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# An Epistemology of Collusion: *Hijras, Kothis* and the Historical (Dis)continuity of Gender/Sexual Identities in Eastern India

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In many postcolonial societies, the relation between contemporary gender/sexual identities and historical precursors of gender variance and same-sex desire has been a fraught and controversial question.<sup>1</sup> While right wing nationalist discourses have often attacked such identities as western influences, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) activists have traced homoeroticism and gender variance, and even LGBT identities, back through revisionist readings of pre-colonial history.<sup>2</sup> Scholarly accounts usually repudiate the conservative denunciation of homosexuality, but the historicity of gender/sexual identities and their relation to postcolonial modernity remains a debated question across several world regions. For example, Joseph Massad critiques western advocates of LGBT rights in the Arab world for propagating a neocolonial discourse of identity that 'produces homosexuals . . . where they do not exist', seeing gay/lesbian identities as modern western constructs that might repress non-identitarian histories of same-sex desire in the non-west.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Peter Jackson links the emergence of LGBT identities in Southeast Asian nations to their distinctive trajectories of nationalism and capitalism, which are not reducible to western influence, and argues that LGBT identities evidence non-western variants that need not derive their logic or justification from pre-colonial histories of gender/sexual variance.<sup>4</sup>

In India, scholarly and activist debates on the historicity or emergence of gender/sexual identities are thrown into sharp relief in the case of the *kothi* (or *koti*), a category for socioeconomically marginalised gender variant or 'feminine' same-sex desiring males that gained visibility within the emerging institutional movement for LGBT rights in the late 1990s. Some activists advocated *kothi* as a more culturally authentic identity than the putatively westernised 'gay' used by elite English-speaking Indians.<sup>5</sup> Several scholars critique this indigenist argument and link the emergence of the *kothi* to the rise of Indian activism for the sexual health and human rights of sexual minorities, situated within the interlinked globalising expansion of sexual rights activism and HIV-AIDS prevention funding.<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Cohen argues that *kothis* 'emerged in cities like Mumbai as a new social fact', distinct from previous usages of the term, parallel to the rise of funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associated communities.<sup>7</sup> Paul Boyce and

Akshay Khanna emphasise the role of state- and donor-funded interventions for HIV-AIDS prevention in constructing the *kothi* as a culturally authentic and vulnerable Indian subgroup within the globalising category of MSM (men who have sex with men) used in transnational HIV-AIDS prevention discourse.<sup>8</sup> As Khanna states, the '*kothi* . . . is in some sense a creation of the [HIV-AIDS] industry itself'.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the *hijra*, a better-known term for transvestite communities described in colonial accounts as 'eunuchs', has been studied as an identity with a more historically continuous trajectory, with pre-colonial records stretching back to at least the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> While the indigeneity of the *kothi* is contested, the *hijra* has functioned as a quintessential marker of Indic gender/sexual difference. The colonial regime defined the *hijra* as the Indian equivalent of the broader pejorative category of 'eunuchs' and attempted to describe, classify and control them, echoing British attitudes to other gender/sexual practices like widow-burning and child marriage that were made to stand for the debased nature of Indian society.<sup>11</sup> As colonial depictions were superseded in the twentieth century, the *hijra* was reclaimed as a prominent non-western 'third gender' or transgender group resisting the western schema of sexual dimorphism.<sup>12</sup> Recent ethnographies by Lawrence Cohen and Gayatri Reddy critique earlier pathologising or essentialising constructions of the *hijra*, describing the *hijra* as a complex identity of marginalised male-born (or rarely intersex) transvestites who combine kinship-based social organisation with Islamic and Hindu religious practices.<sup>13</sup> *Hijras* may undergo castration and penectomy, which confers higher status within intra-community hierarchies, and claim auspiciousness to undertake ritual blessing for money and gifts during occasions such as childbirth in middle-class families.<sup>14</sup> The ethnographies of Kira Hall and Gayatri Reddy situate the *kothi*, too, within this more historically continuous (sub)cultural formation as a same-sex desiring gender variant community related to *hijras*, though not organised into hierarchised clans like them – in contrast to the emphasis on the institutionally-mediated emergence of the *kothi* in Cohen, Boyce and Khanna.<sup>15</sup>

This article will study the historicity of *hijra* and *kothi* as prominent vernacular categories of Indic gender/sexual difference with reference to broader debates on identity, (post)colonialism and modernity in postcolonial and South Asian historiography.<sup>16</sup> I will suggest that the apparent contrast between the historical continuity of the *hijra* and the contemporary institutional construction of the *kothi* masks deeper similarities in how both identities have emerged through collusions between subcultural processes of community formation and governmental power.<sup>17</sup> The focus on the involvement of postcolonial institutional networks (NGOs, donors and the state) in the emergence of the *kothi* as an identity of same-sex desiring males in Cohen, Boyce and Khanna's ethnographies recalls Foucault's widely influential theorisation of the historical emergence of identity-based conceptions of sexuality within modern regimes of power and knowledge.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the aforementioned ethnographies by Hall and Reddy study the cultural dynamics of *kothi* identification in relation to *hijras*, suggesting a greater historical continuity in its formation. Thus, differing epistemological priorities and sites of inquiry result in diverging suggestions about the historical ontology of Indian gender/sexual identities.

These differences may be located within broader debates in postcolonial and subaltern studies on the historical continuity or rupture of identity formations in South Asia due to the governmental institutions of colonial and postcolonial modernity.<sup>19</sup> Drawing

upon Benedict Anderson's influential theorisation of the role of print capitalism and colonial institutions such as the census in forging national and ethnic identities, scholars like Sudipta Kaviraj and Arjun Appadurai postulate a sharp transition from ambiguously bounded forms of social difference to more rigidly defined identities through colonial and postcolonial institutions of power.<sup>20</sup> Kaviraj has argued that premodern collectivities were 'not enumerated' and had 'fuzzy boundaries', while, as Appadurai states, '[colonial] enumerative strategies helped to ignite communitarian and nationalist identities'.<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Dirks argues that colonial administration systematised 'India's diverse forms of social identity' into the overarching framework of caste.<sup>22</sup> Others like C. A. Bayly and Sumit Guha argue for a more continuous trajectory of identity formation from pre-colonial to modern collectivities that was not radically ruptured by (post)colonial institutions.<sup>23</sup> Sumit Guha critiques Anderson, Appadurai and Kaviraj for overemphasising the role of (post)colonial governmental power and neglecting to study how seemingly 'traditional' collectivities such as religious communities dynamically reproduce themselves from pre-colonial to modern periods.<sup>24</sup> He argues that communities demonstrate historical agency and evolve without direct input from (post)colonial governmental technologies.<sup>25</sup> However, this overview is not to reduce this complex literature to a static dichotomy between historical continuity and postcolonial rupture. Kaviraj's later work theorises how pre-colonial conditions influence postcolonial social formations, although he does not demonstrate this for specific identities.<sup>26</sup> Partha Chatterjee's recent work charts mutual interactions between communitarian or kinship-based collectives and postcolonial governmental institutions.<sup>27</sup> While arguing that 'classificatory criteria used by colonial governmental regimes have continued into the postcolonial era' and shape the 'dominant criteria for identifying communities', Chatterjee also notes the historical agency of communities that use putatively 'traditional' logics of kinship to represent themselves to governmental power.<sup>28</sup>

Reading Guha and Bayly in conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, Kaviraj and Chatterjee, I will explore the interaction between the self-reproduction of communities and postcolonial institutions in the case of gender/sexual identities, and trace how continuities between historical logics of community formation and postcolonial governmental processes might underlie profound shifts in identity formation for both *hijra* and *kothi* categories. Drawing upon colonial ethnology, contemporary ethnographies and my own ethnographic fieldwork in India, I demonstrate that there have been locally variegated, yet translocally connected, subcultural formations of gender/sexual variance with different degrees of distinction or overlap between *hijra* and lesser-known categories such as *kothi*. I describe how this variegated terrain of gender/sexual variance might be increasingly consolidated into a more standardised identitarian rubric through collusions between the self-representation of subcultural networks or communities and (post)colonial cartographies of identity. These range from colonial ethnological compendia to contemporary media representations and surveys by NGOs. Such structural collusions between institutional and (sub)cultural processes of identity formation result in the attempted standardisation of the distinction between *hijra* and other identities across a range of locations, constructing emergent normative identity-based divisions that might circumscribe lived practices. The translocal consolidation of these identities creates significant temporal discontinuities between older forms of gender/sexual variance and emerging identitarian formations in India, but this rupture itself might be instituted in collusion with older communities and subcultures.

Thus, I suggest that both *hijra* and *kothi* may be evolving through interrelated and active epistemological projects of naming, describing and classifying gender/sexual identities, through which their definitional boundaries are becoming more standardised in relation to each other. As I will describe, *hijra* becomes defined in terms of gender variance as a transgender identity while *kothi* is defined with reference to (homo)sexual behaviour as a subsection of MSM, constructing an increasing separation between gender and sexual identities that, as noted by scholars like Jackson, is a distinctive feature of modern discourses of gender/sexuality.<sup>29</sup> However, the emergence of *hijra* and *kothi* as seemingly consolidated, bounded and distinct identities demonstrates not only the role of postcolonial epistemologies and cartographies of identity but also the standardisation of pre-existing subcultural demarcations, necessitating an epistemological practice that bridges multiple methods and sites of enquiry to illuminate the collusion of multiple governmental and subcultural processes of identity formation. To that end, this article will bridge archival study, oral histories and ethnography, particularly focused on eastern India where I have conducted participation observation with several community-based organisations, NGOs and associated community networks since 2007.<sup>30</sup> The first section of the article examines British colonial censuses and ethnology as an early attempt to consolidate the *hijra* translocally as a 'eunuch' group. Subsequent sections focus on the contemporary period, examining constructions of the *hijra* and *kothi* in relation to institutional projects of gender/sexual rights and HIV-AIDS prevention. More broadly, the article suggests that the analysis of collusions between vernacular subcultural formations and governmental discourses of identity helps to illuminate the complex imbrications of historical continuity and postcolonial emergence in modern South Asia, and to explain the historical involvement of non-elite communities in the emergence of normative rubrics of gender/sexual identity in postcolonial societies where such identities evidence historical precursors.

