

THE PLACE OF SEXUALITY AND THE SEXUALITY OF PLACE: A DISSIDENT
SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF BANGALORE, INDIA

A Dissertation

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Abstract.

The South Indian city of Bangalore has experienced a period of exponential growth and social change since the India first underwent economic liberalization in the 1990s. Today Bangalore is a thriving metropolis of more than 10 million people, popularly known as “The Silicon Valley of India.” This dissertation approaches the study of Bangalore’s urban condition, not from the popular perspective of its thriving middle class or its high tech industry, but by examining how its prolonged period of growth has shaped the lives of the city’s LGBTQ residents. Expanding on anthropological scholarship about local instantiations of globally circulating sexual identity categories, as well as engaging with ongoing debates in queer theory, this dissertation theorizes sexual dissidence as the category around which people organize non-heterosexual sexualities and non-binary genders, and in turn organize their city. Drawing on 20 months of fieldwork, the ethnographic material focuses on different urban sites where sexually dissident people make and sustain communities organized around sexual difference. As a social geography, the dissertation asks how people make their lives meaningful, and it pays close attention to where and how they do so. As a result, it develops the concept of urban articulation to describe how urban geographies are made socially meaningful and materially distinct through sex, intimacy, and politics.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Scott Sorrell holds a Bachelor of Arts from Duke University (2007) with a Major in Anthropology, and completed his Ph.D. at Cornell University (2019), conducting ethnographic research in Bangalore, India.

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A Note on Names:

Most of the names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms intended to protect the identities of the individuals I write about, particularly in regards to personal stories. However, when my stories reflect public statements or professional work where the individual or organizational names are already linked in the public record, I have opted for people's real names. Further, I have not distinguished between these two usages in the text, so as not to draw undue attention to the difference, but I have made every effort to protect the identities of my informants' personal information.

Introduction

The ride south into the city of Bangalore from Kempegowda International Airport reveals the city in stages. Layers of high-rise residential developments and glass-fronted office parks stretch to the horizon, shimmering through the heat like an unending mirage. In Bangalore there is no singular skyline from which to view the ever-expanding metropolis. Instead, perspective is afforded only by concrete and rebar—like atop the city’s multi-lane flyovers where traffic inevitably comes to a standstill as it funnels into the city’s older and narrower central roads. Indeed, it was in the back of a cab crossing the Hebbal flyover when I first arrived in Bangalore that I noticed billboards advertising the many housing developments and gated communities under perpetual construction across the city’s urban sprawl.

Such views from the miasma of Bangalore’s traffic, as well as stories about getting stuck in traffic somewhere—anywhere—in Bangalore are probably the most common experience people have living in the city today. Talk about the city’s infamous traffic includes tales of hours spent gridlocked at major signals, or intersections, across the metropolis. What’s more, these

conversations about traffic happen in all contexts and with all kinds of people. I had them as a passenger in the backseat of brightly painted auto-rickshaws and in plain white Tata Indicas, the seemingly ubiquitous car model for app-based cab services like Uber and Ola. I talked about traffic with friends who worked for American companies like Goldman Sachs and Accenture, with those who ran their own tech start-ups and traveled around the city on motorbikes, and with people who relied on the city's bus system for transport to low wage domestic service jobs. Yet no matter how widespread the complaints, traffic was not— as people sometimes joked— Bangalore's "great equalizer." For while it is true that if all the vehicles on the road are at a standstill neither a fancy private car nor a jam-packed public bus will get you to your destination any faster, different material conditions of transport continue to index other forms of urban social, economic, and political life.

For example, experiencing traffic in one's own vehicle (usually with a driver) or in a hired cab means disappearing into the virtual world of smartphones, listening to music with the windows rolled up, closed off from the world outside. Waiting out the same traffic jam in a bus, however, probably means pushing one's way through a hot and sweaty crowd with no hands free to hold a phone because they are busy grasping for balance, or listening to someone else's music playing loud and tinny from the phone in their pocket. These are only two of many possible ways to travel through the city, of course, but their starkly different embodiments— including, for example, differential exposure to the city's worsening air pollution¹— highlight

¹See <https://aqicn.org/city/bangalore/> for real time measurements of Bangalore's air quality index. During the period of my fieldwork there was a much talked about statistic that breathing the city's air was equivalent to smoking six cigarettes per day.

the highly classed effects of differential access to methods of transport in an Indian city like Bangalore.

With all the time spent sitting in traffic I paid more and more attention to the billboards. One in particular stood out to me, though at first it appeared to be nothing more than a stock photo of a sparsely furnished living room with floor to ceiling windows covered by gauzy curtains. In the photo, bright light shone through the curtains, offering a sense of spaciousness without making anything outside the room visible. Instead, it conveyed a generic sense of expansiveness that remained detached from the particularity of Bangalore as its site. The clean, modern furniture looked stiff and not at all lived-in, and there were no people or personal effects in the photograph to suggest that the room might also be a setting for social life. In short, it looked exactly like what it almost certainly was—a generic image selected by a marketing team in order to represent an as yet un-built property. Without context, it lacked the thickness of social relations needed to transform the room into a space (Lefebvre 1991) and, in turn, to emplace that space within a social world inflected by, among other things, gender and sexuality (Feld and Basso 1996, Massey 1994).

So many things remained unknown in the image. For instance, who lived there and what might be their relation to each other and to the world beyond the room? While the image seemed to emphasize architecture to the exclusion of social life, its accompanying text did reference possible occupants.

"Bangalore's most PRIVATE lives," it read. Similar to the empty room, the

This number, while striking, was much less than Delhi where the air equaled 20 cigarettes.

word “PRIVACY” was presented devoid of any of the social context necessary to interpret its intended meaning. Instead of drawing on the particular social histories or geographies of Bangalore, the “PRIVACY” depicted on the billboard was reduced to its generic function within the capital-driven cityscape—a highly desirable aesthetic marked by its separation from the din of urban life—or what Asher Ghertner describes as the production of a “world-class aesthetic” (Ghertner 2015).

Gated developments, security guards, and the elusive promise of quiet: both the billboard image and the spaces to which it alluded could easily enough be located in Bangalore, but their value relies upon their imagined fungibility, i.e. the possibility that they can be found anywhere. Insofar as the ad was selling both a specific property *and* a way of life, the absence of local context itself became the context for its conception of “PRIVACY” found outside the traffic, congestion, and pollution that characterize Bangalore today. What’s more, it suggests that decontextualized privacy accrues value—in this case is worth Crores² of Rupees— only insofar as it marks a space apart from the thick networks of sociality and kinship that are understood to characterize life in urban India (Ray and Baviskar 2011).

I offer these observations about a billboard for a high-end residential development, as an example of the rise in consumer capitalism and just one form of material evidence for Bangalore’s explosive, post-liberalization growth (Mankekar 1999). In this way the billboard was indicative of larger trends because it underscored the desirability of separation from the city even as it recognized how desirable living in Bangalore continues to be for those

² One lakh is equal to 100,000 and a 1 crore is equal to 10 lakhs or 100,000,000.

who can afford the life it advertised. Akin to the ways in which access to private vehicles shield people from some of the negative effects of traversing the city, both the shared experience of traffic and of living in the Bangalore offer a veneer of equality to otherwise vastly different lives lived in the close physical proximity of urban space.

It's important to note that lots of stories circulate about Bangalore other than ones about traffic: that it is the tech capital or the Silicon Valley of India, for instance, or that its contemporary identity has been thoroughly shaped by the growth of the city's cosmopolitan middle class. Today that "middle class" is often solely, though inaccurately, associated with the city's IT industry in popular representations of the city. But Bangalore is far more complex, and one result of these widely circulating narratives is how the Bangalore of popular imagination is very different from the Bangalore that people live in, struggle with, and where they sometimes manage to thrive.

Drawing on my experiences living and conducting research in the city over the course of 21 months in 2015 and 2016, this dissertation seeks to understand how a diverse urban place like Bangalore gets produced as both an object of knowledge and of experience. I show how it is a space of action for people who do not always feel that they fit into the dominant story of the city. In order to unpack the array of different experiences, I focus on the category of sexuality. Underlying my approach is how understanding sexuality involves attention not just to individual bodies and desires, but also attention to how individuals are part of communities. What's more, communities organized around sexuality are always already located within thick networks of social, political, and economic relations that are constitutive of urban life.

Through ethnography I will show how the categories of “urban” and “sexuality” are not just related through people’s lived experiences but are co-constituted by and through each other. In other words, attention to different experiences of sexuality in Bangalore is as vital to understanding the city, as the city is vital to the sexuality of its citizens. And although sexuality refers to a broad field of relations between persons and groups, I focus specifically on experiences of sexuality that defy or exceed heterosexual and reproductive norms—including what are variously called gay, lesbian, transgender, LGBT, Queer, Kothi, Hijra, Jogappa, Sexual Minority, Sexuality Minority, and a host of other often confusing and many times overlapping terms that circulated in Bangalore during my fieldwork (Shah 2015). Because all of these ways of living are counter to dominant (heterosexual) forms of sexuality, I refer to them broadly as dissident sexualities, and to the people I write about as sexual dissidents.

To put it another way, this dissertation is both an ethnographic work about sexualities *in* Bangalore and an ethnography *of* Bangalore through the lens of sexuality. That means the portrait of Bangalore I offer is necessarily partial: focused as it is on the experiences and relations of particular subsets of the city’s population, and my own experiences with and among specific people. During the years of 2015 and 2016 when the bulk of fieldwork for this project took place, Bangalore was home to over 10 million people. Within such a vast, difficult-to-grasp number, each and every person has a unique story. I can recount only a few of those stories here, but I do so in the hope they bring to light often overlooked experiences in other scholarship about the city, thereby enriching our collective knowledge about life in Bangalore.

My dissertation rests on a second premise: that cities are not just agglomerations of buildings, roads, cars, or even people. Their physical form brings vastly different lives into close physical, if not always social, proximity (Jacobs 2002 [1961]). This continues to be the case even as the contemporary social and economic conditions in places like Bangalore elevate “private lives” both physically and metaphorically above the life of the street, both in terms of what’s valued and, in the case of high-rise construction, literal height. Simply put, not all people in Bangalore (and in fact very few) have recourse to the kind of privacy imagined on the billboard I described. Indeed, even the very concept of privacy as a desirable trait—in the form the advertisement presents it anyway—only coheres as an effect of Bangalore’s explosive growth in the era of economic globalization.

A third premise of this dissertation is that thinking through and about sexuality necessarily complicates the location and constitution of “private lives” as something separate from and opposite to urban public space. That is, thinking about the relationship between sexuality and the particular city of Bangalore brings sexuality into analytic focus with the concepts like public and private even as it brings the city into focus through sexuality. I show how the city draws together people those whose social worlds are otherwise separate through their common inter-subjective relationship to the Bangalore. I refer to this process as one of articulation, co-constituting the urban and sexuality through intersubjective relationships of both people and places.

The Spatial Politics of Sexuality: Or, thinking Urban Geography through Sexuality

In order to argue that focus on sexuality is integral to understanding what kind of place a city is—and Bangalore specifically— it is first necessary for me to clarify what it means for sexuality to be an object of anthropological study in the first place. Simply put, although sexuality is and always has been present in the anthropological project of understanding human variation—that is, present both among the people studied and those doing the studying—for a long time it was not considered an appropriate object of scholarly inquiry. Instead, the discipline addressed the sexual practices of native informants only insofar as observing them informed work on kinship, economic organization, the division of labor, etc. Sexuality was not an object of knowledge or study in its own right. What's more, the study of sexuality has always been, and continues to be, conducted by proxy—that is, apprehended by looking at practices of marriage or childbirth, initiation rights, or other social practices that index sex itself. For ethical reasons it is difficult for the participant observation methods of ethnographic study to account for sex in any way that is not ethically fraught (Lewin and Leap 1996).

Early work in anthropology took an evolutionary approach to human difference, viewing sexual practices as evidence of civilizational hierarchy. This view held that primitive people lived in a state of lustful promiscuity while civilized (read: white, Euro-American) people entered into monogamous heterosexual marriages. How far people had progressed along this spectrum, was, in turn, directly related to the form sexual organization took in each culture (Davis & Whitten 1987; Morgan 1963 [1877]). Of course

actual practices are always messier and more complicated. In addition to naturalizing one society's set of values on everything from monogamy to promiscuity to sexual object choice, this approach reflected anthropology's racist roots with evidence of difference in sexual practice and—more to the point—the social mores around sex, serving as justifications for colonial domination and control. Even after such evolutionary models fell out of scholarly fashion, anthropologists continued to catalogue human cultural difference in ways that took for granted both the existence and stability of categories like gender and sexuality. Sex, sexuality, and gender, in other words, were simply phenomena to observe, not categories shaped by researchers' own way of seeing the world, or by their own relationships to sex and sexuality.

For example, in *The Sexual Lives of Savages* (1929) Bronisław Malinowski wrote about the place of sexuality among Trobriand Islanders. According to his account of Trobriand marriage practices the men married because “The services rendered by a woman to her husband are *naturally* attractive to a man” (81, emphasis mine). Although Malinowski's work as a whole sought to see the world from a native point of view and therefore acknowledge the existence of different worldviews, his normative sweeping generalizations like the above were grounded in his own categories and ways of seeing the world. They also bear unpacking for contemporary readers—not just because they naturalize heterosexuality, but because they rely on stable binary gender which is no longer understood by scholars of gender and sexuality to be either binary, stable, or natural. What's more, Malinowski was hardly alone in making such sweeping society-wide pronouncements about

norms of sex. The work of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead also concretized cultural differences through their elaboration of native moral orders (e.g. Benedict 1989 [1934]; Mead 1961 [1928]).³ Although they did not frame variations from Western norms of heterosexual monogamy as signs of less evolved societies or people, practices like homosexuality were still deemed anomalous for the places and people anthropologists studied.

This view of sex and sexuality as an observable “fact of life,” so to speak, really changed with the work of feminist anthropologists who denaturalized gender differences and reframed gender itself as a product of historical and political relations of power. Even as second wave feminists took into account the social construction of gender, their approach did not necessarily elaborate how sexuality was *also* socially constructed (Friedan 1963). Ms. Magazine and other feminist publications from the 1960s and 1970s were organized around giving women a larger piece of the pie without questioning the pie itself, especially in terms of sexuality, race, and other factors (Dore 2014).

But there were other voices bringing race and sexuality into feminist debate (e.g. The Combahee River Collective 1974). In relation to sexuality, Gayle Rubin’s work connecting gender and sexuality transformed the discipline of feminist scholarship. For example her essay, “Thinking Sex,” (Rubin 1984) served as a foundational text of Gay and Lesbian studies in anthropology as well as foundational for the interdisciplinary field of Queer Theory that emerged in the 1990s. In the essay she teases sex apart from the

³ As an addendum to this point, the posthumous publication of Malinowski’s diary revealed his limited perspective, his ambivalent and often hostile feelings toward the natives, and his own sexual frustration (Malinowski, 1989 [1967]).

concept of a “sex/gender system,” that she developed in the earlier essay “The Traffic in Women” (1978). In the later work Rubin argued for thinking sexuality on its own terms even as she acknowledged how sex continues to be inextricably tied to gender. Rubin’s work, along with what is now referred to as anthropology’s reflexive turn, made critical reflection on the researcher’s role in the production of ethnographic knowledge integral to methodology. It also opened up sex and sexuality as newly proper objects for ethnographic study.

The push to take the study of sexual subcultures seriously also opened up a space for understanding how what we think of as sexuality is itself an effect of social organization and community-building (Newton 1979), economic systems (D’Emilio 1993), gender, race, etc. These approaches were counter to what Kath Weston labels “ethno-cartography” in her critique of the practice of mapping sexual difference across the world (Weston 1993).⁴ The shift away from mapping differences to in order to make sense of them through modern western categories to thinking critically about the construction of categories sexuality themselves occurred at the same time as the rise of postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist critique (In Anthro: e.g., Behar & Gordon 1995; Rabinow 1977, 2007) as well newly valued ways of studying and writing about culture (Clifford et al 2010 [1986]; Geertz 1973).

⁴ For Weston ethno-cartography is a practice of making different contexts of culturally and historically contingent sexuality commensurable to one another by giving preference to a contemporary, Western framework for understanding sex and sexuality. For example, in Gilbert Herdt’s 1981 work, *The Guardians of the Flutes*, he argues that young boys performing Fellatio on older men as part of male initiation rituals are “really” examples of gay sexuality in a different context. Weston, and many other anthropologists following her, refutes Herdt. Instead she argues that each example must be taken on its own terms and is not, therefore, evidence of some globally commensurable supra category such as homosexuality.

Specifically, in relation to the study of sexuality, Carol Vance referred to this move as “cultural construction theory”—i.e., the theory that sexuality could no longer be seen as innate, biologically driven, and outside of culture, but contingent historical, and constructed (Vance 1991).

Meanwhile, outside of the debates occurring within anthropology, but also building on the work of Gayle Rubin, scholars including Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (2006 [1990]) and Michael Warner in *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) critiqued normative categories like hetero- and homo- as structuring sexuality as a field of knowledge and practice. Butler’s theory of gender performativity, including her claim that binary sex (as in male/female) is itself culturally constructed, fundamentally destabilized the ontological fixity of gender and sex as categories of knowledge. Butler’s work served as a foundational text for subsequent gender and queer theory, and introduced a new generation of scholars to the dynamic nature of these categories. As a result, the field of queer theory broadly situated itself against normative conceptions of sex, sexuality, intimacy, and desire.

All of this was a marked change from earlier efforts to record global occurrences of homosexuality as a natural part of human variation and therefore not as deviant pathology. However well intentioned, anthropologists who engaged in this form of ethno-cartography risked clumping fundamentally different kinds of practices under one analytic umbrella (i.e., as all examples of homosexuality). At the same time, as Kath Weston (1993) points out, only using indigenous descriptive terms—like *hijra* in India or *Waria* in Indonesia— and emphasizing their incommensurability with other manifestations of sexual difference, risks reifying cultural

difference by marking people such terms describe both as always already and only ever other (Weston 1993, 348).⁵ What anthropology needs, and what thoughtful scholars like Gayatri Reddy (2005) and Tom Boellstorff's (2005) ethnographies demonstrate, are ways of thinking about difference without resulting to either everything being a manifestation of the same underlying universal categories of sexuality on the one hand, or everything being irreducibly different and incomparable on the other.

Why is this disciplinary history relevant to the project at hand: that is, to the ways in which urban geography can be thought about through sexuality and vice versa? I want to be clear that my study of the place of sexuality in the lives of people in Bangalore is not intended to make sexuality to an observable "fact of [urban] life" that need not be critically engaged. However, nor do I see sexuality as an object of study that can only ever be understood in vernacular terms. Following the conventions of ethnographic work, I use the concept of sexuality to describe a range of experiences and practices that entangle bodies, people, and the city. In order to understand what they are and how they relate to one another, I need to contextualize the meaning of sexuality in relation to Bangalore, to people's lived experiences, and to the field of sexuality studies.

To situate the study of sexuality in this way is to employ what some scholars have called a queer theoretical approach—that is, an approach that

⁵ *Hijra* is a term that I return to throughout this dissertation, but briefly it refers to male born women who leave their natal families to enter into new networks of kinship and often undergo castration as part of their entrance into that community, (Reddy 2005.) *Waria* refer to male born women in Indonesia who live as women, but often do not undergo sex reassignment. (Boellstorff 2005.) Both groups have historically been referred to as "third gender" and today are increasingly subsumed under a "transgender" label but their experiences are unique to the social and cultural context of their lives and experiences.

builds on queer theory across disciplines—or what Tom Boellstorff has called “a critical anthropology of sexuality” (Boellstorff 2007). This critical anthropology of sexuality asks, as Beatriz Preciado does when he follows Foucault, “How did sex and sexuality become the main objects of political and economic activity” (Preciado 2013, 25)? Central to my project is an understanding of sexuality that is not only about the erotic and intimate lives of the people I write about, but which contextualizes those aspects of their lives within broader social, economic, and political geographies.

In other words, this ethnographic project is not an abstract treatise on either “sexuality” or “the urban” as concepts that can be analyzed separate from the ways in which they are experienced and lived. Instead, I contribute to the study of sexuality by focusing on how dissident sexual practices serve to articulate distinct and different social geographies of the city. And while anthropological work within queer theory certainly informs the dissident framework I use to approach this topic, as a social geography of sexual dissidence it locates queer theory as an ethnographic object also circulating in the social world of Bangalore, rather than as an overarching framework of interpretation removed from the ethnographic context. The result is that while queer theory articulates dissidence in Bangalore, it remains but one of the multiple forms of knowledge and world-making this ethnography explores.

The Sexual Politics of Space: Or, Thinking about Sexuality through Urban Geography

Cities are at once singular *and* plural; they have multiple ontologies

that somehow hang together (Mol 2002). That is, they are simultaneously spoken about as if they are coherent objects— for instance when people told me “the vibe of Bangalore is chill,” or that “Bangalore is so hectic!”— *and* they remain multiple as those two examples make clear. What’s more, the field of urban studies serves as a vast descriptor that brings together work on cities across geographies, objects of study, and very different political and historical contexts (Pinch et al 2014). Even attempting to generalize about a specific city based on necessarily partial accounts of life there can be challenging (Wilson 2004). Therefore, my project does not attempt to intervene in “the city” as some kind of free-floating object of study. Just as sexuality is always about real people’s desires, practices, and identities, cities are always actual places and must be studied within their own historical, political, and economic contexts.

That said, the phenomenon of urbanization is increasingly consequential on a global scale, and lessons from one part of the world can be applicable to the context of others. In the early 21st century more than half of all people live in cities, and that number is expected to increase to 68% by 2050.⁶ As the world continues to urbanize on such a grand scale, studies of how specific cities are organized, about who has access to them, and who can live successfully in them will only increase in importance. Scholarship on urban social geography from around the world also reflects this trend of thinking through and about big social questions by focusing on what’s observable and measurable about inequality and access in specific cities.

This includes housing (Bhan 2016), transportation, food (Fraizer

⁶ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>

2018), education, and a host of other issues. The methods of social geography also illustrate how global capital shapes urban form in the contemporary world. From the increasing concentration of land and property in the hands of private developers rather than the state in “global cities” (Sassen 1991), to the social effects that this shift from public to private has on safety, security, and collective life (Caldeira 2000, Low 2004, Pellow 2002). Anthropologists committed to witnessing the lives of those who have not benefited from the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, do so by telling stories by and about people living at the urban margins (Biehl 2005).

Yet when so many places face challenges like access to basic needs such as water and food, or with climate change putting many low-lying cities at risk of catastrophic sea level rise in the next century, my focus on how the material and social realities of cities shape sexuality might seem small or insignificant. During the course of my fieldwork, and especially when confronted by Bangalore’s chronic and increasing water shortages as well as its toxic, burning lakes, I couldn’t help but question the value of the research I was doing. Did it matter how people from diverse and dissident sexualities interacted with the urban landscape, accessed transportation, connected with one another, or advocated for themselves?

Simply put: of course it does! It matters that all people have access to the city, and it matters whether cities reflect the diversity of their people. Otherwise, how can different voices be represented, how can different groups possibly work together to improve urban life or recognized their common cause? In this dissertation I approach the interrelation of the social, political, and economic forces at work in Bangalore through close ethnographic

attention to sexuality; however, others have approached these topics through different areas of focus and in different urban contexts. For example, Nikhil Anand explores access to water infrastructure in Mumbai in order to think about urban citizenship and what it means for minority communities—including Muslims and the urban poor—to either receive or not receive recognition from state and municipal forces (Anand 2017). Of course concepts like citizenship or recognition mean many things to many people, but Anand's attention to the materiality of water pipes, and to the unofficial connections that disadvantaged communities make in order to survive, ground the meaning of urban citizenship in the specific ethnographic context of Mumbai. At the same time, his work offers a framework that is applicable to thinking through issues of infrastructure and power in any urban context. He does this by making connections between urban infrastructure and the thick networks of sociality that make and sustain urban communities. In the context of Mumbai, he shows how both material *and* social networks are mutual invested in one another.

Expanding on this work about water access in Mumbai, Lisa Björkman writes about protests over access to water as a form of political street theatre (Björkman 2015). She, too, starts with a concrete and measurable aspect of urban life—how much and how often residents of Mumbai have access to the city's municipal water supply—and uses this as a way to observe how political parties use protest over water to accomplish their own goals. In turn, she is able to think broadly about protest as a representational form precisely because her material remains grounded in the vicissitudes of everyday urban life in Mumbai. I take inspiration from, and expand upon, both of these

scholar's approaches.

Ethnography Across Class

Studies of cities cannot represent the extent of the differences held together in urban geographies if they only focus on marginalized groups without contextualizing their marginalization. During a presentation I gave at Azim Premji University in Bangalore during my fieldwork, in November 2015, one professor in attendance asked me if my project—which engages with sexually dissident people across social and economic classes—would be a more “authentic” portrait of the city if it focused solely on the most marginalized sexual minorities. Aside from questioning the conception of authenticity that accrues to certain people’s experiences more than others, I responded that any study of the urban social geography that does not situate sexuality alongside social, economic, and political experience could not claim to represent the complexity of urban worlds. Indeed, as more and more people live in Bangalore, it is a juxtaposition of great human wealth next to persistent dire poverty. As a friend in Mumbai pointed out to me about the close physical proximity of some of that city’s most affluent neighborhoods to some of its poorest communities: their nearness is not coincidental, but indicative of the historical relationship between labor and capital as it is rendered materially present in urban form and social life (Kanthi Krishnamurthy, personal comm. 2016).

Given scholarly attention to the social and spatial dimensions of urban economic relations, sites of consumption in cities have become important sites for understanding urban life under systems of capital accumulation and

globalization (Quayson, 2014). Consumption, in turn, becomes a vehicle of possibility for those who are newly part of the middle class, and for those struggling to endure it. Indeed, visible consumption on city streets is an important practice for locating the self both locally and globally (Liechty 2003, Miller 2001, 2008, Strivastava 2015). To wit: during my time in Bangalore, shopping malls were a frequent destination—and not just to shop, but also to watch Bollywood movies, eat, and socialize.

Selfies as an example of Articulation

In April 2015 I happened upon a “Selfie-Fest” to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Garuda Mall, which is a multistory, mid-range shopping mall in the central part of the city. A short walk from the store-fronts of Brigade Road, which runs perpendicular to the wide boulevard of Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Road and forming the “central business district” and commercial heart of current day Bangalore, Garuda Mall is anchored by Indian department stores like Westside and Shopper’s Stop. The mall also houses international brands like Nike, Adidas, The Body Shop, and U.S. Polo alongside Indian brands like Fab India, Global Desi, and Spykar. There is a multiscreen cinema on the top floor.

The selfie-fest encouraged shoppers to click and share their own selfies using the mall as a backdrop. Outside the main entrance were several dioramas in which shoppers could pose—for instance, there was a “jungle” with plastic plants nailed to an AstroTurf floor, and a sky scene with wooden, painted cutouts of rainbows and clouds. Directly in front of the main entrance was a more than double life-size, 2-D cutout of a woman wearing heels and

mini dress. She was frozen in mid-crouch, lifting her mobile phone above her to pose for a selfie. In the center of the mall's main atrium was a stage where visitors could take their own selfies and receive a gift bag in return. The bag included vouchers for various shops in the mall and a free Krispy Kreme donut.

Although the artistic form of the self-portrait has a long art historical history (Hall 2016), the “selfie”—usually taken with the front facing camera of a smartphone—has come to dominate the aesthetics of self-representation in the late aughts (2000s) and early teens (2010s) of the 21st century (Goodnow 2016). And although the selfie is absolutely a global phenomenon—everyone from American teenagers to Chinese tour groups with extendable “selfie-sticks” snap them—the circulation of selfies in the context of urban India during my fieldwork illustrates how practices of consumption articulate relations with and in the city. This resonates with de Certeau’s work in *The Practice of Everyday Life* where he writes about how “users” of the city move through it. Certeau emphasizes, and the Garuda Mall selfie-fest illustrates, how users are not passive consumers, but alter the shape of urban geography through their processes of active, generative consumption (Certeau 1988). Consumption is but one empirically observable process through which I argue that urban citizens articulate the city so as to connect different people and sites across its geography. I ask: when practices of articulation, including but not limited to consumption, involve sexually dissident people, do they become dissident, too? Do they articulate a dissident city or, as I frame it, does consumption serve to domesticate sexual dissidence?

In the first of several intertexts ordered between chapters, I recount the story of a group of gay men and self-described “queer activists” who launched a selfie campaign targeted towards US President Barack Obama’s state visit to India in January 2015. In that case, as in the example of the “Selfie-Fest” at Garuda Mall, their selfies functioned as digital objects that captured a moment in time and rendered representations of the moment reproducible and shareable. In both cases the selfie was simultaneously an act of cultural production and of consumption—i.e. clicking a selfie produces a cultural artifact that travels across, and is shared in, virtual space. The production and circulation of these kinds of images in turn serves to articulate the urban social geography (sharing them articulates communities), the urban economic geography (as consumable commodities) and the urban political geography (used as tools of organizing).

The activists who took selfies on MG road used the images they made to emplace themselves within a social world where their sexuality mattered. However, in doing so they articulated a world that really exists in Bangalore *and* they remade the city in light of their own experience. But even these “queer” selfies straddle a fine line between promulgating sexual dissidence on the one hand and relegating it to an act of consumption within consumer capitalism on the other. In fact the example illustrates the main theme of this dissertation: that practices of sexual dissidence shape urban geographies even as those practices continue to be shaped by the urban social, economic, and political forces they work to resist.

Embodiments of gender and sexuality that challenge heteronormative and procreative ideals may be forms of dissidence, but they are not free from

the material force of the socially conservative value system and of capitalism in which they are located. In chapter three I elaborate the effects of this embedded-ness as a process of domesticating urban space. Domestication, in this sense, regulates who can occupy the urban landscape through the control of both gender and sexual difference. It is, therefore, no accident the avatar of a proto-typical customer at the Garuda mall “selfie-fest” was a woman, or that she was dressed in revealing western clothing, carrying multiple shopping bags representing the her domesticated status as a good consumer and therefore a good urban citizen.

Articulating the City, Making Worlds

Examples of how gender and sexuality interact with practices of consumption are not limited to urban areas—people can and do take selfies anywhere and everywhere, after all—but the ways in which they locate dissident populations within thick networks of urban sociality are especially important for understanding how categories like sexuality and gender circulate in and shape urban worlds. For example, the hyper-performance of taking a selfie illustrates the backdrop against which certain kinds of sexual identities form: that is, how communities coalesce through their mutual recognition in categories like “gay,” “lesbian,” “transgender,” etc. (Brown and Browne 2016).

One effect of this mutual recognition is that highly personal and individual experiences are also collective and community experiences. This is what the anthropologist Michael D. Jackson calls “lifeworlds.” The concept comes out of his writings in existential anthropology, “the focus of [which] is

the paradox of plurality and the ambiguity of intersubjective life” (Jackson 2013). For Jackson, intersubjectivity refers to the ways in which people’s encounters with and in the world are always mediated by the material reality of the world as well as by people’s relations with each other. In this way Jackson’s concept of lifeworlds is a product of what I refer to as articulation in this dissertation.

It might seem like a trivial example, but when people stopped to take selfies at the mall they intersubjectively constituted themselves in relation to other people, to the mall as an urban locale, and to the selfie as a technology of self-representation that, in turn and through its circulation, connects them within multiple urban (real and virtual) geographies. The concept of lifeworlds is thereby helpful for thinking about the lived effects of urban articulation because it invokes how social worlds bind people to one another, and to the common places where shared life happens.

Moreover, Jackson’s attention to lifeworlds connects the social geography of the city to the ethical practice of doing ethnography. “The way questions of what is right and good figure in almost every human interaction, conversation, and rationalization,” he writes, “effectively re-inscribes the role of ethnography as a method for exploring a variety of actual social situations before hazarding generalizations” (Jackson 2013, 11). Whether it is the meaning of the selfie—its many possible meanings akin to Geertz’s classic analogy of the wink (Geertz 1973)—or the meanings ascribed to sexual practices and identities, human action can only be understood *in situ*. In other words, lifeworlds not only reveal the intersubjective quality of the social

worlds that anthropologists study, they are the substance of ethnographic practice.

I find Jackson's attention to individual narratives and lives as the "stuff" out of which questions about ethics and knowledge arise a compelling framework for relating what is intimate and personal to what is conceptually useful about urban geography. The result takes into account the relationship between urban form and practices of sexuality, which in turn get articulated both materially and socially to produce urban worlds. Put differently, the social, political, and economic dimensions of urban life not only provide a backdrop for thinking about dissident sexualities—they are fundamentally shaped by sexuality as a category of human life. As a result, understanding the city necessarily means understanding when and how sexuality comes to matter in people's lifeworlds.

Nostalgia for an Ever-Changing Bangalore: Different Views of the City

The shopping mall was probably the oddest place where I encountered talk of nostalgia in Bangalore, but it was hardly the only one. In a city characterized by its rapid growth, social change, and ongoing physical transformation, nostalgia was arguably the most common emotion people expressed when talking about the city. Perhaps this was because the urban landscape itself is in a constant state of demolition and reconstruction, making even recent additions to the city the most familiar landmarks. A case in point is Forum Mall, located in the Koramangala neighborhood. Despite the fact that there were multi-story shopping malls all over the city, and many of them were bigger and more elaborate than Forum, it was the first retail space of its

kind built in Bangalore.

Forum was a place that I returned to many times while living in the city: sometimes to see movies in its IMAX theater, other times to meet friends for coffee at the outdoor Café Coffee Day, or to peruse the huge selection of books, and games in its flagship Landmark store. I visited the mall often enough that in the summer of 2016 I noticed that it was undergoing cosmetic renovations and a change of color scheme—its exterior changed from red to black. I was curious to know more so I made my way up to the management office on the top floor above the cinema and asked for an appointment with a mall management representative.

At our meeting I learned about the mall's history. The manager explained how, in addition to Forum being the first mall in Bangalore, its renovations were designed to mark the mall's 10th anniversary. Given how central this and other sites of mass-consumption seemed for the many different social groups I interacted with during my fieldwork, it was hard to imagine the mall-less Bangalore that had existed only a decade prior! The mall manager went on: they undertook the renovations because research showed that the primary way people relate to Forum Mall is through nostalgia. "See, they've grown up coming here!" he said. "They have celebrated birthdays here!" The mall, he wanted me to understand, was an important part of people's lives in the city. And although I thought nostalgia an odd emotion to associate with a shopping mall only a decade old, his corporate invocation of nostalgia as a means of locating consumer capitalism in the social life of the city, was in keeping with other invocations of nostalgia.

The ubiquity of nostalgia as a common affective relation to the city not

only highlights the rapidity of social, economic, and political change in Bangalore, it also points to how time and temporality structure affect in everyday life and in anthropological scholarship (Ahmed 2006, Stewart 2007). For anthropologists, time is necessarily both a category of analysis and of practice.⁷ “Like all other discourses, those about time themselves take temporal form,” Munn writes. “We cannot analyze or talk about time without using media already encoded with temporal meanings nor, in the course of doing so, can we avoid creating something that takes the form of time” (Munn 1992, 94). And because ethnographies, including this one, are narrative products of particular moments of fieldwork and immersion, both anthropological scholarship and the anthropologists who write them necessarily remain caught up with, and in, time (Pandian 2012).

In her work on transnational circulations of Indian-ness within diaspora communities, Purnima Mankekar is “concerned with how time... crisscrosses, transects, articulates, and equally importantly, disarticulates the lives of informants with the temporalizing processes through which nations are made and unmade” (Mankekar 2015, 19). Although Mankekar’s ethnographic focus is on Indian communities in California’s Silicon Valley, her examination of the social effects of the relationship between time and the (imagined) Indian nation is also relevant for my social geography of contemporary Bangalore. The city is simultaneously held up as a paradigm of

⁷ As a category of “native” practice and as a tool of power time has been the subject of extensive ethnographic inquiry, Das 2007, Evans-Pritchard 1969, Geertz 1973, Guyer 2007, Han 2011, Levi-Strauss 1970, Shulman 1987, Taussig 1986 etc. There is also a vast literature that engages time as a category of anthropological analysis, both in its symbolic dimensions Desjarlais 2003, Fabian 1983, Munn 1992, Rabinow 2007 and as an embodied part of ethnographic practice Malkki and Cerwonka 2007, Mankekar 2015, Pandian 2012, Stewart 2007.

India's prosperous economic future *and* is lamented as a site of cultural loss. A place to be nostalgic about: for the quieter, greener city of yesteryear, for experiences of community and belonging thoroughly rooted in the structures of consumer capitalism.

Taking a break from my final edits to this dissertation, I chatted with a close friend who was preparing to go back to Bangalore for the first time since our shared period of fieldwork. "Tell me all about what's changed!" I said to her, and found myself suddenly and viscerally nostalgic for sights and sounds and smells of the Indiranagar neighborhood where I had lived. Yet I also knew the neighborhood must have already changed in remarkable ways. Indeed, I watched it change in the relatively short time I lived there. It seemed like every week there was a new bar or restaurants opening and the area served as one of the most desirable destinations for 20 and 30-somethings from across the city.

I will return to Indiranagar and its nightlife later, but I shared my sense of nostalgia for the present with those who made the area a destination but who also could not keep up with how quickly things were changing. One person I interviewed, a gay man who worked as a club promoter and professional salsa dancer, lamented how the nightlife scene in the area had been taken over by promoters whose only goal was profit. He, along with other long-time residents of Bangalore chided the current crowds, many of whom were recent transplants. There was a frequently repeated joke that on weekends the neighborhood became a "little Delhi" where, after English, you were most likely to hear Hindi being spoken.

The nostalgia for a day before North Indians had taken over the

neighborhood was not even nostalgia for the Indiranagar of the 1970s when its namesake and then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inaugurated the layout. Instead it was nostalgia for five years ago when things were quieter, more “South Indian,” for last year when a favorite pub was still open, even for as recent as a week prior before a new construction project led to increased dust and noise in the vicinity of a local temple. Like the assertion that a shopping mall could be a site of nostalgia, Indiranagar—once peripheral to the city—is now widely considered part of the urban core of Bangalore, and the memories people longed for belonged to that recent past. How, I asked myself, could the affect of nostalgia be stretched to include sites of consumer capitalism as well as those who remembered a less consumerist city?

Indeed, the sheer pace of urban transformation and growth seem to relegate almost everything about Bangalore to the realm of memory and nostalgia. Aside, perhaps, from some of Bangalore’s newest residents who talked about the city as spatially and temporally distant from their lives in rural India, everyone I met articulated the changes the city had undergone as part of *their* story, and as a result longingly recalled a version of the city that was preferable to them. For many, as will become clear throughout this dissertation, changes to the city either unfolded alongside, or echoed, changes in their own lives.

Nostalgia, therefore, represents a temporality of Bangalore that was affective in the sense that it produced its own forms of sociality. This was particularly the case for residents of the older, affluent, and largely Brahmin Hindu neighborhoods of Malleshwaram and Basanavagudi (to the west of the city center) and JP Nagar (to the south). For example, at a research workshop

I attended at the National Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS) in 2016, two filmmakers presented a documentary about the construction of the Bangalore Metro, called *Our Metropolis* (2016). In both the film and in our discussion afterwards, the filmmakers used the destruction of old bungalows to make way for the new metro as paradigmatic of loss accompanying current growth.

It is no doubt that the metro construction does represent a loss from the perspective of the city's architectural heritage preservationists. As the film showed, many of the city's 19th century buildings were razed to make room—not just for the metro—but for the commercial and multi-unit residential properties that have increased the need for mass public transit in the first place. Nostalgia for an earlier, now-lost Bangalore is always tied to the social location of the one remembering the city's changing social, economic, and political conditions.

For instance, those who lived in Bangalore's spacious bungalows in the Cantonment area of the city were largely Anglo-Indian and themselves quite privileged. Post economic liberalization, Bangalore became home to many multinational tech companies for a host of reasons, not least of which was its temperate climate due to its elevated position on the Deccan Plateau. Indeed, one of Bangalore's monikers is "The [naturally] Air-Conditioned City." This has changed, however, with the exponential increase in concrete and asphalt, not only making Bangalore a verifiable heat island but causing long-term residents to lament urbanization's effect on both rising temperatures and changes to their class-specific ways of life (Frazier 2019).

From the nostalgic perspective of *Namma Metro* the promise of the metro was to make the city more accessible for all its citizens, but its

construction primarily benefited new, middle-class residents and IT sector workers. The film figures this material and affective juxtaposition between the benefits and losses of the metro through the literal destruction of an historic bungalow, signaling larger cultural transformations for the Indian middle-class (Ray and Baviskar 2015). The resulting nostalgia—for quiet, for cooler weather, for spacious homes, for a greener city— is indicative of the tensions that undergird Bangalore’s contemporary status as “The Silicon Valley of India.”

Nostalgia and Sexual Dissidence

A number of older gay men also expressed nostalgia for the Bangalore of their past. At the same time, many younger gay men saw Bangalore’s social and political transformations as a precondition for making the city their home, for finding a community there. And that’s only gay men: it says nothing of the complicated relationship to nostalgia for other communities included in the sexual dissidents — including culturally specific identities like hijras, jogappas, and kothis, alongside globally circulating categories like transgender, gay men, and lesbian women. Although all of these dissident groups are more or less marginalized from the dominant culture of Bangalore (hence why I refer to them as dissident in the first place), they also exhibit an ambivalent relationship to the forces of global capitalism around which nostalgia for both the past and the present are organized.

One of the most striking locations in which to observe this ambivalence, a site I will return to many times, was in Bangalore’s Cubbon Park. The park is the largest freely accessible green space in the city, and

among gay men and kothis at least, it has a long history as a cruising site. The park's trees and bamboo thickets break lines of site and thus facilitated erotic encounters between male bodies until the age of smartphones and hook-up apps. One day I was sitting on a bench near at the edge of the park with a friend in his 20s who knew many older gay men in Bangalore. He pointed into the distance and described a nearby site where the police caught someone we both knew.

“And they were, you know, doing sex?” I asked, still quite naïve about the things that happened in parks. “Some people, yeah,” he explained. “I don't think they were doing anything, really, but enough to get detained by the police.” Enough to get detained by the police, I understood, meant anything at all—even just being present in the park at a conspicuous time. Stories like his about Cubbon Park, along with similar stories about the part of nearby MG Road where the Metro station is now, were never simple recollections of a long gone past: they were also nostalgic for the lost forms of homosociality that once happened in those spaces.

Like lamenting the advent of the metro, nostalgia for a time before smartphones and hook-up apps belied class and gender privilege. This kind of sexually dissident nostalgia also challenged another common narrative: one that says things have necessarily gotten “better” over time for gays and others. And although the tension between nostalgia for some people's past sex lives and the overall gains in visibility for the city's sexually dissident population must be understood within the specific context of Bangalore, the tension also speaks to academic debates about time in queer theory and the construction of queer temporalities.

The field of cross-disciplinary scholarship that is today known as queer theory has, since its inception, grappled with the relationship between queerness and reproductive futurity. A vision of the future predicated on both biological and social reproduction, reproductive futurity assumes heterosexuality and, often, assumes participation within an economic system of capitalist accumulation. There are two major strands of queer theory that refute and respond to this form of futurity, known within literary criticism as paranoid and reparative readings, respectively. Scholars who embrace the Freudian death drive exemplify the former framework (Bersani 1987, Edelman 2004). They see queer temporality as an orientation to the future that must reject all forms of reproduction in order to exist in the present; they even reject the possibility of a future. Much of this work, it must be said, was responding to the AIDS crisis and reclaiming the dignity of the present amidst so much needless, senseless death. It is a way of making meaning from death, but is limited as a tool for conceiving transformative politics. The reparative school, on the other hand, while they also reject the idea of a future producing more of the same, frame queer temporality as a horizon full of yet to be determined possibility (Halberstam 2011, Muñoz 2009). Death, life, whatever the future: for them it is it not yet decided. This is a scholarly orientation out of which to conceive a transformative politics of queer community, connection, and collective life.

Given this, albeit simplified, scholarly framework, where does nostalgia fall within queer studies, and how might theories of queer temporality serve to elucidate the multivalent nostalgia that exists for some gay men in Bangalore, especially within the larger affective context of nostalgia in there

today? José Muñoz offers a possibility when he writes about nostalgia and practices of male-male public sex in his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009). What Muñoz calls the world-making practice of sex is what I theorize as dissident urban articulations in this dissertation. “I see world-making here as functioning and coming into play through the performance of queer utopian memory,” Muñoz writes. “That is, a utopia that understands its time as reaching beyond some nostalgic past that perhaps never was or some future whose arrival is continuously belated” (Muñoz 2009, 37).

Here Muñoz specifically references the sociality of cruising in New York City before the AIDS epidemic, but it seems he could just as easily be referring to cruising in Cubbon Park in Bangalore. What’s more, he resists framing memories of an earlier form of sociality as only nostalgic—at least not nostalgic in the sense that the Forum mall management company used it; that is, not as impetus for capitalist consumption. Instead, the temporality of “queer utopian memory” that he proposes is one which transcends linear, reproductive time. It is neither a return to the past nor more of the same. It is a way of embracing the dissidence of dissident sexualities, and using it to transform the world into something better (the utopia part). To this point: through ethnographic stories I show how dissident sexuality articulates new and different urban geographies, and how produces a city of utopic possibilities for living differently.

Nostalgia and the Emerging Field of Bangalore Studies

Having said all the above, nostalgia still marks a persistent affective geography and locates within it everything from consumer capitalism, to caste

and class privilege, to the close erotic encounters of gay men. But nostalgia is complex, and all its forms are not the same. A similarly multivalent nostalgia can be seen in the emergence of a body of social scientific scholarship about Bangalore—and emerging field of Bangalore Studies. I encountered this field of scholarship during my fieldwork when I discovered how many other people found it a productive site for their research. As an anthropologist doing fieldwork in the city I was invited to join a group of scholars and students known as the Bangalore Research Network (BRN), and I got to participate in the network's first workshop in 2015.

Through the Bangalore Research Network I met graduate students from India, Europe, the United States, and elsewhere who were also working on a variety of projects and who came from a variety of scholarly disciplines. This included studies of technology use among working class men in the city, food production and distribution, and the ecology of the office parks that house international corporations across the city (to name only a few). There was also a study of political activists among the city's artists, and my study of sexuality and its place within the urban geography. For many of the scholars undertaking work within this burgeoning field of Bangalore Studies the city was first and foremost a site of rapid social change and possibility: a particular urban site that encapsulating many of the social, economic, and political changes that have come to characterize Indian cities in the early 21st century.

And yet I found that many people, including but not only in the BRN, but everywhere I went, questioned why my project on sexuality was located in Bangalore at all. "You should have gone to Mumbai," I was often told, "Now

that's a city with sex!" "Bangalore is IT!" and "Bangalore is the middle-class!" were common retorts. That both popular *and* scholarly conceptions of Bangalore seemed to elide the place of sexuality in stories about the city indicated to me that it was *precisely* the place to do my fieldwork. What's more, the common conception that much of the research concurrent to my own focused on the middle-class and the IT industry *instead of* sexuality (rather than in addition to it) emphasized the "single story" being told about the city.⁸

While there is a growing body of scholarship that centers connections between gender and sexuality in India (e.g., Basu and Ramberg 2015, Dave 2012, Gopinath 2005, Ramberg 2014, Puri 2016, Reddy 2005, Shah 2014, Vanita and Kidwai 2008), these critical engagements with sexuality continue to challenge dominant modes of inquiry in South Asian Studies. This comes down to a practice that Arjun Appadurai describes as disciplinary gatekeeping. "A few simple theoretical handles become metonyms for the civilization or society as a whole," he writes: "hierarchy in India...are all examples of what one might call gatekeeping concepts in anthropological theory, concepts, that is, that seem to limit anthropological theorizing about the place in question" (Appadurai 1986, 357). He goes on to describe how this form of gatekeeping shapes both area studies and the discipline of anthropology as a whole—e.g. Polynesia is where you study exchange, India is where you study social hierarchies—ergo, exchange is neither a proper object

⁸ The concept of a "single story" comes from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's now famous TED talk, "The Dangers of a Single Story." https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

of study in India nor do the conceptual links between these anthropological objects make sense within dominant scholarly and regional frameworks.

I clearly recognized this form of gatekeeping in the responses I received to my ongoing project. While this was somewhat the case at the level of South Asian and Indian studies, it was most clear in relation to Bangalore studies where scholarly trends, whether contemporary or historical in scope, focus on economic mobility, the role of the middle-class, religion, or globalization. Indeed, the suggestion that “I should’ve gone to Mumbai” implies not only that the middle-classes are a proper object⁹ of study in Bangalore while sexuality it is not: it implied that the two are somehow mutually exclusive, which of course is not true. This form of gatekeeping not only dismisses the importance of sexuality as an object of inquiry in its own right, it also fetishizes poverty as other—and therefore the self-evident site for studying dissident sexualities. I encountered this form of gatekeeping first hand when the scholar at Azim Premji suggested I focus only on groups who are visibly marginalized by their sexuality, or for whom their sexuality compounds other forms of social, political, and economic marginalization.

Despite the relatively bifurcated scholarly approaches to Bangalore, there are already a number of thoughtful academic works focused on the city—if not yet much on sexuality (see Khubchandani 2014, 2016)— and this shelf of engaging scholarship is only set to grow given the number of researchers working in Bangalore today. Perhaps the most comprehensive

⁹ Scholars of gender, sexuality, and queer theory have challenged the notion that there are proper objects of study, and that sex and sexuality are not among them. By making sex into a proper object, scholars transform the place of sex within academic literature, reflecting the central place it already occupies in people’s lives. Butler 1994, Wiegman 2012.

overview is Janaki Nair's book *The Promise of the Metropolis* (2005), which addresses the social, political, and economic transformation of Bangalore in the 20th century. In her book Nair astutely writes about the history of Bangalore as a cosmopolitan site for the ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural differences of South India. Her scholarly focus on Bangalore not only illuminates the particular history of the city as a distinct place, it also opens up critical engagement with cosmopolitanism, and urban studies.

Smriti Srinivas's book *Landscape of Urban Memory: The Sacred and the Civic in India's High-Tech City* (2001) further complicates the prevailing notion that Bangalore is a site only for thinking about technology and social change. In this thoroughly researched ethnography she highlights alternative urban geographies—including those of religious practice and communal relations—that have long shaped and continue to shape the kind of place Bangalore is. Her close attention to the annual Karaga festival, in which the goddess Draupadi takes possession of a chosen (male) priest who then becomes female for the duration of the ritual and is paraded through the city's streets, highlights the importance of this festival to local Kannadiga communities long before Bangalore took on its current form. It also points to long-standing, culturally specific forms of gender transgression in Bangalore. What's more, she shows how these communities continue to maintain their traditions in light of the city's massive growth and rapid change.

Other books recount the history of Bangalore's settlement, growth, relationship to the British Raj, and post-Independence identity (e.g. Jayapal 1997, Nagendra 2016). While this body of work, including that of Nair and Srinivas, is clear-eyed in its approach to Bangalore's past, it does not address

the predominance of nostalgia as an organizing affect in Bangalore. Neither does the other body of scholarship about the city, work that engages with Bangalore's reputation as an Information Technology hub (Heiztman 2004, 2008, Goldman et. al 2017, Radhakrishnan 2011, Upadhya 2008, Willford 2018).

In both cases, nostalgia haunts the Bangalore that scholars write about, but in both cases the scholarly objects of study do not directly address or unpack where either nostalgia comes from or how it is deployed today and to what end. Therefore while some scholars view Bangalore as an urban site understood primarily through its "great transformation" (to use Goldman, Gidwani and Upadhya's phrase), other scholars like Nair and Srinivas emphasize the city's longer history. By doing so they show that history is important for understanding Bangalore as both an urban site, and why it is a valuable object of study. To say these two strands of scholarship are located *either* in the past or the present is an oversimplification, to be sure. However, if historical work is akin to nostalgia for the past—like in the *Namma Metro* film—and contemporary work about Bangalore's rapid change contains echoes of nostalgia for the present—like at Forum Mall—what objects of study can straddle these multiple temporalities of the city? My focus on sexual dissidence, and on the ways in which experiences of non-heterosexual sexuality articulate urban worlds, moves across these different conceptions of time in order to theorize sexuality as a proper object for understanding the city in new ways.

Someone whose focus is different but who walks a similar line between the past and present is Tulasi Srinivas. In her recent book *The Cow in the*

Elevator (2018) she draws precisely on moments where religious practices among (Brahmin) Hindus in the neighborhood of Malleshwaram are entangled with the city's global modernity. She uses moments of experiential and aesthetic juxtaposition—such as the cow in the elevator of a new high-rise apartment building where it has been brought to bless someone's completed home, and from which she gets the book's title—as evocations of wonder. While her reflections on wonder as an anthropological concept in ultimately exceed the specific ethnographic context of Bangalore as field-site, she could not theorize wonder without the particular conditions that Bangalore's mix of old and new, of tradition and modernity, offer to any ethnographer who seeks to engage with and learn from people's lives in the city. At the same time, Tulasi Srinivas's account is located in a community of marked caste privilege. Therefore, it is worth asking how her project might be different if she attended to the place of wonder across urban worlds that exceed lines of class, caste, and religion.

