Begging for change: Hijras, law and nationalism

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This article begins by examining multiple drafts of a parliamentary legislation that aims to provide rights and reservations to transgender persons in India, so as to trace the ways in which hijras have been absorbed into the discourse of nationalism. The most current draft of this bill, 'The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2016' shows that despite claims to protect transgender citizens, the state uses the discourse of nationalism to justify the increased governmentalisation of hijra bodies and lives. I bring attention to the state's insistence on the distance between homosexuals and hijras and the active endorsement of Sexual Reassignment Surgery to argue that the legislations are consolidating heterosexuality rather than making space for queer citizens. The project of heterosexualisation marks the disjuncture between colonial and contemporary ambitions of policing hijras, which have remained remarkably consistent and centred around their economic activity of begging. Based on ethnographic research conducted in rural Odisha, I question the glossing of hijras' practice of seeking alms or challa *as begging, to show how limits of nationalism are drawn and render hijra forms of being as incommensurable with the state.*

Keywords: hijras, begging, transgender, law, nationalism, governmentality

I
Introduction

Since 2014, considerable deliberation has taken place at the levels of the Supreme Court of India and parliament regarding the recognition of transgender persons and their rights. I begin with a critical examination of a Supreme Court judgment and the drafts of a bill, both of which aimed to protect the rights of transgender persons to education, health and other benefits of citizenship. By pointing out gaps within the judgment while also

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***Contributions to Indian Sociology* 53, 1 (2019): 1–25**
SAGE Publications Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC/Melbourne
DOI: 10.1177/0069966718813588

drawing out differences between the judgment and the various iterations of the bill, I show that far from ensuring the rights of transgender citizens, what these pieces of legislation achieve is to transform transgender persons and communities into a legible, enumerated population. At first blush, the ambition of the bills might seem part of the global movement of LGBT rights. However, the silence of these state-led enactments on the sexuality of transgender people and a concurrent distancing of gay and lesbian people from the concerns of transgender persons reveal increased governmentalisation of hijras by pressing upon them the terms and conditions of national membership. The parliamentary bills I discuss show that the legibility of the population is dependent upon encouraging aspirations towards a coherent and correct biology through Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS).

I use the phrase coherent and correct ironically because a large part of the bill and its iterations reveal an obsession with the biology of hijras and transgender people. In her study of the Iranian state's recognition of transsexuality and subsequently permissible SRSs, Afsaneh Najmabadi (2014) offers us some insights into how transgender people get absorbed into new tones of nationalist formations. Iran's case of promoting heterosexuality through biomedical interventions, Najmabadi shows, is made possible by extending Islamic jurisprudence into scientific matters, including the psychology and physiology of sexuality. It would be convenient to argue that the debates over recognising transgender persons in India are similarly indicative of a certain saffronisation of sexology (Pande 2017), yet the kind of intellectual labour that engages with medical writings is absent, even when the material is present (see Sweet and Zwilling 1993; Zwilling and Sweet 1996, 2000). While lawmakers and politicians cite myths and archival evidence to argue for special attention to secure citizenship of hijras, they are not animated by the question of whether the gender of hijras or transitioning from one gender to another is against Hindu or Islamic tenets. Yet, this technique of governmentality that aims to transform hijras and transgender people into citizens whose rights will no longer be denied is not a purely secular exercise of liberal democracy. Indeed, the citing of myths and texts in an unstudied manner in the legislation to reaffirm the religious and political significance of hijras simultaneously recasts the sexuality of the hijras as one that can achieve heterosexuality through surgery. The second part of the article shows how the recasting of the figure of the hijra within heterosexuality is premised on a recalibration of the notion of a hijra household. Since one of the aims of the bill

is to rehabilitate the hijra within their natal families, the bill would also effectively police hijra forms of kinship—namely the *guru–chela* relation that fall outside of the heterosexual family. Such policing would also obstruct hijras' access to forms of livelihood and dismantle communities and remove hijras from public spaces in the interest of a national narrative.

II
From the margin to the centre

The National Legal Services Authority judgment

In 2014, India's Supreme Court delivered its decision on the petition filed by National Legal Services Authority, (henceforth, NALSA) that the fundamental rights granted by the Constitution were applicable to the transgender population of the country (National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India 2014). The judgment is complex in that it recognises the 'third gender' while collapsing the contextual differences between various forms of gender variance in India to clearly demarcate a pertinent population. The Supreme Court goes to great length to ensure that hijras, *eunuchs*, *aravanis*, *thirunangis*, *kothis*, *jogtas*, *jogappas* and *shiv-shaktis* are seen as part of the transgender community and continues to include people who identify as transgender individuals and people with intersex variations. An archive that has now become familiar through repeated citations from scholars and activists affords historical legitimacy to queer sexuality and is once again echoed in the judgment. The concept of *tritiya prakriti* (third nature/sexuality/gender) and myths from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are marshalled as evidences for the hijras' historical presence in South Asia, while the two ethnographies on hijras by Serena Nanda (1991) and Gayatri Reddy (2005) are cited to refer to the religious and political significance of hijras in everyday Hindu lives and the Mughal royal courts.

