Hijra in Stasis

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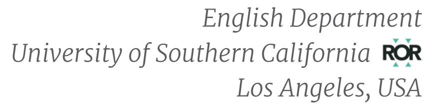

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Introduction: **Maybe a Hijra?**

When I moved to the United States of America (USA), I believed I understood trans politics extensively. I could not identify as trans simply because I was not accessing hormonal, surgical, or any other procedural means to indicate my transition. Transitioning bodies need to possess the relevant paperwork to qualify their transness. While providing access to such legitimisation becomes crucial political work, as it enables marginal bodies to be seen by the state as visible participants in the body politic, it raises the question: What is the appropriate time for someone to call themselves trans?

On a dating app, a profile once sent me a kind message: “Do you identify as a man, woman, or trans?” This compelled me to reflect: what made this person ask this question? This was not the first time I had been confronted with such an inquiry. At airport check-in, I was greeted with “Ma’am” before the attendant leaned in and fumbled to change it to a polite and apologetic “Sir”. At restaurants, the steward addressed me as “Ma’am” and did not fumble, hoping I would not notice the straightened back. I did not mind it; in fact, I enjoyed it. For the longest time, people have pointed out the break of my wrists, the sway of my hips, and the pitch of my voice. In school and at bus stops, individuals would clap their hands, look at me, and call out, “There goes a hijra!” A eunuch, sissy, tranny. Initially, it was embarrassing. However, over time, I recognised that I had more in common with hijras in their hopes and aspirations for transformation and acceptance. Thus, rather than an

insult, it became a signifier of my reality – at once shameful yet delightful.

However, my interrogator's question was more loaded than it appeared on the surface. My appearance certainly elicited some form of curiosity or, rather, confusion regarding my gender. He asked me for a category into which I fit. Dating ultimately is a quest to identify and discern what is pleasurable and what is not. It is a process of asking and answering, which, fortunately or unfortunately, generates definitions. However, I found his vocabulary rather limited. The options presented to me were to choose between the binary, man or woman, or to indicate whether I had a desire to be the other. Trans here is perceived as a movement between the binary. It did not matter that there were differences in the ways individuals experience transness. To insert this knowledge, I told him, "I may be a hijra." Just to confuse him further.

In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India legally recognised hijras, eunuchs and transgender and intersex people as a "third gender" in the National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India judgement. The term "third gender" is another umbrella term that is legally significant, as it compels the state to acknowledge those whose gender specificities differ from the binary. Am I a third gender? Or am I a hijra? My claim to being a hijra is tenuous. Hijras, as Gayatri Reddy notes in With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India, refers to a group of male-bodied individuals who undergo castration in devotion to a goddess, namely Bedraj Mata or Bahuchara Mata. This Hindu goddess of fertility and chastity is depicted perched on a rooster and is known to bless those who perform castration in her devotion. This has allowed hijras in Indian history to be seen as keepers of fertility. Even today, in many parts of India, hijras earn money through the ritual blessing of newborn children for protection. Simultaneously, the term "hijra" derives from the Arabic root hijr or hegira, marking the Prophet's journey from Mecca to Medina in 622 and denoting the onset of the Muslim era. Within the Mughal courts, hijras or eunuchs were an important part of the socio-political scene in the royal chambers, as no men or penises were

allowed in the women's quarters. During British colonial rule, however, hijras were portrayed as baby snatchers and vectors of diseases. Despite the state of their social status, hijras have been an integral part of the social landscape of South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka for centuries. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgement of 2014 asserted that the recognition of a third gender was a means to acknowledge "historical, social and cultural discrimination against transgender communities" and advocated for a willingness to "embrace different gender identities and expressions" (Loh, 2018, p. 40). It can be viewed as a single label that encompasses gender identities such as hijras, kinnars, kothis, zenanas, aravanis, and others, all of which arise from different mythological stories, patronage, indigeneity, and tradition.

