



Counter Home: Unravelling the Socio-Spatial Dynamics of *Hijra* Dwellings of Khulna, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Amidst limited social acceptance and scant governmental and non-governmental support for third gender communities in Bangladesh, this paper explores the intricate relationship between the conception of *hijra* and its profound impact on redefining the notion of home. In the queer tropics, *hijra* communities form a unique identity within South Asia's urban fabric. Employing ethnographic methods and spatial analysis, this multidisciplinary study investigates the *hijra* home-making process in Khulna, Bangladesh, shedding light on their lived experiences. It unravels the complex interplay of tropical architecture leading to their transformation into, and stigmatisation as, *hijras*, investigating the spatial implications of their stigma in the organisation of household spaces based on *hijra* notions of publicness-privateness, spatial sequencing/order, layering, and hierarchy. The formal articulation of homes and their integration into the larger urban scale signifies a distinctive counter-spatial culture within this marginalised community, which acts to counter prevailing ideas of stability, ownership, and family within the concept of home. This counter-culture, as the paper unveils, makes the *hijra* home dynamics a process of socio-spatial transaction where gender identities manifest and are subverted/shaped by the domestic space. The findings of the paper enrich our understanding of the diverse spatial ways social discriminations are interwoven into the ordinary fabric of contemporary urban living in the tropical city of Khulna.

Keywords: third gender identity, *hijra*, urban home-making, queer tropics, tropical architecture, Khulna Bangladesh, counter home

Introduction

The exploration of the concept of 'home' remains a captivating area within architecture (Somerville, 1992), carrying diverse cultural connotations and societal implications. Within the context of Bangladesh, the societal perception of home is deeply intertwined with 'Eurocentric ideals.' Chen et al. (2020) note this as part of a broader ongoing occidental cultural impact in the Orient, while McGee (1991) and Gamage (2018) critique Eurocentrism in South Asia. These 'temperate' ideals emphasise stability, privacy, internal aspirations, and a gender binary (Walker, 2002; Blunt, 2006; Young, 1997). The entanglement of Eurocentric paradigms within local tropical contexts is a legacy of centuries of colonisation across the tropics, which persist into the present (Lundberg et al., 2023). These paradigms extend from ideas to materiality, subtly shaping how the home is inhabited, organised, and perceived (Jones, 2007; Bowra & Mashford-Pringle, 2021).

In post-colonial Bangladesh, the perception of home thus often restricts tropical architectural discourse to mainstream socioeconomic groups, leaving marginalised communities, such as the third gender, in a precarious position. Individuals who identify beyond male or female genders, commonly known as *hijras*, face extreme exclusion and stigmatisation from both society and their birth families (Safa, 2016; Divan et al., 2016). They are often labelled as biologically 'defective' (Ghosh, 2018) due to their inability to reproduce (Connel, 2005; Hossain, 2020), leading to being systematically excluded from even the most marginal job opportunities (Khan et al., 2009; Jebin & Farhana, 2015), and thus exacerbating their social and economic disenfranchisement (Aziz & Azhar, 2020). Consequently, third gender individuals find themselves relegated to the fringes of society, engaging in socially stigmatised activities, and often facing discrimination and ridicule (Khan et al., 2009; Hinchy, 2019; Al-Mamun, et al., 2022). The societal rejection of non-binary gender identities pushes *hijra* communities to the margins, and simultaneously disrupting stereotypical notions of stability, affordability, and family within the concept of home.

Their exclusion is further perpetuated by the reinforcement of gender binaries within the populist discourse of Bangladeshi society (Khan et al., 2009; Jebin & Farhana, 2015), where masculine and female overtones dominate the terms and concepts of 'home', leaving the *hijra* spatial production of home unrecognised and incomprehensively understood in scholarship. The *hijra* home, situated as it is in a context of social exclusion, challenges many of the conventional categories of home and shows how 'exclusion' is a new way of understanding the architecture of home in tropical South Asia.

As [Somerville \(1998\)](#) has argued, the concept of 'exclusion' is socially constructed through different combinations of economic, social, and political processes, with its core meaning tied to social isolation and segregation ([Massey & Denton, 1993](#); [Smith, 1989](#)). Social exclusion can be manifested through a home's physical condition, location, and the mode of production, actively influencing the lives and identity of its occupants ([Somerville, 1997](#)). Furthermore, [Dovey \(1985\)](#) explores the relationship between domestic built form and identity formation, suggesting that the interplay between self and other creates personal or domestic identity through the boundaries of the home. Thus, a home's role in social exclusion may generate a distinct domestic identity reflecting spatial marginalisation or unacceptance, and potentially establishing a discriminatory identity for its dwellers.

The fact that the home can create a powerful spatial base for (discriminatory) identity construction, both internally and externally, is tied up with a long history of queer identity de/construction across the tropics and South Asia. Scholars have explored the various colonial, legal, social, and institutional practices responsible for gender categorisation.

The colonial regime imposed a system of gender tagging or labelling, which [Lugones \(2023\)](#) calls a 'Euro-centered gender system' in her work 'The Coloniality of Gender'. [Greenberg \(2002\)](#) discusses the problem of 'Definitional Dilemmas', in which legal institutions hold the power to assign individuals to a particular racial or sexual category. [Lugones \(2023\)](#) further indicates that the Euro-centered gender system, imposed through colonial law, was primarily responsible for narrowing the concept of gender in the control of sex, its resources, and products. Her argument elaborates upon how race and gender as powerful fictions co-constructed the coloniality of power and the modern gender system in the tropics.

In the South Asia context, [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) analyses the creation and use of Section 377 as 'a legal tool', in conjunction with the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871, to establish any non-English sexual activity as barbaric. Ahmed argues that the colonial empire weaponized gender laws to initiate a 'cultural genocide' for third gender communities, contending that Bengali histories of 'queerness' were suppressed through colonialism, which redefined the *hijra* identity (of third gender) as a political construct. Both [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) and [Hossain \(2020\)](#) discuss how the colonial legal coding of gender has played a primary role in the criminalisation of *hijra* third gender individuals. The imposition of the law initiated a systematic exclusion, which has actively influenced the transformation of *hijra* identity as immoral and corrupt ([Cottet & Picq, 2019](#); [Snigdha, 2021](#); [Hossain, 2020](#); [Akter & Saha, 2024](#)). [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) argues that systematic exclusion through the imposition of law has actively shaped the transformation of *hijra* identity. [Ghosh \(2018\)](#) elaborates that whereas the pre-colonial era considered a

spectrum of identities for third gender, in which the *hijras* were considered sacred and divine beings in South Asia (Ghosh, 2018) and religio-culturally respected in both Hindu mythologies (which describe between 20 to 28 different genders) and by Muslim patrons, this social standing eroded under British rule (Press Xpress, 2024; Ghosh, 2018).

Vinay (2022) explores the socio-cultural role in the making of third gender identity, where he argues that *hijra* identity is essentially a social construct. Vinay's (2022) argument shows how contemporary South Asian social views towards marginalised third genders appropriated and weaponised colonial vocabulary. To explain such disparity, the term 'colonial trauma' was used by Evans-Campbell (2008) and Mitchell (2019), which refers to the enduring, systematic impact of colonisation as the cause of oppression of an entire marginalized (cultural) group (Lloyd, 2000). Colonialism has been analysed as the takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, and the exploitation of gender by its interference with political and cultural structures of South Asia (Mitchell, 2019). Paradies (2016) defined forced assimilation and the legalisation of social, cultural, and spiritual practices in *hijra* identity, pointing to the colonial trauma reflecting how systematic violence and exclusion have been institutionalised and continued through policy, law, and socio-cultural labelling of the '*hijra*' (Mitchell, 2019).

While the existing literature on third gender focuses on external social, legal, political and institutional factors in crafting South Asian '*hijra*' identity and its social exclusion, the material-spatial dimension and its critical role of dwelling environments in the shaping of identity remain largely ignored. Scholarship by Somerville (1997), Rendell et al. (2000), Doan (2010), Istar Lev (2010), and Spain (2000) have shown how a home can actively impact the everyday lives of the occupants and their gender identity. These earlier studies highlight the home as not merely a physical space but a dynamic environment where identity is continuously constructed and negotiated. Drawing on this scholarship, it is crucial to examine the production of homes for third gender communities in Bangladesh and how they intersect with contextual forms of gender and identity production.

This paper examines how third gender communities negotiate their identities and livelihoods within the space of social exclusion or stigma, which in turn shapes their dwelling spaces and their organisational structures. We ask: how after leaving their biological family and being a social and familial outcast, does that 'exclusion' as a condition impact the making of their 'home' with individuals beyond blood relations and in the slippery foundation of a 'fictive' family structure? Furthermore, we ask: how can their 'home' be perceived as a mechanism to embrace or counter/deny their gender identity and self-esteem or as a refusal of societal inferiority? By examining these

questions within the *hijra* community in the tropical city of Khulna in Bangladesh, this paper sheds new light on the intricate spatial dynamics of third gender homes. It reveals how the spatial dynamics of third gender homes are deeply influenced by the complex interplay of external societal forces, including norms, economic factors, cultural perceptions, and identity crises. The findings of this paper contribute to the understanding of how the diverse spatial ways of social discrimination are interwoven into the ordinary fabric of contemporary tropical urban living in a South Asian city.