Yet, far from being a watershed moment in the history of Indian liberal democracy or the LGBT rights movement, the reception of the judgment was at best mixed. Some activists welcomed the decision, while others have been cautious pointing to how the judgment tethers gender and sexuality to biology. For example, the judgment, firmly states:

> [Transgender] has come to be known as umbrella term, which includes Gay men, Lesbians, bisexuals and cross dressers within its scope.

> However, while dealing with the present issue we are not concerned with this aforesaid wider meaning of the expression transgender. (para. 107)

Withholding recognition of gay men, lesbians and cross-dressers but not of hijras points towards not only the creation of a population but one whose specific configuration of gender and sexuality the court is willing to accommodate. On the one hand, the NALSA judgment allows for transgender men and women to choose their gender on official documents after SRS; on the other, it recommends that 'any insistence for SRS for declaring one's gender is immoral and illegal' (para. 129). Furthermore, after collapsing the difference between transgender women and hijras, the judgment insists at several points that hijras be given the right to self-identify as the 'third gender'. The judgment states, 'Hijras/ Eunuchs, therefore, have to be considered as Third Gender, over and above binary genders under our Constitution and the laws' (para. 74), and that 'it becomes imperative to first assign them their proper "sex". As TGs in India are neither male nor female, treating them as belonging to either of the aforesaid categories, is the denial of these constitutional rights' (para. 119).

Anxiety about the tenuous relation between gender and sexuality is reflected in the way transgender persons are considered worthy and acceptable of state and legal recognition because they achieve heterosexuality through biomedical and psychological interventions. When heterosexuality is not the ambition of or possible solution for the subject, then legal recognition is curtly denied, as seen in the judgment's quick dismissal of concerns related to the anti-sodomy law. The learned judges write:

> A Division Bench of this Court in *Suresh Kumar Koushal and another v. Naz Foundation and others* [(2014) 1 SCC 1] has already spoken on the constitutionality of Section 377 IPC and, hence, we express no opinion on it since we are in these cases concerned with an altogether different issue pertaining to the constitutional and other legal rights of the transgender community and their gender identity and sexual orientation. (para. 18)

While addressing another judgment in this manner is the norm of judicial behaviour, inclusion of section 377 IPC, in this case, as being irrelevant to

hijras' sexual orientation is odd since this provision is routinely used by the police to harass hijras whose sex work (which is often undertaken in public spaces) makes them particularly vulnerable. An alternate reading of this contradiction betrays the laboured attempt to frame transgender persons as unrelated to homosexuality and different from the gay and lesbian community. A difference that is defined by the ability of transgender persons to achieve heterosexuality is further encouraged and stressed by numerous citations of court cases from the UK, the USA, Australia and Malaysia which recognised and deemed marriages between a post-operative transgender woman and a man legal. The judgment ties physiological coherence to the processes of identification by a citation to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report that recommends '[g]etting legal recognition and avoiding ambiguities in the current procedures that issue identity documents to Hijras/TGs are required as they are connected to basic civil rights' (para. 45).[1] The biomedical solution to the confusion regarding physiology, taxonomy and rights continues to take much time, effort and space in the ensuing legislative bills that I discuss below.

Rights of Transgender Persons Bill of 2014

The NALSA judgment was confusing in its objectives but the benefit of doubt was given by activists and community leaders to the court and the state in the hope that the judgment would result in more debate. The next few pieces of state legislation that emerged, however, made clear that the state was increasingly factoring hijras into a canny political calculation that would make them more vulnerable to the state's disciplinary and punitive powers. Tiruchi Siva, then leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a powerful political party in the state of Tamil Nadu,

[1] The judgment's ambition to recognise biomedically achieved heterosexuality is clearly reflected in the citations of court cases from around the world that also extend recognition of transgender men's marriages to women. But given the contradictory position of the judgment on the requirement of SRS, the judgment unintentionally creates space for gaming the law by same-sex couples. The statement, 'No status, such as marriage or parenthood, may be invoked as such to prevent the legal recognition of a person's gender identity. No one shall be subjected to pressure to conceal, suppress or deny their sexual orientation or gender identity' (para. 22) can be interpreted to allow marriages between same-sex individuals who agree to change their gender at least on paper. There are historical examples of similar gaming, most notably, the adoption of one lover by another as his son in East Germany (Borneman 2001).

introduced the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill of 2014 (henceforth RTP Bill of 2014) as a private member's bill.[2] Gee Imaan Semmalar (2014) had pointed out a puzzling aspect of the NALSA judgment, which was that the judgment 'is not the result of a campaign undertaken by the Hijra community'.[3] The bill introduced by Tiruchi Siva, like the NALSA judgment, was also unprovoked by sexual minority community activists. Siva, when asked what prompted him to bring this bill and whether he had interacted with transgender persons, replies:

> I had interacted with them before bringing the Bill. But after it was moved so many associations and self-help groups got in touch with me. I got to know how they have suffered. This is a huge step forward in ending the centuries-long discrimination. (Manoj 2015)

Why Siva had not got in touch with transgender activists before drafting the bill and why did he wait for so long to do anything about the transgender community if he had known that they were suffering under centuries-long discrimination are questions that will probably remain unanswered. But this aspect of making hijras and transgender persons a site of legal and state intervention without consulting them is telling. The sidelining of their voices suggested and in the drafts of legislation that came later, confirmed the biopolitical aspirations of the state towards cleaving the hijra and transgender body and population to surveillance and abandonment. Though, Siva was lauded by fellow Members of Parliament across political divides and parties for his initiative, the transgender community organisations were taken by surprise. They reacted swiftly with a request for more time to study the bill and recommend changes if needed.