Herein lies the tension between legality and sociality. To what extent does legal recognition extricate the nuances of identities that may appear similar but, upon closer inspection, are distinct? I raise this issue to assert that my claim to hijrahood is both credible and tenuous. Reddy (2006, p. 225) would contest my claim by stating that hijra identity is an amalgamation of "performative sexual acts/positions; emasculation; enactments of religious difference through circumcision, clothing style, and eating practices; … ritual affiliation with lineage houses; or individualized 'pleasures and afflictions' – that is central to the constructions of hijra and koti identity". The hijra is a cultural identity that has evolved distinct rules and rituals embodied in gender performance. To be a hijra is not merely to accept an insult or an identifier; it constitutes embodied participation in various acts that have material consequences of poverty and alienation from society. Many of these axes, such as sex work, begging, and castration, refer to specific spaces of marginality. Individuals like me, who possess the privilege of not engaging in certain axes, therefore cannot claim the hijra identity.

Is hijra merely a specific experience? Or can it delineate a broader set of values that defy heteronormativity and reveal gender queerness that is deeply rooted in South Asian culture? In her book, Reddy (2006) demonstrates that hijras have developed

an insular community with a hierarchy and constitution independent of what we perceive as society. A clear demarcation of who belongs and who does not thus becomes significant. However, in this chapter, I am interested in mechanisms of self-identification. Can one claim to be that which one outwardly does not belong to? Are we all trans? Is being trans a recognition of movement from one state to another? Can this be universal? Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) challenge the notion that framings and understandings originating from the Third World are only applicable to the Third World (people of colour and queer), while those from the First World (white and heterosexual) possess universal applicability. These third-world knowledges are often referred to as wisdom, experience, and culture, whereas first-world knowledges are categorised as information, philosophy, and science (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). This highlights an essential aspect of a decolonial way of thinking, in which we unlearn the inheritances of colonial and imperial oppression and the prioritisation of the Eurocentric gaze at the expense of our indigenous perspectives. For me, adopting adjacency to the hijra identity accommodates the shame and beauty that the term elicits without erasing it from my subjective experience.

In Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon (1967), the French psychiatrist, posits that our authenticity and sense of self are jeopardised when we assimilate. He presents the case of Black Antilleans who return to their homeland and adopt the mannerisms and values of white individuals. This departure from the old self generates a hierarchy of what is deemed old and needs to be discarded, and what is new and thus embraced. Fanon (1967) observes that through the adoption of white values and intonations, the Black Antilleans lose their sense of self. But what constitutes this authentic selfhood? Are we born with it? Is it instilled in us during childhood? Or do we, over time, lose parts of ourselves and acquire new ones? I raise this topic because I am interested in asserting that our indigenous, local, and decolonial identities require space, while simultaneously recognising that we cannot extricate ourselves from the interconnectedness of the world in which we live. We must

thus negotiate our identities. Does this imply a certain form of assimilation? Is it authentic to remain what one is or to remain true to one's changing environment? Fanon's understanding of identity formation is crucial because we inhabit a world in which we are constantly being othered or othering others. What would assimilation and authenticity look like in such a world? What does it mean for me to assert that I am both a hijra yet not exactly transitioning?

Transitioning World

At the turn of the 21st century, significant political and economic changes contributed to the emergence of a queer-friendly world. Part of this transformation arises from the historical dehumanisation of HIV/AIDS patients during the 1980s. Another aspect is the more deliberate discourse surrounding the gendered oppression of women in the workforce, with the #MeToo Movement representing a pivotal moment in this struggle. While the global landscape is increasingly dominated by reactionary conservative politics, this has, conversely, highlighted issues that were previously obscured. When healthcare benefits for transgender individuals are rescinded, it becomes crucial to interrogate: who is entitled to receive healthcare? What implications arise when only certain individuals can access such services? In this world, the conversation of being trans is also different. When one has transitioned, one has successfully moved to one's preferred gender through social and surgical changes. Therefore, to transition is to move from one distinction to another. However, who determines the success of this transition?

This inquiry leads us to Chapter 3 of the much-criticised 2019 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, which states that "A transgender person may make an application to the District Magistrate for a certificate of gender identity" (Bhattacharya et al., 2022, p. 681). The District Magistrate may issue this certificate only after consultation with a "District Screening Committee". This committee comprises a chief medical officer, a district social welfare officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a representative of the transgender community,

and a government official. This requirement undermines the promise of the NALSA judgement, which aims to uphold the dignity and autonomy of individuals in choosing their gender identity. The presence of this committee illustrates the state's surveillance over the construction of gender, even for identities that do not conform to the binary framework. It reflects the fundamental role of the state in eroding the agency of individuals concerning their bodily autonomy, including their gender perception, and rendering it pliable to prevailing power structures. In this instance, while the narrowing perspective of the Indian legislature is evident, one must also consider the societal aspirations surrounding the desired transgender body.

