Globalizing through the Vernacular:

The Making of Gender & Sexual Minorities in Eastern India

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Introduction: Toward a Theory of Vernacularization

"2nd of July is indeed a historic day for the LGBT community… 2nd July, 1999 was the day when the first ever pride walk was held in India… Pawan Dhall, a leading gay rights activist [was] one of the participants of the first march… 15 bravehearts walked down the roads of Kolkata… The group had people from various cities including Mumbai and Bangalore"

— 'A Walk to Remember', Gaylaxy Magazine, 2010

"This event (the Stonewall Riots in New York, 1969[1]) initiated the organized sexual rights movement (…) On 2nd July 1999, fifteen front-rank activists from different Indian cities came together in Kolkata to commemorate this historic event (…) Since then, the number of participants increase every year" (My translation).

— Pamphlet for Kolkata Rainbow Pride Walk (Bengali), 2010

"Transgender… is an umbrella term, which includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, intersexed persons, etc. … In eastern India there are various local names and identities, such as Kothi, Dhurani, Boudi…"

— 'Report of the Regional TG/Hijra Consultation in Eastern India',
Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India (SAATHII), 2009

Ranajay was born and grew up in a small town near Kolkata, the capital city of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. Now in his forties, he is an activist associated with a community-based organization that works for the rights and sexual health of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people, particularly gender and/or sexually non-conforming people assigned male at birth. Usually described as a 'gay man' within middle class activist circles in Kolkata, he was exposed to gay identity early via the media: "gay was one of the first terms that I heard about".

As a young man in the 90s, Ranajay migrated to the city and became part of an early generation of urban Indian LGBT activists who had started coming out in public, visibilizing themselves to the media, and networking with their counterparts in other Indian cities and the west, as symbolized by the first Indian pride walk in 1999. As the quotes above indicate, the first pride walk is mapped as symptomatic of a larger process of organizing among activists across metropolitan cities, part of a globalizing formation of LGBT (particularly gay) activism, drawing inspiration from western precedents like the Stonewall riots. In such accounts, these metropolitan activists, typically from middle or upper class backgrounds, become positioned as the vanguards or pioneers ('bravehearts', 'front-rank activists') of the LGBT movement in India.

However, having grown up in a small-town family at the lower end of the middle class spectrum, Ranajay also participates in relatively less elite communities of people who use words such as *dhurani*, *kothi* and *hijra* to speak about themselves. Broadly speaking, these are interrelated, overlapping terms found across various regions of India, which describe a spectrum of gender variant and same-sex desiring persons assigned male at birth - including people who describe themselves as women, as feminine males, as a separate gender, or as some combination of these subject positions. Among these, *hijra* is the best known term, commonly denoting a sub-section of these communities who follow distinct professions and kinship structures.[2] In the late 80s, preceding his entry into Kolkata's gay activist circles, Ranajay was inducted into the '*dhurani shomaj*' (society or community of *dhuranis* - roughly, feminine same-sex desiring males) while visiting a park in south Kolkata, a cross-class haunt where sex workers hustled for clients and people cruised for sex behind bushes. Desiring acceptance into the *shomaj*, Ranajay stayed up nights learning *ulti* or *dhurani bhasha*, the specific subcultural terminology or

'language' used within these groups.[3] Later, as an activist employed in state-funded HIV prevention projects run by LGBT non-governmental organizations, he worked extensively within *dhurani-kothi-hijra* communities in various districts, who provided both lower-level staff and targets for intervention for these projects. Most of these people were from working class and/or Dalit (oppressed caste) backgrounds, marginalized due to both gender/sexual variance and class/ caste status, though entry into these communities is not strictly restricted by class. As we see above, these groups and their self-designations may be described as 'local names or identities' relative to globalizing terms like 'transgender' or 'gay'. But as suggested by Ranajay's overlapping community affiliations, formations of gender/sexual difference may intersect in ways that, as I argue, belie the hierarchy of scale between 'global' and 'local' languages of gender and sexual desire.

Globalizing through the Vernacular sketches the intersections and mediations between urban organized LGBT activism and non-metropolitan networks of gender/sexually variant people in India, particularly the aforementioned *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities that stretch between and connect rural areas, small towns and cities in eastern India. It is based on a decade of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork across urban and rural locations in the state of West Bengal and adjoining areas. I focus on this region both due to my cultural and linguistic familiarity with Bengal, and because of its prominence as an early site in the emergence of the LGBT movement in South Asia. Combining participant observation, oral histories and interviews, the book studies how urban LGBT activism and the development sector (NGOs, transnational funders and the Indian state) interface with relatively less elite networks of gender non-conforming people and their articulations of gender/sexual variance. I particularly focus on the aforementioned spectrum

of feminine-expressing people assigned male at birth, partly due to my own location as a male-assigned gender non-conforming person, and partly due to the prominence and visibility of *hijra-dhurani-kothi* communities in Indian activism - both factors affording relative ease of access to these groups.[4]

I argue that the various aforementioned non-elite or non-metropolitan communities enter into mutually transformative relations with the Indian LGBT movement, molding and being molded by organized LGBT activism and related discourses of gender/sexuality. This process of mediation and co-evolution contributes to the emergence and expansion of contemporary forms of minoritized gender/sexual identities across India and South Asia. At the same time, these mutually transformative relations are deeply hierarchical and asymmetrical, resulting in the exploitation or subordination of *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities and related discourses of gender/sexuality. I analyze the tensions and hierarchies that arise during this interactive process, and argue that they help reveal larger contradictions, and mechanisms of contradiction management, within national and transnational assemblages of capitalism and liberal politics that inform LGBT activism. Specifically, I argue that the subordination of *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities and discourses is symptomatic of a broader process that I call 'vernacularization' - the relegation of communities and discourses to 'vernacular' or 'local' levels of scale, simultaneous to the attempted establishment of globalizing rubrics of gender/sexuality. I contend that this process of scalar and discursive hierarchization serves to conceal and manage various forms of mutual mediation and interdependence between globalizing gender/sexual formations and apparently 'local' or 'vernacular' forms of gender/sexual difference. More broadly, vernacularization signals the contradictory imbrications between the economic and political

logics of capital and liberalism, and socio-cultural life forms that cannot be entirely assimilated to capitalist and liberal logics, while contributing to their expansion.

Mutual mediation and asymmetry

In terms of ethnographic focus, the book shuttles between and links gender/sexual transformations in non-metropolitan India and metropolitan activism. I demonstrate how urban Indian LGBT activism draws upon non-metropolitan community networks to spatially expand identity and rights-based politics across South Asian regions, especially into areas outside major urban centers. Here, I do not use the distinction between 'metropolitan' and 'non-metropolitan' to denote rigidly bounded or oppositional spatial locations, but rather as flexible referents for relatively privileged and subordinated locations within spatialized relations of power - urban hubs of capital and resources as contrasted with less privileged locations within cities, small towns and rural areas.[5] Within this complex spatial terrain, the interrelations between metropolitan centers and non-metropolitan community networks are uneven and context-specific: different urban LGBT communities and activist formations have varying degrees of interlinkage or interdependence with the specific communities studied in this book. HIV prevention funding for LGBT people (especially 'men who have sex with men' and transgender women) from development agencies like the World Bank and the Indian state's health sector have aided the growth of NGO networks that work on sexual health and advocate LGBT rights on the side, and these organizations have extensively drawn on *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities both for cheap labor and as target populations. Events such as pride walks, urban cruising sites

(public locations for sexual networking), and online LGBT spaces accessible through cheaper technology like cell phones also intersect with these community networks, while direct interlinkages are less evident for urban lesbian activism, trans masculine communities, and elite LGBT online or offline spaces.

