand in general.

CHAPTER 2

The Filipino Labor Migrants

2.1 Introduction

According to the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO), the Philippine government agency that is responsible for upholding and advancing the rights and welfare of Filipinos abroad while strengthening their ties with the Philippines as their home country (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022), there are three kinds of Filipino migrants or officially called Overseas Filipinos (Asis, 2017; Novio, 2018). First are the permanent migrants, which refer to natural-born Filipinos who have acquired citizenship in their host countries, including international marriages and family reunification (OECD & Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017), aside from other legal processes of naturalization. Second, are the temporary migrants, also referred to as overseas contract workers or overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). OFWs are regular migrants because they are properly documented employed Filipinos outside the Philippines. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this type of Filipino migrant comprises the pool of informants of this research. The last classification is Filipinos, who are not legally allowed to work due to the absence of official work permits and residence cards in their host countries hence the term irregular.

Upon the commission's 2013 account of all permanent, temporary, and irregular migrants, there are an estimated 10.2 million Filipinos abroad (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022). Meanwhile, the most recently available data published by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) pegged the number of temporary workers or OFWs within the period between April and September 2020 at 1.71 million and irregulars who were employed full-time overseas but without proper working documents such as tourists, students, visitors, and holders of other types of non-immigrant visa at 600,000 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022).

The significant number of Filipinos working abroad did not only earn the Philippines the reputation as a major global labor exporter (OECD, 2015), but the phenomenon also got entrenched into the Filipino culture that normalizes and encourages seeking

employment outside the country (Asis, 2006; OECD & Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017). In this regard, to better contextualize the setting of this research, it is only vital to provide an overview of Filipino international migration, which serves as a springboard to discussing a more specific migration experience of Filipinos who have a diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) or those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community of which the research informants associate with as they are self-identified gay homosexuals. Therefore, this chapter is divided into three sections: the first is to provide a historical background of Filipino international migration. The second is dedicated to knowing the push factors or the reasons that continuously urge the Filipinos to search for work opportunities abroad which led to the exponential growth in the number of Filipino labor migrants. The third is focused on determining their migration path or the pull factors that aim to explore their decision-making process in which countries to emigrate. At the end of this chapter, we should be able to understand the motivations of Filipino gay homosexuals in becoming an OFW and pursuing their respective careers in Thailand.

2.2 Brief History of Filipino International Migration

Early accounts of intra-regional migration were performed for trade purposes by indigenous groups, the first settlers in different parts of the pre-colonial Philippines (Center for Migrant Advocacy, 2022). By the time of the Spanish conquest in the 16th century that forcefully established the archipelago as one whole colonial territory, Filipino seafarers were considered the pioneer migrants because they participated in the Galleon Trade, a trans-pacific exchange of goods with another Spanish colony then, Mexico (Santos, 2014). Furthermore, it was during this period when affluent Filipino families could finance their children's tertiary and professional endeavors overseas, often in European countries. Some Filipinos who had the chance to go to Europe to hone their craft were acknowledged as Philippine heroes for their contributions to the armed revolution for independence from Spain, such as Jose Rizal.

At the beginning of the 20th century, after more than three hundred years under the Spanish colonial government, the Philippines was occupied by the US, which resulted in the easy recruitment of Filipinos to work in several US territories like Hawaii,

Alaska, and California on the mainland because they were considered as US nationals (Martin, 1993). Filipinos were mainly engaged in agricultural and fishing sectors and some low-wage employment in the cities during the off-harvest season. Following the Tydings McDuffie Act in 1934, which provided a ten-year transition period for the Philippines to establish its sovereign government, labor opportunities in the US became limited as Filipinos were treated as foreign migrants. Restrictions through a quota system at the end of World War II were imposed that reduced the number of Filipinos going to the US, which at its peak recorded migration of 100,000 Filipinos from 1906 to 1934 (Center for Migrant Advocacy, 2022), thus making the Filipinos look for opportunities in Asian countries instead. The conflict in Indochina in the 1950s demanded the US military bases in Vietnam, Thailand, and Guam to employ additional workers and became the Filipinos' entry point (Center for Migrant Advocacy, 2022). The next decade saw more flexible immigration policies in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand principally for family reunification but also served as access for skilled Filipinos to emigrate permanently because of skills-based provisions in their regulations to admit foreign migrants (OECD & Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017).

Despite the developments from the previous decades, it was only in the 1970s under the Marcos dictatorship when large-scale and systematic international migration of Filipinos started due to push and pull factors present domestically and internationally at that time (Asis, 2006, 2017). The Philippines witnessed political instability and economic crisis, which caused a decline in employment opportunities and an absence of decent compensation amid a growing population. Meanwhile, other countries were experiencing economic boom and industrialization that required supplementary laborers because their respective working population was no longer sufficient. The Marcos government recognized the opportunity to temporarily solve the rising unemployment and declining foreign reserves of the Philippines, which remittances can address by establishing an employment program that connects Filipinos to foreign employers. In 1974, Presidential Decree No. 442, or the Labor Code, was signed by Marcos, which sought to promote overseas employment and guarantee the protection of Filipinos who desired to work outside the Philippines (Official Gazette, 1974). Aside

from its written purpose, some political analysts believed that the law was a mechanism to mitigate the growth of the communist movement, which was aggressively mobilizing at the height of the dictatorship because government officials then thought that unemployment was one of the reasons why people would be interested in joining the insurgency (Novio, 2018; Rodriguez, 2005).

Consequently, there was an influx of male Filipinos in the Middle East because of the available labor-intensive infrastructure-related jobs. At the same time, the emergence of newly-industrialized countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan created an opening for female Filipinos to get hired as house helpers. However, poor economic conditions instituted by the governance of Marcos dragged in the following decades, and after six presidents, the supposedly impermanent intervention became one of the primary ways for Filipinos to seek greener pastures (Medina & Pulumbarit, 2012). From a few thousand Filipinos flying out of the Philippines in the 1970s, it grew to more than a million outflow each year (International Labour Organization, 2022). The increase is despite the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995, a law that declares the Philippine state is not promoting overseas employment; instead, it should only be a choice and not a necessity (OECD & Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017).

By examining Filipino international migration's history, which can be segmented into different periods, we could know several stimuli that triggered a wave of Filipino migrants currently present in over 200 countries and territories (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022). However, as outlined at the beginning of the chapter, the following sections will expound on Filipino migration's push and pull factors. Contemporary concerns augmented Filipinos' interest in finding work overseas and targeting a specific host country.

2.3 The Push Factors

Adam is one of the many Filipinos who experienced difficulties finding work in the Philippines. Despite doing an international seven-month on-the-job training in one of the hotels on the island of Phuket, which is a popular beach destination in Thailand,

Adam was still not able to secure work in any of the hotels or restaurants in the Philippines right after graduating with a degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management in April 2018. According to him, the hiring managers were looking for candidates with long professional experience in the hospitality industry. He then tried applying for positions not aligned with his academic background, such as being a customer service representative or call center agent but was still unsuccessful.

For months I felt hopeless because I had applied to different companies, but I couldn't get in because they said I didn't have much experience and was a fresh graduate. I thought my internship in Thailand was an asset but unfortunately not because competition is just very tough in my industry with a lot of applicants, but few hotels and restaurants are hiring. It was a difficult time for me because I somehow regretted coming back after I was offered by the management of the hotel in Phuket a job even though I would not finish my degree (Adam, personal communication, May 5, 2021).

Due to these rejections, Adam thought of looking for work in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where his mother was working. But in August 2018, five months after his graduation, he reconnected with his former internship supervisor in Thailand, who helped him land a job as an events coordinator in another hotel in Phuket.

The story of Adam resonates with that of many from the Philippines. The main driver of Filipinos nowadays in migration is the quality of employment in the domestic labor market, which is associated with two determinants: one is how an occupation matches their education and experience, and two is the security of a liveable wage. A scarcity of high-quality work opportunities alongside an overflowing labor supply makes job seekers vulnerable to underemployment and exploitation through unreasonable remuneration and unsatisfactory working conditions (OECD & Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017). Therefore, Filipinos' decision to work overseas is to satisfy the need for a job that offers better compensation and more fitting to their background, yet for others having a relatively well-paid occupation abroad is more important, and the latter

becomes irrelevant. Adam even disclosed that his compensation for being an events coordinator in Phuket was two-fold the expected salary he would get if he were hired, as a fresh graduate, in a hotel or any company back in the Philippines. However, because of the pandemic's impact on the tourism industry, his hotel had to discontinue operating. Adam had to change his profession to stay and work in Thailand and still earn more than the average salary in the Philippines. Being referred by a friend, he now works as a language teacher in Nakhon Ratchasima, a city in northeast Thailand.

Sawagee, originally from the Southern Philippines, faced the same challenges as Adam when he decided to move to Manila in 2017 to look for a better, higher-paying job linked to education. Sawagee did not see himself working overseas because he believed that aside from being a graduate of a reputable university in the Philippines, his previous work experience in academia and international exposure as an undergraduate exchange student in Bangkok would be an advantage to getting hired as soon as possible. But after almost a year of poorly paid engagements and unsatisfying work arrangements, Sawagee concluded that he had no future in the Philippines.

The idea of going back to Thailand and working was not originally in the plan. For about a year in Manila, I exhausted all the possibilities of employment just to get by and stay, but it was really a struggle, so I had to find work somewhere else (Sawagee, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

By somewhere else, Sawagee meant outside the country, wherein he believes his profile is desirable for overseas employment and assured of a better compensation package. Hence, he started checking on some available teaching positions in Thailand, Japan, and UAE, which are common destinations for Filipino educators (Tubeza, 2009). He was hired as an English language instructor in an elementary school in Ayutthaya in the last quarter of 2018, where he has worked since.

Apart from the quality of work, other Filipinos who desire to work and currently pursue a career outside the Philippines are more considerate about the likelihood of reuniting with their families and friends, experiencing different cultures, and acquiring new skills

for professional growth (Hasnan, 2019). Some research informants were not actively seeking a job before migrating, as their friends only referred them to their current affiliations. JC was a customer service representative before she went to Thailand to work as a teacher. She was only enticed to accept the language teaching position brokered for her by a friend in Buriram, another city in northeast Thailand because she thought that an international teaching experience could boost her profile and make her a competitive applicant if she decided to seek a teaching job in the Philippines. Based on her employment history, she was underemployed in the Philippines because she graduated with an elementary education degree but worked as a call center agent because she could not get into any educational institution.

In the Philippines, schools favor hiring teachers who have overseas experience because it is good for their image to have staff who have international credentials, which can attract more students to enroll. My employment here also improved my confidence because a Thai school hired me despite the fact that my work prior to this was not in the education sector. I think that will make me a desirable candidate and increase my chances of higher compensation (JC, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

JC added that salary did not play a significant factor in her decision to migrate as the compensation offered by the school in Buriram only had a few thousand difference compared to her wage as part of the business process outsourcing industry. Conversely, Emm and Francis, both in the advertising business, were driven by the belief that the local advertising landscape is no longer exciting. Thus, they see the benefits of being based outside the Philippines and employed by an international company to be more updated and further advance their competencies in a very volatile world of advertising.