Drawing on the analytical framework of Srinivas' project—if hers is an anthropology of wonder, then mine is an anthropology of dissidence— this ethnography is both informed by, and seeks to expand on, the approaches that other scholars have taken. I pay focus on a breadth of non-heterosexual sexualities, which I refer to as dissident because of their opposition to socially sanctioned ways of organizing lives and intimacies. Through attention to these dissident sexualities, and to the urban worlds they articulate, my ethnography examines both the limits and possibilities of making dissident worlds within the consumer capitalist landscape of contemporary Bangalore. It also connects the work of sexually dissident communities to the sustained

efforts of those who came before, and in doing so draws together the historically specific social, political and economic context of Bangalore.

The stories in my ethnography move beyond one kind of nostalgic relationship to the city. Instead, I offer a socially dissident geography that stitches together otherwise radical forms of gender and sexual difference, as well as class, caste, linguistic, and other forms of difference.

A Note Bangalore versus the City's Kannada name, Bengaluru

Like the change from Calcutta to Kolkata or Madras to Chennai, Bangalore is the city's Anglicized name and the one used both during and after the British Raj. However Bengaluru, the Kannada name for the city, was a bid to move away from the legacies of colonialism and, as a result, is now the official moniker. Unlike those other cities, however, the change in name recent. In fact, the city only officially became Bengaluru on November 1, 2014, the occasion of the 59th Kannada Rajyotsava making the creation of the State of Karnataka.

This change took place shortly before I began my fieldwork. Yet while I encountered Bengaluru on official forms, I rarely heard anyone call the city Bengaluru in our daily conversations, either in English or Kannada. However, one discernable effect of this name change is that some scholars now write about the city as Bengaluru rather than Bangalore, a shift that acknowledges the political influence of Kannadiga language politics while emphasizing the city's historical importance as a South Indian cultural and linguistic crossroads. Therefore, invoking Bengaluru is a way to claim the uniqueness of the city's Kannadiga character in response to the dominance of unbridled

capitalism and its status as "India's Silicon Valley".

While I respect the motivation behind this scholarly shift, I do not approach the distinction between Bangalore and Bengaluru in terms of a linear temporality—i.e., that the city used to be called one name and now it is called another. For while both names describe the same geographic location, the official adoption of Bengaluru did not replace Bangalore so much as legitimate a different urban story. Like multiple temporalities of nostalgia both Bangalore and Bengaluru coexist in the city today. They both serve as linguistic placeholders for different stories about where the city has come from, what kind of place it is now, and how it continues to evolve and change.

Throughout my dissertation, I mainly use the term Bangalore because it was far and away the most common term I heard among the friends and interlocutors who populate this ethnography. This, of course, is at least partly because I moved in mostly English-speaking circles, but it was also, I believe, because Bengaluru resonated mostly with a politics of Kannadiga identity and language that was, for the most part, secondary in spaces organized around dissident sexuality. However when events, institutions, or the people I spoke with used Bengaluru, I follow suit in recounting their narratives. Whether someone used Bangalore or Bengaluru was about more than whether they were speaking in Kannada or English: it also referenced their social and political location in relation to the politics of naming the city.

The Briefest of Overviews

In this dissertation I develop the central concept of urban articulation in order to describe the ways in which urban worlds are materially and

discursively produced through the everyday lives of people living in Bangalore. Specifically, I follow the experiences of a range of non-heterosexual people in order to develop the concept of sexual dissidence. While sexual dissidence is refracted through identities like gay, lesbian, hijra, and kothi, it is rooted in practice: that is, dissidence arises from what people do and where and how they do it. In turn, dissidence becomes a means for articulating the city, that is, for producing it as a socially meaningful place (Lefebvre 1991). Given the specific context of Bangalore, practices of dissident articulation also exist in relation to the domesticating effects that the dominant culture of consumer capitalism has on urban life and urban form. Over the course of the dissertation, I draw out the tensions between these two resulting forms of urban articulation—the dissident and the domestic—and I use thick ethnographic description to unpack both the tensions and possibilities of these interrelated, competing, and coexisting ways of living an urban life.

The research that forms the basis of this dissertation took place over the course of 22 months in 2015 and 2016. It began as a narrow ethnographic study of sexualities located in Bangalore, and it ended as a study of Bangalore in which my attention to sexuality informed configurations of social, political and economic life in the city. That is to say, I arrived in Bangalore with the intent to study “queer” people’s lives in the context of contemporary India, and I assumed that “queer” would include people who I, as a gay American man, could easily recognize as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).

Of course I knew that the coherence of the LGBT category is itself a construct of western knowledge about sexuality and the self. I also knew that the term problematically glosses a host of different identifications, especially

in the context of India (Shah 2015). I expected my task as an ethnographer of sexuality would be to engage these different identities— and I hoped I would do so without reducing them to my own categories (Boellstorff 2007). For me, this project meant taking seriously Indian men who identified as “gay” (for instance), but it also meant taking seriously that all men in Bangalore who experience sexual attraction to other men are not “really” gay— as categories like *kothi*, *panti*,¹⁰ and even MSM illustrate. Indeed, as Lawrence Cohen helpfully explains, MSM—or (M)en who have (S)ex with (M)en— began as a public health category that traveled to India via HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programming. It was formulated specifically to describe *behaviors* rather than identities. But one result was men using the category to identify themselves as “MSM” as a form of personhood (Cohen 2005).

This example from Cohen illustrates the complicated interplay of identities in the lives of research subjects, and how life exceeds identity categories even though having categories remains necessary for making sense of life and of ethnographic experience. In Bangalore, my introduction to the individuals and communities populating this ethnography was largely through community based and non-government organizations (CBOs and NGOs), an active and long-running support group, and through the work of the Alternative Law Forum, a non-profit collective of human rights lawyers.

Perhaps, given my acquaintance with so many lawyers and activists, I part of

¹⁰ Briefly, *Kothis* are generally male born persons who identify with feminine characteristics and often use feminine gender pronouns but who do not live their lives as social women. They are also distinguished by their passive position in sex, and today are often identified on a transgender spectrum. *Pantis*, on the other hand, are male born persons who identify as men and use male pronouns but who take an active role in sex with other male persons. See, Cohen 2005.

my experience in Bangalore involved learning to see the centrality of politics and the law to questions of sexuality and difference.

Or maybe I ended up in the locations I did precisely *because* the law was so important for people I wanted to connect with, and that's why it made sense to locate my workspace in the ALF office. Either way, as I deepened my connection to different groups in Bangalore—some of whom fit into the categories I expected them to, and many of whom did not— I came to see that my association with legal activists also shaped the connections I made, *and* that questions of law and politics were important constitutive elements in the formation of both individual and collective worlds organized around sexuality. My research, therefore, turned out to be than an ethno-cartographic practice of documenting sexual difference. Instead, understanding sexual different in Bangalore was a vital key to understanding the city itself.

The Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured so that each of the four chapters traces a different thematic across the urban social geography and, in turn, builds on preceding analytical concepts. That is, the concepts developed in chapter one inform the work of chapter two, and both inform chapter three, and so forth. Interspersed between each chapter are intertextual reflections, and each intertext is focused on a different place or event within Bangalore's urban sexual geography. While the intertexts are intended to be in conversation with the concepts I develop in each subsequent chapter, they can, in theory, be read in any order. The intertexts are more descriptive than they are analytical,

intended to evoke a sense of located-ness across the breadth of Bangalore's urban geography.

The first intertext is the story of a political action/selfie campaign led by a group of gay men on bustling MG Road in what's commonly known as the Central Business District (CBD) of the city. The next intertext travels to weekend nights in Indiranagar where flashy gay parties transform weekday restaurants into temporary clubs, serving as sites of both erotic fantasy and capitalist consumption similar what happens in Bangalore's shopping malls. The third intertext is a short reflection on how encounters with and through the law produced kinship bonds for members of the legal aid group the Alternative Law Forum, as well as those who passed in and out of the collective's office. The final intertext offers a full festival pass to the Bangalore Queer Film Festival or BQFF (just kidding, admission is free!), one of the year's largest gatherings of the city's self-identifying "queer community" and an event that illustrates many of the themes developed throughout the dissertation.

By tacking back and forth between evocative descriptions of important ethnographic sites and more analytically focused-chapters, the dissertation's structure attempts to give readers a sense of Bangalore as a lively and dynamic urban place. Each of the four chapter focuses on the stories of people for whom sexuality shapes their lives in distinct ways. Another aspect of the dissertation structure is that I sometimes return to the same urban sites at different moments in order to illustrate how, at different times and with different people, they become altogether different places.

The four chapters forward the following concepts. Chapter one focuses on sex, and illustrates how sexual dissidence is a practice of living in urban worlds. Chapter two is about streets, and theorizes how the domestication of public space is an effect of urban articulation. Chapter three focuses on love, holding it up as an example for how the lived experience of dissidence produces new urban geographies. Chapter four is about protest, and uses the framework of dissident urban articulation to examine how communities are produced and sustained across different political projects. Economic liberalization, unbridled forces of economic development, and the influence of global capitalism—these have undoubtedly shaped the city as it exists today, something this project shares with much of the contemporary research about Bangalore. At the same time, I argue, contemporary Bangalore cannot be reduced to an effect of these forces, not in its urban form and not in the form diverse communities take around dissident sexualities.

Ultimately dissidence serves as an epistemological and a political tool for understanding how people make new kinds of urban worlds and for living in them differently. While doing the ethnographic fieldwork for this project, I had moments where nothing seemed to make sense, times when no one could agree or get along, experiences where my framework of “dissident sexuality” seemed too impossibly complex, and yet too simple a category to shed light on anything more than individuals lives. But my sustained attention to dissident life Bangalore also revealed moments when new ways of living became possible. In the face of discrimination and prejudice, in the face of class, and caste, and communal conflicts, in the face of dwindling natural resources and a city stretched to breaking: sometimes people came together, formed

dissident communities to resist the status quo. In those moments they were more alike than different. In moments of pleasure and of joy they celebrated their differences, their pride, and their love. It is conveying moments of community to readers that keeps me writing, and it is my honor to share them with you.

Chapter One: Sex

Traveling to various research sites around Bangalore necessarily means passing through Kempegowda Bus Park, popularly known as Majestic, on a regular basis. Though there are a number of satellite bus stations around the city, Majestic serves as the main transfer point for the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) bus routes. Therefore, whenever I chose to navigate the city by bus, chances were I passed through Majestic at some point.¹¹ My earliest impression of the bus park was how much of an assault it was on my senses. It is filled with people who all seem to know where they are going, some sitting on their luggage waiting, others weaving in and out of the tangle of buses. To my untrained eye, Majestic has no spatial logic: I could barely see how to locate the bus I needed, let alone observe any of the social interactions happening there! And so it surprised me that, upon hearing about

¹¹ Mid-2016 the underground portion of the Bangalore Metro line finally opened, and Bangaloreans could now ride the metro from Bayappanahalli near the Ring Road in the east, past my home in the neighborhood of Indiranagar, through MG Road, Cubbon Park, past the Karnataka State government buildings in and around the Vidhana Soudha, and to the Majestic bus park. While it took about 20 minutes to traverse this route by metro, the distance could easily take over an hour by bus, auto, or private car.

my research on the place of sexuality in the urban landscape, many people were quick to tell me that “sexual minorities” came to Majestic to cruise and do sex work.¹²

Shortly after arriving in Bangalore, I was invited to a demonstration at Majestic against rising BMTC bus fares by a group of labor rights activists. The group included a number of different people who were part of the *Bengaluru Bus Prayaanikara Vedike* or the Bangalore Bus Commuter’s Forum. At least two of the participants at the protest I recognized as a transgender women activists from a major “sexual minority”-focused NGO. I was paired with one of the women and she flirted with me in a friendly, joking way as we passed out flyers and chanted slogans together.

At some point, a man emerged from the crowd to talk to her and she playfully chided him in response, calling me her boyfriend instead. She indicated to me nonverbally that I should play along, acting as if she was taken. I understood the game afoot and tried my best to play along as they conversed in Kannada I could not understand. This meant awkwardly standing a few feet away, completely unsure of what to do with myself. Despite the fact that I understood nothing of their conversation, I was not too be surprised when she left the protest behind and followed him onto another bus. Perhaps, I thought, sex really was everywhere at Majestic and my initial inability to see it was a failure of sight.

And so each time I returned to Majestic thereafter I lingered on the benches along its U-shaped platforms, bought snacks and bottled water from

¹² By “sexual minorities” they meant a subset of those I describe broadly as *sexual dissidents* in this dissertation. In this case kothi men and transgender women belonging to the hijra social system who were classified as such by NGOs and community organizations targeting these populations with social and health support.

Nandini Milk Parlour, and hoped to again spot this kind of interaction happening in a public place. At the same time I knew the suggestion of sex like at the demonstration would be visible only to those who already knew how to read its subtle cues. Lingering did not seem to help me. For one, I still did not understand what the linguistic or visual cues of sex in public were, so no matter how long I sat on the benches at Majestic I was unable to see them. For another, I could only ever sit at Majestic for so long before, as a foreigner, I began to look truly lost, or before the combination of diesel exhaust and dust burned my eyes and throat, forcing me on my way. Maybe interactions like the one I'd seen during the fare hike demonstration were not that frequent in the first place, I thought, or maybe I was at Majestic during the wrong time of day. After all, I usually passed through during the morning and early afternoon. I heard that Majestic's sexual character only became visible only in the late afternoon, the evening, or at night.

Anyway, time went by and I found myself changing buses at Majestic one afternoon—I don't remember exactly what time but it was not that late in the day—and I really, really had to pee. Just the thought of getting on another bus and sitting in traffic for possibly an hour or more without first visiting a toilet made me squirm. I fished a 1 Rupee coin from my pocket and handed it to the attendant outside the "pay and use Gents toilet." Inside, the room had high ceilings with urinals around the perimeter and a hand-wash sink served to divide them from the enclosed toilet stalls on the other side. I found a free urinal and went about my business without paying much attention to what else was happening in the room, though at some point I heard another man at the urinal adjacent to mine. He spoke on his mobile phone in English,

something about a property in another Bangalore neighborhood. I did not register the details.

Though I took note of the man in my peripheral vision, I did not acknowledge him or make any eye contact. Instead, after I finished peeing (what I'd come to do), I rinsed my hands with water and exited through the door opposite from the one where I'd entered. Once outside, I briefly paused to get my bearings—I had emerged on the other side of Majestic's central building and away from the bus platform—when I realized that the man from the urinal had followed me out. In order to see if what I sensed was about to happen, I continued to feign the disorientation that had been real only a few seconds before. Sure enough, the man stopped next to me and smiled, revealing small green and purple jewels fixed to his upper front teeth in an alternating pattern. He was a bit shorter than me, with a protruding belly, and was dressed casually.

"Would you like me to suck you off?" he came straight out and asked. Adding, in case I need more convincing, "I have a place nearby we can go."

Aside from catching me totally off guard, this proposition suggested that the common stories I heard about Majestic— i.e., that it continued to be a cruising spot for men seeking sex with other men—were true. All the times since the demonstration that I'd failed to see sex amongst the crowds at Majestic, and suddenly I was again at the center of it! Yet I was also taken aback because I had *not* gone into the toilet looking for sex— I had genuinely needed to pee! On the other hand, I *had* lingered after exiting the toilet, and I *had* allowed him to approach. Was that what signaled to him, I wondered? Or did the toilet have a reputation, which, in my moment of biological need, I was

unaware of?

“Oh no,” I mumbled, “I’m not looking for...*that*.” Then I added, somewhat pathetically, my wheels spinning about how to keep this conversation going without leading him to expect something I wasn’t prepared to follow through on: “Is this a good spot? Do you come here often?”

My questions landed like a heavy object between us, making clear I would not give him the thing he was looking for. “Yes, yes,” he answered without elaborating. He obviously understood that I was not a potential—what, sex partner? client? —because he turned and walked away. Whatever happened between us was over as abruptly as it had begun. Did it even happen, I thought, as I walked around the building to search for the elusive bus that would take me home. Both of these encounters illustrate how non-heterosexual people become subtly visible to, and manage to connect with, one another through shared knowledge and acts in the urban Indian public sphere.

Towards an Ethnography of Sexual Dissidence

Although I might not have realized it in the moment, the *kothi*¹³ who approached me that afternoon accurately perceived something I had not yet articulated to myself about the nature of my ethnographic research. Although in a very different capacity from the one he/she imagined, I was at Majestic, and indeed in Bangalore, *looking for sex*. However, I was not looking to engage

¹³ I use the term *Kothi* here to describe him. This term was used to mean a male born person who was understood to be somewhere on the transgender spectrum, often using feminine pronouns and presenting in a feminine manner, but not as a woman. In sexual parlance kothis were invariably associated with the receptive position. For more see, Cohen 2005, Reddy 2005.

in sex acts; instead, I wanted to encounter sex in order to better understand how Bangalore's rapid growth and urbanization have changed the physical geography of the city as well as the social and affective geography of people's sex lives there.

What's more, the sex lives I was interested in exceed any easy terms of categorization. For example, most are non-heterosexual, but they are not necessarily homosexual. They move beyond norms and they reject the category of normal, even as, to use language common in queer theory, they remain anti-normative (Warner 1999). Indeed, the hard to categorize lives that I refer to include identity categories like gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, hijra, and kothi, but a list of identities—however long—could never sum up all these lived experiences. And because I am interested in what people *do* along with where and how they do it (rather than, primarily, what labels they or others use to describe themselves), I use the concept of sexual dissidence to refer to the organization of lives in against dominant sexual mores and practices.

Just as Mary Douglas worked between categories of cleanliness and pollution to assert that dirt—that is, “matter out of place”—reveals systems of beliefs and practices in which symbolic oppositions come to make sense (Douglas [1966] 2002), dissidence serves as an oppositional relationship to both normative forms of sexuality and to ways of expressing it. Like dirt, dissidence reveals the system of beliefs and practices through which sexuality is understood to fit into both urban and Indian life. They are dissident in that they exist in opposition to norms, as well as dissident in the ways that they resist and remake those norms.

But the normative and the dissident are not fixed categories: they always cohere in particular places and at particular times, hence the social geographical nature of this ethnographic project. Following Henri Lefebvre, I understand space to be socially produced: that is, I see it as an effect of social relations and a constitutive element of place (Feld and Basso 1996, Lefebvre 1991). The urban geography of Bangalore is divided up in many different ways—as public or private, normative or dissident, differently accessible to different classes, castes, and genders. For example, Majestic Bus Park is a place people move *through* but do not linger *in* without consequence, and this is because lingering challenges the normative uses of the space. When people told me that Majestic is a site of dissident sexuality they also explained how the police presence there had increased with the construction of the metro and efforts to modernize Bangalore’s urban form.

In other words, Majestic was a place where lingering risked drawing the eye of the police, but also, as the two stories that open this chapter suggest, a place that facilitates dissident encounters, including sexual ones. Attention to practices of sexual dissidence, therefore, reveal the normative rules of urban life—that is, the unspoken but shared conceptions of being and doing through which spaces in the city become associated with proper forms of sexual and gender comportment, through which normative places cohere, and how sexual dissidence becomes “matter” out of place.

Normative associations, and the practices through which people either reproduce them or enact forms of dissidence in relation to them, show how the urban geography either makes sexual dissidence visible or allows it to remain invisible to the people it does not affect. Also the transaction of sex

and sexual desires across urban spaces, either through carnal acts or speech acts, comes to index sex itself. Attention to different ways of living tethers real sites (like Majestic) to both actual and virtual communities of sexual dissidence.

Berlant and Warner describe various normative instantiations of the public (e.g., discursive, material, and embodied) as sites of heterosexual privilege (Berlant and Warner 1998). Dissident sexuality produces what Warner calls “counterpublics” (Warner 2002), and remakes the urban landscape by connecting it across both real and virtual geographies. In his work on virtuality and intimacy among men who desire and have sex with other men, Shaka McGlotten writes, “By articulating sex in public as an improper use of public space and a flawed model of sociality, the management and policing of these spaces and practices can be read as an effort to manage the virtuality of both sex and public-ness” (McGlotten 2013, 30). Increased policing in Majestic is but one example from Bangalore of the regulation of public-ness that McGlotten refers. At the same time, the persistence of a “counterpublic” and dissident sexuality at Majestic complicates any notion that Bangalore’s urban geography can be easily or neatly broken into a binaries of either public *or* private space.

When my protest partner used her place in Majestic to pick up a client/sex partner, she transformed the public space into something different. At the same time, and although their interaction was mostly invisible to anyone other than me, it was not quite “private,” either. Indeed, the condition of its possibility was both of them being in the public space of Majestic in the first place. In this way her encounter illustrates how the spectrum of visibility

and invisibility challenges the public/private binary in a similar fashion to Warner's concept of the "counterpublic." Like Warner's concept I focus on sexually dissident practices as a way to think beyond binaries. I examine how these practices reveal the cultural systems through which sexuality is constructed as proper to some spaces (like the home), but not others (like Majestic).

By sexual I not only refer to sex acts—i.e. not only to bodies coming into contact with other bodies, although that is sometimes the case—but to sex as a thick set of social practices, including intimate ways of being in the world in relation to others. In order to interrogate the making of urban worlds in Bangalore, I deploy this broad sense of sex as an analytical category distinct from more common objects of urban study like housing, infrastructure, private development, public access, etc. Because sexuality is at once intimately personal *and* is a shared framework for human experience it offers an analytical framework for urban studies that works across multiple scales of inquiry at once.

Dissident is also an analytical category operative across these multiple scales of inquiry. The common root of the words dissent, dissident, and dissidence is from Latin— joining *dis-*, meaning "apart," and *-sedere*, from the verb "to sit." Dissident literally means one who is physically separated or set apart from, and the word often carries the connotation of being opposed to official policy, to the state, or to a structure of power. Dissidence, therefore, not only implies agency in the act of dissenting, it presumes a relational structure. In the context of sexual identity, one can *be* gay or lesbian, etc.; identities become states of being. But to be dissident necessarily means one is

in opposition *to* a normative system of heterosexual privilege; i.e., it is about what one does and how and where one does it, not just who one is separate from that other context.

In this way dissident can function a lot like “queer,” and while they share important conceptual overlaps— especially in relation to the study of sexuality— they offer different analytical purchase. For one, while the breadth of sexualities and life experiences that I refer to as dissident are often glossed as “queer” within human geography and anthropology (Boellstorff 2007; Brown and Browne 2016), the analytical category of queer carries its own baggage because it arises from Euro-American literary and cultural theory (Butler 2006 [1990, Warner 1993]). While some people I encountered in Bangalore used the term “queer” to describe themselves and their communities, it was always a function of their privileged class and educational position. Insofar as queer was a category of practice in Bangalore; it was never a value neutral term about the lives it described. Instead it was always already emplaced within local, urban, and global geographies of sexuality (Dave 2012).

A corollary to sexual dissidence can be found in Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity. Gender comes to have meaning through the iterative ways in which people daily inhabit gendered categories of being (Butler 2006 [1990]). Butler’s use of performance here is not meant to imply conscious acting—as one might perform a part in a play, say—but to reference embodied repetitions that have the effect of producing the very thing they reference. Gender performativity, therefore, works to produce disciplinary norms within a Foucauldian framework of power (see also, Foucault 1990,

1995). That said, *Gender Trouble* is a foundational text for queer theory because one way of repeating a norm is to continuously resist it, to poke fun at it, and in doing so to reveal its underlying constructed-ness. This is why Butler makes her point with the example of ball culture as depicted in the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*. Drag balls, after all, are won by achieving “realness,” which is the ability to successfully inhabit, or “perform,” a classed and gendered persona.

Similarly, sexual dissidence points to the ways in which people daily *dissent from* norms about when, and where, and how sex can appear within the urban geography. By doing so, sexually dissident people’s lives resist dominant ways of inhabiting the city, including under the signs of both “normality” and “queerness.” This is because the breadth of sexually dissident lives I encountered in Bangalore are not always, and are often not, part of queer identity as it circulates there. Sexual dissidence, on the other hand, refers first and foremost to the practices I observed through extended ethnographic engagement. That is, when I describe people (in this chapter mostly men) who engage in sexually dissident practices, I resist subsuming them within a knowledge system where their acts can only be read as indicators of identity—either “gay” or “queer.”

Using ethnographic examples of different men who desire and engage in sex with other men, I argue that sexual dissidence is a productive category for understanding the social geography of Bangalore. It describes the live people live without assuming their male-male sexual encounters must be “gay.” Further, the term dissidence describes people’s sexual practices outside

the normative bounds of heterosexual privilege; thereby resisting making sexual practices reducible to identity politics.

As a result anyone can be a sexual dissident, not just “queer” or LGBT people. In the context of Bangalore’s social geography this includes, but is not limited to gay men, lesbian women, kothis, hijras, jogappas, female sex workers and others. Another way to think about sexual dissidence is anything on the outside of Gayle Rubin’s “charmed circle”(Rubin 1984). In her 1984 essay “Thinking Sex,” Rubin writes about how sex and sexuality are regulated. The charmed circle is, quite literally, a circle that maps accepted forms of sexuality on the inside as “good” and forms of sexuality on the outside as “bad.” When there is a misalignment between parts of the circle that moral panics and sex negativity result. For example “monogamy” is in the good part of the circle while “promiscuity” is on the outside; “procreative” is good while “non-procreative” is bad. Particularly apt to my ethnographic material from Bangalore “At home” is good, while “In the Park” (or the Bus Stand or a number of other places) is bad.

To be clear: Rubin does not offer value judgments with her “charmed circle;” instead she offers a framework for understanding how ideas about good and bad sex get distributed in order to critique the moralizing effects of this distribution of value. Sexual dissidents, both as I develop the concept and as it has been used by others (e.g., Enguix 2009), are people for whom sex is too visible, or too public, who pay for it, for whom it is not in line with heterosexual and procreative norms, etc. Although anyone could, in theory, be sexually dissident, I pay particular attention to those who people and

particular communities outside the charmed circle of normative heterosexuality.

By using dissident—rather than queer— as the key analytical category, I do not eschew the pleasures of signification as Lawrence Cohen puts it (Cohen 1995). That is, the pleasure of being a gay man and connecting with other gay men, of being part of an emergent transgender community or a hijra kinship network rather than being alone in a body that doesn't match who one is and without community or support. Indeed, the ethnographic examples in this chapter highlight the pleasures that arise from interpellation within identity categories and communities, even as the stories challenge the capacity of identity categories to hold everyone. While identity absolutely matters in these stories, identity alone is not sufficient for understanding practices of sexual dissidence, nor is it sufficient for understanding how sexual dissidents make their lives cohere across the urban geography of Bangalore.

The Visible and Invisible, the Virtual and the Real

In the summer of 2016 the app based augmented reality game “Pokémon Go” briefly enjoyed worldwide popularity and Bangalore was no exception to this trend.¹⁴ The way the game worked, players would open the app on their smart-phones and see a map of the surrounding area—just like the real world but with Pokémon hanging out in certain places for players to

¹⁴ The Pokémon Go craze led people to venture into traffic without looking and other reckless situations.

<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/07/12/pokemon-go-get-outta-here/there-are-dangers-to-not-living-in-the-real-world>

catch. The goal of the game was to capture as many of these Pokémon as possible in a player's "pokédex"—a sphere each player carried for storing the virtual monsters— and the way to do so was to move a real body to a real location and then use a phone screen to see an augmented version of the surroundings. By using the app to view the virtual surroundings, players would be able to “see” the Pokémon in relation to their real bodies and to capture it within the augmented reality of the game.

What this looked like in practice was groups of people wandering around Bangalore's streets and parks even more checked into their phones—and therefore more checked out from their surroundings— than usual. This was dangerous and led to accidents all over the world, but it was particularly perilous on the streets of urban India where pedestrian obstacles (cows, cars, open sewer grates) are legion. One Sunday afternoon I joined a group of sexually dissident people in Cubbon Park where members of a “queer dating group” met in person for the first time after the group started on Facebook. In some ways this meet-up also embodied the interplay between virtual reality and real life for sexual dissidents in Bangalore. However, in the case of the group the goal was to build relationships that would endure in the real world. I will discuss this group in more detail in the next chapter: what's important here is that about thirty people were sitting in a circle on the grass when, seemingly out of nowhere, five or six young men stumbled into that circle staring at their phones. They looked up, and then down, oriented their phones, and held them up to eye level. These were the Pokémon Go players, and in their pursuit of virtual Pokémon they had unwittingly walked right into a gathering of real human bodies.

The Pokémon they were looking for did not *really* exist, of course, or at least they had no material presence in the physical world. But the Pokémon *did* exist on the phones and in the shared augmented reality of those playing the game. In turn, their virtual existence had a material effect on the real world in that it brought people to the same physical location, a gathering that had its own effects. Someone from the meet-up group kindly told the Pokémon players they had disturbed an actual event, and asked if they could please move out of the way. The guys with their phones were suitably apologetic and left quickly. However brief, this clash between overlapping real and virtual geographies, and how their confluence was briefly made visible in the same physical space of Cubbon Park, struck me as a model for thinking about the overlapping forms of real and virtual sexual dissidence that shape the possibilities for sex and connection across Bangalore’s urban geography.

In other words, the phenomenon of Pokémon Go helped me to understand how smartphone apps mediate the possibilities of sex among men seeking sex with other men—who are often but not always gay men. This mainly meant the “hook-up app” Grindr and, to a lesser extent among the men I met, Planet Romeo (or PR as it was commonly known). Each of these “hook-up apps” sorted the profiles of other men based on their proximity to the user within a radial GPS grid. For instance, if someone opened up Grindr and another user was in the same Café Coffee Day (CCD), one user might see the other’s profile marked as 5 or 10 feet away. In such a hypothetical case, the Grindr user would, like someone playing Pokémon Go, know that another man was nearby because the app’s virtual geography (augmented reality) renders their proximity visible to one another.

To everyone else in the imagined CCD, however, the sexual dissidence of these two men would not (necessarily) be on display: it would not be visible. Under this cloak of invisibility they could use the app to message one another. Their simultaneous visibility to each other as sexual dissidents and the invisibility of their sexuality to everyone else related to two things. First, it was a function of their cisgender male identity, which allowed male-male sexual dissidence to recede from view since they otherwise occupied urban space seemingly self-evident men. Second, it was a function of their class privilege. After all, in order to access Grindr they needed to own a smartphone and pay for a data plan; they also needed the disposable income to pay for coffee at CCD.

In these ways Grindr functioned similarly to Pokémon Go: it made the virtual urban geography co-exist with, and map onto, the real geography of the city. Like sexual encounters at Majestic Bus Park, Grindr located dissident sexual practices along a spectrum between visibility and invisibility. What's more, both examples complicate the notion that visibility is necessarily good and invisibility is bad, or vice versa. Rather, they locate sexual dissidence within a field experiences, especially those of class and gender. This is why sexual dissidence can best be understood through attention to practice— that is, to what people do—rather than seen to be a function of identity categories like gay. After all men who used Grindr or PR to “hook up” (have sexual encounters) with other men were not necessarily gay, and the invisibility cloak of virtual interactions allowed them to simultaneously seek out sexually dissident encounters without necessarily presenting themselves to the world as sexual dissidents.

In this chapter I focus on men who desire sex with other men, some who describe themselves as gay and others who might not see themselves in that identity. Throughout the rest of the chapter I will move across several different sites in Bangalore: from the weekly meetings of a support group I regularly attended, to a theatre that shows pornography and serves as a cruising spot for men. This chapter focuses specifically on men to show how, even within this seemingly gendered constraint, the practices of sexual dissidence articulate urban geographies even as they exceed the logics of identity that sometimes appear to order sexuality in urban space.

The ethnography moves between descriptions of the porn theatre, the support group space, and other virtual spaces for seeking sex in order to illustrate how shifting meanings of dissidence play out across these sites. I also show how sites figure visibility and invisibility differently, and how these configurations complicate the imagined binary between public and private. The support group space was articulated through its difference from the porn theatre and other places. This, in turn, shaped possible interactions and identities around which men in the support group located their lives and communities in the city.

The Theatre and the Support Group: How Male-Male Sex Matters Differently

By the first time I actually went to the theatre I'd already heard a lot about it, but I was still completely unsure what to expect. I knew it was an old single screen cinema built in an area once on the outskirts of the city and that now, due to Bangalore's rapid growth and voracious urban sprawl, existed somewhere shy of centrally located. In addition to the road's heavy vehicular

traffic, the sidewalk in front of the building saw a steady stream of pedestrians heading to a nearby shopping mall that sold mostly discount "ethnic wear" and factory-rejected Western branded clothing. The theatre itself was unassuming: un-landscaped, painted a dusty green with at least one prominently displayed poster of an outdated regional language movie pasted to its façade on any given day. It struck me as the kind of place people must walk by often and never be very curious about, the kind of place that easily blends into the background of a busy Bangalore street.

While the dilapidated state of the building might not have been entirely intentional— everything about the place had an air of being down and out, after all—I quickly understood how this unassuming quality worked to the theatre's advantage. Despite the posters, the theatre did not show regional cinema— instead it showed pornographic movies four times daily, seven days a week. These old movies were usually American— spliced into a montage of erotic scenes from B-grade Tamil movies. There might be a dark-skinned woman with voluptuous breasts taking a bath in one shot. Then, still half-clothed, she would straddle a man with a full mustache, letting her thick black hair swing in slow circles to the turn of her head and breasts. Smoke from someone's cigarette curled through the light of the projector. Blips in the reel, scratches on the film, and the dank smell of the shadowed hall mixed with a urine-scented whiff of ammonia and tobacco.

The sensoria of the theatre was very different from my other entry into what might be described as a "gay" space in Bangalore: a weekly support group meeting that was my first point of contact with other gay men in the city. Although it was mostly men, the group also included a few lesbian

women and, occasionally, transgender people as well. The meetings were open to everyone, but for reasons that will become clear as I paint a clearer picture of the place, they attracted mostly gay-identifying men. Held in the one-room office of an NGO, I could always tell how crowded a meeting would be from the pile of shoes in the stairwell landing outside the office door. With a number of floor cushions and benches around the perimeter of the un-air conditioned and often-stuffy room, people entered, gave each other hugs, air kissed on the cheek, and made jokes by way of greeting.

At the time of my fieldwork the support group had been meeting for almost 20 years, and although I did not attend meetings every single week, I was a regular and frequent visitor over the course of my almost two years in Bangalore. During that time I saw new faces of those who had just moved to the city, of those visiting from other parts of India, and of those who, like me, were from other parts of the world. Sometimes old friends came back into town, people who had been regulars a decade or so prior, and the older folks in the room would laugh and reminisce about the past, expressing nostalgia for a Bangalore that was no more.

The newer and younger folks would listen intently to stories about cruising along the embankment that formed the north side of MG Road, of sitting in the grass watching other men, of thickets that rendered them invisible while they did other things. Now the city's elevated metro was in exactly that location, and with the construction of the Rangoli Arts Center beneath it, the area was a popular dating spot for young straight couples. Like so many other aspects of life in Bangalore, these men's memories lived on only for those over 40, and as bits of story told in places like the support

group.

Throughout my time at the support group there was a core group of attendees who, despite living or working far from the NGO office where meetings were held, steadfastly made their way through Bangalore's notoriously gridlocked traffic for a few hours of weekly socializing in a place that, as one regular described it, "I can just be myself." This freedom to be one's self was also reflected in the diverse range of topics discussed at meetings. Indeed, no topic was off limits and common topics included the struggle between religion and homosexuality, the immense family pressure to marry, practicing safer sex, and the ongoing stigma of HIV/AIDs. Sometimes the group's conversation focused on one person's struggle. On other occasions everyone chatted about popular culture and current events in India, in the United States, or in other parts of the world.

It was at one these meetings that I first heard mention of a theatre in Bangalore that showed porn, a place where men went to have sex with other men. It was a dangerous place, I heard. Yet because I was interested in sexually dissident geographies of Bangalore, I made note of the theatre and planned to visit. The support group was also a site of sexual dissidence, of course, but to the men I met there it was distinct from the theatre. In the support group men who did not always fit into other social spaces could be themselves; they could speak more freely, and this sense of belonging was not just about sex.

What's more, the dissidence of the support group where men *talked* about sex was perceived to be different from the theatre where men actually *had sex* with each other. As such, the theatre was talked about as separate

from the support group: a place apart, as if it belonged to a different geography altogether. And because the support group had in many ways served as my introduction to the social world of sexual dissidence in the city (particularly among men), I needed locating places where men met other men outside of the framework of gay identity, let alone other sexually dissident identities.

When gay men from the support group encountered hijras collecting money at traffic signals, as they often did, it was across divides of gender, class, and (most likely) caste, as well. One week during a support group meeting someone asked the rest of the group if we gave money to Hijras. Some answered yes: they always gave because, as gay men, they felt especially bad about how marginalized hijras were and understood them to have some identity in common. Others said they never gave to hijras or to anyone begging on the street. As I deepened my connection with Bangalore's "community" of sexual dissidents, I did branch out and meet more people beyond gay men, moving into spaces that did not clearly overlap with the support group, even if some of the same faces occasionally showed up. This included NGO offices that supported hijras and other "sexual minorities," places where support group members—many of whom worked in the IT industry—had no reason to go. Still, like many other men there, the support group was my how I knew *when* and *where* "gay" things happened—and thus it shaped my ethnographic engagements, including the ways in which I saw how men's desires for other men shaped their lived experiences of Bangalore.

Back to the theatre: I first went there on an unplanned excursion with a friend from the support group. It was a weeknight and the day in 2015 that

the Modi led, BJP government declared pornography illegal and temporarily blocked access to mainstream porn websites. Both of us were a little nervous about what we would find, and so we made jokes about how good a day it was to watch porn in protest of the government's actions. We were also curious what the porn theatre would be like since we had both heard about it at the support group but, as far as either of us could tell, none of the people who told us were regular visitors.

To get to the theatre we took an auto-rickshaw, asking the driver to drop us at the nearby mall, not wanting to give the exact address lest the driver know where we were headed. Looking back, I'm not sure what negative consequence either of us feared except perhaps that, insofar as our destination marked us as sexually dissident, there was a fear we might somehow be taken advantage of: asked for more money than our fare or...who knew. The absence of any particular anxiety did not lessen the nervousness we felt, or our shared sense of doing something a little illicit. I later learned we were not the first of the support group regulars to visit the theatre, though this was also not a surprise. Indeed, when I said I had gone (I didn't tell anyone else the identity of my friend who had accompanied me since I didn't know if he wanted others to know), a few other men explained how they, too, had gone once or twice out of curiosity. However, they made sure to clarify, they were *not* regulars. I don't know if this was true, of course, only that I never saw anyone I recognized from the support group on any of my occasional visits.

At least that first time in the auto heading across town in the dark, horns blaring and lights glaring, I had the palpable sense of crossing into a

different urban geography. As a precaution against our inchoate fears, my friend suggested we only take the cash needed and leave our wallets and any identity cards behind. Whether we were being overly cautious or not, we had both heard the same stories: that anyone who went there would likely be groped, harassed, or maybe even assaulted. When gay men from the support group told me this over dinner, or while putting on our shoes in the hall outside of the NGO office, their implication that it was not a safe destination for someone like me— meaning especially a white man and a foreigner—was also about how it was unsafe for them as professional, middle-class Indian men.

Saying that it was unsafe for both of us was also a way of articulating how their “gay” identity was more closely in line with what I represented to them—America! LGBT rights! A politics of sexual identity!— and in opposition to men who went to the theatre presumably because just wanted sex with other men but not to organize their lives around that identity or desire. Making boundaries between different class-based social geographies even happened among men with ostensibly similar sexual desires and practices. What’s more, these distinctions articulated geographical divides and a hierarchy of sexual dissidence that, whatever its empirical truth in terms of who went where or did what, had the effect of instantiating a read divides in the city’s urban geography.

In recounting what I’d heard about the theatre before my friend and I went, it is not my intention to necessarily give credence to those accounts of danger, but to honestly explain the mindset with which we first went there. I also describe these gay men’s perceptions of the theatre in order to highlight

how class-based differences shape the social and geographical imaginaries in which the theatre exists necessarily apart from the support group.

Given all the warnings, I don't know who or what I expected to encounter after we paid for our tickets (at 50 Rupees each, or about 75 US cents at the time). We entered the lobby, and, parting the heavy black curtain that divided the entrance from the cinema hall, allowed our eyes to adjust to the dim light. At first I could barely make out the men who were sitting at the very back of the hall, in the darkest corners under the protruding mezzanine. What I could see immediately, however, was the bright white, LED-flash of smartphone screens, I could hear snippets of conversations in English and Kannada and maybe other languages. Immediately, I knew the theatre might not be as different from the support group as I had been led to believe.

Class-Based Differences and Sexually Dissident Geographies for Men

This is how ethnographers resemble detectives, I thought: we read the sensory and visual clues in our surroundings for both context and detail. When I did so at the theatre my initial observations suggested that the men at the there were not as different from those in the support group as I expected. For instance, I had been warned the theatre would be full of auto-rickshaw drivers, though the warning didn't make clear how to identify a man who drives an auto when he is not actually *in* his auto. Nor did it make clear why a place full of auto drivers would be a problem in the first place. Although almost everyone I knew took autos daily, the relationship between driver and customer was always mediated by the form of the auto itself: a front seat and a back seat, a meter or a negotiation, the exchange of money at the end of the

ride, payment for a service rendered.

I understood that for gay men from the support group, meeting someone from the service industry in a different context, especially one with erotic potential, felt substantively different from the transactional nature of an auto ride—at least in terms of *what* might be transacted, how, and at what cost. Indeed, I understood that the invocation of a generic “auto-rickshaw driver” glossed middle-class anxieties about class difference and how these played out within an urban geography inflected with sex. Usually marked primarily by their class positions, the theatre rendered middle-class gay men and working class men who desire sex with other men, visible to one another *as sexual dissidents*. This mutual visibility is juxtaposed to when they are but driver and passenger. Also, it matters that this gloss of “the auto drive” as someone to watch out for came from Indian men who work in white-collar jobs in the technology sector, or for international corporations, or as doctors and in other professional fields. Their warnings, I think it is safe to say, were as much about their class-based anxieties as they were the result of direct experiences with auto drivers, or out of any specific concern for my safety.

And so my glimpse of smartphones, the overheard sounds of whispered English, the sight of branded clothing and office-going rucksacks, suggested that not all the men in the theatre could so easily be stereotyped as “auto-drivers” with all that gloss entailed. And while working-class men—including but certainly not limited to auto drivers—are more likely to wear tailor-stitched clothing than buy branded clothing from ready-made shops, such material indices of class operated as implicit forms of knowledge. The class-specific qualities of a given spaces and of the people in them were

always described to me as already apparent social facts—not as something socially produced, though of course they are.

What I did when I entered the theatre and looked around—looking for different styles of dress, types of mobile phones, for the sounds of languages comprehensible and incomprehensible to me—was not just read the space for elements of social class. I also noticed how my vision was itself shaped by the social world I inhabited, including the time I spent at the support group. Even if no one there had explicitly schooled me in their visual vocabulary of class, the things they talked about subtly schooled me to see class in my daily interactions, and I could not *un-see* it in the porn theatre.

What I saw was mix of class-based markers that troubled a simple coherent articulation of how these different sites fit into a sexually dissident geography of Bangalore. For example, most of the men in the support group looked like they had just come from office jobs (speaking with them revealed many of them had), and this was also the case for some of the men at the theatre (visually at least). Others may have rolled out of long shifts at BPOs,¹⁵ or from working in shops, or even from driving an auto. Unable to converse with everyone or learn about their backgrounds the way I did at the support group—mainly because the hushed space did not exactly invite spontaneous conversation—my observations hung like question marks both in the air and in my field-notes, queries that could not be definitively answered.

Whatever the men in the theatre did to support themselves, their families, or whomever they might support, the use of "auto driver" by those

¹⁵ BPOs are Business Process Outsourcing Centers, and offer lower-skilled jobs in the IT sector to many workers in Bangalore and other Indian Cities. Mankekar and Gupta 2017.

outside of the theatre to describe who they *imagined* those men to be served not only as a gloss for their presumptive class position, but also for the particular version masculinity that comfortably middle-class men ascribed to those of a lower social and economic status. These anxieties over gender and class also operated through the logics of visibility and invisibility—where being a cisgender male and middle-class made sexual dissidence less visible on the street (in public) and more visible in spaces like the support group.

One the other hand, their imagined failure of the “auto-driver” to properly perform gay masculinity reveals how concerns about the meaning of “gay” always also indexed class-based concerns. In a city where class—and the ability to participate in consumer capitalism— dictates the spaces people move through, inhabit, and live in to a greater degree than perhaps any other single social factor, class also becomes a marker of divergent sexualities among men desiring sex with other men. Auto drivers may transport gay men to the support group, pick them up from parties, from restaurants or bars, or even take him to the houses of friends and lovers, but their trajectories always diverge when the ride part is over. The driver goes his way and the gay man in question goes to the party, or to the support group, or out to dinner.

But gender, sexuality and class are intertwined such that both sexual and gender identities were seen to arise from class position. One week, sitting in a circle under the whirling ceiling fans, one of the support group's regular attendees recounted a conversation he recently had with a friend whom he identified using the feminine pronoun *she*, describing her as a hijra. She had explained to him that the difference between being gay (he identified as a gay man) and being a hijra (her identification) was about class and education,

explaining that it was only her lack of education and resources which initially led her to go for sex work and to join the hijra community. If she had been born into a middle class family, she explained to him, she would have been a gay man. Simple. But because she was poor, and working class, she was a hijra: a transgender woman in contemporary parlance.

Of course neither I nor the other members of the support group who heard this story got to speak with the person it was about, the person who initially told it. Instead what followed was a vociferous discussion of whether the distinction between gay and transgender identities was a matter of class as the story seemed to claim. Most of the men present vehemently disagreed, locating their gender and sexual identities as more fundamental part of themselves than their class identities, which they described as changeable. Someone in the group said: class is a matter of circumstance, but gender and sexuality are “who we are.”

Yet in many life history interviews I did with both gay men and hijra women (as well as those with other identifications, but in this context particularly those two) a common trope among both was how their first encounter with sexual dissidence, that is with people who did not fit into the normative heterosexual categories found in their family homes, was by encountering hijras who were on the street or were collecting money from nearby shops. Where these stories diverged was that gay men inevitably described that moment as recognition of their difference from their families and their difference from hijras.

Gay men, many of whom I met through the support group, narrated the moment as one of disorientation in relation to personal identity and to their

place within geographies of public and private, home and street. The home, they explained, was a space organized around heterosexual relations, and hijras were visible on the street in a way that they and their families were not. Theirs was a different kind of transgression, of bringing sexuality into public space. Hijra women, on the other hand, narrated the same experience of first seeing other hijras as freeing. It was a moment of recognizing themselves in someone else, and on more than occasion hijras spoke of donning their mother's or sister's saris and sneaking out to meet the hijras and collect alongside them at traffic signals.

For the gay men who described their encounter with hijras as a moment of misrecognition, it was because they knew they were not like hijras and therefore feared being associated too closely with their very visible and public form of sexual and gender dissidence. What's more, many of these same men also expressed fear of the "auto-driver" as a sexual predator and—by extension—of the porn theatre as a dangerous site because it hosted men who, whatever their livelihoods, were subsumed under the generic class category of "auto-driver."

Auto drivers seeking sexual encounters at the theatre, Hijras collecting from traffic signals and doing sex work to make a living: *their* dissidence came into focus because of its distance from the middle-class spaces in which gay men lived. The sexuality of Hijras was too visible on the street (in public) and, therefore, associating with them risked highlighting gay-men's sexual dissidence at times when they sought to "pass" in straight society. The sexuality of auto-drivers, on the other hand, was too invisible in on the street (in public) and, therefore, gay men tried to avoid counter public spaces like

the theatre where lurking (and, I should emphasized *imagined*) sexual dissidence of this working-class figure might be directed at them. The resulting anxieties were about *class* differences as much as sexual dissidence, and it was important for gay men like those at the support group to keep class-based sexual geographies separate. In this framework class explains why some men look for sex with other men, yet do not move in spaces that organize that desire *as an identity* (D'Emilio 1993). Gay men constructed hijras, auto-drivers, and the porn theatre, as counter to their lived forms of sexual dissidence. Sexuality was not only tied to social and economic class in these examples, *it was class*. That is to say, sexuality served as a descriptor of existing class divisions, and was the means by which social and economic class was embodied among men desiring other men.

More than Men Who Have Sex with Men

MSM is a category initially introduced to India by public health organizations as part of their efforts to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS. The category was originally intended to describe men's sexual practices without subsuming them under, or collapsing them into, a fixed "gay" identity. It was a category based on practice: sexual acts, not sexual identities. In using this category for project development and funding models, the intention of public health organizations was to facilitate interventions among target populations who might not otherwise seek public health services if they did not identify as gay (Khan and Khan 2006, Young and Meyer 2005). Yet in India as well as other places, something interesting and unexpected happened. MSM was adopted by as a means of self-description and identification (Boellstorff 2011,

Boyce 2007, Cohen 2005). For example, in Lawrence Cohen's account of international public health projects in India amongst the population categorized as MSM, and in response to the question "Who are you?" many would say: "I am MSM" (2005). When I asked about this at a support group meeting some of the men recalled using the term in the past, but the force of MSM as an identity category seemed mostly to have passed in the period of my fieldwork. Perhaps, someone suggested, this was because of the increased prevalence of "gay" as a category of identification not just sexual practice.

Most likely, the change they recounted was due to several factors.

Although the specter of HIV continued to haunt the lives of men I met, it did not seem to outweigh their concerns over gender identity and social integration, at least in terms of topics discussed at the support group. Instead, sexual health it was closely tied to other social concerns. For example, at one group meeting there was a discussion about "PrEP" or Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis medication, which is an anti-retroviral drug that, if taken regularly, has been shown to significantly decrease the chance of transmission in sero-discordant sex partners (Spinner et al. 2016). One man, probably in his late 30s or early 40s, wearing glasses and a collared shirt, described to the group how his overwhelming fear of HIV transmission anytime he had any sexual contact with another man meant that he could no longer enjoy sex at all. He wanted to know if PrEP was an option that could give him peace of mind and bring pleasure back to his sex life?

Opinions were mixed. Some in the group felt that PrEP made men less likely to engage in other safer sex practices, like consistent condom use, and that by putting the burden of prevention on the person taking PrEP it made

men less accountable to each other during their sexual encounters. This contingent also felt that men were less likely to disclose their HIV status in the first place if their partner was on PrEP. Others were all for the drug. They emphasized that the greatest risk of HIV transmission is from having sex with someone who doesn't know his HIV status at all, and if PrEP offers a means of self-protection without relying on the other partner that is only a good thing. Unsurprisingly, the group's conversation offered the very anxious man no definitive answer as to whether he, or any individual present, should take PrEP.

Aside from the range of opinions, the support group could not offer medical advice, as several people present reminded us. It could only offer an informal conversation in lieu of access to medical advice he was encouraged to seek. Several attendees were themselves medical professionals speaking in a non-professional capacity, though none of them were "out" at work, and several doctors told stories of their colleagues making homophobic comments about patients. Because of these well known biases gay men relied on informal knowledge networks—like the support group—to locate gay friendly doctors whenever they had sexual health related concerns, including HIV testing, testing for other STIs, or prescriptions for medications PrEP. Lists of friendly circulated online in social media groups, including the online arm of the support group.

Informal knowledge networks also served to articulate the sexually dissident geography of the city, connecting support group meetings with virtual spaces like WhatsApp and Facebook groups, and providing access to real places like doctors offices, hospitals, and diagnostic clinics. These clinics

did not formally advertise themselves as “LGBT,” “gay,” or “queer” friendly, which is why support group attendees relied on word of mouth recommendations. Just as access to the support group and to online forums belied middle-class status, the database was comprised largely of private clinics. At the time, Truvada, the brand name for PrEP, cost approximately 2,200 Rs. per month (about \$40 USD in 2016) (Hindu Business, 23 May 2016). Again class reared its head, limiting access to medicine, and shaping possible networks of support through access to technology as a knowledge network.

Whether they would have described themselves as MSM, gay, bisexual, or with another category, many of the men at the support group articulated class as *the* operative distinction between themselves and those whom they imagined to be most at risk from, or at least most likely to engage in, risky sex practices. In other words, risk (mostly construed as the likelihood of HIV infection) was not just about receiving or not receiving medical care, but about the kind of sex one had in the first place. Just like they said “the auto driver” was supposedly more likely to go to the porn theatre seeking sex (and I’ll return to just what kinds of sex actually happened there in a bit), men at the support group saw the theatre as dangerous precisely *because* the sex there could not be separated from the class-specific character of the place itself.

This is not to say that everyone at the support group explicated their anxieties about sex, danger, risk, or disease using the English word “class,” but they still indexed class through their attention to forms of embodied social difference. Further, the ways gay men indexed class were also ways of indexing other forms of social difference vis-à-vis the relationship between

class, caste, gender, and sexual identity. The analytical category of sexual dissidence may have included all the sex referenced here, but in the context of the support group gay men produced their own “charmed circle.” It was one in which their experiences of sex were in the center while hijras, auto-drivers, sex at the porn theatre, etc. were framed as more dissident by comparison.

