

MY GENDER IS NOT AN INVITATION

KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

Some #MeToo stories will never gain traction on social media.

Violence against some bodies are more acceptable than others—bodies that are always, already deemed as “perverted” and “unnatural” and hence incapable of being violated. I spoke to five Hijras, involved in a range of occupations from human rights activists to beauticians who shared their stories of navigating the extreme violence that are their everyday lives.

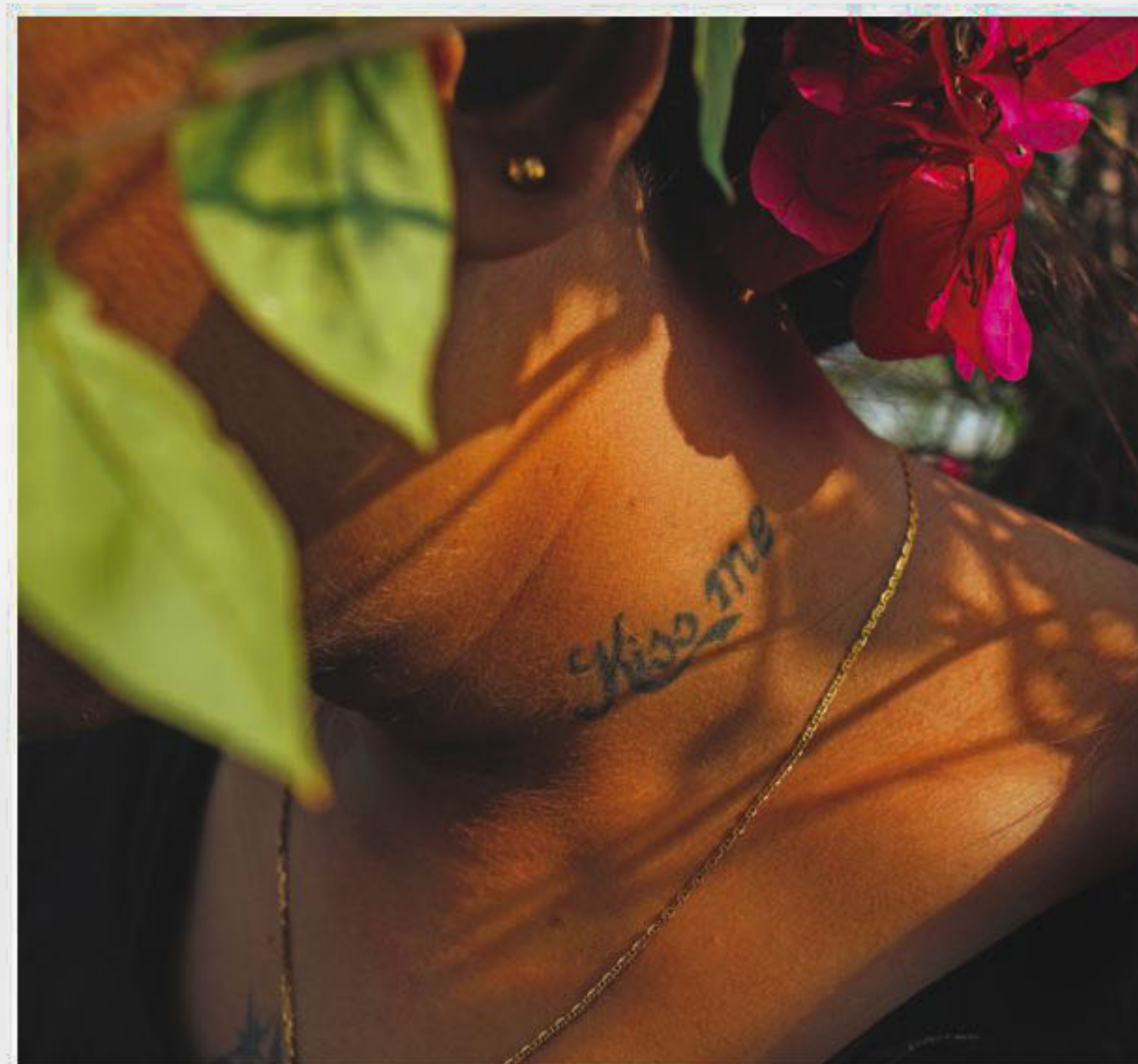
Ivan Ahmed Kotha

Human rights activist

When Badhon was raped at TSC on the night of December 31, 2000, the news spread like wildfire. From newspapers to tea stalls, everyone was either writing about it, talking about it or debating about it. Human rights activists, teachers, students, media personalities and people from different walks of life were demanding justice for Badhon.

