

**IN TRANSLATION/TRANSITION: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HIJRA AND/OR
KHAWAJA SARA MEETS TRANSGENDER?**

by

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Abstract

South Asia is currently seeing a rise in the usage and deployment of the term and concept of transgender to describe hijra and khawaja sara communities in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This situation leads to numerous points of inquiry and discussion that allow for explorations of local-transnational knowledge flows, dissemination of terms and concepts from one are to another and vice versa, the relationship between the local and the global, and the benefits and problems of using transgender to describe various other gender groups in the world. This thesis examines both the benefits and drawbacks of using transgender in South Asia as a term to describe hijra and khawaja sara. It also looks at contemporary events and configurations of meaning making in the context of colonialism, imperialism, and post-colonialism. It examines historical documents, news articles, scholarly works, and popular media. It also asks whether any one term or concept can adequately address the situation at hand. This thesis finds that while transgender does work to some extent, it also exposes many gaps and fissures that serve as useful entry points to examine the situation in a more nuanced fashion. By looking at race, sexuality, sex, and gender as entangled within one another, rather than as entirely separable constructs, this thesis finds that while no one term or concept is a direct translation, a better question is instead to ask what can be done to adequately address (trans) gender configurations in an increasingly global context. It finishes with inquiries into the concept of translation itself, and finds that translation *per se* is not what is best to theorize around, but rather metaphors of knowledge that allow for the entangled realities this thesis describes to be taken into account are a more effective approach. This thesis then proposes a series of linguistic metaphors to serve as a tool and starting point to allow for further inquiries to enable discussions of local and global transgender studies beyond merely translation.

Lay Summary

The key goals of this thesis were to explore whether transgender serves as an effective translation for hijra and khawaja sara, to look at how the term is used and deployed in South Asia, and to propose other ways of thinking around these concepts. It finds that while no term, including transgender, is perfect, the larger question to address is how to attend to both the local and global forces that shape the situation and will continue to shape it in the future. This thesis then proposes a series of metaphors based on concepts from linguistics to serve as a both a tool to do this and as starting points for deeper research that goes beyond translation and instead focuses on the work that can be done if careful attention is given to the nuanced, entangled realities of gender.

Preface

This thesis is an original, independent intellectual work of the author, Mohammad Zakriya Khan. It relies on the ethnographic, scholarly, and journalistic works of the authors cited in its bibliography.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Lay Summary.....	iv
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Dedication.....	viii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Hijra/Khawaja Sara/Eunuch/Third Gender/Transgender: A Brief Historical Overview of Terms and Translations.....	3
2.1 “Eunuch” and Its (Dis)Contents.....	4
2.2 Many-Coined Terms.....	6
2.3 How Many Ways Can We Divide By Three?.....	10
2.4 An Ever-Unfolding Umbrella: The Rise of Transgender.....	13
3. “I Know What I Am” Because of What We All Are: Conceptions of (Trans) Gender Selfhoods Beyond Identity.....	19
3.1 Communal Selves.....	21
3.2 Race, Respectability, Gender, and the NGO.....	25
3.3 Sexuality, Respectability, Gender, and the NGO.....	43
4. On Translation.....	57
4.1 Comparing, Contrasting, Asking.....	57
4.2 This Thesis is Disappearing as it is Being Written.....	64
5. Conclusion.....	70
6. Epilogue: Dialogues and Diasporas.....	72
6.1 India After Section 377’s Repeal.....	72
6.2 Gender Pidgins, Gender Creoles.....	74
Bibliography.....	81

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I would also like to thank the hijra and khawaja sara themselves who, despite the brutal daily realities they live within, continue to make a space for themselves and continue to build lifeworlds worth living in. I would also like to thank the fellow queer and trans people with whom I had many conversations about the terms and concepts in this thesis. Some of them belonged to groups such as VAN-PAH and VML and I thank them for the much-needed distractions those groups provided. I would also like to acknowledge the many bus drivers, restaurant workers, janitors, and many more people who contributed every day to this thesis's creation and to whom I owe a great deal of thanks for feeding, transporting, and cleaning while I was buried deep in books.

This thesis was conceived of and written on the traditional, ancestral, unceded, and occupied territories of the x^wməθk^wəy̓əm (Musqueam), Səl̓ílwətaʔ (Tseil-Watuth), Stó:lō, Shíshálh (Sechelt) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations of the Coast Salish peoples. The legacies of the colonial violence this thesis examines continue to affect these groups today, and the author acknowledges this ongoing, brutal colonial violence and that the struggle for gender and sexual liberation goes hand-in-hand with the liberation of colonized peoples.

To my parents for their undying support.

1. Introduction

In 2018, two critical events in South Asia occurred within months of each other. In March, Pakistan's parliament passed *The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act*,¹ and in September, ruling in the case of *Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India*,² India's supreme court struck down the portions of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code pertaining to sodomy. These two events indicate profound and vital shifts in the construction and dissemination of queer and trans logics within South Asia. This thesis aims to examine one subset of this larger dialogue, the interaction between Western understandings of "transgender" and South Asian understandings of *hijra* and *khawaja sara*. As NGOs rise and spread across the region and as laws and court rulings are passed, this interaction can help us understand the benefits, drawbacks, and implications of translating *hijra* and *khawaja sara* into transgender, as well as provide critical insights into the nature of the spread of knowledge and the thinking we as scholars and queer and trans theorists engage in. In short, it asks: how can we develop global trans studies while attending to the local, indigenous ways of knowing gender in South Asia? What do we gain and lose in the process of translation? How has the category of transgender come to be, and what baggage does it carry when it arrives in South Asia? Are (trans) gendered people able to speak to other (trans) gendered people without also having to consider race, place, identity, class, caste, and strategy? That is, in essence, what happens when a *hijra* and a trans person meet? Because so much of the literature around *hijra* and South Asian studies focuses on India, this thesis shall focus on Pakistan. This is not only to help limit the length and scope of its inquiries, but to begin "de-Indianizing *Hijra*," in an effort to shift scholarship to focus on both supra-localities and hyper-localities in South Asia.³

1 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018.

2 Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India thr. Secretary Ministry of Law and Justice.

3 Hossain, "De-Indianizing *Hijra* Intra-regional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space."

As this thesis attempts to explore and disassemble the very terms it employs, providing initial working definitions of terms is necessary but also ultimately self-defeating. Nevertheless, this thesis takes both hijra and khawaja sara to mean people found throughout South Asia, including Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, who were assigned male at birth who then come to know themselves through both self identification and community recognition as a distinct gender and sex category, who are associated primarily with aspects of femininity as well as with some masculinity. Those assigned female at birth are beyond the scope of this thesis.⁴ We will break down the nuances of hijra versus khawaja sara, as well as sex versus gender versus sexuality, and the hyper-local terms that also engage in dialogue with these hyper-regional terms later in this thesis. As is already evident, these terms are only set off in italics once, unless they appear so in quotes, as they are not expected to be continually “alien” or “foreign” in the eyes of the reader. Rather, as part of the point of this thesis is to examine and often flip the optics of Western queer and trans theory, this thesis takes these terms to be just as natural to the reader as transgender already is, and then disassembles them all only to reassemble something else later. This reassembly will not, I regret to say, likely be satisfactory but it will hopefully provide us space to do more than just ask questions, but also explore the many varied responses, though indeed not answers, those questions elicit.⁵ This thesis will also examine the historical impacts of colonialism, religion, and region on the becoming of these terms themselves. But, for now, they provide a starting line, however uncertain that starting line is.

4 Assigned female at birth people experience a wide range of (trans) gendering experiences in South Asia that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

5 I owe some inspiration for this approach to my civil engineering undergraduate degree, in which we learned much about structures by examining how they failed. Whether the failure was from being overloaded, the ravages of time, shoddy construction materials, etc.

2. Hijra/Khawaja Sara/Eunuch/Third Gender/Transgender: A Brief Historical Overview of Terms and Translations

Two of South Asia's major religions, Hinduism and Islam, both contain references to people both outside of binary conceptions of gender as we know them today, but also as parts of entire unique systems of knowing gender that are quite unlike even male/female/non-binary/trans etc. as defined in modern discourse. Queer theory has already tackled the issues of reading sexualities in the past, with varying results. For example, in "Capitalism and Gay Identity," D'Emilio presents a reading of modern understandings of "gay" as a discrete identity category to be dependent on developments found within Europe and America in the Industrial Era.⁶ Furthermore, Foucault also locates key shifts in mid-to-late-Victorian Europe as critical for understanding "homosexuality" as an identity, rather than as a set of actions, that could be "confessed" or admitted to, and therefore also brought into the discourses of the state.⁷ Indeed, there have been volumes published exactly on the question of translation and contact between terms, times, and contexts of sexuality, notably including *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*.⁸ Here, I am discussing sexuality in a thesis about gender, which may seem to violate a key tenet of modern understandings of the concepts: that they are ultimately unrelated and separate concepts. I am violating that very tenet, and I argue, with very good reason, which will emerge throughout this text, but for now it is because the easy separation between sexuality and gender cannot and does not serve to do us any favours in discussing hijra and khawaja sara. This split will occur as a key theme throughout this thesis time and again, particularly because the very notion of a split, as will be seen, enabled *both* sexuality and gender activists an opportunity to make claims and stake identities. This process

6 D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity."

7 Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*.

8 Epps et al., *Islamicate Sexualities*.

also created much fallout, with the ragged pieces left behind becoming double-edged swords, of sorts.

2.1 “EUNUCH” AND ITS (DIS)CONTENTS

With some groundwork laid out, let us turn to South Asia. Texts as old as the *Kama Sutra* mention people understood as something other than man or woman.⁹ However it is already here that we run up against the problems of translation, time, place, and context. Specifically, the translation cited here by Burton continually employs the term “eunuch.” Burton produced his translation during the British colonial era in India. Colonial authorities were concerned just as much with classifying, typifying, and regulating natives as they were with collecting and disseminating local knowledge, and indeed the two causes went hand-in-hand. The *Kama Sutra* is considered to be a somewhat scandalous book about sex, and while it certainly is a book about sex, it is also a book about palace management, relationship dynamics, and critically, gender. That these are all folded together into one volume speaks to the connections made between these concepts and their very formation themselves in ancient India. That is, in the traditional imaginaries of South Asia, these concepts are taken as co-constituted, not separable. Thus, we must consider both the time and place of how these colonial translations came to be, and we must also consider the relationships between terms and concepts in the text itself.

“Eunuch” as a catchall for any expression of sexuality/gender that the British colonizers could not or indeed would not file has a long history. Chatterjee states that,

The British classified the hijra based on three categorizations: first, as naturally impotent men; second, as males born with congenital malformation; and third, as artificial eunuchs. The way in which the British concerned themselves with the hijra body is noteworthy because it signified “not only the binary sex/gender frame of reference within which colonial officials were operating, but also the naturalization

9 Mallanāga, *The Kama Sutra*.

of sexual difference and the centrality of the ‘deficient’ body in such constructions of identity” (Reddy 2006: 28). The map of sexuality as drawn and redrawn in relation to such frameworks has already been documented for the West (Foucault 1978), and it is possible to read the resignification of hijras in this light as a symptom of colonialism.¹⁰

Now let us turn to the following passage from Burton’s translation of the Kama Sutra: “There are two kinds of eunuchs, those that are disguised as males, and those that are disguised as females.”¹¹ I do not know enough Sanskrit to judge the accurateness of this translation, and though that is not my main point, I do direct readers to understand that it is indeed an awful translation, as it elides many differences and nuances in order to arrive at “eunuch” as a generic descriptor.¹² For example, it folds together what are in fact various experiences into two types, and it misunderstands much of the nuances of the Sanskrit it purports to translate, as Reddy notes. Rather, my point is that Burton’s use of “eunuch” here, however (in)accurate it may be, cannot escape the colonial logic Chatterjee outlined above, as evidenced by his translation’s elisions and deletions. That is, we cannot even read the archive itself without dragging in the past and present in our attempt to explain the future of global trans theorizing. And, I argue, we should not shy away from this fact. Rather, we must acknowledge the profound effects it has on our readings. To continue that thought, Dutta writes that “... the ethnological literature was contradictory in its terminological classification, unable to fix a true eunuch body or coherent ‘authentic’ category such as hijra.”¹³ Indeed, Dutta traces colonial authorities’ inability to nail down who even was a hijra as also part and parcel of the colonial project within India, as the courts and rules they mingled in and the webs of power they were woven into were

10 Chatterjee, “Transgender Shifts: Notes on Resignification of Gender and Sexuality in India,” 316.

11 Mallanāga, *The Kama Sutra*, 53. The particular edition of the translation that I am using only contains PDF page numbers, and these citations refer to those. Burton’s translation lives on in many popular press citations today. For example, at the time of my writing, the Wikipedia article on hijra cites it.

12 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 21.

13 Dutta, “An Epistemology of Collusion,” 829.

forever altered by the colonial situation. Whatever their “natural” progression could have been said to be, it was foreclosed time and again, not only through physical violence, but also in the violence of categorizing, naming, and grouping; of exonyms and of endonyms becoming exonyms.¹⁴ On that last point, we must turn to the very term hijra itself.

2.2 MANY-COINED TERMS

But to get there, a brief detour into Islam is necessary. Islamic texts contain references to people known as mukhannathun, though crucially the Quran itself does not. Discussion of the mukhannathun is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I bring it up to connect us to the next argument: hijra is a Hindi-Urdu term.¹⁵ These languages, really standardized registers of one language, and a classic example of a digraphia, or a situation in which one language has two scripts, owe their existence to the many empires, rulers, languages, and peoples that call or did call South Asia home, including the heavily Persianized but originally Turkic Mughal Empire, Arabic through both Islam and Persian loanwords, and many local Indo-Iranian languages. It functions as the lingua franca, along with English, for much of the Northern portion of India, and practically all of Pakistan. Hijra’s root, originally from Arabic, comes from a term meaning “to break with,” “to emigrate,” “to leave,” or “to forsake,” which as will be seen in this thesis is an aspect of both the limitations and benefits of translating it as “transgender.”¹⁶ Arabic and Islam are tied together—much like Latin and Catholicism are in the West—in the imaginaries of South Asia. Islam and Arabic experience a relationship that informs each other. We will examine later the many conscious and subconscious connections to Islam to be found among hijra, khawaja sara, and the communities that view and interact with them. For now, what is relevant

14 Ibid., 828–30.

15 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 243.

16 Zanned, “Root Formation and Polysemic Organization in Arabic Lexicon,” 97.

is that the term itself is already an umbrella term, made that way through a double-filtering. One, that of the Hindi-Urdu lingua franca, and two, through the colonial apparatus, which, as seen earlier, attempted not only to define its borders but also promulgate its use even beyond its northern Indian context.

With that in mind, we can also finally return to the term *khawaja sara*. It too comes from Hindi-Urdu, specifically the Persian *khawaja* meaning “master” or “teacher” and also “person of distinction”¹⁷ and *sara* meaning “royal tent or dwelling” and also “a traveller's resting place”¹⁸ (compare *sarai* as in *caravansarai*). It is employed mainly in Pakistan. Khan writes that,

While the *khwaja* [sic] *saras* and *zenanas* (a category of *khwaja sara* folk) largely dressed as males and lived and were addressed as men, some of whom had important positions in the courtly culture of per-colonial India, other groups of trans* individuals, *hijras* or *jhankas* as they were called in some places, dressed as females and lived in communities under the direction of a *guru*. Members of these groups did not enjoy the same prestige and power that some *khwaja saras* did.¹⁹

With regard to the second point, that of holding important positions, take also Dutta, who writes that,

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.[31 Preston, 1987, 371-87]²⁰ Most accounts describe ‘eunuchs’ as malformed and repulsive.[32 Forbes, 1834, 359-60; Warden, 1827, 67-8] 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

17 Steingass, “خواجہ.”

18 Platts, “سرا.”

19 Khan, “What Is in a Name?,” 223.

20 Where relevant, citations and footnotes found in quotes and block quotes that also use Chicago-style will be quoted at-length in brackets beside the original citation number, to prevent confusion with citations found in these sources and my own citations found at the bottom of the page and in the bibliography.

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.[33 Preston, 1987, 385-7] ‘Eunuchs’ were subsequently criminalised under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, a law that was revoked in 1952 after independence.[34 Reddy, 2005, 27] In the original act, ‘eunuch’ could refer both to any person ‘dressed any person [sic] dressed or ornamented like a woman’ and anyone who upon medical inspection ‘appeared to be impotent’, encompassing both gendered performance and physiology.[35 Reddy, 2005, 26]²¹

These two passages provide us with deep insights into terminology and context, and we will return to them again later. In Hinchy’s research, “khawajasarai” was also found to be associated with otherwise *masculine* identified people, much like Khan also notes,²² a stark contrast to its usage today.²³ Again, Hinchy finds that the term connoted upper caste and class configurations.²⁴ This shifting, from masculinity to femininity, accompanied by a slight shift in pronunciation (khawajasarai to khawaja sara) clarifies this point: hijra is seen largely as an impolite term, even a slur, in Pakistan,²⁵ and we have here a genealogy of some reasons why. It not only connotes lower class and caste standing historically, but positions them in modern Pakistan as decidedly related to opulent, Muslim and Mughal traditions. Hijra, then, retains a hint of “Indian-ness” that would be hard to work with in Pakistan. There is already a refiguring underway to shift the term to connote trans femininity, and then another to relay this to higher caste and class positions of the past. This is doubly important because, as Khan notes, even in Pakistan, khawaja sara still derive much of their influence due to their proximity to a Hindu goddess.²⁶ So, we can see here another problem, and yet another opportunity, for translation and dialogue between these terms. That is, terms travel along with whatever baggage coined them and al-

21 Dutta, “An Epistemology of Collusion,” 828.

22 Khan, “What Is in a Name?,” 225-27.

23 Hinchy, “Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity,” 278.

24 *Ibid.*, 277-78.