What makes it ideal to move out of the Philippines is the endless possibilities I could get in other countries, as I don't want to feel stagnant. Growth is what I seek, especially in my industry, which is ever-changing, and if I don't manage to get out of my comfort zone, then I wouldn't be

as competitive as the others (Emm, personal communication, May 6, 2021).

From the answers of all the eleven informants, it is noticeable that no one attributed their intention to migrate with their SOGIE or for being gay homosexuals, which was also gathered by some pieces of literature to be a reason why Filipinos who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community do want to work outside the Philippines. Filipino LGBTQ+s experience employment and workplace discrimination because of their SOGIE (ASEAN SOGIE CAUCUS, 2017; UNDP & USAID, 2014), which becomes their basis for leaving the country for work (UNDP et al., 2020). A study showed that 21% of Filipino LGBTQ+ surveyees believed they were denied a job, while 30% reported being bullied, harassed, and discriminated against by others at work due to their SOGIE (UNDP & ILO, 2018). The right to express themselves, especially the transgender, remains disallowed in some organizations (Wright & Villaflor, 2019). Moreover, gay homosexual employees are least prioritized in the promotions and get heavier punishment for the same degree of mistakes committed by their cisgender heterosexual colleagues (Concordia et al., 2009). Because of this, gay homosexual employees need to hide their gender identity and conform to the prescriptive gender expression, which affects them mentally (Rubio & Green, 2009).

The challenges being faced by Filipino LGBTQ+s make them more susceptible to poverty and abuse. The limited employment opportunities to them restrict them from practicing their learned skills. As a result, they apply to jobs not aligned with their skills, which can be an example of underemployment and de-skilling while compensating poorly. They allow themselves to be taken advantage of just to earn a living because they see that financial contribution to their families results in acceptance of their identity aside from helping them address their economic insecurities (Galang, 2015). Therefore, they are pushed to work abroad for a higher salary. In addition to being financially independent and a provider to their families, sexual liberation is also a reason why LGBTQ+ wish to emigrate, as they see this as an opportunity to freely express their SOGIE (UNDP et al., 2020). This kind of motivation to relocate overseas

is called sexual migration, which refers to a movement directly or indirectly influenced by the sexuality of the migrant (Carrillo, 2004).

Nonetheless, the difficulties mentioned above that pushed some Filipino LGBTQ+s to emigrate were not apparent in the responses of the eleven gay OFWs interviewed for this research despite belonging to the same group that defies heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality. The result can be accredited to the differences in the background between the former and the latter. Their family relations, socioeconomic status, and professional capacity may have played critical roles in the variance of their perspectives and experiences in domestic employment. For example, the Galang (2015) report only covered lesbian-identified Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, while the UNDP and ILO study (2018) did not reveal the profession and individual income level of the surveyees, which can help determine their degree of influence in their working affiliations and personal agency. In this research, it is intentional to be definitive with the informants' profiles to ensure that readers do not cite the study to provide a general statement about the migration experience and motivations of Filipino LGBTQ+s, as we must be wary of their multiple subject positions to avoid misrepresentation. However, we cannot totally dismiss the influence of the informants' SOGIE in their migration story, as we will find out in the next section how their SOGIE became a contributing factor in choosing Thailand as their host country and the significance of the kingdom's positive image towards the LGBTQ+ community in shaping their decision.

2.4 The Pull Factors

As a recall of some chronicles above, Adam and Sawagee did not see Thailand as the only place where they could gain desirable employment. There were other countries where they considered going to achieve their goal. But eventually, they decided to work in Thailand for various reasons, which can be referred to as the pull factors. According to Parreñas (2001 & 2005), several contributing elements encourage a person to migrate to a specific country for work. One is the cost of migration which can mean two things: the expenses one has to incur to legally work in their desired host country, such as the placement fee that needs to be settled with the recruitment agency and the

potential compensation that write off the cost of living and the accumulated debt from various expenses of the overseas employment process. The migrant's level of education is also essential as some countries impose a minimum of completed years in school so a foreigner can apply for a job. Another determinant would be the similarity of religious beliefs of the migrant and their destination country, which is evident for Muslims who prefer to go to countries in the Middle East because those are Islamic states (Silvey, 2000). The possibility of obtaining permanent residency and, later on, citizenship is also a cause. Moreover, dependence on migrant institutions like recruitment agencies in a favorable location and social networks' support and persuasions from family and friends to follow and reunify with them are instrumental in carving the migrant worker's journey in choosing a host country.

Sawagee focused his efforts on finding work in Thailand instead of Japan and the UAE because he has friends who can provide some leads for employment, particularly in schools searching for English language instructors. Apart from having a supportive social group, there is no need to engage with and pay a recruitment agency to link him up with possible employers. But more importantly, Sawagee stressed that he is already familiar with Thailand, having lived there as a student, so he knew about the cost of living and was conscious that his qualifications were at par with what the schools were looking for and the corresponding compensation. This knowledge made him aware that it would not be hard for him to assimilate into the work environment. He was confident that he would not be subjected to employment discrimination for his SOGIE.

Thailand is the safest choice for me because I know that UAE is not a gay-friendly country, while Japan is a bit of a gamble given that I haven't been there and I don't know any gay friends over there (Sawagee, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

Sawagee's reason for disinterest in working in the UAE echoed Adam's response when asked about the moment when searching for work in the middle eastern country was an option. Even though working in the Emirates could mean being close to his mother, which Adam very much liked, he was more concerned about the opportunity to express

and practice his gender and sexuality in the open. Ultimately, the offer to be a hotel events coordinator in Phuket came through at the right time before Adam would even start being serious about looking for jobs in the UAE.

My mother, who is an OFW in the UAE, told me that it is not easy to be gay there; it is risky to continue my interest and lifestyle as a gay person, mainly because it is a “Muslim” country, and we all know they don’t tolerate homosexuality. I knew at that time that if I went there to work, I am sacrificing something within me, which was going to add to the challenges of living and working abroad. Definitely, not healthy for me (Adam, personal communication, May 5, 2021).

Adam also feared the likelihood of microaggressions, discrimination, and sexual violence that he may encounter because of his feminine behavior. For him, it would be difficult to file a complaint if any of the situations happened. A study about male migrant workers, which included some Filipino informants based in the Middle East, accounted for incidents of sexual assault, wherein the male victims were threatened with deportation by their assailants, who are locals, should they report to a law enforcement agency. The workers also shared that they had to grow beards to look more masculine to dissuade the locals from hitting on them (CARAM Asia, 2015).

As we have observed from the stories of Adam and Sawagee, the guarantee of their safety and security as gay homosexuals became a critical consideration to work in Thailand, a pull factor that was absent in Parreñas’ list above. The absence of accounting for how a country and its citizens treat people who identify as part of gender and sexual minorities in a migrant’s decision on where to work can be associated with the composition of informants in published works who are usually cisgender and heterosexually partnered women (Constable, 1997 & 2007; Parreñas, 2001 & 2005). Hence, there was no principal worry of restraining the performance of their gender and sexuality as they conform to the hegemonic culturally and socially constructed expectations of being heterosexual. However, this observation should not disregard the abuses faced by cisgender heterosexual migrant workers in their host countries.

Anyhow, the image of Thailand as a gay-friendly country, as described by Adam and Sawagee, can be considered a manifestation of the country's modern queer scenes (Jackson, 2011). Peter Jackson is a prominent scholar who studied extensively contemporary Thailand and dedicated some work in looking at the development of the state's image to being a gay paradise for having one of the largest queer communities in the world due to its robust queer scenes that are highly palpable in Bangkok, which made it as the center of Thai queer life (Jackson, 2011). Jackson majorly attributed the scenes' flourishing to two fundamental elements: one is the political shifts started by "siwilai" at the height of western colonization in the region, and two is the dominant religion which is Theravada Buddhism. Consequently, the interactions of the two elements ensued countless distinguishable impacts on the phase of economic progress of Thailand, most notably the popularity of Thai queer media. In this regard, the next part is an opportunity to examine the correlation between the emergence and progression of Thai queer scenes and the motivations of gay homosexual OFWs to pursue employment in Thailand.

Political Concessions

When Adam and Sawagee were quizzed about the primary basis of their belief that the Thai society is tolerant towards non-normative gender identities and sexualities or the LGBTQ+ community, which convinced them that the kingdom is the better foreign destination to get employed for gay homosexuals, they cited the presence of gays and transgender people or "katoeys" in public and the number of entertainment businesses that are openly promoted and oriented for LGBTQ+ patrons. "I met a lot of gay people, both Thai and non-Thai, and gay Filipino teachers in Thailand during my exchange program, and the gay bars are everywhere in Bangkok!" (Sawagee, personal communication, May 3, 2021). Adam said, "All kinds of gays are on the island (Phuket), and they are free to do whatever they want!" (personal communication, May 5, 2021).

The answers of Adam and Sawagee are tangible results of the century-long political concessions Thailand has gone through. Over the years, from the absolute monarchical reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) to the conversion of the government into a

constitutional monarchy, Thais had witnessed numerous political policies being imposed in the name of *siwilai* or being influenced by its philosophy which helped in the growth of queer public cultural identity. One of these was a series of legal protocols to differentiate Siamese women and men in terms of names, hairstyles, and clothing, which scholars believed to have contributed to the mainstreaming of the *katoey* identity because the non-heteronormative performance of their gender became more visible in the public eye (Atkins, 2012; Jackson, 2003). Another outcome of *siwilai* as a crucial stimulus in developing the Thai queer scenes is the state's relationship with the western countries, particularly its allyship with the US during armed conflicts in the region. Thailand became a convenient location for the American government's espionage undertakings and the rest and recreation program for their service personnel assigned in the Vietnam War. The entry of foreign armed forces escalated entertainment businesses, including gay bars and those that facilitate the sex trade. According to the area's history, the infamous Patpong district, or Thailand's red-light district, along Si Lom Road, started as the center of American intelligence gathering in the region. The evolution of the sex trade from underground patronage to its strikingly visible commercialization caused the city's stereotype to be a global sex capital (Barmé, 2002), of which not only women and men but also *katoeys* rely on it as their livelihood.

Jackson (2011) has uncovered that the absence of resistance from the Thai ruling authorities was because of two things: transgenderism and homosexuality were not generally identified as political issues. Two is that the military government was able to milk profits from the booming sex and entertainment industries, of which the commercial queer scene is part of. The first reason Jackson has noted can be linked to *siwilai*'s attention to controlling the bodies in the public spheres yet unbothered with anything being done in private spaces. With this concept of a regime of images, as long as non-normative gender and sexuality performances do not disturb and shake the public order, which is based on the western notion of heteronormativity, then it does not warrant restrictive and punitive actions (Jackson, 2003). This is an example of how regulations under the premise of *siwilai* still had to be locally appropriate and sensitive according to the state's pre-existing beliefs and traditions because "pre-semi-colonial"

Siam did not have a serious issue with non-heterosexual behaviors (Jackson, 2003).