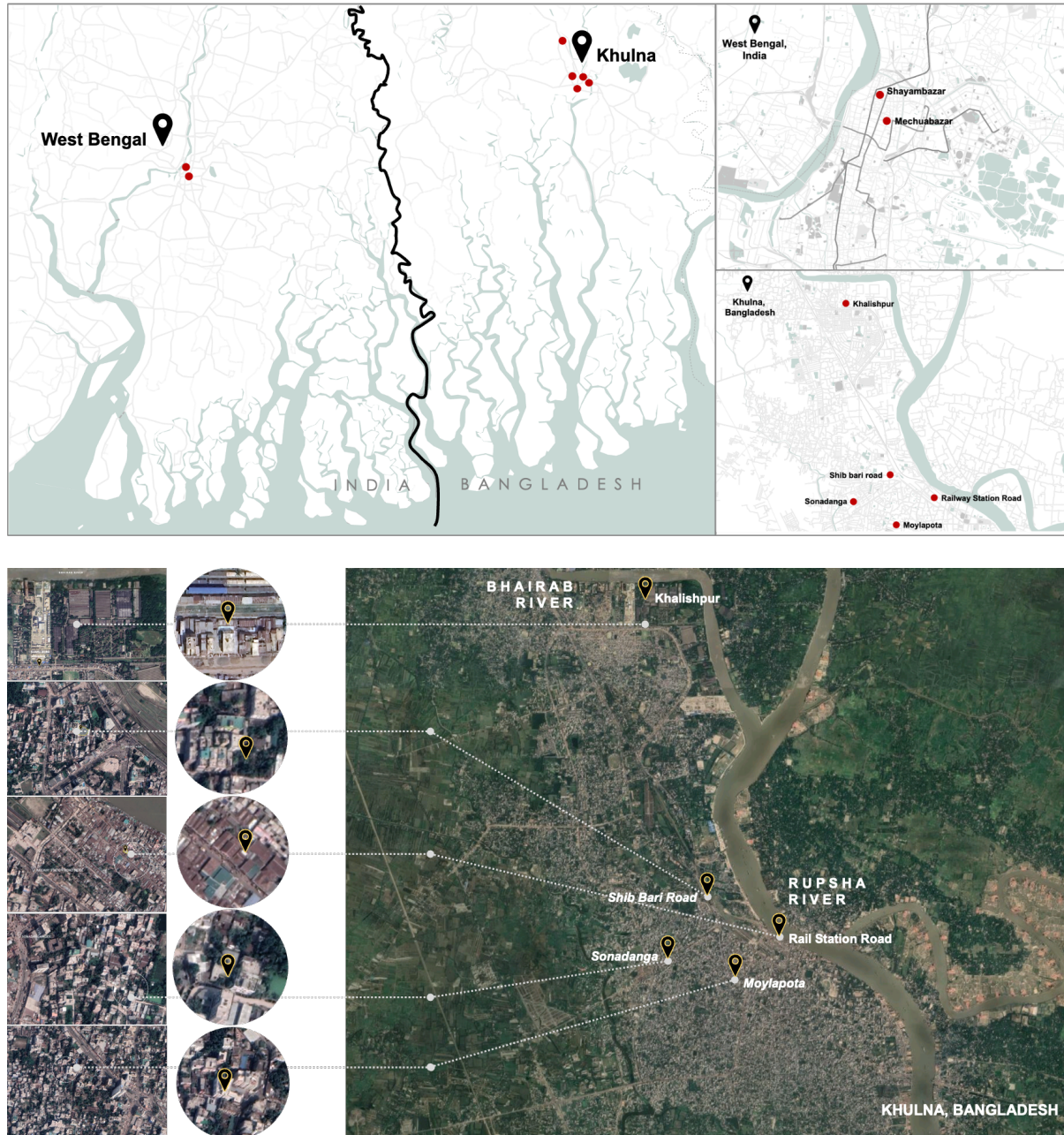
Methodology

This research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, merging methods and analytical frameworks from two distinct fields: architecture and anthropology. This exploratory study, rooted in qualitative data, employs an approach using critical queer theory ([Gamson, 2000](#); [Plummer, 2011](#); [De Lauretis, 1991](#); [Jagose, 1996](#); [Foucault, 1978](#); [Turner, 2000](#)) to investigate the nuanced and lived experiences of marginalised third gender communities.

A queering approach, as an analytical position, helps to explore space not as a neutral or objective entity but as shaped and influenced by power structures and gender dynamics inherent in society ([Pereira, 2019](#); [Watson, 2005](#); [Plummer, 2011](#); [Cresswell, 2013](#); [Gopinath, 2005](#)). In the context of this research, a queering approach means recognising that the construction of third gender identities is deeply intertwined with societal power relations (including those of academic theories) and prevailing gender stereotypes. By adopting such an approach, the research embraces an inclusive and intersectional understanding of marginal identity formation ([Plummer, 2011](#)), acknowledging that it is not solely shaped by individual experiences but is also profoundly impacted by oppressive societal structures, power hierarchies, and space.

To interpret the oppressive conditions of marginal identity-making, the paper furthermore assumes a Gramscian-inspired approach that perceives the mechanism as part of a continuous socio-political process. This differs from Marxian or liberal theories, which record most collective identities as pre-political ([Yiftachel, 2009](#); [Gramsci, 2011](#)). Hence, we employ critical ethnography ([Cresswell, 2013](#); [Carspecken & Apple, 1992](#); [Madison, 2005](#); [Thomas, 1993](#)) with queer theory in an (critical) approach that acknowledges the continuous remaking of community identities where contentious spatial politics and the workings of power are premised on the subjectivity of human experience, the uncertainty of truth claims, value-laden inquiry, local knowledge, and cultural expressions ([Madison, 2005](#)).

Figure 1. (a) Top: Location of Khulna near the India-Bangladesh border. Historically, both are part of the Indian Subcontinent; (b) Bottom: Location of selected hijra Homes in Khulna city.



(a) The map (left) shows Khulna's proximity to West Bengal. *Hijras* in Khulna maintain a strong cross-border connection with those of India. Red dots on maps show some of their approximate locations.

Source: Authors, based on Google Map data, Dutta (2013). (b) Map shows the locations of the selected *hijra* homes in Khulna. Source: Mapped by the authors based on Google satellite images.

The study involved several week-long physical surveys conducted in Khulna city, Bangladesh (Figure 1 a & b). Khulna was selected for its geographical proximity to the Bangladesh-India (West Bengal) border, which facilitates strong cross-border connections and socio-cultural exchanges among the *hijra* (third gender) communities. The Bangladesh communities frequently travel to India, and this cross-border cultural interaction significantly influences their collective spatial culture. This aspect of their experience broadens the scope of the paper, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of the South Asian culture of home-making (Figure 1a, top).

The fieldwork entailed an extensive period of observing daily cultural activities, practices, and rituals within *hijra* homes. Data collection and analysis were conducted at both the settlement and dwelling unit levels. This process incorporated various forms of visual research data, including photographs, detailed domestic mappings, homestead networks, sketches, and aerial drone views.

Given the challenges of accessing private spaces and the lives of third gender individuals, the investigation employed the snowball sampling method (Cresswell, 2013) for participant selection. Utilising semi-structured questionnaires, the study conducted both one-on-one interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) alongside Non-participatory Observations (NPO) (Angrosino, 2007; Cresswell, 2013). These methods were used to gather diverse perspectives on household activities, the production of space, and identity conception. Thematic analysis was the chosen method for data analysis, involving inductive coding, categorisation, and identification of recurrent patterns, themes, and insights.

Findings

From Third Gender to Hijra: Stages and Roles

In Khulna, Bangladesh, individuals who identify as third gender encounter significant challenges early in life. Due to societal prejudices, their families often conceal their gender identity. Families view third gender as a source of shame and believe it results from a biological mismatch, leading to being interpreted as a curse (Authors' Fieldnotes, 2023). As a result, third gender individuals are forced to adopt binary-based forced identities, which leaves them feeling increasingly alienated within their own homes and social boundaries. A *Guru-maa* of Khalishpur *hijra* home (2023) shared in an interview, "Our lives are characterised by exclusion everywhere...Even our biological families don't see us as one of their own...". This paradox is particularly striking, as a biological home is traditionally seen as a safe space for self-expression (Després, 1991). Yet, for third gender individuals, it becomes a battleground for their identity, trapped between societal expectations and the need for self-expression (Baxter & Brickell, 2014). This dynamic creates a dialectic between self and other,

which becomes crucial in shaping a dilemma between their personal and societal construction of gender identity.

The societal gaze often subjects third gender individuals to humiliation based on their reproductive abilities, leading to frustration and a sense of inferiority within their home and neighbourhood social space. This restricts their social relationships and dynamics, like playing with other children or attending school, which significantly hampers their indoor-outdoor spatial interactions. For instance, a respondent during fieldwork shared that their mother prohibited them from going outside to play (Interview with an anonymous *hijra*, 2023).

When it comes to education and work, third gender individuals often find themselves compelled to conceal their gender identity. Some shared that despite some of them being educated up to the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) level,¹ they do not want to engage in outside work due to experiencing harassment and bullying (*Guru-maa* of Khalishpur *hijra* home, 2023). These psychosocial traumas and memories of stigmatisation become the impetus for third gender individuals to seek a new 'home'—not just a physical space, but a refuge from societal abuses. Thus, the *hijra* home emerges as a 'counter-product' of socially constructed 'stigma.'

The *hijra* home serves as a crucial space for third gender individuals' transformative journey to embrace a new identity. This research identified four specific functional phases in their journey: the *Notun-meye* or trainee stage, the *Shissho-meye* stage, the *Guru-maa* stage, and the *Boro-maa* (senior *Guru-maa*) stage. These phases are interpreted from the interview and empirical data (Table 1) (Figure 2).

Table 1. 'Critical Functional Phases' in the transformation towards the *hijra* identity.

Sequence	Phase Name	Key attributes
1 st phase	The <i>Notun-meye</i> (trainee) Stage	Formation of <i>hijra</i> identity Through new family induction and training
2 nd phase	The <i>Shissho-meye</i> Stage	Practice of <i>hijra</i> identity Through Income generating activities
3 rd phase	The <i>Guru-maa</i> Stage	Protection of <i>hijra</i> identity, Through leadership, management and groom the trainees
4 th phase	The <i>Boro-maa</i> (senior <i>Guru-maa</i>) Stage	Management of <i>hijra</i> communal identity Through contributing towards the broader acceptance and recognition of the community in society.

Source: Authors (Field Survey, 2023)

¹ The Secondary School Certificate (SSC), also known as the Matriculation examination, is a public exam in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan for 10th-grade students. It is equivalent to Year 10 of the GCSE in England or the first two years of high school in the United States.

The first stage is the *Notun-meye*, also called the trainee stage. This is where individuals who have suffered from societal rejection and associated trauma join the *hijra* community. It is a foundational phase in *hijra* identity construction when the *Notun-meye* undergoes rigorous training in which they learn the rituals, practices, and cultural nuances of the community. After the completion of this phase, they become *Shissho-meye* and actively practice their *hijra* identity, often participating in income-generating activities that align with related cultural practices such as singing and dancing.

The *Guru-maa* stage is the third phase. It represents a significant transition for individuals who have gained experience to take on leadership roles within the *hijra* community. They manage and lead the community, safeguarding, grooming, and training trainees. This stage is crucial for the sustainability and protection of *hijra* identity. In the *Boro-maa*, or senior *Guru-maa* stage, individuals attain a more comprehensive understanding of the *hijra* community. This stage represents a culmination of the transformative journey, where individuals not only embody *hijra* identity but also contribute to the broader acceptance and recognition of the community in society.