Notwithstanding the unevenness of interactions, both significant forms of urban activism, and the expansion of NGOs and activism outside urban hubs, have relied on the aforementioned community networks in several ways. Transregional interlinkages between *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities help bridge urban and rural areas and connect eastern India with north India and the neighboring countries of Bangladesh and Nepal. Further, they bring non-metropolitan participants to urban activist events like pride walks, and translate between older discourses of gender/sexual difference and emergent categories of LGBT identity. These labors of spatial networking and discursive translation aid the emergence and expansion of LGBT organizations, identities and politics across eastern India and adjoining regions. In turn, these communities and their self-representations have also been remolded and transformed through interfaces with transnational LGBT activism and related discourses of identity and rights, co-evolving with metropolitan activism.

Yet these relations of mutual mediation and co-evolution are marked by deep contradictions and asymmetries. The aforementioned community networks are subordinated and effaced within the very process of transnational LGBT expansion that they mediate and partially enable: their labors are often undervalued and exploited, their ways of articulating gender and sexual desire are invisibilized or positioned as 'backward' or 'incorrect', and their strategies of resistance dismissed as 'uncivil' or not properly political. Working class feminine-identified

people typically occupy the lowest rungs of the labor hierarchy within LGBT NGOs and HIV prevention projects, typically earning between $50 and $100 per month, often below legal minimum wage.[6] As we shall see in later chapters, their gender/sexual articulations and political agency are also commonly circumscribed and disciplined by senior staff and leaders.

Such subordination and exploitation intersects with spatial hierarchies: media and activist narratives often privilege urban middle class activists in metropolitan locations as sources of gender/sexual transformations, as exemplified by the accounts of the first Kolkata pride walk cited above.[7] This is reinforced by developmentalist and teleological narratives where gender/ sexual progress seen as expanding from globalizing metropolitan centers to supposedly backward or less developed peripheries, ostensibly less connected to globalization and western influence.[8] There are many recursive variants of this narrative over the years – in 2005, the Kolkata pride march is cited as an example of westward-looking liberalization and globalization awakening a conservative city ;[9] in 2010, an LGBT film festival in Mumbai is touted as a way of catching up with levels of tolerance in the West;[10] in 2012, US-based multinational corporations are lauded for bringing LGBT-friendly workplace policies to India,[11] and so on. Even attempts to look beyond western models and reclaim Indian models or precedents of same-sex desire or gender variance typically focus on relatively elite literary and artistic archives.[12] The role of rural or small-town communities and non-elite networks in contributing to social change and emerging LGBT formations is thus commonly elided, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Responding to calls within sexuality studies to 'move beyond the hierarchy of metropolitan centers' (Brown 2008), I aim to interrupt metrocentric discourses of social change by studying communities and networks in non-metropolitan India as constituencies that help

produce 'global queering', the transnational expansion of LGBT identities and activism (Altman 2001, Jackson 2009).[13] In this regard, I seek to shift the focus from the ethnographic study of these communities as specific socio-cultural groups to a study of their role as mediators of larger *processes*. Academic studies of gender variant communities in India, which have particularly focused on *hijras* and to a lesser extent on other terms or identities, have done much to provide a nuanced picture of these communities as internally diverse groups with intersectional identities and complex negotiations with social norms (Nanda 1990, Cohen 1995, Reddy 2005, Patel 2008, Hall 2005). Some ethnographies further locate them as dynamically evolving communities who should not be seen as backward relative to 'modern' gay/lesbian identities (Reddy 2005, Hall 2005).[14] However, this literature largely focuses on them as distinct ethnographic groups rather than as an interactive constituency mediating national and transnational LGBT activism. Some studies of the Indian HIV-AIDS sector do analyze activist intersections with urban *kothi* communities, but locate *kothis* as people whose identities are mediated or even produced by transnational HIV-AIDS activism ('AIDS cosmopolitanism'), reproducing a scalar hierarchy of global-cosmopolitan forces shaping supposedly 'local' communities, and neglecting their formative influences on Indian LGBT and HIV-AIDS sectors (Cohen 2005, Boyce 2007, Khanna 2009, Katyal 2016).[15] This suggests the scope and necessity of studying and locating these apparently 'local' communities as agents of 'global queering' and gender/sexual transnationalism, as people who shape formations of organized activism, even as they are re-shaped in the process. Further, the book examines what the contradiction between the dependence on non-metropolitan communities as agents of 'global queering', and their

devaluation within the same process, reveals about the broader phenomena of transnational capitalism and liberal discourses of politics, which inform LGBT movements.

I argue that hegemonic forms of LGBT politics are premised on hierarchies of scale, which, more broadly, also characterize Indian nationhood and globalizing formations of capitalism and liberalism. Institutionalized modes of LGBT activism construct and reinforce scalar hierarchies where certain epistemologies and categories of gender-sexuality are sought to be established as 'global', 'transnational' or 'national', while others – such as *kothi-dhurani* terminology and understandings of gender-sexuality – are positioned as vernacular or culturally specific discourses, or as local versions of globalizing categories: for example, as 'local names and identities' under the transgender umbrella, or as regional sub-categories of MSM ('males who have sex with males').[16] Such discursive and scalar subordination affects not just *kothi-hijra-dhurani* terminology specifically, but also alternative senses of Anglophone terms like 'gay' and transgender' that emerge in non-elite, non-metropolitan contexts. The positioning of these discourses or categories as 'local' elides how the transnational expansion of LGBT identity and politics in South Asia has partly depended on non-elite forms of transregionalism, and how subordinated discourses of gender-sexuality may be part of alternative transregional or even transnational scales (stretching across Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan), which are not legible as per the aforementioned scalar hierarchy. I argue that the elision of these alternative scales parallels the erasure or devaluation of gender/sexual discourses that do not neatly fit into the epistemology of LGBT identities sought to be established at higher scalar levels.[17] Overall, the attempt to universalize rubrics of gender/sexual identity and politics and the particularization of other gender/sexual epistemologies elides the various forms of mutual mediation and translation

that may happen across communities and discourses assigned to different scalar levels. Therefore, the critique of hierarchies within hegemonic formations of gender/sexuality also necessitates an interrogation of normalized categories of scale.