There was another way in which class shaped narratives about risk and social position. For those who did not have access to private clinics, or perhaps even preferred public hospitals, there was a free government-sponsored clinic at a public hospital in central Bangalore that specifically targeted the sexual health of in MSM and other “sexual minority” populations. I never visited the clinic myself, but information about the services it provided, ranging from HIV and other STD/STI tests, to treatment for those who tested positive, circulated in my virtual networks, at the support group, and at drop-in centers (DICs) that were branches of several community based organizations (CBOs) focused on health among the city’s “sexual minority” populations.

One of these DICs is even located near to the support group’s meeting space. It periodically offers free rapid HIV testing, and like the services at the hospital, this testing was advertised both to the mostly gay male crowd at the support group and at DICs targeting “sexual minorities” in the neighborhood. Although some men from the support group may have attended testing days at the local DIC, all of those I spoke to preferred to visit private clinics for their testing needs.

A couple of months after the public hospital clinic opened rumors started to circulate about shockingly high rates of positive HIV tests coming out of the

clinic. Specifically, word was that 40% of those who went to the clinic tested positive for HIV. Granted, these were not official statistics, and I could not verify them since there was no publicly available data. Either way, the circulation of this number produced its own truth effects, instantiating an understanding of embodied risk and suggesting infection rates of epidemic proportions in Bangalore.

One support group attendee who regularly volunteered with sexual health organizations around the city somberly conveyed this information to the rest of the group. His message was straightforward: everyone should be careful, everyone is at risk, and if the unofficial statistic from the government clinic was any indication, the rate of HIV among MSM and sexual minority populations in Bangalore—which from a public health standpoint included all the gay men in the room, whatever their identification—was likely much higher than thought. The subsequent advice he gave the group seemed reasonable for anyone sexually active: know your status, get tested regularly, talk to your partner(s), and always use condoms. It was striking, therefore, just how much push-back his statement got at the support group, how invested some of the people there clearly were in demarcating themselves, and diminishing their perceived risk, from the population tested at the public clinic.

One man in particular argued vociferously that because it was a *public* (government funded) clinic only sex workers and drug users were going to get tested there, and so “of course” the HIV rate was higher than expected. This, he said, seemingly trying to convince himself as much as anyone in the room, *must* account for the difference. But our peer educator friend explained how we really couldn’t know if that was true, that the clinic was open to everyone,

and that he knew professional gay men who had also been there for testing. In his impassioned separation between those going to the public clinic versus those who go to private diagnostic clinics, the man implied that some people were more dissident than others, and therefore more at risk, and this risk was what made them visible as sexually dissident.

He also, perhaps unknowingly, highlighted the relationship between class, sexual dissidence, and sexual identity that articulated the support group, the porn theatre, and the clinic as distinct places even as they existed within a shared sexually dissident geography of the city. Because the public clinic was specifically targeted to the MSM population, going there rendered sexual dissidence visible as such. On the other hand, one could go to private clinic for many reasons and so would not necessarily visibilize a gay man's sexual dissidence. But, of course, access to the private clinic was predicated on class position: choosing to pay for a service available for free elsewhere. Like the category of MSM, dissidence based on sexual practices continued to exceed class categories. This was the case even as gay men at the support group remained deeply invested a hierarchy of sexual and gender dissidence along class lines.

Encountering Sex, but is it Public?

Again, back to the theatre. After watching other men do the same, my friend and I made our way through a small door halfway along the side of the building. On the other side was a hallway that stretched the length of the hall and was open on one side with a metal grate dividing it from makeshift housing at the edge of the property. Streetlamps cast deep shadows, men

looked each other up and down, a few chatted quietly, and at least one man embraced another in a gesture of familiar greeting. At the far end of the corridor there was a crowd around the entrance to what had once been the women's toilet. We made our way forward and joined the crowd with what I can only describe as a mix of voyeurism and ethnographic curiosity. It did not take long to understand what was going on: inside the toilet several men were pressed against the wall engaging in anal sex.

Frankly shocked by this highly visible sex, we retreated back to our seats. Would any of these men call themselves gay, I wondered? Based on what was happening at the theatre they were clearly MSMs—at least in the descriptive sense of that public health category. At the same time, I had no way of knowing whether they would describe themselves that way. With no condoms in sight, the sex itself seemed risky, unplanned if not exactly unexpected, and apparently far from the reach of public health campaigns targeting MSMs. The public hospital's MSM/sexual minority clinic and the theatre were framed as distant from the support group, not just in terms of their spatial distance within the city, in its social geography as well. As a result, they were only visible to one another as opposing spaces; they were not connected by their shared experience of sexual dissidence. The men in the toilet were engaged in an act that made them objects of public health intervention and concern, but as far as I could tell the theatre was not visible to the clinic or vice versa.

In that sweaty and crowded moment did it even matter what words the men used to describe themselves, or what NGOs and community organizations might call them? Was my impulse to name who and what I had

seen merely my academic need to categorize everything? Why did I care if they were “gay?” After all, the toilet was too small and crowded for anyone to know where touches were coming from, or to somehow signal refusal. This put it far beyond my personal comfort zone. I heard rumors that this kind of sexual space between men existed in Bangalore, but I had never before encountered anything like it anywhere. I felt overwhelmed, and my friend did too, so we retreated back into the relative quiet of the theatre.

But what *had* we seen? Visible sex, certainly, but did its visibility *to us* make it public? After all, I may not have been a participant, but I had not found myself in that theatre, or even in that toilet, by accident. Curious to know what went on at the theatre, my friend and I had undoubtedly gone looking for sex, just as I had come to Bangalore for the purpose of studying the city through a focus on sexuality. We just weren’t looking to have it in quite the same way. And the sex we saw that day was physical, very much about encounters between male bodies in dissident space. Yet it was not necessarily gay. It was practice that mattered, the encounters between bodies *made* the theatre space into a sexually dissident space.

The theatre occupies an interstitial location between the visibility of men’s sexual dissidence inside and the class and gender specific ability for their dissidence to remain invisible outside in the wider urban landscape. In one sense the 50-Rs ticket regulated entry, but more than cost, who went to the theatre was shaped by the forms of sociality through which knowledge of the theatre travelled. *How* the theatre got spoken about, and what it came to signify for gay men, was also an effect of where and how stories about it circulate.

Warner's concept of the "counterpublic" is instructive for understanding how visibility and invisibility are related, as well how the support group and the theatre are distinct from one another. "Counterpublics are 'counter'," Warner writes, "to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining sociability and its reflexivity; as publics they remain oriented to stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic but constitutive of membership and its affects" (Warner 2002, 121). The porn theatre maintains its public-ness precisely because anyone can go there. Of course, just because anyone *can* go does not mean everyone *does*. To put it another way, because sex there is visible to other patrons is precisely why it is invisible to society at large.

For example, several female friends, upon hearing me recount my trips to the place, asked if they could go too. I genuinely didn't know how to answer: though everyone I asked said it was unthinkable for a woman to show up, they could not point to anything about the space which explicitly barred women's entry. Instead, the very forms sociality imaginable made the theatre into a constitutively male space, one not just full of pent up sexual energy but suffused with erotic male-male desire. The theatre was a dissident space outside the normative bounds of masculine sociality, as well as outside the worlds inhabited by middle-class gay men. The theatre was therefore doubly dissident: dissident in relation to Bangalore as a whole, and dissident in relation to spaces like the support group.

I returned to the theatre several more times during the course of my fieldwork. I went once on a Saturday evening when it was even more crowded than it had been during the week, crowded with more men whose dress,

smart-phones, and language indicated their middle-class position. I also went a few times at midday or in the early afternoon, when the much the smaller crowd skewed older, when I saw only old flip phones and basic Nokias. The men at these times might well have been the “auto-drivers” I’d been warned about, but they were, if anything, much more respectful of my space, hardly the danger gay men at the support group imagined them to be.

If the Majestic Bus Park and the porn theatre are counterpublics according to Warner’s definition, then so is the support group. It was a space open to stranger circulation—new and different faces joined regulars from week to week—and it offered dissident sociality built on the acknowledgment of shared experience. What’s more, the support group made gay men visible to one another even as their sexual dissidence remained invisible beyond the group’s walls.

On the Limits and Possibilities of Identity as an Organizing Principle

I now turn to how a conceptual framework of “sexuality-as-identity” rendered these different sites either commensurable or incommensurable to one another within the larger rubric of dissidence. By organizing male-male desire under the gloss of “gay” identity, spaces such as the support group became metonymic with “gay-ness.” In doing so the support group rendered identity as a seemingly self-evident category of embodied sexual dissidence. As a category of analysis, however, sexual dissidence moves beyond identity politics as the *sine qua non* for organizing urban space into. Still, it is an oversimplification to place identity on one side of dissidence and sexual acts on the other, to imagine sexual geographies as divisible along lines reducible to

class-specific identities.

By attending to how divergent spatial imaginaries emplace sex in different locations across Bangalore's geography, I have shown the ways class and gender shape the visibility and invisibility of sexual dissidence. Not only do spaces like the support group cohere into distinct places, they articulate particular geographies of the city that, in turn, make particular kinds of people (e.g., gay men) make sense. Therefore, the "truth" of being *gay* in Bangalore is not about what men do or don't do with one another physically, since the men I met who were most invested in organizing their lives around gay identity were the ones who eschewed the porn theatre as having anything to do with them. If being gay was simply about having sexual contact with other men, then the men at the porn theatre were gay. Simple! But of course it was not that simple. The theatre is a dissident space where sex happens, but despite this, it exists largely outside the legibility of "gay" identity to make sense of the urban geography. The support group was also a dissident space effused with sex—or at least with talk about sex. It was organized around the mutual recognition that those who showed up to meetings shared some form of shared identity and experience, and it offered a particular version of enduring sociality week after week, month after month, and year after year.

It turned out this wasn't so different from the porn theatre. While it's true it was a place that most visibly reduced sexuality to physical acts, I also saw people greet each other like old friends. Still, my conversations with men in the theatre were necessarily whispered in the dark—and often in response to the deflection of their advancing hands—so I had no way of really knowing what role the theatre played in their lives, regardless of their identity, or how

it fit into their personal geographies of the city.

Regardless, stories that circulated about these respective spaces—the theatre and the support group— produced as consequential the social divide between them. In addition to a spatial divide in the urban landscape, this was a divide between talking about sex on the one hand, and doing sex on the other. These differences were made materially and geographically distinct when gay men held them in opposition to one another, but the category of sexual dissidence allowed me to think them together. In other words, sexual dissidence is not just about what people do or even they one are: it is highly contingent on a host of factors, including class and gender, space and location. Therefore, to think sexual dissidence within the urban landscape is also to think about categories like class and gender.

As an analytical category sexual dissidence exceeds identity. It refers both to practices and ways of being in the world that are counter to the norms of heterosexual privilege around which urban Bangalore is otherwise organized. By focusing on the ways in which sexual practices articulate a dissident urban geography, the concept of sexual dissidence holds together the support group, the porn theatre, the clinic, and many other spaces without needing to reconcile the tensions and differences between them. When class and gender inflect sexual dissidence some things are visiblized while others are invisiblized. This tension between visibility and invisibility along class lines has real material effects, similar to the ways that “Pokémon Go” and “Grinder” offered access to class-based virtual geographies and had real effects on the lives of urban users.

Intertext One- MG Road

The lights are bright along Mahatma Gandhi Road, or MG Road, as both the street and its vicinity are commonly known. Cinemas, hotels, restaurants, and shops line the wide pavement (or sidewalk to Americans). On weekends it overflows with young people out and about with their friends, with families who have kids in tow, with foreign residents of the city, and even the occasional tourist. The well off and fashionable frequent terrace-level bars and restaurants on this and adjoining streets, including the parallel Church Street, while street vendors hawk trinkets on the sidewalk.

Some people buy things off the street while others frequent the international brands like Nike, Adidas, Jack and Jones, or Calvin Klein, stopping only for a break from the hustle and bustle in the air-conditioned Starbucks that is situated at the corner of Church Street and Brigade Road. Others dress in richly patterned silk saris and enter the multi-storied Joyalukkas jewelry store— the world’s favorite jeweler, at least according to their slogan— shopping for weighty amounts of bridal gold, platinum, and

diamonds. Even from the pavement, the store's massive, sparkling chandelier is visible through the building's glass façade.

Across the street from this commercial strip is a two level promenade that extends beneath the elevated metro line. The lower level of the promenade houses a small theater and what's known the Rangoli Arts space, consisting of several public art galleries. There is an area for crafts vendors and presenters to set up stalls, and a compact playground for children. Bougainvillea grows to the upper level, masking it from street-level view behind a wall of fuchsia flowers. All of this sits beneath the central artery of the city's metro line and between the hulking concrete pillars that support the metro's elevated path through, the Central Business District. The metro, however, is a recent addition to the landscape of MG Road, and indeed to the city as a whole. The northern side of MG Road was not always dominated by hulking presence in concrete and steel. The metro station above MG Road only officially opened in 2011.

Now the area has been transformed. Once an embankment known for physical encounters among men seeking sex with other men, today the highly constructed promenade leaves little space for any connections not visible to other passerby. Even the upper area of the promenade, while not immediately visible from street level, is a long and open space where anyone walking can see anyone else. This shift away from the possibility of being invisible for sexual dissidents— or indeed, for anyone— to an open-planned and freely accessible promenade built with public funds is (literally) a concrete transformation of the urban form. And although older gay men spoke nostalgically of times when they wandered along the once unkempt hill, the

visibility of the new promenade was not only a loss: it rendered sexually dissident people visible to one another, and to the city, in new ways.

To illustrate this, I tell the story of an effort by a group of gay men to get people on the promenade to take selfies and post them to social media as part of a political campaign designed to increase the visibility of sexual dissidents in the Indian public political sphere. The story of this campaign illustrates how the space of MG Road has transformed in relation to sexual dissidence along with the rest of the city. It also gestures to the ways in which communities, including but not limited to the gay men who organized the effort, have transformed their engagements with and in public space to adapt to the changing city. It shows that although what it means for sexuality to be visible in a place like MG Road today is thoroughly shaped by the commercial transformations of the city, sexually dissident people continue to make use of the city in their own ways.

It was a week before US President Barack Obama visited India and marched with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2015 Republic Day parade in Delhi. A post appeared on the Facebook page of the support group about a campaign called #ObamaforQueerIndia #Readdown377. The idea behind the campaign, according to the information on the Facebook page anyway, was to get as many people as possible to take photographs holding signs with the two hash tags and to post the photos to Twitter so the hash tags would “go viral.” The organizers of the effort hoped it would get the attention of US President Obama who might, in turn, speak out publicly during his visit in favor of the rights of sexually dissident people in India and condemn the anti-sodomy law, IPC Section 377.

It was a mild, sunny Saturday afternoon when I met up with nine other gay men at an open air Cafe Coffee Day (or CCD as the chain is popularly known) on MG Road. Vibram had organized the meeting in order to gather photographs of passerby holding up a sign with the two hash tags on it. The goal that day was to collect as many images supporting the campaign from the general public as possible. Walking into the coffee shop's open courtyard to meet whoever else might show up for this task, I looked around anxiously for faces I recognized. From across the open plaza I saw Vibram and a friend of his, Tahir, who I had met briefly at the support group the week before. This particular CCD was entirely open with a counter/kiosk in one corner and a spread of tables and chairs taking up the rest of the space. I noticed that Vibram and Tahir were sitting off to the side and slightly behind the kiosk, and I wondered if this was because they didn't want our gathering of gay men to be visible from the pavement. However, once I reached their table I realized that I was right, but not for the reason I had initially thought: they were smoking, which is not allowed at CCD, and so they had positioned themselves off to the side in the hopes of not being told to put out their cigarettes!

I ordered lemonade made spicy with the addition of green chilies and slowly sipped my cold drink through a straw as I waited for the others to arrive. Soon there were 10 of us, all gay cisgender men, though it was not clear if this was because only gay men knew about the meeting or because they were the group most able to attend. Vibram, who was there with his boyfriend, had organized the gathering. As we waited to see if anyone else would show up, the group chatted amongst themselves and Vibram's boyfriend turned to me and asked, "What is Twitter...for?" I paused and

thought about it, realizing I did not have a good answer. Although I had a Twitter account, I had never used it. He explained that he was asking because he did not understand the goal of the action his boyfriend had organized. I explained that the goal of us walking around and taking photos would be for accompanying hash tags (#) to link all the photos together and therefore disseminate a common message across social media platforms, including Twitter.

But what *is* Twitter? “Twitter is like...like a micro-blogging platform?” I half explained, half questioned, simultaneously hoping this non-answer would be helpful and trying to avoid being more specific about a technology that confused me, too. He just looked at me blankly so obviously neither of us understood Twitter very well. “It provides links to stories and allows people to search by a particular topic?” I ventured. I could tell my explanation wasn’t clarifying, and I suspected that if none of the participants were actively using Twitter then the goal of making #ObamaforQueerIndia “go viral” was a bit of a long shot. However much attention the posts would eventually get on social media, I was mainly interested in how the act of gathering physically on MG road to take photos connected sexual dissidents—in this case gay men—to one another and to the city. What’s more I wanted to know how the act of taking selfies articulated the virtual and the actual, connecting sought after visibility for sexual dissidents on the Internet with their corollary visibility on MG Road.

It seemed no one was in a hurry to leave CCD and go take photographs, and while we were waiting the conversation turned to the meaning of “queer rights”— the term used by Vibram to describe the goal of the event. What,

specifically, was this campaign aiming to accomplish, someone wanted to know. For Obama to be a spokesperson for change in India, to pressure Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on issues around sexuality, Vibram explained, and to accomplish this through the strategic use of social media. Yet while the use of hash tags was clearly designed to make such efforts visible on social media platforms— an algorithmic linkage between otherwise disparate posts— it was not yet clear how Vibram’s desire for virtual visibility would translate (or not translate) into embodied visibility within the urban landscape. Organizing under the common virtual sign of the hash tag (#) in turn forged a particular kind of community amongst those who gathered at the CCD and, eventually, those we encountered and photographed along MG Road and the Rangoli promenade as well.

Once as many people arrived as Vibram seemed to be expecting, we left the CCD to wander the street and meet people. Ankiet, in his early twenties with short-cropped spiky hair and thick, rimless glasses wore dune colored chinos, a white cotton button shirt, and a grey cardigan sweater. Around his neck Ankiet accessorized this otherwise monochrome outfit with a bright turquoise and pink polka-dotted dupatta. The dupatta is a common component of women’s clothing in India, usually worn with a Kurta Surwal set, draped around the front of the neck, dangling to the mid-calf down the back. Instead, Ankiet wrapped the dupatta several times around his neck like a scarf, waving the ends of the gauzy cotton fabric with dramatic effect as he walked.

Someone else had brought along a rainbow Pride flag because they thought it would look good as a backdrop for the photos. Ankiet’s eyes lit up at

the sight of the flag: he unfurled it and proceeded to drape it around his shoulders like a cape, running ahead of the group as we made our way along the promenade, then turning quickly so that it would billow and catch the wind. From his playful demeanor it was clear he enjoyed the way these outward signs visually indexed his gay identity, particularly in the open and freely accessible space of the promenade along MG Road.

All of the men, including myself but perhaps Ankiet in particular, simultaneously occupied the space as sexually dissident persons *and* as normatively gendered persons (i.e. men) who were not necessarily aware of how much space our bodies took up in public. To be sure though, we all took up space, especially Ankiet. That day the promenade was relatively quiet, but it often plays host to young male-female couples out for a stroll or just to sit close together behind the Bougainvillea thickets. Yet anyone hoping for quiet reverie just then would have been interrupted by our group's boisterous talk and loud laughter. Although it wasn't clear to me if we actually risked drawing negative attention from the seemingly bored security guards who paid us no mind, Vibram kept glanced at them nervously while asking us to keep our voices down so as not to draw their attention.

Just then Vibram saw two men with thick, dark beards and chunky glasses walking towards us. Ankiet also recognized them and shouted really loudly that they were gay so that the two men and anyone else around could hear him. This made Vibram visibly uncomfortable. He squirmed and nervously told Ankiet not to shout about people's sexuality on the street! Nonplussed by the loud and public proclamation of their gayness, the two approached us smiling. Someone in the group explained to them about the

#ObamaforQueerIndia campaign and asked if they would be willing to take a photograph with the signs. I watched as they exchanged a glance, communicating something between them without words. Then one turned back to the group and said that while they didn't support the part about Obama they would be happy to take a photo with just #ReadDown377.

There was no discussion about their lack of support for a statement by the US President, though I couldn't help but wonder how Vibram felt about this given all his efforts. Instead someone folded the paper so that only the second hash tag was visible. Someone else snapped a photograph on his phone, thanked the two bearded guys who continued on their way while we waved goodbye.

Moving on, Ankiet continued to skip along with the rainbow flag tied around his neck, his colorful dupatta swinging in front. We made our way down the stairs to the lower level of the promenade and ran into a young male-female couple standing in front of the Rangoli Art Gallery. The couple expressed interest in taking a photo so Ankiet untied his cape and held the flag up behind the young couple. After someone else snapped their photo with the signs and the flag, the woman told us how much she loved the rainbow flag. She even pulled out her mobile and showed off her case, which was also rainbow. "Hey!" one of the guys in the group exclaimed, "your phone looks just like the Pride flag!" "Yes," she said in response, "that's intentional." We thanked them and again waved goodbye. As the two headed up the stairs I interrogated my assumption that they were a couple (in an affective sense, not just that they were two, which they were) realizing I had made a potentially inaccurate and heteronormative judgment based on their genders and the

reputation of the promenade as a date spot. Of course it was impossible to know the nature of their relationship—and her intentional rainbow phone case could have meant anything—but the moment revealed the bias in my own interpretation.

Although none of the other people we met on the promenade, most of whom were male-female couples strolling or chatting, expressed any opposition to the stated cause of “queer rights,” not all of them wanted to take a photo, either with the signs or with the flag. Some of the couples we approached had not heard of the Section 377, and it was left to the group to explain as succinctly as possible the law’s relation to sexual rights and human rights. I kept silent and listened to the explanation. Basically—and I paraphrase— they said that it is a law criminalizing homosexuality, a law that should be struck down because all people should have the right to express themselves and love who they want in India. After this explanation, one couple agreed to take a photo with the signs while another politely refused and moved on.¹⁶

There were several characteristics common across the couples we spoke to on the promenade that day, characteristics which identified them as approachable by a group of educated, middle-class gay men talking about the rights of sexually dissident people. Although no one in the group strategically or explicitly articulated these common qualities, I deduced them by observing whom we approached and whom we collectively decided to pass by. First, most of those we spoke to were relatively young, probably in their 20s based

¹⁶ Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code did not, lawyers were quick to explain, actually criminalize homosexuality. Strictly speaking the law, which prohibited “sex against the order of nature,” criminalized any non-procreative sex but not any identity or gender or sexual expression.

only on my cursory visual assessment. Second, our default language of address was English, and there seemed to be an assumption that anyone who would support the photo campaign (which was itself in English) would necessarily be English speaking as well. Of course, by not speaking to anyone who was assumed *not* to be English speaking, the group relied not on any empirical evidence of linguistic ability, but on tacit visual markers of social and economic class that serve as an index of language, which is itself also an index of class. This circular logic connecting class and language not only had the effect of limiting those with whom we spoke, but of reinforcing the idea that language is necessarily a measure of class or that class, in turn, is a measure of open-mindedness of about sexuality.

Speaking of language and class: in addition to myself—a white, American English speaker—the other gay men in the group included speakers of Kannada, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. All were fluent in English, and as with almost every other meeting of gay-identifying men, including every event I ever attended on MG Road, English was the only language used—and never purely for my benefit. Instead this was because English was the language that everyone in the group was understood to share, an assumption that could not be made about any other single Indian language given that people moved to Bangalore from all over the country.

This implicit assumption no doubt reflected the class composition of groups organized around gay identity, which was itself seen as a class specific identity. In the course of our encounters on the promenade, however, it wasn't just that the group of gay men spoke to each other in English it was that they (accurately) assumed other people in that space would speak English as well.

And they did. Or, rather, anyone who might not have been conversant in English— the security guards, say, or the street vendors— were rendered only minor players. That is, no one thought to approach them, or ask them to take a photo with the hash tags, or to pose in front of the rainbow flag. Indeed, Vibram believed we needed to keep our voices down so as not to draw the ire of the security guards, but he wasn't just concerned about noise, he explained, he was also concerned they would be less amenable to expressions of dissident sexuality than those walking along the promenade for leisure purposes.

After clicking as many #ObamaforQueerIndia selfies as we could, uploading them to Facebook (and possibly also Twitter, though I didn't see this happen), the efforts of the afternoon seemed to disappear into the ether of the Internet. US President Barack Obama joined Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the Republic Day parade through New Delhi on January 26, 2015, just a week or so after our day on MG Road. During his visit he made no public comments regarding LGBT rights in India. At the next weekly support group meeting someone mentioned this, and referenced a heated debate happening on the group's Facebook page. The debate revealed that a lot of people were against the campaign. So while the campaign's virtual presence might not have reached Barack Obama, it *had* reached this particular Bangalore community that stretched across real and virtual spaces. In turn, it had the effect of articulating Bangalore's real social landscape with the virtual one.

One person in attendance at the support group that day asked why others were against it, making clear by the tone of his voice that he didn't understand why anyone would be opposed to a campaign intended to support Queer/

LGBT rights in India. Was this not an unequivocal good for everyone in the room? Another one of the more active members of the support group, and a moderator on its Facebook page, explained to him that some people saw Obama as a violator of human rights and therefore unqualified to make public statements admonishing any other nation-state for not respecting the human rights of its own people. This point was hardly understood by the whole room, and someone asked how Obama, who won a Nobel Peace Prize after all, could be a violator of human rights? The conversation digressed.

A man I recognized from our group on MG road laughed. By way of an answer he simply said “US drone strikes.” To both my surprise and my great relief no one turned to me, the only American in the room, for further explanation about this. Instead, I nodded along, agreeing with what the others said. I tried to listen closely while mostly staying out of the conversation. Indeed, I was more eager to understand the logic of those gathered for either supporting or not supporting the #ObamaforQueerIndia campaign, than I was in explaining it myself. And opinions from the people who objected were not just about Obama being a hypocritical voice to champion human rights. The objection was also that his, or any other, outside voice was neither necessary nor desirable for promoting sexuality rights in India.

Devraj— one of the group's founding members and a “mother” to many there— pointed out that a public statement from the US President on the matter of queer/LGBT rights could have an unintended effect of further justifying right-wing Hindus who see homosexuality as a decadence imported to India from the West. Any statement from Obama, especially one directed to the ruling BJP party, he explained, might have the opposite of its intended

effect. He also pointed out there was significant resistance from queer Dalit groups towards seeking any form of support from the BJP on issues of sexual rights, since theirs is an intersectional political project working to bring together discrimination based on sexuality with issues of caste.

Needless to say this multi-faceted debate was not resolved in that meeting, or even afterwards over a vegetarian dinner at a nearby restaurant where it continued to be the topic of conversation. How could it have been? What would have been a desirable outcome? #ObamaforQueerIndia might not have reached Barack Obama's ears (or his Twitter feed), nor did it affect Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his political party in any discernable way, but it struck me that its presence on the street and on the web were *not* for nothing. The virtual life of the campaign—however small, however contained—stimulated discussion and debate among a number of gay men in Bangalore, some of who took for granted that any powerful voice speaking out for their community would be an unequivocal good. Other responses complicated this view. But people holding both positions sought the decriminalization of homosexuality (as 377 was commonly understood), and wanted recognition of their existence from public figures. They just disagreed about the best ways to achieve these goals.

Those who gathered on MG Road to take pictures of support for #ObamaforQueerIndia #Readdown377 and who asked others to do the same made sexual dissidents visible through their presence on MG Road, and in Bangalore, and in India. At the same time it is important to remember the many bodies and genders and sexualities which were not represented by a group of cisgender gay men, people who could not gather on a Saturday

afternoon, or occupy urban space so confidently and freely. Insofar as #ObamaforQueerIndia claimed to stand for *a* queer India, it was bound to fail to represent the diversity of that imagined umbrella community. At the same time, however, MG Road got a little queerer when Ankiet ran around with the rainbow flag as a cape, when a group of gay men spoke about sexuality, equality, and rights with passerby on the Rangoli promenade. These efforts were not just an appeal to the connection between urban space and sexuality but an instantiation of their interrelation to one another and to the city itself. They articulated a sexually dissident version of MG road.

Chapter Two: Streets

I first met Gopal at his artist studio where we sat on stools amidst the paints, canvases, and stacks of old movie posters out of which he made multi-media collages. Before settling in to chat, he brewed us a pot of chai on the single gas burner of the studio's makeshift kitchen. We discussed his most recent art project, a mobile installation in several auto-rickshaws—motorized, three-wheeled vehicles that provide transport around the city—that he had covered inside and out with elaborate Rexine appliqué. Many autos serve as merely functional objects: their base models adorned only with squares of old sign tarp tied down to prevent passengers from getting wet during monsoon downpours. However, others have glowing multi-colored lights and plush interiors upholstered in iridescent fabrics, put together by craftsmen known as “liners.” In autos designed by liners, the interior serves as a reflection of the personal style of its driver and owner in addition to its utilitarian function.

A professional textile designer by trade, Gopal's art installation riffed on this vernacular practice of decorating auto-rickshaws. He explained that

his goal with the project was to bring art to more people and to new parts of the city. He also wanted to explore the distinction between art that gets displayed in Bangalore's gallery spaces and the work of craftspeople like liners, work that is recognized as aesthetic yet circulates outside formally artistic spaces. His project sought to blur these distinctions and to highlight the ways in which art is already a daily part of living in Bangalore. To achieve his goal of turning often overlooked decoration into art, as well as bringing that art to the public, Gopal drove his decked-out auto-rickshaws around the city and parked them in places where everyday people had easy access, like street corners and at bus stands. Because the autos were very colorful, and because they were not available for hire, he explained to me, people who chanced upon them they were more inclined to think of them as aesthetic objects rather than the means of transport that they usually were. As Gopal said, his auto project was about making art accessible to more people *and* about locating art in the everyday.

Yet Gopal's focus on the aesthetics of urban life through his attention to the material forms that people use to be in, and move through, the city was not the only reason I sought him out. Indeed, several different people had suggested I meet with him— a self-identified gay man in his late 30s— to learn more about how the changing cityscape had shaped his experience of sexual and intimate life outside the bounds of normative heterosexual privilege. As we sipped sweet, steaming tea, our conversation turned to his early experiences of homosexuality and to his encounters with other men. I was curious to know where and how they happened.

"Buses," he answered simply and directly. "So you'll, like, touch each

other and feel [each other] because it's so crowded. I've done that in college also... Like you'll make eye contact in buses and in public loos because my hometown was in one place and I would go to study in another place. That trip would always be [about] looking forward to something— maybe the guy sitting next to you is OK. I've had many such encounters.” I imagined the scene as he described it to me— glances across the crush of bodies, hands lingering below the line of site, furtive appraisals of whether or not someone was “OK” (which is such an elusive and yet evocative descriptor of desirability), touches rendered invisible by the crowded space. Buses, he explained, were one of the only places where he could encounter other male bodies in an erotic context during that earlier time in his life. What's more, this was the case precisely because buses were located in-between home and school— buses were a technology for connecting two places—yet they remained outside the social and spatial logics of either place.

Gopal's account was not the only one to highlight buses as a site of erotic possibility for men encountering other men. At the support group—a place open to anyone but which attracted mostly gay-identifying men— a recent transplant to Bangalore now working for a US-based tech company described having had similar encounters while commuting to and from work using the city's buses. Another man I met who had also recently moved to Bangalore from his home state of Kerala told me about how the men on buses had touched him in erotic ways since he moved to the city, as well. Still wide-eyed at his new urban life, he was struggling to navigate the city using the Bangalore Metro Transit Corporation (BMTC) bus system, an experience made more confusing by these unexpected, if not unwanted, sexual advances.

None of these men's experiences, including Gopal's, resulted in any enduring connections. In each account no words were exchanged, only hands on a thigh or crotch, and then only for as long as the touch could go unnoticed, or until someone moved, or until the next stop.

Urban Articulation

The lives that sexual dissidents lead in Bangalore are full and complex, encompassing what Michael D. Jackson calls "lifeworlds" (Jackson 2011). Jackson's term arises from his work in existential anthropology, but lifeworlds are not just philosophical: they are lived. Indeed, they can only be apprehended ethnographically through attention to real people's experiences. Since the constitution of lifeworlds is a fundamentally intersubjective process, this means that sexual dissidents are not formed as subjects in a vacuum but through their enmeshment within thick networks of sociality. It also means that *where* lifeworlds cohere is essential for understanding *how* and *why* they do so. This chapter explores how processes of intersubjective encounter produce sexually dissident lifeworlds across Bangalore, including in the city's streets and on its different forms of transportation.

What's more, the chapter focuses on examples of lived experience drawn from streets and transport in order to theorize how the urban geography—and by extension the city itself— is articulated through the experience of sexual dissidence. This means that not only are forms of sexual dissidence—including those glossed by identities like gay, lesbian, hijra, kothi, transgender, etc.— experienced within the city's physical geography, but the ways people experience and make sense of their dissidence relates them to

other people and to the city. It is through networks of relations between both people and places that the city's geography coheres into a socially thick urban place. In this formulation gender and sexuality are not just qualities that inhere in persons; they are products of the social relations between persons that ethnography brings to light.

In order to describe the processes through which lifeworlds cohere and urban geographies come to make sense, I develop the concept of *urban articulation*. This use of articulation expands on Laclau and Mouffe's use of the term (Laclau 2001), and on Stuart Hall's explanation of the term articulation's double meaning: that is, both to speak and to connect (Choy 2005; Nelson 2009). As Diane Nelson writes— to articulate “mean[s] both to connect and to speak well or put into words—[as connected] to political practice...It means simultaneously to be separated into joints and connected by them” (Nelson 2009, 45). Articulation, she goes on to explain, “[is] recombinant, a relation that changes what it relates” (46).

In their edited volume of the same name, Anjaria and McFarlane (2011) propose the concept of “urban navigations” as a framework which, through its attention to people's everyday experiences in cities, complicates the predominance of globalization as *the* overarching category through which scholars write about transformations in the Southern urbanism. Rather than seeing the city as an empty vessel filled by globalization, or a site where global flows of capital have their effects, Anjaria and McFarlane's volume focuses on the materiality of the city itself and people's interactions with it as a material landscape. Traversing that landscape is what they term navigations, writing that “Navigation connotes the coordinates through which people

move through the city, and the trajectories and tendencies – both contemporary and historical—that produce and contest urban space” (Anjaria and McFarlane 2011, 7).

While “navigation” is no doubt a useful concept for thinking about connections between the experiences of urban life and the materiality of urban space, navigations are limited in their ability to elucidate the formation of sexually dissident lifeworlds as a constitutively intersubjective practice. Simply put, this is because navigation presumes a preexisting urban landscape through which people move and act. And while this conceptual framework can be useful for describing how people interact with the physical space of cities, it is limited for thinking about how the material form of the city coheres in people’s inhabitations and movements. For example, the position Anjaria and McFarlane critique—i.e., one that emphasizes globalization—might see the question of what constitutes “gay sex”—versus sex between men— as an effect of global flows of “gay” identity, a category that arose in the West and now travels around the world. Simply mapping this global reach of gay is an example of what Kath Weston calls ethno-cartography, and to the best of my understanding, Anjaria and McFarlane’s concept of urban navigations would dispute an ethno-cartographic practice.

Instead, they would frame gay lifeworlds in Bangalore as a set of locally specific, but globally inflected, practices that can be traced across the urban landscape and in turn understood through their relationship to that landscape. My concept of urban articulations takes their useful theoretical intervention one step further, however, thinking not just about how “gay” names a set of globally inflected local practices, but how attention to the

coherence of a gay lifeworlds in Bangalore doesn't just show something about the lives of gay men, it also reveals the geography of Bangalore to itself be an effect of these socially thick, intersubjective ways of knowing. In other words, urban articulations point to moments where different selves as well as different sites get bound together in co-emergent geographies of self and place.

An example of how the concept of urban articulation highlights the connections within existing scholarship can be found in *Street Corner Secrets, Sex Work and Migration in the City of Mumbai* (Shah 2014). In her book Svati Shah follows women who engage in sex work across a number of different urban sites. Her thoughtful and provocative ethnography ties together their experiences of wage labor in *nakas*, or day labor markets, with sexual labor that many of the women who go to markets looking for work also engage in. Rather than framing the distinction between these forms of labor as a moral difference, she explains how women negotiate sexual and non-sexual forms of bodily labor in order to survive.

Another chapter in Shah's book looks at women who do street-based sex work. Although she does not use the term urban articulations as I develop it, her work makes both practical and conceptual connections between different forms of women's labor. By framing sex work as labor, and by thinking about it on these terms, Shah both challenges and critiques dominant moralizing discourses about prostitution and women's sexuality. By making different forms of sex work commensurable as labor, both in the *nakas* and through street-based sex work in other parts of the city, Shah articulates the urban geography through attention to its effects on women's lives, as well as

how women's lives and livelihoods shape our understanding of different urban sites and the social, political, and economic connections between them.

In this same sense, the concept of urban articulations allows me to think critically about the effects that streets and transport have on different sexually dissident lifeworlds in Bangalore, including those of gay-identifying men like Gopal, and on Hijras and other transgender people whose options for navigating the city are very different from one another given their class, caste, and gender position. In order to do this I break the chapter into several sections. In the first section, I return to BMTC buses, but through the perspective of the 2016 film *Nanu Avanalla Avalu*. The film depicts the life of Living Smile Vidya, a transgender woman, actress, and activist, who moved to Bangalore as a young adult and—in the narrative of the film—discovered belonging in a community of gender transgression and sexual dissidence through an encounter on Bangalore's buses. I reflect on how buses serve as a site of possibility for articulating Vidya's dissident life and creating a space of recognition and possibility for her and others in the city.

I then return to Gopal's experience on the buses of his youth, when he experienced the kinds of sexual or erotic encounters that he and others described in this chapter's opening vignette. Although Gopal now identifies as a gay man, during his youth he was unaware of that category of identification. He explained how his experiences on buses "could not be domesticated" at the time, which was his way of describing his inability to articulate his experience in and through language. Drawing on Gopal's use of domestication, I reflect on linguistic articulation—that is, either putting experiences into words or not—as a form of urban articulation. Language, I argue, orders urban geographies

in powerfully material ways.

I then go on to develop domestication as an example of urban articulation counter to sexual dissidence. Domestication on Bangalore's streets can be seen in the examples of public-private partnerships seeking to increase the presence of middle-class consumers and families even as they remove undesirable people from the same streets. The practices of policing which people can access and use public space are, I argue, another example of domestication as urban articulation. Naming sexual dissidents (an example of linguistic domestication) shapes urban geographies by visibilizing¹⁷ groups *as such* in order to remove them. In turn, this increased visibility works to invisibilize groups like Hijras—who were actively removed from the areas targeted by both public-private partnerships and other forms of urban development undergirded by consumer capitalism. These examples illustrate how the practice of domesticating urban space has a materially negative effect on the city's most marginalized populations even as it makes space for middle-class people like gay men who might be dissident in another context.

Finally, I turn to the story of gay men's nighttime strolls in an exclusive residential enclave in Bangalore and the aspirational logic through which the neighborhood is both spatially organized and tacitly policed. Although processes of domestication in that place—shaping who is and is not seen as belonging there—are not as explicit as during the street fairs that I discuss in other parts of the city, the material composition of the neighborhood also articulates the urban geography along lines of class, caste, gender, and sexual

¹⁷ Visibilize and Invisibilize, as verbs, are an idiomatic construction common in Indian English and one that I employ throughout as both a category of practice and analysis.

dissidence. The experience of traversing Bangalore's city streets and navigating its complex urban geography using different forms of transportation continues for those of all backgrounds who move across the city on a daily basis. The chapter ends by returning to auto-rickshaws—Gopal's and others—as material artifacts of urban navigation and articulation, as well as sites for thinking beyond the limitations of domestication as an exclusive and exclusionary practice of articulation.

Nanu Avanalla Avalu (I am Not He...She)

As the account that opens this chapter illustrates, buses move people from one urban site to another; they also bring people into proximity with one another and are productive for what Povinelli (2005) calls “stranger sociality.” An example of this can be seen in an early scene from *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* a 2015 Kannada film that translates in English to “I am Not He...She.” It is a biopic fictionalization of the life of Living Smile Vidya, a South Indian transgender woman, actor, and activist. While the entire film is relevant to the place of sexual dissidence in the urban setting, I focus specifically on a scene early in the film where Vidya has her first encounter with embodied gender and sexual difference in Bangalore. This encounter not only happened *on* the bus, it was an encounter *with* the bus that produced recognition of herself/himself as a particular kind of (non-gender binary) person and the bus as a particular kind of site (with its own social and erotic possibilities).

At this point in the film Living Smile Vidya, then male-bodied and named Madesha, arrives in Bangalore from his/her natal home in northern Karnataka and has trouble crossing the street. In the foreground of the shot is

a busy street with cars, bikes, and auto rickshaws. A concrete barrier divides opposing lanes of traffic with Madesha on the far side. He moves forward ready to cross, hesitates, and retreats back to the curb, seems to gather some resolve, steps forward again, hesitates, retreats again. Finally on the third attempt he scurries through the honking, whizzing traffic and enters the foreground of the shot. The scene feels cluttered and chaotic, a visual representation of Madesha's disorientation as a new arrival to Bangalore.

Madesha, adjusting to the hustle and bustle of city life, begins work in his/her uncle's travel agency while living with his sister and taking classes at an evening college. This arrangement means he must take the bus across the city every day and so, in a subsequent scene, we see Madesha speaking to an older man about his confusion navigating the BMTC bus system. Aside from learning the different routes and necessary changes, buses in Bangalore are set up so that the door next to the driver and the first third of the bus are reserved for women, while the middle door and rest of the bus are primarily used by male commuters. After having finally figured out which bus to take and how to board it, Madesha pushes through the crowd of men and successfully hangs onto the middle doorway. He successfully boards the bus, but in doing so loses his bag.

"My bag! My bag," Madesha shouts frantically. "Stop the bus!" A bystander picks up the bag and runs to the open door to give it back. With a thick mustache, a green striped shirt, and a black satchel strung over his shoulder, the man's hips swing from side to side while his arms sway as he turns from Madesha and walks back towards the camera. In the background Madesha looks on, wide-eyed, as the stranger turns back and shrugs his

shoulders with what appears to be a flirtatious smirk. Then the bus drives away; seemingly severing whatever tentative thread of recognition has just been woven between the two.

All is not lost, however, and the circuits of transport have their own patterns such that soon the two encounter each other again. This time Madesha is counting his earnings while on the bus, a thick stack of Rupees in hand. The same stranger comes along and plucks the bills from his hands only to put them into Madesha's bag telling him to be more careful. The tone of the conversation is playful and friendly: even as this intriguing stranger offers advice on living in the city, his small talk hovers at the edges of the substance of their connection. When he moves to exit the bus, however, his hand lingers on Madesha's shoulder in the center of the frame. No longer than a second, this touch, along with the focus of the camera, gestures to the erotics of intentional touch in a public setting, something Gopal also emphasized. After a brief hesitation, Madesha follows him off the bus to a place where he/she discovers a number of male-bodied people dressed in women's clothes and doing tasks that might be recognized as stereotypically feminine. As is wont to happen in Indian films, a song and dance number follows.

This is group of *kothis*, and they provide a community for Madesha until she eventually travels to Pune to undergo castration (known as *nirvana*) and become a member of a *hijra* guru-chela system. In the rest of the film Madesha becomes Vidya and she undergoes more trials before finally finding success and happiness. What I want to emphasize from this film is not Vidya's overall narrative arch, which is inspiring, but the integral part Bangalore's buses play in catalyzing those changes. Of course, maybe it just happened this

way. Maybe Madesha would have eventually encountered the same communities another way. Maybe, but that doesn't happen.

Instead, the film depicts Bangalore as overwhelming— a sensory overload—and its confusing bus system is part of what feels scary and impossible about the city to Madesha upon first arrival. Yet it is that same confusing tangle of people and machines, departures and destinations that opens up an encounter with urban difference and frames the bus as an urban place in its own right. It is that bus that articulates, as in connects, Madesha's experience of Bangalore as well to her gender identity. The bus didn't just ferry Madesha from her uncle and aunt's house to the night college where she took classes, it transported and transformed Madesha into Vidya, and in doing so changed who Vidya was as well as the thick networks of sociality that articulated her geography of Bangalore.

Transportation as a form of Urban Articulation

The different accounts of Bangalore's buses that opened this chapter— Gopal's and other gay men's—appear, in contrast to Madesha/Vidya's experience in *Nanu Avanalla Avalu*, to male experiences. And it is the case that they were very different from those of Hijra women I met in other contexts. Although Vidya joined the *hijra* community as part of her gender transition, the term does not necessarily describe the same identity or experience as the term "transgender," either as the latter circulates globally in human rights discourse (Thoreson 2014, Valentine 2007), or as it is used instead of the descriptor "third gender" in India during the period of my fieldwork. Instead, *hijra* should be understood as a contextually specific form of gender and

cultural embodiment, marked, among other things, by leaving of one's natal family entering new networks of kinship under a *guru-chela* system (Nanda 1999). And while many *hijras* based in urban areas rely on begging and sex work to sustain themselves and their communities, they have also long held an important ritual function, with the power to both bless or curse births and marriages (Reddy 2005). Despite these different categories of identification, all the *hijras* I met in Bangalore described themselves first and foremost as women. In practice, however, the cultural specificity of their feminine gender (still understood as a form of third-ness within a binary gender system) meant they were not easily accepted as women they understood themselves to be, and this shaped possible ways they could move around the city.

For example, one effect of occupying the social place *between* genders was that *hijras* rarely used the BMTC buses, finding it difficult to physically inhabit the binary gender logic of the bus interior. Specifically, buses in Bangalore are set up so that the door next to the driver, along with the first third of the bus, is reserved for women. Men primarily use the middle door and occupy the rest of the bus. As not clearly male, but neither unequivocally female, the *hijras* I met explained their difficulty occupying either section, including how they were subject to harassment by both BMTC conductors and by fellow passengers no matter where they placed themselves.

Instead of riding the bus, then, most of the *hijra* and other transgender people I spoke with through NGOs and at community drop-in centers preferred to spend their limited funds on auto-rickshaws, similar to the ones Gopal used in his art installation. Because Gopal's project drew attention to the materiality of the auto-rickshaw as an aesthetic object, it encouraged

viewers to think about autos—and by extension buses and all forms of transit— not just as technologies of circulation, but also as urban spaces in their own right. Like the bus, autos articulate the urban geography in that they both connect and constitute different urban places for the people who move between and inhabit those places.

However, unlike the communal experience of riding a bus, autos are more individualized since they hold only one paying customer or small group of customers at a time. In this way chance encounters, aside from with the driver of course, are more limited than they are on buses. This translates into their being a preferred form of transport for *hijras* and other people who feel unsafe on the BMTC buses. This also suggests it is not accidental that the bus was narrated as a site of possibility for Madesha (who was then male-bodied, if effeminate, a *kothi* perhaps) who experienced it as a site of urban articulation in an analogous way to Gopal and other gay men, while Vidya (now female-bodied, a *hijra*) and others like her did not experience it that way. Whatever the person in question's sexuality, the relationship between sexual dissidence and gender within a material instantiation of the culturally located sex/gender system (to put it in the language of Gayle Rubin's framework) distributes both possibility and risk unequally across the urban landscape, and across different technologies of transport.

In Gopal and other gay men's telling, anyway, buses were sites of possibility precisely because their high turnover rate provided a level of anonymity and created a space for fleeting physical connection. Implicit in their experience of buses, however, was the tacit ability to give or deny consent, and how their agency as male subjects shaped the intersubjective

encounter buses facilitated. This was very different from hijras, who explained their avoidance of buses as a protection against unsolicited attention and harassment based on their gender and sexual dissidence. Also, describing experiences of touch on the bus as erotic rather than dangerous belies a starkly male inhabitation of urban space and the privileges that go along with it.

Conversely, for many transgender people autos figured as spaces of possibility in their narratives of traversing the city *precisely* because the form of the auto limited possible unwanted encounters and constrained the visibility of their gender dissident bodies even as they allowed hijras and others to traverse the urban landscape with relatively more safety and security. In hijra accounts riding in a bus meant being physically proximate to strangers who might harass them while riding in an auto meant staying tucked away in the back of a canopied three-wheel vehicle, inhabiting a space neither strictly divided by gender nor subject to the bus's mechanisms of gender policing.¹⁸ These differing politics of visibility for cisgender gay and transgender hijra bodies is also an effect of the different ways that sexual and gender difference are socially emplaced and understood in Bangalore and in India.

Linguistic Domestication as Articulation

What Gopal described in retrospect as a “gay” encounter was, at the

¹⁸ Gender continues to matter in the auto, of course, albeit in different ways. Auto drivers were overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, male and working class. Transgender people often lived in the same communities as auto-drivers and described their relationship—as paying customers—as one of mutual respect.

time, inchoate and unnamable to him. Indeed, in his youth he not only did not call himself gay, he had never even heard the word. This was similar to how Madesha did not know about kothis or hijras or other sexually and gender dissident groups before encountering difference on BMTC buses.

“These are all—” Gopal hesitated, as if searching for the right way to encapsulate the experiences of his youth. “You never domesticated the idea of sex in all those years [growing up]. That is the key thing...”

In other words when he recounted the experience of his youth he acknowledged that it had happened outside the bounds of any culturally located linguistic framework through which he could have made sense of it at the time. He now made sense of his experience through the concept of “gay” but that did not mean that, for Gopal, those experiences were *really* gay at the time. In his own words, the experience was not domesticated—at least not at the time—and so Gopal employed domestication to describe the process by which naming an experience, that is putting it into language, serves as a form of urban articulation. Here Gopal’s sense of domestication articulated his experiential connections within the urban landscape even as it produced those connections as socially and materially significant.

“Third genders,” Gopal went on to claim, “Are much better off in that sense than gays, bisexuals, and lesbians because our languages have no words to mention any of this [meaning gay, lesbian, bisexual]. See, that means completely you have no way to express what it is.” Even though he now has the word and concept of gay, in English anyway, he still doesn’t have a word in Tamil, his first language, and in some way Gopal still felt that his sexuality remained foreign to the part of himself most connected to the Tamil language.

Although Gopal easily conversed with me in English, an Indian language in its own right, he used “our languages” to reference regionally specific Indian languages and to stake a claim to the idea of a shared Indian culture that exceeds the particularities of any one of the country’s many languages. But what was the “it” that Gopal felt could not be expressed in languages other than English? How, in his telling, did cultural and linguistic categories like *hijra* render those marked as third gender somehow “better off,” given the explicit and well-known social marginalization that such groups face? For one, the politics of class and caste, as well as gender, become inextricable from the politics of language. Indeed, it is only from a position of linguistic privilege—as an English speaker moving between English, Tamil, Hindi, and Kannada—compounded with the privilege of Gopal’s high-caste status, that the presence or absence of a linguistic term could be his primary index of being better worse off.

To describe this in terms of visibility: for Gopal having a word that locates his sexual dissidence in either Tamil or Kannada would visibilize his identity, but the invisibility of his sexual dissidence, especially alongside his adherence to the norms of male gender, was also what protected him from other forms of discrimination. Words, or the lack thereof, can simultaneously validate people’s experience and put them at risk. Gopal was not alone in his view that gay men were somehow at a disadvantage, however, and his account echoed a common narrative thread across the life histories of many other gay men I met in Bangalore. As a general narrative it went something like this: *When I was young I realized there was something different about me; I was not like other boys and men, but I was a boy. At that time hijras were my*

only reference for this kind of difference, and I was afraid of being associated with hijras. Therefore, while I knew from an early age that I was not a hijra (i.e., not a woman) I did not know whom else I might be. For those who did not know about or have access to “gay” there was no category, linguistic or otherwise, which encapsulated being male and attracted to other male persons, and this made it more challenging for these men to understand who they were and where they fit socially.

The challenge, it seems was less a matter of degree— on a scale from better to worse— than it was the result of inhabiting different social geographies. These different versions of the city were shaped by different gender, class, caste, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. They could not, in other words, be made so easily commensurable as Gopal’s narrative implied, though neither does this dismiss his observation. For as much he flattened the lived experiences of gender and sexual dissidence to a formal quality of local socio-linguistic categories, he also highlighted how the naming of experience constitutes a form of recognition through which experience is recognized, lifeworlds are made and sustained. Even at the most superficial level, Gopal’s claim that “third gender,” a now mostly passé term for a spectrum of non-binary lives increasingly glossed as transgender, are somehow “better off” because they can be publicly labeled as such is both suspect. This is the case especially because it was spoken from a position of socio-economic, gender, and caste privilege. At the same time, his claim is also worth taking seriously. Articulation means that linguistic categories shape lives and the city.