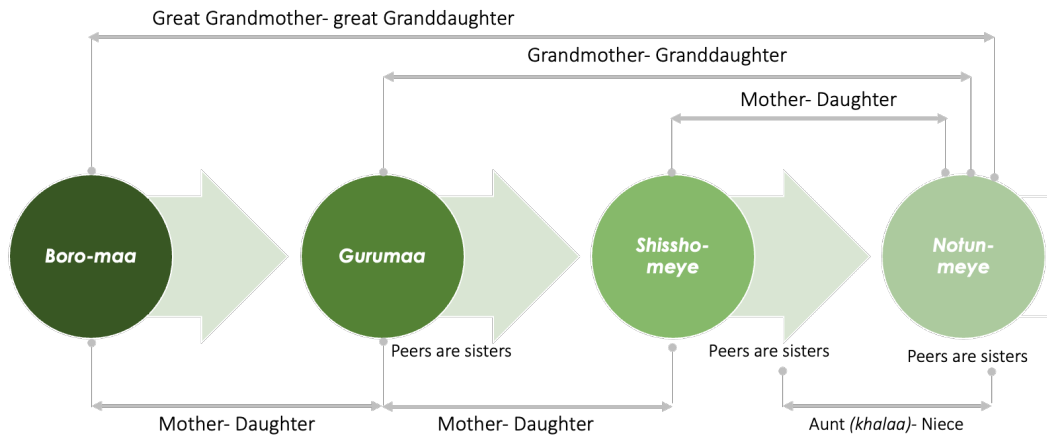
The trainee stage is the foundational stage in the transformation of a third gender individual towards *hijra* identity (Authors' Fieldnotes, 2023). Subsequent sections of the paper will explain the intricate journey and the four consecutive steps of third gender individuals as they navigate through the architectural attributes of *hijra* homes, seek affirmation, and forge a unique identity within their chosen community.

Notun-meye (trainee) Stage

Induction with a fictive family/relationship and feminine/motherhood

The initial stage, marked by the induction phase, signifies the commencement of a transformative journey for third gender individuals, wherein the *hijra* home serves as the most important spatial platform for the affirmation and reconstruction of their biological identity. The newcomers (*Notun-meye*) are introduced into a matriarchal family, which is led by a *Guru-maa*. The introduction takes place in the *Guru-maa*'s room (Authors' Fieldnotes, 2023). The new family is comprised of mother-daughter relationships, aunt-niece relations, and sisterhood relations with peers (see Figure 2). The home layout is designed with a functional centre of 'motherhood', which embraces the outcast child who is deprived and neglected by their own biological family. As *Guru-maa* of Sonadanga *hijra* home states, "we were neglected by our biological family previously...only one *hijra* could understand one *hijra* better than a general public..." (2023).

Figure 2. Diagram of the hijra family relationships.



The diagram shows the *hijra* family's hierarchical relationship, which represents the developmental and incremental transformation of the third gender identity. Source: Authors.

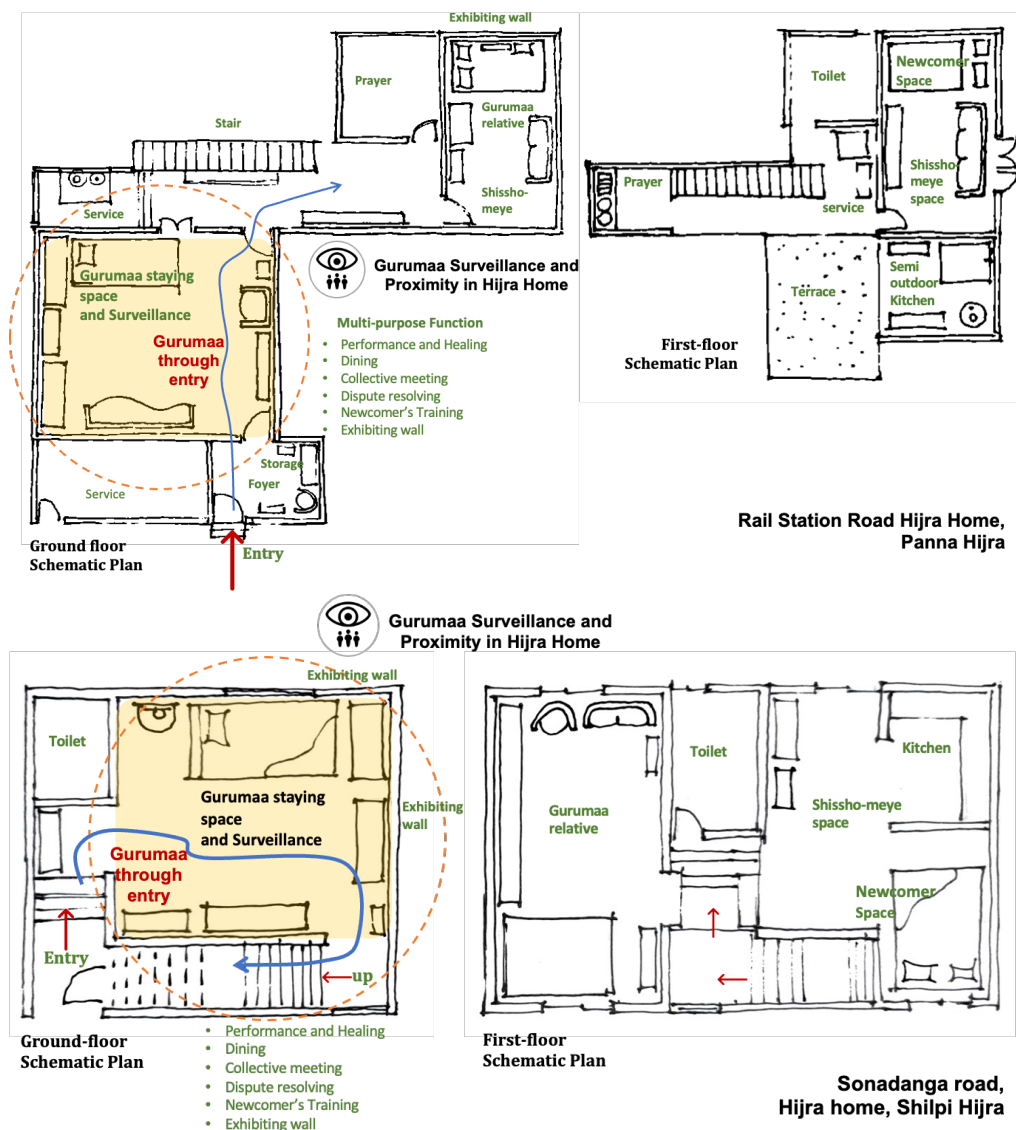
Forgetting appears to be a vital component of this phase, as those seeking refuge in a *hijra* home typically have suffered extensive psychosocial trauma. This phase, occurring outside traditional blood relationships, demands the creation of a new family structure, necessitating individuals let go of their original biological family bonds and memories. The act of forgetting serves as a crucial step in healing from enduring psychosocial trauma and embracing the unknown through 'a space of amnesia'. As one *Shissho-meye* of Khalishpur *hijra* home (2023) expressed, "If we roam outside alone, people tease us". Thus, one of the essential services provided by the *hijra* home is to create a 'space of amnesia' to help them forget their painful experiences. To fulfil this responsibility, the home's design incorporates a comprehensive feminine spatial domain that counters the conventional South Asian home layout based on gender binary (see Doan, 2010). This is essential in providing a sense of care and understanding for third gender individuals seeking shelter. As a *Boro-maa* (senior *Guru-maa*) living in Rail Station Road's *hijra* home explains, "When anyone first comes, she is afraid of everyone, and then we have to console them—come here, do not be afraid! All of them are relative to you, like your mother and aunt. Let us introduce you to your sister, mother and grandmother."

The integration into a matriarchal family led by a *Guru-maa* is essential in establishing a secure and controlled territory within the *hijra* home. The layout of each of the home samples in this study demonstrates a 'circulation network' that is designed so that the spatial layout of the *hijra* home guides a system of circulation centred on and through the *Guru-maa's* room. In '*Guru-maa's* (space) through circulation'² (Figure 3), it is

² The home's circulation path and *Guru-maa's* space maintain a 'pass through' relationship, as (Ching, 2023) explains of the spatial order of architecture.

shown that the spatial/programmatic organisation is such that after entering the house, one has to cross the *Guru-maa's* room first, before encountering other household members and spaces. Such a sequence establishes a spatial guardianship, where *Guru-maa* acts as a shield and symbolic centre who secures the daughters from external mockery, stigma, and trauma. This is how the modality of the *hijra* home creates not only a tangible shelter but also a place of emotional security and safety—a sense of not being abandoned, which Després (1991) identifies as a basic, deep-rooted, psychological need of a home.

Figure 3. 'Guru-maa through circulation' in the plan layout.



The plans show the circulation route inside the home, where everyone has to go through a *Guru-maa's* place to get inside the home. Source: Authors.

By emphasizing the centrality of *Guru-maa*'s space, the *hijra* home diverges from the layout of traditional South Asian homes, which typically feature a formal living area and often segregate the home based on binary genders. The design of the *hijra* home, with its emphasis on the *Guru-maa*'s space and the larger area allocated to it (Figure 3), underscores the significance of the mother's role in both the construction and interpretation of the house, establishing a feminine influence that permeates the entire home as a mono-gendered space.

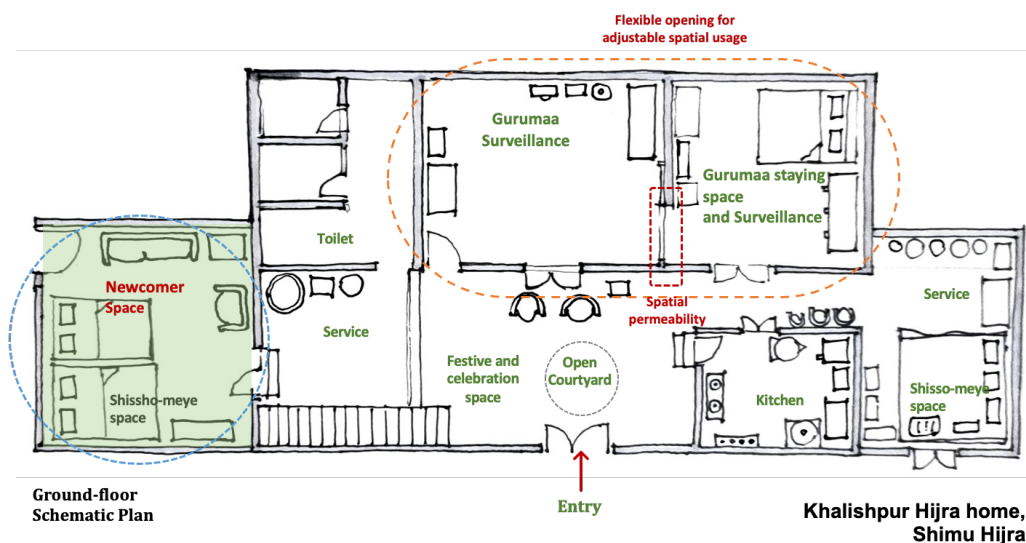
The feminine functional centre seemingly transforms the *hijra* home into a place of trust and care, where the *Notun-meye* can feel a sense of the mother's custody and responsibility. The home layout provides the necessary buffer/barrier to protect and heal from the sufferings of society. Various interview responses demonstrate this sense of protection. For instance, a *Boro-maa* of Rail Station Road *hijra* home (2023) notes, "...only a mother can embrace her every child with her affection and love equally, whereas no one and not even a father could perform so...". And she also asserted, "In our house, no one calls me *hijra*; they call me 'MOTHER'! Not a 'father'! Could a mother ever exclude her child from her and family? No! who could exclude? Either an educated father (*shikkhito baba*) or society (*shikkhito shomaj*)!" Thus, 'Motherhood' is celebrated to generate the inclusiveness of a home. This feminine/mother-centric spatiality impacts the sustenance of the home, which ties the knots of the third gender individual to a 'fictive' family. The 'fictivity' has its own social, spatial, and psychological dimension and is produced as an outcome of social stigma against the third gender identity (Podder & Shahidullah, 2023). Conversely, the home counters conventional family relationship dynamics by weaving this new ideation of this 'fictive' family and home, which seeds an identity transformation from the original third gender to a *hijra* 'counter identity'.