Religious Tolerance

A notable illustration of Thai society's tolerance of queer individuals is how they are being allowed to openly practice their religion without restrictions, such as permitting transgender persons to enter Buddhist temples, as observed by Sawagee and Francis. Before migrating, Francis had been to Thailand as a tourist a couple of times, mainly to attend the Songkran Festival every April, and said:

I think one strong indicator of how welcoming the Thais to the LGBTQ+ community is by seeing transgender women inside places of worship like the Buddhist temples because that means even the religion does not condemn them for living their true selves and publicly practicing their gender. Temple goers do not even mind them inside (Francis, personal communication, May 8, 2021).

Sawagee similarly presented his view:

I don't think the transgender community here (in Thailand) would flourish this much if their religion openly rejected their identity. I always feel that Buddhism is such a peaceful and accepting religion that Thais adhere to by accepting transgender women, whether within or outside the premises of the temples (personal communication, May 3, 2021).

The truancy of opposition from religious groups, especially the Buddhist clergy, was another dimension that Jackson mentioned as beneficial to the advancement of the queer scenes, which prompted Sam Winter (2011) and Nicolas Dacanay (2011) to expound on the work of Jackson of its causality by analyzing the tenets of Buddhism. Winter's study on the vibrancy of the transgender community in Thailand led Winter to understand that, unlike other religious formations and Buddhist sects, Theravada Buddhism, which is predominantly practiced in Thailand, is somewhat accommodating on matters of gender and sexual diversity because of its association to the concept of karma. By studying Buddhist teachings, Jackson (1995) defined karma as an

“impersonal cosmic law of ethical cause and effect, with moral actions leading to happiness and well-being and immoral actions leading to unhappiness and suffering (p.58). Being transgender and/or homosexual are manifestations of suffering a person must bear for committing heterosexual adultery in their past life; therefore, transgender behavior and homosexual desires are considered the results of karma which is believed by the Thai, according to the ethnographic work by Dacanay with Thai gay men in Bangkok. In this equation, being queer is not a sin that would negatively impact or generate suffering in someone else’s situation or status in their next life.

Role of Thailand’s Economic Progress

The socio-cultural and political changes triggered by the principles of siwilai, as well as those sustained due to the influence of the prevailing religious dogma, became more prominent because of the growth of the Thai economy exhibited through the increase in disposable income and improved financial capacity of the citizens including the Thai queer people. Economic independence empowered Thai queers to be more confident with their sexuality because they no longer needed to depend on anyone for sustenance. As Jackson (2011) argued, there had been an increase in openness of gay men in Bangkok because it is much easier to express their sexuality in public without fear of discrimination and stigmatization, particularly in going to recognized gay entertainment and lifestyles establishments in which the proliferation caught up with the phenomenon in the 1970s. The rise of the middle-class population in the 1980s sparked what Jackson viewed as the first queer boom complemented by the initial wave of Thai queer cinema due to queer representations in print and cinematic media that made it an era of maturity of Thai queer consumerism (Ünaldi, 2011). The 90s continued this trend of expanding the commercial scenes by targeting the urban middle class and the youth. The unprecedented growth of the modern queer scenes was closely associated with capitalism’s opportunities, such as in the forms of tourism, the internet, and mass media which Emm, Ztan, and Dan, who are both language teachers, credited as their primary influences in knowing about Thailand’s positive gay culture, unlike Adam and Sawagee whose knowledge of Thailand came from their prior living experience in the country as students.

Social media and Youtube were the sites where I first encountered Thailand's LGBTQ+ culture. Thai shows are not shown on mainstream TV channels before, so I only had the chance to stumble upon these materials online, which I learned so much because I didn't know that Thais are OK with gay and transgender celebrities (Ztan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

The wide distribution and availability online of Thai shows and movies resulted in the materials' relative popularity in the Philippines and among the Thai actors themselves. Hence, it bred some Filipino following which Dan became part of. Dan's introduction to the Thai BL series encouraged him to pursue employment in Thailand, not because he would earn more or needed a new job. BL is short for "Boys Love," a literary theme that tackles and centers on a male-male romance that often includes sexually explicit scenarios (Nagaike & Aoyama, 2015). Being a confessed hard-core fan of Thai actors, coming to Thailand meant being closer to meeting them in person through fan meets, concerts, and visiting their talent agency's offices.

I just love how progressive the media industry in Thailand is and how accepting the Thai audience is of series and movies that show homosexual gay men's affection towards each other which is remarkably absent in the Philippine mass media (Dan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

Dan added that the Thai actors' vocal appreciation of their LGBTQ+ fans and being unbothered when they are being "shipped" or paired up with each other made him like them more. On the other hand, Emm recognized the 2007 highly commended and talked about Thai queer movie *Love of Siam* as his introduction to Thai society's image of being gay-friendly. The film is about "two young boyhood friends Mew and Tong who, after a separation of several years and amid various familial dilemmas, rediscover each other during their senior year at high school and rekindle a relationship that progressively assumes erotic dimensions" (Farmer, 2011, p. 88).

Another demonstration of Thailand's evolving queer scenes was when the progressive tourism for leisure campaign was combined with the country's promotion of its medical tourism which made Thailand globally famous for sex reconfirmation surgeries for transgender people. JC's knowledge about Thailand stemmed from the country's popularity for the type of surgery mentioned because she grew up surrounded by older transgender women who told her about Thailand as the place where they had their sex reconfirmation surgery. Her friends shared stories on how accepting the country is towards gay people, which for them became a factor in why the medical procedure was possible.

When I was younger, I would listen to stories about Thailand from my older sisters [referring to her trans women friends] as they would go back and forth until they completed their surgeries. They were the ones who gave me the idea that there is a country that allows sex change (sic) that is closed to the Philippines (JC, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

Based on her declared age range, it was during JC's middle to late adolescent years from the mid-1990s to early 2000s when Thailand's medical tourism program was launched that was promoted as high quality and at par with the first world in medical treatments yet affordable in comparison to the medical institutions in the US, Europe, and Australia. One of the most in-demand services being availed by foreigners was the gender reconfirmation surgeries, not only because of the cheaper costs but the easiness of getting approved under the Thai regulations. Patients were not required to undergo psychiatric evaluation before the surgery, which is rooted in the Thai culture's take on homosexuality and transsexuality that are closely related to their understanding of the katoey identity. Katoeys are not defined by having sexual and reproductive organs of a female body but through expression and representation of being a woman, which starts years ago and intensifies as a katoey grows older. Hence, in this formative process, Thai medical doctors no longer see the need to assess their psychological readiness. The patients are considered normal and mentally ready before undergoing gender reconfirmation surgery (Aizura, 2011).

Since she was in sixth grade, JC's friendship with transgender women in her hometown made her aspire to travel to Thailand. And just like Dan, it was never in JC's intention to work but only to experience what her friends told her about the Thai Kingdom as a gay paradise.

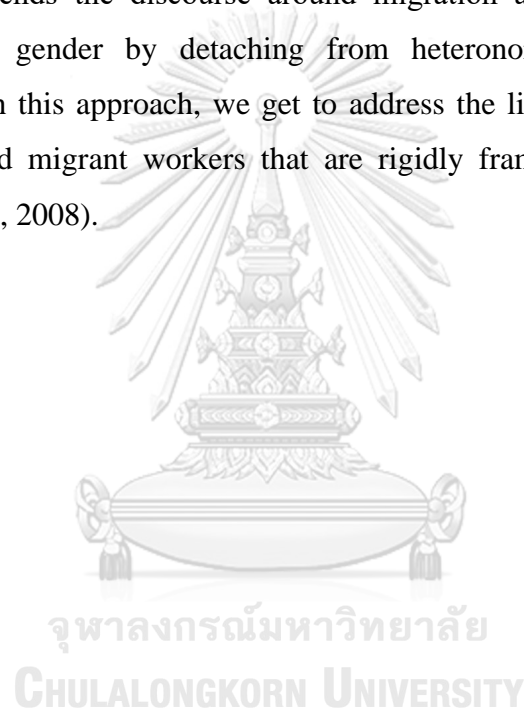
2.5 Preferred Choice of Gays

All these factors created the impression that Thailand's capital Bangkok is a gay urban metropolis where there is the normalcy of seeing and interacting with gays, lesbians or tom-dee, ladyboys, and transgender women who are locally referred to as katoeys, as well as the ubiquity of sex workers. For Jackson, the prevalence of these groups of people signified the queer-accepting culture of the Thais. It intensified the popularity of the country for queer and non-queer foreigners to visit and work in the country, which accelerated the positive reception and treatment of the members of the LGBTQ+ community. Due to this progression and unfolded elements queer scenes have accumulated for the past decades, Jackson regarded Bangkok as second to Tokyo regarding queer cultures' historical depth and degree of social influence the LGBTQ+ community created and held, which made Bangkok the gay capital of Southeast Asia.

It is essential to realize that the queer scene had developed even before the rise of international tourism in Thailand; hence the existence of commercial gay scenes primarily in Bangkok was not to address the needs of the global market but to meet first the demands of the growing Thai audience which Jackson also stressed. But Jackson acknowledges the foreign influence's impact on the city's queer scene's further development. However, we cannot surmise the same thing in other places in Thailand where foreign tourists usually flocked as they may have a different historical queer development, such as Phuket and Pattaya, which was a fishing village until it became a holiday beach destination for American soldiers stationed for the conflict in Vietnam.

The investigation on the development of the queer scene in Thailand, specifically in Bangkok, showed a linkage between the city's queer spaces, which are significant contributors to the formation of the country's reputation as gay friendly, and the gay homosexual Filipino informants' preference to relocate to the kingdom for work. By

queering, it emphasizes the importance of correlating gender and sexuality to the politics of other identities, which may affect their decision-making and thought processes (Giesecking, 2008). In this case, the respondent's migration presents situations when the existence of queer spaces influences the movement of people, which had not been considered or appeared as a pull factor in other migration studies. Queer spaces are not only instrumental in the influx of foreigners to Thailand that continues up to this day but also contribute to shaping the country's queer landscape where non-normative gender and sexual identities thrive (Avery, 2016)—moreover, queering underscores that sexuality extends the discourse around migration and enriches the subject's relationship with gender by detaching from heteronormative assumptions and expectations. With this approach, we get to address the limitations of socio-cultural discussions toward migrant workers that are rigidly framed after cis heterosexual laborers (Luibhéid, 2008).