This situation is not markedly different from the state's expectations. Much of the opposition to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act has originated from the transgender community, activists, and queer scholars. For society at large, such surveillance is perceived as beneficial, preventing the perceived chaos of individuals opting for a third gender. A trans woman is expected to resemble a woman, a trans man a man, and a third gender individual to embody a distinct identity. This presents challenges when the binaries of male and female are often questioned and heavily context-dependent. Discussions regarding the acceptability of transition persist. Films, memoirs, television programmes, novels, and journalistic accounts often focus on the experiences of transgender individuals who have been marginalised and ostracised, later highlighting their profound desire for societal approval. Yet, is this approval truly reflective of the experience of trans individuals? Or does it merely project a heteronormative, patriarchal colonial narrative that relies on the validation of a sovereign authority?

Since there is a body that determines approval, whether it be the state or society as a reflection of the state, this leads to a discourse on who is deemed capable of successfully transitioning and who is not. Caitlyn Jenner's transition gained significant attention following the controversial July 2015 issue of Vanity Fair, which ignited discussions about trans visibility. While much of what the West celebrates as Pride is rooted in the efforts of people of colour, HIV-positive individuals, sex

workers, and transgender activists such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, Jenner emerged as a prominent figure of trans identity through a fashion-forward lens in Vanity Fair. What accounts for this phenomenon? It is not an isolated incident but rather a repetition of historical patterns observed in the 1950s. In 1952, Christine Jorgensen became the first person to undergo gender confirmation surgery in the USA, subsequently becoming a media sensation as she transitioned from a military man to a "blonde beauty". In How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States, Joanne Meyerowitz chronicles the historical evolution of gender affirmation surgeries, emphasising that a specific type of trans identity is afforded acceptability in normative frameworks. The platform that grants visibility and acclaim to both Jenner and Jorgensen, despite their half-century separation, is fundamentally predicated on whiteness. Their experiences of transness are not isolated but rather distanced from the perceptions of trans identities that are rooted in the bodies of gender-non-conforming people of colour (Meyerowitz, 2002, p. 83).

In the USA, and owing to its current technological dominance, trans identities and understandings of gender are perpetuated through racialised constructs. African masculinity and Asian femininity are often understood in relation to whiteness rather than as inherent aspects of gender or racial identity. A 2022 Human Rights Campaign Foundation report indicates that, as of November 2022, 85 transgender individuals have lost their lives in the USA due to transphobic violence over the past two years. This figure does not account for unreported incidents and disproportionately represents cases involving individuals of colour. The question of whose trans identity is visible and which forms of visibility are celebrated is of paramount importance.

In their autoethnographic essay, "A trans way of seeing", Eisenberg-Guyot and Rotolo (2022, p. 278) reframe the notion of visibility from one that seeks validation from normative standards to one that embodies "a doing, a mode of embrace, the labor required to sustain the lines of sight that allow [trans individuals] to see each other while preserving forms

of opacity that enable trans survival in a transphobic world". The act of embracing multiplicity, encompassing the positive, negative, and complex aspects of trans identities that do not seek approval from a surveillant state masquerading as society, is an act of resistance. Transitioning individuals navigate the ambiguities of their categorisation on their own terms and through the intersections of race, class, caste, and nationality. However, the concept of "owning" one's identity is complicated in a context of frequent migration. What occurs to colloquial and Indigenous gender identities that, upon entering Western contexts for education, work, safety, care, and aspirations, they are compelled to translate and articulate themselves within a vocabulary that is not legally or structurally equipped to accommodate them? Is this a form of limbo? A particular kind of stasis that individuals must endure?

Right to Hijrahood

In Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Butler (2006, p. 16) poses the question, "To what extent is 'identity' a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?" Through this inquiry, she argues that gender functions as an effective order, signifying "a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology" (Butler, 2006, p. 32). In other words, gender constitutes the essence of being that exists within and navigates the public space of which it is part. Butler prompts us to consider that the desire for the normative is not an inherent predisposition. Butler (2006, p. 33) states that "certain cultural configurations of gender take the place of 'the real' and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that felicitous self-naturalization". In fact, the normative does not exist inherently; rather, it is constructed through the reduction and erasure of variation. Two genders dissolves what may exist in between them, but more problematically its rigidity also constrains that possibilities of what can exist within each of the binary. By adhering to a normative binary, Butler (2006) warns that there exists a burden of intelligibility on those gender identities that do not conform to the binary framework.

