

S P O T L I G H T



JAPAN

COVER IMAGE: The Bluestockings' New Year's Party, 1914. Pictured from left are Kobayashi Katsu, Iwano Kiyoko, Nakano Hatsuko, Araki Ikuko, Yasumochi Yoshiko, and Hiratsuka Raichō. The photo appeared in vol. 4, no. 2 of *Bluestocking (Seitō)* in February 1914.

The cover of our Japan spotlight features the women of *Bluestocking (Seitō)*, Japan's first feminist literary journal. What began with a few hundred copies in 1911 became a visionary manuscript for *Atarashii onna*, the *New Woman*. The magazine is often credited with helping to launch the feminist movement in Japan. The editors argued frankly and unapologetically on issues of abortion, motherhood and sex work while championing women's sexual liberation. They openly and articulately expressed their anger over the suppression of women's freedom in the family, legal system and workplace. *Bluestocking* treated all of its readers as equal despite their deeply diverse readership. The language was intimate and inviting, causing scores of women to submit contributions, write personal letters and even show up at the *Bluestocking* offices asking for advice.¹

Bluestocking fostered connections between its readers, and we hope our zine will do the same. The stories in this section are not playful anecdotes—they are calls to action. We hope they inspire you to engage with our contributors, **CHIME FOR CHANGE**, or any other fight for global gender equality.

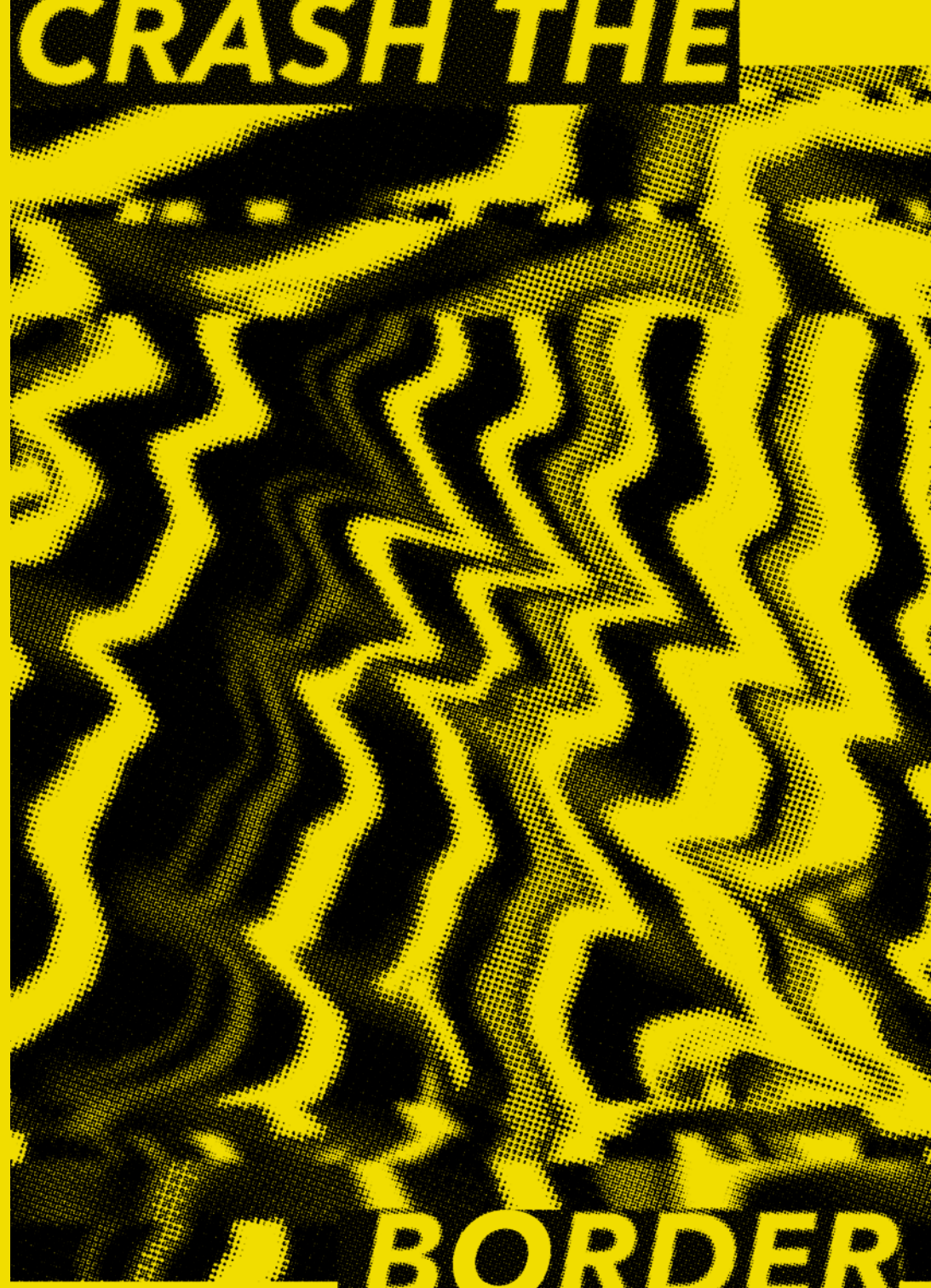
¹ Adapted from: Jan Bardsley. "Introduction." *The Bluestockings of Japan: New Woman Essays and Fiction from Seitō, 1911-16*. Ann Arbor, The Center of Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2007.