Rights of Transgender Persons Bill of 2015

The RTP Bill of 2014 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in February of 2016 where the debate remained inconclusive and further discussion was

[2] The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, Rajya Sabha, Bill No. 49 of 2014 (2014).

[3] Semmalar also warns us that the issue of reservation would replicate caste-based oppression among the 'third-gender' population, with the forward caste transgender population availing themselves of benefits and pushing Dalit transgender people further from emancipation. His most stringent critique, however, is to show that transgender men are only a passing concern for the judgment. See, Semmalar (2014).

postponed, thus preventing the bill's passage into legislation. This was partly because the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) had begun drafting its own bill for the implementation of the NALSA ruling. The MSJE had been holding meetings since 2013 and made a report available in 2014 that showed the initial intention of the Ministry was not to fashion a bill detailing the rights of transgender people, but rather to engage a general concern with 'problems faced by transgender community […] and suggest suitable measures to ameliorate their problems' (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment 2014, p. 1). The NALSA judgment and the RTP Bill of 2014 lent added importance to the MSJE report, which was then used to draft a new bill that would be introduced in the Lok Sabha in response to the failed RTP Bill of 2014.

This new bill, The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2015, (henceforth, RTP Bill of 2015) was uploaded to the ministry's website on 26 December 2015. Various transgender community-based organisations were given a deadline of the 04 January 2016 to register their complaints and recommendations (Anuvinda and Siva 2016). Given little more than 1 week to study the bill, many activists balked at the manner in which they were being rushed into accepting the bill that they had not helped formulate. Numerous organisations, such as Insaaf, Nirangal, Sampoorna, Sangama, Sappho, Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti and South India Transgender Samithi, responded by pleading for more than the one week allotted to make substantial comments. Since the organisations were unsure of whether their request would be granted, they also attached some major changes to the bill. These organisations raised several points of concern such as the bill's silence on section 377 of IPC, which is routinely used to harass hijras, and whether the bill would interpret the NALSA judgment to recognise the rights of marriage, adoption, and inheritance.

The RTP Bill of 2015 clarified some of the confusion around SRS but an effort to bring hijras and transgender persons under the surveillance of the state was once again slipped into the bill under the requirement for a 'Transgender Certificate'. The RTP Bill of 2015 stated that a

> [c]ertificate that a person is a transgender person should be issued by a state level authority duly designated or constituted by respective the State/UT on the lines of Tamil Nadu Aravanis Welfare Board, on the recommendation of a District level Screening Committee headed by the Collector/District Magistrate and comprising District Social Welfare

> Officer, psychologist, psychiatrist, a social worker and two representatives of transgender community and such other person or official as the State Govt/UT Administration deems appropriate. (MSJE 2015: 6)

Transgender activists noted the requirement for a certificate and asked whether such formal identity policing would not undo the first objective of the bill, which was to afford the freedom to choose one's gender. The second issue regarding the proposed 'Transgender Certification' was that such an act of policing would exacerbate the tensions between different groups and people regarding who gets recognised as a real transgender person. Given that the criteria for a real hijra shifts with context and may rest on proliferating variables such as biology, sartorial presentation, marital status, parenthood, occupation, and membership, it is not difficult to imagine how yet another variable of authenticity and a state sponsored one at that, would be confounding (Saria 2015). Since the bill made provisions for transgender persons who did not already belong to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe to gain reservation under the Other Backward Classes for employment, some activists recommended that a certificate issued by a mental health professional should suffice for proving that the person is indeed transgender, as is the norm in other countries. Matters regarding transgender children and intersex persons were also raised, which becomes a more significant element in the next iteration of the bill because it criminalised the relatedness between older and younger hijras (gurus and chelas), harkening to colonial anxieties of hijras as kidnappers, and more recent anxieties about begging in public spaces.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2016

In some ways, the shortcomings of the RTP Bill of 2015 were not surprising. The changes demanded of the RTP Bill of 2014 that was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by Tiruchi Siva were so considerable that it would have been improbable if not impossible for the government to agree to all of them. The watered-down version that is the RTP Bill of 2015 would have passed if transgender rights had been the flashpoint for political parties seeking to define their credibility by way of their transgender policy positions.[4] The next iteration of the bill that emerged

[4] I am referring to how issues such as decriminalisation of homosexuality, gay marriage, adoption of children, or serving in the army were and are such flashpoints for political

in 2016 included sections and clauses that were absent in the earlier drafts and silent on the recommendations made to the RTP Bill of 2015. These additions, which I will discuss below, alarmed activists to such an extent that they organised to actively prevent the passage of the bill that was purported to protect their rights.

