UNSTABLE ASSEMBALGES: MEDIATED DISCOURSES AND LIVED REALITIES OF HIJRAS IN PAKISTAN

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Hijras comprise a community of female-identifying gender-fluid individuals of generally low socioeconomic status in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. They are also known as “Khawaja siras” in Pakistan. The English term “eunuch” was employed for them before “transgender” became a term of currency in media and legislative discourses. While the community did not figure prominently in national and transnational media until the state began granting them citizenship rights in 2009, the discourses on gender variant practices are produced in a highly mediated environment since then. Historically, the community was marginalized and criminalized first under the British colonial rule and subsequently in postcolonial South Asia. However, hijras endured as a close-knit community relying on their kinship system of *guru-chela* (teacher-disciple) and their unique performance cultures. In contemporary Pakistan, most members of the community typically survive on

singing/dancing, begging, or sex work, the means of livelihood considered undesirable. The media have brought these and various other aspects of hijra lives under close scrutiny. This dissertation project examines such national and transnational media - documentaries, films, television talk shows, awareness campaigns - and the discourses of exclusion and belonging that they produce. While the media in conjunction with other external and internal forces function to shift the conversations and practices around gender embodiments for those who have access to the sites of mobility and imagination, these discourses leave out a majority of those on the margins and do not address realities and complexities of hijra lives. This project highlights such complexities and addresses questions of subjectivity and agency in contemporary mediated discourses of human and sexual rights and visibility and identity politics. I argue that the media function as unstable forces, territorializing and reterritorializing marginal spaces and temporalities. While media discourses remain marginally relevant to their lives, hijras continue to negotiate their presence by bringing forth their contingent self, working with and against the pull of essentialist identity politics and its assimilatory imperative for specific ends.

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Dedicated to the hijra community of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF FIGURES

I. INTRODUCTION

The independent film *Immaculate Conception* (dir. Jamil Dehlavi, 1992), produced for Britain's Channel Four, opens with a blurry visual of a person's silhouette, singing a soulful song.[1] As the title sequence unfolds, the person comes into focus and it is revealed that the singer is a hijra. In the next sequence, two women – an upper-class Pakistani photographer Samira and a Jewish American wife of an environmentalist, Hannah, navigate the bustling city of Karachi and reach a (fictional) shrine. After parking their car, as they walk toward the shrine, Samira assures her American friend that the place they are visiting will be "picturesque." In the colorful and festive ambience of the shrine resides the hijra community headed by the singer. Encountering this community Hannah asks: Are they men? Samira responds: "They are hijras…eunuchs." While Samira takes shots of hijras singing, dancing, and moving around the shrine in their colorful attire and garish make-up, Hannah talks to the head of the shrine, the singer. The head hijra magically recognizes that Hannah is trying to conceive and offers miraculous fertility solutions to her. Later, Hannah tells her British husband about the miraculous "eunuch shrine" she visited with Samira for a National Geographic assignment. The couple subsequently enter the

charming and exotic world of amulets, prayers, singing, dancing, and intoxicants. It is revealed later that behind the façade of miracles is a cis-gender boy whom hijras keep to have sexual intercourse with women to get them pregnant while they are intoxicated. The shrine and its hijras become the backdrop for the film's narrative on clash of the exotic and magical yet duplicitous East and modern, scientific, and enlightened West.

Almost two and a half decades after the production and release of *Immaculate Conception*, two gender variant community members sit in the morning show of a private TV network in Pakistan. One asserts that she is a "transgender woman" and the other dismisses the Urdu term "khawaja sira," commonly used for the hijra community in Pakistan: "It is the twenty first century…. we should have to move forward (and not use this outdated term)." Compared to the era when the term hijra was usually translated as "eunuch" in English, as it is in *Immaculate Conception*, the gender variant community has embraced other global terms like "transgender." Their cultural representation and self-presentation has also changed over time; Compared to hijras' depiction as exotic and magical, they appear in the media as activists and professionals. These changes resonate shifts in the discourse on gender variance. In the production of these discourses, national and transnational media are involved and various other forces paly varying roles. Global flows of information and capital, circuits of non-

profit/nongovernmental funding, globalization of identities, Western neocolonial, imperial, and neoliberal orders, and statist interests are among those factors. Everyday lives of the hijra community in Pakistan and beyond are located within and around these mediated discourses. While the transgender representation in the Euro-American center went from negligible representation to a "tipping point,"[2] the contemporary media discourse in South Asia is more complex in which the lives of gender variant people are entangled. Within these complexities, new social formations have emerged in conjunction with as well as separate from old and historical ways. The contemporary discourses are both enabling and discordant, as they fashion new ways of belonging while negating others.

This dissertation considers these formations by asking the following questions: How do we understand the role of media in the (trans)formation of gender variant identities? How are transnational, regional, national, and local forces intertwined in these formations? Are the media enabling or marginalizing forces for the gender variant communities that historically existed in postcolonial South Asia? How do we understand the issues of subjectivity and agency in the gender variant community? This dissertation explores contemporary mediated discourses of human and sexual rights, visibility and identity politics, and nationalism and globalization, as they unfold in Pakistan.

A Brief Historical Perspective

The practices of gender variance in Muslim cultures can be traced to 632 AD, the year of the death of Prophet Muhammad. In those days the term *mukhannathun* was employed to refer to effeminate men, mostly musicians.[3] Male professional musicians who publicly adopted women's fashions were appreciated by some and disapproved by others.[4] As the Muslim rule expanded due to conquests, eunuch (castrated male) slaves became a part of the Muslim polity for centuries, from the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517)[5] to the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922),[6] like they were employed by the Romans, the Byzantines, the Sasanians, and Chinese dynasties. Most of these eunuchs were castrated for slavery outside of the geographies under Muslim rule and subsequently brought and employed as high status slaves. These eunuchs assumed various roles including harem guardians, military commanders, advisors, administrators, tutors to crown princes, and pleasure companion to rulers, and thus had reach in palaces and courts.[7] They were also revered and trusted as guardians of Islam's holiest site of *Kaaba* in Mecca and prophet Muhammad's tomb in Medina for eight hundred years until the Sauds took over in the 1920s.[8] Due to their high status, eunuch slaves had access to "the finest education available, lavish clothing and accouterments, and accommodation."[9] While most historians have talked about eunuchs as only castrated beardless males,

some also trace early phases of transvestism to them.[10] The eighth century Arab poet Abu Nuwas describes them as:

> "You see figures that are female in behavior, but in men's clothes.
> Their hands and feet are bare, their ears and necks unadorned.
> They are slim as the reins of a horse, sword sheaths, or belts.
> But they have ample bottoms in their tunics and daggers at their wastes.
> Their curls are coiled like a scorpion, and their mustaches are perfumed."[11]

Some subsequent accounts refer to aspects of sexuality and feminine appearances. A Muslim jurist of the Mamluk Sultanate, for instance, had the following to say about the beardless sartorial valets called *jamdariyya* who served kings and emirs: "The *jamdariyya* have worked out new fashions in clothing designed to simulate lust; they outdo women in adorning themselves and seduce people with their loveliness."[12] In South Asia, Muslim Mughal rulers brought eunuch slaves to the subcontinent and employed them in key positions. The chief eunuch in their courts were called *khawaja sara.*[13] Thus the hijra community in Pakistan employs this term for themselves, perhaps to associate themselves with the prestige of the Mughal rule. However, pre-Muslim India already indicates the phenomenon of gender variance and/or transvestitism as distinct from eunuchs.[14] Sweet and Zwelling,

for example, trace representations of the third gender, often defined as neither man nor woman, in classical Indian plays and texts as early as first century B.C.E.[15] However, the phenomenon of hijra and eunuch got conflated over time. Some hijras undergo and follow the ritual of castration like eunuch slaves,[16] but not all hijras undertake or desire surgical changes. Ethnographic work in South Asia indicates that emasculation is peripheral to hijra lives, which are mainly governed by customs, language, and communitarian rules and regulations.[17] All hijras indicate desire for femininity, whether they are emasculated and sexually active or not. If sexually active, they are mostly attracted to cis-gender men or work as sex workers catering to men. However, hijras were addressed as eunuchs in British colonial documents. The British colonial rulers criminalized hijras and relegated them to a low social status.

After the colonial rule, it is the axis of class, apart from aspects of gender and sexuality, that continues to mark the community of hijras across postcolonial South Asia. As David Valentine reminds us "the contours of racial or class experiences can shape and reshape what gender or sexuality themselves can mean,"[18] scholars have highlighted that intersections are as important, if not more, in South Asia. Dutta and Roy argue that "South Asian discourses of gender/sexual variance may blur cis-trans or homo-trans distinctions, and community formations may be based also on class/caste position rather than just the singular

axis of gender identity. [19] Thus, in India most hijras belong to the lower castes or are Muslims.[20] Hossain locates hijras in Bangladesh among the working class. In fact, all ethnographic work done in South Asia highlights the lower/working class location of hijras. However, class is one of the intersections on which hijra identification materializes. Reddy argues that hijras conceive of personhood as operating across and within multiple subject positions constituted by the crisscrossing of gender, sexuality, kinship, class, and religion.[21]

It is these intersections that modulate the roles and experiences of hijras and other gender variant individuals in South Asian society. For instance, most hijras became ritual performers and received *badhai* (money and/or other in-kind gifts) on auspicious occasions such as birth of a child or marriage,[22] because there are superstitious (religious or otherwise) beliefs associated with them that hijras have the powers to bless or curse. However, *badhai* practice is not as prevalent any more. There is also a practice of going to and collecting alms from various households and market, indicating their class origins. Increasingly, hijras also beg on the streets and traffic signals in Pakistan. Those who don't beg either perform erotic dancing for men or do sex work or both (I discuss these two occupations in detail in chapter 5). The occupations of begging, dancing, and sex work have become synonymous with hijras in Pakistan and beyond.

Tom Boellstroff argues that "subject positions come into being at a certain period of time, which shapes them and they also change through time as long as they persist."[23] In the twenty first century, the discourse on gender variance shifted with the emergence of global transgender movement and legal recognition of third gender category across South Asia. In contemporary Pakistan and beyond, gender variant subjects find themselves "caught between the fading voice of colonialism from the past and strong pull of globalization in the present."[24] While global identities and histories influence, identities of these communities are also shaped by various economic, political, socio-cultural, and institutional forces.

Emerging Identities

In South Asia, India allowed passport registration for "transgender" individuals in 2005 and created O or Other sex/gender category for voter registration in 2009.[25] Nepal formally recognized the third gender category in 2007 for its heterogeneous gender variant community and also became the world's first country to use this category in the census in 2011.[26] In 2009, the Supreme Court of Pakistan responded to a petition on behalf of hijras and recognized the need for legal recognition of the third gender category. In 2013, Bangladesh also recognized hijras as third gender.[27] The third gender category, however, has been critiqued by scholars as inadequate for categorizing and theorizing most transgenderism or transvestism.[28] Before it was invoked in the initial

legislations in South Asia, third gender functioned as an ethnographic category to define nonwestern gender variant cultures, as different identities under this category seem to "fit well-established assumptions about culture, tradition and locality…different from the West."[29] However, the recent substitution of third gender with transgender "has not necessarily rectified the attendant epistemological problems."[30] Subsequent legislation of the rights of gender variant people in South Asia under the banner of the "transgender" category is emblematic of these shifts that do not necessarily address overarching epistemological issues.

Transgender Persons Bill of 2014 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2016 were passed in India, and subsequently the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act was passed in Pakistan in 2018. While the bill that passed in Pakistan recognizes a wide range of identities and embodiments: "Intersex, Eunuch, Khawaja Sira, and Transgender man and woman," the discourse surrounding gender variance now revolves around a globally recognized transgender phenomenon, which may or may not be fully applicable in South Asia. Now some individuals who may or may not connect with the wider hijra community, claim trans as an identity. Undeniably, "trans" or "transgender" is an emergent identity in South Asia, as the category has been institutionalized through legislations, transnational and national activism, and English language national and international media.[31]

However, scholars caution that "'trans' not only crosses over borders of identity but also highlights and challenges their geographical determinism, the primacy of a Western view of selfhood, citizenship, and jurisdiction, and the global political and economic regimes that emerge from that primacy."[32]

The category of transgender is usually conjured as an all-encompassing umbrella term in South Asia like it is used in the West. Aren Aizura also defines 'trans' as an umbrella term that encompasses "a range of identities encompassing 'transgender,' 'transsexual,' 'genderqueer,' and diverse gender variant practices," but cautions that one has to be sensitive to cultural specificity.[33] Dutta and Roy argue that the "emergent models of transgender identity certainly create new possibilities for social recognition and citizenship, but they may be colonizing precisely in the ways in which they may refuse or fail to comprehend many forms of gender variance relegated to the scale of the local."[34] The problem, as identified by scholars, is that "while there are certainly ways in which transgender has emerged as a South Asian category of identity and community formation, the same ease of adoption, translation, and negotiation vis-à-vis the transnational circulation of "transgender" and "transsexual" categories may not be available to everyone." Indicating class/caste distinctions, transsexual embodiments, synonymous with "no ambiguity or indeterminacy and surgical and hormonal modifications,"[35] are inaccessible to the majority

of working-class hijras and other gender variant individuals in South Asia. David Valentine cautions that the uncritical use of transgender in activist, academic, and other contexts, while progressive in intent, actually reproduces, in novel and intensified forms, class and racial hierarchies."[36] For instance, analyzing the new identity politics in Bangladesh, Hossain contends that "legal recognition works to categorize and potentially 'fix' the hijra in a way that excludes most of those who have conventionally been part of the hijra category."[37] Legal recognition and legislations, as Dean Spade argues, remain symbolic if oppressive structures remain in place.[38] "Law reform work that merely tinkers with systems to make them look more inclusive while leaving their most violent operations intact must be a concern of many social movements today," warns Spade.[39]

The dependence on Western categories for non-Western cultures thus create a perpetual dilemma. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, and social justice bear the burden of European thought and history.[40] So, what is the way forward? Chakrabarty posits that to think about non-European modernities, European thought is inadequate but indispensable.[41] Some scholars suggest hybridity and rhizomatic frameworks to understand new formations. Others critique the hybridity metaphor for relying on

biogenetic representation, “which imply prior unities and originary points of dispersion.”[42] Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura oppose “the interpretive stance that represents non-European gender variant practices as timeless tradition bound to a particular location to which they are indigenous and authentic, and which are perpetually at risk of being polluted or diluted by the introduction of exogenous modern forms.”[43] Aizura identifies how Western transgender embodiments are also diverse, localized, and multiplicitous: “Genderqueer trannyboys rub shoulders with sister girls, brother boys, drag kings and queens, hermaphrodites with attitude, and many trans people who prefer to be simply known as men and women. Terms like transsexual, transgender, FTM, MTF, ‘man with transsexualism’, and ‘woman of transsexual background’ all contain sedimented histories of contestation and reclamation.”[44] Perhaps, there is a need to recognize similar diversity and contestations all over the world without falling into the trap of West and the rest bifurcation.

Stryker and Aizura suggest seeing global gender variant practices as “living, evolving, responsive and refigurable assemblages that circulate alongside and across the medicalized and juridical forms of transsexual and transgender life.”[45] However, questions emerge about “who is the subject engaged in the act of hybridizing what it means to be transgender, which can be determined by their investments and divestments as subjects, since it is these positions that determine the tools they have at hand to engage in the process of decolonizing

transgender, and how." While there is a need to see potentialities of emerging identities, exclusionary discourses cannot be ignored for those whom Shraddha Chatterjee terms as sexual subaltern subjects. Sexual subaltern subjects are those "who lie at the limits of truth, insofar as truth is determined by knowledge structures that put such subjects outside of its borders."[46] As scholars suggest, asking questions and following "the trajectory of disagreements and solidarities"[47] may help find answers to the complexity of gender variance elsewhere. They emphasize asking questions that could point toward "new visions of social justice."[48] Therefore, what this dissertation attempts to do is raise questions and present the complexities of gender variance that have emerged so as to hint at radical futurity that in Jose Esteban Munoz's terms is "not yet here."[49]

Notes on Method

The new visibility brought about by rights discourse and legislations catapulted the lives of hijras and trans-identifying individuals in Pakistan into the spotlight and media attention. While the media turned a blind eye toward the hijra community for decades, they now play a significant role in how discourses on gender variance are produced. Transnational news and documentary media are at the forefront of covering the issues of transgender/hijra community in Pakistan. Apart from documentaries, rare transnational films like

Immaculate Conception have made hijras central to its narrative. National and regional films have sidelined hijras or used them as side characters for a good laugh. While hijras have appeared as central and side characters in Indian cinema,[50] there are few examples in Pakistani cinema. While the film *Aurat Raj*/Women's Rule (dir. Rangeela, 1979) presents men as women and vice versa in its role reversal narrative, hijras appear as third gender for only parts of the film.[51] In recent years, the issue of intersex births was dealt with in a film titled *Bol/Speak* (Shoaib Mansoor, 2011), which was a blockbuster. However, it is privately-owned televisual media where the presence of hijras and trans identifying people became common. They are now invited to numerous morning shows and talk shows and get coverage in other news programming. New items and features also frequently appear in print media outlining various aspects of hijra/khawaja sira/transgender lives. I explore some of these documentaries, films, and televisual texts in chapter 2 and 3 through textual criticism and discourse analysis. The subject of my inquiry is such that I could not completely rely on and become a "prisoner of text."[52] I place my textual criticism in grounded social realities through ethnographic research.

Hence, textuality for this project is "a strategy to enable analysis, not an attempt to claim a privileged status for a range of cultural products."[53] Viviane Namaste critiques scholars who just rely on close readings of representations without any regard to social contexts.[54]

Further commenting on this "exclusive reliance on literary and cultural texts and its representationlist concept of language," Namaste argues that they "offer an underdeveloped account between the discourse and society."[55] I thus not only interrogate discourses and their discursive production, which creates conditions for subjectivity, but also examine what Boellstroff defines as "cultural logics" that make room for the agential subject for negotiations with institutional forces. However, I employ the concept of agency critically, as I take into account discursive regulations of "who may speak and what may be spoken, who and what is given the opportunity to negotiate."[56]

Postcolonial and colonial histories are also crucial to contextualize the contemporary texts and contexts that I am analyzing in this dissertation. Postcolonial scholars highlight that both colonial histories and contemporary global flows from the Euro-American center continue to shape discourses in postcolonial societies. For instance, Gayatri Spivak suggests critically examining the phenomenon of global rupture in that "only mental habits of certain classes, professions, and nations that have changed under globalization."[57] Raka Shome cautions about "the discursive practices that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global domination of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews."[58] Hossain suggests that "a critical regional approach can help decenter the Euro-American centrism not only by providing an alternative nonteleological reading of

gender and sexual diversity but also by critically interrogating the politics of regionalization and its complex bearings on the configuration of sex/gender regimes."[59] I use a regional approach in delineating concepts of gender variance that span the wider South Asian region. For instance, my employment of the subcontinental subcultural term "hijra," as opposed to khawaja sira in official and media discourses in Pakistan, is an attempt for regional solidarities.[60] The community in Pakistan uses both terms but hijra is employed by the community in their everyday usage apart from other terms such as *khusra* or *moorat*. However, there are individuals, particularly those who work in the non-profit/non-governmental sector and appear in media also use English terms such as transgender, trans, and TG. Some even employ the derogatory term She-male.

Non-profit/non-governmental organizations that deal with issues facing the gender variant community and non-normative sexual minorities also burgeoned in Pakistan in the last two decades. Some of these non-profits are not only receivers of transnational funding but are also actively engaged with media in the production of discourses on gender variant communities. While chapter 4 critically analyzes a campaign of a transnational nonprofit, it also traces gestures, subterranean scenes, and ephemeral evidence to comprehend contemporary discourses. Jose Esteban Munoz defines ephemeral evidence as "traces, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the

air like a rumor."[61] Following Munoz, Halberstam suggests "recording and tracing subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs, and fleeting trends" to understand and examine queer and non-normative discourses. [62] I assemble these seemingly unrelated or "disjunctive sources" as a part of my methodology to conduct the analysis. I follow Gayatri Gopinath's approach to juxtapose seemingly disjunctive disparate texts in terms of genre and historical context but identify the lines of connection between them to unpack the crucial interrelations.[63]

This dissertation project is what Nick Couldry calls "media-oriented" and not "media-centric,"[64] and by this virtue it is located in the socio-cultural and explores the un/relatedness of media and lived realities. To locate the everyday, I rely on the ethnographic research method of participant observations, which I explain in detail in the subsequent section, and contextualize media texts in the social world of hijras. I am also aware of the traps of analytical categories of the existing knowledge structures that dissect a phenomenon such as gender variance as only forms of abstract knowledge. For instance, Namaste reminds us that scholarly studies that are preoccupied on grand ideas neglect actual needs and so remain meaningless for people whose lives are analyzed.[65] The focus on grand concepts, while important, fails to address conditions that impact gender variant people's livelihoods and everyday lived realities. With the help of ethnographic work, for instance, I bring to attention the aspects of hijra lives that are otherwise degraded

by contemporary discourses. Therefore, chapter 5 locates dancing and sex work as occupations of hijras that the various discourses denigrate and changing cultural landscape sideline.

Ethnographic Setting

I based my ethnographic research in Karachi, the largest and most populous port city of Pakistan and commercial hub in Southeastern province of Sindh (see Figure 1). Heterogeneous ethnicities, numerous regional languages, and diverse cultures constitute the Pakistani nation, and Karachi is the microcosm of the Pakistani nation.[66] Laurent Gayer defines Karachi's largely migrant character through the concept of "urban citizenship," as the city accommodates people of different income groups, ethnicities, religions, and sects from all over the country as well as internationally.[67] However, the city offers stark contrasts and a widening gap in the lives and lifestyles of the rich and poor. This photograph (Figure 2) of Karachi beach perhaps depicts the contrast that the city offers. Hijras too survive in the city's fringes and also represent a divergent ethnic makeup from all over the country. The city arrangement is such that there are lower and working-class areas adjacent to upscale neighborhoods, apart from large middle- and lower-class areas. The working class neighborhoods provide the labor force (maids, cooks, drivers, waiters, peons, etc.) to the posh areas and business centers. Hijras are spread all over the city in those lower and working-class

Figure 1: Pakistan Map

Figure 2: Karachi, Seaview beach - 2016 (Photo by the author)

neighborhoods, where their presence is generally tolerated. Since I grew up in Karachi, I am familiar with most, if not all, neighborhoods. The choice of this city for my fieldwork was not only ideal logistically but also resulted in access to hijras of different ethnicities and from all over the country.

I came across the two neighborhoods I did ethnographic research in fortuitously. I was doing preliminary fieldwork at a vernacular language cinema in an ethnic neighborhood where young hijras also do dance performances (more details in chapter 5). A cisgender man in the audience introduced me to hijra dancers and their guru Sana who lives in the same neighborhood. Sana rents two rooms in a low-cost hotel and her young disciples, mostly in their teens, rent another. Sana and most of her young disciples are professional erotic dancers and do not like to admit any association with sex work, but some of them do it. Sana and her disciples are neither emasculated nor desire it and are called *aqwa* hijras. They belong to an ethnic group called *Pashtun*, with ties to the KPK (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) province in the Northwest (see Figure 1), adjacent to Afghanistan. Hijra households headed by a guru are called *dera,* a center that other hijras in the kinship network can visit any time. Sana's *dera* never had any dull moment, always buzzing with activities of the visitors. I worked with Sana and her disciples during the month of December 2017, and also visited them now and then during my second research trip from August to October 2018.

Toward the end of December 2017, a friend who works for a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) introduced me to Sitara Malik, who heads a Community Based Organization (CBO) and is regarded as a leader of local hijras in the Sindh province. Sitara Malik became my key research participant and connected me to the wider hijra community. Sitara Malik is in her early 50s (approximately) and lives in a rented apartment with only one disciple Rani and her CBO office set-up. Sitara and her disciple Rani are both emasculated and are thus *nirban* hijras. Sitara Malik's situation is unique as she is connected with media, state officials, legislators, and the NGO network in Pakistan, but is also deeply grounded in hijra community and its rituals. Hijras often refer to her as media-*wali* (media person) because of her strong connection with the numerous televisual and print media offices in the city. She is higher up in hijra hierarchies due to her emasculated status and seniority. Hijra community members often call her along with other senior community member for mediation in disputed community affairs called *chitai*. Even though my fieldwork was located in two specific neighborhoods of the city, I travelled with her far and wide in the city and met with a diverse community of hijras in Karachi. Because of Sitara Mallik, I also connected with at least a dozen other hijras who live in the same neighborhood. Almost all of these hijras except Sitara Malik are full time or part time sex workers, while some also perform as dancers. I became friends with all of them during my daily visits to their neighborhood.