CHAPTER 3

Thailand as a Space for Gay Migrants

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how Thailand provides a space for the performance of the gay homosexual informants' gender and sexuality. I use the term 'performance' here as an operative word to signify the exhibition and expression of gender and not because gender is a performance per se. The examination of how the gay homosexual OFWs live their lives in Thailand still anchors Butler's performative character of gender (Sullivan, 2003) because, to construct identities such as gender, it must be repeated through acts over and over again which makes it a natural state of condition (Butler, 1990 & 1999). Hence, even sexual desires are regarded as an assertion of gender and sexual identity. Thailand was chosen as their migrant destination because of the country's well-established reputation of being an LGBTQ+ friendly haven due to various elements discussed earlier, which made the gay homosexual OFWs confident that their SOGIE would not become a problem upon their migration. For instance, Bangkok, its capital, is known as a gay mecca (Dacanay, 2011) because the gay culture, which is considered relatively accepted, is very much alive in the city because there is regular interaction with katoeys or transgender people, the ubiquity of sex workers regardless of gender, and the striking number of gay spaces that shaped the city's urban architecture (Jackson, 2011). The presence of gay recreational businesses like gay bars manifests how queer a specific locality is. This is a type of establishment that is historically acknowledged as the primary socializing structure for those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community (Chauncey, 1994).

Therefore, to understand how the gay homosexual informants practice their gender and sexuality in their host country, this chapter serves as an investigation of the critical role of various spaces in Thailand in the informants' migrant experiences, particularly in the expression of their gay identity and satisfaction with their homosexual interests. Based on their responses, I have identified three major spaces where the informants mentioned being comfortable and free to fulfill the need to exhibit their SOGIE. Moreover, these spaces showed a degree of significance in the informants' perception of being gay

homosexuals, and working as professionals in a foreign country warrants in-depth discussion. The first is going to physical gay-oriented and promoted sites like bars, followed by geo-locative mobile applications or dating apps, which were described as gay spaces by the informants. At the same time, the third section is directed at the situation of their respective workplaces.

3.2 The Gay Bars

Spending time in gay bars is the most answered activity that the informants do to practice their gender and sexuality openly. Entertainment areas along Si Lom Road dominated the responses where the famous DJ Station is located. At the same time, other alleys also host several gay clubs and sit-down bars, such as Fork and Cork by Sphinx, Telephone Pub, and Tawan Bar. Outside Si Lom, there are the Cassette Music Bar on Ekkamai Soi 10, a videoke bar on Phloen Chit Road called Wine Bridge where, according to one of the informants, most Thais would hang out before hitting Si Lom, and a certain The Hills in Central World in Siam area that had drag shows. Those who do not reside in Bangkok reported the presence of gay entertainment establishments in Nakhon Nayok, Chumphon, the Soi 4 in Pattaya Beach, Silver Sands in Koh Samed, and Paradise Street in the area of Pa Tong on the island of Phuket.

Even though all the informants have visited at least one gay bar in their entire stay in Thailand, they actually have to differentiate insights on the purpose of the establishment in their lives as gay migrant employees. To extract the variations, this section is segmented into three themes to expound on how a gay space such as a gay bar can impact the lived experience of the informants as gay homosexual migrants.

Acceptance and Belongingness

A gay bar provides a safe space for leisure and appropriate contexts for expressing queer identities (Krane et al., 2002; Markwell, 1998). Therefore, it is not only a public site where queer people gather but also a space of alternative discourse that rejects heteronormativity (Blichfeldt et al., 2013; Cattani & Vanolo, 2014; Faderman, 2016; Greene, 2014; Mattson, 2020) which is being observed by Dan whenever he does drag and putting makeup because these are a form of defying heteronormative dressing and

utilization of cosmetics which is usually ascribed to cis heterosexual women. However, we should not be mistaken that doing drag is only a type of performance and not an example of how gender is performative as it is only a limited act (Butler, 1993) that harnesses operating codes and signifiers by mimicking and exaggerating them instead of being original (Lloyd, 1999). To depart from the notion of performance, performativity is described as a repetition of expression and actions that reiterate and follow discursive norms that precede and exceed the performer (Butler, 1993; Jackson, 2003); hence subjective agency is restrained (Harper, 1994).

When Dan arrived in Bangkok in October 2019 to take on the role of an English language instructor, which was referred to him by a friend, he immediately built friendships with other gay OFWs based in the capital and surrounding towns. He would join them in going to gay bars in Bangkok on weekends. Dan would usually put some makeup on and, on some occasions, do drag whenever they went out, which most of the time were in bars along Si Lom Soi 2 and 4, alleys famous for gay-oriented and promoted entertainment establishments. He wears makeup and does drag in gay bars because he knows this is a space where inhibitions are non-existent, and the norm is mutual respect and tolerance regardless of how gay patrons would express themselves while drinking and having fun.

Every time that we go partying in gay bars, I would put on makeup, and if time permits, I sometimes do drag because there is no other chance for me to express my identity to that extent but only in gay bars. Gay bars, for me, are a safe place to just be myself and not afraid of negative reactions because everybody is just very appreciative of my makeup and drag attire. Being gay is something I should be proud of, and displaying my gayness without shame is what gay bars make me feel (Dan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

In this case, how Dan acts, whether inside or outside the gay bar, is what performativity is all about, such as being effeminate with or without makeup or getting into drag. Nonetheless, a gay bar serves as a platform to show how gender is performative for gay

homosexuals, given the activities and acts considered normal inside, such as offering their homosexual desires to other gay customers.

Moreover, as queer people are prone to experience marginalization and micro-aggressions, a gay bar provides spatial protection. It is a space that ensures freedom from fear of violence and discrimination (Branton & Compton, 2021). Furthermore, it is a built environment where queer people can express and perceive themselves without inhibitions; thus, accessing the site helps in identity construction and confirmation (Harvey, 2003; Lashkari, 2018), and as declared by Dan that he feels the gayest inside the gay bars because he feels safe and secured in expressing his gender and exposing his homosexual interests.

Unlike Dan, who was able to meet and establish friendly relationships with other gay homosexual OFWs, Adam's situation in Phuket was different. He did not have any gay homosexual friends on the island, and even at work, wherein he was the only gay person. The rest were cisgender heterosexual women who were mostly Filipinos. Even though Adam had a good working dynamic with his workmates, and for him, they were his friends, they disapproved of Adam's homosexual affairs; therefore, he would go to gay bars by himself every payday.

Payday was a special day to me because that meant the weekend close to that was my gay bar weekend which was the only time when I could sincerely feel that I belonged. Despite that, in the hotel, there were many of us who came from the Philippines; I still longed for people who could understand me as a gay person, which was hard because my Filipino colleagues were pretty much conservative about LGBTQ+s. So I would look forward to spending time in gay bars which are abundant in Phuket, as there is a dedicated stretch there just for gay bars (Adam, personal communication, May 5, 2021).

A gay homosexual person often experiences a sense of self-acceptance and normality of behavior in a gay bar. This is due to the patrons' underlying understanding and

commonality, which develops a social community. However, this does not disregard a stratification based on various social identities such as class, age, professions, etc. (Visser, 2008). Therefore, it is argued that attendance at the site is essential to gender and sexual identities and the performance of gay homosexuals with an immigration background (Shield, 2018). Gay bars, a quintessential example of a gay space (Hindle, 1994; Ivy, 2001), are essential to imbuing one's sense of belonging because of interpersonal social bonds that are being facilitated inside, which have a significant impact on the behaviors of queer people in social environments whether those are considered gay space or not (Anderson & Knee, 2021). For example, Adam believed patronizing gay bars made him more confident with his job, especially since he had to face clients organizing hotel events. In gay bars, he improved his social skills in communicating with different people. Moreover, a gay bar also becomes an opportunity for a gay person to interact with the local culture (Hughes, 1997), which in the case of Adam, was his chance to experience the local gay scene in Phuket and meet other openly gay homosexuals both Thais and non-Thais outside work.

Being Gay While Away

As Dan and Adam lived in areas with a high concentration of gay bars, like Bangkok and Phuket, some of the informants based in other cities in Thailand had to include in their itinerary whenever they would go to Bangkok the time to go to gay bars in the capital. Ztan, who works in Chumphon, and JC, who is employed in Nakhon Ratchasima, both mentioned that they would extend their trip to Bangkok, which is primarily for the renewal of their passports or other consular and labor immigration matters with the Philippine Embassy, to allocate some time to explore the city and enjoy the nightlife.

I live and work a few hours away from Bangkok, so I take advantage of the occasions that I need to go to our (Philippine) Embassy to either renew my passport or settle other concerns as an OFW, which usually just takes a day. So what I do is I plan my trip and allot additional days of work leave or fortunate if my appointment falls on a Friday, so I have my weekend to spend in Bangkok to shop, visit some tourist spots, and

of course, experience partying in gay bars. For us who are not from Bangkok, it is a must to go to the gay bars because that is what Bangkok is also known for (JC, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

Even though there are a few gay bars in their respective areas of residence and employment, JC and Ztan prefer to party in gay bars in Bangkok because, for them, that is something that a tourist should not miss when visiting the city. They are also more comfortable showing up in these establishments and displaying homosexual acts as no one could recognize them as teachers, given the distance of their schools from the capital. As queer individuals, they cannot easily exhibit their gender and sexuality, particularly at work and its surrounding environment; hence they are pushed to search for spaces outside the locations mentioned earlier, often being done in the context of holiday vacation, that could permit them in doing so without having a fear of being reprimanded that could affect their personal and professional lives (Fimiani, 2014). Aside from that, traveling reduces inhibitions and increases the possibility of sexual engagements; thus, gay homosexuals would prefer visiting places that are known to be gay tolerant and have accessible gay spaces to satisfy the need for socialization with other gay people and eventual arrangement for sexual intercourse (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Monterrubio, 2009). Therefore, going to Bangkok is the gay homosexual OFWs' way to escape, and the gay bars serve as instruments to assert their gay identity and fulfill their homosexual desires not only because they can finally do so but because sexual encounter becomes one of their planned activities when traveling. Yearning for homoerotic sexual practices is part of the performance of gay identity (Verduzco, 2014). This scenario is not exclusive to gay homosexuals or those who identify as LGBTQ+s as cisgender heterosexual people are also observed to commit casual sex on holiday vacation (Ryan & Hall, 2001). In this regard, JC and Ztan share the same sentiment about looking for sexual partners in gay bars.

Yes, I would be lying if I said I do not have an ounce of that idea in mind when I go inside the gay bar. Going to Bangkok is my chance to sleep around or do sexual stuff, and it is common knowledge that I can meet someone who is up for that in gay bars without worrying that someone

from the school could see me and create some kind of problems. I think it is a common scene to meet guys in gay bars with whom you would have a one-night stand or just have whatever type of sexual interaction that one can think of. I actually met someone before when I was partying with my friends in Silom. It started from looking at each other's eyes and then flirting and touching inside the bar. We ended up in his hotel room in Nana. That's it, nothing more. It is just pure sex (Ztan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

The insignificance of Gay Bars

Patronizing a gay bar poses particular importance in the lives of gay homosexual OFWs as it has practically diverse functions that make it a safe space to perform their gender and sexuality. However, a few informants also raised some reflections on the insignificance of the site in contemporary times, which caused their disinterest in going. This scenario demonstrates how diverse the needs and interpretations of gay homosexuals are despite sharing the same gender and sexual identities because the gay community is not homogeneous (Sullivan, 2003). Gay homosexuals are influenced not only by their gender and sexuality but by other social identities that contribute to their decision-making and perspective-building processes. Although they recognize the need for a number of gay homosexuals to hang out in well-known gay establishments, Eagle, Emm, and Santos are unenthusiastic about preferring gay bars over other bars that do not specifically target gay consumers or are not promoted as such.