25 Khan, “What Is in a Name?”; Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan.”

26 Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan,” 1290.

lowed them to flourish. It is why khawaja sara in Pakistan use that term, why Reddy²⁷ finds those she labels hijra have other local terms in southern India, while Dutta finds them yet again in eastern India.²⁸ This point will become vital to other arguments I shall make later in this thesis as well. Furthermore, notions of criminalization appear in the colonial record and legalese specifically around these terms (“eunuch,” by extension hijra and khawaja sara) and this will become critical later in the analysis of governmental respectability as related to alternate terms, and translations, such as transgender. I note that point because “khawajasarai” as a term and concept made colonial authorities slightly less anxious than “hijra,” because “*hijras* provoked deeper colonial anxieties and more wide-reaching interventions than did *khawajasarais*, who were not, in the colonial view, ‘habitual criminals’ and sexual ‘deviants.’”²⁹ Colonial authorities would mine up “evidence” of the supposed criminal nature of hijra versus khawaja sara, as we shall see. Furthermore, this thread continues to this day when hijra and khawaja sara deal with formerly colonial government institutions in South Asia, as part of the appeal of khawaja sara as a term and concept, and then also of transgender, is that thread of governmental respectability.

Reddy, Chatterjee, and Dutta all note this slipperiness between various terms used to refer to many gender variant populations in South Asia.³⁰ Dutta examines the promulgation of kothi (a term I expand upon later in this thesis), and Reddy operates in southern India, where Hindi-Urdu does not experience the wide deployment it does in the north. Chatterjee examines both kothi and eunuch as well as hijra. All of these authors together lead us to this point: hijra

27 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*.

28 Dutta, “An Epistemology of Collusion.”

29 Hinchy, “Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity,” 278.

30 Chatterjee, “Transgender Shifts: Notes on Resignification of Gender and Sexuality in India”; Dutta, “An Epistemology of Collusion”; Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*.

and khawaja sara are umbrella terms, with all the stoppages, gaps, and fissures any umbrella term entails. Attempting to map one umbrella term onto another umbrella term is almost guaranteed not to work, but that does not mean that we should not try, or that there is no value in examining when and how it does and does not work. If it seems we have come far only to end up where we started, then take note that this will happen again in this thesis. But, I hope, what is clear is that a set of historical relationships and power dynamics informs even the “natural seeming” categories of hijra and khawaja sara themselves.

2.3 HOW MANY WAYS CAN WE DIVIDE BY THREE?

Throughout that long history, new terms did begin to crop up in Western discourse to refer to these disparate and at times diasporic populations. Of particular note is the surge in popularity of “third gender” and “third sex.” On the surface this positioning makes sense. If hijra and khawaja sara are neither men nor women or something else other than man or woman, then why not three? Later on we shall see some passages from hijra and khawaja sara themselves that may at first blush echo it, and thus, argue the proponents of three, its applicability is assured. An early critique of third gender can be found in “Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the ‘Third Gender’ Concept” by Towle and Morgan. They note that many disparate groups found across various traditions, times, and places are often lumped together under the label “third gender,” without regard for context, history, applicability, or indigenous ways of knowing.³¹ Of particular note, however, is the following claim, “[i]f a common complaint among trans individuals is that their lives and identities are violated and misrepresented for the goals of scholarship, then it behooves us to make sure that we do not commit the

31 Towle and Morgan, “Romancing the Transgender Native.”

same offense against others for the goal of political advancement.”³² Much like Towle and Morgan, this thesis argues that too easy or too simple a translation or explanation runs this risk when producing and disseminating scholarship about hijra and khawaja sara. That is, I am “... skeptical of the utility of the generic transgender native in the popular literature.”³³

Are hijra and khawaja sara a third gender? Many modern day headlines (written long after the 2002 publishing of Towle and Morgan’s paper) claim this to be true, and at Towle and Morgan’s time they were often presented as the archetypal case.³⁴ Here is just a small sampling of these articles both scholarly and popular:

- “Social stigma, legal and public health barriers faced by the third gender phenomena in Brazil, India and Mexico: Travestis, hijras and muxes”³⁵ (note the lumping that Towle and Morgan specifically critiqued back in 2002).
- “Pakistan’s traditional third gender isn’t happy with the trans movement”³⁶
- “Why terms like ‘transgender’ don’t work for India’s ‘third-gender’ communities.”³⁷

That is not to say that these articles have no use or are all-together wrong, but rather that even in their breakdowns they provide us with useful insights; indeed, this thesis will later use some of them again for its own purposes. Shortly, we shall see just how “third gender” breaks down even in its attempts at being encompassing, and later how transgender does the same, but we will use these as key critical moments and tools. For now, as this sections serves more as a history of terms, suffice it to say that third gender, too, much like eunuch or hijra or khawaja sara, also ultimately fails us.

32 Ibid., 470.

33 Ibid., 471.

34 Ibid., 469.

35 Diehl et al., “Social Stigma, Legal and Public Health Barriers Faced by the Third Gender Phenomena in Brazil, India and Mexico.”

36 Azhar, “Pakistan’s Traditional Third Gender Isn’t Happy with the Trans Movement.”

37 Bearak, “Why Terms like ‘Transgender’ Don’t Work for India’s ‘Third-Gender’ Communities.”

But how does it break down? In “The paradox of recognition: hijra, third gender and sexual rights in Bangladesh,” Adnan Hossain finds that,

The third gender as a model is driven more by a desire to challenge the two sex/gender system and less by the lived lives of the people who constitute this ‘third’ (Hossain 2014). Furthermore, the idea that societies that accommodate third gender categories are more tolerant than the rest works to obfuscate the everyday struggle of the hijra who constantly fight against the mainstream to demand a position within those societies (Hall 1997). Moreover, the automatic relationship between the recognition of the hijra as a third gender and empowerment ... does not redress their marginalisation.³⁸

As Hossain notes, not only is “third gender” as a category already suspect, because it exists more as a category by and for anthropologists and activists, however good their intentions, than it does as any part of the lived reality of the groups it ostensibly describes, it also does little to help. Much like Towle and Morgan find as well, no matter how liberatory the term seems to be, it mainly shows “that anthropologists are complicit in creating the very categories they seek to understand and deconstruct.”³⁹ I would also go further and claim that anthropology often ends up creating the very concept of “social group” here out of whole-cloth. Wagner notes, “[i]f we were absolutely committed to ‘finding’ groups, it would be no trouble to assume that these distinctions are descriptions or definitions of concrete, bounded, and empirically existing groups.”⁴⁰ I am not claiming that hijra and khawaja sara as a group—and groups thereof—do not exist, but rather that, as already shown, these are fuzzy boundaries to begin with and furthermore the group that often *is* assumed to exist is some sort of unified “global transgender,” that can be defined and described *per se*. Rather, as I shall attempt to argue in this thesis, there are likely many local conceptions of transness and gender to be found throughout the world, each of which must be addressed and researched on its own terms first and fore-

38 Hossain, “The Paradox of Recognition,” 1429.

39 Towle and Morgan, “Romancing the Transgender Native,” 474.

40 Wagner, “Are There Social Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?”

most, before it can be brought into dialogue with any other conception from anywhere else, not just the West.⁴¹ In essence, the act of observing cements that which we are assuming to measure.

2.4 AN EVER-UNFOLDING UMBRELLA: THE RISE OF TRANSGENDER

Much like any of the terms and categories discussed earlier, transgender itself required a series of movements, theories, and events to cement it into discourse as it stands today: as a category of internal identity,⁴² and then allow it to be disseminated in South Asia. We will examine the second point, its spread in South Asia, later in this thesis. For now, we will examine the historical conditions of its development, particularly including the racialized and classed aspects of the term, which are vital to know before we can continue to unpack its use elsewhere in the world.

Valentine provides an extensive analysis of the rise of the term and concept of transgender in *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*.⁴³ For this thesis, what is relevant is the ever-changing inclusions and dis-inclusions that the term came to embody, and the accompanying logics those movements revealed according to Valentine. Let us begin with a thread introduced earlier that we can finally expand here, that of sexuality and gender as two ostensibly separate realms. Valentine writes that “[t]he tensions between gender-normative homosexual desire and public gender variance is apparent as early as the late nineteenth century, and they were carried over into the earliest homosexual rights movements in debates about

41 For further discussions of representation beyond colonial systems, see Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*. And for explorations of other indigenous concepts of universality, see Meyer, “Indigenous and Authentic.” For a discussion of the formulation and critiques of post-colonial theorizing, consult Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Alternative conceptions of time and space metaphors are discussed in Da Silva, “Difference Without Separability”; Da Silva, “Unpayable Debt: Reading Scenes of Value against the Arrow of Time.”

42 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 106. “Indeed, ‘transgender’ is culturally unintelligible without a concept of ‘identity.’”

43 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*.

strategy, civil rights, and what kinds of gendered/sexual expressions were valid.”⁴⁴ When synthesized with Foucault and D’Emilio as mentioned earlier, we can already see a picture emerging of an anxious colonial authority, that was inasmuch fashioning its own vision of what binary gender and sexuality ought to be. That is, sexuality was not gender and vice versa in this system, but heterosexuality still required that there be the categories male and female to buttress its claim that opposite attraction was the only “acceptable” arrangement of gender and sexuality. In this picture, then, encounters with hijra and khawaja sara in colonial India served just as much as “evidence” for the “superiority” of binaries between genders and between sexuality and gender as they did as formative moments in-and-of-themselves. With that in mind, we can return to Burton’s translation of the Kama Sutra again, and re-read these lines from the section “Of The Auparishtaka Or Mouth Congress,” which state:

There are two kinds of eunuchs, those that are disguised as males, and those that are disguised as females. Eunuchs disguised as females imitate their dress, speech, gestures, tenderness, timidity, simplicity, softness and bashfulness. The acts that are done on the jaghana or middle parts of women, are done in the mouths of these eunuchs, and this is called Auparishtaka [1]⁴⁵ These eunuchs derive their imaginable pleasure, and their livelihood from this kind of congress, and they lead the life of courtesans. So much concerning eunuchs disguised as females.

Eunuchs disguised as males keep their desires secret, and when they wish to do anything they lead the life of shampooers. Under the pretence of shampooing, a eunuch of this kind embraces and draws towards himself the thighs of the man whom he is shampooing, and after this he touches the joints of his thighs and his jaghana, or central portions of his body. Then, if he finds the lingam of the man erect, he presses it with his hands and chaffs him for getting into that state. If after this, and after knowing his intention, the man does not tell the eunuch to proceed, then the latter does it of his own accord and begins the congress. If however he is ordered by the man to do it, then he disputes with him, and only consents at last with difficulty. The following eight things are then done by the eunuch one after the other: The nominal congress/Biting the sides/Pressing outside/Pressing inside/Kissing/Rubbing/Sucking a mango fruit/Swallowing up....⁴⁶

44 Ibid., 53.

45 I save analyzing the footnote attached to this line for later in this thesis, for it works well when analyzing sexuality.

46 Mallanāga, *The Kama Sutra*, 53–56.

There is much to unpack here, so we will work thematically. As already mentioned, we cannot be sure of “eunuch” as an effective translation, but as mentioned I am more concerned with the logics of the colonial apparatus, not with the translation *per se*. The colonial tendency to categorize and classify, which Reddy explored, echoed across the times and spaces of South Asia, as did the thread of colonial anxiety related to gender/sexuality. The breaking into “kinds of eunuchs” would be echoed, as noted by Dutta, time and again in the colonial record. Some “kinds of eunuchs” would be considered more “valid” while than others, and “evidence” to support this fact would be mined up from anywhere and anyone possible to shore up the cause. But beyond that, in relation to sexuality, gender, and transgender, this passage flies in the face of any neat separations of these concepts. Not only is gender variance woven together with sexuality in this passage, it also marries together sex acts with gender with sexuality. As Valentine notes, the neat cleaving of sexuality and gender into gay, straight, and transgender, has despite, “... all its use[s] to transgender-identified people ... ‘transgender’ also has the effect of shoring up claims (however contested) about gender-normative, respectable, and privately practiced homosexuality within the tentatively refigured white, middle-class family of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.”⁴⁷ That is, governmental and regulatory respectability would allow the trajectory of both modern gay/lesbian rights movements and transgender rights movements to achieve certain wins, within a relationship where gender respectability and the state become tied. Respectability in the eyes of the state and its apparatuses will emerge throughout this thesis as a key point, especially as counter to the oftentimes brutal actual lived realities of hijra and khawaja sara in South Asia.

47 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 242.

Indeed, the descriptions of sex acts tied to gender tied to sexuality, as seen above, would be of little to no use today to *either* gay/lesbian activists nor to transgender activists alike. For all its benefits to marginalized people, perhaps one of the main drivers of the use of the term is the very fact that it neatly categorizes *and* that it allows both advocates in sexuality and gender to offset any discussion of non-normative sexualities. That is, the passage from the Kama Sutra above is the sort of thing advocates of both gay/lesbian rights and transgender rights wished to cast off, and the neat cleaving of the two fields of study ostensibly allowed that. What we see emerging here, then, is a thread wherein a split conception of gender and sexuality not only afforded activists a powerful (if fraught) tool to gain progress, it also created an intrinsic outside that at once shored up terms and conceptions around sexuality/gender while being held at arm's length.⁴⁸ What such a split entailed was that, on the grounds of a sexuality divorced from gender, sexual orientation could cast off notions of gendered "deviance." And, gender, as divorced from sexuality, afforded the chance to cast off notions of sexual "deviance." In essence, the two would come to buttress each other. As a consequence, this split would leave its remnants behind and the promise of rights and regulatory victories would also come with much fallout. As will be examined later, it was not as neat a cleaving as hoped, and the severed threads that once tied together these imaginaries still persist today, as does the ever-present allure of governmental respectability.

Throughout his book, Valentine notes that sometimes certain groups were deemed to fall under transgender and sometimes they were not, and sometimes those assumed to be able to be described by that label found little use for it, and that these people were usually people of colour, often Black, did drag, were poor, and often otherwise marginalized.⁴⁹ That those in the

48 In the words of Butler, a "constitutive outside" as explored in *Bodies That Matter*.

49 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 105–37.

margins are the ones most contested is something I also find in the deployment of transgender in South Asia. As Valentine finds, the label of “transgender” did not do the heavy lifting it promised for Black and racialized minority populations because often the employers of the term and concept were either privileged either in class, race, situational, and other ways, or they were outsiders to the communities they were interacting with, which meant their use of the term and concept often did not align with the lived realities of the groups they were interacting with. That is, the category and matrix of knowledge they were developing and deploying was incomplete. Thus, it was not that those being analyzed and living their lives were somehow doing so “incorrectly.”

Which leads me to ask: whither race? Before I do, I must contextualize why I have chosen to marry Black American studies with South Asian studies as will be seen in this thesis. This is because, as Reddy states,

... in later accounts (including that by the well-known traveler, Richard Burton), it is apparently the racial element—most of these eunuchs were of African origin and therefore ‘not just a non-man but a “black” non-man’ (Marmon 1995, 100)—as much as the sexual aspect that causes their discomfort. Through all of these accounts, eunuchs themselves are never given a voice, their history and representation becoming as much a chronicle of the authors’ preoccupations and anxieties as a historical account of their lives.⁵⁰

C. Riley Snorton explores the early Black American trans experience in *Black on Both Sides* citing many examples and narratives. I am specifically interested in examples from the chapter “A Nightmarish Silhouette,” which looks at the ascendance of Christine Jorgensen’s wholesome, middle-class, all-American white womanhood in parallel with other Black American (trans)

50 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 24. A full examination of the enslavement of African peoples in South Asia is beyond the scope of this thesis. As a starting point, I direct readers to Chatterjee and Eaton, *Slavery and South Asian History*; Clarence-Smith, *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. For a fuller discussion of the entangling of gendering and un-gendering and therefore un-personing as Reddy outlines here, see Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”

gender experiences. Snorton notes that anti-Blackness ran as an undercurrent in much of the solidification of what transsexual would come to mean,⁵¹ and as Valentine examines, it continued on into the creation of transgender. It thus makes sense that whiteness would continue to operate when the term was (re)figured to apply to the Subcontinent. Indeed, much like feminism had to grapple with essentialist, universalizing constructions of “womanhood,” global trans studies must also address whiteness and race more broadly. I am not arguing that modern-day hijra and khawaja sara are Black, but rather that the processes seen in this quote mean that gender, caste, race, and class operate in entangled ways in South Asia and co-constitute each other. Similarly, race, gender, and class operate in co-constituted ways in the West, where transgender as a term and concept saw its formative movements. Thus, we are able to compare the fissures and breakdowns along these lines when transgender is mapped onto hijra and khawaja sara and vice versa by using the scholarship of Black American studies to offer us points of similarities and dissimilarities to theorize. We shall save a deeper dive into the nuances of comparing these two lifeworlds for later in this thesis. For now, we note that transgender is inextricable from raciality, progress, and nation-building. As Snorton writes: “the constitution and consolidation of a set of discourses known as ‘transsexuality’ [and, I argue, transgender] ... reveal the mechanisms by which the nation and its histories constituted (and disavowed) the frailty of its own narratives ... in order to represent with authority a version of progress over time.”⁵² That is, as mentioned earlier, concepts of governmental respectability, nation, and progress allowed for a narrative in which sexuality and gender, ostensibly but imperfectly cleaved from one another, helped fuel a concept of nationhood in which governmental

51 Snorton, “A Nightmarish Silhouette.”

52 Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 169.

respectability and regulatory efforts on (trans) gender came to mean “progress” and access to paper rights and concessions, something that we shall see occurs again in South Asia.