### Colonial ethnology: investigating the truth of the eunuch

As noted by Lawrence Preston, British observations of groups they called 'eunuchs' began roughly in the late eighteenth century, and are scattered within the correspondence from contingents of the British East India Company in the early phase of mercantile colonialism.<sup>31</sup> Most accounts describe 'eunuchs' as malformed and repulsive.<sup>32</sup> Preston chronicles British interactions with the community known as *hijra* (or *hijda*) in western India as one of the first colonial encounters with 'eunuchs'. The *hijras* of western India enjoyed hereditary rights such as revenue shares under the indigenous Maratha regime. As the British gradually took over Maratha territories from 1817 onward, these rights were curtailed, and this community was increasingly forced into the expanding urban underworld of low caste workers, prostitutes and beggars.<sup>33</sup> 'Eunuchs' were subsequently criminalised under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, a law that was revoked in 1952 after independence.<sup>34</sup> In the original act, 'eunuch' could refer both to any person 'dressed any person dressed or ornamented like a woman' and anyone who upon medical inspection 'appeared to be impotent', encompassing both gendered performance and physiology.<sup>35</sup>

British administrators and officers started compiling ethnological compendia on different regions of British India after the inauguration of monarchical rule in 1858. The first census was undertaken between 1868 and 1872, and thereafter at ten-year

intervals. In this literature, one notices several diverging names and descriptions for groups described as 'eunuchs', including differences in physiological characteristics and group initiation rites. While the colonial literature seems to have discovered '*hijra*' as one of the first known Indian terms for 'eunuch', it references other regional names and fails to suggest a uniform community across the diverse systems of rule in early colonial India. *Hijra* appears as a distinct caste in the first detailed list of castes and tribes compiled by Kitts in 1885, based on the census of 1881.<sup>36</sup> Subsequent compendia list different names – *khoja*, *pavaya*, *khasua*, *mukhanas* – but they are often listed as synonymous with or redirected from '*hijra*', thus helping to establish *hijra* as the consolidated label for groups that appear to be regionally diverse, notwithstanding their similarities.<sup>37</sup> *Hijra* seems to be a word in Hindi and Urdu, languages that assumed national character through the colonial period as opposed to more 'regional' languages like Marathi, Tamil or Bengali, which might explain its use as the most common signifier for 'eunuchs' in the colonial archive.<sup>38</sup>

The ethnological compendia following the censuses of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 are commonly concerned with investigating the physiological characteristics of eunuchs but diverge in their descriptions. As Reddy notes, there is an overarching epistemological concern with discovering the physiological truth of eunuch bodies.<sup>39</sup> Some reports make the membership of eunuch groups contingent upon congenital deformation, some upon 'natural' impotence and others upon ritualistic initiation through castration and penectomy.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, several reports distinguish between 'natural' eunuchs and those 'artificially' made into eunuchs through castration, designated by different names. For example, in Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1909), the entry marked *hijra* is redirected to an entry on the *khoja*, which includes a description of the *hijra*. *Khojas* are described as 'artificial' castrated eunuchs employed by wealthy nobility, whereas *hijras* are 'natural' eunuchs who are born impotent, forming their own groups with specific religious practices.<sup>41</sup> Contradictorily, in Russell's *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (1916), *khasuas* are deemed to be 'natural' eunuchs with congenital deformation, whereas *hijras* are 'artificial', 'reduced to the like condition by amputation'.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the precise relation between different vernacular terms is already a point of contention. As Hall states, 'Although the term *koti* is largely absent . . . a significant number of colonialist texts mention groups that resemble today's *kotis* as a point of contrast [to] the supposedly 'more authentic' *hijra* community. A tension between the real eunuch and its artificial shadow thus governs the colonialist record'.<sup>43</sup> However, I will note that significantly, *hijras* were not always named as the 'more authentic' community, as seen in Russell above. Rather, the ethnological literature was contradictory in its terminological classification, unable to fix a true eunuch body or coherent 'authentic' category such as *hijra*.

As the census stopped enumerating castes altogether after independence, it does not appear that the postcolonial state attempted to standardise these contradictory definitions of the *hijra*. However, the colonial ethnological literature did seem to standardise the usage of *hijra* (rather than *khoja*, *khasua*, etc.) as the most common name for 'eunuch' groups in subsequent literature. The question of who exactly constituted these groups remained a point of contention in some twentieth century ethnographic literature. As noted by Cohen, an exchange between the anthropologists George Carstairs and Morris Opler in *American Anthropologist* between 1957 and 1960 agreed that

*hijras* were castrated males, but debated whether they were prostitutes, or blessed newborn children in their role as ritual devotees of a mother goddess, Bahuchara Mata.<sup>44</sup> Here, the point of contention was not physiology but rather the real occupation of *hijras*.

### Postcolonial ethnography: an intersectional epistemology of *hijras*

Recent ethnography critiques older epistemological concerns with the physiological essence or true occupation of *hijras*, counteracting essentialising moves to locate 'real' or 'natural' eunuchs. Rather, scholars have focused on the intersection of social, religious and kinship practices through which *hijras* constitute themselves, including religious rituals (Islam and goddess-worship) and kinship structures such as hierarchised lineages comprising tiered ranks of *gurus* (heads) and *chelas* (disciples). Based on his ethnographic research in the north Indian city of Varanasi, Cohen constructs a working definition of the *hijra*, including community membership within hierarchised lineages, comprising the *hijra guru* and her initiated disciples as its smallest unit: '*hijras* are organised into households with a *hijra guru* as head, into territories delimiting where each household can dance and demand money from merchants, and into larger regional and supraregional associations or *pancayats* linking them to other cities across South Asia'.<sup>45</sup> Reddy's ethnography on *hijra* groups in the southern city of Hyderabad corroborates this description and further specifies that 'there are seven *hijra* houses or "lineages" in India', to which all individual households belong.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in Reddy's ethnography, while the community in Hyderabad identifies through the term *kojja* when speaking in the regional language of Telegu, they also represent themselves as part of the larger *hijra* community as members of *hijra* lineages that are spread nationwide.

While describing *hijra* communities, Reddy and Cohen counteract essentialised definitions of *hijras*, noting that members of *hijra* households may or may not be castrated and pursue a variety of occupations including ritual blessing and sex work.<sup>47</sup> However, while describing occasional transitions or overlaps between *hijra* and other categories, even this intersectional epistemology of the *hijra* has largely focused on household- or lineage-based *hijras* as evidenced in the cited excerpts from Cohen and Reddy, potentially leading to an inadvertently restrictive description that emphasises lineage-based kinship.

Moreover, while counteracting essentialised hierarchies between 'true'/'natural' and 'artificial' eunuchs, this literature evidences significant differences on the relation between the *hijra* category and other vernacular terms for male-born gender variance, among which the *kothi* has emerged since the late 1990s as the most salient 'sexual minority'. In Reddy's ethnography, *kothi* is a generic label for non-masculine males used by *hijras* in Hyderabad, encompassing both *hijra* and non-*hijra* sections, with an internal cartography separating *hijras* (*catla kothis*) with other *kothi* subgroups like *kada-catla kothis* (*kothis* in male attire).<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, *kothi* does not occur as an umbrella category in Hall's ethnography in Delhi, but signifies a non-*hijra* transgender group who may parody *hijra* practices but do not self-identify as *hijra*, though some transition to being *hijra*.<sup>49</sup> In Cohen's 1995 ethnography in Varanasi, *hijras* are compared to groups called *jankhas*, with household affiliation and castration being important to the 'full adoption of *hijra* identity'.<sup>50</sup> Cohen argues that *jankhas* are

not 'inauthentic' or 'incomplete' *hijras* but a distinct group linked more to low-caste burlesque than *hijra* occupations, though some may also occasionally self-identify as *hijra*.<sup>51</sup> Later revisiting this work, Cohen notes that *kothi* was only marginally known as a term in Varanasi.<sup>52</sup>

### **Translocal consolidations: relating *hijra* and *kothi* emergence**

Building upon the implications of colonial ethnology as well as postcolonial ethnography, the following sections will develop an argument that is implied but not ethnographically elaborated in the existing literature: there are locally varied vernacular cartographies evidencing varying degrees of overlap or distinction between *hijra* and other categories. I will suggest that the translocal consolidation of *kothi* and *hijra* as increasingly standardised and distinct identities are *interrelated* processes, both connected to postcolonial governmentality, although the collusion of *hijra* identification with governmental power has not been emphasised in the literature.