When I began my research, I was navigating new sets of social relations and subcultures. Even though I grew up in Karachi, I was aware of my own class privileges and foreign education while working with hijras who belonged to the lower class and had little to no literacy. Sitara Malik couldn't even read names from her phone and asked me to read every time she got a call. However, Sitara Malik spoke and understood half a dozen regional languages along with the national language Urdu. She and some other hijras I worked with lived in a congested slum with narrow streets and sanitation issues. When I started my fieldwork, initially everyone looked at me skeptically. For instance, some hijras called me a spy and an opportunistic documentary filmmaker. They also had concerns about the outcome of this research. One of my research participants once asked me: "You will get a job…what will we get?" While I gave some standard explanations about the importance of knowledge production, I was quite aware of their anxieties because of my presence in their everyday lives.

Apart from class and other privileges, I was also navigating a field pulsating with gender and sexual transgressions. For instance, the man who introduced me to Sana and her disciples had expectations in terms of sexual favors. A few days after I started my field work with the hijras in December 2017, I met the same man in the neighborhood. He was either high or drunk, and we went to his room in the building where hijras lived, and he expected me to respond to his sexual overtures. I had

to leave feeling uncomfortable by this man's behavior. One of my research participants also suggested having sex with me. Differential understanding of gendered sartorial practices also surfaced in the way I carried myself. One hot afternoon in August, I went to Sitara Malik's house wearing shorts (which is not unusual in Karachi weather) where other young hijras also visited that day. Sitara Malik objected to my wearing shorts and baring legs in front of other hijras. This is indicative of how my own gender and/or sexuality was perceived by the hijras. However, as I learnt hijra argot (a secret language of hijras called Farsi) and once people got to know me, I was recognized as one of them. They used female pronouns for each other (whether someone is dressed up in feminine attire or not), and soon they started using female pronouns for me. I never objected to their using female pronouns for me, but when I used male pronouns for myself, for example, *karta hon (I do …in male pronoun)*, some of them corrected me, *karta hon nahin karti hon* (I do in female pronoun not male)." My own gender and sexuality was thus "relationally produced," as I learned hijra argot, learnt their culture, and was able to freely communicate with them.[68]

Much earlier in my preliminary fieldwork with the community when I met and interviewed a research participant, I realized that I did not want to use structured or semi-structured interviews. One of my preliminary research participants and I became friends and got along well, but as soon as I set aside a time for the interview, new hierarchies

were established and my friend became merely my research object. The the topics I asked questions about also came up in their daily conversations with each other, but the act of a researcher asking them visibly disturbed my participant. Namaste cautions us that transvestites and transgender people are treated as those figures researchers look at: "they are not those people with whom we speak. And they are certainly not us."[69] I became aware of the "inherent symbolic violence" of my research, and wanted to minimize it.[70] Therefore, I followed Spivak who emphasizes learning from the subaltern instead of studying them,[71] and shifted my emphasis to listening rather than asking questions and obtrusive probes. I relied on infrastructures of listening and camaraderie with hijras. I became a part of their everyday life and attended their events from happy and celebratory occasions to memorials. I participated in some NGO meetings, and helped them organize protests. We shared meals, went to markets, the police station, lawyer's offices, and watched TV together. Some of them turned into good friends and became my key research participants and shared personal and intimate aspects of their lives with me. I am using pseudonyms and obscuring other details to protect their identities. My key methodological tool during my field work thus became participant observation, as my primary purpose was to understand their day to day lives, joys, sorrows, and aspirations, and those aspects manifested in my day to day interaction with them. I draw from this ethnographic work to ground my textual criticism of

documentaries, films, television talk shows, and media campaigns throughout this dissertation and try to bring forth aspects of hijra lives that remain obscured.

Dissertation Outline

Throughout this dissertation I interrogate and examine various media forms and their entanglements in the lives of gender variant communities. While each chapter deals with specific media, they also highlight some key aspects of gender variant communities and lives. In the second chapter, I analyze transnational commissioned documentary forms and specifically examine three documentaries produced over the last ten years that became available for online consumption. These documentaries were commissioned by organizations based in the U.S. and UK for the viewership of Western audiences. I analyze how they center Euro-centric notions of gender and sexuality to evaluate others. The chapter argues that the optics and modalities that these documentaries deploy, make others and their relationalities unintelligible and mainly function as tools in the service of the West. While these media are mobilized to make visible the truth/s of gender and sexuality of others, they produce voyeuristic, reductive, and totalizing accounts.

The third chapter analyzes the presentation of gender variance on Pakistani televisual media and film. Based on ethnographic research and textual criticism, the chapter presents the complexity of gender variance

and how it is talked about on TV, the most accessible and popular medium in Pakistan. The chapter critiques the hegemonic ways in which the discourse on gender variance is produced on TV and other media. I demonstrate that talk shows on TV take up current issues and produce chatter, discussion, and debates around them without necessarily presenting any resolutions, solutions, or conclusions. The discourse produced by talk shows maintains status quo leaving aside broader analysis of systemic oppression that gender variant individuals face.

In the fourth chapter, I explore discourses of trans visibility in postcolonial South Asia where hijras have a survival history as a marginalized but visible gender variant community. Hijras' survival tactics include peculiar gestures, such as hollow clap, and other discursive strategies that are not only integral to their communitarian system and identity formation but also help them negotiate their position within the society. However, visibility politics conflated with logics of neoliberalism and supported by infrastructures of racial capitalism seeks to repurpose hijras' gestures and value-code marginality for consumption as ideas for change. This approach is exemplified in an awareness campaign launched from Pakistan by a transnational not-for-profit organization. This chapter analyzes the campaign and its affective economy, and highlights the limits of visibility politics that functions to create hierarchies of value within gender variant communities.

The fifth chapter is based on ethnographic research and explores

performance, dance, and popular cultural in hijra lives. It also interrogates the professions of dancing and sex work among hijras for which they are generally denigrated. Throughout the chapter I demonstrate how hijras make use of old and new media and popular culture to sustain their own relations and temporalities. Therefore, I argue for the recognition of these aspects of their lives that are generally disparaged in discourses on gender variance. Through my analysis, I thus seek to reopen avenues that have been foreclosed by the very discourses deployed to enable them.

Notes

[1] Channel Four was established in November 1982 to "extend and broaden the best elements of 'public service' traditions in Britain, and connect them with the new ideas and social forces." Channel Four blended the public and private service models, relying on "a lively 'sub-culture' of art-film and 'alternative' distributors, financiers, journalists and such like." For more see Simon Blanchard, "The Two Faces of Channel Four: Some Notes in Retrospect," *Historical Journal Of Film Radio And Television* 33, no. 3 (2013): 365-76.

[2] Referring to a deluge of media representations of transgender people, *Time* magazine coined the term "transgender tipping point" in June 2014. See Andre Cavalcante, *Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

[3] Everett K. Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 4 (1991): 671-93.

[4] Ibid., 681.

[5] For the history of eunuchs in Mamluk sultanate see David Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1999).

[6] For the history of eunuchs in the Ottoman Empire see, Jane Hathaway, *Beshir Agha: Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2005).

[7] Hathaway, *Beshir Agha*, 9.; Piotr O. Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 207.

[8] Hathaway, *Beshir Agha*, 11; Shaun Elizabeth Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995), 107.

[9] Hathaway, *Beshir Agha*, 1.

[10] Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati*, 207.

[11] Quoted in Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati,* 207.

[12] Everett K. Rowson, "Homoerotic Liaisons among the Mamluk Elite in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria," in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed., Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008), 227.

[13] Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 116.

[14] Michael J. Sweet, "Eunuchs, Lesbians, and Other Mythical Beasts: Queering and Dequeering the Kamasutra," in *Queering India: Same-sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, ed., Ruth Vanita, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 78.

[15] See, Micael J. Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, "The First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queerness in Classical Indian Medicine," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 4 (1993): 590-607.

[16] For emasculation procedures among hijras see, Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub., 1990), 24-32; The similarity of procedures in Medieval times see Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati.*

[17] See Adnan Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia," *Asian Studies Review* 36, no. 4 (2012): 495-513.

[18] David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 18.

[19] Arinuddha Dutta and Raina Roy, "Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 321.

[20] Reddy, *With Respect to Sex*, 99-121.

[21] Ibid., 33.

[22] Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman*, 1-6.

[23] Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 35.

[24] Shraddha Chatterjee, *Queer Politics in India: Towards Sexual Subaltern Subjects* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 4.

[25] Faris A. Khan, "Khwaja Sira: Culture, Politics, and 'Transgender' Activism in Pakistan" PhD diss., (Syracuse University, 2014); Cecilia Coale Van Hollen,. *Birth in the Age of AIDS Women, Reproduction, and HIV/AIDS in India* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013), 44.

[26] See Kyle G. Knight, Andrew R. Flores, and Sheila J. Nezhad, "Surveying Nepal's Third Gender: Development, Implementation, and Analysis," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (2015): 101-22.

[27] See Adnan Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition: Hijra, Third Gender and Sexual Rights in Bangladesh," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 19, no. 12 (2017): 1418-1431.

[28] Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago,* 40.

[29] Ibid., 41.

[30] Evan B. Towle and Lynn M. Morgan, "Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the "Third Gender" Concept" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 4 (2002): 469-497.

[31] Jeff Roy, "Translating Hijra into Transgender: Performance and in India's Trans- Communities," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3-4 (2016): 412-32.

[32] Jessica Berman, "Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?" *Modernism-Modernity* 24, no. 2 (2017): 238.

[33] Aren Z. Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes: The Imaginary Community of (trans)sexual Citizenship" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2006): 291.

[34] Dutta and Roy, 321.

[35] Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes," 292.

[36] Valentine, *Imagining Transgender,* 19.

[37] Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition," 1420.

[38] Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 39.

[39] Ibid., 47.

[40] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

[41] Ibid., 16.

[42] Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago*, 5.

[43] Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, "Introduction," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.

[44] Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes," 296.

[45] Stryker and Aizura, "Introduction," 9.

[46] Chatterjee, *Queer Politics in India,* 5.

[47] Ibid., 13.

[48] Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago*, 4.

[49] See, José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

[50] For a detailed analysis of hijras in Indian cinema see, Gurvinder Kalra, and Dinesh Bhugra, "Hijras in Bollywood Cinema." *International Journal of Transgenderism* 16, no. 3 (2015): 160-68.

[51] For a detailed analysis of the film *Aurat Raj/ Women's Rule* see, Shehram Mokhtar, "Aurat Raj: Hacking Masculinity & Reimagining Gender in South Asian Cinema," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, No. 13. (2018) :Doi:*10.5399/uo/ada.2018.13.2

[52] Ien Ang, "On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research," *in Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, ed., Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden:Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 177.

[53] Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), 123.

[54] Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000),15.

[55] Ibid., 39.

[56] Akshay Khanna, "Us Sexuality Types: A Critical Engagement with Postcoloniality of Sexuality,'" in *The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India*, ed., Brinda Bose and Subhbrata Bhttacharyya (London; New York: Seagull, 2007), 179.

[57] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Globalicities: Terror and Its Consequences," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4, no. 1 (2004): 86.

[58] Raka Shome, "Whiteness and the Politics of Location: Postcolonial Reflections," in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* ed., Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 108.

[59] Adnan Hossain, "De-Indianizing Hijra: Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 322.

[60] During my ethnographic research, I have come across the following terms: Hijra, *khawaja sira*, *khusra*, *moorat*, and *zenana*. Scholars who have worked with gender variant community of Pakistan have used the terms hijra and *khawaja sira*. See Claire Pamment, "Hijraism: Jostling for a Third Space in Pakistani Politics," *TDR: The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 54, no. 2 (2010):31: Faris Khan, "Khwaja Sira Activism: The Politics of Gender Ambiguity in Pakistan," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1-2 (2016): 158-64; Muhammad Azfar Nisar "(Un)Becoming a Man: Legal Consciousness of the Third Gender Category in Pakistan," *Gender & Society* 32, no. 1 (2018): 59-81.

[61] José Esteban Muñoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Felling: Approaching Kevin Aviance," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage,* ed., Jane Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 423.

[62] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 161.

[63] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*: *Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 65.

[64] Nick Couldry, *Listening beyond the Echoes: Media, Ethics, and Agency in an Uncertain World* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 13.

[65] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 44.

[66] Punjabi, Sindhi, Pakhtun, Baloch, and Bengali represented six major ethnicities at the time of independence within the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and East Bengal (separated as Bangladesh) respectively. Various other ethnicities, languages, dialects and cultures exist within these geographies.

[67] A large number of Afghan refugees settled in Karachi in the aftermath of wars and conflicts in Afghanistan. Karachi also became home to illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and other nations. Laurent Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 22.

[68] Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition," 1420.

[69] Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 15.

[70] Ang, "On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research," 189.

[71] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular," *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 86.

II. SELF & OTHERS:

UNDER THE GAZE OF TRANSNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY

In the last ten years, issues of gender variance and non-normative sexuality in Pakistan became the subject matter of multiple transnational documentaries. *Transgenders: Pakistan's Open Secret* (dir. Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, 2011), *How Gay is Pakistan?* (dir. Masood Khan, 2015), and *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (Vice News,[1] 2016) are a few examples of documentaries produced for and commissioned by US- and UK-based organizations and meant for consumption by Western audiences.[2] *Transgenders Pakistan's Open Secret* was made for More4 (a subsidiary of Channel 4) by Clover Company and Pakistan-based SOC Films,[3] *How Gay is Pakistan?* for BBC Three (now an online-only channel of BBC), and *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* for Vice News in collaboration with Jigsaw, Google's technology incubator. These documentaries were eventually distributed on video streaming platforms such as YouTube and Netflix where they gained widespread visibility.[4] While these documentaries appear to be about the full rainbow spectrum of LGBTQ, they invariably rely on transgender and hijra subjects as they function as a visible community and have become the face of queer visibility in Pakistan. These projects also elide any relations of women or those who may

experience both intergender and intragender attraction, identified as lesbians and bisexual men and women in the Western lexicon. They ignore female to male, also known as FTM, trans embodiments as well, and delimit the discourse to male to female or MTF trans subjects. Their search for gay and transgender subjects in Pakistan is also a search for normative ideals associated with gay and transgender cultures as standardized in the Euro-American center. These subjects are imagined with the conditions that make the possibility of their being in the center, and so others are constructed by their lack, lagging behind in developing these subject positions. These documentaries deploy optics that make it impossible for claims other than those that align with the center. Pre-eminence of the self forecloses possibilities of other ways of being, and consequently demotes the others as objects who are either defined by the lack or relegated to the scale of the local.

Documentary production about Pakistan has a transnational character, as they are produced to present the country to the rest of the world. Documentaries are not publicly screened in cinema houses, neither are they a prominent feature on television in Pakistan. In the post 9/11 era, Pakistan attracted the attention of transnational documentaries, focusing on concerns and anxieties of the outside world regarding issues such as religious extremism, terrorism, the rise of Taliban, and women's rights. In the last ten years, questions about non-normative sexuality and gender variance have mobilized the

transnational documentary apparatus. These documentaries appear to be about Pakistan and sexual and gender minority subjects who reside there, but I will demonstrate through a close reading of the three commissioned documentaries that they concern Euro-American sexual culture and only present their anxieties about others. I argue that the optics and modalities with the help of which these documentaries attempt to access others, obscure the very emergence of truth/s about them. So what they produce is the idea of the self as subjects while others become mere objects. Transnational organizations, from BBC to Google, are not simply neutral and objective sources of information dissemination, they signify relations of power. The documentaries they produce are discourses that index the self and constitute others for their own consumption. This chapter examines the discourse on gender variance and sexuality, while it also explores power structures inherent in the production and distribution of these documentaries. In the subsequent sections, I will demonstrate how transnational documentaries produce exclusionary discourses and constitute the other as object and reinforce the self as true and normative subject.

Discourses About Others

The critique of Western discourse on the non-Western world is generally understood through Edward Said's concept of Orientalism.[5] Said explains how fields of anthropology, philology, sociology and history

and works of travel writers, novelists, poets, philosophers and political thinkers were deployed to bring the distant Orient closer to Europe first and America later from the late seventeenth century to the post World War II era. The Orient became a place of pilgrimage where many travelers, thinkers, and writers looked for sexual experiences unattainable in the West. Circulating in the West, this discourse stereotypically produced the exotic other. With the expansion of colonial rule in different parts of the world and the easy availability of print technology, the Orientalist discourse travelled through texts, textual genres, referential systems, images, and narratives. From mapping technologies to commodity advertising, colonial and imperial discourse also presented a gendered relation of power between the colonizer and the colonized: "the male penetration and the exposure of the veiled and the aggressive conversion of its secrets into a visible male science of the surface."[6] One can find this relation of revealing, unveiling, and uncovering in contemporary documentaries as represented by their titles such as *Transgenders: Pakistan's Open secret* and *How Gay is Pakistan?*. While contemporary documentary films focus on unveiling realities of gender variance and sexualities of others, fictional representations in cinema had already established hierarchical relations of power through its exploration of terra incognita. Ella Shohat traces Eurocentric articulations of power in cinematic representations of other cultures from *The Jungle Book* (dir., Zoltan Karda, 1942) to *Indiana Jones and the*

Temple of Doom (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1984).[7] Shohat underscores how the master narratives of the progress of Western civilization circulated through films.

Muslims particularly came under the gaze of the Western media that invariably produced their caricatures and constructed the idea of the Muslim world as an unchanging entity and a monolith. Edward Said also gives us historical perspective on how news media in the United States in particular portrayed the Muslim majority world unsympathetically.[8] The Western media's taste for sensationalizing the other created essentialized caricatures of Muslims, which became excuses for military aggressions. Gayatri Spivak and Lila Abu-Lughod trace this aggression to the post 9/11 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan through a discourse of saving Muslim women.[9] U.S. President George Bush co-opted Iranian director Mohsin Makhmalbaf's film *Kandahar* (2001) and prompted Americans to watch it to see women's oppression in Afghanistan.[10] The first lady Laura Bush also took to national radio to rally American people around war on the pretext of saving and liberating Muslim women from the Taliban.[11] The savior trope is an old tool of the colonizer consistently deployed to subjugate the colonized. Dipesh Chakrabarty highlights the employment of the trope of "conditions of women" by the British on issues such as widow immolation, widow remarriage, and child marriage for measuring the quality of civilization.[12] Thus, Spivak critiques the colonial discourse of white men deployed to

save brown women from brown men.[13] However, in the contemporary scenario, Jasbir Puar argues that how well nations treat their homosexuals has supplemented with the woman question in judging their civilizational standing in the world.[14] Treatment of queers has become "a determining factor of a nation's capacity for "sovereignty" and "the symbols of civilizational aptitude."[15] From the images of torture of Iraqi men in compromising sexual positions in Abu Ghraib prison to popular TV shows like *The Simpsons* (1989), these discursive nodes produce a discourse of U.S. sexual exceptionalism relegating all others and their cultures to the prediscursive.[16] Queer and trans discourse, as understood in Western countries, can "operate imperialistically as the standard by which all others are evaluated," affirms Karma Chavez.[17]

Queerness, as it is conceptualized in the center, circulates around the world by global flows of capital, media, news, and information.[18] However, a "level playing field" doesn't exist for all queers around the world.[19] Moreover, queerness and gender variant practices are not homogeneous everywhere either. However, the global universalizing project of the West remains invested in representing and speaking for others, as Gayatri Spivak outlines,[20] to ensure its power.[21] The power to look at, gaze, and scrutinize as well as speak for the other through media apparatus for its own consumption is a potent strategy of the West. It doesn't mean that the other doesn't have any agency but that it is circumscribed by the dominant modes of looking at and speaking for

them. It is in this context of the production of the other from the seventeenth century to the contemporary world that I want to focus on the discourse of gender variant practices and sexuality in the non-Western societies produced through transnational documentaries.

Self/Other and Subject/Object in Documentaries

Transgenders: Pakistan's Open Secret, *How Gay is Pakistan?*, and *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* are similar in that they are commissioned by established international organizations, and follow an expository documentary style that sutures vignettes, snippets, sound bytes, interviews, and other visual/aural evidence or a lack thereof by an authorial voice. Bill Nichols explains that the exposition accommodates various documentary elements but "these tend to be subordinated to an argument offered by the film itself, often via an unseen 'voice-of-God' or an on camera voice of authority who speaks on behalf of the text."[22] The authorial role functions through voice-of-God narration in *Transgenders Pakistan's Open Secret* and *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* and on camera presenter in the case of *How Gay is Pakistan?*. However, voice of authority is not the only element in the construction of "a sense of a text's social point of view" that Nichols calls "voice" of documentary.[23] A documentary constructs its voice through its organizational style of various textual elements as "that intangible,

moiré-like pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film's codes."[24]

In the construction of a documentary's voice through its textual elements, the positioning of the self plays a significant part when the subject is the other. The dynamics of self-othering can be observed in fictional genres such as world cinema. Self-othering is a feature through which filmic text in world cinema dramatizes "conflicts between tradition and modernity, hegemony and the margins, global and local, Westernization and indigenization."[25] In documentaries, dialectic between self and other is often mediated by self-reflexivity.[26] In the absence of any self-reflexivity, which is generally the case with expository style and/or commissioned documentaries, the dialectic relation of constructing others as subjects in relation to the self or dominant culture may collapse and reduce the other to an object status. Murali Balaji traces subject's reduction to object status in Western media's representation of disaster, strife, and other tragedies in the global south.[27] He argues that media representation of the Haiti earthquake in 2010 made Western do-gooders the privileged subject of stories, while the Haitian victims were blurred into the background as merely objects of the good deeds.[28] This indicates that the audience and dominant culture paly a part in self/other and subject/object dynamics of a media text. Balaji argues that objectification depends on racial otherness, amount of power - both physical and symbolic - that one group has over another,

and distance from the viewers.[29] Raka Shome contends that "the relation between the subject/culture and the object/culture being looked at are enmeshed in conditions of power, national and international."[30] Documentary, Pooja Rangan argues, "especially in its most benevolent, humanitarian guise, is thoroughly implicated in the work of regulating what does and does not count as human."[31] Thus, self/other and subject/object are the dynamics within which discourses about others are often mediated.

This subject-object dynamic is particularly evident when the filmmakers are Western, activating various tropes of ethnographic film making.[32] Svati Shah, for instance, critiques the Oscar winning documentary *Born into Brothels* (Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, 2004) and its foreign directors for deploying the ethnographic gaze and white savior trope to rescue children of sex workers in Calcutta. The conundrum of the ethnographic gaze of a foreigner is often addressed by the employment of diasporic and/or local filmmakers as "insiders,"[33] as in the case of local production crews for these documentaries.[34] However, having "insiders" does not guarantee access to "intimacy, interiority, or ordinariness," [35] if they remain invested in dominant worldviews of the intended audience or vision of the commissioning authority and funding agency. The existing critiques of documentaries on LGBTQ discourses in other parts of the world indicate issues of insufficient reflexivity, inadequate research, spectatorial address, and ethnographic modes that

often fail to address contextual complexities.[36] The three documentaries that I am analyzing point to similar issues. In the next three sections I analyze the three documentaries and outline various modes embedded in their structure that suggest self-othering dynamics.

Disciplinary Voice and Voyeuristic Gaze

The documentary *Transgenders: Pakistan's Open Secret* (Hereafter: *Open Secret*) is focused on the struggles of the gender variant community of hijra/khawaja sira, but addresses them with the terminology of "transgender." "Transgender" has become a term of currency, especially in English language national and international media and legal discourses. Some hijras have embraced this term for intelligibility outside the community, while they address each other through everyday subcultural terms. Hijra's long history of social formation in pre-colonial South Asia that precedes their persecution under British colonial rule, which continued into the postcolonial era is effaced in contemporary discourses. Most media accounts on hijras also often deride them because they are associated with begging, dancing, and sex work, the means of livelihood considered undesirable. *Open Secret* also centers around the stories of three hijras, each associated with the three disparaged modes of earning. While *Open Secret* focuses on the lower/working class group of hijras, but it is the modalities with which it presents their stories is a cause of concern.

Abandoned by their families, hijras have survived in South Asia by building their own communal support network in which senior hijras take on juniors as their mentors and guide, and build fictive guru-*chela* (teacher-disciple) kinship with each other.[37] *Open Secret* records the initiation ceremony of such a guru-*chela* relationship at a local hijra household in Karachi, Pakistan. The senior guru performs various rituals including placing a nose ring on her *chela* (disciple) while other hijras sing and rejoice at the ceremony. The authorial voice-over interrupts the apparent festive ambiance with the statement, "A new nose ring and Miss M is now *owned* by B (emphasis mine)." This declarative speech counters the ceremonial visual evidence to frame guru-*chela* relationship as suspect by using terms that pre-ordain a master-slave relationship instead of a widely recognized teacher-disciple kinship formation. While the guru explains various aspects of the relationship equating it to that of a mother and daughter, the voice-over keeps on making counter claims. "It's not quite that simple.… New recruits must often work the streets for their guru," informs the voice-over referring to the economic relationship that builds between a guru and *chela*. However, with its focus on the economic connection that the documentary inscribes as exploitative, it elides other affective and material dimensions of the system that hijras have built for the sustenance of their lives and lifeworlds.

