Ethnomusicology of the Closet: (Con)Figuring Transgender-Hijra Identity Through Documentary Filmmaking

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Ethnomusicology of the Closet:

(Con)Figuring Transgender-\textit{Hijra} Identity Through Documentary Filmmaking

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

by

Jeffrey Charles Roy
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ethnomusicology of the Closet:

(Con)Figuring Transgender-Hijra Identity Through Documentary Filmmaking

by

Jeffrey Charles Roy

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles

Professor Daniel Neuman, Chair

This ethnography is situated in transgender and hijra communities primarily within and surrounding the Mumbai and Lucknow metropolitan areas of India. This study of contemporary and current trans-hijra music and dance practices follows three primary guiding questions: (1) In what ways do individual musical talent and versatility contribute to representations of (the transitioning) self?; (2) In what ways are these representations tied to the hijra gharānā (household, literally ‘of the house’), socialization and izzat (‘respect’; see Reddy 2005), and other organizational motifs in hijra culture?; and (3) How are these representations tied to the emergence of LGBTIQ pehchān (‘identity’) politics, and (changing) conceptions of gender and sexuality in a larger societal scale? Owing to my own frame of reference, and to the complex
dynamics of desire permeating issues of identity in trans-hijra cultures, this dissertation employs a queer approach to documentary filmmaking as a research method. Accordingly, I investigate how queer (American) perspectives and ethnographic methodologies are tied to the creation and/or contestation of trans-hijra pehchān, as well as (the creation of) the field itself. As part of a larger effort to expound on what I call “queer ethnomusicological filmmaking,” I argue that queerly documenting trans-hijra performance participates in and alongside the (con)figuration of trans-hijra pehchān by performatively engaging in key identity-forming processes, amplifying voices on a global LGBTIQ platform, and reconstituting preexisting tropes of the hijra through a lens of transgender respectability, talent, and professionalism. These involve transforming regimes and representations of the hijra family, the guru-chela (‘teacher-disciple’) relationship, and their pedagogies from authoritarian to democratically ideal, participation-based ones.

While some scholars have investigated hijras, little English-language scholarship exists on the music and dance practices of these communities. This dissertation represents an effort to fill this void, building partly upon the survey work of Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy (1988 [1963]) and Anna Morcom (2013), and contributing new visual ethnomusicological material alongside the ethnographic works of Gayatri Reddy (2005), among others. The timeliness of this research is also supported by the April 2014 recognition of the “Third Gender” community by the Indian Supreme Court, a bill that was introduced by a project participant, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. In exploring the connections between hijra music and identity, this dissertation represents and engages with current discourses surrounding issues of gender, sexuality, and identity in India’s emerging LGBTIQ landscape.
The dissertation of Jeffrey Roy is approved.

Timothy Rice

Timothy Taylor

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2015
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Chapter 1
Setting the Scene:
Approaching an Ethnomusicological Definition of Hijra

As we snaked through a lower-middle class neighborhood on the outskirts of Lucknow, I imagined what our course trajectory looked like on Google Maps. Rounding the corner of another impossibly narrow gali (small street), our colorful parade of six—three hijras (‘sari-wearing’ male-to-female transgender), two kothis (‘non-sari-wearing’ effeminate men) and myself (appropriately named ‘gay gora,’ or light-skinned gay man)—attracted the attention of a swarm of neighborhood youths. Swooping down with friendly grins on their faces, two young men seized the harmonium and dholak (two-faced membranophone) that had begun to cramp our queerish gait (see Figure 1 and Video 1).

Forgoing the opportunity to fraternize with the men, Gudiya-guru (‘teacher,’ usually called mother) detached from the group and knocked on the door of a modest-sized shotgun-style home. A middle-aged woman appeared at the door and smiled nervously. Gudiya attempted to charm Auntie ji (marker of respect), and in a decisive motion of authority—signaled by the signature hijra clap (stiff palms with fingers splayed, usually made in pairs) followed by a light tap on the top of Auntie ji’s head (a blessing)—Gudiya moved into the abode’s foyer. The troupe and its youthful roadies advanced.

Once inside, Gudiya made her way towards an 80-something year old widow sitting cross-legged on a couch. She whispered something into the widow’s ear, blessed her shaved head, and quickly scanned the room for Auntie ji, who stood silently fuming in the corner of the room with an empty glass and carafe of water in her hands. Smiling through her teeth, Auntie ji
moved towards Gudiya’s glass and poured her a tall glass of chilled water. *Gudiya got what she wanted*, I remember thinking as I took a seat on a plastic chair, with camera in hand, unaware at the time that I was simultaneously partaking in this performance of force.

Once the water had tamed the flames, Gudiya’s floral-dressed *chela* (‘disciple,’ usually called daughter) stepped in to lead the troupe through a typical *badhai* (ritualistic acoustic music and dance) consisting of three *filmi* (Indian film) songs. The floral *chela* bounced to a groovy cross-rhythm carried by the *dholak* and metronomic clapping from the two other *hijras*. With undulating hips, her wrists flicked back and forth interchangeably as though outlining the contour of the melody carried by the harmonium. The *chela* fudged her way through the lyrics using a distinctly nasal timbre—in a fashion customary of *hijra* singing and speaking—that seemed to bounce off the concrete walls like a SuperBall. Needless to say, the performance was well-received by the youthful roadies, which by then had multiplied exponentially just outside the threshold of the foyer. Their youthful eyes twinkled as the dancer twirled her floral *Salwār Kamīz* (long blouse and trousers) to the jangle of her *ghungroos* (ankle bells).

It is here where my video stops. What I remember is that at the conclusion of the third song, Auntie *ji* presented a customary basket of offerings containing a less-than-adequate sum of *rupees* (Indian currency), amounting to two thousand. I clung onto my plastic chair handle as Gudiya-guru argued for an additional two thousand. The walls began to shake as Auntie *ji* retorted crudely: “You don’t even belong in this neighborhood. You bring your kind somewhere else!” Indeed, I thought. *What would our return time on Google Maps be if we ran? Is there a setting for that?* After a flurry of curses, we scurried off with the harmonium, *dholak*, and offerings in hand—two thousand short of the goal—flushed and deflated. We had been defeated.
My experiences witnessing this badhai serves as an apt representation for the subject of this study as a whole.\(^1\) India’s transgender and hijra communities (hereafter referred to as the trans-hijra community) have endured over 153 years of institutional discrimination, beginning decisively in 1861, when the British colonial government criminalized “unnatural sex” via

\(^1\) The arguably centuries-old music practice of badhai is customarily known to serve as performative blessings of fertility and financial prosperity for willing (or unwilling) patrons at weddings, births, store openings, and other auspicious occasions involving important financial milestones. Performed frequently at hijra jalsas and interregional gatherings, badhaís also provide the pedagogical basis of the guru-chela (‘mother-daughter,’ literally ‘teacher-disciple’) relationship while facilitating the socioeconomic vitality of the gharānā (household, literally ‘of the house’) and inter-gharānedar community. It is common for badhai troupes to establish positive rapport with their audiences; a positive relationship between the troupes and their patrons benefits both parties, and often results in a larger share for the troupe, which can range anywhere from 500 rupees (approximately $8 USD) to tens of thousands of rupees. Badhai troupes hear about potential gigs through word of mouth, direct calls from patrons, or on some occasions, may show up to the home of a potential patron unannounced. It is crucial that patrons live within the designated territory of the gharānā in which the badhai troupe performs. An “unauthorized” badhai performance, like the one above, can lead to conflict between hijra gharānās, and consequently in the relationships between badhai troupes and their patrons.
Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).\(^2\) In the same year, the colonial government outlawed so-called “emasculnation” on the grounds that it would cause someone “grievous hurt,” and only one decade later through the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), introduced definitive sanctions on male cross-dressing as well as on *badhais*, which were customarily practiced by *hijras* in streets and private homes (see Reddy 2005:26-7).\(^3\) At the heart of the regulation and surveillance of *trans-hijra* performance was the belief that criminal behavior was inherent to the *hijra* way of life (*ibid.*). Although the CTA failed to control the practice of *badhais* entirely, what nevertheless resulted was the creation of a *hijra mode d’emploi* of protectionism and paranoia—reinforced by the rise of illegal, entrepreneurial means of employment like sex work and bar dance—and the proliferation of a militantly suspicious and, for all intents and purposes, trans-phobic general public.

Since the (initial) decriminalization of homosexuality in 2009 followed in April 2014 by the Indian Supreme Court decision to formally recognized India’s Third Gender, however, India’s *trans-hijra* community has stood at a significant historical crossroads. Although the current reality still does not bode well for the continuation of *hijra badhais* as we have known them, newly (re)emerging music and dance repertoires are bearing vital adaptive strategies for *trans-hijra* performance, performativity and empowerment. *Trans-hijra* entertainers, activists and politicians, supported by the rise of the global LGBTIQ\(^4\) liberation movement(s), a rising,
(neo)liberal middle-class, and the proliferation of media-based participatory cultures, are gradually phasing out decades of silence in the postcolonial “closet.”

Paying heed to the timeliness of these movements, this dissertation is meant to offer a wide angle view of some the musical experiences, as I have witnessed them, that have arisen in the larger question for trans-hijra visibility, recognition, and self-determination—all signaled by the Hindi-Urdu term *pehchān* (پہچان, pronounced petfân), an Urdu word with Persian etymology that signifies “identity,” “recognition,” or “acknowledgement.” In doing so, I seek to re-/uncover the trans-hijra voice within the realm of practices and discourses surrounding ritualistic *badhai* performance, and indeed other musical practices encompassed within and engendering trans-hijra confirmations of self.

**Outline**

Drawing upon *pehchān* as a theoretical and methodological locus of investigation, my basic goal is to write about the multiplicative (and contradictory) experiences of *hijras* through the lens of designing and implementing a documentary film for and about them. A critical(ly queer) interpretation of these events will reveal other issues, such as the relationships between music and the (trans)formation(s) of individual identities, music communities, and institutional—

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5 Since the initial decriminalization of homosexuality in 2009, queer pride marches, film festivals, and music performances featuring an array of professional LGBTIQ artists entered the collective consciousness of India’s middle-class. Transgender personalities in particular took to the spotlight in mainstream news channels and daytime talk shows. Among them include Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a *hijra guru* and dancer from Thane, Maharashtra, who recently appeared on the nationally syndicated *Bigg Boss* (an Indian adaptation of *Big Brother*) and a plethora of appearances in television and independent Marathi and Hindi films. In April 2014, Laxmi—along with a handful of other transgender representatives—won a landmark Indian Supreme Court case that granted legal recognition to the Third Gender. Laxmi’s argument reinforced the contributions of *hijras* in present-day media and entertainment, as well as their prominence in staple Hindu rituals like the ubiquitous Koovagam festival in Tamil Nadu, as well as the centuries-old practice of *badhais*. Hijra performativity, they argued, plays a central role in mainstream Indian society, and for this reason, warrants recognition, or “*pehchān*.”
governmental, non-governmental, community-based, or otherwise—regulatory systems surrounding trans-hijra culture and music-making.

Among many other questions I raise in this dissertation, I begin by asking: (1) In what ways do individual talent and versatility contribute to (re)presentations of (the transitioning) self?; (2) In what ways are they tied to the hijra gharānā (household, literally ‘of the house’), trans-hijra socialization and izzat (‘respect’; see Reddy 2005), and other organizational motifs in hijra culture?; and (3) How are these representations tied to the emergence of LGBTIQ pehchān politics, and (changing) conceptions of gender and sexuality and on a larger societal scale? Owing both to my particular point of entry as a gay Franco-American of lesbian parentage—something that can be identified as a heritage of sorts—as well as to the multitudinous dynamics of desire that circulate around gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity in India’s trans-hijra cultures, I employ a critically queer approach to visual ethnography. Accordingly, I ask: How are queer (American) perspectives and ethnographic methodologies tied to the production and/or subversion of trans-hijra pehchān?; How are they tied to the creation and contestation of Third Gender identity politics?; How are they tied to (the creation of) the field—otherwise known as the “ethnographic imagination”—itself?

During my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2010, I employed a handheld video camera in order to provide witness to the sometimes subtle events that presented themselves in musical contexts. This approach, I soon found, revealed itself particularly advantageous for navigating inside a community wherein music, dance, theatrical performance and play

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6 I have encountered the word gharānā employed in relationship to hijras in all of my research sites, which include urban Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow, Chennai, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Surat (Gujarat), Kalyan (Maharashtra), and Koovagam (Tamil Nadu) (see ‘Research Sites’ below). The term is also documented in Gayatri Reddy’s ethnography of hijras in Hyderabad, titled With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India (2005).
constituted a principal economy of life; “performers” regularly used cameras and various other technologies to connect with trans-hijra and non-trans-hijra “audiences”; and various media platforms were regularly employed for self-discovery and to make their voices heard. In my early days of fieldwork, “research footage” (or footage captured for research purposes in ethnographic contexts) was given back to members of the community to be utilized by their own archives. I eventually became known in some circles as the “photo chela,” and my camera was often a determining factor in granting my access to (or exclusion from) certain life events.

Then, in my later days of fieldwork, I began to stage events for the purpose of creating collaborative documentary videos. Following the summer of 2010, I borrowed and eventually purchased more professional grade cameras upon the recommendation of my documentary mentors Marina Goldovskaya and Vivian Umino. I subsequently shot and directed a feature-length documentary called *Mohammed to Maya* (2012), a documentary video series produced by Fulbright-mtvU titled *Music in Liminal Spaces* (2012-13), and participated in various other productions in the field. The participatory use of the camera revealed itself in different capacities—sometimes exceedingly so—depending on the situation I found myself in, relative level of expertise of the participants, and/or my own critical awareness of filmmaking at the time. Much of the footage was dialogically edited, co-owned and/or co-produced, and/or released through other professional means. Therefore, it is through careful attention to basic filmmaking approaches at all stages of filmic production—including the pre/production–post-production—and audience engagement/distribution—and other un/controllable elements that arise in their
respective ethnographic contexts, that I investigate the ways in which researchable documentary filmmaking methodologies are tied to (the creation of) the field itself.  

James Clifford wrote that “ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races and genders […] It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes” (1986:3). As part of a larger effort to expound on what I call a critical queer approach to ethnomusicological filmmaking—or more pertinently, “queer ethnomusicological filmmaking”—I investigate how visually documenting trans-hijra performance participates in (and alongside) the configuration of trans-hijra pehchān. In doing so, I seek to adopt some of the aims in transgender activism and theory by: (1) calling attention to the processes of selfhood and self-making “within and between” identity categories; (2) raising questions about the “structuration of power” along axes of identity, including but not limited to gender and sexuality; (3) raising questions about power and authority in the ethnographic process, and (4) identifying “productive points of attachment for linking sexual orientation and gender identity activism to other social justice struggles” (Stryker 2008:149). I suggest that queer filmmaking participates in the (con)figuration of trans-hijra pehchān by performatively engaging in key identity-forming processes, amplifying voices on a global platform, and reconstituting particular preexisting tropes of hijra izzat through an optic of transgender respectability, talent, and professionalism.

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7 A film ethnography is fitting because of the distinctly pluralistic, “glocal,” and media-savvy nature of India’s LGBTIQ communities. In many ways, the current visibility of India’s LGBTIQ movement owes much to the advent of the internet and media exposure. Mumbai “native-turned-academic” Parmesh Shahani chronicles the “coming out” journey of Gay Bombay (2008) against the backdrop of his personal experiences coming out. He argues that the combination of uniquely Indian developments in the 1990s (economic liberalization, media proliferation, the advent of the internet, expansion of the middle-class, and creation of the pan-Indian culture) together with pre-existing social conditions (English speaking middle-class gay heritage and relative governmental non-interference) offered gay men in Bombay (quoting Appadurai) “new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” (see Appadurai 1996; in Shahani 2008:33). Although segmented and stratified in different ways, this is true, to a certain extent, with trans-hijra communities.
In this chapter, I will first introduce a critical ethnomusicological definition of *hijra* followed by a discussion of the ways it converges with and diverges from “glocal” knowledges of transgender and queer. All of this is accompanied by a critical introduction to Hindi-Urdu, English, and “Hinglish” terms commonly employed by community members. Following this, I will then (2) provide a description of the people, places, and performances addressed in the dissertation; (3) summarize transgender and queer representation in literature and scholarship; and finally (4), provide a methodological and theoretical framework for the following six chapters in this “ethnomusicology of the closet,” a term serving the title of this dissertation.

**Hijra, and Other Terms**

The word *hijra* is currently employed throughout South Asia to represent the subcontinent’s vast and culturally complex communities of individuals who largely identify as male-to-female transgender or Third Gender. *Hijras*—whose population may well be over three million in India alone—reside in rural and urban locales in the countries of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Despite possessing a variety of cultural belief systems and structures, the common denominator among most *hijras* is that they leave their place and/or family of origin and choose, or become subject to a way of life within a social framework of familial ties, kinships, and hierarchies.

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8 “Glocalization” is part of several multidimensional “scapes” between the local and global, where “global facts take local form” and local facts are elevated and propagated with global relevance (Appadurai 1996:18). Indian conceptions and expressions of LGBTIQ identity are also part of this process.

9 To my knowledge, no reliable census record of *hijras* yet exists. This number is derived from an estimate of India’s population of “men who have sex with men” (MSM) conducted in 2010. More information in this regard can be found in the 2010 report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India.

10 Many *hijra gurus* in my study have not severed ties with their families of origin. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, for instance, lives in the same apartment building as her mother, brother, sister-in-law and nephew, as well as her *chelas*. Abhina Aher, the founder and chair of Mumbai’s premiere transgender dance contingent Dancing Queens, regularly invites her mother to perform alongside her *chelas* in performances. A discussion of reconstituted forms of family and *hijras* “service” to “heteroconjugalility” (see Waugh 2001) is discussed in Chapter 6.
Therefore, the term *hijra*—a cognate of the Arabic word *haj* meaning “to depart from one’s home”—serves as an appropriate metaphor for the physical realities that unite the communities as a whole.¹¹

To be called *hijra* is to be identified socially; The word signifies a distinct way of life that characterizes one’s belonging to a specific *gharānā* (household, literally ‘of the house’), which is marked by the act of “putting a *rit*” (literally ‘custom’ or ritual; see Reddy 2005:58) and professed devotion to the Goddess *Bahuchara Mata*, also known as *Bedraj Mata* (see Figure 2). Association or membership within a particular *gharānā* determines the type or sub-sect of *hijra* one may be. In Mumbai, there are at least seven *hijra* *gharānās*, and each is conventionally known to possess a certain occupational (and therefore social) association (see Figure 3). As a general rule, there are *gharānās* whose members perform *badhai*s (these are known as *badhai hijras*), *gharānās* whose members’ primary occupation is sex work (these are referred to as *kandra hijras*; also see Reddy 2005:56), *gharānās* whose members beg in the streets, and *gharānās* who do all three.

¹¹ A *hijra* named Urmi spoke of the “inherent tendency or desire” to be *hijra* as a qualification of “membership.” Membership, in this case, is determined by one’s willingness to become *hijra* (pers. comm., Oct. 31 2015).
The Family

The word *gharānā* is utilized in Hindustani (North Indian) music nomenclature, and refers specifically to a “family tradition,” or a “stylistic school and/or members of that school” (Neuman 1990:272). Certain parallels can indeed be seen between the social organization of Hindustani and *hijra gharānās*. The basis of the *Hindustani gharānā*—*ustād-śāgird silsila* or *guru-śisya paramparā* (Muslim and Hindu equivalents to the teacher-student relationship, respectively)—functions much like an apprenticeship system. In this system, learning consists not only of aural osmosis, but “an elaborate ritual of instruction” known as *talīm*, another Urdu term roughly translated as “instruction” (Dard Neuman 2004:102). Learning depends on the maintenance of the *ustād-śāgird* relationship, and students are usually expected to spend time with their teachers in contexts outside the immediate purview of the music lesson, as it provides the student with the opportunity to passively absorb aspects of a professional musician’s life. The “lesson,” therefore, not only structures music learning but implicitly “of being a musician” (Daniel Neuman 1990:58).

In many cases, students work around the house or run errands, receiving lessons in return, or home-cooked meals, to access other aspects of his professional life. This type of labor or service—a demonstration of *izzat*—is inherently linked to the learning process, and has conventionally been associated with a “feudal” (pre-modern) system of learning wherein the teacher is “the owner of the ‘land,’ or the holder of information, and the student is the laborer that cultivates it” (Qureshi 2002:92). Whether “feudal” or not, *izzat* is a type of currency students use for their teachers, not only as a means of learning music but also to progress socially within
gharānedar society. The progress of the student in learning about how to be a musician in the larger gharānedar structure, therefore, depends on the cultivation of izzat, and on the strength of the ustād-śāgird relationship (see Roy 2016).

Like the Hindustani tradition, hijra gharānās possess specific repertoires of beliefs, customs, and musical practices that often have large bearings on an individual’s social status within the gharānā and larger hijra community. Hijra gharānās are founded upon the assumed preeminence of the guru, and her duty to teach and nurture her chelas. Aural leaning consists of elaborate rituals of instruction surrounding key music and ritualistic practices like badhais, as well as the “passive absorption” of these and other aspects of hijra life. It is thus through the demonstration of izzat that chelas learn how to navigate their identities (see Reddy 2005).

Unlike most Hindustani music gharānās—whose system of tutelage and social hierarchy is based primarily on pedigree (consisting traditionally of men who possess blood ties to a common ancestor)—hijra gharānās are generally composed of individuals from a diverse range of religious, caste, class, ethnic, linguistic, gender and sex backgrounds. “Membership,” in this case, is determined less by one’s (previous) identity background and more upon one’s willingness to acquiesce to the social governing structure—the guru-chela relationship—and to assume new praxes of self-identification based within reconstituted parameters of caste, class, gender, sexuality, language and religion. Because of this, the demonstration of izzat is paramount towards a hijra chela's membership and social status.

While it is unclear as to when the term gharānā arose in hijra parlance, its use reflects and engenders a strategy of framing hijra culture along discourses of authenticity, tradition, and kinship (as distinct from inauthenticity, modernity and contemporary notions of individuality and
identity). Along these lines, an ethnographic investigation of the *hijra gharānā*, at least in theory, would yield a rich understanding of the ways in which *hijra* culture—like Hindustani music culture after the turn of the 20th century—has adapted to the forces of neoliberalism, postcolonial nationalism, middle-class development, and the advent of various media and technologies that change the ways we interact with one another and consume music.

This dissertation, to a certain extent, lays the groundwork for a study of this nature. Nevertheless, my primary interest in this text is not to use ethnography as a means of challenging or expanding upon theories of hereditary kinship configurations, or the transactionality of gender (see Ramberg 2013). While issues of “kinship trouble” certainly arise with respect to the *hijra gharānā*, my focus is to write (and visually show) how music and dance dynamically engage (trans)formations of identity in dialogue with culture. It focuses not on the theorization of queer-or trans-reproduction in the *gharānā*, but on how (changes to conceptions and practices of) pedagogy, talent, and *izzat* configure notions trans-*hijra* identity.

Preeminent *hijra guru* and activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi once told me that “What defines you […] is not what is between your legs, but what you do, how you act, who you relate with, who you become” (pers. comm., September 14, 2010, Mumbai). It is with attention to the non-essential variables that impact trans-*hijra* socialization, practice, conceptions and expressions of selfhood that I investigate trans-*hijra* *pehchān* as a process of “becoming.”

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12 Ramberg suggests that gender “is not only performative but also transactional. It is also necessarily tied to strategies of and for relatedness. The transactional aspect of gender emerges when we are attentive to the operations of the gift and if we take kin-making to be a technology of the human, a tool people use to produce certain kinds of persons endowed with particular obligations to and claims on others, social functions, and forms of value” (2013:670).

13 Debates on queer reproduction are currently being investigated by emerging anthropologist Brian Horton, whose Mumbai-based fieldwork on LGB individuals interrogates the intersection of queer and classical kinship models.
Transgender Pehchān

The “heterogenizing” model queers our understanding of globalization from a top-down (usually from a Western-dominant standpoint) force of erasure to a multiway and multi-layered system of exchange. Globalizing forces are reimagined as cultural flows (see Lash and Urry 1994), a “re patterning of fluidities and mobilities” (see Sassen 2000), or as multidimensional “scapes” (see Appadurai 1996) between the local and global. In these cases, “global facts take local form” and local facts are elevated and propagated with global relevance (1996:18). Indian conceptions, patterns, and expressions of transgender identity—and other identities for that matter—are part of these processes (see Shahani 2008).

At least in Mumbai, transgender is not necessarily synonymous to hijra, but possesses at least two distinct meaning in Hinglish parlance. To make sense of the differences between the two, it may be useful here to consider the distinction between identity in Eastern cultures (as a collective) and in the West as (individualistic, or personal) (see Eisenberg 2001:535). It may also be useful to distinguish the difference between identities assigned “from other people’s perceptions of us and the collective contexts we are part of” and that which answers the question “Who am I?” (Gripsud 2002:6; in Shahani 2008:63).

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14 I seek to distinguish the use of the term “transgender” regionally for a number of reasons. First, Mumbai possesses language cultures (primarily Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, and English) that are distinct from other regions and city centers. The meaning of English terms like transgender, therefore, will carry different translations. Second, city centers in India, like Mumbai, are diversely populated—something that is reflected in the transgender community as well. As such, transgender generally encompasses a broad range of transgender expressions in Mumbai, but with significant overlap between regional-based transgender expressions. For instance, I have witnessed Jogas participating alongside hijras in hijra rituals, and thirunangais performing Maharashtrian hijra badhai songs.

15 Citing a number of primary sources, Shahani attributes the growth of the Hindi-English “jumble” as part of post-liberalized India, made popular by the fast talking MTV and Channel V jockeys, and utilized in commercials and tag-lines for brands like Pepsi (Yeh Dil Maange More, ‘This heart Wants More’) and Domino’s (Hungry, kya? ‘Are You Hungry?’), and the introduction of Hindi words (like chai [tea], masala [spices], yaar [friend], chuddies [underwear] and Bollywood) into global English-speaking lexicons (Shahani 2008:56).
On the one hand, transgender serves as a useful catch-all meant to encompass a potpourri of gender expressions that are grouped within the “koti family” of male-assigned bodies. These include hijras, catla (sari-wearing) kotis, kada-catla (non-sari-wearing) kotis, and zenana kotis (Muslim-associated women-men). Other transgender expressions under this domain include jogins (otherwise known as jogtas or jogappas, who are temple devotees of the Goddess Renuka-Yellamma), siva-satis (devotees of Shiva), and thirunangai Aravanis (devotees of Lord Aravan from Tamil Nadu) (see Reddy’s ‘scheme of koti variation’ 2005:53). These individuals are grouped accordingly because they “all look like men […] but [are] self-identified as koti” (2005:52). These transgender communities are largely defined by regional languages, cultures and/or religious traditions (as is the case with the distinction between the jogta, siva-sati and thirunangai communities, among others).

While I find the categories useful to know in the field, I do not read them as experiential fact for the individuals that live them. In India’s urban centers like Mumbai, cultural particularities based on prescribed ethnic, religious, linguistic and caste/class affiliation, and the boundaries defining these communities, are absorptive. For example, I have met kothis who call themselves hijra, hijras who call themselves kothi, thirunangais who perform hijra badhai songs from Gujarat, and even jogtas who participate in hijra rituals while “passing” as kothi. While transgender is a common replacement for kothi in scholarly and colloquial discourse (depending on the context), their interchangeability conflates gender identity and sexuality while neglecting the necessary task of problematizing both terms along historical and ethnographic grounds. Under this rubric, hijras become sub-categories of koti/kothi. This taxonomy places excessive emphasis on biological and bodily difference, and neglects the socio-cultural variables that
determine membership and social status engendered within and by the *hijra gharânā*. By extension, this taxonomy also suggests that *hijra* bodies and desires are merely “extreme” examples of homosexuality—a common misinterpretation of the relationship of transgender women to gay men. For instance, where might *hijras* who identify as transgender women, Third Gender, and/or beyond the purview of sexuality altogether, place themselves under this rubric?\(^{16}\)

This brings me to the second meaning of transgender. While the term has existed for decades in the West, it was employed relatively recently in India as a category emphasizing one’s individuality and selfness (as distinct from one’s social identity). David Valentine contends that, as a whole, the term transgender must be seen:

> In the context of broader changes in U.S. American understandings of identity politics, the body, and embodied identities in the late twentieth century [which have been] been shaped by shifts in neoliberal capitalist modes of production and consumption where ‘difference’ can be exploited as a market niche as much as enabling new forms of subjectivity [Chasin 2001, Martin 1994, Sender 2004]. (Valentine 2004:37)

Most authors credit the American activist Virginia Prince for her coinage of the term “transgenderist” in the 1970s. The term was used to describe “those who lived full time in a gender other than that to which they were ascribed at birth, but without surgical intervention,” and in doing so, differentiated these individuals from transexual men and women, as well as cross-dressers (Valentine 2007:32). Following the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the rise of 1990s queer activism, transgender acquired a “radicalized” meaning through the writings of Holly Boswell (1991) and Sandy Stone (1991) to designate “a position of crossgender identification which embraced an androgynous style and mode of identification,” which drew on radical claims to gender-variant identity not simply as a category between transsexual and

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\(^{16}\) Many *hijras*, for instance, claim to be *sannyasi*, or asexual ascetics (see Reddy 2005:56).
transvestite, but “as an alternative to binary gender” (ibid.). Then, with the emergence of the field of Transgender Studies, transgender was employed in even broader terms to encompass “the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition” (Stryker 2008:1). With this new meaning comes a focus on trans as a process of continuous becoming that, at least theoretically, extends beyond the realms of gender—or indeed race, ethnic, religious, class, and national—categories of being.

Situated alongside and perhaps challenging the first definition of the term, transgender is employed in India as an identity category confirming one’s individualism that does not conform to conventional notions of male, female, or even hijra. Partly responsible for the term’s emphasis on individualism are the country’s HIV/AIDS Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) complex and the rise of global LGBTIQ activism which emerged in the 1990s through organizations like the Naz (‘Pride’) Foundation in Uttar Pradesh and the Humsafar (‘Life Companion’) Trust in Maharashtra, among many others. Supported by UN AIDS Development Programmes, among other funding sources, these organizations established outreach programs based on notions of individual empowerment, a (re-)surge(nce) of LGBTIQ affirmative culture in India’s fast growing urban centers encompassing them, and the proliferation of globally endorsed identity categories. I am referring mainly to the universally accepted “men who have sex with men” (MSM) identity—which encompasses “male-assigned” hijras, kotis/kothis, gay and bisexual men—and other English language markers of gender and sexuality. In these cases, LGBTI, and in particular, Q (‘queer’) are employed (mainly among India’s educated and English-speaking middle class) as an individual identity category both to serve as a catch-all
meant to encompass gender and sexual expressions that lie outside of the (Western- and/or Indian-derived) heterosexual matrix, as well as to mediate the verbal slippage between local gender nonconforming constructs.

In addition to the embrace of transgender as a locus of individualism, various efforts have simultaneously been made to (re)appropriate local, Hindi-Urdu monikers of socialized gender and sexual nonconforming identities in NGO and CBO outreach campaigns. These are subsumed discursively under the umbrella of *pehchān*. The term was first employed in 2010 by the nationwide India HIV/AIDS Alliance to designate a program exclusively devoted to MSM, transgender and *hijra* clients. As of 2015, “Project *Pehchān*” operates across 17 states with five sub-recipients (SRs),\(^\text{17}\) and at least 200 sub-sub-recipients (SSRs) in both urban and rural areas. In addition to providing sexual, reproductive health, and HIV services to an estimated 4.5 Lakh (450,000) of MSM and *hijra* community members, the program also empowers its participants through community-driven advocacy initiatives.\(^\text{18}\)

It is here where I begin to draw connections between *pehchān* as a locus of (self-) recognition, acknowledgement, and identity (trans)formation, and *Pehchān* (with a capital ‘P’) as a socio-political designation for social empowerment programs. The relationship between the two is encapsulated in a speech that Laxmi Narayan Tripathi gave at the 2015 *Hijra Habba*—an annual conference hosted by Project *Pehchān* and the India HIV/AIDS Alliance. Laxmi declared (in Hindi) that “*Pehchān* Project belongs to every person who wants to establish his or her own individuality—his or her *pehchān*” (July 30, 2015). A similar sentiment was expressed by Project

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\(^\text{17}\) These include the *Humsafar* Trust, Solidarity and Action against the HIV Infection in India (SAATHII), the South India AIDS Action Programme (SIAAP), Sangama, and Alliance India Andhra Pradesh (AIAP).

\(^\text{18}\) See the SAATHII organizational website for a description of the program: [http://www.saathii.org/projects/pehchan](http://www.saathii.org/projects/pehchan)
Pehchān manager and hijra guru, Abhina Aher, in a recorded interview I conducted at the same event. She described Project Pehchān as that which is “written on the faces of everyone here” (pers. comm., July 30, 2015). As I seek to demonstrate in this dissertation (and in particular, Chapter 6), it is through the staging of music and dance performance where the term’s dual meanings converge.

Accordingly, I seek to investigate the ways in which (changing) adaptive strategies of trans-hijra identity and its codes have become (re)inscribed into the trans-hijra body and voice. Through the analysis of “traditional” hijra gharānedar badhai and contemporary staged trans-hijra performance cultures, music and dance pedagogies, standardized conventions of performance and staging, vocal and dance parts, performance context, personal narratives, and the camera’s placement in all of this, I hope to reveal—at least theoretically—the ways in which music and dance participate in the (con)figuration of trans-hijra pehchān.

“The Ethnography of a Category”\(^\text{19}\)

I immersed myself within and surrounding trans-hijra communities over the course of more than five years. These took place during periods in 2010 (two months supported by the Society for Asian Music), 2011 (two months supported by the American Institute for Indian Studies), 2012-13 (ten months supported by Fulbright-mtvU), and 2015 (six months supported by Fulbright-Hays). My fieldwork took me to urban and rural locales in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh—including Delhi, Lucknow and Kanpur—although primarily took place in Mumbai. While there, I connected with and, in some cases became the “photo chela” of

\(^{19}\) This heading is derived from the title of a book of the same name by David Valentine (2007).
hijra gurus Abhina Aher, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, and Mujranani. I also spent significant time with musicians spanning the gamut of gender and sexual identity expression in the artistically and politically active LGBTIQ community.

One of the central challenges I faced (and continue to face) in my fieldwork with trans-hijra communities, was to locate a fixed definition of the term “hijra” (and how the term could be applied alongside or distinguished from ‘transgender’). The production of a viably “authentic” ethnography—not to mention one devoted exclusively to the musical production of hijra identity—seemed to depend on it.

What eventually I came to realize, however, is that hijra is neither a stable term nor a uniformly lived experience. The so-called “essentialized icons of India” (Cohen 1995:279) that I had read in books and seen in films prior served neither the perfect examples of the Third Gender (as is often imagined through the figure of the Ardhanārīśvara) nor the idolized relics of an ages-old Hindu tradition. What many had called “tradition” merely appeared to me, musically, as (re-)appropriated Bollywood song made to play on acoustic drum. For instance, I witnessed badhais that combined traditional folk song with Bollywood songs that had been re-appropriated by the community because they contained references to the trans-hijra community, served as icons of queerness. A notable example of this was the song “Saj Gai Gali” (‘The Street is Decorated’) from the film Kunwara Baap (Unwed Father, 1974), which includes a musical number incorporating a group of hijras singing along with the protagonist. While at a hijra jalsa (literally ‘meeting’)—a “rite of initiation” for a chela formally reentering the community after a period of isolation customarily following ritualistic castration—I also witnessed three different performance renditions of the song “Bano Teri Akhiyaan Surmi Daani” (‘Oh Bride, Your Eyes
Are Lined with *Kājal*’), from the film *Dushmani: A Violent Love Story* (‘Hostility,’ 1995), which contains a suggestive dance between two women. Therefore, among other things, my fieldwork forced me abandon my attempt to locate *hijra* “authenticity,” and cease the tiresome rectification of verbal slippage between (my own essentialist fascination of) *hijra* and (Americentric understanding of) transgender.

David Valentine suggests that “like other categories, meanings can shift, are historically produced, and are drawn on in particular social contexts” (2004:215). If the meaning of *hijra* is pliable and shifting in usage, then an investigation of the category is contingent upon an ethnographic and/or ethno-historical methodology. In doing so, it becomes necessary to refrain from reducing an analysis of ethnographic subjects “to a set of categories and incitements all too easily grounded in a globalizing heterosexual/homosexual opposition,” as well as to avoid immobilizing this exploration “within a set of static tableaux trotted out when Indian and sexual difference are narratively linked” (Cohen 1995:401, 422; in Waugh 2001:122). The following is a performance-based sketch of *hijra* representation in historical literature, followed by an explanation of the ways in which a queer ethnomusicological approach in particular can intervene in contemporary ethnographic studies of *hijra* culture and identity. I contend that *hijra* as a category should be interpreted experientially, but that the experiential should not always be subsumed by the category that we employ in common (scholarly) parlance.

**Changing Hijtories and Definitions**

According to Gayatri Reddy, “shifting forms, third-natured individuals, transposed genders, sexual masquerades, and same-sex procreation” were abound in early Hindu mythological,
folkloric, epic and Vedic/Puranic texts (2005). Perhaps the most recognizable gender-defying symbols is Lord Shiva, who is sometimes represented as half-man, half-woman under the name **Ardhanārīśvara**, which literally means “The Lord whose half is a woman.” Gender nonconforming characters are also recognized in the **Mahabharata**. The epic poem’s main hero Arjuna joins a Third Gender tribe and even adopts the name **Brihannala**—a female name—while serving on the King’s court (see Kidwai and Vanita 2000).

The practice of men playing women’s roles in theater is also documented in India’s historical literatures and musical treatises. Patanjali’s grammatical text the **Mahabhasya** (150 BCE), for instance, describes male actors who play females as *bhrukumsa* one who “flutters his brows.” Some historians claim that the **Natyashastra** (2-4th century CE)—South Asia’s ancient music and dance treatise containing early forms of Hindustani and Karnataka music—mentions *rupanusrini*, the “imitation” of men and women taken roles in the opposite gender (Hansen 2002:164).

Texts produced during the Mughal period feature accounts of transgender and **kothi** performers. One popularly quote passage comes from the **Muraqqa i Delhi**, a text written by Dargah Quli Khan that offers a mid-18th century account of a “troupe of boys” from Delhi:

> The slender, well-proportioned beauties capture hearts with their graceful strutting, and the dark-eyed send out messages with their looks. […] When [a eunuch] dances his gestures and movements are enchanting, and when he sings, he charms the universe and drives his listeners crazy. He is young but musically very skilled. He is just a bud but can match any flower in full bloom and even though he is only the flame of a candle, he can claim equality with the sun. His

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admires can never have enough of his singing and those who want to gaze at him forever are embarrassed at the misfortune of the limits of their vision. (Reddy 2005:26-7, also see Morcom 2013:93, Vanita and Kidwai 2000:176)

In addition to intrigue surrounding their performance, it is often mentioned that castrated men played important roles for Muslim rulers in South Asia. Many of these so-called “eunuchs”—a translation of the middle eastern “castrated male or hermaphrodite”—served roles as personal servants or guardians for the female members of the royal court, and were entrusted in important political matters and served high positions in the courts of the nobles. Some may have also been the sexual partners of Nawabs (rulers of princely states). Even today, the city of Lucknow, once a regional capital during the Mughal period, possesses a rich oral history of these relationships, which many in the city’s transgender and kothi communities proudly recognize.21

Before the British arrival, one of the most popular performance forms that included gender nonconformers was Tamasha—a Persian word signifying “entertainment” or “show”—which incorporated earlier styles such as Gondhal, Ovada, and Turra-Kalagi, as well as Lavani, a Marathi folk genre that also involves kothis. Nachya Poryas (dancing boys) were also documented at the time, and courtesans are said to have learned their melodies and dance movements from them (Hansen 2002:164). Male dancers also appeared in Nautanki (folk theater

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21 When conducting preliminary fieldwork there in 2011, my research assistant was a kothi named Divya. He brought me to a number of historical sites where nawabs once brought their queer confidants, and even taught me some words and phrases in their code-language, Farsi, which is still practiced within certain kothi circles. Divya sadly passed from AIDS infection in 2013. My hope is that this world of knowledge did not pass with him, and that further studies of this code language—not to mention the named used for it—are conducted.
from North India), *Saang* and *Swaang* (folk theater and dance from North India), as well as early British colonial accounts of *Kathak* dance (see Walker 2004:118, also see Morcom 2013:95).\footnote{As Anna Morcom poignantly observed, ritualistic performances by transgender dancers at temples can, at least to a certain extent, be seen as vestiges of the sanctification of transgender and sexual nonconforming identities in India’s past. Several Hindu devotional forms of practice involve transgender women “performers,” including *jogja/joggappa* worship of the goddess Renuka/Yellamma, *Aravani* devotee worship of Lord Aravan by *thirunangais* in Tamil Nadu, and in traditions within Krishna *bhakti*. Female characters in *Rasila*, a dance that reenacts scenes of Krishna’s life, are conventionally performed by effeminate male *kothis* or transgender women (see Morcom 2013).}

**Enter the Academics**

Early colonial research on the *hijra* community generally accompanied a wave of overgeneralizing, exoticizing portrayals of the “other.” In these texts, Orientalist scholars often conflated the classical Indian conception of the *tritiya prakriti* (‘third sex’) with “eunuch,” and employed a distinctly ahistorical distortion of readings on pre-Muslim India (Sweet 2002:78; also see Sweet and Zwilling:1993). This reflected, and likely produced, the (post-)colonial legacy to homogenize an otherwise pluralistic community through sensationalized depictions of bodily alterations and procedures.

Other early works interested in appropriating *hijra* stories—or *hij-story*—within a discourse of LGBTIQ liberation, also perpetuated certain disruptive (post-)colonial ideologies. Alain Daniélou, one of the pioneering Indian musicologists of his time, conducted extensive translations on *sutras* (rules or tenets in Sanskritic literature) with references to the transgender community. Although his writings became some of the first examples of the use of the term “third sex” in place of “eunuch,” they conflated Western-based conceptions of homosexuality with Indian-based notions of homo-sociality, and made inferences locating some of the earliest examples of gay marriage in India (Sweet 2002:80). While its political efficacy is understood and
well-received, his efforts to locate queer homologies cross-culturally colors the *hijra* way of life *en rose*, and neglects the diverse (and potentially less rosy) axes of identity that apply to the community.

Accompanying a rise in feminist and early queer theories, media and scholarship on *hijras* multiplied exponentially. From 1990 to 2010, at least six book-sized ethnographies on *hijras* were produced (Nanda 1990; Jaffrey 1998; Balaji and Malloy 1997; Ahmed and Singh 2001; Reddy 2005; Revathi 2009), four articles (Cohen 1995; Goldman 1993; Lal 1999; Nanda 1994), two chapters in an essay collection (Cohen 2002; Sweet 2002), two dissertations (Hall 1995; Reddy 2000), four works of fiction (Mann 1992; Sinha 1993; Forbes 1998; Kotak 2000), seven prominent documentary films (Kalliat 1990; Prasad and Yorke 1991; Cooper 1999; Shiva, MacDonald, Guvovsky 2001; Wartmann 2005; Thomas 2005; Gill 2009), three narrative films (Lajmi 1997; Bharadwaj 2005; Patil 2009), and one interview special (BBC 2007). Indeed, since 2010, this list of *hijra* representation in the media has expanded even further (see Chapter 2 Appendix).²³

Many of these works were largely successful in (re-)orienting scholarship theoretically and methodologically towards an understanding of *hijra* as “third gender.” In doing so, however, some remained focused on (sensational portrayals of) sexual reassignment surgery—a term I refer to as “sexual confirmation surgery”—and arrogated *hijras* along Western codes of transgender. In other cases, *hijras* were used to shed light on theories of gender performativity and/or served as preferred case studies within a leitmotif of “third gender” usually alongside Thai

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²³ This list is an adapted version of that which is found in Gayatri Reddy’s *With Respect to Sex* (2005:3).
*kathoey* (transgender women or effeminate men) and Omani *xanith* (effeminate men) (see Nanda 1990).

Gayatri Reddy’s *With Respect to Sex* (2005) was a timely response to overtly “genderizing” portrayals of *hijra*. Reddy situates her ethnography on *hijra* in Hyderabad within the local organizational framework of *izzat* (roughly translated as ‘respect’). Reinterpreting *hijra* identity through a plurality of differences, Reddy argues that gender and sexuality are not centrally-defining, but two of many axes of identity that combine to form a larger picture of *hijra* life and activity. The emphasis on local constructs of identity, not to mention the richness of her writing, engenders a certain ethnographic sensitivity that creates the opportunity for *hijra* subjectivity to emerge.

While ethnographic works on *hijra* culture that exist outside of the gendered domain is an emerging field, to my knowledge, comprehensive accounts of *hijra* music in culture still do not exist. Recent ethnohistories produced on male-assigned gender nonconforming dancers include Katheryn Hansen’s article on theatrical transvestism in the Parsi, Gujarati, and Marathi theaters at the turn of the century (2002), and Anna Morcom’s two chapters on *kothi* performance in her book *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance* (2013). Both represent important critical advancements in scholarship on queer representation in Indian dance. The latter publication even includes a substantial section on some of the differences between *kothi* and *hijra* performance practices (see 2013:134). While a fascinating look at marginalized musical cultures in India, at times, it assumes a voice that is “removed and authoritative rather than dialogically engaged and interpretive” (Paige, forthcoming). This dissertation hopes to fill the interpretive gap in the ethnographic study *hijra* identity, vocality, and performance.
Approaching an Ethnomusicological Definition of Hijra

Owing to *hijra*’s multiple meanings and experiences in Mumbai’s diverse transgender communities, a central task of this dissertation is not to pin down a definition of *hijra* per se, but to understand the nuances of the category as an historically and culturally located social practice. This approach is founded upon the understanding that “What is *hijra*?” is ultimately an ethnographic question—rather than solely theoretical—that requires us to think not simply about how the experiences of being *hijra* intersect, but also about which experiences the term *hijra* might describe for historically and culturally located subjects (see Valentine 2007 and 2004). Therefore, it becomes necessary to abandon the prescriptive use of terms like *kothi*, transgender, or even Third Gender, in favor of an investigation of *hijra* from a distinctly *hijra* frame of reference.

Critically engaging notions of *pehchān*—a term that I introduce as a contemporary reconfiguration of *izzat*—I seek to cultivate an ethnomusicological perspective on contested conceptions of *hijra* identity, including but not limited to the use of gender categories as a means of interpreting notions about *hijra* selfness. The majority of scholarship on trans-*hijra* culture focuses on (visual displays of) gendered difference, rather than (oral/aural or corporeal productions of) belonging. Building upon recent literatures that establish frameworks of exclusion in Indian dance (notably Morcom 2013, Walker 2013, Soneji 2012, Qureshi 2006, and Hansen 2002), I investigate identity as a locus where orality/aurality and subjectivity experientially converge, and in doing so, engage the critical variable of agency in trans-*hijra* life-making processes.
Badhais are particularly suitable ground to launch an ethnographic investigation of this kind. The arguably centuries-old music practice is customarily known to serve as performative blessings of fertility and financial prosperity for willing (or unwilling) patrons at weddings, births, store openings, and other auspicious occasions involving important financial milestones. Performed frequently at hijra jalsas and interregional gatherings, badhais also provide the pedagogical basis of the guru-chela (‘mother-daughter,’ literally ‘teacher-disciple’) relationship while facilitating the socioeconomic vitality of the gharānā and inter-gharānedar community. In badhai songs, musical emphasis is placed on the vocals—performed usually in mid-register, using a distinct nasal tonality—which are accompanied by the dholak, (sometimes) harmonium, and dance. Their performance conveys the spiritual significance of Bahuchara Mata by calling on her spirit to inhabit the body of the singing and dancing hijra. As such, musical talent, physical beauty, and even “passability” in performance account for a portion of symbolic capital, actual capital (reflected in the division of badhai earnings), social mobility, and izzat. The performance of these values matter more in the configurations of life, livelihood and pehchān than prescribed axes of identity such as caste, ethnicity, sexuality or assigned gender.

The gharānā is the nucleus of all social activities and identity making processes, and as I have found, determines the scale and breadth of one’s association with hijra-ness. It is a cultural microcosm within which everyone has a place—even kothis, women, and foreign guests such as myself.24 It reflects, engenders, and thrives off of diversity of identification. While my understanding of hijra rests within the cultural framework of the family, I seek to focus primarily

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24 As a general rule of thumb, I regard kothi as a social classification used for gay and/or gender queer individuals who live on the periphery of the hijra community. As such, the kothis that pop into and out of this study are revealed only insofar as they interact with the hijras in context of the gharānā.
on the individual and her participatory role in shaping the family. In doing so, I am assisted by recent ethnographic writings that have emphasized the dialectic between individuality and society, placed the ethnographer at the center of the written account, and addressed critical elements of the insider/outsider dichotomy as participant observers (see Sugarman 1997, Abu-Lughod 2000, Racy 2004, Reddy 2005, and Weidman 2006).

Drawing from my own frame of reference, I approach the process of ethnography as experiential while also maintaining a critical(ly queer) eye on my placement (and prejudices) in all of this. As a queer music ethnographer, my goal is to maintain a vivid and nuanced evocation of trans-*hijra* music and dance, social life, and of the individuals that live it by foregrounding the inevitable connections between trans-*hijra* vocality and subjectivity (encompassed within the term *hij*-vocality; see Chapter 4), experiences of belonging at an individual’s rite of passage (see Chapter 5), and a community’s performative reconfigurations of the family and their political engagements (see Chapter 6). In doing so, this dissertation emphasizes two basic premises:

First is the notion of music as both encompassed within and engendering context. Context has been described as “natural habitat” (Goodman 1988), as “social groups and subgroups” into which membership is acquired (van Gennep 1960), as a “field” constituted by a matrix of relations between participating agents by (Bourdieu 1984), as interworking systems of construable signs (Geertz 1973), and as “webs of relationships and interactions between multiple, *shiftingly* interrelated subjects” (Ortner 1996:12). For Ali Jihad Racy, “the musical event is an interface between sound and society, a set of recognizable behaviors that link music to various broadening social and expressive spheres” (2004:11). In such an understanding, music is a set of
practices reflecting and constitutive of all cultural configurations, social processes, and identity (trans)formations.  

This paper’s second basic premise is the notion that identity, like music, is an experience that can be “transient and conceptually elusive, but also private and context-bound” (Racy 2004:8). Post-structural, feminist and queer theorists argue for an understanding of gender and sexuality that is historically contingent, de-/re-constructable, and intersected by other axes of identity including race, class, caste, and religion (see Sedgwick 1990, 2003; Butler 1990, 2004; Ortner 1996; Valentine 2004). In Foucaultian terms (via Valentine), categories of identity do not simply describe, but produce the phenomena they seem to represent (2004:30).

While identities may be context-bound, their (trans)formations can be a very real experience for the individuals that live them. This raises certain implications insofar as notions of affect are concerned. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe affect as “the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing […] that serve to drive us to movement, towards thought and extension” (2010:1) The body itself is defined not merely by the surface boundary of skin and tissue, but by its “potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect” (2010:2). Based upon the premise of their own questioning, I ask: (1) “How does a body marked in its duration by these various encounters with mixed forces, come to shift its affections (its being affected) into action (capacity to affect)?” (ibid.); and (2) What role do music and dance play in these processes?

In “Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres,” Yvon Bonenfant argues that “the

25 John Blacking argued that “no musical style has ‘its own terms’: its terms are the terms of its society and culture” (1973:16). It is here that I begin to draw connections between music as “humanly organized” in different ways and for different reasons by those that utilize them in practice.
permission to create sensations in the social sphere, and thus fully manifest one’s sensorial
existence amongst that of others, might depend on our ability fully and sensually to sound and
seek sound (2010:74). How do queer, transgender, and *hijra* vocal doings and listenings,
configure the political dynamics of the sensorial existence of trans-*hijra* performers? If
subjectivity is sensorally produced, how do particular performances, practices, and stagings of
music and dance (re)configure trans-*hijra* pehchān? What is the line between doing and being?
Instead of approaching *hijra* through an abstract or discursive lens, I critically engage trans-*hijra*
vocalic (or ‘socialic’ bodies), and the music they produce, as a (literal) sites of mediation,
“zones of exchange” where the private and public, psychological and social, biological and
cultural converge. I like to regard them as fluid and intimate “works in progress,” processes of
*becoming* that rely on a dynamic interplay between internal and external ontologies of the body
and voice. An ethnomusicological approach already comes well-equipped to investigate these
dynamics.

As Bonenfant claims, the vast majority of scholarship surrounding performative
embodiments of trans and queer bodies concentrates on gestural utterances rather than aural
means of communication (see 2010). An ethnomusicological approach, will not only contribute a
new and much needed advancements in the understanding trans-*hijra* subjectivity and pehchān-
making, but will also be crucial in dislodging *hijra* identity from a tradition of legal and

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26 He continues to say that “sexuality, among other qualities of human existence, underpins this sensuality” (*ibid.*).

27 Yvon Bonenfant introduces the “socialic body” as a fact of vocality: “The vocalic body is produced not only by
the unique genetic capacities of each human (as modified by their environmental and cultural experience—what I
will call the social body), but also by exactly what is taking place within that body. In other words, our social body is
in a constant state of flux. It changes. Emotional responses, postures, work and play activities, desires, states of
satiation, respiratory patters, and so on, all transform, even if very subtly, the ways that our bodies metabolise, move,
and pulse. The changes necessarily affect the voice of that individual because of the voice’s exquisite
responsivity” (2010:76).
scholarly discourse mired in the visualized exotification and eroticization of their performing bodies.

Why Mumbai

Mumbai, a city with a population of 12 million (although in actuality, is significantly higher), is India’s economic and cultural capital, featuring the largest and densest populated regions in the country. The city is also arguably the most diverse in India, inundated daily by newcomers from all corners of the country, other parts of South Asia and the Middle East. Needless to say, this diversity is well-reflected in Mumbai’s hijra and transgender communities. My project participants represent a plethora of backgrounds of religion, ethnicity, race, caste, language, gender, sex, and sexuality. They also range in age from mid-teens to mid-seventies, and are able to speak on four decades worth of music and dance making in the hijra community.

Aside from its diversity, Mumbai became a strategic ethnographic home base for a number of reasons. First, the city is the home of one of the more active LGBTIQ communities in India, and since 2009, has hosted annual pride celebrations—including music and dance concerts, talent contests, film screenings, and public demonstrations—that attract thousands of participants from the region, including vocal members of the hijra, jogta/jogappa, and the thriving thirunangai communities. Behind these pride efforts are members of the Queer Azādi (‘Freedom’) March (QAM) organizational committee, which is housed administratively under the roof of the Humsafar Trust. This well-established HIV/AIDS NGO became an important key access point for me to reach potential participants in both urban and rural settings.
The city is also the home of the world’s most prolific film industry, and as a result, is arguably India’s cultural epicenter. This presented other serious advantages. Particularly notable is the ease with which to locate and secure participation from highly talented musicians and dancers. I found *hijras* who were able to speak with authority on music, dance, and film, as well as many who have performed on stage and/or stepped foot on a studio set. Many of these professionals worked as vocal activists in the community, and performed either as a component of their activism, or for their own benefit on the side. Among them include the well-known—and already mentioned—Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a *hijra guru, Bharatanatyam* dancer, actress, and activist. A part of this study since 2010, Laxmi delivered the case to the Indian Supreme Court that led to the *hijra* community’s legal recognition in April 2014. Another participant includes Abhina Aher, a trained *Bharatanatyam* and activist from Mumbai who currently serves as the Program Manager at the India HIV/AIDS Alliance for “Project *Pehchān*” in Delhi. After meeting her in 2010, Abhina is responsible for drawing my attention to the Dancing Queens, a group that she founded and currently chairs under the auspices of the Queer *Azādi* Mumbai initiative. Among other things, these primary participants were able to bring a professional level of expertise to the subject of music and dance performance, as well as to the critical discourse of *pehchān*. 
Research Sites and General Demographics of Project Participants

Over the course of the entire study, I visited over four regions. All of these can be ranked (in order) by the amount of time spent conducting fieldwork there (see Figure 4):

![Figure 4: Geography of Research Sites](image)

(1) Mumbai is my primary research site, where I was based for an accumulated time of nearly two years during periods in 2010, 2011, 2012-13 (for ten months supported by Fulbright-mtvU), and 2015 (for six months supported by Fulbright-Hays). While there, I immersed myself within and surrounding the gharānās (households) associated with hijra gurus Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, Abhina Aher, and Mujranani. I also became a fixture in Mumbai’s active LGBTIQ rights community where I befriended individuals spanning the gamut of (gender and sexual) identity expressions.

Mumbai possesses an elaborate network of small NGOs, many of which are operated by individuals from hijra and/or non-hijra transgender communities. This is especially the case in the Malad West, Thane West, and Dharavi areas. In contrast, Santa cruz East and Kalyan West are
home to two branches of the larger *Humsafar* Trust, which are staffed primarily by self-identified gay men.

Figure 4 indicates the extent of my understanding of *hijra* geography in Mumbai. Colored dots indicate places of “origin” (where a *hijra gharânā* is located, for instance), whereas lines and arrows indicate established relationships and movements between groups, as I have seen them. “Relationships and movements” between groups can be explained largely by a formal affiliation between households or organizations, but do not delve into the realm of “informal” relationships (like love affairs) held between members of a household. Although my larger concern for intersubjective positioning depends on the availability of sometimes intimate details about its participants, this study is not a channel for gossip nor does it disclose information held in confidence between the “informal” researcher and his participants. Accordingly, I concern myself only with participant-approved details about personhood insofar as they might impact performances, conceptions of self, and the larger ethnographic narrative.

(2) Secondary research sites were in Lucknow, Kanpur, and Delhi. I spent a total of two months in residence at the American Institute for Indian Studies (AIIS) Urdu Language Program during 2011 in Lucknow. While there, I often visited the homes of two prominent *gharânās* (one in Lucknow, the other in Kanpur), and acquainted myself with individuals from the *kothi* community. Regular research visits were achieved in my spare time and required a bit of finesse insofar as my social schedule was concerned. While in Lucknow, I navigated a double life, dividing my time between (a rather friendly and liberal) community of Urdu language instructors...
and kothis. While there, I witnessed a number of celebratory badhais performed by hijras, hijra worship and prayer surrounding the holy month of Ramadan, kothi worship and prayer to Hindu goddesses, and other aspects of hijra and kothi daily living, including the culture of cruising sites in public parks or train stations, and underground networks of kothi-owned businesses. Divya, who has since passed, served as my companion throughout this visit. Shivananda Khan, the late founder and director of the Naz Foundation, also provided intellectual guidance. The access I was given, I realize upon reflection, was invaluable, and provided a rare glimpse of the (permeable yet not entirely arbitrary) dividing lines between hijra and kothi lifestyles.

Two brief trips to Delhi took place in 2015. While there, I worked with India HIV/AIDS Alliance and Project Pehchān in a participatory film production documenting two trans-hijra and MSM-related conferences. The events were attended by a variety of state- and national-level NGO and community-based organization (CBO) leaders around India (see Chapter 6).

(3) My third research site was in the Chennai-Pondicherry-Koovagam region of Tamil Nadu. While there, I attended several thirunangai and hijra cultural events, including Koovagam on two separate occasions, and acquainted myself with a number of thirunangais, hijra gurus and NGOs in the region. An extremely gifted dancer by the name of Taejha accompanied me throughout the course of my stay there, and on several occasions, he and his friends hosted me. His assistance was priceless in my navigation of the Tamil transgender community, which I nonetheless found to be quite warm and open.

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28 Although I was required to attend intensive language classes on a daily basis, and lived with other American students in the program, as far as I knew at the time, nobody in my language program—roommates included—were aware of my fieldwork ongoing. Among other things, this gave me a small taste of what kothi life is like, and helped me further conceptualize the particular Indian definition of the closet.
My research in Tamil Nadu took place during two separate trips spanning April 2013 to May 2014. My initial decision to attend Koovagam was made while on the Fulbright-mtvU Fellowship at a time when I was looking to expand my library of moving images. The success of the trip to Koovagam inadvertently served as the preliminary study of a new phase of research—one that I plan to continue after the completion of this dissertation—surrounding the comparative analysis of India’s regional transgender music expressions.

(4) A fourth research area was the Surat-Ahmedabad-Rajpipla region of Gujarat, where I spent an accumulated time of just over two weeks during three separate periods in 2010, 2011 and 2012. Most of my fieldwork took place in and surrounding Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil’s pink palace and NGO, the Lakshya (‘Aim’) Trust. I was able to visit one hijra gharānā, and acquainted myself with several hijras and kothis affiliated with the NGO. Manav, as I have been invited to call him, served as my translator and companion throughout the course of my stay there (see Chapter 4).

(5) In addition to these physical locations, I must also mention the importance of the internet—and other media—in the ruminating in and/or gathering of digital information. The participants in this study are, as a whole, well connected to the ever present (and still growing) LGBTIQ community via social media websites like Facebook (an Indian favorite), Twitter, and

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29 Incidentally, my research with Manav also took on a participatory role. As part of my Fulbright-mtvU Fellowship in 2012-13, I was invited to play violin at an annual music festival held at his palace grounds. In exchange for this service, Manav allowed me to film the event and interview him for the purposes of a documentary. The event showcased a diverse array of talents in the largely Hindustani music and Kathak dance fields. Many of these performers were kothis associated with Manav and his programs at the Lakshya Trust. Because of my work there, I was able to both capture another glimpse into the regional variances surrounding hijra and kothi performativity, as well as engage in (and ‘test’ the effects of) participatory-style filmmaking approaches towards my research. The two of us met upon the recommendation of Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and soon discovered that our respective music gurus in fact played with each other (his on harmonium and mine on surbahar and sitar). Since then we managed to cultivate a distinctly musical relationship, and performed a number of times on stage, including on one occasion at Guild Hall in the Hamptons. It is through Manav, therefore, that I am able to combine the seemingly disparate parts of my life—the queer and the musical—into an effective pedagogy and practice.
to a lesser extent, Instagram. In many cases, these individuals utilize the internet as a means of connecting socially (and even romantically) with others, as well as to mobilize their communities for performance events and political rallies. As such, the internet has proven to be the life-blood of LGBTIQ social organization throughout India and the world, and therefore for me, provided an invaluable resource in the daily exchange of intellectual capital between myself and project participants.

The internet also provided the primary platform for the development of a participatory-based documentary film project supported by the Fulbright-mtvU Fellowship during 2012-2013. As I explain further in Chapters 3 and 6, the website housed a digital archive of video portraits of musicians, dancers, and performance ensembles. These videos were produced in “real time”—that is, the preproduction (scouting of research sites), production (filming), postproduction (editing), and audience engagement (posting) occurred within a period of two to four weeks of each other. Although incredibly labor intensive and grueling, the results of this effort produced a virtual resource for project participants and audiences to interact with the (live) media produced about their communities. In this regard, the internet not only provided me with the material I needed to continue my research, but also a way for me to give back to the community.

**Pehchān as a Means of Representation**

According to Stuart Hall, “identity is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990:223). Keeping issues of visibility and concealment in mind, I seek a critical(ly queer) interpretation of camera use in the field and how it participates in the pehchān-making of the subjects captured by—or excluded from—its gaze. As such, my use
and interpretation of my use) of the camera seeks to exhibit a sensitive responsivity to the emotional responses, postures, desires, respiratory patterns, and other “factors shaped both by the internal conditions of the body and by environmental and cultural experiences” (see Bonenfant 2010:76).

Maintaining a critical (queer) eye on issues that arise in documenting performances in real life and on stage, my aim is to represent people and places in extensive detail so as to challenge the homogenization (eroticization and exotification) of *hijra* identity, and in doing so, provide witness to the diverse ways that *hijras* define themselves, perform their music, and live their lives.

My method of (re)presentation is by no means meant to constitute a totalistic view of the communities in question, nor is it intentionally fragmentary or hyper-subjective. With the larger goal of disrupting conventional hetero- and homo-normative methods of ethnographic representation, I seek to establish a flexible middle ground, whereby the spirit and practice of dialogic editing—that which constitutes approaches to participatory filmmaking (see Chapter 3)—are faithfully yet playfully maintained, where the “end results” of analysis are merely parts of a greater collective whole. As such, this dissertation seeks to raise further questions about the nature of ethnographic authenticity, and to allow project participants to “speak out” for themselves.

One of the ways it achieves this is by employing video portraits of participants “in their own skin.” Film links in the text provide an interactive component to reading, and can be viewed in their entirety on the following website: [http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com](http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com) (password: pehchaan). My use of film in this case further seeks to illustrate an “emic”

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perspective of the ways music and dance phrase movements of self (re)presentation. If queer is [truly] “connected to emotions as much as it is a body of theory” (Rooke 2010:26), then it becomes necessary for us to experience it using our own senses. Moreover, as documentarian Werner Herzog explains, “sometimes images themselves develop their own life, their own mysterious stardom.”

Visual ethnography, in my opinion, is best capable of communicating musical knowledge to the viewing (and hearing) scholar while simultaneously maintaining the formal integrity of the original, raw material in an accessible and palatable way.

While film and (written) ethnography are different media, they have common aims. Through developing an intertextuality between filmmaking and scholarship—and through a critical interpretation of musical events presented in text and (moving) visuals—I seek to cultivate a surround-sound understanding of hijra identity where the advantages of “thick description”—or what Appadurai refers to as “thickness with difference”—and visual ethnography configure a stereoscopic, multidimensional perspective of hijra musical culture (and the ethnographer immersed therein) (Appadurai 1996:55). In doing so, I also seek to impart a personal and participatory component to the reader’s critical exploration of the connections forged by music and pehchān.

(Queer) Filmmaking Culture

Due to the ways in which researchable material arose in this study—through the creation of film footage that could be given back to the community—I seek not for this ethnography to merely

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30 *Grizzly Man*, directed by Werner Herzog.

31 Appadurai’s “thickness with difference” is being aware of the contexts and “imagined possibilities” in the lives of those who seek a community (also in Shahani 2008:32).
represent its participants, but also to go somewhere and do something—to apply in their own pehchān-making.\textsuperscript{32} The reasoning for this is simple: If I am to immerse myself within and write about communities on the cusp of social and institutional change, then it becomes my obligation as the ethnographer to provide witness to the local experiences of individuals living within them. Queer filmmaking is particularly suited for work of this nature.

Maintaining a long-term commitment to the community that spans over five years, this dissertation and its media components are not meant to stand in front of—or steal—the platform of the local voices it engages with. Instead, they are meant to participate alongside and amplify other community-based media, and contribute towards the wealth of publicly-accessible materials produced for and about hijras (see Figure 5).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Filming Urmī and Abhina from the Dancing Queens; film footage by author, May 3rd, 2013}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{32} The objective behind this sort of queer “public anthropology” is not simply to create short-term initiatives for the immediate benefit of its participants, but to recognize that problem-solving is an ongoing experience that community members engage with on a long-term basis (see Lewin and Leap 2009).
Beginning in 2012-13 through Fulbright-mtvU, I began the production of a participatory documentary project with the intention of achieving these very goals in real time. Throughout the 10 month period, I maintained an active, online blog of my research, incorporating written descriptions of musical events along with five to ten minute videos of these events. The blog featured videos and audio recordings of interviews, edited and overlaid atop music performances, religious rituals, or other action sequences. The documentary films themselves were created through the fusion of all four stages of conventional filmic production: (1) pre-production (location and talent scouting), (2) production (filming), (3) post-production (editing), and (4) outreach and audience engagement. The timespan between steps (2) and (4) consisted of approximately one and a half to two months. The results of the edited material were shared with project participants and interested audience members/scholars through the virtual platform, as well as through community screenings, discussions, workshops, and other venues suggested by the participants themselves.33

Building upon the efforts produced through Fulbright-mtvU, I seek for my dissertation to achieve the following: (1) the creation of a hyper-reflexive—or in the case of the Godrej presentation—a meta-reflexive visual component that does not get lost in the weeds of the author’s (my) personal narrative; (2) the involvement of participants in both the consumption and participation of their own representation (through dialogic editing, among other

33 Towards the end of my 10 month stay in Mumbai, I arranged for “work-in-progress” screening held at the Godrej India Culture Lab at the Godrej Corporate Headquarters in Vikhroli, Mumbai. The presentation itself was also filmed and produced into a video and blog entry posted online. For visual reference, refer to: http://fulbright.mtvu.com/jroy/2013/08/19/mumbais-queer-voices-a-work-in-progress-screening/
methodologies); (3) transparency in the research methodologies and writing process; and finally (4) the development of scholarly material that interacts with the lives of its participants (and vice versa), with the potential to catalyze change, if something such as this is desired.