The *hijra* home, as a 'counter' ideation of home in the tropics, offers distinct material spatial settings and a corresponding perceived space, becoming the canvas upon which a new identity of *hijra* is crafted with a unique notion of 'femininity'. The *hijra* home functions as an affirmative place for gendered (body) uniqueness, including the third gender individual as a new member of a *hijra* family. The home acts as 'an affirmation place' where they can re-imagine their (third gender) identity within a space of rehabilitation. The new family organogram, featuring grandmother-mother-daughter and sisterhood relationships (peers), contributes to the multidimensional gendered spatiality of the house. To counter societal denial and enable meaningful relationships, this distinct feminine spatial domain is intentionally created, shaping new relationships within the *hijra* home as a fictive family and, in the process, creating a mould to form the adaptive identity named '*hijra*' for survival.

Creating Belongingness: Co-living

The newcomers face a hurdle in adapting to new values and cultures, and co-living is a process of creating belongingness and a sense of place. After shifting to a *hijra* home, they have to gradually begin to adapt to the home. “After moving out, we all have to go through a pain for two to five years, and then slowly we became one of the *hijra* community” (Guru-maa of the Khalishpur *hijra* home, 2023). To facilitate this transformation, the *hijra* home maintains a flexible place module. As the Guru-maa of Shib Bari Road *hijra* home (2023) explains, “In this house, we gather in the other room. We extend the spaces by operating the Thai glass opening. We have several rooms and bedding so that we can flexibly accommodate all of us” (see Figure 4). In spatial placement, the newcomer’s zone is carefully planned to maintain full-time observation. Sometimes, they have to co-live with the *Shissho-meye* (initiates of a more advanced phase) until the *Notun-meye* are able to prove that they are trustworthy. A *Shissho-meye* of Rail Station Road *hijra* home notes, ‘The newcomer could sleep anywhere but has to remain under observation. They sleep with us; they have no different zone’ (2023).

Figure 4. Flexible plan layout of *hijra* home for adjustable spatial usage.



The *hijra* home plan shows flexibility in the spatial layout. Both the *Guru-maa*’s space and common gathering space could be transformed based on necessity. Source: Authors.

Living collectively in a shared space compels the *Notun-meye* to forge bonds with others, thereby initiating a counter-process where their individual identity begins to diminish in favour of a collective identity. This transition towards becoming a *hijra* is facilitated by the co-living mechanism, wherein the home serves as a spatial apparatus. The apparatus functions to negate any alternate gender identities, producing instead a homogenous stereotyped one, ‘*hijra*’.

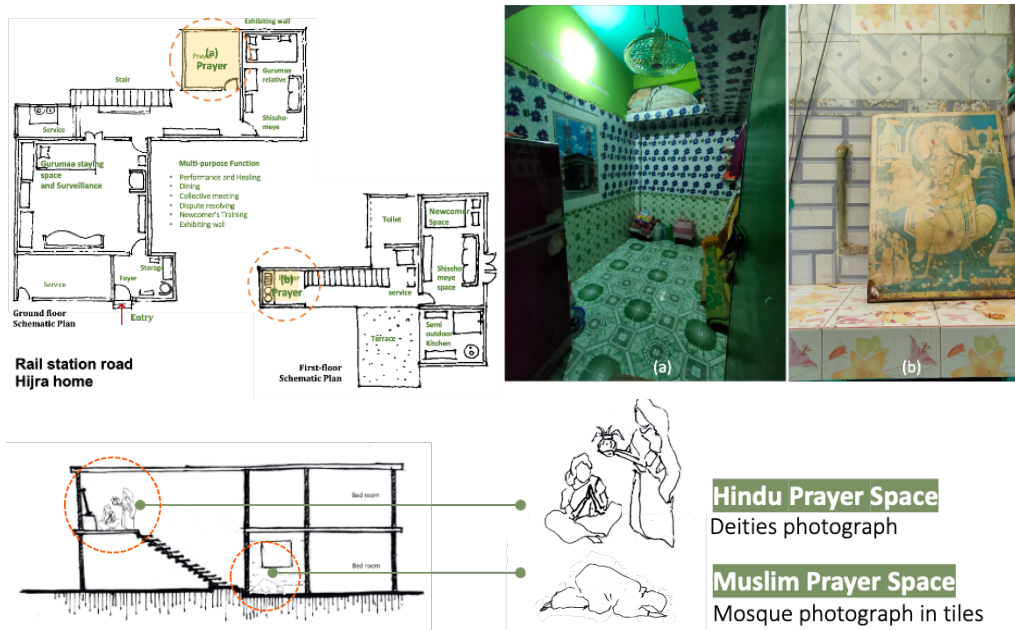
In many ways, their co-living arrangement represents a form of enforced living, which comes with its own unique set of challenges. *"Each of us has pain; sometimes, I use harsh words, and they are rude to me; again, we deliver sweet words to each other"* (Guru-maa of Khalishpur hijra home, 2023). Coming from a context of exclusion and trauma, they have transformed into a new marginalised group in society, enduring harassment at every step, whether external, or internal within the boundaries of their home. In the hijra home, the carefully crafted spatial arrangements for co-living are designed to give them confidence, underpinned by collectiveness, and embrace the idea that they cannot live alone. *"Just as a fish cannot live without water, we cannot live without our community"* stated Boro-maa of Rail Station Road hijra home (2023).

Furthermore, the co-living arrangement extends to countering the religious singularity often curated in conventional South Asian homes. In Khulna's context, third gender people come from diverse religious backgrounds, including Islamic and Hindu belief systems. While historically, religion has played a powerful role in defining traditional homemaking in South Asian society and determining distinct differences in spatial organisation and zoning³ (Mowla, 1999), the hijra home counters this homemaking to prioritise inclusivity. The spaces of the hijra home embody multi-religious beliefs and remain accessible for *Notun-meye*. Boro-maa of Rail Station Road hijra home (2023) asserts, *"...this girl belongs to the Hindu religion, and I am a Muslim. But we share the same room and roof without any collision. We do not discriminate against race, caste, religion, etc."* They celebrate all religious festivals as well as practice their individual religions, despite their necessities and ways of life being denied by conventional religious norms.

Different prayer spaces can be seen in a hijra home, reflecting a multi-culture of religious belongingness (Figure 5). As Boro-maa responded, *"Do you ever see the different religiosities co-living under one roof or cooking in the same pot or stove in any house here? We do not discriminate...we have a Muslim prayer zone for namaz on the ground floor and a Hindu prayer zone for puja on the first floor of the same house."* While the spatial layout of the hijra home shows religious inclusivity, such spatiality works as instrumental in creating belongingness, induction, and naturalisation to initiates in their new hijra family. Through such spatial inclusions, the hijra home acts as a place of solace. As articulated by a Hijra, *"My pain was healed"* (Interview with Guru-maa of Moylapota hijra home, 2023).

³ In architectural terminology, "zoning" refers to the process of dividing building spaces into distinct areas or zones, each designated for specific functions or activities.

Figure 5. Religious dualism in a hijra home.



The drawings and images show multi-religious supportive spaces inside a *hijra* home.
 Source: Authors and (Podder & Shahidullah, 2023).

Moreover, such inclusive spaces play an important role in creating a 'place identity' for the third gender individuals in a *hijra* home. As Guiliani (1991) and Somerville (1997) explain in their attachment theory, individuals tend to construct mental representations of the physical world as they build attachments with physical objects through regular use. The attachment eventually creates a place identity when the spaces of regular life and organisation become central to the individual's concern (Bretherton, 1985; Proshansky et al., 1983). The multi-religious support in space (in *hijra* home) appears to be incredibly valuable to marginalised individuals, providing a deep sense of belonging that their biological families fail to provide. As a *Guru-maa* of Moylapota *hijra* home (2023) states, "I do not think so; my biological family could support me to this extent, as the *hijra* home provided...". The *hijra* home, through its spatially curated environment, constructs a place identity through spatial attachments, countering conventional domesticity. This process is instrumental in rewriting gender identities within the *hijra* home and fosters a sense of belonging through intentional design and spatial configurations.