The documentary negates any affective possibilities by equating the principles of guru-*chela* financial relationship to that of the system of slavery. As part of the initiation rituals, gurus make monetary payment to *chelas* as a symbolic debt. *Chelas* repay the debt over a period of time in return for the special bond, mentorship, and network of support that gurus provide to them in the face of familial rejection and societal sanctions. Tracing the story of another hijra who begs the streets to make a living, the documentary informs the viewers, "Twelve years ago she was *bought* for the equivalent of $350 and has begged the streets everyday since then earning money for her guru (emphasis mine)." An unidentified crew member prods her guru with a loaded question, "That's like buying someone?" Flabbergasted at the idea, the guru becomes defensive, "…. It's not slavery…. It's our custom…. There's no slavery." As opposed to the claims in the documentary, none of the research evidence indicates elements of slavery in guru-*chela* relationship. While acknowledging "hierarchy and a strong economic component," Nanda defines guru-*chela* relationship as "reciprocal, multidimensional, and mutually satisfying."[38] Pamment likens guru to a mother and defines guru-*chela* relationship as "a protective realm" for young hijra initiates.[39] These dimensions remain invisible to the gaze of the documentary that marks the guru-*chela* relationship as flawed a priori. Benedicto terms these modes of addressing the other as "strategies of invisibilization and

discipline."[40] These strategies are deployed through the media to subsume all local contexts to produce and reify a universal.

Judith Butler argues " if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization and humanization takes place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition."[41] In this sense, these documentaries are supposed to establish norms of recognition for the other. However, in the case of *Open Secret*, the terms of engagement are such that the other is deemed culpable instead of vulnerable. The documentary positions its own voice, that Bill Nichols defines as "omniscient," to subordinate its subjects.[42] It presents the voice of the other but does not grant it epistemological agency. When a hijra proclaims that she is taking hormones because she wants to be a woman, the documentary asserts that's because she wants "to attract men." Through the disposal of its own authorial voice, the documentary defines guru-*chela* relationship in terms of buying, selling, and owning, foreclosing any other possibilities of relationality. It projects gurus as suspects who invariably violate their *chelas*. The epistemic violence then dehumanizes the other through its norms of misrecognition. Such a discourse does not constitute to empower but to subordinate, impoverish, and incapacitate the other. It does not make intelligible the other and their relationalities but rather circumscribes them.

While Western sexuality is conceived as socially constructed and historically constituted, the other is relegated to sexual essentialism. Essentialism delimits sex and sexuality to the realm of the corporeal detached from the mind and outside of the social. Gayle Rubin terms essentialist conceptions of sex as "unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical."[43] Documentary films that focus on gender and sexuality of the other often resort to those essentialist notions of sex as an element of appeal. Gender variant individuals in the third world have particularly been on the receiving end of sensationalism, objectification, and voyeurism reducing them to bodies and their relationships to the matters of sex. *Open Secret,* for instance, frames the relationship of a hijra with a cisgender man in a reductive manner to suit its single-track focus on the illegitimacy of anal sex in Pakistan. The voice over sets up the introduction of the sequence of couple's interview as follows: "Transgenders may be recognized as a separate gender in Pakistan but anal sex is prohibited and is punishable by life imprisonment but A who lives openly with transgender (hijra) T isn't frightened of the repercussions." The interview that ensues seeks evidence of anal sex from the unsuspecting couple. While the hijra explains her relationship with her partner in terms of romantic love as: "Love has sustained our relationship…. we have been together for nine years," the unidentified behind-the-camera interviewer pursues her line of questioning:

Interviewer: Do you have sex?

Man: We have a sexual relationship that I can't have with a woman.

Interviewer: There's something special about her.

Man: Yes, there's something special about her.

Interviewer: What's special…What's special about her?

Man: The special thing about transgenders (hijras)…is something I can't talk about.

The couple and their relationship become a victim to the voice of the documentary that seeks to show only the evidence of their illicit sexual relationship that they pursue in the face of strict penal laws. Whether this juxtaposition carries shock value for some viewers or it reinforces their established perceptions of supposedly "secretive" non-normative sexual practices in the non-Western world, the film mobilizes an essentialist view of the other. This stands in contrast to the research that indicates hijras do not construct personhood in terms of their sexuality or gender only.[44] The structure of the film on the other hand reduces sexuality to the realm of the corporeal in which sex essentially indexes ontology of hijras.

This mode of presenting hijra lives becomes more voyeuristic as the documentary presents the story of hijra sex worker. *Open Secret* deploys hidden camera operation to record the minutest and racy details of transactions between a hijra sex worker and her clients. *Open Secret* employs hidden camera twice during the total duration of the film

ascribing their moral authority of secret filming to the will of the hijra sex worker, “She wanted to show us why she believes such outwardly respectable men like her clients are hypocrites in their private lives.” Devoid of any self-reflexivity, filmmakers dispose of their own ethical responsibilities and burden the subjects of the film with the justification of the use of the secret filming device. Filmmakers become passive observers of events driven by their subjects as opposed to the active and investigative approach demonstrated by questioning in the sequence mentioned before. With filmmakers unable to explain the urgency of hidden operation except laying bare the “hypocrisy of clients,” the camera becomes neither an investigative tool nor an observational device. I argue that in the absence of a strong reason, the camera becomes voyeuristic, deployed to sensationalize sex work and present others through the tropes of “unrestrained libidinousness” and “animalization” long associated with exotic cultures.[45] To support my argument, I will now illustrate how the film and its secretive filming device enable various tropes about sex work, sex workers, and their clients.

The camera records a hijra sex worker and her friend at night from a distance as they wait in public for clients driving by. Viewers are told that the hijra sex worker has brought a friend for her protection as she has been sexually assaulted and gang raped before. Once they are able to get into the privacy of a car, visuals become blurry, grainy, and shaky showing the front of the car and back of the front seats. The sex

transaction transpires between the client and the sex worker with the friend sitting in the back seat. In the absence of sharp visuals, aural evidence is brought into play. As opposed to the grainy video, impeccably clear audio of the sex worker guides the client and viewers: "I'll start sucking now…You drive and keep looking straight." Within a few seconds of this aural cue, the film cuts to another sound bite, "You came in my mouth. You are not supposed to…. I could get infected." The sex worker negotiates for more money leading to the end of the transaction. Afterwards, the sex worker walks alone as her friend disappears from the scene. In another sequence, viewers only hear negotiation of the sex worker with the client as she graphically explains the kind of services she can offer. Viewers are spared further details of sex the second time as the sequence abruptly cuts to the car parking back at the spot where the principle camera was apparently positioned. The purpose of presenting this second sequence is also not clear except for apparent voyeurism. While the film's presentation of the sex work and workers as abject is a reanimation of the tropes of ethnographic filming, the documentary does not offer any explanation about who was operating the hidden camera and audio devices, how the sex worker or her friend were involved in this set-up, and what measures filmmakers took to ensure the safety of their subjects. In the absence of reflexivity, the subjects are at the mercy of a voyeuristic artifice that produce them as sexed bodies and objects and

place sex workers and their clients in the roles of victims and perpetrators respectively.

Explicit and sensational presentation of sex and sexuality of hijra/transgender subjects in this transnational feature differs from how they present themselves in the local media. While local media also adopt a similar line of inquiry regarding sexual object choice, anatomical anomalies, sexual interests, and desires, hijras tend to circumvent those questions through their use of "deflective patterns of speech and verbal ambiguity to resist invasive inquiry."[46] Faris Khan quotes a hijra to demonstrate their reluctance to speak about sex and sexuality, "Why should we have to talk about our sex when ordinary men and women don't have to."[47] However, foreign media tend to find willing subjects who spill everything for them. There has to be some fetishistic pleasure in revealing the hidden relations of cultures that value veiling them.[48] However, neither placing a camera guarantees presentation of truth nor does access to (open) secrets constitutes voice. The mode of deployment of visual and aural artifice actually distort veracity and thwart access to truth producing just an illusion of voice and traces of reality.[49]

The deployment of disciplinary voice and voyeuristic gaze render the documentary apparatus as regulatory. The genealogies of similar regulations can be traced to colonial histories. Ann Stoler argues that the management of sexual practices of colonizer and colonized was fundamental to the colonial order of things and that it was coded by

race.[50] The British also deployed regulatory mechanisms in undivided India for its colonial rule. For instance, Criminal Tribes Act (1871) was promulgated to particularly regulate and police gender variant people, criminalizing and marking hijras as habitual sodomites, gender deviants, beggars, cross-dressers, and unnatural prostitutes.[51] On the basis of individual cases of crimes, "colonial officials extrapolated an account of hijras as a criminal and sexually immoral collective."[52] The colonial technologies of discipline and dispossession were deployed for the purpose of keeping dominance and hegemony of one group (white colonizers) over another (people of India).[53] The documentary grammar, codes, and modalities bear stark similarity to the histories of colonial subjection and discipline. However, the disciplinary mandate of this documentary functions with the fetishization of sexual practices of others. As the history indicates that certain others are "envisioned as vehicle for white enjoyment,"[54] *Open Secret* seems to operate within a similar schema. This emphasis on enjoyment is embedded in the production company's aims to be both "credible and entertaining."[55] Sexuality becomes a source of viewing pleasure, functioning paradoxically with the notion that others can be redeemed and salvaged if disciplined. Homi Bhabha points out that the ambivalent discourse of recognition as well as disavowal is central to the process of subjectification.[56] The simultaneous production of victimhood and

fetishization of sexuality indicates a neo-colonial order of subjection for ensuring global hegemony of the West.

Homonormative Lens for Transgender Subjects

The BBC Three documentary *How Gay is Pakistan?* (Hereafter: *How Gay*) claims to investigate aspects of "gay" Pakistan but the presenter keeps on interviewing and meeting hijras/transgender women throughout the documentary. However, what I am concerned here is the lens through which hijra/transgender subjects are investigated. In this section, I will dissect and examine this lens and critique this approach. Since BBC Three is strategically geared toward the youth market,[57] *How Gay* employs a young YouTube comedian and vlogger as its on-camera voice of authority. The documentary derives presenter's authority from his background - born in Pakistan, brought up in Essex, identifies as gay, and can joke about everything. *The Independent* praises the choice of the goofy presenter for "injecting humor" into an otherwise serious issue of exploring gay identity in Pakistan, calling him "easy to relate to."[58] The selection of the presenter and the significance of his relatability to the intended audience of the documentary is the first articulation of the self. The documentary begins with the self-introduction of the presenter. He looks into the camera, and speaks to his audience in a typical mode of direct address associated with vlogging on YouTube. The presenter uses this technique of directly addressing the audience

throughout the documentary whenever anything goes against his worldview. He informs the audience that he has come out to his parents of Pakistani origin. As a diasporic brown man who has come out of closet, he signifies notions of sexual evolution, progress, development, and modernity.[59] The act of coming-out takes one off the "ground zero in the project of articulating an epistemology of sexuality"[60] and in the direction of homonormative citizenship. Same-sex sexual practices that follow monogamy, marriage, privacy, and and a depoliticized culture of consumption define ideals of homonormative citizenship.[61] After establishing the preeminence of the "self" in the sexual hierarchy, the presenter shows curiosity about others who reside in embryonic sexual culture of his country of origin.

Aligned with the center, but oblivious to differences in historical, economic, and socio-cultural circumstances and "divested from politics and social redistribution,"[62] the presenter sets out on his investigative journey of what he calls "lifting the lid." In a long tradition of voyages of discovery by white men,[63] the presenter's journey can be historically traced to "a white, urban, leisure-class gay male whose desire was cast materially onto the globe at the close of the nineteenth century."[64] Eguchi defines contemporary transnational flow of sexual politics as "homonormative distributions of power that normalize U.S. American, middle/upper class, ability, White, gay, and man in various localities."[65] Representing "the white gay male clone,"[66] the presenter becomes a

familiar face for the audience and a link to unfamiliar and distant others, out to regulate what Roderick Ferguson calls "homosexual difference."[67] "Regulating homosexual difference in order to claim coherence as a public citizen is part of the homonormative subject's entrance into racial privilege,"[68] Ferguson explains.

The homosexual difference is articulated by constructing others as primitive, inferior, and underdeveloped. Thus, the "sights and sounds" of the city of Karachi depict spices, pickles, hens, goats, butchers, and men who wear traditional clothes. A cosmopolitan city where a consumer culture of malls and fashion houses exists alongside traditional cultures and trade, the documentary's choice of highlighting only traditional men and mocking their homosocial ways, such as straight men holding hands, are indications of anxieties about others. While the presenter sees "gayness" in men holding hands, rubbing shoulders, and playing mud wrestling, he simultaneously articulates the impossibility of being gay for the other as: "Being Pakistani and being gay are not two things that go together in my head." Being gay is perhaps the realm of whites or those assimilationist nonwhites who like the presenter embody homonormative ideals. López defines the position of assimilationist nonwhites as "not looking white but nevertheless believing they are white claiming superiority by virtue of their whiteness and establishing economic and cultural hegemony over other less privileged groups on racial grounds."[69] Eguchi uses the term "almost white" and defines this "as an ambiguous

domain for non-whites in which economic and cultural capital enables them to visualize their proximity to the center maintained by whiteness."[70] The presenter's racial privilege and homosexual difference also emanate from his closeness to the center.

One can locate notions of racial posturing throughout the documentary. For instance, when the presenter is invited to an underground party arranged by a transgender woman and her male partner at a posh non-residential location in Karachi, he addresses his audience for a comparison with London before entering the space, "I wonder if it would be anything like Soho." Viewers are not informed about who has access to the party and its economy or whether there are other forms of social and political organizing that people do, just a superficial visit to a party is presented. Homonormative ideals are also articulated in the presenter's interactions with the subjects/objects in the documentary. He interviews the transgender woman and cisgender man who organized "the gay" party, and pushes the idea of "Muslim gay" wedding: "You could potentially be the first gay couple to get married in Pakistan." While making such speculations, the host also conflates the terms "gay" and "transgender" subsuming the latter into the former by calling the transgender woman and cis gender man gay couple. This kind of slippage will not be acceptable in any contemporary Western context where transgender and gay mean two different identity markers since the 1990s.[71] Stryker and Aizura warn against a formulation that "privilege

homosexual or queer optics over trans-oriented heuristics as its default mode."[72] Besides, gay marriage is presented as the universal homonormative ideal and a linchpin of change.[73] Roderick Ferguson emphasizes that "women, men of color, and the economically disadvantaged need a much broader and deeper social change to improve their lives."[74]A broader change, including the repeal of penal laws that criminalize same-sex sex, has better applicability in postcolonial Pakistan. However, the documentary feature produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation facilely elides Britain's colonial legacy of criminalization of homosexuality in South Asia. The presenter also denigrates and shames the practice of men who have sex with other men (labelled as MSM by NGOs) and who do not identify as gay or bisexual. While racializing others in general, the documentary remains interspersed with hijra/transgender people, who are presented through the usual tropes of victimhood and medicalization.

Visions of Liberation and Oppression

In 2016, Google's Parent Company, Alphabet think tank and technology incubator Jigsaw collaborated with Vice News to produce a documentary series called *Blackout,* with the stated purpose of demonstrating how digital technologies can be used as "weapons in the fight against oppression."[75] The liberating and democratizing potential of communication technologies and digital media platforms is pitched in

binary opposition to the supposed oppression of what they call "existing orders, existing power structures, and status quo" of regimes across the world.[76] To show their agenda of supporting "communities battling censorship," *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (Hereafter: *Being LGBT*) is the first documentary of the series.[77]

Being LGBT starts with an ominous soundtrack complimented by visuals of mountains and tribal men in traditional clothes carrying guns while their faces are covered. Viewers only hear non-diegetic sound byte of supposedly one of the veiled men claiming that he killed two men who were having sex. This murder has not been reported in national or international media. The artifice of the opening sequence serves to project an extremely oppressive tribal climate so that it can be juxtaposed with modernity. The sequence of tribal men is thus followed by the stories of two young, upper/middle class, English-speaking, mobile, well connected, and tech-savvy transgender women. They shop, party, and use dating apps. The two transgender women were also invited to New York for the launch of the documentary series. The whole media event, from production to launch, certainly fulfilled Google's agenda behind this whole project.

The portrayal of upwardly mobile trans bodies may be considered a part of what C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn call a globalized transnormative political project.[78] Like global homonormative distribution, the circulation of trans normativity aligns with mobility,

modernity, and privilege. In their eagerness to demonstrate that they are modern and progressive, one of the transgender women in *Being LGBT* declares, "(The) World is changing now, trans is the new trend." Presentation of these "transgender" women effaces the community of hijras who are interconnected with each other from big cities to small towns through their formal and informal network throughout the country as well as regionally in India and Bangladesh.[79] Hijras also connect with each other through cellular technologies and applications like WhatsApp but their technological connections are not spectacularized. *Being LGBT* subordinates the communitarian interconnectedness to the supposed technological connectedness of the privileged few to suit the aims of the documentary and its commissioning authority. It privileges and recognizes these modern transgender women as the only acceptable and authentic other, while effacing local formations. Perhaps, this is what Susan Stryker refers to as "oppressive ways in which transgender whiteness functions…to impinge upon and interact with sex/gender/identity configurations rooted in other socio-cultural formations."[80]

As opposed to the presentation of modernity enabled by technology, the oppressive and tribal society is projected as its other. The director of an NGO, also featured in *How Gay*, shows a blurred video, sent by an anonymous source on WhatsApp, claiming to be of tribal men sodomizing a teenage boy with a stick who was supposedly "caught in

the act." The director showed the same video in *How Gay*. The documentary also brings up details of an incident of a reported murder of three men by another man. Tribalism, discussions about and presentation of reported and unreported murders and crimes, and questions about imagined threats portray the perfect picture of an oppressive society and produce moral crisis around it. Sara Ahmed informs us that the declaration of crisis works with real and, in the case of these documentaries, imagined events, facts or figures and transforms them into "a fetish object."[81] So, what emerges is the tribal other as the fetish object of the discourse. The documentaries produce the tribal Muslim body that gets metonymically linked with homophobia and transphobia.

While the discourse of fear projects tribal and homophobic others, the tropes of presenting conservative cleric and common people who hold on to their orthodox views, despite the world changing around them, produce Muslims and their traditions as a static and binary force functioning in opposition to modernity and modern sexuality. Thus, all three documentaries include token statements of clerics who condemn homosexuality and gender variance. While it is apparent that the hardline clerics are not going to magically reinterpret the scriptures and present liberal views, the trope of Muslim cleric is deployed as a quintessential part of films on non-normative sexuality and gender variance in Muslim cultures, produced for the West. The trope thus

functions to present Muslims as racialized others. As a racialized category, Sara Ahmed argues, "the Muslim becomes the stranger, the 'body out of place'; the one who is not us, or not like us, the one who endangers or threatens our well-being."[82] This approach of focusing on negativity corresponds with Said's observation that "the Muslim world is reducible to a number of unhanging characteristics despite the appearance of contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as the West."[83]

The documentaries conjure what Saba Mahmood calls a "rhetorical display of the placard of Islam's abuses" that produce homophobic and transphobic Muslims as objects and trigger moral panics around them.[84] This happens in contrast to the histories and current practices that demonstrate manifestations of non-normative sexuality and gender variance in Muslim cultures.[85] However, Muslim cultures are projected as incommensurate others because there is a desire for an outcome "whose telos is assimilation into West."[86] Tom Boellstroff examines same sex desires among Muslim men in Indonesia and argues that gay lives exist and are lived every day; what exists is a habitation, not a resolution, of incommensurability."[87] However, the developmentalist schema employed in documentary productions ignores lived realities and simply relegates others to a spatial imaginary whose inhabitants have not yet entirely embraced the Euro-American sexual politics and a temporality where time is not considered "an agent of change but rather

the proof of its lack."[88] These narratives, as Svati Shah argues produce the timeless others who must be rescued into the present.[89] A teleological framework reifies those who identify with a universal, modern, homo/trans normative, secular, and cosmopolitan self while all others need to be rescued from the clutches of oppressive, backward, traditional, and homophobic Muslim societies. The imagination of liberation in these films is thus a projection of competing temporalities in which the other is defined by the markers of belatedness and backwardness.

Conclusion

The projects that I have highlighted present serious questions of intelligibility in transnational documentary. Hijras and their established cultures are projected as traditional and flawed and pitched in opposition to transgender identifying subjects, imagined as modern and mobile. They leave no room for negotiations and new possibilities in their presentations. Frameworks of perversity, hypersexuality and libidinous animalism render sexual practices of hijras, sex workers, and men who have sex with them aberrant and licentious, while they also simultaneously portray an overdetermined and overpowering fear of homophobic and/or transphobic Muslim cultures. Reductive ways of presenting subject positions of others make them and their relations unintelligible. Intelligibility appears to be the least of concerns in these

documentaries, as no regard is given to context, complexities, and histories of others. Instead, the documentaries are invested in and center around white, Eurocentric, homonormative, and transnormative ideals. The labelling of communities, groups, and nations as oppressive without recognizing any complexities only functions to serve the viewers, producers, and sponsors of the film. It appears that a visualization of others that takes into account histories, contemporary political and socio-cultural realities, the global distribution of wealth and resources, the international division of labor, and the intersectional complexities is impossible.

What can be done when communication about others results in an impasse? Transnational feminists have highlighted that the answer is not cultural relativism and suggest building "more egalitarian language of alliances, coalitions, and solidarity, instead of salvation."[90] Saba Mahmood argues, "To render unfamiliar life worlds into conceptual or communicable forms is to domesticate that which exceeds hegemonic protocols of intelligibility."[91] Engaging with Saba Mahmood's work, Halberstam suggests "conversations rather than mastery" as a way of being in relation to one another.[92] Locating gender variance and non-normative sexualities elsewhere requires a move away from mastery. To locate gender and sexuality of the other, the media have to forgo mastery and hegemonic protocols of intelligibility that privilege West.

Notes

[1] There are no credits available for this documentary that identify the director/s or film crew. The documentary ends without credits.

[2] Independent filmmakers have also addressed concerns about "LGBT" rights and covered non-normative sexualities in documentaries such as *Chuppan Chupai*: *Hide & Seek* (Saad Khan, 2013) and *Posheeda: Hidden LGBT Pakistan* (F. Faiz, 2015) that circulated in the festival circuit internationally. *Chuppan Chupai* is available on Amazon Prime Video but *Posheeda* has not been posted for online viewing. This article is not focused on these independent productions.

[3] For *Transgenders Pakistan's Open Secret*, the UK-based Clover Films collaborated with Oscar and Emmy winning director Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy and her film crew in Pakistan. Chinoy runs SOC Films from Pakistan. See, https://www.clover-films.com/; https://www.socfilms.com/

[4] *Transgenders: Pakistan's Open Secret* and *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* became available on YouTube while *How Gay is Pakistan?* became accessible to those who subscribe to Netflix video streaming services.

[5] See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[6] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 23.

[7] See, Ella Shohat, "Imaging Terra Incognita: The Disciplinary Gaze of Empire," *Public Culture* 3, no. 2 (1991): 41-70.

[8] See Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the World (*New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

[9] See, Gayatri Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern, and the Popular," *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 475-86; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-90.

[10] See, Weber, Cynthia. *Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and Film* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

[11] Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" 784.

[12] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 118.

[13] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* ed., Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (NY: Columbia University Press, 1993) 93.

[14] See, Jasbir K. Puar, "Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking about the Sexual Politics of Israel" *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011): 133-142.

[15] Ibid., 135 and 139.

[16] See, Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[17] Karma R. Chávez, "Pushing Boundaries: Queer Intercultural Communication," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 6, no. 2 (2013): 87.

[18] Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Introduction: Dissident Sexualities/Alternative Globalisms," in *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York and Landon: New York University Press, 2002), 1.

[19] Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

[20] To understand the complexity of representation, Spivak proposes using its two variations: *vertreten* (representation as speaking for in the political context) and *darstellen* (re-presentation as in art). See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 66-111.

[21] Projansky and Ono make a similar argument about strategic whiteness in the United States. See Sarah Projansky and Kent A. Ono, "Strategic Whiteness as Cinematic Racial Politics," in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* eds. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 152.

[22] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 37.

[23] Bill Nichols, “The Voice of Documentary,” *Film Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1983): 18.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Boaz Hagin and Raz Yosef, “Festival Exoticism: The Israeli Queer Film in a Global Context,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 1 (2012): 165.

[26] Ibid., 27.

[27] Murali Balaji, “Racializing Pity: The Haiti Earthquake and the Plight of "Others,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28, no. 1 (2011): 53.

[28] Ibid., 55.

[29] Ibid., 55 & 65.