**Roadmap of the Dissertation**

My roadmap for the dissertation will consist largely of two sections. The first section will comprise of two chapters that describe my methodology of using queer documentary filmmaking as a research strategy to illuminate issues of music-making and *pehchān* in trans-*hijra* communities. Chapter 2 will present a history of film and visual ethnography placing an emphasis on their relevance within the field of queer ethnomusicology. This will be followed by a more elaborate discussion of my methodology in Chapter 3.

The second part of the dissertation will consist of ethnographic “case studies” from three different angles. Situating my dissertation within current ethnomusicological discussions on voice and subjectivity, Chapter 4 will investigate *hijra badhai* in public contexts and undertake a comparative analysis of four different renditions of the *hijra badhai* song “Asha Natoru” (‘Don’t Break My Hopes’). With specific attention placed on music content, performance context, and visuality (vis-à-vis film footage), I seek a broader understanding of the ways in which *hijra* individuals are interlinked and how local practices and discourses reflect and constitute certain organizational structure(s) of the *gharānā* and a distinct *hij*-vocality. In this chapter, I discuss how more observational and referential approaches to documentary

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34 Steven Feld (1990) used the technique of showing his work to his project participants throughout all stages of its production as a means of involving them more closely in the editing practices and of subverting his ethnographic authority.
filmmaking participate in the gathering and construction of *hijra pehchān* based on strategies of difference.

Critically engaging the participatory role of the camera in the construction of the “ethnographic imagination,” Chapter 5 will investigate the role music played in the ceremonial experience of a *hijra jalsa* “comings out” ritual. Drawing upon A.J. Racy’s analysis of *tarab* (ecstasy) at a Near East *jalsah* (‘meeting’) performance, this chapter will investigate how similar conceptions of *tarab* are choreographed within the larger architecture of this “rite of initiation.” I argue that the achievement of *tarab* is catalyzed experientially through a convergence of participants’ interactions in physical space, the larger ritual performance structure, and ideas about *hijra*-ness, and that this convergence signals the embodiment of community-held values surrounding *izzat* for the family. As I demonstrate, my particular engagement of the camera in this case plays a participatory—in the *cinéma vérité* use of the term—and performative role in the configuration of a *pehchān* of *hijra* belonging.

Finally, Chapter 6 will focus on ways in which *hijra* music and dance are professionally staged and who this relates to the reconfiguration of a distinctly trans-*hijra pehchān*. With attention to music and dance forms against the backdrop of personal narratives from members of Mumbai’s premiere professional transgender dance contingent known as the Dancing Queens, I will identify some of the discourses involved in the historical (re-)shaping of a contemporary trans-*hijra pehchān*. The chapter will also engage in a critical discussion of the ways participatory filmmaking—as a culmination of the previous queer methodological approaches—reveals, contributes to and/or contests the reconfiguration of trans-*hijra pehchān*, what constitutes the “field” and “ethnographic material,” and themes implied yet not all-together
developed in the previous two chapters of the dissertation—that of the experience of “coming out” and gender (identity) transitioning.
Chapter 2
Toward an Ethnomusicology of Queer Filmmaking

My interest in the study of *hijra* music and dance pertains less to the “closeted” collection of music repertoire, and more to the interest of revealing the (multiple) truth(s) about my encounters as a queer American ethnomusicologist filming in trans-*hijra* spaces. The trans-*hijra* locus of *pehchān* informs this methodology, binding issues related to queer filmmaking as an ethnographic research method and way of knowing. Aware of the multiple uses and purposes of documentary film, my approach in this dissertation is to trace myself in trans-*hijra* spaces over extended periods of time (five years, to be approximate), and to see what happens as I trace the development of my own journey with the camera. As I will discuss in these next two chapters, I do not use the camera to capture “reality” (as in observational modes of non-fiction), nor do I use it to stage scripted scenes (in purely fictive genres). As Benjamin Harbert notes, neither is there a way to completely disappear into the crowds to capture life unawares—something I have tried and failed to do in India—nor is it possible to impose scripted scenarios upon living subjects as though they were actors in a film narrative (2010:25). Instead, I place myself as an intermediary between the subject and the camera, in an attempt to bring about, and in some cases, loosely situated events that are rich with ethnographic detail.

At a question and answer (Q&A) session following the screening of her film *Taza Khanbar* (2008), the feminist documentary filmmaker Bishakha Datta admitted that the presence of the camera always changes something about the situation you enter, but it is the job of the filmmaker to find ways of dealing with it (August 15, 2015, Mumbai). As a queer filmmaker, my intention is to openly situate myself between flows of power not to *cause* a particular outcome,
but to participate and perform *within*. This sentiment is expressed by Geertz, who states that “You don’t exactly penetrate another culture, as the masculinist image would have it. You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and enmeshes you” (1995:44). Although an overused simile, the emphasis here is much like a *masala*, wherein loosely measured ingredients fuse together to form one dish.

In India, the camera is far from a purely foreign instrument of gaze. *Hijras* are well aware of its potential for use and exploitation, and for this reason, may even go to great lengths either to include or exclude the camera from participation in their daily lives and on goings. As the visual analyses in Chapters 4 and 5 reveal, some events happen precisely because of the presence of the camera, while others take place because of its (perceived) absence. Accounting for the simultaneously enabling and restrictive nature of the camera informs my methodology. In these next two chapters, I will suggest that distinctly queer filmmaking can reveal key issues and researchable data surrounding *hijra pehchān* in various performance situations. But, this approach does not come without its drawbacks. In their critique of normative textual and ethnomethodological conventions—visual, performative, descriptive or otherwise—queer interpretations may (inadvertently) perpetuate the very hegemonies of discourse that they seek to undo, namely the heterosexual/homosexual binary, the overwrought emphasis on sexuality, and the Euro-American, gay male perspective of the world. Queer filmmaking is not immune to the problematics of ethnographic representation, but may exacerbate them. In order to “own up” to my particular methodological frame(s) of reference presented in greater detail in Chapter 3, it becomes necessary to unpack a history—or histories—of documentary film with a leaning towards the advent of queer theory and ethnomethodologies. This chapter first presents a history
of documentary filmmaking in the Western and Indian film worlds, with a leaning on their changing methodologies, or what Bill Nichols calls, “modes” of filmmaking (see Nichols 2001). This is then followed by a discussion of examples of genre- and gender-bending Western and Indian filmmaking, with an emphasis on contemporary Indian films that exhibit a distinctly of a queer approach to (documentary) filmmaking. A historical sketch of this sort is drawn both to raise critical questions about the conventional division between the world’s two largest film cultures, and also find methodological connections between filmmaking in both worlds. Due in large part to the establishment of queer film festivals in India and Pakistan, new queer explorations in cinematic representation have recently emerged. Drawing parallels between contemporary queer Indian filmmakers and the New Queer Cinema movement of the 1990s in the US, I discuss the ways in which queer filmmaking in both worlds provide alternatives to and complements queer ethnographic methodologies in trans-hijra contexts. To a large extent, new queer filmmaking comes well equipped with the necessary ingredients for the production of researchable film about trans-hijra culture. This chapter is then followed by a more thorough discussion of the ways in which these methodologies informed my own “ethnomusicology of the closet” in trans-hijra musical contexts.

An Integrated History of Filmmaking

The emphasis in this integrated history of filmmaking lies not in the establishment of historical connections for connections’ sake, but on the links that inform my documentary filmmaking practice. I present a Western history of filmmaking because my frame of reference draws heavily from Euro-American documentary filmmaking and visual anthropological practices (albeit from
a distinctly cinéma vérité perspective, informed by Russian documentary filmmaker Marina Goldovskaya). Nevertheless, as I have found, the histories of the world’s filmmaking practices are more related than meets the eye. Benjamin Harbert, who was another student of Goldovskaya’s, provides an excellent summary of Western documentary filmmaking, within an emphasis on movements in visual anthropology that fed into (his chosen filmmaking methodology of) cinéma vérité. My approach to the chapter builds from and queers this approach along national, ethnic, gendered and sexual lines, not only to imbricate history with my queer methodology, but also to demonstrate how filmmaking as a methodology in and of itself, can be considered a distinctly queer phenomenon (see Harbert 2010).

As Bill Nichols states, new film movements, methodologies, or what he calls “modes,” communicate a sense of history because most of them emerged in context “through a growing dissatisfaction among filmmakers with a previous mode [of filmmaking]” (Nichols 2001:100). At the same time, many of these methodologies are also timeless, in the sense that they are still employed and/or openly critiqued today around the world even after decades of reformulation. In this chapter, I do not suggest that one methodology or historical movement is better than the other. Nichols contends that new developments in film modes “signal less a better way to

35 For additional histories on Western filmmaking and visual ethnography, see the following list adapted from Harbert’s dissertation: Aumont and Brewster (1996); Barnouw (1993); Bazin and Gray (1967); Burch (1979); Clifford (1988); Ellis and McLane (2005); Farnell (2003); Feld (2003); Fischer (1977); Graham (1964); Hampton (1970); Hendricks (1975); Issari and Paul (1979); Jacknis (1984, 1987, 1989); Jacobs (1979); Lawton (1978); Lipscomb (1964); LoBrutto (2005); MacDougall (1992, 1998); Nichols (1986, 2001); Norden (1984); Orvell 2003); Rabinow (1986); Rausch (2004); Rony (1996); Rothe and Ruby (1983); Rouch (1975); Ruby (2000); Salt (1976); Sherwood (1923); Vaugan (1979); Zavattini (1966), among others.

36 For instance, while observational methodologies arose in the 1960s out the availability of 16mm cameras, magnetic tape recorders, and during a “heyday of descriptive, observational forms of sociology” (Nichols 2001:100-101), its cinematographic methodologies are employed in films that actively critique its tendency to “camouflage the actual presence and shaping influence of the filmmaker” in any given situation (2001:100). Queer filmmaking, in particular, may employ a cinéma vérité-style camerawork, but do so through reflexive, participatory, and performative modes of representation that bring the filmmaker’s voice into the diegetic frame of the documentary.
represent the historical world than a new dominant to organize a film, a new ideology to explain our relation to reality, and a new set of issues of desires to preoccupy an audience” (ibid.). What I do suggest, however, is that each methodology carries its own set of implications.

**Turn of the Century Filmmaking**

Before cameras, visual artists’ representations of the world were shaped largely by what they wanted to see. When the “impartial” camera came along, however, our understanding of the world was modified from the fantastical to the real (see Harbert 2010). The history of filmmaking, which has been researched by countless many especially in the Western world, generally begins with the the ways photojournalism and later, the moving picture, changed our way of seeing the world (see Hampton 1970; Hendricks 1975; Collier Jr. and Collier 1986; Barnouw 1993; de Brigard 1995; Rouch 1995; Orvell 2003; Ellis and McLane 2005; in Harbert 2010). All of these histories mention the development of Louis Daguerre’s light sensitive plate, “the mirror with a memory” in 1837, which ushered in a distinctly modern paradigm of thinking about the world through a universal, unprejudiced lens.

Drawing from their roots in scientific thought and experimentation, early photographers treated photography as an optical process, not necessarily an artistic one. First time experiments with the camera captured the worlds where the photographers lived. Some of the first ethnographic photographs came from the documentary records of Mathew Brady, who was commissioned by Abraham Lincoln (Collier Jr. and Collier 1986:8). Their depictions of war were grotesque, devoid of romanticism (other than, perhaps, the ‘romantic’ desire to end the war that characterized Lincoln’s presidency) (Harbert 2010:28).
By the turn of the century, photography was employed as a means of exposing humanitarian issues. One example of this was the work of sociologist Lewis Hine, who turned the photographic gaze to immigrants entering Ellis Island. Focusing on the deprived state of children entering the country, his images were influential in passing the first child labor laws in America (Nichols 1986:9). Along with other records of “urban anthropology,” this approach established photography’s role as an instrument for ethnographic research that nonetheless drew attention towards its function, namely its ability to capture life automatically and impartially yet also in response to the subjective desires of the humans operating it.

The film that brought about moving images was Edweard Muybridge’s 1878 film *Horse in Motion*, an experiment that depicted a horse galloping in slow motion. The idea for this moving picture was born from a bet wagered between the filmmaker and California Governor Leland Stanford. To prove his theory that all four hooves left the ground, Muybridge placed twenty four cameras along a racetrack and rigged them together by tripwires. Spaced in intervals of one thousandth of a second, the photographs captured the full stride of the horse in slow motion, proving Muybridge’s hypothesis (Orvell 2003:68-70; in Harbert 2010:28).

Muybridge’s successful visual ethnographic experiment was followed by two short films by French filmmaking pioneers August Marie Louis Nicolas and Louis Jean Lumière. Made in 1895, the films, signaled the birth of the fiction and documentary film genres, respectfully. The film *l’Arroseur Arrosé (The Sprinkler Sprinkled*, 1895) incorporates directed stage action with the intent of eliciting a comedic reaction from the audience in a 49-second continuous shot of an interaction between a gardener and a “rabble-rouser.” Their other film, *La sortie de l’usine Lumière à Lyon (Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*, 1895), takes on an entirely different tone.
Consisting of a 46-second continuous shot of workers leaving the Lumière factory, the film is an unstructured and unscripted documentation of ordinary life, a “relic of the historical world” (Ellis and McLane 2005:6; in Harbert 2012:29).

Two years after their release, the Lumière films were screened at the Watson Hotel in Bombay in 1897. The event was attended by a number of journalists and practicing photographers, including among them Harishchandra Saktharam Bhatavdekar (popularly known as Save Dada). A local photographer, Bhatavdekar was reportedly inspired by the films, and soon after their screenings, ordered a moving camera of his own to begin shooting. In 1899, he released a documentary short of his own that captured a wrestling match in Bombay’s Hanging Gardens, and soon after, reportedly produced the country’s first credited news footage that captures a moment in history when the math scholar R.P. Paranjpe returned to India from studying at Cambridge University.\(^{37}\)

**Early Ethnographic Film**

Turn of the century filmmaking in the West is largely defined by an Orientalist fascination of the exotic other. Documentary footage was used around this time to provide contemporary scholars with ethnographic material to explain and critique the world through its distinctly colonial lens (Ruby 2000:7, also see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998 and Rony 1996). One such of example of this was a film entitled *Gateway to India* (1920), by James A. FitzPatrick. Employing

an observational approach (see below), the film captures images of common Mumbai landmarks and street life, and does so with the intent to astound and astonish.38

A similar tone is assumed in one of the first examples of ethnographic film (for the purposes of anthropological research), which emerged out of France in 1899. Made by a French physician interested in anthropology, Félix-Louis Regnault, the film (unnamed) depicts a Wolof woman making pottery at the *Paris Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale*. What differentiates this film from the Lumière brothers’ depiction of factory workers was its focus on non-Western ethnographic subjects, as well as its intent—namely, that of the film’s function to serve as an artifact of anthropological or scientific investigation. Regnault himself was a trained anthropologist, and advocated the use of moving pictures for the purpose of scientific inquiry. At the same time the film was released, Regault published an article urging:

> museums of ethnography [to] add time-sequence photographs to their collections. It is not enough to have a loom, a lathe, or a javelin; one must also know how these things are used; We cannot know this precisely without using time-sequence photography. (Harbert 2010:30; also see Ruby 2000:7, and Rony 1996)

As Harbert notes, the newfound interest in capturing scenes of “exotic” peoples of unknown lands introduced the potential for verisimilitude through what had otherwise been the fictive methodology of staged action (*ibid.*). These films perpetuated the illusion of “truth” by capturing scenes of strangers in seemingly natural scenes. Indeed, while artists, photographers, and scholars alike were captivated by the camera lens’ potential to change the way we saw our every world, in their attempt to reveal truths about the “other,” they contributed to the “othering” of their truths. It is this dual capacity of the camera(person), that I seek to highlight in a

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38 The film can be viewed on Youtube using the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVttjzkuOMs
methodology of queer filmmaking in the next chapter. I suggest that one of the advantages of queer filmmaking lies in its capacity to simultaneously “other the familiar” and “familiarize the other,” while maintaining some semblance of truth about the moment of intersection between the object of the gaze and the one who does the gazing.

While in the West, anthropologist-cum-filmmakers were capturing scenes from unknown lands, in pre-independent India, filmmaking was largely India-based. Much of the filmmaking that took place in pre-independent India featured foreign filmmakers. One of them was Charles Urban, a British film director who often collaborated with Indian cameramen to shoot films but concentrated on lavish, royal subjects. His film *With Our King and Queen Through India* (1911), for example, documents King George V and Queer Mary’s coronation at the Delhi Durbar. Two years after Urban’s film, India’s first scripted narrative featuring non-colonial subjects was released. *Raja Harishchandra* (*King Harishchandra*, 1913), directed and produced by Dadasaheb Phalke, possessed the same production value as foreign moves at the time, but this time, featured a story surrounding Hindu gods. Phalke reportedly traveled to London to learn from Cecil Hepworth and buy equipment. The film was marketed as the “First film of Indian

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39 At the turn of the century, film connoisseurs, businessmen, and filmmakers alike began film production companies and movie theaters that largely catered towards the distribution of mostly Western films. Hiralel Sen was one of these filmmakers. Based in Calcutta, Sen was a practicing filmmaker who specialized in documenting news footage. On the side, he also also ran a company showing imported films at local theaters. Sometimes he supplemented the foreign films with his own, but as a whole found it more lucrative to screen European films. Incidentally, the company went bankrupt under the pressure of competition from others in his field. One of them was Jamshedji Madan, a former theater impresario who established Elphinstone Bioscope Company and the Elphinstone Picture Palace. Soon after bankruptcy, Sen's films were completely destroyed in a warehouse fire and with it, the documentation of India’s early cinema history. (see Hutchinson, Pamela. 2013. “The Birth of India’s Film Industry: How the Movies Came to Mumbai.” *The Guardian*, published July 25: [http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jul/25/birth-indias-film-industry-movies-mumbai](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jul/25/birth-indias-film-industry-movies-mumbai))

40 It has been uploaded onto Youtube here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsROl0WXmc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsROl0WXmc)
manufacture. Specially prepared at enormous cost […] Sure to appeal to our Hindu patrons” and largely accepted as “made in India.”  

In summary thus far, turn of the century filmmaking can be described as that of experimentation and intrigue surrounding the exotic other. Filmmakers themselves transformed from amateur photographers, to (concealed) documentarians capturing life unawares, to fully-fledged anthropologists (interested primarily in the analytical gaze of human subjects)—although in the later case, trained anthropologists may have begun subsuming the camera in their affairs with various subjects. Following World War I, the development of new technologies and expansion of interest in the narrative art of storytelling brought filmmaking into another realm—the aesthetic. During this period, filmmakers and industry professionals alike became more aware of film’s potential for artistic manipulation.

Postwar Ethnographic Filmmaking

Around the 1920s, methodologies for visual anthropologists changed as technology developed; the portability of cameras and recording devices allowed users to bring them into the field and review footage—referred to as “dailies”—by their subjects on location. In the Americas, a number of “salvage” ethnographic films emerged into the field. By the 1930s, Franz Boas—the so-called father of the American School of Anthropology—along with his students Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, released several films that drew heavily from Regnault’s research-oriented films influenced by anxiety surrounding the “imminent disappearance of native

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cultures” and the desire to preserve them (Ruby 2000:8, also see Jacknis 1984, 1987, 1989). Their work focused the particularities of culture, with an emphasis on some of the routine, mundane habits of different societies. One of these films, *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures* (1941), conducts an observational investigation of, as the title suggests, differences in the practices of baby bathing. Incidentally, their particularist approach influenced the works of Alan Lomax’s approach to the “choreometrics” of dance, as well as Ray Birdwhistell and Edward Hall’s cinematic studies of behavior, body movements, and uses of space (Ruby 2000:8).

Around the same time, theatrical and television markets began to boost a new industry of educational anthropological films that fed the public’s appetite for films about “exotic” cultures shot on location. Prior to World War II, many European countries possessed official governmental departments of folklore that produced hundreds of short films, most often with subjects in peasant clothing and dancing against a bucolic backdrop (Ruby 2000:10). In the US, the Public Broadcasting Service—which still exists today—was established, and other private initiatives began to spring up to house the newfound American appetite for these films. In colonial India, the agency Anthropological Survey Films Division, also continued this tradition (*ibid.*).

Paralleling these developments in anthropological filmmaking, two distinct documentary modes arose out of this period. To a certain respect, these modes lay at opposite ends of the methodological spectrum, but compare in a variety of capacities if not for their interest in audience manipulation. On one hand was the more aesthetically-oriented “poetic mode,” and on the other, the rhetorically-driven “expository mode.”
Expository films placed an emphasis on the primacy of the argument delivered by the commentary, and sequences are organized to “maintain the continuity of the spoken argument” (2001:106). The films addressed the viewer directly using titles and “voice-of-God” voicer-over narratives that proposed a perspective, advanced an argument, or recounted history without the voice itself being implicated within it (2001:105). In doing so, these films fostered the cultivation of the professionally trained, “richly toned” male voice commentary (2001:105-6). Notable examples of these include such titles as The City (1939) and Blood of the Beasts (1949). Without exposing the subjective placement of the voice (or filmmaker behind the camera), the world as seen through the expository lens of these films is configured within a distinctly “rhetorical or argumentative frame” (ibid.). In doing so, they place an emphasis on objectivity, generalization and large-scale argumentation over the particularities of a time and place.

In contrast to this rhetorical mode of filmmaking, artist-cum-filmmakers who were fascinated by the technological potential of the moving image began introducing a poetic sensibility into the world of documentary. Rooted in the modernist avant-garde, the films that emerged stressed mood, tone, and affect over linear expositions, and in doing so, sacrificed “conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it” (Nichols 2001:102). These films were primarily interested in “exploring associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions” than in telling a story involving characters in time (ibid.). Consequently, characters more typically functioned on a par with “other objects as raw material” selected and arranged “into associations and patterns of their choosing,” that as humans with a story to tell (ibid.).
Although shot with attention to verisimilitude, poetic films preferred “alternative forms of knowledge [over] the straightforward transfer of information, the prosecution of a particular argument or point of view, [and] the presentation of reasoned propositions about problems in need of solution” (Nichols 2001:103). Notable examples of this mode are surrealist films like *Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog, 1928)*, by artists Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, and *L’Age d’Or (The Golden Age, 1930)* also by Buñuel. Both films give an impression of a documentary reality, but “populate that reality with characters caught up in uncontrollable urges, abrupt shifts of time and place, and more puzzles than answers” (Nichols 2001:104).

Incidentally, aspects of this mode are still in practice today. They can be seen particularly in the works of New Queer Cinema filmmakers who are experiment with conceptions of time and space, light, and linear narrative conventions. One notable difference emerges between the two genres, however. For instance, while poetic modes of filmmaking largely “camouflage the actual presence and shaping influence of the filmmaker” through their non-linear, surreal, and/or absurdist rendering of reality (2001:100), queer filmmaking often brings the filmmaker’s voice into the diegetic frame of the documentary. It is with attention to the filmmaker and her changing relationships with her subjects, audiences, and in how she depicts these relationship, that we may be able trace the emergence of a queer ontology in 20th century documentary filmmaking.

*Participant Observation Film*

In 1922, Robert Flaherty’s film *Nanook of the North* developed a documentary/narrative-hybrid style of filmmaking that ushered in a new era of participant-observation-style filmmaking, while simultaneously cultivating fresh issues about the exploitation of film subjects. Other films of this
nature were made at the time, including Edward Curtis’s *In the Land of the War Canoes* (also known as *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, 1914) and *Grass* (1925), a film on the annual migration of the Bakhtari of Iran (Ruby 2000:9). However, *Nanook of the North* is largely singled out as the “first of its kind” because of its international market success. Paramount Pictures even financed Flaherty’s second film *Moana* (1926) (*ibid.*).

Flaherty’s “groundbreaking” approach has been criticized, especially among contemporary documentary filmmakers, for enacting “cinematic deceit” for “staging and editing” in a narrative style otherwise conveyed as a documentation of reality (Harbert 2010:32). Flaherty’s interaction with his subjects is unmistakably Orientalist. It has been said that Flaherty wanted to capture the “essential drama” within his material, and in doing so, created a scripted narrative emphasizing the severity of life for primitive Nanooks in the formidably Northern environment. In one sequence, Flaherty reportedly requested that his main character used a spear instead of a rifle (Harbert 2010:32). Nichols reads Flaherty’s film as a suspension of disbelief in the “fictional aspect of his story at the price of a certain dishonesty in what he reveals to us about his actual relation to his subject” (2001:101). For instance, the filmmaker shows a family suffering from starvation, but does not reveal whether or not he himself ate or made food available to his subjects (*ibid.*).

The power-dynamic in the director/actor relationship in Flaherty’s “documentaries” permitted a system of unchecked creative license that was only enhanced by his white American-ness. Flaherty exploited this imbalance to gain access. In one case, he explained that:

…though Nanook and his crowd were at first highly amused at the idea of the white man wanting to take pictures of themselves, the most common objects in
the world, as soon as I got my projection apparatus going and showed them some of the first results, they were completely won over. (Harbert 2010:32)

Although Flaherty’s methodology is praised in some circles for its break from “the purely descriptive,” this praise neglects the historical reality that Nanooks predates the codification of “descriptive documentary” as a methodology. Flaherty’s methodology represents less of a conscious “departure from” descriptive filmmaking, and more of a pre-naissant example of participant-observation filmmaking. The film is exploitative, and exacerbates social issues and concerns that we as a global scholarly community have unpacked for quite some time.

Nevertheless, its inclusion here is apt for a comparison with methodologies that draw attention to issues surrounding the filmmaker’s relationship with her subjects, audiences, and in how she depicts these relationships. These issues begin to reveal themselves in the cinéma vérité mode, and take on new form in the reflexive and performative modes of documentary filmmaking.

**Observational Documentary and Cinéma Vérité**

In the 1960s, the civil rights movement in the US coincided with the development of the 16mm camera and tape recorders, and led to what Tomas Waugh calls “an age of feasting for the 16 mm social-issue documentary film” (1997:107). From films like Harlan County USA (1976) to The Battle of Chile (1977), artists and audiences “wanted to change the world with images of reality” (ibid.). Technological advancements allowed crews to film sound and picture synchronously, and encouraged filmmakers to experiment with recording subjects in natural environments without (at least ideally) intervening in the lives of those being filmed. This,
combined with an interest to reveal certain truths about the human condition, led to two contrasting modes of documentary filmmaking: observational film and cinéma vérité.

Also known as “fly on the wall” documentary, observational film sacrificed the formality of pattern characteristic of the poetic mode and the persuasiveness of argument in the expository mode, in favor of an approach that placed an emphasis on experience (Nichols 2001:109). According to Nichols, the particular strength of observational film was in its ability to create a feeling of presence through its depiction of the actual duration of events. Images and sound were often edited with temporal and spatial sensitivity to the depiction of “reality,” and affirmed a sense of “fidelity to what occurs that can pass on events to us as if they simply happened when they have,” even though they were constructed to give that appearance (Nichols 2001:112-113). Regardless of their true authenticity, it was the presence of the camera in the field that testified “its presence in the historical world” (2002:113). This approach to filmmaking proliferated in the US through the words of Richard Leacock, Robert Drew, Donn Pennebaker, Albert and David Maysles (Ruby 2000:12), and also appeared in the works of neo-realists (Nichols 2001:211). In the films, characters appear to engage with one another, and ignore the filmmakers in scenes that unroll like fiction to reveal aspects of character and individuality (ibid.). As a result, the viewer could make inferences, like zoologists hidden in the bush, about the behaviors or those whose actions appear before us.

Naturally, this approach leads to various new questions about the ethics of filmmaking. Nichols outlines some of his own: (1) To what extent is the camera being voyeuristic?; (2) Where does this place the viewer?; (3) To what extent has the filmmaker received consent from the film participants?; (4) How much do the participants know about the filmmaker’s intentions? (ibid.)
The invisibility of the filmmaker (or its ideal) also sets up an opposition that leads us to question the nature of authenticity itself. This leads to questions, such as: (1) To what extent are the participants responding to the camera?; (2) Are they self-censoring?

These and other questions about the relationships between filmmaker, subject, and audience led towards the development of a mode that shed light on the filmmaker. Cinéma vérité arose to provide the viewer an understanding of the ways the camera intervenes in a given ethnographic situation, and to stress an actual, lived encounter between filmmaker and subject (Nichols 2001:117). Whereas observational documentaries gave presence “on the scene” through bodily absence, cinéma vérité documentaries gave a sense of bodily presence. Spearheaded by French anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch, cinéma vérité employed the camera as though it was another character, and incorporated subjects into the larger collaborative process of filmmaking—collaborations that were often filmed (Nichols 2001:117). A notable example of this is Rouch’s Chronique d’un été (Chronicle of a Summer; 1961), a project he produced alongside sociologist Edgar Morin. Combining Flaherty’s ideas about participant-observation with Russian avant-garde and film theorist Dziga Vertov, participants were invited into discussions of the footage, “which were, in turn, incorporated into the final version of the film” (Ruby 2000:12).

Over the course of his 40-year career, Rouch developed participatory approaches with a number of films made of West Africans—coining the term “shared anthropology”—wherein subjects in front of the camera shared ethnographic authority with the director (Ruby 2000:13). With these participatory documentaries, Nichols states, “we expect to witness the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with, rather than unobtrusively observes,
poetically reconfigures, or argumentatively assembles that world” (Nichols 2001:116). They “involve the the ethics and politics of encounter” between the one who wields the camera and the one who does not (ibid.). Questions that arise from this approach, therefore, concern the ways in which the filmmaker and subject respond to each other, how they negotiate their roles and responsibilities, and how they deliver a truthful yet readable film out of an ideal of participation.

Incidentally, Rouch’s work influenced countless other experimental filmmakers and anthropologists alike, including Steven Feld (see Feld 1990). David and Judith MacDougall, both of whom where graduates of the University of California, Los Angeles’s ethnographic film training program, were also known for employing a participatory approach in their African film trilogy entitled *Turkana Conversations* (1977) (Ruby 2000:16). They were also drawn to India with their film project entitled *Doon School Project* (2000-2003), a series of films shot over the course of three years at an Indian boarding school, and their sequel *Gandhi’s Children* (2008), which examines the lives of homeless school boys. The duo spearheaded the use of subtitles (as opposed to voice over) through their films, and became known for using an intimate, “compassionate” approach to filming “real life” and interviews (ibid.).

The ethnographic richness of *cinéma vérité*, its social focus, as well as its potential for (self-)reflexive analysis through collaborative direction, planted the seed for a distinctly queer sensibility of filmmaking to emerge. The methodology influenced many New Queer filmmakers, including the likes of Jean-Luc Godard, a French New Wave director who is credited as having produced some of the earliest explicit examples of a queer films. However, the two modes that arose next helped to shape queer filmmaking as we have seen it in more recent films.
Reflexive Documentary

One of the major questions that cinéma vérité left unanswered was the question of power surrounding the camera’s gaze and, in particular, its potential for misrepresenting the “historical world.” The reflexive mode of documentary filmmaking emerged in the 1970s at the onset of early feminism, to shift our attention from what gets represented to how it gets represented. As such, rather than attending exclusively the filmmaker in her engagement with her subjects on the screen, reflexive filmmaking concentrated on the filmmaker’s engagement with the viewer (Nichols 2001:125).

Reflexive documentaries achieve this through a variety of techniques. In order to address issues of realism and ethnographic authenticity, reflexive documentaries subvert conventions of continuity editing, character development and narrative structure commonly employed in the observational and expository modes (2001:126). In doing so, these films produce a “heightened form of consciousness” in their mission to readjust “the assumptions and expectations of its audience,” not merely to add knowledge to existing categories of knowledge as observational styles of approach have done (2001:128). Some films achieve this through shots of the film’s cameramen and/or editors in action, This clues the viewer into the ways the narrative within the narrative is constructed (see *The Man with a Movie Camera* [1987] by Dziga Vertov; 2001:126-7). Other films achieve this through “disguised fiction,” relying on trained actors to deliver performances the viewer initially may believe to be self-presentation (see *David Holzman’s Diary* [1968], *No Lies* [1973], and *Daughter Rite* [1978]; ibid.). Still, other films recount personal stories from the perspective of the filmmaker in a distinctly autobiographical tone (see *Bontoc Eulogy* [1995]; 2001:125).
The films that emerged from this mode of filmmaking largely addressed social issues. Many of these films, according to Nichols, followed many of the conventions of participatory filmmaking, but also sought to raise issues about “discrimination against women in the contemporary world” (2001:128). In doing so, the films gave a name “to what had lain invisible: the oppression, devalorization, and hierarchy” that is now called sexism (2001:129). Early examples of these feminist films include *The Woman’s Film* (1971), *Joyce at Thirty-Four* (1972), and *Growing up Female* (1970). The films challenge notions of femininity with reflexive concern for the ways imbalances of power manifest in the conventions of filmmaking. In doing so, they provoke our awareness of culture (in society and in filmmaking contexts) and the assumptions that support it. The also incite the view into action by producing an imagined reality where they might be challenged, or opening up “a gap between knowledge and desire” by pointing to the viewers as social actors and agents of change (*ibid*).

A number of reflexive documentaries can also be seen in the likes of Indian documentaries. Among these films include *Naach* (‘Dance,’ 2008) by Saba Dewan, and *Unlimited Girls* (2002) by Paromita Vohra, and *Gulabi Gang* (‘Pink Gang,’ 2012) by Nishtha Jain. The highly stylized film *Naach* uses a combination of staged interviews, performances, and observational-style sequences to reveal the beautifully grotesque and sometimes morbid details about the daily lives of female dancers at a town fair in Bihar, India. Metaphorical references of patriarchy are embedded throughout the film, and in particular, the first sequence. The film opens to a close-up shot of a little girl picking up cow manure, and then slowly zooms out while panning left to reveal men holding hands while walking leisurely through the fair grounds. The sound of dance music in the distance (as though it were diegetic) produces a feeling of
excitement, albeit tinged by the irony of the visuals. This is followed by a cut to a close-up shot of men barricaded behind a barbed wire fence, and another cut to a 180 degree shot from the POV of the men. The shot is completely blurred, and one can barely make the forms of five or six women dancing on an elevated platform. Another cut to the faces of the men, and the camera slowly pans right to reveal details of the barbed-wire fence in all its morbid glory. The alternation of these two shots continues for a number of minutes, leaving the viewer with a feeling of anticipation, almost as though we were part of the audience. The scene ends before we get to see the dancers in full focus, which ultimate leaves us reflecting about our own voyeurism.

Like *Naach*, the film *Gulabi Gang* (2012) reveals the ways gender dynamics play out in rural India. In doing so, however, the film makes more direct headway in exposing the role of the camera (and filmmaker) as instruments of power and agents of social change. *Gulabi Gang* follows a group of (mostly) women that seek to provide institutional legitimacy to the cases of wives who have been abused or killed by their husbands. Shot using a *cinéma vérité* approach, the film participates in the narratives already taking place in the lives of its subjects, and in doing so, reveals the symbiotic relationship between group members and filmmaker in its production. As the camera follows its protagonist (the group’s leader), it provides legal witness to the events that transpired while also giving the protagonist legitimacy in drawing the truth out of subjects in her investigation. In a scene where the film’s protagonist enters the house to investigate the untimely death of a woman, she invokes the capacity of the camera as an aid to pressure her witnesses.

As Nishtha Jain informed me, “the access [I was given as a filmmaker] was just indicative of the lawlessness of the situation” (pers. comm. August 15, 2015). Understanding the
potential of the camera in creating order, the filmmaker utilizes certain techniques to enhance her
effectiveness in tipping the power balance. In a scene where the protagonist is interviewing a
witness, the filmmaker places the camera above the witness’s head at a 45 degree angle—a move
that, within the ontology of the situation, imposes pressure on her subjects to tell the truth as it
peers down on them, while also signaling to the viewer their own feeling of power. The
filmmaker’s attention to the gaze is reflected in another seen when, following a direct
confrontation with local men—the anti-Gulabi Gang, as I saw them—the filmmaker pans to the
left, revealing an audience of about thirty townsmen and boys. Instead of cutting to another
sequence, the filmmaker lets the camera linger for nearly one minute, revealing the vulnerability
of the filmmaker exchange hands to the men themselves, who leave the frame one by one until
the last one, unaware of (or comfortable with) his powerlessness, is left standing.

As a whole, the film subverts normative axes of power, setting up a sharp distinction
between the role of women and men in the film’s investigations (even the male police are not to
be trusted). Nevertheless, the film refrains from queering power itself. Never does the camera
seem to dwell in the perspective of the men, nor does it explore the intimate (sexual or
otherwise) details of the lives of those on the screen. The private lives of the Gulabi Gang are
understandably kept at a distance, revealed only in cases where it may provide legal witness to a
particular case at hand. That said, the role of the film is clearly defined. We already know that the
film is not meant to be melodramatic, and yet the stories that unveil themselves before the viewer
are just enough to carry emotional weight of the film, enough to incite us into action.
Performative Documentary

Most documentary films are constructed by “an informing logic” that “supports an underlying argument, assertion or claim about the historical world” and are therefore more concerned about relating its content according to historical linkages than creating a sense of credibility and continuity of time and space through continuity editing (Nichols 1991:26-35; in Hosseini and Wakkary 2004). Performative documentary emerged not only to engage questions of representation, but to challenge the very nature of what is known as the historical world and ways of acquiring knowledge about it. In this mode, film becomes less a tool to recount events in history—for the purposes of raising questions about complex social issues—and more a vehicle to engage with them. In doing so, performative documentary underscores “the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasizing its subjective and affective dimensions” through methods that depart from factual recounting (Nichols 2001:132).

If documentary that came before exhibited, in Nichols’s words, an “excessive faith in witnesses” and “naive history,” the loss of “referential emphasis in performative documentary marks a deflection from historical specificity toward a more evocative history” (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:37). As if to come full circle, the performative mode questions the nature of knowledge through an almost surreal, poetic sensibility to emotionality, tone, and memory. One of the most referenced examples of performative documentary is Marlon Riggs’s queer documentary Tongues Untied (1989) (see Nichols 1991, 2001; Holmlund and Fuchs 1997; Waugh 1997). The film makes use of poetic recitations, declarations, and enacted scenes that
address the intense personal stakes involved in black, gay identities (Nichols 2001:132). Taking on the political implications of being a queer person of color, the film formally addresses “how embodied knowledge provides an entry into an understanding of the more general processes at work in society” and in doing so, “strives to animate us to adopt the position of [the filmmaker] for ourselves” as we are “invited to experience what it is like to occupy the subject social position of a black, gay male,” the filmmaker himself (2001:131-132). Like other performative documentaries, however, the film “does not draw our attention to the formal qualities or political context of the film directly so much as deflect our attention from the referential quality of documentary altogether” (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:35).

It is here where I temporarily abandon our methodological discussion of performative documentary, and enter a history of queer filmmaking. I do this so that we may begin to trace the emergence of queer consciousness in film to provide an interpretive foundation for the methodologies that I lay out in greater detail in Chapter 3. Marlon Rigg’s *Tongues Untied*, along with other notable examples of queer film, will (re-)emerge within a queer methodological frame of reference. The following sections trace the development of a queer interpretive strategy in Western and Indian film. This is then followed by a more thorough discussion of how cinéma vérité, reflexive, and performative modes methodologically carry over in the development of distinctly queer films and towards a productively queer methodology of filmmaking.

The Celluloid Closet: LGBT Filmmaking and the Emergence of New Queer Cinema

In the 1980s, a canon of films with LGBTIQ themes emerged with Vito Russo’s publication *The Celluloid Closet* (1981). With the publication came a critical discussion of ways in which to
interpret and therefore define queerness in film. This facilitated the reclamation of texts by validating an interpretive strategy that made queerness visible in other films (see Ghosh 2002:218, who speaks in reference to the film *Fire* [1996]). It is thus with consideration of these strategies that I conduct a short (and I stress *short*) summary of notable interpretive “movements” in LGBTIQ cinema.

In the West, before World War II, gay and lesbian stories often found outlets in modernist avant-garde cinema and poetic films. In fact, according to film scholar B. Ruby Rich, the postwar avant-garde was almost entirely defined by (closeted) gay or queer artists and filmmakers (2013:4). Among these filmmakers included the New York-based duo James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber, who produced *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) and *Lot in Sodom* (1933); Switzerland-based filmmakers H.D. and her lover Bryher, who produced *Borderline* (1930) and the film journal *Close Up* (*ibid.*). These films are largely defined by their cultivation of a new queer potential, through the use of subtle “winks” and other hints signifying sexual and gender non-conformity.

After World War II, a series of “underground” films emerged in Europe and the US. These were spearheaded by Kenneth Anger’s *Fireworks* (1947), and works by other filmmakers including Jack Smith, Gregory Markopoulos, Tarlor Mead, George Kuchar, James Broughton, Nathaniel Dorsky, José Rodriguez-Soltero, and of course, Andy Warhol (*ibid.*). Through these films, it became possible—for those who could read the subtext and spoke the coded languages—to interpret the presence of gay and lesbian characters. These characters went largely unrecognized by mainstream audiences—a result of the general public’s inability to decode the subtle winks in plain view at the time—but in plain view for those who knew the language.
At the onset of the gay liberation movement in the 1960s, gay and lesbian representation in film took a decidedly unambiguous turn. On the eve of Judy Garland’s birthday, June 27, 1969, a group of transgender performers, drag queens and gay men inside a bar stood in defiance to a raid made by police (see Duberman 1994). The legendary Stonewall Riots that resulted ushered in a new era of queer social engagement and along with it, artistic and cinematic approaches imbibed by a new-found spirit of queer visibility (Rich 2013:5). Thomas Waugh characterizes the “first generation” of LGBTIQ documentary as the “post-Stonewall famine” (1997:107). Coinciding, paradoxically, with an increased appetite for the 16 mm social-issue documentary film, there was a shortage of queer documentary films due to what Waugh explains as “lingering closets” and financing difficulties (see Lee Atwell 1977), a “blackout in public broadcasting and in the functioning bodies,” and/or the relative invisibility of gays and lesbians “within the still largely homophobic left and new social movements networks” (1997:107). The few films that emerged in the 1970s were defined by their gay-affirmative tone. Among them included Milton Miron, who made a documentary about “The Cockets” called *Tricia’s Wedding* (1971), and Jan Oxenberg, who made *A Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts* (1975). New York City and Europe also saw a small number of films, including Ron Peck’s *Night Hawks* (1978), which was a view in the lives of gay men in London, and Frank Ripploh’s *Taxi Zum Klo* (1980). Finally, Vito Russo’s *Celluloid Closet* (1981) produced a historical compilation of (postwar) queer suggestive and (post-Stonewall) explicitly queer films, thereby giving voice to the filmmakers and queer subjects that were until then silenced (Rich 2013:5).

Waugh characterizes these films as displaying particular inflections of standard interviewing, editing, and expert testimony styles. A number of films surrounding the motif of
“coming out” using formulaic variations of consciousness-raising formats borrowed from women’s movement documentaries, and expressive elements that were more theatrical than the standard documentary idiom, including dramatization, “improvisatory role playing and reconstruction, statements and monologues based on preparation and rehearsal, and nonverbal performances of music, dance, gesture, and corporal movement, including those of an erotic and diaristic nature” (1997:109). According to Waugh

> Coming out involved transgression of the public-private divide, but even its transgressive power became formulaic. Films such as the Advocate production *Who Happen to Be Gay* [Beldin, Krenzien 1979], for all their instrumentality in the political context of the 1970s, were also the most complicit in social invisibility and in the rote recapitulation of the interactive recipe (interview/snapshots/observational rock-climbing interlude/interview/workplace interlude/interview). The more these films began to pile up after 1980s, the more they deserved [Richard] Dyer’s complaints about ‘hidden agendas,’ the erasure of ‘conflict, contradiction and difficulty,’ and ‘the quest for sameness.’ (1997:120)

Variants of the “coming out” formula began to appear at the beginning of the 1980s. Director Chi Yan Wong’s *Comedy* (1980) to *L’Aspect rose de la chose* (1980) signaled the emergence of self-scripted and self-costumed performances (1997:121). In these films, the “positive images and realism” of the coming out formula wore off, but in turn, brought about “flaming” performative identity vernaculars (*ibid*).

At the same time, a sub-genre emerged that challenged the censorship of sex (and sexuality) and what became known as gay-affirmative documentary. These so-called “cumming out” films featured autobiographical sex “performances” that enhanced the narrative of coming out both as “performance” and as “performativity” (Waugh 1997:121). Films like Curt McDowell’s *Loads* (1980) and Barabara Hammer’s *Women I love* (1976) feature sexual...
performances in narratives that emphasize themes of erotic living and fantasy (*ibid*). In his analysis of the genre, Waugh notes that:

> Like all ‘body’ genres, the sex ‘performance’ extrapolations of the coming-out ritual executed a complex, even troubled, performativity. On-camera erotic behavior both described and enacted the utopian confrontational track of identity politics, an in-your-face alternative to the assimilationist politics of invisibility. At the same time, the viewer’s arousal was qualified by genre class; documentary tact was scrambled by erotic exhibition and vice versa. The spectator was engaged, linguistically, politically and affectively, but also physiologically. Minority politics was not only asserted but also ‘performed’ as sexual exchange. (1997:122)

It was in the mid-1980s that the alternative distribution outfits decided to take on gay and lesbian titles. But, by then, a wave of edgy, angry, yet socially conscious and theoretically rigorous films had emerged onto the American cinematic landscape. Part of what Richard Dyer calls “post-affirmation” LGBT cinema, the emergence of these films was marked not only by the Epidemic and postcolonial voices, but also by “a discursive flux surrounding issues of identity” (in Waugh 1997:110). This new subgenre was introduced by Bill Sherwood’s *Parting Glances* (1986), a narrative film featuring a gay man (played by Steve Buscemi) living with AIDS in New York. The film employs a distinctly low-budget sensibility that could be compared to observational or participatory documentary (Rich 2013:6). Other films incorporated similar approaches in their search for queer authenticity, including among others, Gus Van Sant’s *Mala Noche* (1985) and Sheila McLaughlin’s *She Must Be Seeing Things* (1987).

By the 1990s, HIV/AIDS research and advocacy organizations like ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, founded in 1987) and Queer Nation (a group that was founded by members from ACT UP and whose main initiative was to combat violence against gays and lesbians) were established, and a new form of queer consciousness started to take root. The term
“queer theory” was coined during a film studies conference organized at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990, which was summarily published in a special issue of a collection of essays called Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies (see Valentine 2007).


Drawing from methods in performative documentary, New Queer Cinema conceptually and experientially interlinks form and subject matter in its pursuit to responding to and subvert the social forces that historically “constrain” gender and sexuality (into a binary). Film critics Karl Soehnlein and B. Ruby Rich, who were among the first to name the genre, describe new queer filmmaking as that which contains “provocative subject matter—transgression, gender-bending, and rude activism—to create challenging visions of sexual identity” (in Benshoff and Griffin 2004:220). Filmmaker José Arroyo describes New Queer Cinema as that which “utilizes irony and pastiche, to represent fragmented subjectivities [and] depict a compression of time with sometimes de-historic results [that] are dystopic” (Parmar 1993:90; also see Pearl 2004:23).

In these cases, the genre challenges the notion of documentary as a record of history, like performative documentary filmmakers at the time. In doing so, it “actively breaks down filmic
categories such as genre, fiction, realism, and documentary—as well as deconstructs essentialist concepts of history, race, nation, gender, and sexuality” (Pearl 2004:222). Thus, at its core, New Queer Cinema actively underscores and questions what is normal or normative in both cinematic form and subject matter. For this reason, it can be seen as an intellectual film methodology.

Monica B. Pearl theorizes the formal relationship between queer filmmaking and the AIDS crisis. Pearl describes New Queer Cinema as:

another way of making sense out of the virus, that does not placate and does not provide easy answers—that reflects rather than corrects the experience of fragmentation, disruption, unboundaried identity, incoherent narrative, and inconclusive endings. It is a way of providing meaning that does not change or sanitize the experience. (Pearl 2004:33, also see Benshoff and Griffin 2004:221)

As a form and practice, New Queer Cinema historically provided an outlet for suffering artists to emotionally respond to the realities of their illness through visual/aural metaphor, and a methodology of filmmaking that, according to Pearl, physically took the form of the virus:

Much of AIDS representation follows the course of the virus itself—or what the virus is perceived to be doing, according to scientific narratives and metaphors. A retrovirus does not follow the “traditional” trajectory of infection, whereby a foreign substance infects the body and is “conquered” by an army of antibodies, rather it insidiously convinces the body that its very being is the foreign substance, and so the body fights itself. HIV, as a retrovirus is a postmodern virus. (Pearl 2004:24, my emphasis)

Here, Pearl makes light of the connections between the HIV virus and postmodern ideals embedded within queer filmmaking, particularly as a “nontraditional” and disruptive methodology and sensibility. While New Queer Cinema takes the form of the narrative of the virus, the difference nonetheless boils down to the capacities as constructive and destructive, respectively. Art, by nature, creates (out of loss). The potential in this case for metaphors of (anti-)embodiment are too rich to ignore in this case. Being a “postmodern virus” AIDS
convinces the original host—the body—that it is not a body, but its antithesis. Judith Butler’s treatment of identity of the body is similar to that of the virus. In her theory of gender performativity, the body, insofar as it is conceived as a biological, material entity, is vigorously attacked by a theoretical notion even more powerful than Foucault’s discourse (see Foucault 1979). What we know of “the body” is constructed through performative acts “inscribed” by “repeatedly stylized” acts (see Butler 1990).

Queer Trifecta

As a lead up to Chapter 3, which addresses these concerns in greater detail, the following section highlights three films that, in my opinion, have queerly resulted in the successful production of researchable films on the intersections of race, gender and sexuality. Although produced in the West, these films nonetheless cross geographical boundaries through their subject matters, methodological sensibilities, trans-national and/or queer identification of the filmmakers involved. This films are Pratibha Parmar’s reflexive-escape documentar Khush (1991), Marlon Rigg’s performative documentary Tongues Untied (1989), and Jennie Livingston’s widely-distributed cinéma vérité documentary feature Paris Is Burning (1990).

Khush is a word that means “ecstatic pleasure” in Urdu, and according to the film’s IMDB page, “captures the blissful intricacies of being queer and of color.” Approximately 26-42 minutes long, the documentary interweaves the narratives of subjects of South Asian descent living in the United Kingdom, North America, and India. In doing so, the film attempts to locate the “shared experiences of isolation and exoticization but also unremitting joys and solidarity of

42 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1158725/
being *khush*” (*ibid.*). In doing so, the film subverts notions of film genre and methods of storytelling—by incorporating raw documentary footage alongside scripted narrative, a pastiche of live-action sequences, interviews, and dance segments—which in turn, creates a surreal, dreamlike tonal quality. Although unremittingly optimistic and positive (not in the positivistic sense of the term), perhaps due to its incorporation of music and dance, the film nonetheless leaves room for viewer/reader interpretation and interjection by raising further questions about the nature of reality and being.

Rigg’s film *Tongues Untied* adopts a similar approach to similar questions of authenticity. The film subverts filmic genre through a juxtaposition of documentary footage and scripted narrative, as well as the incorporation of multiple voices—the focus underscored by its title. Through the use of montage sequences, close-up testimonials juxtaposed with scenes that seem disembodied from the narrative, the film “shifts from documentary referentiality and toward a more poetic expressiveness [that] blurs boundaries between autobiography and history, fiction and documentary, the personal and the collective, at the same time that it depicts conflicting racial, sexual, and regional identities” (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:26). This creates a visual-aural pastiche that comments on the nature of knowledge and subjectivity. Described as “part autobiography, part sociological study, and part free-form avant-garde essay” (Benshoff and Griffin 2004:237), the film incorporates the voice of the filmmaker using voice-over monologue, wherein he recounts his experiences of childhood, coming out, intimacy, and in suffering from AIDS.

Unlike *Khush*, which more actively questions (for the sake of questioning) the nature of reality, the emphasis in *Tongues Untied* lies in the performative construction of meaning and
messagery rooted specifically in a politics of queer people of color. Rather than document a
singular black gay man’s life, through evocation and ungrounded testimonials, the film “evokes a
certain collective autobiography wherein the speakers of the autobiographic narratives are
interchangeable precisely because their personal histories are imagined to be
congruent” (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:27). In this case, personal details become less meaningful
than using individual narrative and place in the signaling of homophobia and racism. Time and
space also become disjointed as the documentary cuts across temporal and geographic
specificity, whereas underscoring a series of issues, including, but not limited to, race, AIDS,
gender, sexuality, and religion, becomes paramount. The ultimate message is written at the film’s
However, like other performative documentaries at the time, the film’s emphasis lies less in
directing our attention to the formal qualities or political context and more in deflecting our
attention from the referential quality of documentary altogether (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:35).

Whereas *Tongues Untied* loses the coherence of normative time and place, *Paris Is
Burning* returns to context in performative documentation of a transgender/queer subculture in
New York City. The film operates as an in-depth ethnography of a queer African-American and Latino/a subculture and a series of performances wherein contestants compete through dance and affective performances of gender, race, and class. The film is structured by titles of categories utilized by the subculture, such as “House” (an alternative family of competitors), “Mopping” (stealing), “Shade” and “Reading” (performative forms of insult) (see Fuchs 1997:190 and Hilderbrand 2014:11). These labels, as Cynthia Fuchs notes, “underline the balls’ unreadableness to outsiders, even as they are so elaborately visible, situating viewers as lacking knowledge, as outsiders looking in [while also] construct[ing] the ballwalkers across multiple positions, as knowledgeable within their own community […] and as unknown outside of that community” (1997:190). Juxtaposing the real life narratives of some of the performers against their performances at the ball, the film comments on the fluidity and fictionality of narratives surrounding gender and sexuality. The dialectic between fiction and realness is emphasized by the personal narratives of the ball’s participants, many of whom emphasize the importance of

\[\text{Incidentally, the film was considered one of the first major breakthrough hits at the time, helping to define New Queer Cinema as a mode of filmmaking. Distributed by Prestige (a subsidiary of Miramax at the time), Paris Is Burning also became one of the first few feature-length documentaries to break through to a mainstream audience (Benshoff and Griffin 2004:239). Its success, however, was not instantaneous. Taking six years to make, due in large part to the slow materialization of its $450,000 budget, the film was initially criticized upon its release by the (white) gay elite for its focus on drag queens of color. In a Village Voice article in 1991, Livingston reported that “the gay mainstream, which is essentially white and middle-class, doesn’t want to be shown drag queens” (ibid.). At the same time, the film was also criticized by critical race theorists for employing an exploitative gaze of Black and Latina transgender bodies. In 1992, bell hooks published an article admonishing the film for celebrating “the way in which colonized black people (in this case black gay brothers, some of whom were drag queens) worship at the throne of whiteness, even when such worship demands that we live in perpetual self-hate, steal, lie go hungry, and even die in its pursuit” (1992:149). Some characters in the film are portrayed as having a longing for a “white,” heteronormative way of life. Livingston’s brief depictions of the “real world,” in all fairness (so to speak), are nonetheless colored by irony. The film’s timely release alongside Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet and Butler’s Gender Trouble (both 1990) helped to establish the film as part of a canon of queer theory media. When the film released, the film was lauded by theorists as it both reflected and also constituted to the theory of gender performativity. Indeed, the film reflects on, in some cases, subverts the tenets of gender performativity in subject matter as well as form. In her essay “Gender is Burning,” a chapter in her 1993 book Bodies that Matter, Butler responded with a reformulation her (often misunderstood) theory, and to tease out the theoretical differences of approach to the “transgender-as-queer” and the transsexual. As Butler finds, drag queens “bring into relief” the notion of gender performativity while transsexual bodies do not, because of a desire to seek the constative (see Butler 1993).}\]
being *real*, or true to oneself (see Benshoff and Griffin 2004). Over the course of watching the 78-minute film, what is real and what is *queer* (as if they were opposite to begin with) becomes more difficult to distinguish. Performance sequences are juxtaposed against footage of normative people on the streets of New York City. Other edits performed in this manner lead the viewer to contemplate the relationship between seemingly fictive realities of the drag queens and the nature of life in the “real world,” and in doing so, ultimately succeeds in the normalization of drag culture and the exoticization of the “real world.” The effect is not simply a reversal in POV of the opposition between normative and non-normative society, but the deconstruction of the opposition between symbolic identification and identity itself. As Fuchs notes, the film brings the issue of viability “not of a particular community, queer ball-walkers or straight executives, but of the belief system that sustains class, race, gender, and sexuality as a visible, continually self-authenticating categories” (1997:195). It is with attention to the role this queer POV has in the deconstruction of what we know as to be “real” that I seek to position this investigation of trans-\textit{hijra} performance and identity-making.

**Queer(ing) Indian Film as an Interpretive Strategy**

While explicit depictions of homosexuality have remained absent (or peripheral) in India until quite recently, popular Hindi cinema nonetheless possesses a substantial history that features (suggestions of) eroticism between friends of the same sex. According to Parmesh Shahani, it has even become “trendy” to read Bollywood film as gay or queer (2008:205). Publications that critically queer interpretations of Indian cinema include Shohini Ghosh’s contribution to *Queering India* (2002), and contributions from R. Raj Rao, Gayatri Gopinath, Ashok Row Kavi,
and Riyad Wadia in a 2000 edition of the *Journal of Homosexuality*. Shahani also mentions a Queering Bollywood website [http://media.opencultures.net/queer](http://media.opencultures.net/queer) as an excellent resource for articles, reviews, and a list of Indian films with “queer possibilities” (FN #177., 2008:215). (At the moment I write this dissertation, however, the website is not accessible.)

Representations of gayness in early Indian film were largely subtextual or peripheral to the main narrative. According to Ghosh, expressions of love—heterosexual or homoerotic alike—did not appear as frequently in the fabric of Indian film narratives as much as in song and dance numbers (see Gosh 2002). Moreover, in Indian film, the cinematic strategies employed to depict same-sex friendship appeared remarkably similar, if not the same, to the way in which love was depicted between heterosexual couples. As such, many potentially queer characters were employed within a framework of presumed heteronormativity. Queer “winks” were thus made apparent only to an audience looking for them.

A number of so-called “buddy films” could be seen as exhibiting confluence of the boundaries between love and friendship between two presumed heterosexual men (Ghosh 2002:208). Early examples of these films included *Andaz (A Matter of Style, 1949)*, *Dosti (Friendship, 1964)*, *Sangam (Confluence, 1964)*, and *Namak Haram (The Traitor, 1973)*. In other early examples, two men more explicitly occupied the same narrative roles as those conventionally occupied by heterosexual lovers. Among these films included *Ananan (Joy, 1970)*, *Sholay (Embers, 1975)*, *Anurodh (Request, 1977)*, *Yaariyana (Friendship, 1981)*, and *Main Khilari, Tu Anari (I Am the Expert and You the Amateur, 1994) (ibid.)*. Hoshang Merchant describes the films *Andaz* and *Sangam* as those that intensified “dosti or yaariyana (friendship) between the two heroes [and where the] female lead [was] only there to lessen the homosexual
sting” (Merchant 2011:xxiii; in Shahani 2008:205). In *Namak Haram*, the protagonist declares that “Without friendship there is no love. Without love there is no friendship” (Ghosh 2002:208). In *Dosti*—a film surrounding the “intense friendship” between lower-class, physically disabled young men—the “allegory of homosexual love [is] expressed through the metaphor of physical disability (see Ghosh 2002; also in Shahani 2008:205). In one of the songs, the protagonist sings: “If friendship is the brother, the sister is love” (Ghosh 2002:208).

Ghosh notes that in the 1980s, a more explicit attempt to skirt the boundaries of friendship and sexual love began to appear in Indian film. Queer visibility in this sense was not only enjoyed by its largely queer audience, but also recognized by the normative mainstream. Films like *Mandi* (*Brothel*, 1983), *Naam* (*Name*, 1986), and *Chal Mere Bhai* (*Come on, Brother*, 2000), among others, are reported to “walk the tightrope between sibling affection and sexual love” (2002:209). Then, by the 1990s, gay characters began coming out of the closet. Usually appearing as antagonists and/or comedic sidekicks to the normative protagonist. *Mast Kalander* (*Intoxicated*, 1991) featured Bollywood’s first “out” gay character named Pinku, a villain delivered comically as a “new generation gangster” (Shahani 2008:205). Other comedic gay characters appeared as sidekicks in the films *Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke* (*Companions on the Road of Love*, 1993), *Raja Hindustani* (*Indian King*, 1996), and *Taal* (*Rhythm*, 1999), and in subplots of films like *Kal Ho Na Ho* (*If Tomorrow Does Not Come*, 2003), *Out of Control* (2003), *Masti* (*Mischief*, 2003), *Mango Soufflé* (2003), *Market* (2003). When the 2000’s rolled around, the comedic sidekick was “replaced with the debauched, decadent gay designer” including *Page 3* (2004) and *Let’s Enjoy* (2004) (Shahani 2008:205). (The “glocalization” of gayness is only made apparent by the English titles of these films.) Among the films that featured

Incidentally, 2003 marked the year that “began full fledged mainstream media chatter about gay Bollywood,” to the point where by 2007 there appeared to be “gay reference in almost every second or third Bollywood release (Shahani 2008:206). Films with complex, leading gay characters also began to appear around that time. *My Brother Nikhil* (2005) by filmmaker Onir featured a narrative surrounding the gay champion swimmer who suffered from HIV/AIDS, and was received largely with positive treatments in national and international press (ibid.). Other films that featured leading gay and/or *kothi* characters include *Gulabi Aaina (The Pink Mirror, 2003), Yours-Emotionally!* (2005), *68 Pages* (2007), all by Sridhar Rangayan. Riyad Wadia’s *BOMgAY* (1996), an experimental short film with documentary elements, is acknowledged as India’s first gay film (Shahani 2008:207).

Although the film is considered a narrative, its success is arguably attributed to its documentary sensibilities. The film was shot entirely Mumbai, with some scenes staged on local trains using a distinctly “guerrilla style” approach. The film exists in six segments in the following order: (1) Opinions, (2) Underground, (3) Lefty, (4) Enema, (5) Bomgay, and (6) Friends—a structuring that is slightly reminiscent of Livingston’s *Paris Is Burning* (1990, see below). *BOMgAY* is structured poetically quite literally by a poem written by India writer R. Raj Rao, the author of a book of short stories called *One Day I Licked My Flat in Soul City*, which according to Wadia, was the “first work [he] had read from an Indian author that was able to capture the essence of being a homosexual in India” (2001:316). Wadia worked on the screenplay collaboratively with the poet, and the film was also shot using a distinct participatory
approach—again, much like Livingston’s film. Wadia noted that he “was keen to involve as many people from the gay community in Bombay as he could,” but ultimately settled on heterosexual actors whose sexuality was public enough for them not to fear being “outed” by the film (ibid.). A provocative and “real” film, it was neither released commercially, nor submitted to the Censor Board for review (see Wadia 2001). It was made around the same time Wadia was directing a documentary called A Mermaid Called Aida, featuring the story of a transgender from Mumbai named Aida Banaji. The making of the film allowed Wadia “an opportunity to focus on gender politics and sexual identity,” as well as to draw attention to Wadia’s other filmic achievements (ibid.).

Lesbian Representation

There are notably fewer examples of lesbian protagonists. Ghosh attributes this phenomenon to the historically male-centeredness of Indian cinema (see Ghosh 2002). Nevertheless, a number of films involved two women in spaces normally occupied by heterosexual couples; These included Mere Mehboob (My Beloved, 1963), Humjoli (Beloved Friend, 1970), Razia Sultan (Queen Razia, 1983), Yeh Aag Kab Bujhegi (When Will this Fire Be Quenched?, 1991), and Kamasutra (1997).

By the 1990s, women (gay or straight) emerged as central characters in major studio films. Madhuri Dixit emerged in films like Ansoo Baney Angarey (Tears Turn to Fire, 1993), Anjam (Consequence, 1994), and Mrityundand (Death Penalty, 1997) (Ghosh 2002:213). In 1994, the blockbuster Hum Apke Hain Kaun (Who Am I of Yours?) depicted a homoerotic relationship between two women on screen, featuring an erotic performance number “Didi Tera Devar Divana” (‘Sister, Your Brother is a Romantic’) between the two female protagonist lovers.
Although this number valorized the two women, the film as a whole was applauded by mainstream press for being “clean and wholesome entertainment” (Ghosh 2002:213). The film was even described by its director as “a tribute to the Indian joint family,” which Ghosh argues, pays homage to the film’s “happy ending” depicting one of the lovers breaking off the relationship and “virtuously marrying” according to her family’s wishes (ibid). The lesbian theme is, of course, not apparent to everyone. Other films released around the same time featured two women protagonists and contain subtle lesbian themes. Among these films included Dushman (Enemy, 1998) and Sangharsh (Struggle, 1999). In the film Dushmani: A Violent Love Story (1995), the song “Bano Teri Akhiyaan Surmi Daani” (‘Oh Bride, Your Eyes Are Lined with Kaajal’) contained a suggestive dance between two women. An early example of trans-re-appropriation of Bollywood music, I have also witnessed the song performed in hijra rituals and badhais.

Deepa Meetha’s film Fire (2006) marked a significant moment not only in Indian cinema but also in the sexual politics of the time (see Ghosh 2002, 2010; Gopinath 1998). Given credit as the first Indian film about lesbians depicted in a sympathetic, yet complex light, the film’s narrative (and publicity posters) features two women occupying the same diegetic space conventionally reserved for heterosexual couples, and in doing so, brings homosexuality from a subtextual to a central position in the film narrative (Ghosh 2002:218). Like the Celluloid Closet, the film, “facilitate[s] the reclamation of texts by validating an interpretive strategy that [made] lesbianism visible” in other films (Ghosh 2002:218). Fire transforms daily signifiers of female

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44 When I mentioned the interpretation of Hum Apke Hain Kaun to my partner, he exclaimed that “it is ludicrous” to think of these two women as lesbian lovers. No doubt, this reaction would be had by more than just him.
bonding into erotically charged ones. This inscribes images of mundane activities with an ambiguity that “dislocate[s] any deterministic reading of them as heterosexual” (Ghosh 2000:219). This is accomplished through a “complicated relay between female homosociality and female homoerotic practices,” or in other words, an ontological overlap of the boundaries of both (Gopinath 1997). It is through the “outing” of its characters that we are thus able to achieve a queer reading of sexually ambiguous and/or homoerotic film.

Cross-Dressing and Transgender Representation

Themes of gender play and gender subversion appeared peripherally throughout the history of Indian film, but most often within a heteronormative framework and in a comedic and/or performative manner. Following the historical trajectory of gay and lesbian representation in Indian film, cross dressing moved from the periphery in earlier years, to a more central position. Early examples of cross dressing appeared in the film Kismat (1968), which features a performance number called “Kajra Mohabbatwalla” (‘Kajra-Wearing Lover’) depicting India’s first central hero and heroine both dressing up in opposite-sexed clothing. The number portrays the protagonist, played by Biswajeet Chatterjee, performing on stage in women’s clothing with the heroin, played by Babita Shivdasani, who is dressed in men’s clothing and a mustache.

Other films wherein male protagonists cross-dressed include Rishi Kapoor’s appearance in Rafoo Chakkar (The Runaways, 1975) and Amitabh Bachchan in a sari in Laawaries (The Orphan, 1981) (in Shahani 2008:204). Cross-dressing narratives also appeared in the film

45 Today, there is virtually no Indian actor who has not dressed in women’s clothing on the screen. Conducting a simple online search for “cross dressing bollywood” will yield countless cross-dressing pictures of Bollywood sensations Salman Khan, Sharukh Khan, Ranbir Kapoor, Aamir Khan, Govinda, Sheras Talpade, Ritesh Deshmukh and Aashish Chaudhary, among others.
Chachi 420 (Father 420, 1998), a comedy remake of Mrs. Doubtfire, centering on the story of a father who disguises himself as a female maid to be close to his former family. In Dil Bole Hadippa! (Heart Says Hurry!, 2009), the protagonist (played by Rani Mukerji) impersonates a boy in order to play on the Indian cricket team (see Ghosh 2002).

Until the 1990s, appearances of transgender and hijra characters in films were largely relegated to peripheral roles, and most frequently in song and dance numbers. Among these films included Kunwara Baap (Unwed Father, 1974), which featured a musical number entitled “Saj Gai Gali” (‘The Street is Decorated’) wherein a group of hijras was depicted singing along with the protagonist (who himself appeared rather queerly). Amar Akbar Anthony (1977) featured a hijra badhai troupe, complete with harmonium and dholak in hand, accompanying the protagonist Akbar in the song “Tayyab Ali Pyar ka Dushman” (‘Tayyab Ali, the Enemy of Love’). This number was later remade in the film Once Upon a Time in Mumbai (2010), that involved a badhai contingent of (fewer) hijras, without accompanying instruments.