In contrast to the focus on *hijras* within lineages (or *gharanas*) in the literature, I will explore non-*gharana* claims to *hijra* identity, showing how some of the most occupationally visible *hijras* are not 'authentic' by the norms of lineage-based kinship, and evidence both transition from and overlap with other categories. Such categorical overlaps seem to have an indefinite historical provenance, and might be a structural feature of the uneven territorial control of *hijra gharanas*. But over the last two decades, *gharana*-based *hijras* have actively undertaken to define 'real' or 'authentic' *hijras* as a minority in collusion with NGOs and the media, around the same time when NGOs started defining MSM and *kothi* as vulnerable groups. This attempted construction of the *hijra* as a bounded lineage-based group increasingly separates *hijra* from non-*hijra* (*kothi*, MSM) identities in NGO, state and media discourses in a way that colonial ethnology was unable to standardise, such that who can identify as *hijra* becomes more circumscribed at the level of official discourse, and potentially, lived reality. Meanwhile, various subcultural terms for gender variance related to *hijra*, like *dhurani* and *dhunuri* in eastern India, are increasingly translocally consolidated as *kothi*, which becomes a distinct non-*hijra* identity under the MSM rubric. In the subsequent sections, I will describe the institutional-subcultural collusions underlying the translocal standardisation of *hijra* and *kothi* categories with reference to field notes and oral histories that I have gathered as a participant observer with communities and organisations at multiple sites within the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. The state has seen a growing movement for the civil rights and sexual health of 'sexual minorities' since the early 1990s, led by non-governmental and community-based organisations (NGOs and CBOs). As these organisations bridge metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, the state provides an appropriate site to study the interactions of lower class non-metropolitan communities with NGOs/CBOs and the consolidation of *hijra* and *kothi* through such interactions.

### ***Dhurani*, *dhunuri*, *hijra*: translocal subcultures in West Bengal**

As per the documented history of the movement for gender/sexual rights in Eastern India, early groups like Fun Club (1990) emerged within upper-middle-class circles in the capital city of Kolkata around a nascent 'gay' identity.<sup>53</sup> While early social groups

were short-lived, the first successful mobilisations were Counsel Club (1993) and the Naz Foundation's Calcutta project (initiated 1993–94), which subsequently facilitated the formation of CBOs in smaller towns. This expansion was aided by increasing HIV-AIDS funding for 'sexual minorities' from the Indian state and foreign donors from the early 2000s.<sup>54</sup> Sarswata, an activist associated with Counsel Club in Kolkata, helped found two CBOs whose members I have become acquainted with: Dum Dum Swikriti Society in the northern Kolkata suburbs and the adjacent Nadia district, and further north, Madhya Banglar Sangram in the district of Murshidabad (henceforth, Swikriti and Sangram). Such CBOs have served to bridge city-based activists with lower class and non-metropolitan communities or networks of gender/sexually variant people. As Sarswata described in one of our conversations, a few Kolkata activists had informal contacts with lower-class communities, which were subsequently bolstered through institutional expansion: 'In the mid-90s, some people joined Counsel Club through whom it could extend its reach to underprivileged communities'.

*Hijra gharanas*, or hierarchised lineages, seem to have been the most organised of these communities. In my conversations with *hijras*, as well as NGO activists, I was told that there are three main *gharanas* in West Bengal – Shyambajari, Mechhua and Gunghoria or Gunghor – putatively descended from a single lineage. Each of these lineages is organised into tiered ranks of *guru-ma* (mother *gurus*) and *chelas* (disciples) and divided into households. Senior *gurus* serve as heads of independent households with their *chelas*, who might serve as second-tier *gurus* to *naticheles* (*chelas* of *chelas*) and so on. Each household has its designated territory where *chelas* undertake *hijra* occupations. Typically, junior *chelas* or *nati-chelas* undertake the ritualised occupation of *badhai* in their territory – proffering blessings in return for money and gifts at houses with newborn children, and sometimes, visiting local shops for donations as well. Some *chelas* also participate in the more secretive occupation of sex work with mainstream men, which is seen as more disreputable by *gharana* norms relative to the asexual religiosity of *badhai*.<sup>55</sup> While *hijre* and *hijra* are the commonly used terms for such transvestites in the Bengali language, *chhibri* (literally, castrated) is also used synonymously in intra-community contexts, though many junior *chelas* are *akua* (not castrated). There are also lower-class networks of diverse gender/sexually marginalised people outside *gharana* households, who evidence varying degrees of public visibility and complex relations of overlap or distinction with the *hijra/chhibri* category – such as people who sexually network (cruise) in public spaces, male sex workers and cross-dressed beggars in trains.

One of the members of Counsel Club who played a major role in the formation of non-metropolitan CBOs was Ranajay, himself from a small town north of Kolkata. Ranajay's story provides an entry point into the aforementioned networks. In a long interview, he described to me how he discovered networks of male-born gender variant persons when he went to cruise and socialise in the south Kolkata lake area around 1989–90.<sup>56</sup> There, he learnt intra-community codes used within these subcultural networks, including terms of gender/sexual difference unknown in mainstream Bengali, such as *dhurani*, signifying 'feminine' males who often desire relatively 'masculine' men. *Dhurani* could also refer more specifically to sex workers, being connected to the verb *dhurano* (to have sex) within the subcultural code. Yet, it did not seem to be a consolidated gender/sexual identity in the way that *kothi* or *hijra* increasingly became, as is evidenced in Ranajay's narrative:

One evening, I heard someone call out, 'hey, this boy is a *dhurani*!' . . . I went back and asked, 'what did you call me? What is *dhurani*?' 'Oh, those who take it in the mouth or the butt'. 'But I don't do that!' I replied. 'Well, you know, those who walk in a feminine way, are a bit girlish, like us'. 'But I am not like that, I don't do that either!' So finally this person told me, 'Well, anyone who loves to keep our company is *dhurani*!'

This exchange indicates the process of interpellation into the network and the concurrent mapping of insiders and outsiders – but not in the form of rigid identitarian boundaries. Despite his 'masculine' behaviour and disavowal of sexual penetrability, Ranajay gained acceptance within this network of 'feminine' persons by learning their subcultural code – which they called *khaurir bhasha*, the language of trickery or play.<sup>57</sup> One day, he heard this 'language' being spoken by a self-identified *hijra* who visited the lakes, and remarked, 'oh, you are speaking our language as well!' The *hijra* took offense and replied, 'it's you people who have taken our language from us!' Other *hijras* he later met similarly distinguished themselves as a community distinct from these looser networks, with a greater claim on the 'language'. However, the nature and extent of this distinction seems to have been locally variegated.

To chart the translocal span as well as local variations of these subcultural networks and their 'language', it is insightful to compare and connect contrasting sites – Kolkata, the metropolitan capital, with Berhampore in the Murshidabad district, a regionally important town and the administrative headquarters, which like other similar towns has served as a node of organisational expansion. The exact genealogy of the subcultural networks in Berhampore prior to institutionalisation and their relation to *hijra gharanas* is undocumented. However, in 2009 I met an older participant in these circles, Govinda, who provided me with an account of the years of his youth during the 1980s, long before the local CBO Sangram was established in 2006. He particularly dwelt on abuse and stigma; young males who visibly differed from norms of masculinity would often be targeted in public through terms of abuse like *meyeli*, *chhuri* (girlish) or *moga* (roughly, 'fag' or 'sissy'). However, in response to such demarcation, there also seemed to be a converse process in which older gender variant males would pick out more newly visible persons through their perceived behaviour, establishing a loose network of trusted peers.

Govinda fondly narrated his initiation into this network in a way that closely echoed Ranajay's story. One day while bathing at the river Ganges, someone called out to him – '*Ayi chhuri, tor nang achhey?*' (Roughly, 'Hey girl, you got any husbands?') Initially startled, he soon identified the person who called him out as 'someone like me'. Jaydip, his new friend, thus read and interpellated Govinda as non-masculine, even appropriating a term of abuse (*chhuri*) as the recognition of their commonality. As in Ranajay's narrative, we see the process of hailing insiders into the network through a reading of perceived non-masculine behaviour. 'After that day, I started going around town with Jaydip and our friends', Govinda reminisced. While this peer group or network developed through such responses to social stigma, they also seemed to have an inherited intra-community code similar to Kolkata networks: 'We picked up our language from the older ones among us'. Govinda's narrative presented a range of terms to describe their gender/sexual variance – *dhunuri*, *moga*, *chhuri* – some referring to (homo)sexual behaviour like *moga*, some to effeminacy like *chhuri*, and some to both, like *dhunuri*, signifying 'feminine' males who have sex with men. Only one or two among Govinda's circle had heard the term *kothi*, which gained linguistic

prevalence among a younger generation after the formation of Sangram. Govinda called their language itself *dhunuri bhasha* and described it as '*amader bhasha*', 'our language'. Since *dhunuri* seems to correspond linguistically to *dhurani* used in the Kolkata cruising areas, this suggests the translocal span of the networks through which such terms were disseminated.

Similar to the South Kolkata lakes, there were also focal points of cruising and socialising such as a 'square field' in central Berhampore. 'We used to come here and to other such public spaces long before Sangram was established', Ram, a frequent visitor and part of Govinda's circle, told me. No one could remember when socialising had begun around the field, though it was hardly spontaneous and required active defence against potentially hostile reactions from the police. These dangers necessitated the *thek* or the *khol* – houses of trusted peers where people gathered to gossip, discuss news, even bring in sexual partners. These partners were usually more 'masculine' men called *parikh* in the subcultural code, who seemed to be on the fringes of the network and did not usually pick up the subcultural language. But this boundary between a feminised inner circle and masculine outsiders was also diffuse, as seen previously in Ranajay's case. For instance, sex within *dhunuri* inner circles where one of them took on a 'masculine' penetrative role was also prevalent, though somewhat taboo – possibly drawing from *hijra* restrictions against intra-community sex.<sup>58</sup> Somewhat hesitantly and shyly, Govinda admitted to having had penetrative sex with some of his *dhunuri* friends.