[30] Raka Shome, “Race and Popular Cinema: The Rhetorical Strategies of Whiteness in ‘City of Joy’” *Communication Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1996): 507.

[31] Pooja Rangan, *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary* (Durham: Duke UP, 2017), 8.

[32] See, Svati P. Shah, “Brothels and Big Screen Rescues: Producing the Idea of 'Prostitution in India' through Documentary Film,” *Interventions* 15, no. 4 (2013): 549-566.

[33] Poonam Arora, “The Production of Third World Subjects for First World Consumption: *Salaam Bombay* and *Parama*,” in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism,* ed., Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch (London; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 300.

[34] While *Being LGBT in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* does not identify production crew. However, the interviews and locations similar to *How Gay is Pakistan?* indicate at least the employment of on-the-ground production crew from Pakistan. The director of *How Gay is Pakistan?* is a UK based diasporic filmmaker, director, and producer. *Transgenders: Pakistan’s Open Secret* is directed by Pakistan based Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, who runs her own production company SOC Films from there. See https://www.thetalentmanager.com/talent/497; https://www.socfilms.com/

[35] Laurie Ouellette, "True Life: The Voice of Television of Documentaries," in *Contemporary Documentary*, ed., Daniel Marcus and Selmin Kara. (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 117.

[36] See, Carrie Hart and Rick Dillwood, "CALL ME KUCHU: Post-colonial Dynamics in Transnational LGBT Filmmaking," *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 6 (2015): 1009-1024; Cuneyt Cakirlar, "Transnational Pride, Global Closets and Regional Formations of Screen Activism: Documentary LGBTQ Narratives from Turkey," *Critical Arts-South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 31, no. 2 (2017): 44-60.

[37] Seniority is not particularly tied to age.

[38] Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub., 1990), 45.

[39] Claire Pamment, "Hijraism: Jostling for a Third Space in Pakistani Politics," *TDR: The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 54, no. 2 (2010): 31.

[40] Bobby Benedicto, "The Haunting of Gay Manila - Global Space-time and the Specter of Kabaklaan," *GLQ-A Journal of Lesbian nd Gay Studies* 14, no. 2-3 (2008):318.

[41] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), 43.

[42] Nichols, "The Voice of Documentary," 23.

[43] Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Culture, Society, and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed., Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (London: University College of London Press, 1999), 149.

[44] Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33.

[45] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 137.

[46] Faris Khan, "Khwaja Sira Activism: The Politics of Gender Ambiguity in Pakistan," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1-2 (2016): 161.

[47] Ibid., 162.

[48] For a discussion on veiling in Muslim cultures see, Hamid Naficy, "Women and The Semiotics of Veiling and Vision in Cinema" *The American Journal of Semiotics* 8, no. 1/2 (1991): 47-64.

[49] Here I draw from Susan Sontag's explanation of a photograph as a trace of reality. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell Pub., 1977).

[50] See, Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

[51] See, Jessica Hinchy, Introduction," in *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, C.1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-24.

[52] Ibid., 7.

[53] See, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

[54] Hartman made this argument for black slaves. See, Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.

[55] The UK-based Clover company's self-defined popular vision can be glimpsed in the supposed seriousness of the subjects of their films on ISIS, ISIL, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, pedophilia, homosexuality, and gender variance in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, and Kenya. See, https://www.clover-films.com/

[56] See Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question…." *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983): 18-36.

[57] Faye Woods, "Streaming British Youth Television: Online BBC Three as a Transitional Moment," *Cinema Journal* 57, no. 1 (2017): 140-141.

[58] Daisy Wyatt, "How Gay is Pakistan? BBC3 - TV review: The only offensive thing here was the imam's outdated views," *The Independent*, October 20, 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/how-gay-is-pakistan-bbc3-tv-review-the-only-offensive-thing-here-was-the-imams-outdated-views-a6701576.html

[59] For a comprehensive critique of the concept of "closet" see, Marlon B. Ross, "Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005), 161-89.

[60] Ibid., 161.

[61] See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

[62] Hiram Perez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!" *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 [84-85] (2005):76.

[63] See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

[64] Perez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!," 176.

[65] Shinsuke Eguchi, "Coming In/Out of the Closet," in *Critical Articulations of Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation,* ed., Sheena C. Howard (Lanham, [Maryland]: Lexington Books, 2014), 10.

[66] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York UP, 2009), 60.

[67] Roderick Ferguson, "Race-ing Homonormativity: Citizenship, Ideology, and Gay Identity" in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed., E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005) 61.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Alfred J. López, "Introduction," in Postcolonial *Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 17.

[70] Shinsuke Eguchi, "Queerness as Strategic Whiteness: A Queer Asian American Critique of Peter Le" in *Interrogating the Communicative Power of Whiteness*, ed., Dawn Marie D. McIntosh, Dreama G. Moon, and Thomas K. Nakayama, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 36.

[71] See, David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[72] Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura, "Introduction," in *Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.

[73] Queer of color and other scholars have critiqued the gay movement for making marriage a singular cause to rally around. See, Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*; Ferguson, "Race-ing Homonormativity"; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Sexual Cultures. New York: NYU Press, 2009

[74] Ferguson, "Race-ing Homonormativity," 61.

[75] See Hadas Gold, "Vice Teams with Alphabet Incubator Jigsaw on Doc Series 'Blackout,'" *Politico*, May 2016: https://www.politico.com/blogs/on-media/2016/05/vice-google-jigsaw-blackout-documentary-223164

[76] Ibid.

[77] Other documentaries in the series *Blackout* are on Venezuela, Belarus, Eritrea, and Thailand. The first documentary on Pakistan can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLw613M86o5o4LJRuYqn2EVtHgFFPZnZqj

[78] C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, "Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife," in *Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 67.

[79] See, Adnan Hossain, "De-Indianizing Hijra: Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 321-31.

[80] Susan Stryker, "*Kaming Mga Talyada* (We who are Sexy): The Transsexual Whiteness of Christine Jorgensen in Postcolonial Philippines," in *Transgender Experience: Place, Ethnicity, and Visibility*, ed., Chantal Zabus and David Coad, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies ; 59. (New York ; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 80.

[81] Sara Ahmed, "The Politics of Fear in the Making of Worlds," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16, no. 3 (2003): 393.

[82] Sara Ahmed, "Mixed Orientations," *Subjectivity* 7, no. 1 (2014): 93.

[83] See, Said, *Covering Islam*.

[84] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 199.

[85] Apart from legal recognition of hijras/transgender in South Asia, historians and literary scholars Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai have collected and translated Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim literature from over 2000 years, testifying the presence of same-sex love and desire in various forms in South Asia as opposed to the conceptualization of homosexuality as a 19th century invention in the West. See, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, *Same-sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Massad outlines a history of non-normative desire in the Arab world. See, Joseph A Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[86] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 16.

[87] Tom Boellstorff, "Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005): 582.

[88] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 171.

[89] Shah, "Brothels and Big Screen Rescues," 563.

[90] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?," 789.

[91] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 199.

[92] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011), 12.

III. TALKING GENDER:

NATIONAL MEDIA AND THE COMPLEXITY OF GENDER VARIANCE

In January 2009, some hijras and dancing girls were arrested in a raid on a wedding party in Rawalpindi, a large city in the Punjab province adjacent to the capital Islamabad.[1] Later, a prominent hijra named Almas Bobby filed a petition against police arrests to the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Rawalpindi and demonstrated along with hundred other hijras in front of his office. The event got sufficient press coverage, and charges against hijras were dropped. Subsequently, a cis-gender male human rights activist and lawyer Dr. Mohammad Aslam Khaki submitted a petition to the Supreme Court against police brutalities and general mistreatment of the community of hijras. Various (English) terms such as "eunuchs, middle sex, she-males, and unix" were employed during the court proceedings and arguments were presented to salvage the marginalized community of hijras and grant them voting and inheritance rights and education and employment opportunities.[2] Gender disorder and disability frameworks also came in the litigation proceedings. Arguments were made that because government is responsible for disable citizens, "similar policy can be adopted for unix."[3] Eventually, the Supreme Court of Pakistan directed relevant state

institutions to grant hijras citizenship rights by issuing appropriate Computerized National Identity Cards (CNIC) according to their gender/sex identification.[4] Initially, obtaining the CNIC required medical certificates to determine their status as a third gender individual, neither male nor female. The apparent purpose of medical examination was to differentiate between authentic and "fake unix."[5]

Eventually, the medical examination/certification requirement was dropped, and the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act was passed by the parliament in 2018 that employs a more inclusive language, moving away from earlier essentialist conceptions. The bill recognizes transgender person as intersex, eunuch, transgender man, transgender woman, khawaja sira, or "any other person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the social norms and cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at the time of the birth."[6] While the legal requirements and definitions have changed, the discourse produced by the national media remains fixated on essentialist notions. The Pakistani media continue to focus on congenital defects and sex change and notions of authenticity. The discourse on gender variance remains hegemonic in visual media including film and television. Despite multiple television channels and news media, the multiplicity of perspectives and complexity of lived realities do not emerge. I demonstrate and argue in this chapter that the dominant practices and modes of production that the media deploy only serve them

in maintaining their currency and eventness. The media do not actively seek solutions and only become passive participants in the existing discourses. The chapter addresses the following questions: What is the media discourse on gender variance in Pakistan? What does it tell us about media formations and media practices in Pakistan? What is the link between the media and the discourse of gender variance? This chapter analyzes film and TV shows using textual criticism and places them in the context of ethnographic research in Pakistan and existing literature on hijras/khawaja siras in South Asia.

The Changing Media Landscape and Gender

After the Supreme Court of Pakistan legally recognized third gender category, a Pakistani film titled *Bol*/*Speak* (dir. Shoaib Mansoor, 2011) was co-produced with JSI Research & Training Institute and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs (JHU·CCP). The film deals with the issues of maternal health, family planning, and women's rights.[7] However, in the production of the figure of the embattled and battered woman, noteworthy is the presentation of gender variance through the character of an intersex child. The film became a blockbuster, and is considered instrumental in the revival of Pakistan's declining film industry.

The film begins in prison where Zainab, the film's protagonist, is behind bars for murdering her oppressive father who desired a male

progeny but fathered seven daughters and an intersex child instead. When the child was born, the midwife informs the father that the child "appears male but is not," perhaps hinting at some genital deficiency. The midwife insists on handing over the child to hijras/khawaja siras but the father refuses because of his phobia of the community. He wants to kill the child but stops short, because of the mother's pleas. From that point onwards the father ignores the child, named Saifi, who grows up in the company of sisters and mother, secluded from society. While sisters are supportive of the child's artistic activities such as drawing, they react negatively when Saifi dresses up in feminine attire and adorns make-up telling them, "*mard bano*" (Be manly). In order to rehabilitate them in the outside world, the family sends Saifi for apprenticeship at a truck art/paint shop. Most men at the truck shop lust after Saifi, and eventually rape them. The father murders Saifi using the logic of victim blaming and the fear of hijraism. The intersex child succumbs to the tragedies that befall them, starting from their birth leading to rape and murder. The narrative of the film continues but the intersex life ends. Like various narratives in Pakistani media, the film presents hijra lives as tragic and perpetuate essentialist myths about them.[8]

Saifi's story is one of many tales that the film narrates, but how the act of telling the truth began in the film points to another important aspect of institutional changes in Pakistani society. While in prison, Zainab's brother-in-law tries to convince her to tell the rest of the world

why she killed her father, arguing that it will help change attitudes in the society. Zainab confesses to murdering her father but did not testify in her defense during court proceedings and appeals. However, upon her brother-in-law's insistence, she agrees to *speak* the truth, albeit in the presence of the media. The President of Pakistan (fictional) rejects Zainab's clemency appeal but approves her last wish to tell her story to the television channels from the gallows. Before the media spectacle, Zainab's last meeting happens with her sisters and mother who are wearing black *chadors/burkas* and wailing as she is about to be executed. Zainab asks them to stop crying, change their lives themselves, throw away their *chadors*, and become free. After this brief melodrama that conflates women's veil with oppression (not surprising considering U.S. funding agencies), Zainab reaches the gallows to the glare of lights and clicks of cameras. She climbs the stairs to the set up of microphones with logos of television channels inscribed on them, indicative of the presence of market-based and independent news media in Pakistan. In the presence of reporters, journalists, and dozens of cameras, Zainab begins to *speak* and narrates her story. The intertextual cinematic citation of the televisual media is reflective of the shift in the way private media function and are perceived in Pakistani society.

Until the 2000s, the Pakistani state controlled and regulated all news, information, and current affaires through the state-run broadcast media. The state-run media finally lost this control when economic

liberalization policies allowed dozens of private television channels to operate in the country.[9] Private television channels became easily and cheaply accessible and news channels emerged as one of the most popular media in Pakistan.[10] News channels drove change in Pakistan's media landscape through "24-hour news cycles, on-the-spot reporting, and a diverse array of talk shows."[11] News channels cast themselves as witnesses and mediators, supposedly responsible for bringing out hitherto guarded news, information, and political and social stories for the common people to consume. It is thus not a surprise that the character of Zainab seeks the presence of media to narrate her story. While *Bol/Speak* is one of the few films that brings forth the issue of intersex birth, it is non-fictional televisual media and news channels that present issues of gender variance more often. However, before I examine the modalities of televisual media and outline some of the ways in which issues of gender variance are discussed on TV, I present the complex lived realities of gender variance in Pakistan and beyond.

The Complexity of Gender Variance

It is generally perceived that hijras are born as intersex or hermaphrodite, with genital anomalies. The media in Pakistan – whether film or television - perpetuate those mythical beliefs. The medicalized understanding of gender variant individuals as those who experience gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder also do not figure in the

media often, except that the argument of gender disorder was presented in the Supreme Court of Pakistan to win rights for gender variant communities.[12] Gender variant individuals generally do not identify with sex/gender assigned at birth and adopt mannerisms, sartorial practices, and physical embodiments of the opposite gender. In Western nomenclature, individuals who undergo surgical and hormonal changes and transition to the opposite gender are called transsexuals; hence terminologies like Male to Female (MTF) and Female to Male (FTM) are employed to define them. However, the hijra/khawaja sira system, of predominantly male-to-female individuals, is complex.[13]

As opposed to the psychosexual concept of aligning psyche and body, most hijras say they have the *ruh* (soul) of the female gender in their male body.[14] Perhaps this similar to what Aizura calls "feeling somatically" a woman (or a man).[15] One of my research participants narrated the story of her *chela* (student) when they first wore women's clothes, "their *ruh* (soul) that was agitated got some *sukoon* (relief)." However, there is no singular way of aligning *ruh* (soul) and the body, as becoming hijra is considered "processual."[16] Those who become part of the hijra/khawaja sira system remain in various stages of adopting femininity without necessarily the telos of complete transition. Such individuals start by adopting female pronouns and embracing feminine mannerisms such as gait, gestures, and speaking style, at least in the presence of other community members without any fear or prejudice;

these individuals are called *zenanas*. *Zenanas* usually choose to dress up in typical male attires, called *khotki* in hijra language. I met some *zenanas* who defined themselves as girls/women (with phallus) but disguised in male attire. However, the burden of male-presentation is unbearable for some hijras who adopt *firqa* or women's sartorial practices such as make-up, jewelry, and clothes. They are called *aqwa* hijras/khawaja siras and adopt feminine presentation but do not undergo and/or desire any genital surgeries. Some of these individuals wear wigs and padded bras while some grow their hair long (a sign of femininity in South Asian cultures), receive laser treatments for body and facial hair removal, take hormonal injections, and may get silicone breast implants.[17] The emphasis on beauty rather than genitals indicate a non-medicalized understanding of gender variance and/or transsexuality among some hijras.[18] For some hijras, keeping male genitalia is a religious obligation. According to their beliefs, they do not want to tamper with what God has given them. *Aqwa* hijras are similar to travesties in Brazil, as their definition of woman is restricted to appearance, behaviors, and their relationship to men.[19] However, some hijras desire surgical changes and are called *nirban* hijras.[20]

Nirban hijras are emasculated and undergo a total penectomy procedure, while some only get their testes removed, something hijras call *dongal patana*. There are no legal regulations for and against Sex and/or Gender Reassignment Surgery (SRS and GRS) in Pakistan. In

certain Muslim majority countries, like Iran, changing sex with a doctor's approval is allowed.[21] In Pakistan, some individuals seek court orders before getting sex reassignment surgery done. Pakistani clerics are ambivalent about SRS and give contradictory opinions and verdicts on it. However, it is the cost and the circumstances under which SRS/GRS happens that needs attention. I was informed by a research participant that it costs about $700 in a government-run public hospital for the basic surgery, while other sources identify up to $10,000 and more for the complete transition procedure.[22] Undergoing surgery also means not working for a few months. For people who rely on everyday earnings and do not have regular pay checks, it is difficult to imagine taking this non-working time out for the duration of procedure and recuperation.[23] A participant who was visiting from a rural area told me that her only desire is to get surgery done but does not have the means to do so. In certain cases, male partners provide for the full or partial procedures, while in most cases hijras have to rely on themselves for the procedure/s.[24] Financial constraints lead some to the option of informal and unsafe surgery performed by the senior community members.[25] It would be naïve to think that the government of Pakistan would provide health benefits and facilitate sex-change surgeries for all hijras/khawaja siras who desire surgical changes.

For *nirban* hijras, it is always a matter of pride that they sacrificed their male body parts. Lawrence Cohen informs us that the sacrifice of

genitals is the marker of and claims to citizenship for hijras.[26] Some of them are not afraid of exposing themselves in public, as they take pride in their act of sacrifice, which provides "specific rights in spaces, institutions, and communities."[27] While they are not hesitant of exposing themselves, some of them, in extreme circumstances, are not reluctant to bare those hijras who keep their male genitalia. I have come across videos of hijras, both from India and Pakistan, taking clothes off of *aqwa* hijras and exposing their phallus. These acts are done to bring shame to those who want to retain their masculine identity by keeping male genitals. All hijras normally live harmoniously together but there is always a risk for those with a phallus of being exposed by those castrated as well as outsiders while *nirban* hijras may take pride in exposing their lack. Similarly, *aqwa* hijras use religious arguments against *nirban* hijras for having sinned against the prescriptions of Allah and his will by getting rid of their genitals.[28] Thus "both hijra with a penis as well those without draw on varied symbolic and religious resources to justify their positions within the hijra community."[29] Irrespective of their genital status, all hijras have complicated associations with the established norms of masculinity.

While legal documents allow recognition as third gender in Pakistan, a majority of individuals retain their legal documents that identify them as male.[30] For my research participant Andaz, who works full time for an NGO during the day and part time as a sex worker,

official legal documents (CNIC and passport) recognize her as male, but she identifies as a hijra/khawaja sira/TG in her everyday life. Andaz is legally married to a woman and has children from the marriage. Heterosexually married hijras/khawaja siras are not uncommon either due to societal pressure or out of choice.[31] Those who do not undergo any surgery sometimes return to their male presentation to get married. Sometimes cutting their hair short, like majority of men in Pakistan, and adopting men's sartorial practices signify reverting back to masculinity. However, marriage is not the only reason why a hijra goes back to masculine practices.

I met a hijra who, after having a long and successful dancing career, not only cut their hair but grew a beard according to the tenets of *Sharia* when they joined the Islamic religious reform movement called *Tabligh Jamat*. However, both married and reformed hijras continue to meet others in the community and use female pronouns in their company. Most hijras, emasculated or not, also perform *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, as men.[32] Even when a *nirban* hijra passes away, all the funeral rituals and rites are performed as on a male individual by men. During my research, when one *nirban* senior guru passed away, her body was taken to a morgue for the purpose of getting it ready for the funeral where morgue personnel asked a senior accompanying guru if they should send for women to bathe and prepare the body. The guru explained that all rituals will be performed by men. Hijras thus have a

complex structure of associations with religion, societal norms, self presentation, and identification.

Talk TV

There are about three dozen or so news channels in Pakistan. Prominent channels address the national audience, broadcast in the national language Urdu, and tackle issues of national importance while a few news channels are city-based or broadcast in regional languages. All news channels rely on talk-based formats for their programming other than live news. I am using the term "Talk TV" to refer to formats that require host/s, guests/experts, a topic of current interest, and require a basic set depending on the nature of the program.[33] The Talk TV formats on Pakistani news channels predominantly rely on discussion/debates on political, current affairs, and social issues in the prime time and late evening slots. A lighter and more fragmented version of Talk TV appears in the format of breakfast/morning shows. These talk shows usually do not involve audience participation like most day time talk shows in the U.S. for instance. However, these shows borrow from or rely on other genres like investigative/journalistic reporting and Vox Pop and Day-In-The-Life-Of (DILO) interview formats that require on-location shooting. The Talk TV format functions with a minimum investment of time, money, and effort compared to other genres such as TV drama. Almost every news channel in Pakistan has multiple discussion-based talk

shows and a daily breakfast/morning show usually hosted by a well-known personality.

One of the prominent features of Talk TV format on Pakistani TV is the figure of the host with unquestionable authority and perceived knowledge of and expertise on every issue. Hosts are selected on the basis of their proficiency to moderate the discussion and manage the guests/experts. The talk show hosts speak with authority, interrupt guests/experts, and can be argumentative and at times belligerent. The breakfast/morning show host on the other hand is often non-confrontational and moderates to keep discussions light and entertaining. Both formats rely on different strategies to engage the short attention span of the viewers and avoid long winded discussions or lectures. The celebritization of the Talk TV format has happened over the years, as either hosts have acquired celebrity status or channels have roped in famous actors and actresses to attract large audiences. "Armed with an established fame then, and sustained by a media constructed popularity, the hosts have little difficulty in establishing themselves at the level of expertise."[34] The host relies on their guests for the discussion and performs the art of asserting their authority over experts. However, ultimately, the perspective of the host dominates. They mediate production team's vision for the program, which is usually tied to the channel's overall goals, vison, and mission. Most channels are affiliated with vested interests – political, economic, and socio-cultural and are

ideologically identified as right wing, centrist, and liberal. There are limited to no representation of left-leaning social justice orientation in the media in Pakistan.

Before the Supreme Court took notice of the plight of gender variant people, news media turned a blind eye to the community of hijras. Within years of legal recognition of the third gender, transnational funding of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and international media attention ensued and a rights-based discourse emerged under the umbrella of the term "transgender." English language and mainstream press, and media organizations associated with them, came forward in support of the "transgender" community, although dissociated from histories of marginalization and survival of hijras/khawaja siras. A new breed of trans-identifying young individuals and some senior hijras/khawaja siras came to the front of the movement for transgender/hijra/khawaja sira rights. The new visibility brought about by rights discourse and media attention catapulted the lives of hijras and trans identifying individuals into the spotlight where they became objects of knowledge and public scrutiny, leaving aside the structures of oppression within which they survive. Almost all big and small TV channels could not help but take notice of transgender/hijra/khawaja sira rights and gave coverage to the issues concerning the community in various ways in their talk-based

shows. Here, I outline some of the ways in which such discourses appear on TV.[35]

Talking Authenticity

Numerous talk shows on Pakistani TV have devoted air time on transgender/hijra/khawaja sira issues since the Supreme Court rulings. The private media, assuming the role of the watch dog, often challenge the state institutions. For instance, the state institutions give salience to the self-authority of individuals for their gender identification, the media emphasize the need for medical authorization for this purpose. Special talk shows were devoted to this singular aspect of complex hijras/khawaja siras lives, leaving aside the systemic issues that result in their marginalization. One such instance is the special episode of the talk show *Debate Headquarters* on Bol TV telecasted during the holiday season of Eid in 2018.[36] While the apparent premise of the show was to talk about how the community celebrates Eid holidays, the host, a well known actor, and the two hijra/khawaja sira guests mainly addressed the issue of and the need for medical examination during the forty-minute duration of the show.

One of the two hijra guests was Almas Bobby. Bobby was the figure behind events that led to the Supreme Court rulings in 2009, which paved the way for transgender rights and legislations. Since then a few young, well-spoken, and educated community leaders or trans

identifying people have taken over the rights discourse. Almas Bobby's one of the grievances was that while she was at the forefront of rights campaign, and she has no share in the transnational funds (available for NGOs and CBOs), trips abroad, meetings, conferences, workshops, and trainings. She claims that fake khawaja siras have taken over the discourse and should be identified. Often Urdu words like *behroopiya* and *masnooi*, which mean imposter and counterfeit, are used to demean those with a phallus without mentioning the terms for it. In order to prove her point, she had another junior hijra accompanying her, who followed her guru's line of reasoning that authentic and fake hijras should be differentiated. The host, typically confrontational, was in agreement with the guests, pleading the government and the Supreme Court to require medical examination before issuing identity cards. The hijra community that mostly keeps to itself reacted to the idea of medical examination. A large number of hijras/khawaja siras from the community as well as NGO based trans identified individuals circulated cellphone video messages in WhatsApp groups and social media against Almas Bobby and the host. All hijras, whether *nirban* or *aqwa,* protested against this sensational approach to discuss their lives.