Given that he now understands him self to embody a lifeworld glossed by the English word “gay,” what does it mean for Gopal to say that his

encounters were never domesticated in this youth? How and why does it matter that he now calls himself gay, or that in retrospect he understands his earlier experiences to have been gay ones, even as he insists they were not gay at the time? For one, Gopal claimed that because the lives of “third gender” or transgender people such as hijras have culturally located names, that they *have been* domesticated. If this is so—and for the purpose of my analysis I take his claim seriously—does this perspective change the ways in which we understand how identities are transacted in and across urban geographies? How does it change the possible meaning of domestication as a form of urban articulation?

The relationship between articulation and language did not only mean articulating globally circulating identities in languages other than English; it was not only a process of domestication. Sometimes the use of words from other Indian languages within everyday English speech articulated communities of sexual dissidence across urban worlds. For example, this happened among a group of gay male friends that I got to know in Bangalore. They came from different parts of South India and therefore English was the only language spoken by everyone in the group. Still, within the group it was common for them to address each other with the Malayalam informal third-person “dee.” This is specifically a feminine linguistic form; the male form would have been “daa.” Even though most of these guys were not Malayalam speakers or from the state of Kerala, they had picked up the habit from a friend from there, and so “dee” became a term of endearment within their friend circle. This was still the case after the Malayalam speaking friend moved away. On their WhatsApp group this “dee” was rendered simply as the

English letter “D.”

One day a man on the group shared an embarrassing story of how he had turned to someone in his office and inadvertently called them “dee.” He explained that his staff thought he was crazy since none of them were Malayalam speakers and they did not understand that he was using a feminine gendered form of address within the context of his English speech. Or maybe they *did* speak Malayalam and understood perfectly the nuance of his speech without letting on? Either way, this use of “dee” transgressed the norms of gender even as it articulated the bonds of friendship and sexually dissident kinship amongst those for whom it was mutually intelligible. In this case the way in which language articulated community was distinct from the domesticating work of bringing “gay” into local idiom. Instead, the practice of using informal Malayalam feminine address in English, and amongst men, was a form of articulation that thickened networks of dissident sociality amongst those who considered themselves an alternative kind of family (Weston 1997).

Like these men, today Gopal lives an openly gay life— a vantage point no doubt shaped by the circulation of “gay” as a viable identity category. While Gopal’s experiences, both then and now, are specific to the context of his life in India, the distance between Gopal’s current perspective and that of his youth can be measured through the globalization of sexual identity monikers and how they have transformed sexual politics both in India and around the world (e.g., Cohen 2005; Narrain and Bhan 2005; Shah 2015).

Visibility and Rethinking the Public

An example of how this social transformation of the urban occurs through the linguistic articulation of sexually dissident identities can be seen in the public protests that took place after the release of Deepa Mehta's movie *Fire* (1996). The film depicts a blossoming lesbian relationship between two women. As Naisargi Dave recounts in her ethnography of lesbian activism in Delhi (2012), gatherings in support of the film were the first time anyone had put the words "Indian" and "Lesbian" together in a public place, thus rendering visible the experiences of women desiring other women *as* lesbians.

These actions resulted in multiple articulations—of women desiring women as lesbians, of lesbians visibilized in the public sphere, and of women staking their place within the urban landscape of Delhi. Because of these protests, *Fire* was a foundational moment for lesbian activism across India. As a result, both in Dave's example and in Gopal's story, the line between what people of the same sex do (that is, what I call dissidence) and the articulation of dissidence through identity categories like "gay," or "lesbian," is itself a linguistic articulation *and* an urban articulation of the city and its spaces organized around sexually dissident lives.

Specifically, this sense of the "public" is drawn from Habermas' (1991) work on the public as a sphere of address as it arose in 19th Century Europe. How far Habermas' framework can be extrapolated has been the subject of much debate, and in his article "Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta" Sudipta Kaviraj contests the transferability of a Habermasian public sphere to an Indian, and in his work specifically to the Bengali, context (Kaviraj 1997). In the article, Kaviraj juxtaposes the

binary analytical categories of public and private with those in postcolonial Kolkata— specifically *ghare/bhaire* (in Bengali lit. home/outside) and *apan/par* (lit. yours/not yours)— in order to show that these cannot be neatly mapped onto one another. His conclusions, therefore, are not just specific to Kolkata or Bengal: they are grounded in a Hindu cosmological worldview and its spatial logic of caste that continues to dominate across the country. Indeed, despite many upper case people’s claims that caste does not exist in the city, this spatial logic of caste continued to operate in Bangalore, albeit in less immediately visible ways.

In Kaviraj’s formulation, the street is both physically and conceptually located outside the home; yet the street is not a generic and equally accessible public as it is commonly described. Indeed, the street and other “public” spaces were neither a matter of collective concern nor a site of equitable access in the eyes of Bengali high-caste elites who controlled Kolkata post-independence. Kaviraj goes on to explain that there is no word in Bengali for the concept of “public”, writing, “the adjective *public* has still not been domesticated” (Kaviraj 1997, 97). People may continue to use the foreign, that is English, word “public” to refer to places like the street or the park, but as Kaviraj points out they mean something different than any proposed local equivalency.

Akin to Gopal’s admission that in his youth “gay” had not been domesticated, Kaviraj also uses the term “domesticate” to describe the disjuncture between a foreign concept of public and its meaning in both local language and local worlds. In both cases the perceived inability to domesticate highlights the foreignness of categories like “public” or “gay” in Indian life,

even as it uses an English-language term to describe the process of translating and making sense of them. The inability to domesticate, therefore, both describes the challenges of radical translation and performs the impossibility of such translations by making recourse to a concept that is itself not domestic, in the sense of belonging to or emanating from the local social world at stake (Povinelli 2006).

For Gopal, “third gender” was a gloss for non-cisgender, non-heterosexual embodiments that did not include his experience. For Kaviraj, social relations outside the home had a logic that could not easily be rendered as “public”. Instead Kaviraj proposes a vernacular transliteration— “pablik”— as an alternative way to make the term locally applicable (Kaviraj 1997, 112). Yet this difference in spelling alone, while a nod to local pronunciation, does not engage the more complex work of understanding *why* “pablik” never fully maps onto “public” or what is at stake in either expanding or collapsing similarities and differences between the terms, a negotiation Kaviraj calls “improvisation.”

“Dubbing” offers another framework through which to think about this improvisatory work. In his writing on queer sexuality in Indonesia, Tom Boellstorff draws on the practices of Indonesian gay men and lesbi women who lip-sync to American pop music in public performances (Boellstorff 2005). In doing so they perform global circulations of sexual minority identities as well as a relationship to the Indonesian nation-state. Further, Boellstorff draws on the impossibility of a perfect lip-sync, meaning there can be no “faithful copy” of the original, and this imperfect copy is what he calls dubbing. In dubbing, he writes, “two elements are held together in productive

tension without the expectation that they will resolve into one— just as it is known from the outset that the speaker’s lips will never be in sync with the spoken word in a dubbed film” (Boellstorff 2005, 5).

For Boellstorff, dubbing is a constitutively queer technology, one that draws attention to the performativity of both sexual and national subjectivities. Dubbing is also a productive framework for elaborating what is at stake in both Kaviraj and Gopal’s processes of domestication. The concept of “public” can never be fully domesticated and “gay” cannot fully describe Gopal and other men’s experiences on buses, but they still give shape to the elusive phenomena they seek to name. Similarly, dubbing problematizes the category of “third gender,” as well as its more contemporary counterpart “transgender,” as categories proper to understanding of a domestic—or in Boellstorff’s case national— lexicon of identity. The interplay of English and Malayalam at work in the use of “dee” to index sociality and kinship amongst some gay men in Bangalore can also be understood as a queer or dissident example of dubbing, because it does not align with any one cultural or linguistic articulation, but uses the interplay between different languages to create a new and unique form of sociality and kinship.

Hijras and other people with a complex relationship to (non-binary) gender are socially visible in ways that make them more recognizable, but this visibility—illustrated by their very different relationship to transportation and urban movement— paradoxically does not translate into an increased social or physical mobility within the city’s geography. Indeed, the unproblematic visibility of male bodies in urban public space—including on buses—is a necessary precondition for the *invisibility* of sexual touch between

men in those places. When it comes to articulating forms of dissident sexuality in public, acts of naming are always both improvisatory and dubbed: imperfect but real ways to make sense of experience, especially when it comes to the disjuncture between global/local sexual identities and lives. Gopal's experiences had neither a local idiom to describe them, nor did they fit into the social world around him, despite the fact that he experienced them in that social context.

For this reason the concept of domestication offered Gopal a way to make sense of his experience, as well as framing what was absent from it. It was only later that he could articulate precisely what he could not at the time (i.e., that he was gay). In fact, Gopal used the impossibility of linguistic domestication in vernacular publics as a means of acknowledging the corollary impossibility of recognition through language that was formative to his experience of sexual dissidence. For Gopal, his experiences could not be domesticated because the sex he referenced¹⁹ was only ever sex: that is, always limited to the physical and located in transient spaces like the bus, places without enduring emotional bonds.

The "it" that Gopal said he had no way to express, was it a stranger's hand lingering on his leg? Was it bodies pressed against each other as the hulking bus lurched over unevenly paved roads? Was it eyes meeting across a public toilet, lingering and possibly inviting something more? Was it kissing and touching, oral or anal? In many gay identifying men's accounts, as in Gopal's, this was not always clear from the stories they told. Despite being a

¹⁹ In this chapter I use the term "sex" to broadly refer to a range of physical but not necessarily penetrative encounters that happened between male-bodies.

gay man myself— and therefore, in theory at least, finding it easier to speak about sex with other gay men—asking for too many details felt salacious and not exactly the point of our conversations. Therefore the particularities of sex are often not explicit in these accounts. Instead, as I chose to focus on drawing out the affective qualities of people’s experiences and understanding how these shaped both their individual and collective sexually dissident lives.

Domestication and the Articulation of Urban Space

If the above examples of linguistic domestication serve to illustrate how the practice of urban articulation draws boundaries through processes of naming, then urban articulation as spatial domestication seeks to tame the excesses of urban life by controlling who inhabits city spaces and in what ways they do so. This, in turn articulates, as in produces, a version of the city that excludes sexual dissidents whose presence does not promote or participate in the aesthetics of capitalist development projects. Domestication, in this case, glosses the set of social, economic, and political conditions by which proper urban citizens gain recognition.

While some anthropological work on recognition has focused on the political meaning of the term, within a policy context or in relation to the nation state (Povinelli 2002), my focus is on domestication’s role in framing recognition in India. In doing so I join other scholars who entangle politics and urban infrastructures, aesthetics, health, and norms of gender and sexuality in India (Anjaria 2016, Anand 2017, Bjorkman 2015, Shah 2014, Solomon 2016). One way scholars have expanded beyond a focus on norms is to use the category of “queer” to reference critical engagements beyond heterosexual

actions, desires, and forms of social organization (Boellstorff 2007). Like Boellstorff's concept of dubbing, a queer analysis emphasizes both the social production of normative ways of being *and* the persistence of differently lived lives— lives that push against the parameters of culturally conditioned norms and exceed their underlying logics of those norms (Warner 1993).

Spatial domestication, including the practices I gloss under this term in Bangalore, sought to tame forms of excess that considered queer in such a formulation. These practices sought to physically remove non-normative behaviors from urban public space, and, in doing so re-inscribe the parameters of socially sanctioned normality onto the geography of the city. Such categorizing work offers both possibility and constraint, straddling both the pleasures and pains of fitting or not fitting into existing categories (Cohen 1995).

Central to my formulation of spatial domestication as a form of urban articulation are the ways in which processes of domestication necessarily have spatial effects. For while spatial effects do not necessarily circumscribe sexuality to the home—that is, they do not simply reproduce a binary division between home and outside as Kaviraj writes—they *do* instantiate a moral geography that suppresses public expressions of sexuality from the street and other sites like it. Efforts to erase public expressions of sexuality, uphold traditional values, and protect children, along with the discursive use of children as a reason to protect public space, have been written about and debated extensively in Euro-American queer theory (e.g., Edelman 2004, Halberstam 2011).

What is relevant in the ethnographic context of Bangalore, specifically, and

India, generally, are the ways that (often Hindu) values get used to justify the removal of people deemed outside of home and family— i.e. outside normative bounds of kinship— as is often the case with hijras (Reddy 2005). What’s more, policing the public takes a particular form in contemporary Bangalore, a city where the urban form is today largely the product of market liberalization (Nair 2007, Ramakrishnan 2011, Upadhya 2016). It is also constitutive of the historical production of “publics” in South India as evidenced by the expulsion of Devadasis from temples and by efforts at Devadasi reform (Nair 2011; Ramberg 2014).

Such tensions between acceptable and unacceptable expressions of visible, public sexuality shape the social and geographic worlds of Bangalore. For example, when socially and politically conservative Hindu groups take it upon themselves to police what they perceive as immoral expressions of sexuality— including young men and women holding hands on the street or in the park— they attempt to instantiate their vision of the Hindu nation onto the diversity of the urban population. Such acts of “moral policing” seek to force particular ways of being in the urban landscape: that is, to domesticate the excesses of urban life through the imposition of Hindu values about proper gender and sexual comportment.

Within this milieu all sexuality must be kept covert and hidden away, much as Chatterjee’s analysis of the resolution of “the woman question” showed how Hindu nationalists systemically relegated women to the home (Chatterjee 1989). Access to the home is not universal, however, and it is worth remembering that the figure of the Indian woman Chatterjee writes about was presumptively both Hindu and upper-caste. This means her

domestic world was very different to that of low-caste, working-class people who out of necessity live between the categories of home and outside, often making their homes in informal settlements or on otherwise public land (Bhan 2016, Kaviraj 1997; Srivastava 2015). Whether it is along lines of gender or sexuality, *who* is present in or absent from “public” space illustrates how those spaces have already been domesticated. Further, domestication marks them as part of the Indian nation and articulates the city within an increasingly politically salient Hindu geography, without questioning the underlying politics that subtend the particular vision of the nation at work.

Promoting Middle-Class Pursuits, Cultivating an Urban Aesthetic

Illustrative of spatial domestication is media coverage of two events, including two articles that appeared in different Bangalore newspapers on the same day in February 2016. Each addressed different topics, but both prominently featured M.A. Saleem, the Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) for the *Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike* (BBMP). The first was a full-page spread of photos and text in The Times of India (TOI) (Sequeira 2016). It covered a daylong event in which Commercial Street, a major shopping area located in the Shivajinagar neighborhood of central Bangalore, was closed to all car and motorbike traffic as part of the Happy Feet Initiative. “Over 8,000 Bangaloreans came out to experience their first ever vehicle free day on a street almost always choked with traffic” it read (Sequeira 2016).

This was true enough. I often found myself on Commercial Street while shopping for everything from hardware to bed-sheets, curtains to silk to branded clothing. Both Commercial Street, as well as the narrow streets

branching off it, is densely packed with stalls that compete for sidewalk space and pedestrian attention alongside the many retail storefronts, fast food, and family restaurants that occupy all levels of adjoining low-rise buildings. The street itself is fairly narrow: wide enough for opposing traffic but with little room to spare for the many pedestrians that navigate blaring car horns and motorbikes as they weave in and out of the jumble of bicycles and carts and cars and bodies.

The Happy Feet Initiative closed the usually busy Commercial Street to vehicular traffic for one day in order to turn the road itself into a temporary recreational space. The event was particularly focused on bringing in children and families, and the newspaper coverage included pictures of all ages including a wide shot of the gathered crowd. The photos showed children playing with hula-hoops, bouncy balls, and both adults and children skating and cycling in the street. Yoga was also part of the initiative, which encouraged people to make use of the street as a direct counter to images and stories of Bangalore's traffic-clogged, pollution-cloaked streets. This extensive TOI coverage was not, however, merely a positive human-interest story: in fact TOI was one of the co-sponsors of the Happy Feet Initiative and organized the event along with Bangalore's Commercial Association and Traffic Police. In other words, the media coverage was much a reflection of the corporate branding of urban space as it served to highlight a substantive form of engagement with open and freely accessible vision of the city in the first place.

Scholars and activists often speak about Bangalore, and urban India generally, as indicative of the conditions of neoliberalism, and the Happy Feet Initiative is symptomatic of the changes glossed by this term. Yet despite

scholarship on the conditions of “neoliberalism” and “late capitalism”, including about the social and political effects of the processes these terms describe (e.g., Duggan 2003; Ong 2006), as a descriptor of real places and actual experiences “neoliberalism” can lack specificity. The social, economic and political processes that neoliberalism attempts to gloss are at once broad and extensive— indicative of transformations on a global scale— even as they shape what happens on particular streets at particular times, as the Happy Feet Initiative illustrates. Indeed, ways of organizing urban space in Bangalore under conditions of neoliberalism affect all aspects of urban life—for example, the economic sector, the organization of family life, and religious communities and rituals (Srinivas, S. 2001, Srinivas, T. 2018).

As an analytical concept, domestication describes events like the Happy Feet Initiative: that is, these efforts circumscribe possible uses of urban space, and gestures to the limits of domestic uses of space. These limits are apparent in the media coverage of the Commercial Street event. For example one photo showed a group of cyclists led by M.A. Saleem, and a quote accompanied the article: "I was extremely happy to see people turning up in large numbers. Even at 7 in the morning there was a festive atmosphere that is otherwise hard to imagine on Commercial Street. It was absolutely pollution free" (Sequeira 2016).

Similar to traffic closures in nearby Cubbon Park on Sunday mornings, the temporary blockade of Commercial Street brought together municipal and corporate interests in an effort to domesticate the many uses of urban space, circumscribing ways of inhabiting urban space by fostering conditions in which only some people can thrive. The sponsors framed their efforts within a

broader narrative of Bangalore as a once quiet and green city now subject to too much pollution, too much traffic. Indeed, the push to get people engaged in activities like cycling and yoga was framed as an alternative to citizens' "mall and movie Sunday drill" (Sequeira 2016). It is ironic that corporate sponsorship was framed as the solution to these woes of consumption even as the growth of corporate interests and consumer capitalism led to them in the first place.

Like in Kaviraj's account of urban space in postcolonial Kolkata, the people who count as Bangaloreans in TOI's formulation— i.e. those framed as the intended beneficiaries of the Happy Feet Initiative and public urban space generally— are self-evidently middle-class enough to have the income to buy their own bicycles, have enough leisure time to do yoga outside, and enough of both to go to the mall and watch movies in the city's many multiplex cinemas on a typical weekend. In other words, the effort to domesticate Commercial Street by its very conception imagines the prototypical Bangalore resident and beneficiary of such efforts as a middle-class citizen with disposable income and leisure time. This presumption, in turn, domesticated the city by erasing working-class citizens from representations of the urban populace in elite English language media.

What's more, the event physically erased any citizens who were not its target (i.e., middle class) from the street. While the Happy Feet Initiative no doubt drew crowds and received positive reviews, its effect on Commercial Street and on the life of the Shivajinagar neighborhood was more complex: in order to bring in middle-class people who might not otherwise have been there, others were inevitably displaced. The same day that TOI promoted the

Happy Feet Initiative on Commercial Street, I read another article in *The Hindu*, which is another national newspaper with local coverage, titled "Traffic Police to Announce Drive to Evict Transgenders" (Deepika, 2016). In addition to conflating the categories of transgender and hijra as if they were synonymous, the article referenced a tweet from the same police official M.A. Saleem that announced the eviction. An inset within the article pointed out how this was not the first time the city had announced a drive to remove transgenders from begging at traffic signals.

A similar effort in 2014 rounded up over 200 transgender people and sent them to the Beggar's Colony on the outskirts of the city. I had heard accounts of this previous effort— and its disastrous effects— from transgender leaders at community events during my fieldwork. Coincidentally, on the same day the article was published I attended an unrelated meeting with Akkai Padmashali, a prominent transgender woman, activist, and community leader in Bangalore. At the meeting she mentioned a planned protest in front of the Police Commissioner's office in response to his tweet about the intended evictions. We did not discuss the article at the meeting, but she had clearly been interviewed for it since she was quoted in it saying that the planned action constituted, "discrimination against transgenders" (Deepika 2016).

Taken together, these two public statements issued by M.A. Saleem in his capacity as the Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic)— one praising the Happy Feet Initiative, the other promoting the eviction of transgender people— highlight the division between acceptable and unacceptable ways of domesticating public space in Bangalore. These statements, along with the events they reference, instantiate social divisions along lines of class, gender,

and sexuality, and render them as material effects of domestication. While domestication as urban articulation does not seek to relegate particular people or practices only to the home per se, it does label certain people and practices as urban excess—to be evicted, removed, and made invisible in order for respectable middle-class families and children to have use of the street— as Saleem’s public statements, taken together, clearly illustrate.

What’s more, the proposed eviction of transgender people from the city’s central streets highlights how normative configurations of urban space are produced through efforts to bring desirable populations into those same areas. First, begging, which is a primary form of livelihood for *hijras*, gets framed as both unproductive and unsightly. It does not generate value within a capitalist, market-based economy the way corporate sponsorships or events attracting middle-class consumers do. At the same time, as Akkai and other transgender activists who spoke on behalf of *hijras* pointed out, begging is often one of the only options for transgender women, and particularly for *hijras*, because ongoing social stigma keeps them from getting other kinds of work. The Happy Feet Initiative promoted formal, retail-based consumption practices even as it propagated a class-based aesthetics of urban life where transgenders, auto rickshaw drivers, and other laborers were nowhere to be seen.

Far from supporting the goal of inclusive urban public space, the language in the second article, including the need to remove *mangalamukhis*²⁰ from Bangalore’s streets, echoed the language of another article I read about an

²⁰ This is a Kannada word translated as transgender in English-language media, also the use of the broad term transgender to mean specifically trans-women, male to female (MtF), and mostly Hijras who are already more visible serves to erase the particular experiences and challenges of faced by trans-men.

effort to remove stray dogs from the Bangalore Palace grounds prior to an international business investors' summit. While coverage of the Happy Feet Initiative praised it as a novel use for Bangalore's streets, the article about the drive to remove transgenders shared more its language with the one about removing stray dogs. That is, both were framed through the concerns of implicitly middle-class people for whom transgender, hijra women were thoroughly dehumanized and did not belong in a domesticated vision of the urban public. The comparison here is not meant to conflate transgender people and dogs, but to noticing a dehumanizing slippage already at work in media coverage.

According to the newspaper, the plan was to round up stray dogs and turn them over to an animal rescue NGO that would then relocate them to a different part of the city. As with the article about the transgender eviction drive, the language in the article about dogs figured them as unsightly, as a nuisance to an urban aesthetic cultivated through business investment and middle-class consumption. Maintaining that aesthetic requires removing these other kinds of bodies: requires domesticating urban space. This shared language in both articles had the effect of further dehumanizing transgender people in Bangalore. Rather than being a population whose "happy feet" were welcomed into the street, they were figured as unworthy and inhuman, as an excessive population unwelcome in the domesticated version of the city articulated by and for consumer-citizens.

As Akkai pointed out in *The Hindu* article, "No one has taken steps to implement the transgender welfare policy. People from the community are begging for basic needs such as food and clothing" (*The Hindu*, 2016). While

the police were quick to physically remove transgender people they did nothing to in turn provide for their livelihood. The work of domesticating urban space, therefore, was twofold: it involved both the removal of bodies framed as excessive to its particular aesthetic vision even, and it promoted the presence of others whose gender presentation, sexual comportment, and status as producers and consumers of capitalist value conformed to an already domesticated vision of urban public space.

Let me be very clear: by reading the articles about transgender people and stray dogs together it is *not* my intention to equate transgender people with dogs in any way. I do *not* reduce one to the other. Instead, I want to highlight how both corporate and state discourses, along with the English-language media from which these stories were drawn, employ a common language in their coverage of both populations. In turn, this common language facilitates comparisons in a way that is materially significant for *all* the lives in question, both human and animal. In both examples populations are figured as unwanted and in need of removal, as barriers to international investment, to pro-business events, and to the presence of children and families on the street. Removal of excess lives, in other words, was the necessary precondition to make room for citizens' "happy feet."

Articulating Aspiration in Indiranagar's Defence Colony

One Thursday evening I joined Cyril for beer and a snack at a Tex-Mex style restaurant in the popular commercial and residential neighborhood of Indiranagar. We sat in the mostly empty upstairs seating area while an African man performed a number of different songs: Bollywood, Reggae, Backstreet

Boys: it was a ranging musical variety show. After chatting casually about our lives and me asking questions about Bangalore and what it was like live as a gay man in the city, we left the restaurant and went for a walk through the adjoining residential enclave of Defence Colony. Even though it was night and the streets were dark, just glancing at the houses made it immediately clear that this was the most affluent part of the neighborhood.

Although there seemed to be a number of five to six story apartment buildings going up around the area, I saw even more single-family homes built in various architectural styles. One home we passed had a mock Tudor façade with mullioned windows and a turret. The tops of manicured shrubbery were the only other things visible over the concrete walls that lined that particular property. Across the street was a house with three cars in the garage— the only one I could make out was a white Mercedes Coupe. As we continued along the mostly empty street, we passed a massive building with a floral decorative overlay on its façade. Cyril saw me looking and explained how he and a friend had once thought this was a series of apartments, but later realized the whole thing was a single-family home when they overheard the family's teenage son telling his father that he didn't want a red car, that he *had* to have a black car instead.

Cyril's retelling of this story emphasized the differences in social and economic class between himself and the imagined residents of Defence Colony. From his incredulous tone, it was obviously strange to him that a person could demand a different high-end sports car simply because he didn't like the color of the one he already had. At the same time, Cyril possessed all the markers of being comfortably middle-class himself: he was educated in

English and articulated a global imaginary in which references to Malayalam film songs existed alongside RuPaul's Drag Race, where he recounted his dreams of "making it" on Broadway right after explaining the best places in Bangalore to get appams, his favorite food from back home in Kerala.

He may not have had the financial resources to live in the Defence Colony section of Indiranagar, and did he did not rely on his parents for a car (which he did not own), but he *was* able to walk through the neighborhood regularly without raising any visible concern. At a surface level, it seemed, he both did and did not belong. Indeed, his regular evening walks in Defence Colony involved admiring the houses and fantasizing that he lived in them. That Cyril did this regularly, and that the upper-middle class comportment of the neighborhood had a social meaning for him, already illustrates how places are constituted with class through the ways they are understood, used, and imagined. This is the case both for those who inhabit them and for those who are able to move through them unnoticed.

It's also worth noting that although Indiranagar as a whole contains many commercial properties, and is a popular destination for those with the disposable income to shop and dine, Defence Colony is almost entirely residential. The quality of the area's streets—the sharp division between the municipally maintained roads and lush private gardens hidden behind compound walls— is indicative of a particular (upper) class form of domesticity visible across Bangalore. At the same time, the domestic form of Indiranagar²¹ is very different to other comfortable homes in the city's older

²¹ The layout was developed in the early 1970s by the Bangalore Development Authority (or BDA) and was inaugurated by its namesake and then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

neighborhoods. For example, I could not read the streets' caste composition as clearly as in Basavanagudi where the layout of houses around the central temple complex spatializes the varnas (personal communication, nd.). On the other hand Defence Colony's internal logic is the result of more recent capitalist development, but it shows how class and caste continue to be complexly intertwined in the spatial form of the city.

For example, I also lived in Indiranagar nearer to the bar where our evening had started. This was not more than a five-to-ten minute walk from the houses where Cyril and I took our nighttime stroll. Within 100 meters from my building were Krispy Kreme Doughnuts, a Starbucks and a Costa Coffee, a Gold's Gym, and a multi-story Adidas store complete with its own rooftop restaurant and bar. Meanwhile the area outside my house reflected the spatial logic of a village known as Doopanahalli that predated the city's growth around it. In the center of the open square in front of my house was an active temple to a local Devi. My neighbors were auto-rickshaw drivers and chaat-wallahs who parked their food carts along the periphery of the temple square when they returned home each evening. Meanwhile, there were cows tethered outside the surrounding homes that were always munching on discarded trash. In the morning, I would regularly see their owners milking them as I headed to the gym. I both wondered and worried: where would this milk end up?

Few of my neighbors spoke English or wore branded clothing, two major markers of class position that I learned to recognize in Bangalore. Instead, there was a tailor shop on the ground floor of my building. When I

described the location of my home to an acquaintance from another part of town his face darkened with worry.

“Are you sure it’s safe there,” he asked? “Please be careful! That is the dangerous part of Indiranagar,” he went on to explain, “not like Defence Colony.”

From my experience and from the opinions of our mutual friends, I knew this person to be something of a worrier, and so I took his statement about how my neighborhood was unsafe with a grain of salt. Of course I can’t speak for the experiences of others, but I never heard of any crimes happening around my home. If anything, I felt that my neighborhood was *safer* than Defence Colony. While the colony’s streets were mostly quiet, both during the day and especially at night, Doopanahalli’s were filled with life. Children played games in the open square, men and women visited the tailor shop to pick up their garments and chat, and the tailors looked out over the street from their arrival shortly after dawn until late into the evening. Several women worked to string together *mallige*—strands of jasmine flowers—at the base of the stairwell to my flat.

The stark contrast between Doopanahalli and Defence Colony, two sections of Indiranagar, reminded me of Jane Jacob’s emphasis on active street life as a measure of a city’s social vitality as well as its safety in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacob [1961] 2002). Instead of the Happy Feet Initiative’s efforts to foster this kind of street life through a planned event and public-private ventures, Doopanahalli’s street life arose from the interactions of its residents in common spaces. Of course, Jacobs’ now classic work was a response to the modernist, top-down planning efforts in American cities in the

mid-20th century, but her assertion that street life is both socially desirable and most likely to thrive through the presence of a diverse population and mixed use also translates into the context of Bangalore. For while both sections of Indiranagar no doubt housed domestic spaces, the efforts by which their streets were domesticated—in the sense of the term as I use it here—differed largely on social and economic class. In the Bangalore articulated across these two neighborhoods of Indiranagar, domestic space was both a function of class status and class was a prerequisite for domestic space.

On the one hand Defence Colony's streets were domesticated in the sense that they served primarily as extensions of the area's private homes and not as sites for social life in their own right. When Cyril and I walked the area, as well when I occasionally accompanied other gay men who lived in Indiranagar on similarly motivated evening strolls, we did not loiter in any one place but walked actively *through* the streets. Then we went to a nearby cafe to sit and talk. In order to socialize, it seemed, we either needed to be moving or consuming something. To this end the Colony streets, with their possibility of tacit surveillance on the part of houses' security guards and with the high walls around those houses that kept the streets narrow and closed in, interacted with users of the space in ways that kept us from ever stopping (Certeau 1988).

Dooanahalli, on the other hand domesticated its streets quite differently: through constant and multiple sets of eyes trained on them. Therefore they were much more open for *certain* people to loiter, including for the religious and cultural festivals occasionally held outside the temple. But it struck me as not accidental that I rarely saw hijras in this area, even

though I had heard of other formally peripheral villages nearby that still served as sites for Hijras to gather. I even met one Hijra/transgender woman who was the pujari of a small local temple in a similarly situated neighborhood in another part of the city. So while the number of eyes on the street might indeed make it safer for children to play, or for people to leave their animals to feed, it was only because of a collective sense of who belonged in the area and who did not.

The material presented in this chapter puts forth two distinct yet overlapping and connected forms of domestication as practices of urban articulation. In the first, efforts at and failures of linguistic domestication highlight the processes by which experiences that exceed naming practices get located outside the bounds of local languages and culturally specific knowledge practices. It also describes how efforts to name experience change over time, such as when Gopal looked back from his current perspective as a gay man. In the second form of urban articulation, spatial domestication, powerful actors including state and corporate interests shape urban geographies through the regulation what can and cannot occur, of who can and cannot inhabit, urban space. What's more, both these senses of domestication entangle multi-faceted notions of visibility and invisibility with the related but distinct concepts of public and private, even as the politics of each are distinct.

In both formulations, domestication is not simply a way of moving from the public to the private, as if these categories already existed or were somehow stable or linear. Nor are they simply about moving from more visibility to less visibility (or vice versa)— from outside to inside, from home

to street. For instance, the domestication of urban space results in the greater visibility for middle-class families and children on the street even as the same events and authorities use dehumanizing methods to make other groups, like hijras, less visible on those same streets.

What is at stake, then— in giving the name “gay” to the “it” of Gopal’s youthful experiences, in promoting initiatives that curate an aesthetics of urban public space, or in aspiring to an exclusive and exclusionary form of domesticity— is not just access to a preexisting and self evident urban public, but the very meaning of articulating the urban geography *as a public* in the first place. For this reason, as I have argued, domestication cannot be reduced to privatization, but nor can the domestic be reduced to the realm of the private. To do so would play into the binary fantasy of concretizing discrete spheres rather than engaging in the anthropological work of troubling them.

The Happy Feet Initiative is a clear example of the stake that private corporate interests have, not just in self-avowedly public events, but also in circumscribing the meaning of the public itself. Domestication, therefore, is not just a process that acts upon and shapes a preexisting public; it is one that articulates it in both senses of that term—that it, it both makes distinct and connects. Domestication makes publics recognizable as such— either by rendering them as proper to a consumer-capitalist aesthetic vision of Bangalore, or by abjecting them from the Bangalore domestication articulates.

Not that long after my conversation with Gopal in his studio, I found myself sitting on the front steps of a simple, unadorned temple with a sometimes research assistant who occasionally helped me translate complex conversations into English from both Kannada and Tamil. Across from us sat a

young transgender woman named Laxmi, who described herself as a member of the hijra community. Laxmi was dressed that day in a colorful rayon sari. She lived near the temple in a poor community located not far from some of the city's most premium commercial and residential real estate.

Complimenting her outfit, I asked what she liked to do and, when she said shop, I followed up by asking where she went to buy such lovely clothes! She explained to us that she went to a specific neighborhood and, indeed, to a specific shop she knew to be friendly towards *hijra* customers. How do you get there, I asked? Did she, like Gopal, take the bus or, more similar to other trans people I had met, did she prefer using auto-rickshaws?

“Autos,” she explained through my translator, who rendered this answer as matter-of-factly as Gopal's answer of buses had been. “Because you don't have to worry about the harassment that happens on buses,” she added. Laxmi would save up her money for these trips, my translator explained, precisely so she would not have to take the bus. As I listened, I recalled Gopal's story about the bus as a site of possibility and thought about its limits. The bus not only had different stakes for Gopal and Laxmi, it was an entirely different urban place that articulated an entirely different city.

For *hijra* women like Laxmi or for other gender non-conforming and sexually dissident people, like Madesha who became Vidya, there was first and foremost the fear and worry that their dissidence was always already visible. Gopal had explained this to me as the result of their sexual and gender dissidence being domesticated by language, both local languages and English. Because hijras do not conform to the male/ female gender binary (a binary rendered spatially on Bangalore's buses as well as in its streets) they were

simultaneously highly visible *and* highly rejected, subject to domestication *and* always exceeding its limits.

Gopal's story happened in a place that might, simply because it was not his home, be considered public under Kaviraj's definition. But because Gopal didn't have a word to name his experience until much later, what happened on the bus was not visible as a sexual act, nor was it domesticated in the sense of that term as I develop it. It did, however, articulate the city in a dissident way, a counterpoint to domestication, at least for Gopal.

Attempts to domesticate urban spaces in order to make them public, in both a real and imagined sense, resulted in the removal of *hijras* and others who do not conform in order to remake urban space— in good neoliberal fashion— into spaces of consumption by and for consumer-citizens. This happened not only by the police who removed them but, as Laxmi's story illustrated, through the choices they themselves made to articulate an urban geography that was welcoming and safe, one that avoided sites of discrimination. Domestication works both on and through those it effects.

As I listened to Laxmi's story from the steps of the small neighborhood temple, I could not help but think back to Gopal's textile-based installation in the back of those auto-rickshaws. As an artist he wanted people who daily used autos to stop and think about how the vehicle itself articulates multiple urban sites, but also how auto is an urban place in its own right. The auto in Laxmi's story was a technology through she articulated her lifeworld and *her city*, where she evinced her place within the urban geography in spite of a social world that too often denied her access. Yes, in both cases the auto was in some sense a private form of transport, one not subsidized by the BMTTC.

But it was also a tool through which Laxmi and others resisted the forms of urban domestication that would otherwise keep her out of places like Commercial Street. Both Gopal and Laxmi made me think about my auto journey home that day in a completely new light.

Intertext Two- Consumption

It's Saturday night in Indiranagar and all of the area's international branded shops are closed for the day. Daytime shoppers have given way people eating at the many restaurants serving a variety of regional and global cuisines, drinking at rooftop bars with live music or in pubs that brew their own beer. Along the pavement outside these venues—what Americans call the sidewalk— people smoke cigarettes and send text messages as they wait for their friends, or for an Uber, or for the valet to retrieve their car. Their fingers are a blur as they flit across smartphone screens. Meanwhile, the road is full of cars, auto-rickshaws, and motorbikes weaving on and off the pavement, skillfully dodging pedestrians in order to avoid waiting in the standstill traffic.

Amongst the buildings, noise, and people is an American chain restaurant whose garish, glowing sign illuminates the pavement in front of its entrance. It's about 10pm and although the restaurant is still open for dinner, a section of the interior space has already been cordoned off to make room for a temporary dance floor, transforming the place into a makeshift club. To achieve the effect black paper has been taped along the bottom half of the

street level window to obscure the view of the dance floor from the street. Still, curious passerby can peek around the corners and see inside if they try. If they did, what they would see is a DJ is positioned at one end of the room and a few men dancing with one another under flashing colored lights. Although this is not the only example of a restaurant in the city turning club-like on a weekend night, none of the others I visited had windows facing the street. However, if those passing by were particularly curious about this venue, they might also wonder why only men were dancing, why there were no women to be seen in the “club.”

As the night gets later more men show up, as many as several hundred before the mandatory closing time around 1:30am. The men dance to popular Bollywood songs interspersed between sets of earsplitting, bass-thumping EDM. The partygoers will be visible both when they enter and when they exit the venue, located as it is on a busy road. But the distinguishing characteristics of this party—that it is organized by and for gay men, that it carries a cover charge of several hundred rupees, and that the organizers strictly enforce rules of masculine gender presentation as another condition of entry—will not be obvious to the casual passerby. After all, how many people stop long enough to peek through the gaps in the papered windows?

As an anthropologist, I got used to peeking through the gaps in windows, at least metaphorically. And because life in Bangalore was structured so that I inevitably spent a lot of time in places organized around consumption, one way I learned to pay attention to the lives of those around me was by observing people’s interactions on busy commercial streets like Indiranagar’s, in restaurants and pubs, and at the city’s many shopping malls.

Maybe this tendency to end up in places where people shopped was an effect of Bangalore's explosive growth during and after the country's economic liberalization; maybe it was due to the influence of places like shopping malls on urban social life in contemporary India as Sanjay Srivastava writes about in his book *Entangled Urbanism* (2015); maybe it was because I grew up in a household where window-shopping and people-watching at the mall, along with lunch at the food court, was an ever popular weekend destination. Either way, on days when I had no other meetings or events scheduled I often found myself wandering around one of Bangalore's mega-malls or in commercial areas like Indiranagar.

One of these was Orion Mall in Rajajinagar. The mall itself was long and rectangular with four or five floors of shops organized around a central open atrium. The top floor of the mall housed a cinema where I went to see many movies including *Nanu Avanalu Avallu*, the biopic about Living Smile Vidya that I write about in chapter three. Outside, on one side of the mall was a busy road with elevated walkways that included their own covered escalators to get pedestrians from one side of the busy road to another. On the other side of the mall was a large open area with a man-made lake, multiple residential towers and an all glass office building that housed, among other things, the Amazon office. The pavilion between the mall and the lake had outdoor seating for restaurants and large planters with flowering shrubs. There were a few kiosks dotted around the pavilion selling ice cream and other cool treats. At the far end was a set of grassy risers from which people could sit and look out over the entire mall-office-residential complex.

Thinking that this seemed as good a vantage point as any to observe people at the mall, I sat, notebook-in-hand on the highest of the grassy risers, looking out over the busy comings and goings of the pavilion. The first thing I noticed was that everyone around me on the risers was sitting in a pair. There were young men and women who appeared to be in their late teens or early twenties sitting close together, talking quietly, holding-hands, some eating ice cream. Across the pavilion I noticed other mixed and single-gendered friend groups laughing with one another and enjoying the day. The couples, like me, seemed to have chosen the risers as the space in the mall pavilion where they could most comfortably view others without being as easily on view.

This was most definitely a form of loitering, I thought, and jotted the observation in my notebook, but it felt very different than loitering did in other parts of the city—legitimated somehow by the shopping bags sitting beside the young couples as they leaned into one another, or by the ice cream they (and I) had purchased from the kiosk. All anyone was doing was sitting, but the space of the mall itself transformed “just sitting” from loitering to leisure. Everyone’s presence in that space, I realized, was predicated upon their legibility as a member of the consumer class the mall sought to attract—from the way people were dressed (young women in stylish kurtas, young men in branded clothing) to how they comported themselves—quietly—to how they spent their money.

The young people I observed at the mall embodied practices of good consumerism as ways of living and being in space that come to go without saying; indeed, this was a precondition of their being admitted to Orion mall and other places like it. But, I also suspected that spending time at Orion was

precisely how they learned the ways of acting proper to such urban spaces. If someone was too loud, boisterous, or touchy then one of the mall security guards, usually a thin man with a mustache and a belt that wrapped twice around his waist, signs that I learned to read as indicators of his working class position, would loudly blow his whistle until the offending behavior stopped. Consumers were free to consume, but there were still limits to what counted as acceptable behavior. Like in chapter two, the couple form was acceptable to appear in public but kissing was not allowed. Perhaps it was not obvious to the young people who sat outside the mall with their sweethearts, but not everyone could so easily access the place. And while malls might seem like they are free to enter, such sites of consumer capitalism are in fact highly regulated. Implicit for gaining admission to them is an expectation of successfully displaying outward signs of both familiarity with consumer capitalism and evidence of actively participating in it.

The 2015 Tamil movie *Kaaka Mutai* (The Crow's Egg) beautifully illustrates this point. It tells the story of two young brothers who, after seeing an ad for pizza on the television, dream of nothing but eating pizza at the new restaurant that had, conveniently, opened in their neighborhood. However, they live in a slum and are far too poor to afford pizza. So the two decide to save money by collecting fallen coal from the railway tracks. But even once they have the 300 Rupees they need to buy the pizza they are turned away by the restaurant's security guard who scoffs at their dirty, torn clothes. Before getting to the pizza the kids must first get new clothes from a nearby mall in order to even be allowed into the restaurant.

The brothers do eventually find a way to trade *pani puri* (a popular street food) with two wealthy boys for the new clothes they need, and after a series of comic mishaps they eventually do eat pizza at the end of the movie. In something of a twist, they are disappointed by the taste of it and agree that the version their grandmother made using a *dosa* base tasted better. I mention this movie, which I also saw at Orion mall where it played with English subtitles, because it so clearly illustrates how participation in the capitalist system of commodity consumption is predicated on already being legible as part of that system of consumption. Even once the boys had the money to buy the pizza it was not enough for them to attain it; they also had to *look* the part.

This came up in other, unexpected places, too. For example, at one point in my fieldwork a transgender woman from Tamil Nadu whom I had gotten to know through her work at a local CBO office took me to meet a houseful of Hijras who lived nearby. My acquaintance, I'll call her Anne, spoke fluent Tamil, English, and Kannada. She had a Masters degree in engineering and had only recently undergone sex reassignment surgery. In fact she was still recovering when I met her, a little unsteady on her feet but in good spirits. Because she lived alone in Bangalore and had nowhere else to stay while recovering from surgery, she had spent time in this house of Hijras while convalescing. She was not part of their network of kinship but she was part of their social network. The hijras in the house had taken care of her during that time, and Anne described them as her friends even though she made clear to me that she was not a Hijra, but a transgender and transsexual woman.

At the house—which was not too far away from Orion mall—we all sat around the room and chatted. The hijras who lived in the house were much

less formally educated than Anne, and they earned money through collecting on the street and some did (or had done) sex work. Most only spoke Tamil and so I relied on Anne to translate their conversation for me. At one point we were talking about shopping and I asked if they had ever been turned away from malls like Orion? That is, had they ever been stopped from entering the mall by the security guards? Anne didn't even translate my question to the others before answering on their behalf: "Oh no, that kind of thing has never happened," she said.

"That's interesting," I responded but I wanted to know more. "Do you mind asking everyone else just to be sure?" She looked at me somewhat doubtful, but asked the five or six hijra women who lived in the house if they had, in fact, ever been turned away from entering a mall. They all immediately nodded in affirmation. This had most definitely happened to all of them. In that moment I was not very surprised—after all I had seen the security guards police anyone who did not look "middle-class enough" to be a customer (whatever that meant), even though I knew most of the security guards were themselves far from middle class. Anne, however, was really surprised. She seemed genuinely caught off guard that her experience—she had never been stopped or questioned—was so different from that of the women who had taken care of her post surgery. That moment drew attention, she later said to me, to how her education and relative class status meant that she was able to pass as a woman in a way that many of these other (transgender) women were not.

When I pushed further, and asked why, specifically, they had been turned away Anne translated one response as: "They say we must look

‘decent’ in order to be allowed in.” This notion of decency as a prerequisite for admittance to a space of consumption resonated embodied identities of gender and sexual dissidence. For one, I knew it was in keeping with what I observed about the crowds that socialized at Orion mall, where decency could easily gloss being a good consumer with Rupees to spend. But more than that, I had heard the same word, “decency” used to index desirability and gender transgression in another context. It was while talking to the man who organized the Saturday night gay parties I opened with. What was it about “decency” that arose in both places, I wondered? How does the mall regulate decency (through allowing or denying admission) but also produce it—through the very products it markets and sells as tools for fashioning a decent and respectable self? Could I think about the gay parties in a similar fashion? Indeed, wasn’t access to the mall and the consumer goods attainable there itself a precondition for admittance to parties?

For the gay men who attended these professionally organized parties—like the one in Indiranagar that opened this section— it was precisely their *visibility* as men, as trendy and hip young professionals, that legitimated their “decency” and, in turn, eased their movement through the city and. This sense of decency didn’t just refer to their class respectability; it emphasized how one’s class and consumer position, when coupled with normative masculine gender presentation could render dissident sexuality *invisible*. This was something also occasionally afforded to Ann because the clothes she wore and the social and economic class of her friends many of whom she explained she knew from her engineering program, masked her transgender identity. However, the same was never afforded to the hijra

women whom we spoke with that day. Instead, they were always first marked by the visibility of their gender dissidence and, in turn, by the accompanying presumption of their sexual dissidence as well. Both of these things, it should be clear, were compounded with and complicated by markers of social and economic class that are difficult to pinpoint but are nonetheless materially significant for understanding how identity different factors work together.

I will go into more detail below, but suffice it to say these hijra women could almost certainly neither afford entry into these gay parties, nor, because of their class and gender position, would they have been granted entry if had they tried. The parties simply weren't for them. Like the children in *Kaaka Muttai*, money alone was not sufficient to gain entry into normative spaces of consumer capitalism like parties, malls, or a pizza joint. Masculine looking gay men who could afford to pay, on the other hand, were welcomed into to the party space as cosmopolitan urban citizens, their sexual dissidence seemingly materially insignificant in light of their ability to pay for the privilege of a party. Except that it was a *gay* party, after all, and so their sexuality was exactly that made them desirable to party organizers: as long as it wasn't too obvious, of course.

Indeed, however stigmatized homosexuality continued to be across the urban landscape of Bangalore, the security of their middle or upper class position meant that attending a "gay party" did not, for the most part anyway, put them at risk of appearing out of place in a neighborhood like Indiranagar. That gay men who regularly attended such parties seemed confident to do so illustrates how the spatial quality of class relations can render (homo)sexuality *invisible*, or at least secondary to socio-economic position.

During the two years of my fieldwork in Bangalore (2015 and 2016), such parties were organized by the only professional gay party business in the city. Other organizers had been active in the past but were no longer in business during this period. To learn more about the business side of the parties I occasionally attended, I had asked Jay, the owner of the party business, to have coffee and talk. And so I found myself sitting across the table from Jay on the outdoor patio of an international coffee shop chain. He had chosen the location because it was near his gym and had arrived to our meeting directly from working out, still dressed in gym pants and a tight orange t-shirt no doubt chosen to show off his toned and tattooed biceps.

As we chatted, a young boy climbed onto the railing that distinguished the patio from the street. He was trying to sell us *mallige*, the garlands of jasmine flowers that women often put into their hair in South India. “No girlfriend, no boyfriend, what to do,” Jay said, spreading his hands with his palms upward to indicate to the boy that he would not buy the flowers. The boy instantly knew he was not going to make a sale and so he changed tactic—asking for 99 rupees to buy a Paneer puff from the coffee shop instead. Jay magnanimously pulled out a 100-rupee note and, handing it over, told the kid to go buy what he wanted. The boy excitedly took the money, ran to the door of the shop and opened it gingerly, turning around to wave the note to his friends. I couldn’t help but wonder if, like *Kaaka Muttai*, He would be turned away, but the place was busy and there was no security guard so he entered successfully. Jay, meanwhile, paused our conversation and turned around in his seat to watch the boy order the Paneer Puff from the counter. Whether to make sure the boy used the money as he said he would or because Jay wanted

me to watch him watching the boy, I don't know.

Now I don't want to dismiss the generosity of Jay's action, but I also understood his performance of generosity to be at least partly for my benefit. After all, Jay's parties were known for their cover charge (300 Rupees/or about \$5 USD in 2015 and 2016). The amount was significant but less than the 1,000 Rs. I had to pay as a male guest at a straight party I attend with female friends. They were also known for their strict rules against "CD" or cross-dressing, rules which had the effect of excluding transgender and other gender non-conforming people. He even issued bright pink plastic membership cards to regular partygoers who fit the image he wanted to project, the brand he wanted to build.

When I asked Jay about who was the ideal person to attend his party he explained that he wanted to attract a "good crowd," people who he described as "decent" and "classy." Jay countered the "decent" men he wanted to attract to the "cheap" people who sometimes tried to attend his parties but to whom he refused entry. If Jay's use of "decent" served as a gloss for the confluence of masculine gender presentation and willingness to participate in the party as a space of consumer capitalism (that is, to spend money there), then "cheap" also took on multiple meanings.

On the one hand, both Jay and his venue partner wanted to attract a crowd that would spend money on alcohol and thereby turn a profit for both businesses. Venues, he explained, expect a revenue of 1 lakh Rupees (1,00,000 Rs/or about \$1,500 USD) on any given Saturday, though whether this amount was on top of or including his share of the profits was unclear. According to Jay reaching this sum was a challenge because "community members," as he

described the men who attend his parties, too often drink at home before going out and therefore are less lucrative customers. Presumably by saying so he was making an implicit comparison between the gay men he targeted people who attended other parties organized by other businesses for straight people. This was one of the ways in which he explained and contextualized “cheap,” and therefore why he did not want cheap gay men who would come to the party and not spend more money once there. Gay men, or “community members” did not spend enough money to be a desirable part of Jay’s brand, even though his brand and business was hosting gay parties.

Except obviously Jay *did* want gay men to attend his parties: he had built his reputation and his business on throwing specifically gay parties, after all. Yet he explained that he only wanted men whom he called the “good crowd”—who were “decent” not “cheap.” In addition to these adjectives serving as indicators of someone’s ability and willingness to spend money at his parties, they also glossed Jay’s desire for masculine looking and acting men with gym-toned bodies like his own. In other words, “cheap” was not just about how much someone did or did not spend, it was about bodies that cheapened the value of his business’s brand as a place to find sexy, masculine men. Indeed, every week I would get an notice of the upcoming party in What’s App. The image would almost certainly include a gym-toned, often shirtless, and usually white man. Conversely, “cross-dressers”, any gender non-conforming person, or overly effeminate men were “cheap” because Jay saw their presence as devaluing the erotic masculine image he had worked hard to create. According to Jay’s logic, the brand image he sought to cultivate and his on bodily image were inseparable from one another.

If normative masculinity was “decent” then for Jay effeminacy was a self evident marker of lower class status. In his telling effeminate men were “cheap” in every sense of the word. They didn’t spend as much money on drinks and they presented themselves in ways considered undesirable by his more lucrative straight-looking/acting clientele. He complained about how their stereotypically dramatic behavior was problematic to his business relationships, with venues fearing being labeled as gay places. Indeed, I heard that one popular and central location where I knew he had hosted parties in the past had stopped allowing Jay’s business to rent out the venue because the place had become too associated with being a “gay place” by the broader public and lost other business as a result. When I asked Jay about this he confirmed the story, blaming his loss of that venue specifically on the presence of “cheap” effeminate men.

By asserting that effeminate men were “cheap” in these multiple senses, Jay couched what I understood to be trans-phobic comments within a language of value and economic rationality. In his words he wasn’t discriminating, he was simply making calculations about who to include or exclude from parties simply on the basis of what was good for his business’s bottom line. Decisions like not allowing “cross-dressing” were based on the rules of particular venues not a reflection of his own prejudice, Jay explained.