3. “I Know What I Am”⁵³ Because of What We All Are: Conceptions of (Trans) Gender Selfhoods Beyond Identity

I begin this section with the words of a Pakistani khawaja sara herself. First, because many of my sources are already ethnographies, and second because with the heavy-yet-incomplete work of defining-and-then-undefining already underway, we can go no farther without doing so. Additionally, focusing on an example helps illuminate the lifeworlds in which khawaja sara navigate the various concepts we have thus far unpacked. In “Once ostracised, now Pakistani transgender people are running for parliament,” from *The Guardian*, Barker quotes Zara, a khawaja sara, writing:

The ruling means a lot to Zara. Kneeling on a mattress that takes up most of the floor of her concrete home, she reaches into a fake alligator-skin purse and pulls out a green identity card, and tears well up. On the card, Zara’s gender is marked as “X”./ “I was born with a very small male organ. Inside, my feelings are female,” the 35-year-old said. “I want to live like a woman, cook and do domestic work./ Our appearance is different, so why should we have to have ‘male’ on our identity card?”⁵⁴

Though this may initially gloss as a neat slotting of gender as *identity*, inline with what transgender carries, let us unpack some ideas here. “Inside my feelings are female” does indeed seem to point to an identity-based concept of gender, but the next line “I want to live like a woman, cook and do domestic work” recalls the South Asian conception of gender as at least partly action-based *à la* the Kama Sutra, above, and pre-Victorian European conceptions of much the same as well. I argue that the next line, “[o]ur appearance is different, so why should we have to have ‘male’ on our identity card?” makes clear both the difficulties in translating khawaja sara into transgender and the strengths of doing so all at once. In this conception of gender and

53 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 105.

54 Barker, “Once Ostracised, Now Pakistani Transgender People Are Running for Parliament.”

society, actions and identity exist in a constant dialogue, always in communication with one another. That is, it is impossible to reduce Zara's conception of herself down to "feeling" any particular way nor to "acting" in any particular way. Furthermore, she uses the "X" option on her ID card, further complicating any neat divisions between action-identity-expression. Distinctions between gender identity and expression do not hold up here, and this is *precisely the point* at which generative ideas can occur. But if this feels like it violates a central tenant of transgender, that action, identity, and sexuality are distinct fields of inquiry, Valentine provides insights into much the same breakdowns in his research.⁵⁵ That is, "... none of these people's understandings of themselves or their desires are intelligible in political categories of collective agency, because of the gap between their understandings of personhood and the political categories of identity which claim to represent them."⁵⁶ This theoretical anxiety, this sense that a sensible matrix of knowledge had been violated often manifested itself, Valentine found, in the following manner:

... members' resistance to being identified as transgender was dismissed by my social service provider colleagues as 'transphobia.' Likewise, fem queens' and butches' use of the term "gay" to describe themselves was dismissed by one social service provider who said to me, "They are working with the master's tools," invoking Audre Lorde.[10: The quote is: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde 1984: 112, emphasis in original).] That is, she saw the Clubhouse ball-goers (and others like them) as operating under a kind of false consciousness which disabled them from understanding the distinctions between gendered and sexual identities.⁵⁷

Valentine finds that such distinctions are a product of the matrix of knowledge we *wish* we could apply to those we study, and the resulting anxiety stems from that *desire to implement it*, not from those studied being "wrong" or somehow not yet up-to-date on some supposed "nat-

55 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 105–37.

56 *Ibid.*, 108.

57 *Ibid.*, 99.

ural” distinction between gender, sex, and sexuality.⁵⁸ If, in this conception of gender, identity, expression, and action cannot be neatly cleaved, then so be it. Much like native speakers of a language do not make mistakes, people do not “comprehend themselves incorrectly” when attempting to explain themselves to us.

Yet there are also strengths in the translation as well. Transgender as a term allows Zara and narratives like hers to be immediately taken up and at least somewhat understood by structures of bureaucracy, foreign readers, scholars, news media, NGOs, and the like. Also, it has the possibility to cover her narrative, because as Valentine pointed out earlier, transgender is indeed a term that shifts and moves, its non-rigid boundaries have always been capable of expanding to include other conceptions. It also, vitally, avoids the temptation to declare anything “untranslatable,” which often results in essentializing difference. Colonialism often casts indigenous cultures this way when attempting to justify its ends; the natives are somehow totally beyond reach while simultaneously holding on to some ancient knowledge that we can never comprehend: merely racism dressed up in nicer clothes. Analyzing these issues, fissures, and conceptions requires careful due diligence, not easy platitudes. As content as Zara seems, there are many yawning gaps exposed by others that we shall see.

3.1 COMMUNAL SELVES

To go further, we must understand that coming to be a hijra and/or khawaja sara is a different process than identifying as transgender. And unpacking those nuances is vital for our next turn: the fissures, breakages, and elisions that transgender carries when it arrives in the subcontinent and butts up against already present gender systems and understandings; how these ideas once again carry the echoes of the colonial terms we outlined at the beginning of

58 Ibid., 108–9.

this thesis. What I argue is that the lifeworlds of hijra and khawaja sara as concepts and terms, outlined earlier, are just as strong and vibrant as the lifeworld of transgender. When attempting to map these onto one another, we found both that it is at once not entirely possible, but also revelatory in what it exposes. That is, unlike Valentine's "gaps" or Snorton's observation of "weakness" I find that this is entangled territory, in which we cannot neatly cleave the field into "dominant culture and subculture." That is the "subculture" is a vibrant lifeworld unto itself.⁵⁹

A key part of many hijra and khawaja sara narratives, and one found by Reddy, Dutta, Khan, Nanda, and others consists in joining a community of others (recall Zara's use of "we" and "our").⁶⁰ That is, becoming a hijra or khawaja sara is not an individual act. It requires recognition from a community of others. Along with this, as these authors explore, is a system of teacher-and-student style of learning and initiation, called guru and chela, along with a matrilineal mother of the house.⁶¹ Note that this is not exactly unique to hijra and khawaja sara in South Asia. Musicians, courtesans, and other organizations, life paths, and experiences use this or similar systems as well, and have for likely an equally long time as hijra and khawaja sara. That is, they work with a system of knowledge and identity and group membership that is already extant within the Subcontinent, and already at least somewhat intelligible by people versed in such a context. Yet hijra and khawaja sara are also assumed to have broken with their birth families and have no extended kin system there.⁶² Gender, then, in this world, is not

59 For further discussion on culture and subculture, see Hebdige, *Subculture*. And for a critique of Hebdige on his glossing over women and aspects of gender, see McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*. In particular see the chapter McRobbie, "Settling Accounts with Subculture."

60 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*; Dutta, "An Epistemology of Collusion"; Khan, "Khawaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan"; Khan, "What Is in a Name?"; Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman*.

61 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*; Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman*.

62 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 144.

purely the result of individual identification, but it also clearly requires at least *some* sense of both identity and community. As Reddy writes,

Contrary to popular constructions of hijras as individuals without enduring kin ties, [2 This is an understanding that hijras themselves sometimes play with and perpetuate in the public domain. When hijras ran for public office in North India, for instance, their electoral platform explicitly highlighted their lack of kin ties: without “family,” there was no danger of nepotism and corruption...] hijras themselves repeatedly articulate the importance of these [guru, chela, mother] relationships in constructing their sense of identity.⁶³

Here we see another comparison with transgender that sets hijra and khawaja sara apart, yet I argue there is a moment here for dialogue. There is a chance for these two conceptions to speak. But to understand how, we again have to look at the way transgender crumbles even in its formative years. For that, let us turn again to Snorton. While Snorton’s book cites many examples and explores many topics, what I am interested in is the chapter “A Nightmarish Silhouette.” Here he cites examples of Black American trans people along with Christine Jorgensen’s narrative. What I find useful in focusing on these examples throughout this thesis is how they illuminate a lifeworld of Black American gendered experiences just as vibrant as the ostensible “norm” of Jorgensen’s narrative. That is, much like hijra and khawaja sara are vibrant terms and concepts with their own spacetimes and lifeworlds that cannot be called “sub-cultural,” neither can these Black American trans experiences, which is why they serve as useful comparison points for this thesis. Similarly, attempts to map then-current 1950s terms and concepts such as “transsexual” or “female impersonator” onto these lived realities also displays the entangled upsets and fissures at play in the formation, dissemination, and transfigurations of these terms, much like what happens when transgender is deployed in South Asia.

63 Ibid.

As already hinted at earlier in this thesis, in the section on definitions, the overall white, middle class construction of transsexuality in the narrative of Christine Jorgensen stood in marked contrast to the foreclosed Black ways of knowing gender and of knowing transness around the same time.⁶⁴ Snorton writes that Black trans people in the USA “illustrate—albeit circumscribed in their partiality—other ways to be trans, in which gender becomes a terrain to make space for living...”⁶⁵ So, what were these “spaces for living”? In my view, what stands out among Snorton’s tracings of these alternate and equally vibrant ways of knowing gender is a thread that is familiar in hijra and khawaja sara narratives: communal and non-individual ways of knowing one’s self and one’s gender. Take, for example, this quote from Mary Jones, a Black trans person from 1836, who states: “I have been in the practice of waiting upon Girls of ill fame ... and they induced me to dress in Women’s Clothes, saying I looked so much better in them and I have always attended parties among the people of my own Colour dressed in this way—and in New Orleans I always dressed in this way.”⁶⁶ Note that Jones’s conception of the self draws upon more than just her own sense of being and identity, it calls upon her larger community, “people of my own Colour,” and place “in New Orleans,” in contrast to the highly individualized conceptions of trans that would come to typify the transsexual movement. Much like hijra and khawaja sara, who join a community of others to understand the self, this conception of the self and identity relies on community and non-individualist constructions, a departure from liberal and later neoliberal individualism.⁶⁷ As Snorton explores, anti-Blackness ran as an undercurrent in much of the solidification of what transsexual would come to mean,

64 Snorton, “A Nightmarish Silhouette.”

65 Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 182.

66 *Ibid.*, 71.

67 For further discussion of liberal and neoliberal conceptions and constructions of selfhood and identity, see Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism.”

and as Valentine examines, it continued on into the consolation of transgender. It thus makes sense that whiteness, with all its ties to individualism and respectability, would continue to operate when the term is refigured to apply to the Subcontinent.

3.2 RACE, RESPECTABILITY, GENDER, AND THE NGO

Thus, understanding hijra and khawaja sara in a context that is *racialized* and (*trans*) *gendered* allows for a range of useful critical movements. Consider, as Snorton writes of Carlett Brown, a black trans woman who also garnered press coverage in the mid 1950s along with Jorgensen, but who was frequently cast as her double, despite the differences between their stories, especially racially. Brown kept ties with female impersonators, a marked difference from Jorgensen whose construction of a wholesome all-American white womanhood was out of reach for Brown.⁶⁸ Snorton quotes a *Jet* article on Brown and writes,

According to ... [a] *Jet* article, “Although he plans to have his sex changed, Brown will keep his ties with female impersonators. Said he: “I feel that impersonators are being denied their right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness when they are arrested for wearing female clothes—especially when they are minding their own business.” [66 “Shake Dancer Postpones Sex Change for Face Lifting,” *Jet*, August 6, 1953, 19.] Brown’s argument for the rights of female impersonators via the language of the Declaration of Independence pronounces an experiential distance between Brown and Jorgensen, her supposedly superlative double.... Brown’s comment here also reveals police harassment as a structuring condition that would continue to tether a future post-op Brown to those described as “female impersonators” and, in doing so, casts doubt on sexual-reassignment surgery’s ability to transform her future encounters with the police.⁶⁹

Note that in this figuration, we not only see community solidarity, again a marked similarity to many hijra and khawaja sara narratives, but also the inescapable logics of racism. That is, even today there is “doubt on sexual-reassignment surgery’s ability to transform her future encounters with the police” for Black trans women in America, and later in this thesis it proves true in

68 Snorton, “A Nightmarish Silhouette.”

69 Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 165.

South Asia as well. Or, in other words, both black trans people and hijra and khawaja sara expose a fissure in the national, racial, and transnational logics that allows “transgender” to travel the globe. For example, that it sounds bizarre to call trans people in America “hijra” is because of these same logics of race and gender. Ironically, it is precisely this situation that also presents us with a chance for dialogue between hijra and khawaja sara and transgender as terms and concepts, but only if we keep constant attention on the questions of race, nation-states, and international flows of capital and knowledge. Rather than considering hijra and khawaja sara as “supposedly superlative double” concepts to that of transgender, we can examine their narratives in the larger flows of global capital, racialization, and colonialism. Note, too, the call to appeal to the logics of the state, even though Brown is acutely aware that very state is also the one to enact police violence. Thus, Snorton also notes that:

... Jorgensen’s spectacularized transsexual ‘freedom’ was tethered to equally robust representations of racialized unfreedom, not only as they pertained to Brown and the vulnerabilities of ‘female impersonators’ but also as they were playing out in imagistic expressions of the U.S.’s ever-expanding interventionist Cold War ideology and in the density of images of decolonial struggles around the world. As an exposure of the ways U.S. colonial-imperial authority is shored up by whiteness and a constitutive disavowal of the nation’s foundational logic of white supremacy, Brown’s expression gave discursive form to mimicry’s disturbing relation to the language and logics of colonial-imperial authority, as it pointed to the constitutive shadow that obstructed the U.S.’s expressed commitment to democracy and freedom.⁷⁰

Again I draw upon one particularly notable example in the text here. Snorton’s book, as mentioned, contains other discussions and chapters. I use this example for illustrative purposes. What does it help us illuminate? Let us turn to South Asia in greater detail. Khan writes, “... the more contemporary term transgender or TG as they are popularly known within the NGO community” exists in Pakistan.⁷¹ She writes, in another article, of the “Gender Interactive Alli-

⁷⁰ Ibid., 167.

⁷¹ Khan, “What Is in a Name?”

ance” which speaks on behalf of “transgender communities (a term they use interchangeably with khwaja sara)” and who claim to lobby and advocate to the government.⁷² She also writes of “NAZ Male Health Alliance (NAZ)” that was “established in 2011 as an [sic] non-governmental organization” that provides “technical, financial, and institutional support for improving the sexual health, welfare, and human rights of males who have sex with males and, more recently, those they refer to as transgender communities in Pakistan.”⁷³ I also add TransAction Pakistan, whose website states they work “for the wellbeing and protection of transgender and intersex community. We aim to improve gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights and inclusion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.”⁷⁴ Interestingly they list many of their activist points and literature directly from other organizations, including GLAAD.⁷⁵ And they list publications (whose links are alas broken) that call upon familiar rainbow flag imagery, along with a booklet on which the cover states, in Urdu, “خواجہ سراؤں” (“khawaja saras”), but the English caption reads “Trans Rights.”⁷⁶ To paraphrase Snorton, while transgender indicates a sense of “progress” it also tied governmental respectability to regulatory discourses and papered over its own entanglements to enable such a move.⁷⁷ If gender could become just this sort of tool, what form could it take? Let us turn to Hortense Spillers in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.” Spillers writes that “[t]he female in ‘Middle Passage,’ as the apparently smaller physical mass, occupies ‘less room’ in a directly translatable money economy. But she is, nevertheless, quanti-

72 Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan,” 1300.

73 Ibid., 1306.

74 “About Us.”

75 “Allies of Transgender People.”

76 “Publications.”

77 Snorton, “A Nightmarish Silhouette.”

fiable by the same rules of accounting as her male counterpart.”⁷⁸ That is, in figuring Black womanhood, all was reduced to capital, property, and value-as-commodity. It thus makes sense that Jorgensen’s respectable white womanhood would emerge as a double offsetting: that of casting away suggestions of race and suggestions of sexuality. The vibrant lifeworlds of Black American (trans) gender experiences, such as of the Black “female impersonators” (to quote the 1950s press) represented sexual and gender excess, taboos ever present and entangled but continually offset. Ideally we would examine these threads of sexuality and race concurrently. I have yet to devise a method to write text on top of itself to do this, however. So, I start by focusing on race, then. If we stop our analysis of transgender in South Asia at “well it serves a strategic advantage” and drop any further inquiries, we may only end up re-enacting the logics outlined earlier in this paragraph. Or, in the words of Chatterjee, “[i]t may be the conscious adoption of a kind of transgender identity that provides someone with social or cultural capital, as opposed to being able to term oneself *transgender* [emphasis original] as a direct function of already having such capital.”⁷⁹ Again note here that the kind of respectability being discussed is related to logics of governmentality, and not *per se* respect as in intra- and inter-community interactions, which as we shall see later is a more fraught topic.

But what “respectability capital” could be accessed if one were to adopt the label? Via looking at NGO work and the quotes of hijra and khawaja sara themselves, we can understand some of that appeal. In 2018, Pakistan’s government hired their first transgender (in the words of news articles) employee: Nomi (that is, if we disregard the roles hijra and khawaja sara served in the Mughal India and earlier). The website “Pro Pakistani” quotes her as saying “[i]t is still unbelievable I got a respectable government job on merit and now I will be able to earn

78 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 72.

79 Chatterjee, “Transgender Shifts: Notes on Resignification of Gender and Sexuality in India,” 314.

money with full respect and dignity.”⁸⁰ Echoing Zara, she also states, “[s]ince my childhood, I used to see how my mother was cooking and from her, I have learned to cook all dishes.”⁸¹ And she also expresses some very real concerns about the violence and indignity of her former occupations, “I hope now people will feel proud of me rather than degrading me by calling me ‘Khusra’⁸² and asking me to dance.”⁸³ The job provides key benefits that cannot be overlooked: security, a steady income, and “... a warning that any individual found guilty of harassing Nomi shall be terminated.”⁸⁴ It thus makes sense that transgender and its deployment—recall this job comes *after* the passage of *The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act*—has real, material benefits that we cannot ignore.

The idea of governmental respectability as tied to being a good Muslim is something that many khawaja sara work with and navigate. This is a vital thread for understanding their gendered lifeworlds. Hossain explores this and writes that,

... hijra routinely travel between and across national boundaries—and in the sense of moving between different sorts of social settings and occupational positions and ritual statuses. It is evident that being a hijra does not stand as a roadblock to one’s participation in Islamic practices, from daily prayers to roadside preaching. Many hijra aspire to become, and be acknowledged as, good and pious Muslims, and their efforts to do so often require them to negotiate their own and others’ expectations of what is and is not appropriately Islamic in relation to their own and others’ expectations of what does and does not define hijrahood.⁸⁵

Thus, for hijra and khawaja sara, Islam is not something that constrains their experiences and practices, but much like the very names they use to refer to themselves and the narratives they share, it becomes part of the lifeworld that they inhabit and shape. This in turn also factors in

80 Shabbir, “Government Appoints First-Ever Transgender Employee.”

81 Ibid.

82 This term is a slur. Another whole section or indeed thesis could be written on the status of various terms and slurs in South Asia related to hijra and khawaja sara communities, but these alas cannot be satisfactorily included in this thesis.