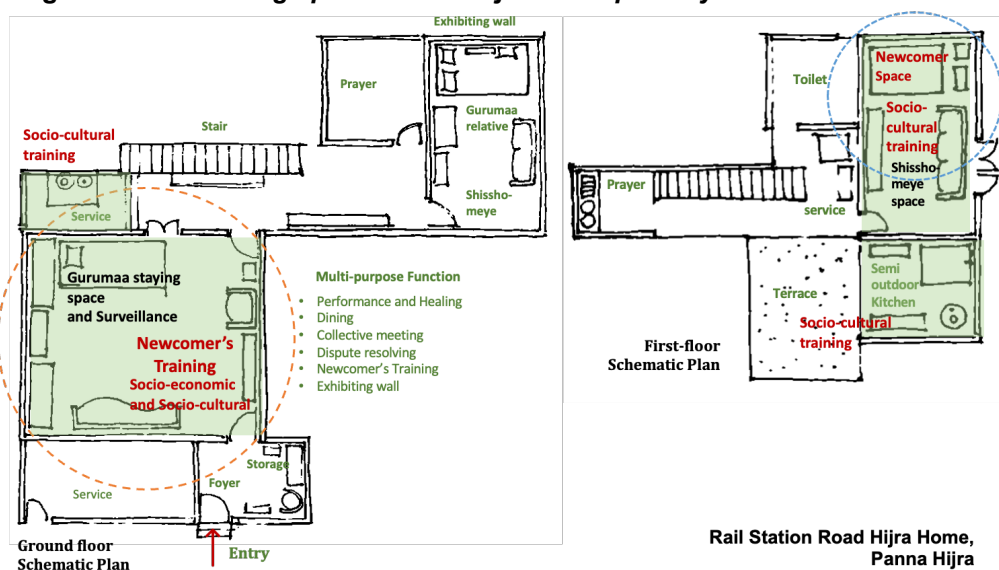
Stigma-produced Livelihood Training and Grooming

The livelihood training and grooming phase, a significant component of the *Notun-meye* (newcomer) stage, unfolds within the spatial confines of the *hijra* home. This phase encompasses diverse activities, ranging from household chores such as dishwashing and cooking to engaging in socio-cultural and socio-economic

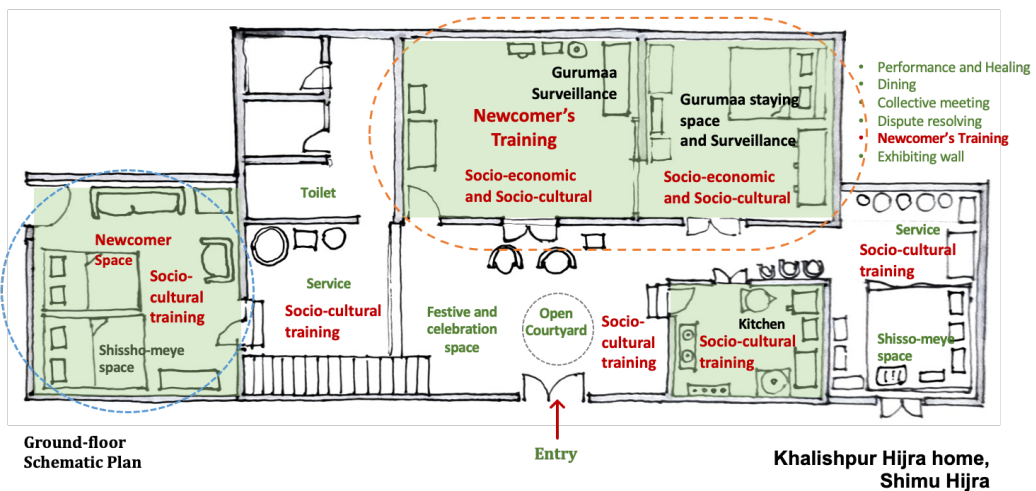
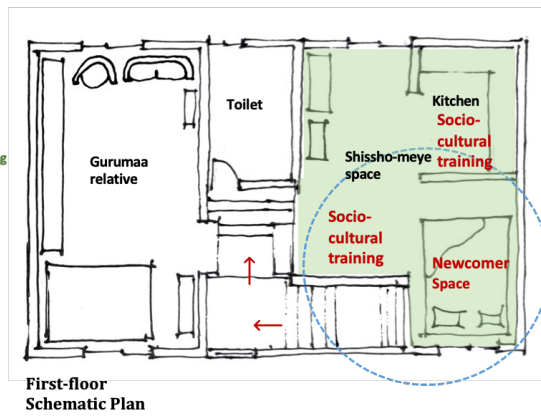
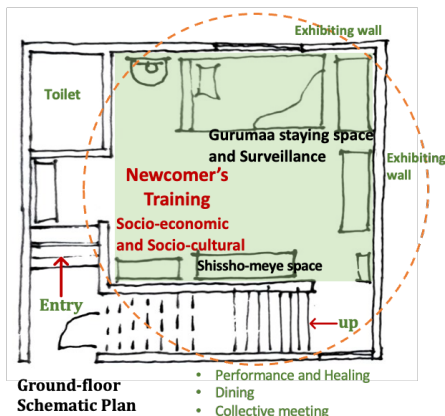
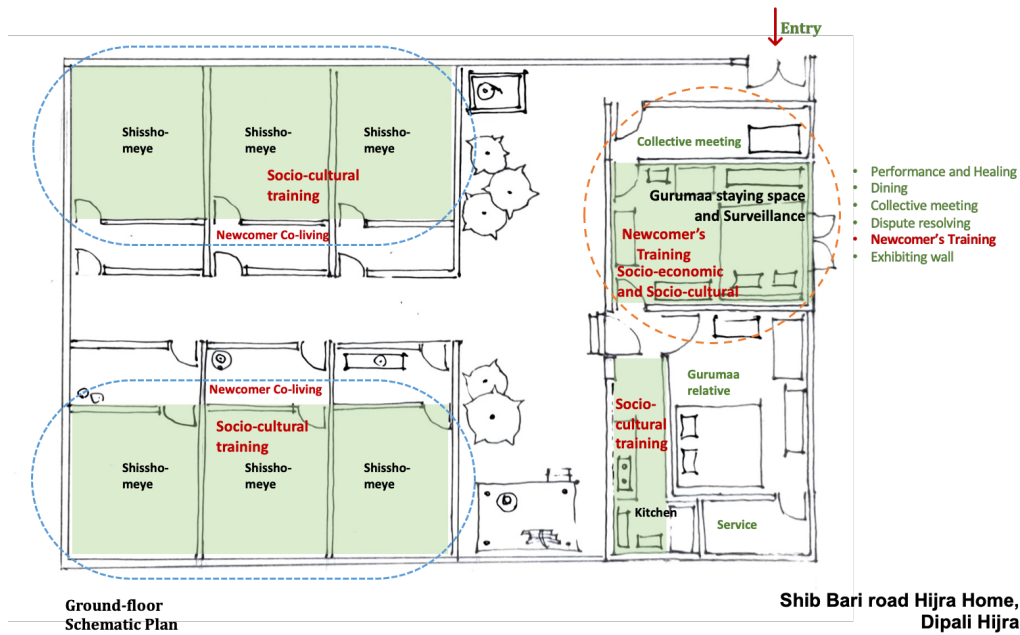
endeavours. Through these activities, newcomers navigate the intricate interplay of perceived and lived spaces, fostering a sense of belonging, skill development, and communal identity within the unique spatial context of the *hijra* home. Somerville (1997), in a historical analysis, showed that dwelling form and design were transformed due to economic and social changes. Since a *hijra* needs to earn through cultural performance, the *hijra* home has to shape its space and the identity of the occupants according to this livelihood pattern.

The *Guru-maa*'s room serves as the primary venue for the training and performance of the *Notun-meye*, who gradually learns the particular music, dance, or drama with a certain style or attitude (Author's Fieldnotes, 2023) (Figure 6). They learn from the supervision of *Guru-maa* and lateral learning from *Shissho-meye* and their performances. A *Shissho-meye* explains, "we had been taught values and economic activities from our Guruma...we arrange a 'boithak' in a week in our home, we enjoy ourselves with cultural practices like dance, music, musical instruments playing, etc. and even in behavioural culture, how to converse with people. For example, when we go for 'baccha nachano'⁴(baby dancing), we greet, sit in a certain manner, and deliver some sweet words—all these are taught and trained by our Guruma." (Interview with an anonymous *Shissho-meye* at Sonadanga *hijra* home, 2023). Such training and performance activities create the *Guru-maa*'s room, the most vibrant and performative space of the *hijra* home. The space creates a platform to counter and heal their everyday sufferings through colourful cultural rituals and bodily expressions. This performativity makes the space a 'centre of *hijra* life and dwelling', helping them to remain alive in a society that does not offer them the basic rights of a human being.

Figure 6. The training spaces in the *hijra* home plan layout.



⁴ A dancing ritual performed by the *hijra* community to welcome the new-born babies into society. It is a popular way for the *hijra* community to earn money in Bangladeshi society.



The above *hijra* home plans show the training spaces (both socio-cultural training and socio-economic training) for the *Notun-meye* stage. Source: Authors.

The training phase prepares a *Notun-meye* for the further journey of *hijra* life and economic independence. To create a sustainable economic venture and support domestic space (Després, 1991), the institutional role of the home appears to be primary. The institutional character of the *hijra* home can be perceived as a 'school' or training domain for third gender individuals. The *Guru-maa* of Khalishpur *hijra* home (2023) symbolizes the home as a school: "As in school, one could get skilled and cross the classes, I also had some phases to grow and skill development with communication, care, and love. In performance, the one who could behave and interact with humbleness and Mohabbat (love), he/she could have good earnings and have everyone's love and attention". Through a rigorous training process in *Guru-maa*'s space, a *Notun-meye* learns the skills to earn and thus become a *Shissho-meye* of a *hijra* family. In this trainee phase, *Notun-meye* are instructed to participate in household activities. They are provided with specific tasks and workloads. The home acts as an organised institution where the members are taught discipline, *hijra* etiquette, and cultural practices (Author's Fieldnotes, 2023).

Hijras utilise social stigma to frame the politics of livelihood, generating new interactions and dynamics of cultural-economic exchange within society. Despite societal exclusion from mainstream economic activities, the third gender community leverages their '*hijra*' identity to assert certain rights, particularly in rituals associated with newborn babies. As the *Boro-maa* of Rail Station Road *hijra* home (2023) explains, their 'defective body' is considered 'lust-free and pure,' and thus uniquely capable of bestowing sacred blessings on newborns.

To maintain purity, the domestic layout is meticulously organised to ensure continuous observation by *Guru-maa*, thereby maintaining the asexual nature of the spaces. In Khulna, the authenticity of *hijra* identity is closely linked to specific lineages, where asexuality is considered a fundamental aspect of their economic tradition. The *hijra* home has become a centre for admirers who travel from distant areas to seek the blessings of *Guru-maa* (Author's Fieldnotes, 2023). This denial of sexual relations fosters a collective identity imbued with pride at the community level, epitomised by the notion of 'the name and respect of the home (*baari naam ar maan*)'. As community members emphasize, "Any occurrence which could defame this house is not permitted" (Interview with anonymous *hijra* of Sonadanga *hijra* home, 2023). Such admiration elevates a *Guru-maa hijra* to the esteemed position of 'mother' or '*devi*' (angel). As one *Notun-meye* of Rail Station Road *hijra* home remarked about a *Guru-maa*, "She is not only the mother of *hijra*, but also everyone in this community/area calls her (divine) '*maa*'".