However, despite using several inherited terms for gender/sexual variance, Govinda and his peers like Ram did not use any of these intra-community labels for representation to the mainstream as a separate community, though their gender variance was hardly invisible. Ram and Govinda lived with their families and dressed as men, and though they had not married, some others in their circle were married men. In socio-economic terms, most of Govinda's and Ram's close friends ranged from lower middle class to lower class and pursued relatively mainstream occupations.<sup>59</sup> Govinda and Ram had small businesses in wholesale spices and handicrafts respectively. Thus, for them, the sartorial and occupational distinction from *hijras* seemed clear even though their 'language' evidences many overlaps with that of *hijras* situated within *gharanas*. Govinda asserted that he 'did not know any *hijras*', implying his avoidance of the more marginal *hijras* based on his relatively mainstream position and respectability.

However, Ram's friends include Annapurna, who had been initially a part of this peer group but subsequently joined a *hijra gharana*. At present, Annapurna leads one of the two *gharana*-affiliated *hijra* households in Murshidabad, which undertake the ritual blessing of newborn children within their respective territories. Ram had known Annapurna as one of their *dhunuri* peers, but she differed from them in that she began cross-dressing in public, left her family, took initiation under the older leader of the *hijra gharana* in the area and underwent castration. In both Ram's and Annapurna's narration of this story, there is a transition from *dhunuri* to *chhibri* or *hijra*, but also a clear distinction between *dhunuris* like Govinda and *hijras* like Annapurna, though they had participated in the same extended network in their youth.

But this distinction between *dhunuri* and *hijra* is less clear for many people lower down the socio-economic strata relative to Ram and Govinda. This particularly applies to people who cross-dress while performing sex work (*khajra*) or while blessing people

for money in commuter trains (*chhalla*), when they may be publicly perceived as *hijra*. But they may also otherwise dress as males or live with their families, blurring the categorical distinction between *hijra* and *dhunuri*. Although sometimes called *hijra* and *chhibri* by Berhampore *dhunuris* like Ram, they are usually neither literally *chhibri* (castrated), nor formally initiated under a *hijra guru*, given that *gharana* leaders often disparage public sex work and *chhalla* as disreputable. As Annapurna told me, these cross-dressers were not really *hijras*: ‘those ones sometimes call themselves *hijras*, sometimes *dhuranis* . . . as suits their purpose’.

However, this need not imply a uniformly hostile relation between *gharanas* and these ‘other’ *hijras*. While there have been occasional media reports of ‘real eunuchs’ assaulting ‘fake’ ones, the quotidian relations between non-*gharana* and *gharana hijras* in Bengal seems to be a more delicate practice of tolerance, premised on the maintenance of the territorial rights of the *gharana hijras* in a particular locality.<sup>60</sup>

About halfway on the rail link between Kolkata and Berhampore, there is a small town called Ranaghat in the district of Nadia, which has over the years become the third site of my fieldwork. One evening in 2010, I accompanied Avijit and Arghya, two members of the CBO Swikriti, on a bicycle trip to ‘field areas’ where they undertake community outreach to increase HIV-AIDS awareness. Avijit and Arghya used both *dhurani* and *kothi* to talk about themselves, but their sense of distinction from *hijras* was less marked than for Govinda. Biking along the narrow lanes of Kanchrapara, a town near Ranaghat, they pointed out an apparently abandoned old house where a group of young *dhuranis* lived together separately from their families. ‘Like a *hijra* household?’ I asked. ‘Yes’. ‘But not a formal *hijra* group?’ I prodded further. ‘No, but they do *chhalla* in trains’. Avijit described how they were indistinguishable from castrated *hijras* when cross-dressed – clearly, becoming *hijra* as a livelihood required neither castration nor *gharana* affiliation. I asked whether the *gharana hijras* of the area disliked or censured this. ‘No, demanding *chhalla* in trains is fine’, Avijit said, ‘Even we do it sometimes!’ The *chhallawalis*, as Avijit described them, would even visit local *hijra* households to maintain pleasant relations and would acknowledge *hijra gurus* as seniors without undergoing full initiation. Avijit was friends with one of these *chhallawalis*, Moloy, who would be usually in *chhibripon* (‘in *chhibri* mode’, i.e. cross-dressed) without being *gharana*-affiliated. One evening, we met Moloy on a train near Ranaghat. I reproduce a section of our conversation:

Avijit: Hey, are you going to get castrated?

Moloy [claps loudly]: No, I am a *tonna* [man]! If I can’t do well as *chhibri* I will cut my hair and become *tonna*! [clapping is a gesture associated with *hijras*]

Avijit: So who is your *guru* now? Sometimes you say Chandramukhi [a *hijra guru*], sometimes you say Puchki [another *chhallawati*].

Moloy: There is no certainty to who my *guru* is! . . . I became the disciple of Chandramukhi, but when they asked me to get castrated I quarreled and came home . . . then I started doing *chhalla*, and took Puchki as my *guru*.

Moloy, therefore, had lived both inside and outside *hijra gharanas* and performed *chhalla* cross-dressed while living with her natal family, appropriating *chhibri* (‘castrated’) as a metaphor even while claiming to be *tonna* (man). This overlap with social masculinity, and resistance to actual castration, earned her *guru* Chandramukhi’s

disfavour, recalling hierarchies based on respectability among *hijras* who disparaged gender shifting in Reddy's ethnography.<sup>61</sup> Even so, such overlap seemed permissible for those who did *chhalla*.

*Badhai* – the ritual blessing of newborn children – was a different matter. 'For that, you need to take the *anchal* [full initiation] of the *hijra guru* who controls that particular area', Avijit told me. It appeared that the territoriality of *gharana hijras* in Nadia was exercised through strict control on the practice of *badhai* in their area, but cross-dressed *chhalla* did not impinge upon territorial rights enough to attract active censure. But how far could non-*gharana* claimants to public *hijra* visibility stretch such concessions from *gharana* territoriality?

At Ranaghat, I also heard the story of Shyamoli-*ma* (mother Shyamoli), variously described as a *hijra* or *dhurani* who had gathered many *chelas* who pursued occupations like *khajra* (sex work) and *chhalla*. She had died of AIDS-related causes in 2007 before I commenced my fieldwork, and while I never met her in person, the Ranaghat branch of Swikriti includes several of her *chelas* or *nati-chelas* (*chelas* of *chelas*). One afternoon in the CBO office, I had the following conversation with one such *nati-chela*, Subhash, along with some other community members:

Me: Did she ever become a *gharana*-based *hijra* or do *badhai*?

Subhash: No, she lived with her family. I never saw a *dhol* [drum used for *badhai*] in her house. But she would have many *chelas* who would visit or even stay with her. She would select the beautiful ones and send them to dance at weddings in Bihar [a neighbouring state; cross-dressed dancing boys, called *laundas*, are reputedly a common feature of social occasions in Bihar]. She would take commissions for this; it was her business.

Me: Was she regarded as a *hijra*?

Subhash: No . . . within the town many knew her as a feminine male, she had grown up nearby and lived with her parents, and was *akua* [non-castrated] . . . But outside, I cannot tell if she was. She was not really a *hijra*.

Sumeet [another community member]: How can you say that? Her identity was up to her, no one can say you're not a *hijra* if you say you're one. Also, didn't she do *badhai* elsewhere, outside Ranaghat?

Subhash: Maybe, I don't know. She had some *chelas* who had . . . joined *hijra* households in Bihar. But they would still respect her as their *guru-ma* (mother *guru*) . . . whenever they visited Ranaghat.

Me: What was her relation with the *gharana hijras* of the Ranaghat area?

Subhash: They would tolerate but avoid each other . . . She also did not do *badhai* in the area like these *hijras*, even if she did it elsewhere.

Back in Murshidabad after this conversation, I spoke with one of the two senior *hijra gurus* of the district, Annapurna-*mashi* (Aunt Annapurna) of the Mechhua *gharana*, on the relation of *hijra gharanas* with these liminal yet widespread *hijra* figures outside formal lineages, of which Shyamoli-*ma* seemed to be an exceptionally successful example. In her explanation, Annapurna-*mashi* expanded on the workings of *hijra* territoriality. *Hijra* households divided their local region into distinct territories, such that one may not encroach into another's area. However, there might be small areas that were bypassed by these designated territories, or that *hijras* could not cover

adequately. It was this uneven and ruptured territoriality that created the possibility of *hijra* figures outside *gharana*-affiliated households:

Suppose in a village where *hijras* do not go, there is a *dhurani* who has taken to cross-dressing in public. Maybe over the years, she starts posing as *hijra* . . . Some people of the area regard her as a *hijra*, some people still regard her as male, and call her *moga* [sissy]. Maybe she buys a *dhol*, and starts doing *badhai* for money. Now, at some point the actual *hijra* household of the area comes to know this . . . So they go there, create trouble and ask the *dhurani* to stop [acting as *hijra*]. But maybe she is already too powerful, has local *chelas*, and resists the *hijras*. So they visit her again, but this time, offer her a position in the *gharana* hierarchy. After all, you have to give her credit . . . she took a wild uncultivated area, where *hijras* did not go, and cultivated it, made it suitable for us!

Thus, faced with the inevitable unevenness and incompleteness of their territoriality in practice, the *gharanas* try to regain territorial control by either preventing external *hijras* from pursuing characteristic *hijra* occupations (especially *badhai*), and failing that, by attempting to assimilate renegade *hijras* as members and re-establish the consolidated kinship network. However, not all challenges to *gharana* territoriality merit equal attention. Asked about the *chhallawalis* in trains, Annapurna replied dismissively, ‘oh, those ones sometimes call themselves *hijras*, sometimes *dhuranis* or *kothi*, as suits their purpose’, disparaging their shifting identifications without seeking to actively censure them. But Shyamoli-*ma*, with her own kinship structure of *chelas* and her thriving business of dancing boys, mattered more. According to Annapurna-*mashi*, Shyamoli-*ma* had also been approached by *gharana hijras*, and while powerful enough to resist them, ultimately did join the *gharana* hierarchy: ‘in later years she came into our system’. Even if this is true, the community in Ranaghat remembers her as an institution unto herself, distinct from the *gharana hijras* of the area.