83 Shabbir, “Government Appoints First-Ever Transgender Employee.”

84 Ibid.

85 Hossain, “Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia.”

what others perceive being a “good Muslim” is, as Hossain notes. As we can see, then, Islam is something that enables the very sort of dancing along boundaries that hijra and khawaja sara are known for.

With that idea in mind, let us turn to the photograph of Nomi seen in the article: she stands at a cooking pot wearing a shalwar kameez and with a white dupatta on her head:⁸⁶ an iconic image of wholesome, caste, domestic femininity in South Asia, especially Pakistan. We begin by working with that image. Khan writes of Nergis:

Nergis identifies herself as a khwaja sara and as a haji (one who has performed the pilgrimage in Mecca). As such, she claims space for herself as a practising Muslim and as a khwaja sara, while she promises integrity and political honesty should she be elected. Nergis has mobilized the electoral process to open up a space where khwaja sara can make demands sustaining trans* folk in the informal economy of begging, badhai, and performance at functions. She has learned to negotiate government processes to acquire a better share of benefits for her community, and she claims for other impoverished Pakistanis as well. Her quest for political status reminds us that the electoral process promises an opportunity to claim a share of state resources.

Moreover Nergis’s status as haji, her simple white shalwar kamiz ... complete with a white dupatta draped over head, and her consistent invoking of pious language disrupt normative understandings of khwaja sara as solely reduced to sexualized bodies. Instead, her demeanour and comments suggest that non-normative gender, sexuality, and piety can exist in the same body. At the same time, Nergis uses political rhetoric and quotations from the Qur’an to remind viewers that khwaja sara fulfil important functions at the Kaaba in Mecca and the Prophet’s mosque in Medina. Inviting other politicians to come and debate issues with her, Nergis beats her chest on air as she claims relevance in the electoral process. Her seemingly contradictory positionalities have been legitimized through the electoral process and under the terms of the recent status accorded the khwaja sara by the Supreme Court and she has been declared qualified to run for elections. The persona she projects muddles the seamless understandings of piety, morality, sexuality, and citizenship, and is quite distinct from the commonly held assumptions about sexualization of khwaja sara. On the same show, religious scholar Mufti Abdul Qavi endorses Nergis’s ability to run for elections when he draws upon a verse in the Qur’an [61 To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; He creates what he wills. He gives to whom He wills female [children], and He gives to whom He wills males (Verse 49) and Or He makes them [both] males and females, Sura 42,

86 Shabbir, “Government Appoints First-Ever Transgender Employee.”

Verse 50, Qur'an.] and states that 'Allah has made men and women and he has made in between people, the khwaja sara. As long as they qualify they should be allowed to run'.⁸⁷

Nergis, much like Nomi, has likely learned to work with image, government, and religion to work the system to advance herself and community. Nergis also exhibits much of the folding together and blending of sexuality, action, identity, religion, and gender this thesis discusses. Here we can also again pick up the thread that ties gendering, religion, and politics. Recall first Reddy's line that hijra manipulate the social perceptions of their identities in politics. Nergis does much the same here. Next, recall my brief mentioning of mukhannathun as it relates to Islam, and khawaja sara and hijra as decidedly marked terms of Persian-ness and Islamicness. Here, religiosity ties into respectability ties into politics in ways that are both enabled by khawaja-sara-as-transgender activism and that are also yet not captured by what transgender ostensibly entails. Thus, it is becoming clear here that transgender, with its notions of progress, nation-building, globalness, and respectability does have effective modes of action that create material benefits in Pakistan and South Asia, but something is also being foreclosed as something else is being opened up.

To unpack this further, let us turn to Reddy again. In "We Are All Muslims Now" from *With Respect to Sex*. Reddy notes some key themes: that of Islam as *practice*, hijra going on Hajj, blurring gender lines in Islam itself, the ever-presence of Hinduism regardless, and the historical flows of Islam in South Asia.⁸⁸ These topics are far too vast to give full treatment here, but I bring them up because I underline Reddy's point that Islam *does* something with regard to gender, sexuality, place, and space in South Asia. As Reddy writes,

⁸⁷ Khan, "Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan," 1303-4.

⁸⁸ Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 99-120.

Perhaps, as Lawrence Cohen suggests (pers. comm.), in this particular context, Muslim identification can be seen as potentially translocal, or transnational even, in a way that various Hindu identifications cannot. Could it be hijras' very supralocal-ity, their ability to cross borders—of gender, religion, and nation—that allows for their Muslim positionality? ... it symbolizes a supralocal transnationality—an “all-India pass” that permits hijras to travel on public transportation, free of charge, anywhere in the subcontinent, including Pakistan (see Cohen 1995a, 1995b)... perhaps hijras, whether “real” or symbolic, are not only constituted by the axis of religion but also embody the only transcendent position in a world of categorical absolutes in contemporary (Hindu) India—the very violence of their becoming locating them indelibly as the ultimate border agents of humanity in contemporary South Asia.⁸⁹

Taking these statements together I argue this: Islam is already border crossing and international in the South Asian imaginary, in addition to being politically beneficial in Pakistan. Harking back to the earliest sections of this thesis which showed the exonymic-endonymic status of hijra and khawaja sara, it perhaps is then no surprise that transgender and Islam marry so well in this imaginary. Both already have crossed or are currently crossing borders; both have been or are being (re)figured and (re)deployed. Both claim to be relevant at once to both the entire world and any particular locality. Keep these points in mind. I drop this thread now for reasons of staying on topic, but it gets picked up again later in this thesis in the section on sexuality.

With all of that covered, let us turn to the laws themselves. I do this because once again the law contains indications of breakages and fissures that alas spoil the somewhat rosy picture I may have painted a few paragraphs earlier. Take the following passages: “The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2017 seeks to: (i) define a Transgender Person...”⁹⁰ and earlier states that a “‘Transgender Person’ is a person who is: (i) Intersex (Khunsa) with mixture of male and female genital features or congenital ambiguities; or (ii) Eunuch assigned

⁸⁹ Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*.

⁹⁰ Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, 11.

male at birth, but undergoes genital excision or castration; or/ (iii) a Transgender Man, Transgender Woman, KhawajaSira or any person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the social norms and cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at the time of their birth.”⁹¹ Consider also India’s 2016 bill, which states “(i) ‘transgender person’ means a person who is—/ (A) neither wholly female nor wholly male; or/ (B) a combination of female or male; or/ (C) neither female nor male;/ and whose sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at the time of birth, and includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers.”⁹²⁹³ What strikes me right away is that both bills include *intersex* people into the concept of transgender. In the dominant Western understanding while these groups do have many intersections, they still exist as separate. In South Asian contexts they *are* included in the scope of hijra and khawaja sara and therefore transgender. That the bills have similar structure is due to the aforementioned colonial apparatus that both countries work with; on that note, “eunuch” resurrects itself yet again. All the ghosts from Part 2 continue haunt us now. To see how, we must again look at the splits, fissures, and tears.

In “Pakistan's traditional third gender isn't happy with the trans movement,” Mobeen Azhar writes about the deployment of the term “transgender” in Pakistan. She quotes Bindiya Rana, a khawaja sara guru with her own house of chelas, writing:

But those who identify as transgender ... don't subscribe to the guru-chelah system. As a result, Rana and her chelchs view the transgender identity as alien and even immoral./ “If you don't have a guru, we don't recognize you. These people who say they are transgender; that concept is just wrong,” says one of Rana's chelchs. “They

91 Ibid., 2.

92 “Gender-queers” is quite an interesting phrasing. It is alas beyond the scope of this thesis to even begin speculating here, but I have no doubt something is going on there as well.

93 The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, 2.

can never be women. They cannot give birth. Even if they change their bodies they can't change who they are. We are not women. We are what Allah has made.”

There is much to unpack here, and we will meet Rana again later. So much exists to unpack, in fact, that I reach for fiction in the form of film.⁹⁴ This is because in tracing the film *Queens! Destiny of Dance*, I believe we can find the threads in the above quote and then untangle them. As Harlan Weaver writes in “Monster Trans” when looking at Stryker’s use of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,

The nature of theory is to engender a new understanding of the way the world works, a new way to take in one's own experiences and make sense of them. When reading theory, we are being asked to re-evaluate what we know, to re-understand our worlds and to come to new understandings. Stryker's theory, borne of her monstrous rage and the diffraction patterns between her and Shelley's monsters, asks us to re-understand our encounters with a gendered social world, for she asks us to take up the anger and frustration these encounters produce and, rather than turn them into a personalised sense of abjection, a face-less monstrosity, use them to drive us into action. By pushing us to take up the bodily affects, the somatechnics of bodily feelings, that diffract between her and Shelley's monsters, she interpellates us into new and different understandings of language, materiality, and gender, so that we might also be moved by fury and affect, so that we might also transform the relationship between language and bodies, so that we might also feel differently. Reading Stryker's words, we are asked to transform.”⁹⁵

I view using the film here in much the same way. To understand the way hijra’s and khawaja sara’s lives unfold, we can use fiction to understand their complex, nuanced lifeworld. By looking at thematic elements, music, dress, language and other aspects of the film’s world, we can also understand the worlds of hijra and khawaja sara. For some context on the film, the actors playing Amma and Nandini are cis, but there are extras who are indeed hijra. The film travelled to various international film festivals, and is directed by David Atkins. As such it has subtitles

94 Weaver, “Monster Trans.” For a fuller examination of using fiction to theorize trans concepts, consult Weaver.

95 Ibid., 303.

that we will also examine. That is, the film travelled just as much as all the terms we have seen travelled.

Queens is a film about a hijra household, organized along their traditional guru-chela system. Amma (literally meaning “mother”) owns and runs the house, as guru, and her chelas are assigned tasks in town that are traditionally associated with their community, including singing and dancing for newborns and in wedding ceremonies. The task of managing these appointments and of being a recognized dance instructor falls on Mukta, who herself functions as a guru of sorts to other chelas (though not as a mother figure). When an ostensibly cis, rather gender-normative woman, Nandini, arrives in the household, Mukta feels threatened. Not only do all the other members of the household seemingly fall head-over-heels for her, but they sometimes abandon their assigned roles and miss opportunities to make money for the house, on top of which Nandini proves to be an accomplished dancer that all the hijras in the house wish to dance like. Amma, however, considers Nandini an angel beyond reproach. The film then shows how this all drives Mukta mad, and she ultimately sells Nandini to a human trafficker, who rapes and kills her. Nandini haunts Mukta, and forces her to dance until Mukta dies. The story is a frame narrative, in which we see the aftermath of Nandini’s death and Mukta’s madness, then we are brought back in time to see how and why it occurred.⁹⁶

We begin by noting the presence and absence of Islam in this film, to understand how Islam is indeed present even when it is ostensibly not there. That is, the film displays the intricateness of the forces and flows outlined earlier in this thesis. For example, toward the beginning when Mukta is at the blessing of a newborn, she finishes the performance with the de-

96 Atkins, *Queens!*

cidedly Sanskritized form of thank you unique to Hindi, “धन्यवाद” (dhanyavaad) however just a few seconds later when she accepts gifts of clothing for the performance, she says the very Urdu and Arabic inflected “شکریہ” (shukriya).⁹⁷ Islam is present in this film, but only, it seems, in linguistic hints at India’s Muslim past, or with Hakim, the villain who sexually assaults and kills Nandini.⁹⁸ This is in marked contrast to much of the research presented in this thesis, in which both Indian and Pakistani hijra and khawaja sara remark on the importance of various aspects of Islam in their life. Where Islam does have this sort of relationship with hijraness is during Mukta’s breakdown after she leaves the compound. Here, we hear a distinctly qawwali influenced song that not only reflects Mukta’s situation, but because this is qawwali, it also appears to address Allah in the manner of complaint/response the style employs.⁹⁹ But perhaps the most intractable but yet unquestioned form of Islam in the film is the dancing itself. Nandini’s item number is done as mujra,¹⁰⁰ a style of dance developed from kathak and notably performed by many Muslim courtesans in the Mughal courts.¹⁰¹ Indeed it exists as a very fusion-manifested-physical of the synthesis of Hinduism and Islam that hijras speak about embodying and enacting, a dance along the borders that hijra balance and break. Mujra is more abstracted and eroticized than kathak, which itself is a more eroticized and abstracted form used originally to tell the stories of Hindu Gods and Goddesses.¹⁰² Again, the balancing of mas-

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 AFP, “How Facebook Is Killing Lahore’s Heera Mandi”; Agarwal, “Mujra Leaves the Kotha to Party.”

102 Walker, *India’s Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*. While there are claims that kathak traces its origins back to Vedic times, as Walker examines these are hard to substantiate. I am greatly simplifying the many twists and turns of kathak and mujra to save space, and this work should be consulted, along with scholars of classical Indian dance in general, to fully understand the nuances I alas cannot cover.

culine/feminine and Hindu/Muslim that hijra and khawaja sara continually negotiate is seen here in the film and in the lifeworlds they inhabit in South Asia.

It would be very easy to read Nandini as threatening to Mukta because of her Islamicly-inflected dance, but that would be far too simple because Mukta herself dances mujra. In fact, while we do see Mukta's childhood and her process of learning dance, we do not see this from Nandini. Indeed, we do not know how Nandini came to be a good dancer, only that she is. Nandini is also presented in more "Muslimized" garments than many of the hijras: she appears first in the film in a white anarkali suit: a shalwar kameez with a long full, skirt. The shalwar kameez is a historically Muslim-inflected garment that has become a sort of casual Desi universal in India and definitely in Pakistan.¹⁰³ Most of the hijra in the film wear sarees, though they do occasionally wear shalwar kameez.¹⁰⁴ Here I again restate: we cannot separate identity, action, presentation, and gender in the South Asian imaginary cleanly. This is most evident in two points in *Queens*. In one, Mukta puts on decidedly male-coded clothing, the clothes she was in when she ran from home to join the Amma's hijra household.¹⁰⁵ Though, everywhere she goes, she is still seen as a hijra by observers. When Mukta does return home in these clothes, after a heartbreaking experience at her childhood home where she cannot return to the Amma of her past, her *birth* Amma (it will be clear shortly why the emphasis is there), her current Amma says she cannot enter the household in the manner she presents herself in.¹⁰⁶ I do not view this merely as clothing as the line ostensibly states. Rather, I see this as Amma stating to Mukta that she cannot enter the household without accepting *everything* that hijra are, and her household norms. That is, this process involves the very foldings and re-foldings of iden-

103 Guha, "The Spread of the Salwar."

104 Atkins, *Queens!*

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

tity, action, presentation, sexuality and gender as seen throughout this thesis. The garments discussed here perform many of the same sort of entangled travels that the language and concepts around gender do in South Asia as well; recall we saw this with the very terms hijra and khawaja sara themselves. Here, following the thematic trend of clothing in a fictional world allows us to reflect on the entanglements of language and concepts in the actual world.

With the idea of language in mind, I must also remark upon the subtitles in this film. Especially when Mukta goes to local officials to have the household's international dance performance approved. Mukta calls trans and other gender figurations from around the world "hijra" and the subtitles say "transgenders."¹⁰⁷ Recall my earlier comment that this feels "bizarre"? It did when I first watched the film. But then why does it feel less bizarre to deploy "transgender" in exactly the same manner? And what to make of the odd bit of grammar, "transgenders," a wildly offensive term in North American and other varieties of English? Indeed, this phrasing can be found in some of my sources, as well as in others.¹⁰⁸ Then also fold in that brochure from Trans Action, with the title containing "خواجہ سراؤں" (literally "khawaja saras"). What I believe is happening here is multi-faceted. On one hand, native concepts of gender and gender variance *do* allow South Asian populations to view and at least somewhat understand other such configurations from elsewhere, just as transgender allows Western viewers the same opportunity. Furthermore, this practice is an almost-calque from Hindi-Urdu into South Asian English: to make khawaja sara or hijra plural is not unusual in Hindi nor Urdu. As such, as an almost-calque, (much like the garments worn in the film are cloth-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Guramani, "Senate Unanimously Approves Bill Empowering Transgenders to Determine Their Own Identity"; "5 First Transgenders of India | IndiaTV News."

calques) it would be only logical in that imaginary to say and write “transgenders.” Thus, I believe even at this moment, where there is immense friction between concepts, much like Tan notices in China, that “... the wide circulation of English-derived terms may sometimes intersect with existing social hierarchies (cosmopolitan/local, urban/rural) in Chinese [or indeed South Asian] queer communities, they are not *simply* transplants from queer politics in the West [emphasis added].”¹⁰⁹ My main caution throughout this thesis is that it is just as easy to think transgender works as it is to think it is purely a colonial imposition. Neither approach is correct in my view. Even though Rana has extreme reservations around its spread, the fact that these terms are changing according to Hindi-Urdu grammar rules, is, in my view, “not a passive process of direct adoption but an active process of selecting, reinscribing, and meaning making that could be seen as a ‘translingual practice’ (Liu 1995).”¹¹⁰ Of course, not all of those meanings and selections are problem-free, but it *is* happening. As such, the film clarifies the idea that any too-easy or unidirectional reading does not serve to accurately understand what is occurring in South Asia. The entangled processes here go beyond such easy binaries and platitudes. Or, to put it in the terms of the film itself, when the “international hijras” do arrive, they are guests of Amma and work within her hierarchy, not the other way around.¹¹¹ From dress to speech, this a lifeworld with its own complex workings.