YUME MORIMOTO

Living in Japan, I often find myself at a loss for words. We are taught to hide our feelings. We are told that we're selfish if we speak out and "disrupt" the existing ways of society. We are educated not to talk about our pain nor our politics. Many of us stay silent and complacent to maintain a facade of peace. Japanese can tend to be a vague, non-direct, non-confrontational language, so how do we find the words to directly confront the issues we face every day? In Japan, transgender individuals are required to go through sterilization to change their legal gender identity, same sex marriage is illegal, and Japan is once again ranked abysmally low in the Global Gender Gap Index. How can we raise our voices against these issues when we are educated to do the exact opposite? For me, I gave it my all. I went on a search to find my own words,

untied by the binds of what society told me. I fervently consumed the pages of Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler, bell hooks, and Roxane Gay. I turned to the loud, demanding, angry, black and white pages of Riot Grrrl. I remember the cut out zig zag words jumping out at me saying, "we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings." So I made a zine. Words I didn't know I had in me poured out and flooded the pages. I wrote about not wanting to be the "kawaii", calm & collected girl society wanted me to be. I wrote about being an LGBTQ+ ally for the first time, unaware it was a step towards coming out two years later. We wrote about intersectional feminism & mental health issues & sexual consent & armpit hair. We built a small community around the words that had long been trapped within us and let them flow out one by one on paper. Existing Japanese words of queerness, feminism, intersectionality, equality can be complex and inaccessible. In a society where politics are taboo and the conservative party has consistently ruled, it takes courage to raise your voice. Sometimes, I still have no words, and I cry, I spit, I feel, I laugh, I scream, exasperated

at the ugliness in the world. Eventually, when I dive in and resurface with the words, they are from deep within, they spurt out with fire and fury and find their way onto the pages of my zines. I use zines, with all their words, to navigate politics, understand my queerness, promote freedom, fight for radical change, and connect with others. I use zines, because by communicating and debating with others in our own terms, I can deconstruct my own privileges, admit to my faults, and reflect on my mistakes. One day, these words, or this zine, will be considered outdated and insensitive. Heck, it is probably being scrutinized and criticized now. I welcome those words... because those words are how we change & reshape the world. An open conversation must continue to create change. We fight existing hierarchies by questioning the norms that bind us. We must react, read, reflect, research, and raise our voices. We must create, contest, critique, cooperate, counter, and keep the conversation going. We are gradually creating new meanings. We are fighting with and for our words, finding ourselves, and each other.



W A I F U

Tokyo's queer nightlife has been centered in the Shinjuku Ni-Chōme area for the last half-century. Originally a red-light district, it became a place for Japan's LGBTQ subculture to flourish. But as it's been embraced by the mainstream, Ni-Chōme has become an unwelcoming space for many women, trans, and gender non-conforming people. Incidents of discrimination against trans women and sexual harassment largely went unaddressed by bar owners and club organizers until a group of five women began a radically inclusive club night called Waifu to combat problematic trends in the scene. Organized by Elin McCready, her wife Midori Morita, Lauren Rose Kocher, Maiko Asami and Lisa Tani (who has now departed the group), Waifu began as a resistance party after Elin, a trans woman, was barred from entering a lesbian party thrown by a well-known bar, where her friend was DJing. "The owner came out and was like, 'Well it's the policy. I can't change it. It's not only my decision.' So my friend was like, 'Okay, well I'm not