I have gay friends who do not like going to gay bars and only prefer “regular” restaurants to hang out at, which I also prefer nowadays. I only go to gay bars because of my friends, not because I want to, and it was purely for the social interaction that I can have with my group of friends. And proximity-wise, the bars are near to everyone. I mingle with my gay friends outside those considered gay spaces more often. I believe the role of gay bars depends on the aims and the intent of going to these establishments. If you are just by yourself waiting for someone to meet, then that is important, but if you are just piggybacking on the social

interaction with your friends, then that is not really important (Eagle, personal communication, May 7, 2021).

This narrative is not uncommon, as previous studies showed similar results about the irrelevance of frequenting publicly recognized gay spaces just to affirm one's gay identity and address homosexual needs. Some gay homosexuals happily patronize gay and non-gay places (Browne & Bakshi, 2011), while some do not see the point of visiting a gay space, whether around their localities or outside during vacation (Blichfeldt et al., 2013). Hence, it cannot be generalized that gay homosexuals can only feel confident in expressing their authentic selves as far as their gender and sexuality are concerned within the premises of gay spaces because studies have proven that otherwise, as some consider non-associated gay areas or locations usually dominated by cis heterosexual demography as platforms also of gender and sexual freedom (Browne & Bakshi, 2011).

Moreover, according to Ivy (2001), the lack of interest in experiencing some time inside the gay bars is mainly because there is no urge to assert a gay person's gender identity and sexual orientation, which Nickoholics can relate to. For Nickoholics, a college instructor in Bangkok, gay spaces are secondary and do not play a critical role in living as a gay homosexual. What matters to him is personal and social acceptance instead of relying on consuming services and supporting products to feel a sense of gayness.

The important thing to do and remember is to accept yourself first and get accepted by the people around you, which invalidates the need to access a specific space to feel belong. But I respect the people who go to the commonly known places as gay spaces if that is what makes them feel free and happy (Nickoholics, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

Gay bars have been recognized as the central figure of gay spaces and, in general, queer spaces, given their function as a socializing institution where the LGBTQ+ people converge in large numbers in search of belongingness in the queer community

(Chauncey, 1994; Greene, 2014; Mattson, 2020). However, the growing concerns about the value of gay bars and gay spaces, in general, can be attributed to our time approaching a post-gay era. The era is stimulated by the socio-cultural and political changes that make the society more accepting of the queer community resulting in the community's higher encouragement to assimilate into once denied mainstream social spaces (Ghaziani, 2011, 2015) and lessening the need for queer-specific spaces (Nash, 2013).

Despite this emerging phenomenon, it can be argued that consumers are heterogeneous, and there will be queer individuals who will still find the presence of gay establishments vital in the construction and performance of their non-normative gender and sexual identities. Nevertheless, it is a site with a long history of transgression toward heteronormative ideas and institutions that Thailand, with its capital Bangkok, was able to capitalize on its flourishing and etched on the country's socio-political, cultural, and economic dimensions. On the other hand, the post-gay era stimulates a conversation that even gay bars need queering to deconstruct their prevailing idea of the existence and role to queer people and identify the concerns that are not uncovered because of the absence of examination of the patrons' intersectional identities apart from their gender and sexuality, in this case as migrants. But an important thing to ponder is the extent of the gay bar's volatility as a space that can affect its queerness and succumb to heteronormativity in the end.

3.3 The Gay Apps

Post-gays refer to younger generations who have become the most extensive online queer space consumers through gay apps (Collins & Drinkwater, 2017) of which the emergence and accessibility have been identified as another reason why gay homosexuals no longer see the need to be at the gay bars as they can already establish a level of engagement with other queer individuals online (Ruting, 2008). The development of internet-based platforms allowed people to virtually meet and engage with anyone through social media sites, chat roulettes, and the most popular instrument, mobile applications. Online social interaction birthed the online queer space or channels primarily marketed for either gay dating or homosexual hook-up activity, such as

mobile applications that, through their geo-locative functionality, challenged the idea and purpose of physical gay space (Shield, 2018). The wide availability and accessibility of the applications, as these are free to download on the phone using an internet connection, reduce the motivation and frequency of the queer patrons to go to gay-promoted and oriented establishments (Collins & Drinkwater, 2017). The online tool enables the users to converse with their prospects without physically meeting them; thus, it is no longer time and effort-consuming, which are exhausted in going out and more economical as there are no more incurred expenses when meeting in either a queer commercial space or just a regular private establishment. Jeese, a former client support officer but, because of the pandemic, was retrenched and is now a teacher in Bangkok, views mobile applications dedicated to gay homosexuals as a very useful instrument to conveniently address his needs for romantic engagement and sexual activities because they do not require him to get out of the house and spend some money to satisfy his desires.

Gay apps definitely made everything easier for someone like me who just wants to find someone to have sex with without exerting so much effort, like going outside and spending on places where I do not have the assurance to meet that person who is up for “fun.” In the comfort of my home, I can get what other gays would expect to get in gay bars, and that is a sexual partner, which takes time because, of course, it is not like in just a second of arriving at the bar somebody will approach them and propose to have sex. It is a long and tiring process in one night just to get laid, and I do not think I have the energy for that. In gay apps, everybody is looking for the same thing, so no more long chats and just get down to business (Jeese, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

For Jeese, gay apps provide assurance in finding sexual partners despite the absence of investment in money and effort. It lessens the risk of wasting time and money going to gay bars only to address his sexual needs if he can rummage through the profile of users who are into homosexual activity on various apps while at home. He also prefers to host or invite the prospective sex partner to his place because it is more economical; if it

goes the other way around, it would still cost him time, money, and energy. In addition to that, Jeese is not the one who needs to go home in case he does not like the app user in person.

All the research informants admitted that they have experience using at least one gay app while living in Thailand. Some were active users of several apps at the time of the interview, which for them is necessary to have more options and find your niche as a gay homosexual wherein the usage is based on the kind of gay demography uses the apps or what sort of engagement majority of the users are expected to offer like aside from sex, it can be friendship or even romantic relationship. For example, the research informants shared that Tinder is for people who look for romance while Grindr is solely for sexual intercourse. In terms of gay types, Blued was mentioned as for those who like Chinese men, Growlr is for bear-type or chubby users and seekers, and Jack'd for people who are into muscular and buffed gay homosexuals. In this regard, downloading mobile apps becomes a tactic to search for the most appropriate partner looking for the same physical attribute.

I use a couple of apps to broaden my options for guys and increase my chances of meeting someone who would like to date me or have sex with me. You know gays have preferences like they want lean or with muscle and abs, others are more interested in men who have some flabs or colloquially known as dad bod, while others are into hairy guys or bears. In gay bars, it is hard to search for your type and go through everyone; then, after, you would wonder if they like you or if they are into hooking up. In gay apps, that is already given, so your only problem is if the guy you like likes you back. But see, at the tip of your fingertips, you have explored the horny gay population without a sweat (Dan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

Because the apps use geolocation to detect other queers nearby, it reinforces physical geography and marginalizes those living in areas with low-congestion or residency of queer persons. The constructed virtual urban divisions are no longer physical but social,

ethnic, and racial (Shield, 2018). This is more obvious, especially in looking for sexual partners, as users prefer to engage with available places to do sexual acts, making Sawagee more desirable online. As he lives alone, he can invite a stranger he meets online.

A lot of guys are messaging me because I have a place, and that makes everything easy. I do not need to initiate a conversation because I would just put in my bio that I have a place and wait for their messages. It is like I'm being chased by men, which is impossible to happen outside. I think inviting someone over is less dangerous than me going to the stranger's place. I'm more comfortable in my apartment because I am knowledgeable about my surroundings if anything unfortunate happens and because this is my home base, I am at my advantage (Sawagee, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

However, because Sawagee is a teacher, he unknowingly participates in the marginalization of queer online users through his preference for people who live far from him. This is his tactic to ensure that the stranger does not have any connection to his school. He practices discretion in his personal activities, such as hooking up. Being a teacher also means being a role model; therefore, it does not give him a favorable image if he is seen with different men; hence he also made sure that no one in his school was a neighbor. Using the app, a physical space for a meet-up before the sexual intercourse is no longer necessary as the sexual prospect can just go directly to his residence. The scenario had been observed among the middle class and foreigners as they have their accommodation where they can invite someone over (Samakkeekarom & Boonmongkon, 2011). However, for lower-class queers, the behavior in accessing physical queer spaces did not change despite using cyberspace to meet fellow queers because they do not have the luxury of having their place. Usually, they are uncomfortable inviting someone into their homes due to family issues with their sexuality (Samakkeekarom & Boonmongkon, 2011). In this regard, socioeconomic status can determine how physical queer spaces are perceived to be helpful in queer interactions.

Another reason for the gay apps' popularity is the gentrification of cities which comprised of closure of queer establishments that displaced queer people's leisure places (Mattson, 2015) and the commercialization of queer spaces by transforming them into physical locations that are promoted as fun, calm, and hip (Kanai, 2014). In this way, the neighborhood would attract cis heterosexual residents and patrons. Moreover, for businesses' financial stability, gay bars would commodify queer community norms to entice non-queer audiences (Branton & Compton, 2021). Because of these conditions, queer people no longer feel welcome and belong in the spaces they used to access. The growing presence of cis heterosexuals in queer spaces or the space's heterosexualization can lead to the queer community's loss of safe space (Eves, 2004; Pritchard et al., 2000) and create tensions about whom these spaces are for and the expected norms that must prevail (Branton & Compton, 2021) which paved the way for queer people to be resourceful in addressing their need for socialization using internet sites and smartphone applications. The feeling of Sawagee reflects the abovementioned concerns inside the gay bars, wherein he no longer perceives the place as safe to express his gayness.

It is true that even in gay bars, I do not feel comfortable displaying my gay expression because of the presence of straight people, particularly straight guys who might misunderstand my actions which can cause some terrible commotions. As a foreigner and teacher, that is the least that I want to be the reason for the trouble. With straight guys, you will never be sure how they will react to some gay admiration, so I might as well be the one adjusting despite the fact that the space is basically constructed for me to express my identity as a gay person freely (Sawagee, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

In this regard, Sawagee prefers using gay apps to fulfill his sexual needs because he is sure that his fears in the gay bars will not happen as the users are all inclined to participate in homosexual acts. But aside from sexual needs, gay apps are also being used with other purposes in mind. Jeese shared that he learned the Thai language and

understood more about Thai culture by talking to Thais on the apps and meeting them eventually to have sex.