When the 1990s arrived, a number of major studio and independent films began to feature hijra characters more centrally in their narratives. Waugh characterizes this period of Bollywood parallel cinema as introducing the new “sexual marginality film of the 1990s” within which appeared a number of sub-genres. Most notably was the action film where “transgenders and more ‘recognizable’ gay men emerged as charismatic film-stealing villains” (2001:126). Villainous hijras appeared in movies like Mast Kalandar (‘Ballad of Intoxicating Joy,’ 1989), Sadak (Street, 1991), and Shabnam Mausi (Aunt Shabnam, 1995), a biopic of the hijra who was elected to the legislative assembly in Madhya Pradesh (Shahani 2008:206). In Sadak, an “implausibly rampaging and phallic hijra pimp” named Maharani enacts “dubious gender
credentials” in her gangster/smuggler milieu (Waugh 2001:131). In his analysis of the film, Waugh notes that while

\textit{Hijras} are associated, in popularly culture as well as in anthropological research, with prostitution […] the character of megapimp Maharani is more than an ethnographic treatise. She is so successful in performing the contradictory horror and attraction of the same-sex violence model that the narrative incoherence of her role as simultaneous penetrator and penetrated hardly matters. (2001:131)

Maharani’s \textit{hijra}-ness, in this case, is read as gay. This conflates notions of gender and sexual identity, while perpetuating \textit{hijra} stereotypes as prostitutes and/or underground gang leaders.

Around the same period, \textit{hijra} representation also underwent a significant transformation that simultaneously established their centrality in filmic narrative while softening the tone and image surrounding them. What Waugh calls the “queer supermother” emerged in melodramas like \textit{Bombay} (1995), \textit{Tamanna} (\textit{Desire}, 1997), and \textit{Darmiyaan} (\textit{In-between}, 1997) (Waugh 2001:126; Shahani 2008:205-206; also see Ghosh 2002). The film \textit{Tamanna} is often described as \textit{Cage aux Folles} meets \textit{Stella Dallas}. The film features a \textit{hijra} protagonist named Tikoo who desires a normative lifestyle and ultimately adopts a normative person. Tikoo keeps her identity a secret from her daughter, although she ultimately finds out the truth when Tikoo is discovered dancing. The film plays on \textit{hijra} stereotypes while reconstituting popular tropes of kinship (familial associations) through an optic of middle-class respectability. The relative sanitization of Tikoo is achieved despite what Waugh describes as “the grating shriek of her disembodied voice” (2001:126). Part of what contributes to the character’s “believability” is the way the film partakes in the semi-religious ritual function of \textit{hijras} as “social mediators of heteroconjugality” (2001:127). It is here where, Waugh notes, the character “encapsulates popular culture’s problematization of sexuality, family and gender in one overdetermined body
and vividly performs its interpenetration with socioeconomic dynamics and class anger” (ibid.).

Table 1 depicts to the best of my abilities illustrating the prominence of LGBTIQ characters and themes in mainstream and independent Indian cinema. The films are noted according to the appearance of a notable LGBTIQ theme, its presence in the film (subtextual, peripheral, or central), as well as the relative production size of the film. What I hope to illustrate here is the steady rise in the number of films made featuring LGBTIQ themes at the center of their narratives (see Table 1).

**Potential Problems Associated with Queering Indian Films**

In compiling this list, I consistently ran across several issues with film taxonomy. Need less to say, a number of questions arose as a result:

*First, what makes an Indian film queer?*

This question lies at the very center of this list and to the interpretive paradigm framing this chapter. If categories and their meanings are “historically produced […] and are drawn on in particular social contexts” (Valentine 2004:215), then ascribing the word *queer* and its codification onto Indian film—especially those before the rise of “out” characters, LGBTIQ activism and/or the initial nullification of Section 377 in 2009—would be historically and culturally problematic.

The development of queer theory is historically related to the rise of the lesbian and gay movement in the US after Stonewall, and particularly, the emergence of queer artists and
filmmakers of New Queer Cinema. Although queer by nature resists political domestication, its use in the US, India and elsewhere, nevertheless, signals notions of class, caste, and cultural elitism—axes of identity that take on very different formations depending on the country and cultural context. Some have indicated the absence of a distinctly queer identity in India (see Shahani 2008). Nevertheless, one need not go far to hear the term employed regularly among the English-speaking middle class. A number of English-language publications by Mumbai-based Queer Ink, for instance, are produced by self-identified queer individuals. Within these and other social circles, queer serves as a catch-all meant to encompass gender and sexual expressions that lie outside of the (Western- and/or Indian-derived) heterosexual matrix. As part of a internal cultural war (generally between gay men and women), queer also rests within the users wish to dis-identify with the burgeoning, and (male-dominated) gay mainstream. As a result, queer is a term has become normalized in the lives of gender and sexual non-conformers, that derive privilege from their strategic distinction from the “community” at large.

Identity politics aside, the question nonetheless remains, how can queer be translated and applied constructively as an interpretive strategy in a cross-cultural taxonomy of Indian film? The answer to this question is naturally imperfect, but the term’s original meaning provides some semblance of coherence. Queer, in its original meaning, is about situating against and destabilizing notions of heterosexuality—movements that are currently being made in India’s LGBTIQ liberation movements and cinematic arts. It therefore may be appropriate to foreground a number of qualities that underscore a film’s self-conscious queerness as that which subverts

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46 Incidentally, film theorist Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “queer theory” during a film studies conference organized at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990, which was summarily published in a special issue of a collection of essays called Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies (see Valentine 2007).
heteronormativity and conformity. These include but may not be limited to: (1) the presence of perceived gender and sexual non-conforming language and/or body language; (2) the presence of or references to established gender and sexual non-conforming contexts (place), props, costumes, and/or personas; and (3) the presence of explicit signs of homoeroticism, like kissing or sex, and gender crossing.

In order to provide some relief in regards to queer presence, I utilize the adjectives “subtextual,” “peripheral,” and “central.” A film may thus have “queer subtext” if homosexuality or transgenderism is inferred in the form of figurative “winks” in performative language. Interpretations of queer subtext are generally made by queer individuals and may or may not be read by heterosexuals. A film with peripheral queer themes may contain more or less straightforward (pardon the pun) references to homosexuality or transgenderism, but in select scenes or sub-narratives. Peripheral queer themes arise in many cases through song and dance numbers, including the musical number “Saj Gai Gali” (‘The Street is Decorated’) in Kunwara Baap (1974) and “Tayyab Ali Pyar ka Dushman” (‘Tayyab Ali, the Enemy of Love’) in Amar Akhar Anthony (1977). As a whole, the line between “subtextual” and “peripheral” is difficult to draw since it involves making the distinction between implicit and explicit references to homosexuality. Films with “central queer” themes, in contrast, employ an unquestionably queer narrative.

Second, what exactly constitutes Indian film?

The presence of a queer filmmaking diaspora, Western-funded films involving Indian filmmakers and/or films featuring Indian subjects complicates matters for us. One example of this is Pratibha
Parmar, a Kenyan born British filmmaker of Indian origin who places her transnational identity also at the center of her films. After *Khush* (1991), she made *A Place of Rage* (1991, not included on the list) about the struggles and achievements of African-American women featuring Angela Davis, June Jordan, and Alice Walker. This was followed by *Double the Trouble Twice the Fun* (1992, included on the list), a documentary about gay people with disabilities, including the transplanted Indian writer Firdaus Kanga. Then, she made a film called *Jodie* (1996, not included) about Jodie Foster’s transatlantic status as a gay icon (Ghosh 2010:61).

Other films that complicate nationality include *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), which was directed by Gurinder Chadha, a Kenyan-born British filmmaker of Sikh Indian origin, and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), a film directed by Stephen Frears and written by Hanif Kureishi (a British man of mixed origin), which features an interracial relationship between a Caucasian British man (played by Daniel Day-Lewis) and British man of Pakistani origin (played by Gordon Warnecke) (Ghosh 2010:61). While British-made, the film nonetheless made inroads to an Indian audience.

The scope of this chapter does not come equipped to deal with the taxonomical issues that arise in (trans)national identity, but it is nonetheless important to queer through suggestion. For the purposes of this list, I identify an Indian film based on: (1) the presence of Indian themes, subjects, and characters, (2) the presence of Indian nationals and/or their descendants in front of or in prominent positions behind the camera, and, perhaps more importantly, (3) the impact the film had on (queer) Indian audiences and scholarship. This last point leads us into the next major taxonomical issue:
Third, what exactly constitutes a “Major Studio” and “Independent” film?

A categorical framework on production budget helps to infer the film’s potential impact on Indian audiences (i.e. through expansiveness of distribution), but is nonetheless difficult to assess. Since film budgets are generally concealed, I indicate the presence of a major studio (equipped presumably with major funding) or an independent one. The categorical definition of “independent” is also the subject of increasing debate, and addressing this taxonomy comprehensively must thoroughly take into account the historical economic conditions of the film industry in India (or wherever the film was made), the roles major studios play in the film production and distribution strategies, and their widespread appeal.

Budget alone is not an adequate determinate of a film’s “indie” status. Certain issues, for instance, arise with films like *My Brother Nikhil* (2005), which was made with a large budget, but because of the absence of song and dance, was not considered mainstream-worthy by the general public. The films *Fire* (1998) and *Water* (2005) also came with large budgets, but because of their content-heavy narratives and production locations (Canada), they nonetheless occupied a marginal domain on the “independent” side. On the other hand, the short film *BOMgAY* (1996) was produced on a modest budget, but made a large impact both in mainstream and indie cinema. This may have been due to the film’s placement in history being their first film incorporating gay issues, its inclusion of recognized (and normative) Bollywood actors, and/or also because of the director’s own stature in Bollywood society. Riyad Wadia inherited his family’s Mumbai-based production company Wadia Movietone, which was known for producing films with subversive and feminist narratives.
Despite these complexities, what this table shows is that while there has been an increase in films made with narratives devoted centrally to queer themes, the productions themselves appear to have decreased in budget value and consequently, their impact on the market has moved to the periphery. This does not necessarily reflect a decrease in value of queer narratives as a whole, but a fragmentation of genre in the film market. The number of films in India being made with queer themes and narratives at either the periphery or center is staggeringly higher today in comparison to those made two to three decades ago. Moreover, while independent film budgets are drastically reducing in size (when adjusted for inflation), the film market itself is enjoying an expansion in platform distribution. As I explore in greater detail in the following sections, LGBTIQ representation in film is expanding just as audiences are growing and more filmmakers are entering the foray, due to advancements in affordable filmmaking technologies and newfound LGBTIQ and feminist consciousness. If anything concrete can be interpreted from this data, therefore, it is that filmmaking in India is enjoying a queer film renaissance. The influence of a distinctly New Queer Cinema can be seen in the many of these works by contemporary Indian filmmakers.

**Mumbai Is Burning**

Certain congruences can be seen between the advent of New Queer Cinema in the United States and the so-called queer film renaissance in India. These congruences pertain mainly to filmmaking narratives, subject choices, techniques and aesthetic choices framed by certain historical similitudes—in particular, the relationship between LGBTIQ activism and HIV/AIDS prevention. Seeded in 1991 by Pratibha Parmar’s experimental film, brought into the sunlight by
Dheepa Metha in the mid-2000s (see Ghosh 2002, Gopinath 1998, Patel 2002, Vanita 2002), and watered by (the good will and financial capacities) of HIV/AIDS NGO socio-cultural initiatives, a community of emerging (queer) filmmakers are currently moving towards a sustainable queer filmmaking future. Many of these films exhibit aesthetic sensibilities that loosely compare with highlights from New Queer Cinema. The following provides a brief historical sketch of the history of recent queer Indian films, leading to a more thorough discussion of the ways contemporary methodologies in documentary film exhibit distinctly queer sensibilities.

**Queer Film Festival Communities**

Following the initial decriminalization of homosexuality in 2009, LGBTIQ film festivals in Mumbai and Bangalore were established, and with them, a new community of young filmmakers. The former was founded and (still) maintained by the openly gay filmmaker Sridhar Rangayan (director of *Yours Emotionally* [2011] and *Gulabi Aaina* [*Pink Mirror*, 2006], a film that was banned by India’s Censor Board). Since their insemination in 2009, other LGBTIQ film festivals have popped up in other urban locals, including Chennai, New Delhi, and Kolkata.

I had the honor of attending the *Kashish* Mumbai International Queer Film Festival (MIQFF) in 2012. While there, I screened a version of my documentary film *Rites of Passage* (2011), where we incidentally received the prestigious Special Jury Prize for Best Documentary, and met many talented filmmakers (a synopsis of the film is provided in Chapter 3). Among many these young filmmakers were Pradipta Ray, director of *Eidi* (2013), *The Night Is Young* (2012), and *Shrishti* (2001). S/he directs films with a queer noir aesthetic and, in the case of *The Night Is Young*, even casts himself in drag. *The Night Is Young*, a film that awarded Ray with the
Award for Best Film from an Emerging Indian Talent, skirts the boundaries between narrative and documentary, incorporating many improvised moments as well. The film is shot and edited with an sensitivity to light and color (something that was indeed pre-planned), favoring dramatic contrasts to pastel flatness to evoke a specific melancholic mood.

Another talented queer filmmaker that I met was Nakshatra (a pseudonym derived from the Sanskritic word denoting the 27 lunar sectors along the ecliptic). He directed a number of films that quickly gained critical appeal in the queer circuit in Mumbai, among which include Logging Out (2012), Book of Love (2012), Xmas Story (2012), Curtains (2012), and PR (Public Relations) (2013). Along with Ray’s film, Nakshtra’s Logging Out also won an award at the 2012 Kashish MIQFF, and subsequently accompanied a series of Indian-made queer films on a festival tour. Logging Out is an intimate portrait of virtual-love, approaching the psychology (and perhaps psychopathy) of imaging a love that is physically unattainable over a series of text messages held inside a gay online chatroom. Nakshatra’s presence in the film is justified by his silence—there is no spoken dialogue at all, only text messaging. This approach also plays on more conceptual notions of virtual time and place versus time and place in real life, enhancing its intimacy while also conveying the feeling of being alone (not necessarily loneliness).

Nakshatra’s presence within the ontology of the film produces a sensation of disembodiment, enticing audiences to imagine being on the other side of the virtual barrier (which, in reality, they already are—just across a different barrier). Ultimately, in dealing with issues of self, identity, love, and the antithesis to all three of those things, Logging Out brings queer filmmaking into a contemporary, fragmented space.
A number of documentary films about women, LGBTIQ and *hijra* subjects, as well as those that exhibit a distinctly queer sensibility, also recently graced their presence in India’s queer independent film scene. Table 2 features a(n incomplete) list of independent documentaries made in or about Indian queer subjects. As one can clearly see, the number of films increases by year following 2009.

**Documentary as a Queer Methodology**

Before we arrive at what I call a queer methodology towards documentary filmmaking, I first seek to outline some of the characteristic distinctions between documentary and narrative film. In her book *States of Emergency*, Patricia Zimmerman states that documentaries already embody a “radical heterogeneity that positions difference(s) and conflict(s) as a core of contestation” (2000:13). This is due largely to its historical stature as the lesser known genre marginal(ized) to/by fiction film, as well as its tendency to queer standards of making that conventionally define genre.

Michael Renov suggests that “it is the differing historical status of the referent that distinguishes documentary from its fictional counterpart, not the formal relations among the signifier, signified, and referent” (1993:3). The emphasis here is on the subversive nature of documentary as a “purely” nonfiction genre itself. Nonfiction films, according to Renov, are never entirely “non-fictive,” yet are founded on “fictive” elements and moments, wherein objective representations are combined using creative intervention (*ibid.*). The opposite can be

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47 *Nanook of the North* (1922) could be seen as a literal example of the interpenetrative, subverts conventions of fiction and nonfiction by presenting “staged” scenes as documentations of “real life,” and casting “real life” people as actors. Indeed, the use of fictive elements is greater in some documentaries than in others.
said of fiction films: that the truth in impact lie not in their fictive elements, but in their ability to
draw from or invoke reality (pers. comm., Nishtha Jain, August 12, 2015). Regardless, it is this
contradictory practice of affirming the non-fictive while drawing from fictive practices that
documentary film *queers* the genre itself. As Philip Rosen suggests, however, fiction and
documentary can never be mutually exclusive. They are bound together by the very concept of
“narrativity”—or creative intervention—and what he calls the “conditional glue of
representation” (see Rosen 1993). This is akin to Kirin Narayan’s analysis of the relationship
between narrative and analysis:

> Narrative and analysis are two categories that we tend to set up as opposites but a
second look reveals that they are contiguous, with a border open to the most full-
scale of crossovers […] A greater integration of narrative into written texts does
not mean that analysis is to be abandoned but rather that it moves over, giving
vivid experience an honored place besides it. (Narayan 1993:681-2)

Its representative systems, in short, lend documentary film to be unbinding, subversive,
contradictory, and self-reflexive. Nevertheless, the question remains: What methodologically and
experientially defines documentary film? What might define conventional documentary film
from feminist or queer documentary film? The following attempts to highlight some
contemporary conventions of documentary filmmaking, with a leaning towards their relevance to
the methodological issues I present in the following chapter.

> On October 26, 2014, I attended a documentary filmmakers panel at the Film
Independent Forum held at the Directors Guild of America on Sunday. The panel was
composed of directors, producers, and incidentally, sound engineers representing eleven

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48 This was not the first time that I had been to such a panel. As a documentary filmmaker (*Mohammed to Maya* [2012] and *Music in Liminal Spaces* [2012-13]), I have attended a number of filmmakers events with the intention of “networking” with higher-ups in the industry. What made this event different for me, however, is that I attended with a distinctly critical hat on.
documentary films at various stages of production. Among the films included (all forthcoming): *Farewell, Ferris Wheel; Jiàoliàn; Like a Rolling Stone: The Life & Times of Ben Fong Torres; My Uncle Gloria; Rightfooted; Soledad; Street Fighting Man; Thank You For Playing; and We're With the Band*. Moderated by Jennifer Kushner, the Director of Artist Development at Film Independent, the panel incorporated screenings of approximately 10 minutes of rough cuts from each film, as well as a question and answer session lasting another 45 minutes. I might add that the films were curated along a number of variables, including but not limited to: (1) the film’s commitment to continuing the Film Independent mission of diversity (as reflected both in front and behind of the camera); (2) the potential for the film’s completion and success; and (3) the film’s relative uniqueness in content and methodology, in relation to the others. The point of highlighting this is that while each of these films were unique in subject matter and approach, all of the filmmakers on the panel were in general accord about the ways in which documentary films in the present day are made. Among a number of points raised were five that, I felt, engendered the spirit of queer documentary as I have experienced it in practice:

*First, access changes daily, and it is the filmmaker’s job to improvise accordingly.*

This sentiment was expressed on several occasions by a number of directors, although I felt that the music documentary *We’re With the Band* best exemplified this tenet. The film is about a band whose members are comprised of one Israeli rabbi and three Palestinian women. In order to hold

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50 These factors were not simply deduced by conjecture, but also through some back channeling. As a Film Independent Fellow for 2013’s “Project Involve”—a signature diversity initiative dedicated to the advancement of the careers of minority filmmakers—I am privy to certain information that Film Independent outsiders may not be.
regular rehearsals both members had to cross the Israeli-Palestine border—an illegal act for some of them. Because of the precarious nature of the rehearsals, one of the members inevitably left the film production. After this change in membership, and due to ethical issues in involving the band member, the filmmakers were forced to change their narrative strategy: “We went through a lot. In the end her leaving [became] part of the fabric of our story. I highlight this because access can change a lot and it is always fluid. Time is always moving. But there is always a wall to overcome. Literally,” explained director Jen Heck.

This reminds me of a story shared by director/producer Suzanne Joe Kai about the making of her film Like a Rolling Stone: The Life & Times of Ben Fong Torres. A biopic about The Rolling Stone’s legendary editor, the film production encountered a number of obstacles when dealing with the company. “We had to find creative ways to overcome that fortress,” Kai explained. She recounted a time when attempting to gain access into The Rolling Stone’s building to shoot a crucial scene with Torres, she and her director of photography disguised themselves as members of Torres’s family. Entering the building with handheld cameras—so as not to attract attention from the authorities—Kai and company shot the scene they needed. Incidentally, the team attracted the attention of Grateful Dead’s Bob Weir, who stepped into the frame and offered to deliver an interview for them. Ultimately, the filmmaker was able to extract two morals from the story: (1) don’t be afraid to disguise yourself in order to get the shot, and (2) “Try and work as closely with the artists themselves rather than the PR people. You never know what’s going to happen,” explained Kai. In other words, the demand for access can sometimes be greater than the personal security and safety of the filmmakers involved.
Second, honor the agreement between you and your subject.

David Osit, director of the film *Thank You For Playing* “When you make a documentary about someone, the reason why they agree to make it is because they can feel empowered by making it. It is the filmmaker’s responsibility to honor that agreement.” Osit’s film is an intimate portrait of a computer software engineer who designed a video game about his five year-old son stricken with terminal cancer. When Osit gained access the film this story, he did so with the knowledge that “documentary [can be] a tangential tool for someone who has something to excise.” In this sense, access is granted because the documentary participants feel it to be a benefit to their lives, and this agreement is what defines an exploitative film from a empowering one. The logic is quite clear in this regard: If a documentary is not benefiting its participants, then it is exploiting them. This point was also raised by director Jamie Sisley and producer Mayuran Tiruchelvam, whose film *Farewell, Ferris Wheel*, underwent dramatic changes over the course of the shooting. Director Jamie Sisley and initially set forth to shoot a nostalgia piece about traveling carnivals. After spending a summer at one on the California-Mexico border, however, he realized that there was more going on than met the eye: “We wanted to confront the issues of workers’ exploitation because we felt that we had a responsibility to share their story,” he explained. “But once we started shifting the focus, we wanted also to be truthful to the carnival manager. We told him. We eventual lost access to him, but we felt that that was the responsible choice.” In being responsible, filmmaker Sisley lost access to what he originally had, but in the process, gained much more.
Third, don’t be afraid of the Meta element.

That is, a documentary film is as much about its filmmakers as it is about its subjects. This sentiment was expressed on several occasions. For this, I first return to David Osit, who explained that he went through a personal transformation after the death of his film’s primary subject, Joel, the five year-old boy with cancer: “After Joel passed away, I realized the film is a documentary about what it means to document and what it means to handle our grief. We’re there not only because they want use to be there but also because we’re doing something for ourselves.” This ties into notions of self-reflexivity, and the honesty any filmmaker/ethnographer in the field must own up to before approaching a subject, which is related to another point:

Fourth, filmmakers can be just as exposed as its subjects.

That is, filmmakers must accept being the object of surveillance themselves. Filmmaker Cassidy Friedman recalled a moment when he and his director of photography reached a breakthrough with his subjects—all of whom are were inmates at a high-security prison in California. He and the DP were invited to shoot a support group meeting held inside of the detention center. The group was sitting in the circle and the filmmakers were placed in the center of the circle. “It was such a raw experience that there was no possible way to hide,” Friedman explained. Friedman acknowledged that it is because of the vulnerability that he and the DP felt while shooting that contributed to the film’s authenticity: “There is no way that we could have been bullshitting.”
Fifth, don’t bullshit.

Although documentary filmmakers generally agree that bullshitting is unadvisable, sometimes not “bullshitting” challenges conventional (i.e. normative) ideas about “authenticity.” This arose most notably with respect to Robyn Symon’s story about making *My Uncle Gloria*, a documentary that explores the sexual transition of a senior citizen with a questionable past. Symon had a difficult time capturing moments of “authenticity”—at least in the normative sense of the term—in her subjects because, “They were all narcissists! Nobody had a problem with being on camera. They were so conscious of the camera because they loved it so much. But that was ultimately a challenge because I had to tell them to just be natural and not to play to the camera,” she explained. When Symon began showing cuts to an audience, there was some concern that Gloria, the main subject of the film, was a fraud. “People didn’t believe her. So, I went back to her to challenge her about her motivation for a sex change. That made our relationship more tense. You see her getting introspective and self-reflecting, but she was very uncomfortable because of that. You see her becoming very defensive and you see her telling me to turn the camera off,” Symon explained. Symon’s relationship with her subjects were initially “solid,” but when Symon felt the need to change her strategy and confront Gloria about a number of issues, she (unsurprisingly) felt that trust weaken.

Although I admire Symon’s search for “truth,” this is where I depart from her methodology. I do not find her approach particularly queer, because it relies on notions of “authenticity” that are founded on normative conventions of gender identity. If authenticity is that which is “of undisputed origin,” Symon was “digging” for an origin for Gloria’s conception of self because in her mind, Gloria’s gender was “disputed” territory. This is a process that is
based on the belief in an essential gender, and requires a scientific or psychological crux to
transgender as though it were a disability that should be examined, explained, and eventually
cured. Moreover, Symon’s interrogation of “authenticity” neglected the examination of her—and
normative society’s—own parameters of questioning, and as a result, pulled the subject into a
space that threatened her sense of personal security and safety. As a film documentarian, I find
that the greatest authenticity is the authenticity that is offered to me. I do not approach my
participants in order to probe questions about the reliability of the answers they give me, or to
question their authenticity, but the authenticity of our encounter. If there is a truth that can be
teased out at all, it is the truth of the search (for authenticity, identity, or whatever theoretical
engagement strikes one’s fancy). Understanding this is to begin to engage in a queer sensibility.
Chapter 3
Queer (Documentary) Filmmaking as a Research Method

This chapter will explain in greater detail the pertinence of queer filmmaking to my methodology while drawing connections to existing queer and ethnomusicological theories. In doing so, I will investigate some of the conceptual and pragmatic issues that arose while filming three documentaries with the trans-hijra community between the years 2010 and 2015. Each of these documentaries came with their own set of implications and, consequently, will provide some rich points of discussion. Through a reflexive account of these events, I hope to critically engage issues that arose in (the developments of) my own subjective positioning(s), emotionality, (deconstructions of) ethnographic authority, and how my critical filmic engagement(s) with participants elicited different results.

In the sections that follow, I first attempt to clarify my interpretation of queer theory and how it has been applied methodologically in the field. Five themes arise out of this discussion and are tended to as per their relevance towards documentary filmmaking; These are (1) performance and performativity, (2) queer time and place/space, (3) reflexivity, (4) emotionality/tone, and (5) multiplicity/plurality. This is then followed by an analysis of my approach to some of the routine techniques of filmmaking that arise during the pre-production (scouting of locations and subjects), production (filming), post-production (editing), and audience engagement (distribution) stages of film development. I argue that a visual “Ethnomusicology of the Closet” depends on the ethnographer’s critical attention to and participation in local politics of identity (something I call ‘serious play’), a malleability and adaptability of techniques and perspectives (‘movement’), and the willingness to limit complete control as director/producer at 105
all stages of filmic production while still creating a translatable experience for the reader/viewer
(‘participatory filmmaking’). The chapter is then concluded with another roadmap to the
dissertation, highlighting the ways each chapter engages these schemas.

Notes on Queer Theory and its Methodologies

Queer theory is a term that emerged in the 1990s to refer to a field of critical theory that
includes the philosophy of sexuality and gender identity, as well as (trans)gendered
interpretations of literature and other media. *Queer*—derived from the Indo-European root
twerkw (across), the German *quer* (transverse), and the Latin *torquere* (to twist)—is a
derogatory term used for gender and sexual minorities. Arrogating the pejorative, queer theory
foregrounds poststructural, feminist challenges to essentialist claims that naturalize gender
and (hetero)sexuality, and subverts the supposition of identity as a stable subject that can be
politicized. A hallmark trait of queer theory is its resistance to rigid categories of identification
and to the domestication of gendered critique. Therefore, attempts to normalize queer theory
for the purposes of this or any other text is inherently counterintuitive to its semantic rationale
and political efficacy.

The development of queer theory is historically related to the rise of the lesbian and
gay movement in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly the group Queer Nation, and
to the emergence of queer artists and filmmakers of New Queer Cinema. The film theorist
Teresa de Lauretis is said to have coined the term “queer theory” for a conference organized at
UC, Santa Cruz in 1990 and a special issue of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural
Studies* she edited based on that conference (see Valentine 2007). Early queer theory derives
heavily from the writings of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) and Judith Butler (1990), all of which draw from Michel Foucault’s three volume *History of Sexuality* (1976-84). (David Halperin’s *Saint Foucault* (1995), a required reading in many queer theory courses, is the most outspoken defense of Foucault’s contribution to queer scholarship.) Queer theory places an emphasis on the precariousness of identity categories, and deconstructs narratives that essentialize heterosexuality and cisgender identity. In Judith Butler’s formative book *Gender Trouble* (1990), transgender subjects, butches and drag queens, serve as living examples that “bring into relief” the theory of gender performativity. Under this premise, gender appears not as the result of a cultural narrative but as performative acts “repeatedly stylized” onto the body that over time produce a “natural” appearance. This illustrates one of the central—and disputed—tenets of queer theory, which posits that sex is not the cause but an effect of cultural constructions and discourses of gender.

*Debates in Queer Theory*

This central thesis has been critiqued for failing to adequately resolve the relationship between chromosomal/biological sex and gender, and for equating transgenderism and transsexuality with gender subversion. Jay Prosser (2006), for instance, argues that early (Butlerian) queer theory inadequately addresses trajectories of (trans)gender identity that are constative, failing to make room for transsexuals who may be living—not performing—in the wrong bodies. Placing an emphasis on referentiality (i.e. surfaces of bodies) over literality (i.e. interiors of bodies), queer theory therefore entangles transsexuals into the realm of gender “theatricalities” that normally characterize drag performance. Other current criticisms of
queer theory surround a number of issues, including: (1) its priority of sexuality over gender (vis-à-vis Sedgwick, see Martin 1994); (2) the overall dismissal of queer theory’s genealogy with activism (see Garber 2001); (3) the binary it creates between queer and heterosexual, and the primacy it awards the second term over the first (see Prosser 2006); (4) the privileging of Western theoretical and Orientalist frameworks in their application in non-Western cultures (vis-à-vis Foucault, see Sweet 2002); and (5) its erasure of discourses of race, ethnicity, and of voices from queer people of color (see Muñoz 1999; Johnson 2003; Hayes 2010; Bailey 2013). It is with attention to these final points that I approach a critically queer ethnomusicology.

**Queer Theory in Musicology and Ethnomusicology**

Over the past twenty years, queer theory has become a component of social and cultural analysis within a variety of disciplines. It has served as the primary analytical focal point for LGBT studies, and is also incorporated in the fields of women and gender studies, comparative literature, film studies, anthropology, and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Although the methodological limits of queer studies are still debated, it is associated with lesbian, gay, and transgender subjects, dealing particularly with the trope of transversing categorical boundaries of sex, sexuality, and gender, as well as the constructions that place each within a binary framework.

In the fields of ethnomusicology and musicology, gender and sexuality are explored as social constructs and usually along other axes of power, such as religion, race, ethnicity, and class. As a whole, however, the application of queer theory in text-based musicological
studies greatly outnumbers field-driven studies. Works in the so-called “new musicology” offer a post-structuralist focus on musical aesthetics and culture, featuring compelling analyses and interpretations of Western-based composers and their compositions. Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings* (1991), one of the better known examples of the study of sexuality in classical music, contains a riveting discussion of what chord progressions can tell us about the gender and sexuality of those who wrote them. Among other applications of queer theory in ethnomusicology, however, few studies exist on the relationships of gender, sexuality and music in cultures around the world.

In the past two decades, notable feminist applications in ethnomusicology can be seen in various publications. These include the volumes *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (1987), *Music, Gender and Culture* (1990), *Shadows in the Field* (1997), *Music and Gender* (2000), and *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean* (2003). Queer approaches in ethnomusicology can be found in journal articles, and increasingly so in books that concern the complex relations between gendered practices, performances, and the critique of gender identities, roles, and sexuality in dominant cultures. Many of these publications—most of which are based in Western cultures—skirt the boundaries between ethnomusicology, musicology, and performance studies. Some examples include Marlon Bailey’s *Butch Queens Up in Pumps* (2013), which examines Ballroom culture in Detroit’s inner city as a queer cultural formation that upsets hegemonic discourses of gender, sexuality, kinship, and community; Eileen Hays’s *Songs in Black and Lavender* (2010), which looks at the black women’s involvement in women’s music festivals, and their roles in the development of black lesbian consciousness; José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications*:
Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (1999), which investigates how queer Latino performance artists absorb mainstream styles to create performance spectacles that critique the white, heteronormative social matrix; and Judith A. Peraino’s Listening to the Sirens (2006), which investigates discourses of music, sex, and the self in Western culture spanning twenty-seven centuries “from Homer to ‘Hedwig’” to suggest an alternative framework for understanding music’s place in ethical philosophy.

Queer subjects have also appeared in works on non-Western cultures. Among these include Neil J. Garcia’s Philippine Gay Culture (2008), which examines popular and academic writings about homosexuality in the Philippines, focusing on the historical emergence of bakla as a homo/sexualized identity in the arts and entertainment. Other notable examples include Martin Stokes’s The Republic of Love (2010), which features a chapter on queer singer Zeki Muren, and treatments of masculinity, affection and intimacy in Turkish culture; and Anna Morcom’s Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance (2013), which explores erotic female bar dancers and male kothi “orchestra” dancing along axes of exclusion. In these ethnomusicological texts, non-normative subjects are employed to engage questions posed surrounding ideas in queer theory. While formative in their investigation of non-Western queer subjects, these works investigate queer subjects from the “outside in” and refrain from engaging their fieldwork methodologies queerly.

What is a Queer Methodology?

Although a manifesto and/or “canon” of queer methods contradict the loose principals upon with queer theory is founded, there are signs that such a development in scholarship is underway.
Several highly anticipated works are poised to make more direct headway in the queer ethnomethodological arena. Arguably at the forefront of this is the forthcoming publication *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, edited by Gregory Barz and William Cheng. The first large-scale study of queer issues in ethnomusicology, the volume will reflect on ethnomusicology’s disciplinary practices with a focus on theorizing queer approaches to fieldwork methodologies, and interrogate normative approaches to musical ethnography, including discourses on what constitutes the field, questions surrounding the sexuality and gender identity in interlocutors and fieldworkers, and structures of power that frame one’s questions and boundaries of study. The publication will feature a diverse array of subjects, including writings on transgender communities in Indonesia and India, queer hip hop in urban America, queer cyber culture, and a contribution of my own on the use of queer filmmaking to highlight issues of musicality and gender transitioning in India’s trans-hijra communities.

Indeed, as Gregory Barz and William Cheng note in a blog post leading up to the publication, “an audible silence lingers in the field and fieldwork of ethnomusicology” (July 28th, 2015). Few ethnomusicologists have engaged issues of sexuality or queer theory, and are underrepresented in anthropological and musicological collections that deal primarily on queerness.

This publication follows extensive effort in the field of anthropology to locate and define a distinctly queer methodology. The *Graduate Journal of Social Science* published two special editions entitled “Queer Studies: Methodological Approaches” (2008 and 2009), edited by Mia Liianason and Robert Kulpa. The contributing essays deal primarily with a general notion of “queer as method,” while steering clear of intersecting issues of “queer” with existing methodologies in the humanities and social sciences. This task was later undertaken in an essay
collection entitled *Queer Methods and Methodologies* (2010), edited by Kate Browne and Catherine J. Nash. The goal behind this was to engage overtly with “those sets of logical organizing principles that link our ontological and epistemological perspectives with the actual methods we use to gather data” (2010:2). The publications present a diverse range of critical engagements including approaches to fieldwork and writing, but nonetheless, deliberately and perhaps self-consciously refrains from declaring a definitive manifesto of queer methodology, leaning heavily on inclusion through a heterogeneous pastiche of issues and concerns. Some of these include issues raised in performative ethnography (see Power 2009), approaches to translation at the “intersection of ‘race,’ ethnicity, and sexuality” in Latino cultures (see Viteri 2008), ethnography as activism (see Engebretsen 2008), and the “counter-intuitive” shift from reconstructive efforts of queer theorists to overtly critical and self-destructive modes (see Halberstam 2008).

Other collections include the “Out” series, which critiques a variety of issues surrounding queerness in the field of anthropology. These include: (1) *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists* (1996), a collection that interrogates issues of being lesbian and gay while in the normative and non-normative fields; (2) *Out in Theory: The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology* (2002), a collection that addresses the theoretical questions the previous collection posed but did not answer, in order to more thoroughly define the scope and aims of lesbian and gay anthropology; and (3) *Out in Public: Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World* (2009), which deals largely with subjects outside of the ethnographic domain and explores long-term anthropological works that intervened in the everyday lives of their LGBTIQ interlocutors. What becomes clear through all of these is a general interest not
only in non-normative subjects, but also in how approaching them influences notions of selfhood. Queer methodologies seek multiplicity in favor of singularity, and ways of perceiving of and representing time and place that subvert hegemonies of perspective. They also incorporate transgressive practices that not only challenge previously established methodologies, but do so in a playful manner (see Browne and Nash 2010). While the principals of subversion and anti-normalcy are useful in practice, their usefulness can only extend so far before it arrives towards a space completely incomprehensible. In order to maintain some semblance of coherence, I seek guidance from my own self-awareness and self-knowledge, leaning heavily on the productive capacity of the camera in the creation of a reflexive, transparent, and transformative form of researchable material.

(Queering the) Rubric of Queer Methodologies

Scholars who deal primarily with issues of transgender and transsexual generally contest the applicability of queer theory as a whole on trans bodies (see Prosser 1998, Namaste 2000, Stryker 2006, 2008). Their concerns pertain to the use of transgender as a means of “bringing into relief” the theory of gender performativity, the tendency to misconstrue trans as either a gender or a sexual orientation, and the homonormative action of containing transgender for the assimilative gender-normative agenda within the sexual identities (see Styker 2008:148). I have no interest in “explaining” transgender bodies or in using transgender bodies as case studies within which to prove various tenets of queer theory. Instead, I seek a critical exploration of queer methodology/ies as a means of highlighting issues that arise in an (not the) understanding of trans-ḥijra performance and identity-making as a way of life.
In my reading (and living experience) of queer and its theories, several key issues struck me as particularly pertinent to this investigation. The following is a list of these ideas that have come to me in the formulation of a productive methodological approach towards the visual documentation of trans-*hijra* music and dance. These ideas are then related to my involvement trans-*hijra* communities, conceptual approach to documentary filmmaking, and the filmmaking process itself.

*Performance and Performativity*

Thomas Waugh writes about the distinction between performance and performativity in his analysis of queer films. While it is important to distinguish between the two terms, Waugh nonetheless argues that their etymological and homonymic overlap is especially significant in their filmic application (1997:111). The words performance and performativity derive their significance from the root “perform,” and the slippages in meaning that usually arise between the two derive from the two principal meanings of the root—“the execution of an action” and “a public presentation or exhibition” (Waugh 1997:110). The word performative stems from the first meaning; It defines a category of utterance “that executes, enacts, or performs the action that is uttered” *(ibid.)*. While Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity is based on the first definition, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, the theory never entirely loses sight from his foundation in performance. Drag performance, she notes, is not just the shaping metaphor, but “the very idiom of a tautologically heterosexist gender/sexuality system, and the idiom also of the possibility for its subversion” *(Sedgwick 1993:1; in Waugh 1997:111).* As Waugh points out, it is the significant overlap in the two terms that documentary film exploits.
Performance, according to Waugh, is the basic ingredient of classical documentary insofar as the self-expression of subjects in front of the camera and in their collaborative relationships with the filmmaker are concerned (see Waugh 1993). In the performative mode of documentary, however, this overlap is made more explicit. Performative documentaries, Waugh notes, function like the speech act utterance “that not only describes but also executes a transformation in the relationship of speaker and listener” (1997:111). They address the audience “with a sense of emphatic engagement that overshadows their reference to the historical world” (Nichols 1994:92; in Waugh 1997:111). In doing so, they take on a musical tone, relying on dramatization and self-conscious theatricality, both of which are made especially evident in the works of Pratibha Parmar and Marlon Riggs.

Performative documentaries may not always employ a performative form. The film *Paris is Burning* is an immersive documentary of a queer performance culture that utilizes cinéma vérité approaches to cinematography as a means of highlighting the fluidity and fictionality of (narratives surrounding) gender and sexuality. Performance sequences are juxtaposed against confessional interviews of performers, that draw the viewer in to contemplate the dialectic of fictionality and realness. In doing so, the film deconstructs the opposition between symbolic identification and identity itself, thereby bringing the issue of viability not only of a particular community, but of the “belief system that sustains class, race, gender, and sexuality as a visible, continually self-authenticating categories” (Fuchs 1997:195). With particular reference to this film, it is with attention to the distinctions and overlaps between performance and performativity that I seek to position my investigation of the relationship between trans-hijra performance and “self-authenticating” identity-making.
In *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam defines heteronormative time as the normative processes of successful aging, marked by landmark moments in life like the “time of reproduction” and “time of inheritance” (see Halberstam 2005). The achievement of these rites of passage comprises the locus of heteronormativity and, in particular, the ways normative individuals conceive of time and space in relation to their own (presumed) heterosexual bodies. Part of what has made queerness pertinent as a form of self-description, she notes, “has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space” (2005:2). Queer uses of time reflect a temporal dealignment from the heteronormative trajectory, and carries with them an alternative “logics of location, movement and identification” (2005:1).

Halberstam attributes the emergence of queer time at the end of the 20th century, when LGBTIQ communities were mobilized into activism at the onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis. She elevates the life narratives of poets who dealt with the virus in varying capacities. Among them, thoughts of the death of lovers, thoughts of one’s own death, the confusion these realities beget cause the compression or annihilation of time and space, something Halberstam relates to Baudelaire’s conception of time in relation to modernism, namely “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” (in Halberstam 2005:2). The emphasis here extends beyond the realm of HIV/AIDS. Under this rubric, queer time operates against temporal conventions that lie within the normative scripts of family inheritance and child rearing, and into logics defined by a future imagined
through new possibilities of identification and living. As such, queer time is that which compresses, overlaps, envelopes, and/or expands normative conceptions of time.

A queer approach to the way we think about time also requires a readjustment of the ways we think about space. Space has been defined along a number of other parameters. Halberstam defines “queer space” as that which refers to the “place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage [and] the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counter-publics” (2005:6). Lorena Muñoz defines queer space against what she describes as “pseudo” heteronormative spaces (that is, public spaces that are imagined to be heterosexual but in reality, are not), as “fluid, temporal” and as including “messy, fluctuating,” multiple positionalities, trans-border identities and perspectives in gendered, classed, and racialized terms (Muñoz 2010:58). Aaron Betsky posits that “queer space is not only place: it is an act of appropriating the modern world for the continual act of self-construction […] Queer space queers reality to produce a space to live”” (1997:193). And in extending Halberstam’s definition of queer space in Black American queer culture, Marlon Bailey defines queer space as the place-making practices that people undertake to affirm and support their non-normative sexual identities, embodiment, and community values and practices (Halberstam 2005; in Bailey 2013:2).

Space has been described in music-making contexts as an “audiotopia,” or a space wherein which “music functions like a possible utopia for the listener, [where] music is not only experienced as sound that goes into our ears and vibrates through our bones,” but becomes a “space that we can enter into, move around in, inhabit, be safe in, [and] learn from” (Pabón and Smalls 2014:1). Jeffrey McCune’s describes queer musical spaces as that wherein which express
themselves with little or no disgrace,” a world-making that is as much about constructing a history as it is building a “home” that is nonetheless (in quoting Chandan Reddy) a “contradictory location that is open and hybrid” (1998:367, in McCune 2008:10). It consists of the structure of space (its physical frame) and the texture of the space (the ideological frames of gender), an “architexture” of activity-in-space that may be elastic, but which also seek to privilege a certain style of performance (see McCune 2008).

Queer filmmaking lends itself particularly well in making visible these differences in (conceptions and practices of) space and time because of the temporal and spatial logics that it applies in practice. It compacts the structure of the space (its physical frame) and as well as its texture (the ideological frames of gender) into a readable and researchable product. In doing so, queer film subverts normative ways of gazing at the subject, at times bending light and space as well as the one-to-one correlation of shape, color, their movements, and sounds. Technically speaking, queer film queers normative conventions in cinematography and editing in ways that may include, but are not limited to: (1) omitting the main “subject” from the camera frame while she speaks; (2) choosing long shots at intimate moments, or close-ups at emotionally distant ones; (3) editing around the main subject to tell a story about the main subject; (4) juxtaposing especially mundane scenes with ornate ones; (5) choosing multiple film narratives and/or voices relative to each other; (6) constructing an atemporal order of sequences; (7) speeding up, slowing down, or reversing the reel in order to complicate one’s perception of time; and (8) layering a non-linear or hyper-linear narrative in order to help the viewer embody experiences had by the subject, filmmaker, or both.
Queer filmmaking also compresses or annihilates the normative stages of filmic production—pre-production–production–post-production–audience engagement/distribution—which are based upon conventional conceptions of temporality. In doing so, it subverts the way subjects are engaged in the film production, and leaves open to critique the roles and power dynamics that come with being directors, producers, camera people, and talents/subjects. As a result, queer filmmaking shifts our gaze not merely on the end product, but on the process of its creation.

Queer filmmaking also subverts genre. It accomplishes this in ways that may include: (1) the juxtaposition of scripted sequences with “staged” improvised sequences, sequences of observational-style filmmaking, sequences that incorporate cinéma vérité (and so forth), in a methodological pastiche; (2) probing the real lives of actors and/or actresses, while hiring non-actors to read scripted sequences; (3) editing documentary footage employing a narrative arc; (4) editing “staged” footage to include only that which is “behind the stage”; (5) juxtaposing serious sequences against humorous ones to emphasize the irony of certain situations; (5) juxtaposing mundane aspects of people’s lives with extraordinary ones; and (6) incorporating deeply raw, reflexive elements. If normative film can be read as a series of visible symbols upon which gestures, body movements, verbal language, music, power dynamics, (conceptions of) time and space are constructed into a seemingly natural form (Ruby 2000:240-41), then queer filmmaking subverts the illusion of “naturality,” and reconfigures film to conform to the temporal and spatial ideals (and/or emotionality) of those making it. This point in particular reminds me of the adage “Truth is stranger than fiction.”
Reflexivity

In the most basic sense, reflexivity “is not merely intellectual and epistemological ‘navel gazing’” (Babock 1980, Okely 1992), but rather a matter of acknowledging one’s (shifting and always fluid) subjective positioning and power relations in queer ethnographic contexts (Rooke 2010:36). The point in highlighting one’s own experiences is not to indulge in the “banal egotism” of reflexivity (Probyn 1993:80; in ibid.), but to draw attention to the implications of one’s own insider/outsider-ship.

As Rooke, and indeed others have expressed, I am “within and a product of the subculture that I am studying,” and therefore my fieldwork provides me the opportunity to engage in an LGBTIQ identity politics that I myself am invested in (ibid.). Yet, as a queer-bodied insider and white-bodied outsider in trans-hijra contexts, my identities and cultural experiences accompany socio-political implications that must be problematized. It becomes necessary that I openly tend to the ways in which my experiences as a openly queer white man of lesbian parentage from America’s public-sector working-class color my frame of reference, and how my presumptions and prejudices about what it means to be an empowered gay male, lesbian, bisexual or transgender in an urban American context impact the formulation of ethnographic context and conclusions drawn.

I grew up in a lesbian household in urban Milwaukee. Visibly androgynous—for reasons not of my control—my gender and sexuality were challenged throughout my childhood by my grade-school peers (and sometimes teachers), a difficulty that was compounded by my mothers’ lesbianism. This led to a certain crisis of identity that I had to resolve early on in life. At the age
of 12, I “came out” to the freshman class and promptly joined Milwaukee’s only drop-in center for at-risk LGBTIQ youths. I was the youngest member at the time.

What I discovered over the course of my own gendered and sexual development, was that the ontological categories of straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and transgender are merely cultural constructs, words that we use merely to make sense of differences. I found that the words I comfortably employed for over 17 years in the safe confines of my openly gay, middle-class, Midwestern household, were not universally experienced by those with whom I was working. Moreover, what it meant to “come out” was conceived of and practiced differently from person to person. These were difficult lessons for me to learn, since I was (and still am) emotionally attached to and invested in my own assumptions about what being openly gay and queer is all about. Being open about my sexuality and gender fluidity is what largely defined (and continues to define) my own artistic practice, and what provided me the drive to continue my line of work.

As I came of age, my gaze shifted to other countries and cultures. If LGBTIQ are English words, what do they—or their equivalents in other languages—mean to those living in other parts of the world? After spending time in India, I came to realize that although the words were employed in practice, the multiplicative experiences of being gay, bisexual, or transgender were entirely different from my own. Perhaps more stark were the differences in conceptions of “the closet” held by hijras, kothis, transgender, and gay individuals alike. I came to realize that individual empowerment is not necessarily contingent on one’s coming out of the closet, as performed through the act of labeling. Being visible or “sounding out,” in other words, is not always as productive as being silent.
The privileging of one’s gender and sexual frame of reference is something some would call “sexual ethnocentrism” (see Tucker 2002). Reflexivity in queer ethnographic contexts is a way to own up to and dismantle the primacy of one’s ethnocentrism (whether sexual or not) through transparent self-analysis and analysis of the parameters of study. In her own study of lesbian musicians, Sherrie Tucker came up against a roadblock because most her subjects were uncomfortable formally “coming out” to her—either in private or for the record—although their language and stories about their relationships with “friends” suggested otherwise. Tucker later realized that her own sexual ethnocentrism shaped the “expectations, research goals, and scholarly desires” placed before her, preventing her to understand the ways in which certain power structures of silence in the community “conceal, shape, and imperfectly contain sexual contents” (2002:297, 298). Tucker’s “yearning for [her subjects] to come out,” she notes, had enacted an epistemic violence, silencing the very voices she originally sought to amplify (ibid.).

It is thus with sensitivity to the ways silences speak (or sing) “behind the veil”—and the roles ethnographers play in facilitating (or disrupting) these silences—that I seek to understand how music-making engenders trans-хизра пехчан.

The fragility of queer and trans truth-making demands a methodology that, with particular sensitivity, allows an ethnographer to determine her (unstable) place in a given ethnographic context, and also to examine the consequences of “outing” on paper (or on the screen) the complex makings of queerness and transness encountered.51 It also demands a

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51 It can be argued that making things concrete is inherently contradictory towards queer methodologies. But, if we were to take this postulation forward, what would be the point in writing or researching in the first place? A methodology, in this case, should provides some semblance of coherence while being productive in its capacity to uncover truths about the queer experience.
methodology that allows for the critical analysis (in real time) of power structures embedded in the ethnographic process.

Rooke calls for a queer ethnography that not only deconstructs the normative logics of ethnographic practice, but also undoes “some of the textual conventions which create the ethnographer as unproblematically stable in terms of their gendered and sexual subjectivity [while also examining] the consequences of taking seriously the complexities of understanding queer subjectivities” (2010:34). Ultimately, this places great onus on individuals to maintain (or deconstruct) a queer methodology of themselves, if only—among many other things—to determine its applicability towards the subjects they are dealing with and the relevance of queer theory in their own lives.52

Disrupting textual conventions, in my opinion, calls for a methodology that challenges the primacy of text itself. Because of the distinctly temporal (and spatial) nature of the film medium, (queerly) reflexive filmmaking is uniquely suited for this. Queer filmmaking is that which not only elevates the self as subject, but also, as part of a reflexive research process, examines the complexities (and even perhaps the seriousness of them in the first place) of understanding (queer) subjectivities.

Speaking in reference to David and Judith MacDougall’s participatory documentaries, Lucien Taylor notes that the “documentary exists not in contradistinction to participatory or

52 One of the ways some feminist and queer ethnographers have achieved this is through auto-ethnography. Like queer methodologies, auto-ethnography, as a form of self-reflection and writing that delves into ethnographers’ personal experiences to draw connections between them and their subjects, and in the process, works to deconstruct stable notions of self as a subject. Auto-ethnography “works to map how self-subjects are accomplished in interaction and how these subjects act upon the world” (Adams and Jones 2010:197, also see Adams 2005, Berry 2007, Butler 1990, 1993, and Spry 2011). Incidentally, Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams (2010) make a strong case for auto-ethnography as a distinctly queer methodology. Although auto-ethnography and queer theory are “held apart by focus, by context and by discipline” the “affinities and commitments of queer theory” lead directly into “the purposes and practices of auto-ethnography” (ibid.) But these differences are indicative of the inherent differences between theory and methodology: one posits while the other accomplishes.
‘reflexive’ propensities, but rather as their consummation. What becomes incontrovertibly clear
[…] is that if observation is not, in the end, participatory and self-reflexive, then it is not human”
(Taylor 1998:3).⁵³ I suggest that queer documentary filmmaking not only draws attention to a
queer perspective of the world and to the process of documentary making, but does so through a
critical interrogation of and active dismantling of conventions of power that their position of
ethnographic/filmic authority awards them, as well as a focus on the human as both subject and
maker. As I discuss further in the next two sections, this is accomplished through a variety of
ways, including through an acknowledgement of the so-called “erotics of knowledge
production”—the dynamics of desire and emotionality that shape parameters of study and what
one learns as a result—and the critical engagement of participation (or what some have called
collaboration) in documentary film contexts.

Eroticism and (Skin) Tone

Ellen Lewin and William Leap define queer anthropology as that which concerns the processes
through which private people come together to form a public, that deal with matters of general
interest without subject to coercion, and seek an understanding of the processes at work like
desire, personal identity, and erotic interest (2009:4). Along similar lines, Allison Rooke
contends that:

An ethnographic journey is one which requires that we embrace the queerness of
the situations we often find ourselves in. This can lead to an ethnography that

⁵³ Nichols suggests that reflexive documentaries “ask us to see documentary for what it is: a construct or
representation” (2001:125). This sentiment is echoed by filmmakers K.P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro, who
suggest that documentary defines its form by drawing attention not only to its basis in "reality," but to the way that it
is made (pers. comm., August 24th, 2015). In their own reflexive documentaries, this has been achieved
through non-diegetic voice-over or subtitles, shots of the filmmakers filming their subjects, pedagogically-driven
narratives concerning issues of social inequity, and a performative approach to these issues.
recognizes experience as a nodal point of knowledge, providing useful information about the self, subjects, and the spaces they inform and are informed by. (Rooke 2010:39, also see Probyn 1993)

It is with attention to the layered insider-outsider dynamic that I address the circulatory effect of emotional and sometimes erotic enmeshment that my dual status as insider/outsider awarded me in gaining access to heretofore unseen aspects of trans-hijra music. It is also with attention to a so-called “erotics of knowledge production” (Rooke 2010:35) that I seek to make something critical of the desire that transcends the banal space of pleasure for pleasure’s sake.

A large part of my access into the trans-hijra community was facilitated by my dual status as a queer-bodied insider (signaling empathy, understanding, and eroticism) and white-body outsider (signaling cultural difference, ignorance, exoticism and more eroticism). More often than not, my role as an ethnographer introduced an unstable variable to a sometimes critical situations, leaving me feeling “like an outsider looking in” (Rooke 2010:35). In music and dance contexts, however, the energy of the community often pulled me into the ontological framework of those that I was supposed to be studying, signaling at least some coherence of belonging that nonetheless made it difficult for me to return to the comfortable armchair of writing.

In some of these contexts, my whiteness often engendered eroticism.54 I was recently made aware of this while spending time with members of a dance group at the “Mujre ki

54 This is not always the case in normative Indian contexts. In normative contexts, fairness is often read as beauty and engenders notions of romanticism and sexuality. One need only see the plethora of facial whitening ads on billboards, television, radio, and movie theaters, to understand the ways class and privilege of this sort is conventionally inscribed onto white normative bodies. As such, for normative white people, this romanticism engenders a privilege of attention and movement. Because of the distinctly heterosexual nature of this romanticism, however, the same attention awarded to normative white bodies becomes problematic for white queer bodies. In some cases, my queer whiteness invites open criticism and/or forceful sexual advances from normative males. In other cases, it engenders aggression. As a result, having a queer body (and voice) in normative Indian contexts, I am often dis-included in the conventional power structures that cisgendered, sexually normative whiteness provides. The stability that my whiteness supposedly affords me gets undone by the open speculation that my queerness invites.
“Raat” (‘Night of North Indian Dance’) event organized by a local LGBTIQ activist group. Just as the song “Chittiyaan Kalaiyaan” (‘White Wrists’) began to play, three transgender dancers created a space on the dance floor on my behalf, gesticulating to the lyrics and performing blessings on my head.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mann jaa ve, mainu shopping kara de} & \quad \text{Please take me shopping,} \\
\text{Mann jaa ve, romantic picture dikha de} & \quad \text{Please show me a romantic movie,} \\
\ldots & \\
\text{Chittiyaan kalaiyaan ve} & \quad \text{White wrists,} \\
\text{Oh baby meri chittiyan kalaiyan ve} & \quad \text{Oh baby, I have white wrists}
\end{align*}
\]

The sexualization of my body that occurred on the dance floor was not entirely their doing. The song itself reflects a Bollywood romanticism towards the fair complexioned skin tone. The encounter as a whole reminds me of what Margaret Jolly and Lenore Manderson call:

\[\text{The deep histories of sexual contact and erotic entanglement between Europeans and ‘others’ [...] exchanges in meanings and fantasies as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies [...] sites of desire formed by confluences of cultures, be they the tidal waves of European colonialism or the smaller eddies of sexual contacts and erotic imaginings created between cultures. (1997:1; in Waugh 2001:124)}\]

Nevertheless, when moments like this occur, the feeling of vulnerability that I sometimes feel in normative contexts (being singled out and sized up) is configured into a pehchān of white privilege (drawing affirmation of my whiteness through sexual acts)—something that normative white people typically experience in “normative” Indian contexts. The dance, in this case, confirmed my own white privilege through trans-on-queer attention (romantic, sexual or others).
The point of sharing this was to explain that, unlike the experience of being white in America, I am not racially invisible in India. Because of the response that my (queer) whiteness engenders in both normative and non-normative contexts, therefore, it becomes necessary that I acknowledge the simultaneous manifestations of power and vulnerability—both of which are engendered through privilege—that my whiteness awards me, while also willingly pull apart and undo all attachments to that which conventionally provides me some semblance of ontological security. On the page, I am not, nor should ever be, ethnographically omniscient and all powerful.

This can be a complicated process. The feeling of vulnerability that is engendered though the privilege of being an ethnographer is reflected upon by queer ethnographer Jeffrey McCune. Speaking in reference to his distinct insider/outsider placement as an ethnographer (signaling outsider-ship) who also happens to be a queer person of color (signaling insider-ship), McCune speaks of the complicated role his “productive distanciation” from the ethnographic context played in creating vulnerability:

This is a unique vantage point as it sets me apart (creating vulnerability), while giving me scopographic power (providing control). The vulnerability I experienced was a result of over-stimulation—where the heightened action within the space left me available for unwarranted touching, pushing, and shoving. My body, as it absorbed so much of the vibrant action in the club space, was the receptor of much uninvited, and often unwelcomed energy. (McCune 2008:13)

It is with attention to the shifting implications of words, identities, and ontological perspectives as they are experienced in fieldwork and non-fieldwork contexts that I engage in the (possibilities of an) ideal malleability of gender, sexuality, class and race in space and place (see Muñoz 2010). In doing so, I seek to remain cognizant of the cultural and political dynamics that
race and ethnicity in trans, queer, normative, and intersectional contexts impose upon, inscribe, or derive from my role as an ethnographer.

Only a methodology that is sensitive to the emotional and tonal ongoings of the community will be able analyze the ways the dynamics of gender, sexuality, class and race manifest in daily life. With experience as its “nodal point of knowledge” (Rooker 2010:39), queer filmmaking is something that can reveal the often intense emotional experiences, vulnerabilities and positions of authority engendered by these experiences, strategies employed by the filmmaker to negotiate them, and results from these negotiations. With attention to camera placement and my role as a queer-bodied insider and white-bodied outsider—subject to unwarranted touching, pushing, or shoving in sometimes highly-charged musical atmospheres—queer filmmaking makes visible/audible some of the ways that (unstated) desires (erotic or otherwise) and emotions (pleasant or otherwise) manifest experientially.

**Heterogeneous Scope and Eccentric Positionality**

“Queer” [...] does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-construction, and practices of community—for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth and desire. (Halperin 1995:62)

The emphasis placed here is the possibility for queer methodologies to embody a “heterogeneous scope” by virtue of the “eccentric positionality” occupied by the queer subject, and what I would add, the eccentric and always shifting inter-positionalities occupied by the researcher in his
ethnographic context. In the rest of the chapter, I seek to emphasize how my queer filmmaking methodology embraces a plurality of approaches, and how these different methodological approaches lead to different results.

Kim Christian Schroder states that “if method is a lens, no one would expect two different lenses to produce the same visual representation of the object” (Schroder 1999:51). In the development of a critically productive (and productively critical) filmmaking methodology, I seek a nuanced, textured, pluralistic and distinctly queer perspective of my participation in the cultures and practices I seek to study (also see Shahani 2008:35). This POV would not be possible via a singular methodology. As a illustrate, part of my “heterogenous scope” in queer filmmaking stems from my own growth in perspective and ability as a filmmaker.

**Queer Filmmaking as “Critical Enmeshment”**

Filmmaking provided me with many opportunities to become enmeshed, and in doing so, challenged me on levels that purely descriptive “research”—if there is such a thing—would not allow. It was not originally part of my research agenda, but became part of the fabric of my methodology over time. As it stands now, my film work with the trans-

### Particular Filmmaking’ in the latter half of this chapter).

Just as my own gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, class, and religious ethnocentrism required a reshuffling, over the course of five years, it became necessary that I engaged in a “theoretical maneuvering” or—as I would rather call it—a “growth” of my subjective positioning in relation
to my ethnographic approach. Rather than existing as a secure, cogent, and impenetrably queer ethnographer, I frequently submitted myself to the position as subject, becoming in some cases, someone’s “photo chela” (figuratively marking my insider/outsider status), and in others, someone’s “gay gora director” (marking me as a sexualized professional, of sorts). As Geertz would have it, I became ontologically incorporated within the organic walls of hijra culture while not entirely losing sight of my own (changing) subjective position. I became critically enmeshed within a “web of significance” (see Geertz 1973).

Speaking from an experiential standpoint, in these next sections, I relate the complex and sometimes contradictory methodologies to the development of my own craft—a “rite of passage” of the queer ethnographer–cum-filmmaker. The order I reveal in these three methodologies corresponds to the chronology of their development. Like Bill Nichol’s “six modes of documentary,” I do not suggest that one methodology excludes certain techniques or perspectives within others (2001:100). They in fact possess considerable overlap. The performative approach utilized in Mohammed to Maya (2012), for instance, contains elements of participation that define Music in Liminal Spaces (2012-current). Likewise, many of these methodologies incorporate similar reflexive, emotional, and tonal approaches. In other words, the characteristics of a given methodology function as a dominant function in that “they give structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organization (ibid.).

Although these methodologies arose at different stages of my filmic development, I do not suggest that one approach is inherently better than the other. To do so would imply a value judgement, and “taste” is not a primary subject of concern here. What I do suggest, however, is that the use of certain methodologies beget certain results, and therefore, knowledges about the
subject, the self, and its relationship to performance. These methodologies arose from a dialogue between myself and participants, and took shape out of an engagement with various aspects of performance, in both the literal and conceptual senses of the term. It is with sensitivity to basic techniques of what I call a queer approach to filmmaking that I write about my critical enmeshment with hijra culture and queer filmmaking’s potential to elicit certain truths about the relationship between music, self, and culture.

“Serious Play” (in Invisible Goddesses [2011])

We might consider the concept of “serious play” to be a vestige of Sherry Ortner’s “serious games” in order to highlight the aggressively playful nature of hijra social life. Indeed, in hijra society, “power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways, and […] while there may be playfulness and pleasure in the process, the stakes […] are often very high” (Ortner 1996:12). Keeping in mind the pliability of ritual in Indian society, however, I seek to maintain a certain “flexibility, spontaneity, and improvisation” (Racy 2004:12) with respect to the theoretical musings of “serious games” encountered structurally and symbolically in hijra culture. As such, serious play emphasizes the particular improvisatory forming, skirting, and subverting of the so-called “rules of the game” governing hijra society and therefore my approach to filmmaking as a whole.

Serious play does not downplay the importance of rules, or the consequences for breaking them, but deemphasizes their rigidity. It encompasses the flexibility and fluidity with which some of these rules come about and how they are applied in daily life. It recognizes that life is not necessarily a game, wherein actors or characters battle for the top prize, but a playground that
individuals play on for life. Accordingly, serious play captures the absurd and sometimes surreal moments of my interaction with hijras, and is particularly attentive to the sometimes contradictory occurrences of serious humor and/or humorous seriousness.

As I discuss further in the chapter on badhais (Chapter 4), filming this way can reveal the seriously playful ways power and inequality pervade in hijra culture. Through this lens, hijra culture is not only conceived of as a “way of life,” but also, in Stuart Hall’s words, as “ways of struggle” [that] constantly intersect” with axes of identity and livelihood. As Stuart Hall notes, it is at these points of intersection where “the pertinent cultural struggles arise” (1998:451). This resonates with Halberstam’s notion of queer space. Queer space is that which exists simultaneously as a crisis and an opportunity, “a crisis in the stability of form and meaning, and an opportunity to rethink the practice of cultural production, its hierarchies and power dynamics, its tendency to resist or capitulate” (2005:6).

Through a seriously playful methodology, I seek to reconfigure the ontological frames of everyday trans-hijra realities that, within normative categorizations, have been rendered as marginalized, silence and oppressed (see Muñoz 2010). Much like Jennie Livingston’s methodology in Paris Is Burning, I seek to critically normalize the lives of my interlocutors (for the viewer and reader) not only to gather an honest and truthful perspective of their lives and the spaces within which they reside, but also to reveal truths about our own potentially normative lives. As Mumbai-based filmmakers Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar once told me, one of the strengths in documentary lies in its capacity to normalize the lives of the "abnormal," and as a result of this, revealing the truth (or truths) about ourselves and our "normative" societies (pers. comm., August 24th, 2015). In this case, a “map of resistance is not simply the underside of the
map of domination” but that which is a lie, and that which gives the lie to the other (Pile 1997:6; in Halberstam 2005:6).

Invisible Goddesses (2011)—a documentary short that arose out my preliminary work with Laxmi Narayan Tripathi and others from the hijra community—methodologically engages hijras in serious play. This is achieved through a variety of production approaches that, more often than not, arose spontaneously, with little intent, and/or at the behest of the participants involved in the making of the film. A seriously playful approach to filmmaking is most apparent in the ways I negotiated shots and contexts for shooting (production), and in the ways the emotionality, tone, and subjectivities of its participants arise in the editing process (post-production). (Conventional approaches towards pre-production and audience engagement, as such, hold little importance in this discussion because of their complete absence.)

In regards to the former, footage gathered did not arise by force, but grew out of the dialogic relationship between participants and my own (gradual discovery of) camera use. For this reason, it exhibits aesthetic and modal homologies most closely with the cinéma vérité style of documentary—an approach that was more or less unintentional. Observational modes of filmmaking were also employed when I was given the opportunity to disappear behind the lens (see Chapter 4). The majority of footage was gathered during periods in 2010 and 2011, well before I had learned the vocabulary and craft of filmmaking, and because of this is characteristically grainy, haphazard, and rockily vérité. As a whole, however, the footage

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55 Invisible Goddesses was neither shown at film festivals nor published online. It was never screened publicly in its entirety, but in pieces at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Philadelphia, and in other controlled settings. It is unlikely that conventional distribution would materialize for the film. For this reason, the film affectively remains, for all intents and purposes an artifact of subversive film—a queer film.

56 The footage was shot entirely on a Sony HD Handycam—a device that was purchased after the loss of my HD camera during the first week of my initial arrival in India—and without professional sound equipment.
largely reflects the perspective of an unknowing documentarian “catching life unawares” while himself entirely unaware. Consequently, the finished film becomes a sort of reflexive statement of my own naïveté and vulnerability in the field, and captures the pre-cognizant stage of my awareness as filmmaker (see Figure 6 and Video 2).

The film was edited while I was enrolled in Marina Goldovskaya’s course “Advanced Documentary Filmmaking” in UCLA’s School of Film, Television & Theater. (It was because of taking Goldovskaya’s course and gaining support from various mentors, including the prolific documentary filmmaker Vivian Umino, that inspired the crafting of the footage into something other than an ethnographic artifact.) Due to its roots in experimentation, the film engenders a spirit of playfulness in post-production; It was re-cut, assembled and mastered into a filmic narrative naively, but while revealing especially “raw” moments in the lives of its subjects. While playful, the film is also intimate, sensitively capturing moments of self-reflection, exposed desire, and vulnerability (both on the part of the subject and filmmaker). At some points in the film, the relationship between subject and filmmaker takes on an erotic dimension, which is ultimately quelled by intellectual dialogue and rough juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated
sequences. This transforms queer eroticism (between queer filmmaker and transgender subject) into a study of absurdism. Because of the unprofessional quality of the film, I regard *Invisible Goddesses* more as a resource for “found footage” than as a formal springboard upon which to launch an analysis grounded in film and gender theories.