There were several issues in the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2016 (henceforth TPB of 2016) that was introduced in the Lok Sabha in August of 2016 that enraged activists, especially since it undid all the patient elaborations, clarifications and discussions that had taken place since 2014 (The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2016). While the bill included the proper definition of transgender persons as people whose sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned at birth, there was also a surprising return and inclusion of a biological understanding of transgender people as 'neither wholly' or 'a combination' of male and female.[5] The most contentious parts of the bill that made the state's ambitions of enumeration, surveillance and eventual criminalisation of hijras clear was the suggestion to create 'District Screening Committees' comprising:

> (a) the Chief Medical Officer; (b) District Social Welfare Officer; (c) a Psychologist or Psychiatrist; (d) a representative of transgender community; and (e) an officer of the appropriate Government to be nominated by that Government.

While the application for the certificate is made optional for the transgender person, the requirement of this certificate has been made compulsory if the transgender person wants their official documents changed. These

parties in the US, if not the larger Euro-West. A pro- or anti-stance on these issues would then further define the ideological bent of the political parties.

[5] The recommendation to include people with intersex variations in the ambit of the RTP Bill of 2015 was meant to prevent doctors and hospitals from performing sex assignment surgeries on children without their consent. More specifically, the recommendation was to make sex assignment surgery of infants to decide their gender as male or female punishable by law. It was hoped that, once in place, many persons would not be forced to live the gender that was surgically assigned to them at birth. Furthermore, since transgender people and hijras were sometimes also born with intersex variations, the inclusion of intersex issues in the bill might prevent painful childhood harassment, bullying, and confusion.

certificates would also be necessary for the transgender person to change their gender in the future.

The response of increased policing of transgender identity to recommendations to relax the previously drafted measures of screening and enumeration, transformed the bill into a renewal of the many possible ways in which the state could police hijra kinship and practices. The bill proposed punitive measures against 'begging' which lies at the heart of fashioning hijra personhood and qualifies them as ascetics. The bill states:

> Whoever (a) compels or entices a transgender person to indulge in the act of begging or other similar forms of forced or bonded labour other than any compulsory service for public purposes imposed by Government; (b) denies a transgender person the right of passage to a public place or obstructs such person from using or having access to a public place to which other members have access to or a right to use; (c) forces or causes a transgender person to leave house-hold, village or other place of residence; (d) harms or injures or endangers the life, safety, health, or well-being, whether mental or physical, of a transgender person or tends to do acts including causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse; shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to two years and with fine. (6)

Framing begging as 'bonded labour' and forced activity is important discursively and performatively because it erases the history of hijras in India, all the while citing it to legitimise action for them. The particular form of begging undertaken by hijras is called *challa mangna* in the hijra language (or code-switching; see Hall 2005) and, as I will show in the next section, emerges from the particular configuration of eroticism and asceticism, and of gender and sexuality that hijras embody and signify. Since the gurus of young hijras train them in how to ask for challa (alms) on trains, clause A in the bill renders the entire structure of relatedness (if not kinship) vulnerable to state's disciplinary and punitive measures. Hijras also leave their natal households and biological families to join a hijra gharana, (more often than not to escape torture and cruelty inflicted upon them by their natal families and usually when they are still legally

minors) as part of consolidating their asceticism that frees them from the duties and obligations of the householder. By opening the possibility of recognising such ascetic practices in Clause C as forcing young hijras to leave their households would criminalise all hijra households.[6]

There were further queries such as why perpetrators of abuse of transgender persons were given a significantly shorter term of imprisonment compared to those who committed aggression against cisgender women. Benefits such as reservation and protection against discrimination when seeking health and employment, which were present in the earlier drafts, were removed and practices that constitute the everyday life of hijras and were previously not heavily policed were stressed as criminal. The TPB of 2016 was introduced in the Lok Sabha and was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment for examination. The outrage against it was immediate and the committee held five sittings between October of 2016 and July of 2017 with several members from the transgender community presenting their depositions. The Forty-Third Report of the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (hereafter SCR Report) that detailed the concerns of the community was presented to both houses in July of 2017 (7) (Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment 2016–2017).