Vernacularization, language and scale

The scalar hierarchization of gender/sexual discourses parallels the positioning of world languages along levels of scale: specifically, the tiered hierarchy between the 'global' lingua franca (usually English), national languages, and sub-national local or vernacular languages - a tiering that characterizes both the operations of transnational capital, and the Indian national public sphere. I adapt the analytical rubric of 'vernacularization' to theorize the interlinkages between scalar hierarchies, linguistic ranking and epistemological particularization. In my deployment of 'vernacularization', I depart from typical usages of the term in the social sciences and humanities, where it commonly denotes the adaptation of transnational discourses or phenomena into a 'vernacular' or 'local' setting: 'Vernacularization of Universal Human Rights' (Okafor & Krooneman 2011), 'Vernacularization on the ground: Local Uses of Global Women's Rights' (Levitt & Merry 2009), 'Vernacularization of Democracy' in India (Michelutti 2007), and so on.[18] A related usage connotes localized formations of culture that arise in response or resistance to the 'cosmopolitan' (Pollock 2009).[19] These usages take the distinction between the transnational/cosmopolitan and the local/vernacular as an apparently neutral description of a pre-existing difference. However, I use 'vernacularization' to theorize the processes through which this difference is actively constructed: thus, to examine how categories like 'vernacular'

and 'local' get produced in the first place, and how particular sites (spatial and linguistic-discursive) are subordinated by being positioned within such scalar categories. In an uncommon departure from the usual gloss of 'vernacularization' cited above, the African postcolonial scholar Herbert Chimhundu writes, "to vernacularize a language is to reduce it to the vernacular".[20] It is this sense of vernacularization as the process of reduction into a subordinate scalar and linguistic position that is germane to my project in this book.

In questioning the construction of the local/vernacular, I am inspired by feminist and queer interrogations of the gendered binary and hierachy between 'global' and 'local'. Feminist and queer scholars have critiqued how common conceptualizations of capitalism and globalization pit the scale of the 'global' as an overwhelming force that 'penetrates' and takes over the 'local', which is essentialized, feminized and rendered passive.[21] Feminist and queer approaches to scale have undone such rigid dichotomizations and hierarchization, demonstrating how scalar levels may be mutually constitutive such that the 'local' may inflect the 'global' (Mountz & Heindman 2006); apparently oppositional scalar processes may overlap and 'globalization' may simultaneously foster 'localization' (Appadurai 1996, Jackson 2009); multiple scales may inform a particular site, or a process may manifest itself across multiple scales simultaneously (Blackwood 2010, Dave 2012).[22] My arguments are enabled by this strain of critique and theorization, but I also shift the focus by interrogating the *a priori* construction of phenomena as 'local' or 'global'. Feminist and anarchist geographers have suggested that we need to question not just scalar hierarchies, but further interrogate scale itself as an epistemological construction rather than an empirically given reality: as Marston, Jones and Woodward note, "we may be best served by approaching scale not as an ontological structure

which 'exists', but as an epistemological one – a way of knowing or apprehending".[23] This epistemology also has performative effects: "The performative epistemology of scale ensures its perpetuation beyond ontology… (it) encourages hierarchical thinking".[24] This suggests that categorizing phenomena in scalar terms is a dynamic, power-laden, and contestable process with material consequences: discourses and practices are not simply local or vernacular but rather actively local*ized* and vernacular*ized* through processes that merit analysis and critique.

The concept of 'vernacular' is useful for such an analytical purpose as it is a flexible and supple term with multiple connotations, such that it can denote both scalar and linguistic hierarchies, and suggest their interlinkages. In one sense, 'vernacular' connotes the linguistic distinction between standardized or official registers of languages and more informal or everyday usages, which is useful to capture the hierarchical distinction between official activist discourse and the subcultural languages used by *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities. Further, as the 'vernacular' carries senses of the 'demotic' and the 'provincial' as contrasted with the 'universal' and the 'cosmopolitan', it can simultaneously connote scalar hierarchies between global and local, and conceptual hierarchies between cosmopolitan and provincial, universal-abstract and particular-substantive.[25] Here, I am not concerned with alternative visions of cosmopolitanism such as 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', 'situated cosmopolitanism', 'rural cosmopolitanism' (etc.) but again, with the *a priori* construction of the vernacular-cosmopolitan or provincial-universal difference.[26] While the 'global', 'cosmopolitan' and 'universal' are conceptually not the same, expansionist formations of capital and liberalism often justify scalar supersession through conceptual universalism (think how discourses of transnational capitalist expansionism conflate globalization with democratization and expanding freedoms). Hegemonic LGBT discourse may

seek to establish rubrics like 'homosexual' or 'transgender' both as global and as universal human ontology, positioning other rubrics as cultural-particular, such that the attempt to spatially globalize is also to conceptually universalize (As Hillary Clinton declared while announcing US diplomatic support for the globalization of gay rights, "being gay is not a western invention, it is a human reality").[27] In this regard, vernacularization can connote distinct linguistic, scalar and conceptual processes of dichotomization and hierarchization, but also suggest their interlinkages and overlaps.

Further, vernacularization also serves as a useful framework to conceptualize a contextually variable tiered hierarchy rather than a fixed binary. For example, languages in India are variably ranked as 'local' or 'regional' vis-à-vis the 'national language' (Hindi, a contested claim) and the transnational lingua franca (English). Scholarship in South Asian studies has critiqued the hierarchy between English/Hindi and 'vernacular' languages, but has not typically interrogated the category of 'vernacular languages' itself.[28] However, like *kothi-dhurani-hijra* discourses, such languages may also be described in terms of alternative scales not reducible to scalar hierarchies of vernacularization, such as the transnational span of Tamil, Malayalam or Bengali across multiple South Asian countries and the diaspora. Even at the level of official recognition, certain languages occupy multiple scalar positions depending on context - for example, Bengali is 'regional' in India but 'national' in Bangladesh. The tiered hierarchy of vernacularization can also be extended within languages themselves - Sanskritized versions of South Asian languages gain state recognition at 'regional' levels while 'local' dialects do not. Thus, not all subordinate linguistic positions are equally vernacularized, and may be more or less vernacularized depending on context.

This contextual variability in degrees of vernacularization is apparent in gender/sexual terminology as well. Within the *kothi-dhurani-hijra* spectrum, certain hegemonic versions of *hijra* identity propagated by *hijra gharanas* (clans) acquire a more publicly and officially recognized 'national' position. Indeed, *hijras* have been commonly mapped as a quintessential Indian 'third gender' identity.[29] In contrast, terms like *kothi* or *dhurani* are more typically seen as local. In some contexts the *kothi* may also been seen as a more 'national' term, but as we shall see in the first two chapters, its claim to national status is altogether more unstable relative to the *hijra*. Vernacularization therefore does not stand for a singular or rigid deterministic logic, but rather, for variable processes of scalar supersession and subordination that may contest and contradict each other.