The following is how methodologically *Invisible Goddesses* captures the serious play associated with filming *hijra* life:

1. Emphasis on improvisation, but with attention to the rules of the situation - Reflecting one of the more basic tenets of contemporary documentary filmmaking (refer to the Film Independent Forum in Chapter 2), I literally moved by the seat of my pants. Preplanning was not a strength of *Invisible Goddesses*, and the bulk of the film was created through spontaneous filming sessions with participants, using a low-quality camera and sound equipment. The overall feel of the film is jagged, and the rough editing reflects this improvised tone. Nevertheless, the film was shot with sensitivity to social particularities, powers and/or hierarchies if present. For instance, if a *guru* was present, my decision making—including shot placement, when I turned on and off the camera—were made according to their approval. The camera, in this case, becomes less of a tool for investigation or to disrupt social dynamics in a given ethnographic situation, and more a tool that participates in the organization and texture of the space within which it resides. Chapter 5 contains a number of instances where this technique was used in *badhai* contexts.

2. Emphasis on the particularities - In the ever present “wink vs. twitch” debate, serious play lies somewhere in the middle. Although seemingly insignificant, minute actions are regarded with a degree of significance, that significance is not taken too seriously. This is done in
order to highlight the improvisatory, playful nature of filmmaking and, in particular, filming *hijras* in their own environments. Accordingly, filming to capture serious play often involves incredibly up-close, tight shots of individual facial expressions, gestures, and other movements.

3. Engages the camera with its subjects - Often times, participants spoke directly into the camera (or to myself, behind the camera). The direct engagement of the camera engages the filmmaker (as a subject) in the larger ethnographic narrative arc, and consequently the audience. This provides a performative dimension to the notion of serious play.

4. Captures the subject in daily routines - Filming “on location” is part of what sets documentary filmmaking apart from narrative filmmaking. Moreover, serious play largely hinges on the ways individuals interact with and respond to variables in their environment. Knowing this, close attention to participants in their mundane living spaces was carefully employed in *Invisible Goddesses*.

A number of these seriously playful techniques are captured in a sequence that takes place while someone (whom will remain anonymous) performs her “coming out” story while bathing. The scene was not researched or planned, nor was it my intention to do anything of the sort. The scene was filmed at her behest, at the spur of the moment. As such, the film relies exclusively on the delivery of her performance to create a meaningful experience for the viewer. This is achieved entirely through improvisation, and through her playful interchange between seriousness and humor, and improvisatory use of the environment of a bathroom in the creation of symbolic imagery. The sequence is structured by the narrative she sets forth herself, consisting of an exposition, rise, climax, and *dénouement*. Apart from the creation of researchable material,
the film creates a situation rich in lyrical symbolism and artistry, and reveals a special fluency in
the musical “language” of storytelling (see Chapter 3 Appendix).

There are a number of reasons why this sequence is queer. First, it subverts conventional
storytelling by relying exclusively on an improvised “script” performed entirely by the subject.
The way that she delivers the story accounts for more than half of its expressive potency, as she
subtly brings her body into the camera frame, fully aware of her nakedness (which is
undisclosed) and the impact that (the idea of) her exposure has on the viewer. She utilizes the
tools she has around her to illustrate her improvised performance, using on several occasions, the
water to which she also refers in her vivid portrayal of coming out.

Second, the visuals tell a story that is simultaneously distinct yet complementary to the
spoken narrative. The cinematography is a conservative, with tight shots of the subject’s face.
The embarrassment and vulnerability of the filmmaker shows clearly throughout the film through
the way the camera avoids her body, and the way the voice in some cases interjects with
questions unrelated to the situation at hand. Ultimately, the visuals reveals the filmmaker’s loss
of control of the situation and the ways the the subject exploits this.

Among other things, the subject’s improvised performance in front of the camera is a rich
resource for ethnomusicological inquiry. This would not have emerged without a seriously
playful methodology. Throughout her performance, the subject poses such questions as: What is
the relationship between music and dance—or art in general—to gender and sexual identity?
How does art reflect “truth”? How does it create “truth”? At one point in the film, she literally
declares that “Art has no language, no sex, no drama,” and that “It is all there.” As if to negate
the postulate “Art imitates Life” (and vice versa), the subject equates “art” with “truth,” and in
doing so, critiques the discourse of “coming out” as falsely representing the process of self-
realization. “I always never say I was ‘coming out,’ because I was always ‘there,’” she says. The
way she alludes to the process of self-realization incorporates notions of body and soul,
referencing objects and imagery located within the camera frame: “What is ‘coming out’? Do I
come out from the skin in what I am? Do I come out from the soul? […] This body is skeleton
with flesh. My soul is inside. The soul had decided when it took birth and came out into this
world. So, I was always there. I was out. I need not be ‘out.’” Taking a small bucket in hand, she
continues using the metaphor of water to demonstrate her point: “Only like the water, if I take it
in this container, and if it flows down and goes into another container and wants to be there, why
not let it be there.” Then, she immediately creates a moment of deadpan humor, taking a swish of
water and spitting it out: “H20. That is life.”

**Movement (in *Rites of Passage* [2011])**

Border crossings are always trouble. First of all, who’s in control? Second of all,
is it dangerous? And finally, do you have the courage to go across?
(Bociurkiw 1993:137, quoted in Goldstein 1997:175)

Using cinematographic techniques and methodologies more typically associated with *cinéma
vérité*, like rocky camera work, performative documentaries “document the emotional reality of a
particular subject’s experiences while simultaneously making connections to the social, cultural
and political world in which the subject is historically situated” (Goldstein 1997:176). Blurring
boundaries between conventional documentary and narrative film, performative documentary
captures the experience and identity of a subject through an emphasis on his or her subjective
reality. Through this means, viewers are provided an “affective and critical understanding of both particular subject and themselves in the moment of viewing” (ibid.).

The approach Marlon Riggs’s *Tongues Untied* (1989) can be considered an example of this documentary mode. It is performative evocation of the filmmaker’s life as an African-American dancer/musician, and demonstrates “how embodied knowledge provides entry into an understanding of the more general processes at work in society” (Nichols 2001:131). Performative documentary is often employed in films that engage subjects that lie outside the normative realm, but do so while emphasizing the normative aspects of their lives. This is done through attention to particularly intimate moments in the lives of its subjects, stressing “emotional complexity of experience” and “the subjective qualities of experience and memory that depart from factual recounting” (ibid.). In this case, Riggs utilizes recited poems and scenes that address intense personal stakes surrounding his black queer identity (ibid.) Like other performative documentaries, the film “does not draw our attention to the formal qualities or political context of the film directly so much as deflect our attention from the referential quality of documentary altogether” (Nichols 1994:93).

As I discuss further in Chapter 5, filming a music ritual performatively (through movement) achieves the same affect, while also highlighting the ways individuals reflect or engender notions of self in *hijra* culture. However, unlike *Tongue Untied*, which consciously “shift[s] away from documentary referentiality and toward a more poetic expressiveness” through deliberate editing that “often blurs boundaries between autobiography and history, fiction and documentary, the personal and the collective” (Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:25), my approach evokes poetic expressiveness through presence—that is, my presence as a filmmaker is
signaled without entirely losing grasp of the context within which filming took place. This is largely because of the fact that the subject matter—music in ritual—was a context wherein the lines between music, dance, and “reality” were already blurred. Instead of referring to this particular methodology as performative, therefore, I call it “movement.”

Through this lens, we begin to see that identity is not fixed, but fluid and intimate “works in progress”—a process of becoming—that rely on the active interplay between internal and external dynamics of the body and voice. Stuart Hall says that “identity is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990:223). Keeping this in mind, I seek a critical(ly queer) interpretation of how my filmmaking reflects and participates in the (trans)formations of self and selfhood. My approach to performative documentary seeks a sensitive responsivity to the emotional responses, postures, desires, respiratory patterns, and other “factors shaped both by the internal conditions of the body and by environmental and cultural experiences” (see Bonenfant 2010:76). It is through a performative methodology, that I seek to reconfigure the ontological frames of everyday trans-hijra realities as not only understood but experienced as normative.

To better illustrate the ways in which performative filmmaking—what I otherwise refer to as “movement”—can be used to highlight issues of music-making in hijra contexts, I use the example of my experiences making Rites of Passage (a 19-minute short documentary film). The film, also entitled Mohammed to Maya (the 54- and 74-minute versions of the same project), represents a significant transition point in both the life of its subject and filmmaker. The film
movingly captures the sexual transition of a transgender woman, and in doing so, signals my own transition from neophyte to a more seasoned filmmaker.\textsuperscript{57}

The film methodologically engages the main subject in movement. This is achieved at all stages of production that, more often than not, arose spontaneously. Movement is most revealed in the ways that I negotiated shots, contexts for shooting (production), the emotionality, tone, and subjectivities in the editing process (post-production), as well as conventions of distribution and audience engagement. (Like \emph{Invisible Goddesses}, a discussion of my approach to pre-production holds little importance here because of its complete absence.) The cinematography in \emph{Mohammed to Maya} reflects an indefatigable \textit{cinéma vérité} approach. This, however, reflects less an artistic strategy at the time of shooting, and more a methodological categorization that can be applied after the fact. While I had conscious notions of the \textit{vérité} style at the time of shooting, my concerns were more pragmatic than aesthetic. As such, the film as a whole is less a formal example of \textit{cinéma vérité} than it is performative.

\textsuperscript{57} The film production literally began at the behest of its subject, Maya. I met Maya in Los Angeles, approximately two months after my preliminary fieldwork expedition in 2010, after retrieving her contact through \emph{Satrang} (seven colors), the southern California-based South Asian LGBTIQ community organization. Our first meeting—the parameters of which were settled within the realm of ethnographic fieldwork—took place at her apartment in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Korea Town in December 2010. I intended to interview her about her training in \emph{Bharatanatyam} (South Indian classical dance, literally ‘Dance of India’), with the larger goal to combining her perspective with Laxmi’s in a larger discussion of the ways dance engenders or reiterates notions of gender transformation. This ethnographic agenda reflects in the quality of the initial interview’s recording (The video looks and sounds like an excerpt from \textit{Invisible Goddesses}).

One week after our initial meeting, Maya informed me over the phone that she intended to undergo sex reassignment surgery in Bangkok in approximately two months’ time, and invited me to accompany her for the purposes of video documenting the entire process. Thrilled by the prospect of witnessing a procedure that I had, until then, only seen on television documentaries, and taking it as a sign that our plane departure would serendipitously take place on my birthday—February 6th—I agreed. The next moment, I found myself calling a friend to politely ask for a camera. I also bought sound equipment, and applied for a last-minute travel grant—which paid for approximately half of the plane ticket—through the Department of Ethnomusicology at UCLA.

While I approached the trip as an opportunity for fieldwork—and with the intention of incorporating the footage into my larger research project—I also had a developing understanding of basic camera function, shot placement, and audio capture, thanks to my basic training in Goldovskaya’s class. In fact, I was planning to show the footage to the class, which I had hoped, would inform me about the potential for its use. Although the intentions were there, a conscious plan of action had not yet materialized. I had not made calls to scout out shot locations or receive permission to shoot inside the hospital, but was, for all intents and purposes, flying by the seat of my pants. Of course, permissions were eventually received with little to no fuss.
Although performative documentaries are “conventionally” about the filmmakers themselves, *Mohammed to Maya*’s exploration of identity as a process in (physical) motion, reiterates and at times contests configurations of filmmaker/subject roles, and consequently the viewer’s sense of self. In the film, Maya frequently addresses the camera in ways that make the audience a referent (via the filmmaker) and exposes her (changing) sense of self in full bloom. The filmmaker (myself) is referred to often as it is only he who is present with Maya throughout the entire film.

According to Trinh T. Minh-ha, self-referencing can serve as a “troublesome incursion” upon the audience member’s sense of identity. Minh-ha insists that “[a] subject who points to him or herself as subject-in-process, [or] a work that displays its own formal properties or its own constitution as work, is bound to upset one’s sense of identity” (1990:92). Because of the frequency with which she does this, however, Maya’s speaking into the camera effectively includes the camera/man in the larger fabric of the narrative. This draws the viewer into her journey while exposing the ways camera is involved in the structuring of truth and narrative. As such, the film as such becomes less a statement of truth about Maya’s subjective experience, but about the relationship between her and the filmmaker/camera/audience.

My general strategy for post-production reflected a general concern for picture “authenticity,” but that which emphasized the materiality of experience over the highlighting of specific concepts and ideas. I desired for the editing to honor my shooting strategy, and to enhance the feeling of presence. Frost characterizes the editing style as “quick and choppy” but that which nonetheless supports the notion of immediacy, honesty, and at times disorientation. In the short film version, *Rites of Passage*, I kept the sequence of events intentionally short,
trimming “moments of fat” to let emotional potent sequences stand out emotionally for the viewer. The feature-length version contains a similar editing rhythm in the first twenty minutes, but then slows considerably to allow for moments of breathe. In all, the film editing is characterized by a balance of interviews in their “natural” contexts, with musical montages to break the monotony of spoken word and to build emotional tension (see Figure 7).

The following is how methodologically *Rites of Passage* and later *Mohammed to Maya*, captures the movement associated with Maya’s sexual transition in a performative way. The following tenets do not stand in place of those provided under the “serious play” heading, but builds upon them:

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58 Incidentally, it was during the editing process that the title *Rites of Passage* popped into my head. This title stayed throughout the course of our Kickstarter campaign, which effectively raised funds for post-production (sound mix and color correction) and a film festival run. Thanks to our donors, the short film *Rites of Passage* made a successful showing at over fifty international film festivals, universities, and other venues, and won five awards, including the Audience Choice Award for Best Film at its premiere at the Los Angeles Transgender Film Festival. The film’s showing at these film festivals helped to increase exposure of the film and consequently both Maya any myself, and led to the development of the feature-length version *Mohammed to Maya*. News about the project ultimately boosted our careers and overall stature in the Los Angeles filmmakers community, as well as the international LGBTQ community of activists and artists. Maya to this day continues to receive requests for on camera interviews about her transition and even made a cameo appearance on the Golden Globe-winning television show *Transparent* (2014) thanks in large part to the contacts we made through screening at such prestigious film festivals as Outfest and Palm Springs International Shortfest. I also received my fair share of attention and support from local and national organizations—not to mention boosted my credentials in the larger academic community—including from reputable film making communities like Outfest, the Film Society of Lincoln Center, and Film Independent. Need less to say, as far as distribution is concerned, the film’s festival run reflects a somewhat conventional approach to filmmaking, but that which nonetheless helped us to enter the increasingly queer world of entertainment production.
5. Captures the subject (literally) in movement - This approach can be conceived of in pragmatic and more conceptual terms. Pragmatically speaking, many sequences included interviews in moving vehicles, and quick cuts from scene to scene. Symbolically speaking, many sequences involved objects or contexts wherein visual and/or aural signs of motion was involved, whether it be on a street corner or in an airport, as a means of highlighting the subject’s moment of transition in her life. This approach became one of the quintessential features of the film, intended to both highlight the metaphor of Maya’s “journey” and also to emotionally lure the viewer into the physical process of sex reassignment surgery. Emily Frost, a contributor to National Public Radio’s *On Being*, wrote in her review of the film that “the journey” was “central to the documentary.”

6. Favors immediacy and honesty above all else - This includes not only the use of harsh lighting, close-up shots, and capturing the subject in movement, but also capturing moments of non-preparedness and vulnerability, and honest and truthful interview content. As a general rule, I let the camera roll, even during moments that were not situationally opportune. Marina Goldovskaya once told me, in echoing Werner Herzog, that one never knows what is going to happen and sometimes, during the most unexpected moments, “the miraculousness of documentary filmmaking [may] appear” (Herzog *Grizzley Man* 2005; pers. comm., January 5, 2012). In a key sequence of the film, which takes place inside the taxi ride on the way to the hospital the day before surgery, Maya begins to break down after I

59 Emily Frost writes: “Before the film begins, Ms. Jafer has been on an internal voyage during two years of hormonal and psychological therapy. In the opening scene, she is moving again. Without any explanation, the viewer is thrust into an airport in Thailand, the only place where she can afford gender reassignment surgery. The harsh lighting and close-up shots make it feel as though we, too, have been on the impossibly long flight from Los Angeles. The director favors immediacy and honesty above all else, shooting with a cinéma vérité style.” The excerpt is from “A Tight Focus on the Spiritual Side of Transitioning” in *On Being*: [http://www.onbeing.org/blog/tight-focus-spiritual-side-transitioning/2437](http://www.onbeing.org/blog/tight-focus-spiritual-side-transitioning/2437)
ask a question about her father. Emotionally conflicted, my immediate reaction was to place the camera down and console her. But, the need for the footage trumped this impulse. I kept filming.

7. Does not explain, but shows – This favors a more “active engagement of the filmmaker with her subjects [and] avoid anonymous voice-over exposition [thereby situating] the film more squarely in a given moment and distinct perspective” (Nichols 2001:123). In post-production, this strategy centers on the trimming of unnecessary “fat” in order to build a narrative centered on Maya’s character. I doing so, I sought to highlight the ways in which Maya thought and acted, laying out her decisions and presenting the sometimes contradictory aspects of her decision making. Dialogue is in the film, but only exists within the diegetic space of the narrative. Moreover, many scenes exist without or with minimal dialogue.

8. Not only records, but becomes involved in the construction of narrative – The capacity of the camera as a record of truth is explored in a variety of capacities, but it is their constructive nature that I highlight here. In the film Gulabi Gang (2012), the camera became a witness to a number of brutal crimes perpetrated on women by their husbands. In this case, the camera becomes involved as a record of facts in the telling of the story of the crime (both to the authorities and to the film’s audience), and in the construction of facts leading its subjects in the larger search for truth. Indeed, the protagonist of the film was aware of this throughout filming, and at one point declares to the men involved in the crime’s cover-up that “the camera is here recording every lie you say” (see 14:00), effectively using the camera to elicit a
truthful response. In *Mohammed to Maya*, the presence of the camera builds a narrative of truth in a similar matter. Instead of acting as witness to a crime, however, the camera becomes witness—indeed the only witness—to Maya’s physical and emotional triumph over the utter pain experienced through gender reassignment surgery.

9. Becomes part of the subject’s search for redemption – At one point in *Gulabi Gang* (2012), the camera turns to the protagonist as if to interrogate her. Jain, who presumably is the one asking the questions, openly questions the role the protagonist is playing in the investigation, as if to ask: “Why can’t you do more?” This camera angle signals confrontation (to the viewer), while also (within the diegetic space of the film) is employed by the filmmaker to impose pressure on her protagonist to tell the truth. In *Mohammed to Maya*, the presence of the camera is felt differently. Most sequences are shot from a low angle, as if to elevate Maya—who in many cases is being captured in moments of anguish. There is a sequence in the film wherein Maya is provided a camera of her own to journal her experiences while the filmmaker was away. One sequence reveals Maya balling into the camera because of the incredible pain of having to remove the bandages over her new breast implants. In this, and indeed other sequences, the camera becomes a real device in the character’s search for redemption and catharsis.

The film’s methodological emphasis on performative documentary is emphasized in once scene, where Maya effectively points to visual symbolism surrounding notions of sex reassignment
as a form of dance. The following sequence rather explicitly delves into aspects of Maya’s (former) dancing profession.

The sequence begins two days after surgery on Valentines Day, at a point when Maya was able to lift herself out of the hospital bed and sit in a chair for the first time since the procedure (see Figure 8 and Video 3). I decided to take opportunity of her newfound mobility and the change of scenery to stage an interview her about how she felt her surgery went. Picking up my camera and turning on the sound equipment, I began to film her against the backdrop of the window, which filled the entire space of the far wall. Maya was still wearing her hospital gown and cap, and was barefoot. I noticed that she was busy moving her legs around, and asked her if she felt like she had Restless Legs Syndrome. “I have fast feet because I’ve danced for years,” she explained to me as she tapped her toes on the ground and pressed her heals against the legs of the chair. Moving into this line of thought, I asked her to talk about her experiences dancing as a child, and this is what she told me:

I’ve always seen myself as a beautiful woman dancer, female dancer, from my earliest of memories. I’ve idolized Hema Malini, Vajinti Mala, Sri Devi, Mardhuri Dixit, et cetera, who are and were amazing actresses in Hindi film. Beautiful, beautiful dancers. […] I’ve always… I just watch a dance and I know the moves, and the music is on and I can do the same moves. I don’t have to get trained. And dance has been something that has been very stress relieving, very balancing, grounding. When I’m sad I dance, when I’m happy I dance. Dance is a very prominent expression for me. When I’m on stage and when I dance, it almost feels like it’s not me, like another spirit has taken over. A lot of the times, when I dance on stage, it’s like I lose myself. Another spirit has taken over. I don’t have the guts to be standing in front of all those people and dancing. Are you kidding? I would make a ton of mistakes. It’s that another spirit takes over and I just dance and then how much my body can do do will do. But, I’m sad that that I cannot dance as well as I used to. But, I still think I have the grace, if not the speed and flexibility. And now I think I would even be a better dancer, or at least, a purer better dancer, because I have a real… I am a woman now, a complete woman now. It fits well. (pers. comm., February 14, 2011)
In this interview, which would not have come about without a performative approach, it became possible to understand more particularly the ways in which Maya conceptualizes her gender transition. She achieves it through the metaphor of dance, within which arise notions of spirituality. Specifically, she suggests that when on stage, another “spirit” takes over her and that which is decidedly feminine or female. This relates closely to Laxmi’s notional of “duel” identity—*true* Laxmi versus “Laxmi.” In Maya’s case, however, gender confirmation surgery made it physically possible for her to successfully merge her dual identities into one. At the conclusion of her statement, she declares: “Now I think I would even be a better dancer, or at least a purer better dancer [because] I am a woman now, a complete woman now.”

Figure 8: Edited scene from *Mohammed to Maya* (2012); see Video 3: [http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset/chapters1-3](http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset/chapters1-3) (password: pehchaan)
If the camera lens were a stage, then it also functioned as an apparatus through which Maya was able to invoke her true sense of self. “When I’m on stage and when I dance, it almost feels like it’s not me, like another spirit has taken over,” she says. In other words, it is not only the gender confirmation surgery that provided her the emotional relief from the anxiety that being “a woman trapped in a man’s body,” but also the presence of the camera that allowed her to physically step into the body to which she had only conceived of on the performance stage until then. Structuring this particular scene also leads to questions of materiality and the camera. Daniel Tiffany argues that material substance is “a medium that is inescapably informed by the pictures that we compose of it [and the] conventional equation of materialism and realism depends on the viability of the pictures we use to represent an invisible material world” (2000:9). Following this logic then, filming Maya’s gender confirmation surgery provided a feeling of permanence—while literally making permanent via its recording of “history”—that which had before then only been experienced temporarily.

**Participatory Filmmaking (in Music in Liminal Spaces [2012-Current])**

The “rite of incorporation” is an appropriate term representing (my approach to) my next film, *Music in Liminal Spaces*. By the time production came about for this project, I had already “transitioned” into my identity as filmmaker, and was keen on incorporating newfound knowledge in the development of a project that participated more directly and instantaneously in the lives of its subject. The term participatory filmmaking does not relate modally to the *cinéma vérité* sense of the term. Participatory filmmaking, in this sense of the term, arose through its development as a means of engaging conceptually and methodologically with contemporary
theories of participatory culture (see Jenkins 2006; Carpentier 2011) in specifically trans-hijra contexts. It is primarily through this methodological locus that I tease out the larger implications of queer filmmaking in the configuration of trans-hijra pehchān (in Chapter 6).

Bill Nichols contends that participatory documentary (in his conception of the mode) at its most basic level, gives the view a sense of what it was like for a filmmaker to be in a given situation, and how the situation altered as a result. Similarly, participatory filmmaking (in my conception of the methodology) is about telling the truth about the encounter (rather than the absolute or untampered truth), and in doing so, revealing the “types and degrees of alteration [of truth that] help define variations within the participatory mode” (2001:116). My approach diverges, however, in its application of participation not only in the representation but also in the process of filmmaking, as a means of revealing the ways its subjects embody the democratic ideals of participation in different contexts.

Filmmaking is by nature participatory. It involves the collaborative incorporation of disparate elements (e.g., light and sound) and talents/subjects in the making of something temporal into something permanent. Nevertheless, participation itself—as a concept, practice and socio-political ideal—is by no means uniformly conceived of or practiced in filmmaking culture. The way participation materializes in contexts of decision making, depends on the roles defined within the parameters of the collective, the individual frames of reference of those involved, the desires (explicitly political, sexual, or otherwise) of those involved, and the ultimate purpose of the collaboration and finished product.
Nico Carpentier (2011) identifies “minimal” participation in contexts where imbalances of power result in a minority group controlling decision making processes within media creation, and “maximal” participation in situations of relative power equity (see Kelty, et al 2014:474). If participatory filmmaking is about telling the truth about the encounter, rather than the absolute or untampered truth, then through this methodology we will be able to “see how the filmmaker and subject negotiate a relationship, how they act toward one another, what forms of power and control come into play, and what levels of revelation or rapport stem from this specific form of encounter” (Nichols 2001:117). As such, I critically engage participatory filmmaking in order to reveal the ways pehchān as a political ideal in trans-hijra culture (re-)configures the collective and individual senses of selfhood.

_Hijras_ actively incorporate film and other media both as a means of self-identification and as a means of outreach to other groups in a form of participatory politics. Drawing upon my own examples of trans-hijra participatory filmmaking, my critical interest in (and productive

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60 Christopher Kelty's (et al) seven dimensions of participation include: (1) the educative dividend of participation; (2) access to decision-making and goal setting in addition to task-completion; (3) the control or ownership of resources produced by participation; (4) its voluntary character and the capacity for exit; (5) the effectiveness of voice; (6) the use of metrics for understanding or evaluating participation; and (7) the collective, affective experience of participation (2014:476).

61 Carpentier suggests that an analysis of participation must evaluate the subtle distinction between participation in and through media (see Carpentier 2013). Conventional approaches to documentary filmmaking reflect this distinction: In the pre-production, production, and post-production stages of film development, participation pertains to decision making processes and the power relations inherent with in the making of film. Whereas, in the distribution/outreach/audience engagement stage of film production, participation pertains not only to the ways power dynamics are reflected in collective decision making, but also how participants and audiences engage publicly with each other and “use [the] media to enter into society (or more localized) debates, dialogues, and deliberations” (Carpentier 2013:10).

62 One example akin to this is the way in which DREAMers, a group of mostly undocumented youths in the United States, have been fighting for education and citizenship rights. As Arely Zimmerman (2012) has found, DREAMers relied heavily on YouTube, “often in the form of confessional straight-to-camera ‘coming out’ stories […] to identify and forge common bonds with others who shared similar backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives” (in Jenkins and Carpentier 2013:11; see Zimmerman 2012). As small-scale circulations of media, they simultaneously provided the “social and cultural preconditions for meaningful participation” while also functioning as “an important means of outreach to other groups” (ibid).
use of) participatory filmmaking does not distinguish between participation in or participation through filmmaking (for the sake of theoretical musings about the distinction between art making and society), but investigates how participating through filmmaking with a desired outcomes produces (or participates in the production of) certain cultural and identity formations.

Specifically, I ask: What does participatory filmmaking reveal about how the filmmaker and subject negotiate a relationship? What forms of power and control come into play? What levels of revelation or rapport stem from this specific form of encounter? Also, in what ways can participatory filmmaking participate in the lives of its trans-hijra participants? How do trans-hijra politics participate in the collaborative performance of filmmaking? What political messages get made as a result? How does the collaborative performance of filmmaking participate in the (re)configuration of trans-hijra identity? How do these participatory processes and messages participate in the lives of its audiences?

As I have found, simultaneous pre-/production–post-production–distribution/outreach/audience engagement is a productive way to investigate these issues while productively participating in the lives of its participants. This is because it engages participants at all stages of the filmmaking process, draws audiences into this process, directly involves participants (and audiences) in the formulation and reformulation of the representational “product,” and constructs (and ideal) neutral ground upon which to engage in all of these processes. The potential for learning goes without saying. Henry Jenkins says that participation culture is “a site of civic learning for members in and outside the community. It is a way for members to develop a deeper understanding of issues and debates and to acquire the skills needed to act meaningfully in response to these concerns” (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013:17). The productive capacity of
participatory filmmaking in trans-hijra contexts is multiplied exponentially not only because of its capacity for (creating) researchable material about communities in transition, but also its ability to create meaningful acts in the lives of its participants and audience members. Over time, learning can be achieved on a variety of levels, not the least of which include the participants who learn (from the bottom-up) through practice, the audience who learn (laterally) through display, and the academics who learn (top-down) through the theorization of ethnographic material.

The idea for Music in Liminal Spaces arose while Rites of Passage was still enjoying its run in the film festivals. During the spring of 2012, I received a notification from Fulbright-IIE program that my proposal for Fulbright-mtvU was accepted, and when the month of October arrived, began my 10 month-long production. Participatory filmmaking had not yet materialized conceptually, but arose in practice partly out of necessity and out of a desire to contribute more directly in lives of my project participants.

There were practical motivations that initially lead me in this direction, one of which was financial. Fulbright’s method of grant disbursement—installments of a modest sum of money distributed every two months over the course of 9 months—forced me to conceive of a production strategy that deferred major expenses associated with production, post-production, and distribution. This led to the development of a strategy that fused all three (or four, if counting pre-production) stages of conventional filmmaking—what is known as simultaneous production, post-production, and distribution/outreach/audience engagement. This was an approach that, for all intents and purposes, queered the rather linear production style defining Rites of Passage,
while also building audience engagement and participation from participants throughout the course of production.

The other practical motivation was the distribution platform that Fulbright-mtvU awarded me and the other three recipients of the fellowship over the course of our fieldwork period. In partial fulfillment of my obligations with mtvU—the participating co-sponsor of my fellowship—I was also strongly encouraged (if not required) to produce blog entries on a regular basis. I had made it a goal to produce an entry containing rich visual ethnographic content every month, and as part of it, wanted individual video material to tell the story of my encounter with the communities I encountered. By the end of my fellowship period, I had in fact produced 13 separate video portraits of musicians, dancers, and performance troupes self-identified as LGBTIQ or as allies (see Figure 9).

Instead of existing as a single film—either short or long, as in the case of *Rites of Passage* and *Mohammed to Maya*—*Music in Liminal Spaces* currently exists as a digital archive of video portraits. Consisting largely of films 5-6 minutes in length, the video portraits feature interviews and performances of individuals and (in some cases) their music groups, and are

![Figure 9: Videos from *Music in Liminal Spaces* (2012-13); see all videos: http://www.fulbright.mtvU.com/jroy](http://www.fulbright.mtvU.com/jroy)
organized on the digital archive largely according to the time and place the filming took place.

Written in the first person, accompanying text provides a reflexive look into my life at the time of my encounter with the communities. In many cases, the text tells a story that also complements (or, fills in some of the gaps left unanswered by) the videos themselves.

According to Geertz, ethnographers in the field routinely face the reality that what they are writing is the “construction of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (Geertz 1973:9). If ethnography is an invention, then participatory filmmaking allows one to “own up” to this fact in the hopes of producing a semblance of “truth.” Here, the emphasis lies not in the end product, but in the process of its construction; The construction (of others’ constructions) is greater than the ultimate sum of its parts. Moreover, while the finished film may stand for something, it does so while simultaneously standing in.

Drawing from the seven dimensions of participation, the following list highlights those words that best describes my participatory filmmaking methodology during its production:

10. Participation with individuals and their organizations - On many occasions, I decided to include NGOs and/or CBOs in film production, whereas in others, I did not.

Participating with both individuals and larger organizations helped to contextualize and theorize degrees of participation in trans-hijra contexts. I ultimately found that while some organizations maintained a tight, centralized control of political messaging, others allowed individual participants to have greater control in the pursuit of their own messaging. In individual or small group settings, individual participants usually had the greatest influence in their decision making processes.
11. Participatory “staging” and direction - According to Lucien Taylor, “performances staged for the camera may have affinities with those that people put on for themselves—and the performers may be no less true to themselves for it” (1998:3). Keeping this in mind, I experimented with involving participants in the staging and direction of interviews, performances, and other events that (they felt) would illustrate their stories in the larger creation of individualized documentary portraits. Staged interviews took place in contexts ranging from the inside of participant’s studio apartments to the securing of popular Mumbai performance venues.

12. Confessional style interviews - Taking cue largely from a sequence in Mohammed to Maya (the feature-length version of Rites of Passage), my primary goal behind this strategy was to elicit honest storytelling in a way that would speak directly to the viewers, and on a larger production scale, to involve participants more in their own direction. On a direction level, this involved having participants speak directly into camera, in loosely-constructed interview settings, as though they were speaking to a friend or family member. As the director-on-record, I relied less on the listing and reading of questions and more on the philosophy of gently guiding participants through the telling of their story. Although physically present, I attempted to remain “invisible” throughout most of the interviews and/or events.

13. Focusing only on what participants want to be shown - This strategy places emphasis on that which participants desire to be communicated to the general public, and less on the sharing of intimate, and sometimes illicit details of a person’s life for the purposes of “authenticity.” This approach is rooted ideologically in the participatory production strategy, as well as
practically in simultaneous production—post-production—and outreach. Production-wise, I wanted the film not only to be about its subjects, but also for them.

14. Less is more - This strategy places a greater emphasis on the minute details of the sometimes mundane aspects of people’s lives, over wide-sweeping, life changing events. The “less-is-more” doctrine was employed in order to offset the production’s rather ambitious scope of involving over 20 musicians and activists, to stretch production funds as far as they could, and also to provide audiences with a brief snapshot into the ordinary lives of ordinary queer Indians.

15. Giving back - As part of the larger simultaneous production—post-production—outreach strategy, greater emphasis was placed on giving back to project participants and local audiences through the organization of community screenings and the creation of a digital archive of (downloadable) video portraits. According to Zemp, aside from enriching the analysis and reaching larger audiences, film inherently is a way of giving documents back to the community or individuals studied” (Zemp 1990a:63, in Harbert 2010:86).

16. A multidimensional perspective - Videos produced through the Fulbright-mtvU project were posted in their entirety on the Fulbright-mtvU website along with space for written text and photos. This allowed for the combination of written narrative, visual aids, and documentary film to produce a multidimensional perspective of the musician or musical group featured. This strategy allowed for the possibility of engaging in more contemporary methods of “impact distribution” and/or “visual storytelling” particularly suitable for participatory film projects. The notion of non-traditional distribution campaigns like *Music in Liminal Spaces* has been gaining steam in the filmmaking community.
According to Benjamin Harbert, “ethnomusicology stands to gain methodologically by filmmaking over attempting reality-re-presentation” (2010:81) precisely because it is a temporal medium. Accordingly, the emphasis placed in *Music in Liminal Spaces* is on filmmaking process, as a participatory effort. Although efforts are currently being made to turn *Music in Liminal Spaces* into a feature-length documentary film, I would argue that the product is most effect in its current state—as an “unfinished,” and entirely liminal entity.

**Queering Conventions of Ethnomusicological Filmmaking**

Ethnomusicologist Hugo Zemp advocated for the use of documentary filmmaking for its potential for social change because of its ability to reach large and diverse audiences (see 1990:61). In doing so, he wrote a series of scholarly articles based on his extensive body of work that have served as methodological “how to” books for the field. The articles pertain less towards the theorization of film—that is, apart from the everyday affairs of filmmaking—and more on a list of guidelines that ethnomusicologists and filmmakers can incorporate into their daily filmic practices. (In some cases, the articles even contain harsh criticisms against the use of more conventional filmmaking methodologies.)

Aside from its potential to reach wider audiences, my particularly queer approach to documentary filmmaking carries implications in the understanding of the relationship between music and identity. The following is a point by point comparison of ethnomusicological methodologies proposed by Zemp and my own. The comparison is not meant to evaluate the ways that filmmaking is improved by a queer approach, but how differences in filmmaking methodologies elicit different results insofar as our understanding of music and culture are
concerned. In many ways, Zemp’s approach to filmmaking is already queer. I will highlight the specific cases of this as well.

*Pre-production*

Zemp mentions the importance of securing crew who are not only competent in what they do (as camera operators, sound engineers, or personal assistants) but also fluent in the language belonging to those filmed. All of my films have included, when needed, crew members who were “local.” However, while filming *hijras*, I found that for the most part, the presence of “outsiders” who were nonetheless local complicated matters more than they helped. If the objective is to gain trust, I would suggest that while translation assistance is important, the issue extends well beyond strictly language fluency and towards the domain of (sub)cultural fluency. This implies notions of belonging and/or the maintenance of a certain cultural sensitivity and neutrality.

Of course, speaking strictly from a filmmaker perspective, I have found that working with crew who are both proficient at their job and also aligned aesthetically and philosophically with my own ethnomusicological objectives, is of utmost importance. As Zemp points out the director and cinematographer’s views “can and should be convergent” (1988:394). Nevertheless, camera proficiency is of mute point if the cameraperson is (sub)culturally problematic.

*Production*

There are many different ways to film music, depending on the type of music and the main focus of the filmmaker. For myself, I follow one rule: to respect the music and the musician. (Zemp 1988:393-4)
For Zemp, ethnomusicological film production surrounds the following rule of thumb: convey ethnographic information as effectively and ethically as possible, in a way that is both palatable to wider audiences and not boring to the spectator. In doing so, his filmmaking methods follow a distinct ethnographic aesthetic approach. Although my films follow these basic tenets, they challenge conventional expectations of what constitutes ethnographic information (Is it something that explains, demonstrates, or engages?). They also destabilize the notion of who, what, and/or where from a (stationary) “spectator” actually is (Are they project participants, scholars, or general audience members?). In order to hash out some of these points of convergence, I look at some of the basic techniques behind the camera:

1. Stationary Framing (Fixed Angle): According to Zemp, “if the musical piece is short and the number of performers very limited, stationary framing may not only be acceptable, but the best solution” whereas for larger ensembles, “wide angle coverage is not only boring for a general audience but also, in many cases, useless as research footage” (Zemp 1988:395). Similarly, I employed medium, eye-level stationary shots throughout my films featuring individual performers or small ensembles (See Chapter 4 for a number of examples). For large and/or staged ensembles, like Zemp, I minimized the use of the tripod in the wide-angle “locked-off camera” shots. This served the role of both humanizing the observed and observer, as well as to providing the eye with more to observe. According to Steven Feld and Carrol Williams, a “locked-off camera” can minimize rather than maximize ethnographic data due to the fact that the human eye physically cannot resolve the central and peripheral view in sharp focus simultaneously (1975:30). For this reason, they note, “cameras should move flexibly in order to maintain the framing that includes the information that the eye is
triggering on” (1975:29). Treating the camera as a humanly operated instrument, I usually include movement and, in some cases, zoom as visual extension of the filmmaker’s subjectivity.

2. **Panning** - Moving the camera slowly from one point to another serves a variety of purposes. For Zemp, panning at a close or medium shot “enables one to discover one after the other the performers who play or sing together […] to explore the relationships of the musicians with their environment at the very moment of the performance and examine the reaction of the public” and to take a closer look at the fingerings of an instrument (1988:396). My films reflect these general objectives, but do so while also attempting to keep pace with the music being played. If the general objective behind a methodology is to remain transparent (as is the case with Zemp’s editing), then the technique should also embody and/or reflect the object it attempts to capture.

3. **(The absence of) Zooming** - Martine Joly states that “the generally autonomous and anonymous character of zooming exacerbates the work of the image as ‘false movement’: false contact, neither vision nor point of view” (1987:79, quoted in Zemp 1988:396). Similarly, Jean Rouch states that “the zoom lens is more like a voyeur who watches and notes details from atop a distant perch” (1975:93, quoted in Zemp *ibid.*). Zemp refrains from zooming as it complicates analysis through the artificial framing of objects and environment. In my experience, however, so do many other techniques. Although some advocate against the zoom for fear of conjuring up the ghosts of armchair anthropology, I maintain its usefulness in certain situations, as long as it is achieved with (reflexive/performative) intention. The emphasis here is not to shut out these complications, but to embrace and own
up to them. (That said, I use the zoom sparingly. *Music in Liminal Spaces* is shot almost entirely using a close-up lens. This forced me to physically move closer to musicians I was filming in public.)

4. **Sequence Shot** - This shooting technique involves the physical movement of the camera, taking it to wherever is the most effective, and “improvising a ballet in which the camera itself becomes just as much alive as the people it is filming” (Rouch 1975:93, quoted in Zemp *ibid.*). Rouch calls this technique a “synthesis between the theories of Vertov about the ‘cine-eye’ and those of Flaherty about the ‘participant camera’” (*ibid.*), while David MacDougall, describes its virtues as a restoration “of the continuity of perception of an individual observer” and a narrowing of the distance between the filmmaker and audience (1982:10). As in any filming techniques, one must justify the use of sequence shots. I generally favor sequence shots over other styles of cinematography, especially in *Rites of Passage*, that contain scenes where the subject is moving around or in motion. I use sequence shots more sparingly in portrait-style films like *Music in Liminal Spaces* largely because the subjects are sitting stationary or standing relatively still when performing.

5. **Several Cameras and/or Multiple Shooting with One Camera** - Some have advocated against the use of several cameras, especially in the early years of *cinéma vérité*, due to the ways it “removes subjectivity” from the person seeing the events being filmed and detracts from the film’s unity (see Colin Young’s description of Maysles, 1975:72). Nevertheless, subjectivity can also be conveyed through post-production, not only through the camera, and capturing subjectivity can be enhanced through the inclusion of multiple cameras, especially if there are many subjects whose subjectivities need to be captured. (The resulting film, in this case,
would therefore be an investigation of the ways their intersubjectivities are represented.)

Moreover, filming with multiple cameras conveys more information than filming with one. *Music in Liminal Spaces*, a film about a variety of individuals with a wider scope and larger production budget, employed two cameras on average, with the largest number being three. *Rites of Passage*, a movie about one person, did not. Regardless of the number of subjects, employing multiple cameras is useful when available if not for the ability to capture B-roll.

**Post-production**

Zemp treats the post-production process along a general set of parameters:

> to keep music performance free from voice-over narration, and to translate song texts with subtitles; to film the musician as a human being and not like a thing or an insect, and to show the relationship between filmmaker and musician in the film, rather than hiding it; to allow expression of the musician’s point of view, respecting his voice and his language through translations in subtitles. (1988:393-4)

In doing so, he employs a method of editing that maintains a vision of “truth” along the edge of the camera frame. In this sense, his approach to filmmaking pertains less to early *cinéma vérité* style, and more to observational cinema, with a strong reflexive component (see Zemp 1990a: 50). Zemp’s ethnomusicological justification in the use of reflexive observational style is perhaps best illustrated in a statement where Zemp explains his rationale for including a shot that included two noticeable mishaps in their performance:

> I decided to keep this shot and to put it at the end of the film for three reasons: 1. to show interaction between the performers and with the filmmakers; 2. to give an example of polyphonic singing with many participants […] to make the analysis clearer; 3. to humanize with this final sequence the film which dominantly features analyses of music structure and performance technique. (1990a:58)
Along these lines, Zemp’s editing process generally involved the strategic (and extremely economical) use of cuts and (even more sparingly) cutaways. He is perhaps best known for presenting music and interview sequences without cutaways, in unbroken continuous shots. This shooting style has its advantages. Steven Feld notes that this technique:

> turns the viewer into a concertgoer-in-the-field, seated or standing just next to the camera in close presence to complete activities of music-making. In this sense Zemp has merged aspects of research sound recording with the practice of cinematic representation of musical performance. (Feld 2014:462)

Similarly, in order to allow for his subjects to speak, Zemp refrains from using voice over, believing along the same lines as Karl Heider, that it “detracts and distracts from the visuals” (Heider 1976:70). Zemp advocates instead for the liberal use of subtitles and title sequences. In addition to translating local language into French or English, his titles even reveal his own editing devices. Employing an otherwise reflexive approach to film, Zemp’s justification of these titles is to remind the viewer of the sometimes “false” nature of filmmaking:

> Following the advice of some colleagues, I could have made a short announcement in the form of captions at the beginning of the film, but I was reluctant to show my hand so soon. After the last image of the film it would also have been possible, but few people read the credits and many projectionists have the bad habit of turning on the lights while they are still on the screen. So I decided to completely integrate the announcement into the structure of the film. During the last shot of the convening gathering the Alpine hut, the word ‘Warning!’ suddenly appears in huge letters. Then, while the participants sing the last part of a yootz, a superimposed text acknowledges that this sequence was not filmed on the day of the journey up to the Alpine pasture” (Zemp 1990a:52).

Zemp constructs films *queerly* through the subversion of conventional style documentary filmmaking, using narrative (and technical) tools made available to him at the time of editing to make a researchable film, incorporating reflexive statements (through subtitled commentary), viewing naturalistic human interaction as ethnographic material, and embodying the musical
content the film seeks out to capture. If Zemp’s films were to represent all of ethnomusicological filmmaking in its entirely, then one could suggest that they were, by nature, already queer. That said, queer documentary films employ a number of other methodological devices in post-production that differ from Zemp’s films.

While recognizing the emotional and informational potency of the long shot, the use of cuts and cutaways is usually more liberal. Musical sequences in Music in Liminal Spaces, for instance, are edited in such a way as to allow for both the music and narrative to advance parallel to one another. At times, interviews overlap musical sequences, and vice versa, which at times break conventions about what constitutes “reality.” In some cases, it becomes unclear about whether the interview is conducted in the “present” or whether the concert is.

This reminds me of what Alison Rooke calls a fracturing of time and space in acknowledgement of the temporality of ethnographic time:

Producing ethnography requires a constant crossing between the “here” and “there,” between the past, present and future: from being “in the field” while thinking about future point of writing up, to the point of writing and revisiting the “ethnographic past.” Even when we are “there” we are “here” and vise versa. Acknowledging this temporality is to queer an otherwise normative rational version of ethnographic time. (Rooke 2010:30)

I would suggest the editing process is where queer films acknowledge time’s temporality, and instead of preserving the otherwise temporal moment—thereby rejecting the existence of temporality for something permanent—makes it temporal once again. In other words, queer post-production is an acknowledgement of the acknowledgement, a fracturing of the fractured. It consists of subverting the notion of film as a permanent document of temporality (or temporality made permanent) through the creation of a film that exists in real time (or is made temporal,
again). For the viewer, therefore, what is conventionally a concert being performed on a stage for their enjoyment, suddenly becomes a journey into the hearts of the musicians.

Although queer post-production may distort the viewer’s sense of time and space, it does so to reflect those of the subject. In other words, editing is all about the subject, and if the subject requires time to breathe, she gets it. In *Rites of Passage*, a pivotal scene wherein Maya is on her way to the hospital to undergo sexual reassignment surgery, is given minimal treatment. The nearly ten-minute sequence unrolls with cleanly edited shots of her discomfort, a number of cuts to her praying, with cutaways to B roll, and then finally rests on her face. The cuts at the beginning of the sequence, in this case, function as a montage would to increase the tempo so that it may be possible to slow down the tempo for Maya to tell her story. Speaking directly into the camera, Maya courses through an emotional take of abuse at the hand of her father. The sequence is shot in a stable, close shot of her face until the point where Maya begins to cry, so that the viewer may see the entire narrative arc. Careful editing is employed after her tears begin to fall in order not to ruin emotional affect and to carry the narrative along further.

Paying attention to emotions is a distinctly queer filmic trait. For this reason, Zemp’s inclusion of humor can be seen as queer. In his article “Visualizing Music through Animation: The Making of the Film *Head Voice, Chest Voice,*” Zemp makes the case for humor as that which “helps the audience to relax, to be briefly entertained, and thus to be ready for another sequence which requires more concentrated observation” (Zemp 1990b:74). Throughout *Rites of Passage*, I include a number of figurative “winks” to the audience through the juxtaposition of images and sequences, as well as the inclusion of jokes told by the main subject. The very beginning sequence of the film is a joke told by Maya in the airport. Its inclusion of it establishes both a
context for the narrative as well as the emotional context. Thus, jokes, if employed responsibly, not only aid in the entertainment of the viewer, but advance the story through tonal variation.

Distribution

As one of the widely overlooked parts of the filmmaking process, I have found that knowing what audience the film is for is essential in the earliest stages of production. For Zemp, there are at least five kinds of audiences for film:

(1) the musicians who are filmed as well as other musicians, schools, museums, cultural associations, etc; (2) Ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, students in performing arts; (3) Musicians, young amateur researchers gathering in workshops, cultural associations interested in traditional music; (4) School teachers and school children (primary, secondary, college) for lively world music education; and (5) General public, museums, videotheques in public libraries, cinematheques, and possibly TV. (1988:422)

While I tend to find that films created for educational purposes generally differ from those created purely for entertainment, unlike many scholarly filmmakers, I do not shy away from an educational film’s potential for entertainment, or an entertaining film’s potential to be educational. I have found that a film can be equally informational as entertaining, and that, in fact, one reinforces the other when acknowledged and executed correctly. Moreover, from a research perspective, entertainment is not out of the reach of scholarly analysis. To call a film “educational” or “entertainment,” as though they were either one or the other, is to neglect its potential to have elements of both.

Zemp is probably best known for using films to give back to the communities it represents and also to reach wider audiences. He states that:
In many cases, scholarly papers are probably not the most efficient means for a direct return to those being studied (unless those studied are a community of social scientists!) […] Ethnomusicological (ethnographic) films can communicate more directly the results of research to an audience which usually does not read scholarly papers. (1990a:61)

The availability of online media platforms, the emergence of transmedia storytelling, and participatory cultures (and politics) in media (see Jenkins 2006), leads us to decidedly queer(er) approach to distribution. Chapter 6’s ethnography of the Dancing Queens in *Music in Liminal Spaces* unpacks some of new possibilities of audience engagement and outreach, and they ways they are helping to transform trans-*hijra* cultures of music-making.

**Another Roadmap to the Dissertation**

Although filmmaking by nature is participatory, it does not automatically allow for the possibility of cultural enmeshment. Queer filmmaking as a practice subverts the insider/outsider divide (through critical awareness of it) facilitating their interpenetration. Certain representational elements of film are queered through the process of including the filmmaker in the process of representation, usually through the inclusion of a self-reflexive element. Likewise, the roles of project participants are queer through the process of including them in roles behind the camera.

In queer filmmaking, the notion that film captures “reality” is obsolete. Here, the emphasis lies more so in the *process* of filmmaking, and what can be said about what is revealed as a result of the practices behind the camera and in the editing booth. Queer filmmaking acknowledges the temporality of the ethnographic past, present, and future and unites the seemingly three disparate stages of normative time. Queer filmmaking queers the ethnographic
situation by exposing and undercutting the dominance of the ethnographer through improvisatory
(‘serious play’), performative (movement), and participatory practices. Queer filmmaking also
complicates the relationship between film and audience, through a focus on embodied
knowledge and methodological transparency. In the end, what once was an “closeted” process
suddenly gets “outed.” This places onus on the part of the viewer to create a meaningful
experience for themselves.

The rest of this dissertation highlights some of the more specific instances of the ways
queer filmmaking participates in the production of a trans-\textit{hijra pehchān}. I show the ways in
which trans-\textit{pehchān} is (re-)configured through the critical engagement of the intersubjective
spaces that form between the filmmaker, subject, and audiences, and the differences in how they
manifest in different contexts. I relate the complex and sometimes contradictory methodologies
to the development of my own craft as a “rite of passage” for myself, and for the participants
involved in the films’ making. Each chapter reveals these stages of development through
different aspects of performance: Chapter 4 demonstrates how in different \textit{badhai} contexts, more
“seriously playful,” observational approaches to filming configure a \textit{pehchān of hijra}
respect(ability) and difference; Chapter 5 shows how in communal music making in a communal
\textit{hijra jalsa} (‘meeting’), methodologies of \textit{cinéma vérité} and performative documentary—
encompassed in what I call “movement”—configure a \textit{pehchān} of belonging through embodied
experience; and Chapter 6 reveals how participatory filmmaking as an integrated component of
staged performance configure a trans-\textit{hijra pehchān} within (and to advance) a politics of
\textit{LGBTIQ} empowerment through a lens of transgender respectability.
As Geertz intended, I approach the process of writing as an act of discovery. As a musical ethnographer, my goal is to maintain a vivid and nuanced evocation of *hijra* music and dance, social life, and of the individuals that live it while attempting to create a balance between speaking from the inside and communicating on the outside. In doing so, I seek to foreground “a productive distanciation” (Rice 1994:6) on my critical exploration in relation to relevant contexts, including what the researcher brings to the intimate domain of the musical event. “If orality means the inseparability of content and context, of words and their speakers and hearers, then the ethnomusicologist’s access to oral knowledge is likewise personal and participatory, and he or she must factor the impact of her presence into the equation” (in Roy 2016:105).

In representing myself, I attempt to allow my memories, field notes, and footage speak for themselves, and in doing so, allow for some of the more “unpolished” aspects of the writing and filmmaking process to shine through. Writing is not a linear process, but involves a series of contractions and retractions as a whole piece. Since video is a temporal medium, dwelling in footage in written form can reveal its elusive, fragmentary nature (see Harbert 2010). Within each chapter, the lyrical narrative travels into and out of the ontology of the film itself. I approach the process of writing each scene by placing myself in the dialogical flow between video footage and field notes, without entirely losing the interpretive framework of filmmaking.

Using time markers that link descriptions of ritual events with videos and log tables, I also seek to impart a personal and participatory aspect to the reader’s critical exploration of the connections forged by music and *hijra pehchān*. The reader will find that field notes, videos and log tables provide their own perspective, while allowing for a multidimensional view of the event. The log tables (in the appendix) provide a—for lack of a better term—linear grounding of
the event. Whereas, the lyrical narrative found in the main body of this text, provides a more experiential account. The film footage makes it possible to view the even unhindered by my own choice of words while simultaneously communicating (my) subjective intent and perspective. My intention is not for readers to consider only one of these three options, but to use them complementarily as per their relevance at any given point in the narrative.
Chapter 4
“Don’t Break My Hopes”:
Respecting Difference in (the Documentation of) Badhais

It was just after sunset on an evening in August 2010, and the intermittent monsoon rains had already begun to create tributaries in the mud-laden streets just outside of the Mumbai Central Rail Kalyan station (about a 45-minute express train ride from Mumbai’s city center). Nita guru led me into a small gali that shot up from the train station, up one of the main tributaries. The power had been cut due to the rains, and it took our eyes a few seconds to adjust to the darkness. After a few minutes of aimlessness, we were eventually able to find our way to a set of stairs that led into a two-story structure. We ascended the stairs to the first floor (not counting the ground floor) of the building, and were greeted by three young chelas. Three surrounded me, helped to unload my backpack and jacket. I took off my sandals, and was led into a modest sized salon through a door frame to our left. I could make out the shapes of five figures seated in a semi-circle on the floor in the center of the room. Seated at the right end of the semi-circle was a dholak player, and in the center, Mujranani guru. Her impatient eyes cut through the dimly lit space like a knife in butter. She was ready for this nonsense to begin.

Mujranani is the mother and grandmother of a gharânā of badhai playing hijras. She also happens to be the guru of Nita—my liaison to the community and a middle-aged “mother” of six who simultaneously works full-time as an HIV/AIDS outreach worker for the Humsafar Trust Kalyan office. Nita immediately took to my research because in her eyes, “Hijra culture needs to be preserved,” and assisted in brokering my relationship with Mujranani (pers. comm.,
September 25, 2010). In fact, it was due largely to her interest in preservation that a number of ethnographic contexts in this and the following chapters were established.

Before I had a chance to sit down, Mujranani motioned for dholak player to begin playing. I struggled to turn on my camera (a hand-held Canon digital) and audio recording device (Zoom H2). Noticing the fluster, Mujranani instructed the dholak player to stop, waited patiently, and after a minute or so, politely asked if I was ready to begin. Positioned with the Canon in hand, still waiting for my Zoom H2 to boot up, I nonetheless said that I was ready. With the nod of a head and a wink in my direction, and another motion to the dholak player, Mujranani restarted the badhai song “Asha Natoru” (‘Don’t Break My Hopes’) from the beginning.

With respect to the “ritual of filmmaking” in some of my first time encounters with badhai musicians, this chapter incorporates aspects of serious play as a queer filmmaking methodology. Since I was a newcomer to these communities—and probably the first white-bodied queer ethnomusicologist some had ever met—my primary concern rested not in the “closeted” collection of music repertoire, but in methodological transparency, and the demonstration of reliability, trust, and respect. In short, I sought not to “break their hopes” in the development of a sustainable, long-term, working relationship. Drawing from these approaches, I look at some of the ways power, (in)equality, and izzat (respect) manifests in certain organizational structures, subjective positionings, and specifically, vocalizations—or what can be called hij-vocality—in some of my first-time encounters with hijra badhai culture.

The “voice” is a multifaceted term within which orality/aurality and subjectivity are conceptually and experientially interlinked. Singing is a principal means through which messages in badhai music are conveyed. As a polysemic social practice, it “allows individuals to
convey a range of messages that they might wish to make about themselves as social beings [...] thus serv[ing] as an embodied performance of multiple aspects of that performer’s sense of self and of community,” while at the same time, contributing “to the ongoing consolidation of the practices” that define the hijra community (Sugarman 1993:3). The practice of singing, and more specifically in the dialectic space between singing and subjectivity, is where the self is experientially manifested.

Elias Krell contends that voice “literally and figuratively speaks affective trajectories that offer critical insight into the ways in which transgender subjects experience and negotiate identities and bodies” (Krell 2013: 489, 495). If voice is a space where transgender bodies speak/sing their subjectivities, what might its analysis reveal about the strategies hijras employ in the (trans)formation of hij-vocality? What might the difference between Krell’s analysis on (Western) transgender singers and an analysis on hijra singers reveal about the ways hijra corresponds to or departs from transgender? If the voice and body are understood to be experientially interlinked, then singing and dancing to badhai music enables hijras to inhabit and produce various embodied subjective positions that they may or may not express in daily life. With this understanding, I suggest that badhai music represents and engenders emotional affects, values, and social practices encompassing a “respectful” strategy of difference (from normative society). This strategy of difference not only encompasses notions of gender, but other axes of identity—such as one’s relationship to the gharānā, religion, and spirituality.
The *Izzat* of Filming

This chapter’s filmmaking methodology incorporates aspects of serious play in the context of ethnographic production, including that which was omitted from the camera frame. Paying close attention to Hugo Zemp’s “golden rule”—to convey ethnographic information as effectively and ethically as possible both in a way that is both palatable to wider audiences and not boring to the spectator—my approach in this scene attended to certain ideals concerning sound and light, and employed basic techniques such as employing stationary (fixed angle) framing at a medium, eye level. I welcomed it when participants looked directly into the camera, and tried to capture them as many times as possible (see Chapter 3). I also employed wide-angle “locked-off camera” shots, but minimized the use of the tripod in order to humanize the observed (and observer), as well as to provide the eye with more variety. I did not allow for the camera to keep rolling between song performances. After each song, the camera was switched off immediately after the conclusion of each song, resulting in a temporally and spatially fragmented portrait of seemingly unrelated performances. Through these gestures, it was my intention here to demonstrate of ritual of respect, a performance of *izzat* while also clearly signaling my intention—to record their music.

If referential (i.e. classical) documentary film records, documents, and otherwise *reveals* what happens in front of lens and microphone (Loizos 1992:51), then my presence as a filmmaker signaled a *pehchān*—or recognition—of difference through the forming of

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63 In addition to the Sony Handycam, which was used at the *hijra jalsa*, I also possessed a portable Zoom H4 recording device and regularly situated the device in front of the appropriately positioned performers for optimal sound levels.
imbalanced relationships based on the primacy of the gaze. But, what are the ways in which my queerness disrupts this imbalance? What are the ways in which serious play conforms to or disrupts this imbalance? Queer filmmaking recognizes that the recorded gaze is not a window of seeing “the truth” of experience, but a device that participates in the construction of multiple, layered ethnographic truths in the context of its use (see Feld 2003). In this chapter, I attempt to “own up” to my queer perspective and methodologies not by filling in the gaps, but by clearly defining my ethnographic frames (of reference). One of the ways I do this is by incorporating recordings along with detailed observations in a corresponding appendix (see Chapter 4 Appendix; see video excerpts: http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com/chapters4-6).

The Izzat of Badhais

A Farsi word originally denoting “honor,” izzat is utilized by anthropologist Gayatri Reddy (2005) as a means of interpreting aspects of the organizational structures and identity formations of the hijra gharānā. Izzat is regarded as the primary currency through which hijras and kothis craft their identities and negotiate their relative status, while also maintaining the social structures and hierarchies from which they reside (Reddy 2005:40). It can also be seen as something that facilitates and structures the badhai’s social vitality and central pedagogical system, the guru-chela relationship.

64 Through the incorporation of minimally edited visual ethnographic components, I seek to provide a stereoscopic view of the music(al culture), nurture a four-dimensional understanding of subjectivity within the context of performance, and also to communicate ethnomusicological knowledge to the viewing (and hearing) scholar while simultaneously maintaining the formal integrity of the original material. This is part of an effort to distance hijra music from the inevitable damage that will occur through the process of writing, reveal “voice” unfettered by technological or interpretive mediation, and also to encourage study participants to engage with the material in ways that are potentially beneficial for them.
Reddy derives her use of the term from the value code “honor” vis-à-vis Ernestine McHugh (1998). In a study of the Mediterranean world, McHugh defines “honor” as that which refers to a larger configuration of meanings: “through this concept one’s place in a given social world is defined, and one’s character as a moral person is assessed” (1998:165, quoted in Reddy 2005:42). Izzat has an impact on the ways in which badhai hijras define themselves in relation to other hijras—those, for instance, who engage in badhais, commercial sex work or bar dance. According to Reddy, “badhai hijras, or ritual practitioners, consider themselves (and are generally considered by most hijra sex workers as well) to be the more respected hijras—those with izzat” (Reddy 2005:43). The implication here is that izzat is constituted via notions of sexual abstinence and spirituality. Therefore, those who are abstinent and spiritual—or at least perceived to be—are thought to possess greater izzat than their more sexually active and/or secular sisters. This is indeed reflected in the performative function of dance which is modest, and sexually sanitized. The lyrics of most chosen badhai songs also contain little to no references to sex or sexuality (see ‘lyrics’ section below).

Whereas the Mediterranean origin of izzat takes on a “libidinous” dimension, Reddy argues that hijras’ use of izzat is not restricted to the erotic: “The concept of izzat among hijras has a moral valence that derives strength precisely from its diffusion beyond the axis of sex/gender to encompass a range of other hierarchical domains, including kinship, religion, and class” (Reddy 2005:43). This, if anything, is demonstrated in the relationship between guru and chela, and also in some of the personal beliefs of hijras. In an encounter I had with a hijra guru named Gudiya Singh, she became visibly sick after I asked about her marital status. “Sex is complicated for me,” she said while dry heaving out of the side of our moving vehicle (pers.
Rather than restricting the meaning of *izzat* to (the libidinous) “honor,” therefore, I follow Reddy’s translation as (the more sanitized) “respect.”

As extensions of the larger social organization of the *gharânā, badhai* troupes, reflect, perform, and produce value systems surrounding notions of respect. I would argue that *izzat* also have bearings on the practice of *badhai* in at least six other ways: (1) the spiritual meanings and associations encoded within the *badhai* ritual (religion); (2) relationships held between members of the *badhai* troupe (kinship); (3) relationships held between *badhai chelas* and their *gurus* (kinship); (4) general rapport held between members of the *badhai* troupe and the general public (kinship/class); (5) the *badhai* troupe’s overall social stature and whether or not it reflects that of the surrounding community (class); and the (6) overall quality and reception of the *badhai* performance. Depending on the relative affluence of the particular neighborhood or jurisdiction government by the *badhai* troupe, money earned through *badhaïs* can signal the relative level of *izzat*.

Before revisiting Mujranani’s house, we first travel to Lucknow and Kanpur to take part in a couple street performances. In this section, I look at some of the ways the *izzat* manifests between *badhai* troupes and their (normative) audiences, and how all of this is tied to capital. I show how *izzat* derives its significance and moral strength on the predication of difference, but that *izzat* does not necessarily reflect in money earned or its distribution within the *gharânā*.

**Zehra and Gudiya**

During the summer of 2011, I found myself in Lucknow for two months in residence at the AIIS summer Urdu language intensive program. Following my afternoon classes, I often sneaked
away from the campus to visit the *Maan* (‘Truth’) Foundation, which was only a short walk from my apartment. (Sneaking was deliberate to avoid invasive questioning from the faculty in the program.) While at the NGO, I met Divya, a young *kothi* outreach worker, and Nishant, an administrative assistant. I took up close friendships with both of these men, who assisted me in my fieldwork with the *hijra* community in the area.

**Zehra**

One Sunday morning, Nishant and I traveled to Kanpur (a short train ride from the Lucknow city center), where we met Zehra, a *hijra guru* from a Muslim *gharanā*. While there, she took me under her wing, and often found a great deal of satisfaction chauffeuring us around town in her SUV (see Figure 10). We met Zehra in the middle of Ramadan. A devout Muslim, prayed regularly (which she allowed me to film, albeit in unideal, low-light conditions), and her *chelas* to do so as well, although this was not a requirement. Most of her *chelas* were Muslim, had converted to Islam (from Hinduism), or were non-practicing Hindus. She also visited the *masjid* (mosque) regularly (wearing male clothing) and interacted with the locals in the market nearby. At dusk, Nishant and I sat with Zehra while she broke fast. Shoveling lamb *biryaní* (mixed rice dish) in our mouths, we sung verses of the *qawwali* (Sufi devotional) song “*Mast Qalandar*” (‘Joyful Saint’). (Unfortunately, I did not capture the event on camera, although my memory of the evening is just as crisp as the footage would have been.)
Zehra was an avid listener of music, and spoke about it with enthusiasm. She often drove around her neighborhood blasting qawwali and filmy music with her windows wide open. This was accepted—and perhaps even expected—by the neighborhood community. Passersby often waved at the SUV from the street side as if they knew her, and Zehra waved back with a customary Salām ‘Alaykum (‘Peace be upon you’).

The day following our gleeful biryani feast, Zehra drove us through a small gali located just off the main road and into an open field and another cluster of houses. She did not tell us where we were going, or why, although I had a good idea. Zehra parked the car at the end of a row of houses in a developing neighborhood. We got out, and shuffled our way down the gali into a more populated area. I could begin to hear the faint sound of the dholak, softly bouncing off of the concrete homes creating a meter-less texture in the air. Turning another corner, a small badhai ensemble of four suddenly materialized about 50 meters away. They were situated just outside the door of a modest, shotgun style abode. One of Zehra’s chelas appeared to be in the middle of a dance number. The song concluded as we approached nearer, and the chelas approached us to greet Zehra with a quick motion to her feet (a sign of respect). The patrons of
the house—one elder and one younger woman—seemed to know Zehra, and made a similar
gesture with an additional ādāb (a hand gesture signifying respect).

One of Zehra’s chelas encouraged Zehra to join, and with the flick of the wrist, signaled
the lead singer to begin the first verse of the song. At the end of the lead in, the dholak (played
by a fully-dressed male) started playing Keherwa tāl (eight-beat rhythmic cycle), followed by the
soothingly devotional metallic sound of the manjīrās—two metal idiophones commonly played
in bhajans (Hindu devotional music)—articulated by the lead singer. It was a shādi (marriage)
song, the lyrics of which praise a bridegroom for possessing various riches associated with
marriage. The song itself featured a call and response structure, common to most badhai songs.
While dancing Zehra “responded” to the lead singer’s “call” (see Figure 11 and Video 4).

![Figure 11: Zehra guru performs a badhai song; still from video footage by author August 28, 2011; see Video 4: http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset/chapters4-6 (password: pehchaan)](image)

At the song’s conclusion, the troupe moved into the house foyer, and began singing
another shādi song in a similar fashion as the first. Following this, the patrons of the badhai
brought out a basket of rice and flower, and Zehra sifted through the rice, wet the flower and
applied a small amount to the base of the dholak. She blessed the house with a quick gesture in
the air.
Negotiations over the price of the performance were quick and painless. Once the transaction was over and we were already on our way, an elderly gentleman approached to inform Zehra about the potential for another badhai. Apparently, in a house only 100 meters from where we were standing, a young mother had recently delivered a baby. We casually walked the 100 meters, and Zehra instructed the badhai troupe to investigate. I asked her why we were sitting on a stoop opposite the house, and she told me that “They are new for us. It would not be respectful for us to go in” (pers. comm., August 28, 2011). This triggered some questions:

Why this demonstration of “respect”? Were we protecting the respect(ability) of our patrons? Was shielding me from the encounter about protecting the respect(ability) of the troupe in their performative solicitation? My “otherness” would have complicated matters in the final exchange process. Was it the camera? Were they protecting themselves from all of the above? (Field notes August 29, 2011)

The sound of the dholak reverberated through the street and I could hear the shrill timbre of the lead singer as she started. I felt the impulse to enter the house, but quelled the urge by reminding myself of the respect that Zehra and I had cultivated. Zehra had given me a place in all of this, and disrupting these codes would have proved problematic. Because of the sensitivity of the situation (as expressed by Zehra), it became necessary to pay heed to the differentiation of roles. Respect, at least in this particular encounter, became synonymous with maintaining some
semblance of difference (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Zehra’s badhai chelas perform a badhai in “secret”; still from video footage by author August 28, 2011

**Gudiya Singh**

Somewhere on the outskirts of the city, I met a young *hijra guru* named Gudiya Singh who was in the process of negotiations with the *hijra* community to establish her own *gharānā* in a developing area. At 26 years of age, Gudiya was optimistic about her ability to establish a reputable *gharānā* in a relatively unknown part of the city. “I boycotted my *guru* [Razia] to become independent and to own my area” she told me (pers. comm., August 25, 2011). The area she sought to “own” was a mix of lower-middle class homes and empty lots (presumably still in development) encompassing about ten square kilometers in and surrounding a neighborhood called Jankipuram. Gudiya's *gharānā*’s name was *Mevachati*, although I am unsure about its authenticity because it took Gudiya one minute (and with some help from one of her *chelas*) to recall the name.