I will cite two more examples of shows that follow TV Talk format but raise similar issues. Both shows, aired on Samaa TV, rely on differentiating between *asli*/authentic and *masnooi*/fake khawaja siras. One is a DILO format where the celebrity host, a well-known actress,

interviews and spends a day with an “original” and “educated” khawaja sira activist.[37] The show starts by the proclamation of the host that she has heard right from her childhood that “original” khawaja siras are born that way compared to those who transform themselves. The host also explains that their guest khawaja sira is also different because she has a respectable job unlike those who adopt begging and dancing as their profession. The host elides sex work as the third major source of khawaja sira income. If mentioned at all, sex work, a means of livelihood for the majority of khawaja siras, is often referred to as *ghalat* (wrong) and *ghair iklhaqi* (immoral) acts in talk shows. The host starts her interview with

Figure 3: Screenshot of the Show from YouTube

the question about authenticity; the guest had to explain that intersex birth is rare and that most hijras/khawaja siras transform and transition over a period of time. It's not clear whether the explanation enlightened the celebrity host and the production team, as the show remains titled as "Original Khawaja Sira" on YouTube (see Figure 3).[38]

Another exposé/crime/investigative-reporting style show employs the same trope to expose male beggars who dress up in female attire and make-up to earn a living.[39] For the exposé part, the show employs hidden camera operation and involves a male television crew member who dresses up act as a hijra/khawaja sira. The host subsequently visits "authentic" community members who live together in the kinship structure at a *dera* (hijra household). There were moments during the visit at the hijra/khawaja sira household that reflected camaraderie apparent in the community as signs of humane authenticity that any discerning viewer could see. However, the host culminates the show with an interview of a medical doctor asking again about people who are not hijra/khawaja sira but become one and brings the issue of identity cards and medical examination.

Sex Change as Spectacle

While most televisual discourses focus on the figure of hijra or MTF embodiments but FTM narratives also appear as news and features

focusing on sex change. [40] Such news items either describe the sex change as a whim of the individual person or at best discuss it in medico-scientific context. The desire for male child who can be a bread-winner is projected as an alibi for a sex change procedure and parent's support. In order to give the issue a controversial spin, religion and societal mores are also brought into the picture. Another trope of such news items and features is the repetitive showcase of pictures of the individual before and after the change, marking sex change as a miraculous event and presenting individuals who undergo change as freaks. Common questions asked to FTM individuals are about changes in love interests and friendships before and after surgery. Most of the cases of the individuals that are included in the news are from the lower/working class backgrounds. Since these people are not influential, the news media get a free reign on how to present the issue. Some of these reported cases are also those of teenagers, and journalists/reporters who take advantage of their adolescence and inexperience and shove microphone in their faces. Due to factors like class, age, gender, and ultimately their positon compared to the media personnel, agency is not granted to these individuals in most cases. Already there are limited discourses on FTM individuals, but the deployment of these tropes spectacularize sex change as a singular feature of FTM people's lives. FTM people are dehumanized as freaks and sex change becomes a spectacle for people to watch.

Similar tropes were employed in a news and discussion-based show *Hum Log* (We the People) featuring a FTM sex change case.[41] First the news anchor, as an authority figure on morality and religious principles, interviews the FTM individual and his mother in the hospital for the first ten minutes of the show. While the interviewees keep on giving various medical and psychological reasons why such a procedure became necessary, the unsatisfied host argues that religion does not allow such whimsical changes and that they should have consulted clerics before taking such a step. The subsequent discussion happens in a studio with two clerics and the medical doctor who performed the surgery in the reported case. Bringing clerics to the discussions is a trope of local media for topics that appear to stoke moral panics around social mores. The clerics remain in demand for both the foreign and local media, as religion continues to provide fodder for self-Orientalizing culture. Such shows set aside principles of neutrality, objectivity, and ethics associated with critical and investigative journalism and anchor their line of inquiry around morality and religion. Thus, the host keeps on interrupting medico-scientific arguments of the doctor to push the discussion around two themes of the show: “increasing trend of sex change” and “girls are becoming boys and boys are becoming girls.” During the whole duration of the show, these two lines appear multiple times. The host uses this theme during the discussion to establish metonymic relationship between sex change and sexual perversion.

Acceptance Discourse

In contrast to the discourse that reduce the ontology of hijras to the corporeal, acceptance narratives also emerge in talk shows. However, the conundrum of acceptance discourse is that it privileges certain sanitized aesthetics and embodiments that everyone does not have equal access to. Such discourses project those who have not only transitioned but also transformed into productive citizens. Aren Aizura defines this kind of citizenship as "fading back into the population (and exercising the rights of populist democracy) but also the imperative to be 'proper' in the eyes of the state: to reproduce; to find proper employment; to reorient one's 'different body into the flow of nationalized aspiration for possessions, property, wealth; to consider the responsibilities as well as the rights of being a recognized citizen."[42] The elements of exclusion are thus built into such a discourse of acceptance and citizenship.

One such example is a morning/breakfast show on Dawn News that invited two fashion models and actors who identify as trans women.[43] The breakfast/morning show format is slightly different in that it is more fragmented including small talk, information, and entertainment, "offering a variety for everyone to pick from whenever needed."[44] The show begins with the two celebrities attempting to explain the terms transgender, transsexual, and transvestite. For the Urdu term "khawaja sira," the guests give competing explanations of the

terminology. While one guest defines the history behind the term that goes back into the Mughal era, the other guest asserts that she does not like the term khawaja sira, "We are entering into the twenty first century… Mughal era has ended……We should have to move forward." The host who is dependent on guests' knowledge of gender variance and terminologies remains at loss. The nature of the program is such that the host and the guests are not particularly invested in explanations of complexities associated with gender variance but rather in presenting and endorsing their normative selves. With the emphasis on taking advantage of guests' celebrity status, the show time is thus spent in taking calls (people's participation through call-ins), going on breaks, jokes, fun questions, and cooking segment along with a sit down interview to show that transgender people are normal.

Normal here can be read as middle class or bourgeoisie, as the guests were well dressed, well-spoken, professional, used terminologies in English, and preferred to call themselves "post-operative trans women." However, Pakistani media's presentation of post-operative professional trans women for the consumption of mostly non-transsexual cis-gender viewers is a reminder of Viviane Namaste's concerns that media select those individuals who are well spoken, have jobs or are professionals to facilitate acceptance and to show that transsexuals are normal.[45] Namaste critiques, "non-transsexual people working in the media who make calculated decisions about which transsexuals can

speak, what they can say, and when they can say it."[46] Unlike political/talk shows, these morning programs avoid any major confrontation and hence, most of the questions revolve around personal lives and struggles. The emphasis on the personal is so prevalent that another talk show invited Pakistan's "first trans news anchor" to assert that if she can make it then everyone can do it with hard work.[47] With the "inefficiency of state intervention and the anodyne character of private enterprise" as given realities,[48] hard work and self-sufficiency are offered as pedagogical solutions to myriad systemic problems like access to education, housing, and healthcare.

The Currency of Talk TV

When I started my ethnographic research with the hijra community, I kept learning about how the community functions and what their rituals are. Being a media studies scholar, I kept looking for evidence of how media are intertwined in their lives. A few weeks went by, but I didn't particularly find anything noteworthy other than the fact that there is a tremendous influence of popular films and music in hijra lives (see chapter 5). Later into my research, I attended a memorial for a hijra who passed away, at a septuagenarian guru's *dera* (house). The *dera* was full of the old and young community members, who came to pay their respects, indicative of their communitarian values and connectedness. On such occasions, food and tea is offered to all the

visitors while those visiting also offer some money for the host. On such occasions, the host hijra has to keep a record of, in a notebook, the details of money that gurus or their *chelas* (disciples) give so that the host can reciprocate with at least the same, if not more, amount should an occasion arise to visit their places. I happened to be the only person with the ability to write. Since I had already met the host before and she was aware of the fact that I was doing research, she asked me to write people's names and the amount that each person was giving. I was happy to assist while also listening to various conversations around. Three to four rather old hijras near me were teasing each other but addressed one particular hijra from whom they were trying to get some information. They jokingly threatened her that if she did not budge they would call media-wali (media-person, referring to my research participant Sitara Malik because of her liaisons with various media organizations) and then they will know the truth. They were referring to the news media's rise in Pakistan and their newly found institutional power in negotiating key issues in Pakistani society.

The Pakistani state granted citizenship rights to gender variant people, but the deregulated private media is negotiating their inclusion in the 'national imagination.'[49] Films and TV are reflective of the media's prominent role in negotiating citizenship rights for hijra/transgender people. Some of the limited and reductive ways in which the discourse on gender variance emerges on talk shows on television is inherent to the

structure of media organizations and production constraints that seek to fill air time with limited resources and inadequate research. Viviane Namaste reminds us that the institutional unwritten codes and norms determine "what gets said, how it is articulated and where it is distributed."[50] However, the key function of the talk shows , I argue, is to maintain the status quo, while sustaining a perception that the media negotiate change. Talk, chatter, debates, and discussions on TV provide this semblance of complexity and multiplicity, but in essence they work toward the goal of normativity. If we regard television as "a socio-technical apparatus,"[51] then it follows that it may help to connect margins or marginal issues to the mainstream society.[52] However, it does so in dominant and hegemonic ways as is evident in the discourse of gender variance on Pakistani media. Liberal or conservative, talk shows represent "a current of accumulated social discourse, a readily available data base of acquired discursive practices."[53] In this sense, talk shows function to maintain the status quo: "a glue that gives unity and legitimacy to the dominant views, institutions, and centers of power in any given society."[54] The talk show format succeeds because they "reject the arrogance of discourse that defines itself on the basis of its difference from common sense."[55] The commonly held beliefs and debates that are already circulating in society provide fodder to the Talk TV format. It is not a surprise that hijras participate in existing discursive practices, as they want to be a part of the common sense and help society to maintain

the status quo. For instance, they want to sustain mythical ideas that the society can relate to and approve of them. However, within this complexity they also negotiate their presence in society through whatever re/presentational dimensions become available to them. They are also bound by their desire "to belong without complication to a normative society."[56] However, as Aizura argues such "normative desires result in depoliticized social existence despite forces of institutional violence – among them the social effects of transphobia."[57]

Based on my analysis of talk shows on Pakistani TV, I thus argue that the prime concern of Talk TV is maintaining currency. They take up current issues and produce chatter, discussion, and debates around it in various ways. In the case of gender variance issue, the media did not take it up and brought it to the fore. Television talk shows responded to the discursive formation of the transgender/hijra/khawaja sira rights discourse already started by a series of petitions and court orders, and became a node in its production. Hence the link between the talk shows and transgender/hijra rights and issues is not causal but that of alliance.[58] The media's objective is to remain current while not challenging the status quo, while the hijra/trans activists, leaders, and celebrities also desire to claim their hitherto denied air time whether it is through reinforcing bourgeois values or mythical beliefs reinforcing the social norms. However, what is sacrificed in this discourse are the concerns of the community at large and broader analysis of health care

system, AIDS prevention, problems of police harassment and unnecessary arrests, decriminalization of sex work, criminal system, and other systemic issues that place hurdles in the path of livable lives for the majority of hijras. I thus ask with Namaste if the critical journalists and/or media producers have any "moral and ethical obligations to discuss the very social policies and institutional practices that force transsexuals (in South Asian case hijra/khawaja sira community) into abject poverty and profound social isolation."[59] It appears that the media are not concerned about critical discourse, they are invested in currency produced through contradictions, sensationalism, scandals, spectacle, and chatter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how media perpetuate hegemonic discourses on gender variance. By focusing on talk, they fill time slots in the most economical way possible but at the same time they also participate in current discourses. There is no direct and causal link between talk shows and the production of discourses. Their singular focus on gender identity markers essentially tied to the sexed body perpetuate the myth that all transgender/hijra individuals are born with ambiguous genitals. They rely on spectacularization, sensationalism, and controversies to get higher ratings or attention. On the other end of the spectrum lies discourses of acceptability and normativity eliding the

concerns of majority of gender variant individuals who are poor or do sex work and dancing as their means of livelihood (chapter 5). Within these formations the truth of oppressive conditions remains obscured and broader systemic analysis is sidelined. Talk shows on TV in particular do no offer any resolutions, solutions, or conclusions, rather their attempt is to remain current and maintain status quo.

Notes

[1] For complete details of the case that led to the filing of petition in the Supreme Court of Pakistan, see Jeffrey A. Redding “From 'She-Males' to 'Unix': Transgender Rights and the Productive Paradoxes of Pakistani Policing,” in *Regimes of Legality: Ethnography of Criminal Cases in South Asia* ed., Daniela Berti and Devika Bordia (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2015), 258-289.

[2] Ibid.

[3] These words from court proceedings were quoted by Redding. Ibid., 269.

[4] The Computerized National Identity Card (has) three categories for transgender/khwajsira identified people for the “gender” category: “Khawaja Sira (female) for i individuals whose body is biologically closer to females, Khawaja Sira (male) for those whose body is biologically closer to males, and Khansa-e-Mushkil for true hermaphrodites. See, Nisar “(Un)Becoming a Man,” 78; Pakistani passport on the other hand has a “Sex” category and allows “X” as an option for those who chose to identify as M (male) or F (female). See, https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pakistan-issues-landmark-transgender-passport-n778076

[5] Redding, “From 'She-Males' to 'Unix',” 269.

[6] The bill passed by the Pakistan’s senate (upper legislative chamber) on March 07, 2018.

[7] See https://ccp.jhu.edu/entertainment-education/

[8] Some television dramas and made-for-television films such as *Moorat* (2004) and *Chandni* (2016) also produce similar narratives.

[9] Pakistan had 35 channels in 2001 that increased to dozens after 2002. See, Tahir H. Naqvi, "Private satellite media and the geo-politics of moderation in Pakistan," in *South Asian Media Cultures Audiences, Representations, Contexts,* ed. Shakutala Banaji (London: Anthem Press), 109-111.

[10] Subscription to television channels is relatively cheap in Pakistan compared to other entertainment options such as going to the cinema. Hence, television has popular appeal among common people.

[11] Naqvi, "Private satellite media," 109.

[12] See Redding, "From 'She-Males' to 'Unix'," 258-289.

[13] Even though the CNIC offers Male Khwaja Sira option (akin to FTM identity) but the community generally comprises of female identifying hijras/khawaja siras (akin to MTF identity). The community has a general acceptance of various gender variant individuals but it predominantly comprises male-bodied female-identifying individuals.

[14] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 188-192.

[15] Aren Z. Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes: The Imaginary Community of (trans)sexual Citizenship" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2006): 295.

[16] Hossain calls hijrahood processual and defines it as "emerging in practice – that is, in the normative and transgressive inclinations and identifications they acquire as part of the process of doing and becoming hijra." See, Adnan Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia," *Asian Studies Review* 36, no. 4 (2012): 496.

[17] See, Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 121-134.

[18] This emphasis is similar to the practices of *kathoey* in Thailand. Aren Aizura, "The Romance of the Amazing Scalpel: Race, Gender, and Affect in Thai Gender Reassignment Clinics" in *Queer Bangkok: 21st Century*

Markets, Media, and Rights ed. Peter A. Jackson (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 2011), 150.

[19] Don Kulick, *Travesti : Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 93.

[20] In India, *nirban* is pronounced/written as *nirvan*, perhaps due to dialectical difference. In Bangladesh the term *chibry* is used. Pakistani hijras also use the term *chibry* along with *nriban*. Similarly, *zenana* is pronounced/written as *janana* in Bangladesh. See Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub., 1990); Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation," 500.

[21] Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 165.

[22] Abdur Rauf Yousafzai. January 2018. "Despite the cost and pain, sex-reassignment surgery gives transgender their real identity." News Lens Pakistan. Para 7. http://www.newslens.pk/despite-the-cost-and-pain-sex-reassignment-surgery-gives-transgender-their-real-identity/

[23] Nanda also mentions a period of isolation before operation among hijras in India. See, Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman*, 26-19.

[24] For the details about how the procedure is performed by a midwife. Ibid.

[25] Yousafzai. January 2018. "Despite the cost and pain," para 10.

[26] Lawrence Cohen "The Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification," in *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective*, eds. Stacy Leigh Pigg, Vincanne Adams, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 278.

[27] Cohen, "The Kothi Wars," 278.

[28] Adnan Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition: Hijra, Third Gender and Sexual Rights in Bangladesh." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 19, no. 12 (2017): 1420.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Nisar estimates that less than 2 percent members of this community have chosen the legal third gender. See, Nisar, "(Un)Becoming a Man," 65.

[31] Hossain informs us that "many hijra in Dhaka, Bangladesh are in fact heterosexually married men who simultaneously perform the role of "macho" house holding men and that of hijra." See Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation," 495-513.

[32] Ibid., 502.

[33] Some formats like Day-In-The-Life-Of (DILO) do not even require a set and are shot on location. Set is the only major production expense for the television channel apart from providing pick and drop to the guests.

[34] Christine M. Quail, Kathalene A. Razzano, and Loubna H. Skalli, *Vulture Culture: The Politics and Pedagogy of Daytime Television Talk Shows*. (New York, N.Y..: Peter Lang, 2005), 69.

[35] This not an exhaustive survey of all talk shows.

[36] The show titled 'Debate Headquarters' aired on Bol TV on June 16, 2018. See, https://www.facebook.com/HamzaAliAbbasiFP/videos/vb.515917608538547/1313681655428801/?type=2&theater

[37] The show titled *Samaa Kay Mehmaan* aired on Samaa TV on 22 May 2017. See, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKTByGCC7Ek&t=335s

[38] Ibid.

[39] The show titled *Awam Ki Awaz (Transgender Exclusive)* aired on Samaa TV on 20 December 2016. See, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORKEOQ6y4kc

[40] Such news items have appeared on national and city based news channels such as ARY, CNBC Pakistan, Capital TV, Channel 5, and Royal News and have been posted online.

[41] The show titled *Hum Log* was aired on Samaa TV on September 14, 2012. Online version of the show can be accessed in three parts here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeqtSIOCWb8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lvHbUSo6F4&t=662s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoXdnor5ZH8

[42] Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes," 295-296.

[43] Morning show called *Chai, Toast aur Host* aired on Dawn News on July 27, 2017. Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6fbe0ff37I&t=936s

[44] Jan Wieten and Mervi Pantti, "Obsessed with the Audience: Breakfast Television Revisited." *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2005): 35.

[45] Viviane K. Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism*. (Toronto: Women's Press, 2005), 49-51.

[46] Ibid.

[47] The program titled *Live with Nadia Mirza* aired on News One channel on May 18, 2018. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xILIF72OTpY

[48] Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public*, (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

[49] Drawing from Naqvi, "Private satellite media," 109-122.

[50] Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change*, 42.

[51] Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*, 3.

[52] Studies on daytime talk shows with audience participation regard them as positive developments because of democratic representation of women and sexual minorities. See, Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Munira Cheema, "Talk Shows in Pakistan TV Culture: Engaging Women as Cultural Citizens," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 2, no. 1 (2018): 1-12.

[53] Paolo Carpignano, Robin Andersen, Stanley Aronowitz, and William Difazio, "Chatter in the Age of Electronic Reproduction: Talk Television and the 'Public Mind'," *Social Text* 25-26, no. 25/26 (1990): 54.

[54] Quail, Razzano, and Skalli, *Vulture Culture, 49.*

[55] Carpignano, Andersen, Aronowitz, and Difazio, "Chatter in the Age of Electronic Reproduction," 52.

[56] Aren Z. Aizura, "Of Borders and Homes," 290.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Here I draw from Rajagopal who argues that there was neither any causal relation between economic reforms and the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalistic politics nor any inherent shared logic. Rather, there was an opportunistic alliance. See Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*, 3.

[59] Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change*, 50.

IV. AFFECTIVE NONPROFITIZATION & VALUE-CODING OF MARGINALITY:

COMMUNITY, GESTURES, & VISIBILITY POLITICS

I conducted ethnographic research between August and October 2018 with Sitara Malik, the head of a Community Based Organization (CBO) for hijras. During the period of about two months, I visited her office/house that she shares with her *chela* (disciple), Rani, almost everyday. Her rental space has three small rooms out of which one functions as a make-shift office with a desk and two chairs and a cupboard to store files related to the organization. The CBO had no funded projects or welfare activities during the period I worked with Sitara Malik, so I ended up helping her clean and organize old files. However, during this time period, two protests were organized by Sitara Malik outside Karachi Press Club, one to denounce the murder of a hijra in the KPK (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) province of the country and one against police brutalities and harassment against hijras in the city. I participated in the organization of these protests and engaged in activities such as writing press releases and social media posts, making placards, designing banners, and other logistics. Other than protests, Sitara Malik also went to Lahore and Islamabad to attend joint meetings

of other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and CBOs working on the rights and welfare of gender and sexual minorities including hijras, MSM, and LGBTQ identifying people. By the time I left Pakistan in October 2018, Sitara Malik's CBO got a big project on HIV/AIDS prevention, which allowed them to rent a proper office space and hire staff. The granting body chose various NGOs and CBOs in different parts of the country based on their capacity to reach hijra community in their respective locations. Sitara Malik's CBO was selected and contracted for HIV/AIDS prevention work in Karachi.[1]

The contagion of HIV/AIDS in male-to-male and male-to-hijra sexual practices dominates the NGO discourse in Pakistan, like in India and Bangladesh.[2] HIV/AIDS prevention and medical services continue to be the source of funding for these organizations, as is evident in Sitara Malik's CBO. While CBOs like that of Sitara Malik are involved in grassroots work, identity and visibility politics is also at the forefront of NGOs that have more resources. Some of these NGOs not only rely on transnational funding but also its visibility politics. The way non-profit sector operates internationally, its attendant visibility politics is seeping into various locations around the world. Myrl Beam's work on queer non-profits informs us that these organizations "increasingly adopt businesslike structures, use corporate style management techniques and language, and operate according to increasingly market driven principles."[3] The result of corporatization is that it translates into

depoliticized and superficial change that relies on image-system. While image management and visibility politics may result in "positive representation," Gossett, Stanley, and Burton contend that a representation "when produced within the cosmology of racial capitalism give little support to trans and gender nonconforming people on the margins."[4]

It is this affective visibility politics linked to the non-profit/non-governmental visual economy that I explore in this chapter. Through the analysis of an affective campaign of a transnational non-profit organization, I demonstrate how media-generated affects are becoming central to the success of humanitarian discourse in the neoliberal economy and the liberal humanism that circulate globally. However, the generation and circulation of affects depends on what Gayatri Spivak calls "value coding marginality."[5] The process of value coding trans in particular relies on what What C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn call "value extraction" from other less privileged bodies.[6] The resultant outcomes of such a discourse are "global hierarchies of value" that privilege certain embodiments, gestures, and relations and functions to erase, diminish, and subsume others.[7] In the subsequent sections I will demonstrate how these affects are produced as a discourse of liberal humanism through a process of value extracting and coding. For the purpose of analysis, I will first explore hijra survival strategies including their gestures and then present evidence of how local formations become

raw materials for transnational and national non-profit/non-governmental organizations to generate affects. I interrogate and highlight how marginality is being implicated in transnational non-profit/non-governmental system and how identity formation intersects with transnational modes of cultural production. However, the purpose of this exercise is not to pitch trans-as-global in binary opposition to hijras-as-authentic and local but to understand the complexities and entanglements of transnational trans visibility discourse in postcolonial South Asia where hijras have been visibly negotiating their presence in society.

Survival Strategies

The hijra community was marginalized in postcolonial South Asia following their persecution under the British Colonial rule. The survival strategies that the hijra community deployed in postcolonial South Asia have morphed into a system of relations which govern their lives and shape their lifeworlds, from community formation to identity construction. The development of guru-*chela* (teacher-disciple) kinship relations with each other is one instance of them building their own support network in the face of mainstream society shunning them as outcasts.[8] Apart from guru-*chela*, hijras establish other kinship relationships with each other such as *maan*/mama (mother other than guru), *dadi* and *potri* (grand mother and daughter), *guru bhai* (all chelas

under a guru are considered brothers to each other), and *sangat sahelian* (friends). The community formation is hijras' way of relating to and negotiating with the normative society that functions to exclude them from its ambit or keep them at its precincts. Similarly, the deployment of hijra argot, called Farsi,[9] allows them to communicate in codes with other members of the community. The use of Farsi among hijras is an example of challenging the existing linguistic system and its meaning structures for the purpose of re-signification for the community. For instance, words associated with sexual acts such as sodomy that have negative connotations in the mainstream society are reduced in their gravity by the deployment of Farsi.