The 'epistemology of the *hijra*' has traditionally focused on household or lineage-based traditions (Dutta, 2013). In the Khulna context, engaging in sexual practices at home

is equated with prostitution, and those who do so are perceived as merely collecting money under the 'guise' of being *hijra*, thus not considered 'authentic' *hijra* (Author's Fieldnotes, 2023). It is crucial to note that their acclamation to 'purity' negates the corporeal identity of third gender individuals. Nonetheless, the *hijra* home, by ensuring an asexual space, serves as a training ground that instils the pride of *hijra* in the *Notun-meye* novices. "I have self-respect, and I found respect in the *hijra* community", asserted by *Guru-maa* of Sonadanga *hijra* home. For outcasts, achieving respect within the *hijra* community becomes a significant aspiration. As an anonymous *hijra* from Sonadanga *hijra* home noted, "When a *hijra* dies, she should not feel that no one wants to give her a proper funeral. Even in death or the afterlife, we do not want to be excluded; we want to be acknowledged and respected with a *hijra* identity after death" (2023).

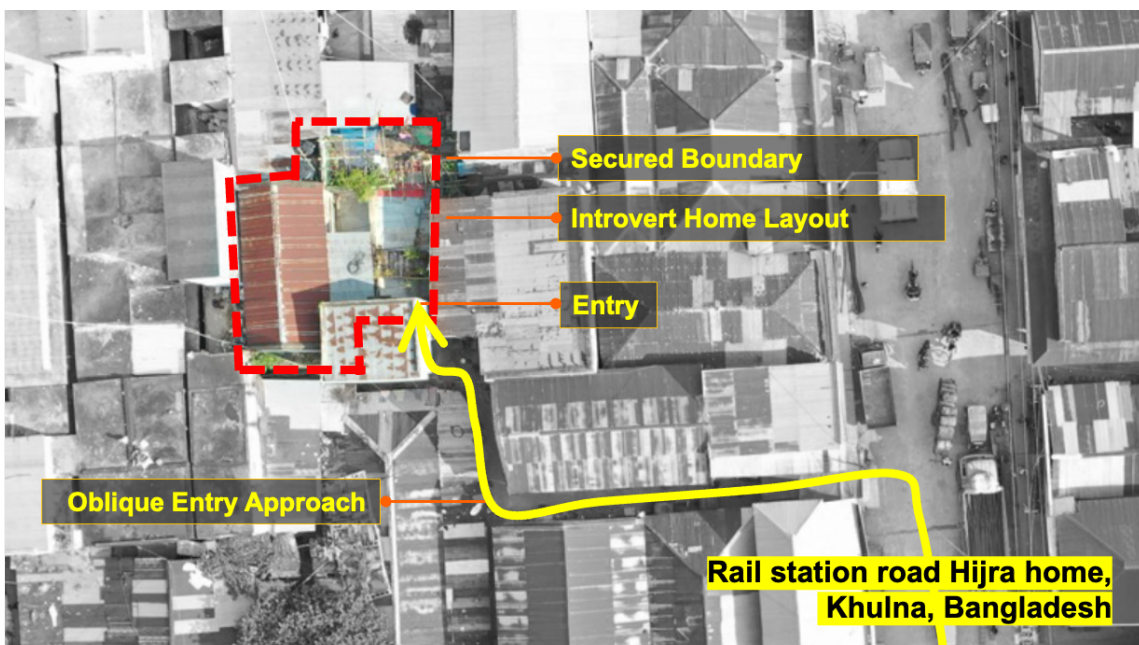
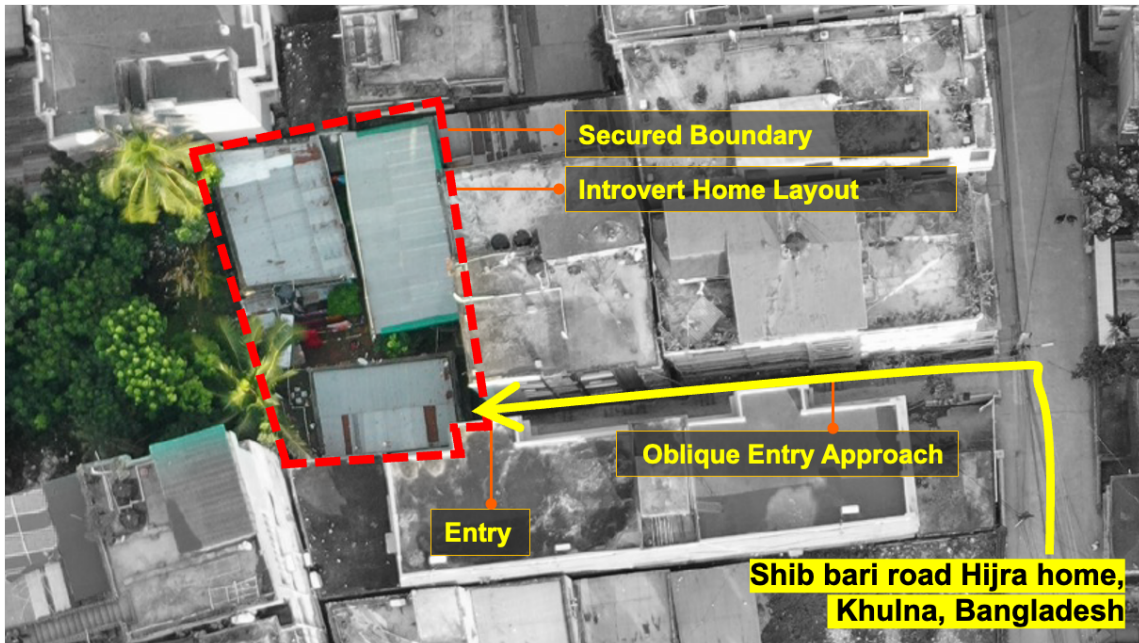
Cultivating Dual Identity

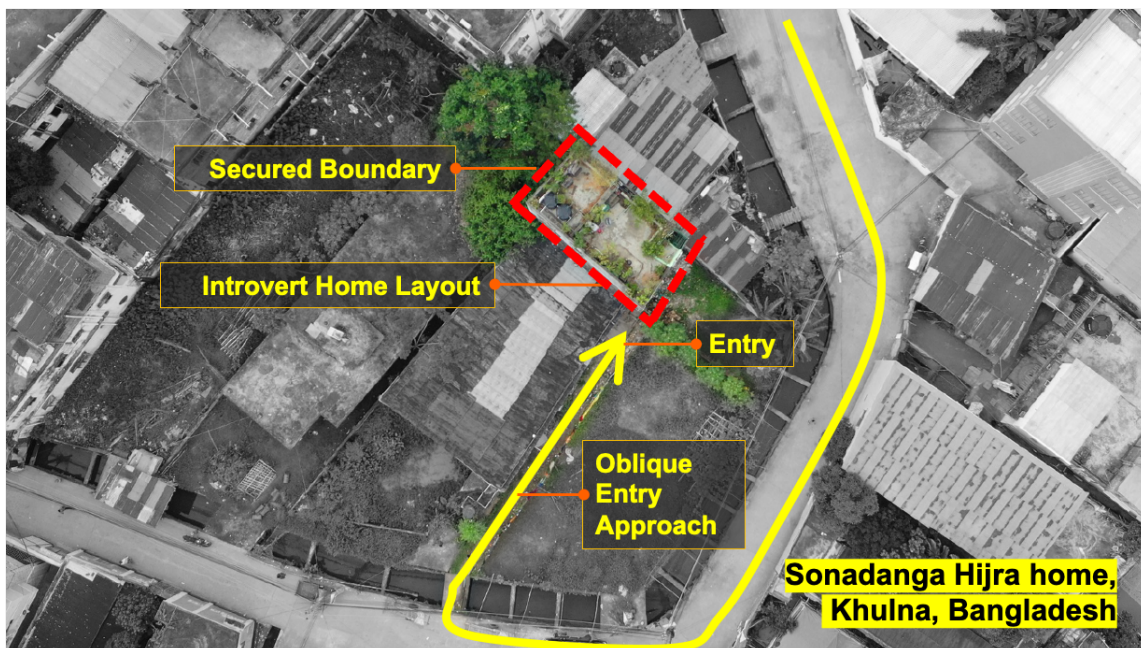
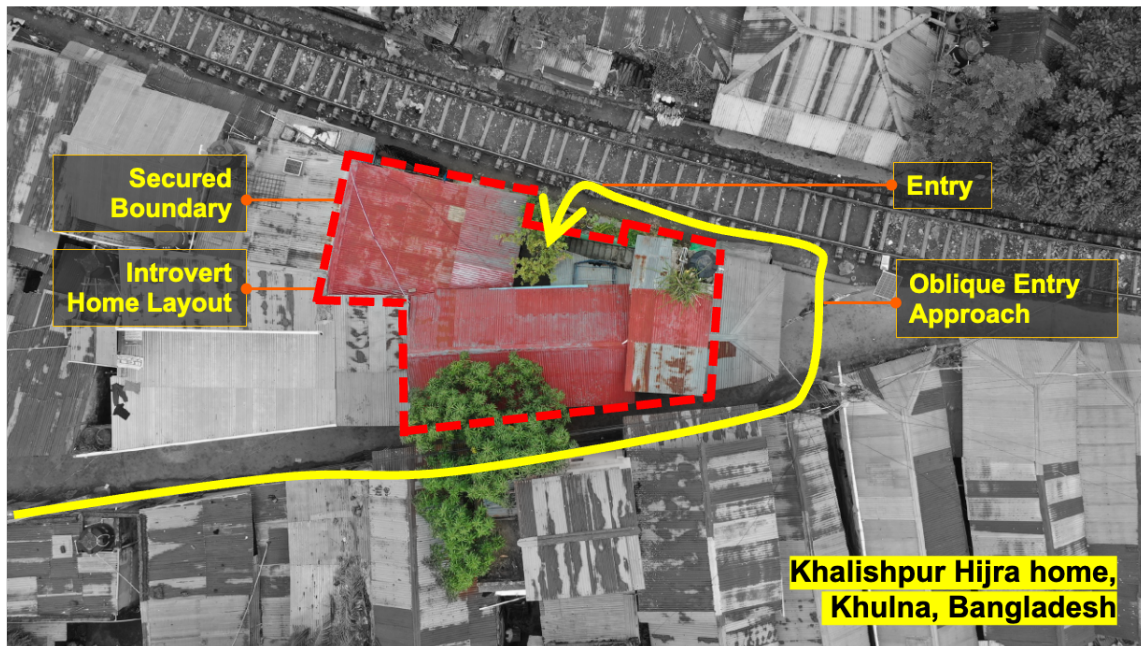
In order to find and adopt an economical way out from their social exclusion, the *hijra* home requires cultivating a dual identity in each *Notun-meye* as part of their journey to become a *hijra*. When they go out in the public realm as a *hijra* for income-generating activities (locally called *badhai*) or for money collection, they perform being extrovert and aggressive in the public realm. People commonly fear them for this *aggressive behaviour*. However, in their house, a highly *modest character* of the *hijras* is observed. *Boro-maa's* (Rail Station Road *hijra* home) statement supports this point, "the third gender has different faces inside (humble) and outside (aggressive)... [*hijra ra rastay je rokom, kintu vitore kintu arek jinish ... nomro, vodro*]" (2023). A *Guru-maa* of Moylapota *hijra* home expands on their dual identity, "Whatever I have to say outside, sweet or sour, only for the sake of the profession. It is not defining me" (2023).