However, by using an economic, “what’s good for business” rationale in order to justify exclusionary practices, Jay ignored the how a similar logic of class-based social exclusion plays out across multiple geographies in Bangalore. In other words, the exclusion of hijra women from entering malls and the exclusion of men who failed to fit Jay’s masculine standards of sex

appeal both produce a confluence between good consumers and normative versions of gender, sexuality, and class. And in both cases norms were figured through a language of “decency.” Xavier, a Bangalore-based writer, artist, and self-described queer person with a gender non-conforming sense of style who had no desire to attend Jay’s parties, explained to me how the ripple effects from Jay’s own calculations of “decency” and “cheapness” had in turn shaped the gay aesthetics among the city’s sexually dissident community.

Years ago he met a *firang* (foreign) man, Xavier explained, a man who taught him about going to the gym and bodywork and building muscle and the version of gay masculinity that arises from that aesthetic. Xavier, it turned out, had known Jay a long time. As Jay began to build muscle and take on the appearance and persona of a masculine stereotype of gay male desirability, he increasingly emphasized a similar aesthetic among the people who attended his parties. What Xavier told me resonated in my own conversation with Jay who talked about building *his* brand as the result of the labor he put into his own body work and the “decent” guys he attracted to his parties. Whatever gay men did *inside* the party, on the street these men looked just like all the others wearing skinny jeans and smoking cigarettes on a Saturday night.

Inside the party, however, this alleged fixity of the gender binary Jay so strongly emphasized in his business model was significantly more complicated. In his work on dance and performance among gay South Asian men in Bangalore and Chicago, including at the parties I reference, Kareem Khubchandani shows how gay men embodied Bollywood screen divas Madhuri Dixit and Sridevi when they danced. His work draws attention to the ways men physically snaked their way across the temporary dance floor

(Khubchandani 2016), riffing on a vocabulary of feminine gender performance drawn directly from Bollywood and from regional Indian cinema. As Khubchandani shows, gay men may have used spaces like Jay's parties to trouble binary notions of gender, but the ability to perform some level of "decency"—that is, of normative masculinity still served as a precondition for whatever forms of gender transgression they took pleasure from on the dance floor. And just as tracing Jay's masculine aesthetic highlights, gay parties as syncretic sites of pleasure always existed within an urban, cosmopolitan, and globalized geography of gay identity and desire (Benedicto, 2014, Manalansan 2003).

Khubchandani's account of "gestures [that] bring queerness into visibility through a sincere execution of anachronistic, animalistic, vulgar, foreign dance" (Khubchandani 2016, 83) may at first seem highly contradictory to the normative disciplining of both bodies and space Jay glossed with the word "decent." But the condition of possibility for men to dance with each other is their access to sites where parties are located in the first place. That is, for men them to become temporarily visible to one another *as gay men* in the space of the makeshift club they must safely middle class and masculine outside of it. They must appear as if they belong in fashionable and trendy neighborhoods like Indiranagar. And in order to do so they must have access to shopping malls and other sites of consumer capitalism through which to fashion their bodies as properly classed and gendered in the first place.

For their homosexuality, their sexual dissidence, to be visible to each other it must to remain *invisible* to the wider world. If the hijra women who

were turned away from the shopping mall are an example of how class, gender, and sexual dissidence get read together as indecent, then Jay and the men who attend his parties are an example of how middle and upper class status gets read alongside male privilege to render them “decent” people whose sexual dissident is made otherwise invisible. Thus I emphasize how both the spatial and temporal specificity of “gay” parties are constitutive of the locations where they happen.

Chapter Three: Love

SCENE: A bamboo grove in Bangalore's Cubbon Park. The clusters of bamboo there are so big that people cannot see around them, so high that they shade the open, dusty ground below. The bamboo has been there a long time: stalks so thick that many people have, over the years, carved their names into them. Some of the names are even encircled with hearts, perhaps a sign of young lovers meeting behind the thickets for a moment away from many inquisitive eyes in the city. In fact, on any given day young men and women can be seen in this secluded spot talking, holding hands, and kissing. All seemingly innocent acts, perhaps, but in a society where arranged marriages continue to be prevalent, and where similar caste, class, ethnicity, and religion (to say nothing of heterosexuality) continue to be markers of compatibility for family-approved couplings, such clandestine meetings enact their own form of sexual dissidence.

It turns out the bamboo grove also has a different, more dissident, and altogether less visible history, too. Stories circulate about men meeting other men in its twilight shadows, about them having sexual encounters with one

another in the park, shielded from sight the same way the young straight couples are. While I personally never witnessed this use of the place, I heard about it from people who had experienced it first hand and from those for whom stories of this real (rather than virtual) cruising formed part of the collective and nostalgic imagination of Bangalore's past.

These days the park also hosts a weekly gay running club, and early one Sunday morning I found myself jogging alongside several other running enthusiasts who recounted having recently seen two men engaged in oral sex behind one of the park's bamboo thickets. Perhaps, I thought, the reason I had never witnessed this use of the park was because I rarely visited around dusk or after dark. However, my jogging partners explained their sighting had happened in broad daylight! Cubbon Park, it seems, continues to be a site for enacting many different forms of sexual dissidence, if one knows when and where and how to look.

For the scene I'm setting, however, the Bamboo Grove appeared very different from its usual sparsely populated state. For one, there was a colorful carpet laid underneath one of the thickets, and there were plastic flowers strung above it to create the illusion of a fairy bower. A man played the violin, and several other people (the actors) wearing brightly colored costumes with dark, kohl-lined eyes, milled around the makeshift stage. Then people (the audience) started to gather in the clearing, approaching from all sides. First twenty, then thirty, then a hundred, then several hundred. Kids sat cross-legged on the ground, their parents standing behind. Young adults took selfies to document their outing. And just like that the grove began to overflow with

people who even climbed into the surrounding trees, sitting on their lower and sturdier branches to get a clear view of the “stage.”

They were there to watch a free, open-air performance of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in February 2016. By the show’s four o’clock start time, over 1,000 people had gathered. Without microphones or any technology to amplify their voices, the actors prepared to shout at the top of their lungs.

CHARACTERS: Shakespeare’s original version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* tells the story of two sets of intertwined lovers and is set in ancient Athens. Hermia is betrothed to Demetrius but is in love with Lysander. Meanwhile Hermia’s best friend Helena is desperately in love with Demetrius who spurned her when he agreed with Hermia’s father, Egeus, to marry Hermia instead. Refusing to bend to Egeus’ will, Hermia and Lysander elope to the forest. But Demetrius pursues them and Helena follows suit, determined to make Demetrius love her again. As if this wasn’t complicated enough, in the haste of their midnight flight the four humans stumble into the middle of a feud between Oberon, the King, and Titania, the Queen, of fairies.

Meanwhile Oberon’s knavish sidekick Puck makes a mess of human emotions, mistakenly casting spells that cause both Lysander and Demetrius to fall in love with Helena, leading to a raucous brawl between the “lovers” as the four human characters are commonly glossed. In the secondary plot, a roving group of “mechanicals” happen to be in the same woods rehearsing their own play. Puck famously turns the leader of that group, Nick Bottom, into an ass so that Tatiana will fall in love with a forest animal. These misalignments of affection—both human and fairy— lead to lots chaos and

laughter until finally Puck finds everyone asleep and undoes his magic so that when each wakes the enchantments are reversed and the lovers are reunited with the original objects of their affection—Titania with Oberon, Lysander with Hermia, and Helena with Demetrius. The night is remembered only as a midsummer night's dream.

Our play offered a different take on Shakespeare's beloved comedy of love gone awry. The lovers' plight is comedic because of the misalignment between lover and beloved. To riff on the theoretical language I employ throughout this dissertation, it works because the dissidence/dissonance between affection and sexual energy propels both the narrative. In turn, everyone lives happily ever after at the end of the play because this dissidence/dissonance is resolved into a harmony of alignment. The script we performed was a much abridged version—cut to run about 45 minutes—and was adapted by Danish Sheikh, a good friend of mine, a lawyer working at ALF at the time, and a burgeoning playwright, teacher, and fanatical lover of Shakespeare. Danish is also a gay man and was inspired to adapt the play after watching the 2009 American movie musical *Were the World Mine* about a high school Shakespeare production where Puck's magical flower turns everyone, including the school jocks, gay. With the movie as his inspiration, Danish wanted to use *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to explore the pleasures and challenges of what he calls "queer love," and to perform in a public setting in Bangalore so that it might be freely accessible and promote "queer" visibility. Doing so, however, first involved making some key changes to Shakespeare's classic characters.

Similar to the original, our version of the play opened with Egeus giving his blessing to Demetrius for the betrothal of his daughter Hermia. Little did he know, however, that Hermia is really in love with Lysa (who is Lysander transformed into a woman). Because their same-sex love is forbidden, the two decide to run away, but not before Hermia confides the plan to her best friend Halen (who is Helena transformed into a man, played by yours truly). Halen, it turns out, is in love with Demetrius who now spurns his former gay romance in order to enter into a socially sanctioned straight marriage with Hermia. Everyone runs off into the forest and collides with the fairies. Yet Danish's gender switches mean that when Puck enchants Lysa she falls in love with Halen, leading to what looks like a "correct" – that is straight— pairing but which is, of course, all wrong within the world of the play. Similar antics ensue and in the end the two male characters—Halen and Demetrius—and the two female characters—Hermia and Lysa—end up together. Same-sex love prevails; all else is but a dream.

I got involved with this play because I knew Danish and some of the other actors socially, and was inspired after I attended an earlier production of *The Merchant of Venice*. When they asked me if I would like to join, I was delighted, and rehearsing and performing with our motley crew of amateur actors dubbed "The Bardolators" is my happiest memory from my time in Bangalore. We would meet early in the morning, just after dawn, when the park was still mostly empty except for a few roving Chaiwallahs who eagerly sold us small cups of sweet tea from their thermoses. The dogs that made the park their home woke up eagerly awaiting our affection and our breakfast crumbs. Over the course of a couple months we got used to rehearsing in the

bamboo grove of Cubbon Park, the same place where we would eventually perform. And because we did so almost daily without any onlookers, none of us could have imagined the audience of more than 1,000 people who showed up for our third and final performance that Sunday afternoon.

The massive audience seemed to be the confluence of several factors, along with a lot of luck and that strange magic the Internet has to make things go viral. For one, there was a street fair on MG Road the same day—similar to the one on nearby Commercial Street put on by the public-private partnership, the Happy Feet initiative. That event meant that a lot of people were in the vicinity already. Another reason for the crowd was that the public Facebook event announcing the play had somehow been shared by people we didn't know and were not even virtually connected with: in fact by the Saturday before our performance over 10,000 people had marked themselves as “interested” in the event! In turn, the performance came to the attention of several English language newspapers, each of which did write-ups both before and after the show, with the ones beforehand most likely increasing our audience size even further. There was even a news channel with a camera crew that filmed us!

All of these forms of (unexpected) publicity have something else in common: that is, the simultaneous visible presence of people like ourselves in the bamboo grove was correlated with the absence of others. For example, while Cubbon Park is free to enter and the event was literally open to everyone—we did not even have a proper stage, or seating, or any way to manage the crowd—those who showed up to watch our performance were, unsurprisingly, all marked by their middle-class status. Or perhaps attending

a Shakespearean performance in the park was itself a way of inhabiting the city that rendered the audience as middle-class. Either way, and although we were using Shakespeare to make sexual dissidence visible in Bangalore, our presence no doubt served to displace others from the bamboo grove. These others included young straight couples who had nowhere else to be alone, or the men who might have otherwise met up for sexual encounters there, or hijras, kothis, and other gender and sexually dissident people who relied on public places like the bamboo grove for intimacy, to do sex work, etc.

The centrality of same-sex couplings in our version of the play staked a claim to the rightful place of sexual dissidence in Cubbon Park, serving to articulate the park within a dissident urban geography of the city in a highly visible way. At the same time, the performance connected the characters' sexual dissidence with their capacity to love, and doing so reinforced a version of sexual dissidence predicated on our class-based occupation of Bangalore's public space. Indeed, the centrality of love to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* story is precisely what renders the same-sex relationships between characters appealing to a general audience.

The play may have served to articulate sexual dissidence—by bringing it into language and by locating it in Cubbon Park—but its recourse to the normalizing (if not normative) importance of love, along with the fact that we were performing Shakespeare and therefore representing high culture, education, and middle and upper class status to many Indians, meant no one questioned, criticized, or at all challenged the “queer” premise of the play. Instead, post-performance, many parents approached us with their kids who

wanted to meet us, thanking the entire cast for providing this kind of free entertainment for their families.

To paraphrase another famous Shakespearean character, when it comes to representing same-sex or “queer love,” perhaps the play really is the thing. After all, love is a notoriously difficult object to capture ethnographically since it can describe so many different feelings and kinds of relations. Even focusing on romantic love requires understanding how the meaning of love is always historically and contextually specific (Lindholm 2006). By paying attention to the ways in which sexually dissident people use “queer love” to claim visibility in Bangalore, love itself becomes a form urban articulation. Counter to processes of domestication, which seek to limit access to urban space by bringing the logic of the private sphere into the public, “queer love” serves as a dissident articulation that increases public visibility for ways of living that have traditionally be relegated to private spaces and spheres. That is, “queer love” brings together the concepts of sexual dissidence and urban articulation in order to produce a geography that connects the two.

But love, it turns out, is never quite so free as this imaginary would lead us to believe. For even when claims to “queer love” seek to visibilize sexual dissidence, they do so by framing love as a world-organizing concept that is imagined to be unfettered, universal, and apolitical. In this chapter I draw on ethnographic moments in which sexually dissident people engaged with the concept of love at different moments and in different ways across Bangalore’s urban landscape. The stories show how the concept of love, despite its seeming power to make the dissident palatable, is still contingent, specific, and suffused with politics. Making love an object of anthropological study

means paying sustained attention to love's status both as an emotion *and* as an affect. It means asking what happens when different approaches to "queer love" inflect love's social, political, and economic place in Bangalore's urban geography and in the lives of its sexually dissident citizens.

A Midsummer Night's Dream may not have put love itself on display in Cubbon Park— the play was just acting, after all— but the centrality of love to the performance rendered the concept of love materially significant for articulating the park's place in Bangalore's urban geography. Moreover, the love in the play was figured as "queer love," and the visible presence of dissidence transformed the urban sites in which it was articulated. Love, here, was an affective relation enacted through a series of intersubjective relations between persons: in this case between the actors by means of the script, and between the actors and the audience by means of the performance. Finally, the play visibilized queer love in order to articulate a dissident from of the city, but its highly classed associations mean that its vision of love remained accessible only to those who already have access to love as a world-organizing concept.

Love Articulates (Urban) Worlds

Not only is love central to the plot of many Shakespearean plays— including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, probably most famously, *Romeo and Juliet*— it is also at the center of almost every Bollywood movie made. As the ubiquity of big-screen romance illustrates, love is not just an individual emotion, it is also a key organizing affect within Indian society and particularly for the middle-class consumer-citizens, and especially women,

who are targets of such cultural production (Dwyer 2000; Mankekar 1999). When middle-class Indians go to multiplexes to watch movies about love and marriage, or when they gather to see Shakespeare performed in Cubbon Park, the prevalence of love reveals its ability to articulate common experiences of urban life within these shared urban spaces. And yet many of the other factors that shape urban life and urban space— gender, class, caste, and sexuality chief among them—are always compounded with love to shape social, political, and economic worlds articulated in and through it. In other words, there is no unfettered love, and when it is inflected by these other categories of experience it challenges the normative regimes of heterosexual privilege around which both narratives of love and urban life are otherwise organized.

During the highly visible performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* love came into focus as an expression of sexual dissidence precisely because the play joined “love” with “sexuality” in order to present a public vision of what the organizers called “queer love.” At the same time that this “queer love” was capacious and welcoming of difference, it remained tethered to particular experiences of class and gender. Love, therefore, is a means of resisting the domestication of urban space and of articulating sexual dissidence. As an ethnographic category of practice with political potential, however, it still has its limits.

In anthropological scholarship there are two overarching approaches scholars have used for locating love as a useful category of disciplinary analysis. The first is an analytical focus on love as emotion. In this framework, the study of cross-cultural emotions acknowledges their fundamentally socially constructed nature rather than seeing them as biologically based

universal human responses (Averill 1980). This is not to say, of course, that anthropologists dismiss any biological framework for what get experienced as emotional responses— it is just that the study of things like cortisol, dopamine, or serotonin remain in the domain of clinical psychology and neuroscience. Instead, anthropologists are concerned with the culturally located ways in which people come to ascribe emotional meaning to their experiences. This view of emotions is a way of understanding shared experiences and values that exceed individual psychology.

Historically, anthropological studies of emotion sought to understand them through the study of culturally located symbolic systems (Douglas 2002 [1966], Geertz 1973, Turner 1995 [1966]). In turn, emotions were a lived effect of these symbolic systems. Language is the primary cultural system through which symbolic anthropologists understood emotions to be a set of shared cultural meanings. Yet more recent work on emotions challenges the idea by focusing on the discursive circulation of emotion, as well as on the semantic forms it takes, one can necessarily understand individual experiences (Beatty 2014, 2019). Instead, emotions offer a way of understanding the politics of everyday social life (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990).

My ethnographic engagement builds on scholarly attention to the emotional qualities of love by paying close attention to the ways in which individual experience is narrated and understood. However, even in the case of life history interviews where life people told me about past experiences of love, their stories were never just about them. Instead, individual narratives are also always already culturally located, and what counts as love in them

reveals the shared frameworks of meaning through which lives come to make sense, which again is what Jackson refers to as “lifeworlds” (Jackson 2011).

The second approach to the study of love is to frame it as an affect. If love as an emotion is about locating it in language and the ways in which common language circulate to form shared meanings, then love as an affect is about shared feelings that exceed language, that are impossible to pin down. Indeed, “much [affect theory] implicitly positions itself in distinction to earlier work on emotion, which it imagines as overly focused on language and linguistically coded meanings rather than either the body or the inchoate” (2017, 187). Affect, on the other hand is notoriously difficult to locate because it is rooted in movement, in connection, in shared experience, and shared feeling (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, Massumi 2002).

I understand affect to be intersubjective in two senses. First, affect is formed through intersubjective encounters between persons with each other and between people and their environments. Second, affect is also the “stuff” of intersubjective encounter—like breathing the same air, it describes the feelings people share, feelings which circulate outside of language as a common descriptive vocabulary. Because of this shared quality affect also has the chance to, well, *affect* change in the world. As affect Love—and in the example of *A Midsummer Nights Dream* “queer love”—has the ability to rearticulate connections between people. But this expansive, and it must be said elusive, conception of love only has force because of a culturally specific, shared emotional vocabulary of love.

But how does this work within my ethnographic example of the play? For example, when Lysa says to Hermia “the course of true love never

did run smooth,” the audience laughed not just because the line is famous, but because its meaning was collectively understood. Perhaps many people in the audience, too, had experienced the ups and downs of love. Maybe not in the same-sex configuration, but they could still recognize a common human experience. In this way, the “love” in the play wasn’t just an emotion the actors were performing; it was also a consciously cultivated and shared affective state. It was the buzz in the air of Cubbon Park when so many people gathered for the performance; it was the rush of energy the actors got before shouting lines and exaggerating movements for so many people to watch. In turn, both the audience and the actors *felt it*, and their shared feelings transformed the performance of “queer love” into an affective, dissident force with the power to articulate Bangalore’s urban geography in new ways.

In rest of this chapter love variously comes into focus as both emotion and affect; in both cases the cultivation of “queer love” is an example of dissident urban articulations. That is, attention to how, and when, and where, and by whom love is made to matter shape possibilities of sexual dissidence and in turn shape the city. At the same time, and as a means of articulation, formulations of “queer love” have limits. Sexual dissidents deploy love as a way to visibilize their presence in the city. This works counter to processes of domestication that seek to invisibilize anyone who does not fit the dominant consumer-citizen ideal. But love is not unfettered from the logics and aesthetics of consumer citizenship, and even performances of “queer love” like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, reach limits in their ability to articulate a dissident city with room for all forms of sexual dissidence.

The ethnography in this chapter is divided into three sections that examine the possibilities and tensions of love as a form of dissident urban articulation. In the first I recount two very different political events both of which happened in the same area of Cubbon Park known as the “Queen’s Park.” The first was a “Queer” event organized to commemorate India’s Republic Day. It was held in such a public location in order to claim the rightful place of the sexually dissident population within the city and within a diverse and secular Indian nation-state. The second event was a Valentine’s Day “stroll” organized against the rise in “moral policing” by Hindu right wing political groups (including the the BJP and RSS) and cultural organizations (VHP).

The organizers of the first gathering figured love as a transformative force around which they sought to build a coalitional politics connecting sexually dissident people with other marginalized groups, especially Dalits. In the second, the activists figured love as a unifying force across religion, caste, nation, gender, and other the forms of difference that inflect both sexual dissidence and love. In both cases the participants’ intentional focus on love was framed as a way to rise above partisan politics and bring different groups together with common cause. As the stories show, how effective they were in doing so remains an open question.

In the second section I recount the story of a young gay man’s first experience falling in love with another man when he was a teenager in Bangalore. Telling me his story over coffee on afternoon, Daniel used cinematic tropes from Bollywood film to structure his narrative and, in turn, to retrospectively make sense of his burgeoning sexuality. What was most

striking about Daniel's story was how he drew a hopeful lesson about love out of an otherwise bittersweet memory. Here, love functioned as the emotion through which Daniel organized and made sense of his sexual dissidence.

Then I return to Cubbon Park for the first face-to-face meeting of a group called Priti. Priti, the Kannada word for love, is an online "Queer Dating Platform" started by a resident of Bangalore in early 2016. According to the group's founder, Puran, the goal of Priti is to facilitate meaningful, lasting, and non-judgmental connections— both real and virtual— among "queer" people in Bangalore and across India. Everyone at the event was nervous, especially Puran, who wanted it to be welcoming to people with many different expressions of gender and sexuality. As part of the meet-up, participants told each other love stories.

In the third section I tell the story of yet another Valentine's Day event: this one was a "celebration of love" held at a popular local performance venue. One of the events organized for the day was a "sex toy party" hosted by a Bangalore-based startup company called LoveTreats. In addition to being an online business, LoveTreats often hosted events similar to the party; they also had stalls at several of Bangalore's popular craft fairs and outdoor markets. IN addition to building their brand around love, the company described their merchandise as "sexual wellness products" which was deliberate coded language meant to circumvent anti-obscenity laws.

Why, I ask, was the concept of love central to the founders' vision of empowering sexuality through consumption, so much so that they put it in the company name? Their original target market was professional, middle-class Indian women, but they quickly expanded their product offerings and

marketing strategies in order to reach a broader spectrum of gender and sexual identities. For LoveTreats, love and sexuality came together in the business' embrace of dissident sexuality. Yet given the focus on Indian consumer citizens, was this articulation of love dissident or did it serve to domesticate sexual dissidence within the contemporary social geography of Bangalore?

In all the ethnographic material in this chapter dissident sexuality is made visible through recourse to a universalizing conception of love as something unfettered and available to all regardless of gender, class, caste, or sexuality. But these stories also show how love isn't quite so free or accessible to all. For activists and entrepreneurs, for those looking for love and for those remembering when they found it, love does a lot of work. That is, love is taken up in different ways: to make sense of individual life experiences, to identify like-minded communities, to formulate political projects, and to market consumer goods. Given this range, in what ways does love serve as a world-organizing concept for articulating urban worlds for sexually dissident populations? When does love reach its limit as a dissident concept? Does everyone have access to love as a way to give meaning to the worlds they live in?

Love and Politics

On a crisp January morning in the Queen's Park section of Cubbon Park, a crowd of about 25 people gathered to commemorate India's Republic Day, a national holiday that marks the ratification of the Indian Constitution in 1950. But this was not just any patriotic gathering. For while the group flew

the Indian national flag, with its tri-color panels of saffron, green, and white, they also raised the rainbow flag, a global symbol of sexual diversity and LGBT pride that is often associated with globally circulating over locally specific forms of sexual dissidence in Bangalore. I would go on see this same rainbow flag prominently displayed at other times and places, most notably during Bangalore's annual November Pride March. In the context of Republic day, however, and alongside the Indian national flag, the colorful rainbow banner was intended by the organizers to represent the diversity of "LGBTQ+" and "queer" people—that is, sexual dissidents— as a constitutive part of the Indian nation.

Yet even as the group acknowledged their diverse presence within the Indian nation, the gathering mostly consisted of cisgender, gay-identified men. Arvind Narrain, a prominent lawyer at the Alternative Law Forum (ALF) and a well-known activist in Bangalore's sexually dissident community, was one of those who spoke at the event. That morning Arvind spoke about how the constitution is important for sexually dissident people because they can and should place their hope in it as a formative document that recognizes their rights as Indian citizens. Arvind also used his speech to acknowledge B.M. Ambedkar, the Dalit scholar and activist, caste abolitionist and the principal author of India's Constitution, as an important figurehead for the politics of sexuality. The gathering was, in this sense, not just an acknowledgement of Ambedkar's life and work on the occasion of Republic Day. It also served as a performative claim for making Ambedkar—a founder of the modern Dalit rights movement—into a "queer" figure. According to Arvind this

transposition of Ambedkar made sense because the most important right for sexually dissident queer people was their “right to love.”

That is, Arvind and others who believed in the “right to love” took their inspiration from Ambedkar. In the *Annihilation of Caste*, a text by the Dalit rights activist, caste abolitionist, and principle author of the Indian Constitution B.M. Ambedkar, he advocates for undoing the institution of caste through concerted efforts at caste endogamous marriage and reproduction (Ambedkar 2014). Although Ambedkar’s call was for social and biological reproduction outside the bounds of caste was still heterosexual in its framework, self-avowed “queer activists” like Arvind saw themselves in the imperative to love and to marry outside the logic of Hindu-Brahmical patriarchy.

They understood Ambedkar’s call as not just about Dalits marrying freely, but for everyone to love in ways not socially sanctioned by imperatives of biological and social procreation. This “queer” reading of Ambedkar, Arvind explained to the gathered crowd, illustrated the transformative potential of love to free *any and everyone* from societal constraints. As a result Ambedkar’s historically specific call to center caste-endogamous marriages in his anti-caste politics became a central reason that some sexually dissident people also saw Ambedkar as a founder of their own movement for sexual rights.

At the same time that the group drew connections between dissident sexual rights and anti-caste politics, many of the activists present were cisgender gay men from upper caste backgrounds. As such, their claim to Ambedkar as a political figurehead, no matter how well-intentioned the coalitional political project they envisioned, was understood by Dalit activists

to be yet another instance of the upper-caste appropriation and erasure of a uniquely Dalit political project. This erasure seemed to come about through the group's recourse to a universal concept of love spanning other kinds of difference. How did the concept of love become central to a group of sexually dissident people gathered to commemorate the nation's Republic Day in the first place? As the group went around the gathered circle, each person shared the hope they placed in the constitution, speaking both about political the potential of romantic love as a means of national inclusion, *and* about their love for a (secular) nation, one they hoped would one day recognize and accept their sexual dissidence in return.²²

Because of the growing influence of right-wing groups associated with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in both civic and political life during the period of my fieldwork, activists I met in Bangalore usually spoke about nationalism as an insidious force opposed to human rights and necessarily antithetical to the social and political recognition of sexual dissidents. Yet this event was undoubtedly a nationalist, just secular rather than Hindu nationalist in its relation to the Indian nation state. What's more, the gathering co-inflected the participants' multiple identities— as Indian on the one hand and sexually dissident (i.e., mostly gay, but also lesbian and transgender) on the other.

Participants displayed their investment in secular nationalism through the highly performative character of the event where everyone stood around

²² In the most straightforward sense this referred to the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which prohibited "sex against the order of nature" and during the period of my fieldwork was still in force. The law did not strictly make homosexuality illegal, but it did criminalize non-procreative forms of sex including homosexual sex acts. For others present, the possibility of recognizing sexual dissidence extended to same-sex marriage rights. For others it was about workplace protections, etc.

the Indian flag and each participant spoke about what the Indian constitution meant to them. And while no one gathered that morning explicitly expressed support for the BJP, no one used the platform to openly condemn Prime Minister Modi or the BJP's policies either. Instead, the event was organized around—and infused with— an articulation of love as politically transformative and separate from partisan politics. The commemoration instead served to elevate the Indian Constitution as an aspirational document for the both the politics of low-caste Hindus, of non-Hindu minorities, and of sexually dissident people, whatever their caste, religion or ethnicity. By extension, it performatively claimed B. R. Ambedkar as a central figure in the politics of sexuality.

The Republic day event was not the first place where Arvind had articulated his “queer” politics through the framework of a “Right to Love.” In print, this formulation is most clearly stated in his introduction to the edited volume, *Law Like Love*, (Narrain and Gupta, 2011) where Arvind writes about the commensurability of inter-caste marriages (such as those between Brahmins and Dalits), of inter-religious marriages (such as those between Hindus and Muslims), and same-sex love (between two men or two women, etc). He frames all of these as “queer” relations.

“The Queer struggle...” Narrain writes, “Is as much about the inter-caste couple who want to get married as it is about the persecution of same sex love. What ties the two together is that both are subversive of the ‘order of nature’ as imagined and laid down [in IPC Section 377] in India. Thus a re-imagination of the order of nature as being not only about the prohibition of non-procreative sex but instead about the limits imposed by structures of

caste, class, religion, and community, takes the idea of a queer struggle to a much wider platform” (Narain and Gupta 2011, xxxvi). This emphasizes how a diverse spectrum of sexually dissident practices resists the normative logics of a caste-Hindu social world. He invokes love as something shared across other forms of dissidence. In this formulation, love is a way for both caste and sexual dissidence to transcend those politics, and to articulate with one another in a politics beyond difference.

By framing his political vision around the love, Arvind cultivated a social-justice imaginary that spans a number of different identity based political projects. At the same time, by tying his imaginary to a universalizing notion of love—e.g. where the “Right to Love” is said to eclipse other forms of difference, and where it has the ability to unite otherwise disparate people—the “Right to Love” project assumed love to be a stable category through which to frame politics. However, this view of love as greater than or beyond politics is contrary to viewing love as always already political.

My graduate training in anthropology not only taught me to think critically about love as both emotion and affect, it also gave me the skills to unpack the political stakes of a concept like love precisely because it seems to be outside of politics. The book that transformed my thinking in this way was Elizabeth Povinelli’s *The Empire of Love* (Povinelli, 2006). In it she tells the story of two very different worlds in which she lives and moves, worlds so different that making sense of one in the context of the other requires a radical, even impossible, form of translation. In the first story she writes about a wound on her shoulder that she contracted while living in an Indigenous community in Northern Australia. In that community where skin infections

are endemic, she explains, they become marks of thick networks of sociality: a sign of love written in flesh. However once back in North America her wound no longer signifies her close relationships with the indigenous people she loves, it becomes a danger that must be mitigated through biomedical intervention.

In the second story, Povinelli writes about an alternative community in North America known as the Radical Faeries. These mostly male born persons live outside normative forms of sociality, drawing on different spiritual traditions, genders, and sexual practices in order to create a “queer” community. That is, their social world is both socially and sexually dissident. When Povinelli loses a friend in this community she cannot mourn them within her Indigenous Australian community because the forms of sexual and gender transgression common among Radical Faeries do not make sense there. Again she experiences the challenges of radically translating love across her divergent social worlds.

The claim to a universal “Right to Love” in Bangalore made love appear as something which could articulate otherwise radically divergent social geographies in both the Indian city and nation. But Povinelli’s work provides a caution to such a universalizing impulse: it is a reminder that love, however personal and deeply felt, is also always already politically embedded among people with whom we feel it. Therefore her work draws attention to the profound difficulty of translating emotions like love across culture and language, as well as to the profound affective disjuncture of being unable to express love across the different worlds or geographies that we inhabit.

Moments of disjuncture, she explains, are so profoundly political because they reveal the power of politics to shape something thought to be as fundamentally human as love. She writes, “Love is not merely an interpersonal event, nor is it merely the site at which politics has its effects. *Love is a political event*. It expands humanity, creating the human by exfoliating its social skin...” (Povinelli 2006, 175, emphasis mine). In the margin above this quote in my dog-eared copy of the book I first scribbled in pencil: “nice phrase, but what does it *mean*?” For a long time I was not sure. Indeed, it took the experience of doing fieldwork among Bangalore’s community of sexual dissidents—including cultivating a lot of love for the people I met there—in order to see how my own social skin is also stretched across continents and between cultures.

When Povinelli writes that love “exfoliates the social skin” she means that love reveals the complex layers of sociality—the stuff that goes without saying in one context but can feel foreign in another—even as love continues to work in and on our bodies and lives. This is the awesome power of love, but it is not one that can remove social differences like shedding dead skin cells. In other words it does not mean that there is one real, unified social skin underneath our differences, what the claim of a “Right to Love” seemed to imply. This universal “right,” as Arvind and others articulated it, did not take up the nuances of politics so much as it claimed that love could transcend politics.

Drawing on the work of Povinelli (2006), David Eng (2010), and Lauren Berlant (2011), I assert that the universalizing conception of love promoted at the Republic Day event is both historically contingent, highly

class specific, and therefore ultimately of limited use for building a coalitional politics of dissident sexuality like the one Arvind imagined. What's more, these limitations were particularly the case insofar as the "Right to Love" intersected with the politics of caste, religion, and ethnicity in the contemporary Indian national context, and in Bangalore's urban geography.

Arvind's political conception of love was also on display when a small group of lawyers, academics, artists, and at least one journalist gathered at the Alternative Law Forum (ALF) on Valentine's Day 2016 for a talk titled "What's Constitutional About Love?" The talk came shortly after a meeting of African Students who were facing harassment and racism both in their everyday lives in Bangalore, and as foreign students at colleges and universities in the city. Aside from myself, and a couple of the people who worked at ALF, there was complete turnover between the two meetings. Whatever might be constitutional about love, it seemed, did not extend to the fair treatment of African students. Which is not to say anyone attending the second talk was against the rights of African students, but whatever affective force the intersectional politics of love had to draw people to a talk at a law office, that day it also seemed to have its limits.

The announcement for the event read as follows:

The Supreme Court of India's referral of the Naz Foundation Curative Petition to a Constitution Bench marks the first step in the recognition of a grave injustice [the continued legality of IPC Section 377]. It also inches us closer to the articulation of a *right to love*. This discussion will explore different components of the right to love, and how love might intersect with questions of justice. What might a properly political concept of love look like? How could it draw on, and add value to other constitutional rights articulations? Where do we locate it in the story of the Naz Foundation litigation, and where might we place it in a broader political and philosophical canvas?

Although proponents of this constitutional "Right to Love" evoked the concept in a generic and universalizing sense, when it came to specific examples of this right in practice, they necessarily emphasized certain forms of love over others. Indeed, as one of the organizers explained during the talk, emphasizing the "Right to Love" was clearly meant to differentiate subsequent political claims from any previous constitutional rights activism that had been tied specifically to [dissident] sexuality. For example although the 2009 Naz Judgment²³ never specifically mentioned love, the legal activists who proposed a "Right to Love"—including Arvind Narrain, Lawrence Liang, Danish Sheikh and others—explicitly took Naz as their inspiration (ALF 2009). As someone attending the talk said, when the Supreme Court of India reinstated Section 377 in the 2013 Koushal judgment, it was a "bad day for love."

But what did the continued legality or illegality of IPC Section 377—a law that criminalizes "sex against the order of nature"— basically anything other than penile-vaginal intercourse for the purpose of procreation— have to do with love? Why did legal activists like Arvind and others tie their project of decriminalization of 377 to love, or tie love to the Indian Constitution as a founding document for secular nationalism? Specifically, what did love offer them that a framework of dissident sexuality seemingly did not? For one, sexuality can subdivide the population based on a variety of acts that only certain people do, but in their view love was universal.

²³ The Naz foundation judgement in 2009 before the Delhi High Court temporarily decriminalized IPC Section 377 on the basis of a fundamental right to privacy and autonomy. The decision was later overruled by the Supreme Court of India through the Koushal decision of 2013. This effectively recriminalized Section 377.

Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that a particular conception of love, and of the loving subject, was imagined as universal. That conception presumes love to be an affect of dyadic relations, and that each of the loving subjects in relationship are also individual rights-bearing liberal subjects. In other words, the proposed "Right to Love" accounts for same-sex relationships and for inter-caste marriages, but cannot account for the "love" of Brahmin parents who so want their children to marry within the same caste that they incite acts of violence.

Broadly enough conceptualized, of course, love could describe pretty much *any* strong set of affective relations, but the "Right to Love," with its roots in the Indian Constitution, never stretched this far. This distinction reveals how a particular vision of justice was already implicit in the genealogy of love used here. What kinds of politics come into focus when the love of sexual dissidents looks to the work of Ambedkar for their legitimacy? Is the claim by some queer activists that Ambedkar is a relevant political figurehead for their politics a radical way of thinking across other social differences or simply another appropriation of Dalit politics by elite, high-caste intellectuals?

In her controversial essay "The Doctor and Saint" published as an introduction to the Navayana edition of Ambedkar's speech *The Annihilation of Caste*, popular intellectual and leftist critic Arundhati Roy describes participants in the South African Indian workers' strike (which Gandhi later became involved in) as "they broke caste in the only way it can be broken-- they transgressed caste barriers, got married to each other, made love and had babies" (Roy 2015; 86). Ongoing cases of violence against inter-religious or inter-caste marriages "love" marriages evidence how it is not just politics

but life itself at stake in these cases (Mohan and Harish 2018). Yet how does love as a conceptual category and a descriptor of experience attempt to make commensurate, inter-caste marriages that continue to be met with familial and communal violence, and “queer” or sexually dissident politics as it has emerged in India in the last 20 years?

First, the emphasis that sexually dissident activists place on love should be understood as a strategic decision to move beyond conflating lives organized around sexuality with sexual acts themselves. This was especially important for activists since acts, in isolation, have limited potential for political organizing. As I discussed above, for Arvind Narrain and others, love formed the basis of their universalizing political claims precisely because it rendered the politics of religion, caste, and sexuality mutually intelligible. However it also made these respective political projects secondary to love as an overarching category. Another event held on Valentine’s Day in Cubbon Park in 2015 was organized precisely around love connecting across difference. Whether it served to effectively connect them or form a coalitional politics, however, is another matter.

A Valentine’s Day “Stroll”

It was February 14, 2015 when I arrived at Queen’s Park for a Valentine’s Day “Stroll,” an event that was organized in response to a number of recent instances where couples who were visibly expressing affection across India had been subject to instances of what is known as “moral policing” by right-wing Hindu groups. These groups sought to impose their vision of sexual morality by violently suppressing expressions of intimacy or

affection. The group who organized the Bangalore event was called the “Coalition against (Im)moral Policing” and consisted of journalists, lawyers, academics, and activists. I had attended several of the group’s planning meetings—where different ideas about the event abounded— and so I was intrigued to see what it would be like. The organizers had carefully chosen the immoral part of their name— that is, they were against “*immoral*” and not “moral” policing because they wanted to emphasize that all forms of social policing were wrong and should be resisted, rather than objecting only to some forms of policing (and thus implicitly condoning others).

The Facebook announcement for the event encouraged participants to wear red, so I donned a coral colored shirt I’d recently gotten on sale at Fab India. It was neither very red nor quite pink, and seemed like an appropriate color for the day’s events. When I arrived at the edge of Cubbon Park I found a small group of people gathered on the side of the road. Nearby were a number of regular vendors with carts selling water, fruit, grilled corn, and other snacks. Everyone was milling around chatting, but no one seemed sure of what to do next.

I found a man and a woman who represented one of the city’s sexual minority focused NGOS passing out flyers about the event in English and Kannada. The flyers were for us participants to pass along to the public, and the English flyers were light blue while the Kannada flyers were light pink. Supposedly these colors had simply been chosen for their readability— the thin newsprint came in limited colors, after all— but the association of these two particular colors with male and female binary gender difference made me

wonder whether the “stroll” would serve to reinforce or to undermine gender norms.

Everyone was just milling around waiting for the event to begin in a more organized fashion. Clearly no one was in charge. There were, however, a number of police and almost as many, if not more, journalists as there were participants. In addition to representatives from Bangalore specific publications like the Deccan Herald, there were also representatives from the Associated Press and Al Jazeera. I actively avoided speaking to the journalists, choosing instead to direct attention to my Indian friends and acquaintances. While I stood there trying to avoid being interviewed, someone brought me chai in a tiny plastic cup. I sipped it and chatted with the other participants, people I knew from support group meetings and some I’d met at the Bus Commuters' protest at Majestic the month before. Signs got passed around with slogans in both Kannada and English. The one I got read: "Love is too big for one Religion."

The idea for the event, which I knew already from the planning meetings I’d been to, was to highlight different forms of non-normative love by having representative couples speak with passerby about their love stories and the challenges they faced being in love in India. Those of us who were not part of the representative couples would stand alongside them as a gesture of solidarity and support. First we would gather at Queen’s Park, an area that someone explained was sometimes called “Lover's Lane” and was not far from the bamboo grove where we would later perform *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Then each couple, as well as those supporting them, would break away from the group and walk to nearby places where they could address passerby and

handout flyers—including in the busy shopping areas along MG Road and Brigade Road, and along the densely packed commercial streets of nearby Shivajinagar.

But before the groups could disperse— or even properly organize themselves— things got more complicated. The event’s organizers had made a conscious decision not to take police permission for the event because the lawyers in the group assured everyone that police permission was strictly unnecessary. One of the lawyers present explained that any rally with less than 200 participants did not require a permit, and while the permit threshold number was much lower for a march— just 24 people— the plan was to have groups of no more than ten people walk together. Such a small group, they explained, would not require special permission. It was for this reason that the Coalition decided to call the event a "stroll" rather than a "march." And although this semantic difference did not seem to index any embodied difference in the eventual movement of the groups away from our initial gathering spot, it was meant to signal a different and less political intent should the police make inquiries. It was Valentine’s Day, after all: love and not politics was in the air; we were just taking leisurely strolls together.

Insofar as the term “march” was generally used to describe gatherings that move with from point A to point B with a predetermined purpose—like the annual Pride March, for instance— this was not a march. The group’s intent was not collective movement in which the gathered crowd, by gathering bodies en masse and moving through urban space, laid claim to that space as Judith Butler theorizes her theory of public assembly (Butler 2015). Rather, the intent was precisely *not* to make a claim on the urban geography by

gathering bodies, but to disperse those bodies across the urban landscape. This would result in an affective articulation of love across different urban sites. What's more, the use of "stroll" to describe this embodied difference indexes the change of intent, and is keeping with the ways in which love was seen as political but not partisan by the organizers. Here love was invoked instead of politics, and by calling the event a Valentine's day "stroll" the organizers hoped to circumvent both the issue of police permission, which was unsuccessful as I will explain, and they hoped to evoke a romantic stroll people might take together.

Whether any of this actually happened is debatable, and most of the participants I spoke to during or after the event felt the stroll was highly ineffective. This was at least partly because the police stopped the group from dispersing and walking anywhere at all for over an hour. While the organizers may have been technically correct in asserting they did not need special permission to move in small groups, it turned out they had not even given an intimation to the police that the event was going to take place. This in turn exacerbated police resistance when they saw the event was happening. Someone also explained to me that the police were more cautious because we were handing out flyers, although no one could point to any specific ordinance requiring police permission to distribute printed materials.

Groups affiliated with the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP) in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh had threatened to patrol Indian cities on Valentine's Day with a pandit in tow, saying they would marry on the spot anyone caught holding hands in public. Because of this there was heightened police and media attention to Bangalore's event. Just that morning I'd seen a

meme circulating on Facebook mocking this excessive moral policing by depicting the wedding of a man and his dog after they were caught going for a walk. Therefore, I assumed that the organizers were not caught unaware by the constable's demand that the group's plan to disperse and move from our gathered spot in Cubbon Park first be cleared with the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP).

A woman from the organizing committee who was dressed in a flowing cream-colored kurta with red accents and a bright red dupatta spoke to the ACP at length over the phone. After about an hour we were finally given permission to stroll. By this point, however, the group's energy had decreased considerably, and the stroll became less about engaging people in conversation than just handing out as many of flyers as possible while walking down streets adjacent to Cubbon Park. Since traffic was backed up at the signals as usual, those in my group ran to hand out the papers to pillion motorbike riders or passed them into the open windows of BMTC buses.

By the time it was over, the event hardly resembled the one planned and discussed in Coalition meetings. The original plan was to have an inter-caste couple, a Hindu-Muslim couple, a divorced couple, a gay and/or lesbian couple, and a transgender couple present for the stroll. At the actual event, given the way it was organized, only two couples were visible *as couples*—and both were heterosexual and mixed-race, consisting of Indian women and white men. One was a white American man wearing a red and white striped Fab India kurta with his British Indian wife (they explained to the gathered journalists that they were married) who had their young baby in tow. The other was an Indian woman with her German partner who was very tall,

dressed in a dhoti, and wore a waistcoat (vest) without any shirt underneath. What's more neither of these couples were part of the planned efforts of the Coalition, just people who had seen the Facebook event and decided to attend on their own!

After all the talk about organizing the event to make visible diverse forms of love in urban public space, it struck me that the visions of love and diversity that both these couples represented were highly normative. In both cases they were heterosexual and racialized in a way that simultaneously marked them as different, even as the whiteness of one partner shielded them from the negative effects of racial difference—a situation very different from the African students who organized against violence and daily harassment in Bangalore. Further, the event implicitly elevated the couple form as the most legitimate way to resist moral policing, a move that had its own moralizing effects.

For example, members of the Coalition that planned the event strongly rejected the recent Kiss of Love campaign,²⁴ organized as it was around middle-class people asserting their right to kiss in public in the nearby state of Kerala. "There are more important issues than kissing in public," someone said in a planning meeting, even going so far as to suggest that Kiss of Love participants needed to "get a room." I was, frankly shocked that a group explicitly organized around an expressed belief that all forms of policing

²⁴ Kiss of Love was a social movement started after a straight couple was attacked for public kissing in a Café Coffee Day in Kerala. In response to this event public demonstrations of kissing were held around the country including at a previous Bangalore Pride March. People in Bangalore were divided on whether or not public kissing was an appropriate response to this form of moral policing.

others' expressions of intimacy and sexuality is immoral, would simultaneously dismiss public kissing as a lewd and inappropriate act.

However, kiss of Love was not the only campaign that the “Stroll” organizers dismissed. At about the same time a Bangalore based arts collective called Maraa organized an open-ended storytelling event in another part of the park called "Park Bench Stories." When Maraa's organizers proposed to host a second storytelling session on Valentine's day as their own response to increased incidents of (im)moral policing, members of the coalition expressed their frustration. As one organizer, "Maraa sees love itself as a radical force!" They intended this as a dismissal, meaning that Maraa failed to contextualize love, but “love itself as a radical force” was not that different from their own project. What’s more, it echoed the “Right to Love” by separating love from other political factors. The group calling themselves the Coalition rejected what they called an "exalted" and "apolitical" understanding of love in favor of a love focused on identities most at risk from moral policing. As a result, their event also articulated love as a political force to shape the urban geography without locating love alongside a host of other factors shaping social lives in the city.

One of the Coalition’s primary critiques of both Maraa's "Park Bench Stories" and the Kiss of Love public kissing events was that they were too urban-centric and therefore overly focused on the concerns of middle-class people and spaces, emphasizing the freedom to kiss in a place like Cafe Coffee Day (accessible only to consumer citizens, where in 2015 a coffee averaged 100+ Rs) over more immediate concerns like the safety and security of socially marginalized and sexually dissident people. At the same time,

however, their Valentine's Day "stroll" reproduced the very class-based limitations love that it attempted to resist, highlighting the complexity of love as a force for sexually dissident urban articulation.

One of the ways that the stroll did this was by uncritically conflating love with the couple form. Indeed, the visibility that the coalition's Stroll promoted was, unlike Kiss of Love, not the visibility of an *act* like dissident kissing (indexing love through embodiment and practice), but simply the visibility of two people: a couple. In this formation, couples represented love while sexuality was understood to be a matter of privacy and therefore an inappropriate way to resist (im)moral policing. Never mind that the occlusion of embodied dissident acts (like kissing) was itself a form of moral policing. During the stroll sexual dissidence didn't need to be made visible, since it implicit in the visibility of the couple form itself. The problem with this assumption was that the identities of the visible couples did not index dissident sexuality, but conformed to the forms of heterosexual privilege that already dominated the urban landscape.

As I watched the journalists interact with those of us who had gathered for the event, it was absolutely clear that certain pairings—namely the heterosexual, mixed race pairs where the male partner was white— were immediately more visible *as couples* than anyone else there, whatever our relationships to one another. For example, present was a mother and her adult son. The two were active in sexually dissident events and groups together—for instance she accompanied him to Pride events as a gesture of maternal support. While they might be two people, and therefore strictly speaking a couple, they could never be read as such based on the affective assumptions

about what “love” and “couple” meant in this context. On the other hand, the white American man and the British Indian woman with the baby were instantly (and correctly) read as a couple— especially because their child made publicly visible and socially legitimated their bond.

At both the “Queer” Republic Day commemoration and the Valentine’s Day Stroll organized by the Coalition Against (Im)moral Policing, the concept of “love” was invoked in order to articulate a dissident vision of Bangalore’s urban geography, one that visibilized the place of sexual dissidents within the city’s social landscape. However, in both cases the political potential of love to be an index of dissidence reached its limits. For example, when Arvind Narrain invoked Ambedkar’s concept of “constitutional morality” to bolster the “Right to Love,” he claimed Ambedkar as a figurehead for sexually dissident politics in India. Yet in doing so he also ignored the specificity of Ambedkar as an important figure in the modern Dalit’s rights movement. Similarly, the coalition’s Valentine’s Day Stroll also attempted to present love as an experience held in common across other forms of social difference. The event did so in order to build a coalitional politics of resistance to right-wing Hindu forces that violently oppose public expressions of love and intimacy, dissident or otherwise. Instead, the stroll only managed to visibilize couples that were already legible as such within the context of normative heterosexual privilege.

In both cases, love was offered as a way past divisive politics. Narrain claimed that love could build coalitions and unite people whose lifeworlds and challenges were otherwise very different; the coalition believed that making love visible through the couple form would serve as its own political statement. Yet neither public instantiation of love addressed the constitutively

political nature of love itself. And while neither example sought to domesticate urban space—that is, to limit access to ostensibly public parts of city in the manner of the public-private partnership behind the Happy Feet Initiative—their use of love as an organizing tool ultimately fell short of the dissident work envisioned the concept to do.

Falling in Love, Telling Love Stories

I will now turn to the personal narrative of a young gay man as he recounted to me his experience of falling in love for the first time. It's the story of Daniel, who I met up with at a popular bakery and coffee shop near both our homes. In his mid-20s, Daniel's story took place a decade prior when he was about 16 and when he met an American teenager named Jason. Jason would have been 17 or 18 at the time and was living in Bangalore while working as the choir director for Daniel's Catholic church. As Daniel told it, Jason was so cool that all the young people in the church seemed to have a crush on him, either because he was tall and handsome or, maybe, because he was white and foreign. Anyway, while he was living in Bangalore Jason broke up with his girlfriend back home in America, and when this happened Daniel—who was in the church choir—had already known Jason for some time. The breakup brought them closer together.

Jason started to go over to Daniel's house, just to hang out and watch movies. Although Daniel wasn't "out" to anyone at this point in his life, he explained to me how he already knew he was mostly— no, he clarified, only— attracted to men. One day when they were watching a movie and drinking the

two “shared a moment” together. Jason looked into Daniel’s eyes, there was a lingering awkwardness, neither said anything, and...

As Daniel told me the story over coffee, I could picture the room in darkness, illuminated only by the television’s flickering light, both of them imagining what was going to happen next. But it didn’t go as I expected: they didn’t kiss. That was it. Instead, it was clear from Daniel’s voice, as he told me the story years later, just how badly he had *wanted* to kiss Jason that night. But something had held him back. He explained that he had resisted because it felt like kissing Jason would have been be taking advantage of drunkenness and heartbreak to get something Daniel wanted. After all, he said, Jason had just broken up with his *girlfriend*. And although he was now single it did not mean he was interested in Daniel whose own feelings for Jason, he worried, may have led him to misread the signs.

So nothing happened that night. OK. But shortly afterwards Daniel met up with Jason again and Jason explained that the night they’d spent together had left him thinking about trying new things. Daniel’s heart leapt at this news! It must have meant Jason was thinking about and questioning his sexuality, too, and that there was mutual interest. With this in mind Daniel responded saying, “Yes I would like to try new things, too!”

“Oh,” Jason’s voice wavered, the sexual meaning of Daniel’s response seemingly catching him off guard. “I was...um...talking about changing my field of study to psychology.”

Daniel fumbled, laughed it off. “That’s what I meant too, duh!” It wasn’t. “See, I’m thinking about going into design.” At the time they were both English majors.

The narrative structure of this awkward but endearing scene again played out like any number of Bollywood romances set in a college. I thought of my personal favorite, *Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na*. As Daniel continued his story, it was a little unclear what happened next: a musical interlude, perhaps? The two seemed to drift apart as their close friendship was replaced by the awkwardness of what had clearly been left unsaid between them. Jason changed his major to psychology; Daniel pursued design. Time went by and things continued like this until one day Jason asked Daniel outright: “Are you in love with me?”