With all that in mind, let us turn to Azhar who writes that, “Kami Choudary has made international headlines and has been billed as ‘Pakistan’s first transgender supermodel.”¹¹² It is evident that Rana and her chelas likely do not have access to this path. Furthermore, as the film *Queens* also makes clear, hijra and khawaja sara “have succeeded in carving out for themselves

109 Tan, “Beijing Meets Hawai‘i: Reflections on Ku‘er, Indigeneity, and Queer Theory,” 145.

110 Ibid., 144.

111 Atkins, *Queens!*

112 Azhar, “Pakistan’s Traditional Third Gender Isn’t Happy with the Trans Movement.”

a viable economic niche over which they exercise considerable control both within their own communities and in their interactions with outsiders.... [H]ijras have to a large extent cornered an economic market.”¹¹³ That is, I argue that Rana is seeing before her one of the fissures this thesis examined earlier: of “progress” and “development” via NGOs and globalizing that threatens her and her chelas’ ways of knowing and being in the world and their ways of accessing resources. The nation-state, as explored earlier in this thesis, folds together governmental respectability and development in such a way that the other gendered lifeworlds found within it often fall by the wayside. Thus, note, too, that for Rana, “transgender” seems to capture a binarism, yet the concept and term is supposed to imply a multifariousness. Alas, as Dutta and Roy note, “... there is a systemic compulsion to exert a strong mono-gendered claim to trans womanhood (or manhood)—one fallout of which is the neat separation of binary and nonbinary identities, recreating a majority-minority dynamic wherein (trans) men and women are followed by a trail of genderqueer/bigender/agender ‘others.’”¹¹⁴ Rana, I argue, notices this too. Much like normative binary conceptions of (trans) womanhood and (cis) femininity threaten Mukta in the form of Nandini,¹¹⁵ they play out for Rana, too. But unlike for Mukta, for whom much of the “threat” was ultimately self-inflicted, for Rana the stakes are indeed high. It is then no wonder Rana appeals to Allah, because as we have seen Islam, hijra, and khawaja sara inform each other on many levels.

Additionally, in *Queens*, Amma states that if she could have children, she would want one just like Mukta, ironic because Nandini ends up being shown to be Amma’s niece.¹¹⁶ Yet again here is Rana, because as Reddy states,

113 Nanda, *Neither Man Nor Woman*, 51.

114 Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” 333.

115 Atkins, *Queens!*

116 *Ibid.*

Despite all [the] accoutrements of femininity, hijras and other kotis did not unequivocally think of themselves as women.... The most explicit proof of this is their inability to produce children. Almost all the hijras I interacted with appeared to love children, and many harbored a fantasy of giving birth and nursing a child. They often insisted on my photographing them while they “nursed” a child in their laps, but as they themselves indicated, “hijras cannot give birth to a child themselves.”¹¹⁷

Dutta and Roy note even under the umbrella of transgender, there is “... a majority-minority dynamic wherein (trans) men and women are followed by a trail of genderqueer/bigender/agender ‘others.’” Furthermore, as Reddy points out in her work with hijra, there already also exists a concept of honour and community respectability that hijra work with: *izzat*.¹¹⁸ While unpacking that concept would run the risk of breaching the bounds of this thesis, it is vital to note because again we see yet another reason why friction would occur between the two concepts of transgender and hijra/khawaja sara: already extant knowledge structures on gender, livelihood, respectability, and community access are running up against those that come as baggage with transgender.

Rana’s worry, then, of a loss of knowledge, power, place, an already unique form of respectability and status, can also be found in the echoes of some of Nomi’s words; recall, she hoped she would no longer have to dance. Dance, in *Queens*, is at the forefront of the film. Rana’s worries may indeed be grounded in a real loss of income as well as the other losses mentioned. Let us turn to Khan, who writes of khawaja sara that,

... they no longer train as dancers or singers, as many did in earlier years; instead, they often choose to draw upon the sexually suggestive forms of dancing commonly found in contemporary Pakistani and Indian films. The availability of young female dancers has also impacted khawaja sara age-old badhai dance celebrations except among the lower middle classes, who do not have the means to reward them handsomely for their performances.[30 C. Pamment, ‘Hijraism: jostling for a third space in Pakistani politics’, *The Drama Review*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 29–50.] In recent years, the celebrations at sufi shrines where they performed have also been restric-

117 Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” 332.

118 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 17–43.

ted by the state, which fears the crowds will invite violence. As khwaja sara find it difficult to find employment, many have turned to begging at road signals, where they ask for money from passengers in cars who are waiting for the light to change.¹¹⁹

I must add another twist to this already contorted story. South Asian classical dance has a thwarted history in Pakistan. During the reign of Zia-ul-Haq, dance was cast as “un-Islamic” and heavily suppressed.¹²⁰ Before Zia-ul-Haq, though, dance was vilified by colonial authorities, so this old thread cannot be said to be entirely his idea.¹²¹ Even after Zia-ul-Haq’s death, this stigma remains to some extent.¹²² While it is seeing somewhat of a revival, the traditional methods of learning it, as Khan notes as well, suffered;¹²³ the revival is currently mainly accessible to middle and upper-class Pakistanis.¹²⁴ Thus in an ironic twist, both “khwaja sara” and “transgender” as terms and concepts in Pakistan appeal to Islam, yet so-called “Islamization” and governmental respectability-via-transgender cut off key traditional avenues of income, community support, and recognition along the lines that Nanda outlines for khawaja sara. Rana, then, lives in strange times.

Strange times indeed, but not without precedent. In Snorton’s examining of much the same tension between Jorgensen’s white, all-American, wholesome, transsexual womanhood and the various foreclosed Black trans lives often “doubled” to her narrative, we find even in this seeming dead-end, yet another space for the two terms and concepts to speak (remember I do not wish to categorize anything as “untranslatable”). Recall Carlett Brown, mentioned earlier in this thesis. Recall also Valentine, who explores the tension between drag and trans-

119 Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan,” 1290.

120 Hetland, “Classical Dance – a Lost Art in Pakistan”; Leiby, “Academy Strives to Maintain Classical Pakistani Dance Tradition.”

121 Walker, *India’s Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*, 94–98.

122 Hetland, “Classical Dance – a Lost Art in Pakistan”; Leiby, “Academy Strives to Maintain Classical Pakistani Dance Tradition.”

123 Leiby, “Academy Strives to Maintain Classical Pakistani Dance Tradition.”

124 Ibid.; Yasin, “LIVING COLOURS.”

gender, explored earlier in this thesis. If “transgender” carries a strain of respectability-because-not-dancing, I argue it did not originate whole-cloth in South Asia. Again viewing racial-ity as well as gender, as this section is titled, finally allows us to see how and why. That is because, as Snorton traces, such dancing and performance was attached to Blackness, excess, and taboo. It was thus necessarily cast out of Jorgensen’s narrative, until she later re-incorporated it as a nightclub act, that is, in a far more middle class and whiter context (here echos classical dance). Dance, then, was used as evidence of “deviantness” in the narratives of the Black trans lives told as Jorgensen’s “doubles.”¹²⁵ And recall, as Valentine notes, it was often the Black drag queens, fem queens, and butch queens who were cast as the most errant in their figurations of gender.¹²⁶ That is, dancing and performance as things to be cast (or, perhaps in South Asia, caste) out of a proper, respectable transgender narrative experience a similar deployment in both cases. When the terms and concepts are mapped onto each other, we see this fallout. Much like Nandini’s dancing ghost who then orders Mukta to dance,¹²⁷ these deployments are already forever framed by their own hauntings.

3.3 SEXUALITY, RESPECTABILITY, GENDER, AND THE NGO

Dance allows us to transition to sexuality.¹²⁸ To understand the context of dance in South Asia, and especially Pakistan, we are required to examine sexuality and sex acts. As noted before in this thesis, the passage from the Kama Sutra already presents us with a blended vision of sexuality, gender, and livelihood in the popular South Asian imaginary. When the British encountered dance in all its forms in India, they both patronized and condemned it.¹²⁹

125 Snorton, “A Nightmarish Silhouette.”

126 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 99.

127 Atkins, *Queens!*

128 All puns intended.

129 Walker, *India’s Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*, 94–98. “Decadence, corruption and indulgence became some of the favourite failings, and the nautch-girls were handy scapegoats on whom to tack these social ills.

As mentioned already, so did some Indian and later Pakistani nation-builders, hence why I argue Zia-ul-Haq's condemnation of the form, and the effect it had on hijra and khawaja sara, cannot be seen in isolation from the colonial apparatus. Zia-ul-Haq was propped up by the Reagan administration, which was also more than content to look the other way on his many oppressive and violent policies, because of the USA's own imperialist interest in both South Asia and Central Asia along with the Middle East.¹³⁰ Again, note here that gender, sexuality, development, global politics, and the nation-state cannot be easily dis-entangled. What confounded Zia-ul-Haq and his predecessors and condemned dance in the minds and imaginaries of him, British colonists, and early Indian nation-state builders in South Asia was an association with sexuality, excess, taboo, and decadence, along with the fact that dance's association with women and indeed, to an extent, empowered women, created a sort of doubled nervousness.¹³¹ Thus, I do not feel content to consider Zia-ul-Haq's categorization of dance as "un-Islamic" enough. That may have been his scapegoat, but what is today known as "Indian Classical Dance" to the Indian imaginary cannot merely be said to be some long-standing tradition because,

... banning nautch did not call any deep-seated Hindu or Muslim customs or traditions into question. Furthermore, part of the resistance reformers had found to their attempts to educate girls was a perception that the only type of woman to be educated and literate would be a *ṭawā'if* [courtesan] or a *devadāsī* [temple dancer]¹³² (Oddie 1979: 106–8). The Indian participants in social reform and eventually nation-

Victorian morality combined with Edwardian suffrage and feelings of inferiority created an Indian need to purge society of immoral and backward elements (Sundar 1995: 245). Professional women performers were clear targets."

130 Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, 463.

131 Walker, *India's Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*, 94–98; AFP, "How Facebook Is Killing Lahore's Heera Mandi."

132 I am greatly oversimplifying my translations here for the sake of space and time. For a fuller exploration of these terms and concepts, see, Srinivasan, Doris M. "Royalty's Courtesans and God's Mortal Wives: Keepers of Culture in Precolonial India," and Maciszewski, Amelia. "Tawa'if, Tourism and Tales: The Problematics of Twenty-First-Century Musical Patronage for North India's Courtesans" both in Feldman and Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts*.

alist politics were on the whole middle- or upper-middle-class men who had been educated in Britain. They had no immediate cultural connection to these types of performances, which had been patronized by the Indian and Anglo-Indian aristocracies, and they had also absorbed a certain amount of Victorian prudery along with their education.¹³³

This anxiety over sexuality, then, as both a creation of power discourses and its object of control,¹³⁴ is another driver of what I believe to be part of the reason for popularity of translating hijra and khawaja sara into transgender. Indeed, the public performances and dance of hijra and khawaja sara were extreme anxiety points for colonial authorities. As Hinchy writes, “[w]hy then was the public presence of *hijras* so troubling to British officials in north India? First, according to colonial officials, the feminine embodiment of *hijras* was evidence of innate sexual and gendered deviance.... Second, the public performances of *hijras* evoked a wider set of anxieties that preoccupied British officials following the revolt of 1857, when the British lost control of much of north India.”¹³⁵ Dance, then, in many ways is excess and loss of control of the state laid bare in and on moving bodies of sex/gender others. Recall that this idea is what allows us to compare Black American trans experiences to South Asian experiences of hijra and khawaja sara. Because of these associations, “[a]t the same time that transgender is legitimized through the notion of hijra tradition, practices and conceptions of the hijra family are changing alongside differences in approach to music pedagogy, economy, performance repertoires, and stagings.”¹³⁶ Rana’s worries, then, are also likely in response to these shifting times in regards to sexuality, performance, and livelihood as well.

133 Walker, *India’s Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*, 95.

134 Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. Again the very constitution of India-as-foreign-sexual-other occurred when, as Foucault outlines, the late Victorian colonial authority was encountering both challenges to binarism and what it saw as “evidence” for the “superiority” of binarism and “Victorian values.” That is, this is a spiral feedback loop. See particularly pp. 70-73.

135 Hinchy, “Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity,” 279.

136 Roy, “Translating Hijra into Transgender: Performance and Pehchān in India’s Trans-Hijra Communities,” 419.

I must finally turn back to “koti” (kothi) and again to Dutta. Dutta examines the deployment and uses of kothi. Ostensibly it is used to mark a category of sexuality, but it is also, much like hijra and khawaja sara, a broad and loose umbrella term that is native to certain parts of South Asia and not others, and not native to West Bengal, the area of Dutta’s research. According to Dutta, its spread is due to many NGOs and through media, as another “nativized” exonymic-endonymic term.¹³⁷ I unfortunately cannot delve into too many specifics here, but what strikes me about Dutta’s analysis is an emergence of a divide, between *sexualized* kothi and *gendered* hijra.¹³⁸ And yet hijra and kothi, along with other populations do collude, as Dutta notes, at times, so any easy conclusions about “localities” is far too simple.¹³⁹ That is,

... how both *hijra* and *kothi*, while evidencing distinct histories of construction, emerge as (seemingly) coherent identities through the collusion of multiple subcultural¹⁴⁰ 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* [households], 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.¹⁴¹

But why is this needed? I argue that this is because if transgender is defined as “not sexuality” than it leaves a vacuum in the South Asian imaginary where these are co-constituted ideas. As Nomi’s quote illustrates, if transgender does allow a sort of respectability to arise because it is not-dance and not-sexuality, we must then examine that fissure.

Let us turn to another quote to understand what is happening here. Barker’s article also states that,

137 Dutta, “An Epistemology of Collusion.”

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Again “sub-cultural” is not quite what I am getting at. These are just as full, rich, and vibrant gender life-worlds as the “dominant” gendered world as this thesis shows.

141 Dutta, “An Epistemology of Collusion.”

Nadeem Kashish, a 35-year-old transgender woman running for office in Islamabad, smokes a cigarette on the street below her makeup studio./ Banished from home, she entered the 'guru' system, in which an elder khwaja sira houses younger trans people in return for a cut of their earnings as dancers or sex workers. She wants that system abolished, saying it is exploitative./ 'When you see a transgender person, do not give them your notes, give them your votes,' Kashish advised listeners to her weekly radio show./ The trans community in Pakistan is divided between a young, international-leaning cohort who believe gender is fluid, and an older group who claim only those born with both female and male genitalia truly qualify.¹⁴²

Note, as Reddy does, that hijra and khawaja sara are well aware of how to work with political systems. For Nadeem, the exploitative system of gurus and chelas with its dancers and sex workers stands in contrast to respectable democratic state institutions, a thread we have seen associated with transgender throughout this thesis. The system may very well be exploitative for some members, I cannot definitely say. What interests me here is again the strategic deployment of "progress" and nation building, similar to what this thesis looked at earlier via Snorton's work. If associations of sexuality and dance are being cast out of respectability-as-tied-to-nation in a certain cementing of transgender, then I argue again we have seen this ghost before. It haunted Zia-ul-Haq; it haunted the Indian (and later Pakistani) nation-state builders. A similar ghost danced in the construction of Christine Jorgensen's narrative. This spectre found itself foreclosing the other ways of knowing gender and of being trans for Black Americans at that same time. It is also this colonial ghost, remember, that I believe is part of the impetus for the use of khawaja sara in Pakistan. A less anxious term already, it too carried connotations of slightly less "sexual deviance," and slightly more respectability, along with less harassment from colonial legal authorities. Thus, I argue that the use of the term khawaja sara is strategic in regard to sexuality, and its own fissures as an umbrella term sometimes do line up with the fissures found in transgender, but because it shifted to address a different group

142 Barker, "Once Ostracised, Now Pakistani Transgender People Are Running for Parliament."

than it did at first, it swept up a whole host of other sexuality and gender anxieties along with it.

Thus far I have avoided talking about anybody's genitals. First, because I really do not believe that is the question. Second, because there has been enough such writing and spectacle around hijra and khawaja sara, and I do not wish to engage with most of the gawking over body parts that comes to define much discourse around any variety of trans topics. But I will discuss the meaning-making implied behind Barker's un-cited assertion that genital configurations are the ultimate arbiter of who "truly qualifies." Remember the quote from far earlier in this thesis, that "[t]he British classified the hijra based on three categorizations: first, as naturally impotent men; second, as males born with congenital malformation; and third, as artificial eunuchs." Whether subconsciously or consciously, Barker reproduces this understanding. Indeed, the idea that the "true" hijra or khawaja sara is one that has had their genitals removed also appears, and it is true that nirvan, or the castration ceremony, is revered, there are many hijra and khawaja sara who have not had this procedure.¹⁴³ Whither transgender here, though? It is in numerous places, I argue. First, there is the old trope that the only "true" trans figuration is one who has had genital surgery, hormones, and is "verified" by medical institutions. Second, there is the aforementioned binary-and-others figuration that Dutta and Roy pointed out earlier in this thesis. Third, there is the deployment of genital surgery itself in South Asia.

As Dutta and Roy write,

In this context, the advent of a new discourse of trans womanhood, whether accompanied by gender affirmation surgery or not, creates new possibilities of personal and social identification, which may have life-affirming implications for some people. We do not seek to rehearse the facile critique of transsexuality as conformist and reproducing binary gender, as if nontranssexuals do not do so all the time

¹⁴³ Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*.

(Valentine 2012). At the same time, both of us have encountered gendered and classed hierarchies between emergent models of trans womanhood and older forms of feminization and gender liminality. Given that hijra communities and kothi forms of public visibility (such as flamboyance, sex work, and cruising) are often socially disreputable and stigmatized, some CBO leaders actively advocate that community members fashion themselves as women rather than *hijra/kothi*—to quote one such person, “the way that you people behave in public, does any woman behave like that? No wonder you have no respect in society.”¹⁴⁴

That such figurations are found within hijra and khawaja sara communities today cannot merely be said to be a natural fact, it owes its presence to colonial legacies and the spectres of respectability discussed earlier to at least some degree. That ghost still haunts South Asia. Respectability and its associated fallout must be kept at the forefront of thinking around this topic.