The entire encounter I had with her seemed “on the fly.” We met Gudiya in an apartment—a shotgun-style home on the second floor of a three-story structure (not counting the ground floor)—which housed her and her five *chelas*. After some formalities, she decided to call
her *badhai* troupe. About an hour later, two men showed up at her door bearing a *dholak* and harmonium. They jumped into a car with two of her chelas, we jumped into another, and drove off to a far corner of the territory. Although most *badhai* troupes hear about potential gigs through word of mouth or receive direct calls from patrons, it was Gudiya’s intention here simply to “show up.”

Like Zehra, music and dance is an significant facet of Gudiya’s identity. As an adolescent, Gudiya had trained in *Kathak* dance. “I love music and dance, but this community has spoiled me,” she told me on the way to the *badhai*. “When I entered the community, it was fun because I had no responsibilities. Now that I’m *guru*, I have to look after too much” (pers. comm., August 25, 2011). Although she had not performed on the stage for quite some time, she performed regularly with her *badhai* troupe (see Figure 13 and Video 5).

We experienced two *badhais* that day. One was hosted inside the home of a patron that Gudiya knew personally. The introduction of the dissertation provided a clear description of the non-staged *badhai* wherein Gudiya’s troupe caused a stir among several of their (forced) patrons. At the time, I had wondered if my presence complicated the situation for Gudiya. Had my
presence disrupted the *izzat* normally engendered from *badhais*? Had it disturbed their negotiations?

Despite having earned about Rs. 4,000, Gudiya was visibly distraught on the way back home from the conflict with the patron. In attempt to redirect her attention, at one point, I asked Gudiya if *badhais* were “an important source of income.” Gudiya took little time to respond; “No. This music is less about the money and more about destiny,” she said (pers. comm., August 25, 2011). On the word *kismat* (‘fate,’ or ‘destiny’), Gudiya motioned with her hand and pointed to her temple. With this motion of the hand, it became clear why she was so distraught. For her, the money she earned that day was secondary to the *izzat* of the music itself. Although money earned is an important way of sustaining the economic vitality of her *gharanā*, for her, these practicalities take second place to the respect and honor the music awards her individually.

**Izzat and the Social Organization of Badhais**

A closer look at the performance structure elicits an understanding of the ways *izzat* manifests in the social organization of *badhais*. *Badhai* performances generally constitute two to three numbers. In some cases, the first number generally consists of a ritual song calling the attention of the Mother Goddess to the context of the performance. If the *badhai* troupe is called upon to bless a newborn, the Mother Goddess song may be followed by a *jaccha baccha* (children’s) song. If the *badhai* troupe is called upon to bless a married couple, the Mother Goddess song is followed by a *shādi* song (which are more frequent in number), and/or *filmi* songs generally follow the Mother Goddess song. Depending on the context of the performance and the established relationship with the patrons, songs may be requested and/or improvised.
The total number of performers in *badhais* usually range from two to five. The rhythmic centerpiece of the ensemble is the *dholak*. *Dholak* players are generally accompanied by a harmonium (especially in the north), a lead singer (who may play the *manjirà*) and a small group of supporting singers (who usually clap). *Dholak* and harmonium players may be hired from outside to perform *badhais*. This was the case in Gudiya’s troupe, which had a *kothi* and “straight” man (who I nonetheless sensed were a couple) play the harmonium and *dholak*, respectively. Despite their prominence in the music repertoire, the roles—and therefore *izzat*—the instrumentalists possess in the larger organizational structure of the *badhai* troupe are secondary to the lead singer.

Singers and dancers are responsible for the creation of emotional affect and the larger orchestration of the *badhai*’s social-musical activities. These include the leading of particular prayers/chants, singing of lyrics (which can be seen as extensions of these prayers), the choreography of acts of prostration, and more importantly, the interaction with patrons during the exchange of offerings. Most of the time, *hijras* are responsible for singing the music and/or dancing, although I have encountered some performances where the lead singer also happens to be a hired male harmonium player (this was the case with Gudiya *badhais*) or *dholak* player (which occurred during an encounter in Surat, Gujarat and the Dharavi neighborhood of Mumbai; see below).

In general, the lead singer constitutes one who is skilled in vocal performance, knows the songs by memory, and holds a high position on the social hierarchy relative to the supporting singers. A singer’s musicianship is measured along to a number of variables including, but not necessarily limited to: (1) the ability to project her voice using a high-nasal tonal quality, (2) take
command of rhythm, and most importantly, (5) recall and perform a large repertoire of songs. Lead singers may also dance (and vice versa), although this is not a requirement. As a whole, musical ability does not necessarily connote dancing ability. In fact, as I have found, lead singers generally do not dance.

_Chelas_ may alternate dancing between one another, or most of the dancing will be the responsibility of one of the _chelas_. But, this is no science. Various levels of _izzat_ may be determined by the following dance attributes: (1) knowledge of the song; (2) the ability to convey _abhinay_ (expressive gestures in the body’s upper-half); (3) the dancer’s social status in the _gharānā_; and (4) the dancer’s overall effectiveness and sophistication in dance repertoire. Although dancing is usually shared by several _chelas_, it is customary for the _guru_ to take part in some of the dancing if she is present (as was the case with Zehra). The social and spiritual significance of the _guru_—her supreme _izzat_—makes her involvement in the performance especially auspicious.

Before we arrive an analysis of the music itself, I first turn to the distribution of capital. Looking at the dispersement of profits, it may be possible to understand (qualitatively and quantitatively) the extent to which _izzat_ participates in the social organization of the _hijra_ _gharānā_. That said, as Gudiya made clear, it would be unfair to suggest that _izzat_ is isomorphically related to income earned.

_Distribution of Capital_

Differences in the distribution of earnings point to the pluralistic approaches to money, and its relationship with certain _gharānedar_ customs and governing structures. As we see below, for
Zehra, *badhai* seniority and overall *izzat* determines how a particular *chela* is positioned financially and hierarchically in the *gharānā*, while for Sowmya, social rank and *izzat* from *badhais* have little bearing on the degree to which *chelas* belong to the *gharānā* (see Figure 14).

*Badhai* earnings vary from context to context, and may range from anywhere between Rs. 200 to Rs. 6,000. In my experience, the amount of money earned in *badhais* is tied to a number of variables. These include, but are not limited to: (1) the quality and reception of the performance; (2) the *izzat* a particular *gharānā* carries, related—but not limited to—religious affiliation, caste affiliation, class, and the age of household; (3) the relationships held between *badhai* troupes and their patrons, which can be characterized by a number of different adjectives, including but not limited to, friendly, nurturing, loving, brash, or businesslike; and (4) the affluence of the particular neighborhood or jurisdiction wherein a *badhai* troupe regularly performs. It is generally expected that the higher the degree of each of these variables, the more money can be gained. That said, while earnings may be tied to the musical production of *izzat*, higher earnings do not signify greater *izzat*. In fact, in some cases, the opposite may be true.
Earnings vary from *gharānā* to *gharānā*, and are distributed in different ratios by the *gurus*. Back in Kanpur, I sat next to Zehra *guru* as she meticulously separated her troupe’s daily earnings, which had amounted to Rs. 6,000. Two thousand *rupees* were handed to and divided among the three participating *chelas* and the hired *dholak* player. Out of this two thousand, eight hundred *rupees* was handed to the troupe’s lead singer—a more senior *chela*—while the other *chelas* received four hundred. The remaining Rs. 4,000 went to Zehra, who gave a small handful to her *guru* elder (see Figure 15). Zehra’s distributions ratio contrasts slightly with Gudiya’s ratio. Earning slightly less than Zehra’s troupe had taken in, Gudiya distributed exactly 50% of the earnings to herself, while the remaining 50% was divided evenly among her performing *chelas* and hired accompanists (see Figure 16).

We can see from these differences that in Zehra’s system, monetary value is placed largely along hierarchic and talent-based lines, whereas, for Gudiya’s troupe, emphasis is placed
on individual participation regardless of their particular productive capacity, musical ability, or izzat. Still, some questions remain: How is izzat engendered in the music itself, or in performance situations involving no money (like in communal, and/or staged contexts)? How is izzat embodied by the performers in context of the performance? From here, we turn to various encounters with the music to look more closely at the ways izzat manifests in the dialectic space between singing and subjectivity, in the (trans)formation of hij-vocality.

Don’t Break My Hopes

For the rest of this chapter, I focus on performance aspects the same ritual song “Asha Natoru,” roughly translated as “Don’t Break My Hopes.” For this, we return to Mumbai and the surrounding areas, which in my experience, possess a relatively homologous repertoire of songs. The fact that “Asha Natoru” was performed to me on four different occasions by four different performers signals its prominence in the region’s badhai repertoire. The song’s lyrical significance, timbral and tonal qualities, and performative function also makes it an apt example within which to locate hij-vocality, how it implicates and/or is implicated by izzat, and how it embodies certain parameters of difference.

All four performances took place in different locations and featured a different set of performers. The performances in the first, third, and fourth iterations took place in Mumbai (within a geographical radius of about 50 kilometers), and the second performance took place in Surat, Gujarat. In all four cases, “Asha Natoru” was chosen at the behest of the gurus and/or lead singers involved. Tables 3 and 4 highlight some of the filmic and music “variables” surrounding each of the four performance contexts (respectfully).
In the first, second, and third iterations the songs were staged for the purposes of documentation. In these contexts, my assistant and I were the principal audience members. The lead singer in all three cases sat facing me, and the supporting singers sat in in an arranged line parallel to the principal singer (performers in the first and fourth iterations sat on the floor, while performers in the third sat in chairs). The fourth iteration, in contrast, took place within the evening-long *jalsa* and in front of an audience of 75 individuals. Here, the boundaries separating the “stage” and “audience” were more permeable than the other three iterations. This was due largely to the regular (semi-)participation of audience members in the singing of the song, interaction of the performers with audience members, and improvised nature of the performance as a whole. In the following sections, I attempt to clarify these contextual differences in order to highlight various nuances in *hij*-vocality and how it emerges through and engenders a strategy of difference.

**Who is studying who? (in the First Iteration)**

After struggling to turn my camera on following the hectic start to my encounter with Mujranani and her *chelas* (at the beginning of this chapter), I felt the gaze of the six-person ensemble. Sitting about one meter away in a semi-circle in dim lighting (caused by a power outage), I could nonetheless make out the faces of a *dholak* player, four supporting singers, and Mujranani. My vulnerability in the situation seemed to trigger their curiosity, although it may also have been my queerness. Nita had informed Mujranani about my sexuality prior to my arrival, and while gayness is normally met with scrutiny by *hijras*—due largely to the stratifications that already exist in India’s culturally diverse LGBTIQ communities—I felt the gaze of their eyes (and ears)
as one of intrigue more than hostility. My skin color likely contributed to this, as did my relative ignorance of Indian custom at the time. My naiveté was read as innocence, or perhaps even sexualized. (see Video 6 with corresponding transcription in Table 5)

Needless to say, the performance that followed can be defined largely by acute awareness of the camera. This was demonstrated by frequent, subtle glances in my direction from Mujranani, Nita, and an unnamed chela, whom I refer to as Chela 1 (see time markers 00:54, 01:24, 02:50 in Table 5). Awareness of the camera is also revealed in conversations before and after the performance, which largely concern the staging of the song. In this performance, it became apparent that Nita and Mujranani were interested in putting on a good “show” for the interests of research and/or of presenting a positive view of her community—a showing of proper “face” and/or in seeking out recognition. This was something that I was naturally happy to accommodate through film.

Shot at medium eye-level, the footage in the first iteration features four performing hijras in a single long take. While a relatively uneventful film from a methodological or theoretical point of reference, it nonetheless “reads” some of the ways hij-vocality emerges in song.

Melody and Rhythm

With the flick of the wrist, Mujranani signaled the dholak player to begin a rhythmic interlude—a cross-rhythm consisting of an underlying (eighth-note) pattern (3+3+2) in Keherwa tāl, emphasized by syncopated accents, played at medium tempo (in measures 5, 7, 8, and 9; see Table 6). After a number of cycles, Mujranani entered at the top of the sthai (main chorus sung in the first half of the middle octave). The contour of the song featured an interplay between the
sthai and antara (part of the chorus sung in the second half of the middle octave) in a call and response structure.\textsuperscript{65} In this (and the other) performance(s), the sthail was followed by an “answer” of the antara, followed by the sthail (or a variation thereof), followed by the antara (or a variation thereof), and so on until another change in structure occurred (see Figure 17).\textsuperscript{66}

![Notated sthail and antara for “Asha Natoru”]

The notes of the sthail are consistent with those in Rāg Bilāwal. Comprised entirely of four notes, the melody begins on Ga—the third note of a major scale—and then concludes on Sa—the tonic. Then, in the antara, Sa jumps to Ga, and then climbs to Pa, the fifth note of the scale before landing on tivra (sharp) Ma. The shift in value from shuddha (pure) to tivra (sharp) Ma, therefore, signals a significant break in the Bilāwal structure; In this case, the “shift” from

\textsuperscript{65} The first iteration maintained a recognizable call and response structure. In this case, Mujrananu assumed the responsibility of singing the first lines of the sthail and antara, and the supporting singers responded with the same lyrics and melody. Incidentally, this contrasted with the third and fourth iterations, both of which were sung entirely in heterophonic unison.

\textsuperscript{66} Without confusing correlation for causation, the interplay between the sthail and antara is akin to the complementary relationship established between the lead and supporting singers in a call and response performance situation. The sthail begins the song and followed by the antara’s “answer”, followed again by the sthail (or a variation thereof), the antara (or a variation thereof), and so on until another change in structure. A hierarchy of importance can also be interpreted in the number of sthails, antaras, and their variations. In all four iterations, there is a higher number of sthails than antaras, and the number of main sthail and antara lyrics is greater than their variations. A ranking based on the number of occurrences of all four instances places the greatest importance on the main sthail, followed by main antara, the sthail variations, and finally, the antara variations (see Table 7). Although it is customary in Indian music (classical, folk, or otherwise) to conclude a number a tihai (final section of three repeated parts), only two out of the four iterations of “Asha Natoru” included a tihai. In both cases, the tihais featured a short prayer to the Mother Goddess (see ‘Lyrics’ section)
shuddha to tivra Ma conforms to the modal patterning in Rāg Yaman Kalyan, which incorporates shuddha and tivra Ma along within a heptatonic scalar structure of suddha notes.

Rāg Yaman Kalyan—also known in Karnatak music as Rāga Kalyani—is generally performed in the evenings (in North India) and commonly at weddings (especially in South India). The badhai song’s incorporation of this particular rāg, therefore, reveals a connection between Indian classical musical conceptions of rās/rāsa (‘mood’ evoked corresponding to a particular time of day or context) and hijra performance. This suggests that badhai melodies and melodic structures are not only composed, but also theorized accordingly to the context of their performances. In “Asha Natoru,” melodic references of “service to the bride (or bridegroom)” are engendered in rāg structure, engendering izzat through a differentiation of roles between hijras and their patrons.

Call and Response

In this iteration of “Asha Natoru,” Mujranani assumed three distinct roles in the performance: (1) lead singer—the most prominent of which she assumed in this performance context—, (2) hijra guru, and (3) diplomat—one that came through developing a relationship with the camera/ethnographer (myself). Despite her poise in demonstrating fluency with all three, Mujranani appeared less comfortable serving the role of lead singer. Her body language, especially in the beginning of the performance, signaled anxiety (see time markers 00:09, 00:39, 00:52, 1:30 in Table 5). Mujranani had trouble remembering the lyrics to the song—a fact demonstrated by the number of times the main sthai was performed in relation to its variations (see Table 7). Mujranani was frustrated by this, and expressed some of this frustration in short episodes of
negative body language directed towards her chelas (see 01:05-01:30, 01:55, 02:05, 02:30 in Table 5). That said, she recovered from her frustration quickly through concentrating on her own performance (01:37, 02:36).

Mujranani’s excessive repetition of the main sthai reminds me of a passage by Dard Neuman in his dissertation about Hindustani classical music. Repetition to the point of redundancy is one of the defining features of Hindustani music learning, helping to bring the student toward a closer degree of musical fluency, and leading one to penetrate “the space of creativity [or] the ‘zone of unconscious,’ where [the voice may begin] to explore independent of one’s mental will or directive” (quoted in Roy 2016:110; see Dard Neuman 2004:164). For Mujranani, repetition is what allowed her to enter the musical mental space, overcome the gap in her memory, and recover the lyrics of the song (see Figure 18 and Video 6).

In call and response singing, a clear schema is generally defined by the primary role of the guru/lead singer and secondary role of the chorus. Despite Mujranani’s visible frustration, her chelas demonstrated great respect for her by closely and patiently following Mujranani’s gestural instructions. They also refrained from taking musical liberties of their own, and assumed a conservative sitting posture, making sure not to deviate too far from their roles as supporting singers, or even to giggle or smile for too long (see time markers 1:05-1:20). The following are some observations that I gathered from my field notes about each of the supporting singers:

1. “Chela 1” does not know the song very well, and takes advantage of her physical positioning sitting in Mujranani’s left blind spot (next to and slightly behind her) to disengage from the performance without fear of reprehension (see 01:20, 01:30, 02:30).
“Chela 2”—the dholak player—is generally concerned about the possibility of being reprimanded by Mujranani throughout much of the performance and does her best to deter them by performing well.

“Chela 3” pays extremely close attention to Mujranani, an act which is reciprocated through eye contact and outward gesturing. (Field notes August 24, 2010)

In this performance, it became clear at the very least that badhai music is something that Mujranani and her chelas take great pride in. Mujranani placed great pressure on herself and her chelas to perform the song well, reprimanding them when a mistake occurred, despite the fact they had visibly not rehearsed it in a long time. Although there were visible “mistakes” in Mujranani’s performance—many of which were recognized by her chelas through smiles or eye rolls (see 00:52, 01:11, 01:16)—Mujranani’s authority as a guru or lead singer was never undercut. One could say that Mujranani’s izzat as a lead singer, in this case, was directly related
to her izzat as a guru, and that effectiveness of performance was predicated on the establishment of difference between guru and chela. In this case, demonstrations of respect were also articulated through (the attempt of) musical accuracy and overall poise—something that engendered Mujranani’s sense of self in relationship to her “audience” as a whole.

**Sustainable Izzat (Iteration 2)**

Once we arrived inside the Lakshya Trust office in Surat, Manvendra called on two badhai performers to the NGO. After hearing a description of my research, the two presented “Asha Natoru” to me along with one other badhai song. In the absence of a dholak, Sita (the guru and lead singer of the two), grabbed two metallic cups from a neighboring room and began performing the familiar eight-beat cross-rhythm. (see Video 7 and Table 8)

Unlike the first iteration, the relationship established between Sita and the supporting singer (SS) was not based upon a need to put on a “show” of respectability, but on a certain respect for the music itself. While Sita ultimately drew from the social status allotted to her by her role as lead singer/accompanist, her prime concern pertained exclusively to the effectiveness of performance—a demonstration of musical izzat. Sita’s body language throughout the performance demonstrated an easy to multitask between lead singer, accompanist, and guru. This is illustrated, among other instances, in her resourceful choice in metallic cups to provide rhythmic accompaniment in the absence of a dholak, near perfect execution of the lyrics, consistency in rhythm and melody, and command of intonation; Sita sang entirely in sur (in

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67 Incidentally, this performance represented just the tip of the iceberg of hijra performances I witnessed in Gujarat. Immediately following the performance, Sita escorted Manav and me to her gharānā located in the center of Surat. There, Sita rounded up her badhai troupe to perform a 12 song set of traditional folk and filmi songs.
Moreover, in contrast to Mujranani, Sita did not exercise dominance in order to draw attention to her role superiority as *guru*, but engendered *izzat* through sheer effectiveness of musical performance (see Figure 19 and Video 7).

Both Sita and SS performed the song in near perfect unison, even incorporating the same breath marks throughout, signaling vocal synthesis achieved through embodied understanding. On several occasions, SS forgot the lyrics (see 1:06, 1:23), but gracefully slipped back into the melody after quick visual verification from Sita. (SS’s mistakes followed a noticeable glance to the camera, suggesting that while SS was relatively familiar with her role as performer, she was less familiar with the stage it created [see :52, 1:23]). A symbiotic trust was evident between the two—a mutually-shared *izzat* that enhanced the effectiveness of performance.
In this performance, it could be said that the productive capacity of izzat was cyclical: The izzat applied to the music itself through rhythmic, lyrical and tonal accuracy, engendered izzat between Sita and SS. This happened at the same time the izzat between Sita and SS was able to facilitate izzat towards the music itself. The effect was the creation of a sustainable izzat ecosystem that Sita and her chela to utilized together in the construction of a mutually-shared pehchān. Through this cyclicality of respect, a distinct hij-vocality is able to emerge. “Through their Throats, They Sing.”

**Lyrics**

Indeed, it is through the lyrics where hij-vocality acquires additional significance and potency. The final refrain, performed by Sita, performatively enact the roles hijras play as spiritual intermediaries in badhai contexts:

- **Mileko bakko mai re,** I’m yearning to meet you,
- **Jisi ki lodh lagavi re,** That is all I want,
- **Gale mein aaj samao re** Through my throat (voice) you sing

The literal translation of the final line, “Through my throat you sing,” performatively substantiates hij-vocality as an embodiment of the Goddess herself. It brings the goddess into existence through/into the body of the performing hijras, and in doing so, invoke hijra izzat as a phenomenon that has otherworldly implications.

This is achieved in at least three other ways. The first is through the notion of a plea, petition, or command upon the Goddess to bless the patrons (who are not hijras) for getting married or for having a new born baby (see the ends of the second and third iterations for
examples of this). These pleas were generally accompanied by vivid illustrations of wedding rituals in the form of: “Someone putting a garland in your hair” (see the second antara in the first iteration, third antara in second iteration in Appendix); “Someone offering you coconut” (see third antara in second iteration); and “a Prince or Princess putting a garland around your neck” (see sixth sthai in the first iteration, third sthai in second iteration). In other cases, pleas were expressed through self-declarative phrases. This was most prominent in the second iteration, as well as the tihai in the fourth iteration: “I am singing this auspicious song and making food for you in order to convince you.” In these cases, the singers voiced their roles as intermediaries between the Goddess and her patrons through illustrations of izzat.

Second, oppositions are frequently expressed through a variety of lyrical imagery. These appeared most notably in the third iteration’s final antara:

\[ \text{Andhe ko aankh meya,} \quad \text{Eyes to the blind,} \]

\[ \text{Gori ko kayaa} \quad \text{A fair bride for the darker husband} \]

The notion of opposites in this case seems appropriate considering the positions hijras hold spiritually in contexts of badhai performance; Illustrations of balance signify that to which hijras performatively enact as intermediaries between the Mother Goddess and her mortal patrons—an auspicious manifestation of izzat.

Third, the song alludes to the difficulties of performing the task of blessing their patrons, illustrating scenes of self-sacrifice and/or devotion. The second antara in the second iteration, for instance, emphasizes the notion of having traveled very far:

\[ \text{Dur gali khatta maiya} \quad \text{Where I’ve come to see you} \]

\[ \text{Kale ay bhavani} \quad \text{is far} \]

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This is similar to, but not exactly the same as, the central meaning highlighted in the lyrics of the main sthai:

- **Meike bhavan bade dur;** The Goddess’s house is very far,
- **Meya more assa natoru** Don’t break my hopes\(^{68}\)

Here, the emphasis is placed on the distance between the Goddess’s house and the place where the *badhai* is being performed. The descriptions of self-sacrifice adds weight to the case presented to *Bahuchara ji*: “Don’t break my hopes,” because presumably, “I’ve come very far.” In this case, therefore, the spiritual significance attributed through suggestions of *hijra* sacrifice also lyrically manifest *izzat*, while also serving as a performative wink to patrons not to disappoint the troupe financially.

The combination of these themes signal a lyrical tendency to engender their *izzat* through references of self-sacrifice and devotion, among other values. To add quantitative detail to this ethnography, I took the liberty of constructing a table that compares prominent lyrical themes according to their number of occurrences (see Table 9). Two numbers in each section show the ratio of different, unique ways each of these themes were expressed over the number of total repetitions. Aside from illustrations of *puja* (prayer) at weddings—which presumably, are not those of the *hijras* themselves—there is a relatively notable thematic absence of gender and sexuality. This suggests that conceptions of gender, are not strongly held values that *hijras* wish to convey lyrically about themselves in “*Asha Natoru*.”

Incidentally, all four iterations shared the same lyrics in the main *sthai*, but differed—sometimes widely—in the *antara*, *sthai* variations, *antara* variations, and *tihai*. I do not view

\(^{68}\) It is unclear what or where the Goddess’s house actually is. My understanding is that the lyrics are referring to the Bahuchara Mata temple in Northern Gujarat.
these differences, however slight, as “mistakes” but as representative of the highly flexible, improvised, and social(ly contingent) nature of badhai music.

**Tonality (Iteration 3)**

When I entered the halls of the Darpan Foundation in Mumbai’s Dharavi slums, a middle-aged thirunangai (Tamil transgender) health worker escorted me to a small, dimly lit room. Over filter coffee, I explained the purpose of my research to her and she beckoned one of her most highly skilled performers. With a dholak strapped to her shoulder, the lead singer sat on the floor immediately in front of me, and began playing the familiar cross-rhythm (see the first iteration). She began to sing, but became frustrated by her own playing, so she stopped, and called for two others. Standing in a row, the lead singer began “Asha Natoru” entirely in a cappella. At the time, my camera was out of battery power, so I was forced to rely on remedial audio equipment to capture the event (see Video 8).

Yvon Bonenfant contends that:

> The permission to create sensation in the social sphere, and thus fully manifest one’s sensorial existence amongst that of others, might depend on our ability fully and sensually to sound and seek sound. Sexuality, among other qualities of human existence, underpins this sensuality. (Bonenfant 2010:74)

In extension of this principal, I would further argue that certain desires also underpin the “sensorial existence” of hijras who sound out. But, these desires do not exclusively occupy the realm of sex, sexuality, or gender. Hij-vocality demands a certain izzat from its “audience” while also signaling a recognition of difference or separation from the normative public.
The singing registers of the principal and supporting singers were high pitched, loud, and produced a nasal, raspy, and/or shrill timbre. In the fourth iteration, the lead singer’s voice seemed to penetrate the concrete walls of the Darpan Foundation (not to mention my bones). The song was performed in the *madhya saptak* (middle register above middle C), as is conventionally performed in vocal *sthais* (and in the Tenor 1 or Alto 2 ranges in Indian classical music). Their singing voices occupied a middle space somewhere between the conventional male and female ranges, but never trespassed the extreme parameters of either.

Krell argues that the trans male singer Lucas Silveira’s (changing) voice from higher to lower registers “enacts what has been called transgender vocality, or trans-vocality, in that his voice works to unhinge certain affects from their assumed correlative genders, and prescribed genders from presumed bodily morphologies” (2013:495). For singing *hijras*, however, the timbres produced within what I call “*hij*-vocality” works to disrupt notions about what it means to be male or female by unhinging certain affects and associations of vocal range, tone, and timbre from their correlative genders. By sounding neither male nor female, *hijras* aurally carve a distinct space for themselves. (Since this is a middle-range voice, I hesitate to consider it “third,” and therefore *last* in a grouping of three genders. Instead, I prefer to think of *hij*-vocality as occupying a *central* or *inner* space in the range of human vocal experience.)

This distinctness also emerges with respect to intonation. As a whole, the intonation shared among the singers (especially in the first, second, and fourth iterations) were imprecise. In some cases (particularly the second and fourth iterations), the keys themselves were not fully decided. In these cases, however, intonation seemed to carry little concern in general for the performers. In fact, in the case of the *jalsa*, singing out of tune seemed to serve a particular
strategy of singing and overall orality/aurality, as a means of drawing attention to the performance.

This reminds me of the several encounters I have had with hijras in the streets and on Mumbai’s local trains. As a general rule, those who beg tend to grab the attention of prospective patrons by clapping in the signature hijra style, and by projecting through voices using the diaphragm and the narrowing of sound through the nasal cavity. The two combined produce a distinct and unmistakably hijra sound that is strategized to cut through a typical normative crowd in a virtuosic performance of attention giving and getting.

Bonenfant argues that “queer is a doing, not a being [that] listens out for, reaches toward, the disoriented or differently oriented ‘other’” and because of this reflects “a virtuosic development of the performance of giving attention” (2010:78). A performative indicator of presence, singing, speaking and clapping is one way in which hijras identify themselves in normative public contexts either to signal the solicitation of normative people, to demonstrate one’s dominance, to signal each other, or to do all three. In these cases, the louder one naturally is, the more attention one gets and potential advantaged earned in the situation. If singing, speaking, and clapping like hijras reflects a strategic virtuosity, then singing and clapping reflects a kind of attunement to define and draw somatic recognition—or a somatic pehchān—to hijra difference.

That said, the performative function of clapping naturally shifts from context to context. Nita once told me that “you are not hijra until you learn how to clap” (Interview, September 20, 2010). In other words, hijra clapping signals hijra pehchān. Whereas in public clapping and singing draws attention to difference, in communal contexts, they serve the performative
function of \textit{belonging}. In these cases, the objective is not to \textit{impose} or cut through, but rather to \textit{join}. This point gets developed further in Chapter 5.

\textit{Possible Differences Between Hijra and Kothi Vocality}

While \textit{hij}-vocality carries implications of gendered difference, it would nonetheless be disadvantageous to equate the ways \textit{hijras} may sing with how other gender nonconforming singers sing. While at the Koovagam \textit{mela} (festival) transgender beauty pageant in Tamil Nadu, I witnessed the performance of a male singer named Gopi, who dressed entirely in male attire while singing entirely in his \textit{falsetto} voice (a method of vocal production used by male singers to sing notes using the ‘head voice’). A professional playback singer, Gopi learned most of his music aurally through, by himself, through film recordings. Reflecting his rigorous self-training, his intonation was exacting and reflected a certain virtuosic sensitivity to mimetic accuracy. (The video I produced about Gopi can be viewed in its entirety on the following link: \url{http://fulbright.mtvu.com/jroy/2013/06/06/meet-gopi-koovagam-part-2/}.)

Rather than serving as a distinct marker of difference, Gopi’s approach to singing conforms to, yet \textit{queers} conceptions of normative belonging. Gopi often performs with a male counterpart, but rarely follows the gender roles prescribed for them. In a performance of “\textit{Kotta Paakkum}” (‘Betel Nut’), for instance, Gopi followed the exact contours of Madhumitha’s (the original playback singer) disembodied voice in her register, but sung the male lyrics. His singing partner conversely performed in the lower register while singing Madhumitha’s part. The playfulness with which the two approached the singing roles also reflected in the ways they responded to the camera. They enjoyed themselves, flirted with the lens, and at one point gave
each other a peck on the cheek while eying the camera to make sure the moment was recorded.

The playfulness of gender roles, and the sexuality implicit in the song lyrics, was performed in order to comment on and subvert gender normative roles in Tamil film music. Madhumitha’s disembodied playback singing was reflected in the visual disconnect between Gopi’s male body and female-sounding voice, only to be re-embodied again through the reversal of vocal parts. Singing the male part of the song in “female” voice, Gopi draws somatic attention to—and engenders a pehchān of—queerness.

Gopi’s vocal performance corresponds with the narrative he presents off-stage. Following his vocal performance, I conducted an interview with him in a literal backstage closet. The content of the interview, as such, bore symbolic resonance with the context wherein it took place. In my interview with him, he did not explicitly “come out” to me at the time of my interview with him, but chose to speak in code: “My family doesn’t know that I’m like this,” he told me. “But I am participating in Koovagam for my happiness as well as everyone else’s” (pers. comm., April 25, 2013). Gopi’s story echoes that of my kothis whom I have met either through the trans-hijra community or one their own in public. Gopi told me that “at home and in public places, I’ve faced a lot of hurdles, tortures, insults, and shame. But, I don’t care about any of that stuff. I stand firm in what I believe in my heart. And now, my parents are proud of my singing” (ibid.). For him, music has served a central role in the building of personal, private conceptions of self and self-hood.

If singing (and speaking) queerly reflects a strategic virtuosity—what Bonenfant considers “a virtuosic development of the performance of giving attention” (2010:78)—then Gopi’s singing reflects a certain kind of attunement to vocalizing (and hearing) what is
classically pleasing to the ear in order to *queer* somatic recognition of normative belonging, in order to belong to himself. Moreover, his singing style is distinctly queer because it resonates familiarity with normative, queer and transgender audiences alike. By singing what is classically pleasing, Gopi simultaneously engenders *izzat* from his parents because of its recognizability as normative, and *izzat* from his *thirunangai* audience because of its queerness.

This contrasts with what *hij*-vocality achieves. In my experience spending time with *hijras*, singing out of tune in the middle-range and using a nasal tone, reflects a certain kind of attunement to vocalizing and hearing *beyond* what is classically pleasing to the ear. This draws somatic *pehchān* of difference altogether from normative vocalizations. That is not to say that *hijras* did not recognize, or respond to Gopi’s performance. Gopi’s expertly queer interpretation of the otherwise heteronormative Tamil film song was instantly praised by its transgender audience. Several *hijras* approached Gopi after the song to perform *variyan* (literally ‘preference’ or ‘precedence,’ that comes in the form of a shower of money over the head). Gopi’s queerness, in other words, was brought into the realm of the familiar.

Nevertheless, if the social function of singing atonally produces the exact opposite effect to that which is conventionally experienced affectively, how is *izzat* engendered through *hijra* tone, timbre, and intonation? Indeed, in North and South Indian classical music contexts, singing “out of tune” assuredly has a negative impact on one’s *izzat*. In *hijra* contexts, however, singing atonally using a distinct nasal tone and timbre, is a vocal strategy produced and mutually shared by many within the community—a sonic stimuli that many *hijras* within the community sound and seek out. While *hij*-vocality queers conventions of musical *izzat* via the subversion of timbral, tonal, and intonational uniformity, they engender respect because of their ability to cut
through the static of gender and sexual conventions and signal a recognition of difference. Unlike Gopi’s performance, which rests on the playful vocal inversion of gender roles yet ultimately relies on the stability of the male/female binary to conduct its playful inversions, *hij*-vocality disrupts the stability upon which notions of male and female by carving a separate, distinct vocal space.

**Deconstructing the Stage: Towards a *Pehchān* of Belonging (in the Fourth Iteration)**

Due largely to the participatory role of the ethnographer (myself) in this somewhat chaotic iteration, my camera served a more active role in the creation and contestation of visual meaning in this *jalsa* performance (see Video 9 and Table 10). In capturing a highly social situation, where awareness of the camera was less apparent, filming the *jalsa* played a more participatory—in the *cinéma vérité* sense of the term—role in constructing an understanding of *hij*-vocality.

Reflecting the general energy of the room, the cinematography and sound design throughout the performance was erratic. In several instances, the camera shook or panned quickly and unpredictably from one position or angle to another. Individuals captured within the cinematic frame moved freely from the “stage” to the “audience,” and engaged in many (unplanned, improvised) activities occurring at once. In one instance, the camera was accidentally bumped by someone passing through. In other instances, noticeably overwhelmed by the situation, I chose arbitrary or insignificant subjects of focus (0:51). The absence of visual clarity and movement—that is, through the occurrence of multiple obstructions, occasional pixilation, and *vérité*-style cinematography—confronts a purely observational “fly on the wall” approach to filmmaking. It reveals the identity of the ethnographer-with-camera, and more specifically, the
ways in which it impacts and is impacted by the drama of “improvised life” taking place in front of its camera lens. In doing so, the camera does not merely gather “evidence” for the sake of truth, but acknowledges its role in the participation and provocation of its “ethnodialogue” with *hijras* (see Feld 2003:17).

Among other things, the camera follows the contours of Mujranani’s movements as she visibly negotiates her tripartite role as *guru*, disciplinarian, and lead dancer. Although it was quite evident that her identities as *guru* and disciplinarian took precedence over that of lead dancer, these roles mutually reinforced one another in context of this *jalsa*. In contrast to the first iteration, where Mujranani employed her authority as *guru* to demand her *chela*’s full attention in the production of music, in this case, Mujranani utilized her physical proximity to LS/SS and position has lead dancer to enact her role as *guru*. The emphasis here, in other words, rested on function of “*Asha Natoru*” as a means of (1) attracting the attention of her *chelas*, in order to demand *izzat*, while also (2) carrying significant spiritual meaning—a supreme *izzat*.

While “*Asha Natoru*” in this context serves a clear functional purpose within the larger context of the *jalsa*, its prominence in the musical repertoire and construction of space was also destabilized by the larger, dis/interested *hijra* body present in the room. The boundaries of the performance “stage” were physically unclear, reinforced only by the barely audible LS/SS and *dholak* player. In this case, there is no performance “stage” reinforced by boundaries, but a series of “activity” centers captured by their absence in the camera frame.

While the performers in this iteration paid less attention to the camera than in the other iterations, the footage reflects and *engenders* the social(ized) nature of *badhai* music and, therefore, produces different ideas about *hijra pehchān*. Through the experience of watching the
footage, it not only becomes possible to imagine activities that occurred off-frame, but also to more clearly *embody* what it was like to be in the same room. The activities taking place off-frame actually take center stage, leading the viewer towards a more interactive viewing experience. In this context, (a conception of) the *pehchān* engendered in this context contrasts with the three other iterations—as opposed to the *pehchān* of difference, here we see a *pehchān* of presence and belonging (see Figure 20 and Video 9).

Figure 20: Performing “Asha Natoru” at the *jalsa*; still from video footage by the author, September 20, 2010; see Video 9: [http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com/chapters4-6](http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com/chapters4-6) (password: pehchaan)

**Conclusion**

With particular attention to correspondences in and departures from song lyrics, melody, rhythm, vocal qualities (timbre, tone, intonation), and certain visual elements, this analysis of “Asha Natoru” identified some of the values constituting and constituted within *hij*-vocality. Through visual analysis (aided by camera footage and field notes), it also identified some of the ways in
which my own ethnographic frame of reference cropped out, enhanced, or otherwise participated in its configuration.

As we found, *hijra* timbre, tone, and intonation—combined with signature clapping—are employed sonically in certain contexts to “cut through” the din of a normative general public and draw attention to differently gendered bodies. The music draws attention to *hijra izzat* through lyrical evocations of their roles as spiritual intermediaries, melodic references to marriage, and structural (im)balances between the lead and supporting singers in call and response structures. These reflect a musical “strategies of difference” as a means of simultaneously drawing attention to their unique *hij*-vocality. In the context of the filmic staging of these *badhai* songs, individuals navigated their performances to reflect positively on the overall quality of their *hij*-vocality.

Mujranani, in particular, placed great emphasis on this (in the first iteration) for the purposes of putting on good “face” (for the camera), and (at the *jalsa*), for the purposes of maintaining order within her community. Using a slightly different strategy, Sita embodied her *pehchān* as *guru* through effectiveness of vocal performance.

As a whole, filming “seriously playfully” produced a temporally and spatially fragmented series of “behind the scenes” video clips. The particular staging affect of the camera in context of three iterations of the “*Asha Natoru*” produced a formal boundary between the ethnographer and subject. Although a staging of seemingly ordinary life—an “othering” of something otherwise familiar—the filming of music challenged the ontological frames of everyday *hijra* realities that have been normatively rendered marginalized, silenced and oppressed (see Muñoz 2010). The staging affect of the camera, in particular, helped to normalize the “abnormal” and to produce an honest perspective of their lives and the spaces within which *hijras* reside. In doing so, it also
revealed certain truths about my own abnormal positioning in the ethnographic situation, and reconfigured the strategy of into a pehchān of familiarity.

Indeed, certain questions still remain. Mainly: To what extent do particular “regimes of knowing” the self (through relations with others) shape the lives and voices of hijra performers? (see Sedwick 1990); (2) (How) does music performance literally and figuratively “sound out” the “silences” of knowing, individually and socially held by and/or imposed on the body? (see Tucker 2002); and (3) How can the camera more directly participate in the lives of those it captures? In the first, third and fourth iterations, the camera helped to change our perspective of what constitutes normal, but was more referential—as in a constative reading of events—than performative. In the following Chapter 5, I will continue the discussion begun on the second iteration to see how approaches to movement in performative filmmaking in the context of the hijra jalsa deflects attention from historical specificity toward a more evocative telling of events, and toward a more poetic expressiveness blurs boundaries between autobiography and history, fiction and documentary, and the personal and the collective (see Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:26).
Chapter 5

Coming Out: A Pehchān of Belonging in a Hijra Jalsa

Somewhere on the outskirts of Mumbai, a young HIV/AIDS outreach worker named Yogesh handed me a lukewarm cup of chai (tea). Waterlogged by the evening monsoon rains inside a Humsafar Trust drop-in center, we lounged on a pair of plastic lawn chairs, blankly observing Salman Khan thrust his well-defined lower torso to the driving beat of “Munni Badnām Hui” (‘Munni was Ruined [Because of You]’) on a temperamental television set. Sipping my chai between involuntary sessions of nail biting, I felt my patience begin to break down with each pulsation.

Three hours had already passed, and still no word from Nita. She had extended us a rare invitation to witness her chela’s jalsa—a “rite of initiation” (literally ‘meeting’) for a hijra to formally reenter the community after a period of isolation customarily following ritualistic castration (see Figure 21). The event—a ten hour-long overnight affair of ritualistic music-making and dance (‘you know, the kind that they sing in badhais [Nita in Interview, August 5, 2010]’)—promised to serve as the capstone of my fieldwork that year. As it turned out, the opportunity had come not a moment too soon; My flight back to Los Angeles was scheduled to depart at 11 the next morning. On tenterhooks, I observed a shred of fingernail slide from my index finger into my chai.

Nita seemed to think highly of me. Her chela Sowmya, for whom the jalsa was organized, had referred to me as her “gori photo chela” (‘white-skinned daughter who takes pictures’). There was potential in me, she said; I had a warm, open face that was “popular with
the others.” (I was not exactly sure what that meant, but nonetheless took the comment as a positive reflection of my character.) A solid trust, I thought, had formed between us.

Why then had I found myself waiting in an office past business hours, vaguely watching Malaika Arora Khan enthusiastically solicit eternal love from a needy suitor in a dingy bar? Perhaps Nita had developed second thoughts. Maybe I was not worth her while, or had been deemed a threat to the interests of the community. Maybe I was too normative, too middle-class, too “homo-gay.” My emotional self-worth slowly slid to the floor along with another nibble from my pinky fingernail.

Just when I had started chewing on my left hand, our call came through. The celebration had begun and they were ready to receive us. We switched off Salman in mid thrust and slipped out into a shallow river of rain water. My hands and feet became (re-)soaked with promise.
Approaching the Jalsa

The *hijra jalsa* is an overnight affair that marks the climax a larger progression of rites and rituals beginning customarily with castration and followed by a period of total isolation, fully veiled, for forty days and forty nights. This period of time can be compared symbolically with *chilla* in the Hindustani music tradition—a spiritual retreat wherein musicians isolate themselves for vigorous practice (see Neuman 1990). As in the Hindustani tradition, *hijras* may be placed in quiet rooms and/or have restricted contact with the outside world. In some cases, they may be forced to maintain a minimal diet. Following this period of sensory deprivation, the raucous *jalsa* marks the literal unveiling—a formal "comings out"—of the *hijra* and her newfound status as *nirvāṇ* ('liberated'). Through an elaborate performance of wedding-style rituals, religious activities held in secret, and *badhai* music and dance, the *jalsa* sanctifies, re-configures, and re-inscribes the relationships between *chelas*, their *gurus*, and the *gharānedar* community.

According to Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, thinking about space through movement is exactly what performance does, although the insights garnered from them are nuanced (see 2002). In this chapter, I draw upon methodologies of movement, which encapsulates aspects of *cinéma vérité* and performative filmmaking, in order to understand how music and dance as sensorially experienced social phenomena, enable the configuration of *hijra pehchān*. Drawing connections to ethnomusicologist A.J. Racy’s (2004) analysis of *tarab* (ecstasy) performance in

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69 The term *nirvāṇ*—derived from the word *nirvāṇa*—means “blown out,” extinguished, or liberated. Other etymological interpretations of the word, however, bear striking similarities to the more modern notion of “coming out.” For instance, the preverb *nir* carries the potential etymological interpretation of “out” and “being free,” while *vana* connotes “the path of rebirth.” Of course, being of Hindu-Buddhist origin, the word carries religious significance, denoting the “release from suffering” after a period of *bhāvanā*, or development. The word’s function in the *hijra* community is homologous with this meaning, as it is after a month-long period of complete isolation following castration, that the *jalsa* is performed to mark *nirvāṇ*. 

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the Near East jalsah (informal gathering), I also seek to understand how hijra music-making enables hijra world-making for the individuals that do the making.

“Queer world-making” has been described as “a conscious, active way of fashioning the self and the environment, cognitively and physically, through embodied social practices moving through and clustered in the city” (Buckland 2002:19). Within these social practices, it has been said that “queer communities challenge, undo, and transform the exclusionary realities of built environments in urban centers by undertaking the necessary social and performance labors that allow members to revise and reconfigure exclusionary, oppressive, and violent spatial forms” (Bailey 2013:3). In many of these communities, chosen families are a central part of these practices. The film Paris Is Burning (1990) encapsulates this in the documentation of ballroom cultures in New York City:

A house? A house. Let’s see if we can put it down sharply. They’re families. You can say that. They’re families for a lot of children who don’t have families. But this is a new meaning of families […] It [isn’t] a question of a man and a woman and children, which grew up knowing as a family. It’s a question of a group of human beings in a mutual bond. (House mother Dorian Corey, time marker 23:43)

Through appropriation of normative rituals and practices, and the exclusion of “normative peoples,” families allow queer/trans individuals to create “fixed, tangible, and concretized spaces” of inclusion (Soja 1989, in Bailey 2013:3). Once again, we return to the notion of queer and trans as a process of becoming, identities that rely on their doing to exist.

Nevertheless, while these understandings fit the queer Western-based subcultures out of which these statements arose, how might they translate in specifically hijra contexts? If queer space is part of the place-making practices that people undertake to affirm and support their non-
normative identities (Halberstam 2005), what are the nuanced ways hijra “place-making practices” like the jalsa affirm and support their identities and conceptions of family? What do these practices mean for the individuals that perform them?

If the connections between ritual, music and identity are multilayered, then a dynamic investigation of the jalsa will raise numerous corollary questions, particularly in regards to the hijra gharânā and how it conforms to and/or departs from classical conceptions of kinship affiliation. Critically engaging Racy’s inquiries surrounding the use of “secular ritual” as a referential model, I ask if the jalsa as a whole not only reflects broader cultural patterns of practice and values in identity-making, but also shapes those patterns (see Racy 2004).

Specifically, I ask: (1) Does the jalsa embody the “preliminal (séparation)–liminal (transition, or marge)–postliminal (incorporation, or agrégation)” progression characterizing the schéma of rites de passage (van Gennep 1960:11-13; Turner 1969:94-203; in Racy 2004:12)?; (2) To what extent does the jalsa resemble “rites of initiation,” marriage rites, or other ceremonies associated with gender and/or (a)sexuality (see van Gennep 1960:65-115)?; (3) To what extent does the music performed embody contemporary notions and structures of “coming out”?,70 (4) Does the music itself contain the overall structure of the ritual and/or the values and practices held within hijra society and the broader Indian public?; and (5) To what extent does the ritual constitute notions of gender, sexuality, and other axes of hijra identity?

Racy investigates ritual both in terms of the ways it reinforces or reiterates social values (see Devons and Gluckman 1964; Nadel 1954; Rappaport 1999; et al.), but with an emphasis on

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70 Contemporary notions of “coming out” is conventionally derived from the notion of a débutante’s “coming-out party.” According to George Chauncey, “Gay people in the pre-war years […] did not speak of coming out of what we can the gay closet but rather of coming out into what they called homosexual society or the gay world” (Chauncey 1994).
the ways in which ritual articulates and shapes those values (see Geertz 1966; Turner 1969; Moore & Myerhoff 1977; Sugarman 1997; Abu-Lughod 2000; et al.). Following this lead, I also “maintain flexibility, spontaneity, and improvisation,” which are often encountered structurally as well as symbolically in Indian rituals (Racy 2004:12). In other words, since ritual is humanly organized, it is also social by nature, and therefore subject to transformation.

Like Racy, I also incorporate the ritual process as part of this chapter’s representative design, while adding a performative dimension—or “movement” in queer filmmaking—to communicate a sense of presence. The specific lines of inquiry I pursue are: (1) the physical and geographical framing of the ritual; (2) the “architexture” of the performance space, meaning how individuals move through and interact with the physical space, and how ideological frames of hijra-ness engage within these movements (see McCune 2008); (4) the performance substance, including musical and other oral/aural components; (5) the sensation of embodiment, or tarab transformation itself (see Racy 2004:10); (6) the visuality of the performance, which can be described as the visual affect that, combined with the music, elicits certain codes of meanings; and (7) the subjective experience of the ethnographer (myself) as part of the larger experiential component.

Filming the Jalsa

Henry Lefebvre writes that queer space “unleashes desire [and] presents desire with a transparency which encourages it to surge forth in an attempt to lay claim to an apparently clear field” (1992:97, quoted in McCune 2007:5). Engaging movement in a methodology of queer filmmaking, I seek to understand how the camera movement itself reflects the desires in this
clear field, how the camera interacts within and in the creation of place-making practices at the *jalsa*, and in particular, the affect its staging has on un-staged social activities. What might chosen angles, sequence shots, and editing say about or do in the production of *pehchān*? What role do I—a critically queer-minded and -bodied ethnographer with white skin—occupy in this space? How would a dynamically participatory approach to filming the event achieve an understanding of *hijra* place- and *pehchān*-making processes? In what aspects might this methodology drop the “Ball,” so to speak?

The *jalsa* was shot entirely on a Sony HD Handycam—a device that was purchased after the loss of my HD camera during the first week of my initial arrival in India—and without professional sound equipment. It reflects my own subjective positioning of naivety “capturing life unawares” while being unaware. Since at the time, I had little knowledge of filmmaking, and little authority of myself in this *hijra* dominated space, I relied exclusively on the “direction” of my intermediaries and my instincts. My movement through the *jalsa* was heavily surveilled and restricted in some cases by Mujranani (the *guru* in charge), Nita (the *guru*-mother), Sowmya (the *nirvāṇ hijra*), and/or my assistant Yogesh. They determined what events—both in and behind the “scenes”—I was allowed to film (something that reveals itself much more clearly in Scene 6). Revealing instances of vulnerability on a variety of levels, therefore, the footage queerly raises questions of power, ethnographic agency, and its epistemologies.

Movement emerges in basic filmmaking techniques—including shot angles, direction, and other (semi-)uncontrollable elements. In most cases, I let the camera roll in situations normally disadvantageous for filmmaking, such as next to a loud speaker or in extremely low light (see ‘Behind the Scenes’ and ‘Scene 7’). This was done less as a means of capturing “the
miraculousness of documentary filmmaking” (Herzog *Grizzly Man* 2005) and more so as a way of peering “behind the veil” of my experience attending the *jalsa*. This raw, reflexive footage of my time there illustrate, among many other things, the metaphor of a journey. The journey is emotionally luring and (ideally) triggers a physical response in attending the *jalsa*. It is my intention to highlight these moments through movement.

Movement also encapsulates the presentational framework of this chapter. As critical performance theorist Dwight Conquergood explained during a graduate seminar course that “sometimes […] you do have to go there to know there” (in McCune 2007:6). The writing of this chapter dwells in and is enhanced by the film footage, and also exists in dialogue with the film’s post-production. More specifically, the lyrical narrative reflects and engenders the film’s editing of sequences. They are linearly presented without regard to contemporary notions of professionalism, and in a form that, like observational documentary, purposefully communicates a sense of duration as they were experienced in real time. The chapter subheadings are comprised of “Scenes,” marking the particular phases, or rites, of the *jalsa* process, which are indicated in the film itself. (see Video 10)

**Contextualizing *Jalsah/Jalsa***

The Near East *jalsah* and *hijra jalsah* share a number of homologies. Without confusing correlation for causation, the following section attempts to point out some of the structural and symbolic similarities between the two.

In Arabic music, *jalsah*, or *qa’dah*, means “a sitting” “get together” (Racy 2004:51). The word *jalsah* comes from *jalasa*, “to sit,” and is related to the word *mahflis*, namely “place of
sitting,” or “assembly” which historically took place in the confines of the medieval courts 
(*)ibid.*). In contemporary times, *jalsahs*, also known as *sahrahs*—“evening musical parties”—
occur irregularly or without much preparation, “as friendly encounters in which music ‘happens to occur’” (*ibid.*). They also occur as part of a *farah*, or wedding celebration held usually inside a 
courtyard or tent in a relatively self-contained outdoor environment (2004:43-44).

Taking place over the course of an entire evening (for approximately 6-7 hours), the *hijra jalsa* resembles these types of music sessions, but with a contextual emphasis on rituals 
associated with (normative) marriage. Beginning in the late evening and going until dawn, the 
*jalsa*—otherwise referred to as a *muhurata* (‘auspicious time’)71—involve a series of rites 
associated with conventional Indian weddings. These include the *tel bān* ceremony (wherein the 
wife is doused in ceremonial *haldi*, or turmeric paste), *mangalya dharanam* (literally ‘wearing 
the auspicious’ that involves placing jewelry on the bride), gift giving (from wedding guests to 
the married couple), a procession, and formal pledge between husband and wife. All of these 
rituals are detailed in Scenes 3, 4, 6, and 7 of the *jalsa* (respectfully).

Perhaps the most important point of congruence between *jalsah* and *jalsa*, at least insofar 
as this ethnomusicological analysis of the event is concerned, is the role that context plays in the 
enactment of musical *tarab* (roughly translated as ‘ecstasy’). According to Racy, as a collective 
celebration marked by socializing and feasting, weddings provide “ideal conditions for *tarab*
making” by generating “an atmosphere of elation (*bast*, or *kayf*) perfectly suited for producing 
and listening to *tarab* music” (2004:44). Held usually inside a courtyard or tent in a relatively

71 *A muhurata* is a conventional Hindu term derived from Vedic astrology used throughout South Asia to denote an 
auspicious moment for a wedding ceremony. The use of the term here suggests a use in the metaphor of a wedding to 
signify this stage in the *nirvāna hijra*’s rite of passage.
self-contained outdoor environment, the primary goal of *tarab* music is to facilitate direct, intimate contact and communication between the performers and audience. This is achieved through the building and “releasing” of emotional affect, termed by Racy as *saltana*, a state of ecstasy “that enables the performers to produce a highly affective musical renditions” (2004:13). With this goal in mind, *tarab* music embodies a “sequence of gradually unfolding and organically linked phases […] that contributes significantly to the *jalsah*’s transformative purpose” (Racy 2004:53).

Like the Near East *jalsah*, the *hijra jalsa* embodies a sequence of ritualistic phases, or rites, marked by music that when performed signal various stages in the metaphorical “growth” of the *hijra* up to the point of her literal unveiling to the community. These phases are gradually unfolded, organically linked within the larger structure of the *jalsa*. They are also ordered in a way that contributes to the *jalsa*’s emotionally and physically transformative purpose, especially for the *nirvāṇ hijra*. The evening begins with Sowmya’s complete obscurity—marked by the cloak of a veil—and with a series of communal and concert-style performances, wherein demarcated roles of performer and audience are enforced, but gradually destabilize over the course of time (Scene 1). This is followed by a series of escalating musical and dance practices that further deconstruct the roles between performer and audience member, and engender a spirit of participation where virtually all attending members (including myself) sing, dance, and take part in the ritual (Scene 2). As the lengthy evening progresses, boundaries between songs and other aspects of the ritual begin to blur, songs take on more symbolic significance and “non-musical” aspects acquire performative qualities (Scenes 3 and 4). Accompanying this gradual escalation of emotional rapture, social boundaries and identities begin to deconstruct—*gurus*
dance joyfully with *kothis, kothis* dance like *hijras*—and rituals take on layered symbolism—primarily the metaphors of rebirth and “coming out” (Scene 5). This is followed by an outside procession and a “private” pledge to the Goddess (Scene 6). The *jalsa* concludes with a final dance performed by the *nirvāṇ hijra*—her formal unveiling (Scene 7). I suggest that it is through the transformative progression where the deconstruction (or subversion) of the former (pre-initiated) takes place, and wherein new values and practices (of the initiated self) are inscribed onto the bodies of its participants, and in particular, the *nirvāṇ hijra* for whom the event is structured. My camera *participates* in this process, becoming in effect, a facilitating character in the larger film of the *nirvāṇ hijra*’s rite of passage. As in *cinéma vérité* film, it captures the particularities of this movement through movement, and in doing so, conveys a feeling of presence to the reader-cum-viewer.

In order to provide some semblance of structural coherence, I have constructed a visual depiction of this sequential flow (see Figure 22). Modeled after A.J. Racy’s diagram of *tarab* performance (2004:57), but with some notable differences, the illustration shows how a gradual “crescendo” of transformative processes occurs over the axis of time. This map corresponds with a transcription of the event, provided in Table 11 (see Appendix).

The *jalsa* took place on the grounds of a large hotel. Two rooms had been reserved for the event, including one large ballroom and one smaller bedroom, as well as an outdoor covered pavilion (for food) and access to a nearby body of water. Figure 23 depicts a bird’s-eye map of the grounds, showing the location of the ballroom (wherein most of the music-making took place) in relation to the hotel bedroom (where more private affairs occurred), the outdoor lawn
and waterfront (where the procession in Scene 6 took place).

**Setting the Scene (0:00)**

The *jalsa* is already underway when Yogesh and I exit the rickshaw. We quickly make our way across a well manicured lawn, up a set of stairs, and onto an outdoor balcony where at least four *pānthis* (male sexual partners to *hijras* and *kothis*) are standing. Pushing through the loitering *panthis*, we enter the Grand Ballroom and find ourselves standing squarely in front of what appear to be sixty *hijras* lined shoulder to shoulder along the walls of the ballroom (see Figure 23). An acoustic music performance with two singers, a *dholak* player, and supporting vocals were already underway, and as the intruding *fireng* (foreigner) in the situation, I instantly attract...
the attention of the room’s audience. Feeling the gaze of all 150 eyeballs, I apologetically “melt into the floor out of sight and out of mind” (Field notes on October 21, 2010). Two jogtas are among those sitting next to me—some of whom I recognize from a fieldwork expedition weeks earlier—including one dressed as a boy in a baseball cap. (see Figure 24)

After mustering up the courage, I eventually lift my camera out of my lap and begin scanning the room. The camera finds the center of the floor, where about six hijras, a male dholak player, and Mujranani—hijra guru in charge, not to mention the virtual “grandmother” to nearly everyone in this room—are seated, singing a badhai song in a call and response fashion characteristic of Mujranani’s approach to singing. The supporting singers clap to the downbeat of the dholak’s groovy Keherva tāl cross-rhythms. My camera struggles to station itself when, at the
end of a verse, the lead singer dressed in a bright orange sari (hereafter referred to as ‘Orange Sariwalli’), stands up and twirls three times. This movement triggers an urgency in me, and just in time to capture the event, the camera steadies itself.

Following the twirl, Mujranani stands up and performs a variyān on top of Orange Sariwalli’s head, and then gestures for the dholak player to stop. Sensing a shift of attention in the room, I retract the camera in my seat. I can feel all 75 faces turn in my direction, as Mujranani walks fearlessly to me with arms outstretched (see 2:10). Loudly, for everyone to hear, she declares “Hello! Kesai beta?” (‘How are you, beta?’ [a term of endearment meaning ‘son’ or ‘daughter’]). Stunned by her forward approach, but mostly because I am shy, I respond first in English and then Hindi: “Very good. How are you? Kesai Aap?” “Acche!” (‘Good’), she replies. Bored with my response, Mujranani moves back to the center of the room to direct the increasingly boisterous ensemble. It is here that she establishes my recognition as outsider/insider: The public greeting makes me known as different (being on the outside), but its brevity makes me not important enough to warrant any further interaction (being somewhat on the inside). My camera and I are allowed to disappear temporarily into the audience.

**Scene 1: Introducing the Characters, a Pehchān of Presence (2:10)**

Christopher Small proposes a view of music not as an object, but as a verb to express the act of taking part in a musical performance. In this case, all those involved in any way in a music performance are “musicking” (1987:50). As this “scene” shows, context (temporal, spatial, conceptual, and cultural) is a vital aspect of hijra musicking. The 19 communal- and concert-style songs performed therein enact the performative function of literally and figuratively
defining the physical and conceptual parameters of place, and the people within that make it for what it is.\textsuperscript{72}

Responsible for these processes are its most prominent musicians and dancers: (1) Mujranani, who assumes a central role in the event’s production, management, singing and dancing; (2) Orange Sariwalli, whose primary role is to sing communal badhai songs; (3) a hijra dressed in a black sari (hereafter referred to as ‘Black Sariwalli’), a professional singer whose primary role is to sing ghazal (North Indian vocal music), qawwali, filmi and other “concert-style” songs; and (4) a series of supporting singers, clappers, and audience members who regularly traverse the performance “stage.” Despite the presence of these jalsa place-makers, this scene is distinguished by the total absence of Sowmya—the “main character” and for whom the transformative architecture of the music and rituals are taking place.

Among the 75 guests in attendance, approximately 60 are hijras from a number of different Mumbai-based gharānās—including Lashkarwalle and Bhindibāzār. Three guests are jogtas whom I had met previous to the event; Ten are (sari and non-sari wearing) kothis, and five are pānthis.\textsuperscript{73} In addition to the male dholak player, two men had been hired to operate a professional-grade video camera (and flood lights) to document the celebration for the gharānā’s private records. The fact that I am not the only camera person in the room simultaneously excites

\textsuperscript{72} The distinctions made between “communal-style” and “concert-style” songs are based primarily upon the lead singer who is performing them as well as the genre of song. Communal-style songs were largely badhai, whereas “concert-style” songs were ghazal, qawwali, or filmi songs. “Communal-style” songs are, as a whole, were more effective in encouraging socializing that is disengaged from the music. Here, the roles between performer and audience can be made unclear, whereas the distinction between performer(s) and audience are more discernible in “concert-style” songs. The distinctions between “communal-” and “concert-style” songs are by no means rigid. Performers of them would, on occasion, exchange roles. For instance, in a ghazal performed by Black Sariwalli (see a description of Song 13 below), Orange Sariwalli was allowed to sing the final verse.

\textsuperscript{73} The participation of several jogtas suggests that cultural/linguistic boundaries separating transgender/gender queer communities are more permeable than generally believed. Moreover, the presence of hijras from other gharānās also suggests that there in fact may be strong spirit of cooperation between houses. That said, further research would be needed to address the specific relationships between houses and house members.
and unnerves me. Perhaps the diminutive size of my camera (and lack of other equipment) activated a feeling of masculine competition. Nevertheless, I eventually learn to exploit his presence by observing his physical positioning throughout the jalsa to gauge the importance of the events transpiring before us. To a certain extent, the second camera person becomes my guiding light through evening’s affairs.

I am positioned next to my jogta friends as the scene commences with a set of eight communal-style songs performed by alternating lead singers Mujranani and Orange Sariwalli. In this set of songs, the musicking that takes place creates a sensation of full immersion. This is largely facilitated by the dholak player, the dominant sonic force in the room—not to mention the only acoustic instrument present for the entire evening—which plays a significant role in defining the spatial and temporal dimensions of the music. A formal stage was not constructed for the event, but the sonic pull of the dholak is sufficient enough to form a nucleus of musical activity in its vicinity. With careful articulation and sheer power, the instrument establishes the rhythmic DNA for each song—usually Keherwa āl—around which the melodies circulate.

The reason why I consider this set of songs to be communal-style lies in the role of non-musical activity in the productive capacity of place-making processes. In the first set, the spatial and temporal lines demarcating songs from musically disengaged socialization are often transgressed. Songs blend into tangential socializing, and dancing blends into physical play. Partly responsible for this is Mujranani, who throughout the set, multitasks between her role as lead singer, dancer, ensemble director, event producer, event security, and nani (grandmother).

Her performance throughout this and other “scenes” during the falsa reminds me of the roles House mothers play in Paris Is Burning (1990). It is said that “to be the mother of the
house, you have to have the most power. Take a real family; It’s the mother that’s the hardest worker, and the mother that gets the most respect” (Willi Ninja, in Paris Is Burning, 30:19).

Throughout the scene, Mujranani delivers an effective performance of force through her ability to be in all places at once. She is alert and always listening around her. She is also intimidating when she needs to be. Her physical (and social) stature, strength, and general persona (which fluctuates regularly between hot and cold) seems to extract respect from all those around her. The non-sari wearing kothis (myself included) seem particularly enamored with her. As Pepper LaBeija, she conquers her space: “I came. I saw. I conquered. That’s a ball” (in Paris Is Burning 6:53).

Another place-making practice responsible for the transgression of song is the performance of varyān (literally ‘preference’ or ‘precedence’). Varyān generally functions as a performative gesture from “audience member” to “performer” in any given performance situation, that literally and figuratively gives precedence to whomever is either performing or being featured in a particular performance. The movement usually involves some element of financial capital—in this case ten rupee bills—that are encircled twice over the head (like a halo) or simply dropped onto the head of the preferred person (see Figure 25).  

Varyān can be represented as the transference of actual capital (rupees) into social and symbolic capital (and vice versa). Along this line of logic, if varyān is performed on someone during a performance, it quantitatively reflects and engenders izzat by (literally) paying dues to

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74 Varyān can be a lucrative practice, although I counted about Rs. 200 ($3.00) made during Song 3 alone. With over 60 songs performed in the jalsa, the potential for revenue is well regulated by Mujranani and Moneywalli. After each varyān (performed in the original manner), a number of designated hijras are also responsible for scooping up the bills left on the ground, and for giving the cash to Moneywalli, who places it in a metal tin for counting. For this reason, its practice carries great significance both on the symbolic as well as pragmatic levels.

75 Bourdieu suggests that gift giving signifies the conversion of actual capital into a leveraging advantages; Symbolic capital, in this case, is transferred to the gift giver in exchange for her gift (Bourdieu 1984:291).
the social status of the performer and/or the effectiveness of her performance, while simultaneously engendering respect in return for those performing the variyān. In theory, the higher the individual in the social hierarchy and/or the better the performance, the more respect is obtained. Indeed, in the first scene, “hard working” Mujranani is given the most “respect” out of them all. Nevertheless, because of the particular complex nature of musicking in this communal space, I prefer to think of variyān as a simple acknowledgement of presence, a performance of pehchān that conveys the status of someone’s existence as part of the place-making processes within a given context.

By the time Songs 3 and 4 arrive, variyān and other various tangential socializing completely takes over the entire the ballroom space. Musicking is still happening, but the songs themselves lose their affective appeal. Moreover, at this point, the focus of variyān activities encompasses more than just the dancer, but a number of performing and non-performing audience members (I counted 18 in all). In these routines, a number of non-performing participants “sponsor” other participants to have a blessing performed on them by the principal dancer (which is Mujranani in both cases). When this happens, a ten rupee bill is placed on the head of a “preferred” person. Then, while still dancing, Mujranani takes the ten rupee bill, encircles the money twice around the head, and delivers the cash to a metal bucket monitored by another hijra (whom I refer to as ‘Moneywalli’) whose special function throughout the jalsa is to

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As a whole, the longer the song, the more who participated and the more money was collected. Although, this was not always the case. In Mujranani’s instrumental dance Song 2—which lasted for only 1:30 seconds—18 hijras performed variyan. In her other longer performances, however, Mujranani only received two or three variyans. This suggests that izzat garnered through variyān may not only dependent on (1) the performer’s effectiveness in eliciting emotional response from the audience, (2) the performer’s social status and/or (3) the status of the “preferred” person, but also (4) the song’s placement within the larger architecture of events and therefore its ability to emotionally inspire a response from the jalsa participants (see Figure 25).
count and protect the money. It is through this formal acknowledgement of presence that variyān serves as a way of getting to know each of the jalsa participants.