gonna play,' and then there was a lot of screaming. I thought punches were going to be thrown," recalls Elin. In Ni-Chōme it's extremely common for lesbian parties to deny entry to trans women on the grounds that they could be masquerading as abusive cisgender men. "Basically, while people at these parties haven't responded to direct questions from us, people often say that they restrict entry for trans women in an attempt to prevent harassment, an obviously misguided one," says Asami. "So the focus of ensuring a safe space for people in the party was on regulating entry based on whether somebody was or looked trans, as opposed to what people did once inside," says Asami. Lauren, a bisexual cisgender woman explains, "What's most frustrating is there are a lot of women at this mostly-lesbian party who present as masculine and their lives are made worse by a society who punishes them for not looking how a woman 'should' look. And then they turn around and police another woman's gender at the door, denying a trans woman entry because she doesn't meet their definition when, by default, they might not even meet their own definition. So many cis lesbians don't realize the cis privilege they possess. And honestly, I didn't either until I read a specific trans woman's story online," Lauren says. "The writer presents very feminine and had 'passed' with ease for years.

When she was out with her butch cis lesbian friend, it was the butch cis friend who was stared at, or confronted in restrooms by other women who would say, 'A man is in the women's bathroom!' This issue comes up a lot when I am out with my more butch lesbian friends," Lauren continues. "However, it was only while reading this woman's story online that I was able to understand how this issue intersects with a trans woman's experience. The important difference is that if the restaurant confronts the butch cis lesbian and she says, 'No, I'm a cis woman,' the restaurant will apologize to her and maybe even give her a free dinner. But if someone confronts a trans woman and finds out she is trans, she would not get a free dinner, she would not get an apology, and she could find herself in a very fragile and dangerous position. The butch cis friend has huge cis privilege despite being more visible as a minority than the trans woman." Founded upon the principles of intersectional feminism and a no-tolerance policy for abuse, plus a desire to showcase new music and activism, the first Waifu party was put on only ten days after Elin's being turned away from the lesbian party. Over 100 people showed up and it quickly took off from there. "There was a lot of buzz surrounding the incident, especially because of how quickly we had come together and organized a counter-party afterwards," Asami tells CHIME. "Other club events started



A person wearing a white paper crown is holding a large black sign with white text. The sign is positioned in front of a wooden fence. The person's face is partially visible above the sign, and their hands are holding the top corners of the sign. The background consists of a wooden fence and some foliage.

SHY
BUTCH CLUB

putting up posters similar to ours, and there were lesbian parties that openly declared they would not discriminate against trans women, because they felt that the incident was indicative of a greater problem within the community, and wanted to be a part of the solution." Widespread talk of the institutionalization of discriminatory, trans-exclusive feminism in Ni-Chōme's lesbian community went viral after the owner of a well-known lesbian bar, who's known for her activism posted a sign declaring an event "Cisgender Women Only," excluding not only trans women, but all non-binary and gender non-conforming people from the city's biggest, longest-running and most influential women-only party. "So in organizing our counter-party, we decided to create a big sign that made clear that any form of discrimination or harassment would not be tolerated," says Asami. Posted outside and inside every Waifu event is their "NO TRANSPHOBIA. NO HOMOPHOBIA. NO RACISM. NO SEXUAL HARASSMENT. DRUNK ≠ CONSENT" sign, which is virtually unheard of for a nightclub. "In the Tokyo club scene there are rarely policies against discriminatory or abusive behavior," says Elin. "Our thought is, the right way to do it is to let everybody in and then have everybody in the party looking out for everybody else, as it should be. We show everybody the sign at the door and say, 'This is the policy. Do you accept the policy?'" The name Waifu—"wife" in Japa-

nese—was chosen partly to reclaim objectifying images of the "anime wife," but also in affirmation of Elin and Midori's right to call each other "wife". "Right around the time we created Waifu," Midori explains, "Elin and I had been married for nineteen years. Two years ago, Elin transitioned, and changed her gender to female on her American passport. She tried to do the same in Japan, at the ward office, and on her alien registration card, but was not able to do so if she wanted to stay married, as same-sex marriage is not recognized in Japan. She was told that she could not stay married to me as a woman." Now, Elin is running a crowd-sourced fundraising campaign to take her case to court with the Japanese federal government. In the meantime, the Waifu collective is hosting discussions on queer rights, gender-inclusive makeup workshops, and DJ workshops to close the gender gap and counter sexual harassment in the club scene. "I know people who didn't go out to parties before and they come out now. So, people needed it," says Elin. "That's what I've learned from this: If you're not happy with the scene, go start your own party, make your own space, because somebody needs it."