The Forty-Third Report of the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment

At the outset, I should mention that the SCR report was rejected, and at the time of writing this article, the government had decided to go ahead with the TPB of 2016 as it was then drafted. I cite the back and forth between the committee and the ministry at length in this section to show

[6] This clause is a repetition of a clause in the Bill that states:

1. No transgender person shall be separated from parents or immediate family on the ground of being a transgender, except on an order of a competent court, in the interest of such person.
2. Every transgender person shall have—(a) a right to reside in the house-hold where parent or immediate family members reside; (b) a right not to be excluded from such house-hold or any part thereof; and (c) a right to enjoy and use the facilities of such house-hold in a non-discriminatory manner.
3. Where any parent or a member of his immediate family is unable to take care of a transgender, the competent court shall by an order direct such person to be placed in rehabilitation centre (TPB, 2016, 4).

how a bill that was ostensibly presented as a recognition of hijras and their form of life ended up rendering them more vulnerable to the punitive powers of the state while offering and promoting a heterosexual form of life and productivity in exchange. Regarding the criminalisation of hijra kinship that entails young transgender children leaving their natal homes and households to join hijra households, the SCR recorded the ministry's response as:

> Clause 13 (1 to 3) was primarily aimed at retention of transgender children within their immediate family. Punishments envisaged in chapter VIII are expected to bring down cases of domestic/familial violence. The spirit of the bill is to integrate transgender persons and community in to the society rather than to create separate structures. If we allow two parallel systems to exist then the bill have no meaning for the transgender community. However, where any parent or a member of his immediate family is unable to take care of a transgender, the competent court shall by an order direct such person to be placed in rehabilitation centre. (82)

Along with disrupting hijra kinship structures, the ministry also wants to only allow heterosexual units of family at the expense of eroding alternative forms of kin-making. The ministry believes that:

> As long as Transgender Person is a child, he/she should not have a choice to reside other than the household where parent or immediate family reside as it would increase the chances of his physical and sexual abuse. Such child may also not get a chance of proper education. It would, therefore, be in the interest of the child to be with his/her family. A Transgender Person, after becoming an adult may have his choice of residing anywhere. (82)

The committee pushed back by stating that family be defined so as to protect hijra elders, whose relationship with their celas is seen as a form of adopted parental rights.

Regarding beggary, the ministry was clear as to its ambition vis-à-vis hijras. It not only revealed its aspirations, namely that hijras stop begging, by stating that it was already criminal to beg but also warned that 'forced beggary/beggary syndicates shall be dealt with under appropriate

provisions of the IPC Act. After the bill is approved, all efforts would be made to mainstream the transgender community by providing skill training' (100). The committee also agreed with the ministry 'that beggary/beggary syndicates and bonded labour system must be discouraged as being a crime under various acts irrespective of any gender' (101). It further placed the charge of perpetrating the crime of begging by hijras on hijras themselves, by stating, 'The Committee strongly feel that the bill must recognize these offences as crimes against transgender persons and provide for sentences commensurate with the gravity of their offences' (101). Thus, not only was begging criminal, but the begging done by a hijra would qualify as a crime against transgender persons for which her guru could be prosecuted. There were no measures mentioned that would prevent a hijra household from being recognised as a beggary syndicate, and the bill allows for begging to be seen both as a crime committed by a hijra and on a hijra. The policing is offset by the committee 'exhorting' the Ministry 'to issue directions to State Governments to provide alternative employment opportunities for transgender persons' and 'to introduce various short-term courses designed according to their abilities and requirements for skill development' (102). The government in the November of 2017 announced that it was disregarding the SCR and going ahead with the TPB Bill of 2016 that had not only removed the provisions of earlier drafts but had also made it possible to criminalise challa mangna, the economic mainstay of hijras across the country (*The Wire* 2017).

III
Challa

Through the iterations of the bill that aimed to protect the rights of hijras, what the state aims to achieve is not so much equality for its hijra citizens but a much tighter grip on a population that has historically escaped surveillance. Much of the anxiety around identification, enumeration, discipline and punishment revolves around hijra kinship that disrupts the heterosexual family and the hijras' asceticism, which takes a particular form of begging in the public sphere. These anxieties are not new, and neither are the measures put forward to police them. Historians have shown how colonial attempts at policing hijras came across challenges that are strikingly similar to the ones that these set of legislations hope to address. The physiology of the hijra was never transparent as seen in the

census data of 1891 and 1901, both of which divided hijras into male and female (Agrawal 1997; Reddy 2005). While it remains unclear whether the 'female hijras' in the census data was referring to women dependent on hijra households or hijras who had undergone the ritualised emasculation/castration, the hijra body in the current moment as in colonial governmentality continues to be examined to yield a coherent linking of sex, sexuality, and gender. The criminalisation of hijra kinship, which entails hijras leaving their natal families to join hijra gharanas, often when they are still legal minors, can also be traced to anxieties in colonial policing and governance. One of the reasons why hijras had been added to the list of criminal tribes under colonial rule was that hijras were suspected of kidnapping young boys and forcibly castrating them to make them join hijra communities (Hinchy 2017, 2014a; Jaffrey 1996; Nataraj 2017). Whether this suspicion of kidnapping was the cunning of state recognition of hijra kinship and/or corporeality is not discernible, but what is apparent is that while the hijras' appearance in discourses of nationalism is new, the suspicion towards their body and communities still frames them as a threat to the state.