At one point in Mujranani’s dance, variyān is performed on me, thereby implicating me and the camera as a character within the ontology of the scene. As if taking cue from this moment, the shots that follow become increasingly enmeshed within the socially affirming practices taking place around the music. My camera transgresses the threshold of the performance space, capturing singers and dancers in close-up and medium range, and doing so while in constant movement. It also frequently interacts with the jalsa participants. At one point—most likely feeling the pressure to perform for the sake of my research, if not for the sake of putting on a show in front of my filmmaking competitors—I “introduce” myself and the camera to everyone in the room. Starting at the lower-left corner of the ballroom (see the map of the ballroom), up along the edge of the ballroom and down the other side, the camera captures this grand introduction in one long sequence shot (see 7:04): “Hello” and “How are you” (in

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77 Bourdieu might say that the capital—or izzat—gained in this action was not reflected in actual capital earned, but in the amount of work that took place for the principal dancer to approach to preferred person, bless them, and then deliver the money to Moneywalli for collection all while dancing.
fully disclosed American-accented English), I say to everyone catching the camera’s gaze. Many
guests interact freely with me and/or bless me in the process (see 6:25).

Despite the presence this footage (theoretically) engenders, the footage reveals a
disconnect between what (appears to be) transpiring within at the jalsa and what is actually
captured on the two-dimensional screen. This schism is largely a product of the visual/audio
divide. For instance, long sequence shots capturing singers, dancers, and other participants in
their element are completely disengaged from the conversations (sometimes with myself)
captured in the audio. In other shots, the camera moves in to capture a beautiful close-up shot of
the singer or dancer, then without a moment’s notice, pans away to capture shots of the audience
while still in audio range of the performance. As part of a frustratingly unfocused methodology
of filmmaking that communicates confusion more than it signals intention, it is here that the jalsa
begins to feel like a chaotic affair, disembodied from the space within which it resides. In this
case, the space the viewer enters feels more like a “contradictory location that [is] open and
hybrid” (Reddy 1998:367) rather than a home “audiotopia” where “[we can enter into, move
around in, inhabit, be safe in, [and] learn from” (Pabón and Smalls 2014:1).

The destabilization of the visual/audio relationship on camera is a product of the sonic
disruptions of the music. At times, the music itself seems to battle the non-musical activities
taking place in the room. At times during the “introduction” sequence shot, singing from Orange
Sariwalli is completely supplanted by the din of conversation inside the room. I can attribute this
to (at least) three different dimensions of activity: (1) Shril banter in the mid to upper vocal
range that drowns the melodic contours of the songs; (2) Minor scuffles between chelas in the
lower vocal range that add sonic texture of the banter; and most importantly, (3) loud signature
hijra-style claps produced both by supporting vocalists as well as disengaged guests that bounce off the concrete walls like SuperBalls, clashing with the pulsing dholak, if not one’s own heart rhythms.

According to Gregg and Seigworth, “affect is found in the intensities that pass body to body [and] transpires within and across the subtlest of shuffling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed” (2010:2). In the ballroom, the transference of affective forces neither subtle nor go unnoticed. They are shocking to the ears (and eyes), and seem to be produced to elicit that response. At times, the shrill banter and claps, at least in their particular localities, seem to engender an affective force that can only be compared to “shade”—a body language and vocality that communicates insult. Much like the signature hijra clap in public contexts, it engenders a hija-vocality of imposing force.

While these forces appear to destabilize the musicking taking place, the combination of shrill banter, clapping, and music is embraced as part of the larger architecture of place-making. They are not governed or frowned upon (by Mujranani or Nita), but part of the governing structures that make the scene what it is. In context of the jalsa, they become a part of the larger progression of events—a loud introduction that communicates “We’re here!”—and as such, part of the (fragmented) whole of musical activities and whatever constitutes hija-pekchān-making. As Pepper LaBeija says, “I came. I saw. I conquered. That’s a ball” (in Paris Is Burning 6:53).
Scene 1 (Part 2): Concert-Style Performances (8:12)

Following the fragmentary first set, the boundaries between performer and audience take a more discernible form and the sonic dominance of the music begins to reassert itself with a second set of eleven concert-style songs performed by Black Sariwalli. Aside from the occasional variyān that take place over Black Sariwalli’s head, audience members largely sit and listen to her performance attentively. Mujranani is also less active, sitting or scooping up rupee bills from the ground—a job which she seems to enjoy perhaps because of its banality. Moreover, less attention is given towards my camera—a product of both the affective power of the music as well as a comfortability towards me. Either way, this allows for the presence of honesty without the pretension of putting on a “show.”

By the time the recording starts, everyone—including Mujranani—was already seated on the ballroom floor with Black Sariwalli standing in the center of the room facing them. An announcement from Black Sariwalli prompts an excited response from the audience: “Yeh hai ghazal” (This is a ghazal.,) she says. “Subhanallah,” exclaims Orange Sariwalli, followed by pattering on the dholak. Seated on the floor to Black Sariwalli’s right, I capture the entire performance at 90 degree angle from the performance “stage” (see Figure 26). The framing of the performance positions Black Sariwalli in the left third of the frame, with Mujranani, the dholak player, and several other audience members occupying the lower third. Orange Sariwalli is seated in the lower right-hand corner through much of the performance, her eyes looking upward as if paying respect to Black Sariwalli. The framing of the camera in context of the concert-style performance configures Black Sariwalli in this moment as the undisputed nucleus
of place-making activity. Moreover, the camera’s literal framing of the audience’s framing is what stages her authority in this scene’s musicking.

Born out of the Sufi poetic tradition, *ghazals* follow a structure of rhyming couplets that communicate intense love (towards someone, God, or someone who comes in the form of God) and the inevitable pain of intoxication stemming from this desire. When performed, they are also conventionally known to provoke feelings of intoxication, or *tarab*, within its listeners. Black Sariwalli’s performance succeeds in causing this affect in a *ghazal* that lyrically invokes messages of intoxication through the metaphor of alcohol consumption. Following her announcement of the song genre, she begins with a *sher* (short Hindi-Urdu poem):

\[
\begin{align*}
Ki hai Kanhaiya bewafa & \quad \text{That Kanhaiya (Krishna) is unfaithful} \\
Tujh mein & \quad \text{In you…} \\
Aur main marun tere liye & \quad \text{And, I would die for you}
\end{align*}
\]
Tujh mein meherbani nahin  
You have no benevolence

More jeena haram hai  
My life is haram

Na peelana haram  
Not drinking is haram

Aur peene ke bad hosh mein aana haram hai
So is coming to my senses after drinking

To peela ke mujhko kharaab kar doge
So you will spoil me by making me drink

Hamari zindago yunhi barbaad kar doge
Destroy my life just because

Peelana farz tha  
If making me drink was your duty

Kuch bhi peela diya hota  
You could have made me drink anything

Aur sharaab kam thi toh  
And if the liquor was not enough

Paani mila diya hota  
You could have mixed some water in

At the conclusion of each line, the dholak patters a short interlude, which in turn, elicit a number of favorable reactions from the audience: “Wah Wah” (affective sound) are the usual responses.

Then, at the conclusion of the sher, the drum plays a longer interlude after which Black Sariwalli begins the sthai: “Humne toh tumhe dil diya tha aajmaane ke liye,” (‘I had given you my heart to try it out’). With a downbeat on “ke,” the dholak establishes the ghazal in Keharwa tāl at a moderato (walking pace) tempo. The sthai is largely performed in a call and response fashion—something that affectively draws the audience into performance making. Following Black

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Sariwalli’s first “call,” the audience “responds” with: “Aajmaane ke liye, humne toh tumhe dil diya” (same meaning, but with the phrasing reversed). Then, after yet another recitation of the sthai, the dholak plays a rhythmic refrain. With her microphone to the side, Black Sariwalli concentrates all her energy on the thrust of her hips to the side, which provokes an excited response from the audience. Each thrust elicits a louder clap from the audience than the one before it.

Feeling the energy build in the room, I pan to the right to capture a row of hijra spectators dutifully clapping to the down beat. A quick pan back to the left and I find Mujranani rising from her seated position and moving toward Black Sariwalli as she prepares to sing the sthai. At the start of the sthai, she drops three ten rupee bills over Black Sariwalli’s head, and Black Sariwalli begins to recite another sher, followed by another verse:

- **Jaana hai toh jaayiye** If you want to go, leave
- **Mud ke humein na dekhna** Don’t turn back, look at me
- **Khoj lungi dusra** I will find someone else
- **Dil lagane mein ke liye** to give my heart to

The alternation of verse, sthai, and rhythmic-dance refrain continues for another four cycles, contributing to a rise of intensity. This, in combination with the call and response structure of the sthai, gradually deconstructs Black Sariwalli’s performance “stage.” At the start of the third verse, Mujranani steps into Black Sariwalli’s space to dance, a move that, following the fourth verse, inspires Orange Sariwalli to take over the microphone. This is welcomed by Black Sariwalli who uses the opportunity to step aside and rest. Mujranani herself appears to enjoy the performance and continues to dance along with a number of her chelas. Thus, whereas in the first
set, the deconstruction of the stage subverts music-making, in the second set, it signals the effectiveness of music in the affect of intoxication.

Here, we return to our discussion of space. Queer space is described by Lefebvre as possessing a certain transparency that encourages forth and/or “unleashes desire […] to lay claim to an apparently clear field” (1992:97, also see McCune 2007:5). The affective performance of the ghazal certainly unleash desire to the point where the performance “stage” is rendered unrecognizable. Nevertheless, these desire do more than simply lay claim to—or colonize—the ballroom space/performance stage. In this case, they actively (re)constitute an architecture of acoustically centralized place-making (from a socially-organized ‘stage’ to a song and dance party).

This nuance can be best understood in reference to the difference between space and place. On the one hand, space “indicates a modern form of measuring and mapping,” a temporary space that one can enter for a finite period of time (Neuman 2004:208). The emphasis in this regard is placed on physical or temporal boundaries separating one demarcated space from another. For a musician, this may consist of the music stage or platform made separate from an audience. “Place,” on the other hand, is defined as “a particular area […] locality, region” or “an open space” (Agnes 1999:1099; quoted in Roy 2016:109). In Bourdieusian terms, place refers to the “locus upon which the dialectic between external and internal,” objectivity and subjectivity, is based (1977:12). Defined by the ways in which humans, as agents, relate to their surroundings, place is also made synonymous to practice—that which “helps to constitute structure or structuring properties” (ibid.). In this case, place serves the boundless locus defined by the social
activities that constitute it; Without activity of any kind, there would be no conception of place (and vice versa).

This idea resonates with Liv Lande, who, in espousing Japanese philosopher Kitarō Nishida’s concept of basho, defines place as that “which can be realized through practice or artistic experience [and where] human beings can emancipate themselves from bonds and attain freedom and ‘enlightenment’” (2007:24; also see Akizuki 1996; Kawanami 1997; Kobayashi 1991; Nishida 2012; Saeki 1999). Basho transforms space into a lived locale as defined by the whole picture of events that take place within it, and which also has the ability to affect processes that take place within it (in Roy 2016:109).

Part of what facilitates the deconstruction of the stage (as demarcated space) and the making of place is Black Sariwalli’s performance and the tarab she is able to impart to her audiences. This more closely relates to Dard Neuman’s understanding of jagah (‘place’ in Urdu), which refers to the architecture of musical creativity within the body wherein the “craft of practice draws on the search for an exploration of rāg-spaces as well as the aesthetic work of building on and around them” (2004:207). Here, Neuman highlights the real and obvious link between place, as it is occupied physically or in the mind, and practice, as a place-making process occurring outside of the mind. The link is what facilitates the existence of both. In this sense, jagah constitutes the environment wherein vocality (or instrumentality), its structuring properties, and the artistic/spiritualistic experiences of the performer are manifested and imparted musically to audience members. Jagah is also constituted by the by the affective responses of the audience, which come in the form of signature-style clapping, singing, and expressions of intoxication: “Subhanallah!” Indeed, the more the audience responds, the more the “craft of
practice draws on the search for the exploration of rāg-spaces” in the constitution of jagah. The
the performer feels and the more she gives.

It may be apt, therefore, to consider affective musicking as that which does more than
simply fill a transparent space per se, but that constitutes a nucleus of musical place-making
originating from the performing bodies of all its participants.

**Scene 2: Dance and an Emergence of Sexuality (19:12)**

According to Kai Fikentscher, “dance not only manifests the music as sounded reality […] it also
connects the musical sound to the dimension of musical experience or sensation on the part of
those involved in the performance, including those participants described as performers,
musicians, dancers, or audiences” (1996:107). As such, I do not view this scene as distinct or
separate from the musicking in Scene 1, but as an extension of it. Scene 2 can be defined by a
number of parameters, including communal dance to recorded Bollywood songs, as well as an
increase in participation from Nita and (the veiled) Sowmya, marked by her first—albeit
inconspicuous—appearance. In this scene, we also continue to see the gradual deconstruction of
the boundaries between performer, audience, and filmmaker through communal- and concert-
style dance.78

The scene begins with the song “Munni Badnam Hui” (‘Munni was Ruined [Because of
You]’) from the film *Dabbang* (‘Fearless’ 2010). Blasted front a set of two speakers, the music
instantly transforms the ballroom into a dance club filled to the brim with dancing *hijras*–cum–
Malaika Arora Khan (the female dancer in this particular number). If queer world-making is an

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78 The parameters defining communal- and concert-style dance are based on those in Scene 1. The only distinction
here is the dance to recorded, as opposed to live music.
act of appropriating the modern world for the continual (postmodern) act of self-construction (see Betsky 1997:193), then the use of recorded music in a night club-like space corroborates the queerness of this particular aspect of *hijra* world-making.

Incidentally, so does the cinematography. The cinematography reflects and engenders a general sense of full immersion and, dare I say, confusion. Unfocused on any particular performance activity, the camera meanders throughout the crowd, capturing the occasional interaction between myself and a *hijra* participant. At one point, the second camera person enters the frame poised on the opposite side of the room with his professional grade camera high above his head to capture the crowd. He appears to be fixed not only on *hijra* subjects but also on myself. Initially annoyed by his gaze, and viewing him with some contempt, I come to accept his presence. Something about the thought of Salman Khan thrusting his torso to “*Munni Badnam Hui*” seems to inspire me to play into his gaze.

*When the other cameraman entered my frame, I saw him shift his gaze towards mine. We were like two lionesses from two different prides. Although I felt diminutive—most likely accompanying a hint of camera-envy—at that instant, I also felt that he had effectively validated my role in the jalsa. I was no longer the (transparently) white observer: I became the American photowalla.* (Field notes October 21, 2010)

Incidentally, the designation of “*photowalla,*” that I (imagined myself of having) received was literally given to me in Scene 3.
At a moment’s notice “Munni Badnam Hui” is turned off by the DJ, and I could hear Mujranani yelling unintelligible instructions. “Sowmya has come now. Did you see her?” Yogesh explains to me. I dart through the crowd and to the other end of the room, eventually landing a shot of Sowmya sitting in the far corner against the wall, completely enshrouded in a thick, and cotton blanket. She is chatting with someone through the garments. Apprehensive about startling her, and (more importantly) fearing reproach from Mujranani—I recoil and jet off to the other side of the room. For reasons unknown to me, the camera is switched off.

When the camera is switched back on, general order was already reestablished, with all of the evening’s guests sitting in their original positions along the walls. I make my way to the back of the room while the DJ shuffles through some of his music obnoxiously for everyone to hear. Nita approaches the camera dressed in new green sari and we begin a conversation about saris. Two or three chelas can be seen in the background dancing to the recently chosen Marathi song “Mi Mosambi Mi Narangi” (‘I am Moonshine’) from the film Mausambi Narangi (Moonshine, 1981) on the dance floor next to Mujranani and in front of the other cameraman. A hijra dressed in maroon joins the group of dancers, but Mujranani quickly takes hold of her and pushes her back to the side lines to sit with the others, effectively saying “This stage is not meant for sharing.”

In queer ballroom contexts, Mujranani’s forceful gesture towards the hijra dressed in maroon may well be interpreted as “shade.” According to Dorian Corey, shade is ‘I don’t tell you you’re ugly, but I don’t have to tell you because you know you’re ugly’” (Paris Is Burning, 35:34). A body gesture that communicates a “higher form of reading”—a verbal insult that picks apart someone’s physical personal—shade is meant to establish rules of dominance by
“Knock[ing] ‘em out if you can. Get[ing] ‘em any way. Hit[ing] ‘em below the belt […]” (ibid., 33:24). In the ballroom culture depicted in Paris Is Burning, multiple “gurus” in one space may compete against each other in dance and modeling competitions. In these competitions, contestants are reduced to size and judged exclusively on their ability to perform, and act that often leads to power squabbling, especially when a dominant guru is “off her game.” Such competitions, in this particular jalsa, do not exist in the formal sense. Talent is not used in this instance to determine a winner. Therefore, while a “shady” act nonetheless, Mujranani’s gesture towards the hijra in maroon may be less an example of “shade” and more a simple statement of the incontestable truth of Mujranani’s authority. This is something the hijra in maroon accepts with grace. Following the encounter with Mujranani, she sits back in her spot along the ballroom wall.

After a couple seconds, the camera moves with the crowd as it gathers around Sowmya sitting on a small mattress in the back of the room (see 24:00). She is veiled with the cotton blanket, but only as far as her eye line; A more transparent veil covers the rest of her face. Following this revelation, Nita enters the frame and begins to perform variyān on Sowmya. In doing so, she causes a chain reaction in the room. As if in competition with each other, ten more hijras jump in to shower Sowmya with money. The second camera person swoops in to capture the event marking the first formal acknowledgement of Sowmya’s presence at the jalsa (see 24:55).

Almost as if to feed into the newfound spirit of variyān, a Marathi song called “Mala Jau Dya na Gharī” (‘Let Me Go Home’) from the film Natrang (Artist, 2010), begins to play (see Song 25). Incidentally, the song garners additional significance later in the evening—it is the
same song that Sowmya dances to as part of her formal unveiling (see Scene 7: Part 2). After the song’s instrumental interlude, the room is suddenly jolted by a dose of caffeine. More hijras and Yellow Kothi pour onto the dance floor in Sowmya’s general vicinity, and a nucleus of dancing, variyān, and vigorous place-making begin to open up to the entire room.

Just as the song is about the end, Mujranani breaks up the dance party and instructs everyone to sit down. Upon seeing this, the camera moves to the edge of the ballroom, and then pans back to its original placement, only to find Sowmya missing.

An inconspicuous entrance begat an inconspicuous exit. (October 21, 2010)

The camera is switched off.

When I switch the camera back on, Yellow Kothi is in the middle of a solo dance performance. He is dancing into the second camera person’s camera, veiled with a transparent, red and green dupatta, to the song “Tu Kya Jaane O Bewafa,” (‘What Do You Know, Unfaithful One?’) from the film Haath ki Safai. (Skill of Hand, 1974). Yellow Kothi plays to the camera’s expectations; The camera person follows him attentively and even kneels on the floor at one point to capture Yellow Kothi’s sexualized movements on the floor. This move signals a favorable response from the hijra audience (see 27:46):

Yellow Kothi seemed to relish his “same-but-different” status. He seemed to feed off of the attention others gave him as a femme dressed in male clothing yet who
was nonetheless capable of attracting (straight) men. (Field notes, October 21, 2010)

In her 2013 publication, Anna Morcom’s interpretation of staged kothi “orchestra” dance, describes the performance of male effeminacy as a form of “female impersonation.” In it, she suggests that effeminate male dancers (kothis) “are not just performing as females but identify in general as females (being the passive sexual partners of real men)” (2013:7). The statement itself raises a number of issues, among which include the implication that gender identity is constituted by sexuality, the subjective (and personal) experience of gender can be generalized, and male effeminacy can be made analogous to femaleness or womanhood.

While Yellow Kothi’s particular gestures towards the (presumed heterosexual) cameraman while dancing the female part in a sexualized rendition of “Tu Kya Jaane O Bewafa” might corroborate this theory in normative situations, the context within which this particular performance is taking place queers it. Whereas the notion of kothi as “female impersonator” is dependent on the primacy of (one’s belief in) heteronormativity in a performance taking place in a primarily heteronormative context, a dancing kothi in a hijra jalsa raises important questions. Namely, if Yellow Kothi identifies as female, then why is he dressed as a male, dancing suggestively in a room full of sari-wearing hijras?

Moments later, a pānthi clears the dance floor to make room for Mujranani to perform a solo dance to “Salaam-E-Ishq Meri Jaan Zara Kabool Karlo” (‘My Dear, Accept This Greeting of Love’) from the film Muqaddar ka Sikander (Conqueror of Destiny, 1978). Despite the presence of the second camera, Mujranani dances into my camera—something that I welcome
with a smiling face. Her dance inspires variyān from a number of chelas, Yellow Kothi included. At one point, kneeling before the dancing guru, Yellow Kothi holds a wad of ten rupee bills in his hand and then drags himself to Mujranani. Still on the floor, Yellow Kothi places a ten rupee bill between his teeth, then Mujranani kneels on the floor and accepts it using her teeth (See Figure 27; and 33:38).

This subversive form of variyān destabilizes conventions upon which heteronormative rules of attraction and norms of sexual dominance (active versus passive roles) are based. Moreover, the implication of (homo)sexually charged non-staged dance between a kothi and hijra guru in a distinctly hijra context complicates the notion of gender identity as that which is conceived of or understood in relation to one’s sexuality being “passive partners of real men.” If Yellow Kothi’s gender is indeed determined by his attraction to men, then why is he dressed in male clothing and dancing suggestively with a hijra in front of other hijras and pānthis who may be more suitable sexually?

![Figure 27: Scenes of Mujranani and Yellow Kothi dancing; stills from video footage captured by the author, September 20, 2010](image)

There is a very real possibility that the dance was staged for the camera. On several occasions, both Yellow Kothi and Mujranani dance directly into my camera. Is their sexually
charged dance meant to excite the camera person (myself)? Even if it is, my identity nonetheless complicates matters. I do not identify as a heterosexual male, not do I care to express myself as particularly masculine. Moreover, my fluid identity is known to most of the *hijras* in the room. At one point (see Scene 3), I am even named as Sowmya’s “photo chela.” Why, then, would a *kothi* be dancing suggestively to me, another *kothi*? Do I attract him? Even if I do, could he still call himself a *kothi* being an imagined “passive partner” of another *kothi*?

What I suggest these sexual displays demonstrate above all is the private, conceptually elusive, and context-bound nature of gender. The playfulness of Yellow Kothi’s performance, the ease with which he slips into and out of his performances, and the way he elicits the participation of Mujranani, a dominant *hijra guru*, draws attention to the sometimes arbitrary, frisky, and lighthearted construction of gender (as an idea) as a form of play that everyone, regardless of their gendered categories or social positioning, participates in. Yellow Kothi is neither “female impersonating” nor “identifying as female,” but rather, *queering* (the normative relationship between) gender and sexuality through a consciously subversive, sexualized performance with a fully-dressed, *sari*-wearing *hijra guru*. In doing so, he is also highlighting his materiality—his body and the space it inhabited—as truth unfettered by prescriptive labels and the assumptions that accompany them.

Speaking in reference to queer night club dance, Kai Fikentscher notes that dance itself “has the potential for liberating the self (mind/body) from dominant modes of thinking and behavior. Dancing may have an educational function, impacting the way one thinks about oneself as a gendered human being, and/or about others who may belong to a different ethnic group, and/or may express a different sexual orientation” (1996:121-122). Just as dance has the capacity to
reflect or amplify “the social conditioning of one’s gender” it may also question or subvert these constructions playfully (1996:122). Fikentscher relates these notions to the idea of “cryptoheterosexuality,” or “the art of pretending to be what you aren’t because no one can come up with a satisfactory definition of what are are. It is also the art of inversion—of flipping the meanings of things inside out, the better to understand what words and music truly signify” (Cooper 1994:58-59). At the jalsa, dance is more than a momentary escape from the mundane, normative aspects of life, but an opportunity to constitute through movement one’s (changing and transformative) self. In this case, it provides an opportunity for Yellow Kothi and Mujranani to shed the words that their identities may signify in order to playfully explore the potentials of their own physicality. (This, incidentally, is an idea that applies in a much more visceral way to the nirvāṇa hijra for whom dance marks the final stage of her re-entry into the community.)

The camera is part of this transformative experience. It actively constitutes the dance floor (by providing a stage for performance) and in doing so, effectively draws forth these private, conceptually-elusive, and context-bound processes into the public sphere. If talent is considered “the vestige of endowed promise to success” (Harbert 2010:73), then the camera encourages an especially provocative performance from the dancer by facilitating the creation of an imagined audience—against which an actual one exists—and a formal recognition, or pehchān, of their performances “for the memory books.” But, the camera does more than provide a stage, it effectively inscribes pehchān onto the bodies of the dancing kothi and hijra by re-assigning meaning (or making permanent) an otherwise meaningless (or temporal) event. As Trunh T. Minh-ha points out “[a] subject who points to him or herself as subject-in-process […]
is bound to upset one’s sense of identity” (1990:92). Because of the frequency with which they
dance into the camera, Mujranani and Yellow Kothi implicate their identities in their movements
and elicit the participation of the camera in the structuring and signification of their dance-
identity narratives. The resulting footage becomes less a narrative of truth about their own
identities/subjective positioning, and more about the truths that can be said about the relationship
between the dancers and the filmmaker/camera/audience they are drawing in.

**Behind the Scenes: Preparing the Deity (36:01)**

In stark contrast to the events taking place in Scene 2, behind the scenes of this evening’s
celebrations is a series of *puja* (prayer) preparations held in an adjacent room in the hotel. This
event is held discreetly, while most of the event’s participants are still dancing in the ballroom. It
is also exclusive, in that the event is held in secret. Throughout the preparations, Mujranani
directs two of her *chelas* as they construct the *Bahuchara ji* alter. There were approximately six
*hijras* in all, including Mujranani and myself taking part in these affairs. (See Figure 2 for a
glimpse at the *Bachurata Mata* deity; also see the Appendix for a description of the event
details).

**Scene 3: Reflexivity in *Tel Bān* and *Mangalaya Dharanam* (40:27)**

After the alter is constructed, Sowmya is instructed into the bedroom located in the rear of the
hotel room, and told to sit on a chair facing the bed. About five to six *hijras* encircle her and
begin to apply *haldi* (turmeric paste) on her body, much like a bride during the *tel bān* (bath)
ritual, but with vigor. Naturally, this does not go on without a hitch. After nearly one minute,
more than 15 hijras enter the small bedroom and decide to get in on the action. A fight breaks out between two of them (off frame) because, allegedly, one of them “purposefully got haldi on [her] sari.” This attracts the attention of Mujranani, who until then was sitting in the shrine room. She scolds them first from afar, and then approaches the doorframe to instruct everyone aside from Sowmya’s chelas and immediate circle of friends to leave the room.

No one in the room survives the haldi attack. The bed sheets, walls, floor, my camera, and even my face are left with yellow haldi marks. (In this case, the strength of the images greatly outweigh any written description of the room.) After a few moments, Nita pops her head in the room and exclaims in Hindi, “Haldi band kar do. Bahut hogya. Hijre hijre se raho, aurat mat bano!” (‘Stop doing the haldi. It is too much. Behave like hijras, and not like women!’). Through this declaration, Nita engenders a notion of respectability by situating hijra against normative acts of womanhood, or more precisely, bride-hood.

After the troublemakers leave, the second cameraman walks into the room and begins to film. Upon seeing the second camera person, Sowmya immediately pulls everyone (or anyone) she can within arm’s reach into his camera frame to “introduce” them formally. “This is one of my oldest best friends, she taught me how to do make up. Vidya darling! She’s a famous Lavani dancer,” she explains while embracing her. Then, she reached towards me, and effectively introduces me as her “photo chela.” She pinches me, laughs, and then embraces others. It is at this moment that my role in the ceremony is explicitly given a name. Pointing my camera in the direction of myself while posing with Sowmya and four of her chelas, I take a grand “selfie.”

After this, Sowmya is escorted into the bathroom and begins to wash the haldi off of her skin. I turn the camera off for this. When I switch the camera back on, Sowmya is escorted into
the room with the shrine, fully veiled, and made to sit on the floor with her back to the idol.

Mujranani instructs the others to gently adorn Sowmya with jewelry in a Mangalya Dharanam (literally ‘wearing the auspicious’) ceremony. Glimpses of Sowmya’s face can be seen when someone lifts her veil to place a necklace around her neck, or earrings on her ears. This act inspires someone to begin sing the Bollywood song “Bano Teri Akhiyaan Surmi Daani” (‘Oh Bride, Your Eyes Are Lined with Kaajal’) from the film Dushmani: A Violent Love Story (Enemy, 1995). The song comes from a film that is believed to contain lesbian undertones. If queer appropriates and then subverts normative ritual and practices to create spaces of inclusion, it is here where hijras are re-appropriating queer symbolism and iconography to create “fixed, tangible, and concretized spaces” of inclusion by literally inscribing them on the body of the “bridal” hijra (Soja 1989, in Bailey 2013:3). This enacts the postmodern ideals of challenging, undoing, and transforming exclusionary realities, but within the “normalizing” domain of ritual.

Once fully adorned, Sowmya is re-veiled and then instructed to stand. Mujranani and her chela tie a mangalsutra around Sowmya’s neck, and dhagan around her wrists. The mangalsutra is an auspicious thread tied around a bride’s neck before her wedding ceremony, while dhagans are auspicious threads tied at the hands of priests in temples or in religious contexts. It is through these processes that (Hindu) wedding iconography and ritual become increasingly more prominent in the larger architecture of the jalsa.

Once the mangalsutra is tied, a number of others begin to pour into the small space and start taking pictures. The high beam light of the second camera suddenly floods the room, which causes me momentarily blindness. “Move, move! She is coming through,” I hear Mujranani yell. Startled, I stand up and move over to the outside balcony. Mujranani guides Sowmya through the
balcony and into the ballroom while everyone remains seated in their original spots along the wall. I follow directly behind them, next to Moneywalli as she begins to sing and clap:

_Bhani re humare betiya_

*dulhan bani,*  
Our daughter has become a bride,

_Bhani re humare betiya_

*dulhan bani*  
Our daughter has become a bride

Before she is able to finish the second line, Mujranani yells for her to stop—another incontestable display of authority. Nita takes Sowmya by the hand and leads her to the center of the room—the same location as the acoustic music performances in Scene 1—where a blanket with pillows are arranged neatly. This marks the transition into the next stage of affairs.

**Scene 4: Gift Giving and Naming (43:00)**

In Scene 4, the lines between song and ritual begin to blur. Songs become more symbolic, rituals are performed more like songs, and in a more seamless blend of one song to another, from ritual to song, and vice versa. Whereas in previous scenes, Sowmya and Nita were largely on the sidelines, this scene is marked by their increased participation, as well as the formal acknowledgement of their participation from nearly every single *hijra* in the room accompanying the process of gift giving.

The dispersal of gifts is common to both Hindu and Muslim weddings in India. In *hijra* culture, it is a highly formal affair that is replete with symbolism. van Gennep explains the “exchange of gifts” as emblematic of an individual’s “rite of incorporation,” signifying her membership with a social group, and/or in the actual uniting two or more groups through an
exchange of capital. Some rites of incorporation “are both individual and collective; the
acceptance of a gift places a constraint not only upon the individual who accepts it but also upon
the groups to which he belongs” (1960:132-33). To refuse a gift, van Gennep notes, “is a sign
that the proposed union is not accepted; and […] the return of a gift is a sign that the
arrangements have been dissolved” (1960:132). Thus, the symbolic significance of the gift lies
not only in the gift object itself, but in the counter gift, what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic
capital, or the “acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and
honorability” (Bourdieu 1984:291). Building upon Marcel Mauss’s structuralist theory of
reciprocal exchange (see Mauss 1924), Bourdieu sees the act of gift giving as an exchange of
that which is given to the gift giver in exchange for her gift. In this case, the gift giving itself
signifies the conversion of actual capital into a leveraging advantages.

Like variyān, gift giving—a symbolic capital translated into actual capital—also
functions like a blessing. In the jalsa, the materiality of these blessings include sarīs, jewelry,
gold, silver, pearls, and solah shringars (gift boxes filled with 16 kinds of beauty products).
These gifts are also accompanied by actual money, which usually amount to anywhere from 51
to 1001 rupees. (Adding one rupee at the end of any whole amount divisible by ten is a
customary Indian tradition that signifies a blessing.) In contrast to variyān, which is performed
with a more discrete acknowledgement of capital amount, a pehchān of presence in gift giving
accompanied a formal declaration (on the microphone) of the gifts and amount of money given
by the guests. The declaration provides all contributors an understanding of their quantitative
izzat, and more importantly, allows Mujranani to assess the quantity of capital earned, as well as
the izzat to grant her guests.
For what seemed like an eternity, the room was completely silent. (October 21, 2010)

The entire 15-minute long affair is laborious, as there are about 44 guests accompanied by 44 announcements made about their gifts. Seated on a blanked in the center of the ballroom are Nita and (the still veiled) Sowmya. Moneywalli is sitting about three feet away from them next to the metal container filled with money, and Orange Sariwalli and Mujranani are standing in front of them. The entirety of the ritual involves the following sequence of events: A gift and some money is handed to Orange Sariwalli or Mujranani. If the gift is a sari, it is placed on the head of Nita and/or Sowmya. If the gift is money or jewelry, it is dropped directly into Nita’s lap (using her sari to catch the gifts). At an opportune moment, Nita hands the money and other gifts over to Moneywalli, who in turn, counts the money, stacks the fabric, and organizes the jewelry into bundles. Music is absent throughout the entirety of this process, most likely to encourage orderly participation from everyone in the room: “Don’t just give it like that! Say your name and your guru’s name,” Mujranani exclaims to one hijra.

The following list is the sequence of announcements delivered by Orange Sariwalli in the order in which they are given:

1. *Sari* and 101 rupees from Chandewalle *ke* Sauvni
2. 201 rupees from Mujranani
3. *Sari* and 101 rupees from Sandyama’s *chela* Chaknewani
4. *Sari* and 101 rupees from Sandyama’s *chela* (unnamed)
5. *Solah shringar* (box of 16 kinds of beauty products) from Sandyama’s *chela* (unnamed)
6. Sari and 101 rupees from Lashkarwalle house Nita’s chela (unnamed)

7. Sari and 101 rupees from Bhindibazaar house chela Pavni

8. Sari and 101 rupees from Zagappa, the Jogta

9. Sari and 101 rupees from Mujranani’s chela (unnamed)

10. 101 rupees from Mujranani’s chela (unnamed)

11. Sari and 101 rupees from Mujranani’s chela (unnamed)

12. Sari and 101 rupees from Madhuri’s chela (unnamed)

13. Sari and 101 rupees from Bhindibazar house chela Lalika

14. Sari and 101 rupees from Bhindima’s chela Sonika

15. Sari and 101 rupees from Rekha (guru unnamed)

16. Sari and 201 rupees from Nita’s chela Veena

17. 101 rupees from Nita’s chela (unnamed)

18. Sari and 101 rupees from Nita’s chela (unnamed)

19. Sari and 101 rupees from Nita’s chela (unnamed)

20. Sari and 101 rupees from Lashkarwalla house Chatniwani’s chela Salma

21. Sari and 201 rupees from Nita’s chela Aparna

22. Gold rings and 101 rupees from Nita’s chela Sharma

23. Sari from Laxmi’s chela Tulsi

24. Sari from Nita’s chela Banchpani

25. 101 rupees from Sagappa’s chela Sindhi

26. Sari and 101 rupees from Awanti’s chela (unnamed)

27. Sari and 101 rupees from Awanti’s chela (unnamed)
28. Sari and 101 rupees from Nita’s chela Soni
29. Sari and 101 rupees from Bhilu’s chela (unnamed)
30. 105 rupees from Nita’s chela (unnamed)
31. Ring from Bhilu’s chela (unnamed)
32. Sari and 101 rupees from Laxmi’s chela Vidyasagar
33. Five pearls and 101 rupees from Sharma’s chela Archanna
34. Ring from Priya’s chela (unnamed)
35. Ring from Nita’s chela (unnamed)
36. Silver plate and 501 rupees from Bhagwan’s chela Anisha
37. Sari and 101 rupees from Lashkarwalla house Muskaan’s chela (unnamed)
38. Sari and 101 rupees from Nita’s chela (unnamed)
39. Ring and 101 rupees from Laxmi’s chela (unnamed)
40. 101 rupees from Sonika’s chela Mamta
41. 101 rupees from Lashkarwalla house Mansi’s chela (unnamed)
42. 101 rupees from Ashram’s chela (unnamed)
43. 101 rupees from Nita’s chela (unnamed)
44. 101 rupees from Raveena’s chela (unnamed)

“Who else is there? Come along!” Orange Sariwalli exclaims. “40 days Nita ka chela has waited for this muhurata!” The room begins to clap loudly and cheer following this announcement, and Mujranani begins to sing an auspicious ritual song. She moves over to Sowmya and performs variyān over her head, and Orange Sariwalli declares for people belonging to the same house to
do the same. Eleven of Nita’s *chelas* make their way through this procession with ten *rupee* bills as Mujranani and Orange *Sariwalli* sing:

\[ \text{Varīyān varīyān varīyān re,} \]
\[ \text{Hire bhi varun panne bhi varun,} \quad \text{Diamonds and rubies varun,} \]
\[ \text{Varīyān varīyān varīyān re,} \]
\[ \text{Hire bhi varun panne bhi varun,} \quad \text{Diamonds and rubies varun,} \]
\[ \text{Varīyān varīyān varīyān re,} \]
\[ \text{Sona bhi varun chandhi bhi varun} \quad \text{Silver and gold varun} \]

While *varīyān* is taking place, Mujranani calls for the *dholak* player and Black *Sariwalli* to return to the center of the room. I can see Black *Sariwalli* put on her *ghungroo* s at the edge of the frame. Once *varīyān* is completely finished, Moneywalli announces that eleven thousand *rupees* were collected. Immediately following this, the *dholak* player begins an instrumental interlude and Black *Sariwalli* starts singing. This seamless transition leads to the start of Scene 5.

**Scene 5: *Badhai* Song, Identity Deconstruction, and Building Intensity (45:30)**

Scene 5 transforms the overall tone of the *jalsa* from a series of marriage-based rituals to a more loosely-structured, yet intense social affair. Scene 5 involves the fluid interaction of performers, accompanists, and audience members in communal musicking in a way that simultaneously challenges the stability of social boundaries, norms, and consequently, senses of selfhood. As a whole, the evening’s late hour combined with the gradual increase of ritualistic symbolism and music and dance, contributes towards a feeling of otherworldliness.
The sensation of participating in this scene reminds me of McCune’s experience at a queer night club, where vibrant, heightened action in space resulted in his over-stimulation and ultimate withdrawal from himself (see McCune 2008:13). In the jalsa, the intensity of affairs forces me to attend to the actual limits of what my body can physically absorb. The scene causes me to engage a heightened state of self-reflexivity, to assess the boundaries of my physical reality, scrutinize my emotional state of being, and potentially readjust my placement in everything.79

To a certain extent, the events taking place resembles Turner’s notion of liminality. Turner describes the “liminal period” as a “time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action [which] can be seen as a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs” (Turner 1969:167). Liminality in this sense is experienced via the deconstruction of social boundaries and (previously held) identity markers not by the withdrawal from context, but by the withdrawal from hij-normative modes of social action, acceptance, and respectability. For instance, it is within this period that we see the jogta begin to partake in hijra badhai songs and dance; Kothis dance more like hijras; where Mujranani can be seen interacting not merely as event administrator or guru, but as a participant partaking in the fun and merriment of music and dance; and where Nita and even Sowmya partake in the scene’s musicking. While participants may not necessarily be actively “scrutinizing” their cultural values through reflexive critique, Scene 5 nonetheless provides the context for these values to be challenged. As far as I am concerned:

79 This is a process that reflexive documentaries seek to achieve for their audiences. Accordingly to Nichols, these films produce a “heightened form of consciousness” in their mission to readjust “the assumptions and expectations of its audience” (2001:128). In contrast to reflexive filmmaking, there is no “mission” or agenda here, other than those of visceral immersion.
I felt the overwhelming urge to put the camera down and dance with everyone. It was as though there were two conflicting sides of me: the “photowalla” hell bent on capturing every moment of the celebration, and the “chela” interested in dancing for his freedom along with everyone else. This was the first time in the celebration where I didn’t feel scrutinized. My “otherness” didn’t really matter. (No longer was I “photochela.”) Social boundaries of all sorts were crossed here because identity itself didn’t matter. The rhetoric didn’t exist. This was the part of the evening that was most challenging for me, I think. (October 21, 2010)

In this scene, Mujranani is still at the heart of everything, managing matters from a both distance and then stepping in when needed. But, as a whole, she seems neither concerned about governing the boundaries of song and dance, nor administrating who takes part in them. By the time Song 35 arrives, Nita can be seen dancing in the middle of the room. During her dance, Sowmya—still fully veiled—stands from her position on the floor and performs variyān on her. This marks the first moment where she is seen participating in the ballroom in a capacity other than sitting.

Following this, three more communal songs are performed with Mujranani as the lead singer and Nita as dancer. At one point, Mujranani starts to sing a communal-style, but quickly looses interest in the song. Noticing this, Black Sariwalli enters the frame to take the microphone away from Mujranani. The way this plays out resembles a playful rendition of what normally takes place in a Near East jalsah. In the jalsah:

Participants listen attentively and appear totally immersed in the process. Furthermore, the performers are able to determine or negotiate the times appropriate for them to perform and to choose repertoires they feel inspired or
prepared to perform with relatively little interruption from the listeners […]. The instrumentalists may take turns in playing, or may perform together, for example when accompanying a singer. (Racy 2004:52)

In this scene, participants appear totally immersed in the process, but the process is much larger than the music itself. Mujranani’s abrupt departure from the song, and Black Sariwalli’s quick recovery, signifies a concern for the larger texture of place-making and architecture of the jalsa, rather than for the performance of the music itself (for music’s sake).

Black Sariwalli continues with a sher recitation, which leads to another ghazal. At one point, a close-up shot during this performance reveals a transparently-veiled Sowmya smiling; Her bright white teeth shine through the thin, green fabric, thereby marking the first instance where Sowmya’s face can be seen (partially or otherwise) in the context of the ballroom. Then, after Black Sariwalli’s affective performance, Mujranani takes the stage again to reengage the audience in musical merriment. She instructs Orange Sariwalli to sing a rendition of “Asha Natoru” (‘Don’t Break My Hopes’; Song 42), while she stands attentively, clapping and singing along.

This is arguably the most “communal” songs of the night, featuring a mélange of activity, including Mujranani’s signature multitasking efforts and hijra skirting the performer/audience divide as singers, dancers, clappers, and audience members. During this song, virtually everyone in the room is singing along while clapping along loudly to the downbeat of Keherva tāl. As mentioned in Chapter 4, in the jalsa, “Asha Natoru” fulfills performative function of belonging—something that the camera readily participates in through vérité style cinematography. It is also here where the ritualistic symbolism to which the song refers takes on
a performative dimension, and where values and practices surrounding hij-vocality become
figuratively inscribed on the bodies of the dancing hijras:

\[ Ao \ mai \ ray \ bhala \ tum \ jago \ mai \ re, \quad \text{Please come with all your glory, oh Goddess,} \]

\[ \text{[...]} \]

\[ Mileko \ bakko \ mai \ re, \quad \text{I’m yearning to meet you,} \]

\[ Jisi \ ki \ lodh \ lagavi \ re, \quad \text{That’s all I want,} \]

\[ Gale \ mein \ aaj \ samao \ re, \quad \text{Through my throat/voice you sing!} \]

By the song’s conclusion, everyone is standing, singing, dancing, and social activities are
beginning to get increasingly frenetic. At one point, Mujranani is forced to settle a scuffle that
breaks out between two chela. The dholak player tries his best to cover the sound of the sound
of shrieking, but his efforts to keep the spirit alive are made in vein. After making an earnest
effort to ease the tension, Mujranani instructs everyone to go back to their seats.

The quiet does not last for long. After a few minutes of respite, the dancing starts up
again. At one point, Moneywalli steps into the frame cradling a bundle of white cloth like a baby.
She kneels down to Sowmya and gently places the baby into her lap. In a visible display of
displeasure, Sowmya instructs Moneywalli to hand the baby over to the jogta, who is dancing
nearby. The jogta happily embraces the bundle and dances with it in her hand. While this is
happening, Nita affectively hands off her spot on the dance floor to a chela of hers, and three
others join in. Soon after, Moneywalli leads the hijras into a(nother) brief chant, following which
Mujranani takes Sowmya by the arm, escorts her out of the ballroom, and back into the shrine
room. This abrupt departure marks a rather inconspicuous transition into the next scene: the
procession.
Scene 6: A Queer Portrayal of a (Concealed) Procession (46:46)

Queer time has been described as that which compresses, overlaps, envelopes, and/or expands normative conceptions of time (see Halberstam 2005). Queer filmmaking lends itself to this conception because of the temporal and spatial logics that it applies in practice. It compacts the structure of the space (its physical frame) and as well as its texture (the ideological frames of *hijra*-ness) into a readable and researchable product while subverting normative ways of gazing at the subject (see McCune 2008). In doing so, it draws attention not only to the end product, but also to the process of its creation.

If any scene in the *jalsa* engenders a methodology of movement, it is Scene 6. In this case, however, movement is encapsulated through a subversion of normative time and space not by its compression, but expansion. The footage, which exists in digital files, is not cut, but placed in sequential order while emphasizing the negative space between each file. It presents itself much like observational film, to emphasize what took place in real time, but in doing so, reveals some of the truths about the encounter between subject and filmmaker. Doing this, I seek to include that which is “behind the curtain.” If, as Ruby notes, “normative film” constructs a reading of time and space into a seemingly natural form (see Ruby 2000:240-41), then this approach to movement in queer filmmaking subverts the illusion of naturality, and reconfigures it to conform to the temporal and spatial ideals (and/or emotionality) of those making it.

This procession is the most obscure and scantily filmed event of the evening. Out of nine film tapes and approximately 30 minutes of actual time spent, only 6 minutes and 20 seconds are captured. The footage that exists is unsteady, with poor audio. Despite the quality of recording—
and the momentary pain that it causes me to think about it—the footage nonetheless affectively reveals the (internal) conflicts that take place when negotiating the boundaries of insider (‘photo chela’) and outsider (ethnographer) within an ethnographic context. It conveys, among other things, the tension one feels when battling one’s instincts to film (as ethnographer), and conceal (as chela) in order to respect the (unstated) wishes of the subjects involved and community at large. As such, much of what can be understood about all of this can be gathered from the “empty” spaces between the moments captured and recorded on camera.

The scene begins with a 34-second video segment on the balcony, wherein Mujranani and Moneywalli place a pot of milk on top of (a still veiled) Sowmya’s head. Mujranani yells at the crowd of six or seven hijras, including myself to move out of the way. As the camera moves back, someone can be heard, albeit faintly, saying “no shooting.” I switch the camera off.

About one or two minutes later, I switch the camera back on to reveal a procession of nine to ten walking approximately five meters ahead. The sound of chanting can be heard underneath the din of loud conversation taking place off frame. Mujranani yells out instructions to a nearby hijra, and after 36 second, the camera is switched off.

About one minute later, the camera is switched back on again to reveal Sowmya—approximately ten meters away—descend a steep embankment towards a body of water. Mujranani is waiting by the shore for three other hijras—Nita included—to assist Sowmya through the process with the pot on her head. Because of the distance, at this point, the audio is completely disembodied from what is occurring on screen. Standing at the top of a small embankment, I situate the camera in front of a large group of talkative hijras and kothis. While the scene at the water front is taking place, someone asks if I speak Hindi and I reply “a little bit”
in Hindi. Then, Yogesh and another kothi ask me in Hindi “Are you kothi or pānthi,” (meaning a sexual ‘top’ or ‘bottom’) and I try to avoid answering the question by pretending not to understand the question.

At this point, members of the procession at the water’s edge begin to throw red powder in short streams into the body of water. Someone yells out my name and the camera is again switched off. Two more 20 second video segments are captured after that, but none that show aspects of the ritual.

*What took place was a dance of concealment. Mujranani led about two minutes of prayer by the water’s edge while nine or so hijras kept through red powder into the lake. Then, I saw Sowmya bend over to pour the milk from the pot into the water. How I wish I was invited to take part in this ritual! After another prayer, the procession ascended the embankment while the rest of us were escorted into an open grass field. We were explicitly told to stay away from the procession while they encircled the grounds and make their way back on the balcony and into the shrine room.* (October 21, 2010)

When the camera is switched back on, the lens takes 10 seconds to readjust to reveal a table of food and drink on the balcony in front of the hotel room. Mujranani passes through the frame with a plate of food on her hands, and enters the shrine room. I switch the camera off at 42 seconds and then turned it back on about one minute later to reveal Sowmya, only partially veiled, sitting cross-legged in front of the Bahuchara mata deity, eating prasad (food offerings).
Scene 7: The Final Pledge and a First Look in the Mirror (50:15)

In the next four-minute scene, Sowmya is led in call and response fashion through a final pledge while prostrated in front of the Goddess:

- Guru ke hath mein hath do, Put your hands in your guru’s hands,
- Bol ay Bahuchara ji Mata, Say “Oh Bahuchara ji Mata,”
- Mera roop tu le, Take my beauty,
- Tera roop mujhe de de, Give me your beauty,
- Mera kol tera sach chahiya, I desire your truth,
- Aaj se mein jhoot nahin bolungi, I won’t lie from today onwards,
- Imandari se chalungi, I’ll live my life with honesty,
- Sachchai ki roti khaungi, I’ll eat an honest meal,
- Guru ke aage nahin chalungi, I won’t walk in front of my guru,
- Jiske nam mein nar se nari bani, In whose name I have become a woman from a man,
- Zindagi bhar uska gaungi uska khaangi, I will only sing (her praises) and eat (her food) all my life,
- Guru ko chod kar mein kahin nahin jaungi, I won’t go anywhere without my guru,
- Yeh tere thade ke upar mein kasam khati hun This is what I promise at your doorstep
After the pledge, prasad and chai are distributed around the room (I am given an apple).

Sowmya’s veil is partially removed, although she maintains a directional position in front of the deity. In one 30 second shot, she is seen speaking with her “guru-bhai” (‘sister’) but keeps the conversation level to a minimum. The camera is switched off.

About ten minutes go by before the camera is switched back on. The image reveals Sowmya smiling, kissing her guru-sisters and chelas in front of a full-length mirror hung on the right-side wall of the bedroom. At one point, the mirror catches a glimpse of me filming Sowmya as she carefully inspects her own face inches from the mirror pane. In an especially emotional moment for her, Sowmya takes a step back, turned around to see her guru-sister, and opens her eyes wide, smiling. It is as though Sowmya was waking up after a long nap.

Figure 28: Sowmya refuses to open her eyes, with image of camera in the mirror; still from video footage captured by the author, September 20, 2010

After a couple seconds of socializing, she suddenly withdraws again. Placing her hands over her face and covering her eyes, she exclaimed: “I don’t want to see anyone else but my
guru!” Someone grabs her arms to pull Sowmya’s hands from her face, but Sowmya’s eyes are still closed. The next minute of footage is Sowmya, with eyes closed, coyly rejecting the requests to engage with those around her. “Asha guru!” she yells. The camera is switched off. (see Figure 28).

**Scene 8: The Final Unveiling (53:00)**

After a series of prostrations to Nita and Mujranani (captured in two 47 and 11 second-long shots) Sowmya is escorted into the ballroom for the final performance of the evening.

Performing a *Lavani* dance to the Marathi song “*Mala Jau Dya na Ghari,*” (heard earlier in the evening during communal dance session in ‘Scene 2’), Sowmya demonstrates what it feels like to be exhibited in front of an audience for the first time after 40 days of complete sensory deprivation and immobility. If the *jalsa* is architecturally designed to create a sensation of full immersion and *tarab,* then Sowmya’s dance represents its visceral and symbolic climax. Merging physical space with the ideological frames of what it means to be *hijra,* the dance performatively invokes Sowmya’s newfound *pehchān,* Through this enactment, Sowmya is both literally and figuratively unveiled as a *nirvāṇ* (‘liberated’) *hijra.*

The recorded song begins with a *tabla* interlude lasting for approximately 35 seconds, followed by an ascending *arpeggio* (notes of a scale played in succession) performed on *santur* (a hammered zither of Near East origin). The interlude features Sowmya engaged in vigorous footwork while still veiled, as is customary in *Lavani* dance introductions. Then, at the top of the *arpeggio*—the climax of the interlude—Sowmya stylishly lifts the veil and turns 180 degrees while popping her hips to the start of the first verse. Two *hijras* immediately swoop in to shower
her with ten rupee bills, followed by two more. But, this is unacceptable to Mujranani who, until then, was watching patiently on the sidelines. Mujranani quickly moves across the camera frame to scold the delinquents: “This stage is not for sharing.”

Sowmya, at this somewhat brief physical and figurative point of climax, is fully enraptured by the moment. This reminds me of what Turner states about the ways in which (staged) ritual engenders creativity through the mandatory improvisation (liminal periods, trance, visions) of otherwise highly structured, rule-bounded activities (see Turner 1969). This process, which is highly individualistic in nature, produces a psychological concentration so extreme that there is a loss of self-consciousness and a feeling of “flow” (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:8). This is tarab—the building and “releasing” of emotional affect “that enables the performers to produce a highly affective […] renditions” (Racy 2004:13). It is also basho (‘place’ in Japanese), where “human beings […] emancipate themselves from bonds and attain freedom and ‘enlightenment’” (see Lande 2007; Nishida 2012; et al.); and Jagah (‘place’ in Urdu), the architecture of musical creativity within the body wherein the “craft of practice draws on the search for an exploration of rāg-spaces as well as the aesthetic work of building on and around them” (Neuman 2004:207).

Part of what facilitates this concentration is the second camera. Throughout the 6:47 second performance, Sowmya is fully enraptured by its gaze. In fact, Sowmya dances into camera, utilizing the performance stage defined by her newly earned social position and bound together by the camera frame to deliver a captivating, concert-style performance. Realizing the significance of these gestures, and their potential for meaningful analysis garnered from them by capturing the perfect shot, I position myself next to and slightly under the second camera into
which Sowmya is dancing. The cinematography is steady, unobstructed, diverging drastically from the unintentional cinématograph style camerawork in the previous scenes. My position as the “third wheel” also provides me with a unique vantage point. It sets me apart (creating vulnerability), while delivering a certain scopographic control (providing control) (see McCune 2008:13). The shot is tight, and in all its unobstructed glory, conveys the imagined significance of her transformation. It even becomes possible to see the glistening pores on Sowmya’s face as she, while grinning in the second camera, vigorously steps to the rhythm. Sowmya’s interactions with the camera are subtle but intentional. Their synergy is so tight that it appears as though she was directing the second cameraman (see Figure 29).

![Figure 29: Sowmya dances in formal unveiling; still from video footage captured by the author, September 20, 2010](image)
Embodiment is described in the vein of new materialism as a “set of spatially and temporally distributed series: body a-where-ness rather than body awareness” (Thrift 2002:126). It consists of a “constantly moving carnality” that are unconsciously or materially framed. In this case, the second camera becomes responsible for engendering tarab-induced embodiment, as it provides the (meta)stage upon which for her to improvise her highly structured, rule-bounded activities in a “constantly moving carnality.” Here, we can involve the idea of new materiality as defined by Daniel Tiffany. Material substance, he suggests, is:

A medium that is inescapably informed by the pictures that we compose of it. We are confronted with the idea that a material body, insofar as its substance can be defined, is composed of pictures, and that the conventional equation of materialism and realism depends on the viability of the pictures we use to represent an invisible material world. (2000:9)

Following this logic, materiality becomes a matter of perspective, and perspective in documentary—more specifically in the cinéma vérité school of thought and all those proceeding it—describes as much as it structures what is placed in front of the camera. In (queer) temporal terms, the camera positioned in front of her in that moment provides Sowmya with the possibility of realizing her future self in the present. It allows her to “leap into the future […] through becoming, a movement of becoming–more and becoming–other, which involve[s] the orientation to the creation of the new, to an unknown future, what is no longer recognizable in terms of the present” (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2012:7).

In this moment of transformation, Sowmya’s body is reconfigured by a variety of intersecting events and placements: (1) the bodily craft of dance (tarab), (2) its physical/temporal placement within the larger 40-day sequence of ritualistic affairs (time/space), (3) the ideologies about what it means to be hijra in this particular position (conceptualizations of self), and (4) the
camera (a foreign entity that provides recognition of these practices and values). If hijra world-making consists of the combination of place-making practices with the ideological frames of identity, then this moment in dance enables the merging of her new pehchān (what nirvāṇ represents) with the tangible. In other words, it is here where everything merges for Sowmya.

At the conclusion of the piece, Sowmya places her right hand on her forehead as if to signal “cut” to the second camera. The second camera cuts, but I do not. Instead, I pan from Sowmya’s now beaming face as she turns towards her nearest audience to her right (our left)—a group of 20 seated hijras all of whom are clapping and smiling, and reaching out to Sowmya as though she was Amruta Kanvilkar from the film Natrang (Artist, 2010) herself.

The evening concludes. Sowmya walks over to her jogta friends and guru-sisters, who promptly stand up and checked their purses and other belongings preparing to leave. Just as others begin to filter out of the room, Sowmya, Moneywalli, and other chelas stage a photo shoot. “Ready, action!,” someone yells from off camera. In two separate 35 second shots, I capture a scene that was meant to be recorded in history: smiles, laughing, joking, and good-natured hilarity between Sowmya, Moneywalli, and two other guru-bhai. Sowmya’s transition is firmly sealed. As Dorian Corey states, “It’s a fame. It’s a small fame. But, you absorb it, you take it, and you like it. You like the adulation, the applause, the people cheering you on […] It’s like a physical high, you know?” (in Paris Is Burning, 10:07).

**Conclusion**

One of the inherent roles of the camera is to bear witness to and provide permanent evidence of otherwise temporal moments in time. As the footage of this jalsa has shown, the camera not only
bears witness to these events, but also, in a sense, produces them. There are a number of
moments throughout the jalsa where a pehchān of self is achieved through and as a result of the
presence of the camera. Among them include Scene 3’s entirely visceral Tel Bān ritual. In this
scene, the dual presence of the cameras facilitate a process of naming and name recognition.
There is also Scene 8, wherein Sowmya gleefully dances directly into the camera during her final
unveiling. This produces an affect that facilitates self-recognition and belonging.

As the “unknowing” queer filmmaker, I was awarded access to some of the more intimate
moments of the jalsa while also bearing witness to some of the grander moments. The camera
itself was small enough where its presence provided minimal distraction to the participants,
while large enough to facilitate the building of a stage when particularly desired by the
participants. Nevertheless, the richness of the footage was in capturing all of the movements
between: The shots of my feet while scrambling to retrieve a battery before the procession
begins; The shots of Sowmya shielding her face against others’ intrusiveness followed by a
moment of self-recognition and an embrace of the camera; The cuts to black after explicit
requests to stop recording followed by footage of my walking feet; The scene of Sowmya
pouring milk into the lake while being asked questions about my sexuality; The shots of Sowmya
juggling her interest between the two cameras while dancing.

The camera’s movement allowed us to configure an experiential understanding of hijra
identity (trans)formation. It captured moments of stillness and freneticism, moments of accord
and friction, moments of sanction and prohibition. It did so through the use of cinéma vérité style
cinematography—albeit employed unconsciously—and otherwise “rough” movements, self-
editing and even censorship (most pronouncedly in the procession). As such, the camera
provided evidence my own subjective positioning and pehchān as it is experienced in real time (to the millisecond), while simultaneously reflecting and producing someone else’s.

What advantage does “movement” have over more prescriptive approaches to documentary filmmaking (say in the case of Flaherty), or purely observational ones (as in ‘fly on the wall’ filmmaking)? The observational “God view” is a point which transforms subjects in their spaces from a “complexity into a readability” (de Certeau 1984:124). It also happens to reflect a location of power and control, by allowing the ethnographer to observe action from afar and not only locate, but construct an ethnographic material whose actions are in line with their ideals. By engaging the camera in movement, however, the filmmaker relinquishes prescriptive (and descriptive) control of the ethnographic situation. This obviously comes with certain disadvantages, including the potential disruption of an event’s “reading.” Nevertheless, movement reveals filmmaking’s productive potential to encapsulate what it does in real time—the circulation of desires and disgusts produced in space. What the viewer experiences when watching as the camera is literally tossed around from point to point in space is the product of an “erotics of knowledge” that compacts, structures, and produces space (physical frame) and its texture (the ideological frames of identity) into a fixed document capable of being copied, reproduced, and experienced.

Moreover, the film is less referential—as in a constative reading of events—and more performative. The camera becomes a facet of the jalsa ritual structure that not only engages its subjects in context of the ritual but helps to structure the performances that take place. The way that these elements combine produces an experience of watching that functions much like performative documentary. The film “attempts to reorient us—affectively, subjectively—toward
the historical, poetic world it brings into being” (Nichols 1994:106). Moreover, the film’s experientializing of music allows the viewer to embody that which the participants felt—emotions that the camera itself was partly responsible for. It draws the viewer along Sowmya’s rite of passage, while also reflecting and refracting the filmmaker’s own experience of his own rite of passage for the viewer to experience for themselves. For these reasons, the film facilitates a sensation of belonging.

The Jalsa Itself

Implicitly gained in the (visual) analysis of the jalsa is an understanding of the extent to which Racy’s jalsah model corresponds with the hijra jalsa, and/or the extent to which the hijra jalsa itself constitutes a ritual (vis-à-vis van Gennep and Turner). Perhaps the most obvious point of connection between the two models is the notion of ecstasy as something that is built socially (over a long period of time) but that which produces experiences of emotional transformation for individual participants. How this is specifically achieved, however, is different from the jalsah. For instance, the hijra jalsa is divided into “scenes” wherein a series of distinct events (in several distinct locations) take place. Within these scenes is a mix of musical and non-musical (in the ‘formal’ sense of the term) activities. In other words, due in large part to the architecture of its performance, the affect of tarab is conceived of and/or embodied differently.

Ultimately, the hijra jalsa makes socially (and even physically) permanent that which the Near East jalsah makes temporarily. This is as much a matter of performance as it is a matter of intent. For instance, in the Near East jalsah model (see diagram on 2004:57), emotional transformation—where the affects of tarab are not intended to be (physically) permanent—is
visually depicted in a gradual rise and fall of “transformative affect.” In this case, performers and audience members are allowed, and perhaps expected to eventually return to their pre-tarab emotional states. In the larger progression of events leading to, and within the jalsa itself, a sense of permanent physical transformation is implied—if not performed. This is achieved through the symbolism of pre-jalsa castration, followed by her period of isolation, and reincorporation into the community. The jalsa itself marks this physical rite of incorporation through a performance structure not unlike the dramatic arc of events: exposition, rise of action, and climax, followed by a (relatively non-existent) dénouement.

In the “gift giving” scene, a rise of action takes place wherein the boundaries between stages begin to deconstruct, ritualistic practices take on more symbolic meaning, music and “non-musical” ritual begin to blur, and the “transformation affect” begins to escalate to the point of ecstasy. Then, in “Scene 7,” a climax is achieved wherein Sowmya achieves a state of full self-awareness and artistic realization. It is here where her pehchān, or knowledge of self, becomes actualized socially through the completion of her transformation and “comings out” marked by her literal unveiling to the community. This process is made permanent in that it has lasting consequences for her social stature in the community. Sowmya’s unveiling ultimately solidifies her newfound status as nirvān hijra. It is also permanent in that through this moment, her new social status becomes inscribed onto her body.

Yvon Bonenfant describes “socialic bodies” as those that are biologically grounded but also “modified by their environmental and cultural experiences” (2010:76). Socialic bodies are in a constant state of flux. They change according to the “emotional responses, postures, work and play activities, desires, states of satiation, respiratory patterns,” that our bodies metabolize,
move, and pulse according to the social circumstances we are in (ibid.). While the context of the
dance itself may not be long enough for Sowmya to feel the affects that her newfound status
awarded her, its positioning following the evening-long jalsa, which followed a month-long
period of isolation that (at least ideally) followed castration, certainly provided a physical release
for her to experience a sense of movement. One need only look at the permanently inscribed
smile on Sowmya’s face to imaging how satisfying finishing the final step (of the dance, jalsa, or
otherwise) must have been.

Ultimately, what this chapter has endeavored to show is how music and dance, as a
deeply emotional phenomenon, facilitates and produces processes of social identity
(trans)formation. Music, in this case, is conceived of in much grander terms than simply the
conzert-style performances of either the qawwali singer or badhai. Music in the jalsa is a social
practice formed by relations between individuals within the social structure and hierarchy. It is
also what facilitates the eventual deconstruction and reconstruction of social boundaries, values,
and identity conceptions experienced through the (gradual) crescendo of activity and moment of
ecstatic “becoming.” Especially for the nirvāṇ hijra for whom the jalsa is performed, this
experience is very real. For those participating in the “music” of the jalsa, identity is experienced
as a process of difference or exclusion, but through productive, and highly creative practice of
inclusion.

Other Observations

While the “preliminal (séparation)–liminal (transition, or marge)–postliminal (incorporation, or
agrégation)” progression characterizing the schéma of rites de passage certainly contains
moments of structural applicability, there are key differences in *hijra jalsa* symbolism that point
to the inadequacies of applying such a positivist model. This is demonstrated in a number of
ways, including, but not limited to the amalgamation of symbolic practices and values gathered
from many rites into one. For instance, the *jalsa* symbolically resembles an initiation (‘rite of
transition’) and marriage (‘rite of inclusion’), while some aspects leading up to the *jalsa*
resemble in some cases a funeral (‘rite of separation’) symbolized most vividly through the
month-long seclusion and subsequent rebirth of the *nirvāṇa hijra*.

Perhaps the most significant point of departure is that while the *jalsa* marks a significant
moment of a *hijra*’s identity transformation, it does so without adopting the use of symbols and
rites conventionally associated with one’s sexuality. Moreover, the *jalsa* represents a departure
from what is commonly known as “transvesticism,” “female impersonation” or other forms of
“gender performativity” characterized in certain “rites of the temple” enacted through the
symbolic marriage of a cross-dresser to the deity. According to van Gennep “the idea behind the
priest’s adoption of woman’s dress may be that he believes himself possessed by a female spirit
or goddess with whom he wishes to become identified” (1960:172, note 3). In the *jalsa, hijras*
are not “impersonating” women, or even the Goddess for that matter. They are simply being—or
*becoming*—themselves. This was illustrated colorfully in the *tel bān* ceremony (in Scene 3),
where Sowmya’s *hijra* sisters take the marriage rite of applying *haldi* onto the “bride’s” body to
a new level. “Stop doing *haldi*. It is too much. Behave like *hijras*, not like women!” exclaimed
Nita. What is shown here is that *hijras* do not merely “perform” gender but *subvert* the
performance of it through authentically real, ritualistic play.
It is said that through the appropriation of normative rituals or practices, queer communities create “fixed, tangible, and concretized spaces” of inclusion (Soja 1989, in Bailey 2013:3). In these contexts, individuals are involved in the continual act of self-construction (Betsky 1997:193). If, along these lines, marriage constitutes a normative ritual, then the *jalsa* represents the epitome of queer. This may also be reflected musically through the re-appropriation of Bollywood music—played either acoustically on the *dholak* or danced to queerly—in the reconstitution of these rituals. Nevertheless, I do not find queer to be entirely consistent with the *hijra jalsa*. The *jalsa* is more than a queer night club that surround the postmodern ideals of challenging, undoing, and transforming exclusionary realities. The *jalsa* is a formal “comings out” wherein events are designed to facilitate for a single *hijra*—in a body of 75 others—an architecture of presence and (permanent) belonging. In other words, it is not about subversion, but about normativity. It does this through the embodiment and active production of *hij*-normative practices—normative rites and rituals—where individuals are honored for their unique contributions to the community through personal fulfillment and growth.
In June 2015, the director of programming for Project Pehchān at the India HIV/AIDS Alliance invited me to film a day-long function called the “3rd National Hijra Habba” (‘festival’ in Kannada). Attended by over 350 trans-hijra community members, the event featured an elaborate array of speeches from government Ministers, “open meetings” with local leaders, and performances from Mumbai’s premiere professional transgender-led dance contingent known as the Dancing Queens. In matching attire, the dance troupe presented two eclectic sets of regional, Bollywood, and international dance highlighting the event’s mission to build awareness about the “ongoing struggle for rights, respect, and dignity for the transgender community.”

Against the backdrop of these and other concert performances by the Dancing Queens, this chapter investigates how new adaptive strategies of performance—such as staging, changes to music repertoire and choreography—are participating in the organizational and discursive reconfiguration of hijra performativity. Predicated on the exchange of devalued, “dishonorable” ways of encoding hijra difference for respectable ones, these strategies problematize normalized tropes of hijra pehchān by reconstituting (representations of) the hijra family through an optic of transgender professionalism, talent, and respectability (see Figure 30).