### Gharanas go public: consolidating the *hijra*

While Annapurna, like the *hijras* in Ranaghat, tolerated *chhallawalis* even as she privately disparaged them, recently some *gharanas* in West Bengal have made increasingly public attempts to assert *hijra* authenticity, in collusion with non-governmental organisations and the media. One person who has acted as a *gharana* representative in this capacity is Ranjana, who works with a large NGO in Kolkata and is a prominent *hijra* activist. While I had previously known her as transgender-identified, in early 2010 she identified herself at a public event as a *hijra* under the Shyambajari *gharana* of Bengal. As an NGO official overseeing HIV-prevention projects, Ranjana did not pursue any typical *hijra* occupation and belonged to a higher economic stratum than both *chhallawalis* and *gharana hijras*, except perhaps senior *hijra gurus*. Thus, her identification as a *hijra* struck me as both atypical and significant, given her public stature as an activist.

In the course of an extended conversation, Ranjana recounted that she had decided to join a *hijra* group formally while retaining her NGO job and independent living arrangement and argued that these occupational and residential choices were not the determinants of actual *hijra* identity:

Many people may call themselves *hijras*, does that mean that they become *hijras*? The real criteria for becoming a *hijra* is not cutting off one’s genitals or taking up the *dhol* [drum] to demand money for blessings . . . If you have gone through the *rit* [initiation] and been given the *anchal* [ceremonial

blessing] by a senior *hijra* in a *gharana*, then only you are a *hijra*, and then it doesn't matter what else you do!

Ranjana described her initiation as a new trend in which *gharanas* were opening up to newer forms of recruitment to keep up with changing times when *hijra* occupations were harder to sustain, and to establish good relations with the emerging NGO-based movement for gender/sexual rights. While on one hand this broadens *hijra* identification by downplaying occupation and castration, it insists on formal discipleship under a senior *hijra* leader within a lineage or *gharana* as the ultimate criteria of *hijra* legitimacy, in the absence of other markers of *hijra* belonging.

As Ranjana was well aware, this leaves out people who might both self-identify as *hijra* (or *chhibri*) and be perceived as such in public, without being strictly *gharana*-affiliated. Ranjana stressed that 'begging in trains' (*chhalla*) is forbidden to *chelas* in all three *gharanas* of West Bengal, and those who do *chhalla* are not actually *hijras* even if they have loose associations with *hijra* households (as the *chhallawali* Moloy had). Ironically, cross-dressed beggars in trains are among the most common representatives of the group recognised as '*hijra*' by the mainstream public in Bengal. To go by *gharana* affiliation, then, some of the most visible *hijras* in everyday life are not legitimate *hijras* at all!

During a 2011 interview on a television talk show in which Ranjana was called as a *hijra* activist, she decided to clarify this point:

See, my *gharana* is an authentic ['authentic' in English] *hijra gharana*. [But] many people think that any man dressed in a *saree* [Indian feminine garment] or clapping their hands in trains is a *hijra* . . . but they are not! *Hijra* is a tradition . . . transmitted through a *guru-chela* system. The ones who beg or extort money in trains, they too are a kind of *hijra*, but they are not a part of *hijra* society.

Interviewer: But how are the common people supposed to understand this? The whole blame is being shifted to your community!

Ranjana: The matter is . . . a few people have utilised it [the *hijra* identity] wrongly . . . [but] the whole blame has fallen on our shoulders.<sup>62</sup>

In this process of a *gharana*-based legitimisation of *hijra* identity, the train *chhallawalis* appear both as inauthentic *hijras* who are cross-dressed men and disreputable beggars spoiling the public reputation of the legitimate '*hijra* society'. Though they remain 'a kind of *hijra*', they are not 'a part of *hijra* society' – an inauthentic yet hypervisible category of illegitimate *hijras*.

From these examples, one could argue that the *gharanas* are a system of spatial consolidation, expanding a hierarchical kinship structure and associated norms of respectability and gendered authenticity over locally diverse practices and subject-positions that might claim visibility as *hijra*, and seeking to establish a normative territoriality over uneven spaces. In the process, the *gharana*-based kinship structure has to be strategically flexible, accommodating exceptional figures like Ranjana and Shyamoli-*ma* as required. Even as *hijra* occupations might be pursued by non-*gharana* *hijras* and forms of *hijra* kinship – such as the *guru-chela* relation – may be selectively replicated outside *gharanas*, the *hijra gharanas* contingently expand to include some outsiders, sometimes even permitting non-traditional professions. Overall, the desired effect is a consolidation of the *hijra* category through kinship, extending its incomplete discursive consolidation in colonial ethnology through postcolonial media

and activist representations. Cohen notes how *hijra* leaders have actively represented themselves to the national media as a 'sexually underprivileged' minority since at least the 1980s, appealing to the governmental function of the modern state to demand special concessions.<sup>63</sup> As Reddy notes, this transforms the public representation of the *hijra* from the asexual religiosity of ritual blessing to a gender/sexual minority.<sup>64</sup> But during this process, *gharana*-affiliated *hijras* have sometimes forwarded the claims of 'real' *hijras* and exposed 'fake' ones, seeking to establish the boundaries of this minority identity based on *gharana* norms of authenticity and respectability, over and above local distinctions or overlaps.<sup>65</sup> For example, Ranjana's representation of 'authentic' *gharana hijras* distinguishes them from inauthentic cross-dressed men – the *chhallawalis* who are disparaged for their gender shifting and overlap with masculinity by *gharana* leaders such as Annapurna and Chandramukhi. Such ongoing processes of *hijra* representation have also been formalised in national AIDS policy, where *hijras* are defined as a distinct transvestite 'socio-religious group' organised 'under seven main *gharanas*' and 'covered under the term "transgender"', distinct from *kothis* who become grouped as feminine MSM (men who have sex with men), a construction that I describe in the next section.<sup>66</sup>

As an ongoing process of consolidation across subcultural and institutional registers, *hijra* identity formation speaks to debates about the historical continuity or postcolonial emergence of South Asian identities. While Kaviraj argues that South Asian communities have had 'fuzzy' and overlapping boundaries, it appears that *hijra* and non-*hijra* distinctions have not been uniformly 'fuzzy', but rather, locally variegated.<sup>67</sup> For Kaviraj, modern governmental instruments such as maps and censuses have a determinant influence in the rise of territorially bounded and enumerated identities.<sup>68</sup> However, as argued above, the contradictory ethnological discourse on eunuchs produced via colonial censuses failed to create a coherent *hijra* category: it is rather the seemingly traditional *gharana* kinship system that actively undertakes the ongoing process of consolidation more effectively. This seems to corroborate Guha's argument that 'the warm fuzzy continuum of pre-modern collective life was not . . . arbitrarily sliced up by colonial modernity', but rather, as Bayly contends, an indigenous 'critical public' was already in place from the pre-colonial period, and has actively participated in constituting various identities.<sup>69</sup> However, as Chatterjee argues, the interaction of communities and (post)colonial institutions brings about profound changes such as a 'deepening of the web of governmentality . . . as practices of everyday life among rural people', extending the reach of governmental institutions and discourses outside metropolitan centers.<sup>70</sup> The collusion between *gharana* kinship and media, NGO and state discourses to construct a bounded 'authentic' subject of governmental welfare affects a historical rupture in identity formations that elides and potentially circumscribes the lived practices and self-representations of various marginal subjects.

### The rise of the *kothi*

*Kothi* does not seem to have been used widely before the late 1990s in West Bengal, nor (as Lawrence Cohen notes) in North Indian cities like Varanasi.<sup>71</sup> It was not commonplace among the older generation of the Berhampore network, while some of Shyamoli-*ma*'s disciples in Ranaghat had known but rarely used the term. But since the late 1990s, *kothi* gained extensive usage within NGOs, CBOs and community networks,

alongside terms like *dhurani*, *dhunuri* or *moga* for older community members and often replacing these terms for the younger generation.

In the late 1990s, *kothi* became prominent with NGO usage, and in the mid-2000s entered the AIDS-control policy of the Indian state as a subgroup of MSM (men who have sex with men), a ‘high risk group’ (HRG) for HIV infection. The emerging definition of the *kothi* in HIV-AIDS discourse is summarised in the guidelines for the third phase of the National AIDS Control Policy (NACP-III, 2007–2012): *kothis* are males showing ‘varying degrees of femininity’ and ‘involved mainly . . . in receptive anal/oral sex with men’, called *parikh* in West Bengal and *panthi* elsewhere in India.<sup>72</sup> Defined as feminine MSM, *kothis* are distinct from *hijras* who are described as lineage-based “transgenders” or TG’, though the guidelines concede in passing that ‘self-identified hijras may also identify . . . as kothis’ (but not vice versa).<sup>73</sup> These official distinctions thus override overlapping identifications like the aforementioned *chhallawalis* who might switch between *dhurani*, *kothi* and *hijra/chhibri*.