Other forms of gender and sexual expression are compromised in order to maintain the continuity of the normative within the cultural matrix. Gender is predominantly perceived through the lens of biology and medical authority. Butler (2006) challenges this perspective by asserting that gender also encompasses an experiential dimension. Gendered roles are inscribed through the mechanisms of play, imagination, expectations, and capacity. While there may be a connection between the experiences of a girl and a socially constructed female experience, this relationship is not fixed; it is fluid, allowing for the possibility that she may also engage in the play, imagination, expectations, and capacities traditionally associated with masculinity.

However, are trans women individuals who have always desired to be women, men who are transitioning to womanhood, or women who are in the process of becoming women? This question is not merely academic; rather, it highlights a deeper issue. The crux of the matter lies in the perception that certain types of bodies are regarded as truthful (typically white and heterosexual), while others are deemed deceptive (such as individuals of colour and queer individuals). Eisenberg-Guyot and Rotolo (2022) illustrate this point effectively in their ethnographic essay that details their prison experiences. In one instance, they describe how prison authorities assumed that breasts and bras were used to conceal and smuggle contraband. Bras were subjected to examination, while waistbands of boxers, similarly capable of hiding contraband, were not scrutinised in the same manner. This distinction underscores the societal perceptions of certain body parts as "deceptive, concealing the 'truths' of our bodies and contraband (drugs) in equal measure" (Eisenberg-Guyot & Rotolo, 2022, p. 87). It is undeniable that the body serves as a significant site for social performance. Our desires, needs, traumas, labours, joys, fears, knowledge, politics, and losses are inscribed upon our bodies. Nevertheless, there exists a gaze that dictates which forms of desires, needs, traumas, labours, joys, fears, knowledge, politics, and losses are deemed valid, acknowledged, and celebrated, while others are not. Understanding one's transness is a political concern because, as Beauchamp (2018, p. 6) articulates, "transgender

and gender nonconforming populations [are] caught up in ongoing state surveillance practices that almost never explicitly name transgender as a category of concern". This observation should not be dismissed as mere paranoia but rather recognised as an imperialist necessity for subjugated difference as foundational to power dynamics. Consequently, transgender identity emerges as a significant category of state consent, with the potential to serve as a mechanism for regulating the "right way" to be queer, which implies conformity to the binary. Instead, one might consider what it would mean to exist adjacent to hijrahood and transness.

For Muñoz (1999, p. 6) transness represents "a way of seeing in order to highlight the intersubjective, dialogic, and collective nature of trans identifications". Transness is not merely a singular "other" that stands in opposition to the gender binary, nor does it encompass everything that is antithetical to it. Rather, it is constructed through the experiences of diverse individuals and their multicultural histories. Furthermore, as trans individuals navigate different spaces, they contribute to the discourse surrounding gender and sexuality, thereby facilitating a multiplicity of meanings. Gairola (2002, p. 308) asserts that "in different identities in different contexts, we inevitably reshape the socio-political atmospheres in the geographies within which we are role-playing". Gender is not an isolated phenomenon; its conceptions are continually evolving. My claim to identify as a hijra is therefore simultaneously justified and tenuous. On the one hand, it represents the closest identity that aligns with the women I admire, the familial structure I aspire to, the way I pray, the things I am sensitive about, the way I eat, what issues I deem important, and my responses to humour and slurs. On the other hand, it does not fully encapsulate the experiences described by Gayatri Reddy, Vaibhav Saria, or Jessica Hinchy in their research on hijras. While I have been subjected to the slur of hijra in India, I do not belong to that community; concurrently, residing in the USA, I find it difficult to relate to the experiences of trans individuals, aside from our shared childhood experiences of bullying that led to gender dysphoria.

I yearn for a sense of belonging, yet I grapple with the question: Where do I truly belong?