80 The term “dancing queens” is a vestige of Mumbai’s long held tradition of bar dance. A simple Google search of “Mumbai’s Dancing Queens” will yield a surplus of articles related to the subject. For instance, an Afternoon Despatch & Courier article entitled “Mumbai’s Dancing Queens” published on July 17, 2013—around the time the Supreme Court lifted the ban on Mumbai’s dance bars—contains a description of bar dancing life (without mentioning our Dancing Queens). A Daily Mail article entitled “Dancing Queens Makes a Comeback” published on July 16, 2013, contains a journalistic ethnography of bar dancers (still with no reference to our group).

81 James Robertson, Executive Director of the India HIV/AIDS Alliance, in the Hijra Habba video (see Video 15).
While at the Habba, the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment informed me that the ratification of new policy by the Indian Parliament, following the April 2014 ruling to recognize the “Third Gender,” depends on the clarification of the term transgender, “because if the definition of transgender is unclear, then we will not be able to implement any work schemes” (pers. comm., June 30, 2015). Paralleling national-level efforts to define “Third Gender” as transgender for institutional recognition, this chapter investigates what transgender legitimacy involves within the framework of the hijra gharānā. Among other questions, I ask: What, in the experiences, practices, and performances of hijra, gets included in the acknowledgement of transgender identity? What gets excluded? How do reformulated stagings alter the way we think about the labor of music and dance in the gharānā?
A professional performance group comprised mostly of *hijras* employed by HIV/AIDS NGOs, the Dancing Queens encompasses a family-like structure for individuals to achieve *pehchān* (on a level of self-knowledge and understanding), while also providing opportunities them to represent *Pehchān* (as a social-political designation of LGBTIQ recognition, visibility, and equality). Foregrounding the group’s social organization, personal narratives, and concert performances through the lens of a participatory film production, I address how the stage performatively reinforces, challenges, or reconfigures local epistemologies of *izzat* in *hijra badhais*. In doing so, I seek to show how *pehchān* manifests as the contemporary reconfiguration of *izzat* through its service to the larger aims of *Pehchān* and what can be called the emergence of a certain Indian “trans-nationality.”

**Staging *Pehchān* Through Participatory Filmmaking**

Although I am skeptical about how ideals of participation translate into practice, I am not cynical about its potential for education, research, and social change. In the most basic sense, participation involves the “collective actions that form something larger so that those involved become part of and share in the entity or effects created” (Kelty, et al. 2014:475). Participation can be analyzed along a number of dimensions, including: (1) its educative dividend; (2) an individual’s overall access to decision-making and goal setting, in addition to their ability to complete a task; (3) the control or ownership of resources produced; (4) its voluntary character

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82 The term “trans-nationality” is derived from homonationality, which was coined by Jasbir Puar (see Puar 2007). Speaking in reference to the emergence of institutional LGBTIQ recognition in the US, Puar notes that a dynamic form of national homosexuality, what she terms homonationalism, “operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects” (2007:2). Contingent upon the emergence of an institutionally sanctioned homonationalism, she notes, is the segregation and disqualification of certain racial and sexual others from the national imaginary to form a sexual exceptionalism.
and the capacity for exit; (5) its effectiveness of voice; (6) the use of metrics for understanding or evaluating participation; and (7) the overall collective, affective experience of participation
(2014:476). If participation is about neutralizing social hierarchies, subverting dictatorial enterprises, and promoting the democratically-conceived ideals of collective action, then participation in filmmaking would also, ideally, equally benefit all involved in a film’s production. At least in theory, participatory filmmaking involves the above processes in the creation something that goes somewhere and does something. That is, the film has educative potential (for those who participate and for its audience members), multiple uses, audiences, ownerships, and the potential to engage in the lives of its participants in equally beneficial ways. (Indeed, who defines what is beneficial entirely resides in the eye of its ‘participant-observer.’)

Nevertheless, in practice, these power dynamics manifest in more complex ways.

Maintaining a critically (queer) eye on the politics and (consequently) ethnographic authorities of all those involved in filmmaking contexts, I analyze the multiple dimensions of filmmaking in the four basic stages of film production, known as “pre-production—production—post-production—distribution.” Participation was firmly entrenched in both the processes and intentions of all parties involved in pre-production leading to the development of this chapter. Indeed, my access to the Dancing Queens as a filmmaker was granted because our interests in documentation were aligned. We agreed, for instance, that our film should possess a high “educative dividend,” a certain potential for research, and achieve an “effectiveness of voice.”

According to Kelty (et al.), an educative dividend comes in two forms: (1) the cultivation of participatory skills or what is understood as civic virtue; and (2) marketable skills or life

83 Pre-production is also something that incurs simultaneously, but only insofar as the scouting of locations and subjects are concerned. In my case, finances were covered through the Fulbright-mtvU Fellowship.
experiences that result from learning-by-doing (2014:476). Central to participatory filmmaking is the learning that results from participating in the process of a film’s making, which may include skills developed in front of or behind the camera, taking advantage of opportunities that arise as a result of the film’s making, and developing new tools in thinking and communicating about the self in different ways. While our methodology did not include the Dancing Queens’s direct involvement with the camera, it nonetheless strove towards a sensitivity of the ways the camera, editing, and audience engagements reflected and/or engendered the film’s participants’ notions of selfhood. Our intentions and plans of action were (and are being) made transparent, and we have regularly sought out suggestions on how best to achieve them. Our work, in other words, has been made in constant, close dialogue with each party involved.

If visual ethnography—to recycle Clifford’s quote—“describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes” (Clifford 1986:3), then a critical engagement of participation at all stages of film production will simultaneously reveal the organizational patterns of visual ethnographic authority. To what extent does my knowledge of the camera and editing processes effect the outcome of storytelling? What impact does the Dancing Queens’s own knowledge of trans-hijra subject matter, dance, and discourses of LGBTIQ pehchān have on the so-called “authenticity” of ethnographic storytelling? What does the staging of their performances reveal about these processes?

As Lucien Taylor notes, “performances staged for the camera may have affinities with those that people put on for themselves—and the performers may be no less true to themselves for it” (1998:3). Through the critical use of confessional-style interviews, performances and additional footage produced and sanctioned by the Dancing Queens, my interest here lies not
merely in the search for “truth” but in the understanding of the ways our multiple “truths” combine in practice. The potential for research is not merely in the understanding of subject through film (for the sake of theoretical musings about the distinction between art making and society), but in understanding the nuances of trans-hijra intersubjectivity in and through the process of filmmaking.

**Formation and Membership**

I met Abhina Aher five years ago at a Cafe Coffee Day in the Khar neighborhood of Mumbai. The Dancing Queens had just formed a year earlier as a component of the Queer Azādi March fundraising initiative in 2009. The success of their first performance—which attracted the attention of local press and drew in approximately 30 thousand rupees (the equivalent to about $750 US dollars)—catapulted them to the forefront of the Mumbai pride organization committee. Now, the Dancing Queens virtually serves as the face of Mumbai’s pride events, something that reflected in the way Abhina presented herself.84

At the coffeeshop, Abhina spoke about how the idea for the group took form soon after her own “coming out.” As a child, Abhina had always been attracted to dance, and at one point, even took lessons secretly from a dance guru. But, when her mother eventually found out:

> I was kept away from the kitchen, away from my girlfriends, and was supposed to go to an all-boys day school. So, that was the ‘condition.’ Because men don’t do [dance]. There was a lot of conscious effort put into [preventing me from dancing]. But, the rhythm was there inside me. The dance, I picked up like that,

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and then I just couldn’t stop. I just kept going. But, at that time I was not a transgender. I was identifying myself as a passive gay man. That was about eight or nine years before [I decided to transition]. (pers. comm., September 9, 2010)

After coming out, Abhina started dancing “in the drag style,” but eventually realized that she “was at a stage where I needed a different kind of audience; I needed an audience that would appreciate me for who I am”:

I started to realize the kind of guys I would attract, but I was not comfortable with it. The reason why I did it is to have that kind of thrill. It’s a different kind of feeling. After a while I realized that it as not worth it, because once you remove that makeup, you get a different kind of reaction. All the attraction is gone. [Bar dancing] was a humiliation for the real talent that I have. Ultimately talent is something which will only cherish if people appreciate it. If I don’t get my appreciation, I won’t get satisfied. (pers. comm., September 9, 2010)

Abhina’s story resonates with those of many others who I interviewed in Mumbai during 2012-13. For Laxmi, Maya, Alisha, Manvendra, and others in the Fulbright-mtvU video series, music and dance played a vital role in the realization of their talents—a term that for them is synonymous with pehchān. For them, music and dance practice contributed to their emotional stability, confidence and even spiritual grounding; Performance (on stage) validated that which they felt privately. Realizing the affective role music and dance play in these processes, with an interest in cultivating opportunities for the professional development of her “daughters,” Abhina founded the Dancing Queens. (Abhina speaks about the group’s formation in Video 11.)

While “membership” to a hijra gharānā is exclusive and informal, the Dancing Queens strategizes its membership in a formal audition process and through outreach initiatives of inclusivity, talent, and diversity. In a video-recorded interview we staged as part of a larger

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85 See http://www.fulbright.mtvU.com/jroy
production with Fulbright-mtvU in 2012, Abhina explains how diversity is part of the group’s mission:

I think Dancing Queens is all about bringing the bridges together between homosexual, heterosexual, asexual, ‘b-sexual,’ whatever sexual community that you find it across. Here, we just tell people that is, ‘Forget about your sexuality, forget about gender, just come and see this different world that you have not seen yet. And see that these people are also extremely normal and don’t judge them anymore. Just let them have the same space that you have in life. And that is what Dancing Queens is all about. (pers. comm., November 5, 2012)

At the moment, the Dancing Queens consists of a wavering number of nearly 20 individuals, comprising a mix of transgender individuals (including hijras), gay men (including kothis and pânthis), straight men, trans-men, lesbians, and even jogtas (male-to-female transgender individuals from the Maharashtra/Karnataka border) who serve as auxiliary members for their cultural shows.

Figure 31: Members of the Dancing Queens at their auditions; photo by the author, October 5, 2012
While diversity is implied in the gharānā way of life, the Dancing Queens strategizes diversity through outreach initiatives and advertisements that call for individuals of all backgrounds. Part of this effort involves the conscious effort to update, “refine” and/or re-sensitize the language of gender and sexual inclusivity using globally-endorsed LGBTIQ monikers. Over the eight years of its development, the Dancing Queens’s membership affiliation underwent a discursive transformation. This is revealed in the following three mission statements, which were published over the course of six years in 2009, 2011, and 2015 (respectively) on “Mumbai Pride’s official weblog” and in a local advertisement: (1) “Dancing Queens is [a] coming together of 20 male dancers who impersonate as women and perform dance numbers of all time famous Diva’s of Hindi Cinema”; (2) “Dancing Queens’ is a performance by drag queens of Aamchi Mumbai” (translated from Marathi as ‘Our Mumbai’); and finally (3):

Dancing Queens is a Mumbai-based LGBTQ dance troupe. Every year as a part of the Mumbai Pride Festival, Dancing Queen brings the spirit of Dance and Joy to the queer community. Under the Dancing Queens banner, members of the LGBTQ community bring their talent to the forefront in the form of different dance forms under different themes.

The replacement of the terms “female impersonators” and “drag queens” (published in 2009 and 2011) with “LGBTQ dance troupe” (published in 2015), reflects an interest to abandon concepts normally associated with early (1990s) queer theory and feminism, and to embrace contemporary, global lexicons associated with contemporary transgender respectability within

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87 See the following page for a description: http://www.justdial.com/events/Mumbai/Dancing-Queens-Presents-The-Journey-of-Dancing-Queens-Woh-7-Saal/EV625423
the framework of LGBTIQ activism. The use of “LGBTQ,” as opposed to transgender or *hijra,* also points to inclusivity as a strategy for global legitimacy (see Figure 31).

*The Audition*

Another way the group strategizes its membership is through the staging of auditions. In October 2012, I was invited to attend and film a staged audition for potential future members of the Dancing Queens at the *Humsafar* Trust office in Mumbai, which was organized in anticipation of two performances scheduled to take place in conjunction with the Queer *Azādī* Mumbai march held in January 2013.88 Abhina agreed to coproduce a video based on the audition. Following the conventional role of the co-producer, she took part in the film’s pre-production, including establishing the date, location, and principal participants (about 20 in all) for the shoot. As the film’s official director-producer on record, I prepared the lighting equipment, two cameras, sound equipment, and a second cameraman.

In the early years of *cinéma vérité,* filmmakers advocated against the use of multiple cameras because of the way they “remove subjectivity” from the person seeing the events being filmed and undercut the authority of subjects (see Colin Young’s description of Maysles, 1975:72). Concerned about the potential of spoiling ethnographic “authenticity,” I initially attempted to conceal the equipment to minimize the impact that their presence might have in the outcome of footage, but quickly realized the futility of these efforts. There was no way to

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88 A description of their audition announcement was published on a website hosted by the group *Gaysi: The Gay Desi* (a colloquialism for ‘Indian’), a Mumbai-based queer online publication that also hosts yearly open-mic events in coordination with the Queer *Azādī* organizational committee. An excerpt from the announcement reads makes explicit appeals to individuals (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transgender, queer, or otherwise) who “believe in the spirit of the Dancing Queens” and who have the “commitment and talent” to be part of their “family.” See the following page for the excerpt: http://gaysifamily.com/2012/10/03/dancing-queen-auditions-mumbai/
disappear behind the walls of the room. In the end, the film became a performative experiment in participatory role playing. In doing so, it engaged in aspects of methodological transparency (including the use of shots that revealed the cameras and filmmaker), which in turn drew attention to the filmmaking process, and revealed issues about the collaborative process. Ultimately, the (meta)staging of the audition came to reflect and/or engender values surrounding transgender professionalism, talent, and respectability.

The audition was judged by five experts on music and dance, including Mangala Aher (a trained Bharatanatyam dancer who also happens to be Abhina’s biological mother), Suhail Abbasi (founding member of the Humsafar Trust), Pallav Patankar (Director of HIV Programs at the Humsafar Trust), a director of Marathi film who will appear unnamed, and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (transgender activist and Bharatanatyam dancer). The judges evaluated 15 contestants based on a number of attributes, including: (1) “basic dancing ability, facial expressions and awareness of the stage”; (2) “presenting face and energy while dancing”; (3) openness and outness as an LGBT person; (4) ability to volunteer in administrative affairs if needed; (5) awareness and understanding of the Dancing Queens mission; and (6) overall commitment to dance as an art form. These criteria—and in particular the emphases placed on “openness and outness as an LGBT person”—highlight the significance of LGBTIQ pehchān, among other things. I was initially bashful about the display of “dominance” that directors (especially in India) give. Part of this internal conflict rested in my inability to distinguish my role as music ethnographer from filmmaker. The Fulbright-mtvU Fellowship itself—which funded my 2012-13 period in Mumbai—perfectly embodied the dual nature of my identity in the field. While I sought out the fellowship precisely for what I considered to be an ideal marriage of two disciplines that I love, I did not anticipate the discord that I would experience while negotiating shots. Ultimately, I sought refuge in (1) making my intentions clear to Abhina and the Dancing Queens, (2) allowing Abhina to make executive decisions on who to stage for performances and interviews, and (3) relying on some of the ritualistic conventions of narrative filmmaking, including setting up flood lights on either side of the “stage,” a boom mic for ideal sound, a stationary (and moving) camera, and stating clearly to those being filmed when I pressed the record button.

These parameters are based on the audition sheets held at the time, and later revised in an email from Abhina Aher which was received on February 27, 2015.
things, as a qualified moral standard reinforced by a panel of judges that the group employs as a principle for membership. (The video can be viewed on the Fulbright-mtvU website: http://fulbright.mtvu.com/jroy/2012/11/06/welcome-to-mumbai/.)

Production involved the staging of audition dances, guest performances from audience and judges, and interviews. Interview participants, who were chosen by Abhina, took place after the auditions had been held against a rainbow flag backdrop. The interviews themselves were “confessional” and involved two cameras: one stationary, placed on a tripod and medium-eye level and within three meters distance of the subject; and the other moving, capturing long shots of the room (including the stationary camera itself), and close ups of the subjects’ face, hands and even feet.91 As I found, staging interviews using more than one camera helped to convey more information about subjects and space than one camera would have allowed, provide a familiar working template to refer to when collaborating with individuals who were less familiar with the camera, elicit “honest and intimate” storytelling, and enhance the overall quality of production so that it may be appropriated for use by the participants and their own audiences themselves.

In the context of this participatory event, the audition and film mutually supported and enhanced the aims of both. For the Dancing Queens, my cameras provided a virtual platform upon which judges used to provide legitimacy in the evaluation of prospective members’ performances and in the credibility of their own authority. For the film itself, the staging of performance and interviews allowed for the control of certain variables necessary for filmmaking

91 I used two cameras in the field, a Canon 7D and JVC. The Canon 7D was regularly employed in the field as the principal camera, partly do to its high recording quality and portability. The JVC provided secondary support in interview settings and served as a back-up in the event my Canon 7D batteries died. In interview contexts, the JVC was placed on a tripod, and situated behind or at a slight angle to me. From a practical standpoint, the alternate shooting angle provided vital backup support in the editing process.
(e.g. light and sound) without sacrificing contextual authenticity. If we consider “talent” to be “the vestige of endowed promise to success” (Harbert 2010:73), then the (meta-)staging process signified through the act of filming a judged audition also endowed dancers with the faculty and artistry to perform.

**Pedagogy**

Professionalism, talent, and respectability also lie at the heart of the group’s dance and leadership pedagogy. At the core of the Dancing Queens are its founding members, Abhina (*hijra guru* and her *chela*) Urmi Jadhav. The two met over ten years ago when Urmi joined the *Humsafar* Trust as an outreach worker. Abhina, who at the time served as the organizations chair of outreach and development, took Urmi under her wing because she “looked too thin to be out there in the field” (pers. comm., June 3, 2013). While Abhina is a *hijra guru*, her pedagogical approach challenges *hij*-normative notions of *izzat* through her professional association with various NGOs and adoption of egalitarian participation in the management of the Dancing Queens as a whole.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, housed within the larger governing structure of the *hijra* *gharānā* resides a distinct repertoire of beliefs, customs, and pedagogical practices engendered through the *guru-chela* relationship. At the core of these structures is the formal bond between “mother” and “daughter,” an apprenticeship system wherein learning consists largely of aural osmosis dependent on demonstrations of “service.” This service, manifested in the form of *izzat*,

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92 During their off-season, Abhina engages in various administrative affairs, including event curation remotely from her current NGO administrative position as India’s HIV/AIDS Alliance programme manager in New Delhi. Urmi, who works at the Humsafar Trust, largely serves as the producer/co-director of the group taking part in the group’s managerial functions including the choreographing of dance pieces and the managing rehearsals and auditions.
reinforces the bond between mother and daughter. As a result, it often has significant bearings on one’s status in the gharānā and inter-gharānedar community.

Abhina appropriates the power dynamic implicit awarded by her izzat within the traditional hijra guru-chela relationship (by being declared ‘mother’), but subverts exclusive authority by cultivating opportunities for members to join (to become her daughters) and giving them opportunities (literal platforms) to express their musical talents outside the conditions set forth by conventional guru-chela relationships. Much like guru-chela process of aural-osmosis, Abhina cultivates opportunities for her chelas to learn-by-doing, but in doing so, allows them to take ownership of their own labor. Her pedagogy, in other words, has a high educative dividend.

Abhina expresses this aim in an interview we staged in June 2013 (see Video 12):

It’s more than just a guru-chela relationship. I don’t think it has much to do with that, because I never treat her as my disciple. I never treat [Urmi] as my chela, or something like that, because I treat her equally. And she also makes sure that she respects all the freedom and all the kinds of opportunities that I provide her. […] Sometimes I’m her friend. Sometimes I’m her lover. Sometimes I’m her husband. I don’t know what exactly. That’s the kind of relationship that we have together and that makes us bonded to each other and keep both of us grounded. (pers. comm., June 3, 2013)

As opposed to the conventions of the hijra gharānā, Urmi’s “service” is not used by Abhina as a condition of her status of belonging in the Dancing Queens family. Instead, Urmi’s izzat is earned through hard work and made to be part of the fabric shaping the social organization (and mission) of the group as a whole. Urmi, for instance, often serves as the Dancing Queens’ principal choreographer and, when Abhina is in Delhi (which is most of the time), often participates in the group’s administrative affairs. She is also frequently featured as a soloist on the stage. In theories of participatory culture, a high educative dividend is achieved through the designation of multiple leadership roles and the cultivation of outlets to apply them (see Kelty, et
al.: 2004). As such, Urmi’s izzat is not cultivated as “service” on behalf of the guru, but for the sake of izzat itself—an izzat of and for the self and one’s own learning potential.

**Concert Pre-Production**

Transgender professionalism is also engendered in the ways the group cultivates opportunities to stage its own performances. In contrast to the passive curation of badhai, the Dancing Queens actively seeks out registered and licensed concert auditoriums based on a number of attributes. These include, but are not necessarily limited to availability, proximity to the Humsafar Trust, and whether or not the managers of the space are receptive to the goals of the larger aims of the Queer Azādi Mumbai initiative. In Mumbai—and other Indian cities—it is common for LGBIQ, and in particular, transgender-sponsored events to be denied access to performance, club and bar venues because of concerns about their sexual proclivity, association with the hijra community, and/or the potential for raids from police (an increasingly infrequent phenomenon). As an openly transgender performance group, the Dancing Queens must locate venues that either ignore the social or institutional ramifications of being associated with homosexuality and transgenderism, or have a vested interest in the promotion of the gender and sexual equality.

In addition to these concerns, concert spaces are chosen according to the availability of an elevated stage with decent light and sound equipment, a hall capable of filling a large audience (around 250 people), and the availability of a private dressing room. The dressing room is a separate, sacred space for members of the Dancing Queens. More often than not, the room is fortified by a volunteer “bouncer”—usually an employee or trusted volunteer from the Humsafar Trust—who prevents unknown admirers of the group to enter without permission. As a whole,
the space prevents an unwanted gaze—benign or otherwise—from intruding on relatively private, intimate affairs of inter-performer social bonding, while also providing a liminal “holding cell” for item numbers intended for the stage (see Figure 32).

According to David Gere, a “central component of the experience of viewing dancing and choreographic activities in general is the examination of the performers’ bodies” (2004:48). Whether in Western post-modern or Indian dance, the experience of dance “enhances and facilitates this operation of the gaze” (ibid.). For hijras, the intimate venues within which badhais are generally performed—in home salons, balconies, porches, or in the streets—facilitates a spectatorship that allows their patrons an unobstructed view of the body’s movements. Through their (meta-)staging of music and dance, the Dancing Queens, in contrast,
constructs an experience of viewing made at a significant distance. The emphasis here lies not merely in the experience of dancing, but in the consummation of its total package.

Rehearsals and Profits

While badhais are often implicitly structured via a learn-by-doing method, the Dancing Queens employs a series of prescribed stages of concert preparation. These include:

   Stage 1: Brainstorming about the performance concept
   Stage 2: Conceptualization of songs and plan of execution
   Stage 3: Finalizing the “look” of the dancers and dance sequencing
   Stage 4: Selection of dancers (for each dance)
   Stage 5: Editing of songs (to fit the dance)
   Stage 6: Rehearsals and choreography
   Stage 7: Final directions and stage set-up
   Stage 8: Final rehearsals and dress rehearsals
   Stage 9: Show
   Stage 10: Party and evaluation of the show for improvement

Rehearsals are usually held two to three months before a concert is scheduled to take place. They are more sparsely spaced at the beginning of the rehearsal period, and become more frequent in number during a month of “dress rehearsals.” Often held at the Humsafar Trust, rehearsals are scheduled at fixed intervals of time—usually two to three hours—since time blocks are coordinated with other support group sessions and rehearsals for other performance groups.

93 These parameters are based from an email from Abhina Aher which was received on February 27, 2015.
In badhais, money is distributed in different ratios by the guru, and the division of badhai earnings may (but not always) exhibit symbolic congruence to the ways social hierarchy manifests within the larger gharānā. For the Dancing Queens, however, talent or social status has little to no bearing on one’s financial prosperity or visibility within the group. Members dance largely on a voluntary basis, and if stipends are provided to the group for their service, they are equally distributed, handled on an individualized basis, and/or involve the signing of paperwork (for tax purposes). If the Dancing Queens are the primary act in a ticketed concert, sales are channeled directly into the Queer Azādi Mumbai initiative or into organizational expenses. Audiences may be ticketed in the range of around 100-500 rupees (roughly $1.60-$8.00 USD), or depending on the circumstances, whatever the attendee is able to give.

The distribution of ticket sales emphasizes the philanthropic nature of the Dancing Queens’s organization, its mission to participate alongside the efforts of the larger Queer Azādi Mumbai initiative the best way they can (by providing financial relief), and placing an emphasis on talent (through the creation of a ticketed spectacle). Through this effort, notions of talent are not rewarded monetarily, but through visibility, exposure. Dancing, therefore, becomes less about “service” to the guru, and more about one’s own recognition (pehchān) engendered by the dedication of labor, service, or izzat to the larger aims of LGBTIQ liberation and Pehchān.

Concert Production

As detailed in Chapter 4, badhais generally consist of two to three numbers, including a ritual song calling the attention of the Mother Goddess, a jaccha baccha song (if the troupe is called upon to bless a newborn), a shadi song (if the troupe is called to performed for a recently married
couple), and (other) *filmi* songs performed acoustically for marriages or other auspicious occasions. Depending on the context of the performance and the established relationship with the patrons, songs may be requested, otherwise they are entirely chosen by the performers on the spot.

Music and dance numbers are strategized by the Dancing Queens along to a number of attributes. These may include their relevance towards what is “in vogue” at the moment, what may seem visually attractive, what may advance the larger mission to educate and empower along the lines of LBGTIQ activism, and what advances the Dancing Queens’s aims of diversity and inclusivity. More often than not, songs are chosen in accordance with a particular theme. Titled “The Journey of Dancing Queens,” the eight-year anniversary performance in January 2015 featured a reflexive look at the group’s “humble beginning as *Lavani* performers” and its eight year transition into an eclectic LBGTIQ dance contingent. An excerpt from the description of the performance reads:

This year’s theme is ‘The Journey of Dancing Queens.’ The members of the troupe will take us back to time to their humble beginning as *lavani* performers and gradually growing into a dance troupe performing Bollywood hits in varied dance forms in a time span of 8 years. At this years dance show we will get to see dance forms like *Lavani*, Bollywood, Classical, *Mujra*, Ballet, Salsa, *Bhangra* and many more. This is an event you surely do not want to miss!  

Other performance themes reflect an equal interest in genre diversity. The title for the December 2012 performance was “Rhythm of India,” and featured an eclectic array music and dance including (in order) *Mujra* (North Indian courtesan dance), *Dandiya* and *Garba* (both Gujarati folk dances performed during Navratri celebrations; *Garba* literally means ‘womb’), modern

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Bhangra (Punjabi folk dance), Lavani (a Maharashtran folk dance that has a tradition of cross-dressing), Belly Dance, Jogappa/Jogta (male-to-female transgender devotees of Goddess Renuka-Yellamma) folk dance from Karnataka, and classic and contemporary Bollywood. Other concerts have consisted of a wide range of material, ranging from Bollywood numbers to Marathi, Punjabi, and even Kannada folk song, ranging in style from queer to heteronormative (like Bhangra and Garba). Out of the six staged performances that I have seen, visible markers of the dholak, harmonium, or dance associated with badhai, have never been staged (a transcription of the event is provided in Table 12).

In the Dancing Queens’s performances, a pehchān of professionalism, talent, and respectability is engendered on the stage. Concerts are generally hosted by at least two individuals holding microphones. At the “Rhythm of India” performance, Abhina and Sumit, a young man who has been a member of the group for three years, began the concert with a short prayer to Ganesh. This was followed by a four-minute speech highlighting the Dancing Queens’s mission statement, description of previous performances, a sher, and another appeal to the audience.

A Mujra followed, consisting of two solo dance numbers—one by Madhuri and the other by Urmī—interwoven in alternating in vignettes lasting approximately two to three minutes. The choreography contained some elements of eroticism, but none that transgressed the boundaries of heteronormativity previously established in the Bollywood versions of “Sun Lo Tum” (‘The Flame Will Not Rise,’ from the 2005 film Kisna) and “Kaise Mukhde Se Nazre Hataun” (‘I Can’t Take My Eyes Off Your Face,’ from the 1996 film English Babu Desi Mem). The choreography was also exacting, corresponding to the second with the music edits (see Figure 33, Video 13).
Reconfiguring the Family

Approximately 30 minutes into the performance—immediately following the Bhangra performance—Abhina and Sumit interjected with (loosely) rehearsed, theatrical banter. Appearing as though he was disappointed with something, Sumit entered the stage shouting “This won’t work. This won’t work!” “Why wouldn’t this work?,,” Abhina responded. Sumit then went on to explain how the audience saw performances from north India and Gujarat, but still did not see Lavani, the “mother of all dance genres” in Maharashtra. Abhina then explained to Sumit that not only was she wearing Lavani attire, but that a special Lavani performance featuring Abhina’s biological mother was about the begin. This transitioned into an anecdote...
about Abhina’s coming out story. She spoke about her mother, and how after many excruciating years of denial, she finally came to accept her daughter’s gender identity.

This was not the first or last time Abhina has shared her coming out story on stage. It has appeared in a number of iterations and contexts, including staged performances, interviews, and personal communications. As such, its message has become central to her own personal manifestation of legitimacy and respectability, while also becoming the integral to the Dancing Queens’s staged reconfigurations of tropes of family.

A professional dancer and actress based in Mumbai, Abhina’s mother was not initially supportive of her (then) son’s interest in dance. In a speech delivered on stage at the *Hijra Habba*, Abhina spoke of the difficulties she and her mother faced as they both “came out”:

There was a time when I was struggling with my gender identity and she was struggling with her son becoming a daughter. And it was ironic, because both of us were trying to be somewhere. She wanted a happy family for her son, and I wanted a happy family for me and my mother. We could not talk for years, we were living under the same roof. And at the end, one day we just met, we just cried, and she said that when you came into this world, I was the one that taught you the first step. And I will not let your hand go in this different journey, and that’s what encouraged me. She said that both of us share the same blood group, and that is B positive about this entire relationship. (June 30, 2015)

In an interview I conducted only moments before the speech, Abhina explained the centrality of her biological mother in the group’s configuration of transgender professionalism, talent, and respectability:

My mother is a central part to our Dancing Queens. She gives a very strong signal to the people saying that is the families have to accept their trans people kids. And if you accept your trans people kids, they will be able to achieve higher goals in their lives, they will be able to contribute to society, and at the same time they will be able to live with dignity as an equal citizen of this country. (pers. comm., June 30, 2015)
A bittersweet and heart-warming message of acceptance, Mangala’s participation on the stage performatively constitutes pehchān (that which is illustrated in her coming out story) through its service to Pehchān (the political aims of LGBTIQ equality), manifested quite literally in the flesh and blood. Mangala’s performative role in the Dancing Queens, moreover, challenges conventions of hij-normative behavior—in particular, the gharānedar practice of releasing all attachments to one’s biological family and former self, and embracing what is considered one’s true identity through allegiance to the guru, gharānā, and inter-gharānedar community. In doing so, it reconstitutes tropes of hijra family through an optic of transgender respectability.95

*Hijras* have historically been represented as figures whose roles are to affirm notions of heteroconjugal and normative family structures. Stemming from their capacity as spiritual intermediaries in *shadi* and *jaccha baccha badhai*, contemporary representations of the *hijra* have played her in narratives ranging from hyperbolic depictions of *badhai* ensembles in *Kunwara Baap (Unwed Father; 1974)* to portrayals of the trans-normative individual in *Tamanna (Desire; 1997)*. In its contemporary portrayal of the transgender protagonist, the film *Tamanna* plays on *hijra* stereotypes while reconstituting popular tropes of kinship (familial associations) through an optic of middle-class heteronormativity (see Chapter 2). As Thomas Waugh points out, part of what contributes to the character’s “believability” is the way the film partakes in the semi-religious ritual function of *hijras* as “social mediators of heteroconjugality,” and how the character “encapsulates popular culture’s problematization of sexuality, family and gender in one

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95 Incidentally, Abhina is not the only *hijra* who has embraced her biological parents. Although Laxmi refrains from involving her mother in her (relatively frequent) public interviews, she lives in an apartment unit located on the third floor (not counting the ground floor), and next door to where her mother and brother currently live. Inside Laxmi’s modest apartment unit lives two “stay-at-home” chelas who are responsible for the maintenance of daily affairs (such as cooking, cleaning, and errand running). Laxmi’s other chelas live in a separate unit located on the ground floor of the same building.
overdetermined body and vividly performs its interpenetration with socioeconomic dynamics and class anger” (2001:127). In the film, the protagonist conceals her transgenderism in order to adopt a normative child and assume a normative lifestyle. Her social mediation of heteroconjugality, in this regard, is defined by her aspirations towards middle-class respectability.

The way the Dancing Queens problematizes notions of family (or kinship) reflect a similar, yet structurally opposite strategy of transgender respectability. Instead of being “adopted” by the drive to assume a normative lifestyle, in the Dancing Queens, Abhina “adopts” her biological mother in order to embed her in the social organization of her reconstituted hijra gharānā. While disruptive of heteronormativity, and the privilege that it supposedly engenders, by adopting her mother, Abhina also unsettles the conventional hij-normative practice of biological detachment. If hij-normativity is defined through its service to heteronormative lifestyles, then Abhina’s inclusion of her biological mother in the Dancing Queens signifies a reversal in the directional flow of “service”; Here, normative individuals provide “service” to transgender P/pehchān through their love and acceptance of them. Thus, it is through this act that the Dancing Queens performatively encapsulates the problematization of family, gender and sexuality through the transgendering of conventional socioeconomic dynamics of hijra identity.

Susan Stryker notes in her article “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity” that “because transgender phenomena unsettle the categories on which the normative sexualities depend, their articulation can offer compelling opportunities for contesting the expansion of neoliberalism’s purview through homonormative strategies of minority assimilation” (2008:155). The question still reminds: If hijras are already “unsettled categories,”
to what extent does the transgendering of *hijra* represent the normative strategy of minority assimilation? (see Video 14)

*(Sanitized) Eroticism*

Following Mangala’s performance, the “Rhythm of India” continued along a general progression of song and dance forms—*Garba* and *Bhangra*. These two genres are associated with tropes of heteroconjugality (the word *Garba* literally means ‘womb’), and involve male to female pairing. In the Dancing Queens performance, transgender women played the part of the normative women, while their male-bodied counterparts (who may be *kothi, pānthi*, gay, straight or otherwise) assumed the male roles. In these cases, the performance of heteronormative dance form signals an appropriation of established normative codes and signifying systems. At least upon first glance, they appear to engender a notion of trans-normativity (via transgender assimilation).

Following the *Garba* and *Bhangra* performances, however, a provocative belly dance was performed by three scantily dressed transgender dancers. This was followed by a traditional *Jogappa/Jogta* folk dance called *Karaga* (a style of dance involving balancing pots on the head), and then a series of old and new Bollywood numbers. The event eventually concluded with a disco song from the film *Student of the Year* (2012).

The sequencing of conventionally “illicit” forms of dance, following heteronormative folk genres like *Garba* and *Bhangra*, employs a strategy of appropriating and then disrupting established normative codes and signifying systems of respectability. The group plays into (normative audience) expectations about what a transgender and/or queer performer should do on
stage (or in a bar). But, in doing so, packages sexually-charged music and dance in context of LGBTIQ and HIV/AIDS activism. In this case, the staging of sexuality is not meant to shock (for the sake of shocking along normative expectations), but to inspire, entertain, educate, and even reveal the absurdity of its inclusion alongside other (more normative) dance forms. In fact, it could be said that the juxtaposition of belly dance against normative forms like Garba, highlights the absurdity of both genres.

Through this sequencing of performances, the Dancing Queens enacts the postmodernist interest in appropriating and reworking performance material already made available in other contexts, whether it be Garba or Lavani, to critique all notions of normativity. whether it be heter–, homo–, or hij–. It is through the staging of heteronormative codes and signifying systems, alongside sexually charged dance, by hijra performers under the LGBTIQ banner, that engenders a distinctly transgender pehchān that playfully skirts the boundaries of trans-normativity, but does not exactly fall into it.

Post-Production and Audience Engagement

In addition to the multimedia presentation that exists concurrently with this chapter, two independent documentary videos have been released that feature the Dancing Queens in different capacities. For the first video, we return to the Dancing Queens audition that took place in November 2012. The video, which was released on the Fulbright-mtvU website, features members of the Dancing Queens at the center of its narrative (see ‘The Audition’). The second video is primarily about the Project Pehchān-sponsored event Hijra Habba, but features interviews and performances from members of the Dancing Queens. In these two videos, which
were edited dialogically with members of the performance group as well as representatives of the Humsafar Trust and India HIV/AIDS Alliance, respectfully, notions of transgender respectability, talent, and professionalism reveal themselves.96

The first film can be defined as a trans-affirmative film, not unlike the gay-affirmative documentaries produced during in US during the 1970s which relied on “particular inflections of standard interviewing, editing, and expert testimony styles” (see Waugh 1997:109). A performative experiment in participatory role playing, the film nonetheless unearths some of Richard Dyer’s complaints about the erasure of “conflict, contradiction and difficulty,” and “the quest for sameness” (quoted in Waugh 1997:120). According to Waugh, the “coming out” films of the 1970s, “for all their instrumentality in the political context of the 1970s, were the most complicit in social invisibility and in the rote recapitulation of the interactive recipe (interview/snapshots/observational rock-climbing interlude/interview/workplace interlude/interview)” (1997:120). In the 6 minute-long video, interviews provide the narrative backbone, and are edited formulaically to provide “conscious-raising formats” borrowed largely from the “coming out” narratives of the 1970s. The film follows a similar recipe through its sequencing (dance into/interview/dance interlude/interview/dance interlude/interview/dance interlude/interview) in order to maintain a tonal balance between interviews and expressive elements.

Although both parties played an integral role in the management of the film’s production—filming took place inside the Humsafar Trust, audition logistics were handled by Abhina and other members of the organization—the organization provided relatively minimal

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96 The first video can be viewed on the Fulbright-mtvU website: [http://fulbright.mtvu.com/jroy/2012/11/06/welcome-to-mumbai/](http://fulbright.mtvu.com/jroy/2012/11/06/welcome-to-mumbai/). The second can be viewed on the following website: [http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com](http://www.ethnomusicologyofthecloset.com)
feedback in the editing process. Participatory post-production involved sending two rough cuts that were sent to Abhina and another representative from the *Humsafar* Trust, the host institution where the audition took place, after which suggestions were shared (about the tone, overall messagery, and relative number of minutes individual speakers were allotted in the video). At one point, it was suggested that I not falling victim to “transgender politics”—an indirect way of telling me not to include too much of one person. This intention was communicated to me quite clearly during Facebook chat and email correspondences. In the interest of remaining sensitive to the interests of the NGO, I heeded the representative’s call for representational fairness, and footage of all interviewed and performative subjects (mostly that of said individual) were whittled down to proportionate size.

Following a more theatrical alignment of the standard “coming out” documentary idiom, the film presents an compelling study of transgender dance. The film includes “dramatization, improvisatory role playing and reconstruction, statements and monologues based on preparation and rehearsal, and nonverbal performances of music, dance, gesture, and corporal movement, including those of an erotic and diaristic nature” (1997:109). The performances themselves were edited along a number of parameters the reflected the Dancing Queens’s mission of cultural diversity and inclusion: (1) tonal variation; (2) expressiveness and overall “talent” of the performer; (3) whether or not they visually complemented the narrative content; and (4) whether or not the inclusion of the dance conforms to the *unspoken* rule of representational fairness.97 The featured dances include a belly dance by Harsha (a contestant), a *Mujra* from Navya Singh

97 The music itself was a determining factor in establishing tonal variation, although the original tracks were omitted to avoid copyright issues. Incidentally, my own music tracks were superimposed on the dance, which enhanced the theatrical tone of the film.
(another contestant), and two Lavani performances from Abhina and Laxmi. The dances elicit different tones, including erotic, bittersweet, joyous, and romantic (respectfully). Overall, the film is playful. Laxmi’s improvisatory kiss on the camera lens in the final sequence theatrically gestures to the audience and to engender their participation as audience members: “See you all on the final day of performance. Bye!”

In contrast to the first film, the second film can also be described as a trans-affirmative film, but does not necessarily follow the “coming out” narrative formula. Another experiment in participatory role playing, the film nonetheless functions more as a referential telling of events (as they occurred in history) and less a participatory experiment in role playing and performance. Filmed over the course of six hours, the film includes over 20 interviews from experts ranging from Abhina (Programme Director for Project Pehchān, which is administered by Alliance) to India’s Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment. The footage also contains speeches from the same number of individuals, two performances, and B-roll of the 350-persons in attendance.

Capturing these events was labor intensive, and involved the strategic coordination of Alliance’s Communication Director Nirnita Talukdar, Executive Assistant Amrita Bhar, my own partner-cum-assistant Priyamvad Deshmukh, and multiple others. Abhina oversaw the film’s production, but played a more hands-off role in its implementation. Nirnita and Amrita—answering the calls of Abhina and other administrators from Alliance—elicited the participation of interview subjects and dictated the parameters of their questioning. As such, my role in the film’s production fluctuated from director to director of photography (responsible for the staging and lighting of interviews).
Editing involved a comprehensive series of back-and-forth emails that lasted for approximately three months. Rough cuts were shared privately through a password protected Vimeo link, and timed in order to conform to their weekly Thursday meetings. I corresponded regularly Nirnita, who mediated requests—however large or small—from the Alliance staff and myself.

Six iterations of the *Hijra Habba* film were made before the final film was approved. Although somewhat time consuming (because of the number of individuals involved in the editing process), post-production was relatively painless. This was due mainly to the fact that the roles of everyone involved were well-defined, the parameters of representation (including what could and could not be included in the final video) were clearly spelled out, and distribution goals were taken into consideration. The organization’s intentions were conveyed clearly and unambiguously, to the point where the emails I received contained a second-by-second sequencing of shots to be included in or excluded from the video.

Like the audition video, part of the Alliance’s concerned rested in the representational fairness of those that were featured. Their requests explicitly took into account current internal LGBTIQ politics (which for the purposes of this dissertation will go undiscussed), while also making sure to highlight various contemporary national-level issues in the institutionalization of transgender recognition. The Alliance wished to feature the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment as the central mantlepiece of the video, around which various interviews from transgender community members were sequenced to convey an “activist message of empowerment.” This represented a strategic re-sequencing of my initial strategy, which was to center the film’s narrative around the telling of the event as I had observed and participated in.
Overall, the emotional sanitization of the film, the stature of those it represents, the context within which they were represented, and its explicit rule in representational fairness operates (understandably so) as a regulatory script for the film. This script is engendered not only in the participatory—and therefore “democratic”—nature of the film’s post-production, but also in the strategic editing out of various images and sounds that contest the narrative of Indian nationalism. To a certain extent, the distinctly “tame” tone of the video represents an interest to configure transgender bodies and voices as normative and nationalistic. Contingent upon this is the erasure of “conflict, contradiction and difficulty,” a general “quest for sameness” (Waugh 1997:120), and the segregation and disqualification of certain “others” from the national imaginary to form a kind of exceptionalism (Puar 2003:50). In this case, a certain “trans-nationalism” is founded on the sanitization of various signs of emotionality and in linking the discourse of transgender pehchān to the national narrative of transgender exceptionalism (see Video 15 and Figure 34).

Figure 34: Omitted shots from the 2015 Hijra Habba video; stills taken from footage by the author, June 30, 2015
Preliminary Conclusions

Through the lens of pre-production, production, and post-production stages of participatory film production, we have seen the Dancing Queens reconfigure various tropes of the *hijra* family and the music its makes into transgender. A number of questions, however, still remain. Namely, What is the difference between the “respect” and respectability that *hijra* music-making and the Dancing Queens engender, respectively? How does *izzat* translate to *pehchān*? To what extent is *izzat*, in the *gharānedar* sense of the term, still present in the Dancing Queens?

Table 13 illustrates a list of differences between *hijra badhai*—wherein *izzat* is engendered—and the Dancing Queens—wherein *pehchān* is constituted. The table utilizes a model outlining differences between *hijra* and *kothi* performance illustrated by Anna Morcom in her 2013 publication *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*. Owing to the distinctly transgender identity of the Dancing Queens, however, the table contains some notable distinctions. Among them include the strategies of performing for non-profit fundraising as opposed to personal gain, assuming managerial and pedagogical structures that are distinct from informal notions of family, the emphasis on talent, the discursive emphasis of transgender over *hijra*, inclusiveness and eclecticism, and the emphasis on visibility (see Table 13).

Drawing from this table, the following rubric illustrates some of the differences in meaning, manifestation and (re-)negotiations of *izzat* and *pehchān* in the social organizations of *hijra badhai* and Dancing Queens:

- Whereas *izzat* denotes “honor” and/or “respect,” *pehchān* denotes “identity,” “recognition,” or “acknowledgement.”

- Whereas *izzat* applies to kin, *pehchān* is a recognition of the individual.
Whereas *izzat* is socially granted (through various forms of ‘service’ to the *guru*), *pehchān* is individually manifested and socially nurtured (through social initiatives and/or ‘service’ to the larger aims of *Pehchān*).

Whereas *izzat* is a social currency that governs the relatively closed occupational system based on (semi-)hereditary membership, *pehchān* is applied within an open occupational system based on the individual.

Whereas *izzat* is determined by (exclusive) membership to a *gharānā*, *pehchān* is cultivated and fostered by values of inclusivity.

Whereas *izzat* may be used to determine one’s social rank within a (fixed) social hierarchy, *pehchān* is employed by all *hijras* regardless of social stature.

Whereas *izzat* “empowers” *hijras* based on conditions of spiritual aestheticism, *pehchān* empowers the individual through an embrace of religious difference.

Whereas the socio-linguistic roots of *izzat* is derived from notions of sexual abstinence and/or denial, *pehchān* is derived from the embrace of open discourse surrounding sex and gender identity.

Whereas *izzat* is implied within the social organization of *badhais*, *pehchān* is explicit, part of their socio-political and discursive agenda of LGBTIQ identity politics.

Whereas *izzat* is reflected, performed and produced through *badhais* to pay homage to the *guru*, *pehchān* is reflected, performed and produced as a reconstituted form of *izzat* to pay homage to the larger aims of *Pehchān*.
- Whereas *izzat* manifests in daily interaction within social structures, *pehchān* is something that is reified in other realms of society, including art and politics.
- Whereas *izzat* is founded on the primacy of social imbalances and hierarchies, *pehchān* based on the (ideals) of democratic participation.

(Re)Configuring an Ethnohistorical Model of Trans-*Hijra* Performativity

Certain historical parallels between the shift from the organizational emphasis of *izzat* to *pehchān* can also be seen in a number of other historical models of local performance genres. Without conflating correlation with causation, the following is an sketch of other “traditions” that have undergone social transformation.

First is the appropriation of *Tamasha* by “middle-class” performers from working-class exponents. The historical transformation of *Tamasha* has been attributed to the so-called “moral crusade” at the turn of the century, which was largely responsible for the sublimation of female hereditary music and dance traditions to new “classical” traditions around the turn of the 20th century. In her work on Karnatak music, Amanda Weidman links the sublimation of these forms to “the literal *domestication* of music as a sign of bourgeois respectability” and a “politics of voice,” which “involved both the privileging [of] the voice itself as Karnatic music’s locus of authenticity and [a] valuing [of] a certain kind of voice,” referring specifically to the upper-caste Brahmin female voice (2006:116).

The nationalist project has been made responsible for the literal domestication of women and, in particular, the suppression of their sexuality in Purnima Mankekar’s ethnography of the state sponsored television channel *Doordharshan*. Mankekar posits that commercial television
engendered a new woman framed within a democratic ideal of respectability. Women, and in particular, their sexuality were made a “threat to masculine valor” (2003:259) and consequently, were portrayed on television as ideal middle-class housewives with suppressed libidos.

The tidal wave of respectability also contributed to the sexual sanitization of hereditary dance forms in the south. In his book *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (2012), Davesh Soneji details how *devadasi* dance was appropriated by the culturally and institutionally dominant Brahmin culture to a program of Hindu nationalism and nation building, and over time, homogenized, sanitized, and developed into standard pedagogies. The once “sexually provocative” hereditary dance of the *devadasis* subsequently led to the development of a new centuries-old tradition entitled *Bharatanatyam* (literally ‘Dance of India,’ a title that might invoke comparisons with the Dancing Queens’s 2012 performance ‘Rhythm of India’). Incidentally, the transformation of courtesan dance to *Kathak* underwent a similar process. In her ethnography on the North Indian classical dance form, Lalita du Perron attributes the changes that were demanded of performers as part of a larger democratization of the female body, rehabilitation of the “fallen woman,” and the sanitization of the courtesan tradition (2013:321).

In Mumbai, during Indian nationalism as new forms of gender representation began to emerge under the rise of respectable Indian woman, drag performers were gradually displaced from the stage. Katheryn Hansen attributes this shift to an underlying social anxiety of more recent cross-dressing genres and its implications of effeminacy as new forms of theater and musical performance placed greater emphasis on the natural feminine (2002:164). This shift can also be attributed to the process of hypermasculinization, which Tanya M. Luhrmann points out
was cultivated as a defense strategy by Indian men during colonial domination, and then was
revived and restyled by advocates of Hindu nationalism in the postcolonial period (see
Luhrmann 1996; in Hansen 2002:169). While traditional gender non-conforming forms like
Lavani and other illicit were pushed into obscurity, others were displaced to rural areas,
particularly Kathakali of Kerala and Ramlila of Uttar Pradesh. Today, gender non-conforming
practices surface subtly in mainstream film and drama, and through illegal, or recently legalized,
illicit forms like bar dance and badhai.

While this models may explain the reasons for the marginalization of gender nonconforming performance practices from the normative mainstream, to what extent do these historical models apply to the transformations that seem to be occurring within the trans-hijra community? As we have seen, the relative domesticity of the hijra body, which may be tied to notions of class imbalance, can be found in certain aspects of the Dancing Queens organization and performances. For instance, the Dancing Queens is largely middle-class, and involves a privileging of globally endorsed LGBTIQ values over (lower-class) hijra and kothi values.

Political endorsements from Abhina and Urmi, to an extent, signify the domestication of the hijra voice, and employ a discourse of transgender respectability based on codes of “trans-normativity” and individuality. On the performance stage, literal signs of domestication—in the familial sense of the term—can be seen in certain dance styles where hijra dancers may be seen with male pānthi counterparts, and/or in the inclusion of Abhina’s biological mother.

That said, the Dancing Queens is not founded on principals of class-based oppression, but on (ideally) uplifting individuals out of the social frameworks previously determined by their gender identity, sexuality, class/caste. Moreover, despite the efforts of the Dancing Queens
towards “minority assimilation” or “trans-nationalism,” LGBTIQ liberation is (still) seen by mainstream politicians as antithetical and therefore political disadvantageous to the goals set forth by Indian nationalism. Many politicians, the current prime minister included, consider homosexuality to be the product of Western colonial influence. Although April 2014’s decision to formally recognize the “Third Gender” was welcomed by transgender activists, the Supreme Court’s ruling fell short of retracting the ubiquitous Section 377, which applies to homosexuals, transgender, and otherwise queer individuals alike.

Therefore, to suggest that the Dancing Queens represents or engenders the emergence of a uniformly experienced “trans-nationality” would be to neglect the reality of exclusion that members of the trans-\textit{hijra} community still face on the ground-level, as well as the existence of some of the most basic laws that continue to deny any semblance of normativity in their lives and livelihoods. It would also neglect some of the strategic differences in approach that other trans-\textit{hijra} or \textit{kothi} groups currently employ in their dance practices. To what extent does the Dancing Queens represents the entirety of this so-called transgender “revolution”? How might the Dancing Queens’s strategies of transgender professionalism, talent, and respectability differ from those of other queer performance ensembles?

\textit{Hijra vs. Kothi (The Dancing Queens vs. Bin Baykancha Tamasha)}

The Dancing Queen’s performance and repertoire differs, to a large extent, those of the well-established \textit{kothi} performance group \textit{Bin Baykancha Tamasha} (literally ‘Performance Without Women,’ hereafter referred to as \textit{BBT}). \textit{BBT} incorporates a sanitized form of (homo)sexually-charged \textit{Lavani}, and incorporates a discourse of talent, professionalism, and respectability in
their social organization and overall media strategy. All of this is believed to legitimize their
talent and overall existence as a group. This is best reflected in a response that Hankare, a
member of the BBT, provided the New Yorker in an article published on March 7, 2013: “I’m not
a kothi. I’m just a man who wears a sari in pursuit of the art he loves.”98 If talent is the endowed
promise to success, then part of that process for Hankare, is the rejection of the (sexualized,
vulgar) kothi identity.

Despite their implicit recognition by members of the LGBTIQ community, the group
nonetheless avoids visible associations with LGBTIQ activism. For most lower-class kothis—
many of whom do not speak English, use the internet, or hold college degrees—“LGBTQ”
visibility and advocacy is believed to compound their problems more than rectify them. This is
because the majority of working-class kothis remain “in the closet,” stealthily skirting the line
between married life and sexual nonconformity. It can be said that the kothi way of life thrives on
not being seen, and the freedom of movement that invisibility allows.99 Thus, Hankare’s
thwarting of the kothi label, and redirecting the conversation to his love for art and overall talent,
provides cover for members of the BBT to maintain their lives as kothis.

Speaking in reference to the culture of American dance in the 1980s and 90s, David Gere
posits that “for bodies and bodiliness in the age of AIDS, dancing is ground zero [where] the
meanings of AIDS—the stigmas, the fears, the enduring assumptions, and, contradictorily, the
explosive power of life-giving metaphors—are distilled into an elixir” (2004:40). Because of the

98 See the article on the following link: http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/men-in-saris-mumbais-new-
lavani-dancers

99 This naturally leaves them vulnerable to institutional victimization. If caught “in the act,” many are unfairly
targeted by the police or blackmailed by local goons. As a result, many kothis consistently live in fear that their
sexual relations with other men are discovered.
association of dance to effeminacy and homosexuality in the West, U.S. audiences conflated AIDS with its attendant gay markers, and dance, with a brand of gay markers. “Hence, with nary a flip of the wrist, male dancer = gay = AIDS” (2004:41). This chain of meanings takes a similar approach with dancing trans-hijras. Kothis and hijras are disproportionately at risk to HIV/AIDS infection—a fact that has since the 1990s only added to the culture of fear, stigma, and assumptions already forced upon their communities. Because of this, dance performance, while a life-giving practice for the community, are also seen as a virtual masala of stigma associated with transgenderism, homosexuality, AIDS and their signifying systems.

Because of the ways kothis live their lives, and because of the stigma associated with their performance, BBT’s strategy of disassociation is not to be taken lightly. Nevertheless, this strategy has been openly critiqued by members of the LGBTIQ, and in particular the hijra community, most of whom do not enjoy the “privilege” that invisibility is seen to afford. Largely because of the position of visibility that hijras already maintain in public, the Dancing Queens utilizes a strategy of open discourse, using dance as a forum to speak to issues that people otherwise “feel uncomfortable talking about […] in public”100 to position themselves in front of the potential for hij-phobic and transphobic critique and backlash. The strategy reflects in various engagements with the public. In addition to serving as point persons during local pride parades and celebrations, Abhina and (increasingly) Urmi often accompany other members of the local LGBTIQ activist community in documented appearances in the media. The nationally syndicated television show Satyamev Jayate produced by Bollywood moguls Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao, for instance, recently produced a special segment entitled “Accepting Alternative Sexualities”

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100 Abhina Aher, programme manager for Project Pehchân and founding chair of the Dancing Queens, in a recorded interview June 30, 2015.
wherein both Abhina and Urmi were given air time.\textsuperscript{101} The group has also been featured in various photo shoots with international photographers, and regularly participates in my and various other documentary film efforts.

Indeed, the Dancing Queens’s embrace of the LGBTIQ mission and overall strategy of visibility reflects, at least to a certain extent, a kind of class privilege that \textit{BBT} do not have the luxury to enjoy. Members of the Dancing Queens largely speak English and/or “high Hindi,” have jobs in the health or business sectors, have college degrees or some level of formal education, and use the internet. Born and raised in Mumbai, Abhina herself is middle class and formally educated, having attended University of Mumbai for a degree in Public Health and worked as a communications specialist for Johns Hopkins University. The Dancing Queens also conducts most of its official business and advertising on the internet, visible, and alongside (or in front of) Mumbai’s Pride organizational efforts. Many of them have financial independence from their families and live alone or with friends.

Nevertheless, these are privileges that have come through their work in LGBTIQ advocacy, which is diverse in its economic demographics and arguably classless in its overall political ideology. The movement and its initiatives are founded on principals of uplifting individuals out of the social frameworks determined by their previous classes/castes, and integrating them into a culture that embraces democratic ideals of egalitarianism. Thus, it can be said that through their outreach and audience engagement efforts, and the privilege that visibility affords them, the Dancing Queens effectively repositions the “classed” (yet casteless) \textit{hijra} into a diverse and all-inclusive culture of participation.

\textsuperscript{101} See the following link for excerpts from the television show: http://www.satyamevjayate.in/accepting-alternative-sexualities.aspx
Some Additional Conclusions

The Dancing Queens positions themselves against illicit, “vulgar” forms of performance through the appropriation and disruption of earlier forms to gender theatricality (e.g. Tamasha, Lavani, Mujra [North Indian courtesan dance]), their staging alongside sexualized contemporary dance genres as well as normative dance forms like Garba (Gujarati folk dance) and Bhangra (Punjabi folk dance), and discursive framing. Through their performances, the Dancing Queens performatively nods to the illustriously homoerotic and/or queer past but reframes their practice through a rainbow-colored lens of transgender professionalism, talent, and respectability.

Moreover, because of the group’s prominence in the trans-hijra activist community, the role they play within the larger HIV/AIDS NGO complex, and their efforts to craft a distinctly respectable show of “face,” their performance signals a larger move from socially transgressive mode of badhai performance—sex work, bar dance and other forms of “service” associated with displays of servitude to the guru—towards a middle-class, secular, and trans-national pehchān. In doing so, they are transgendering the hijra family, and reconstituting what is thought as musical labor from forms of service associated with disempowering displays of servitude to the guru, towards a professionally-employed and officially-recognized transgender frontier.

If making explicit the implicit, staging the liminal, or of “outing” the contained, is reified through the practice of “coming out,” then as their audience, we are not only enjoying a carefully choreographed show, but also witnessing the emergence of a new hijra out of the historical closet and onto the global stage. She is a finely dressed hijra, a proper hijra, a respectable hijra, and one that identifies her new self in modern terms.
Chapter 7
Some Conclusions

With Chapters 4-6, I hope to have provided an experiential understanding of trans-
vijra music and identity (trans)formations. The potential drawbacks of employing a multimedia ethnography are that its composite of methodologies and/or theories can lose their cohesive strength and get lost in the larger narrative. This chapter attempts to reassemble the dissertation in the hopes of revealing some of the larger contributions of this study to the field/s.

The conclusion begins with a summary of how the previous three chapters were sequenced and what conclusions were able to be drawn from this sequencing. This is then followed by a brief discussion of aspects of my study that could be expanded upon and/or clarified. I will then discuss more generally about what my focus on queer methodologies has accomplished and how filmmaking is able to cultivate them. The final part of this conclusion will then expand upon the study’s contribution towards larger theories of performance and performativity, and larger frameworks for analyzing music making in South Asian/non-Western transgender contexts.

Three Perspectives

Three methodological lenses of investigation were employed in three different trans-
vijra performance contexts. Using the approach of serious play, Chapter 4 identified some of the ways badhai reflect and engender notions of respectful difference between performance participants and their audiences. A comparative analysis of four iterations of the same badhai song highlighted key differences and semblances in approaches to music-making, drawing particular
attention to “local” variances in the social organization of badhai, and how hij-vocality emerges from (and engenders) song.

Chapter 4’s (comparative) analysis of four distinct public performances by different groups set the stage for Chapter 5’s micro-study of the hijra jalsa. In an investigation of music making within the context of this “closed” event ritual held by members of the hijra community, Chapter 5 used movement as a conceptual and methodological locus to investigate how ritualistic music making engenders a pehchān of belonging. Drawing connections to A.J. Racy’s ethnography of the Near East tarab performance, I looked at how music is organized to catalyze feelings of ecstasy and contribute to one’s experiential understanding—or embodiment—of themselves and their communities. Taking cue from the premise upon which the study was based, the chapter attempted to performatively convey the individual emotional and physical movement of one’s “comings out” through its re/presentation of a filmic experience.

With attention to a professional transgender dance contingent called the Dancing Queens, Chapter 6 critically engaged some of the ethno-historical discourses involved in the reconfiguration of trans-hijra pehchān. The chapter shows how this involves the shift from values concerning izzat (‘respect’ for the gharānā) to pehchān (individual ‘identity’) reconstitutes tropes of the hijra family through an optic of transgender professionalism, talent, and respectability. Reflecting these ideals, the study critically integrated notions of participation into a filmmaking methodologically, and in doing so revealed certain socio-political dimensions of pehchān making in trans-hijra performance contexts.
Gender/Identity Implications

The formal progression of these three chapters also set the stage for various conclusions about the (differences between the) *hijra* and transgender identity categories. As mentioned, these conclusions are based on the premise that neither *hijra* nor transgender are essential categories, but always shifting, changing, and moving—much like this dissertation—in the individuals that live them and according to their respective positioning within the a cultural web of mutually-agreed upon values and practices.

Chapter 4’s analysis of *badhai* culture led to the conclusion that while a relationship exists between identity and singing, *hij*-vocality is not founded exclusively on premise of gender or sexuality. As per Gayatri Reddy (2005), *hijra* identities are complexly constituted via the establishment of axes that depend on a wide range of variables, including but not limited to religion, class, caste, as well as pedagogies, tropes of the family, and *izzat*. As Laxmi Narayan Tripathi says, *hijras* are “the largest ethnic transgender minority in the world” (pers. comm., June 30, 2015). If we are to accept *hijra* as a state of belonging to a social group, then to be called *hijra* is both to accept certain codes and values that reside within the community—many of which lie outside the purview of gender and sexuality—and to perform them through various “services” to the *guru*, *gharānā* and inter-*gharānedar* community. In other words, *hijra* is about *doing*, not only being. Music is a basic part of *hijra* doing.

Through a focus of a social “rite of initiation,” marking the precise moment in time when a *hijra* enters the community as *nirvān*, Chapter 5 localized the ways in which music and dance achieve a transformative affect that facilitates the transmission of certain values of belonging to the community. In doing so, the chapter reveals how *hijra* identity, while socially produced, also
carry real, physical implications. The emotional and arguably spiritual manifestation of musically produced tarab enables values of belonging to inscribe themselves on the bodies of the performing hijras, and in particular, the hijra for whom the jalsa is taking place. The results of such an affect are (ideally) permanent and lasting; One could say that, much like gender confirmation surgery, they exceed the realm of performativity and allow one to arrive at a constative (as in, non-performative) understanding of one’s self. It is this constative understanding of one’s self that exists in the cyclical relationship between the body and the place that it resides in/moves through/constitutes. Furthermore, as I discover in the chapter, the recognition of the camera (in movement) plays a central role in these pehchān-making processes.

Chapter 6 illustrated how certain social forces are influencing the discursive transition of hijra identity from its devalued, former meaning to one based on notions of global transgender. New adaptive strategies of music and dance practice in the Dancing Queens performatively reconfigures hijra through changes to repertoire, and reconstituted pedagogies of the guru-chela relationship and particular preexisting tropes of the family. While the impact of the respectable transgender on the hijra culture remains to be seen, we are nonetheless confronted with the emergence of a new transgender in hijstory.

The use of the camera—and writing implements—is part of this paradigmatic shift. Not only does it provide a record of evidence within which to “read” it, but it has also become a dynamic facet of the campaign for transgender liberation and empowerment. Various efforts are continuing to be made in this and many other film projects to provide formal recognition of the transgender community’s efforts to “uplift” itself. As I write this, plans are being formalized with the Dancing Queens to continue my visual documentation of their performances and conduct
more interviews in the development of a feature-length documentary. Funding through Fulbright-Hays and other sources (potentially locally-based NGOs) have already contributed to the production and post-production stages of its development.

**It would have been nice…**

By no means is this a complete ethnography of *hijra* music. Neither is it a comprehensive survey of *hijra* music, nor a proper micro-focused ethnography that focuses on the particularities of musical expression in gender(ed) contexts. Needless to say, it would have been nice to travel down some of these roads.

On the macro-scale, one of these roads would have been to investigate further the geographical lines of demarcation that define transgender culture in South Asia. One of the ways that I envisioned accomplishing this was to conduct a comparative analysis of musical and their corresponding languages in the transgender cultures of South Asia. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, *hijras/kothis* practice the above mentioned “code language” called *Farsi*, which derive from popular culture and *filmi* music (and has little relation to Persian, although it may include some Urdu words). A comprehensive, comparative study of (musical) languages like *Farsi* and others would illuminate the ways in which India’s LGBTIQ communities are distinct, as well as key us into the ways globalizing forces are impacting local queer subcultures. This would support and extend my study of the discursive transformation of *izzat* to *pehchān* in performance contexts.

On the micro-scale, another line of inquiry would have been to include a discussion of the ways in which performance practice and repertoire impacts notions of the (transitioning) self in...
contexts of gender confirmation surgery. While this concept has been represented in films—including my own on the transgender dancer and activist Maya Jafer—there is virtually no representation of this sort in ethnomusicological literature. Its inclusion in this dissertation would have deepened our understanding of the ways in which music and dance participate in one’s constative understandings of themselves. A chapter was prepared to address these concerns, but I decided to exclude it from this dissertation as I found that the respective identities of those involved—Sowmya and Maya (a self-described male-to-female transsexual)—would have collided with the discussion points raised in Chapter 6, not to mention disrupted geographical specificity. (Although Indian by birth, Maya lives in Los Angeles and possesses American citizenship.) This subject, I decided, warranted its own attention either in the form of a separate article or even book.

Thoughts On Queer Ethnomusicological Filmmaking as a Research Method

The way chapters 4-6 are sequenced is also configured by my changing approaches to the use of documentary filmmaking as a research method. Various self-reflexive anecdotes reveal these differences in approach, including some of the “mistakes” that arose in my methodology and/or perspective and how these “errors” may have elicited certain results. This was particularly evident in Chapter 5, where methodological transparency—including when I switched on and off the camera—was incorporated into the larger narrative of the jalsa event. As I discovered, methodological transparency was important not only for the establishment of context within the larger ethnographic narrative, but also for the constitution—and queering—of my ethnographic “voice.”
Chapter 4’s emphasis on the use of serious play in the referential documentation of badhais produced grounds for an analysis concentrating comprehensively on musical content. While efforts were made to incorporate ethnographic subjectivity into the investigation through analyses of visual representation, the videos’ cinematography in two of the four iterations (one of which was not recorded on camera, but exclusively on an audio device), was too banal to provide substantive points of entry for film analysis. Surface-level observations were made based on fieldwork notes and various visual observations, but these were surpassed with the comparative analysis of musical content. At times, it even became unclear what interpretive frame I was utilizing at what point. These are aspects of my writing that, while particularly queer in a certain regard, I will define/clarify further in future iterations of this work. Nevertheless, if Chapter 4’s ethnographic scope illustrates a pre-modern, pre-acknowledged, pre-pekchān state of existence, then my filmic methodology most certainly reflected it.

Whereas Chapter 4 merely “captured” that which was already there, Chapter 5 helped to constitute it. The wealth of footage of the jalsa event provided fertile ground for the structuring of a rich written ethnography, and was able to make inferences about the ways in which individual subjectivities produce the cultural “realities” they are products of. The chapter’s emphasis in movement, with cinéma vérité and performative modes of approach, reflected and participated in this intention. Through methods that departed from factual recounting, the film effectively dwelled and took form in it, forcing the viewer to consider the subjective and affective dimensions of film in a more evocative telling of events (Nichols 2001:132; also see Holmlund and Fuchs 1997:37). Thus, if chapter 5 represents a sort of ethnographic “middle-
ground,” a liminal holding space housing a *hijra* as she completed her final “rite of passage,” than the filmic methodology certainly engendered it.

Methodologies incorporated within Chapter 6 were wider in scope, reflecting a participatory approach to all four stages of film production. While much of the performance footage was observational, interviews and other footages of daily life were staged. These approaches differed from the “staged” events in Chapter 4, to the extent that project participants were actively involved in the creation of a film that was used not only for the purposes of research, but also went somewhere and did something. Participants were fully aware of the camera, and were/are/will be involved in much of the films’ production, post-production, and distribution. The use of the camera (and post-production) therefore played a more active role in the constitution of representation of its participants. Ultimately, Chapter 6’s filmic methodologies yielded a grounds for analysis that centered on that which it created for itself.