Hijra tactics are thus disidentificatory as they employ the normative code as "raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture."[10] In her study of linguistic practices of hijras in India, Kira Hall identifies the community as "a flamboyant and subversive semiotic system – a system identified through unique choices of dress, gesture, and discourse."[11] Claire Pamment locates in Pakistan the subversion of hijras' low social status in their inversionary tactics.[12] Hossain defines hijra practices as traversing the normative and transgressive in Bangladesh.[13] The subversive strategies, guerilla tactics, and transgressive practices that hijras deploy range from their use of the language to the disposition of gestures. Other elements in their semiotic

system include expressive gesticulation of the arms, swish of the hips, deep raspy voices, bright and shiny attires, garish make-up, and their peculiar hollow clap (Farsi word used by hijras for is *tarri,* their adaptation of the Urdu word *tali*). The hollow clap is one gesture integral to the notions of identity formation and a quintessential part of a repertoire of disidentificatory and guerilla tactics for hijras in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

The Hollow Clap

The hollow clap of hijras differs from normative clapping used for the purpose of applause in that it is the meeting of hollow palms, usually but not necessarily perpendicular to each other, that creates amplified impact sonically. Due to its divergence from and exceeding the norms of proper corporeal containment, the hollow clap can be considered what Juana María Rodríguez calls an "over-the-top gesture."[14] Unlike applause that usually ends with the performance that it felicitates, a hijra clap is deployed to create ripple effects sonically, kinetically, semantically, and socio-culturally. Hijra clap functions in a system of disidenitficatory gestures "as a socially legible and highly codified form of kinetic communication, and as a cultural practice that is differentially manifested through embodiments"[15] Like *kabaklaan* in the Philippines, hijra gestures "index ways of overacting, of being over the top, of being

aware of one's being over the top, and of asserting a distinctly queer sensibility about the travails of everyday life."[16]

While Rodríguez informs us that gestures have both metaphoric and material qualities,[17] Muñoz emphasizes the materiality of gestures and argues that it is crucial to understand what gestures perform instead of delimiting them to the realm of signification.[18] While powerfully metaphoric, the hollow clap is also performative. The clap can bring relations into being, independent of or in conjunction with speech acts. Hossain traces magical value of clapping in myth stories that circulate among hijras in Bangladesh. He narrates one such story of a hijra with a phallus as told to him by his research participants: "She/he was neither a male nor a female, as despite her/him having male genitalia she/he was never a male at heart. She/he had the preternatural power to vanish her/his phallus with three claps. She/he could also bring it back with the same."[19] The hijras I conducted ethnographic research with in Karachi also bring their relations into being by three claps. When a new *chela* (disciple) comes under the wing of a guru, the new initiate repeats thrice that she has become a *chela* of so and so, pronounced by three hollow claps. All fellow hijras present at the occasion also welcome the new initiate in the community with loud claps and felicitate by saying *mubarak* (an Arabic word commonly used for blessings). For new community members, clapping sets off the

process of becoming a hijra. It is one of the few gestures that hijra initiates have to perform and demonstrate as a form of proclamation.

Similar to its performative potential of bringing into being, the clap is also productive of the acts of culmination and proscription. When a guru renounces a *chela*, due to her bad behavior for instance, the relationship ends by saying *pho* (end) or *huqqa pani band* (food and drinks prohibited/not welcomed) coinciding with loud claps. Other fellow hijras also follow suit and rescind previously initiated relationship/s with claps. The clap, which indexes inclusion in and/or sanctions from the community, is also an announcement and pronouncement of hijra identity outside the community. When hijras arrive at weddings, or birth celebrations (invited or uninvited), or go for alms collection, the sound of the peculiar clap reaches its intended audiences, announcing to the world that the hijras have arrived. Instead of trying to pass in conformity with the binary gender system and/or its propriety, hijras' claim to and embrace of their gender-ambiguous and nonconforming identities is unambiguous. The clap is just one of the "unambiguous markers" of such an identity.[20]

While felicitation is one feature, the power to disrupt and communicate anger is another hallmark of loud hijra claps. When hijras complain about other hijras or highlight some grave issue that bothers them, the incessant clapping goes with their verbal banter. The angrier the hijra gets, the louder and repetitive the claps become. While the

hollow clap guides internal relations within the community, it is in their relations with the world outside of the community that the clap becomes particularly interventionist. The clap is invoked at the time of crisis or when the outcomes are not according to hijras' desires. For example, Gayatri Reddy narrates a scenario, from her fieldwork in India, when she encountered a group of hijras in the marketplace asking a shop owner for money; they started clapping and hurling abusive epithets on being refused payment.[21] She argues that clapping allows hijras to "proclaim their status publicly, acknowledging their stigma, and playing on it."[22] It is a common practice for hijras to beg on traffic signals in cities in Pakistan, now that their tradition of going to homes and neighborhoods for alms collection has declined. They often dress up in their colorful attires, wear make-up, often garish, and clap to present their flamboyant identity to the public for the purpose of begging. However, the public does not always treat them with respect. When a confrontational situation transpires, they bring their claps and verbal assault to their defense. Similar tactics are used by those in the dancing profession. I attended a dance performance function, where a young guy was constantly teasing and harassing a hijra performer. Annoyed by young boy's remarks and teasing, the performer clapped and hurled abuses that took care of the boy's rowdy behavior. Pamment locates interventions in hijras' attempts to participate in mainstream politics in Pakistan. Summarizing her analysis of hijra interventions, Pamment

contends that “amidst the ruthless power play, crass corruption, and cold injustice, hijraism mocks the pageantry of pomp and ruptures the façade of the political show with a hollow clap.”[23]

In the hollow clap resides hijras’ agency. Instead of being docile subjects, they mobilize their claps and other discursive strategies to intervene in public spaces in order to turn the social order in their favor a bit. If they don’t succeed, then they merely disrupt the normative social order and challenge notions of middle/upper-class respectability with their hollow claps. The majoritarian sphere treats them as human surplus, they recode the surplus imaginary through the excesses of their own body and bodily gestures. However, excesses, such as the hollow clap, are not merely spectacles; they carry interventionist potentialities. Like various other activist gestures, hijra clap works to “push, jam, open, block, and twist social forces in the material world.”[24] Arguments that gestures “signal a refusal of a certain kind of finitude” and are “forms of self determination” reflect in hijras’ employment of the clap in everyday struggles as well as overall identity formation.[25] The clap is an ephemeral evidence that indicates strength, playfulness, pragmatism, and resourcefulness of those on the margins. My aim in presenting this ephemeral evidence is not to conflate marginality with authentic nativism or to glorify the purity of traditional formations but to demonstrate how hijra identities are lived and performed everyday in ways that can be deemed both political and modern despite their locality/regionality.

However, it is the discourses of mainstream visibility that I turn to now to demonstrate shifts in the way everyday politics is reimagined.

Value-Coding Marginality

In 2017, an online awareness campaign was launched from Pakistan by a transnational not-for-profit organization called Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTN) to create awareness of trans issues and address transphobia across South Asia.[26] The campaign presents the argument that people appropriate the hollow clap to ridicule and tease transgender people, and hence there is a need to change it to a normative clap as a metaphor for change in mindsets. Launched on human rights day in December 2017, the #ChangeTheClap campaign is a short public service message video of about ninety seconds duration. The video differs from other re-presentation of hijras and transgender people in documentaries and news stories in that it is entirely directed and scripted. Produced by an advertising agency, the video relies on a simple narrative structure of presenting a dilemma followed by a resolution, characteristic of advertisements that usually present a product as a solution to some consumer problem. Like advertisements, the video is shot entirely in the controlled environment of a studio with elaborate lighting, art direction, sound recording, and other elements of the production system dispensed to produce a message according to the script. The script in advertising usually responds to and provides visual

interpretation of a written brief provided by a client. In the case of the campaign, the script translates the aims of APTN for raising awareness of transgender issues in South Asia.

The video starts with the images of children playing cricket in a fictitious playground, set up in a studio. When hijras/transgender women walk by, children start mimicking their hollow clap. They tease them through incessant clapping and call them *chakka* (a derogatory word, meaning effeminate). Helpless hijras counter them by saying, "Please, get away." While people may employ derogatory terms such as *chakka* for hijras, which can't be condoned, we also know that hijras don't use pleasantries; they are known for taking on their harassers often through verbal assault and the use of choicest expletives.[27] However, the hijras falling prey to children's teasing is exacerbated by male security guards who physically push them out of the playground, touting that they are not allowed in the *sharif* (respectable) neighborhood. While some people are reluctant to engage with hijras, we also know that hijras have historically relied on the practices of *badhai* and *toli*, going to different neighborhoods and friendly households and asking for alms. However, in order to establish and represent victimhood, the campaign relies on tropes that caricature hijras, men, and even male children. The two short sequences that follow show hijras becoming victims of harassment of mostly men, with no agency to take them to task. They are presented as victims of desires of men who want to use them for their sexual needs.

While documentaries present them as hypersexual (see chapter 2), hijras are otherwise projected as non-sexual and non-desiring subjects. All the sequences are strategically pronounced by close-up images of hollow claps, associated with hijras but appropriated by harassers to abuse them. Surely, some people mimic hollow claps but they also mimic their gait, gesticulation, raspy voice, and other mannerisms. The appropriation of the hijra clap is thus not an adequate reference and the campaign may be termed catachrestic, "a concept-metaphor without an adequate referent."[28] The narrative simplifies the complexities of real life scenarios to produce hijra/trans lives along a "singular identity plane of victimhood."[29] While documentary and journalistic narratives also produce hijras as victims, the campaign differs from them in that it offers a resolution to the dilemma of victimhood.

Morocom argues that "the victim trope places people in a position of being less than human or a 'violated human,' though potentially restorable to the universal, human level by being 'saved.'"[30] The campaign also functions to save hijras. Thus, the conundrum of victimhood is magically resolved by "Pakistan's first trans model" walking on a ramp and challenging men with her glamorous modelling profession. The ramp is the platform which provides the transgender model to make banal proclamations to men, constituting the majority of the audience: "Never thought people like us could get this far, right?" The model then asks people to change the appropriated hijra clap into

normative applause, which the campaign claims will change their mindsets. The triumphant music follows and the video displays images of a transwoman engineering student, a transman activist, and a transwoman/hijra social worker, and the trans woman model, to help them align gender variance with notions of respectability. The trans model, who in real life is loosely connected to the hijra community and functions outside of their kinship system, becomes literally the model of success and self-actualization.[31] However, one has to ask how certain bodies become legible in mainstream and/or glamorous careers. Dan Irving reminds us that only certain bodies deemed "normal, healthy, able, and productive with the potential to become respectable citizens become deserving of social recognition."[32] The campaign projects similar hegemonic and neoliberal ideas of autonomous self-cultivation ignoring multiple vectors of systemic oppression that hijras and/or trans identifying people face in South Asia and beyond. As Dutta and Dasu contend that social change is usually wrapped up in feel good stories of aspirations and upward mobility, the campaign follows that same model.[33] While the campaign presents a commonsensical, non-political, image-centric, and affective conquest of marginality, it points to a corporatized NGO/non-profit infrastructure implicated in its visibility discourse.

The Affective Economy of Visibility Politics

#ChangeTheClap campaign is produced for APTN (Asia Pacific Transgender Network), a regional not-for-profit organization based in Bangkok, for transgender people across Asia and Pacific region. The Asia Pacific Transgender Network follows principles of advertising and branding to advance its rights-based politics. In this sense, it is like many LGBT nonprofits that "increasingly articulate queer identity and issues through the corporate language of logic models, return on investment, efficiency and branding."[34] This is exemplified in APTN's employment of Ethica, an agency that specializes in social marketing, corporate responsibility, and cause communications to manage its brand identity.[35] Ethica has been involved in creating branding identity elements such as APTN's circular and colorful logo, which it defines as powerful and positive, a web-based hub, and engagement strategies.[36] A well-designed and well-strategized web hub perhaps means that the call to action is displayed upfront. Like non-profits that "monetize the idea of movement in order to capture the heart and pockets of potential donors,"[37] the first thing one comes across on APTN's website is the display of trans bodies holding rainbow-themed paraphernalia with calls for donations accompanying the images. For APTN, the politics for transgender rights and requisite fundraising is routed through the

image-system based in brand strategizing and brand identity management.

With its rootedness in branding and marketing for the purpose of foregrounding visibility politics, it is not a surprise that APTN hired a transnational advertising agency, BBDO (Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn) Pakistan, to produce the awareness campaign. While adverting's role has always been "mediating between culture and capital,"[38] its foray in the non-profit sector with marketing and branding for the construction of identities and shaping rights-based politics demonstrates a shift in in the way capital is functioning globally to bring marginality into its domains. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that "identities take on meaning at the precise moment they are recognized as market categories."[39] The incursion of corporate logics into rights-based discourse is perhaps meant to prepare margins for the market. For this purpose, marginality has to be value-coded before it can operate within the logics of capital. The value-coded version of marginality then generates affective responses that circulate in an economy of new social media environments.

During the time the #ChangeTheClap campaign was launched, I conducted ethnographic research with a community of hijras in a lower-class ethnic neighborhood of Karachi. Throughout the month that I spent with the community, none of my research participants either mentioned or talked about the campaign. They didn't share the campaign in different WhatsApp groups where various song-and-dance and other

videos related to the hijra community circulate. Some of my research participants did not have smart phones, while those who had them did not use Twitter or Instagram (where the affective campaign was shared). While they use other social media apps, most hijras do not have the required literacy to tweet or interest to Instagram. The campaign did not have a bearing on this particular community of hijras I worked with not so far away from the circuits of mainstream visibility politics. Hijras and the working-class people among whom they live were clearly not the target of the so-called awareness campaign. Given this, which segment of the market did the campaign target and mobilize with its rhetoric?

Transnational discourses of visibility that travel to to other parts of the world resonate with a particular class of individuals who are moved by affects that ideas of superficial change generate. Patricia Clough defines affects as "the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, engage, and to connect."[40] The campaign made an impact on social media users to help imaginatively engage and connect with the hijra community by circulating the public service message video on Twitter and Instagram. It also provided opportunities for celebrities, opinion leaders, and urban youth to show allegiance to the rights of trans community by demonstrating how to change the clap through short videos. The affective campaign was thus effective at mobilizing the didactic impulse of liberal humanism that circulated through an economy of images, re/tweets, likes, and re/posts as only ideas about

and images of change. The English language press also chimed in and concurred with the campaign's predictable and banal triumph of marginality, divested from any emphasis on historical context or redistributive politics and social justice. Micha Cardenas's concern that "there is no longer a link that can be assumed between transgender experience and radical politics" appears to be true.[41]

While Pakistan's first trans model mobilized the national media and social media circles, when a local news channel hired a transgender woman as a news anchor in March 2018, it made international and national headlines, and social media exploded with "the good news." Soon the stories of other firsts followed, from first trans cab driver to even first trans barista. News and social media and the business sector unanimously celebrated the news of hijras' inclusion in the formal economy from the informal sector that they work in. However, my research in Karachi indicates that dancing and/or sex work continue to function as means of livelihood for majority of hijras (see chapter 5), but market forces are imagined as a site of transformative change. As opposed to broader structural and societal changes, those who transform, self-cultivate, and become productive members of the society, by adopting suitable professions, learning how to speak properly, carrying appropriate demeanor, and containing over-the-top gestures and gesticulations (e.g. a normative clap), is an imaginary triumph. Neoliberalism "manages, contains, and designs identities as particular

kinds of brands," and so trans has become "unique and brandable form of value."[42] However, this value-coding and visibility happen at the expense of devaluation and invisibility of others, directing attention away from oppressive structures of power. Micha Cardenas contends that "the increasing mainstream visibility of transgender people has been brought about by solidifying the line between who is an acceptable trans person and who is disposable."[43] Those capable of bringing about personal change are spectacularized while ineffectual others are rendered disposable.

Hijras also speak for their rights as evident in the formation of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and public protests by them against police brutality and harassment, but they are kept at the margins of the visibility politics. They are brought into mainstream domains as victims to invoke pity and their lives are presented as tragic to invoke pathos unless they transform through personal efforts. "A centralized and tiered structure of social movements, with funders, NGOs, activists, and scholars based in Western or postcolonial metropolises at the top and small CBOs near the bottom" does not result in "egalitarian exchange."[44] While the oppressive societal structures remain in place, transformed individuals are invited to elegant parties, fashion shows, and embassies and the stories of self-transformation are mass distributed through traditional and new media. Visibility is offered as "the primary path which trans people might have access to livable

lives."[45] However, as Gossett, Stanley, and Burton argue, visibility can be a trap if it seeks domination of hegemonic modalities. Advertising, public relations, and branding are not mobilized to make change happen as claimed: "We help make change happen."[46] They produce the idea of change and affective ways of relating to it. They rely on identity politics in which others and their relations, gestures, and agency simply become collateral damage to its image-system.

Negotiating Visibility Politics

While mainstream visibility politics relies on image-centric and value-coded version of identities, hijras, who constitute the majority of gender variant people in Pakistan, have to negotiate with these new socio-cultural realities. When I asked Sitara Malik what she thinks of the campaign and its appropriation of hijra clap, she diplomatically dismissed the campaign and politely called out the ignorance on the part of those involved in the production. This corresponds with similar findings in Indonesia where *waria*s dismiss their participation in transnational media and documentary productions as insignificant.[47] Like their Indonesian counterparts who think of their partaking in media productions as merely "work (*prestasi*),"[48] hijras also regard mainstream visibility narratives pragmatically, and participate in media productions and NGO organizing matter-of-factly. Like *waria*s, hijras in Pakistan also increasingly ask for money or in-kind compensation for their

participation in morning shows, documentaries, and news features, knowing very well the demand for such productions.

NGOs and granting bodies also know they need participation from the wider hijra community, otherwise their meetings will be held without proper quorum and their discourse will remain limited to a selected few individuals. I attended one such meeting held in Karachi by a United Nations organization to assess the political participation of the transgender community in the general elections held in 2018. The majority of participants were hijras who attended partly because they were compensated with stipends for their participation and attendance. Hijras realize that the mainstream society, non-governmental sector, and media function to give them some benefits after all. So, in difficult situations like police arrests and harassment, hijras are quick to use the trans visibility discourse in their favor along with their inversionary tactics such as the hollow clap, verbal assault, or exposing their bodies. Similar is their approach toward identity politics of terminologies. For instance, liberal English language media in Pakistan identify all gender variant individuals as transgender, while the national language media employ a rather respectable Urdu term khawaja sira. During my ethnographic work, I did not meet any hijra who raised objections to the use of the new terms. In fact, some of them have gone on media to dismiss local terms in favor of trans, transgender, and TG. CBO/NGO leaders when speaking to funders or state officials also do no use the

local terms and honor the "language of political representation."[49] Hijras' approach is thus "utilitarian," like other gender variant local formations in different part the world.[50] They play along and against the dominant formations as long as they can sustain their own lifeworlds. While those on the margins see their exploitation not as an end but a means to the end of sustenance of their lives, and indicates "everyday resources with which they draw on their tenacious wills and creative energies."[51] However, as Dutta and Roy argue, the production of scalar and hierarchical structures need to be dismantled, in order for an egalitarian order to prevail.[52]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted how local/regional cultures are inventive and resourceful in their lived realities. However, the non-profit sector's value extraction from and value-coding of the margins can't be ignored. I have indicated how rights-based politics in the non-governmental/nonprofit sector are influenced by the corporate logics of branding, advertising, marketing, and selling, producing ideas of superficial change. A meaningful change requires cognizance of the power structures that insidiously seep into transnational transgender visibility politics in the nonprofit/non-governmental sector. It also requires an understanding of the complexities, as Marcia Ochoa contends that "to design interventions, it is important to understand and

respect the symbolic, economic, political, and interpersonal environments that are pertinent to the transformation one wants to effect."[53] A superficial visibility politics instead of opening doors for everyone harnesses the fittest and erases the relations of the most vulnerable. If transnational trans narratives have to be productive of broader changes that materially impact everyone on the margins, then the visibility politics have to be reimagined. Spivak suggests "reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding."[54] Micha Cardenas argues for "new modes of visibility or methods that do not prioritize visibility."[55] In order for visibility politics to be materially effective for the margins issues of redistribution and equity have to be addressed alongside image management.

Notes

[1] Various governmental and non-governmental bodies are involved in HIV/AIDS prevention program in Pakistan. These organizations include: The United Nations, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and National AIDS Control Program under the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination of Government of Pakistan.

[2] See, Gayatri Reddy, "Geographies of Contagion: Hijras, Kothis, and the Politics of Sexual Marginality in Hyderabad" *Anthropology & Medicine* 12, no. 3 (2005): 255-70; Adnan Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia" *Asian Studies Review* 36, no. 4 (2012): 495-513.

[3] Myrl Beam, *Gay, Inc.: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 11.

[4] Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, "Known Unknowns: An Introduction to Trap Doors," in *Trap door: Trans Cultural*

Production and the Politics of Visibility (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), xv.

[5] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Marginality in the Teaching Machine," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 53-76.

[6] C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, "Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife," in *Transgender Studies Reader 2* ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 67.

[7] Benjamin Hegarty, "The Value of Transgender: *Waria* Affective Labor for Transnational Media Markets in Indonesia," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2017): 81.

[8] Some hijras continue to navigate their lives in hijra community and mainstream society as some of them either choose to or have to get married and have children.

[9] Farsi is a code language developed and used by hijras; It has got nothing to do with Persian/Farsi language. In Bangladesh, this language is called *ulti vahasa* (reverse language), see Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation," 495-513. When I started ethnographic work in December 2017, I had to learn the hijra argot in order to communicate with the community.

[10] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.

[11] Kira Hall, "'Go Suck Your Husband's Sugarcane!' Hijras and the Use of Sexual Insult," in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality* ed., Kira Hall and Anna Livia (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1997), 431.

[12] Claire Pamment, "Hijraism: Jostling for a Third Space in Pakistani Politics," *TDR: The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 54, no. 2(2010): 29-50.

[13] Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation," 495-513.

[14] Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (NY: NYU Press, 2014), 2.

[15] Ibid., 6.

[16] Robert Diaz, "*Biyuti* from Below: Contemporary Philippine Cinema and the Transing of *Kabaklaan*," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5 no. 3(2018): 404.

[17] Ibid., 4.

[18] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York UP, 2009), 67.

[19] Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation," 505.

[20] Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 136.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 137.

[23] Pamment, "Hijraism," 48.

[24] Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures*, 4.

[25] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65; Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures*, 25.

[26] See https://sogicampaigns.org/portfolio/clapping-transphobia-away-in-south-asia/

[27] See Hall, "Go Suck Your Husband's Sugarcane," 430-460.

[28] Spivak, "Marginality in the Teaching Machine," 60.

[29] Sarah Lamble, "Retelling Racialized Violence, Remaking White Innocence: The politics of Interlocking Oppressions in Transgender Day of Remembrance," in *Transgender Studies Reader 2* ed., Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 31.

[30] Anna Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

[31] The trans-model has recently been accused of sexual assault and has been removed from the committee of *Aurat* March (Women's March) in Pakistan. See https://images.dawn.com/news/1182853

[32] Dan Irving, "Normalized Transgression: Legitimating the Transsexual Body as Productive," in *Transgender Studies Reader 2* ed., Susan Stryker

and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 24; Gossett, Stanley, and Burton, "Known Unknowns," xv.

[33] Mohan J. Dutta and Amber Dasu, "Subalternity, Neoliberal Seductions, and Freedom: Decolonizing the Global Market of Social Change," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 18, no. 1(2018): 81.

[34] Beam, *Gay, Inc.*, 11.

[35] See https://www.ethicastrategy.com/

[36] Ethica defines APTN's logo as: "A powerful and positive brand logo represents the coming together of a diverse range of people, ideas and lives into a harmonized, circular form." Ethica has been involved in "preparing the brand strategy, designing a web-based hub and complementing with engagement strategies to support the important work of transgender-related agencies like APTN." See https://www.ethicastrategy.com/asia-pacific-transgender-network.html

[37] Beam, *Gay, Inc.*, 6.

[38] See William Mazzarella, *Shoveling smoke: advertising and globalization in contemporary India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[39] Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Free Self-Esteem Tools?: Brand Culture, Gender, and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign" in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*, ed., Rupali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (New York and London: NYU Press, 2012), 51.

[40] Patricia Ticineto Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

[41] Micha Cardenas, "Dark Shimmers: The Rhythm of Necropolitical Affect in Digital Media" in *Trap door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press), 170.

[42] Banet-Weiser, "Free Self-Esteem Tools," 42; Emmanuel David, "Capital T: Trans Visibility, Corporate Capitalism, and Commodity Culture," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 1(2017): 30.

[43] Cardenas, "Dark Shimmers," 170.

[44] Aniruddha Dutta and Raina Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 335.

[45] Gossett, Stanley, and Burton, “Known Unknowns,” xv.

[46] See https://www.ethicastrategy.com/

[47] See Hegarty, “The Value of Transgender,” 78–95.

[48] Ibid., 81.

[49] Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India,” 330.