Bodies That reflect

In her book, Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India, Hinchy (2019) explores the frustration and fear surrounding hijras as legacies of colonial desires and failures to classify and categorise these individuals. For the British, the question arose: Where do hijras fit within the framework of gender and family? The hijra community does not conform to a specific socio-economic standard; it includes hijras of significant social standing and wealth, while others engage in begging as a means of income. On the one hand, they may be perceived as unemployed vagabonds who use music and dance for entertainment; on the other hand, they are individuals who are involved in thriving economies related to drugs and sex work. The etymology of the word "hijra" is rooted in Muslim affiliations, yet the practice of castration among hijras is motivated by devotion to the Hindu goddess Bahuchara. Unable to comprehend their societal role, hijras were criminalised through a legal system that aligned with colonial objectives. Hinchy (2019) contributes to a Foucauldian understanding of criminality by positing that it is not an inherent capacity for disorder, but a product of state power exercised to police societal norms. If an identity is uncategorisable, it is rendered criminal.

Hinchy (2019) asserts that hijras became a site of hysteria as they were labelled as child abductors, a narrative that is closely tied to the British child-saving project. The hijra poses a perceived threat to male children; not only due to the potential for abduction but, more critically, because of the loss of maleness associated with the act of castration. This perspective fails to acknowledge that, within the hijra community, castration is a voluntary act of devotion to a deity. This narrative established a precedent for the child-saving initiative, the echoes of which persist today, reflecting state-sponsored anxieties surrounding gender categorisation that upholds the sanctity of a patriarchal nuclear family unit. Consequently, marginalised bodies are perceived as threats to societal privilege, which leads to a

perceived need for their termination. In this way, the hijra identity resembles that of homo sacer – a historical entity that may be killed but cannot be sacrificed (Agamben, 1995, p. 71) According to Agamben (1995, p. 82), the enigma of a homo sacer individual lies in their being "simply set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law". The homo sacer represents the original sovereign being whose life and death are under state control. Hijras epitomise this power dynamic in their marginalisation. Hijras thus serve as black boxes of gender relations in South Asia, illustrating the costs associated with transgressing social norms. While it may be claimed that there is little regard for the lives of hijras, who often beg and face disenfranchisement and discrimination, their material conditions reveal the operations of state, national, and global powers. Perceiving the world through a lens of disembodiment therefore reflects hijra sensibility. Both hijras and homo sacer enable this perspective.

Given the profound entanglement of colonialism with hijra identity, it is imperative to adopt a decolonial approach to understanding hijrahood – one that transcends the lens imposed upon this identity, which has historically served to disenfranchise it. Such an approach facilitates "a recognition of one's own positionality as scholar, critic, and speaker, recognises the necessity to decentre and pluralise knowledge formations, and finally offers alternative ways to conceptualize and experience the world" (Gallien, 2020, p. 28). Consequently, an individual's claim to their vernacular transness, not only in linguistic terms but also in relation to lived experiences, affords a deeper understanding of the possibilities for gender variance in contemporary society and the implications for cultural discourse and historical contexts. This understanding resists quick translation.

In Gayatri Reddy's (2006) With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India, the demand for respectability among hijras is articulated through the realities of their bodies. Reddy (2006) notes that Kotis, or effeminate men, are defined by their roles as receptive partners in penetrative sexual activity, without altering their assigned gender identity. In contrast,

hijras undergo a rite of passage through the Nirvan operation, which involves the removal of their genitals, thereby committing to the life of a hijra. This act of sacrifice affords hijras a greater degree of societal respectability. It is only through the process of castration that hijras secure a place in society, which is a privilege that Kotis may not achieve. As one of Reddy's (2006, p. 225) subjects explained: "If people give us respect, then we are also respectful. But if they do not… then we also abuse them verbally and lift our saris. Then they bow their heads in shame and give us respect. It is like that." This highlights the precarious balance of the hijra body on the seesaw of shame and respect. To constitute hijra subjecthood necessitates enduring ritualistic humiliation through the renunciation of the ability to conform to hetero-patriarchal gender norms. Paradoxically, this loss enables hijras to attain social and, increasingly, political standing. The hijra experience demonstrates that individuals are not condemned to a life of shame; rather, they can transform circumstances of shame into sources of power. The embodiment of hijras closely aligns with the notion that shame does not negate respectability; indeed, it may, as hijras suggest, catalyse the demand for it. The navigation of shame and the acceptance of oneself and suffering become matters of respect.