I am not a transactional kind of guy. I usually talk to my sex partners and sustain communication with them. That's why I was able to learn the (Thai) language and more about their culture. Actually, I get to be updated even on the news about Thailand because of them. I also have a good sexual relationship with a Vietnamese guy who taught me the Vietnamese language and his culture (Jeese, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

What Jeese shared also complements research about the usage of immigrants of Grindr in Copenhagen, which shows that they do not use the app the same way they use queer spaces (Shield, 2018). The app was for socialization and making friends in the new neighborhood of the immigrant, which is a way to access lesser-known queer spaces. The research even argues that apps can revitalize gay urban spaces, both commercial and non-commercial, where cruising can happen. As for the gay OFWs interviewed in this research, gay apps became their primary instrument for seeking sexual interaction, while gay bars are regarded as a place to express their gay identity by being with fellow gay patrons but not with the intention of finding sexual partners. Even Ztan and JC, identified above as seekers for sexual partners in gay bars, claimed that they use gay apps too because of the convenience, especially back in their town of employment. Therefore, both physical and online queer spaces are being used by gay OFWs because they view them as complementary and not in opposition to each other.

Despite the debate about whether online platforms are killing the physical queer space industry, their functionality became more evident in the middle of the pandemic (Collins & Drinkwater, 2017). The restrictions made the physical queer spaces inaccessible, which paved the way for queer people to be resourceful in addressing their need for socialization. Scholars have observed that virtual queer leisure has become common, including online shows and campaigns such as pride celebrations and drag performances as a fundraising activity benefitting drag performers who rely heavily on queer social spaces (Anderson & Knee, 2020). Online queer space somehow managed

to lessen the emotional and mental ramifications of getting stuck at home and being vulnerable. The usage of online apps to interact with the queer population increased to find a sensible conversation with fellow queers and practice virtual sexual intimacy. Others even arrange a personal meet-up that commonly happens in either one of the residences or vehicles, which is a way to observe the pandemic's safety protocols.

Somehow, the development of technology has helped in reconfiguring queer leisure from physical to virtual. Thus, there is a growing concern if the pandemic made queer consumers comfortable with the absence of physical queer spaces ushering a more innovative online queer leisure engagements or if the situation caused the queer community to realize the importance of physical, and social outlets. However, there is another physical space that the informants considered as a safe place to openly display and express their gay identity, which is their respective workplaces in Thailand. We will find out below how, as migrant employees, they enjoyed the culture of tolerance cultivated by their organizations.

3.4 At the Workplace

It is essential to probe the experiences of queer people within the realm of work because it is considered that a more significant part of a person's life is spent in a workplace where social interactions with co-workers happen more frequently compared to family and friends (Boerties, 2012). There may be queer employees who find the need to "hide" themselves by not disclosing their queer identity and sexual orientation and by modifying their gender expression to not face discrimination and unfair treatment at work. The research informants commended their employers for having an open and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ employees. This is more pronounced in corporate offices with an outstanding non-discrimination policy that the informants who work in these international companies are proud of.

The benefit of working and getting affiliated with multi-national companies is their strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, which is a policy that promotes tolerance and acceptance to everyone regardless of gender as long as you have something to offer that makes the company

operate effectively. Perhaps it is also a way to integrate how open the Thai society is to the LGBTQ+ community, though (Francis, personal communication, May 8, 2021).

A survey about employment discrimination based on SOGIE and sex characteristics that was conducted in Thailand, the Philippines, and China showed that there is a lower degree of possibility of workplace discrimination in international non-governmental organizations and multinational companies than in national and local government agencies (UNDP & ILO, 2018). Apart from the workplace context, the likelihood of intolerance against LGBTQ+ workers can be attributed to the established organizational culture and the present demography of employees (Cech & Rothwell, 2020). Organizations may have prevailing beliefs and acceptable behaviors that are different from those outside the offices, usually shaped by each organization's core values. In this regard, the prevalence of heterosexism and homophobia may depend on the company culture. The presence of other queer individuals at work can also help to prevent isolation and social stigma because of the support that comes from their fellow queer workers (Ragins, 2008; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

Moreover, it can reduce anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments because it increases the regular contact between queer and non-queer employees, which breaks negative stereotypes and prejudice (Smith et al., 2009). The informants claimed they do not need to modify their behavior to fit into the prescriptive male role in performing their responsibilities because their employers do not have explicit policies, and their colleagues have no concerns that can restrict them from expressing their gender and sexual identities. Even in the case of Adam, his workmates are only not supportive of his sexual affairs as they do not find any problem with how exhibits his gayness at work. Due to the accepting atmosphere, the informants identify remarkable moments that signify how queer expression tolerant their workplaces can be. Dan shared that even the school administrator where he teaches encouraged him to dye his hair into something colorful, which he did.

Maybe I am just fortunate that I got into a school that embraces not only my skill in teaching but myself as a gay person. They see past my gender

and objectively look at me as somebody who shares and inculcates knowledge in students. My gender never became a problem with them regarding how I act effeminately. What is important is how I perform my job and not how I perform my gender, just like how the school administrator was fine with having hair highlights (Dan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

However, some boundaries still need to be observed because gay homosexual informants believe these boundaries help keep the integrity of their professions, particularly those affiliated with educational institutions. Gay Filipino teachers have to simulate proper etiquette and high morals, not only because their actions are part of the school's image but also because they are educators themselves. They are expected to be role models for the students. Pressure on how gay Filipinos should behave in their respective communities as teachers curtail them from insinuating and doing feminine acts at school (Wright & Villaflor, 2019). This is despite teaching as a profession widely ascribed to femininity because performing the job demands empathy and caring (Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020). As claimed by JC, who is a feminine expressing gay homosexual, being openly gay or the public knowing you as a gay person is okay but exhibiting too much femininity in public can cause a problem in her school. I argue that this condition is based on the context of work and not influenced by the level of tolerance of Thai society on queer expression. Academic institutions can still present some hostility and bigotry based on the study among LGB college faculty members, which resulted in 25 percent of informants declaring their place of work as intolerant (Sears, 2002).

Even though the informants did not mention any employment-related discrimination they encountered due to their SOGIE, it does not mean that formal or those institutionally-driven and informal discriminatory acts or those perpetuated by fellow employees are not being experienced by queer job seekers and employees in Thailand. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia with a national law protecting anyone from being discriminated against because of their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Section 3 of the Gender Equality Act of 2015 (BE 2558)

describes discrimination based on gender as “any act or omission of the act which causes division, discrimination or limitation of any right and benefit either directly or indirectly without justification because the person is male or female or of a different expression from his/her own sex by birth.” (UNDP & ILO, 2018). Despite the passage of the law, people who identify as members of gender and sexual minorities such as lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people continue facing various types of discrimination such as getting denied employment and less competitive compensation package than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts as well as being receivers of heterosexist and homophobic remarks. A survey of roughly 500 participants in Thailand recorded that about 50 percent recognized their workplaces as open and accepting.

In contrast, 23 percent confirmed that they were being bullied, harassed, and discriminated against by their colleagues because of their SOGIE and sex characteristics. It was also revealed that 28 percent believed their job application was rejected because of their SOGIE (UNDP & ILO, 2018). In this regard, the current and alarming concerns about the discriminatory practices in the workplace setting in Thailand give an idea that there is no uniformity of experiences of those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community that make them consider their places of work as spaces that allow them to perform their gay identity and homosexual desires. It can vary according to their organizations and profession.

3.5 The Triumvirate

This chapter demonstrated how queering works in multiple domains that intersect with the social identities of the respondents, from recognizing that migrant workers have sexual desires and erotic practices to reconstituting the meaning of assimilation in their host society. Following Manalansan’s (2006) argument, queering or the embedding of sexuality cannot be independently analyzed using only one subject, such as migration, because concerns about sexuality cuts across socio-cultural and political relations. Hence, queering exposed how the subject of space provided and created by the host society is a significant element in the migrant’s life.

Understanding how gay homosexual informants perform their gender and sexuality as migrant workers paved the opportunity to figure out how impactful Thailand is as a country not only as a labor destination but as a site that provides several spaces where

non-normative gender and sexual identities can thrive. Aside from providing work opportunities for these highly-skilled workers, which enabled them to migrate, Thailand became a vast space for identity construction and assertion because the country exposed them to an environment that supports them in addressing their needs as individuals who seek social acceptance, belongingness, and sexual pleasures while fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as members of their host society (Ulla & Pernia, 2022). However, this does not dismiss the fact, as narrated earlier, that some informants have to employ tactics.

Despite this, the gay homosexual informants were able to take advantage of the tolerant climate Thai society was able to cultivate and enrich over the years toward the members of the LGBTQ+ community. The public knowledge of the existence of physical gay-oriented establishments, the availability of smartphone applications that are primarily for gay people's online interaction, and employers that value diversity and inclusion became the venues that allowed the informants to practice their gay identity and pursue their homosexual interests repeatedly. Being migrants, they were able to find a local community that shares their gender and sexual identities in gay bars, they capitalized on the use of gay apps to successfully fulfill their sexual needs, and coincidentally landed jobs in organizations that embraced their queer preferences and expressions which are all spaces that help in further building their identities. Spaces are crucial in the process of having an identity because these are where the formation, development, and validation happen (Cox, 2002); therefore, the participation of gay homosexuals in various activities both within gay and non-gay spaces influences what kind of gay identity they will be, or they want to be because of the relations they have forged with other individuals (Collins, 2007; Farr, 2007; Hughes, 1997).

Furthermore, the investigation of the performance of the informants' queer identity revealed how physical and online spaces functioned differently and were not competing. Online space does not replace the purpose of physical space and vice versa, as they are perceived by the informants as complementary, facilitating the fulfillment of their need to perform their gender and sexuality. On the other hand, it is essential to remember that despite the commonality of the informants as gay homosexuals and

Filipinos, the differing objectives in using and consuming the spaces is a testament that gay experiences and migrant living should not be described and depicted as homogeneous. Nonetheless, the informants' labor migration to Thailand empowers them to continue performing their gender and sexuality.



CHAPTER 4

The Presence of Gay Migrants and its Impacts on Thailand

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we found out how Thailand and the established physical and accessible online gay spaces became instruments in the lived experiences of gay homosexual OFWs. The spaces served as opportunities for the informants to manifest and enrich their gender identity and continue their homosexual pursuits, which they had done before migrating to Thailand. Before relocation, the informants already identified themselves as gay homosexuals. There was no more self-exploration to figure out their gender and sexual identities while in the kingdom. Therefore, gay homosexual OFWs' consumption and patronization of gay spaces in Thailand is their way of affirming their gender and sexuality (Monterrubio, 2009). Consequently, the migration of Filipino gay homosexuals may have contributed to sustaining Thailand's reputation as a gay-friendly destination as they become part of the highly visible and growing queer population in the country who carry stories that describe the kingdom as such, just like how JC's childhood friends were able to inform her about Thailand's favorable treatment on LGBTQ+ individuals.