To move us forward, take these lines from Barker’s article, where Barker writes about Almas Bobby, a politically active khawaja sara in Pakistan:

Almas Bobby, who launched the country’s trans rights movement by storming a police station in 2004 to call for the arrest of “dirty men”, argued that the law would merely encourage gay men to claim they were transgender in order to claim benefits..../ “There were 10,000 khwaja siras counted in the census,” she said, referring to the official exercise conducted last year, thought by many to have recorded only a fraction of the community. “After this there will be millions, billions.”¹⁴⁵

Bobby is a recurrent figure in my research, especially in Khan’s two articles.¹⁴⁶ I do not entirely agree with the way she is cast by Barker. But first, we turn to sexuality. That gay men are to be cast out of this imaginary is not all that novel, as this thesis has already discussed, transgender as a term and concept has its uses for *both* trans activism and gay/lesbian activism. Also, recall a fissure between sexuality and gender haunted the colonized categories that what into constituting hijra and khawaja sara in the first place. Ironically, the idea of “deviant men” entering

144 Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” 331.

145 Barker, “Once Ostracised, Now Pakistani Transgender People Are Running for Parliament.”

146 Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan”; Khan, “What Is in a Name?”

spaces not for them is found in the most regressive forms of trans exclusionary “feminism” in the West. As Valentine notes, the very same separating of gender and sexuality is indeed part of why such “feminists” can even make such a claim.¹⁴⁷ And anyway, that part of the quotation is a paraphrase, I cannot know what Bobby actually said. It has been filtered through Barker, much like the Kama Sutra through Burton.

What I am more concerned with is Bobby’s anxiety over numbers. To get there, a fairer picture of Bobby must be painted. First of all, Khan traces her activism at least as far back as 1997, when she attempted to run for office but was disqualified.¹⁴⁸ Bobby was not also merely protesting “dirty men,” she was protesting police brutality,¹⁴⁹ something racialized trans people in the West are also unfortunately far too familiar with. As Khan writes,

... khwaja sara are no longer satisfied by political platitudes. Instead, they want substantive change. Bobby refuses to be sensationalized. Instead, she uses the forum offered by television to seek legal protection from the harassment khwaja sara suffer in society, much of which, she claims, stems from police brutality. Demanding a state response to the violence, she produces a file documenting incidents in which the police are implicated or are complicit bystanders. She further points to the state’s unwillingness to catch and punish the perpetrators. Speaking in Urdu with a smattering of English, Bobby refuses to be silenced by Sanaullah’s [the talk show host’s] comments that the ‘state is looking into these incidents’ with the rejoinder that his remarks do nothing to stop the brutality of violence perpetrated on the bodies of khwaja sara.¹⁵⁰

This is crucial to note, I believe. Not only does Bobby have a long history in dealing with the state, we cannot ignore the extreme levels of violence and dispossession khawaja sara face. Recall again Reddy’s observation that hijra are very well aware of the nuances of politics. Bobby, I believe, is no different. Thus, we can finally contextualize her words more fully. That Bobby worries new laws around the deployment of transgender would permit gay men to slide into

147 Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 204–30.

148 Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan,” 1297.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid., 1299.

khawaja sara structures and that in general it would open the flood gates, so to speak, is much like what Rana worried about earlier in this thesis, I believe. Bobby is likely well aware of the slippery deployment of the term and concept, and its potential for erasing and eliding her ways of knowing and being in the world. After all, she has long had experience in dealing with plitudes from the state. Bobby can mobilize her chelas to do work, much like Amma in *Queens*.¹⁵¹

The situation unfolding seems to be,

Because of the efforts by many middle-class transgender activists to craft a distinctly respectable show of face, this involves the larger move from the socially transgressive mode of hijra toward ... individual empowerment. This results in the transgendering of the hijra family, and reconfiguring what is thought as musical labor from service associated with the guru toward what can be seen as the professional employment of the individual and the cultivation of talent.¹⁵²

Bobby, I believe, exposes perhaps the most damning fissure of the deployment of transgender in South Asia: her “comments remind us that changes in laws do not always translate into changes at the grassroots level.”¹⁵³ That is despite all the credit the nation-state puts into shoring up a respectable governmental regulation of gender (as not-sexuality), it ultimately *also* proves that all the excess and taboo it wishes to elide are ever-present and continuing. Here, the echoes of Black American (trans) gender experiences and interactions with the nation-state reverberate, much like Nandini’s ghungroo¹⁵⁴ in *Queens*.¹⁵⁵ And yet even still, this is not a complete imposition, for as Jeff Roy writes, “we are witnessing the emergence of the individual defined not by a singular allegiance to a shared doctrine of beliefs but by her own unique con-

151 Ibid., 1300.

152 Roy, “Translating Hijra into Transgender: Performance and Pehchān in India’s Trans-Hijra Communities,” 426. Roy’s exploration of pehchān is worth a read all on its own.

153 Khan, “Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan,” 1300.

154 Ankle bells worn by classical South Asian dancers to emphasize their complex footwork.

155 Atkins, *Queens!*

tributions given to the community/ies where she comes from and in the cultivation of her own sense of self-worth.”¹⁵⁶

But even that benefit has its drawbacks. In the run-up to the passage of Pakistan’s transgender rights bill, the Pakistan Senate passed the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2017*. The NGO, Forum For Dignity Initiatives (FDI), which is focused on “striv[ing] for an equitable society for transgender people, sex workers, and girls and young women,”¹⁵⁷ investigated the many complaints Pakistan’s khawaja sara and trans communities had about this version of the bill.¹⁵⁸ The 2018 bill exists as it does today, with provisions for safe houses, employment, and other deep concerns of these communities, and without such provisions as medical testing,¹⁵⁹ is because, again, of the astute political awareness and campaigns of khawaja sara and their activism. However, a key complaint highlighted by FDI’s report is, “STIs, HIV and other medical issues faced by transgender persons should be taken into account.”¹⁶⁰ Here we see how Khan’s observation and Bobby’s anxiety can come to the fore. In a law based purely around gender and identity, there was no space for STI and HIV issues. After all, these are often issues associated with *sexuality*, so the fissure between sexuality and gender has this unfortunate effect. The law as passed in 2018 does not mention HIV or STIs. It does mention health and medical treatment around issues of specifically *gendered* aspects of dealing with medical institutions, but the key concepts of STIs and HIV remain absent.¹⁶¹

Recall Rana, quoted by Azhar? I bring her up again because Khan provides more key insights here, now that we have the context of “proper” hijra and khawaja sara and “proper”

156 Roy, “Translating Hijra into Transgender: Performance and Pehchān in India’s Trans-Hijra Communities,” 427.
157 “About FDI.”

158 Ali, “Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2017 Salient Features, Gaps & Recommendations.”

159 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018.

160 Ali, “Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2017 Salient Features, Gaps & Recommendations,” 11.

161 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, 8.

trans subjects defined by surgery and hormones. Rana and other khawaja sara, like the report from FDI shows, are *also* well aware of the consequences of that imaginary and thus,

Bindiya Rana, President of the Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA), led protests outside the Karachi Press Club, which challenged ... hormone testing and its use in the verification process for eunuchs. She noted that 'no such testing was being asked for males and females, instead their word was enough. Why is our word not enough?'. [41 Supreme Court of Pakistan, Constitution Petition No 43 of 2009, p. 2, http://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/web/user_files/file/const.p_43_of_2009.pdf {accessed 8 February 2017}] The activism in Karachi led to the Supreme Court's diffusing what could possibly be a volatile matter, as subsequent Supreme Court directives do not mention the hormonal-testing requirement.¹⁶²

I argue that far from being passive victims of the deployment of transnational logics, NGOs and the government, hijra and khawaja sara are acutely aware of the fissures, breakdowns, and politics of the terms and concepts they are working with and resisting simultaneously; they are thus active agents.¹⁶³ They know of the elisions and deletions they must work with. Of how sexuality and gender are splitting before their eyes and how they were categorized in past colonial and post-colonial imaginaries and legal structures to enable this splitting, at least in part; how they must jump on that train. Yet they are also aware that by jumping onto that train, they leave ways of knowing and being behind; that their ways of life are being threatened. On top of this, as shown, the long shadow of colonialism means that hijra and khawaja sara represented, in many instances throughout spaces and times in South Asia, excess and boundlessness. I argue, then, that the incorporation of their narratives into state apparatuses is that same anxiety but turned back on itself. Rather than suppress, part of the state's thinking may be: incorporate, represent, subdue. It is then, I believe, also a temporal confounding. Time is of the essence in many ways. On the one hand, hijra and khawaja sara cannot afford to be slow be-

162 Khan, "Khawaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan," 1295.

163 I say "agents" with all its connections to conceptions of agency and power, because as this thesis has shown hijra and khawaja sara are certainly enmeshed in many webs of power. After all, one only needs agency when dealing with/in the face of power.

cause their community members, however contested that definition of *community* is, are facing extreme levels of violence. On the other hand, the very fact the deployment of transgender is occurring at an ever-accelerating pace means that they will lose community members, and yet paradoxically, as Bobby worries, gain many more who they will not understand and who in turn may not integrate with their already extant imaginaries. The present then creates an anxious future, haunted by a colonial, racialized, caste-ized past. Unlike Mukta, for whom Nandini presented no real threat,¹⁶⁴ the spectres facing Rana, Zara, Nadeem, Nomi, Nergis, Bobby, and many others are quite real.

This situation, a series of fissures and breakages with many shattered pieces and loose threads hanging everywhere, also has a precedent elsewhere in our contemporary, feminist, queer, and trans theorizing. As Butler explores in “Against Proper Objects,”

In particular, terms such as “race” and “class” are ruled out from having a constitutive history in determining the parameters of either field [feminism vs. lesbian/gay studies]. Whether the position is for or against the centrality of gender to sexuality, it is gender and sexuality alone that remain the common objects of contention. The presumption is that they can be compared and contrasted, but that the binary frame presumed and instituted through the analogy is itself self-evidently “proper.”¹⁶⁵

That “properness,” of sexuality’s and gender’s neat split into two spheres that can intersect, which in the South Asian case are “caste/classless” by virtue of upper-caste association, and therefore also de-racialized, but that do not co-constitute each other, already had political motivations behind it at the time of Butler’s writing, as she explores. We require a return to Islam to understand a further point here. In characteristic colonial fashion, our quote from Burton’s translation of the Kama Sutra comes with an acerbic footnote, from the section “Of The Auparishhtaka Or Mouth Congress,” he writes,

¹⁶⁴ Atkins, *Queens!*

¹⁶⁵ Butler, “Against Proper Objects: Introduction,” 6–7.

[1] This practice [oral sex] appears to have been prevalent in some parts of India from a very ancient time. The Shustruta, a work on medicine some two thousand years old, describes the wounding of the lingam with the teeth as one of the causes of a disease treated upon in that work. Traces of the practice are found as far back as the eighth century, for various kinds of the Auparishtaka are represented in the sculptures of many Shaiva temples at Bhuvaneshwara, near Cuttack, in Orissa, and which were built about that period. From these sculptures being found in such places, it would seem that this practice was popular in that part of the country at that time. It does not seem to be so prevalent now in Hindustan, its place perhaps is filled up by the practice of sodomy, introduced since the Mahomedan period.¹⁶⁶

Here we see a startlingly modern trend in the colonial archive. That is, Hindu nationalism often portrays Islam as something that ran roughshod over tradition, and we can see here this process is colonial in its figuration. But I digress, and save that portion for the implications section of this thesis, to be found in the conclusion. What interests me here is the setting up of a non-Muslim-versus-Muslim imaginary where “deviant” sexuality like sodomy comes from Islam. Ironic, then, that “Islamization” in contemporary South Asia era implies a cracking down on such sexualities. Or is it? As we have seen, the Indian intellectual adopted the same Victorian prudery of the colonizers who introduced it. In this collection of events, the Indian and, later, Pakistani Muslim with access to veins of state power is re-enacting this footnote, I argue. Just as Zia-ul-Haq unsurprisingly resurrected the ghosts of sexually licentious dancers of the past, I argue that the “[o]ne reason for the growing acceptance of the trans community springs from an unlikely source - Pakistan’s mullahs”¹⁶⁷ actually isn’t all that unlikely. In this after-colonial Islam, which was part of a larger process of “development” where the “modern Islam” did not—could not—include sodomy and other “deviant” sex acts as it once did, as Najmabadi explores,¹⁶⁸

166 Mallanāga, *The Kama Sutra*.

167 Barker, “Once Ostracised, Now Pakistani Transgender People Are Running for Parliament.”

168 Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 11–60. Najmabadi looks at Iran, but I find her analysis of the siren call from colonial modernity to discard “deviant” sexualities and a degendered beauty aesthetic that was decidedly different than anything seen today, to achieve some fabled “modern manhood” to be useful in understanding some of the sexual lives of an Islamic past and present that again entered the spiraled feedback loops of the colonial apparatus.

it makes perfect strategic sense that these mullahs, who also work with state power and institutions, *would* find it amenable to support a “proper” split between gender and sexuality.¹⁶⁹

“The presumption ... that they can be compared and contrasted” along with “[t]he turn to gender... signals a papering over ... [of the] more fundamental structuring of language, intelligibility, and the production of the subject along the axis of a split which also produces the unconscious.”¹⁷⁰ This is again playing out in South Asia to an extent, I argue. As the rise of kothi, and then lately MSM,¹⁷¹ versus hijra and khawaja sara shows, there indeed does seem to be some attempt at making “proper objects” of study. Of course, as already examined in this thesis and in my sources, this is not merely a top-down process. As we noted with Valentine far earlier in this thesis, this division does have strengths, but it leaves many loose threads and ways of knowing behind. And much like Reddy, I do not believe it is possible analyze hijra and khawaja sara as either an example of a group based purely around sexuality nor as a group based purely around gender (at least as they are understood in discourse currently).¹⁷² As Dutta and Roy note, large pieces of fallout from such a neat split consist of fierce border wars, as this section examined.¹⁷³ Recall that Valentine encountered this throughout his research as well. The ghosts of shattered concepts have continued to haunt this fissure. Therefore, attempting to neatly cleave sexuality and gender leaves behind pieces with sharp edges. Some of them can

169 On that note, during the buildup to Partition, many mullahs and maulvis were opposed to the plan, because it threatened their already extant power networks. In this case, it does seem they have anticipated a shift in power dynamics and jumped on board.

170 Butler, “Against Proper Objects: Introduction,” 16.

171 Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India Some Reflections.” “MSM” stands for “men who have sex with men.” That sexuality gets associated with men and masculinity has further uncanny echoes in Butler’s “Against Proper Objects” and Najmabadi’s analysis. I cannot devote much space here, but it is almost an inversion of the earlier logic at play, where masculinized-but-less-sexual gendered others assuaged some colonial anxiety. A strange marriage of an old trope, that of the oversexed and dangerous Muslim man, with the modern trope, of an utterly desexualized and sexually frustrated and repressed Muslim man.

172 Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*.

173 Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” 329.

cut through the webs of power and offer key moments of liberation, while others only serve to harm those left to clean them up.

4. On Translation

Now that we have unpacked some pitfalls and engaged some challenges in putting transgender into dialogue with hijra and khawaja sara, we return to the questions of translation and comparison themselves. This section does this to both begin wrapping up ideas and to begin moving forward. “Translation” as used here is a loose term. As Traub writes,

The deployment of translation serves as an apt figure for describing the pleasures and perils involved in the production and reception of this new field of knowledge. Acts of translation require recognition of linguistic, cultural, and temporal difference, while also demanding awareness of multiple fields of reception.... Translation simultaneously involves contradictory methods and imperatives: fueled by a utopian desire for transference of signification across incommensurate linguistic entities, it nonetheless confronts lapses in the seamless conveyance of meaning... translation manages its act of transfer and transmission only by also leaving something behind—meanings “lost in translation,” nuance falling by the wayside.¹⁷⁴

Yet what Traub calls translation is not what I quite have in mind. For one thing, while this quote does point out that “translation” serves as a useful metaphor for beginning an analysis, it also posits translation as a process that meets at end points, not the entangling, webby, messy processes of constant interactions and (dis)incorporations that I have explored in this thesis. Thus, I must move on from mere “translation” into something else. Something more than two end points to run between.

4.1 COMPARING, CONTRASTING, ASKING

I begin by asking this: can we compare incomparables? This thesis has attempted to do just that, by tearing up concepts and seeing if the threads can be woven to each other, even if only temporarily. It has also woven together fiction and non-fiction, to enable discussion. In “Is

174 Traub, “The Past Is a Foreign Country?,” 30.

the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?” Berman explores ideas such as the tying of gender to nation, much as this thesis has, writing that we must, “... recognize that any discussion of transnational or world literature must also attend to the assumptions of embodiment and gender identity that are attached to the concept of the nation.”¹⁷⁵ Recall that I used the film *Queens! Destiny of Dance* in a similar process. Literature and art, I believe, much like Berman, allow “[c]omparison based in incommensurability rather than equivalence [which] offers critical vantage points across fields and discourses that can illuminate shared patterns, adjacencies, interconnections, and divergences without erasing the singularity of events, texts, histories, or identities.”¹⁷⁶ To further this form of comparison, I turn to some ideas from Tan.