I shift attention to the emphasis on the criminalisation of begging introduced in the TPB of 2016 when it had been absent from all deliberations that had taken place beforehand to show how the heterosexualisation of hijras dovetails with the criminalisation of challa in order to make hijras commensurable with state-sponsored nationalism. As mentioned earlier, the begging that is referred to in English is how challa mangna is translated. The translation erases the distance and difference between the secular framing of begging and the religious economic exchange that challa mangna entails. This difference reveals that while the legislation cites the religious importance of hijras to justify the drafting and passing of the bill it criminalises precisely those practices that define and qualify the hijras' religious significance. The scenes and exchanges described below took place during rounds of fieldwork among various hijra groups and households between 2008 and 2018 in the coastal districts of Jalasore, Bhadrak, and Jajpur in Odisha. Significant parts of the fieldwork involved joining my informants on the trains that run along the eastern coast of India. While passing through these districts by train, I learned from them how one asks for challa. It was through this long engagement that I realised that the exchange of paltry sums of money between passengers and hijras was not as simple as begging.

My difficulty in asking for challa led me to ask my informants how they first learned to go fearlessly onto trains. Questions like, 'Who taught you how to ask for challa?' and 'When did you first go?' revealed an intense relationship between the hijra gurus and her celas that filled each of them with gratitude towards their gurus, and rancour towards celas who had left their households. Parvati, a young hijra guru, said:

> When I go to visit my guru, I carry so many gifts. Last time, I took a cupboard, some money, food. She taught me everything, how to sing songs at *badhai* (childbirth and weddings), how to ask for challa. If she hadn't taken me, taught me how to ask challa would I have been alive today?

Another guru and I were discussing a young hijra who had recently left the guru's household when she said:

> When she left her house and came to me, she didn't know anything. I fed her, clothed her, and then took her to ask for challa, she was so scared, I told her, "You have to do this to survive, what will you eat?" She would hide behind me in the train, tightly holding my saree's pallu. She wouldn't even be able to say anything. Slowly I taught her to ask passengers for money, when they wouldn't give money, I would be there to scream at them. Now look at her, she goes alone into bogies and she's forgotten who taught and looked after her.

This young hijra acknowledged the debt to her former guru and laughingly said:

> At first, I was so ashamed, what if somebody sees me, I used to think it was like asking for *bheek* but that slowly went away, now I love it, I do so much comedy on the train, passengers love me, yesterday, one young man asked, "Sister, can you give birth," I said, "if we gave birth, then what would the women do?" everybody laughed.

The training offered by gurus to young hijras recast for them the exchange of money from bheek to challa and in doing so undid the stigma that was attached to begging.

A semantic difference becomes apparent with the use of bheek, because nobody ever said upon casual enquiry about a hijras's whereabouts that she's gone to ask for bheek. In fact, it would be considered very insulting to say to another hijra that she begged. In the process of learning from a hijra guru on how to ask for challa in the trains, I realised that it was a complex exchange that required careful calibration of coercion, placation, humour, and sartorial presentation. Elsewhere, I have argued that challa has only partial similarities to other forms of religious exchange of money such as *Dana* (Heim 2007: 191; Parry 1989: 66–8), *Dalali* (Huberman 2010: 408), *Dakshina* (Das 1983: 454; Parry 1980: 111), *Bhiksha* (Carrithers 1983: 282, 1989: 325; Saria 2014). A hijra's ability to negotiate the relationship between the god/dess and the householder to either bless men with impotence/childlessness or bless them with fatherhood makes hijras akin to the sanyasi—the ascetic renunciate who is sometimes structurally opposed to the Brahman and sometimes parallel to him (Das 1982). It is this form of asceticism that makes hijras' *challa mangna* a form of religious exchange of money rather than begging and tethers hijras not only to each other as guru and cela but also to public spaces and the householder.

IV
Cease and desist

The first time I went to ask for challa on the train, I was lagging behind the hijra guru who had taken me with her. I noticed that when she passed the Train Ticket Examiner/Conductor (TTE) who was in the same compartment as us, he did not look up, but when I passed him, he looked a bit confused and asked me for my ticket. I said, 'I'm with her', and he gruffly let me go. While begging, as the legislative documents warn us, is punishable by law, hijras and the various officials of the railway have established an informal system of negotiations that accommodate hijras' claims to ask for challa. Many of the lower officials at train stations and police station were also friends or lovers of hijras and sometimes extracted sexual favours from them but this was not the only reason that altercations between passengers and hijras never reached a point where a crackdown on hijras was inevitable or enacted. When one such altercation occurred in Bhadrak, the railway police forbade the hijras to get on the trains for challa for a week. This sentencing was not carried out and after a few days, we were back while the officials turned a blind eye. Yet, there is a pattern

of change that is gradually making it difficult for hijras to continue to ask for challa. There are several trains on which the hijras are not allowed to ask for challa, like the Rajdhani, Shatabdi, Duronto, those which have chair cars, travel only between major cities and stops, cater to tourists, whose tickets are expensive, and are evidence of the modernising, high-speed, railway system of India. Furthermore, hijras are not allowed to beg in the first-class compartments on any train, and as more and more trains become high-speed, with multiple classes of compartments, hijras are being slowly pushed out from this space.