The comparison with the hierarchization of Indian languages is also germane in as much as *kothi-dhurani-hijra* discourses correlate with ideas of gender/sexuality in 'vernacular' languages, particularly their less Sanskritized colloquial registers. As I argue in chapter one, terms like *kothi* or *hijra* are not just subcultural terms in isolation from more mainstream discourses, but rather are in dialogue with epistemologies of gender and sexuality found across languages like Bengali, Bhojpuri or Hindi, and serve as adaptations or subversive transformations of more mainstream ideas of gender/sexual difference: for example, the overlap between *kothi-dhurani* identities and the *meyeli chhele* in colloquial Bengali or the *mowga* in Bhojpuri (roughly, feminine boy or male). Thus, while *kothi-hijra-dhurani* discourse serves as a prominent example of vernacularization, it extends beyond these specific terms and signals broader processes of epistemological hierarchization. Particularly, epistemologies that permit a continuum between gender and sexuality, between gender-variance and same-sex desire, and

which do not conform to ideas of ontologically fixed gender or sexual identity, become susceptible to vernacularization and illegibility at higher scalar levels.[30] This may include variant senses of apparently 'global' terms like 'gay' and 'transgender', which acquire non-hegemonic meanings within non-elite and non-metropolitan spaces or networks, whether through direct translations with *kothi-hijra-dhurani* discourse or through more independent adaptations.

This suggests that vernacularization is not a matter of *cultural* opposition between Anglophone and South Asian languages of gender/sexuality. Naisargi Dave (2012) critiques the anthropological essentialization of gender/sexuality in the non-west in terms of cultural difference. For scholars ranging from Massad to Boellstorff, western 'gay' or 'lesbian' identities are seen as incommensurable with non-western sexual subjectivities: "Following from the presumption of cultural alterity is the idea that most non-Western queer people are preoccupied not with the politics of identity, but with commensurating their sexuality with culture, religion, or nation."[31] My critique of vernacularization is not from the point of view of an essential cultural difference or incommensurability; the process of epistemological hierarchization is not reducible to a hierarchy between 'foreign' versus 'indigenous' or 'culturally authentic' terms because discursive circulation and translinguistic mediations defy such dichotomization. 'Gay' can be used in rural India as a perfectly authentic identity, however, the point is that not all senses of gay identity gain equal transnational recognition or legibility. As we see in the third and fourth chapters, when terms like gay or transgender are disseminated by the media, NGOs, funders or the state, the expansion and concretization of these terms as identities and groups may utilize vernacularized discourses of gender/sexual variance and related logics of community formation; such mediation creates versions of 'gay' or 'transgender' that are less legible or accepted at

national/transnational levels, especially senses where 'gay' and 'trans' are not clearly distinguished from each other. Scalar and linguistic hierarchies conceal not just the pre-existing alternative scales of non-Anglophone terms, but also contradictions in the dissemination of Anglophone categories themselves - globalizing terms, during the very process of their spatial expansion, may acquire senses that are subordinated relative to hegemonic (trans)national discourses and epistemologies of gender and sexuality. While 'gay' and 'transgender' may be thus vernacularized, hegemonic versions of the 'indigenous' *hijra* identity ascend to the national level and become linked to transnational transgender discourse. Thus, vernacularization signals the shifting, dynamic process through which, during the messy multi-directional interactions and translations between various terms and discourses, epistemologies of gender-sexuality are variably universalized or particularized in scalar and conceptual terms, irrespective of their cultural or linguistic 'origins'.

While Anglophone terms are certainly not oppositional to non-elite or non-metro contexts, entirely sidestepping the question of identitarian difference or commensurability can be dangerous in as much as it may elide hierarchies of intelligibility. Dave's approach, which simply extends terms like 'lesbian' and 'queer' as translatable, 'widely accommodating' rubrics creating solidarity and commonality across linguistic and spatial locations, may deny discursive and locational differences of power: "Queer," a term that has come to India largely through the migratory movements of young, cosmopolitan scholar-activists (just like "lesbian," "gay," and their activism more generally) then gained currency as a widely accommodating, radical political frame".[32] But not all locations and languages have equal capacity of asserting such potential translatability and currency; indeed, vernacularization is precisely the denial of such potentiality.

It is precisely because of vernacularization that terms spread by 'cosmopolitan scholar-activists' can be advanced as potential sites for translinguistic and transregional commonality, but *kothi-dhurani-hijra* terminology are typically denied that scope by being positioned as spatially and culturally particular, even though they mediate and contribute to processes of transnationalism.

Just as the vernacularized is not simply the 'indigenous' or non-Anglophone, it also does not simply correspond to the non-elite. Rather, vernacularization is a subordinating mechanism that compounds or articulates with class/caste differences but is not deterministically linked to them. In other words, there may be class/caste hierarchies independent of scalar or epistemological hierarchies. For example, working class and Dalit gay men or trans women whose identities 'match' hegemonic models of homosexual and transgender identity may still be oppressed along axes of class, caste, gender or sexuality, in which case the vernacularization of languages or identities may be a less salient factor (as exemplified by biographies of Dalit transgender activists who fluently articulate themselves as trans women).[33] However, epistemological and scalar hierarchies, where applicable, intensify class-caste subordination and help in their perpetuation by preventing access to identitarian legibility and identity-based claims to rights. Further, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the vernacularization process pits different models of identity against each other along lines of progressiveness and intelligibility, which prevents solidarity across different identities and community formations, and belies actual processes of exchange and translation across different groups - posing barriers between non-elite people whose subject-positions are more or less intelligible as per hegemonic models of homosexual or transgender identity. The critique here is therefore not a rejection of the potentials of LGBT identity politics in non-elite contexts *per se*, but rather of how such political

possibilities are restricted and subverted by hierarchies of scale and language. The shifting

relation between class/caste subordination and vernacularization marks it as a flexible linking

mechanism effecting contextually variable alignments between epistemological or discursive

hierarchies and those of class and caste, rather than a fixed, determinate structure.

Capital, non-capital and vernacularization

The book further argues that the process of vernacularization and the scalar ascendence of

categories and rubrics of intelligibility characterizes and helps reveal contradictions and modes

of contradiction management within national and transnational formations of capitalism, or more

precisely, within assemblages of capital with other normative logics of gender, sexuality, caste,

etc. that seek to consolidate themselves at national and transnational levels.[34]

A large body of scholarship has examined the role of globalization and transnational

capitalism in the process of cross-cultural emergence of LGBT identities and politics ('global

queering'). Early theorizations often saw capitalist globalization as a dominating and

universalizing force that was bringing about a homogenization of sexual identities based on the

western model of homosexuality and the heterosexual-homosexual binary, whether this was seen

as a potentially positive development (Altman 1996) or as a negative form of cultural

imperialism (Massad 2008).[35] This model of 'global queering' evokes what JK Gibson-Grahams

call the 'rape script' of globalization-capitalism, where 'global' economic forces penetrate and

transform 'local' cultural formations. Subsequent scholarship has revised and nuanced this view -

arguing that emerging LGBT identities in the non-west are not simply derivative of the 'west',

that globalization and global queering are not simply homogenizing but evidence both cross-cultural convergences and heterogenization, and that non-western forms of nationalism and capitalism, or national capitalism - not just a west-dominated form of capitalism - are also important drivers for the emergence of modern non-western LGBT identities.[36] This trajectory of scholarship has thus proceeded from the view of capital as a monolithic, Eurocentric, homogenizing force, to a vision of capitalism as more multifarious and variegated at national levels, capable of producing heterogenous subjectivities even while forging transnational connections. However, much of this literature reinforces the focus on the interlinked logics of capitalism and nationhood as the dominant forces or influences in the emergence of contemporary LGBT identities in the non-west. As Evelyn Blackwood argues, this emphasis has also resulted in a focus on the scale of the 'transnational' and 'national' as the dominant scale of LGBT emergence, and a neglect of 'local' factors that influence this process: or in my framing, the neglect of factors that are not recognized at national/transnational levels and reduced to the scale of the local (localized-vernacularized).