Tan writes that “[a]lthough scholars who work on Asia and those who work on indigenous studies have both critiqued the epistemic structure of particularizing the non-West and thus supporting the domination of the West, they are hardly in dialogue.”¹⁷⁷ I will attempt some of this here. Discussion of two-spirit peoples would be far beyond the scope of this thesis, but I believe in this section we can take up some of the dialogue Tan envisions. In “Two-Spirit and Bisexual People: Different Umbrella, Same Rain,” Robinson explores the implications of folding together bisexual and two-spirit. Robinson also finds that two-spirit envelopes more than just sexuality or gender, indeed it is a co-constitution of both, but it is also spiritual in its figuration, as well as defying these understandings as they are known in Western discourse, much like hijra or khawaja sara.¹⁷⁸ Robinson writes, quoting Alex Wilson, that “[c]oming out as LGBT, she explains, ‘is typically a declaration of an independent identity,’ whereas two-spirit identity ‘reflects Aboriginal peoples’ process of “coming in” to an empowered identity that integrates

175 Berman, “Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?,” 218.

176 Ibid., 220.

177 Tan, “Beijing Meets Hawai‘i: Reflections on Ku‘er, Indigeneity, and Queer Theory,” 139.

178 Robinson, “Two-Spirit and Bisexual People.”

their sexuality, culture, gender and all other aspects of who they understand and know themselves to be' (p. 197).¹⁷⁹ As such I argue it is indeed possible to put this into dialogue with hijra and khawaja sara ways of knowing themselves, their larger social group, and their society. Opportunities for translation and dialogue do exist; as Robinson writes, "[t]o use the umbrella metaphor, colonization may be the rain that beats upon both bisexual and two-spirit people, but the deluge hits us to different degrees and we may find that we are under different umbrellas for very good reasons. Two-spirit identity is an umbrella that Indigenous people have made ourselves, designed for the kind of downpour we have been experiencing since colonialism began."¹⁸⁰ I must continue on to other points, but I believe the potential for many essays and concepts exists in the dialogue between South Asian, Black American, and Indigenous American studies with regards to thinking around (trans) gender.

Language, sex, and gender are incredibly entangled, as Butler's *Bodies That Matter* explores. It may mostly speak in and around "the West," but again I argue dialogue and translation can occur, there are no "fundamentally untranslatable" things. So, as Butler writes,

If the bounding, forming, and deforming of sexed bodies is animated by a set of founding prohibitions, a set of enforced criteria of intelligibility, then we are not merely considering how bodies appear from the vantage point of a theoretical position or epistemic location at a distance from bodies themselves. On the contrary, we are asking how the criteria of intelligible sex operates to constitute a field of bodies, and how precisely we might understand specific criteria to produce the bodies that they regulate.¹⁸¹

That is, bodies are not *a priori* to discourse and thus subsequently described by words. Rather, language and the body have a relationship that is inextricable and co-constituted. To put it crudely, bluntly, and as a pun: words matter. To bring back a quote from Butler used earlier in

179 Ibid., 22.

180 Ibid., 24.

181 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 55.

this thesis, “[t]he turn to gender... signals a papering over ... [of the] more fundamental structuring of language, intelligibility, and the production of the subject along the axis of a split which also produces the unconscious.”¹⁸²

So with these ideas in mind, of the fundamental purpose of language, of discourse, of translation, of dialogue, of describing-as-creating, of looking-onto-as-making, of measuring-as-creating-a-particle, I turn to uses and metaphors of language itself. I do this because, again, while there may be no easy or direct translations to be found here, I do not take a broad brush and dismiss everything as some sort of “transgender international.” For, as Al-Kassim writes, “[a] critique that is content to halt with a righteous indictment of Orientalism, however just and justified, cannot hope to illuminate the complexity of the deployment of sexuality [and I argue gender] and falls into the trap of essentializing cultural difference through a prior essentialisation of epistemology.”¹⁸³ I must then modify one of my earlier ideological stances. While there be many local conceptions of gender and transness throughout the world, the borders of these regions are not set in stone, but rather they shift and morph right along with the transnational forces they must engage with. This is not “the West and the Rest” nor is this a simple tale of “transgender as a term of the colonizer.” Both are over-reductive, in my mind, and both ultimately do not capture the situation. Transgender is here to stay in the Subcontinent.

To continue this idea of language, hinted at throughout this thesis, I now fold together another idea. Dutta and Roy use the word “idiom” to theorize around gender,¹⁸⁴ and at the beginning of my drafting process for this thesis I also did. Seeing their use of it thus presents me with the opportunity to elaborate my conception of much the same. Gender is like an idiom.

182 Butler, “Against Proper Objects: Introduction,” 16.

183 Al-Kassim, “Epilogue: Sexual Epistemologies, East in West,” 305.

184 Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” 324, 328.

Idioms are, of course, expressions in which the literal meanings of the words together does not convey the same thing as the expression as a whole. Take for example, “it’s raining cats and dogs.” Literally, such a sentence would be horrifying. However, most native English speakers understand that this sentence should be taken to mean “the rain is intense.” Idioms are famous for being notoriously difficult to translate. To put such an idiom directly into Urdu, for example, would create a sentence such as “بلیوں اور کتے آسمان سے گرجاتے ہیں” which literally means “cats and dogs are falling from the sky,” a sentence that would alarm any native speaker. Likewise, the Urdu idiom, “گھر کی مرغی دال برابر” means something along the lines of “taking something for granted” but its literal translation is something like “house chickens [as] equal to lentils.” Of course these phrases are not untranslatable, it’s perfectly possible to say “the rain is intense” in Hindi-Urdu and to say “taken for granted” in English, but the precise sense and quality of the idioms cannot be conveyed fully with these translations. Likewise, we may never be able to convey fully the nuances, histories, sentiments, and embodiments of one culture’s gender systems to another, even in essay-length works such as this, but that does not mean it is totally impossible or un-attemptable. Rather, gender, much like idiom, is dependent on place, culture, time, people, ideas, and many other such subtleties that indicate various ideas, qualities, nuances, and concepts of the people that live it. Sometimes we may need to make swift, word-for-word transcriptions in our fights for liberation, sometimes we may take the time to unpack the idiom and examine the cultural forces that lead to it, all the while knowing that examining any one portion individually would render it far less meaningful, so we should make

sure to keep its whole in view the entire time. This also affords cultures all of their rich nuance around gender without having to rely on tropes such as “cross cultural universal” or “directly (un)translatable” and avoids the pitfalls of walling off theoretical gardens as well. Avoiding the-oretical fiefdoms is key, for khawaja sara and hijra do not just break down barriers between identity, expression, and behaviour, they also break down neat distinctions between gender and sexuality, perhaps one of the most critical and yet contentious points of both modern queer and trans theory as thesis explored.

Yet I eventually found “idiom” to be too limiting, so I now weave together the threads of language as a constitutive force of gender, *à la* Butler,¹⁸⁵ “trans-linguistic practice” from Tan,¹⁸⁶ and use metaphors from linguistics to shape another argument. In language, each of us has our own idiolect,¹⁸⁷ the words, phrases, and constructions unique to ourselves but that also come from our larger context. We enter these into broader dialects, the words of others with whom we share a mutual intelligibility, such as the “Bazaar Hindi-Urdu” of the everyday north Indian and Pakistani. Some dialects are more mutually intelligible with our own, some are less. A certain configuration of one dialect becomes a prestige dialect, considered to be “proper,” usually it becomes prescriptively taught in elementary schools and often is the form held up by “gram-marians” as “correct.” Along with that idea comes language. As the popular phrase goes, “a lan-guage is a dialect with an army and navy,” or that is, power. Take, for example, Hindi and Urdu, as their statuses in South Asia show, languages like them often cover larger regions and have strong political implications. Some languages, through certain webs of power and exchange be-come global lingua francas, and travel the world, like English. Sometimes two dialects meet

185 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.

186 Tan, “Beijing Meets Hawai‘i: Reflections on Ku‘er, Indigeneity, and Queer Theory.”

187 Not to be confused with idiom nor idiomatic. Idiolects are the unique ways of speaking an individual has that are both a product of their own making *and* a product of the context in which they speak.

and develop pidgins and later creoles. I present all of this because I believe a way forward is to consider this figuration: gender as idiolect that enters into conversations with dialects. Certain understandings of gender become prestige dialects and get held up as “proper,” and some even gain the figurations of power and context to be considered “languages” across broader regions, such as in South Asia with the spread of hijra and khawaja sara. Transgender, then, positions itself as a lingua franca, and much like a lingua franca it both facilitates some understandings and forecloses others. In analyzing genders and trans configurations around the world, I propose a way forward is to keep this metaphor in mind. At times the lingua franca is powerful and necessary. At other times it may be needed for two dialects to meet and form gender pidgins¹⁸⁸ and creoles.¹⁸⁹ At all levels it is important to keep in mind power and context. Sometimes, in my linguistics hobbyist circles, we come across yet another sentiment that a “global” or “world” language would solve the world’s communication problems. Yet, as we explain to the people who hold this utopic vision, this approach has serious drawbacks. One, this vision erases the various local ways of knowing culture, place, context, and history that the world’s languages contain. That there are efforts to preserve dying languages speaks to their importance.¹⁹⁰ Two, colonialism is inseparable from such imaginaries, because the languages that are dying are indeed those most at risk from the forces of global imperialism, world capital, and extraction economies. Three, it would be a futile effort. Languages evolve and change. And thus the next part of my metaphor. We should always keep in mind that the analysis of gender is not the analysis of a static object. Rather, as I have attempted to show in this thesis and as my

188 Formed when one language contacts another usually in a context of trade, border zones, colonization, or other such circumstances.

189 When a pidgin is nativized and becomes the language of the descendants of the original speakers of the previous pidgin.

190 “Endangered Languages Project.”

sources have also done, it morphs, evolves, and takes on new forms, just like language in this extended metaphor. It may be tempting to cast indigenous and non-Western ways of knowing gender as “the past as a foreign country,” but that is just as harmful as broad, sweeping, easy translations. As examined in this thesis, hijra and khawaja sara are politically and socially aware of their context. To rob them of the chance to evolve their understandings on their own terms would also be yet another colonial deployment. We cannot, however, ignore where, how, and why the forces that ultimately compel this complex local-international evolution come from. Now, I turn to the final part of this metaphor. Language plays such a large part in gender and in my metaphor, yet I ultimately believe gender vanishes before we can reach it with words. We can tread ever closer, but ultimately it slips our grasp, and becomes something only understood as a complex mix of bodily experience, social context, political forces, national and international configurations, history, sexuality, race, class, caste, and the myriad of other forces that go into creating “us” and “I.”¹⁹¹

4.2 THIS THESIS IS DISAPPEARING AS IT IS BEING WRITTEN

But translation and temporality must ultimately meet. The threads of “progress” and “development” we saw throughout this thesis leads me to ask what it means to write about a moment that is essentially vanishing as it is occurring, much like the act of preserving languages as they are disappearing. That is, transgender is likely to continue to unfold across the subcontinent. Temporality confounds this thesis even as it attempts to become something relevant both immediately and in the future. Some ideas discussed in this thesis are likely already fading out of existence while others are coming to light. What does it mean to write about

191 Actually, pick out any one of these concepts and I would argue much the same.

trans politics and representation in such a context? Indeed, as explored earlier in this thesis, hijra and khawaja sara are also well aware of the problems that time presents.

A notable example of temporality tempts us in the subtitle of Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Is writing about gender and trans figurations throughout the world a "vanishing present"? To an extent, I would argue yes. But it is not a hopeless situation. First, I turn to *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, where Spivak writes of vanishing.¹⁹² Much like the spectres and ghosts that haunt discourse around the topics this thesis examined earlier, nothing ever truly vanishes I argue. Recall that in the last section I made it clear that language evolves. Language thus has etymology, and using our metaphor, so do gender and sexuality. Even if we are writing about rapidly shifting contexts and terms, they leave traces, their metaphorical etymologies do not die. Indeed, like the terms hijra and khawaja sara themselves, these etymologies may very well be called upon again some day in the future.

Plus, I argue that *not* working with this evolution would also be a disservice. As Al-Kassim notes, any too-easy call to Orientalism or colonialism risks making stuck subjects. Stuck in time, stuck in the mud of nation-states, ever out of reach. Again, nothing is "totally untranslatable." That is, "[t]he past can feel like a place as much as it does a time—a *foreign* place, outside the doors of the familiar, beyond the gate and the gatekeepers of *now*.[1 Catherine Brown, "In the Middle," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 3 (2000): 547n.]"¹⁹³ I argue we run the risk of turning other countries into the "past," a form of colonialism itself, to justify "progress" and "development" precisely if we do *not* write about things that

192 Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, x. "The latter position, a 'moving base' that I stand on as the text seeks to catch the vanishing present...."

193 Traub, "The Past Is a Foreign Country?," 1.

are vanishing. Recall earlier in this thesis my findings that hijra and khawaja sara are indeed fully capable agents well aware of the weight of history, the long shadows of the colonial institutions, the current politics that they must deal with, and the problem of a rapidly-changing present. To keep up with the at times lightning speed of changes is a necessary part of writing about disappearances, but it is also a writing about new understandings, (re)volutions, and futures, that is, of possibilities.

Time is not merely one-dimensional, however. As Hossain writes, in “De-Indianizing Hijra,”

... the project of a unified South Asianist imaginary risks reifying not only the concept of South Asia as a region but also intraregional similitude and disjuncture. Perhaps one way to evade such reification is to bring into view the sharp intraregional asymmetries not only across the subregional scales but also within the national spatialities. At the discursive level such a coalitional South Asian queer imaginary can be conceived by taking into account the multiple trajectories through which nonnormative sex/gender subjects have emerged within various South Asian regions. Such a project should begin with the acknowledgment that South Asia is not reducible to India and that nonnormative sex/gender subjects within different nations emerge in intricate interaction with the intra/transregional symbolic and material flows.¹⁹⁴

This applies, in my view, to both space and time (they are co-constituted in relativity, after all). Thus, this thesis has drawn examples from primarily Pakistan for this reason, as well as my own familiarity with some of the area studies needed. Recall that in this thesis we found so many of even the “native sounding” terms were also made into umbrellas, subject to regional forces that found echoes in international forces. I argue that we must keep in mind a South Asia that is tied to spacetime. What trajectories do terms take in *places* and in *times*? Why is this important? Let us finally look at the court case mentioned in the introduction. We now have enough context, I believe, to at least begin unpacking some ideas.

194 Hossain, “De-Indianizing Hijra Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space,” 329.

Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India was presented as a decidedly “decolonial” victory by many news sources and opinion pieces.¹⁹⁵ But the court case itself is more complex than that. This is not a spacetime, I believe, that truly captures the nuances of what happened. Much like Pakistan and India’s transgender rights bills, the colony lives even in a situation where it purportedly finally vanishes. A strange etymology lingers. For example, the trial cites German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in its very first line, and British philosopher John Stuart Mill as part of the next few, to contextualize concepts of individuality.¹⁹⁶ A whole list of other prominent Western figures follows: Shakespeare, the Supreme Court of Canada, the Supreme Court of the United States, and many other such examples.¹⁹⁷ Clearly the participants here, too, are well aware of time and space, of a calling upon modernity and a “now” to win important legal victories. What strikes me is that while this case does cite some examples and histories of sexuality in India, and unpacks the roots of Section 377 as colonial, it also devotes heavy weight to unpacking English law and the colonial legal system, and to citing American and European examples, such as Oscar Wilde. It does this, critically, to show how the workings in “the West” came to influence India, the creation of Section 377, and its current society and laws. As this thesis examined earlier, to win legal victories in South Asia, sometimes one has to be very well aware of the colony; it is, after all, their institutions left behind that South Asia works with, as the arguments seen in the court case show. The ruling also cites hijra, gender, and attempts to reinforce gender-binarism as examples of why *sexuality* is regulated,¹⁹⁸ a very nuanced move because as this thesis examined just such a split was used to buttress either

195 Dudney, “In Affirming LGBTQ Rights, the India Supreme Court Struck a Blow Against Colonialism”; Dhillon, “In Finally Accepting Homosexuality, India Will Return to Its Roots”; Ahmed, “The British Empire’s Homophobic Legacy Could Finally Be Overturned in India.”

196 *Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India* thr. Secretary Ministry of Law and Justice at 3.

197 *Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. v. Union of India* thr. Secretary Ministry of Law and Justice.

198 *Ibid.*, 8, 90, 206, 209–11, 287.

concept. Yet the news coverage and opinion pieces frame this as “India ... Return[ing] to its Roots.”¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Pakistan is a “conservative Muslim nation” whose hard-won transgender rights bill “does not address the rights of gays and lesbians.”²⁰⁰ These headlines and articles simplify a far more nuanced picture. Namely the use of modern terms and concepts such as gay, lesbian, LGBT, and transgender shows that the ruling parties and India at large have indeed been altered by contact with terms and concepts from “the West” and as such we cannot neatly paint this as a “return to roots.” And while the overturning of a colonial-era law is welcome, *Johar v. Union of India* complicates calls of “decolonization” that assume a total removal or disavowal of colonial or “Western” ideas, or a return to a time “before the colonizer,” because indeed the court case cites colonial discourses and “Western” ideas heavily to make some vital points. As such, we can see that South Asia is not free from the temporality and geologies constituted in the larger discourses of the “war on terror,” Hindu and Islamic nationalism, and queer and trans theorizing. As I have said throughout this thesis, nothing is simple, we are looking at spiralling feedback loops and strange mappings and meshings of power. That is, “[i]n relation to hijra supranationality and the constant comings and goings that mark hijra subjectivities, it is important to recognize sub/intra/interregional variations and inequalities.”²⁰¹ If we are to consider more deeply the other briefly mentioned sexuality/gender configurations mentioned in the thesis, such as kothi, and the many others, we cannot afford *not* to keep the spacetime(s) of South Asia in mind. After all, in using the entangled, nuanced workings of law

199 Dhillon, “In Finally Accepting Homosexuality, India Will Return to Its Roots.”

200 Mosbergen, “Pakistan May Soon Put The U.S. To Shame On Transgender Rights”; Ingber, “Pakistan Passes Historic Transgender Rights Bill.”

