

## **Badhai: Hijra Performances across Borders in South Asia**

**Panel organized by Claire Pamment, accepted for the Conference on Asian Studies (SWCAS), to be held virtually October 2020**

*Badhai*, the repertoire of devotional prayers, songs, dances, and comic repartee, performed by socially marginalized trans feminine *hijra* and *khwaja sira* throughout South Asia, has long been recognised as vital to these communities' identities. Transmitted through lineages of gurus (teachers) and chelas (students), *Badhai* performances cultivate embodied knowledge and piety, strengthen kinship bonds, offer personal expression, and equip practitioners with skills to negotiate normative society. Typically staged at neighboring households to shower blessings of fertility, health and prosperity upon willing or unwilling celebrants of weddings, births, job promotions and other auspicious occasions, these performances carve affective networks of relationality and constitute important livelihood for performers. However, *badhai* is increasingly considered to be on the decline. Evocative of the nineteenth-century colonial prohibition against *hijra* performance, *badhai* practitioners today have been subjected to accusations of extortion and of polluting public space as a result of the contemporary collusion of classist/casteist, heteronormative, nationalist, religious and neoliberal agendas, even with the expanding narrative of transgender rights across South Asia over the last decade. This panel couples historical research on the archives of criminalisation of *hijra* performance (Jessica Hinchy) with new ethnographic fieldwork, drawn from Bangladesh (Adnan Hossain), India (Jeff Roy) and Pakistan (Claire Pamment), to examine the diverse ways in which practitioners negotiate changing social scripts, enact genealogies, and mobilize different, if not competing, futurities.