Call to action: To learn more about Elin and Midori's campaign follow @elinmccready on Twitter and @waifu_party to support future initiatives for trans and queer people in Tokyo.

MY DREAM



BY AKKOGORILLA

How amazing would it be, if every person could celebrate their sexual orientation and gender identity, and live their life with joy? What if that became the norm? When that's the world you're striving for, the general mood in Japan can be stifling. It's like you need the approval of others in order to feel good about yourself. And because we don't want to lose face, we overreact to failure—both others' and our own—by mocking and lashing out. Rapping, for me, has always been about breaking down that kind of win-lose worldview, dismantling these definitions of masculinity and femininity, all in an attempt to put myself back together. I was overjoyed when I learned that there was a word for what I was doing: feminism. Feminism, it turns out, is not about headstrong women hell-bent on defeating men. It's a light of affirmation that assures me that being myself is enough. In Japan, people still think of the "feminist" label as a sign that someone is a difficult person. The blowback is real. There are times when I'm wracked with a feeling of powerlessness. Still, even if what I do comes across as incoherent babble, I want to be moving forward. My dream is to foster an environment in Japan for people to talk bluntly about issues like gender and society. To have real, heart-to-heart conversations with you through my music, and for you to come out of the experience knowing why you're fine just the way you are. The road ahead may seem long, but at the same time I feel like I can already see a light at the end of the tunnel. I strongly believe that individual change builds momentum, growing and spreading and ultimately leading to real, genuine change.



TODAY'S ABSURDITY IS TOMORROW'S REVOLUTION

BY YUKI CHIZUI

(1) Question old conventions. (2) If you see a rule that doesn't suit you or those around you, be the one to say something and bring about change. (3) Never forget what makes you, you. (4) Don't get hung up on rules. These are the principles I hold dear. I am a sushi chef, and manager and owner of Nadeshiko Sushi, which features an all-female staff. In most sushi restaurants in Japan, the simple fact of being a woman disqualifies you from making sushi—in fact, you're not even allowed to step foot in the kitchen. When I first entered this industry ten years ago, I'd get the cold shoulder at the market, which was overwhelmingly populated by men. Vendors would refuse to sell to me. I'd hear things like "Your sushi is not real sushi" and "You're in the way, don't come here." Why, you ask? It's because I don't look like a male sushi chef, who wears a white uniform and no makeup. Instead, I wear a kimono, have long braided hair, and put on colorful makeup. It's because Nadeshiko Sushi is located in Akihabara, the land of pop idols and anime, rather than in

Ginza or Kyoto. And it's because I don't limit myself to the kind of sushi tradition built up by men. I choose to flavor and arrange my sushi in a way that reflects who I am. I see my sushi as art. Having taken classical Japanese dance lessons as a child and studied graphic design at art school, I see sushi—comprised of a minimum selection of colors and elements—as a type of art that condenses Japanese aesthetics into a tiny package. That's why I want to take all of the sushi design drawings I've accumulated over the years and serve them up to diners from around the world in a way that only I can—in a way that only women can. I had a feeling that people would be on board with that. But in practice it's never been so easy. There have been twists and turns, times when I even wore a maid outfit behind the counter in order to entice male customers to come to my restaurant. Ideally, I would have never had to resort to anything like that. It was the feedback I was getting from abroad and the attention from foreign press that really gave me a

confidence boost. In Japan they mocked my place by calling it a kind of "hostess bar" selling sushi. But the foreign press presented me as someone confronting a male-dominated society head-on. It was encouraging. I experienced an awakening, and started posting to social media more frequently. When I started drawing attention, the internet masses apparently didn't like it, and their displeasure erupted, spreading prejudiced views like "a woman's menstrual cycle affects their sense of taste" and "you're going to get makeup on the sushi". It got a little out of control. In Japan, strong-willed women who say what's on their mind and dare to venture off the beaten path get severely scrutinized. But my supporters stepped up and saved me with their actions. They taught me that if you're forced outside of established conventions, you should strive to overcome, as the land of creativity lies just beyond. Live just the way you are... What's considered absurd today will bring about a revolution tomorrow. Just keep pressing forward!