In this context, I seek to interrogate the presumption of national modernity and transnational capital as the most significant sites of analysis, and focus on processes or formations that are irreducible to capital, or only partially translatable vis-a-vis hegemonic logics of nationhood and capitalism. In doing so, I draw from developments in South Asian and feminist political economy that emphasize capital as a dependent, non-sovereign, and non-totalizing logic, parasitic on various other logics or processes. A prominent group of leftist theorists such as Arif Dirlik (2003), Hardt-Negri (2000-2009) and Vivek Chibber (2013) tend to see socio-cultural multiplicity as part of overarching totality of capital or empire; there seems to

be nothing 'outside' capital, difference itself is co-opted by capital.[37] However, others like Timothy Mitchell (2002), Kalyan Sanyal (2013), Vinay Gidwani (2008/2014) and Joel Wainwright (2014) argue that 'capital' is not a complete sovereign logic, but is rather parasitic on other socio-cultural-economic logics that are not reducible to its terms, such as gender, race or caste.[38] Gidwani and Wainwright state, "the law of value, which structures capitalist social relations, is a normative logic that is parasitic on other (often effaced) normative logics (including non-capitalist ones); apropos these other normative logics, the law of value historically becomes a structure-in-dominance… other normative logics (of gender, caste, race, region, and religion, to name some)… traverse, enable, and interrupt… capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production."[39] These various systems, logics or processes comprise a capital/non-capital complex as per Sanyal, Gidwani and Wainwright, which could be also conceptualized as a contingent assemblage of differing logics or processes. Feminist scholars like Oksala (2016) also emphasize multiple crisscrossing normativities that intersect with capitalism to constitute socio-economic relations as a whole.

Drawing from this framework, **t**he complex and dynamic mediations between organized LGBT activism, transnational funding, the nation state, and various gender/sexual identities and communities may be seen as assemblages within which the economic logics of capital and political logics of citizenship and rights are positioned as 'structures-in-dominance'. The question then is, which assemblages or conjunctures of capital/non-capital prove to be relatively stable, and which conjunctures need to be managed or even effaced if they prove to be more recalcitrant to recuperation and containment within emerging normative assemblages.

I argue that the hierarchical mediations of LGBT activism with vernacularized communities and discourses demonstrates how processes of gender-sexual transformation may partially rely on socio-cultural formations that are not entirely recuperable to dominant logics of capital, nationhood and liberal citizenship, even as they contribute to them. As previously marginalized forms of gender/sexual difference demand recognition, citizenship and rights, certain articulations between capital, liberal rights-based politics and gender/sexual difference prove to be more successful, and are sought to be established and expanded at higher (national/ transnational) scalar levels. However, some formations such as *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities may evidence more partial intelligibility vis-a-vis capitalist and liberal logics, and may contribute to them while not being entirely recuperable to their terms, resulting in an incomplete or ruptured articulation. Such contradictory co-dependencies need to be controlled or effaced when they threaten to destabilize capitalist political economy and liberal politics.

In my argument, vernacularization indicates a particular form of contradiction management in the formation or emergence of these capital/non-capital assemblages, as it serves to elide or efface how transnational capitalist processes and institutions (such as LGBT NGOs funded by agencies like the World Bank) partly depend on socio-cultural formations which may not be fully legible as per capitalist and liberal logics. For instance, as we see in the second and third chapters, the affective and display labor performed by *kothis* and *hijras* who seduce and bring in clients for HIV prevention or targets for public activism are not readily quantifiable within capitalist logics of work, and certain strategies of resistance like public threats or cursing are also seen as threatening liberal politics by breaching civility and public/private divides. Thus, these communities and discourses are subordinated as local or regional versions of normative

gender-sexual identities in as much as they contribute to the establishment of articulations between capital, liberal politics and gender/sexual difference, and erased or abjected when they threaten to destabilize normative assemblages. 'Vernacularization' thus serves to manage and efface the parasitic dependency of 'global queering' (expansionist assemblages of capital/non-capital) on these irreducible, or partially legible, forms of gender/sexual variance. Such elision underscores the devaluation of the feminized labor performed by non-elite communities, which are not entirely intelligible in capitalist terms but that transnational funders, development agencies and NGOs nevertheless exploit and benefit from. The scalar subordination of *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities and discourses thus parallels the undervaluation of their labor.

Vernacularization thus helps to reveal various forms of tension or contradiction within the co-evolving formations of LGBT activism and non-elite communities - between different logics of gendering, between capitalist logics of work and forms of labor irreducible to capital, between liberal and non-liberal modes of politics. These contradictions and attempts at contradiction management get aligned with each other in shifting and variable ways. Since attempts at scalar supersession are varied and sometimes in tension with each other (e.g. the national ascendance of *hijra* as a 'third gender' versus a more binary transitional discourse of transgender identity), emergent LGBT assemblages are processual and contingent, marking shifting conjunctures between gender/sexual formations and liberal-capitalist logics. Vernacularization or scalar subordination is thus a flexible mechanism that can manifest itself in various ways, as will be contextually elaborated over the subsequent chapters of the book.

Entering the 'field'

The analytical focus on scale and vernacularization has both emerged out of and informed the research methods that evolved during the activist and collaborative experiences that underlie and enable this book. My initiation into this project was deeply personal – I started working with LGBT organizations, particularly certain larger NGOs in the city of Kolkata, during my own politicization and 'coming out' (as various things to various people, including queer, gay, *dhurani*, *kothi*, transgender) in the years of my undergraduate and graduate training in India, which was in literary and cultural studies. I stumbled into ethnography and 'participant observation' almost accidentally but inexorably, when my contacts and involvement with communities that were being termed 'sexual minorities' increased, and as I was exposed to communities and community-based organizations (CBOs) beyond the metropolitan city, in various small towns of the state of West Bengal in eastern India, similar to the town where I had grown up. In the process of participating in NGOs, CBOs and associated communities, I gradually started noting down my experiences in writing. Subsequently, this 'ethnographic research' expanded to span the metropolitan city of Kolkata with small towns such as Berhampore, Kalyani and Ranaghat, all to the north of Kolkata, as well as their surrounding villages and working class settlements. The state has seen a growing movement for the civil rights and sexual health of 'sexual minorities' since the early 1990s, led by non-governmental and community-based organizations that bridge metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Therefore, the region provided me with both an appropriate and accessible site to study the interactions of lower class and/or non-metropolitan communities with NGOs, funders and the state, largely based in big cities.