One day in 2011, my informants told me that nobody was going to get on the train. Upon enquiry I was told that a lot of hijras had been arrested, and it would be better to let the situation calm down. After pursuing the matter further, I soon discovered a press release by the South Central Railway that read:

> Railway Protection Force Authorities of South Central Railway arrested 212 eunuchs/transgenders as a result of special drives conducted against them in the Railway stations and trains during the month of June, 2011 and prosecuted them in the court of law. In order to eradicate eunuch menace, the security department of South Central Railway conducted 564 drives during the month of June, 2011 at the sections where presence of eunuchs was reported. As result 201 cases against eunuchs were registered. An amount of 34, 150/- was collected towards penalty from them and eleven eunuchs were sentenced to under go imprisonment. Trial against remaining twenty six cases are pending in the Court of Law. (Rao 2011)

Until June 2011, incidents like these were, to the best of my knowledge, rare. So, I inquired as to what might have provoked such a determined act of policing. My informant told me that a hijra had ended up slapping a man who refused to give her money and that the man had turned out to be a railways officer. Not having any way of verifying this story, I could not pursue the matter any further but since then, several such acts of policing have emerged in other states. They are spectacular due to the sheer number of hijras arrested. Reports in December of 2014 stated that the police in Bangalore had arrested 150 hijras and sent them to Beggar's Colony, a state relief centre (Long 2014). Yet another eviction notice was tweeted out by the Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) that said, 'We will

conduct a drive to remove *mangalamukhis* from traffic junctions after 5th Feb (Deepika 2016).' This recent increased policing points towards the erosion of hijras' place in the social and public sphere and has a longer genealogy that can be traced to colonial policing that included them in The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.

The striking similarities between colonial policing and the current ambitions of the legislative bills must be highlighted before we tease out important discursive differences. Jessica Hinchy writes:

> In the long term, the aim of the CTA [Criminal Tribes Act] was the extermination of eunuchs through the prevention of emasculation, which would cause eunuchs to "die out". The immediate aim, however, was to erase hijras as a visible socio-cultural category and gender identity. Thus, the Act provided for the imprisonment for up to two years with fine of "[a]ny eunuch … who appears, dressed or ornamented like a woman, in a public street or place, or in any other place, with the intention of being seen from a public street or place, or who dances or plays music, or takes part in any public exhibition", thereby criminalising hijras' primary means of income. (Hinchy 2014b: 276)

One of the reasons for the failure of colonial governmentality to police hijras was related to the failure of colonial imagination which could not recognise the carnality of hijra bodies, that is, the corporeal transformation that castration and emasculation entailed. This failure of imagination explained their aspiration and ambitions to remove children from hijras in order for hijras to 'die out'. Another reason for the failure of colonial policing was the ability of hijras to evade arrests because of their membership and participation in travelling theatre troupes that put up religious drama across the country (Hinchy 2014b; Preston 1987).[7] In this context, the departure of new forms of legislation is significant in that the state discursively frames itself as having an aspiration to undo precisely this genealogy of wrongdoing. The legal recognition that the legislation affords, even while citing the vast cultural materials associated with hijra

[7] Such forms of occupation remain alive today, at least in rural Orissa where hijras are a large part of *jatras* (travelling theatre troupes) and local music video productions called *Sambalpuri Productions*.

personhood, ends up disqualifying the very position that these cultural matters afford them by conflating challa with begging and by criminalising hijra kinship. Hijras and their absorption into agendas of governance that are becoming increasingly important to current ascending Indian nationalism, are framed not as a population that must 'die out' but as one that must be encouraged to thrive. Yet, this thriving depends on forcing hijras to perform an 'ontological trick'—to remain intact as hijras while also ceasing to be hijras (Povinelli 2002). By ensuring heterosexuality through biomedical intervention, threatening kin-networks and policing the expanding borders that keep hijras' economic and religious claims out, hijra bodies and population are made commensurable with the limits and conditions of nationalism.

V
Haq

That the governmentalisation of hijra life is framed as reparation has as much to do with the current moment of global queer rights as aspirations of Indian nationalism and the increasing precarity of hijra lives. Over the years, I noticed a number of hijras leaving their communities in large cities and setting up households (that were still affiliated with their gharanas in the cities) in district headquarters, small towns, and other settlements that had train stations. The reason for moving away from large cities, I was told, was the increasing difficulty in meeting the cost of living. Upon enquiring about the fresh faces that appeared in my field sites over the last 10 years, I was told that young hijras found it difficult to earn enough to pay for rent, food, and clothes, after giving a ritual-contractual share of their income to their gurus. Furthermore, the right to spaces and neighbourhoods where they could ask for challa and *badai* (collecting money at weddings and childbirth) were fiercely fought over by hijras both within a household and between different households. While some remained in the cities but started asking for challa at traffic signals, some saw it fit to establish themselves closer to their natal homes. It could be argued this spreading to other public spaces in cities, such as traffic signals has resulted in the crackdowns by the police under various anti-beggary laws. Scholars across disciplines have shown how the state has begun to use anti-beggary laws in innovative ways in order to remove the poor

and the homeless (Dupont 2013; Ramanathan 2008). While hijras were always vulnerable to anti-beggary laws, the enforcement of these laws reveals that the aspirations to governmentalise hijra bodies and population are also part of the aspirations to create global cities and infrastructure.