Boyce argues that the reification of the *kothi* as ‘a culturally indigenous category with self-evident meanings’ excludes more ‘complex understandings of sexual subjectivity’, and Cohen critiques the creation of *kothi* as a ‘black box’ concept, an unquestioned cultural category for same-sex desire in the HIV-AIDS discourse.<sup>74</sup> Countering its indigenist usages, Cohen argues that *kothi* communities often grew around NGOs, though he notes that *hijra* networks could have also aided its dissemination.<sup>75</sup> While these critiques are germane to understanding how *kothi* emerged as an institutional category, they also focus on a top-down history of identity formation, emphasising the involvement of big-city NGOs in constructing this minority identity. This epistemological focus on metropolitan institutional agency has tended to downplay how NGOs have relied on non-metropolitan subcultures.

The following sections chart how institutional activism for gender/sexual rights and sexual health depended on the aforementioned subcultural networks of lower-class gender variant males with varying extents of distinction from *hijra gharanas*. The increasing usage of *kothi* in West Bengal has relied on its correspondences with older subcultural terms used in non-metropolitan networks, such as *dhurani*, *dhunuri* and *moga*. Even as the *hijra* becomes a more bounded term, the *kothi* emerges through attempts to standardise notions of same-sex desire, as well as the distinction from *hijras*, across these subcultural networks, thus paralleling the consolidation of the *hijra*.

### From informal to institutional networks

Of the early Kolkata collectives, both Counsel Club and the Naz Calcutta Project were initiated by middle-class Kolkata activists in 1993.<sup>76</sup> They were loosely affiliated with two larger organisations that pioneered HIV/AIDS-prevention and activism in India: the Counsel Club with the Humsafar Trust and Naz Calcutta with the Naz Foundation International (NFI). The Humsafar Trust and the NFI were associated respectively with rival activists Ashok Row Kavi and Shivananda Khan, leading national activists who built connections with transnational HIV-AIDS and LGBT activism during the 1990s.<sup>77</sup> Parallel to this process of gender/sexual globalisation, the reach of the Kolkata groups expanded into non-metropolitan areas. In 1995, an article entitled ‘Magazine about homosexuality being sold openly’ ran in the Bengali newspaper *Anandabazar*

*Patrika* and reached small-town readers.<sup>78</sup> Sarswata, from a small northern suburb and a pioneer in small-town organising, narrated his discovery of this article to me as a moment of political initiation.

The recruitment of activists from outside Kolkata proved crucial to the state-wide expansion of NGOs and CBOs. Institutional expansion rapidly increased in the 2000s, which has been attributed to metropolitan organisations like Counsel Club that established 'satellite groups' in districts of West Bengal.<sup>79</sup> However, this emphasis on metropolitan institutions that ostensibly drive gender/sexual globalisation misses the role of translocal *dhurani-dhunuri-hijra* subcultural networks, which facilitated non-metropolitan institutionalisation. After Counsel Club disbanded in the early 2000s, the activist Ranajay became associated with Dum Dum Swikriti Society, established under Sarswata's leadership in Kolkata's northern suburbs. Ranajay helped expand its reach to towns like Ranaghat through contacts with cruising and *hijra* networks. Meanwhile, a participant in the Berhampore network heard about Kolkata CBOs through the Bengali media, and started visiting Swikriti meetings. Gradually gaining familiarity with the Berhampore circle, Sarswata helped establish the CBO Madhya Banglar Sangram there in 2006. Several such small-town CBOs joined an organisational network named MANAS Bangla, with its administrative hub in Kolkata.<sup>80</sup>

This shift from informal to institutional networking was fostered by the increasing availability of funding for HIV-AIDS prevention from western and multilateral funders during the 1990s, and later the Indian state. Transnational meetings such as the International AIDS Conferences evidenced a growing global awareness of the AIDS epidemic and donors like the UK's DFID (Department for International Development) began to provide funds for mapping vulnerable groups and community outreach through larger NGOs and the state.<sup>81</sup> 'Around the late 90s, we started doing the needs-assessment surveys', Sarswata told me; 'there were two such surveys, one in 1996 and one around 1999–2000'. The first survey in Kolkata was by the Naz Calcutta project, which generated the report 'STD/HIV outreach among sexual networks of men who have sex with men in Calcutta', presented at the International AIDS Conference in 1996.<sup>82</sup> This was followed by a survey by Integration Society, an activist group that grew out of Counsel Club.<sup>83</sup>

Through these surveys, activists like Sarswata were introduced to lower- and lower-middle-class spaces in and around Kolkata, identifying vulnerable populations for HIV-AIDS prevention. As surveys extended beyond middle-class gay-identified circles, the Naz Calcutta report adopted the term 'men who have sex with men' (MSM) as a broad non-identitarian, behaviour-based label that would be intelligible to international audiences.<sup>84</sup> MSM, as Tom Boellstorff notes, had arisen in western HIV-AIDS discourse as a term for participants in same-sex behaviour who did not identify as 'gay'.<sup>85</sup> MSM was also adopted by 'baseline surveys' of the Humsafar Trust in Mumbai and subsequently entered the Indian state AIDS-control discourse.<sup>86</sup> While its adoption marked a bid to acknowledge 'cross-cultural variation in . . . sexual identity', ironically, its increasing official usage made it into a hegemonic form of representation.<sup>87</sup> As Sarswata narrated, 'Around 1999, a senior activist told us to use MSM instead of "gay" or "homosexual", so that we would get government projects'.

At the same time, surveyors also picked up subcultural language; as Sarswata narrated, 'we learnt words like *dhurani* through these field visits'. However, the category that gained national circulation among NGOs was not *dhurani*, but *kothi*. As

Cohen describes, *kothi* was discovered as a term during surveys on male sex workers in South India.<sup>88</sup> The Naz Calcutta survey had already noted the term in Kolkata in 1996, suggesting its prior subcultural dissemination (though it was not widespread in its usage). Based on these surveys, Naz Foundation International propagated the term *kothi*, defined as feminised males who desired masculine men (variously called *panthi*, *parikh* and *giriya*), as an indigenous category that was less elite than ‘gay’, while the rival Humsafar Trust contested the gendered *kothi-panthi* model as the putatively dominant indigenous structure of male same-sex desire.<sup>89</sup> Despite the differing attitude to *kothi*, Humsafar, like NFI, began mapping *kothis* as a vulnerable subgroup within MSM.<sup>90</sup> Thus, institutional appropriations of (and differences over) subcultural language were subsumed within an emerging lingua franca of HIV-AIDS control, where MSM, as Boellstorff notes, increasingly shifted from denoting non-identified behaviour to designating vulnerable ‘populations’, including identity-based communities at risk of HIV-AIDS.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, in response to NGO advocacy, the Indian state and its National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) gradually acknowledged high rates of HIV transmission among groups designated as MSM.<sup>92</sup> National AIDS control policy mapped MSM subgroups according to relative sexual risk for HIV transmission. Given the symbolic position of the *kothi* as a non-elite sexual minority, it entered national AIDS policy as a core ‘high-risk group’ under the MSM rubric, combining sexual risk with gendered marginality.<sup>93</sup>

### The translocal standardisation of subcultural language

On one hand, the institutionalisation of the *kothi* evidences a biopolitical project in the Foucauldian sense, where vulnerable target populations are constructed as ‘domains and objects of knowledge’ through governmental technologies of HIV-AIDS intervention.<sup>94</sup> But the other side of this story is subcultural collusion in mapping and constructing identities. The project of mapping ‘high risk’ populations in West Bengal relied on the subcultural cartography of terms like *dhurani* and *dhunuri* that marked loosely bounded gender variant circles. As CBOs like Sangram were established, non-metropolitan groups began interacting with Kolkata circles through a combination of institutional forums like AIDS-awareness workshops and older cruising networks. This forged an increasing standardisation of subcultural usages, evident in Berhampore in the shift from the older generation of Govinda and Ram, to a newer crop of Sangram members. Akhtar, one such member, told me, ‘we heard the people in Kolkata speak, and picked up new words like *kothi*’. A common name for the subcultural code or language itself, *ulti*, has increasingly replaced its diverse designations (*dhunuri bhasha* in Berhampore, *khaurir bhasha* in the Kolkata lake areas), and Kolkata *dhurani* and Berhampore *dhunuri* circles are bridged under the emergent consolidated term *kothi*. As Govinda narrated, ‘now they all say *kothi*; before, we would say *dhunuri*, *moga*’. The process of interpellating outsiders on the basis of perceived behaviour, through which Govinda was introduced to the Berhampore network, has continued, but newer members are now commonly hailed as *kothi*. However, the rise of a common vocabulary cannot entirely overshadow local variations: in Ranaghat, while *kothi* is now commonplace, *dhurani* persists due to the influence of Shyamoli-*ma*’s disciples.

The combination of institutional and informal mapping, within the larger process of linguistic standardisation, has consolidated a common *kothi* identity in two senses: normative ideas of sexual behaviour and distinction from *hijras*. While metropolitan activists undertook early surveys, the mapping of ‘high risk groups’ and cruising areas, integral to HIV-prevention work, is increasingly carried out through local community members, who must be ‘recruited to conduct mapping’ and provide services as per national AIDS policy.<sup>95</sup> While such work relies heavily on an intimate knowledge of local spaces, this labour is severely undervalued in current funding regimes – the salary for low-tier CBO workers is usually less than Rs. 2000 (about \$50) per month.<sup>96</sup> In the process, the loose cartography of *dhurani/dhunuri* and *parikh* – evidencing considerable behavioural diversity within *dhurani/dhunuri* circles, like the masculine Ranajay and the sexually versatile Govinda – are gradually understood as bounded populations differentiated in terms of sexual behaviour. Categories laid out in national AIDS policy documents are propagated through institutional spaces. As Ranajay explained during an NGO meeting in Kolkata in 2010, ‘we now map MSM into the following subsections: *kothi*, feminine males, *parikh*, the husbands [*sic*] of *kothis* and *dupli*, versatile males’. This cartography is enabled through the translocally standardised subcultural language of *ulti*, where *kothi* becomes a more consolidated identity opposed to *parikh* than terms like *dhunuri* or *dhurani* had been.