As a woman and a human rights activist, I was in solidarity of this rage against our toxic and patriarchal society. I felt angry, devastated. But to be honest, I wasn't feeling broken just because of Badhon, but also because of what my body and mind had to go through on the same night with 16 of my Hijra sisters on our way back home from the same celebration at University of Dhaka. A bunch of hooligans obstructed our path and started to tease us but their demands grew quickly. They demanded sex work and we rejected their offers. Angered, they started to beat us up with their belts and chains. At one point, they took us inside the sweeper colony and started to rape all of us. We were crying, bleeding, panicking and were begging them to stop hitting us and violating our bodies, but they showed no mercy. I was too scared to even beg for help because it felt like they would kill me if I did. After a few hours of their relentless torture they just left us there and took off. The next morning, I saw the headlines of the newspaper. I was angry because of what had happened to Badhon, but I was even angrier because I knew our society and its history would never document or remember the narratives of us Hijras the way they would for a cis-woman. I was still thinking about reaching out to a few newspa-

pers and filing a case at a police station, but I was terrified of the consequences we might face after this. Would my landlord evict me from my house because I got raped? Would we face more harassment at the police station while we try to file a case because I was out late on a 31st night? These and hundreds of other similar questions were hovering in my mind. I knew the media coverage might trigger more violence towards us and everyone will turn a blind eye towards the harassment and violence we might face and will do nothing about it. Because who cares about a Hijra getting violated anyway? That's apparently what we deserve, though I don't know why.



Samiul Alim Shammi

Service holder

Do you know what I wanted each morning when I woke up? I used to desire a partner to grow old with, but now, on most days I just feel an overwhelming desire to die. I think loneliness is one of the biggest problems in our community. It is a constant and I don't know how to deal with it anymore. I was in a relationship with a man for eight years. When we first started seeing each other, he was the sweetest and kindest man I had ever met. He used to call me his wife. He knew I am a Hijra but he never used that word with a negative connotation. He never tried to draw a line between a cis-woman and a hijra or demeaned me for who I am. He respected me—something I never got from my previous partners. When people from my area found out about our relationship, they started shaming my partner for falling in love with a Hijra. Initially it didn't seem to bother him, but after a few months he started to act differently. He started avoiding me and would meet me only to take

some money or the “gift” he wanted from me. I acquiesced because I did not want to lose him. But after a while, he started to forcefully take my valuables and jewellery. He also beat me up when I requested him not to take my things or failed to meet his demands. I did not have anywhere to go to or seek help to prevent him from abusing me verbally and physically. I was not welcome in my house as I am a hijra, even though I am the most established one among my siblings and I contribute the most in my family. My abusive partner eventually left me because he saw no future with me because of my gender identity. My family shuns me because I tarnish their “social image”. Where should I go? Who will provide me with the love, affection, and support that I deserve like any other human being? I guess on the streets—that's where my brother believes I belong.

Mitul

Student and volunteer

The other night I went to my sister's place to attend a dinner party. On my way back, the Uber I'd taken was stopped by cops at a check post. They asked me to come out of the car, and interrogated where I was headed and why do I look like “this”? I had no other choice but to tell them I am a trans-woman. The policemen immediately started to make fun of my body. They forced the Uber driver to ‘admit’ that I am a sex worker and that he was taking me home for sex. When they failed to make me admit to their false accusations, they checked my bag and started asking silly questions—like why I had cosmetics in my bag—to humiliate me in public. Eventually I was able to go home because they couldn't prove anything.



Mitul

This is one tiny incident among the many that I face every day. This city refuses me a job because of how I look, even though I worked hard to earn my Master's degree. People, especially men, refuse to let me navigate freely in this place I call my home. They spew out curses about how I look and how



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