Daniel tried to avoid the question: “Hahaha.” Awkward pause. “What makes you say that?”

“I’m a psychology major,” Jason told him, “I know how to read people.”

Daniel finally explained that yes was gay, though whether he confessed his love he did not say. Then, in yet another unexpected twist to his story, one I didn’t see coming, Jason responded by saying that he was gay too and even had a boyfriend now.

“A boyfriend!” Daniel exclaimed to me, still incredulous at this ironic and unwelcome piece of news, even a decade later. “But I thought you liked girls?!”

“It just...happened,” Jason explained.

Now this might have been the end of the story, but, like most Bollywood movies, it was just the intermission. In the next act Jason’s boyfriend turned out to be secretly attracted to Daniel, though it wasn’t clear to me how Daniel came to know about this, or what exactly happened. Subplot. In any case, everything eventually fell apart and Jason and his

boyfriend broke up. By then Daniel saw little of Jason and tried to put the whole thing behind him.

Still, when the time came for Jason to return to the United States he asked Daniel to meet him at the church in the middle of the night before he left India. They met outside the church where Jason was waiting at midnight with a book wrapped up as a gift for Daniel.

“Please don’t look at it until I’ve gone,” he said. “See, I was with this other guy but I wanted to be with you. I so wish you had kissed me at your house that night.”

Daniel told me how much he wished he had, too. But, of course, he hadn’t. And so the two parted ways: Daniel went back home and Jason returned to America.

Of course as soon as Daniel was home he opened the book. It was full of ticket stubs from movies they’d been to together, of journal entries about Daniel. Both the existence of the book, and fact Jason had given it as a gift suggested to Daniel that Jason had in fact harbored feelings—dare he say love?!— for him all along, feelings Daniel had missed out on reciprocating. It was a loss he could never get back, he explained to me. But it was also his first experience of love.

This is such a great story I thought, both when I first heard it and again when I rediscovered it in the process of writing this dissertation, buried in my ethnographic field notes where I had scribbled, “This is so cinematic!” in the margin. And, indeed, the story is really cinematic. There’s the sitcom like moment when Daniel tried to confess his feelings and Jason responds by saying that he was talking about something else altogether. Then there’s the

midnight rendezvous at the church where, I imagine, night cast its deep shadows over the two figures as they sat on a back pew, with icons of Jesus, Mary, and the saints watching over them. While my mental composition of the scenes is no doubt partly the result of my own cinematic imagination, the movie-like structure of the narrative is ultimately an effect of Daniel's telling. In this case, life reflected the conventions of cinematic storytelling as much as filmmakers look to life for the frames of their stories (Pandian 2015, Narayan 2004). The aesthetic and narrative conventions of cinema also shape articulations of life in the city.

The cinematic quality of Daniel's story reminded me of a conversation I had with Xavier, whose trenchant observations on life, love, and sexual dissidence I return to at various points in the dissertation. Xavier compared current ideas about love and romance among gay men to embodiments of love by Hindi film heroines of the 1940s. I nodded along though I did not fully understand the reference. He explained that many people (in the context of our conversation I understood this to mostly mean gay men) in their early to mid 20s will say to him, "I've been in X relationships," and the number will be very high, say ten. Now ten relationships is a lot if you're in your mid-20s, Xavier said, but they mean every guy they have ever been out with!

This kind of "relationship" might last only three days, but according to Xavier a young person would still describe this using the word "relationship." He went on to explain how many young men at the Bangalore Queer Film Festival approached him to say "I love you" after a performance when he wore a Sari.

“What do you mean, you love me” Xavier would respond, “You don’t even know me?!”

What’s more, he said, some of these same guys asked if he loved them too. Others even wanted to know why he didn’t say “I love you” back.

“Because I don’t know you so how can I love you,” he said. “What does love mean? If three days of dating can be called a relationship, and people can talk about loving a person they have never spent time with but only seen in a performance, then what kind of love is even being talked about?”

Xavier’s provocative questions led me to question the love in Daniel’s story, moving though it may have been. If Xavier was right and an overblown, emotional sense of love amongst gay men can be traced through the influence of Bollywood, then perhaps Daniel’s story was just that— fiction. There was no way for me to verify his story, to confirm how true it was, or to tell how closely events actually unfolded to the way Daniel conveyed them over coffee. Perhaps no American named Jason had ever directed the choir at Daniel’s church. Or maybe he did, but the attraction was only one-sided. Maybe there was no confessional journal passed along under the cover of night, only the longed-for hope of reciprocal feelings. Maybe their attraction lasted only as long as the look they shared, but Daniel still called it love. Or maybe all the things had happened exactly as Daniel said they had.

As an anthropologist the truth I’ve been taught to look for is less one with a capital “T” and more an emotional and affective small ‘t’ truth, one that resonates in terms of feeling and experience. Regardless of what actually happened, the way Daniel narrated love in his story conveyed something deep and emotionally resonant about his experience as a young man who was

emotionally and physically attracted to other men but not yet “out”—to use his language— in regards to his sexuality. Given this, what can the story’s emotional truth reveal about how love articulates—as in, makes meaningful— life as a gay man in Bangalore? After all, Daniel’s story is not just limited to Daniel’s individual experience; it is productive for thinking about how (here, romantic) love is a world-organizing concept within a his particular gender and class-based experience of urban life. .

By this I mean that Daniel’s story— both the substance of it as well as *how* he told it—illustrates love as a powerful and transformative force in his particular life and in the social world at large. To put it differently, Daniel’s experience of love helped him make sense of who he was, yes, but it also shaped the dissident meaning of Bangalore’s urban geography in ways that are unique to Daniel’s experience of the city. For example, his church was an important site that he associated with coming to terms with his sexuality. His Bangalore was full of love, yes, but it was also infused with the cinematic vocabulary of Bollywood movies, and with the movement of people and ideas, emotions and affects as they crossed the city and the world.

Love Across the Real and the Virtual

On a warm and sunny Sunday afternoon in mid-July I made my way to Cubbon Park for an in-person meeting for members of Priti, a queer dating group that utilizes Facebook as a platform for “queer” people across spectrums of sexual and gender dissidence to post profiles in order to connect with one another. Disaffected by the prevalence of Grindr, a hook-up oriented app only targeting gay men, Puran founded Priti in early 2016. Interactions on

Grindr felt impersonal and shallow, Puran explained to me when I asked about the impetus behind Priti. On Grindr it is common for men to post lists of their physical preferences, both in terms of body type, ethnic background, the sexual acts they will or will not do, etc. It was the overwhelming transactional quality of these online interactions that Puran blamed for why apps like Grindr never seemed to lead to deeper emotional connections. After talking a number of friends who had similar experiences Puran had the idea of setting up a database where “queer” people could post their profiles and potentially connect with other people looking for real relationships, for love.

Although the group had already been around online for a few months, the meet-up in Cubbon Park was the first time that members had ever gathered together in person. And while the virtual group was open to people from all parts of India and even to those living abroad, the physical meet-up was limited to those living in Bangalore for obvious reasons. I was not looking to meet anyone through Priti, but Puran assured me I was still welcome to attend the meet-up. As always on a sunny Sunday afternoon, the park was crowded with people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Facebook announcement for the Priti event just said Cubbon Park but not where specifically the group would meet. When I got to the park I called one of the organizers to ask. Unsure of how to describe the location, he passed the phone to Puran. “We’re in the Queen’s Park about halfway between the two statues,” Puran explained. Remnants of the city’s colonial past, Puran was referring to the statue of Queen Victoria that stands at one end of the easternmost part of the park and the statue of Edward VII that delineates its other end. When I got to the spot Puran had described, I recognized the group

immediately by the bright pink balloons tied to Puran's backpack. Soon a number of other people had arrived and we organized ourselves into a seated circle in the middle of the grass.

I could tell Puran was nervous about how the event would go, whether people would have a good time, if anyone would make lasting connections, or find the possibility of love. The meet-up involved a series of organized activities intended to help us get to know each other, although most of the people— about thirty at the group's largest point—already knew each other from the support group. Like so many other gatherings I attended, despite the fact that it was specifically advertised as "queer," and thereby open to everyone, most of those in attendance were cisgender gay men. When dissident virtual spaces were articulated with real spaces in Bangalore, the privilege of access to virtual worlds often translated into a lack of diversity in person. This was true even among those I count as sexually dissident.

To break the ice, the Priti organizers—Puran and friends—passed out "chits"²⁵ with short prompts describing different kinds of love stories. The idea of the game was to draw chits and take turns telling love stories as a way to know one another. My chit said "silly love" and, as usual, my mind went blank as soon as I read it. When I hesitated someone else who I knew to be an outgoing type from our interactions at support group meetings volunteered to tell a silly story in my place. He explained how he had once had a crush on another guy in his college hostel, and so he would always leave the door to his own room open so that he could see whenever his crush came back from the shower, or if he was out in the hall making a phone call.

²⁵ Chit is a term in Indian English used to describe small pieces of paper.

Anyway, at some point the guy he was crushing on fell sick and so he went and got medicine, checking in on him regularly to make sure he was doing well. After his crush recovered the two continued to share the hostel but nothing further developed between them. At the end of the year he got a note from his crush thanking him and comparing him to a brother. Recognition of love, perhaps, but not the sort he had intended!

On hearing this sweet story, my first thought was that it wasn't silly at all. Similar to Daniel's story, the context of the telling was as important for understanding it as the narrative content. It was a story about love and misrecognition, after all, emotions which in retrospect felt silly to the person telling it. At some level, he explained, *of course* he had known his actions would not be reciprocated in the manner he wished. Though I couldn't figure out how exactly, he insisted that he knew the guy who had been his crush was straight.

Moreover, the best way I can describe it is that when he tried to express his feelings of romantic love the affect had translated but the emotion had not: the result was that, for his crush, it was fraternal love. Still, sharing this story amongst a group of sexually dissident people who had gathered together looking for love, and sharing it as an example of a "silly love" story, both subtly and beautifully illustrated the challenges of finding love within a social geography structured around heterosexual norms.

Simply put, in both Daniel's story and this one the experience of love made the narrators vulnerable. Love meant opening up to the possibility that someone would not feel the same way. What's more, this vulnerability was exacerbated by both men's sexual dissidence. In neither story were they sure

that the boy they'd fallen in love with would be able to love them back. For Daniel it turned out that his love had been mutual, but it was still a missed opportunity because he held himself back from expressing his feelings. The "silly love" hinged on a mistranslation: the love was recognized, but as something else altogether. As I sat cross-legged on the grass watching Puran's nervous face and listening to this story, I suspected that the fear of unrequited love, of dissident love seeming silly, was ever-present for many of the people who made Priti profiles or who had shown up for the meeting. If the political visions of love in the first part of this chapter were grounded in the belief that love could overcome other social differences and thereby connect diverse people, then these personal narratives point to the emotional vulnerability of love.

Love Sells Sex (Toys)

It's mid-afternoon on Valentine's Day 2016, and I'm helping my friends Ute and Bala set up their store's product table for the evening's sex toy party at a popular bar, restaurant, and performance venue in the Indiranagar neighborhood of Bangalore. They are the founders of LoveTreats.in, an online business that sells "sexual wellness" products, or "intimate treats" as they call them. Each of these euphemisms is a way to make their main products—sex toys—more marketable to the well-off Indians who form their customer base. To prepare for the party we string fairy lights with white and pink crepe paper flowers over the table, fan out an array of lacy masks, carefully stack jars of strawberry and chocolate flavored body paint, and arrange feathered handcuffs in a small bowl. Another bowl is already filled with lipstick-shaped

vibrators.

As we work a few people are already stretched out on floor cushions watching a lunchtime screening of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. It's probably the quietest showing of this movie I've ever witnessed: no one is dressed in campy costumes singing along, just watching intently. At the other end of the room, near the bar and the wall of windows that overlook the street below, there are a few people eating lunch. I unpack boxes full of postcards with phrases like "Cupid is Stupid" and "Some people are worth melting for." In the evening there will be a drag performance and gender-neutral latin dance instruction. The day was not just organized around heterosexual romantic love but same-sex love and sexuality as well.

LoveTreats' participation contributed to the diversity of the day's programming. Ute is German and Bala is Indian, from Tamil Nadu, and the two—who are both business and romantic partners—first met at the same party where I met both of them in January 2015. When I first arrived in Bangalore Ute had been working on a fair-trade project for with several Indian companies. At the time was living downstairs from the serviced apartment that was my initial accommodation. Because I'd known them both for so long, I had watched LoveTreats grow from an idea thrown out over drinks to a successful start-up business.

I was happy to help my friends out with their Valentine's Day event, but I was a little nervous about the task I'd been given. My job was to explain how some of the male toys worked, though truth be told I was unsure about how to describe using a "masturbatory aid" in clear but not explicit language. I was even more nervous about how to do so to a room full of Indian men *and*

women. Luckily Ute was expert at putting the slightly nervous collection of about 15-20 people who showed up for the “party” at ease.

I glanced around the circle of those gathered for the “party” and made a quick mental note of how many men and women were there— more women than men by half. Yet even as I sorted those around me into binary gender categories I made a second note: that no one present challenged the multiple and quotidian criteria by which I sorted people into binary genders in the first place.

Ute passed around chits and pens and asked everyone to write down the age at which they had first kissed someone. No names on the chits, totally anonymous, we all scribbled our numbers, folded them, and put into a bowl. She then proceeded to take them out and read out loud numbers ranging from adolescence to mid-twenties. There was laughter and an unclenching of tension around the circle as people realized that their experience— or lack thereof— was not so unusual after all.

Next we passed around one of the small lipstick vibrators from the bowl along with a diamond shaped vibrating “pebble.” Ute and one of her female Indian friends explained to the group how the two women’s toys worked. Then it was my turn to hold up a small, stretchy silicone ball and explain to everyone how to use it. I stretched it over my middle and index fingers and then passed it around so that everyone else could touch it. People laughed when they felt the squishy silicone between their fingers. They shuddered slightly when they touched the smooth surface of the diamond vibrator and it began to purr and sputter across their palms.

Why did a popular restaurant, bar, and performance venue decide to

partner with Lovetreats in order to put together their Valentine's Day party? Just like the name LoveTreats itself, the confluence of sexuality and love that cohere in the sex toy party illustrates how love articulates sexuality—and sexual dissidence—for middle-class consumer-citizens in Bangalore. Although the business promoted an empowered version of sexuality that explicitly included “queer” people and events like the Valentine's Day party, the price point of their products necessarily meant not everyone was included. As both a product of Bangalore's start-up culture and as a business marketing products to the consumer-citizens that make up the city's middle class, LoveTreats can be seen as domesticating the city because the nature of their the business limits its vision of sexual dissidence to class-specific, consumer spaces. At the same time, LoveTreats' model for embracing sexual dissidence undoubtedly articulates consumer spaces, almost all of which are organized around presumptive heterosexuality, into a dissident version of the city where people can talk about sexuality more freely and openly. It was a sex toy party where a group of strangers passed around vibrators and masturbators, after all! When it comes to processes of urban articulation, the line between domestication and dissidence was not always so clear.

After the party I sat down with Ute and Bala to discuss their business in more detail. “Who did you initially imagine as the LoveTreats customer and how has that customer changed over time,” I asked?

“At the beginning we focused on women because,” Ute explained, “That was the target group who had not been served at all.”

“[Specifically] women in an urban environment, with a certain education and a certain earning capacity,” Bala continued. “Now it's just, like, we have

35-40% rural orders,” which was something they did not expect and which they still couldn’t quite account for. They had expected that the social geography of sexuality to included urban India, but had not anticipated the ways in which virtual spaces, in this case of commerce, articulated the urban and rural as well.

What Ute and Bala called the “initial organic growth” of LoveTreats consisted of a number of promotional activities in Bangalore, and so they anticipated growth in the Bangalore market right away. For the most part this was what happened. What all their early customers had in common was that they were well educated with what Bala called “a good disposable income.” Bala calculated their average customer to make about 6 lakhs, or a little over \$9,000 USD, per year in 2016. This was much more than a comfortable salary, implied high levels of education and work in a skilled professional industry. By contrast the caretaker of a friends’ apartment building made just 1.2 lakhs per year (~12k per month). The average income level and inferred class position of LoveTreats customers, therefore, firmly located them as the prototypical consumer-citizens that so much of contemporary Bangalore was designed for and organized around.

Related but not reducible to income was the assumption that customers shared a set of globally circulating cultural references. For example their target customers were people who watched shows like “Sex and the City” even as they enjoyed the latest Bollywood blockbuster, the kind of people who traveled abroad and may have even visited sex toy stores in other countries. Locating the consumer citizen both globally and locally highlights the deep imbrication of places like Bangalore and India within global capitalist

imaginations (Grewal 2005, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Even keeping this in mind, they emphasized, theirs was still a mid-range customer, and they expressed doubt about claims from their online competitors that they regularly sold products to Bollywood celebrities.

“That really, really luxury segment, really rich people are the ones who would just travel to Paris to buy lingerie,” Ute said, implying that marketing to this group would only serve to scare away the customers they actually wanted.

I also wanted to know how LoveTreats had become a regular feature at “queer” events like the Valentine’s Day party, given that straight women were their first target market. Ute said, “We didn’t even plan on reaching out to that community.”

Bala added, “We wanted to be inclusive [from the beginning]. First we started with banners that just had heterosexual couples, and we got feedback from the LGBT community that said hey, you’re just being heteronormative you’re not being inclusive!” He laughed. “Fair point! So then we removed that.”

At the time I spoke with them only a couple of men had openly remarked on what LoveTreats could offer to gay men. For instance, someone ordered a dildo and then sent a message that said, “I’m a gay man, I’m so happy!” But mostly they had no way of knowing how toys would be used or the sexual orientation of the person who eventually used them. Ute explained, “Most toys can be used by anyone. Vibrators may be designed with the female anatomy in mind, but in the end a lot of them can also be used by men.”

The form of toys in other words, does not discriminate on the basis of sexuality; however, their price tag does. Especially because many of their

products are German-made, the sex toys sold by LoveTreats' are not accessible to everyone. Their use of love was also an effect of customers' imagined class position. For example, one of Lovetreats' competitors is a website called *Besharam*, which is a Hindi word meaning "shameless." According to Ute and Bala that business sells sex toys at a lower price point and without the same attention towards the comfort of their customers around issues of sexuality.²⁶ *Besharam*, on the other hand, assumes that if someone is shopping online for sex toys they are already shameless. To be clear: Ute and Bala were not advocating for shame but acknowledging that the reality of shame can act as a barrier to access for many Indians.

Indeed, shame and shamelessness offer an axis along which to understand the articulation of sexual dissidence within the urban geography. In an essay advocating for the embrace of shamelessness as a tool of empowerment for sexually dissident people, Nithin Manayath (2015) reclaims the term in relation to debates over same-sex marriage in India. In some ways Manayath's provocation to embrace *besharam* is commensurable to the work it does as the name for a sex toy website. In other important ways, however, it is different. For Manayath's it is shamelessness that articulates a sexually dissident geography that exceeds the boundaries of erotic (private) and non-erotic (public) spheres. He writes that, "It is in these shameless acts [inter-caste marriages, hijras on the street, gay and lesbian visibility, etc.] which violate demarcations between erotic and non-erotic sociality, that we wish to popular our idea of critical queerness and see them as holding the potential

²⁶ For LoveTreats this included discrete packaging that made no mention of the item inside the box.

for erotic expression without shame, as well as for a politics that can be built around such an expression” (Manayath 2015, 275-76). While sex toys visibilize the erotic in materially significant ways, they circulate as commodities. They offer erotic pleasure but only as a product of consumer capitalism. Therefore, while buying and using sex toys may be a shameless act of self-love, they only articulate sexual dissidence for Bangalore’s consumer citizens and as such cannot be the basis for organizing a shameless, transformative politics of dissident sexuality.

In this chapter I explored the ways that love, both as an emotion and as an affect, is deployed in Bangalore to articulated different visions of sexual dissidence within the urban geography. Yet the many love is used to organize political projects, shape personal stories, and facilitate consumer experiences fail to acknowledge how the concept of love itself is constitutively political.

As each ethnographic example in this chapter illustrates, an exalted vision of love does not necessarily allow everyone into the worlds it organizes. What’s more, each ethnographic example of love relies on other forms of identity, especially those of social and economic class, in order to make sense. At the end of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Hermia and Lysa, Demetrius and Halen awake from their collective dream of love gone awry. They embraced and exited the stage hand-in-hand and to thunderous applause. Through their applause the audience celebrated a particular vision of love: one that is imperfect, is full of ups and downs, but that still somehow manages to survive. In contrast to the dominant forms of heterosexual love that are ubiquitous in Bangalore—in the plot of Bollywood movies, in advertisements, etc.—the play was a dissident, shameless, and highly visible paean to “queer love.” But the

plays vision of love was also politically situated, tethered to other forms of social difference including class, caste, and gender. The political project of sexual dissidence must expand its scope in order to articulate a dissident city where everyone can live, love, and thrive.

Intertext Three- Kinship of the Law and IPC Section 377

Baring monsoon downpours at the Alternative Law Forum, or ALF as it is more commonly known, lunch is always eaten on the terrace next to the kitchen. A mango tree hangs over one side of the building and a mature rubber tree shades the other, its massive vines falling down to the ground, rooting in the earth below. On the terrace outside the kitchen was a plastic table and chair set where office staff, clients, and friends regularly gathered to talk and eat. One day when I was working out of the office I went upstairs for lunch only to notice a new round table instead of the old rectangular one.

I asked Darshana, a lawyer and activist who worked at ALF at the time, about this change and she explained that the collective needed a new table and chose to get a round one so that everyone could eat at the same time without anyone being at the “head” of the table. In other words, like so many aspects of the way the ALF space was organized, a seemingly straightforward choice of table was in fact a conscious decision made to reinforce ALF’s place as an alternative family in addition to an alternative practice of law.

Over the two years I spent in Bangalore, the folks at ALF became some of my closest friends in the city. In addition to serving as the office from which I regularly worked, ALF was an important site for what Geertz called “deep hanging out” because it articulated so many different communities of sexual dissidents in relation to one another. People whose respective social geographies of Bangalore were otherwise divergent all seemed to end up passing through ALF at some point. This was because of the central role that law plays in the lives of sexual dissidents in India, and because of the central role of ALF as the main progressive legal space in Bangalore.

While there were many ways that the law shaped the lives of sexual dissidents, the most visible and prominent during the period of my fieldwork was the continued existence of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The law criminalizing “sex against the order of nature”—so not homosexuality per se but strictly speaking any non-procreative sex—was first struck down by the Delhi High Court in the historic *Naz Foundation vs. Government of NCT of India* (2009). The Supreme Court reinstated the law in 2013 when it overruled the lower court’s decision, stating that it was unconstitutional to strike down a law that only negatively affected a “miniscule minority.” In 2015 and 2016 Section 377 was still “on the books” and many people within that “miniscule minority”—a sexually dissident population that is anything but insignificant and invisible—were actively protesting and organizing to overturn 377 (Puri 2016).

This included lawyers at ALF who, along with other legal activists around the country argued the case for decriminalization. These efforts came to fruition when, on September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court of India ruled IPC

Section 377 illegal and permanently struck down the colonial era law in the Johar v. Union of India decision. By this point I was back in the United States where I joyfully watched online videos featuring many people I knew dancing in celebration. I read comments on the support group's Facebook group from people who now vowed to "come out" in their workplaces and other social settings. Because their sex was no longer illegal, such posts read, they could live confidentially in who they were.

Given the historic nature of the decriminalization of Section 377, and given the important of ALF as a research site that articulated my own dissident geography of Bangalore, it may seem odd that 377 does not play a larger role in this dissertation. This was, in the end, a strategic choice. Earlier outlines of the dissertation included an entire chapter devoted to "The Social Life of Section 377." Ethnographic material for that chapter included the story of the first time I attended one of Jay's parties with friends. That night a fight broke out, and we quickly left by the back stairwell. As we waited on the street for a cab to take us home, we saw the police raid the party.

Suddenly the dangers of 377 felt very real. And although the police were only there to arrest the brawler and not to charge everyone under 377, the sight of police raiding a gay party had lingering effects. The next morning over breakfast one of the friends I'd been with recounted to the group a nightmare he had about being arrested and charged under Section 377 because he had attended the gay party. In the dream his parents saw him on television being handcuffed and taken away by the police. This outed him as gay even as it shamed the family by visibilizing him as a criminal. Of course none of this actually happened, but it highlights the far-reaching psychic

effects of Section 377. While plenty of gay men still express anxiety over publicly acknowledging their sexuality, decriminalization has gone a long way to allaying fears of arrest and prosecution.

The ghost chapter also included other examples of how Section 377 haunted public expressions of sexuality, including comments by Bollywood star Karan Johar about how, in his 2017 memoir he could not say “those words” lest he be subject to legal persecution (Johar and Saxena 2017). It also included the infamous story of a “Bangalore Techie” whose wife had secretly recorded his sexual liaisons with other men in their home, and how she used the covert footage to bring a case against him under Section 377, a very public, if rare example of the law being used in this manner. Stories like the one about the techie circulated amongst many of the sexually dissident people I knew—particularly among gay men—and, in turn, the existence of 377 affected both theirs and their family’s acceptance of their sexuality.

However, for many of the transgender people I met, and especially for hijras, Section 377 was only one of many ways that police harassed and exerted authority over them. Their public visibility as sexual and gender dissidents meant that, while in theory Section 377 affected everyone, in practice the burden of the law fell most heavily on those whose dissidence intersected with class, caste and other compounding forms of social marginalization. Without follow-up research it is difficult to know if decriminalization of 377 has led to overall improvements in daily life for Bangalore’s hijras.

Ultimately the unequal distribution of risk associated with the law was the main reason I chose not to make Section 377 a central focus of my

dissertation, instead allowing it to come up only when it arose in the course of my ethnographic encounters. Given what I knew about the ongoing appeals case lawyers at ALF, I expected and hoped that the law would be overturned before I finished writing my dissertation; and it was. Given this outcome, I did not want readers to view all of my material as therefore historic and outdated merely because this one, albeit significant, aspect had so drastically changed.

This is because, while 377 might no longer be part of Indian law, the ways in which the visibility of sexual dissidence accrues to some people and places more than others has not substantively changed. In turn, this visibility of sexual dissidence has real effects on the articulation of the city's social geography for people in different social locations. What's more, the risks associated with being visible as a sexual and gender dissident persists for people who, like hijras and transgender men especially, continue to be marginalized in other ways.

What's more, and given the unequal distribution of visibility around sexual dissidence, there was hardly consensus among people I knew in Bangalore that Section 377 should be the central focus for political work around sexuality. It certainly was not the only work of lawyers at ALF targeted at sexually dissident populations. For example, Bangalore Pride planning meetings also happened at the ALF office, despite the fact that they were organized by the Coalition for Sexual Minority Rights (CSMR), which is an umbrella group that includes a number of different organizations working with sexually dissident populations, and of which ALF is but one.

Certainly one reason that ALF— which describes itself as a collective of human rights lawyers, researchers, and activists— played this role as a key

node within the sexually dissident geography of the city was its open and welcoming reputation, but it was also the way in which ALF connected issues of sexuality to other issues of social marginalization. It was the political possibility of thinking about dissidence as connected but not limited to sexuality. For example, during the period of my fieldwork lawyers at ALF represented diverse clients on a pro bono basis. Many of the cases they took—including divorce, sexual harassment, the rights of street vendors and sex workers, legal aid to transgender people trying to change their government documents to match their gender, etc.—were cases that other law firms either would not take or for which clients could not afford their services.

What's more, it was intersecting forms of both privilege and marginalization that shaped whether or not law was articulated as a site of social change (as it was for those gathered at the Republic Day commemoration), or as punitive and dangerous (as it was for many sex workers who faced constant harassment). For example, comfortably middle class gay men sometimes showed up at ALF seeking legal documentation of their unmarried status so that they could travel abroad and marry men in countries where same-sex marriage is legal. The privileges manifest in their encounters with the law are many—first the gender privilege to choose whom to marry even if family don't approve, second the financial ability to travel, and third the social position to view the law as something they could either choose to engage with (or not).

ALF connected different people and emplaced the law as a discourse through which sexual dissidence was both experienced and understood. And if it seems like my references to ALF slip between referring to the people who

made up the collective and to the building itself this is no mistake. Instead it is an example of urban articulation's material effects, and evidence of why discourse also matters for material and embodied geographies of the city. For this reason, and towards the end of my time in Bangalore, I decided that I wanted to learn more about the history of ALF: both about organization the office space itself. For instance, I already knew that the building—a block away from the Shivajinagar bus station and near Cubbon Park and MG Road—had once been the childhood home of one of the organization's founders, Arvind Narrain. Sometimes people who had known the building when it was the Narrain residence exclaim their surprise at that what was once a bedroom was now an office and so on. To learn more about these changes I spoke with Arvind and with two other founding members, Lawrence Liang and Aarti Mundukur.

They explained to me how, when they founded ALF as a group of young lawyers, it was located in a rented office nearby. That space was organized off a long central hallway where each office opened into the hallway but none were visible or connected to each other. This meant that although everyone was in the same space working, not much collaboration happened. When Arvind's parents moved, they gave him the chance to convert the house into an office and so the building was redesigned with the work of ALF in mind. This meant opening up the main library so that all the surrounding offices were connected both to the central room and to each other.

One effect of this spatial organization, Arvind explained, was to have people regularly move through one another's offices and to collaborate more on the work they were doing. I spent enough time in ALF to know that this

was how things worked there. Like the design of the space, and even the rooftop table, the physical space emplaced the law within the city's sexually dissident geography by giving groups not otherwise represented a place to meet, organize, and have unscripted encounters. In turn, connection to and through the law forged bonds of kinship for those who moved through it. Like any family, the all folks at ALF sometimes had good days and bad days. But overall it was a unique space and supportive space in Bangalore, one that articulated the city's geography of sexual difference in significant ways that visibilized unseen communities across many urban sites.

Chapter Four: Politics

It is twilight and, like most days, Bangalore's streets are cloaked in a smoggy haze. Still, people gather on the steps of a municipal building known as Town Hall. It is a frequent site for political protests, and on this particular day each person on the steps holds a candle ensconced in a paper cup. In front of the group buses vie with a tangle of motorbikes for road space as they all attempt to cross the busy intersection. In front of them car horns continue to blare incessantly.

This candlelight vigil was to commemorate International Transgender Day of Remembrance; a day observed annually around the world on November 20th to mark the loss of transgender lives both locally and globally.²⁷ The event was organized by the Coalition for Sexual Minority Rights (CSMR), an umbrella organization that plans and administers Pride

²⁷ The International Transgender Day of Remembrance was started by a transgender activist named Gwendolyn Ann Smith in 1999 (<https://www.glaad.org/tdor>). It began in the United States and is now commemorated in India and across the world, which can be understood as a sign of the spread of transgender as an identity category through which to make sense of a range of different sexual and gender embodiments, and as an effect of this category to organized very different and contextually specific forms of marginalization and discrimination under the category of transgender. (For more on transgender see, Valentine 2007)

events in Bangalore. The vigil was also one of a series of Pride events. It took place on Friday evening and the annual Pride march culminated on the same steps around midday Sunday, just two days after the vigil. That is, only two days apart over a thousand people from across the spectrum of genders and sexualities would dance, sing, and shout in the same place where so few gathered to remember lost transgender lives. Dressed in a rainbow of bright colors, the pride marchers would hold up signs calling for the recognition of diverse sexualities and genders, for an end to IPC Section 377. They would decry the ruling BJP government's regressive social policies, among other things.

At the vigil, however, there were only about 50 people huddled together in the gathering dark. The group included a number of self-described activists: some for whom sexuality was only one of the issues important to them, others for whom sexuality was central to their lives and politics. Among those who gathered were a few people identifying themselves as transgender men and women, including Akkai Padmashali, a transgender woman who is a spokesperson for transgender and sexual minority rights in Bangalore. Overall, however, there were more cisgender gay men present and a smaller number of lesbian women. I was there too, both in my capacity as a gay man and as an ethnographer sexual dissidence in Bangalore.

Despite the CSMR organizers' emphasis—across planning meetings, email announcements, and on the event's Facebook page— that it was open to everyone, and despite being a vigil to remember transgender victims of violence and discrimination, people who might be considered transgender were mostly absent. This would also be the case at Sunday's Pride march, and

in both cases the cisgender organizers of the Pride complained loudly about the lack of overall transgender participation. After all, they said, the events were open and accessible to all members of “the community.”

Their singular use of *community* to describe the breadth of sexually dissident people in the city masked a number of omissions when it came down to whose bodies were visibly dissident at Pride events. It was easy to invoke a singular cohesive community, but much more difficult it seemed, to bring one together at the same time and in the same urban space. Using community as a gloss flattened the multiplicity of different communities (plural) whose lived experiences of sexuality only reflected one aspect of the multiple and complex social factors that articulated their respective lives in Bangalore.²⁸ What’s more, parsing out the different communities in sexually dissident community risks reducing people to binary oppositions—for instance, the simplification that organizers are “middle class” while transgender people are “working class.” This collapsing of gender, sexuality, and class difference was a common trope among activists and NGOs in Bangalore.

What does class mean when it is refracted through the experiences of dissident sexuality and gender within the context of Bangalore? What about

²⁸ What I’m referring to here is intersectionality by another name. I hesitate to label it intersectionality not because the term itself was absent in Bangalore—indeed, it seemed to be increasingly common—but because intersectionality has a specific history related to the multiple forms of oppression facing Black women in the United States (Crenshaw 1991) and because the term was mostly not used by the people whose lifeworlds I am referencing here (i.e., transgender people). Both knowledge about and the use of intersectionality in Bangalore during my fieldwork more often signaled participation in global conversations about sexuality and gender than in local embodiments of the same. This division was particularly clear among the people who showed up for the International transgender day of remembrance.

the truism that political organizers were largely “English speaking” while most of the transgender community is “non-English speaking.” While in my experience this was a mostly accurate descriptor of the languages different groups used in their interactions, simply using language as a marker of difference fails to contextualize how language, class, gender and sexuality all worked together to articulate lived experiences of community and politics, to say nothing of caste and ethnicity.

The CSMR organizers of the Transgender Remembrance Vigil framed the gathering as a putting aside of other social differences in order to support the “community members” who bear the brunt of so much violence and discrimination. Why, then, did the lack of participation by transgender people either at this vigil or at other Pride events get construed as a problem by the largely cisgender coterie of organizers in charge of CSMR? Even within the “community” framework that such events claimed to represent, it seemed as though differences of experience—and very real differences of experience at that—often mattered more than belonging to the “community.”

Back to the vigil: It turned out the event had no organized message, no collective moment of silence, nothing to bring attendees together and emphasize their common cause or purpose. In fact, aside from a banner strung between two pillars showing images of transgender people in Bangalore who had died during the past year, and aside from the candles we held, nothing really *happened* at the vigil. No one spoke, or read out names, or led us in chants, or did any other form of performative commemoration. In fact, several people in attendance—but not the organizers— afterwards said they thought

it would have been nice to sit around and share stories about the people we were commemorating.

Instead, we just stood with our candles until one of the organizers indicated it was time to go. Flames were blown out and everything was put away; we dispersed. Just like that the vigil was over and participants were left wondering what sort of event they had attended. On the one hand the Town Hall location chosen by CSMR organizers suggested a political dimension to the event, but it had included no explicit demands or statements—like an end to violence against transgender people, for instance. After having sat in on four months of CSMR planning meetings, I couldn't help but feel that the lead up, including extensive planning discussions about the participation of different people and groups in the event, had been more substantive in their engagement with the politics of transgender lives in Bangalore than the vigil itself.

On the hand planning meetings included spirited debate about the presence or absence of different members of “the community,” and in doing so those that participated acknowledged the community was not as united as it sounded. On the other than, events like the International Transgender Day of Remembrance were administered in such a way that they appeared to speak on behalf of the imagined cohesive community. This chapter is explores protest and other forms of political gathering as a form of dissident urban articulation that joins different sexualities with each other, and gives sexuality common cause with other lived forms of social difference.

Politics is a messy and complicated concept, referring simultaneously to state governance and to representations of people in all parts of life across

Bangalore's urban landscape. In some sense, every part of this dissertation has been about politics broadly conceived, but in this chapter I specifically refer politics as a contestation over who counts, how much, and who gets to decide (Nelson 2015). Like the tensions around who was either present or absent at the Transgender day of Remembrance, I use several different ethnographic stories to examine how sexually dissident people gather together with common cause and what are the effects of doing so.

I draw on ethnographic stories in which sexuality comes to matter—and sometimes when it seems like it doesn't—in order to think through and about the political as a category of dissident urban articulation. Each story shows how the category of politics focuses attention on the particularities of experience, and how those experiences are situated within unequal fields of power. Each story also illustrates the limits of thinking about experiences of dissidence—sexual or otherwise—as somehow separate from one another. Therefore, I use ethnography to address what is distinct and important about political formulations, *and* to examine possible connections elided by a focus on particularity and parsability.

As the laments of CSMR organizers at the Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil illustrate, it is common to hear invocations of community on the part of sexually dissident people in Bangalore. This use of community serves as a gloss for the panoply of dissident orientations, genders, desires, and practices made to coexist under the singular linguistic sign. In life, if not always in speech, there were many different *communities* (pl.), and many different experiences that shape political claims. However, there is also potential in the singular form of the noun community. In Kannada, as in Hindi,

samudaya is the word that is translated into English as “community.” In both Indian languages it derives from Sanskrit and literally means a “collection” or the “whole of something.”

In order to engage with multiple invocations of “community” among sexual dissidents—rendered as they are across languages—I explore what a politics of community, rather than one foregrounded on the differences between identities, might like in Bangalore. In doing so I take inspiration from Muñoz’s conception of queer futurity as a utopic project, one that “insist[s] on the essential need for an understanding of queer collectivity” (Muñoz 2009, 11). In other words, I suggest that “community” in Bangalore is—or at least has the potential to be—a form of “queer collectivity.”

This possibility of inclusive community politics is not intended to minimize the real and important differences existing both within and beyond sexually dissident groups in Bangalore. Indeed, as hopeful examples from Bangalore show, any viable politics of community must cultivate visibility—if not to everyone then at least to each other—in order to build and sustain connections across lived forms of social difference. Such political connections are what articulate dissident urban geographies not only between sexualities but beyond sexuality as well.

Stories about Sexuality and Politics in Bangalore

Examples of sexually dissident politics include protests against the continued existence of IPC Sec 377; discussion about the proposed Transgender Rights Bill; the removal of the word “eunuch” from Karnataka Police Act 36A in 2016; even a “Queer Hugs” day when queer-identifying

people stood with signs on MG Road and offered free hugs and information about LGBT people and sexuality. Each case not only makes visible the presence of sexual dissidence within the city's geography, they place demand on urban space to be recognized and make a place for dissidence in Bangalore.

Rather than see caste discrimination or street vendors' rights as separate political projects—that is, articulating different versions of the city focused on labor or caste—I juxtapose different efforts at political organizing in order to ask how and why sexual dissidence coheres as a political category in some places but not in others. For example, in the first section about organizing I tell the story of lawyers and activists from ALF who met with street vendors' union representatives in order to discuss problems that vendors face earning their livelihood on Bangalore's streets.

Although there were both men and women present at the vendors' meeting, the men unsurprisingly dominated the discussion. To remedy this gender inequity representatives from ALF—both men and women—made sure to address women street vendors and to get to know their thoughts and concerns. Because the structure of the meeting itself did not facilitate women speaking it required direction attention on the part of organizers for women to have space to voice their concerns. This work was not without tension, however, and nor was organizer's efforts to connect the challenges facing street vendors' with those faced by Hijras. Despite the fact that everyone at the meeting shared the common goal of equitable urban access, by raising issues of gender and sexuality organizers foreground the challenge of articulating a common politics within an otherwise diverse community of people connected through their street-based livelihood practices.

In the second section I return to the site of the International Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil, the steps of Bangalore's Sri Puttanachetty Town Hall. It was far and away the most common site for dissenting voices to gather in protest during the period of my fieldwork. This section includes two very different scenes of activists gathering on the building's steps. The first scene took place in the aftermath of Rohith Verma's death in January of 2016. Verma was a scholar at the University of Hyderabad and a Dalit activist whose death sparked nationwide outrage over caste discrimination (EPW 2016).

The second Town Hall scene took place in February 2016 after the Supreme Court of India agreed to hear a Curative Petition on the Koushal case (the case which eventually led to the overturn of IPC Section 377). This petition was an appeal of the 2013 Supreme Court case that reinstated the colonial era Anti-Sodomy Law. The two gatherings took place only weeks apart and both dealt with very different forms of state-sanctioned violence against historically marginalized groups in India. However, despite this seeming similarity, the affective landscape of the two protest events could not have been more different. What's more, the only people who articulated (as in, spoke about) these two events were part of a coterie of full-time activists already working on a number of simultaneous political projects that included fighting for sexuality rights and against caste-based discrimination.

In order to think about how these very different events were both dissident inhabitations of the city, I reflect on the affects cultivated across different protests at Town Hall. Finally, the third section focuses on Bangalore's annual Pride events, including the march of over 1,000 people

through the central part of the city. I reflect on the planning and administration of the Pride march by the umbrella group CSMR, and how visibility debates over inclusion, participation, and absence shaped Bangalore's Pride in 2015. At the heart of these lively and ongoing debates lay a productive tension: was Pride a *celebration* of sexually dissident lives, and therefore a dissident articulation of the city? Or was it a political *protest* against oppressive and discriminatory laws and societal attitudes and practices? Could it be both, and what implications did that duality have on the ways in which Pride articulated or was articulated into the city?

Each section illustrates how political claims are made in and through the presence of sexual dissidents in specific places in Bangalore's urban geography. Using ethnography to think across different events highlights the particularities of different experiences. To this end, and drawing on lessons from my ethnographic stories, I reflect on the concept of community as it was used among sexually dissident people. Instead of a source of division, I suggest that a politics of imagined community (and communities) can only ever foster dissidence within the urban geography if it takes into account how sexuality is connected to other forms of social difference.

Organizing on City Streets

I travelled to a meeting of street vendors' union representatives with my friend Gowthaman who was a lawyer at ALF at the time. The other people we knew who were attending the meeting from ALF had left the office before us and we were having trouble finding the exact location. Despite the fact that Gowthaman had written down the name of the place, we asked and got

conflicting directions once we disembarked from an auto rickshaw in the industrial area to the north west of the central city. I can't remember exactly how we found finally the group, only that we had to cross a railway station, climb down from the train platform, hop over the tracks, and scramble through a hole in the fence while the station guards were looking the other way.

We found a group of street vendors, mostly men but also some women, along with three other organizers from ALF who were already sitting cross-legged behind an array of vegetables spread out on the ground along the stretch of road that served as a market. It was blisteringly hot and someone had strung up blue plastic tarps with twine to keep the produce from wilting in the sun. The tarps had the added benefit of providing shade for those gathered under them to discuss the group's demands in light of the Street Vendors Act of 2014.

When Gowthaman and I arrived we saw that one of the other cisgender male organizers from ALF was already speaking to the group, and we noticed that only the male street vendors responded. To counter this Gowthaman and two women from ALF who were also present, Lekha and Deepta, each made sure to ask the vendor women for their thoughts. Later back at ALF, we discussed why the women might have been silent in the context of the larger group. Lekha told us that the same women had been quick to speak with her one-on-one. Deepta suggested that the prospect of speaking to the entire group, especially since it consisted mainly of men, kept the women silent. She felt like a different meeting format could correct this. Meanwhile Gowthaman pointed out that because of these same gender imbalances men were more

likely to be nominated as representatives in the first place, and this in turn had the effect of reinforcing the gender imbalance and women's silence.

Each of their possibilities made sense, but I was specifically interested in how the form of the meeting itself—as a gathering of people from ALF along with representatives from various street vendors' collectives from across the city—ultimately failed to acknowledge women vendors as a political constituency in their own right. Some of the members of ALF saw this as a problem that needed be corrected, but the main ALF organizer (himself a cisgender male) saw the women's silence as evidence of their disinterest in the political project of labor organizing itself. After all, he said, women were free to speak if they wanted: no one that silenced them!

What does it mean to be silenced or invisibilized in a group setting? Does someone have to speak over you or stop you mid-sentence? Or can the conditions themselves keep certain categories of people from contributing? While gender is certainly a factor in labor organizing efforts, just pointing to the relative silence of women says nothing about those whose relationship to the male/female gender binary was more complex. The ALF organizers who asked the women street vendors their opinions also wanted to know about their interactions with Hijras.

The chatter at the meeting was in Kannada, but Gowthaman translated what I couldn't understand. "They say that Hijras sometimes buy things from them," he explained to me, "and they are happy to have the business. They don't have any problem with them."

What about the harassment that vendors face from police who ask for bribes so they can keep their stalls, I asked? Do they also see Hijras being

harassed by the police while collecting money in the same areas?

He turned back to ask these questions, and while there was an acknowledgement from the street vendors that Hijras—for whom collecting money is a central livelihood practice—also experience harassment from the police, they didn't really see the relationship between that and their interactions with the police. One person present pointed out that vendors *sold* food or small goods while Hijras simply *asked* for money. This explanation laid bare the accepted hierarchy of the street as a public space where its publicness was always already contingent upon a capitalist system of value. Vendor's inexpensive goods benefited Bangalore's consumer-citizens and were good; hijras only took money and were bad.

This was an ironic stance for street vendors to take since shop owners used a similar logic to explain why vendors taking up space outside of their businesses (as well as potentially taking away customers) were such nuisances. In both cases the explanations, while representative of viewpoints operative among people for whom access to the street formed a central part of their ability to live in the city, also failed to unpack the multi-layered tensions around the street as a site for contesting power. Instead, protections afforded by the Street Vendors Act meant those selling goods on the street had more of a legal claim to it as a space of livelihood than those who continued to be seen as public problems, and here street vendors displaced this domesticating logic onto Hijras, rather than rejecting it outright.

Similarly, organizers at ALF told me an analogous story about the crackdown on food carts in a park located in a wealthy and stylish neighborhood in eastern Bangalore. What happened there was, several non-

veg (meat) food vendors operated in that park. Since the residential neighborhood was close to a busy commercial area, the food carts drew business from nearby offices as well as from neighborhood residents. Not all the residents approved, however, since adjacent to the park was a pure-veg apartment building whose occupants complained that the stench of grilled meat wafting into their homes made them sick. The building's association went to the police with a complaint about the sickening meat smell, and the food vendors were temporarily kicked out of the park. This got the attention of labor organizers and lawyers at ALF who, in turn, represented the vendors' right to be and sell food in the municipally owned park.

Ultimately the vendors' claims to public space won and they were able to continue operating out of the park. The case illustrates how social dynamics shape political contestations over public space in Bangalore along lines of caste and religion, gender and sexuality. For example, the building's "pure-veg" designation served as a thinly veiled reference to its preference for only Brahmin (high-caste) Hindu inhabitants. While many non-Brahmin Hindus eat meat, as indeed do many Brahmins, the food vendors selling meat and subject to harassment were most certainly lower caste Hindus or Muslims.²⁹ In other words, a seemingly straightforward complaint about food odors indexed caste

²⁹ The convention I have employed here of referring to a diet of meat as "non-veg" continues to center vegetarianism as the norm. This subtle but ubiquitous descriptor further connotes India with Hinduism, and reduces the rich variations in cuisine in Sub Continent to an axis of difference where the Brahmin Hindu diet is the unmarked position. To a non-Indian resident like myself this resulted in sometimes amusing categories. For instance, in one of the modern grocery stores where I sometimes shopped the butcher's counter had a large sign over it reading simply "Non-Veg." And on any Air India flight the meal choices would simply be veg or non-veg, an either/or choice that used to leave me perplexed. I don't know which one I want, tell me what is the vegetable, what is the meat! The more I experienced this, however, the better I understood that the distinction was not one of momentary dietary preference, but a reflection on the way in which diet locates one socially.

and communal tensions. Although the caste dynamic of this conflict was never explicitly named as such, no one involved was unaware of the tensions along caste lines.

Attention to the ways in which class, caste, gender, and sexuality work together—as Lekha, Deepta, and Gowthaman explained— is necessary for framing the shared interests of dissident populations, thereby making common political cause between issues like the harassment of street vendors and of hijras collecting in the same areas. What’s more, exclusions made by both street vendors and activist organizers, even as they worked to broaden access to urban space, further illustrate the effects of systematic discrimination of people who are not legible as consumer-citizens even as they are highly as visible sexual dissidents.

The park where vendors fought to serve non-veg food may have been “public” in name, but local residents’ objection to the stench of nearby non-veg food blurs the lines between what rights people claim over their domestic spaces—rights arising from a capitalist system of ownership—and the increasing privatization of previously public spaces like parks and streets. When private citizens and corporations control access to public space and to what people can do there, it articulates the city as a series of domestic spaces.

Community Organizing or Organizing Community?

Lest the above example place the burden on street vendors for their lack of recognition for a particularly marginalized subset of the transgender community, I now turn to a day-long consultation held in response to a Karnataka government proposal to allocate transgender people housing in the

Bangalore Rural district (i.e., on the periphery of the city's urban development). Discussion and debate around this issue illustrates tensions even within the seemingly cohesive transgender "community," especially in regards to that community's adoption of categories widely used to stake political claims.

Indeed, the consultation was literally held under a banner that read "Karnataka Transgender Community" in English and "*Karnataka Transgender Samudaya*" in Kannada. What's more, participants used the singular term "community" in English and "*samudaya*" in Kannada throughout the day-long consultation to describe the imagined collective on whose behalf they had gathered. I will return to their use of community (sing.), and to the politics it opens up, in due course.

To set the scene: there were about 60 people present in the starkly lit hall over the course of the day. Participants moved in and out of the hall, answering their phones, changing seats to chat with friends, etc. It was a casual environment and many of the participants clearly knew each other already. The conversation that day was organized around two debates: first, whether or not the provision of state-funded housing for transgenders was desirable, and second, on what basis it should be offered if so.

The second point meant debating the specific state categories of recognition for transgender people in Bangalore: (1) as a caste (i.e., functionally similar to the "Other Backward Caste" or OBC category), (2) as an economic class (akin to the position of street vendors, for instance), or (3) on the basis of gender (similar to reservations for women). Each of these frameworks had supporters and detractors among the group gathered for the

consultation. Similarly, each overarching concept had implications for the relationships between “transgender community,” city and state-level governments, and the broader urban social context in which the transgender community is situated.

The morning session of the consultation included three guest speakers in a panel format. Each commented broadly on the place of caste and class in Indian society. Then there was a break for lunch brought in from a local restaurant, and in the afternoon participants split into four breakaway groups. Each group was given poster paper and markers and was asked to record their discussion. Since I was at the consultation as a participant-observer, I was assigned to a group even though I could not contribute much.

The debate in my group quickly became heated. Talking fast and in a mix of English and Kannada, people finished each other’s sentences, cutting one another off. With the help of a friend who could both translate what I didn’t understand and fill me in on the context of people’s strong positions, I did my best to follow along. The result was—the group did not want caste-based reservations for “transgenders” because, they said, there is no caste discrimination within the Hijra community. According to their logic, any government benefits given on the basis of caste would only serve to create new divisions, further splitting the community.³⁰

It seemed slightly unclear, both to me and to the other participants, what it practically meant to recognize transgender as a caste for the purpose

³⁰ Although the narrative that a person leaves her caste distinctions behind when she becomes a part of the hijra community was common, it is not the same as saying that hijras never experience discrimination on the basis of caste. Hijras, from my limited engagements across several sites in Bangalore do tend to come from lower caste communities.

of a housing reservation scheme. Would only SBC and OBC transgender people be eligible? Or would transgender itself *become* an OBC category in the eyes of the state? Participants were adamant that the transgender community does not function *the same as* caste, but was this the same thing as saying that caste itself did not exist among transgender people?

Since people who fall under the category of transgender people come from many different caste backgrounds, they said it was more important to be recognized as transgender than to be recognized on the basis of their respective caste identities. I understood this collective statement not to be a dismissal of caste discrimination, but an acknowledgement of the ways in which transgender embodiment is always more visible than being lower caste or Dalit, and thus is more often the basis for their experiences of discrimination (for more on this see, Reddy 2005). Of course this view fails to take into account the simultaneous, overlapping forms of oppression accounted for in an intersectional framework (Crenshaw 1991). The participants in my group agreed that any government provisions meant to benefit transgender people should benefit the whole community and not be distributed selectively on the basis of other social factors like caste.³¹

Another proposal put forth for discussion was to treat “transgender” as an economic class. Some participants favored this approach because they felt that class was a bigger issue than caste within “the community.” With this in mind, they supported government provisions on the basis of economic class. A

³¹ This overall disavowal of caste identity, as well as caste based discrimination, in order to highlight forms of discrimination based on gender or sexuality minority status was consistent with the stories I heard from people across a spectrum of caste backgrounds, class positions, and queer identities over the course of my research in Bangalore. Indeed, parsing out the intersectional effects of caste on queer identities was both ethnographically challenging and important for this reason

class framework, it seemed, would emphasize commonalities between social and economic positions of hijras and other transgender people. What's more, this framework could articulate the connections between hijras and street vendors' that the latter's union failed to do. This framework also had its drawbacks, as others present at the meeting pointed out that transgender people can occupy any and every class position, and so, grouping them as a single economic class would flatten intra-community diversity.