Here, the metropolitan/non-metropolitan schema deserves some elucidation in terms of the specific context of West Bengal. While there is a clear stratification of resources and standards of living from more metropolitan to rural areas, the spectrum of slums, suburbs, exurbs, small towns and villages interrupt a neat spatial demarcation between 'urban' and 'rural' in West Bengal; thus, rather than relying on stable descriptors of places as 'urban' or 'rural', I am more interested in how places and people are relatively positioned within spatialized relations of power. As we shall see, some small-town community-based organizations (CBOs) and their staff members may well have greater access to the metropolis and attendant circuits of discourse/ capital than other participants in *kothi-dhurani-hijra* communities living in slums or villages, even as they are otherwise disempowered vis-à-vis metropolitan institutions – the metropolitan and non-metropolitan schema thus designates shifting spatial stratifications rather than an absolute divide that can be fixed in terms of specific 'urban' or 'rural' locations.

Within this stratified spatiality, I was both a representative of metropolitan privilege (whether as NGO volunteer or academic researcher), and a 'native' co-inhabitant of towns like Kalyani (my birth place) and Ranaghat. However, the boundaries of researcher and subject were quickly destabilized, as I was often interpellated into these communities as not only *kothi* or *dhurani* but also as a friend, sister or daughter – resulting in complex negotiations between 'participation' and 'observation', on which I reflect in greater detail in the conclusion, which elaborates on ethnography as the practice and politics of friendship and kinship. However, the chapters themselves are more on the side of 'observation' rather than explicit reflections on the 'participation', having arisen from detailed daily field notes of casual interactions and conversations, as well as recorded interviews and oral histories, collected over a period of more

than twenty four months spread across ten years from 2007 till date. Unless recorded, these notes were most often written down on the same day and were usually written in the form of conversations between the people I engaged with and myself. In keeping with the conversational style of the notes, the chapters often make use of quoted excerpts from exchanges or interviews – this is not to claim absolute verbatim accuracy, but to indicate a sense of the linguistic dynamics of the exchanges in the 'vernacular' (here, I must take responsibility for any unintended distortions or inaccuracies owing to the inevitable slippages of memory; I have tried my best to ensure that the confidentiality of persons is not breached in conversations that deal with sensitive or controversial topics, where unintended inaccuracies could be potentially costly).

In the attempt to render the dynamics of the 'original' narratives and dialogic exchanges, I realize that there remains a certain strategic empiricism to the ethnographic descriptions, oral histories and interviews contained in the subsequent chapters. Even as I critique the various representational frames and categories that have been used to approach and describe these communities (MSM, transgender), a claim to evidentiary verisimilitude and descriptive facticity (and its attendant responsibility) remains unavoidable if one is to not only critique dominant epistemologies (whether activist or academic) but also provide alternative approaches that might allow us, as variously privileged subjects, to better 'hear' sites that are marginalized or vernacularized in various ways to recognize and respond to the materiality of the other. While in many ways ethnography (including oral histories and interviews) is the primary mode of approaching such materiality in this book, where appropriate, I also use archival and textual analysis, particularly to examine or question processes of representation by the state, NGOs, funders and the media.

Representing subjects: Gender, Sexuality, Caste, Class, Religion

Even as it interrogates institutionalized discourses of gender/sexual difference, this book

is also, in itself, an act of institutionally constrained representation that in some sense brings the

difference it describes into being, even as it tries to ethically respond to a material alterity that

cannot be confined to the act of representation.[40] This becomes a particularly fraught issue when

defining and describing the marginalized people and communities who are the subject of this

study. Thus far, I have broadly used terms like 'gender/sexually variant' – intentionally a clunky,

awkward formulation – to designate the particular subject positions of *kothi-dhurani-hijra*

persons. As Valentine reminds us, gender and sexuality may not be neatly separable as categories

of experience even as they might be useful as discrete analytical frames,[41] indeed, conceptions of

'gender' (femininity, masculinity) are 'sexualized' and vice versa. The book both problematizes

and uses this distinction contextually; indeed, I am particularly interested in how the distinction

between gender and sexual identity emerges through vernacularization, as explored in the second

and third chapters.

In terms of caste and religion, my interlocutors across Kolkata, Nadia and Murshidabad

have included upper, middle and lower caste individuals as well as both Hindus and Muslims.

hijra gharanas or clans (which have their own religious norms), non-gharana *dhurani-kothi*

communities, as well as small-town CBOs typically include members across caste and religion,

and recruitment (as described in the first chapter) seems to be based more on perceived gender/

sexual presentation than any other factor. Particularly in Murshidabad, which is one of the few

Muslim majority districts in India, a large section if not numerical majority of the people I have

interacted been have been Muslim. Explicit caste and religious bias, or explicit reflections on potential differences of power due to caste and religion, are relatively rare in my experience of these communities, and hierarchies of intra-*gharana* rank, or of staff position in CBOs and NGOs, are far more visibly evident. In this context, I use 'lower middle' and 'lower class' (corresponding to the Bengali terms *nimno-moddhobitto, moddhobitto*) as broad markers of socio-economic position; this is not intended to dismiss caste or religion as frames of analysis, but to indicate overall position that may involve variable configurations of caste, religion, and economic status, which I try to contextually specify where relevant.

Politics

The political stances and arguments of the book arise from certain specific collaborative experiences within the broader span of participant observation. Since 2009, I have been closely involved with several CBOs, particularly including Madhya Banglar Sangram and Dum Dum Swikriti Society, as a volunteer and advisor. This allowed me the privilege of being included as an ally in negotiating the tricky terrains of institutional identity politics. My privilege as an English speaker meant that I was often asked to fill out forms, check reports, and deliberate on how to represent CBO members as MSM, *kothi*, TG, etc. Such experiences constantly reminded me of the material and discursive hierarchies through which many community members must negotiate transnational terminologies of gender and sexuality. The political critique of vernacularization in this book directly emerges from such collaborative experiences, and from the constant realization of the inequalities of privilege and access that marked our collaborations, on which I reflect more explicitly in the conclusion.

Mapping the book

While each chapter tells its own story, here I attempt to draw out some of their linkages and sketch the broader continuous narrative that spans discrete chapters. The first three chapters form a closely interlinked narrative tracing the emergence of *hijra*, *kothi*, MSM and transgender categories as population groups and/or minority identities in eastern India. The consolidation of these terms as concepts and identities through mutually transformative mediations between institutional and subcultural formations results in the vernacularization of subcultural terms as regionalized sub-categories of MSM or transgender, and the attendant elision of complex subject positions and practices that overlap or switch between emergent identitarian divides - even as institutional-subcultural mediations may be slippery, and permit usages that breach institutional discourses of identity.