[50] Diaz identifies a utilitarian approach of the *kabaklaan* in the Philippines. See Diaz, “*Biyuti* from Below,” 404–424.

[51] Ibid., 413.

[52] Dutta and Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India,” 330.

[53] Marcia Ochoa, “Perverse Citizenship: Divas, Marginality, and Participation in "Loca-lization,"” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (2008): 160.

[54] Spivak, “Marginality in the Teaching Machine,” 63.

[55] Cardenas, “Dark Shimmers,” 178.

V. PROBABLE LIVES & PERFORMING SELVES:

WORK, PLAY, AND POPULAR CULTURE IN HIJRA LIVES

In 2016, I began my field research in Karachi for a project on vernacular language cinema and gendered spectatorship. Part of this work entailed visiting a local cinema house in an ethnic neighborhood of Karachi that plays Pashto language films exclusively.[1] It's a single screen cinema that caters to local and migrant men of mostly Pashto-speaking ethnicity in the multi-ethnic city of Karachi. Like the genre of Bollywood in the subcontinent, Pashto films are also interspersed with song and dance sequences, but often raunchier. This cinema's audience is different as it is comprised of men only. Men hoot, shout, and whistle in reaction to the images on the screen as part of their synesthetic experience. A unique feature of this particular cinema is live dance performances during the evening and, sometimes, late-night show times. During some of the song and dance sequences, young and petite performers dance in front of the screen on the extended platform, built like a stage (See Figure 4). The silhouetted dancers seem ambiguously gendered in the darkness of the hall. A man sitting next to me one night was giving thousand rupee bills (equivalent to about $10 bill in value) to one of the performers, as giving reward money to singers, dancers, and

other performers as is customary in South Asia. I asked the man about the dancers and requested that he introduce them to me. He told me that they are hijras/khawaja siras but dressed in male attire, who dance part time in cinema to earn some money. He introduced me to one of the dancers, who initially thought I was a client, interested in developing sexual/romantic liaisons with her. Eventually, I became friends with some of them.

Figure 4: Screening at a Pashto cinema hall in Karachi - 2016 (Photo by the author)

I visited the cinema multiple times between 2016 and 2018 where these young hijras, ranging in age from teens to early twenties, danced

regularly. All the hijras congregated in the large open-air courtyard outside the hall at the premises of cinema. The dancers paid for the full ticket to be at the premises but entered the cinema hall when they all wanted to dance to a particular song. After the performance, they would come out of the cinema hall in the courtyard and chit chat, crack jokes, take selfies, and socialize with each other. Some of them would go back inside from time to time to sit with a prospective client or acquaintance who desires sexual/romantic relations with them. The cinema house is a place for these dancers to socialize and work. The total number of dancers on a typical day varies: sometimes, usually weekends, there are up to ten to twelve dancers and other times there are only a couple. When about a dozen performers dance on stage they look like a discordant group as their dance is neither in sync with the images on the screen nor with each other, they follow the music to pattern their individual dance steps. Spectators' reaction to the images on screen and the performances in front also varies. Some men give them money in appreciation of their dance performance and some apparently are not bothered with what's happening on the stage. However, silhouetted bodies surely compete with on-screen images. Sensations flow from gendered bodies on screen and those performing live. Off-screen performers borrow from and impinge on the dance and song on the screen and re-channel it to their admirers through their live performance.

The use of the space of cinema and technology of film beyond its intended use reflects hijras' inventiveness. Brian Larkin argues that when media get taken up and used in everyday life, "they spin off in wholly unexpected directions, generating intended and unintended outcomes."[2] The intended purpose of Pashto films is to amuse and entertain its spectators, but hijra dancers make use of the cinema space and movie-viewing leisure-time to find their own performance space and temporality. This assemblage-like formation with and the deterritorialization of the existing media and other social structures is a hallmark of hijra social formations. As Amit Rai argues "the assemblage self-organizes its unpredictable and patterned trajectories through forms of popular unruliness,"[3] hijra performance and work practices follow similar pattern of carving their own space and bringing forth their own temporalities. By their ingenious use of normative space and time and existing and emerging media structures and forms, they find ways of belonging in the mainstream society that otherwise excludes them from all normative activities. However, the space and time they create for themselves is ephemeral and subject to reterritorialization. In the case of Pashto cinema, they may face regulations by the cinema owners or government bodies or societal forces who may object to their dancing practices at the cinema premises. Or some commercial forces may appropriate, objectify, or commodify their dancing in front of the screen.

Similar regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms keep appearing with respect to hijras' association with dancing and sex work.

In July 2018, a rather unknown Pakistani news channel hired a transgender news anchor and caused quite a stir in the national and international media.[4] The media hailed this as a positive step in breaking barriers of entry to respectable professions for hijra/transgender people in Pakistan who are typically associated with the disparaged professions of begging, dancing, and sex work. While employment of hijra and transgender people in the mainstream professions is indeed a positive development, but what constitutes "respectability" remains out of reach for the majority of hijras who face multiple vectors of oppression and systemic structural exclusions from the mainstream society. While begging is discussed in the media discourses, dancing is often dismissed as undesirable and sex work remains an unthinkable offense. My research participant Sitara Malik once mentioned how her Community Based Organization (CBO) struggles to find new employment sources for hijras but they keep on going back to dancing and sex work. The ground realities of hijras' involvement in dancing and sex work demonstrates that these occupations are an integral part of hijra lives. Hijras make use of these supposedly undesirable activities to create space for themselves in mainstream society. This chapter details how dancing, sex work, and other performance related aspects make hijras lives probable. While hijras' participation in wider economic realms through their employment

in various formal sectors should be celebrated, I argue that dancing and sex work may be also recognized as legitimate work.

The Field

When I started visiting Pashto cinema house, some hijras, who initially didn't know that I was doing research asked me, "Why are you coming into this 'field'…. you look decent." They invariably used the English word "field" to define their lifestyle that often involves dancing and sex work.[5] "Don't come into this field…. it's a bad field," one hijra, who perhaps internalized the stigma associated with dancing and sex work, advised me. Often hijras explained their time in the field in terms of the number of years, as in "I have spent ten years in the field." When they used the word field, they didn't particularly referenced dancing or sex work but talked about their life in general. Soon I realized that they consider being hijra an occupation, and dancing and sex work are incidental to it. Hossain explains that the occupation of hijras is *hijragiri*, meaning learning the rituals and customs of being a hijra,[6] and thus also involves learning means of earning a livelihood. For *bissu* or male transvestites in Indonesia, Boellstroff also argues that being *bissu* is a profession: "Unlike being male or female, you have to have a special calling and engage in training (memorizing rituals and phrases for instance) to become a *bissu*."[7] Similarly, based on his ethnographic work in Bangladesh, Hossain (2018) considers the mastery of the argot as "one

of the sure signs of one's being a hijra."[8] When Hossain learnt hijra argot, they started treating him as one of them.[9] I experienced more acceptance among hijras in Karachi with my mastery of hijra argot. Various trainings are crucial to becoming a hijra, including learning about hijra's typical means of livelihood.

People are often defined by their field – doctor, artist, scientist, etc. While being a doctor or an artist defines the field, profession, or occupation, the source of income could be slightly different; for example, working at a hospital versus private practice, or managing an art gallery versus making art. The source of earning emanates from and is incidental to the core field that one adopts full time. Just as one receives training, develops expertise in, and learns rules and regulations of surviving and succeeding in a profession, hijras learn the ropes of hijrahood which includes technologies of gender, means of livelihood, community customs, and survival techniques. Learning about modes of earning is a part of becoming a hijra and being in the field of hijrahood. The means of livelihood used to be *badhai* (performance on the occasion of child birth and marriages in return for money)[10] or *toli* (collecting alms),[11] but increasingly most hijras, at least in Pakistan, tend to become erotic dance performers and/or sex workers. Hijras choose between dancing, sex work, begging, and collecting alms like an artist would choose between managing an art gallery or making art after learning the ropes of the field. While the rights-based discourse and the media

valorize other “respectable” modes of earning, ground realities for majority of hijras remain embedded in dancing and sex work that not only are sources of livelihood but are integral to becoming a hijra, considering the systemic exclusions they continue to face despite legal acceptance and the rhetoric of change. In the subsequent sections, I draw from my ethnographic field work to explain these two aspects of hijra lives and argue that denigrating dancing and sex work erases some key relations of hijra lives.

Dancing at “Functions”

My research participlant Andaz, in her early 40s, identifies as hijra/TG. She has grown her hair long, a feature of femininity in South Asia, has no facial hair but has not undergone any other surgeries. This means that she is *akwa*, a hijra with a phallus. Her identity card and passport identify her as male despite that fact that the state of Pakistan now allows third gender identification on self-authority. Andaz also has three children from a heterosexual marriage. Many hijras in South Asian context may be heterosexually married,[12] as marriage does not impede the process of becoming a hijra. Andaz’s family lives in a rural town away from the city of Karachi where she works full-time as an outreach worker for a local NGO, part time as a sex worker, and sometimes gets gigs arranging dance performances, known among hijras as “functions.” She lives alone in the slums where she rents a portion of an apartment-style

run-down building comprising one-bedroom with a make-shift kitchen and a bathroom. Other hijras also rent similar one-bedroom structures in the same area either individually or with others. She lives alone but other hijras in the kinship network and clients visit all the time.

I visited Andaz's flat often in the evenings during weekdays and afternoons on weekends due to her day job. One August weekend in 2018, Andaz received advance money of Rs 3000 (equivalent of $25) for arranging three performers for a "function" in a low-income area of Karachi. The function was arranged by a few close friends of a soon-to-be-married man, similar to the concept of bachelor party in which friends enjoy some erotic dancing before the wedding day. August is a busy season for such functions and hijra performers are in high demand during this season. Past her prime, Andaz does not perform publicly anymore and acts more in the capacity of a manager. After receiving advance money, Andaz began frantically calling prospective hijra performers, in-demand due to their beauty, style, charisma, dancing skills, or a good combination of all of these traits. A number of performers refused initially due to their prior engagements and commitments. By about sunset time, Andaz was able to recruit three hijras to perform. The performance time was set for midnight. Andaz finally confirmed her client the time and asked for good arrangements such as a stage and good sound system, which the client agreed to provide. I decided to go back to my home, eat dinner, and come by

midnight to accompany them. When I arrived by midnight, performers - dressed in their traditional attires with shimmering embroidery - were still giving last touches to their hair and make-up. The three performers differed in terms of their appeal and state of transition. Performer A had undergone surgical operations, grown her hair long, and considered extremely beautiful by local standards. Performers B and C were in their early stages of transition. They had not undergone any surgical changes and wore wigs and padded bras. There were two other teenage hijras in men's clothes accompanying them as helpers. One of them was also putting on basic make-up for the event while the other covered her face with a scarf. By half past twelve, Andaz got a call from the client asking about their whereabouts. Another phone call, some frenetic shouting, and the use of profanities made all of us leave the house to search for transportation. I arranged an Uber and Andaz hailed a three-wheel drive, rickshaw, for a quick 15-minute ride to the location for the seven of us: Andaz the manager, three performers, two helpers, and myself.

The client and his male friends greeted all of us. I was introduced as the team's photographer, as I was carrying a camera. The bare-minimum stage set up was at a street corner lined by numerous small one to two-floor town houses and small shops in a congested low-income neighborhood. Some men were seated in the spectator area lined with chairs. On one side of the stage, sound system was set up. The area next to the sound system was designated for us where we all sat. Performers

were smoking, combing, and giving a few more touches to their make-up. The stage set up was flimsy and so Andaz requested her hosts to move the rugs from the stage to the floor so that performers can dance freely and crowd can interact with them easily. As a warm up, the teenage helper, who had put on make-up, performed to an upbeat Bollywood song. However, the crowd was waiting for the main performers. The first performer sought Andaz's permission to perform, touched her knees and the stage/floor as a sign of respect before starting. When she finally started, the crowd got somewhat excited. She paid special attention to the groom sitting in a special chair and danced around him. People started clapping and enjoying the dance performance. Soon the second performer joined, more adult men, teenage boys as well as male children joined, cheered, and hooted. Some women were looking at the performances from the balconies of their homes. Eventually, performer A came and wooed the audience with her dancing skills and beauty. The audience showered the performers with reward money as they danced one by one. Helpers were collecting the money and handing them over to Andaz, who was stashing them in a tote bag. This reward money that admirers throw on performers is their main source of income and is a traditional way of rewarding and appreciating singers and dancers in South Asia. The better the performance, the more money is given. Some male admirers give money when they fancy a particular performer (See Figure 5). As the night went by, dancers performed one-by-one as well as

together. Crowds became more excited and threw more money on the performers. I had to leave for home by 3:00 am but Andaz told me that the “function” ended by 4 am without any major issues, which is sometimes the case as men get drunk and fight. The hosts arranged for the team’s departure in cars. Andaz told me that she distributed the money among the performers and gave helpers about $15 each and distributed about $30-35 among all performers and kept slightly more for herself. Performer A stayed with Andaz and other two left for their own homes, as they lived in the same area. When I met them the next day, they all sounded very satisfied with the event.

Figure 5: A hijra performer (in the center) surrounded by young and old male admirers- 2018 (Photo by the author)

This is the scenario of a typical "function" where most hijras perform (erotic) dance on popular and raunchy songs for a majority of male audience. When one asks hijras who dance in different parts of Pakistan, a majority of them would say "I do functions." Function is an English term that hijras use to define their livelihood and employment in dancing profession. Oxford English (online) dictionary defines function as a "formal social event; an organized social gathering."[13] The use of the word "function" by hijras approximately fits this definition, as they are employed to perform erotic dancing in various social gatherings, albeit of mostly men. Social gatherings vary from pre-wedding celebratory occasions to stag parties. Hijras are usually invited as a group; they dance one by one or all together for men in the audience who appreciate their talent and/or beauty by giving them money. The space and time of the function is ephemeral, as they are held in make shift spaces such as the corner of the street, a vacant plot in a neighborhood, or the top floor of a building/house. They are not built spaces like cinema houses or theater halls and are not bound to the designated showtimes or performance slots that engender regular cinema going or theater audiences. However, despite their ephemerality, there is a spectatorship for (erotic) dancing, also often called *mujra*. Men who want to see the *mujra* or erotic dancing are called "*tamashbeen*" (spectators who like watching *tamasha* or spectacle). *Mujra* is typically performed by women

on popular and film songs, but hijras have always been in demand for such performances.

Hijras have been employed for dance performances in various entertainment venues. For example, hijras danced at local folk theaters before the designated show.[14] They also danced in local circuses and *maut ka kuan* (the well of death or motordrome) set up in local festivals and carnivals before the performances of male and female acrobats, stunt folks, bike riders, and magicians.[15] They have also known to be a part of performance cultures in red light areas. Louise Brown estimated that hijras comprised about ten percent of the population in brothels and dancing salons in Lahore's famous red light district.[16] Hijras have been employed in contemporary Punjabi theater, which is primarily driven by women performers.[17] Recently, a transgender performer/model was hired for an erotic dance sequence (usually known as an item number) in a commercial film.[18] In academic accounts, hijras have historically been associated with street based or *badhai* (birth and marriage celebrations) dancing but their performances at functions is hardly discussed. The aspects of performing at functions are sometimes scrutinized in journalistic accounts and documentaries but hijras are not valued as cultural producers and performing artists. Anna Morcom attributes the marginalization of erotic performers –female and transgender – in India as only prostitutes and not performers to modern discourses of rights and liberalism that deploy savior trope and to the bourgeois morals and

the middle class control of national identity through culture.[19] Morcom argues that "the construction of public erotic performer as not-performers has been underpinned and often accompanied by moves to 'save' them from 'indignity' or 'exploitation' and has justified countless campaigns or initiatives that have undermined their livelihood and socio-cultural identity."[20] Morcom traces these exclusionary discourses to the British colonial rulers and their promulgated laws that identified female and hijra performers as prostitutes and criminals. Similar formations can be traced in Pakistan that marginalize public/erotic dancing and do not regard it as performing arts. The cultural production of "function" requires skills, charm, star appeal, and public relations management like any other performances, but hijra performers and their functions are not given any legitimate status.

Performance and Play in Everyday Life

Most of those who become part of hijra kinship systems end up as performers but dancing is not something that they do to earn money only; it is integral to the field of hijrahood. My research participants would break into filmic dance steps every now and then with or without background music. A sound system with large speakers and/or LCD screen to listen to and watch latest films, film-based music, and popular songs are essential for hijras who otherwise live with minimal furniture and make-shift arrangements. Most of their life events and celebrations

involve dancing. Jeff Roy contends that music and dance are central ways of reflecting and engendering hijra identity, albeit their dancing is socially devalued.[21] Anna Morcom considers dancing as a gendering arena different from sex/gender understandings and situates it in the context of the dynamics of gender, gendered space, dance, eroticism, and the body in South Asia.[22] Based on her ethnographic and historical analysis, Morcom contends that for hijra and *zenana* (*kothi* in India) performers it is "a medium by which maleness rooted in the male body can be transcended, the body can become female."[23] Thus, dancing has a central role in the construction of performing self for hijras.

Dancing is not the only element in the cultivation of a sense of self. Hijra lives heavily depend on and draw from different elements of performance, film, fashion, and popular culture to nurture and sustain their own fabulousness.[24] Richard Dyer explains that "the person is a body, a psychology, a set of skills that have to be mined and worked up into a star image."[25] Hijras work on building their star personas to not just succeed in dancing or sex work but in the field of hijrahood. They choose their own names like screen names of film stars, celebrities, and characters in films. Those who achieve appreciation and star status in the field of hijrahood or become popular in the dancing profession, prefer to be addressed by the honorific title of "Madam," as a sign of respect, similar to the most iconic superstar, singer, and celebrity of Pakistan Noor Jehan, who was always addressed as Madam. Some consider

themselves as imaginary beauty contest title holders of the city they live in, like Miss Karachi or Miss Peshawar. Some call themselves imaginary super models while some who design clothes for each other prefer to be called dress (fashion) designers. All hijras love to pose for the camera, and with cell phones at their disposal they take pleasure in taking selfies alone or with their friends. The walls of most hijra rooms are adorned with their large professionally produced and framed photographs. Thus, appearance and how they mediate their selves are central to hijra ontology.

Hijras painstakingly take care of their appearances and care about how they look. It takes technologies of the dress and somatechnics to construct an appealing appearance. These techniques involve taking care of hair, nails, clothes, jewelry, make-up, and body. While some undergo extensive bodily transformations such as silicone breast implants, most hijras rely on technologies of the second skin. Entwistle argues that dress forms the part of our epidermal schema as a second skin and that the dressed body is also a social body influenced by social and historical techniques, attitudes, and aesthetics. [26] Hijras, however, exceed the social norms to fashion their second skin and to make themselves intelligible. However, the same techniques make them suspects and subjects of moral scrutiny. Extremely negative perceptions persist among educated and middle-class people in Pakistan. For example, I met a teacher of an elite English medium school in Karachi who inquired about

my dissertation project, which I explained is about hijras. While he sympathized with hijras and lamented their marginal status in society, he also pointed me towards one problem with the community. He objected to their sartorial practices and sexualized appearance and mannerisms that they present in public spaces. He thought that their sexualization of the self threatens the middle class values in society and was concerned that men might get carried away by their allure. Their outward appearance and performance practices bothered him a great deal and he recommended me to pay attention to this visibly material aspect of their ontology. However, visibility is precisely what hijras capitalize on and appeal to men who appreciate, admire, and desire their aesthetics.

While hijras present their aesthetics and allure for dancing at functions, it is their own ceremonies such as "*salgirah*" (birthday party or some call it simply party) where their performing selves are at full display. Unlike birthday parties, the event of *slagirah* doesn't coincide with the date of birth. A birthday party is a general celebration of an individual hijra by community members. Some of my research participants called the event "*khel*" (loosely translated as play). The play is constructed by taking elements from the normative society and is patterned on the way heterosexual weddings are performed. The individual hijra, whose party it is, dresses up like a bride – shiny, colorful, embroidered clothes, jewelry, bright make-up, and accessories

that go with it. Friends, gurus and *chelas* (disciples) in the close kinship network also dress-up for the occasion and spend considerable amount of time and money on their outfits and preparation. For most hijras, it is the opportunity to flaunt their dressing, make-up, hairstyles, femininity, dancing, and compete with other fellow hijras in terms of appearance. From intricately embellished, long, and flowing traditional Eastern outfits to minimalistic Western gowns and mini skirts, these sartorial presentations reflect individual personas. Gift exchanged at the occasion is strictly in the form of money. My research participants told me that often parties are arranged for the purpose of exchanging gift money. If one hijra goes to another's party and pays money, then it becomes obligatory on hijras to return the same amount or more on the occasion of another's party. These are some of the communitarian rules of exchange that hijras follows among those who become part of the kinship network.

The theatricality of the "*khel*/play" starts with the arrival of the guests, known as "entry," at the location (usually a wedding hall). An emcee is usually designated for the evening who announces the arrival of guests. The guests come from all over the city and country. The emcee announces the name of the guest/s and often the location where they have come from. Once the announcement is made, hijra guest/s sashays down the hall to greet the host, like they are walking on red carpet or a ramp, to the clicks of the camera/s. The camera crew (usually both still

and video) is hired to record the event. Once all the guests arrive and exchange of gift money is done, the dance performances start. The performers are chosen on the basis of closeness to the host or cultural capital, appeal, charisma, and dancing skills. The emcee announces the names of the performer who chooses popular song to perform on. Hijras and their invited or uninvited male admirers, known as *giryas*, give appreciation money to the performers. Some of these male admirers compete for the attention of particularly skilled and sensual performers. Some of these men also get drunk and/or high on hashish. Hence, often, fights break out leading to various interruptions in the order of the event. Such fights may become so intense that they eventually lead to armed conflicts and culmination of the event. I have attended a party in which the conflict was resolved and another that led to an early (by midnight) and abrupt termination of the event. Some hijras decide to hold their parties at their *dera* (house) to avoid any conflict. However, the norm is to have an elaborate event at an outside location (wedding halls). Now there are YouTube channels that post videos of hijra entry and performances. Thus, hijras assemble various elements such as fashion, dance performances, film/popular music, video/photography, and social traditions/norms to make a bricolage called "*khel*" (play) or "*salgirah*" (birthday party).

The use of the word "*khel*" or play to define the ceremony signifies that it is something that is mainly for hijra's pleasure. Their ceremonies

are both similar to and different from other sanctioned social gatherings such as wedding, engagement, and birthday parties. While other ceremonies are performative in the sense a couple gets married or engaged or a person gets a year older, other than monetary exchange nothing but pleasure and amusement materializes out of hijra's event. This corresponds with Huizinga's conceptualization of play as "never a task" and "only for fun;" "the need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need" and is thus "never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty."[27] There are no necessary duties to accomplish at the party: hijras just have to bring their performing selves and be participants in the revelry. Just as hijra dancers utilize Pashto cinema, they make use of normative spaces of wedding halls to hold their event and draw from normative wedding rituals to construct their play. This play with and through normative codes, spaces, and temporalities make their lives probable. This play is neither political nor resistant, but is one of the many contingencies upon which hijra lives are built and their lifeworlds are sustained.

New Media Assemblages

Since 2015, many YouTube channels have surfaced that showcase videos of hijras dancing at their birthday/*slagriah*, private parties, or functions. Some of these videos are professionally recorded and edited and garner millions of views (See Figure 6). Hijras make use of the

YouTube platform and its "economy of attention,"[28] as it is certainly a source of revenue for the producer of these videos or owners of these channels and YouTube itself. Some hijras have themselves collaborated with professional videographers to create their own channels. While most of these videos appear to be based in big cities in Pakistan, there are some groups that are from small towns. Among such groups was titled Swabi Dance Group from a small city called Swabi in the North Western province of KPK in Pakistan.[29] Most of the videos of the channel featured a group of hijras dancing in either semi-private or public locations in Swabi while all male bystanders watched them perform on songs mostly in the regional Pashto language. Compared to other groups there was less emphasis on glamour in these videos but performers still flaunted their dancing skills, performance of femininity, and physical beauty. As is customary, men showered them with money for their performance. I have been following Swabi Dance Group and other hijra dance channels on YouTube. However, when I looked up Swabi Dance Group in 2019, its account was terminated (see Figure 7). While the digital platform offers the promise of new formations, they are also threatened by its architecture, as new media "interject their own turbulence into the connectivity."[30] However, as is typical with assemblages that resurface, the group reappeared with a different name and continued posting videos. Unlike hijras' limited use of one Pashto cinema, they are making use of the affordances that the Web 2.0 offers for a different kind of

visibility that is not top down and territorializing. These videos project hijras' performing selves in full force and while also creating their demand for functions and/or sex work.