While equating transgender to an economic class for the purpose of receiving state reservations was certainly less controversial among the people at the consultation than equating the category with caste, participants still rejected what they saw as the underlying implication that transgender necessarily equals a destitute class category. That is, they emphasized that neither the category of transgender, nor of hijra, was necessarily synonymous with poverty. Amazingly this was the case even though half the people in my 14-person discussion group said they had done sex work in order to survive. The group's discomfort with class as a category for transgender visibility and recognition seemed to be less about its inaccuracy and more about the ways it reduced complexity and diversity of transgender personhood to the material fact of many people's economic vulnerability within that category.

The third and final proposed category of transgender recognition discussed at the consultation was on the basis of a gender identity card. Once raised, this option resonated the most with those in my group. And although it seemed generally appealing, Akkai Padmashali, who was one of the organizers and leaders of the consultation resplendent in a mint and cream sari with gold

accents, spoke out adamantly against the use of the term “third gender.” This would be the proposed category of gender recognition on the identity card.

“Third gender,” she asserted, perpetuates patriarchy because it continues to place male as the first gender, female as the second gender, and transgender as the third gender. It continues to subjugate transgender people to the lowest rung on the social hierarchy. It also dawned on me as I listened to her speak how it implicitly naturalizes male and female genders as well.

What’s more, as a category of recognition “third gender” failed to describe the experience of the transgender people I met, both in Bangalore generally and at the consultation that day. Like Akkai, who unequivocally identifies as a woman, the transgender people in attendance invariably labeled themselves as either male (in the case of FtM) *or* female (MtF) (Dutta and Roy 2014, Valentine 2007). So while gender seemed like a logical category through which to think about their relation to the state, after much discussion and debate the breakaway group voted to reject the state category of “third gender.”

In the end none of the three options put forward resonated with those present at the consultation. Each had its limitations and its problems, each its inevitable baggage. At an impasse, our group discussion turned to the category of community under which the consultation had been organized in the first place. Could framing transgender as “community” offer a way out of the problems raised by prefacing caste, class, or gender? Even as the group seemed to nod in agreement with this alternative, others expressed concern that “community” over-performed a coherence not actually present within the umbrella category of transgender as they lived it in Bangalore.

For instance, a trans-man in my group pointed out how female born trans-men like himself are not well understood—are less visible—even *within* the purported singular community of transgenders. He linked trans-men’s intra-community visibility, or more pointedly their *invisibility*, to sexual dissidents invisibility within larger normative society. One reason for this is because transgender women—who are often but not always hijras, even if they are always assumed to be by society—generally have greater cultural visibility they and are therefore more likely to serve as spokespersons for “the community” (cf. biographies of other well known Hijra trans-women: Laxmi, Rao, & Joshi, 2015; Living Smile Vidya, 2007; Rēvati, 2010).

The example of trans-men being relatively less visible than trans-women, and than Hijras in particular, points to real concerns about visibility, representation and recognition within an otherwise seemingly capacious category transgender community. A trans-women wearing a maroon and cream chiffon sari, who had up to then sat quietly through the group discussion, spoke up to explain that while most of us (meaning, presumably, those at the consultation) are accepting of an overarching [transgender] community as one, this is not always the case. She went on to explain, “not all hijras know the plight of female to male trans people.”

“Community,” with its singular promise of continuity and cohesion, seemed to offer a host of both possibilities and challenges when it came to organizing around transgender as a category of recognition. Specifically, my breakaway group’s discussion revealed that none of the proposed categories for state recognition offered acceptable models for providing reservations to transgenders. And while the consultation itself was premised on the

importance of state recognition, the conversation that took place revealed the political entanglements which always accompany proposed forms of recognition (Povinelli, 2002). As a result, the participants rejected the proposed housing scheme *and* all the proposed categories in favor of one “transgender community.” However appealing this category was in practice it remains a challenging one around which to organize shared politics.

This challenge can also be seen in the landmark 2014 Supreme Court Judgment *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* which affirmed that transgender identity is based solely on self-identification³² (Narrain, 2014), while subsequent legislation has contradicted the underlying promise of self-determination. For example, the draft *Transgender Persons Bill* (which first circulated in 2016) proposed establishing a government authority charged with authenticating gender transition (Jawahar Kudekallu, 2017).

How does the capacious legal definition of transgender that was codified in the NALSA decision, along with use of the broad use of the term “community” as favored by consultation participants, shape both the possibilities and limits of “transgender” as a category of dissident urban articulation? Moreover, how did the consultation, happening as it did under the sign of the “Karnataka Transgender Community” (where the English words were written in transliterated Kannada) serve to make visible a

³² From the decision: “Gender identity refers to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body which may involve a freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or functions by medical, surgical or other means and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms. Gender identity, therefore, refers to an individual’s self-identification as a man, woman, transgender or other identified category.”

singular community of otherwise diverse people, genders, sexualities and experiences in urban Bangalore?

One effect of the categories of “transgender” and “community” was that nothing substantive materialized from the Karnataka state proposal for housing transgenders, not least of all because the outcome of the consultation was a public statement rejecting the proposal. Another effect can be seen in the gathering of different transgender people at the consultation and the debate that took place that day. Discussion and debate among a group of sexual dissidents was itself an ethical practice and an intervention in the categories of recognition (Dave 2012).

Akin to the way street vendors did not see the plight of hijras tied up with their own, the state’s possible forms of recognition for transgenders would have limited their political claims by relegating them to a single axis of experience. It would have articulated an urban social geography in which they moved from one location to another, but it would not have connected their lives to those of other dissident and marginalized populations. For this reason the participants chose to acknowledge the intersectional quality of their experience by embracing “community” as a unifying category of social and political recognition. Despite the flaws of a category that downplayed intra-group differences, participants at the consultation decided that “community” still offered ways of thinking across difference.

Before moving on, and because this is a social geography after all, I would be remiss not to mention how the proposed, but ultimately rejected, housing scheme would have played out within Bangalore’s specific geography. Specifically, it would have re-located transgender people to the edges of

Bangalore's urban sprawl, placing outside metropolitan Bangalore but still within its rural administrative district. And while the proposed plan never progressed far enough to located a specific site, other resettlement schemes for centrally located *bastis* (slums) were built far southeast of the city (Housing and Land Rights Network & Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties, 2013). Because of Bangalore's gridlock traffic and the difficulty of transgender people faced on the BMTC bus system, the likely proposed location would have made it very difficult for them travel to and from work in the center of the city.

Protests at Town Hall

I will now turn to two ethnographic stories of political protest, both of which took place at Town Hall. The first section illustrated the challenges of organizing political claims for visibility and recognition around identity categories. This section continues to explore the tensions between identity-specific politics and those whose identities, in this case as activists, are always complicated when they are also part of the communities around which protests are organized. By accompanying activists to a number of different protests all at Town Hall, it became clear that many of them experienced a disjuncture between their political position *as activists* and their individual relationships to the political issues that led them to show up day after day.

By referring to individuals and collectives —such as ALF— as activists, I do not intend to label everyone who ever assembled in public space and in relation to issues of power or politics. For example, there was a Garment Workers' protest in April 2016 that brought over One Lakh (100,000+) workers (the vast majority of whom were women) onto the streets and shut

down traffic in industrial areas of the city for two days (Special Corr, 2016). In another case residents of the city formed a human chain to oppose the proposed construction of a massive steel flyover; the project was scrapped as a result (Sharma, 2017).

While both of these are examples of political action, the people who participated in them were not necessarily activists in the sense of ALF lawyers, or Akkai Padmashali or others. The difference is that activists were people whose social worlds were articulated around spaces and acts of protest. Like in Lisa Björkman's study about street-based protests for water access in Mumbai as a form of political theatre, there is an important distinction between the people organizing political actions and those who participate in them (Björkman 2015). Indeed, the presence of activists across different urban spaces and issues is what both "activist" and "political" forms of dissident articulation.

Scene One: Rohith Verma

It was two days after Rohith Verma's death. He was a young scholar, scientist, and Dalit activist at the University of Hyderabad who had been relatively unknown until his death threw him into the national spotlight and put him at the center of ongoing debates about discrimination towards people of lower caste in contemporary India. Dry and bright and dusty, the traffic was backed up in front of Town Hall as usual. Usual, except that several hundred people had gathered on the steps of the building. This included student political organizations like the Karnataka chapter of the *Bahujan Vidyarthi Sangha* (BVS). They waved flags and shouted in a call and response format

while journalists interviewed members of the crowd. Across the sea of faces, Rohith's picture was visible on a number of signs, some of which included quotes taken from his final letter. Two men sat on the bottom step and held up a large banner with the words "Institutional Killing of Dalit Scholar..." printed in English letters that looked as if they were dripping with blood. The crowd was mostly men.

The media reported Rohith's death as a suicide, and the note he left outlining his depression as well as the systemic discrimination he faced as a Dalit student and scholar circulated widely online. Contrary to this media narrative, however, the poster that labeled his death an "institutional killing" challenged the narrative that because it was self-inflicted it was a personal or private matter. Instead, this framework highlighted the institutional forces at work. Some of the activists I met went even further, calling it an "institutional murder." In order to leave open the possibility of each of these, I will refer to his death in a value neutral sense;-- not murder or suicide, just senseless, needless death.

I arrived at Town Hall that day in an auto, accompanied by several friends who were lawyers and activists at ALF. On the way they explained to me why they called Rohith's death a murder. Like me, they had heard about the Town Hall gathering through social media and had decided to attend—though exactly what would be happening none of us was sure: maybe it would be a vigil or a memorial of some kind? Instead it was quite different from the somber occasion we expected.

We disembarked from our auto to find a crowd shouting not just political slogans about discrimination against Dalits, but also a variety of anti-

Modi and anti-BJP chants as well. What we didn't hear, at the edge of the crowd listening to these chants, was anyone talking specifically about Rohith's life, scholarship, or activism. Were they memorializing him by protesting caste discrimination in his name, I wondered, or were they merely using his death to forward their own political positions? No doubt they were positions that Rohith would have supported, but it still felt distant from the loss people around me were feeling.

My friends and I hovered uncomfortably at the edge of the scene until someone suggested retreating to the canteen at the back of the building. It was a welcome suggestion, and once there we ordered hot, steaming lemon tea and crunchy vadai wrapped in yesterday's newsprint. The wrapping still proclaimed the goings on of a different world. Standing at the high tables sipping tea my friend Darshana, a practicing lawyer and a self-described activist exclaimed: "I'm sick of being so angry all the time!"

The event we had come for—she called it a protest and it seemed an apt enough description—felt to her like everyone just using Rohith's death as a springboard for their own agendas, for making their own political demands. Although his image was visible on the posters participants held, it was there as a potent political sign deployed strategically, rather than an acknowledgment of his humanity, of the person he had been, or of his life so tragically and abruptly ended. At the same time, Darshana was strongly and vehemently anti-caste and without a doubt supported the political goals of those gathered on Town Hall's steps. Indeed, as we sipped our tea and talked, she insightfully connected Rohith's death to the larger structural issues of

ongoing caste discrimination and to the policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi the BJP government.

In Darshana's statement I did not hear an objection to the political position of the protestors, which I knew aligned with her own, but to the seemingly inevitable anger that accompanied protest as the only legible response an activist could have to Rohith's death. Because Darshana was regularly at Town Hall for one protest or another, I understood her frustration to be as much with the feelings of anger she was continually expected to manifest as an activist as about any specifics of what was happening that day. Protesting different issues— including caste discrimination, gender inequality, violence against transgender people, IPC Section 377, etc.— involved returning again and again to the same physical location of Town Hall.³³ It also involved performing the same angry emotion in each context without necessarily drawing connections between multiple political issues and protest events. Rather than Town Hall articulating different political issues through the shared use of urban space and a shared affective response, the form of protests at Town Hall managed to disarticulate different political issues from one another.

“Isn't this righteous anger?” I asked her. “Isn't it justified?” Of course it was: everyone I knew who called themselves activists were justifiably angry.

³³ Mathew, a long time organizer for the right to housing and against slum clearance described the movement of protestors across different urban sites over time. “Eventually the only *visible* place available to us was Town Hall,” he said. And although people had gathered at Town Hall for some time—in her book *The Promise of the Metropolis* Janaki Nair mentions a protest by the women's rights group Vimochana that took place there as early as 1993—Mathew's and others' accounts related the consolidation of activist protests to Town Hall with the construction of the city's metro and efforts to sanitize adjacent urban sites. “There is a link between the metro construction and ‘cleanizing’ the roads—cleaning them from sex workers, transgenders, protestors...everything,” Mathew said.

They were also sad about Rohith's death, even if none of them had known him personally. Yet different activists had different strategies for dealing with their emotions differed. Gowthaman, for example, had declined to join us at Town Hall, explaining, "We need legitimate time for mourning who we've lost." Protesting, he implied, could not offer him the time or place to process his emotions.

As professionals who identified themselves through their publicly visible political work—in addition to inhabiting identities like "queer" and woman and Dalit and Indian—activists often found themselves standing on the same Town Hall steps shouting slogans like "*dikara dikara*" ("Down! Down!"). Sometimes their collective anger, and the amplification of so many individual voices was palpable. On this particular day, however, Darshana experienced it as out of sync with her emotions. Instead, she needed a space where she could be collectively exhausted, sad, and angry all at once. She, Gowthaman, and others longed to be with the complexity of their emotions rather than immediately resolve them into public speech.

Indeed, I could see in hers and others' faces the tension between their anger, pain, and the visible struggle to make sense of it. I could hear in their tired voices the responsibility they felt to speak out, and the worry that if they didn't speak out no one else would. Their political work was dissident; it challenged the status quo on issues of sexuality, gender, class, caste, and beyond. And so their presence at Town Hall was also a dissident articulation of politics within Bangalore's urban geography in a location that visibilized political issues. Indeed, the media knew if they wanted to cover a political issue they would meet protestors and activists at Town Hall. In turn, regular

activists returned to Town Hall because it was the place in Bangalore that visibilized their causes *as political*.

Scene Two: A Step Towards Decriminalization of 377

Just two weeks after the protest that followed Rohith Verma's death, I again found myself on the steps of Town Hall, this time because something good had happened. On February 2, 2016 the Supreme Court of India agreed to hear a Curative Petition to overturn IPC Section 377. Although we couldn't have known it at the time, this was the case that would eventually overturn Section 377 once and for all in September 2018. In the short term what we knew was this: by referring the curative petition to a full five-member bench, the Court acknowledged that the case about the legality of 377 would affect generations of Indian citizens to come. Therefore it deserved the benefit of a full judicial review. At that same time, as lawyers at ALF pointed out, the court did not issue a stay on Section 377 pending the review, which was a possibility open to them. So the news that February day was, for activists invested in the overturning Section 377 as a benchmark of sexually dissident rights in India, a positive step but not an outright victory.

In light of the announcement, CSMR organized a gathering at Town Hall to be held regardless of the outcome of the ruling on the curative petition. If the court dismissed the petition, people would gather at Town Hall to shout "Supreme Court, *dikara dikara!*" (Supreme Court, down down!) If the court agreed to hear the petition, the crowd would shout "Supreme Court *zindabad!*" (Long live the Supreme Court!). It turned out to be the latter

(Zindabad! Zindabad!), and Akkai led the hastily collected group of 40-50 people in rounds of celebratory chants.

“My body!” she called. This rights-based claim echoed across the crowd. “My Right!” we answered, alternating between English and Kannada, putting into words the sovereignty of sexually dissident bodies at the same time that our call and response made recourse to the state as the protector of that sovereignty. Another call and response was “I am...Hijra, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Straight, Kothi, Jogappa” etc. to which, each time, the crowd responded: “That’s OK!”

The second chant named and visibilized a range of sexually dissident identities in an affirmative sense, performing public community acceptance through collective vocal affirmation. Sitting next to me on the steps was a trans-man activist named Rumi whose work with lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in Bangalore and across South India has spanned many years. Amidst the group’s affirmations of identity and shouts of acknowledgment, he gestured to our surroundings and said to me, “I don’t know how to celebrate something here!”

This comment about Rumi’s inability to be happy at Town Hall immediately struck me a mirror to Darshana’s recent frustration with being angry there. On the one hand, gathering at Town Hall in response to the decision of the Supreme Court to hear the curative petition celebrated a sense of possibility. On the other hand the news did not acknowledge the ongoing violence against hijras, trans-men, and other “sexual minorities” for whom the legality or illegality of 377 remained peripheral to the matter of their daily survival. There were still plenty of things to be angry about, even as the

gathering offered another possible way to be at Town Hall other than publicly expressing angry about social injustice. In this way Rumi's sense of unease with the celebration further illustrates how anger dominated the affective landscape of public gathering and public political speech. So much so that he did not know how to feel differently when (literally) called upon to do so.

Both of these stories feature crowds of activists protesting at Bangalore's Town Hall. The first was organized around an instance of caste-based violence, the second around sexual dissidence and opposition to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The category of activist connects people across these different issues, locating those who describe themselves as activists within fields of politics and power. What's more, the space of Town Hall was so closely associated with political protests that people who regularly attended protests there because they saw themselves as activists and they were visible as activists because were at Town Hall.

What happened at Town Hall did not always reflect their personal emotions about the events being protested. Nevertheless, they expected themselves to be present, and the media had come to expect the same. One reason for this disjuncture between personal and collective affect was because no activist was ever *just* an activist. They were also women and men, cisgender and transgender, Hindu and Muslim, Brahmin and Dalit, etc. Insofar as protesting at Town Hall offered a public response to injustice, they continued to show up on the steps of Town Hall. But their emotions highlight the challenge of reducing the complexity of life in contemporary urban India to any one problem or issue.

When Rumi said he didn't know how to be happy at Town Hall in light of the Supreme Court's about IPC Section 377, it was not because he was *unhappy*. Instead he was unable to separate the issue of Section 377—or any particular step towards overturning it—from the larger issues of societal discrimination that continue to affect broad swathes of sexually dissident people, especially women, transgender, and gender nonconforming people. It was because Rumi knew that these forms of discrimination would continue with or without IPC Section 377.

Moments of affective disjuncture, like Rumi's, illustrate both the limitations and possibilities of organizing across multiple identities, experiences, and political projects. The concept of a singular, inclusive community—like the one proposed at the Transgender Consultation—attempts to hold shared politics together with the recognition of different lived experiences. If “community” is one category that does this work, then perhaps “activist” is another. As my friends' testaments at Town Hall illustrated, the work of being an “activist” means stitches together differences rather than glossing them over; it connects people, politics, and urban geography.

Marching through the Streets with Pride

Although the march³⁴ was the culmination of, as well as the biggest event during, the month long pride celebration in Bangalore, it was hardly the

³⁴ Unlike in the US context, which was more familiar to me prior to living in India, no one ever described the event in Bangalore as a “parade.” And, having attended the New York City Pride Parade where I stood on a street in the West Village and passively watched float after corporate sponsored float go by, the distinction between the two seemed clear. Everyone who showed up regardless of sexuality,

only event organized by CSMR during that time. Other events included a storytelling session held on the top floor of a college building in the central part of the city, an open mic night at a vegan café where Kannada poetry and prose were performed alongside dances and songs sung in English, a trivia night with iconic queer music and video clips projected for teams to try and guess their source, a “garage sale” of donated items that served as a fundraiser for the overall CSMR budget, and a Sunday morning jog through Cubbon Park complete with rainbow flags and hand painted tea mugs handed out to all participants.

During the month of November even the places where sexual dissidents regularly gathered—like the weekly support group meetings—could not fail to acknowledge the centrality of the upcoming pride march. For example, I arrived at the weekly support group meeting on a day leading up to the march only to find the space temporarily transformed. There were pieces of white and blue, yellow and pink poster papers and a variety of markers, paints, glue pens, and glitter. Everyone who showed up that evening, including me, was asked to make a sign for the Pride march. These signs were for the organizers to pass out to people who might show up without their own.

Charged with making a sign that anyone could carry, I sat on the floor and stared at the pastel pink expanse of my poster paper, grasping for anything to draw or write. After months of regularly attending CSMR meetings—of listening to the planning committee debate the pros and cons of participation by different groups, discuss their preferred routes, etc.— I knew

gender, or relationship to “the community” participated in the march through Bangalore

that most people wanted it to be an inclusive and highly visible event for “the community.” What’s more, I knew that the pride march was intended to make sexual dissidents visible in urban space commonly coded as public.³⁵ The pride march would visibilize sexual dissidents within Bangalore’s urban landscape. This reminded me of a Black Lives Matter protest I attended in late 2014 after the police murdered Freddie Gray. Thousands upon thousands of people took over streets in cities across the US, chanting in call and response: “Whose Streets?” “Our Streets!”

I took the memory of that chant as inspiration. I also thought about Henri Lefebvre’s treatise on citizens’ “right to the city” in light of the alienating forces of capitalism (Lefebvre 1968), and about domesticating forces like the Happy Feet Initiative that sought to limit public access and visibility only to middle-class consumer citizens. Pride was not just a celebration of sexual diversity; it was a dissident response to the forces of capitalism and normative heterosexuality. What’s more, pride articulates that dissidence by visibilizing sexual dissidents on Bangalore’s streets. And so I decided to draw a street paved in rainbow colors, and to write “Our Street!” in big bubble letters.

This sentiment encapsulated the theoretical and political heart of my project: the idea that the city is transformed into socially meaningful, experientially rich urban space (Lefebvre 1991). The social geography of Bangalore, as my experience with the city’s sexual dissidents taught me, is a material artifact of real people’s experiences (Certeau 1988). This is the

³⁵ Another way to say this might be, the “visibilizing” work of gathering together for a march through the streets of Bangalore accrued publicity to the crowd *as* sexual dissidents. Indeed their collective gathering was itself *a form* of dissidence.

meaning of urban articulation: the city becomes recognizable as such only through close attention to the lives people lead there.

And so, by gathering together as sexual dissidents, the crowds marching in Pride would articulate Bangalore's streets into a place where different expressions of sexuality can and should exist. Confident that my knowledge of theory would translate into a meaningful sign, I went to work on my art project. Yet one of the things I was forgetting was how those I call sexual dissidents are hardly alone in the project of claiming urban public space for themselves.

In the context of women in urban India, the book *Why Loiter* (Phadke et al 2011) serves as a treatise for women to gather in and occupy streets, parks, and other public spaces in Mumbai. The book, written by a collective of women in the city, argues that women should claim visibility through the practice of inhabiting urban places. What's more, the book illustrates how women involved in the project actually do this; that is, they gather together and thereby visibilize their practices of extra-domestic female sociality by "loitering." This treatise is similar to what happens when sexual dissidents in Bangalore gather in public space to claim their right to the city.

Like the women who wrote *Why Loiter?*, sexually dissident people in Bangalore make themselves visible in urban space every day, not just at Pride. And yet at the time the pride march seemed—coming as it did in the middle of my ethnographic fieldwork—to be the paragon of all these practices. It, more than any other single sexually dissident event, brought a lot of people together in a way that made them visible *as sexually dissident* in public urban space. In other words, if the dissidence in daily life is about individual or small group

instantiations of sexuality across the urban geography, then the pride march appears to be the same but on a larger, more visible scale.

My sign imagined the street itself as a rainbow to convey gathering together and claiming the street for sexual dissidence. Although I wasn't conscious of it at the time, in retrospect I see that the symbolic power of the rainbow to represent sexual dissidence is both universalizing and normalizing. For example, the rainbow flag was held up as a symbol of "the community" by many of the "gay boys" planned the pride. It was not, however, a symbol that had meaning for everyone who might be described as sexually dissident in Bangalore (Alm and Martinsson 2017). Therefore, my poster naively paved the road with one dominant narrative, unwittingly similar to the preponderance of gay men on the Pride planning committee, an issue I will discuss further.

As we worked, the ten or twelve other people in the room took turns walking around and examining each other's posters. When they got to mine they all stood silent and perplexed. "What does it...mean," one asked?

"It's...colorful," another person begrudgingly conceded.

I registered their tepid reactions, but decided it was just because I hadn't finished. Yet I had to admit that the person in charge of collecting the signs and holding onto them until Sunday was least enthusiastic about mine. Needless to say I never saw my sign again. I looked for it at the march—where I saw many of the others from that evening—and I even asked around, but no one had seen it. And while I can't be sure if someone at the march discarded it or prior to distribution, I'm confident no one carried it that day.

Did this mean my research itself was somehow misplaced? If the pride march was indeed an instantiation of sexually dissident people's right to the city, why did my sign fail to resonate with both organizers and participants? Did Pride's visible gathering of many sexually dissident people across other forms of lived social difference offer a way to move beyond the limitations of identity-based politics? Could pride actually cohere the "community" of sexually dissident people organizers so often invoked? I had so many questions.

The members of CSMR who had organized the Pride went out of their way to formally if not substantively include some groups, but in doing so made decisions to exclude others, like corporate organizations. Despite the fact that Pride was not described as a political event by most participants at the march—at least not in the sense of making political, rights-based claims on the state—there was undoubtedly a political framework put in place by the event's organizers. In turn, the politics of the organizers' shaped the form of the Pride march, what it stood for, and who visibilized as sexually dissident.

In the remainder of this section I examine the preconceptions that organizers brought to Pride, and how their political frameworks shaped what kind of event it was and who participated in it. Like my poster, where I overlaid a familiar metaphor of sexual dissidence (the rainbow) onto the Indian street, the CSMR members who organized the pride overlaid their ideas about inclusion and diversity onto an event that was ostensibly open to everyone in "the community." In order to think about how conceptions of CSMR members shaped pride, I outline planning meetings and the major issues discussed at them. Finally, I suggest that although the organizers of the

Pride march did not frame it solely in political terms, the march nonetheless had the effect of staking a political claim to urban public space through the embodied presence of so many sexually dissident bodies on Bangalore's streets and flyovers, in its parks and in front of its municipal buildings.

The march also had the effect of making those gathered visible to the rest of the city and to each other. In other words, despite the fact that no one could agree on exactly who or what "community" meant, Pride nonetheless, and however temporarily, articulated the diverse communities of sexual dissidents in Bangalore.

The main event of pride—the march— is a spatial and political practice with its origins in the United States. After the Stonewall uprising in New York City in 1969, the first march known as the Christopher Street Liberation Day March was held June 28th, 1970.³⁶ Today pride marches take place around the world. Many scholars have argued that as this form has travelled, it has colonized other places, people, and contexts with homogenizing force. They argue and that instantiations of Pride do and should look different in different contexts (Feliciano, 2016). Yet Pride marches and parades are not a unidirectional process of globalization that simply infuses global forms with local meanings or, for that matter, local forms with global meanings (Boellstorff 2005). Instead they represent a complex interplay between the global and the local, between globally circulating categories like gay, lesbian and transgender, and local instantiations of sexual dissidence such as hijra, kothi, etc. In this way pride marches represent an "elsewhere," Bobby

³⁶ <http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/starting-point-of-nycs-first-pride-march/>

Benedicto's term for locally situated sites of global sexually dissident imaginaries (Benedicto 2014).

On the one hand, Bangalore's pride march enacts a sexual public that can only ever exist in Bangalore because the march visibilized on the city's streets forms of embodied sexual dissidence that are unique to Bangalore's sexual dissidents. At the same time, by drawing on a globally circulating form, the march necessarily referenced public enactments of pride as they take place elsewhere. What does this tension between the global and the local mean for the politics of pride? Does the march eclipse other locally situated sexual publics, many of which co-exist with or may even be at odds with idea of a march as the paragon of public visibility?

By this I mean that hijras—to use but one example—are already highly publicly visible when they collect money on city streets, but this visibility is always tied to social marginalization. However for many of the middle-class gay men and lesbian women who organized and participated in the march, visibility on the street was an assertion of their right to exist. Between these two relationships with the street were many others, of course, but my point here is that public visibility during the march did not, and indeed could not, mean the same thing for everyone glossed as “the community.”

The tension between representing “the community” at Pride and recognizing how diverse that community is, played out in CSMR planning meetings between July 2015 and late November 2015. For example, the earliest planning meeting was held in mid-July in the ALF office and included a screening of a documentary film called *Walking The Walk*. The film follows a Pride Walk in Hyderabad in February of 2015, which was organized after the

murder of a transgender woman in that city and which drew inspiration from the movement to create the Telegu-speaking state of Telangana out of what was then the Andhra Pradesh. Present at the screening of the film was the filmmaker Moses Tulasi and several transgender women activists from Hyderabad who collaborated with him and who were featured in the documentary. About 40 people attended the screening, sitting on rugs spread across the floor of the office's library and main room.

After the screening, the guests from Hyderabad answered questions about the film and about the politics of sexuality-based organizing in that city. This, in turn, opened into a conversation about sexuality, politics, and pride more broadly. Both this and the many subsequent meetings I attended were conducted in a mix of Kannada and English (as well as, at the first meeting, Telegu); everything was translated into English. The majority of participants at all meetings were, as they were both affectionately and pejoratively called, "gay boys:" a term that referred to English speaking, "middle-class," cisgender men—including me.

The prevalence of "gay boys" at CSMR meetings does not mean that there was no participation from transgender men and women, from cisgender women, or from male people with sexual identities other than gay (e.g. kothi)—but none of these other groups was ever the majority. And although the crowd on that first day included a number of "gay boys" it also included more women, both cis and trans, and several trans-men than at any of the meetings that followed.

Walking the Walk was intended to set the tone for the entire process of Pride planning in Bangalore. The questions the film raised—about who

participated, about what they were marching for— continued to feature prominently in discussion and debate at all the CSMR meetings. Indeed, over the course the following four months CSMR meetings served multiple functions. First, they were a place for discussing budgeting and fundraising and for brainstorming and planning the logistics of pride events. Second, they were social gatherings, a place for participants to meet up with friends and usually go to dinner afterward. Third, they facilitated debates about inclusion and exclusion within both the pride planning committee and in the sexually dissident community at large.

For the past 10 years Bangalore Pride has been organized by the Coalition for Sexual Minority Rights (CSMR), an umbrella group that works across various NGOs, CBOs, and other organizations with vested interests in the politics of sexuality in Bangalore. Some people attended CSMR meetings as representatives of their respective organizations, while others came as individuals. And although members of CSMR said the group functioned beyond just pride planning activities—for instance making collective public statements or issuing public statements which member organizations might not want to make on their own— Pride planning was the only CSMR activity that I ever observed or participated in.

The most heated debate in course of Pride planning in Bangalore in 2015, and from what I gathered by speaking to other participants every year before or since, was about the participation of corporations, including both Indian and multinational companies. This was the case even though a number of the people who attended CSMR meetings worked for international organizations themselves and wanted their corporate communities to gather

and march en masse. Others at the CSMR meetings, mostly individuals affiliated with the different NGOs and CBOs targeting “sexual minority” populations in the city, strongly objected to the visible presence of corporate employees *as corporate employees* in the march. They felt this commercialized the march and would discourage unaffiliated people as well as working class people from participating.

What’s more, while some participants were vocal that Pride should be planned by whomever expressed an interest (i.e., the people who “showed up” for meetings), others expressed a desire to bring a broader range of participants into the planning process. The latter group acknowledged the structural reasons that middle-class “gay boys” were currently overrepresented in CSMR while working-class folks were mostly absent. This included middle-class participants having more free time to attend voluntary meetings, as well as gender and class-inflected access to travel across the city easily. This latter group’s logic was that if there was a lack of diversity in the planning committee it followed that the events they planned would not attract a diverse crowd of participants either.

What’s more, CSMR meetings were held almost completely in English. Yet on multiple occasions I was told that the majority of meetings in previous years had been conducted in Kannada, and that participation from the transgender community had been more substantive when this was the case. Akkai said that in years past there had been more participation by members of the Hijra community in the planning process. Among those who advocated for greater representation, there was a palpable sense of nostalgia for a more

diverse planning committee that could, in turn, reflect broader demographic participation at the march and at other events.

In addition to these ongoing discussions about the participation (or lack of participation) from hijras and other transgender people, a common point of contention was over the extent to which corporates could or should be visible in the pride march. For example, those who bemoaned the lack of participation from “more marginalized” communities—that is, from communities who didn’t see the relevance of an annual march in the first place—were also mostly against the active and visible participation of corporates.

Conversely, those who pushed for the greater presence of corporates generally saw formal, emailed invitations extended to representatives of the transgender community as sufficient. The pro forma nature of “outreach” operative at meetings pointed to a disjuncture between the CSMR’s assertion that Pride was for “the community,” and the ways in which institutionalized boundaries of participation served as barriers for uniting Bangalore’s sexual dissidents as one community. What’s more, participants debated whether Pride was merely a celebration of sexually dissident diversity or, if not a protest exactly, still a political event, the politics of which exceeded the visibility of celebration?

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the CSMR members who worked for corporations generally felt that corporates should be visible in the Pride march. Their logic was that corporate participation would increase the acceptance of LGBT populations amongst the general public by showing how respectable LGBT people could be in corporate workplaces. This view

presumed an aspirational orientation towards white-collar corporate workplaces, something that belied the particular social and economic class of the organizers. Also, views towards more corporate participation highlighted how being pro-LGBT was good for both the business and economy.

One example of this mindset was when a young gay male employee of an American finance company announced at a CSMR meeting that he planned to wear a suit to the Pride march. Although many people wear bright colors and flamboyant outfits as a way of celebrating their identities as sexual dissidents, he insisted that if he wore a suit it would emphasize the respectability of LGBT people. What's more, he said, it would show how LGBT people are like everyone else, and it would encourage parents to see the professional potential of their children regardless of sexuality.

Implicit in his framing of the suit as a symbol of respectability politics was not only a class-based claim about the desirability of white collar professions over other forms of work, but also a gender-based claim to the suit as a representation of normative masculinity. When he explained that by wearing a suit he would encourage other parents to accept their gay sons, he reproduced ideas of normative masculinity at the expense of embracing other forms of gender embodiment. Finally, by wearing a suit to the pride march this young man rendered his professional, masculine-self visible as sexually visibly dissident in a way that he would not otherwise be. This was very different from hijras and other gender and sexually dissident people whose different is daily visible.

Wearing a suit was one thing, but the fear of many of the organizers around corporate T-shirts or holding corporate banners higher and more

prominently than the CSMR banner was that doing so would diffuse the message of unified community pride. What's more, they worried it would corporatize the Pride—domesticating the event by targeting consumer citizens. This kind of pride, they argued, would just be an advertisement for the open-mindedness of particular businesses, rather than a celebration of Bangalore's diverse sexually dissident community.

After much debate, the decision in 2015 was ultimately *not* to allow group participation from corporates, and the policy regarding banners and corporate participation was (*taken from meeting minutes*): "Corporates and other groups/NGOs are free to wear branded T-shirts and hold placards with their insignia [as long as they are no larger than A3 size]." And "Corporate Participation is welcome as long as they walk with the pride and not try too hard to assert a different identity." Exactly what "trying too hard" meant remained unclear and open to debate, and was left intentionally vague since CSMR organizers could not come to a consensus on more exact language. What's more, his ambiguous wording illustrated the open-ended place of corporates within "the community" and how they were continuously open to contention and debate.

People on both sides of the corporate participation debate framed it as a decision that first had to be resolved in order for CSMR to move on to the more important work of actually planning and doing pride activities. Groans and objections would inevitably echo around the table whenever the question was raised at planning meetings—and because the meetings were open to anyone, new people would attend and inevitably ask about this issue even late in the planning process. As a participant myself, I sympathized with the

frustrations that organizers felt when rehashing this conversation again and again.

Yet I also saw the value in having an ongoing and open debate that did not necessarily lead to a permanent conclusion. Continued and open-ended discussion about the place of corporates in Bangalore Pride was an ethical practice akin to the ethics of queer activism that Naisargi Dave (2012) writes about among lesbian women in Delhi. That is, regardless of the outcome, facilitating the conversation itself is an ethical practice, one that articulated Pride as a particular kind of sexually dissident community, a place where debate was both welcomed and encouraged, and where different opinions were valued.

It was easy for CSMR organizers to say that Pride planning meetings were open to everyone, but it was another thing for everyone to be equally invested in the process of planning and administering Pride events. As one gay man who was a regular participant in CSMR asked: why is it actually important for everyone to be equally invested in the process? I took this question not as a dismissal of diversity (though it could have been that), but as a genuine inquiry into the importance of diversity. After all, CSMR meetings claimed to represent “the community” but they also relied on a recognizably narrow slice of that community to do the organizing work. As part of the process, I came to see the pursuit of diversity as itself a strategic decision that had the ability to, if not the result of, cohering diverse sexual dissidence in Bangalore as one proud community.

Indeed, no matter how capacious the concept of “community,” put forth by Pride organizers, it seemed that there would always be exclusions.

Saying no to corporates had the effect of limiting Pride as a form of urban articulation as domestication. Instead, the commitment to Pride as a community event articulated the city as a dissident place. Yet there was another kind of gatekeeping around Pride planning, particularly in regards to the representatives from local NGOs targeting sexual minority populations. Anil, who worked for one such organization, was quite adamant in early meetings about the need for outreach to hijra/transgender communities in working-class neighborhoods across the city. Yet to the best of my knowledge this outreach never happened in any substantive way.

As a term, “outreach” implied that CSMR formed the center and anyone else who might participate in Pride had to be brought into its orbit. Outreach also remained vague as to exactly what it meant. When I asked some of the other CSMR organizers what kind of outreach had been done, and whether it had served to bring new people into the process, they explained that Anil told them the hijra and transgender groups we had discussed did not want to be involved in Pride. He said, “They were not interested in meeting people from the other parts of the community.” Although no one at CSMR had any reason to doubt Anil’s account, it was impossible to know whether he had actually discussed the matter with these otherwise under represented hijra and transgender groups in Bangalore, or if he had simply assumed he knew what the outcome would be.

It seemed as if the explanation “I checked, and people don’t want to engage” was often used as a way for organizers to avoid the difficult and sustained work it takes to actually engage with members of “the community” not already invested in Pride. It also suggested myopia on the part of CSMR

organizers about what engagement means. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it suggests that real, open engagement risks decentering the activists who serve as gatekeepers between more marginalized dissident groups and CSMR. In this way, parts of “the community” were marginalized not only by their sexual and gender difference in relation to society at large, but in their relation to “the community” itself.

Despite all this, when the day of the pride march came there was still what felt like a wide range of people, genders, sexualities, colors, outfits, and signs. I arrived at the south end of Majestic Bus Park after a heavy downpour had drenched the earth that morning to find hundreds of people dodging puddles dressed in every color of the rainbow. Because it still looked like rain many people carried rainbow-striped umbrellas. People wore dhotis and lenghas, kurtas and saris, and even a couple of western style suits! I recognized gay men from the support group, Akkai Padmashali and her coterie of transgender women activists, people from ALF and from sexual minority NGOs, and from a number of different community-based drop in centers (DICs) located around the city. There were students, people with their children, and adults who brought their parents along to support them. Everyone who might be described as sexually dissident in Bangalore was not there, of course, but many were, and the gathered crowd represented many different forms of sexual and gender dissidence.

As the march got going the group stretched from the thick knot of people milling about at the start into a long, almost single-file procession. We walked alongside the city’s incessant traffic and took up half the road, at one point stretching as far ahead and as far behind as it was possible to see from

the vantage point of Bangalore's relatively flat terrain. Participants waved to pillion motorbike riders, and to passengers looking out the windows of BMTC buses. Because the pride march took up half of the flyover it crossed, both directions of traffic got bottlenecked into two narrow lanes. The procession walked more quickly than the buses could drive, and as the march continued towards its culmination at Bangalore's Town Hall the clouds parted and the sky turned blue. People beat drums and others danced.

A few people wore shirts with the logos of their corporate diversity initiatives, but they were interspersed throughout the crowd and there was no one section that appeared to be a corporate contingent. Google employees walked alongside trans-women, Goldman Sachs and Accenture staff next to NGO workers. For just a moment the stark divisions of class, gender, caste, and sexuality seemed to fade. Instead, the collective experience of moving together, the massive gathering of bodies in urban space, loudly and proudly announced the presence of Bangalore's sexually dissident community. "We're here, we're queer!" someone shouted.

On the one hand Bangalore's pride was highly localized. It was about community members whose lives and memories were held in common, coming together in the same physical space and at the same time, dancing on the steps of Town Hall. On the other hand Bangalore's pride was recognizable as such to people not from Bangalore—people who, like myself, had experienced Pride elsewhere could recognize in the form of the march a political claim about the presence of sexual dissidence in urban space going back to the first Christopher Street March in New York City. In both cases Pride served as a dissident articulation— that is, it briefly brought Bangalore's

diverse communities of sexual dissidents together as community (singular); it also connected them with others around the world who also seek visibility and recognition based on their sexual dissidence.

Pride's collective performance of the political evokes Judith Butler's work on the performative nature of public assembly (Butler 2015). In her book she uses the example of Egyptians gathering in Tahrir Square during the "Arab Spring" of 2011 in order to illustrate how, prior to and separate from any public speech acts or protest demands, the material fact of bodies coming together in public is already a performative political claim made on and in urban public space. There are many communities organized around sexual dissidence in Bangalore, but in gathering so many dissident bodies together they briefly cohered *as a community*. What's more, by gathering on the street the community performatively staked its political claim to the rightful place of sexual dissidence in urban public space. This was what I wanted to convey with my poster, even as my American vocabulary of "owning the street" failed to translate into the celebratory language of Pride in Bangalore.

The community that cohered during the pride was not exhaustive and it was not necessarily enduring. It articulated a dissident city, but only for as long as it lasted. Then people took off their brightly colored clothes, dispersed to their respective social worlds, and the community dissolved again. In other words, Pride was a community of sexual dissidence both spatially and temporally located. In this way, the pride march was a hopeful but imperfect exercise. It may not have included everyone but it used public urban space to embody and perform a collective hope for capacious and inclusive sexually dissident community.

In this chapter I have drawn on ethnography to present three different modes of political engagement—organizing, protest, and pride—to show how the politics of representation articulates a dissident Bangalore. The first part of the chapter focused on street vendors who collaborated with lawyers to organize and claim their right to the street as a space of livelihood. This advocacy included vendors’ collective claim to the street, even as the politics of doing so—that is, the work of cultivating visibility through the productive use of the street as a space for livelihood—meant entailed a disidentification with the hijras who also use the street to collect money (Muñoz 1999).

The next part focused on the experiences of hijras, transgender women, transgender men, kothis, and others who attended a Consultation organized by the Karnataka Transgender Community. In the context of the consultation, politics revealed itself in discussion and debate about whether or not to accept a proposal for housing relocation, and, if so, on what basis transgender people should be considered for government benefit. What was at stake in these debates was the formation of political identity for the purpose of recognition and material benefit. Ultimately participants at the Transgender Consultation opted to embrace the term “community” as a means of self-recognition. Although this term did not align with those proposed by the government, it opened up new possibilities for thinking within and across differences subsumed within the category of “community.”

In the second section I recounted two political protests at Bangalore’s Town Hall—the first in the wake of Rohith Verma’s death in January 2015 and the second in February of the same year after the Supreme Court agreed

to hear the Curative Petition to overturn IPC Section 377. In both of these examples the category of “activist” cohered participants’ experience across the different protests. Finally, I turned to Bangalore’s 2015 pride march in order to show how Pride briefly brought diverse communities of sexual dissidents together as “community.”

In each of these examples politics describes the relationship of sexually dissident people to the urban geography, and through their shared experience of urban space their relationship to each other. The ways of living that produce these intersubjective relations are what I call processes of urban articulation. Throughout this dissertation I have shown how urban articulation among sexual dissidents in contemporary Bangalore take two broad forms: they can domesticate or they can make dissident. In articulating a politics of sexual dissidence around the concept of community, sexual dissidents not only connect to one another, they remake the city into a place where they all might one day belong.

Intertext Four- Bangalore Queer Film Festival

Since 2008 the Bangalore Queer Film Festival (or BQFF as it is commonly known) has provided free screenings of movies from all over the world, including short films and long ones, dramas and comedies, documentaries and experimental art house cinema. The common thread is that all the movies focus on topics related to gender and sexual difference in some way. In 2015 I worked as a volunteer at the festival, and in 2016 I attended it along with over 1,000 other people whom organizers documented as having watched at least one movie or performance during the annual three day event. Although the Bangalore Pride march I write about in chapter four arguably attracted a larger crowd—in that it involved more people gathering in one place at one time, versus over the course of several days and in multiple locations—for the subset of “community” most easily glossed (in the parlance of this dissertation anyway) as the city’s sexually dissident elite, it was undoubtedly the highlight of the annual queer calendar.

BQFF was not just an opportunity to watch movies but a chance to see and be seen by others in attendance. I understood this to mean that in addition to the stated purpose of the event, the festival transformed the host locations into spaces where gay men can show off to other gay men, where lesbian women can meet new women. In addition to catching up with old friends, which I saw lots of people doing during BQFF, there was also an air of flirtation and the possibility of sex. Part of what made this possible, and what marked BQFF as different from the atmosphere of the Pride march on the city's streets, was the festival's location at the French Cultural Center, Alliance Française, and, starting in 2015, at the Max Mueller Bhavan of the Goethe Institut as well.

In both places the confluence of influences from the European countries running these centers—France and Germany, respectively—and the festival's focus on dissident sexuality meant that BQFF was more open to and welcoming of dissident sexualities than many of the other urban sites encountered in this dissertation. Additionally, the spatial relations of Alliance and Max Mueller facilitated certain interactions. Alliance, for example, is on a corner lot in an older part of town, its gate positioned at the intersection of two roads. To the right of the entrance is an unpaved area used for parking and there are tall, mature trees surrounding the property. During BQFF at least 100 motorbikes parked there along with as many cars as could fit into the space. To the left of the gate is the entrance to the building. The walkway from the parking area to the building's front steps curved through thick tropical plants, blocking the line of sight from the compound's entrance to the

building's first steps, and providing a further sense of enclosure and separation from the city beyond.

A wide entry area with an archway leads into a glassed-roof courtyard on one side with doors to the main performance space and screening hall on the other. Indeed, the mood of the festival echoed the architectural openness of its setting, with porous boundaries between outside and inside such that the building itself seemed to engender movement and flow, making conversations, connections and socializing more possible. Indeed, like the open plan of Alliance making festival goers visible to one another across the space, BQFF seemed to be as much about visibility—about seeing and being seen—as about watching movies in the darkened hall.

Prior to my first BQFF I had been to Alliance once before for a performance of *The Vagina Monologues*. While the production of Eve Ensler's famous play included references to the Indian context of its performance to comedic effect, the audience seemed self-selecting and already on board with frank open talk about women's sexuality. Not at all, from the accounts of my Indian female friends, like the climate of India or even Bangalore more generally. That both BQFF and *The Vagina Monologues* happened at Alliance illustrated how it was simultaneously a rarefied space within the sexually dissident geography of the city as well as how necessary such spaces were—the BQFF organizers explained to me that there were few other sites in the city that willing to host the film festival.

Located in Indiranagar, Max Mueller Bhavan seemed to serve a similar function even though its more centralized location on a busy street meant that anyone coming and going from the place was clearly visible. Indeed, there was

no good space outside the screening hall for attendees to socialize between movies, just a narrow staircase and a first floor landing that, at best, served as a transitional space for either going upstairs to the café or back down to the Institute's library, the street, and the exit. Once there, the ground floor entrance and the long walkway from street to building also offered little space for people to congregate without interrupting others' movement in and out of the Institute. Perhaps for this reason, as well as Max Mueller being a new location for BQFF screenings in 2015, the crowds to Max Mueller were far smaller than at Alliance, and the people who did show up did not seem to hang around and socialize for as long after the movies were over.

In an attempt to make Max Mueller's hall feel more friendly and welcoming, organizers brought in a number of floor cushions. This offered attendees a chance to relax and watch the movies without having to sit in the stiff-backed chairs that were provided by the Institute. As a volunteer for the festival, I saw a number of people using the cushions in precisely this way, but the presence of cushions also caused some confusion. After the very first screening of the festival in 2015—a British film called "Age of Consent" about a Vauxhall sex club that had very explicit scenes of gay sex—a man emerged from the hall, appearing somewhat scandalized, and declared that the film was just terrific.

It struck me that he used the word "terrific," since its double meaning resonated particularly well with the simultaneous horror and fascination he seemed to take from having just watched rough gay sex on-screen. Then he asked about the cushions in the front of the hall and whether there was going to be "a session" of some kind later? It took me a while to understand what he

was asking. Xavier, one of the festival organizers who appears in many dissident sites across Bangalore, was quick on the uptake and responded to this thinly veiled question about a potential orgy saying something like “No, no, the only pleasure we’re offering is watching films!”

And watch films people did. At both Max Mueller and at Alliance the audiences did anything but passively consume the moving images projected on screen, even if people were largely silent during the screenings (and no extra sessions were on offer). The audience may have clapped at the end—a common practice in South Asia that does not carry the pretentious associations it has in the US—then filed out of the hall in an orderly manner. Still, they were quick to make their opinions known. Chatter outside the hall included trenchant critiques of some of the more “art house” selections from people who admittedly preferred the aesthetics of standard Bollywood fare. This was perhaps especially true with the screenings from South Asia itself, many of which were low budget productions. When someone came out of the screening hall asking why the festival had shown a particular Indian film they did not enjoy, one of the organizers stepped in and emphasized the importance of creating venues for South Asian Queer Cinema. Perhaps the most notable exception to this was a documentary about the life and gender transition of a well-known, and well liked, trans-man living in Bangalore. He was present at the film screening and people cheered and clapped and whistled throughout, giving him a big ground of applause when he stood up at the end.

However, BQFF was about more than just movies. Through all the screenings people moved freely between the social space of the courtyard and

the screening hall, even and especially while the movies were showing. In other words, movies gave legitimacy to the gathering and facilitated other forms of socialization within the constructs of the temporary community that BQFF created. Movies— watching them, talking about them—was only one aspect of this fluid movement of people through the space legitimated by the showing of films. Which is not to say that no one took the movies seriously; plenty of people did. Some came specifically for one movie they had looked up on the schedule and knew they wanted to see it. Others watched almost everything, taking snack and tea breaks at the cafes, especially at Alliance where refreshments were available at two cafés right outside the hall.

One café served filter coffee, tea, and a variety of breads including chocolate, banana, and a banana coffee bread along with some savory options. The café in the back, Anju's, offered more substantial fare like samosas, phulkas and curry, sandwiches on white bread with the crusts cut off, and plastic cups of sour-sweet Nimbu Pani. The café also provided an important space for possible connections between attendees, contributing to the air of sex that pervaded the festival. "Did I ever tell you about the time I almost got kidnapped from BQFF," Daniel, whose story of falling in love for the first time I told in chapter two, recounted to me over a coffee at Anju's during a break between films.

"No! What happened," I asked. And so he told me the story of his first time at the festival a few years prior. At the time he'd been very nervous about such a big crowd of gay people. So his closest friend Deepta had tagged along, assuring him that 90% of the people there were going to be gay and it would be a good experience and a way to meet new people. They had arrived at

Alliance together but she'd gone to get something from the car, leaving Daniel alone at the same café where he told me the story. He bought coffees for both of them, but Deepta's promised five-minute outing stretched on, leaving him with one extra coffee and one free seat. Just then a really cute guy came up and asked if he could sit down. Daniel thought, Why not? Then the guy asked if anyone was drinking the other coffee, and technically no, no one was, so Daniel offered it to him as well. After all, Deepta hadn't come back and why shouldn't he give her coffee to this cute guy?

They sat and chatted a bit, he explained to me, and the guy soon invited Daniel to a party after BQFF was over that day. The invitation made Daniel both nervous and flattered at the same time. It felt unlike him to accept an invitation from a stranger as he was usually very cautious, but he said yes anyway. When Deepta returned she thought Daniel was crazy to agree to go with the unknown guy, but she told him to do what he wanted. And so, after the last film screening Daniel and the cute guy left Alliance together.

However, before going to the party, the cute guy needed to stop at his hotel and change clothes, he said. When they reached the hotel he left Daniel watching TV while he showered. When they entered the room Daniel had noticed the guy locking multiple locks on the room's door, which felt strange and unnecessary even if he wasn't sure why at the time. Daniel could hear the shower running in the other room as he sat there nervously waiting. Finally, the cute guy emerged from the bathroom wrapped only in a towel and sat next to Daniel on the bed. It wasn't clear if they kissed or touched at that point, but either way their reverie was soon broken up by the arrival several of the cute guy's friends who knocked loudly on the door demanding to be let

in. They brought liquor with them and pried Daniel with alcohol until he felt drunk. By then the cute guy was making out with him on the bed. He took off Daniel's shirt and a second guy, one of the friends who had shown up unannounced, crawled on top of him and started making out with him, too. "This sent me into panic mode," Daniel recounted. "I'm going to get raped, I thought, what have I done?!"