The first and second chapters study the historicity and emergence of *hijra* and *kothi* as prominent categories of South Asian gender/sexual difference with reference to broader debates on identity, (post)colonialism and modernity in postcolonial and South Asian historiography. While the *hjjra* has been a long-standing site of gender/sexual difference, the *kothi* is often seen as a recent emergence. These chapters suggest that the apparent contrast between the historical continuity of the *hijra* and the contemporary construction of the *kothi* masks deeper similarities in how both identities have emerged through collusions between (sub)cultural processes of community formation and governmental power, which result in the scalar ascendance or vernacularization of categories vis-a-vis each other.

The first chapter traces the bounded emergence of the *hijra* beyond the temporal rupture/ continuity divide, taking cue from feminist and anthropological interrogations of the spatial global/local dichotomy. I locate the *hijra* as part of a larger spectrum of communities, including terms like *kothi*, *dhurani* and *meti*, which are both regionally varied and transregionally connected. They are also dialogically related to colloquial understandings and idioms of gender-sexual variance in South Asian languages. However, there are longstanding tensions between this broader spectrum and *hijra* clans, which seek to establish a 'true' version of the *hijra* and commonly deride other feminine-expressing people as 'false' *hijras*, propagating their version of *hijra* identity to the media and state. I argue that the consolidation of the *hijra* as a national identity, through collusions between *hijra* clans, the postcolonial state and the media, is the earliest case of vernacularization, preceding the growth of the institutional LGBT movement in the 1990s and 2000s, and continuing till date. Further, the separation of *hijra* identity and the standardization of a *hijra/*non-*hijra* divide sets the stage for the separation of sexual identities like *kothi* and MSM from gender identities like *hijra* and transgender, explored in the subsequent chapters. The emergence of a standardized cartographic division between *hijra* and *non-hijra* identities helps consolidate the hegemonic division of gender and sexual identities in India, paralleling and contributing to transnational tendencies.

The second chapter examines how the *kothi* is consolidated as an identity through mediations between subcultural networks and metropolitan institutions, vernacularizing terms like *dhurani* or *meti*, even as it is simultaneously vernacularized as a regionalized sub-category of the transnational MSM rubric, commonly used in HIV-AIDS activism. Through this and the third chapter, I particularly examine the development sector comprising NGOs, CBOs, the state

and transnational funders as a particular form of the capital/non-capital complex, which draws upon transregional community networks for its consolidation and spatial expansion, but elides their spatial scales in the process. The HIV-AIDS and development sectors contribute to the establishment of umbrella terms like MSM and transgender, which subsume terms like *kothi* as 'local variations' or 'regional' identities. This process simultaneously elides the regionally varied articulations of gender-sexuality within *kothi-dhurani* networks under the standardized (trans)national rubric of MSM. The contradiction between the dependence on transregional subcultural networks and discourses, and the subordination or elision of alternative scales and epistemologies, marks a key dynamic of vernacularization. It is accompanied by the creation of labor hierarchies that subjugate and exploit the feminized labor of lower-tier *kothi-dhurani-hijra* fieldworkers, and the delegitimization of their strategies as uncivil or illegible as per rights-based models of politics.

In the third chapter, I focus specifically on the emergence of the transgender or TG category and the attendant MSM-transgender divide, connecting the institutional propagation of identities through HIV-AIDS organizational networks with a more diffuse dissemination of biomedical discourses of transsexuality through the media and medical industry. Institutional-subcultural mediations establish translations or correspondences between the MSM-TG schema and the *hijra-kothi* and intra-*kothi* splits, enabling the expansion of 'transgender' as a separate gender identity and a supra-regional 'umbrella term' for gender variance that contains and vernacularizes its 'local variations'. The transgender-MSM divide tends to elide and exclude subject positions and practices within *kothi-dhurani-hijra* groups that breach the binary divide between homosexual men and trans women, and reinforces the boundaries between female-

attired and male-attired people in these communities. Yet, there are also variant translations of 'transgender' identity and discourse that may be elided and vernacularized relative do the dominant versions of the term.

The fourth chapter shifts from the institutional topoi of the previous chapters to study the emergence of urban middle class gay communities and identities in relation to categories like *kothi*. The chapter examines how middle class gay identity is often articulated in terms of a modernizing teleology, which positions gender-normative and masculinized version of gay identity as modern or progressive. This process tends to not only vernacularize *kothi* or *dhurani*, but to indeed render such subject positions abject. Yet, intersections and translations between gay and *kothi* discourses foster variant temporalities of emergence that contradict the metrocentric and teleological narrative of gay identity formation. Such variant articulations of gay (e.g. gay men who use *kothi-dhurani* languages and practices to create community, or *kothis* who adopt gay as an identification in ways that challenges its normative masculinization) may be rendered as private, and localized with respect to the dominant narrative of a globalizing gay identity. Moreover, activists may also contain tensions and challenges by constructing a liberal, inclusive or 'fluid' version of gay identity that can apparently accommodate both masculine and feminine subject positions and gender fluidity, but often without countering the position of masculinity as an unmarked norm for gay men, and retaining masculine privilege within gay communities.

Together, these four chapters on identity and community formation critique the reification of identity in terms of rigid boundaries, reducing the dynamic insider-outsider boundaries of *kothi-dhurani-hijra* circles into fixed minority populations, but do not valorize 'fluidity' unconditionally. Some articulations of 'gay', for instance, demonstrate the dangers of subsuming

gender difference into apparent liberal vision of gender equality and fluidity, eliding the power differentials entailed by social masculinity and femininity that are constantly negotiated by *kothi-hijra* networks. The problem may be endemic to overarching transnational identitarian schemas that try to encompass and vernacularize the translocally linked yet locally variable dynamics of community formation, marginality and discrimination, such that the shifting boundaries between insiders and outsiders in marginalized communities is inevitably rendered in reductive ways – either reified in terms of the MSM-TG split, or elided in 'fluid' versions of gay identity.

The fifth chapter charts dominant forms of civic activism for LGBT rights and the decriminalization of homosexual behavior in India, such as pride walks, and critiques how they evoke the *kothi* and *hijra* as strategic figures of victimhood. However the decriminalization narrative itself largely uses the argument of private autonomy and re-criminalizes *kothi* and *hijra* publicity through the public-private split, which tends to render forms of *kothi-hijra* resistance as aggressive or disruptive, breaching civic equality or private space, and thus posits them as inadequate or unworthy citizens who need to be pedagogically trained into citizenship. Even as civic activism draws on these communities as necessary, *kothi-dhurani-hijra* politics may be rendered unintelligible within dominant terms of political or civic engagement. Further, ideals of citizenship and civility are translated vis-à-vis hierarchies of respectability within *kothi* and *hijra* communities to produce hegemony. However, as before, mediations and translations remain slippery, and variant political possibilities may emerge. The chapter concludes by examining shifts in civic activism and newer forms of vernacularization that emerge in the wake of increasing gentrification of pride walks and urban spaces, which physically erases *kothi-dhurani-*

hijra presence in activist spaces far more than ever before, even as their languages, gestures and strategies may be appropriated by middle class activists.