Maintaining the queer feminist spirit of reflexivity, the progression of these chapters are in a sense representative of my larger methodological maturation in filmmaking—a “comings out” surrounding my understanding of myself as a film director/producer. It is in this sense that through the interaction between filmic elements and writing that the overall theme of “coming out” is given another dimension. That said, the ethnography does not escape from the critical foundation upon which it was built. Queer ethnomusicological filmmaking constantly shifts, changes, and moves much like its dynamic subjects, according to the situation it finds itself in. It maintains a critical reflexive eye on its positioning in relation to its subjects, and adapts with them. Its purpose is not so much as to “observe” as to enmesh itself within, and then see what
happens as a result. Its purpose is not merely to subvert what has been established, but to
(complexly) create something.

Music, “Coming Out” and Other Thoughts

Queer approaches to transgender subjects have been debated and contested for some time. This
dissertation, however, is not meant to reinforce or subvert either sides of these arguments, but to
approach an alternative to the ways gender performativity is talked about in relation to
performance. The argument set forth is based on the notion that transgender (along with gender
itself) is a socially constructed category, but also something that is not merely configured
performatively, but also constituted within. It is through queer ethnomusicological filmmaking
that, ironically, we may not only read but also witness—and therefore experience—the
foundations upon which constative manifestations of (gender) identity are realized.

What does this do for our understanding of what music is and/or does? At its most basic
level, this dissertation illustrates the ways in which music can be both personal and social. It can
be an instrument of use both for community formation and reformation. It is used as a means to
produce notions of difference, belonging, and as a means through which individuals achieve
understandings of the self in relation to these notions.

In the early stages of my dissertation, my research centered largely on the ways in which
music and dance facilitated the comings out of my participants. Using my camera, I sought to
record the coming out stories of as many LGBTIQ musicians and dancers from India, in order to
create a collage of personal narratives—much like the “queer affirmative” films seen in 1970s
and 1980s American LGBTIQ cinema. Although these narratives did not make the “cut” into the
larger body of the dissertation, my intention is to include them as part of a larger publication based on this dissertation.

One of the voices of these narratives is from Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, whom I have known since the commencement of my research in India during 2010. In a recorded interview I conducted with him in his hometown of Rajpipla, Gujarat, in 2012, Manav—as I have been invited to call him—explains how music, which he regards with spiritual reverence, facilitated the cultivation of an inner sense of peace:

Music has been a stress-reliever for me especially [during] the times when I was challenging, or [when] I was going against the current. It was a big challenge for me to opening come out and tell to the world. […] For me, music is something which just doesn’t help you in your own development but it helps you in bringing about an equilibrium or balance within yourself or to a position of mental peace. […] Music, for me, brought self-confidence as well, and that was again, affected by my own coming out story. And my guru, who accepted me with open heart, also encouraged me to be original. There’s nothing like being original. […] (Interview October 30, 2012)

For both Manvendra, music is not only a vehicle through which to achieve the confidence and inner peace through the process of self-realization, but is integral to his conception of self. This resonates with a story Maya Jafer told me about her dance training in the early stages of her coming out process. “Dance has been something that has been very stress relieving, very balancing, grounding,” she said (Interview, February 14, 2011). We return to the edited scene in Mohammed to Maya (2012), where two days after her surgery—on Valentin’s Day—Maya emerged from the hospital bed and sat in a chair for the first time since the procedure:

Dance is a very prominent expression for me. When I’m on stage and when I dance, it almost feels like it’s not me, like another spirit has taken over […] And

102 See the following excerpt of the interview in Melodies [and Maladies] of a Monarch: http://fulbright.mtvu.com/jroy/2012/11/30/melodies-and-maladies-of-a-monarch/
now I think I would even be a better dancer, or at least, a purer better dancer, because I have a real... I am a woman now, a complete woman now. (Interview, February 14, 2011)

As the documentary unfolds, it becomes more clear that the “spirit” is not merely a persona—something constructed within the staged realms of gender performances—, but something that has resided in her since she began dancing. “I’ve always seen myself as a beautiful woman dancer,” Maya explains. After the surgery, “for the first time, I’m myself. I am who I was meant to be. This is the real me” (ibid.). Sex reassignment surgery, in this case, becomes a way for Maya to permanently achieve self-realization she sought temporarily through dance. “And now I think I would even be a better dancer, or at least, a purer better dancer, because I have a real... I am a woman now, a complete woman now. It fits well,” she explains (ibid.).

Trans-Hijra Performance is Not Gender Performativity

If we are to understand what “LGBTIQ music and dance” is, and how it is distinct from normative music and dance, then we must incorporate the personal narratives of everyone who belongs to this spectrum. At one point, I have mentioned that there is no singular music and dance form that LGBTIQ musicians and dancers perform, just as there is no race, ethnic, religious, class/caste affiliation. LGBTIQ music and dance are as diverse as those that produce it. Music and dance serve a variety of functions, and are practiced by LGBTIQ for different personal reasons. For instance, I have met hijras that sing classically, gay men that play the harmonium, lesbians that play rock music, transgenders that don’t dance, transmen that dance, jogtas that know badhai repertoires, and so on.
Nevertheless, what this dissertation has illustrated is that *hijra* and transgender performance is not equivalent to gender (theatrical) performance. *Hijra* and transgender identities are distinct from gender performative expressions, such as drag personas. Their repertoires and practices of occupy a distinct mimetic space that transgender performers do not, and is meant to entertain as commentary. *Hijra* and transgender music—staged, informal or otherwise—on the other hand, is not necessarily performed to entertain or to comment. Even though much of the music is *filmi*, the performers that perform them are not always *imitating* the playback singers and dancers on the screen. On a bodily and vocal levels, transgender performers do not imitate to establish their sameness (with the normative), but constitute on the surface that which is already inside of them to establish their uniquenesses (from the normative).

According to Laurence Senelick,

Gender is performance [and] gender exists only in so far as it is perceived; and the very components of perceived gender—gait, stance, gesture, deportment, vocal pitch and intonation, costume, accessories, coiffure—indicate the performative nature of the construct. (1992:xi)

For members of the trans-*hijra* community, gender is not merely uttered or gestured, but also felt on an emotional and bodily levels. It functions much like music. Music is both a social phenomenon and also deeply rooted in the physical and emotional ongoings of the human body. It is part of that thing whose “name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing […] that serve to drive us to movement, towards thought and extension” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010:1). The cyclical relationship between the body and society is what allows it to exist in time; music cannot exist without humans producing it, yet the body’s production of music cannot exist without an understanding of such.
As a dynamic force of its own, gender is implicated in this relationship. Like music, its transformations and configurations are not representative of its arbitrary nature—its superfluousness—but of its bond to the (always changing and growing) body, its capacity to affect, and drive one towards movement, thought and extension.

Final Thoughts

It is my hope that, among other things, this dissertation makes clear the role music plays as a force of inclusion, not just of exclusion. Hijras, and their transgender sisters, utilize music as a means of “acknowledging,” “recognizing,” and otherwise “identifying” themselves and their (familial) associations. It is what manifests their sensorial existences amongst one another, part of the need to sensually “sound and seek sound” (see Bonenfant 2010). It provides vital opportunities for communal bonding, the nurturing of the guru-chela relationship, the establishing of rapport between hijras and their audiences (or other participant observers), and overall pehchân of the self in and of community. It also gives voice to individuals and/in their cultures to draw attention to—and potentially change the status of—the plight of the trans-hijra community.

Some have forecasted the demise of hijra badhai music, and thus the hijra community’s central pedagogical and organizational system, at the hand of a growing (secular) middle-class. Despite drastic changes to repertoire itself—including the widespread use of contemporary Bollywood song—however, trans-hijra culture has demonstrated incredible resilience through its ability to adapt to changing demographics, audiences, and sensibilities, as well as to utilize discourses of “tradition” in formal contexts (including the Indian parliament and Supreme
Court). The use of the word gharānā itself—among others—reflects an effort within the community to ride (ahead of) the wave of social and economic change by looking into the past for models of affirmation.

If the constitution of “tradition” lies in its ability to adapt to the times without losing their “seeds of the past” (see Neuman 1990), then I am not worried about the future of hijra music and culture. The community's pehchān manifests musically through respectful reverence to age-old values, practices that renew with constant vigor, and a doctrine of diversity. The plurality of expression that trans-hijra community embraces and engenders is what constitutes the vitality of its pehchān. Trans-hijra pehchān is not merely about the reconfiguration of hijra to transgender, but the expansion of hijra to include new possibilities of identity shaped by the availability of affordable gender confirmation surgeries, respectable professions, and the swift emergence of a sympathetic middle-class. These possibilities are constitutive of what has already been made possible by individuals within the community. As one hijra once told me, “I was already there. I was out. I need not be ‘out’!” (pers. comm., September 5, 2010).

That said, only a study tracking the continued changes to badhai music over the course of a lifetime—or many lifetimes—would be capable of assessing the future of trans-hijra performance. It is my hope that this dissertation provides the foundation upon which to launch a larger study concerning the ramifications of contemporary Indian society on the musical pedagogies, practices and sensibilities of future practitioners in hijra culture.
Appendices

Appendix - Chapter 3

Conventional Pre-production

Pre-production refers to the sometimes long and laborious stage in film production that involves everything from conceiving of an idea to convincing potential funders about why the film is worth investing money in. The crafting of a proper budget detail, budget proposal, and production schedule is essential, especially for films involving a large crew (something that has recently become easier to get by without) and/or number of shooting locations. This stage also involves the scouting of film locations and cast members, as well as the securing of the crew, none of which materializes without a secure budget. Need I mention that this stage involves an inordinate amount of time waiting.

Conventional Production

Simply put, production involves the shooting of the film. Unlike pre- and post-production, production does not involve a finely delineated sequence of events. Everything happens at once.

Conventional Post-production

Post-production refers to the stage in film production that involves the scripting, editing and fine touching of the film footage. It is largely considered to be one of the most intimidating stages in film production because it is the most important in the crafting of narratives. Unlike production, post-production involves a pretty standard methodology, which has been detailed by a number of
documentary film resources (see below for a list of these resources). The following is an abbreviated version of that which is provided by the Raindance Film Festival:103

1. Choosing an editing format - For individuals shooting on film (as opposed to digital), this involves the rather simple task of scanning the film into digital format. If the film is shot digitally, this stage is rather non-existent in the post-production process.

2. Editing the film - This is stage is regarded as the most important in the documentary film production process, as it involves the time consuming task of reviewing footage, creating a list of chosen edits (an Edit Decision List, or EDL), and the actual cutting of the film. Unlike narrative, in documentary, the editing processes is where the film narrative is “written.” Editing takes time—a matter of months for most—and involves sometimes tricky negotiations between director, producer, and editor. In many cases, directors and editors work closely on cuts together, whereas in other cases, the editor may have free reign over the material. Regardless, strong interpersonal skills and unerring work ethics are absolutely necessary in this stage. A number of “rough cuts” (drafts) will be created in the editing process. But, it is imperative that the post-production process not move on to the next step until the picture is “locked.”

3. Editing the sound - Once the picture is locked, a sound editor may be hired to enhance the film’s sound tracks. This is normally done over the course of one month, and involves the cutting of dialogue tracks, re-creation of sound effects, and preparing the cue sheets for sound mixing.

103 See http://www.raindance.org/the-13-steps-of-post-production/
4. Doing Automatic Dialogue Replacement (ADR) and foley - This step is useful for directors who wish to include voice over, re-recording dialogue, or add sound effects.

5. Composing and/or securing music - For all filmmakers, and particularly documentary, securing the appropriate composer could mean the difference between a premiere at Sundance and a premiere at a lesser-known film festival. The hiring of a composer is crucial for the building of tone and tension in the larger film narrative. It is especially necessary for those who do not wish to purchase the rights of music owned by someone else.

6. Sound mixing - Once all tracks of sound (dialogue, ADR, foley, music) have been secured, it becomes necessary to mix them together. Hiring a professional mixer is crucial due to the sensitive and highly subjective process of sound mixing.

7. Title sequencing - This step can take place before or during steps 4 through 6 as it involves the film track, not sound. In fact, it is here that composers may wish to let their own music shine. Regardless of the order preference, titles are needed to give credit to the individuals responsible for making the film, including the funders. Titles usually consist of opening title cards and then rear title crawls.

8. Picture delivering - Once the film has been put together, the hard drive containing the final copy of the film should be delivered to create a Digital Cinema Package (DCP), Blu Ray, HD CAM, or any other format used in film festivals.

9. Dialogue scripting - This is especially useful for those who wish to screen their film internationally. Creating a dialogue script with time codes will allow various film festivals in countries with multi-lingual audiences to subtitle or dub the film.
10. Publicizing of press kits, and making a trailer - Chances are, producers will have already created a press release and/or demanded a trailer from the editor by the time the film is ready to be delivered. This step is crucial for films seeking out various distribution options.

_Conventional Distribution_

Many filmmakers—particularly those working in social justice or participatory genres—refer to this stage as “Audience Engagement” or “Outreach.” For “linear” film productions, distribution is the final stage of the filmmaking process. Unlike post-production, the order and number of steps needed for distribution to occur varies. Differences in distribution approaches vary from production to production, and rely largely on the (hopefully careful) discretion of the producer.

These steps may include:

1. **Film Festival Screenings** - Film festivals are especially important for independent films who have not yet secured a distributor. This stage is also particularly useful for the building of audience awareness through screenings, launch parties, press releases, press reviews, and other “local” events created for the purpose of attracting audiences.

2. **Theatrical Release** - High budget productions may skip film festivals and bring their films directly to the theaters, whereas most independent and/or high-profile documentary films will wait until their film festival run is complete to release theatrically. By this point, it is generally assumed that the film has secured distribution.

3. **“Home Video”** - Conventionally following the theatrical release, distributors will make the film available for general consumption on a variety of film platforms like pay-per-view services, regular broadcast on television, and even in-flight entertainment. The availability of
in-home viewing especially for low-budget films has increased due largely to companies like Netflix and Amazon. For others, especially international productions, youtube is another albeit less profitable option.

4. Non-conventional Platforms - Gradually gaining steam in the mainstream film market, a numbers of non-conventional distribution platforms are surfacing online. There are even a number of film funding agencies—among them the Tribeca Film Institute—with grants and/or funding strategies devoted exclusively for visual storytelling.

**Online Resources for Documentary Film**

1. American Film Showcase, [http://americanfilmshowcase.usc.edu/film-resources/](http://americanfilmshowcase.usc.edu/film-resources/)

2. Britdoc, [http://britdoc.org/resources](http://britdoc.org/resources)


Online Resources for Non-Linear Storytelling

13. Tribeca Film Institute Hacks (Due: February 18) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/tribeca_hacks


Artist Development Programs

1. Film Independent Directing Lab (Due: September 14) http://www.filmindependent.org/labs-and-programs/directors-lab/#.VNFMMcaYnzI

2. Film Independent Documentary Lab (Due: December 7) http://www.filmindependent.org/labs-and-programs/documentary-lab/

3. Film Independent Fast Track (Due: February 23) http://www.filmindependent.org/labs-and-programs/fast-track/

4. Film Independent Project Involve (Due: April 27) http://www.filmindependent.org/labs-and-programs/project-involve/

5. Tribeca Film Institute All Access (Due: February 9) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/tribeca_all_access

6. Tribeca Film Institute IndieFilms Story Lab (Due: November 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/pages/TFI AE Films Feature Doc Storytelling Workshop

7. Tribeca Film Institute Interactive (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/TFI_interactive
8. Tribeca Film Institute Hacks (Due: February 18) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/tribeca_hacks

*International Funding for Documentary Films*

*Pre-Production / Production*


4. Catapult Film Fund (Due: February 16) http://catapultfilmfund.org

5. CES ArtsLink (Due: January 16) http://www.cecartslink.org/grants/artslink_projects/

6. Creative Capital (Due: March 2) http://www.creative-capital.org

7. Film Independent Canon Filmmaker Award Program (Due: February 23) http://www.filmindependent.org/labs-and-programs/grants-and-awards/canon-filmmaker-award-program/#.VNFL48aYnzI

8. Ford Foundation JustFilms Grant (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/freedom-of-expression/justfilms/for-grant seekers

9. Hartley Film Foundation (Application Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://hartleyfoundation.org/grants
10. IDA Pare Lorentz Doc Fund (Due: Spring) http://www.documentary.org/pare-lorentz-doc-fund

11. Impact Partners (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.impactpartnersfilm.com/about_filmmakers.php

12. Naked Edge Films (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://nakededgefilms.com

13. Sundance Documentary Fund (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.sundance.org/programs/documentary-film

14. Tribeca Film Institute Documentary Film (Due: November 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/pages/dfi_documentary_rules

15. Tribeca Film Institute ESPN Future Filmmaker Prize (Due: July 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/espn_future_filmmaker

16. Tribeca Film Institute Latin America Fund (Due: February 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/tfi_latin_america_media_arts_fund

17. Tribeca Film Institute New Media Fund (Due: November 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/tfi_new_media_fund

18. Tribeca Film Institute Resilient Communities Project (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/pages/resilient_communities_project

19. Visions SudEast (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.visionssudest.ch

20. Women In Film Finishing Fund (Due: Spring) http://www.wif.org/fff

21. World View Project Development Fund (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.worldview.org.uk/fund/project-development-fund/
Post-production

22. Fledgling Fund (Due: July 9) http://www.thefledglingfund.org/apply

23. Impact Partners (Application Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.impactpartnersfilm.com/about_filmmakers.php

24. Movies That Matter Finishing Funds (Due: April 15) http://www.moviesthatmatter.nl/english_index/international/support_programme/apply_for_funding

25. Naked Edge Films (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://nakededgefilms.com

26. Pare Lorentz Doc Fund (Due: Spring) http://www.documentary.org/pare-lorentz-doc-fund

27. Sundance Documentary Fund (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.sundance.org/programs/documentary-film

28. Tribeca Film Institute Documentary Film (Due: November 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/pages/ tfi_documentary_rules

29. Tribeca Film Institute Latin America Fund (Due: February 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/tfi_latin_america_media_arts_fund


31. Visions SudEast (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.visionssudest.ch

32. Women In Film Finishing Fund (Due: Spring) http://www.wif.org/fff

Distribution / Outreach

2. Bertha Britdoc Connect Fund (Due: April 13) http://britdoc.org/real_funds/bertha-britdoc-connect-fund

3. Fledgling Fund (Due: July 9) http://www.thefledglingfund.org/apply

4. Movies That Matter (Due: April 15) http://www.moviesthatmatter.nl/english_index/international/support_programme/apply_for_funding

5. Naked Edge Films (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://nakededgefilms.com

6. PBS POV (Due: June 30) http://www.pbs.org/pov/

7. Sundance Documentary Fund (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.sundance.org/programs/documentary-film

8. Tribeca Gucci Documentary Fund (Due: February 5) https://tribecafilminstitute.org/programs/detail/gucci_tribeca_documentary_fund

9. Visions SudEast (Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis) http://www.visionssudest.ch

Appendix - Excerpt from Invisible Goddesses (2011)

INT. BATHROOM - DAY
[TIGHT SHOT OF SONU’S FACE, SHOULDERS UP]

JEFF
We’re going to title this ‘Normal Discussion Points of Sonu: Sonu While Bathing.”

SONU
SONU takes a sip of water and spits it out.
Yeah.

JEFF
So, Sonu will you tell me about your coming out? We were going to talk about that.
SONU
See my “coming out” is available on the net, TedEx conference 2010…

JEFF
It is available, yes.

SONU
So that is a full description of, you know, how I came out, what was my whole movement of understanding my own sexuality and blah, blah…

The phone rings and a chela calls SONU from outside

Who is it?

DISSOLVE IN

See, I always say that “coming out” of a person is self-realization as far as sexuality is concerned. I always never say I was “coming out,” because I was always “there.” What is “coming out”? Do I come out from the skin in what I am? Do I come out from the soul where this body… This body is skeleton with flesh. My soul is inside. The soul had decided when it took birth and came out into this world. So, I was always there. I was out. I need not be “out.”

SONU takes a pale of water and pours it slowly on the bathroom flow.

Only like the water, if I take it in this container, and if it flows down and goes into another container and wants to be there, why not let it be there. It should be pure.

SONU pours the water into her hand, and with her hand puts water in her mouth, swishes the water and then spits it out.

H20. That is life. [Pause] What happened?

DISSOLVE

SONU continues to bathe.

SONU

344
I think that I could take baths 10 times a day to stay pure and fresh, but we should be fresh right from the soul. [Pause. About her chela] This bitch is trying me a lot, shouting and yelling outside.

JEFF
Do you think dance played a part in your coming out process?

SONU
See, I was already an established dancer when I came out you know, so it was hardly anything different. But, the one thing that enhanced was that I was more at ease with my body and myself in my own performances. I never had to restrict myself that whether I’m overdoing it or I’m not. Then I was like, “Yes! This is the way I am and this is what I’m doing.” Do you understand? I was more of a liberation, or liberty to my own self. You know? So it hardly mattered.

SONU begins to shave her face.

SONU is finished bathing and talking straight into the camera.

SONU
So it is true that if you’re an artist and if you’re a true artist to your own self and to your own life, people accept you as you are. [she pours more water on herself] Why should I change? Will the politicians change for their own agenda? For me? No. They will do their own thing. Will the world change for me? No. Then why should I change for the world? Excuse me! [Pause] And my “art” is art. Art has no language, no sex, no drama. It is all there. It is even more so… music and dance and everything…and I’m happy to be an artist. Dance and music brought me acceptance, gave me what I was. And that is something which is great. Today, when I speak, when I talk, when I walk on the street, it’s all the confidence what gave me right from my young childhood on the stage. And my art gave me that grace which puts a woman to shame. Isn’t that true?
SONU pours water over her head.

Oh.

She looks at me and smiles, pours water into her mouth and then spits.

So, tell me. Tell me more.

SONU stands up from the camera frame revealing her torso and waist.

DISSOLVE

SONU

Femininity is everywhere where it hurts to be.

SONU exits the bathroom.

FADE OUT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Production Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Navrang</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mere Mehboob</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Dosti</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Kohra</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Kismat</td>
<td>Gender Play</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Ananam</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Humjoli</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
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<td>Subtextual</td>
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<td>Gay</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Pakeezah</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
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<td>Namak Haram</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Subtextual</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
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<td>Kunwaara Baap</td>
<td>Hijra/Transgender</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Major Studio</td>
</tr>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Rafoo Chakkar</td>
<td>Gay, Transgender</td>
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### Table 2: Documentaries about Queer Indian Subjects

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<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Will This Change?</td>
<td>Hijra/Transgender, Gay</td>
<td>Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Gender Talents</td>
<td>Hijra/Transgender</td>
<td>Anthology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>India, Saudi Arabia, US</td>
<td>A Sinner in Mecca</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Feature</td>
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</table>

Table 3: Variables of filming each performance iteration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recording Format</th>
<th>Song Length</th>
<th>Performers</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Principal Language of Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Video/.MPG</td>
<td>3:20</td>
<td>1 guru, 5 chelas</td>
<td>Myself and Assistant</td>
<td>“Staged” Private Concert</td>
<td>Hijra house, Kalyan, MH</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Video/.MPG</td>
<td>1:53</td>
<td>1 guru, 1 chela</td>
<td>Myself and Assistant</td>
<td>“Staged” Private Concert</td>
<td>Lakshya Trust (NGO), Surat, Gujarat</td>
<td>Gujarati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Audio/.wav</td>
<td>0:53</td>
<td>4 thirunangais</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>“Staged” Private Concert</td>
<td>Darpan Foundation (CBO), Dhairavi, Mumbai</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Video/.MPG</td>
<td>2:20</td>
<td>1 guru, 2 chelas, 1 male accompaniment</td>
<td>approx. 75, mostly hijras, 3 jogtas, 10 kothis, 3 panthis and 2 hired cameramen</td>
<td>Non-staged Jalsa</td>
<td>Hotel Ballroom, Kalyan, MH</td>
<td>Marathi, Hindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Musical variables of the performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Performers</th>
<th>Role of Performers</th>
<th>Accompaniment</th>
<th>Language of Song</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Lead Vocal, 4 Support Vocal, 1 Dholak, clapping</td>
<td>Bhojpuri/Hindi</td>
<td>Call/Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 Lead Vocal (also accompanist), 1 Support Vocal, 1 Metallic Cup player, no clapping</td>
<td>Bhojpuri/Hindi/ Gujarati</td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 Lead Vocal, 3 Support Vocal, A cappella, no clapping</td>
<td>Bhojpuri/Hindi</td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 Lead Vocal, 1 Support Vocal, 1 Dholak, 1 dancer, clapping</td>
<td>Bhojpuri/Hindi</td>
<td>Call/Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Thick Description of “Asha Natoru” Iteration 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Marker</th>
<th>Audio Element</th>
<th>Visual Frame</th>
<th>Visual Description</th>
<th>Inferred Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:00</td>
<td>conversation in Marathi</td>
<td>Eye-level, Medium Shot featuring 4 hijras, (Long Take, Open Form)</td>
<td>4 hijras are sitting cross-legged on the floor</td>
<td>Nita (Chela 4) tells dholak player to play, this is a form of izzat through the recognition of talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:09</td>
<td>dholak player begins</td>
<td>unchanged</td>
<td>Mujranani (M) scratching her eye with left hand, Chela 1 (C1) smiling at camera, Chela 2 (C2) playing dholak, Chela 3 (C3) looking at Mujranani</td>
<td>M is left handed; Chelas are very respectful of her position of authority, demonstration of izzat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:16</td>
<td>M sings the sthai alone</td>
<td>unchanged</td>
<td>Mujranani moves hand from eye, and gestures outwards on the lyrics “dur” and “asha,” and then places them in lap</td>
<td>Hands gesture on two rhythmic downbeats, suggests that rhythm is conceived as Kaherwa (8 beat cycle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:22</td>
<td>3 chelas sing the sthai on que, M begins clapping</td>
<td>Camera pans left to include 5th Chela (C5), Three-Shot</td>
<td>Mujranani puts her hand on ground on sam (downbeat) and then starts to clap, everyone else immediately follows her clapping</td>
<td>clapping was not planned but felt through M’s body, the chelas watch M closely (izzat), chelas are excited to be clapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:26</td>
<td>M adds variations on clapping, joins chelas in singing</td>
<td>camera pans right, 4 hijras</td>
<td>M claps along with chelas</td>
<td>clapping variations stress eighth note pair beginning on second beat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:30</td>
<td>Everyone begins to sing repeat of sthai</td>
<td>camera pans right, 4 hijras</td>
<td>M gestures to chelas to stop and makes a face, C1 immediately stops singing and clapping</td>
<td>M wants to follow the call and response structure, but did not make that clear to her chelas before</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Marker</th>
<th>Audio Element</th>
<th>Visual Frame</th>
<th>Visual Description</th>
<th>Inferred Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:39</td>
<td>M begins to sing antara alone</td>
<td>2 hijras</td>
<td>M places hand on eye and then gestures outwards</td>
<td>M’s gesture makes it clear to her chelas that they should not sing, while also maintaining grace and musical form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:44</td>
<td>3 chelas sing the sthai on que, M begins clapping</td>
<td>camera pans left, then right</td>
<td>Chelas do not clap until M leads them in</td>
<td>Chelas refrain from taking musical liberties, closely follow the lead of M,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:52</td>
<td>the sthai is being sung in unison</td>
<td>camera pans left</td>
<td>M scrats eye with left hand, C1 looks at C4, who smiles, C1 smiles</td>
<td>The call and response structure is broken, the smile may be because of a break in protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:54</td>
<td>the sthai is being sung in unison</td>
<td>2 hijras</td>
<td>C4 looks at the camera and smiles</td>
<td>C4 becomes conscious of the camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:58</td>
<td>M sings the sthai alone</td>
<td>camera pans right</td>
<td>M moves hand from eye and gestures outward; Chelas are clapping but not singing</td>
<td>M’s gesture makes it clear to her chelas that they should not sing, while also maintaining grace and musical form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:05</td>
<td>chelas sing the sthai on que, dholak player (C2) loses beat</td>
<td>camera captures the dholak player</td>
<td>M looks at C2 and nods to the beat, hands in lap</td>
<td>M is guiding C2 back into the beat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:11</td>
<td>M sings the sthai alone,</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>C2, C3 look straight at M, C1 looks away, clapping ceases</td>
<td>confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:16</td>
<td>chelas sing the sthai on que, C3 begins clapping</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M leans forward, makes face of confusion</td>
<td>M is anticipating the antara variation, but can’t remember the words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:20</td>
<td>M sings the antara variation</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>C4 (out of frame) extends hand to dholak player (C2), C1 looks away, C3 looks at M and sings</td>
<td>C4 wants to maintain the call and response, think C2 is not doing well, C1 has lost interest, C3 is still interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:26</td>
<td>chelas sing the antara variation</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>C1 looks at camera and smiles, does not sing, C3 looks at M</td>
<td>C1 does not know the song, C3 wants to please M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:30</td>
<td>M repeats the antara variation, includes annunciation and sings louder</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M looks at C2, C1 and C3 look at M as she annunciates, C1 looks at the camera</td>
<td>M is annoyed with her chelas lack of effort, C2 looks dejected, C3 is trying, C1 is hiding because feels self-conscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:37</td>
<td>M sings sthai variation, louder</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M moves forward towards C3</td>
<td>M wants to spark energy back into the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Marker</td>
<td>Audio Element</td>
<td>Visual Frame</td>
<td>Visual Description</td>
<td>Inferred Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:40</td>
<td>clapping</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>C4 begins clapping, followed by M and the other chelas</td>
<td>energy is back into the group, M has remembered the lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:50</td>
<td>everyone</td>
<td>camera pans</td>
<td>M gestures outward</td>
<td>M gives permission for everyone to sing the main sthai while she attempts to remember the next antara variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sings the main sthai, M fades back</td>
<td>right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:55</td>
<td>M sings</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>hands in lap</td>
<td>M feels that the structure of the song has been established, minimal gesturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>antara variation, loud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:00</td>
<td>chelas sing the antara variation, M starts clapping alone</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M claps, C1 looks at C2, C3 looks at C4</td>
<td>chelas did not hear the lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:04</td>
<td>M sings the same variation, louder</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M gestures outward</td>
<td>M is teaching the same variation to her chelas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:10</td>
<td>M sings a sthai variation</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M looks upward and gestures upward</td>
<td>M remembers the lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:14</td>
<td>clapping</td>
<td>4 hijras</td>
<td>M and C4 begin to clap, followed by the other chelas, C2 looks off frame and smiles, C1 looks off frame</td>
<td>M and C4 want to put on a good show, the chelas are closely watching M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>begins in middle of sthai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:20</td>
<td>variation of sthai is repeated, M stops singing</td>
<td>4 hijras, another chela enters the frame</td>
<td>another chela (C5) enters the frame and hands M something (money), M does not see her, C1 takes it and places it in M’s lap</td>
<td>M may have been embarrassed about the money, C5 is not aware of what is going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:30</td>
<td>the antara is sung in unison</td>
<td>camera pans left</td>
<td>M moves forward, C1 gestures to C5 to sit down</td>
<td>C1 is completely disengaged, M feels that her performance is not good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:36</td>
<td>the sthai is repeated in unison, clapping</td>
<td>camera pans right</td>
<td>M wipes her face with dupatta (long scarf), gestures outward with both hands</td>
<td>M wants the performance/energy to keep going, she is not giving up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:41</td>
<td>M sings antara variation, others stop clapping</td>
<td>5 hijras</td>
<td>M gestures with right hand while singing, and moves head forward to beat</td>
<td>M is gesturing to the lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Marker</td>
<td>Audio Element</td>
<td>Visual Frame</td>
<td>Visual Description</td>
<td>Inferred Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:46</td>
<td>chelas sing the antara variation, M begins clapping</td>
<td>5 hijras</td>
<td>M begins to clap, C5 looks down, C1 looks into camera, C2 looks away and then starts laughing, C3 looks at M</td>
<td>M wants to keep the energy up, dholak player is laughing at everyone’s poor performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:50</td>
<td>M sings antara variation</td>
<td>5 hijras</td>
<td>M looks at me and gestures with her right hand, C2 continues to laugh</td>
<td>Aware of her chelas’ laughing, M is interested in her reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:58</td>
<td>M sings a sthai variation, loudly</td>
<td>5 hijras</td>
<td>M gestures with right hand while singing, and moves head forward to beat</td>
<td>M is determined to remember all of the lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:00</td>
<td>M begins to clap in the middle of the sthai</td>
<td>5 hijras</td>
<td>M beings to clap, followed by C4 (off screen), then C1</td>
<td>C4 closely watches M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:13</td>
<td>M begins antara while clapping</td>
<td>camera pans left, then zooms into M</td>
<td>M claps then periodically looks up, C4 and C1 looks at me</td>
<td>M still tries to remember the lyrics, the chelas are aware of my gaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:30</td>
<td>the song ends</td>
<td>camera zooms out to include, 4 hijras in frame</td>
<td>M gestures up with her right hand: “Stop”, C2 looks at her, C1 looks at the camera</td>
<td>M is finished singing the song, the other chelas are very responsive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: TUBS notation of “Asha Natoru” rhythm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Performance structure in “Asha Natoru”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Number of sthai</th>
<th>Number of antara</th>
<th>Variations of sthai</th>
<th>Variations of antara</th>
<th>Tihai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G# Major</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A Major</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>C Major</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Marker</td>
<td>Aural Element</td>
<td>Visual Frame</td>
<td>Visual Description</td>
<td>Inferred Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:03</td>
<td>Lead Singer (LS) starts to sing</td>
<td>2 hijras</td>
<td>Supporting singer (SS) smiles</td>
<td>SS knows and likes the song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:05</td>
<td>LS starts to play the cups, SS begins to sing</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>LS continues to sing, looks at SS, SS looks up while singing</td>
<td>LS makes sure that SS knows the song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:15</td>
<td>LS/SS begin antara, adds variation to cups</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>LS is concentrated, SS looks behind her briefly has someone comes into view</td>
<td>Rhythmic emphasis placed on the sections of the song and lyrics,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:23</td>
<td>LS/SS begin sthai, adds variation to cups</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>LS looks down and then extends arms outward for the cups</td>
<td>Rhythmic emphasis placed on sections of the song and lyrics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:28</td>
<td>LS/SS begin antara variation, adds different rhythmic variation</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>LS looks at the camera and then at her cups, SS looks at LS briefly then looks down, LS looks up</td>
<td>LS is the leader, but SS knows the song well, LS tries to remember the lyrics briefly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:33</td>
<td>LS/SS sing sthai variation, adds rhythmic variation</td>
<td>zoom into LS</td>
<td>LS smiles and then looks into camera, then looks away</td>
<td>LS gets great pleasure singing and playing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:47</td>
<td>LS/SS sing antara variation, adds rhythmic variation</td>
<td>zoom out to include LS and SS</td>
<td>LS looks briefly at SS and then looks down and plays, looks at camera, SS still looks away and then looks at camera</td>
<td>LS verifies the lyrics and then continues to sing the variation, LS is more confident than SS in performing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:52</td>
<td>LS/SS sing sthai variation, adds rhythmic variation</td>
<td>2 hijras</td>
<td>SS begins to laugh while LS continues to concentrate on the cups</td>
<td>SS is reacting to something off camera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:06</td>
<td>LS/SS sing antara variation, adds rhythmic variation</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>SS looks briefly at LS and then off to the side</td>
<td>SS is verifying the lyrics and then continues to sing, LS is the leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:14</td>
<td>LS/SS sing sthai variation, adds rhythmic variation</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>SS looks away, LS concentrates on cups</td>
<td>LS/SS are establishing a pattern of singing, very stable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Marker</td>
<td>Aural Element</td>
<td>Visual Frame</td>
<td>Visual Description</td>
<td>Inferred Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:23</td>
<td>LS/SS begin to sing the <em>tihai</em> section</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>SS looks briefly at LS and then off to the side, LS looks down and then to the camera</td>
<td>SS is verifying the lyrics and then continues to sing, LS is concentrating and is conscious of the camera</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:39</td>
<td>LS/SS sing the <em>tihai</em> section</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>SS looks away</td>
<td>SS is not as confident about this section of the song; LS has taken complete charge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:42</td>
<td>LS beings to sing the final <em>tihai</em>, loudly, SS backs off entirely from singing</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>SS looks down and away, LS still concentrated on the cups</td>
<td>SS is still not confident enough to finish the song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:50</td>
<td>end of song with rhythmic variation</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>LS makes final rhythmic variation, and then put cups on table while looking at camera, SS begins to laugh while looking at camera</td>
<td>LS is proud of her performance and clearly gets a lot of pleasure from singing, SS knows she didn’t do amazingly well, but finds it fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Lyrical Themes in all four iterations of “Asha Natoru”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hope</th>
<th>Bless/Plea</th>
<th>Puja</th>
<th>Baby</th>
<th>Family/Marriage</th>
<th>Suffer</th>
<th>Opposites</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Embodiment</th>
<th>Gender/Sexuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 / 25</td>
<td>2 / 25</td>
<td>3 / 8</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>2 / 6</td>
<td>2 / 19</td>
<td>1 / 2</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 / 7</td>
<td>11 / 14</td>
<td>2 / 2</td>
<td>1 / 1</td>
<td>4 / 4</td>
<td>2 / 2</td>
<td>2 / 2</td>
<td>3 / 3</td>
<td>5 / 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 / 8</td>
<td>2 / 8</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>1 / 6</td>
<td>1 / 2</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 / 12</td>
<td>6 / 16</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>1 / 2</td>
<td>2 / 4</td>
<td>3 / 12</td>
<td>1 / 4</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>1 / 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 10 - “Asha Natoru” Iteration 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Marker</th>
<th>Audio Element</th>
<th>Visual Frame</th>
<th>Visual Description</th>
<th>Inferred Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00:27</td>
<td>Lead Singer (LS) begins the main sthai</td>
<td>3 hijras in foreground, 10 in background</td>
<td>LS has microphone and walks over to supporting singer (SS), Dancer (Mujranani) is gesturing at her chelas</td>
<td>M is the person in charge, wants her chelas to participate in the song, LS takes her role seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:39</td>
<td>middle of sthai, people have begun clapping and dholak enters</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>M has begun to dance, LS and SS look at camera, (clapping is off frame), everyone looks off screen</td>
<td>the song performance is getting overshadowed by what is transpiring off the screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:45</td>
<td>M begins to sing the response to antara</td>
<td>camera pans left (with M)</td>
<td>M stops dancing, sings, and turns away to discipline one of her chelas</td>
<td>the song performance is getting overshadowed by what is transpiring off the screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00:51</td>
<td>LS/SS begin to sing the sthai</td>
<td>camera pans down to dholak player</td>
<td>camera moves to capture other aspects of performance, catches the nirvan chela veiled on the platform, one chela is dancing in the background, another is clapping</td>
<td>camera person (me) is overwhelmed by what is going on, not sure what to capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:05</td>
<td>LS/SS being the antara variation, followed by the response sung by M</td>
<td>camera comes back to original frame</td>
<td>M moves toward LS/SS, nods her head and gestures response</td>
<td>M is clearly in charge of the performance, offers them approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:09</td>
<td>LS/SS begin the sthai variation</td>
<td>original frame</td>
<td>LS is gesturing at the beginning of the sthai, M spins in a circle and begins dancing, other hijras clapping</td>
<td>M is engaged with the song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:24</td>
<td>LS/SS begin antara variation</td>
<td>camera pans to the right</td>
<td>16 hijras and 2 jogtas come into view, three are clapping, the others sitting patiently, 1 jogta asks me a question</td>
<td>as “audience” members, some of them are engaged, others are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:34</td>
<td>LS/SS sthai, followed by M and other chelas response</td>
<td>camera returns to original position</td>
<td>another hijra approaches LS and begins clapping</td>
<td>the song is respected more, people are engaged with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01:44</td>
<td>LS begins the antara variation, followed by the response from M, SS and others</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>LS gestures and everyone looks at her</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:06</td>
<td>LS begins the tihai</td>
<td>camera pans downward</td>
<td>dholak player comes into view, he is attentive</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Marker</td>
<td>Audio Element</td>
<td>Visual Frame</td>
<td>Visual Description</td>
<td>Inferred Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:16</td>
<td>LS sings <em>tihai</em>, followed by response</td>
<td>camera pans up from ground</td>
<td>LS, SS, and M come into view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:26</td>
<td>M sings the response</td>
<td>focus on the singer, etc</td>
<td>M gestures to other hijras and blesses them</td>
<td>M uses the performance of the song to bless her chelas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:35</td>
<td>LS sings final <em>tihai</em> followed by vocal bursts</td>
<td>same</td>
<td><em>kothi</em> and <em>hijra</em> pass through the frame</td>
<td>engagement towards the song is diminishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:40</td>
<td>M recommences the song as the LS</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>M picks up the mic, original LS/SS exit the “stage” and talk with other <em>hijras</em> in the frame</td>
<td>LS/SS have finished, M continues the song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:42</td>
<td>M stops singing but <em>chelas</em> in the background continue singing</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>M gets distracted by a conversation and another singer comes to take the mic, M nods in acceptance</td>
<td>M’s <em>chelas</em> are engaged, but M has already moved on, M respects the authority of the other singer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:52</td>
<td>the song is finished</td>
<td>zoom in on the second singer</td>
<td>the other singer is standing patiently</td>
<td>transition point between songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:04</td>
<td>the other singer begins her song, it is quieter</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>the singer gestures, and dancers come into view</td>
<td>hijras are more engaged with the second singer’s singing and choice of song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Song Number</td>
<td>Song Length</td>
<td>Song Genre</td>
<td>Song Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1:40*</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*partial song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4:26</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0:37</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3:24</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0:54</td>
<td>Communal Song (reprised)</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2:59</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Break</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5:56*</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7:38</td>
<td>Ghazal</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2:57</td>
<td>Ghazal (reprised)</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6:40</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene Number</td>
<td>Song Number</td>
<td>Song Length</td>
<td>Song Genre</td>
<td>Song Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5:31*</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5:04</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2:30</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2:34</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1:47</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5:54</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2:05</td>
<td>Concert Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1:24</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>:15* :20</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2:18</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0:20</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1:12</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2:42 :47</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>:28</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Song Number</th>
<th>Song Length</th>
<th>Song Genre</th>
<th>Song Language</th>
<th>Potential Song Titles</th>
<th>Principal Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>:15**</td>
<td>Transition Time</td>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>the DJ is playing around with songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>Concert Dance</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Tu Kya Jaane O Bewafa</td>
<td>Recorded Music + a shrouded kothi is dancing alone (to the camera)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5:34</td>
<td>Concert Dance</td>
<td>Hindi-Urdu</td>
<td>Salaam-E-Ishq Meri Jaan Zara Kabool Karlo</td>
<td>Mujranani dances alone + Yellow Kothi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1:48</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Salaam-E-Ishq Meri Jaan Zara Kabool Karlo</td>
<td>Yello Kothi + 2-3 hijras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3:28*</td>
<td>Communal Dance</td>
<td>Hindi, English</td>
<td>I love you</td>
<td>Turquoise Sari + 5-6 hijras, 1 kothi + Yellow Kothi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Puja Prep**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>File Number</th>
<th>File Length</th>
<th>//</th>
<th>//</th>
<th>//</th>
<th>//</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 14</td>
<td>1:42</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>shot of goddess, while chela lays down colored sand, 2 chelas and Mujranani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 15</td>
<td>:33</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 16</td>
<td>1:18</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>putting goddess into place, and placing turmeric on goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 17</td>
<td>2:18</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>placing rice, veggies, garland on goddess, 6-7 chelas, Mujranani and Nita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 18</td>
<td>2:23</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>shot of shrine, placing fruit around goddess, opening the package of sweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 19</td>
<td>:19</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>shot of haldi paste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 20</td>
<td>:44</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>shot of clay bowl in the making, shot of shrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 21</td>
<td>1:47</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>placing more fruit around goddess, Mujranani finishes the bowl and places it, makes wick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/S</td>
<td>Jalsa 22</td>
<td>7:26</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>pouring fuel into bowl, jewelry is placed next to goddess, coconuts are oriented towards goddess, candle is lit, incense is lit, then arthi (fire ceremony) in front of goddess, rubs the milk bowl, asks for milk, then puts red and yellow paint on container</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jalsa 23</td>
<td>:18</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>indiscriminate shot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Song Number</th>
<th>Song Length</th>
<th>Song Genre</th>
<th>Song Language</th>
<th>Potential Song Titles</th>
<th>Principal Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tel Baan</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 24 (Song 32)</td>
<td>7:12</td>
<td>Bollywood/ Ritualistic</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>clapping and singing Bano Teri ankiyan</td>
<td>Includes 9-10 chelas who apply haldi onto Sowmya; they put it on like they are sculpting her; they put it on each other, and even me; many of them are interacting with me, with the camera; a small fight breaks out, Mujranani comes in to break it up, only four are allowed to stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 25</td>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Sowmya poses in front of the second camera and introduces her sisters and chelas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 26</td>
<td>:22</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>someone puts more haldi on my face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 27</td>
<td>1:47</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>includes self-reflexive shot as she calls me her “photo chela”; people kiss and pose with me; Mujranani comes in and complains about the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 28</td>
<td>:43</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>same, then Nita comes in to scold them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 29</td>
<td>:18</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>indiscriminate shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 30</td>
<td>:22</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>chelas walk out the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 31</td>
<td>:13</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Nita poses for camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>File Number</td>
<td>File Length</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>(washing off haldi and preparing for the procession)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 32</td>
<td>1:06</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>shot of balcony, sound of recorded music, pan into the dance room and 4 panthis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 33</td>
<td>:10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>indiscriminate shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 34</td>
<td>:25</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>shot of the mother goddess, three hijras present and nirvan is washing the haldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 35</td>
<td>2:02</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Mujranani leads Sowmya out still veiled, she sits with her back to the goddess, Nita begins to put a necklace on her, this part is secretive, others are not allowed in here. 5 other hijra are present. They ask for shooting to happen. they yell for the shooting to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Song Number</td>
<td>Song Length</td>
<td>Song Genre</td>
<td>Song Language</td>
<td>Potential Song Titles</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalsa 36</td>
<td>:1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>indiscriminate shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jalsa 37</td>
<td>15:57</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>singing <em>Bano tera Ankiyaan</em></td>
<td>10 chelas, Mujranani is directing the crowd, 5-6 are present, they start to sing another song for the camera, led by Moneywalli, Nita puts <em>kajal</em> (eye shadow) on Sowmya; Sowmya smiles for the camera several times as they adorn her with jewelry, fix her hair, place a garland in her hair, and place a string around her; people come in to take pictures and watch, and a string is put around her neck; they move her to the entrance and I move the balcony; she is escorted into the dance room in front of everyone, silent; Someone starts singing and Mujranani silences them; everyone is back in their original spots on the floor; Nita, Sowmya, and Nita sit in the center again, flanked by Nita chela on her left and chela on Sowmya’s right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jalsa 38</td>
<td>8:42</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Orange Sariwalli announces and gives the gifts (microphone), Mujranani gives the gifts, <em>saris</em> are placed on the heads of those receiving them and then put into the bucket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jalsa 39</td>
<td>1:03</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>clapping and chanting <em>variyaan</em></td>
<td>Nita gets up, mujranani calls in the <em>dholak</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jalsa 40</td>
<td>23:52</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Black Sariwalli puts on <em>ghungroos</em> (ankle bells); Orange Sariwalli announces the amount earned through gift giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9:25</td>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td><em>Sehra</em></td>
<td>Black Sariwalli (singer/dancer) mujranani (dancer) Orange sari and 2 supporting singers clappers Nita (dancer) <em>Dholak Player</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Song Number</td>
<td>Song Length</td>
<td>Song Genre</td>
<td>Song Language</td>
<td>Potential Song Titles</td>
<td>Principal Performers</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3:15</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td><em>Bano Teri Ankiyan</em></td>
<td>Black Sariwalli (singer/dancer) Dholak Player 3-4 <em>chelas</em> (dancers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5:22</td>
<td>Concert Singing</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td><em>Aaj Ki Raat</em></td>
<td>Black Sariwalli (singer/dancer) Dholak Player Nita (dancer) Sowmya (variyaan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1:14</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>mujranani (singer) Black Sariwalli (singer) 4-5 <em>chelas</em> (dancers) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1:00* :52</td>
<td>Badhai Song</td>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>mujranani (singer) 1 <em>chela</em> (supporting) Nita (dancer) 3-4 <em>chelas</em> (dancers) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5:04</td>
<td>Badhai Song</td>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>mujranani (singer) 1 <em>chela</em> (supporting) Nita (dancer) 2-3 <em>chelas</em> (dancers) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2:31* :15</td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td><em>Mora Dil Naahi Jaaye</em></td>
<td>Black Sariwalli (singer/dancer) 1 <em>chela</em> (dancer) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2:26</td>
<td>Badhai Song</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td><em>Asha Natoru</em></td>
<td>Orange Sari (singer) 1 <em>chela</em> (supporting singer) Mujranani (dancer) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2:53*</td>
<td>Concert/</td>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>Black Sariwalli (singer/dancer) Nita (dancer) Orange Sariwalli (dancer) 4-5 <em>chela</em> (dancers) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communal Song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1:04*</td>
<td>Communal Song/Dance</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>mujranani (singer) 10 <em>chela</em> dancers (no clear lead singer as everyone is overpowering Mujranani) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Communal Song/Dance</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>incomprehensible</td>
<td>Mujranani (singer) 10 <em>chela</em> (dancers) 1 <em>jogta</em> (dancer) 1 <em>kothi</em> (dancer) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Song Number</td>
<td>Song Length</td>
<td>Song Genre</td>
<td>Song Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3:20</td>
<td>Communal Song/Dance</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td><em>Baadlaa Chalo Bulawa Aaya Hai</em></td>
<td>Mujranani (singer) Nita (dancer) 1 <em>chela</em> (supporting singer) 1 <em>jogta</em> (dancer) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3:30</td>
<td>Communal Song/Dance</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td><em>Chalo Bulawa Aaaya Hai Mata Ne Bulaya Hai</em></td>
<td>Mujranani (singer) Nita (dancer) 1 <em>chela</em> dancer (lots of clapping and supporting singing) Moneywalli (singer) Dholak Player</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc</th>
<th>File Number</th>
<th>File Length</th>
<th>Song Length</th>
<th>Song Genre</th>
<th>Song Language</th>
<th>Potential Song Titles</th>
<th>Principal Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 45</td>
<td>:58</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>on balcony, fully veiled, Moneywalli whispers something into veiled Sowmya’s ear; Mujranani places the pot on head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 46</td>
<td>:45</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>rubs something on Sowmya’s teeth, something dark; sound of pouring the milk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 47</td>
<td>:34</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Mujranani chants while they place the pot of milk with garlands on her head; someone comes to me to tell me that I cannot film anymore; the rest of the footage is in chunks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 48</td>
<td>:36</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>walk from the building to the waters edge, from behind; out of respect, I am out of audio range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 49</td>
<td>1:34</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>I stand on the cliff while the nirvan carefully walks down a path to the river; hijras are helping to hold the pot as she descends; a spray of red powder into the river, throwing into the river; <em>kothis</em> ask me about my sexuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 50</td>
<td>:18</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>people tell me not to film</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 51</td>
<td>:21</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jalsa 52</td>
<td>:42</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>the lens goes blurry as they pass by; the procession is back on the balcony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pledge

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Song Number</th>
<th>Song Length</th>
<th>Song Genre</th>
<th>Song Language</th>
<th>Potential Song Titles</th>
<th>Principal Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 53</td>
<td>:36</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>shot of Sowmya eating prasad while sitting in front of Bahuchara ji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 54</td>
<td>4:02</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>prostrating in front of Bahuchara ji, Sowmya is partially veiled at this point; Mujranani is instructing Sowmya to chant to Bahuchara ji; 10 <em>hijras</em> present; then Mujranani gives permission for <em>chelas</em> to eat the prasad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 55</td>
<td>:30</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Nirvan is drinking chai and talking with her <em>guru bhais</em>, she is still facing Bahuchara ji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 56</td>
<td>1:13</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Nirvan is encouraged to stand in front of the mirror for the first time; her eyes still closed; there are probably 8 <em>hijras</em> total in the room, including Mujranani and Nita; beautiful footage of her eyes opening; she wants to go back in her veil, then she takes her hands off and keeps her eyes closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 57</td>
<td>:47</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>she prefers the solitude; Sowmya prostrates at Nita’s feet; then her chelas are prostrating at her feet; her sisters kiss her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 58</td>
<td>:11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>people are touching Mujranani’s feet now</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final Dance**

**Song 48**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Song Number</th>
<th>Song Length</th>
<th>Song Genre</th>
<th>Song Language</th>
<th>Potential Song Titles</th>
<th>Principal Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jalsa 60</td>
<td>:38</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>farewell video/photos; “action!” one of them yells. “ok start” Moneywala says something and then claps. they joke around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Song Number</td>
<td>Song Length</td>
<td>Song Genre</td>
<td>Song Language</td>
<td>Potential Song Titles</td>
<td>Principal Performers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalsa 61</td>
<td>:33</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Moneywalli does a blessing on Sowmya’s head; they pose for photos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalsa 62</td>
<td>:16</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalsa 63</td>
<td>:16</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yogesh calls me <em>pagal</em> (crazy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Song Titles</td>
<td>English Translation and media links</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Tera Pyaar Pyaar</em></td>
<td>“Your love”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td><em>Vakratunda Mahakaya Suryakoti Smaaprabha</em></td>
<td>Traditional prayer to Ganesh commonly performed to start all kinds of ceremonies: <a href="http://greenmesg.org/mantras_slokas/sri_ganesha-vakratunda_mahakaya.php">http://greenmesg.org/mantras_slokas/sri_ganesha-vakratunda_mahakaya.php</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 0:42  |      | Dialogue |                                 | Welcome everyone to the 7th year celebrations. Please clap. Do you know what is the meaning of Dancing Queens? Our aim to create awareness about sexual minorities. Sometimes talking about these issues of homosexuality, transgender causes, etc, is not palatable to the public. And so our aim is to talk about these issues through the medium of dance, so people can come and interact with us, and work towards normalizing these issues.  

Every year has a theme. What’s the theme this year. In the past we’ve done - Madhuri Dixit, 70s, tribute to the 60’s heroines. What do you hear in your heart? …heartbeat? It has rhythm. We have so many dances in India, so many rhythms and so we are celebrating Rhythms of India.  

- Our first introduction -  
*Is Ada se Baath Ki*  
*Ki Dil Chura Gaye*  
*Hum Toh Samjhe The Boot*  
*App toh dhadkan suna gaye*  

“You spoke with such an elegance  
That you Stole my Heart  
I took you for a silent-one  
And you spoke with your heartbeat instead”  

(audience claps)  
So Let’s start with our favorite, *Mujra*.  
(audience claps) |
<p>| 4:35  |      | Song     | <em>Sun Lo Tum</em>                     | “The Flame Will Not Rise”: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tH7QQAduxh8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tH7QQAduxh8</a> |
| 8:30  |      | Song     | <em>Kainse Mukhde Se Nazre Hataun</em>   | “I Can’t Take My Eyes Off Your Face”: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htf6V2d9xQ">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htf6V2d9xQ</a> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:50</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Tohfa Kabul</em> Hain Humein</td>
<td>“I Accept Your Gifts But…”; <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIO8Lv-64g4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIO8Lv-64g4</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:04</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent performance. People are busy, they’ve been practising for weeks, it’s very credible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:37</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Now we move from <em>Mujra</em>, the choice of the <em>Nawab</em>’s (royal land owners) from the north. Now we move west to Mumbai which has <em>Dandiya</em> and <em>Garba</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:21</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>(unclear)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:45</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Dholida Dhol</em></td>
<td>“The <em>Dhol,</em>” a Gujarati Folk Song; <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTo4Cvaes60">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTo4Cvaes60</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:13</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Odhoni Odhu Ude Jayee</em></td>
<td>“My Scarf Flies in the Air,” a Gujarathi Folk Song; <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lh5iipp-JcA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lh5iipp-JcA</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:00</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>(repeated)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:07</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Please clap! Some jokes about <em>Sardarje</em> and now going back to the north to <em>Punjab</em>’s <em>Bhangra</em> now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:50</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:10</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Ek Omkar</em></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxob7YNUM14">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxob7YNUM14</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:50</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Bari Barsi Khatan</em></td>
<td>Traditional Punjabi Wedding Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26:15</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Hulle Hula Re Hulle</em></td>
<td>Traditional Punjabi Wedding Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27:31</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Bhootni Ke</em></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKbmf9RHDtY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKbmf9RHDtY</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sumit: Abinaji, this won’t work.
Abina: What wouldn’t work?
Sumit: No no no this absolutely wouldn’t work.
Abina: But why? I’ve shown you such beautiful dances, so many
whistles, so many claps, so what wouldn’t work?
Sumit: Many whistles, good. Claps, good. We’ve seen dances, very
good. Ok, so I’d like to ask you now. So we saw the Mujra?
Abina: Yes, we saw the Mujra. Say Salam Alaikam!
Sumit: Adaab adaab adaab...
Abina: Yes, did you like her, the one who performed Mujra?
Sumit: Yeah yeah, what excellent Mujra that was. Wasn’t it guys?
Abina: Focus focus Sumit, we are conducting a show over here.
Sumit: Yes yes, focus focus. So we did the garba afterwards?
Come look here! So we did Bhangra there as well?
Abina: Yes.
Sumit: Ok so where are we now?
Abina: Mumbai.
Sumit: So we are in Mumbai and why have you not shown me any
Lavani yet?!
Abina: gasps
Sumit: See see, how beautiful is the saree, what delicateness!
Abina: Thank you!
Sumit: so should we have the Lavani or not?!
(audience cheers)
Abina: Ok ok, but I’d like to say something first. One of the
initiatives of Dancing Queens is that the LGBT community, sexual
minorities, we want that their parents accept them. There are many
LGBT people who have suicidal tendencies because their parents
don’t accept them. Do you know that it took ten years for my mother
to accept me for who I am?
Sumit: Guys, this is a very big thing that it took ten years, to
understand her. So do you have any suggestion for how to proceed?
Abina: Yes, I do have some advice, a suggestion. I talked to my
mother and I told her that we always think about what brings about
change in a society. So people think that once an Indira Gandhi is
born, Jhanci’s Ki Rani is born, that will change things. But I thought,
if we want to instill change, why not start at home.
Sumit: Yes, that is very correct.
Abina: So Sumit, do you know that there is a surprise item in this
performance.
Sumit: Oh yeah? Yes, we like surprises don’t we?
Abina: Guys, do you like surprises? Ok, so keep watching!
Sumit: Please clap, DQ presents Rhythms of India.

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**Song** | **Mala Zao Dya na Ghari** | “Let Me Go Home, It’s Midnight”:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVRzHpDwSP4

**Song** | **Disla Ga Bai Disla** | “I Saw Him, I Saw Him”:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCiUi_LKkoM

**Song** | **Kakhet Kalsa Gavala Valsa** | “The Pot of Water is in Your Arms, But the Village is Searching for it,” a Marathi Lavani song

**Dialogue** | **Coming up is belly dance!**

**Song** | **Maiya Maiya** | “O Mother, O Mother”:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0V_4q7v0HY
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45:40</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Aga Bai Halla Machaye</em></td>
<td>“Oh Dear, There is Cacophony in My Heart”: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQIn_3NYa1Q">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQIn_3NYa1Q</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46:30</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48:03</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>(audience claps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have you guys had some food? Then scream louder!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Now we are presenting something different, about the performer, she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>is amazing, so fasten your seat belts. We are moving towards the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>South now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>But first a <em>Sher</em> -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You are that kind of a bird…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>...birds take flight and that sky is all that they know...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>But you guys are those birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For whom even the sky seems not enough!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(unclear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The next dance is from Karnataka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50:30</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Mundi, Mundi Viyagane</em></td>
<td>Folk Music from Tamil Nadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ZttHrEnso">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4ZttHrEnso</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53:45</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>second part of the &lt;tamil dance&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54:54</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>(unclear)</td>
<td>Instrumental Folk Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57:15</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>And now some Bollywood numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57:45</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Aa Re Pritam Pyare</em></td>
<td>“Come Here, Oh My Dear”:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwOFjXP3BqY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwOFjXP3BqY</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00:00</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>(repeated)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00:35</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Aa Ante Amalapuram</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htnO7XWage0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htnO7XWage0</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:01:55</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Naka Muka</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:04:05</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Mere Photo Ko Seene</em></td>
<td>“Glue My Photograph to Your Heart”:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y5SDlsUaLs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y5SDlsUaLs</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:05:55</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>(unclear)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:07:50</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td><em>Party Abhi Baki Hai</em></td>
<td>“The Party’s Not Over Yet”:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb9FUunmoGEY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb9FUunmoGEY</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:09:50</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Disco Song from <em>Student of the Year</em></td>
<td>“Crazy for Disco”: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcL6ZEnM49Q">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcL6ZEnM49Q</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 13 - Hijra Badhai and the Dancing Queens</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hijra Badhai</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Dancing Queens</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Emphasis</strong></td>
<td><em>Izzat</em></td>
<td><em>peehchān</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Context</strong></td>
<td>Private houses, streets</td>
<td>Public Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Length</strong></td>
<td>15-30 minutes</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performers</strong></td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repertoire</strong></td>
<td>Regional badhai folk, filmi songs</td>
<td>Wide-ranging, except badhai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content/ Meaning</strong></td>
<td>Highly religious, auspicious (implicit)</td>
<td>Political, LGBTQ equality (explicit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumentation</strong></td>
<td>Acoustic, <em>dhola</em>k, harmonium,</td>
<td>Recorded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of Sexuality</strong></td>
<td>Not explicitly sexual</td>
<td>Heteronormative codes of gender and sexuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogy</strong></td>
<td>Mother/daughter relationship</td>
<td>Teacher/student relationship, rehearsals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Context</strong></td>
<td><em>Gharānā</em>, familial way of life</td>
<td>Formal extracurricular activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Organization</strong></td>
<td>Hierarchic structure with explicit rules and systems of rewards/punishments</td>
<td>Managerial structure, “democratic”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td>Case-by-case basis</td>
<td>Auditioned, formal process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>Primary source of income</td>
<td>Fundraising initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>Rs. 500 - 10,000 / performance</td>
<td>Rs. 10,000 - 50,000 / performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
<td>Classless/Very Low</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics</strong></td>
<td><em>Hijras</em> and some <em>kothis</em> of heterogenous caste/religious backgrounds</td>
<td>Mostly <em>hijras</em>, <em>kothis</em>, <em>panthis</em>, other transgender, of heterogenous caste/religious backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>A mix of Hindu and Muslim customs</td>
<td>Secular / Hindu ideology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation in Mainstream Society</strong></td>
<td>Renouncers, social outsiders</td>
<td>Mainstreamers, social outsiders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visibility</strong></td>
<td>Visible but secretive</td>
<td>Visible and transparent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix - Song Lyrics

“Asha Natoru” Iteration 1

Call: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

Response: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: Assa na todu ri asha na choru, (Don’t break hope, don’t even leave it.)

R: Assa na todu ri asha na choru, (Don’t break hope, don’t even leave it.)

C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)
C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

R: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

C: Koi chadai maiyya gajraa lagaye, (Someone is putting a garland in your hair,)

R: Koi chadai maiyya gajraa lagaye, (Someone is putting a garland in your hair,)

C: Koi chadai maiyya gajraa lagaye, (Someone is putting a garland in your hair,)

R: Koi chadai maiyya gajraa lagaye, (Someone is putting a garland in your hair,)

C: Raja chadaike gale haar, Meya more assa natoru, (The prince is putting the garland around her neck, Don’t break my hopes,)

R: Raja chadaike gale haar, Meya more assa natoru, (The prince is putting the garland around her neck, Don’t break my hopes,)

C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

C: Dag dag pair maiya, aankh bhai aaye, (Prostrating at the feet, her eyes became full of water,)

R: Dag dag pair maiya, aankh bhai aaye, (Prostrating at the feet, her eyes became full of water,)

C: Sone kasej chadhaye, Meya more assa natoru, (Sitting on the golden bed, Don’t break my hopes,)
R: *Sone kasej chadhaye, Meya more assa natoru.* (Sitting on the golden bed, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: *Assa na todu ri asha na choru.* (Don’t break hope, don’t even leave it.)

R: *Assa na todu ri asha na choru.* (Don’t break hope, don’t even leave it.)

C: *Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru.* (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: *Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru.* (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

R: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

C: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

R: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

C: *Oh, charo taraf bade dhar, Meya more assa natoru.* (It has big doors on four corners, Don’t break my hopes)

R: *Oh, charo taraf bade dhar, Meya more assa natoru.* (It has big doors on four corners, Don’t break my hopes)

C: *Assa na todu ri asha na choru.* (Don’t break hope, don’t even leave it.)

R: *Assa na todu ri asha na choru.* (Don’t break hope, don’t even leave it.)
C: *Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru*, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

R: *Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru*, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes)

“Asha Natoru” *Iteration 2*

*Meike bhavan bade dur, Maiyya mori assa na todo*, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

*Meike bhavan bade dur, Maiyya mori assa na todo*, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

*Assa na todu nirassa na modo*, (Don’t break my hopes, don’t even bend them,)

*Assa na todu nirassa na modulo*, (Don’t break my hopes, don’t even bend them,)

*Meike bhavan bade dur, Maiyya mori assa na todo*, (The bride’s house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

*Dur gali khatta maiya kale ay bhavani*, (Where I’ve come to see you is far,)

*Dur gali khatta maiya kale ay bhavani*, (Where I’ve come to see you is far,)

*Ali gali mahavir, Maiya mori assa na todo*, (I am singing this song to you, Don’t break my hopes,)

*ali gali mahavir maiya mori assa na todo*, (I am singing this song to you, Don’t break my hopes,)
Koi chadave maiyya gajraa ne nariyal (Some people are offering flowers and coconut for your hair,)

Koi chadave maiyya gajraa ne nariyal, (Some people are offering flowers and coconut for your hair.)

Rani chadhave gale haar, Maiya mori assa na todo, (The princess is putting a garland around your neck, Don’t break my hopes.)

Rani chadhave gale haar, Maiya mori assa na todo, (The princess is putting a garland around your neck, don’t break my hopes.)

Aandhe ko aankh, maiya gori ko kaayaa, (You are like eyes for the blind and light for the dark, [fair lady for the dark groom,])

Aandhe ko aankh, maiya gori ko kaayaa (You are like eyes for the blind and light for the dark [fair lady for the dark groom,])

Suhagan ki godh bardhai, Maiya mori assa na todo, (Bless the lap of this newlywed bride with a baby, Don’t break my hopes,)

Suhagan ki godh bardhai, Maiya mori assa na todo (Bless the lap of this newlywed bride with a baby, Don’t break my hopes,)

Ao mai ray bhala tum jago mai re, (Please come with all your glory, Please wake up oh Goddess,)
Please come with all your glory, Please wake up oh Goddess,

I am singing this auspicious song for you, offering food, to convince you,

May the newborn and his mother live long, That’s what we pray to you, dear Goddess,

I wish that your daughter-in-law lives longer and your sister lives longer too, This is what we pray to you, dear Goddess,

(in Gujarati)

I’m yearning to meet you,

That’s all I want,

Through my throat (voice) you sing!

“The Asha Natoru” Iteration 3

The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,

The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,

(Don’t break hope, don’t even bend it,)

(The house of the Goddess is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)
Devi ke bhavane bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The house of the Goddess is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

Andhe ko aankh, kaude ko lage, (Eyes to the blind, white to the black,)

Meike bhavan bade dur; Meya more assa natoru, (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

“Asha Natoru” Iteration 4

C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

R: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes,)

C: Assa na todu ri asha na moru, (Don’t break hope, don’t even bend it,)

R: Assa na todu ri asha na moru, (Don’t break hope, don’t even bend it,)

C: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes)

R: Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru, (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes)

C: Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo, (They built a house in Awadh,)
R: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

C: *Oh, charo taraf bade dhar, Meya more assa natoru.* (It has big doors on four corners, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: *Oh, charo taraf bade dhar, Meya more assa natoru.* (It has big doors on four corners, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: *Assa na todu ri asha na moru.* (Don’t break hope, don’t even bend it.)

R: *Assa na todu ri asha na moru.* (Don’t break hope, don’t even bend it.)

C: *Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru.* (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: *Meike bhavan bade dur, Meya more assa natoru.* (The house is very far, Don’t break my hopes.)

C: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

R: *Awadi puri mein bhawane banayo.* (They built a house in Awadh.)

C: *Charo taraf bade dhar, Meya more assa natoru.* (It has big doors on four corners, Don’t break my hopes.)

R: *Charo taraf bade dhar, Meya more assa natoru.* (It has big doors on four corners, Don’t break my hopes.)

Ao mai ray bhala tum jago mai re, (Please come with all your glory, Please wake up oh Goddess.)
Ao mai ray bhala tum jago mai re, (Please come with all your glory, Please wake up oh Goddess.)

Achcha jive bachha jive, jive mai re, (May the newborn and his mother live long, That’s what we pray to you, dear Goddess.)

Mileko bakko mai re... (I’m yearning to meet you.)
Bibliography


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