The impact of their dual identity can be observed in the introvert spatial layout, opening usage, and privacy zoning, of the *hijra* homes. All of the *hijra* homes are identified with an oblique entrance approach⁵ which is not directly visible from the public road, while the entrance is simultaneously kept open (Figure 7). At their neighbourhood scale, there is an attempt to hide the entrance, while the oblique circulation guides one towards the entrance. The home location is significantly separated from the public zone and not permeable. Thus, the home does not allow a visual connection from the road. Whilst the conventional home layout is more oriented towards connectivity and permeability with good indoor-outdoor connection, *hijra* homes counter all such aspects to secure their dual life. Even inside the home, while the doors and windows remain open, these are covered with curtains. This duality allows the *hijra* home to be both connected and isolated from the surrounding community/society.

⁵ The home's entrance is approached in an 'oblique' way. See also Ching (2023) on the grammar and order of an architectural space.

Figure 7. The introvert planning of hijra home on a neighbourhood scale.

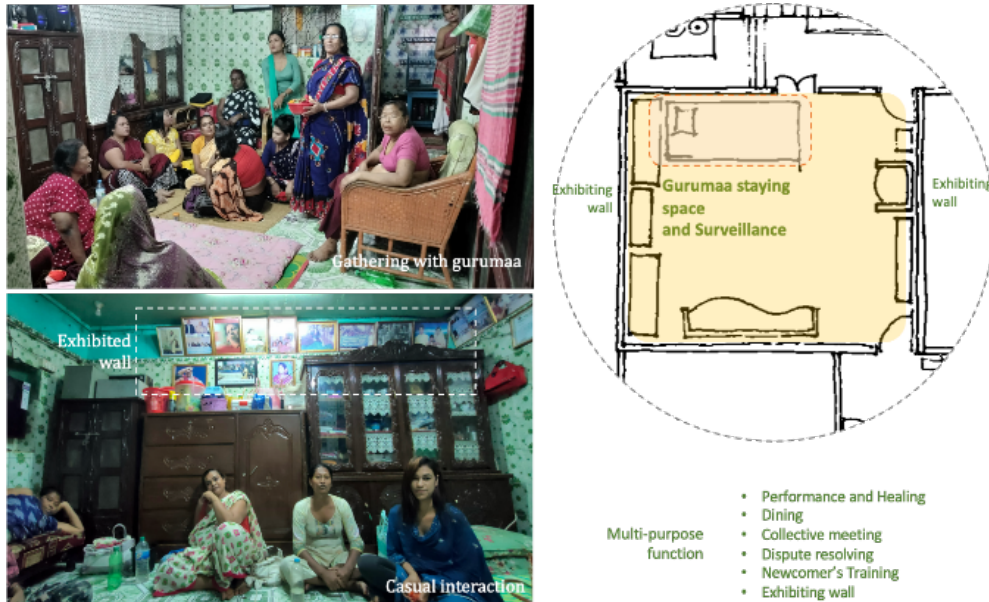




The maps illustrate the introverted spatial planning of *hijra* homes, characterized by oblique entrances designed to facilitate social segregation on a neighbourhood scale. Source: Authors.

As Illich (1982) argued, gender shapes bodies as they shape space and are, in turn, shaped by a spaces' physical arrangements. In crafting their dual identity, the *hijra* home employs a distinct architectural zoning that shields the vibrant performance space from society's view (Figure 8). The oblique entry, controlled layout, and introverted planning create an envelope/enclosure that rarely reveals the social life of *hijras* to outsiders, fostering a perception of inaccessibility.

Figure 8. Various social interactions at the hijra home.



The photographs taken inside *hijra* homes reveal interactions marked by politeness and cordiality, contrasting sharply with the aggressive behaviour often displayed externally in public. This dichotomy underscores their dual identity and the complex social dynamics they navigate. Source: Authors.

Figure 9. The exhibiting wall and mirrors in Guru-maa's room inside hijra home



The photographs in *hijra* homes display images capturing moments of personal and communal pride. These wall exhibits contribute to a performative aesthetic within the interior spaces, enhancing the cultural and social dignity of the *hijra* community. Source: Authors.

However, despite their seclusion, these spaces are adorned with images of performances displayed on the walls, showcasing the *hijra* family's accomplishments, pride, and culture (Figure 9). This decor helps instil a sense of self-dignity within their chosen economic path. *Guru-maa's* room, decorated with multiple mirrors, helps to craft their faces with colourful makeovers to prepare *Notun-meye* novices for the income-generating *hijra* identity. These facial makeovers, and bodily modifications, serve as a means to conceal their humble domestic selves, while the distinctive home interior, complete with multiple mirrors, presents a contrasting portrayal of their self-image merging with the '*hijra*' identity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Scholarly literature explores the concept of home through various analytical lenses, including the sociological perspective, non-sociological viewpoint (Després, 1991), and social phenomenological approach (Somerville, 1997). The sociological approach examines external aspects such as class, gender, tenure, and age, while the non-sociological perspective emphasizes internal aspects like territoriality, psychological needs, and attachments (Dovey, 1985). Among these approaches, Madigan et al. (1990) demonstrated that the meaning of home is inherently gendered, regardless of the analytical framework used (Somerville, 1997).

In South Asia, the concept of the "*hijra* home" challenges traditional gender norms by illustrating how such homes are reconstructed beyond the conventional gender binary. This reconfiguration presents a mono-gendered (i.e., third gender) domestic identity, offering a unique perspective that counters established notions of home in academic discourse. The *hijra* home exemplifies a space where conventional gender dynamics are subverted, providing new insights into the construction and experience of domestic identity outside the binary gender framework.

This alternative domestic space, which this paper identifies as *counter home*, becomes crucial given the limitations of a third gender individual's biological home. Since a third gender individual's biological home fails to offer the necessary 'emotional refuge' that is integral to the role of a home (Seeley et al., 1956; Rainwater, 1966; Blunt & Dowling, 2006) or provide a space for authentic gender expression, the *hijra* home is considered a refuge. The *hijra* home intends to be the symbol of freedom and independence, or a platform for self-expression, especially when their biological (conventional) home restricts such scope. However, instead of solely providing the necessary platform for self-expression, the *hijra* home often paradoxically reinforces gender stereotypes, manifesting as a feminine-stereotyped space in an effort to counter the socially constructed stigma enforced on third gender individuals.

The stigma attached to third gender individuals often leads to extreme suffering, societal exclusion, and discrimination rooted in their bodily attributes, which is likewise attached through the *hijra* tag to their home. As revealed in one respondent's assertion, 'You made me hijra! Is my body tattooed with the word *hijra* by birth?' (Interview with *Boro-maa* of Rail Station Road *hijra* home, 2023) (Figure 10). The labelling underscores how deeply ingrained societal perceptions dictate third gender identities. This stigmatisation not only appears to be a personal burden but also manifests in physical and social spaces, marking their homes and bodies as sites of discrimination.

Figure 10. *Boro-maa* (senior *Guru-maa*) in a *hijra* home



The image shows the interview responses of the senior leader of the Khulna *hijra* community, offering insights into third gender identity, social stigma, and exclusion. Source: Authors.

To counter social stigma, the *hijra* home emerges as a crucial alternative space, shaping a new collective identity and fostering a sense of a fictive family distinct from biological family structures (Podder & Shahidullah, 2023). In the tropical city of Khulna, the *hijra* homes adopt a family structure of *Guru-maa-Shissho-meye*, emphasising formal discipleship under the *Guru-maa* leadership. In South Asian studies, scholars such as Nanda (1986) and Dutta (2013) explained similar familial practices as a ‘*gharana-based*’ structure with a strict hierarchical model (Kalra, 2012; Nanda, 1997). This hierarchical model is reflected in the spatial organisation of the *hijra* home, with the *Guru-maa* receiving the maximum area and facilities. Relationships within their fictive family are forged not through blood ties or traditional social institutions like marriage, but within the boundaries of this counter-home (Authors’ Fieldnotes, 2023).

Since maintaining a *hijra* identity necessitates continuity of experience, akin to the conventional role of home described by [Somerville \(1997\)](#), boundary is crucial. The boundary of the home is central to creating a place identity. The idea of "home" as "place-identity" is well articulated by many scholars including, [Giuliani \(1991\)](#), [Proshansky et al., \(1983\)](#), [Tuan \(1980\)](#), [Urry \(2000\)](#) and [Zhang & Su \(2020\)](#). The *hijra* home, with its defined boundary, introvert space, and oblique entrance, creates a powerful site for spatial identity formation. The home boundary generates a sense of belongingness and territoriality, asserting a place-based spatial identity regardless of whether it counters their biological identity.

However, what is unique to this paper's findings is the collective identity of the *hijra* community, which extends beyond individual *hijra* families. This *hijra* community comprises a network of interconnected houses, forming a web of transient dwellings. An individual *hijra* can move from one home to another in a dynamic way, according to convenience and adaptivity. There is a culture of shifting home and discipleship, maintaining the community as a collective family and reflecting the community's strong network. As *hijras* claim, '*We are one but distributed in different areas*' (*Guru-maa of Khalishpur hijra home, 2023*). The conception of their home boundary thus oscillates between an individual and collective family, representing the *hijra* 'home' as an interwoven broader network. This conception counters the conventional home boundary which [Somerville \(1997\)](#) defines as being based on stability and permanence.

Another crucial finding regarding the relation between identity and the *hijra* home is the construction of a dual identity of the third gender (through the *hijra* home). This dual identity includes one that conforms to the social stereotype of *hijra* and the other which is non-*hijra*. The *hijra* home facilitates the articulation of both identities to make the third gender simultaneously visible and invisible to society. This duality arguably upholds a failure to decolonize an unresolved trauma inflicted by British imperialism ([Mitchell, 2019](#)). [Dutta \(2013\)](#) asserts that the term *hijra*, historically used in colonial accounts to pejoratively describe 'transvestite' communities as 'eunuchs,' has a continuous historical trajectory prior to their traumatic treatment under colonialism.