However, the investigation of the spaces where the gay homosexual informants are comfortable performing their queer identities led to a realization that their presence in these spaces became a contributing factor in the intensification of existing issues on the function and significance of gay spaces which may have a serious impact on the future of queer cultures that Thailand had cultivated for more than half a century. This observation banks on the idea that despite that a space is helpful in an individual's identity formation, an individual is basically the creator of space because it is social, as conceptualized by Lefevbre (1991). The scholar claims that "each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space, and it also produces that space" (p.170). By being space themselves, humans can form social relations and determine use-values which refer to the perceived tangible features of an activity or a commodity that can satisfy a human need or want. The scenario means that space and identity are mutually constructed (Lashkari, 2018) because space is a product of connections and exchanges.

The created links and meanings turn into material and symbolic spaces (Forrest & Kearns, 2001). Hence, the participation of gay homosexual informants influences the molding, remolding, or even strengthening of the shape of gay and non-gay spaces in Thailand. In this regard, by analyzing the informants' narrated behavior and perception of the spaces, I have identified three major impacts of their presence: first is the heterosexualization of the queer spaces, second is the homonormalization of heterosexual spaces, and third is the reinforcement of compartmentalization of queer establishments specifically in Bangkok. It is interesting to note that the first two ramifications have been subjects of concern in queer space research set in the West (Ekenhorst & van Aalst, 2019; Visser, 2008); thus, the findings of this study can help widen the perspective on these topics that are based on the Global South and set in a world-famous queer tolerant country.

4.2 Heterosexualization of Queer Space

A physical establishment that is openly targeting gay patrons through various means is understood to have a majority of its patrons being queer (Blichfeldt et al., 2013) because it is constructed for the safety performance of the consumers' gender and sexual identities. However, as other societies have become more tolerant of queer expressions, cisgender heterosexuals also became more comfortable being inside gay bars and engaging with queer individuals (Casey, 2004), which triggers a phenomenon called the heterosexualization of queer space because of the increasing and apparent attendance of cisgender heterosexuals inside the space (Branton & Compton, 2021). The gentrification of cities mainly causes the dilemma and the capitalistic opportunities it catalyzed that attracted customers who identify as heterosexuals. The development negatively affected the space's political significance as a symbol of resistance against heteronormative urbanization and a space attending to the needs of gender and sexual minorities who are often marginalized on the outside due to their queer identities.

But, one aspect that must be considered in the change in general demography inside the physical gay leisure and entertainment businesses is the habit of gay homosexuals themselves. They invite and encourage their heterosexual friends to visit gay bars with them, just like Sawagee, who admitted that even he would ask his heterosexual friends

to party in gay bars for him to still scout and ogle over men inside. If we can remember in Chapter 3, we learned that Sawagee's reason for using the gay apps was to satisfy his homoerotic sexual desire because he could no longer feel safe searching and flirting with other customers in gay bars which he attributed the insecurity to his observation of the presence of cisgender heterosexuals. With this behavior, he contributes to the heterosexualization of the space that makes him feel restricted. Moreover, having a mix of friends and colleagues who identify as homosexual and heterosexual is common for some informants; therefore, Jesse and Eagle would go to gay bars with both groups.

I have a diverse set of friends, from straight to gay, and my straight friends, they did not mind hanging out in gay bars. Gone are the days when people would assume that everybody in a gay bar is gay or open for some gay stuff. I think now gay bars are for everyone regardless of your gender as long as you see yourself having fun with your friends and dancing all night long (Eagle, personal communication, May 7, 2021).

My manager in my previous company preferred treating us in gay bars as our team building. At first, it was weird because I had never experienced a getting to know you session with your workmates in this kind of establishment. But I felt it was actually more relaxing and fun than getting bored in your office's usual setup of team building. The majority of my former workmates were straight. I believe I was the only gay then (Jeese, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

The habit demonstrates how gay homosexual informants, even though they are foreign migrants, can play a part in the heterosexualization of queer spaces in Bangkok by encouraging their heterosexual friends to patronize gay spaces. This occasion may present unfavorable implications for the assertion of other patrons' gay identity and homosexuality, who will feel uncomfortable around non-queer people. The informants become incognizant accomplices in repurposing the essence of gay bars that produce harmful effects on queer consumers who only rely on these establishments to feel safe

and belong. Thus, the phenomenon raises a question about the degree of security and freedom one can experience with their non-normative gender and sexuality in Bangkok's queer spaces, as well as the atmosphere these spaces can sustain in the future. Heterosexualization creates fears and risks because it changes the dynamics of interaction among the patrons that previously constructed social cues and accepted behavior may no longer be understood and tolerated. Hence, it can spark additional demand for new and emerging queer spaces, which Thailand can continue to capitalize on. Suppose the patronization of cisgender heterosexuals is becoming a usual sight in queer spaces. In that case, the reverse side of this phenomenon is also happening in Bangkok, which is the presence of queer consumers in heterosexual spaces because they do not find gay spaces desirable.

4.3 Homonormalization of Heterosexual Space

The hegemonic institutions bounded in heteronormativity resulted in the notion that public or private space is heterosexually produced (Goh, 2018). Heterosexual behaviors are repeatedly acted in public while heterosexual principles and politics are continuously propagated in different schemes that affect our personal views, only reconfirm that spaces are naturally heterosexual (Butler, 1990 & 1999). Therefore, any establishment and structure that was not constructed, opened, and targeted queer patrons either privately or publicly can be distinguished as a heterosexual space. If we recall, in Chapter 3, Eagle, Emm, and Santos are not fans of gay bars as they prefer patronizing businesses that are not considered gay-oriented or promoted sites.

I do not distinguish places whether they are for gays or not because all of them only offer the same amount of fun and level of service. My purpose in going out is to have fun with my friends and drink, and I can have that experience in just a bar, not particularly a gay bar. It has been a long time since I went to a gay bar, honestly (Emm, personal communication, May 6, 2021).

The habit of the three informants in frequenting heterosexual spaces such as restaurants and bars when meeting other gay friends is a point of contention in understanding the

idea of queer space. It makes us wonder if this is already a way of queering the space where cisgender heterosexual people dominate.

To answer this, we turn to Gustav Visser's (2008) research on the preference of white South African gay men in going to heterosexual leisure places such as "straight" bars. Based on Visser's argument, the consumption of gay men in spaces that are overwhelmingly heterosexual is only a "homonormalization" and not enough to convert and recognize the space as queer. The concept is an extension of Lisa Duggan's (2002) notion of homonormativity, which Duggan explained as a norm that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized depoliticized gay culture in domesticity and consumption" (p.50). In this regard, there is nothing queer about being gay and lesbian if gay and lesbian individuals and groups harp on assimilationist politics to be recognized as "normal" members of society, in a status quo that they are still able to enjoy their privileges accompanied by their other social identities while others are much more oppressed.

In applying the lesson of homonormativity, homonormalization or homonormalizing heterosexual spaces rejects the belief that the usage of gay homosexuals automatically results in queering the space. Gay men only find themselves comfortable being in the space despite the heterosexual identity that the space has based on its prevailing demography. As Visser argues, gay men subscribe to a masculine expression of gay identity, which makes them easily assimilate. To juxtapose Visser's observation with the Filipino informants of this research, Eagle, Emm, and Santos, who shared that they prefer going to "straight" bars, are gays who express and represent themselves in a masculine way. Hence, they can be comfortable being in heterosexual spaces because they conform to the expected set of behavior and appearance of a cisgender heterosexual man.

I guess my gender expression which is very masculine gives me an impression of normalcy because I never thought of changing or adjusting my actions anywhere I go unlike maybe other gay men who have to

lessen their femininity or gayness to feel welcome in a particular place (Eagle, personal communication, May 7, 2021).

Even though there is no sense of defiance against the heteronormative institutions, it is enough for homonormalization to produce a space originally conceived as a heterosexual leisure space (Visser, 2008). Despite the reconstitution, homonormalization does not aim to deconstruct and resist the discursive purpose of the space as it is grounded in the idea of sameness of the homosexual lifestyle with the heterosexual instead of recognizing the difference between them.

I do not like going out and partying. Still, whenever I get invited by my colleagues to hang out with them outside, we would go to “straight” clubs or clubs for a general audience, not really for gays, so I was not really properly oriented or exposed to gay places here in Bangkok. I do not see any problem with that because, again, I do not like going out, and I am doing OK, just going to non-gay places. But if I go out, I would go to straight bars because I do not see any difference between the two; they are just the same (Santos, personal communication, May 8, 2021).

Therefore, it does not anymore follow the foundation of queer theory, which refuses binarism and celebrates gender and sexual diversity. In this form, homonormalization tends to exclude other gender and sexual identities by being focused on the validation and acceptance in heterosexual spaces, an example of which are JC and Adam, who believe that their feminine expression will make them uneasy in hanging out in non-gay spaces. Despite the issue of inclusivity, homonormalization presents an opportunity to extend the metrics to determine how queer a particular area is, which in this case is Thailand. Aside from the existence of physical gay-oriented and promoted sites, businesses, and locations where those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community frequent and the level of preference and convenience to access these physical non-gay-oriented and promoted sites can also be indicators that queer cultures are thriving. Before I move on, it is essential to understand that homonormalization does not contribute to the phenomenon of “degaying” or heterosexualization of gay

spaces of the changing norms and attitudes within the space because of the attendance of cisgender heterosexual customers (Visser, 2008), which I discussed above.

4.4 Reinforced Division of Metropolitan Queer Spaces

In Chapter 3, we have been informed about the gay bars where the informants would usually go and the various smartphone applications installed to perform their gender identity and fulfill their sexual needs. One striking observation that warrants a discussion is how the segmentation of gay demography via gay apps reflects the exact condition of physical gay spaces in Bangkok. As noticed by Jackson (2011), gay entertainment locations in the capital of Thailand have been socio-economically and linguistically compartmentalized because they can be categorized based on their major patrons (Atkins, 2012; Dacanay, 2011; Jackson, 2011). Foreigners, tourists, immigrants, and middle-class Thai gay men would go to Si Lom Road. Meanwhile, younger local demography from lower-class backgrounds frequented Saphan Khwai, which is recognized as the suburban version of Si Lom. Other sites are outside the downtown commercial districts, such as Chatuchak in the north, Ratchada in the inner north, and Ramkhamhaeng in the city's eastern part. Another signifier that results in the compartmentalization of gay businesses would be the physical attribute of the dominant patrons that forms the place's reputation (Ruting, 2008), which Dacanay (2011) investigated through the consumers of gay bathhouses in Bangkok. Using physical appearance as a determinant is similar to how gay apps create differences in their target users, which some informants mentioned in the previous chapter.