Regardless of this history of policing and criminalising of the hijras in public spaces, the practice of collecting challa, *badai* and performing at religious festivals in public spaces has persisted. The insistence on these means of livelihood rather than any other partially explains the limited success of contemporary efforts to make the hijra more respectable in terms of their economic activity.[8] Scholars have argued that the failure to police hijras is primarily because of the fractured nature of colonial policing and governmentality (Chandavarkar 2007). I want to suggest that there is another reason why hijras themselves have persisted in collecting money through performances, blessings and curses in the public space, one that shows how the incommensurability between hijras, law, and nationalism can be made productive.

The word used by hijras to talk about their claims to certain spaces and monetary exchanges is haq. The notion of haq not only renders what hijras do on trains different from begging but also implies the different stakes in giving up such a right. Spivak's analysis of the word is helpful to understand the resistance in giving up being hijras, she writes:

> *Haq* is the "para-individual structural responsibility" into which we are born—that is, our true being. Indeed, the word "responsibility" is an approximation here. For this structural positioning can also be approximately translated as birth-right. Whether it is right or responsibility, it is the truth of my being, in a not quite English sense, my *haq* (Spivak 2012: 341).

[8] The amount of money a hijra can earn in a year or in their lifetime through challa, *badai* (collecting money at weddings and childbirth), and other religious–economic exchanges depends on a large number of variables such as place and city of residence, corporeal status (which is directly related to respect), status within the hierarchy of the hijra gharana, to name a few. It is revealing that while efforts are made to employ hijras in menial government jobs, there is no attempt to show that this form of rehabilitation is economically viable. I suspect based on my ethnographic fieldwork that it is not and that perhaps such efforts will lead to more hijras becoming impoverished. This technique of making hijras economically vulnerable, once again has a precedent in colonial governmentality as shown by Preston (1987).

Haq as right *and* responsibility that spans the individual and the structure explains why hijras would often lament their fate. While hijras were quite aware that they were objects of ridicule and whose demands for money at weddings, childbirths, religious festivals, and in trains, made them vulnerable to violence and stigma, they would lament about their work rather than protest against it because to give up asking for challa would be to give up one's haq and consequently the truth of one's being.

A closer look at haq would also reveal that the mode of exchange that it signals with the nation is one of accountability rather than violence. This is made clearer when we compare hijras and challa mangna to other forms of charismatic religious figures and their economic practices. Copeman and Ikegame (2012) have shown that what defines modern gurus in South Asia is their uncontainability, which makes it possible for them to transgress roles and boundaries, often in ways that threaten the nation at multiple levels. The use of haq by hijras engages the state in a different manner, as it signals accountability rather than threat. Unlike gurus such as Ram Rahim, Radhe Maa, or Rampal, hijras are far from uncontainable; in fact, the various provisions of the bills reveal quite the opposite—the shrinking roles and spaces for hijras in the nation.

Jasbir Puar offers a helpful analysis of US nationalism that measures the sexuality of LGBT citizens of the United States against the sexuality of the Muslim other to justify the war on terror. She writes:

> National recognition and inclusion, here signaled as the annexation of homosexual jargon, is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary. At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism—the emergence of national homosexuality, what I term ''homonationalism''—that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire. (Puar 2007: 2)

We could very much study the legislations and its aspirations towards governmentalising hijra lives and the surveillance of the hijra population as indicative of hijra nationalism. Not only is the use of hijras as an ideological prop to further a certain nationalism evident in the legislations discussed above, so is the erasure of caste, class, and sexuality amongst the transgender population to annex a certain history of the

'third gender'. Wherein and whereby any attempt to opt out or fight such practices of governmentality would render hijras and transgender persons as anti-nationalist.[9] Since hijras become nationalistic figures only in so far as their gender, and sexuality is the fulcrum around which notions of governance are advanced, it could be argued not that hijras are being increasingly governed because they are nationalist figures but rather that they are becoming nationalistic figures because they are increasingly governed. Hijra nationalism like homo-nationalism would have been dependent on successfully proving to hijra citizens that there was a threat (like, terrorism) against which state action would offer protection. Given the only threat that hijras and transgender people have asked protection from is the state itself, pressing hijras into nationalist agendas would have to be necessarily a one-sided affair.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Ghazal Asif, Swayam Bagaria, Sruti Chaganti, Aaron Goodfellow, Nick Mueller, Maya Ratnam, Aditi Saraf, Pooja Satyogi, Megha Sehdev and the two anonymous reviewers for their astute comments on earlier drafts of this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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[9] Harriss, Jeffrey, and Corbridge collate a helpful list of various governmental practices that are rendering large populations of India vulnerable to accusations of anti-nationalism and consequently violence; amongst others there are the ban on beef, demonetisation, student protests at Jawaharlal Nehru University, among other such reportage (See, Harriss et al. 2017)

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