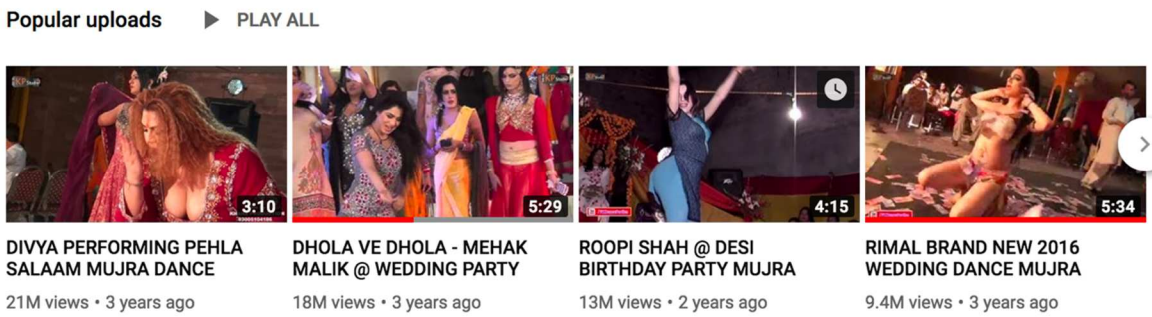

Figure 6: Screenshot of a hijra dance channel on YouTube - taken in 2019

Figure 7: Screenshot of a hijra dance channel terminated on YouTube - taken in 2019

Sex Work as Work: *Paisha*

Hijras who do sex work use the word "*paisha*" for it and those who perform the sex work are called "*paisha-geer*." The word *paisha* means professional work and does not have any connotation, linguistically, that it involves sex. Hijras do not view their work in moralistic terms unless they internalize or reflect on mainstream society's mores about sex. I

have observed in my ethnographic work that they view sex work as work, the labor that they perform for money. For instance, for my research participant Megha sex work is simply a fact of life. Megha lives with her mother on the top floor of the three floor small house she owns in the slums of Karachi. She rents the second floor to other hijras and devotes the first floor of the building for business for herself and two of her *chela* (student/disciple) sex workers. Megha has a cis-gender male partner who knows about her profession and is comfortable with the fact that she is having sex with others for money. They both go out for movies, eat together, enjoy each other's company, and also often fulfill their religious duties, such as prayers, as practicing Muslims. Sex work doesn't discourage them from leading fulfilling personal lives or performing religious duties. Megha knows how to juggle and manage personal life and (sex) work, which requires important sexual and non-sexual skills.[31] For instance, many times she has told new and regular clients who call to talk for pastime that she is not interested in talking. Once a regular client called and asked if he can come visit. Megha asked him to come over right away or anytime as long as he can pay the rates she demands. When the client insisted on lower rates, she told him to "stay wherever you are" (*jahan ho wahin raho*) and not to come. Sometimes, sex workers have to give in to the needs of their regular clients and show flexibility too. A client, who works at a restaurant, once showed up with food in return for Megha's services and she obliged. She was narrating the story

that once she had no money and was afraid that if any *chelas* or friends visit, she will have nothing (usually food or cold drinks) to offer to them as a gesture of hospitality. She found three clients that night out of whom only one had penetrative sex with her while the other two she was able to satisfy with other services. In the end, what mattered was that she was able to get some money for her regular needs.

Hijras have to deal with the contingencies that sex work brings but they treat difficult situations with interpersonal skills demanded in any profession. One evening, I was lounging at my research participant Andaz's flat and chatting with her when two men knocked on her door. Andaz immediately recognized what these men were here for and asked me to go out for a while and wait in a neighbor's lounge area. I said to Andaz that I will come later or another day as I realized that the men were clients. Andaz insisted on waiting for only ten minutes and took me to neighbor's area. She locked her flat entrance and opened it in approximately 15 minutes as the two men left, one of them looked a little disappointed. She told me that one man, a previous client, brought the second man for the first time whom she had quick sex with. However, the previous client also wanted to have sex in return for the favor of bringing a new client. Andaz refused to have sex for free, asked him to wait in the kitchen area, and to come again when he has money. For Andaz who lives alone, dealing with clients is a part of her everyday life. The negotiation skills of sex workers to receive the most amount of money for

the least amount of work are well-known in South Asia and the rest of the world. In her study of courtesans of Lucknow India, Veena Talwar Oldenburg informs us about "secret skill - the art of *nakhra*, or pretense, that courtesans had to master in order to spare no opportunity of coaxing money out of their patron and his friends."[32] Similarly, vendors in different parts of the world "know how to perform sexual and emotional acts in order to satisfy customers, as well as how to maneuver and manipulate."[33] The amount of money hijras make through dancing and sex work with the time and effort invested is incomparable to wage labor and other menial jobs that they may get alternatively. Sex work for hijras is not just about individual work, they support each other by referring clients to each other. Megha often helps other hijras in the neighborhood, working with others and building synergies.

As opposed to lived realities of sex workers, journalistic accounts and media representations project sex workers as victims of clients who are invariably considered "exploiters, colonizers, victimizers, perverts, people with sexual or psychological problems or simply as immoral."[34] Testimonies of sex workers from around the world counter the idea that it is a last resort for them; "some find selling sex more enjoyable than other jobs, as the flexible schedules and independence of the work are attractive to and empowers many."[35] Robin D. G. Kelly's work with African American youth informs us that for some black youth, sex is a form of work to earn money and play to enjoy, indicating a dialectical

link between work and play.[36] Relations of work and play is a part of hijra lives as well. My research participants hardly expressed any self-loathing and shared stories of dealing with clients with humor. Surely, hijras have to deal with extreme violence and many have been murdered in cold blood. However, scholars argue that violence and other forms of criminal exploitation are not inherent features of sex work; instead, "they are produced by structural factors including legal regimes that criminalize prostitution and illegalize migrants, the capitalist organization of the labor process, and gendered and racialized devaluations of work."[37] Pamment's interviews with hijras in Pakistan informs us that religious groups and police officers give them greater harassment than their customers do.[38] The issue at hand is that hijra lives in general and sex work in particular are devalued through a rhetoric of moralism, which doesn't impact hijra lives in any material way.

The sex work as work paradigm is crucial in impacting material realities of hijra sex workers. Melissa Ditmore argues that sex work is affective labor akin to much work done in contemporary capitalism. María Agustín cites "emotional labor of flight attendants, baby sitters, and nannies as admirable demonstrations of sound work ethics" like affective labor under sex work.[39] In some European countries sex workers demand labor rights and rights to organize, as they recognize sex work as a service industry in the market economy.[40] In neighboring

India, Darbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DSMC) is an established organization of sex workers that adopts the “sex work as work” paradigm and involves sex workers in the implementation of programs that are geared toward achieving better working conditions, rather than focus on the morality of sex work.[41] Focusing on improving working conditions such as the right to decline a client, along with health and safety of sex workers such as the training to negotiate the use of condom can actually bring material changes. Therefore, there is a need to emphasize political movement around the identity “sex worker” rather than reforming, rescuing, and saving them.

Sanitized Citizenship

The genealogy of citizenship discourse in regard to dance performers and sex workers can be traced to the British Colonial rule in South Asia. Veena Talwar Oldenburg found the occupational category of “dancing and singing girls” in the tax ledgers and other British colonial records, an indication of the elite status of courtesans under various Muslim rulers before their subsequent marginalization under the British rule.[42] Similarly, hijras, mentioned as eunuchs in documents, who had special privileges in Mughal courts and princely states in pre-colonial India were particularly targeted by the British who criminalized them and declared their singing and dancing obscene acts.[43] The debasement of these professions and class of people started with Contagious Disease

Act (CDA) of 1864 to protect British officers against venereal disease.[44] Marcia Ochoa quotes Briggs and Martini-Briggs in her study of *transformistas* and beauty queens in Venezuela and employs their concepts of sanitary citizenship and unsanitary subjects defined in terms of medical understandings of the body.[45] Classification into sanitary citizenship and unsanitary subjects is tied to the "modern medical relationship to the body, hygiene, illness, and healing."[46] In this sense the promulgation of CDA assigned singing and dancing girls and hijras into the category of unsanitary subjects. With CDA, Anna Morcom also sees an emergence of a rights-based paradigm that structured different players into victims, perpetrators, and saviors.[47] This approach continued into postcolonial South Asia, and for this reason dancing and sex work are denigrated as debased occupations and erotic dance performers and sex worker are relegated as second class citizens.

The state, non-governmental forces, and private media thus promote rights based sanitized citizens and want to rescue unsanitary ones from undesirable professions and wayward ways. Hence, there is a celebratory vibe when hijras adopt respectable and acceptable modes of earning a livelihood. While hijras deserve opportunities in every walk of life, the denigration of dancing and sex work is futile for hijras unless structural social conditions change. The marginalization and criminalization of dancing and sex work may have a debilitating effect on the field of hijrahood as it is integral to their survival beyond rhetorical

presentation of individual achievements. Hossain also likens the current formation to the British colonial policies that criminalized female and hijra sex workers and stigmatized singing and dancing in South Asia. Hossain contends that "the conventional occupations of the hijra are now targeted as archaic and criminal as new initiatives proliferate to transform the hijra into citizens worthy of rights and recognition."[48] Marcia Ochoa argues that being a subject of rights is conditioned by the accomplishment of the aesthetics and behavior of a "good citizen" and hence calls for the transformation of the very notions of citizenship.[49] In human rights discourses, the sex worker is referred to a subject of rights who has these rights based on the condition of being a human being, not a citizen[50]. Thus sex workers and erotic dance performers are excluded from various mainstream rights-based campaigns that rely on "good" citizenship discourse. Ochoa contends that there are exclusionary practices and limitations in such political imaginaries and so the struggle is for "the right to have rights."[51] Ethnographic studies of female performers and sex workers in Pakistan attempt to humanize them,[52] but there is a need to explicitly argue for citizenship rights which could lead to the recognition of singing, dancing and sex work as legitimate professions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the lives of hijra dance performers

and sex workers in Pakistan who function outside of normative morality and moralism. I have demonstrated how dancing and sex work are integral for hijras to function in the wider society. Hijras negotiate their low social status, lack of cultural capital, and gender variance with their dance performances, sartorial practices, and sex appeal. Dismissed, disregarded, and disparaged within the dominant culture, they carve their space and bring forth their temporality by virtue of excess, badness, abandon, and revelry. They cultivate and embody their transgressive gender and performance aesthetics to gain visibility that makes their lives and livelihoods probable. Their non-normative gender embodiments and performances make room for their own pleasures as well as provide them means of livelihood. Thus, dancing and sex work are modes of professing selves for hijras for the sustenance of life and lifeworlds.

Notes

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[1] Pashto films are typically action-thrillers and revolve around themes of family feuds, bandit fights, and warlordism. See Milan Hulsing, "Pashto Horror Films in Pakistan," *Wasafiri* 19, no. 43(2004): 53-57.

[2] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.

[3] Amit Rai, *Untimely Bollywood: Globalization and India's New Media Assemblage* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2009), 55.

[4] Some of the international news organizations that covered the news worldwide include BBC, CNN, VoA, DW, Reuters, Huffington Post, NBC News, and ABC Australia.

[5] Some English words are often used in everyday employment of national language Urdu and regional languages, even by those who can not formally read and write any language.

[6] See Adnan Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia," *Asian Studies Review* 36, no. 4 (2012): 495-513.

[7] Tom Boellstroff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.

[8] Adnan Hossain, "De-Indianizing Hijra: Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018):326.

[9] Adnan Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition: Hijra, Third Gender and Sexual Rights in Bangladesh" *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 19, no. 12 (2017): 1420.

[10] Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition," 1420; Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub., 1990), 1-3.

[11] *Toli* is term used among hijras in Karachi which involves collecting alms from friendly households and marketplace.

[12] Hossain also informs us that many hijra in Dhaka are heterosexually married men who simultaneously perform the role of "macho" householding men and that of hijra. Hossain, "Beyond Emasculation," 500.

[13] See, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/75476?rskey=tS4pLv&result=1#eid

[14] Fouzia Saeed, *Forgotten Faces: Daring Women of Pakistan's Folk Theater* (Islamabad: National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, 2011), 28.

[15] Ibid.

[16] T. Louise Brown, *The Dancing Girls of Lahore: Selling Love and Hoarding Dreams in Pakistan's Ancient Pleasure District* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2005), 46.

[17] Punjabi theater is currently a commercially viable and self-sustaining entertainment form in the Punjab province of Pakistan. It is known for

bold dances by women performers. See, Claire Pamment, "A Split Discourse: Body Politics in Pakistan's Popular Punjabi Theater," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 1 (2012): 114-127.

[18] The film titled *7 Din Mohabbat in/Love in 7 Days* (2018) was a major flop at box office but the employment of a transgender performer was widely appreciated.

[19] Anna Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-29.

[20] Ibid., 170.

[21] Jeff Roy, "Translating *Hijra* into Transgender: Performance and *Pechan* in India's Trans-*Hijra* Communities," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3-4 (2016): 416.

[22] Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*, 96.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Here I am drawing from Marcia Ochoa who describes *transformistas* in Venezuela as fabulous. See, Marcia Ochoa, "Perverse Citizenship: Divas, Marginality, and Participation in 'Loca-lization,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (2008): 151.

[25] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.

[26] Joanne Entwistle, "The Dressed Body" in *The Fashion Reader* ed., Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2011), 138-139.

[27] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 8.

[28] Laura Horak, "Trans on YouTube: Intimacy, Visibility, Temporality," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 572.

[29] Swabi Dance group was created on May 2015, had 33,000 subscribers, uploaded 200 videos and garnered 2.4 million views to 5000 views.

[30] Rai, *Untimely Bollywood*, 209.

[31] Melissa Ditmore argues that seemingly non-sexual aspects of sex work, such as intellectual skills to make and maintain personal connections, remain largely unexamined, See, Melissa Ditmore, "In Calcutta, Sex Workers Organize," in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed., Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean O'Malley Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 170-186.

[32] Veena Talwar Oldenburg, "Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow, India," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. Summer 90 (1990): 274.

[33] Laura María Agustín, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labor Markets and the Rescue Industry* (London; New York: New York: Zed Books, 2007)*, 68.*

[34] Ibid., 79.

[35] Ibid., *63.*

[36] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 74-75.

[37] Van Der Meulen, Emily, Elya Durisin, and Victoria Love, *Selling Sex: Experience, Advocacy, and Research on Sex Work in Canada* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2013), 18.

[38] Claire Pamment, "Hijraism: Jostling for a Third Space in Pakistani Politics," *TDR: The Drama Review: A Journal of Performance Studies* 54, no. 2 (2010): 32.

[39] Agustín, *Sex at the Margins, 62.*

[40] Ibid., 72.

[41] See, Ditmore, "In Calcutta, Sex Workers Organize," 170-186.

[42] Oldenburg, "Lifestyle as Resistance," 259-260.

[43] Pamment, "Hijraism," 34-35.

[44] Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*, 34-35.

[45] Marcia Ochoa, *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2014), 39-40.

[46] Charles L. Briggs and Clara Mantini-Briggs, *Stories in the Time of Cholera* (University of California Press, 2002), 10.

[47] Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*, 36.

[48] Hossain, "The Paradox of Recognition," 1420.

[49] Ochoa, "Perverse Citizenship," 156-160.

[50] Ibid., 159

[51] Ibid.

[52] See, Fouzia Saeed, *Taboo!: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Brown, *The Dancing Girls of Lahore*.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Before the event of *salgirah* (birthday/celebratory party) of a hijra, a *mehndi* ceremony takes place in which close friends take henna with lit up candles, fruits, and other decorated stuff to the house of the hijra whose *salgirah* is being celebrated (See Figure 8). The event mimics the event of *mehndi* that commonly take place before (heterosexual) wedding ceremonies in Pakistan, and involves taking henna to the bride's house from the groom's and/or vice versa. I attended one such *mehndi* ceremony of a hijra with my research participant Sitara Malik. We reached the friend's house situated two lanes away from the house where we were supposed to go to. All hijras were dressed up for the occasion and henna and other goodies were already decorated (Figure 8). After spending an hour chatting, gossiping, and doing some last-minute make-up, hijras were ready to go in the form of a procession. As we disembarked the narrow stairs, one hijra gave me a plate of henna, with lit up candle, to carry. We all started walking the lanes of lower-middle class neighborhood lined with small town houses. There was a professional *dhol* (double headed drum) player accompanying us, who began beating his drum with sticks and hijras started ululating and dancing. Men, women, and children from the town houses looked out of curiosity at the spectacle of the procession moving forward. People looked

through the widows, peeked from the edge of the boundary walls, stood at their doors, and perhaps admired the procession. In those fleeting moments when the procession moved, hijras certainly claimed the public space and displayed pride in their identity. These were moments of pride, joy, and celebration that their long history of struggle and survival in the society afforded them.

Figure 8: Henna decorations for *mehndi* ceremony at a hijra household - 2018 (Photo by the author)

While hijras rejoice affordances based on their long history of survival in the mainstream society, there are new ways in which their lives are empowered. I realized this when helping a teenage hijra (under eighteen) who was running away from a violent single father and wanted to join the community. Sitara Malik's neighbor and disciple Megha made the teenage hijra her *chela* (disciple), but they wanted to take all legal

procedures under consideration. For this purpose, Megha, myself, the teenager, and another hijra went to the local police station and reported the teenager's dilemmas. At the police station, most police staff (both men and women) were respectful and patiently recorded the teenage hijra's plea. Subsequently, we went to a prominent human rights lawyer's office to seek help and guidance in case any complications developed. The lawyer also met us with respect and guided hijras for any legal requirements. The staff at the office also assisted and helped hijras without any prejudice. While being in a major city like Karachi should also be taken into account, hijras' claim of public services like police and legal advice has resulted from their awareness of their rights. These public service personnel have also become aware of hijra/transgender rights over a period of time. This doesn't mean that various issues facing the hijra/transgender community such as police harassment in every city and town of the country and prejudices of the society at large have dissipated.

I travelled around the city of Karachi with my research participant Sitara Malik on three-wheel rickshaws often. Once when the rickshaw stopped at a traffic signal, another rickshaw with women, teenagers, and children stopped next to us. They looked at us amusingly and kept laughing at and made fun of Sitara Malik. Malik chose to overlook their behavior and feigned ignorance. This indicates that there are still issues of wider acceptance in the society. However, on another day, a rickshaw

driver asked Sitara Malik if her breasts are real (she has had a silicon implant). Sitara Malik instantly quipped that she would let him know if he could tell her if his phallus was real or not. The driver kept quiet after that. While Sitara Malik speaks against oppressive forces – individual or institutional, she is also willing to speak for and support elements that reinscribe the status quo. For example, on a commemorative day for Pakistan's military, Sitara Malik wanted to make a video for online consumption in support of the military forces and dominant nationalistic ideals. All of these different scenarios mentioned in this section summarize what I have explained throughout this dissertation that hijras profess what Afsaneh Najmabadi calls a "contingent self, constituted within particular nodes of relations, through what one does at a given conjunction of networks of affection, work, play and other spaces of social presence."[1] Hijras thus are highly inventive in "narrativising self" through stories that are available or generating new ones for configuring their sense of being in the world.[2] However, a sense of being that's contingent hints at non-teleological goals and assemblage-like formations. In this sense, time for hijras, to borrow from Naveeda Khan, can be conceptualized as becoming, "with its capacity to surprise, to fork in ways that diverge from those expected."[3] Jasbir Puar explains that "an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency,"[4] and gender variant practices also emerge in a complex

web of existing and emerging structures, institutions, organizations, and ways of being. From within this web, I have analyzed the entanglements of media and gender variant practices in this dissertation, and explained how marginality is produced and imagined through various media formations and modalities.

The analysis of various media forms - documentary, films, TV talk shows, affective PR campaigns – suggests that national and transnational media are tied into webs of their systems of production, distribution, reception, formats, and programming. Transnational documentary and/or film still follows Orientalist tradition of producing timeless 'others' for their own consumption. Instead of operating as interventionist ventures, transnational commissioned documentaries function as one of the most problematic of all media forms. Perhaps owing to time and budget constraints and responding to faster production and consumption cycles, commissioned documentaries are not invested in researching on and presenting the complexities of gender variance elsewhere. Similar issues manifest on the national front; Talk shows on television are bound to the limitations of their formats and program structures that only result in the production of endless chatter and noise. These formats and production regimes do not seem committed to visions of social justice and change. Instead, they often function to exercise economic and biopolitical control by (ab)using rights-based language. For instance, affective awareness campaigns are increasingly

brought and produced within the structures of racial capital producing aspirational imaginaries of citizenship, which in turn generate what Jasbir Puar calls new forms of "biopolitical failures" such as trans of color or gender variant practices conceived as local.[5] Even though gender variant communities in Pakistan participate in and become a part of such media formations, the analysis in this dissertation demonstrates that these representations are marginally relevant to their everyday lives.

Media assemblages are generally characterized for "bodying forth new temporalities, rhythms, tempos, and intensive pulsations."[6] However, as Amit Rai contends, they are increasingly "folded into security functions across the abstract machines of societies turning more and more toward control and management, aiming at the production of populations with specifically modulated affective dispositions."[7] In this sense, as Patricia Clough points out, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and gender are not just simply matters of subject identity.[8] Clough explains:

> "they are rethought in terms of the connections and disconnections on a plane of consistency, the interlacing of given materialities of the human body and cultural inscriptions, given over, however, to the speeds of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, to the vulnerabilities of exposure, under- and overexposure to media event-ness, such that politics involve the when, where, or how of acknowledging, elaborating, resisting, or

refusing the visible and invisible markings and effects of desiring production."[9]

Media thus function as unstable assemblages, territorializing and reterritorializing the margins for the purpose of their own eventness. As media's engagements with the hijra/transgender community in Pakistan suggests, people's lives are assembled with the media whether they are connecting with them or not, or as Clough says whether "turn it on or off."[10] However, gender variant practices seem submerged in the messiness of media eventness.

If the media are conceived of as indispensable but are inadequate, then the resolution to the conundrum of the messiness they create perhaps lies in rethinking and expanding the jurisdiction of "imagination" and broadening the horizons of "eventness." Chakrabarty proposes "breathing heterogeneity into the word imagination and to allow for the possibility that the field of the political is constitutively not singular." [11] Thus, there is a need to highlight "other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmares of tradition that modernity creates."[12] However, the reliance on mastery and metanarratives reterritorialize the marginal, residual and tangential and obscure the emergence of new formations, modernities, or multiplicities. Boellstroff explains that "one aspect of the collapse of metanarratives is the possibility of multiple modernities,

alternative to each other and with no overarching expectation of synthesis."[13] Metanarratives and Manichean imaginaries that neatly bifurcate modernity and tradition stabilize territorialized and reterritorialized axes. While new media assemblages, as discussed in chapter 5, are examples of deterritorialization and indicate some self-presentation and preservation for hijras, they are still at the receiving end of structural, epistemic, and physical violence in Pakistan. However, hijras continue to function against the pull of essentialist identity politics and its assimilatory imperative for specific ends, as they bring to the fore a contingent sense of being and make their lives probable.

Note

[1] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 276-277.

[2] Ibid., 276.

[3] Naveeda Ahmed Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.

[4] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 212.

[5] Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[6] Amit Rai, *Untimely Bollywood: Globalization and India's New Media Assemblage* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2009), 183.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Patricia Ticineto Clough, *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 135.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 149.

[12] Ibid., 46.

[13] Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 34.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY OF URDU AND FARSI(HIJRA) TERMS

Aurat	A woman
Akwā	A hijra with male genitals and who has not undergone castration.
Badhāī	The practice of performing on child births and marriages for collecting money in return for blessings
Behroopia	An imposter
Burkā	Stitched outer covering or veil for women
Chādor	Long and unstitched scarf that functions as veil for women
Chakkā	A derogatory term for effeminate men and hijras
Chelā	Student/disciple
Chitāī	A meeting to resolve dispute/s
Dādi	Grandmother
Derā	A hijra household that sometimes function as a community center
Doñgal Patānā	Surgically removing testes only
Eid	The two celebratory occasions in Muslim cultures, one after the holy month of Ramadan and one on the tenth day of Hajj
Firqā	Women's clothing
Giryā	A male lover and admirer of a hijra
Gūrū	A teacher or mentor

Gūrū-bhāī	All hijras related as brothers under a guru
Huqqā pāni band	Prohibition of food and drinks or temporary ban
Khawājā Sirā	A rather respectable Urdu term used for hijras
Khel	Play
Māñ	Mother
Masnuuī	Fake
Mard	Manly man
Mubārak	An Arabic words for blessings
Khotkī	Hijras who wear men's clothes
Nirbān	A hijra who has undergone penectomy and has no male genitals
Pho	End or finish
Potrī/Potrā	Granddaughter/son
Ruh	Soul
Sangat saheliān	Friends in the circle
Shariah	Islamic laws
Sharif	Respectable
Tāli/Tārri	Clap
Toli	The practice of going to households and market for alms
Zenānā	Effeminate men who may or may not dress up in women's clothes

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