The informants' preference for Si Lom Road over the other gay districts only reinforces the division amongst socio-economic classes in accessing particular queer spaces. Being highly-skilled workers, they become part of the class that, according to Jackson (2011), dominates the queer spaces' identities and homogenizes political and cultural ideas. Aside from being spatially separated, Si Lom's popularity with foreigners, especially tourists, causes other spaces to become invisible.

We usually go to the bars along Si Lom specifically DJ Station because that is where the crowd is. It is also the most famous among the gay bars

in the city, maybe because it is in the middle of everything. If it is well known then a lot of cute guys will be there (Dan, personal communication, May 3, 2021).

The situation limits the queer businesses' access to purple baht because of the foreign patrons' unawareness of other queer places. Purple baht is an expression that refers to the market significance and purchasing power of queer consumers. In Western countries, they used pink to correlate the expression, while in Thailand, purple is more commonly associated with the LGBTQ+ community (Jackson, 2011).

Furthermore, the segmentation creates false assumptions and hasty generalizations among Thai queers as money boys because money boys tend to go to Si Lom instead to look for prospective "partners." Hence, the reinforcement affects how spaces are created and understood, foreseen as intimidating, and falsely characterized because of the homogenization and alienation of perspectives from other classes, specifically the lower class. The attendance of Filipino migrant workers only amplifies the socio-economic and linguistic division of gay entertainment zones by following the common or famous gay spaces until they decide to patronize those frequented by the locals and members of the lower class.

4.5 The Three Phenomena

We have seen in the discussions above how Filipino gay informants played a part in sustaining the queer cultures of Thailand by performing their gender and sexuality in various spaces. But alongside their active participation in these spaces, there are problems that the informants unknowingly amplify, which can contribute to the evolution of the queer landscape, specifically in Bangkok. The heterosexualization, homonormalization, and compartmentalization are for sure not the only concerns that the field of queer space needs to confront and expound on, but because of integrating the participation of gay migrants in studying Thailand's queer spaces, perspectives to address and discuss these issues have been enriched and queered. Hence, it is essential to acknowledge and continue examining these issues because they significantly impact the queer-tolerant environment Thailand is known for.

By queering the result of the informants' presence in Bangkok, the scenarios are clear testaments to how spaces can be shaped and reshaped by their users, considering their social identities and preferences. A space, whether gay or non-gay, is a fluid and contested site of identification, meaning, and negotiation; therefore, it should not be regarded as having a fixed set of norms heavily framed by discursive perception (Branton & Compton, 2021). Lefevbre (1991) argues that the malleability is caused by the differences between the perceived function of the space, the constructed idea by the builders and authority, and finally, how the consumers use it. Throughout the narratives of the informants, it is noticeable that they use spaces with various intentions in mind that are either aligned with what the space is supposed to be for or not. In this sense, the gay migrants can reform the objective of the space's existence in their lives that does not follow its intended purpose even though the misalignment exhumed areas of concern in the future of queer spaces. As Carillo posited (2004), migration can be both enriching and transformative, intensifying division amongst social identities.

In this regard, the three phenomena can stimulate another wave of queer cultures characterized by the rise of newly identified spaces that will be considered genuine sites of transgression against the heteronormative assumptions of gender and sexuality. Demand for such is natural because as long as people are being oppressed, disenfranchised, and marginalized by the prevailing hegemonic heterosexual politics, there will always be a motivation to look for avenues that escape and reject the discursive order and understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation. But just like the previous queer booms in Thailand, capitalism is still a critical element in this emerging period congruent with the post-gay era. Heterosexualization and homonormalization, on one side, may be suitable for businesses as they openly expand their target consumers, and an increase in profit may be expected. On the other hand, the challenge for businesses will be their primary patrons, who may be discouraged from going to the establishments because of the changing demography; therefore, business owners may need to carefully and sensitively employ innovative strategies so that they can maximize the benefits of tapping both heterosexual and queer markets.

Having a well-established reputation for being a queer-friendly country, it is exciting to witness how these observations can enthruse different stakeholders in Thailand to come up and effectively enforce interventions to capitalize on the emerging issues of queer spaces while recognizing the importance of leveraging the participation of gay migrant workers, or is it bound to fail in sustaining its robust queer cultures by neglecting the changing landscape of queer people's search for acceptance and belongingness.



CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

This study about the lived experiences of the informants who are gay homosexual documented overseas Filipino employees in Thailand enriches the literature regarding migrant laborers who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community or those whose identified gender and sexuality do not conform with the traditional notions of gender and sex binaries and heterosexuality. By doing so, it veers away from the dominant heteronormative perspectives and concerns on labor migrants that heavily revolved around heterosexual family dynamics (Manalansan IV, 2006). It presents new data about the migrants' interaction with their host society, engaging the three disciplines of migration, sexuality, and space as these touch on the multiple subject positions of the informants. Therefore, it exposes the importance of gender and sexuality as identities that have critical functions in the informants' lives (Carillo, 2004; Luibhéid, 2008) outside the Philippines while acknowledging that they are not only labored agents but are sexual beings or pleasure and desire-seeking individuals (Manalansan IV, 2006).

This study about the lived experiences of a group that shares gender identity and sexual orientation reveals that even though their decision to emigrate was not triggered by their necessity to sexually liberate themselves as they were already openly gay, the intangible and tangible manifestations of the popularity and mainstreaming of queer cultures, particularly in the country's capital, Bangkok, became a consideration that attracted some of them to choose Thailand as a target destination for overseas employment coupled with contemporary labor issues ongoing in the Philippines. It establishes that various societal changes in Thailand stimulated by political concessions in the context of "siwilai" (Jackson, 2003), prevailing religious beliefs, and decades-long economic progress honed its global recognition as a gay-friendly country (Jackson, 2011). In this sense, apart from being the country of their eventual employment, it posits that Thailand embodies a space where the informants can continue publicly living as gay homosexuals upon their migration (Ulla & Pernia, 2022) by pursuing activities that assert their gay identity and homosexual orientation without or with fewer restrictions and apprehension from the state, the workplace, and even the public. Hence, it

recognizes that Thailand's reputation serves as an assurance that the country has a society that provides an environment where gay homosexual informants would feel safe and comfortable performing their non-normative gender and sexual identities (Lewis & Mills, 2016). However, the study claims the value of acknowledging that the push and pull factors that influenced them to leave the Philippines to work in another country can vary from person to person that is based not only on their gender but on the conditions of their other social identities (ASEAN SOGIE CAUCUS, 2017; Galang, 2015; UNDP & USAID, 2014). This way, the hasty generalization of the lived realities back at home and motivations of Filipino LGBTQ+ migrant workers is avoided.

This study about the lived experiences of eleven gay homosexual Filipinos employed in educational institutions and corporations and settled in various cities in Thailand demonstrates how their migration only sustained the performance of their gay homosexual identity despite being labor migrants. It informs that the convenient access and exposure to structures and instruments that are gay-oriented such as gay bars and gay mobile applications, and the welcoming and unthreatened atmosphere non-gay spaces emit like their respective workstations were considered to be opportunities that accommodated the informants' queer expression of their gender and sexuality (Blichfeldt et al., 2013; Browne & Bakshi, 2011). It shows that the patronization of the informants of physical gay entertainment sites allowed them to participate in activities inside that satisfied their need to confidently affirm their gayness and homosexual desires (Monterrubio, 2009; Shield, 2018). On the other hand, it figures that the consistent usage of mobile applications that cater to gay and homosexual interests addresses the informants' search for romantic and sexual engagements, a way to assert their queer preferences (Collins & Drinkwater, 2017; Ruting, 2008). It also accounts that the places of employment of the informants are recognized as spaces that permit them to unchallengingly exhibit their authentic selves that do not align with heterosexual expectations. Nonetheless, the study surfaces contradicting views about the significance of gay spaces in the performance of the informants' queer identities stemming from their diverse ways of gender expression. Thereby, it emphasizes that despite the commonality of gender identity and sexual pursuits, heterogeneity exists in

the gay community because of differing interpretations and dispositions of those who identify as members (Sullivan, 2003).

This study about the lived experiences of gay homosexual Filipinos who emigrated to Thailand for employment confirms that their consumption and active presence in both gay and non-gay spaces do not only give them the chance to perform their gender and sexuality but also contribute to the change in perception and conception of spaces in the country whether observed as queer-oriented or not. It determines that the migrant workers themselves are drivers of the increasing number of cisgender heterosexual patrons inside the physical spaces primarily constructed and promoted for queer consumers exacerbating the heterosexualization of queer spaces (Branton & Compton, 2021; Ekenhorst & van Aalst, 2019). Moreover, it distinguishes the level of comfort gay migrant experiences in sites that are not considered gay spaces, which became their apparent choice for social interaction prompting the occurrence of homonormalization of heterosexual spaces (Visser, 2008). Furthermore, it reinforces the observations of previous studies about how compartmentalized queer spaces in Bangkok are because of the clear differences in gay demography an area or establishment attracts, as the informants would likely patronize sites that are immensely publicized as queer spaces which are dominated by their fellow non-Thai consumers resulting in the invisibility of other queer localities and the concentration of the purple baht only among internationally renowned gay businesses (Atkins, 2012; Dacanay, 2011; Jackson, 2011). However, it also acknowledges these scenarios as opportunities for various actors that may activate elements that transform the queer cultures, communities, and spaces in Thailand (Lewis & Mills, 2016).

This study about the lived experiences in Thailand of the migrant workers who defy the discursive trend of understanding and practicing gender and sexuality opens a number of discourses that also warrant further analysis as each can be associated with cultivating the discussion on the role of various mechanisms present in the kingdom that allow the performance of non-normative gender and sexual identities and maintain its attractiveness as a queer migrant destination; for instance, the degree of influence of Thai mass media, particularly the production, wide distribution, and growing

prominence of BL shows and films in igniting the interest of emigrating to Thailand as briefly shared by a few informants. Another interesting exploration closely related to the post-gay era is focusing on heavily utilized social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and messaging apps like Line, Telegram, and WhatsApp as tools for queer interaction. But, research that is highly imperative after this study is on other queer spaces in Thailand that can be primarily dedicated to lesbian and transgender consumers to provide additional perspectives from other queer gender and sexual identities that evade the monolithic comprehension of spatial construction and reconstruction of spaces happening in Thailand.

Lastly, queering the migrant experience through the stories of Adam, Dan, Eagle, Emm, Francis, JC, Jeese, Nickoholics, Santos, Sawagee, and Ztan presents the importance of gender and sexuality as identities in the migration process as the performance of these identities serves as a piece of evidence that the shaping and structuring of spaces are a two-way process where the spaces would mold the conceptions of gay identity and expression at the same time the users are active stakeholders that influence and manufacture the meanings of these spaces (Cox, 2002; Dacanay, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991). Hence, being gay, homosexual, and migrant workers are fundamental roles in the flourishing of sexual identities, practices, and communities.



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