In the summer of 2009, I accompanied Bijoy, a friend from the Berhampore circle, to a nearby village to help him record a survey. At the house of his friend Rahim, Bijoy proceeded to ask the questions, one of which inquired about sexual roles (options: penetrating, penetrated, versatile). Rahim hesitated – ‘what would I do in sex? I would take, I suppose?’ Bijoy chimed in, ‘Of course you would take, aren’t you *kothi*?’ At this, Rahim looked embarrassed, replying, ‘yes, of course, what else!’ While Rahim had been unsure how to map his sexual behaviour vis-à-vis his gender-variance, *kothi* (vs. the masculine, penetrating *parikh*) provided a neat grid of identification – of course, ‘feminine’ males would also be penetrated. During the survey, a few identified as *dupli* – an emerging usage for ‘versatile’ – but were also relatively excluded from the inner circle of *kothi* bonding and sisterhood.

These consolidations of identity translate between the translocal language of gender/sexual variance and the risk-based cartography of MSM subsections in transnational HIV-prevention discourse, where penetrated persons are at ‘higher risk’.<sup>97</sup> Playing the part of a good peer educator, Bijoy advised Rahim: ‘Sister, be careful, always make them (the *parikh*) wear condoms’. Wearing condoms becomes the naturalised function of the masculine, mainstream *parikh*, while gendered marginality, sexual vulnerability and anal penetrability are conflated in the marginalised *kothi*. Thus, the *kothi* serves to standardise locally variegated vernacular categories such that the diffuse boundary between insiders and outsiders in older networks becomes more marked, translating subcultural cartographies of gender variance into the transnational risk-based cartography of HIV-prevention. However, this consolidation is incomplete; both in Berhampore and Ranaghat, newer formulations like *dupli kothi* (*kothis* who like to fuck) transgress these cartographic boundaries. Such constructions may be regarded pejoratively at the intra-community level, and have not entered state or national official cartographies as separate categories.

As *kothis* become organised into community-based organisations led by middle-class leaders and funded via city-based NGOs, *kothi* also becomes increasingly distinct

from *hijra* or *chhibri*. Sarswata, a salaried activist who has alternated between gay/*samakami* and *kothi* identifications, is the ‘mother’ to the younger Berhampore circle. Even as this alludes to *hijra* kinship, it further cements the class and gender-based distinction with *hijras* that had been already evident for older *dhunuris* like Govinda and Ram. Sangram’s magazine has featured ethnographic accounts of *hijras* as a ‘traditional’ Indian group, even as CBO members attend pride walks in Kolkata and are interpreted as a sign of globalising ‘gay’ visibility in media reports.<sup>98</sup> For others with less access to metropolitan networking such as the cross-dressed train beggars (*chhallawalis*), the overlap with *hijra* persists, though not recognised in the official cartography of MSM and *kothi*. Meanwhile, the focus on same-sex behaviour also distances MSM projects from *gharana*-affiliated *hijras*, whose involvement in sex work is less public. Annapurna-*mashi* initially regarded Sangram’s condom-promotion activities with suspicion, although her *chelas* have subsequently availed themselves of Sangram’s services.

I will close this ethnographic account on an intentionally inconclusive note, since the aforementioned cartographic consolidations of identity are ongoing and unfinished. As noted above, the existing official cartography classifies *kothis* as feminine MSM and *hijras* as lineage-based transgenders. However, in 2011, the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society increased funding for CBOs catering to transgender groups, spurring intra-community debates regarding which *kothis* might be considered authentically and consistently ‘feminine’ enough to be included within ‘transgender’ CBOs alongside *hijras*, as opposed to same-sex desiring males.<sup>99</sup> While the transnational history of ‘transgender’ as a category is beyond the scope of this article, emerging trends in West Bengal indicate that *hijra* constructions of gendered authenticity might also inform concerns about *transgender* authenticity, restricting who can enter this newly funded category. This potentially leads to further cartographic distinctions and identitarian strictures, extending the transgender-MSM division between *hijras* and *kothis* into a divide between more and less authentically feminine *kothis*.<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion: collusion and (dis)continuity

To conclude, I will return to questions about historical continuity and postcolonial emergence with reference to these processes of identity formation. I have attempted to demonstrate how both *hijra* and *kothi*, while evidencing distinct histories of construction, emerge as (seemingly) coherent identities through the collusion of multiple subcultural and governmental processes. An epistemology of these collusions must necessarily bridge multiple sites of enquiry – in the case of *hijra*, ranging from colonial censuses and ethnology to contemporary media representations and the kinship system of the *gharanas*, all of which have contributed to consolidate the identity in official discourses. The *kothi*, on the other hand, evidences the collusion of subcultural networks that are less structured than *gharanas* with governmental technologies of HIV-AIDS control. Locally variegated subjects, like the *dhurani* of Kolkata and *dhunuri* of Berhampore, are translocally consolidated into an MSM sub-category, constructing ‘domains and objects of knowledge’ for the funder-state-NGO nexus.<sup>101</sup> Simultaneously, institutional cartography colludes with subcultural language and vernacular categories, creating hegemonic identities at the community level – witness

Rahim's initiation into being properly *kothi*, fitting both into the target group of HIV-prevention and the peer circle. The consolidation of these networks into a translocal *kothi* identity increasingly standardises the distinction between *hijra* and non-*hijra*, and potentially elides locally variegated distinctions and overlaps. On the whole, *hijra* becomes defined in terms of socio-religious and kinship norms that regulate its boundaries as a 'transgender' identity, whereas *kothis* become conceptualised in terms of their passive/receptive role within male same-sex behaviour (MSM), though *kothi* femininity may cross over to the 'transgender' category as well. Both cases evidence the attempted construction of bounded identities amid the deepening web of governmentality that marks the postcolonial period for Chatterjee.<sup>102</sup> But as Sumit Guha argues, governmental constructions of identity evidence complicities and continuities with pre-existent logics of community formation, in this case *gharana*-based kinship and *dhurani/dhunuri* networks.<sup>103</sup>

The ongoing consolidation of *hijra*, *kothi* and MSM potentially delegitimises subject-positions that cannot be easily assimilated into coherent identities – 'inauthentic' *hijras* outside *gharanas* who cross-dress in trains for their living; *kothis* with ambiguous gender/sexual behaviours that breach the institutional cartography of MSM subgroups. Clearly, these processes of identity formation have material consequences of inclusion or exclusion vis-à-vis emergent minority identities. Moreover, they elide histories of categorical fluidity, boundary crossing and the tolerance of ambiguity, evidenced in the stories of *hijras* outside *gharanas* like *Shyamoli-ma* or masculine *dhuranis* like Ranajay. Through such elisions, forms of collusion and continuity between subcultural and governmental processes of identity formation might constitute profound discontinuities in how gender/sexual variance is imagined and lived on the margins.

## Notes

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1. I use the phrase 'gender/sexual identity' broadly to include varied configurations of gendered and sexualised subject-positions without presuming a strict separation between gender identity and sexual orientation.
2. For critical discussions of nationalist denunciations of homosexuality, see Deborah P. Amory, "'Homosexuality' in Africa: Issues and Debates", *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 25 (1997), pp. 5–10, here p. 5; Ratna Kapur, 'A Love Song to Our Mongrel Selves: Hybridity, Sexuality and the Law', *Social and Legal Studies* 8 (1999), pp. 343–58; for examples of LGBT readings of pre-colonial history, see Giti Thadani, *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (London: Cassell, 1996); Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (eds), *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).
3. Joseph Massad, 'Re-orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World', *Public Culture* 14 (2002), pp. 361–85, here p. 363.
4. Peter Jackson, 'Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 (2009), pp. 357–95, see esp. pp. 360–61.
5. Shivananda Khan, 'Males Who Have Sex With Males in South Asia: A Kothi Framework', *Pukaar* 31 (2000), pp. 3–5.

6. For example, see Lawrence Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification', in Vincenne Adams and Stacy L. Pigg (eds), *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 269–303.
7. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 293.
8. Paul Boyce, 'Conceiving Kothis: Men Who Have Sex with Men in India and the Cultural Subject of HIV Prevention', *Medical Anthropology* 26 (2007), pp. 175–203, see esp. pp. 181–2; Akshay Khanna, 'Taming of the Shrewd Meyeli Chhele: A Political Economy of Development's Sexual Subject', *Development* 52 (2009), pp. 43–51, see esp. pp. 49–50.
9. Khanna, 'Taming of the Shrewd Meyeli Chhele', p. 49.
10. Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 9.
11. For an overview of colonial attitudes to the *hijra*, see Lawrence W. Preston, 'A Right to Exist: Eunuchs and the State in Nineteenth-Century India', *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (1987), pp. 371–87.
12. For *hijras* as a 'third sex' or 'third gender', see Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1990); Gil Herdt, *Third Sex, Third Gender* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).
13. Lawrence Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration: The Postoperative Status of Hijras, Jankhas and Academics', in Paul R. Abramson and Steven D. Pinkerton (eds), *Sexual Nature, Sexual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 276–304; Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, pp. 2–16.
14. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 2.
15. Kira Hall, 'Intertextual Sexuality: Parodies of Class, Identity, and Desire in Liminal Delhi', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15 (2005), pp. 125–44; Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, pp. 45–6.
16. There has been a lack of comparably prominent vernacular categories for female-born persons in activist and academic literatures, perhaps owing to the greater visibility and focus on male-born queer subjects in activism and the public sphere, a problem that deserves separate treatment beyond the scope of this article.
17. I refer here to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and the 'art of government'; see Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality' in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87–104.
18. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 68–70.
19. In Foucault's theorisation, modern state institutions are situated within a 'general technology of power' that he terms 'governmentality'; it is in this sense I use the phrase 'governmental institutions' here. I use 'governmental power' as a shorthand for both specific institutions and the wider 'technology of power' within which they are placed. See Michel Foucault (auth.), M. Senellart, F. Ewald, A. Fontata and A. I. Davidson (eds), *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–78*, tr. G. Burchell, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 120.
20. For such arguments see Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. 7 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 1–39; Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination', in Peter van der Veer and Carol Breckenridge (eds), *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 314–39; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Modernity and Ethnicity in India: A History for the Present', *Economic and Political Weekly* 30 (1995), pp. 3373–80; Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Partha Chatterjee, 'Community in the East', *Economic & Political Weekly* 33 (1998), pp. 277–82.
21. Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', p. 26; Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination', p. 315.
22. Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 26.
23. See C. A. Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony', *South Asia* 27 (1994), pp. 1–25; Sumit Guha, 'The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India c.1600–1990', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003), pp. 148–67; Sumit Guha and Michael Anderson (eds), *Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Radhika Singha, 'Civil Authority and Due Process: Colonial Criminal Justice in the Banaras Zamindari, 1781–1795', in Michael Anderson and Sumit Guha (eds), *Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 30–81.
24. Guha, 'The Politics of Identity', pp. 149–50.