201 Hossain, “De-Indianizing Hijra Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space,” 327.

and society, gender and sexuality to our advantage, we can win important legal victories such as *Johar v. Union of India* and the workings of India's activists around Section 377 show.²⁰²

That attention to temporality, context, time, and place not only allows deeper insight into South Asia, however. Before we must conclude, I bring up one more point for future potential generative discussion. In "(Re)making sex: A praxiography of the gender clinic," Latham explores how sex is continually (re)made in the context of the gender clinic.²⁰³ Latham's work shows, in my mind, that the very fissures and breakages apparent in transgender that became clear to me when looking at South Asia are *also* seen by those of us in the West when coming into contact with medical institutions and regulatory discourses. And as Valentine noted, they were also seen and experienced during its more formative years. Thus, I agree with Snorton that, "[t]here is a growing consensus in transgender studies that trans embodiment is not exclusively, or even primarily, a matter of the materiality of the body."²⁰⁴ Furthermore, the topic of language, community, and identity are also being examined in the popular press. Take, for example, "Why I'm Nonbinary But Don't Use 'They/Them'" by Black writer Ashleigh Shackelford.²⁰⁵ Schackelford's explorations of the concepts of history, selfhood, Blackness, and identity also show alternative imaginaries that are possible when we approach trans topics with an eye on topics such as raciality, time, place, caste, and history. I believe that comparing incomparables, treating gender as metaphorically linguistic, while always keeping in mind time and place, raciality and history, will allow for generative potential for trans people in the West as well, not just in South Asia, and perhaps in the world. It would be a collective liberation.

202 For a fuller examination of the nuanced strategies of resistance to Section 377, see Puri, *Sexual States*.

203 Latham, "(Re)Making Sex."

204 Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 182.

205 Shackelford, "Why I'm Nonbinary But Don't Use 'They/Them.'"

5. Conclusion

I can finally address what is probably the last lingering main question: what now? In this thesis I had hoped to go beyond Chatterjee's "reflexive questioning,"²⁰⁶ and make claims, much like Dutta and Roy. Making claims is risky. It does make me anxious. But language, as explored throughout this thesis, is vital to gender, as is translation and its associated aspects. So much so that we as humanities scholars cannot ignore the implications of our words. The medical studies and popular press articles mentioned toward the beginning of this thesis deploy terms and concepts birthed in and around academia. To claim we are merely writing and thus have no impact on the places we research flies in the face of all relevant evidence. For example, in "Why terms like 'transgender' don't work for India's 'third-gender' communities," Bearak writes, "[t]hat is partly why the term 'transgender' is seldom used in the Indian context. In Indian legalese, the term most commonly employed is 'third gender'—as when, two Aprils ago, India's 'third gender' was acknowledged by the country's Supreme Court."²⁰⁷ As this thesis has examined, "transgender" is indeed used by India's legal system, as the 2016 bill shows. While Bearak makes a valiant effort, the very words that are deployed in the article are yet again the ones problematized in this thesis.

Beyond the popular press, there are implications for medical research and aid organizations. As examined earlier in this thesis, a neat divide between sexuality and gender does not adequately address the needs of sexuality/gender communities in South Asia. A methodology that approaches South Asia with the idea that HIV research, for example, must focus on specific quantifiable *sexuality* groups would miss large portion of the populations that need such outreach. On the other hand, assuming that (trans) gendered populations need only medical

206 Chatterjee, "Transgender Shifts: Notes on Resignification of Gender and Sexuality in India," 318.

207 Bearak, "Why Terms like 'Transgender' Don't Work for India's 'Third-Gender' Communities."

treatments for *gender identity* related aspects is a double elision. One, it assumes that gender is the same as (self) identity in South Asia, which, as this thesis explored, is far a more complicated topic than it seems. Two, this approach assumes the only medical problems faced by gender diverse populations are those related to their gender, without considering the co-constitution of gender, sexuality, caste, class, and the myriad other factors facing these communities. Theorizing that keeps in mind the strong lifeworlds and messy entanglements that went into creating terms and concepts such as hijra, khawaja sara, and transgender must go beyond acknowledging that hijra and khawaja sara lie at intersections. It must also examine the roads that led them to that intersection, and the contacts, accidents, pushes and pulls along that route, and indeed how those routes are already entangled within each other.

Additionally, I am writing this thesis during the rise of Hindu and Islamic nationalisms, global fascisms, and ever-constricting popular discourses of gender and sexuality, including in the self-professed “liberal democracies” of the West. It may seem, then, that this thesis would best be reserved for a more neoliberal world, where the nuances it examines are in wider relays with states and global bodies. But I argue that it is precisely now that we need such research. For such nuances indeed still are in play within such relays, even if that relay is a shutting down. This thesis cannot follow all the rabbit holes it has opened up and peered into. Part and parcel of nationalisms and fascisms across the world and throughout history are patterns of shutdowns, in which definitions are taken as concrete realities that are static. Such regimes thrive when discourse stops and no new ideas are given space to grow. An urgent example is the United States, where the Trump administration is well aware of this, as during the time of my writing this thesis, the administration is trying to define trans people out of existence.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Green, Benner, and Pear, “‘Transgender’ Could Be Defined Out of Existence Under Trump Administration”; Ariane and Cohen, “Supreme Court Allows Transgender Military Ban to Go into Effect.”

Fascists, racists, regressive transphobic “feminists,” all of these groups are well aware of the power of words. If we hope to defeat them, if we hope to have any possibility to experience multiple ways of knowing gender, of knowing transness, then I argue we cannot stop writing research like this. We must write ourselves into history, into that etymological trace that carries our narratives. In doing so, we may just win.

6. Epilogue: Dialogues and Diasporas

6.1 INDIA AFTER SECTION 377’S REPEAL

As this thesis was in the process of revision and comment, India introduced a series of legislative measures that attempt to define the discourse around hijra, khawaja sara, and trans people within its borders.²⁰⁹ Much like my fears at the end of the thesis, these measures are aimed at using medicalization, governmental respectability, and state apparatuses to control the lives and realities of the various gender groups discussed within this thesis. The stakes could not be higher. What strikes me about these legislative attempts is the very foreclosing of gender lifeworlds down into government approved, medically stamped legitimacy. Unlike fascisms of the past that wish to totally destroy generative gender imaginaries and their long trajectories of existence, these measures focus on a vice-grip retention of narrative. It is not “there are no trans people here” it is “we only have the ‘right’ kinds of trans people.” The mandates include medical screenings, limiting and grossly inaccurate definitions of who is and is not “trans” according to its criteria, extreme serophobia, and a litany of other problematic measures. How could a country that recently removed sodomy laws, indeed removed them as a result of court arguments *citing hijra and the harm of binarist assumptions around gender*, also be

209 Dharmadhikari and Gopinathan, “Equal to Killing Us”; Smith, “India: Trans Demonstrators Protest Transgender Persons Bill - PinkNews · PinkNews”; Allen, “India Is on the Verge of Passing a Draconian Anti-Transgender Bill”; Brandt and Anasuya, “Eighteen Reasons Why.”

the one that introduces such violent legislation? How is it so uncaring and unaware of the gender lifeworlds within its own borders? And what do we make of the diasporic concerns these issues raise for South Asians in the rest of the world?

These situations, I believe, are part of the problem of too easily and uncritically employing blanket terms such as transgender to South Asia's long-existing systems of sexuality/gender. It is a spacetime too concerned with governmental respectability and paper rights. As the many hijra and khawaja sara I cited in my thesis stated and enacted, interactions with governments must be carefully calculated and ever-aware of the colonial discourses that persist to this day in South Asia. Much like the "Islamicized" governmentality in Pakistan, India's current Hindu Nationalist governing elite are well aware of the power of discourse and definition. Foreclosing gendered spaces of living is the very dangerous fallout of any too easy split of gender, sexuality, caste, and class in South Asia.

These dangerous legislative measures are part of the reason why I believe we as scholars must develop tools, language, and discourse that go beyond "transgender is a colonial imposition" and "transgender is an ever expanding umbrella" because neither approach can adequately address what is happening in India and South Asia and the rest of the world. It is part of the reason why I believe "idiomatic" is ultimately too limited to work as tool in this complex interaction of gendered existences. To these points, the government could very well respond "of course it isn't oppressive we have had trans people here and it is up to India to define them" which they very well are doing, but not in any way that engages the various gender groups within its jurisdiction, but yet still draws upon the *very same* legitimizing-yet-limiting discourses found in "the West" such as the binarist transmedicalism found by Latham²¹⁰ and Dutta

210 Latham, "(Re)Making Sex."

and Roy's²¹¹ point that trans often encompasses a binary and a set of further-othered groups. What a mess. And not a mess that "transgender is an ever unfolding umbrella" can cover, either, because the bill is decidedly *limiting*, not expansive, while deploying these terms and concepts.

So what set of tools and discourses could we develop? What would account for the unique lifeworlds of gender systems not just in India and South Asia but in places all over the world? What theoretical framework breaks past the sticky sludge of this murky place? How can we be true to the ever shifting, constant re-figurings found in gender lifeworlds such as hijra and khawaja sara without reducing them to any set of essential characteristics, without reproducing the colonial impetus to categorize, label, essentialize? How can we also avoid the temptation to freeze them under glass, to deny the chance for dialogue altogether because dialogue inevitably means change? I am not sure. I have no definite answer. But what I propose below are some approaches, thought experiments, and imaginaries that hopefully will serve as a starting point to be critiqued over and over again and evolve into a working set of theoretical approaches.

6.2 GENDER PIDGINS, GENDER CREOLES

In the conclusion of my thesis I began with the idea of language as a possible starting point. Translation did not quite capture what I want here, but it served as a working beginning. As we have seen, the uptake and dissemination of terms in South Asia and likely elsewhere in the world cannot be said to be directional. Not only do hijra and khawaja sara actively work with the own etymologies of the words that define their existence, they follow the shifts and flows of the external words that do as well, and sometimes these forces are useful for them to

211 Dutta and Roy, "Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections."

harness. Again, remember why in Pakistan we find khawaja sara as opposed to hijra in the first place. If languages exist as long streams with their own histories and their own internal forces, they also exist as streams in the presence of other streams and rivers. Sometimes, they merge and flow into each other. At other times canals come to be built between them, sometimes by force in the case of colonial contact. Some of these canals are murky, such as the one between transgender and khawaja sara, this canal cannot be said to flow entirely in one direction, nevertheless a power dynamic does push it along at times. But still the waters are too murky to dredge up a theoretical framework from this metaphor.

If a ghost danced between Nandini and Mukta,²¹² and her ghungroo could still be heard all throughout, then what about haunting? If something lingers, flows underneath, alongside, sometimes within, dominant gendered narratives and it carries the lived realities of other gendered experiences, could it be a theoretical framework that is less concerned with “accurate translations” or “sufficiently expansive umbrellas” and one that is more concerned with tracing the trajectories of these experiences and lifeworlds is one that would offer a way forward?

For that, I turn to metaphors of language and gender again. In my original concluding thoughts I briefly mentioned “gender pidgins and creoles.” I wish to take up these ideas more thoroughly to offer what I believe could work as a functional response to the questions raised in this thesis. Furthermore, after unpacking this idea, I will then apply it to diasporic concerns briefly as well. A pidgin is a language that develops when two languages previously not in contact meet, such as Hawaiian Pidgin, Basque-Icelandic Pidgin, Chinese Pidgin English, and many other examples. They develop in many circumstances, but what is particularly relevant to our concerns here are pidgins that develop because of colonial contact. In situations where

212 Atkins, *Queens!*

pidgins develop, there is usually a “dominant” language that exerts a stronger influence. (That is, compare translating hijra into transgender versus translating transgender into hijra. For example, the tensions found in “American hijras” versus “Indian transgender people.”) For our metaphor, the “dominant” position can be taken to be the term and concept of transgender. When it meets other gender lifeworlds, such as hijra and khawaja sara, it has a stronger influence. Nevertheless, in pidgins and in our metaphor as well, the other language in this situation of contact still exists and exerts its own influence. Pidgins facilitate communication and interactions, but, especially in situations of colonial contact, they also contain and display the unique configurations and flows that led to their development. Pidgins are at once products of and showcases for these forms of contact. But pidgins, while providing a useful starting point, do not quite capture what I have to say.

Because pidgins can do something remarkable. They can become nativized as the predominant language in use in a certain area. The results are creoles. Haitian Creole, Tok Pisin, and Louisiana Creole are some notable examples. A pidgin often becomes a creole (though not always) by becoming the native language of people and developing its own evolutions and configurations. In the increasingly entangled world which we write about as humanities scholars, cultural pidgins and creoles, I believe, are likely developing all the time. In the case of hijra and khawaja sara, for example, we seem to be currently in the pidgin phase of this contact: a rather rapid rise in contact and exchange between transgender and hijra and khawaja sara. This means that pidgin-like exchanges are occurring. Recall the repeated uses of “transgenders” in South Asia as a stand-in for the plural “خواجه سراؤں” I discussed earlier. Using a metaphor of a pidgin allows us to unpack the flows, deployments, and entanglements occurring currently. But

I believe this situation will not, and ultimately cannot, remain under the metaphor of pidgin. Hijra and khawaja sara as terms and concepts will become creolized. They will not be the same after their contact with transgender. And the pidgin developing currently will inevitably become at least somewhat nativized and part of the newly emerging lifeworlds for these terms. Furthermore, transgender will not be the same afterword²¹³ either. As a term and concept that claims to be an ever-expanding umbrella, it too will shift and morph as more contact along the lines explored in this thesis occurs. Thus, I believe future scholars theorizing around these issues must consider that they are likely looking at gender pidgins and creoles, and be cognizant of what that means to their analysis. These configurations, as mentioned, allow for vital communication between groups, terms, and concepts. But they also contain entanglements, power, colonialism, and the myriad other factors at play that led to their development and continue to influence their evolution. And, vitally, both pidgins and creoles do not function as pure vectors in my metaphor here. The threads of the previous languages, terms, and concepts can *also* be analyzed, just as the native languages of people existed before the contact that led to the formation of pidgins and creoles. Thus, while there may be a “dominant” in this contact, it is not the only presence in this entangled realm.

This, I believe, also allows us to begin addressing diasporic concerns. In my brief personal experiences with my fellow queer and trans South Asian diasporic people, I have encountered many ways at handling the problems of queer- and transphobia we deal with. On the one hand, we may insist that “India has always had transgender people” which glosses over the very complex issues I raised in this thesis. On the other hand the assertion “hijra and khawaja sara are not transgender!” shuts down any opportunity for dialogue. As interlopers in these

213 Pun intended.

processes that create pidgins and creoles, diasporic communities, I believe, are actually uniquely positioned to break through these stalled conversations. By exploring deeply the processes that led to the current entanglements for various gender groups around the world, be it hijra, khawaja sara, or others, we as diasporic peoples can *also* make more nuanced, detailed and effective responses to the phobias we see both from our own communities, and from the largely white, cis, heterosexual structures we interact with. In her similar explorations of the relationships between the diasporic and Subcontinental, Gayatri Gopinath writes, “[i]t is ... from the vantage point of a queer diasporic present that we can place multiple geographic locations within a shared conceptual space.”²¹⁴ That is, queer and trans diasporic South Asians are uniquely positioned to affect the other thread in pidgin and creole creations. That is, the thread of what happens to transgender “over here.” Rather than easily translating hijra and khawaja sara to use as “evidence” of the “naturalness” of our self-understandings and fights for our rights, and rather than insist that no dialogue can take place, we can instead fight so that the ever-expanding umbrella of transgender is not content with merely covering us under binary transgender or non-binary/genderqueer/genderfluid etc. Rather than being yet another tacked-on term, understanding the pidgin and creole statuses of the various indigenous ways of knowing gender and sexuality around the world allows them to be afforded the due nuances and entanglements that are owed to them, and this process can help us to tackle issues in “the West” as well. For example, rather than claim “India has always had transgender people so therefore Desi parents, teachers, etc. should accept us,” we could argue “because of colonial contact and messy realities, diasporic parents, teachers, etc. may not be aware of the very lived realities of these gender/sexuality systems nor can we simply claim transgender. Because, what they *do*

214 Gopinath, “Who’s Your Daddy? Queer Diasporic Framings of the Region,” 294.

know about gender/sexuality may not easily line up with that term and concept.” In this configuration, we acknowledge the pidgin- and creole-like realities of South Asia *and* the limitations of transgender in “the West.” Plus, this approach gives space for diasporic communities to heal and understand the strange flows, entanglements, and forces that got us here. Furthermore, rather than fighting for state rights, which as shown in this thesis are volatile, easily revoked, and often ineffective at ground-level, diasporic communities may very well benefit from pushing for transgender as a term and concept to undergo similar processes that pidgins and creoles undergo and that terms and concepts such as hijra and khawaja sara are undergoing. Perhaps we could be like Zara, and demand Xs for our ID cards (which is occurring in some places in “the West”) while also demanding to be seen as unique configurations and imaginaries of gender/sexuality that are continually influenced by their pasts and are evolving now. Living embodied creoles of concepts and terms. Understanding, like hijra and khawaja sara do, that state rights and recognition matter, but that without the strong communities and life-worlds we have built for ourselves, such individualist deployments may not ultimately help us. Plus, by doing so, I believe we could *also* make more effective calls for change in our respective originating places. For example, rather than call India merely transphobic, we could cut at the current Hindu Nationalist government, its oppressive ideologies, and its regulatory efforts by pointing out such gender normative regulatory ideas are actually *anti*-Hindu and deeply colonial. But they are also anti-Muslim, for as we have seen in this thesis hijra and khawaja sara have a unique, nuanced relationship with Islam. Such a call puts the state in a strange, uncomfortable position. It requires a knowledge of the spacetimes and entanglements of historical India, modern India, and the West, something diasporic people are uniquely positioned to do. And, it avoids making the struggle all about us, because we still afford the space and potential

for hijra and khawaja sara in South Asia to evolve and shift their understandings on their own terms if we remember the processes of pidgins and creoles occurring. Rather than speak on their behalf, we can speak on the strange logics of the state. And indeed, as the arguments in *Johar v. Union of India* show us, these can be quite powerful tools. These won't be easy or clean-cut processes. Things will get messy, but I believe that such processes are vital if we are to have the chance to live the lives of gender and sexuality that allow us to not only be acknowledged and remain alive, but that allow us to thrive.

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