The colonial regime's Criminal Tribes Act (passed in 1871) to systematically deny the 'immoral' or 'corrupt' *hijra* identity ([Ahmed, 2019](#); [Hossain, 2020](#)) reflected broader colonial attitudes towards 'otherness' and the cultural and sexual diversity of South Asia, aiming to undermine the foundations of Indian society. The colonial construction of *hijra* identity as criminal also posed socio-political challenges to the visibility of their home. However, the South Asian *hijra* identity has a much longer and more celebrated history, for the third gender have been acknowledged since the times of the ancient mythological quests of the Ramayana and Mahabharata (also known as the '*Aravani*'

in South India, or 'Kinnar/Khusra' in North India) where the *hijra* resembles non-Western transgenderism (Kalra, 2012).

Ahmed (2019) marks the colonial Criminal Tribe Act as responsible for 'the loss of native identity' of the *hijra*, and Hossain (2018) highlights 'de-Indianizing' the *hijra*, which Mani (1998) argues is a way to make Indian tradition/culture 'contentious'. The historical foundation of colonial *hijra* and the consequential struggle of third gender communities to de-criminalise/decolonize *hijra* identity in contemporary social, cultural, and political contexts in South Asia, which creates widespread opposition to *hijras*, has to rely on Eurocentric narratives of transgender activism to get any visibility in the (international) politics of human rights.

The identity crisis experienced by the *hijra* community presents a unique dilemma for their tropical living environment, which exists as both a place and a non-place, symbolically countering the idea of 'home' in the city of Khulna. This conflict is reflected in their inward-focused organisation and discreet entryways, which represent their socially isolated domesticity at the neighbourhood and city scale. The survival of the third gender from colonial criminal constructions negotiates a unique exchange relationship with society and fosters an alternative, socially accepted form of the *hijra* identity. However, the construction of their identity transcends external social interactions, involving unique spatial dynamics within the framework of their counter home. As evidenced by the account of the *Boro-maa* of Rail Station Road, the *hijra* community manifests different personas inside and outside their counter home (Interview with *Boro-maa*, 2023) (see Findings section for details). This countering of home showcases a delicate interplay of external (*hijra*) and internal (non-*hijra*) identity.

Since the *hijra* household economy is shaped by their external/socially constructed identity, it necessitates that their training and living spaces align with this stereotype (Author's Fieldnotes, 2023). During the trainee phase, new members (*Notun-meye*) undergo training where they learn specific attitudes, norms, and income-generating activities such as the clapping dance (Tanupriya & Pannikot, 2021), *badhai*, *babu nachano*, and drama. These activities are tailored to fit the stereotypical *hijra* identity and are crucial for their economic survival. The income-generating training activities significantly shape their domestic space and home layout, giving rise to an institutional infrastructure within the *hijra* home. The *Guru-maa* plays a pivotal role in this training process, exercising greater control to ensure that newcomers adopt an 'authentic' *hijra* identity by discarding or countering any alternative versions of identity.

Elaborating on the nuanced layers of the 'authentic' identity, Khandoker's (2014) research shows how Bangladeshi *hijras* employ an assemblage concept to showcase

their body's capacity to generate a 'terror image' as part of their survival tactics. Similarly, [Dutta \(2013\)](#) illuminates how third gender communities in India deliberately crafted a 'stigmatised image' of *hijra* identity to secure international funding for HIV-AIDS prevention from Western and multilateral funders in the 1990s. In Khulna, the third gender community's dwelling has been strategically utilised to produce a contextual version of the 'authentic' *hijra* image. *Guru-maa's* room displays various exhibits and photographs that effectively depict a performative image of *hijra* to express pride or 'apparent' self-esteem in being *hijra* over third gender.

Yet, in Khulna's case, the construction of 'authentic' *hijra* identity counters many aspects of the third gender's social, corporeal, and economic freedom, which is distinctly different from the conception of the Western queer. The latter is hinged on combatting unequal gender identity, as referenced by feminist philosopher and queer theorist [Butler \(1992\)](#), and activists like [Truth \(1851\)](#). The identity of 'queer' evolved from social discrimination, exclusion, and social movements in the United States and was strengthened by Foucault's theoretical contribution ([De Souza Lima et al., 2023](#)). Foucault's *The History of Sexuality (1978)* represents a milestone in the sociological inquiry about the body and corporeal practices ([De Souza Lima et al., 2023](#)). Western temperate queer identity emerged as a form of movement for human rights and sexual freedom, whereas, as [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) and [Dutta \(2013\)](#) discuss, the conception of *hijra* identity in tropical South Asia portrays a different agenda.

The findings in Khulna corroborate the assertions made by [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) and [Dutta \(2013\)](#). The *hijras* in Khulna reject the labels 'gay,' 'lesbian,' and 'homosexual,' underscoring a significant perceptual and epistemological difference between Western queer concepts and those of the South Asian *hijra* community. According to the *Boro-maa* of Rail Station Road *hijra* home, their 'authentic' *hijra* identity is considered 'pure' because they lack 'impure' bodily fluids such as sperm or menstrual blood. They believe that this purity, combined with a lack of lust or sexual desire, brings them closer to God, enabling them to bestow blessings upon newborns. Similar practices of asexuality, as noted by [Hossain \(2020\)](#), are observed in the ritual of *nirvan* within the *hijra* tradition elsewhere in South Asia ([Karla, 2012](#); [Nanda, 1999](#)) where *hijras* seek a 'pure' body through emasculation surgery, creating a sacred domestic space in their counter homes to bless babies and individuals.

Furthermore, [Tanupriya & Pannikot \(2021\)](#) argue that corporeality is central to the constructions of various archetypes of identity, including sexuality and gender. In Khulna, the practice of asexuality influences domestic spatial segregation and aggregation, which impacts the privacy layer of the *hijra* home. While [Somerville \(1997\)](#) describes a conventional home as a 'sanctuary of privacy,' the layout of the *hijra* home counters/disrupts this notion. In the journey of becoming a *hijra*, the home

encourages collective living among *Notun-meye* and *Shissho-meye* with *Guru-maa* as the functional and symbolic centre to maintain the asexual tradition. The oblique entrance of the house, the entrance/circulation through *Guru-maa's* space, and the connectivity of all domestic functions with her room, create a surveillance structure that allows for the supervision of all domestic spaces. The *hijra* home strictly adheres to traditional norms, discouraging carnal/corporeal activity of *notun-meye/shissho-meye* through its non-contaminated layout and spatial organisation.

Table 2. Synthesis of Counter Home attributes.

Counter Home Attributes		Key Feature	Spatial code	
Countering the conventional home conception	Countering gender binary		Mono-gendered space	Feminine Stereotyped space
	Countering authentic self-expression		Forced identity	Restricted indoor-outdoor relation
Countering traditionality (home lineage)	Countering the conventional Family model (South Asian)		Fictive family structure	Hierarchical planning
	Epistemological shift from traditional home boundary		Inclusive religiosity	Inclusive religio-cultural space
Countering colonial identity	Dual Identity imposition		Members move between homes	Home Network/transient dwelling
	Dual Identity imposition		Duality in space; visibility-invisibility, home-homelessness	Introvert Planning and oblique entrance for social segregation
Counter living and economy	Countering the Gender role		Feminine Functional center	Centralized control
	Countering typical layout	Production of economy through prioritizing training	Training and performance space	Predominance of Institutional space
		Social Image-making and production of pride	Exhibition of dignity/ photographs in living/ <i>Guru-maa's</i> space	Performative aesthetics
Countering western queer domesticity	Home-making intension and perceptual difference		Counter-identity spatial culture	Carefully Surveilled/ Controlled space
	Asexuality practice; Denial of corporeality	Claimed divinity	Production of 'pure' bodies	Asexual Space
		Countering the conventional privacy and corporeality	Co-lived space	Disrupted Privacy Domain
			Gharana-based honor and authentic <i>hijra</i> identity	Resistance to sexually 'contaminating' layout (i.e. Prostitution/ homosexuality)
Counter spatial identity	Politics of labelling queer/ <i>hijra</i> through home		Production of 'new normal' queer identity	'New-normal' Spatiality

Source: Authors.

It is evident that in contrast to the *hijra* homes, Western queerness and queer domesticity, as discussed by Bryant (2015), Maguire (2015), and Vider (2022), emphasises the freedom of sexual expression in domestic space and the acceptance of corporeal identities within the LGBT community. However, in the *hijra* homes of Khulna, the corporeal space directly opposes their home lineage or *ghrana*-based *hijra* honour, which they call the 'name and fame' of the house, '*baarir naam o maan*'. This honour must be protected. To ensure dignity and uphold their spatial culture, the *hijra* home suppresses sexuality and freedom, countering the privacy functions of both Western queer and conventional homes. In doing so, the *hijra* home fosters an 'authentic' *hijra* identity and establishes a unique *hijra* home layout.

In conclusion, between the categories queer and *hijra*, these labels can also be interpreted as '*problematic identity*' markers. Historically, the obtrusive colonial legalised identity markers categorised the *hijra* of the South Asian subcontinent as 'physiologically abnormal' with the label of 'eunuch' (Gannon, 2009; Ghosh, 2018), while also normalising and legalising the conception of gender within a strict 'binary' code of heterosexual male/female. This generated social discrimination towards other gender identities, which were rendered abnormal. Countering this institutionalised notion of abnormality, the third gender of South Asia created 'a new normal spatiality' through normalising spatial discrimination and discriminatory identity. The Khulna case shows that they accepted the label of *hijra* as a socio-economic-political construction to sustain a shared sense of identity. As Khandoker (2014) has argued, 'naming' acts as an effort to mainstream inclusion in normalised discourse, even as this naming can be a form of exclusion and stigmatisation—as in the case of the label *hijra*. Thus, the *hijra* home is embedded in a counter-identity construction through critical layers of functionality in the form of unique spatial interaction and modality. The domestic space of the *hijra* home focuses on creating a social identifier/marker of *hijra* subjectivity where normalisation happens through the workings of power, institution, and identity politics.

This study reveals how the *hijra* home resembles a dynamic 'way of life' (rather than a static enclosure), where domestic spatiality plays the central role in countering third gender identity and establishes a 'normal' subjectivity through functionality, privacy layout, feminine centring, co-living, circulation, oblique entrances, etc. In this way, the counter home/homemaking of *hijras* delves into the socio-spatial dimension, defining home not as an ideological experiment of form, nor a one-way social construct. Instead, the *hijra*'s counter home can be interpreted as a transformative domestic space, evolving/creating *hijra* subjectivity and identification out of a generic third gender identity in the process of both external (social) and internal (domestic) construction.

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Interview and Field Survey References

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