25. Guha, 'The Politics of Identity', pp. 149–50.
26. Sudipto Kaviraj, 'Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity', *Journal of European Sociology* 46 (2005), pp. 497–526.
27. Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
28. Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society*, pp. 199–203.
29. Jackson, 'Capitalism and Global Queering', p. 360.
30. In 2007, I conducted participant observation with the community-based organisation (CBO), Madhya Banglar Sangram. Between 2009 and 2012, I continued working with several CBOs across Kolkata, Nadia and Murshidabad in West Bengal, particularly Dum Dum Swikriti Society and Madhya Banglar Sangram. All personal names mentioned in the context of my fieldwork are changed to protect the confidentiality of my interviewees and interlocutors. As surnames suggest a public identity (often including religion and caste position in the Indian context) they have been omitted. All translations of quoted material from the original Bengali and explicatory parentheses included within quotes are mine.
31. Lawrence Preston, 'A Right to Exist: Eunuchs and the State in Nineteenth-Century India', *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (1987), pp. 371–87.
32. For example, see John Forbes, *Oriental Memoirs* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), pp. 359–60; John Warden, 'On the Customs of Gosawees or Gosaeens', Appendix B to Arthur Steele, *Summary of the Law and Custom of Hindoo Castes within the Dekhun Provinces Subject to the Presidency of Bombay* (Bombay: Government of Bombay, 1827), pp. 67–8.
33. Preston, 'A Right to Exist', pp. 385–7.
34. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 27.
35. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 26.
36. E. J. Kitts, *A Compendium of the Castes and Tribes Found in India* (Bombay: Education Society Press, 1885).
37. For ethnological compendia with entries on 'hijra', see W. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Government of India, 1896), pp. 495–6; R. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Government of India, 1891), pp. 319–20; Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 3 (Madras: Government of Madras, 1909), pp. 288–9; R. V. Russell, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1916), p. 206–07; R. E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, vol. 3 (Bombay: Government of India, 1922), p. 226–7.
38. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 21.
39. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 26.
40. On eunuchs as congenitally deformed, see Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, p. 495; on eunuchs as impotent, see Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, p. 292; Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, p. 226; for descriptions of their ritualistic initiation, see Russell, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, pp. 206–07; Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, p. 226.
41. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, pp. 288–90.
42. Russell, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, p. 206.
43. Hall, 'Intertextual Sexuality', p. 128.
44. Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration', p. 284.
45. Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration', p. 276.
46. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 9.
47. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, pp. 45–56; Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration', p. 284.
48. Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 52.
49. Hall, 'Intertextual Sexuality', p. 129.
50. Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration', p. 283.
51. Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration', pp. 277, 287.
52. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 274.
53. Sherry Joseph, *Social Work Practice and Men Who Have Sex with Men* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), p. 99.
54. Joseph, *Social Work Practice*, p. 100.
55. On such hierarchies of respectability, also see Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, p. 56.
56. While Bengali lacks gendered pronouns like 'he' or 'she', I compromise by using male-gendered pronouns for those socially identifying as male, however 'feminine', and female-gendered pronouns for those identifying as *hijra* or transgender/transsexual. These identifications may be situational and changeable.

57. On similar languages/codes called *Farsi*, see Hall, 'Intertextual Sexuality', p. 129.
58. On this restriction, see Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, pp. 45–7.
59. As I noted during conversations, members of this peer group would use Bengali phrases like *nimno moddhobitto* (lower-middle class) in their self-description.
60. 'Real eunuchs beat fake ones', *Hindustan Times*, 30 June 2005, p. 3; 'Eunuchs show all for truth's sake', *Hindustan Times*, 20 July 2005, p. 5.
61. On intra-community hierarchies among *hijras* and *kothis* based on respectability (or *izzat*), see Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, pp. 44, 60.
62. 'Bhalo Achhi Bhalo Theko', *Tara Muzik*, 10 July 2011.
63. Cohen, 'The Pleasures of Castration', p. 297.
64. Gayatri Reddy, 'Geographies of Contagion: *Hijras, Kothis*, and the Politics of Sexual Marginality in Hyderabad', *Anthropology & Medicine* 12 (2005), pp. 255–70, here p. 262.
65. 'Real eunuchs beat fake ones', *Hindustan Times*, 30 June 2005; Hall, 'Intertextual Sexuality', p. 126.
66. National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), *Targeted Interventions under NACP III: Operational Guidelines*, vol. 1: *Core High Risk Groups* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2007), p. 12.
67. Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', pp. 21–6.
68. Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', p. 27.
69. Guha, 'The Politics of Identity', p. 162; Bayly, 'Returning the British to South Asian History', p. 9.
70. Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society*, p. 92.
71. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 272.
72. NACO, *Targeted Interventions under NACP III: Operational Guidelines*, vol. 1: p. 12.
73. NACO, *Targeted Interventions under NACP III: Operational Guidelines*, vol. 1: p. 12.
74. Boyce, 'Conceiving Kothis', p. 178; Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 285.
75. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', pp. 278, 285, 293.
76. Joseph, *Social Work Practice*, p. 100.
77. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 270.
78. 'Prokashye Bikri Hochchhe Samakami Patrika', *Anandabazar Patrika*, 10 June 1995.
79. Joseph, *Social Work Practice*, p. 100.
80. Subsequently, Manas Bangla has been decentralised into several zones.
81. Joseph, *Social Work Practice*, p. 100.
82. 'STD/HIV Outreach among Sexual Networks of Men Who Have Sex With Men in Calcutta', Naz (Calcutta) Project, Kolkata (1996), <<http://www.aegis.org/DisplayContent/download.asp?type=pdf&sectionID=299635>>.
83. Joseph, *Social Work Practice*, p. 100.
84. 'STD/HIV Outreach among Sexual Networks of Men Who Have Sex With Men in Calcutta', Naz (Calcutta) Project, Kolkata (1996).
85. Tom Boellstorff, 'But Do Not Identify as Gay: A Proleptic Genealogy of the MSM Category', *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (2011), pp. 287–312, here p. 291.
86. '1<sup>st</sup> Baseline Study', The Humsafar Trust, Mumbai (2000), <[http://www.humsafar.org/research\\_papers.htm](http://www.humsafar.org/research_papers.htm)>
87. Reddy, 'Geographies of Contagion', p. 262.
88. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 284.
89. Cohen, 'The Kothi Wars', p. 271.
90. '4<sup>th</sup> Baseline Study', The Humsafar Trust, Mumbai (2005), <[http://www.humsafar.org/research\\_papers.htm](http://www.humsafar.org/research_papers.htm)>
91. Boellstorff, 'But Do Not Identify as Gay', p. 298.
92. Ashok Row Kavi, 'Criminalizing high-risk groups such as MSM', *Infochange Agenda* (2008), <<http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/hiv/aids-big-questions/criminalising-high-risk-groups-such-as-msm.html>>
93. NACO, *Targeted Interventions under NACP III: Operational Guidelines*, vol. 1: p. 12.
94. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 118.
95. NACO, *Targeted Interventions under NACP III: Operational Guidelines*, vol. 1: p. 26.
96. For a critique of funding structures and priorities, see 'Chasing Numbers, Betraying People: Relooking at HIV Related Services in Karnataka', Aneka and Karnataka Sexual Minorities Forum, Bangalore (2012), <<http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/New-Resources2/A-New-Resource-Aneka-and-Karnataka-Sexual-Minorities-Forum-KSMF-Chasing-Numbers-Betraying-People-Relooking-at-HIV-Related-Services-in-Karnataka>>
97. NACO, *Targeted Interventions under NACP III: Operational Guidelines*, vol. 1: p. 13.

98. Arunavo Nath, 'Noorjahan', *Padakshep* 1 (2008), pp. 15–16; 'Rural gays dominate rally', *The Asian Age*, 30 June 2003, p. 3.
99. West Bengal State AIDS Prevention & Control Society, *Advertisement for Inviting Applications from CBOs for Empanelment* (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 2011).
100. On the emergence of 'transgender' as a distinct category from 'gay', see David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: The Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
101. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 118.
102. Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society*, p. 199.
103. Guha, 'The Politics of Identity', p. 161.