The conclusion locates the process of fieldwork and the book itself within wider logics and processes of vernacularization. It particularly examines how participant observation pulls the ethnographer in contrary directions to the demands of the metropolitan academia, which utilizes the ethnographer as a native informant and conduit for an exploitative process of knowledge accretion and the creation of academic capital. The book itself is complicit in the scalar hierarchies of academic capitalism, for which my community friends and interlocutors are but localized and particularized sites for more abstract argumentation directed at transnational Anglophone audiences. I contend that the contradictory complicity of the book project within the very process of vernacularization that it critiques can never be undone within the economy of academic production itself, and necessitates collaborative engagements which must live beyond the walls of academia and the pages of this book.

[1] Beginning from the early morning of 28th June 1969, LGBTI individuals assembled at the Stonewall Pub in New York demonstrated against a police raid, an event that has acquired iconic status in US and transnational queer histories.

[2] For ethnographies on *hijras*, see: Nanda, S. 1990. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing; Reddy, G. 2005. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[3] On such languages elsewhere in India, see: Hall, K. 2005.'Intertextual Sexuality: Parodies of Class, Identity, and Desire in Liminal Delhi', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, pp. 125-144.

[4] Persons assigned female at birth have been relatively less visible in activist spaces, especially in non-metropolitan areas, partly owing to the larger number of NGOs and funders that focus on male-assigned people - a problem that deserves separate treatment beyond the scope of this chapter.

[5] For a critique of metrocentrism, see: Brown, G. 2008. 'Urban (Homo)Sexualities: Ordinary Cities and Ordinary Sexualities'. *Geography Compass* 2/4, pp. 1215–1231.

[6] On such labor exploitation, see the report: Aneka & Karnataka Sexual Minorities Forum (KSMF). 2012. *Chasing Numbers, Betraying People.* Bangalore.

[7] For a recent example of the privileging of metropolitan activists in the media, see: Sheikh, I. 2015. '14 People Revolutionising India's Fight for LGBT Rights', *BuzzFeed*, 20 October 2015, available at https://www.buzzfeed.com/imaansheikh/rainbow-revolution (Accessed 5 October 2016).

[8] For a critique of developmentalism, see: Chakrabarty, D. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton University Press: Princeton.

[9] Sengupta, V. 2005. 'Oh! Calcutta!', *The Telegraph*, August 7, 2005.

[10] Hazlewood, P. 2010. 'India gets its first mainstream gay film festival', *AFP*, Apr. 7 2010.

[11] 'IBM, Goldman Sachs and Google to Launch an LGBT Resource Guide for India Inc.', *Economic Times*, 17 October 2012.

[12] For examples, see: Pattanaik, D. 2002. *The Man Who Was a Woman and Other Queer Tales from Hindu Lore*. Routledge: London; Thadani, G. 1998. *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*. Cassell & Co.

[13] Brown, G. 2008. 'Urban (Homo)Sexualities: Ordinary Cities and Ordinary Sexualities'. *Geography Compass* 2/4, pp. 1215–1231; Altman, D. (2001). Global gaze/global gays. In Hawley, J.C. (Ed.) *Postcolonial and queer theories: Intersections and essays* (pp. 1-18). Praeger: New York; Jackson, P. 2009. 'Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, pp. 357-95.

[14] Nanda, S. 1990. *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing; Reddy, G. 2005. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Cohen, L. 1995. 'The Pleasures of Castration: The Postoperative Status of Hijras, Jankhas and Academics', in Paul R. Abramson and Steven D. Pinkerton (eds), *Sexual Nature, Sexual Culture.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 276-304; Hall, K. 2005.'Intertextual Sexuality: Parodies of Class, Identity, and Desire in Liminal Delhi', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, pp. 125-144.

[15] Cohen, L. 2005. 'The Kothi wars: AIDS cosmopolitanism and the morality of classification', in Adams, V. and Piggs, S. L. (eds.), *Sex in development: Science, sexuality, and morality in global perspective*, pp. 269-303; Boyce, P. 2007. 'Conceiving Kothis: Men Who Have Sex with Men in India and the Cultural Subject of HIV Prevention', *Medical Anthropology* 26, pp. 175-203; Khanna, A. 2009. 'Taming of the Shrewd Meyeli Chhele: A political economy of development's sexual subject'. *Development, 52*(1), pp. 43-51; Katyal, A. 2016. *The Doubleness of Sexuality*. New Text: Delhi.

[16] For examples of such categorizations, see: National AIDS Control Organization (NACO). 2007. *Targeted interventions under NACP III: Core High Risk Groups*. New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India (SAATHII). 2009. *Report of the regional TG/Hijra consultation in eastern India.* Available at http://www.saathii.org/orissapages/tg_hijra_issues_consultation%20.html (accessed on 14 July 2012), p. I.

[17] Though different urban middle class spaces vary in the level of direct interaction with non-elite communities, I will argue that both more interlinked arenas of activism and urban communities that are less interlinked with non-metro networks are complicit in the aforementioned hierarchies of scale - less interlinked communities often effacing these communities and discourses altogether, and more interlinked forms of activism denying or eliding their co-dependencies.

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[19] Pollock, S. 2009. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. University of California Press: Berkeley.

[20] Chimhundu, H. 1993. 'The Vernacularization of African Languages after Independence'. *Diogenes* 161: pp. 35-42.

[21] Massey, D. 1993. 'Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place', in Jon Bird et al. (Eds.), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change.* London: Routledge; Gibson-Graham, J.K. 1996. *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*: *A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Oxford: Blackwell; Nagar, R., Lawson, V., McDowell L. and Hanson, L. 2002. 'Locating Globalization: Feminist (re)readings of the subjects and spaces of globalization', *Economic Geography* 78:3: pp. 257-284; Mountz, A. & Heindman, J. 2006. 'Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate', *Women's Studies Quarterly, 34* (1/2), pp. 446-463.

[22] Mountz, A. & Heindman, J. 2006. 'Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate', *Women's Studies Quarterly, 34* (1/2), pp. 446-463; Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalizaton*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis; Jackson, P. 2009. 'Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, pp. 357-95; Blackwood, E. 2010. *Falling into the Lesbi World: Desire and Difference in Indonesia*. University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu; Dave, N. 2012. *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

[23] Marston, S.A., Jones, J.P. & Woodward, K. 2005. 'Human Geography without Scale'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 30, pp. 416-432.

[24] Springer, S. 2014. 'Human Geography without Hierarchy'. *Progress in Human Geography* 38:3, pp. 402-419.

[25] Werbner, P. 2006. 'Vernacular Cosmopolitanism', *Theory, Culture and Society*: 23: 2-3; Coupland, N. 2009. 'The mediated performance of vernaculars'. *The Journal of English Linguistics,* 37:3, pp. 284-300.

[26] Werbner, P. 2006. 'Vernacular Cosmopolitanism', *Theory, Culture and Society*: 23: 2-3; Gidwani, V. & Sivaramakrishnan, K. 2003. 'Circular Migration and Rural Cosmopolitanism in India'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37:1-2.

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