So he leapt from the bed, still not wearing a shirt, and explained that he thought they were going out to a party and that he wasn't comfortable with what was happening. The cute guy said, no, this *was* the party: he and his friends were there to party with *him*. By that point Daniel knew that he had to get out for his own safety. He quickly grabbed his shirt and made for the door, which he managed to pull open, and ran away from the hotel and from the whole situation.

As Daniel told me his story, I looked around Alliance and observed the crowd, only some of whom I recognized from other places in Bangalore, wondering if similar stories would come out of the flirtations I was witnessing. Were people being safe, telling their friends where they were going before they left with someone? Perhaps all the talk of "community" as it was used to refer to those in attendance conveyed a false sense of familiarity and safety. After all, Daniel said that his decision to go with someone he had just met, to a place he did not know, was not at all characteristic of him in other circumstances; Deepta had told him as much at the time. Still, BQFF was a *community* event, he explained, and because it included some familiar faces and felt like a safe space where he let his guard down and potentially put himself in a dangerous situation.

Of course gay men did not need BQFF in order to hook up with one another given the prevalence of apps with exactly that purpose. As one gay friend said to me while we sat and watched the crowd during the festival: “It’s like Grindr come to life!” He was referring, of course, to the popular gay hook-up app that reveals available men based on their GPS proximity to the user. He had even seen many of the gay men in the room on Grindr, but in real life and never so many of them in one place. “Not even at Jay’s Saturday night parties”, he said. “I know that guy from Grindr. And that one too, but I’ve never spoken to him in real life,” my friend explained as he gestured across the crowd towards the queue for chai and coffee at the café.

Indeed, like Daniel’s story of a hook-up gone wrong or my other friend’s observation about Grindr illustrates, BQFF facilitated potential sexual encounters—potentially both good and bad—in multiple ways. For example, the darkened screening room wasn’t just illuminated by the projection on the big screen but by the glow of numerous smartphone screens too, little squares of white light tiled across the darkness. No doubt many of these phones were open to Grindr, their users looking down rather than up to see who was nearby. However, the comment that BQFF was like Grindr come to life was not merely a descriptive one—it elucidated something significant about who was present at BQFF, about what kind of space the film festival created embodied particular social networks of sexual dissidence even as it obfuscated others. At BQFF the furthest away user visible on Grindr—at least on the 100 profiles setting of the limited, free version of the app that most people I met used—was still someone inside Alliance.

For the duration of BQFF at least, possible connections between gay men were temporarily organized in overlapping physical *and* virtual spaces. The spatial logic of apps like Grindr gets mapped on to real urban geographies in ways that shape desirable traits—like the decent, masculine bodies of Jay’s parties—as well as delimit the possibilities for sex among men. In the virtual world of apps, categories like have a “place” or “no place” for sex serve as glosses for access to privacy and function as sexual currency. Although any sexual encounters facilitated by BQFF eventually happened elsewhere—despite what that one man thought there were no “sessions” planned—the festival did render possible hook-up partners temporarily visible and in doing so turned Grindr’s logic of privacy-as-desirability on its head. Of course this was nothing new to the men who remembered cruising in Cubbon Park, or who visited certain bars and restaurants where gay men were known to gather, or really anyone accustomed to forms of sexually dissident sociality prior to the dominance of smartphones. Yet among those men whose experiences of sexuality coincided with the rise of social media and app-based sociality, they continued to check out those around them by looking at their phones to see who was available and interested— before actually looking up and interacting with the same people in real life!

As someone not caught up in this virtual mediation, it was striking to observe how real bodies in the room became effects of their online avatars and not the other way around. Or to put it another way: Grindr seemed to mediate the sociality of BQFF for gay men, changing it from a place where new forms of connection might be possible to one that simply reiterated Grindr’s form of one to one app-based connection. What’s more, the prevalence of this

logic had effects for festival attendees beyond the gay demographic. For example, the preponderance of gay men at the festival made it more difficult for women or gender non-conforming people to find and connect with one another in the mostly male and mostly gay crowd. This was perhaps exacerbated by the lack of app-based connection for these groups, something that the Priti was later established to counteract.

At one point during the festival I sat at the registration booth near the entrance to Alliance, asking people to sign in as they arrived and gave them a complimentary bag with the festival program. My fellow volunteer was a lesbian woman named Anju who I had not met before. Dressed in jeans and an oversized, summer-weight flannel shirt she explained to me that she had never been active “in the community” and that her family did not know about her sexuality. However she was comfortably out in her workplace, an international company where most colleagues were American or European. Just then, Xavier came over with his phone to photograph us hard at “work.” “I’m going to tweet this,” he told us, which made my fellow volunteer visibly nervous. “What if my mother sees it,” she asked. “Then your mom needs to come out to you,” he responded, “As a cool mom!”

We all laughed. The joke had broken the tension; so impossible was it to imagine that her mom using Twitter. Of course, Twitter, unlike Grindr, is a public in the most straightforward sense of that term—when the BQFF account posted anything posted on Twitter it became searchable and viewable to anyone else using Twitter. The publicity of the tweet, and Anju’s nervousness, reminded me of people who wore masks during the Pride march lest their image circulate online in ways they couldn’t control. They wanted to

participate and be part of the community gathering but they did not want evidence of their participation to circulate beyond their control and maybe get back to their families.

Grindr, on the other hand, was a virtual network only accessible to registered users. Because it strictly targeted gay men, it delimited the form of virtual visibility it offered from other groups like lesbian women. Several lesbian support and social groups co-sponsored BQFF, but most of the women I met had criticisms of these groups—that only couples showed up, for instance, and therefore they did not serve as places to meeting new, available women. Also, there was a lot of criticism about the elite nature of at least one prominent lesbian social group in the city. They only meet at expensive bars and restaurants, places that a lot of women can't afford to go, Anju told me. Her account echoed that of another friend who had recently told me about her similar experience with the same group.

Not only were there social and technological barriers to the festival as a site of sexual possibility and connection for lesbian women, Xavier told me there had also been a decline in the number of women attended the festival. This struck me as particularly ironic since the most common complaint about BQFF I heard from gay men was that too many of the movies shown were about lesbians, or focused solely on transgender and women's issues. It seems they wanted more gay content, and, I suspected eye candy. If the crowd as too gay for lesbian women, then the movies were not gay enough for the crowd. Looking over the 2015 and 2016 programs, it was true that more movies focused on women and transgender experience than they did on the experience's of gay men, but why was this a problem at a *queer* (*not* gay) film

festival? Because the gay community in Bangalore (and India) is highly transphobic, some said.

Xavier explained that both the shift in attendance and the discontent with broadly queer content had to do with the consolidation of the “queer” in the film festival’s name as a gloss for masculine gay identity. He had worked for the festival from its beginning and noticed fewer men attending in ways that visibly transgressed gender norms over time. This, in turn shifted BQFF from a broadly queer space to one specifically gendered male. Since I observed a similar effect due to the predominance of Grindr as a technology that mediated sociality at BQFF, this explanation resonated with my own observation and experience at the festival. Indeed, the association of “queer” with gay masculinity may also have been an effect of BQFF’s status as “Grindr come to life.” This resulted in making women and transgender people feel less welcome, and therefore less likely to attend, less likely to see the festival as having an air of sex about it *for them*. In other words, Xavier made a connection, if not an explicit one, between the bodily morphologies found both at BQFF, on Grindr, and at Jay’s Saturday night parties, with the concomitant erosion of BQFF as a space for more inclusive and diverse queer community.

Despite, or perhaps because of the complex interplay between real and virtual sexually dissident geographies that played out at BQFF, the experience of the festival was still a highly tactile one. There was the darkened hall, with its sticky air, especially as more people gathered into the room, the ushers with their flashlights, the donation box wrapped in floral paper, the slips of paper with movie titles which we volunteers fastidiously cut into strips asking

people to cast votes in one of three boxes: “loved it,” “it was alright,” or “hated it.” There were the smells of the film hall or lack thereof: the chemical scent of fresh ink on the festival bags as we unpacked them from their plastic, stuffed them with cards from different sponsoring organizations serving the community, and counted out festival brochures. There was the acrid whiff of sweaty bodies, particularly packed into the Alliance hall for the live performances on the second and third days of the festival. Sometimes, especially during the European films, the audience was observant and mostly quiet, whispering to one another during the films. Other times they were active and vocal, whistling, clapping and reacting to especially films in ways culturally sanctioned as appropriate audience responses (Mankekar 1999, Pandian 2015, Srinivas L. 2016).

While BQFF was undoubtedly a gathering of *a* community of Bangalore’s sexual dissidents, the tendency of festival attendees to refer to it as *the* community preemptively erased all of the people not present from inclusion in the collective noun “community”—including those for whom entire days off work are not economically feasible or those who do not speak English, the dominant language of the festival despite the wide array of languages in the movies shown.

On the first day of the festival at Max Mueller there was a moment where this disparity of access and inclusion for different forms of sexual dissidence was especially clear. We were sitting in the screening hall when Xavier stepped to the front of the room and said that there would be an impromptu performance. Three hijra women came forward and the volunteer introduced them, saying something about their importance in the community.

Then the three women, dressed in colorful rayon saris—one yellow with a bold floral print, another in bright red, another in fuchsia—sat in a semi-circle and sang bright and clear in Kannada. One of them played what I think was a tambourine or a similar handheld percussion instrument. The effect of bringing music normally heard on the street into the performance space of the hall was striking.

The a cappella song resonated through the otherwise silent space, as much an aural contrast to the quiet of the festival as their brightly colored clothes were to the stark white minimalism of the building. As they sang for the relatively small mid-morning audience, someone passed around a hat, and as it moved from hand to hand it filled with rupees. When the hijras finished their songs we applauded, thanked them, gave them they collected money, they thanked us, left, and the film festival went back to its original rhythms, sounds, colors, class and gender configurations. This moment, I later learned around the volunteer table, had been completely unplanned. What happened was, some of the volunteers had gone outside to smoke cigarettes when the group of hijras just happened to pass by them. They were collecting from shops along the road, as was their regular practice, so the volunteers decided to ask them into Max Mueller to perform. After all, this *was* a queer film festival they thought, so shouldn't they try and include everyone.

Except that they hadn't included everyone in the same way. If timing had been a little bit different, if they had gone for a smoke at a different time, or if the hijras who performed had taken long at their previous stop, they would never have been part of BQFF. No one who occupied their social position (in terms of class, and for the most part in terms of gender, too)

would have been part of the festival at all. And though I understood the move to have been well intentioned on the part of the organizers, I spoke with several audience members who had mixed feelings about it. After all, while hijra were the subjects of a least a few of the films—in 2016 *Nanu Avanala Avallu* was one of the very well received films that headlined the festival—very few if any hijras attended as spectators.

This moment of impromptu performance made visible the bodies of the particular hijras who performed, as well as provided them with a monetary donation they would not otherwise have received. But did it really signal inclusion and diversity at BQFF, as the organizers hoped? How did it produce forms of publicity or privacy for very different embodiments of dissident gender and sexuality within the social geography of Bangalore? Festival organizers may have imagined that the “queer” part of the film festival made other sorts of differences hang together under the common experience of sexual dissidence, but the happenstance nature of the three hijra women’s inclusion suggests otherwise.

I think it is safe to deduce that by virtue of attendance at BQFF the people present saw themselves as connected to Bangalore’s sexually dissident “community” in some way. But both “queer” and “community” —as these terms circulated in Bangalore at least—were more capacious than the social realities they described in the context of an event like BQFF. Because the hijras who came into the screening hall and briefly sang were not equal participants in the festival, they were more similar to the movies on screen. In both cases—the hijras’ performance and the films— rendered different experiences of sexual dissidence visible to festival attendees in a

unidirectional sense. This was not, in other words, the kind of visibility through which to cohere a capacious and community, which despite its difference was unified through the shared experience of sexual dissidence. Indeed, one thing I saw across the many urban sites that make up the geographies of this ethnography was how community is always in formation, an imperfect descriptor of the world as it is *and* a utopic vision of what sexual dissidence might be (Munoz 2009).

By acknowledging the motivation behind inviting the hijras into BQFF to perform was one of inclusion, *and* that doing so illustrated the limitations of BQFF as an inclusive and comprehensive community, the meaning of visibility at the festival becomes more complicated. Eager to understand what kind of public BQFF was or could be, I brought up the question with several people attending. Was BQFF a public or private event, I asked? In each case they responded that the film festival was public, then qualified their opinions as they thought more. One friend explained to me, “BQFF is a place where people publicly show off to other members of *the community*” (emphasis mine). His observation was accurate enough—for example, I saw it in the colorful outfits people wore to the dance performances on the festival’s last day, and in Daniel’s story about how the public, visible nature of festival allowed him to meet someone new even as it meant he was less careful than he otherwise would have been about making safe choices around sexual encounters.

My friend’s assessment of the public nature of BQFF took for granted that no one outside of, or unfriendly to, “the community” would attend. In this way, BQFF closely fits Michael Warner’s concept of a counter public. Drawing

on theories of the public sphere in relation to the work of Jurgen Habermas, Warner's conception of public relies on media circulation and mutual forms of recognition through language (Warner 2002). In turn, relies on what Povinelli calls "stranger sociality" (Povinelli 2006). Counterpublics, Warner explains, cohere through their tension with and opposition to the larger public (Warner 2002, 56). Held in two European cultural centers, BQFF is both physically separate from the city at large, even as its focus on "queer" films sets it apart from the presumptive heterosexuality of much Indian cinema and social spaces in Bangalore.

"Counterpublics of sex and gender," Warner writes, "[teach] us to recognized in new and deeper ways how privacy is publicly constructed. They [test] our understanding of how private life can be made publicly relevant" (ibid, 62). However, aspect of the social relations of BQFF not only offers a foil to what might otherwise be termed the "normative" public, it also reproduces norms within the context of a "queer" event. Listening to hijras sing, gay men watching films about women's desire for one another: each of these examples reproduces masculinity, gay or otherwise, as the most publicly—or counter-publicly—visible embodiment of sexual dissidence within the festival space and by extension the "community" at large in Bangalore. Indeed, describing BQFF as "Grinder Come to Life" made the space constitutively gendered male. It also presumed that gay male forms of sociality, visibility, and publicity were paramount. Everyone else, for example lesbian women attending the festival, still had to negotiate the gendered politics through which the visibility of sexual difference was still organized, even at an ostensibly queer event.

As the final crowds dispersed and volunteers began cleaning up Alliance, the energy was high for everyone exiting the festival hall. Was BQFF a perfect representation of the diversity and difference that characterize sexually dissident community in Bangalore? Not at all. Like every “community” event it simultaneously imagined a community of difference *and* was constructed in such a way that it placed limits on the degree of differences within the community it brought together. Still, events like BQFF did offer the possibility for new connections, for feelings of belonging, for sex and other yet-to-be determined forms of connection.

Conclusion- The Many Lives of Cubbon Park

A group of friends spreads out a blanket to make space for their picnic under the shade of Cubbon Park's towering silver oaks, red-silk cotton trees, and blue jacaranda. As they listen to the sounds of birdsong, the city's usually ubiquitous horn blasts recede into the distance and perhaps for a minute the group even forgets that the park is in the middle of a sprawling metropolis. As a centrally located urban site, Cubbon Park is variously described as both the "heart of the city" and "the city's lung." However, these bodily metaphors not only reference the park's central place within Bangalore's social and ecological geographies, they highlight the multiple investments residents have in the park as a rich site of urban meaning-making and urban life. In turn, the important place of Cubbon Park within the imagined body of Bangalore offers analytical insight into ongoing differential access to urban for the city's

diverse populations, access which continues to be unequal despite the fact that the park is ostensibly the city's largest freely accessible green space.

On its website, the Karnataka State Department of Horticulture describes Cubbon park as “a major lung space of Bangalore and a location for early morning walkers, so also for naturalists who study plants in the serene natural environment.”³⁷ In other words, the horticultural agency highlights how the park's many trees serve to filter the city's increasingly noxious air, in turn (hopefully) having an ameliorative effect on an urban landscape increasingly comprised of concrete, asphalt, and steel rather than trees, plants, and earth. What's more, calling the park a “lung” implies not only that it is beneficial for, but also that it is *vital to* the life of both the city and its residents.

It follows, therefore, that Cubbon Park is known as “the heart of the city,” a common descriptor evidenced in print by its use as the title of a 2014 article that appeared in the national English language newspaper, *The Hindu*.³⁸ Like calling the park a “lung,” the invocation of a heart metaphor also suggests that the place is essential to life in Bangalore, albeit with a different connotation. What's more, the use of “heart” suggests that Cubbon Park represents a characteristic or quality that is essential to the city, even as it locates this quality in the park's distinction from the rest of the urban landscape. “Cubbon Park's vast green landscape may be one of the last resting haunts in Bangalore,” writes Allan Moses Rodricks in the Hindu article. “[It is]

³⁷ <http://www.horticulture.kar.nic.in/cubbon.htm>

³⁸ <https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/society/the-heart-of-the-city/article6574705.ece>

a city that is moving faster than many of us expect [sic].” This newspaper account of Bangalore’s growth—glossed by an image of fast movement—juxtaposes the park with the city’s speedy temporality of growth and progress, in turn figuring Cubbon Park as a site of rest, respite, and leisure where residents can connect with Bangalore’s urban nature as well as its pasts.

In other words, the ways in which Cubbon Park gets conceptualized as an organic and fundamental part of the city necessarily situates it within larger nostalgic narratives about Bangalore, narratives that cut across the city’s multiple temporalities and articulate the urban landscape as both socially meaningful and materially significant. Although during my period of fieldwork such nostalgia often presented itself as an antidote to the evils of Bangalore’s unbridled growth post-liberalization, close attention to the park’s earlier history shows how nostalgia has been a constitutive part of park even from its earliest days. What’s more, as a site of urban articulation the park has, both from its origin and throughout its history, been a place where the tensions between efforts to domesticate the urban landscape and to foster dissident inhabitations of the city get played out.

Because of the park’s central place in the life of the city, the stories that form the backbone of this ethnography have returned to Cubbon Park again and again, just as I found myself returning on an almost daily basis during the time I lived in Bangalore. Whether performing Shakespeare, running and exercising, attending storytelling events, cruising for sex, or just playing card games on a blanket after having a picnic, Cubbon Park provided the space for different sexually dissident people to occupy the park in many unique ways.

Sometimes these ways of occupying the space served to visibilize people's sexual dissidence within the urban landscape—such as when annual Pride Run participants gathered in front of a large rainbow flag— while at other times people's very ability to be in the park without harassment or violence relied upon the invisibility of their sexual dissidence—for example men cruising for sex with other men, or those who recounted doing sex work in the park at great risk.

Therefore, attention to sexually dissident people's ways of being in Cubbon Park breaks down the perceived binary between visibility and invisibility. For example, men looking for sex with other men tried to remain invisible to the police even as they simultaneously sought heightened visibility to one another. Sex workers needed to attract clients for their livelihood without also attracting attention from other people in the park. As many of the stories I tell illustrate, tensions between visibility and invisibility always exists in a complicated relationship with the corollary (perceived) binary of public and private. After all, Cubbon Park is pretty clearly a public space in the sense that it is free to enter and is municipally maintained. Yet those who make their sexual dissidence visible in public spaces like Cubbon Park—such as the people gathered for pride—are able to do so *precisely* because they also have access to another private sphere in which their experiences of sex and intimacy can happen away from the eyes of others.

The practices of sexual dissidence that cultivate visibility in urban sites like Cubbon Park cannot, therefore, easily be conflated with the perceived “public-ness” of sex in the park. This is because access to privacy elsewhere remains a condition of possibility for those who choose to both publicly and

visibly express their sexual dissidence in the park. Conversely, the experience of having one's sexual dissidence invisibilized, that is, erased from public narratives about who the park and the city are *for*, often results from a presumptive lack of access to privacy, particularly along class lines.

In fact, the complex and multifaceted processes through which marginalized groups get invisibilized are often predicated on only having recourse to sex in spaces coded as public in the first place. As with many of the other places in Bangalore that make appearances in this ethnography, my sustained attention to Cubbon Park illustrates the uneasy and unstable conceptual relationship between visibility and invisibility on the one hand, and between public and private spheres on the other.

Simply put, practices of occupying Cubbon Park articulate Bangalore as an urban place in which the park's green space is both the city's heart *and* its lungs, a place where the park is essential to urban thriving. Like the concepts of visibility and invisibility, or of public and private, or indeed of the city itself, both the social history and the social present of Cubbon Park serve to articulate (that is, to bring into being) multiple and at times competing visions of what Bangalore is and who it is for. What's more, the tensions between different ways of being in Cubbon Park can broadly be understood through the two forms of urban articulation that I have developed over the course of this dissertation: processes of domestication on the one hand, and the cultivation of dissidence on the other.

In conclusion, I offer a brief history of Cubbon Park in order to illustrate these how seemingly competing forms of urban articulation still manage to coexist and even build upon one another. This reiterates my

overarching observation that, as processes of urban articulation, domestication and dissidence are not as divergent or separate as they seem. To do this I will first briefly discuss the origin of the park under British colonial administration, and show how from its conception the park was infused with nostalgia: its existence literally intended to domesticate the exotic Indian landscape. Then I will examine the transformation of the park in the post-independence period through construction of nostalgia-infused civic architecture adjacent to the park. I will outline how, from the 1980s to the present, Cubbon Park's place within Bangalore's social and political landscapes has shifted, invisibilizing some dissident inhabitations of the park even as others became more visible.

This marked increase in visibility for the park's dissident sexual life, so-to-speak, has been concurrent with other heightened strategies of domestication across Bangalore and on the part of both the city's government and corporate interests. The result has been greater possibilities for certain forms of sexual dissidence even as other forms of dissidence have been lost or have become less common. Finally, I return to the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in order to reflect on the continued tensions that exist between domestication and dissidence as competing, overlapping, and concomitant forms of urban articulation. As all my ethnographic accounts illustrate, Cubbon Park continues to play an important role in the life of Bangalore's sexually dissident communities. Like the city of Bangalore itself, Cubbon Park continues to transform through different people's inhabitations, occupations, and investments.

Colonial Nostalgia Past, Post-Colonial Nostalgia Present

Despite the fact that the statue of Queen Victoria located at the edge of Cubbon Park depicts the British monarch immortalized in stone, she still manages to show her age. Today the surface of the statue is darkened by both time and pollution, and bits of stone are chipped and missing. Still, the statue's position near the southwestern entrance to the park, at the intersection of Queens Road, Kasturba Road, and MG Road, assures its continued prominence. For example, it is where participants gathered for the Valentine's Day Stroll that I recount in Chapter Three, and where the weekly gay running club meets early on Sunday mornings. On weekends it is invariably thronged with amateur photographers, fancy DSLR cameras strung around their necks, everyone adjusting apertures and exposure times to get the best image of this now iconic symbol of the park.

Perhaps Queen Victoria is such a common reference point because of her central location, or perhaps it is because she is situated on a pedestal and therefore highly visible, serving as a good meeting point for those otherwise unfamiliar with the park. Either way, the association between citizens gathering in the park and using the statue of Queen Victoria as a meeting point has come to have a particular class-based connotation which Janaki Nair explores in her book, *The Promise of the Metropolis* (2005). In it she discusses how gatherings around the statue date back at least to 1993, and culminated "for a full six weeks in September and October of 1998, [when] the Victoria statue became the rallying point for middle-class citizens seeking to protect Cubbon Park from the slow process of attrition that had reduced its original size" (Nair 2005, 293). I will explore the post-independence transformation of

the park which led to the overall shrinkage of its footprint— and to the aforementioned protest— in due course. Here I am interested in the strategic use of Queen Victoria by middle-class Indian residents as a nostalgic symbol for Cubbon Park’s place in the landscape of a bygone Bangalore they sought to preserve.

“The choice of the Victoria statue as the location for a protest to save the park,” Nair writes, “therefore sought to empty the site of its historic meanings and deploy it as a sign of aesthetics under siege. Indeed, the protest itself”—which involved mass gatherings of women and children—“was aesthetic in its mobilization of the middle-class” (Nair 2005, 213). In this instance, at least, the concerned citizens who invoked the statue as an aesthetic marker of Bangalore’s past did so in order to collectively resist future political encroachment over urban nature and culture. However, in doing so their demands glossed the necessary historic context for the continued existence of a monument to British monarchy in an Indian park.³⁹ And while Nair accurately describes these citizens’ claims about statue as being a purely aesthetic object, the fact remains that their chosen emphasis on both the statue and the park was inextricably tied to the history of colonialism in the city.

In other words, it is impossible to see such organizing as separate from the nostalgic affect that suffuses many middle-class narratives about Bangalore, and which is connected to the forms of social, political, and economic change that have taken place in the city since liberalization. During my own time in Cubbon Park, and while observing others’ fascination with the

³⁹ It is one of only five statues of Queen Victoria remaining in India today.

statue of Victoria, I was reminded of the many stories friends told me about how Enid Blyton wrote their favorite children's books. Indeed, even the picnic I alluded to in the opening paragraph was inspired by the organizer's memory of Blyton's stories! In other words, middle-class concerns about the preservation of the park cannot be disentangled from their complicated relationship to colonialism and resulting attitudes about the proper uses of urban space and urban nature in the city today.

What's more, this nostalgia on the part of the current Indian middle class to preserve Cubbon Park is reflected in the original British reasons for establishing the park. Elsewhere in her book Nair explains that the "swathe of parkland [which made up Cubbon Park] separated the city from the cantonment, keeping the two areas and their respective cultures apart well into the twentieth century. The chosen location of the Queen Victoria Statue at the southern edge of Cubbon Park in 1906 was a symbolic proclamation of the station's gratitude to the colonial regime, as many Indian, European, and Eurasian groups contributed to its installation" (Nair 2005, 62). In other words, the place of Queen Victoria in Cubbon Park was, ever since its installation, invested with class-based claims to the urban landscape, just as the park itself served to articulate that landscape along lines of class and ethnicity, of rulers and ruled.

To this day Cubbon Park continues to divide the two sections of Bangalore that Nair references, though with recent unbridled development their demarcation is no longer quite so distinct. The old "city," or *pete* in Kannada, is located adjacent to the fort and is the historical locus of Kannadiga commerce and trade is on one side of the park; the "cantonment,"

which housed British residents and Anglo-Indians during the colonial period, is on the other side. In addition to the placement of the park as historically dividing the British from native populations, the park was designed by the colonial authorities precisely to fulfill another form of nostalgia: their longing for the faraway gardens, hedgerows, and bucolic meadows of England. In this regard Bangalore was an ideal site in which to evoke that far away island, since its central location on the Deccan Plateau “offered such a salubrious climate that it soon became the most important cantonment in peninsular India, with a corresponding expansion of the civil presence and all the support population that this implied. For nine months of the year it was a ‘spot of England in India,’ or, as another writer puts it, ‘India without its scorching sun and Europe without its snow’” (Herbert 2011, 130).

In her book about British Gardens in India, *Flora's Empire*, Eugenia Herbert uses primary source material from British colonial correspondence to highlight how the desirability of Bangalore's climate, architecture, and gardens helped establish its reputation as both a highly sought after posting for colonial officials and as an Anglo-Indian pensioners' paradise. For example, she quotes an 1839 letter from a British woman named Julia Maitland who wrote, “The early mornings [in Bangalore] are as pleasant as anything I can imagine. They have all the sweetness and freshness of an English summer. The air smells of hay and flowers...” (Herbert 2011, 132). Maitland goes on to favorably compare her experience of Bangalore to the miasma of Madras, which she found foul and suffocating. Because of its pleasant climactic reputation, both the British military and civilian presence in Bangalore's cantonment grew, and General Richard Sankey, the then chief

British Engineer of Mysore State, set aside about 100 acres to establish the park in the 1864.

“Cubbon Park,” writes Nair, “was created...out of a little more than a hundred acres of farmland. It was envisaged as rolling parkland dotted with trees, quite different from the plotted botanical order of Lal Bagh” (Nair 2005, 61-62). In other words, through the establishment of Cubbon Park the British sought to literally domesticate the South Indian landscape: to make it like look like home. They also intervened in Lal Bagh, though in a different manner. Lal Bagh, which to this day remains a series of formal botanical gardens, is situated several miles to the south of Cubbon Park. Hyder Ali originally established the site circa 1760. Hyder, along with his son, Tippu Sultan, imported a wide variety of plants from across the subcontinent and planted them in the gardens. Tippu also used the gardens of Lal Bagh to cultivate a wide variety fruit trees, spices, vegetables, and roses (Nagendra 2016).

When the British took over Lal Bagh in the nineteenth century, they transformed it from a site for the purposeful cultivation of exotic plants into a manicured pleasure garden for the city’s British and Indian residents (Nagendra 2016). Unlike the “country” style of Cubbon Park, Lal Bagh remained highly organized in its design. In 1889 the British even erected a glass house modeled on the Crystal Palace in London, and the Prince of Wales commemorated the structure during his visit to India that year (Herbert 2011). The same glass house continues to host Bangalore’s annual flower show today, and Lal Bagh continues to provide a green space for the citizens of Bangalore, though with an admission price of 20 Rs (about 40 US cents as of

2016) its social role remains distinct from that of the freely accessible Cubbon Park.

Both in the cases of Lal Bagh and of Cubbon Park, their respective histories are tied to British nostalgia for homes far away, because of which they built houses, parks, and cities to reflect their own urban ideas and aesthetics in places of empire (Bigon and Katz 2014, Herbert 2011, Rodman 2001). In the case of Bangalore, the British were able to play out their nostalgia on the urban landscape quite easily because of the city's fortuitous location within South India's otherwise scorching climate and geography. Even more than Lal Bagh, the location and layout of which predated the British presence, the colonial establishment of Cubbon Park was the direct result of what I refer to throughout this dissertation as a process of urban articulation figured as domestication. For one, the park connected disparate parts of the city as well as connected different populations living in each respective place. For another, it created an urban space in which city residents could enjoy a highly mediated version of urban nature.

Through these examples of (1) the British officials who originally created Cubbon Park and (2) more recent Indian citizens who protested to "save" it, it becomes clear how both groups transacted in an affective currency that locates the park within multiple temporalities of colonial (and post-colonial) nostalgia. One effect of this nostalgia is the domestication of Cubbon Park within the urban social and physical geography, both historically and today. That is, conceptions of the park as a site for leisure and culture solidify its place in the city as one where residents with access to a class-specific conception of leisure can use it. As I will go on to show, however, within this

nostalgic vision of Cubbon Park not all leisure counts as proper to or acceptable. Instead, domestication necessarily references colonial forms of living in the city, including colonial limits of acceptability.

Post-Colonial Nostalgia for a Pre-Colonial Past

Colonial forms of nostalgia, along with their post-colonial presence in contemporary life are not the only manifestations of nostalgia that have been used to domesticate the park over the course of its existence. Through civic architecture that references an imagined pre-colonial Bangalore, newly independent Indian reformists sought to solidify the city's power by using the Park and its environs as potent symbols for Bangalore's place in the new nation.

These buildings now form the complex of state government offices that line the northern part of the park. Immediately adjacent to the more recent construction is a red neoclassical building known as the Attara Kacheri (literally "eighteen offices" in Kannada), which today houses the Karnataka High Court. It was built in this location around the same time that the park was founded. Across the street from the court building is the main government building of Karnataka state, the Vidhana Soudha. Its structure is vast and monumental, "reach[ing] back to a very particular historical legacy in order to claim an authenticity that was markedly different from the symbols of colonial power. It sought this authenticity by quoting from the magnificent stone edifices of a distinctly Hindu monarchical past" (Nair 2002, 1210). The planning of the Vidhana Soudha, as Nair explains, connected nostalgia for a pre-colonial, Hindu past with the power and aesthetics of the Princely Mysore

State. She goes into the particulars of Mysore Chief Minister Kengal Hanumanthaiya's grand plans for the building, including his insistence on heavy embellishment at a time when this architectural style was politically unpopular.

Ultimately the Vidhana Soudha, with its pediments and friezes alluding to Hindu mythology was built at a cost of 180 Lakhs. Despite an initial estimate to build the entire structure for 50 Lakhs, the final design included over 46 Lakh in architectural features and embellishments alone (Nair 2002, 1217). This includes a grand flight of steps that were built to be purely decorative, and which are only used on holidays and ceremonial occasions. The whole building towers over, and even dwarfs, the older Attara Kacheri and the green expanse of Cubbon Park across the street.

The building is steeped in nostalgia for a source of power that quite literally overshadows the British colonial imprint on the city. Such a long shadow, it turns out, has other effects on the spaces around it. As Nair points out, "the gradually restrictive and rather ritualized uses of public space around Vidhana Soudha appear to confirm the fear of plebian democracy as it has developed among the ruling classes in the immediate post-independence decades. The historical uses of the Cubbon Park area as a whole and its centrality to the civic culture of the city shift the discussion to a new register, going beyond monumental architecture to the making and meaning of public space" (Nair 2002, 1219).

Here Nair refers to the gathering of protesting citizens in Cubbon Park, particularly on the grounds of protecting its natural environment and aesthetic beauty. This is why there were protests organized around the

Victoria Statue to “save” it in the 1990s—because the Karnataka government officials wanted to reclaim land from the park in order to build additional government buildings. Nair’s meticulous account of the political uses of the park focuses mostly on the mobilization of Bangalore’s urban middle-class. “[In the post-colonial period] the park gradually was transformed by the everyday occupations of the lower class,” she writes. But she goes on to explain that a preponderance of environmental concerns has once again ceded symbolic political control of the park back to the middle classes. This classed based struggle over access to the park, both physical and symbolic, is why it is all the more important to attend to social, political, and economic processes that articulate the park within Bangalore’s urban geography.

For a different perspective on citizens’ political engagements with and in the park, I spoke to Mathew, a labor and land rights organizer who has been active in Bangalore for over 30 years. It was an oppressively hot day when we sat in Mathew’s top floor office, the door open in the hopes of catching a breeze. He explained that prior to 1986 protestors would gather on the steps of the Vidhana Soudha itself (Nair says they were only ever ceremonial). Then they moved to the pavement opposite the Vidhana Soudha.

However, they could not get any closer to the main government building because of the barriers and enclosures around it, enclosures of once public land that Nair describes as effectively privatizing the public space. This logic extended into the park as well, where Mathew explained that police no longer allowed him and other political activists to gather for protest, but where the new “user rights” of the “jogger, walker, or occasional picnicker” are perfectly acceptable (Nair 2002, 1223). Certainly Nair’s assessment that

there were more limitations on uses of the park with the advent of public-private partnerships is in keeping with the Happy Feet Initiative that I recount in Chapter Two. These efforts sought to, and succeeded at, domesticating Cubbon Park and the surrounding area, “cleanizing” it as Mathew described the process in which working-class people were forced out of the park even as it remained amenable to the pursuits of middle-class consumer citizens. Post-colonial nostalgia, whether for a pre-colonial or colonial past, seemed to have prevailed.

Mathew went on to narrate the slow but steady retreat of protests, not just from the immediate vicinity of the Vidhana Soudha, but away from the general area in and around Cubbon Park altogether. Soon they moved from the pavement across from the legislature, to the area around Corporation Circle, and then to the Gandhi Statue that sits across Queens Road from the statue of Queen Victoria. Protesters continued to gather in this Cubbon Park-adjacent locale until construction on the metro closed the site in the early 2000s.

Finally they ended up at Town Hall—the only place left to visibly protest as Mathew described it—and the site of many protests as I describe them in Chapter Four. This forced shift away from Cubbon Park and from the immediately surrounding area firmly locates political protesters as people articulate dissidence. This is not to say that protestors like Mathew were focused on sexuality, per se, but similar to sexual dissidence the presence of political protest not aimed at preserving middle-class uses of the park only served to disrupt normative forms of sociality there.

Sex and the Park

So far I have drawn on different historical periods in the life of Cubbon Park in order to highlight how practices that I categorize as forms of domestication have served to articulate the park both within Bangalore's urban geography and throughout its history. Still, like the buses where Gopal first experienced same-sex desire, the park also resists domestication despite the powers that seek to enforce it. That is, both places have their own unique sexually dissident histories that cannot be articulated into a domesticated, "cleanized" version of the city.

I first heard about Cubbon Park's dissident sexual history when I spoke with many gay-identifying men as well as a number of kothis for whom Cubbon Park's former reputation as a cruising site—and to a lesser extent as a location for sex work—was common across their otherwise distinct narratives about life in the city. Indeed, the association between dissident forms of sexuality and the park as a site of dissident articulation, here meaning erotic and sexual connections between men, was one of the first things I found out about the park through my interviews.

Specifically what I heard were stories from days before the existence of hook-up apps like Grindr, Planet Romeo, or Tinder, about a time before support groups and NGOs and pride marches, when meeting in Cubbon Park was one of the only ways for men to connect for sex with other men. I mostly heard these accounts from men who, during my period of fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 ranged from their mid 40s to their mid 50s. Perhaps this was because I did not have the opportunity to speak to anyone older than his 50s.

Yet I heard plenty of second-hand accounts about such forms of sexually dissident sociality from younger men who, although not old enough to experience it themselves, had also heard about and passed along the stories. Whether first or second-hand, these stories were steeped in nostalgia for practices that their narrators located firmly in the past.

As I transcribed the stories into my field notebooks, it was not lost on me that they were all from—and all about—male born persons who mostly also present as men. If such accounts of Cubbon Park were indeed rooted in nostalgia (as they seemed to be) it was highly gendered. Access to this nostalgia was contingent upon the gender privilege to imagine past bodily encounters to have been somehow freer and therefore more conducive to creating shared experience, than the virtual connections that most gay men said structured almost all of their sexual and erotic interactions today.

This kind of narrative brings to mind accounts of cruising in New York City before the AIDS era, as José Muñoz writes about in his book *Cruising Utopia*. In the chapter titled “The Ghosts of Public Sex” he quotes Douglas Crimp’s description of sexual encounters from that time, and the loss of sexual freedom that came with AIDS. Muñoz calls this “queer utopian memory” and does “not read these texts as nostalgic discourse but instead presents them as a moment in which queer utopian remembrance re-enacts what Crimp has called a culture of sexual possibility” (Muñoz 2009, 35).

Are the memories of gay men in Bangalore manifestations of Crimp’s “sexual possibility” or are they a kind of nostalgia for past erotics, for past sex? Certainly insofar as these memories point to dissident articulations of the city— to ways of living and being that are both urban and otherwise— they

offer the possibility of making a different city and a different world. But the same memories do not offer sexual possibility to everyone, any more than the forms of dissidence that gay men found themselves nostalgic for offered sexual possibilities to everyone conceptualized as sexually dissident. What some remember with nostalgia, others are grateful to put behind them.

Interested to try and corroborate the stories I heard about cruising in Cubbon Park, I visited Cornell's Human Sexuality Collection. The library's collection includes a number of editions of the Spartacus International Gay Guide, which outlines the laws and attitudes around homosexuality for different countries and lists different destinations in major cities for each country in a particular year. The older guides in the archive take the form of printed books, while today Spartacus functions as a website and an app-based guide that can be downloaded onto smartphones and accessed anywhere. The guide is produced in Germany and contains text in English, German, French, and Spanish. India was listed in every edition I read (ranging intermittently from 1977-2006); there is also an India section on the website today, though it no longer includes Bangalore. It was not clear from reading the guide how the information about each country was obtained.

The 1977 edition of the Guide lists Bombay [Mumbai], Calcutta [Kolkata], Kashmir, Madras [Chennai], and New Delhi. Like the most recent guide, Bangalore was not listed at all. "Homosexuality is completely illegal [in India]," it said, "and it is dangerous to be too obvious in public. Of course, it exists," the Guide goes on, "but it is much more under cover than in most places. There is no 'gay scene' as such in India and it all goes on under cover." (Spartacus 1977, 384). The Guide was almost certainly correct in its

assessment that there was no out and open “gay” scene in Indian cities in the 1970s, at least given what counted as a “scene” for the authors of the guide was the kind of bars, clubs, bath houses, and other facilities found in Western Europe and North American at the time. However, as my ethnographic stories have explored throughout this dissertation, sexuality in India—gay or straight, dissident or otherwise— sometimes looks very different from Western ideas about sexuality.

It is therefore impossible to deduce the extent of “gay” life in urban India from this limited and (potentially) biased publication. Still, for Delhi at least, the 1986 *Spartacus* lists the gardens in the center of Connaught Place as a cruising site, and this information is in line with all the stories I have heard about cruising in Delhi. In fact, the center of Connaught Place was long known as a site for cruising and sex work, at least until more recent efforts to crackdown on dissident ways of inhabiting urban space and the privatization of that space. That the Guide does not list Bangalore at the same time suggests either that there were no active cruising sites in the city, or, more likely, that Bangalore itself was not on the international gay radar in the late 1970s.

This had changed by 1982 when the Guide lists Bangalore for the first time, albeit with some confusion about which city it actually was. The brief description reads: “Holiday centre for upper class Indians from Bombay or Madras. For safe contact: the health clubs of the OBEROI TOWERS HOTEL and the TAJ MAHAL HOTEL in South Bombay, the SEA ROCK HOTEL in Bandra, and several big hotels in the JUHU BEACH area, all of which are well known and require no addresses” (*Spartacus* 1982, 371). It seems as if this information has been cut and pasted from the Bombay section without much

thought, since each of these locations is specific to that city rather than Bangalore. Still, underneath the inaccurate description it says “Outside Cruising→ Cubbon Park, 18-22hrs.” Confusion or not, Cubbon Park had made its way onto the international radar of gay cruising sites!

The 1983 and 1988 editions (these are the other two Spartacus guides that Cornell has from the 1980s) repeat verbatim the information about Bangalore and Cubbon Park, including the inaccuracies. Although it doesn’t provide a lot of context, this textual source bolsters gay men’s narratives about Cubbon Park being used in this way. And because the older men—though they were hardly old—whom I spoke with recalled Cubbon Park as a more active cruising site, it makes sense that the Spartacus Guides from the 1980s supports those accounts. After all, they are documenting and remembering the same time period. The 2006 edition listed a number of other sites under Bangalore, including prominent NGOs and support groups. The location of cruising in Cubbon Park was more specific in this edition, explaining exactly where in the park it happens, and the listing carried the addendum “many students,” something I had not heard before.

The Park Today

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the dissident sexual history of Cubbon Park remains mostly absent from both popular and scholarly narratives about the park’s place within the broader social landscape of Bangalore, now and throughout its history. After all, the invisibility of dissident people and their ways of living in the city are not *only* the result of social marginalization (though they are certainly that)—they are also a survival strategy, a way to

persist in an otherwise unaccepting world. But things are changing, and more recent efforts to visibilize sexual dissidence in Cubbon Park—including the queer Republic Day commemoration and the Valentine’s Day Stroll, the gay running club, the performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and the Priti meet-up—draw their strength and claim their visibility from the diversity of participants. Each of these examples does so in order to counteract what was long a pervasive mindset among sexually dissident communities I met in Bangalore—that only through invisibility could sexually dissident people be safe. The many accounts of public, visible expressions of sexual dissidence throughout this ethnography are a testament to how much things are changing, at least for those in positions of class, gender, and caste privilege.

In 2016 I presented a brief but broad overview of my ongoing research at a workshop titled “Bangalore’s Great Transformation.” The event was held at the National Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS) in northwest Bangalore, and was attended by scholars across different fields, each of whom somehow made Bangalore their object of study. I was the last presenter in the last panel on the second day of the workshop and everyone was exhausted, but I still got a strong response to my call for thinking about the city through practices of dissident sexuality (what I then called “queer”), and in turn my call to think about sexuality through close attention to the city.

I clearly remember one older female scholar, who was wearing a carefully pleated silk sari and who worked with quantifiable data. She got excited about the possibilities of a “queer” approach to Bangalore. “I don’t know how I could use it in my work, this queer theory,” she said trying out the sounds of the words on her tongue, “but I like it! It’s interesting!”

The historian Janaki Nair was also present at the workshop, someone whose work I have drawn on extensively throughout this dissertation. What's more, her thoughtful, well-researched history of Bangalore informs much of the historical scholarship about the city written in English. Despite, or perhaps because of, her wealth of knowledge about the city Nair was skeptical about the premise of my project. During the workshop Q & A she asked me whether it made sense to study "queer"/dissident sexuality when *heterosexuality* is still not accepted in the Indian public sphere. I thought I understood her point: for example, I heard stories from both gay men and lesbian women about how much easier it was for them to travel together and stay in hotels than for a male-female couple to do the same. According to those stories, hotel staff would sometimes ask for proof that a young man and woman were married just so they could get a room together, and barring such proof would harass them, demand to speak to their parents, or even phone the police!

Such widely circulating narratives, along with the incidences of moral policing protested on Valentine's Day, undoubtedly illustrate the lack of acceptance for public displays of heterosexuality in public space in India today. As I discuss elsewhere, sites of consumer capitalism offer some protection against conservative groups that seek to quash any visible expressions of sexuality. It is also worth remembering that the initial harassment leading to the Kiss of Love campaign happened in a Café Coffee Day in Kerala, a space of middle-class consumption. Still, all of these examples are predicated on the prior *visibility* of heterosexuality in public space.

Thus a gay male couple are not immediately read as a couple, but the relationship between a man and a woman is always already assumed to exist within a field of (hetero)sexuality. Therefore, I responded to Janaki Nair's provocation by explaining how my research showed heterosexuality to be always already visible, both everywhere and all the time, *precisely* because of its position as the unmarked or normative form of sexuality (Butler 2006 [1990]). And while this observation does not mean that expressions of heterosexuality are free from harassment and violence—far from it— it also emphasizes their continued dominance in the public sphere of contemporary urban India.

When you go to the movies how many of the advertisements are for wedding clothing or jewelry? Answer: almost all of them. When you look at the billboards for the myriad new housing developments around Bangalore, how many show a husband and wife, plus their children, and *maybe* their in-laws? Answer: again, all of them. Each of these examples—plus many more—make up what feminists scholars call the “compulsory heterosexuality” of the public sphere (Rich 1980). At the same time, the current social and political context of dominance by the Hindu Right means that all forms of non-procreative, non-matrimonial sexuality (including heterosexuality as Nair pointed out) can be thought of as dissident in relation to that context.

At the time I used the term “queer” rather than dissident to describe my project, which in retrospect may have emphasized my attention to particular sexual practices over my project's broader critical engagement with sexuality through the lens of those most marginalized, most dissident from normative ideas about sexuality. And while it is important to include within

sexual dissidence forms of heterosexuality that also push against normative ideas about sex and gender, I do not believe in a hierarchy of sexualities where heterosexuality should or even could be studied apart from other sexualities and experiences.

Throughout this ethnography I have sought to highlight those who are working hard to visibilize dissident forms of sexuality, and, in turn, to articulate a dissident city through their attention to the diverse experiences of sexuality that come to cohere under the analytical category of sexual dissidence. At the same time, my sustained ethnographic engagement with experiences and practices of sexual dissidence in Bangalore also engages with, and hopefully contributes to, the work of articulating a dissident social geography of the city. One reason that I returned again and again to Cubbon Park—as well as the reason I chose to end with a reflection on park as a site of sexual dissidence—is because the park was at times a figurative and at other times a literal stage for visibilizing diverse and dissidence forms of sexuality in Bangalore. This makes it a productive location from which to theorize the complex relationship between visibility and invisibility, public and private, domestic and dissident conceptual relationships that this dissertation seeks to unpack.

As strategies of urban articulation, both the domestic and the dissident work on Cubbon Park—just as they work on Bangalore—in order to make it the place that it is today. Although I have often juxtaposed processes of domestication and dissidence in order to emphasize the different ways that city is transformed through experience, knowledge, and the stuff of urban life, returning to the example of Cubbon Park means resisting the binary division

between these two forms of articulation. Instead, efforts to visibilize sexually dissident lives challenge the totalizing domestication of Cubbon Park's public status. For example, our queer performance of *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* sought both to visibilize sexual dissidence *and*, akin the Happy Feet initiative or the citizen protests at the statue of Queen Victoria, also domesticated the park by offering a "cleanized", middle-class specific form of entertainment.

Put differently, as forms of urban articulation neither dissidence nor domestication, neither efforts to visibilize nor efforts to invisibilize, neither the public nor the private are ever as distinct as binary frameworks would make them seem. And because the modern Indian public/private spheres were established through a constitutive division of gender in both real and symbolic terms (Chatterjee 1989), public places like Cubbon Park continue to be gendered male, even through articulations of dissidence that otherwise challenge those gender norms. This is why nostalgic stories about the heyday of cruising in Cubbon Park are only the stories of gay men, not of kothis whose feminine gender presentation puts them at greater risk for harassment and violence, not of others who would today be categorized as transgender, and not of women, lesbian or otherwise.

In this way the nostalgic articulation of Cubbon Park's dissidence seems to foreclose its place within urban geographies and lifeworlds for anyone whose sexuality and gender marginalizes them from participating in the community in other ways. And indeed, events, practices, and inhabitations of Cubbon Park in some ways domesticate its place in the urban geography—for instance, through our performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—but they also have the effect of opening up newly dissident ways of being in the

park for new people. My final example, therefore, holds the dual processes of urban articulation that I have theorized throughout—domestication and dissidence—together. It does so in order to illustrate how these processes work to articulate (as in, make distinct) urban geographies, even as those geographies remain articulated with one another.

Cubbon Park Old, Cubbon Park New

One day in the grassy expanse near the Queen Victoria Statue I met a young woman in her mid-20s. Along with several of her friends she had come to the Priti meet-up. Each of the women in the friend group identified as lesbian and, they explained to me, had decided to come to the gathering in the hopes that they might meet new queer women. Opportunities to meet and connect with other women interested in women in Bangalore remain few and far between, they said, a sentiment echoed by many other accounts I heard from women at the Queer Film Festival, at support group meetings, during Pride events, and through my own social networks. Unfortunately, the Priti meet-up that day proved no different: aside from these four women (who all knew each and were friends already) everyone else present either identified as, or was looking to meet, men. Indeed, once the initial get-to-know-you activities were over, the four lesbians politely left to do their own thing: to spend their afternoon in Cubbon Park in their own way.

This was a hot July afternoon and the open, grassy expanse where Priti had gathered offered little shade or respite from the heat. Perhaps this was also why they were leaving, I thought. As they got up and prepared to go one of the women approached me. “I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your

play [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*]," she said. I smiled and thanked her for the compliment, especially because by this point it had been more than five months since the performance, and I was surprised that she remembered me.

"Coming to see that performance was the first time I ever came to Cubbon Park, and now it is my favorite place in the city," she continued. The woman explained to me how she was not from Bangalore, and that she had moved to the city a few years ago for work. She had heard about Cubbon Park initially but had been scared to visit either alone or with others—especially given her identity as a lesbian woman. Would she be safe in such a large public park, she wondered? Finally, she decided to visit the park one Sunday morning to watch a Shakespearean play that she had seen advertised on Facebook.

The performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had changed her perception of the park in part because of its thoroughly middle-class audience consisting mostly of families with children, along with other young adult professionals like herself. So while the make-up of the audience suggested the play's domesticating effect on the park, it also opened up a space for her to feel that *her* form of sexual dissidence could find a place in the park, too.

What's more, the play's depiction of same-sex relationships visibilized sexual dissidence in Bangalore's urban public space in a way that she felt welcomed her, specifically, to both the park and the "community." As she explained this to me, I realized how even our performance had multiple, and competing effects on the park where we staged it. On the one hand the performance inevitably contributed to the domestication of the park whether we intended it or not, transforming it into a space where bodies could freely

gather so long as they conformed to a set of unwritten but nonetheless materially significant rules about the aesthetics of urban life under conditions of consumer capitalism. Even if there was no entry fee for the play, the event had been advertised on Facebook and these were all consumer citizens. In this way, and despite being a grassroots rather than corporate effort, the play shared some characteristics with the Happy Feet campaign.

At the same time we performers literally shouted about sexual dissidence to the gathered crowds, to the trees and bamboo, to Queen Victoria's marble likeness a little less than a kilometer away from our makeshift stage. Was this the evocation of England that British Colonists had hoped for when they laid out Cubbon Park in the mid-nineteenth century? Queer Shakespeare was certainly not the domestication of the South Indian landscape they had in mind. Like the protestors Mathew described as having moved from place to place around the park in order to make their voices heard, and like those men who used to cruise in the darkness of night and amongst the very same bamboo thickets, our performance took place in the park *even as* it rearticulated the park so that the dissident was a little more domestic and the domestic was also a little more dissident.

Lawyer, activist, and playwright Danish Sheikh who originally conceived the queer take on Shakespeare, explained that he intended for the performance to stake a highly visible claim about the place of sexual dissidence within Bangalore's largest park and, by extension, within urban public life. It was just one effort, of course, but the subsequent presence of the Priti meet-up group along with the hopeful story of one lesbian woman who now loves spending time in Cubbon Park, suggests that performances that

intended to visibilize sexual dissidence—whether they come as Shakespeare or in the guise of daily life—do, in fact, reshape the park. Both dissidence and domestication, it seems, result from efforts to visibilize sexuality in Cubbon Park and Bangalore as a whole. The city that is articulated as a result is ever changing and full of possibilities for making the domestic more dissident, for “queering” the city. This new form of urban articulation, in turn, brings different configurations of love and desire, community and connection into the urban landscape boldly and proudly. By doing so it articulates the city as something new, different, and possible.

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