Vaibhav Saria describes the hijra as a disembodied being who finds no benefit or status in the material realm, instead engaging with the spiritual world. Saria (2021) further elucidates that this spiritual dimension of hijra identity arises from practices of asexuality and asceticism. In mainstream culture, hijras are frequently portrayed as hypersexual beings that rely solely on sex work for their livelihood. Saria (2021) challenges this stereotype by asserting that, historically, given their ritualistic practice of castration, hijras were perceived as spiritual entities. The act of castration is rooted in a quest for spiritual liberation from the burdens and pressures of material existence. Castration constitutes only one aspect of what defines hijra as a spiritual identity. According to Saria (2021), begging represents another facet of this ascetic practice. She provides an example of a hijra interviewee who articulated the significance of begging to her identity. The act of begging positions individuals

outside the capitalist framework of surplus generation; instead, it relies on the goodwill of others through the act of seeking. Here, the self in relation to the world becomes paramount. The shame associated with depending on others for sustenance is something that Saria's (2021) subject wished to convey to her. More than merely belonging, hijras offer valuable lessons. While hijrahood may be accompanied by shame, embracing that shame allows for alternative ways of being that hold meaning for those who grapple with the challenges of gender discrimination.

The characteristics of hijrahood, which involve navigating a feminine identity to carve out a non-binary space, invoke a form of liberation. The very act of severing the penis from the body propels hijras beyond a system that codes power according to the phallus. While this marginalisation may render them criminals in the eyes of society, it does not strip them of agency or power. The misconception that marginal bodies lack agency, or freedom is a significant fallacy. The plight of the marginalised body, often perceived as pitiable due to oppression, is far from the reality depicted by Reddy (2006) and Saria (2021). Despite the social designation of marginality imposed upon hijras, they embody vitality for those who are queer. They confront power with truth, expressing joy and sorrow in tandem. Although my own queerness was once derided by being categorised as a hijra, I have come to appreciate the resilience of the hijra body in the face of adversity. These women confidently occupy public spaces, soliciting alms with authority, regardless of societal shame and rejection. Hijrahood embodies a journey of overcoming the fear of emasculation and embracing shame as a means of resisting systems of oppression. In this light, the hijra transforms into a symbol of ecstasy/ex-stasis, showcasing liberation from bodily expectations and social regulations while delving into realms of both sexuality and spirituality, all through the lens of shame.

The Hijra Ecstasy

There is a story about an interaction between Narada, the messenger of the Devas, and Vishnu, one of the three aspects of the Hindu holy trinity, as recorded in the Bhagavat Purana.

Narada, unable to conceptualise Maya, the illusion of the material world, inquires of Vishnu regarding its nature. Vishnu responds that Maya cannot be explained and can only be experienced. At that moment, an inexplicable thirst arises within Narada, which prompted him to request water from Vishnu. Vishnu instructed him to go to the nearby river but cautioned him to wash immediately after drinking from it. When Narada inevitably neglected this advice, he transformed into a woman. Shortly thereafter, Narada's beauty attracts a passerby who requests her hand in marriage. This blissful union results in the birth of 60 children, symbolising an abundance of worldly pleasures. However, a plague subsequently claims the lives of all of Narada's children and her husband. In the depths of her grief, Narada experiences a profound hunger and, upon spotting a mango, climbs onto the bodies of her children and husband to reach the fruit. Before consuming it, a sage advises her to wash herself to avoid contamination from the deceased. As she immerses herself in the river, Narada keeps one of her bangled hands out of the water to hold the mango afloat. Upon emerging from the water, Narada realises that she has spent her earthly existence in pursuit of a grahasti, or household. Vishnu revealed himself, having transformed from the sage, and informed Narada that the hunger she experienced was Maya. In reverence, Narada brought her bangled hands together (Pattanaik, 2014, p. 63).

Myth, as Barthes contends, through its departure from logical order, enables us to arrive at meaning. Pattanaik (2014) examined this myth within a series on queerness as represented in Hindu mythology. His work prompted several pertinent inquiries concerning the queer narrative. Why does Narada transform into a woman to gain insight into Maya, the illusion of the material world? Why does she leave her hand outside the river at the end? Why does she retain a marker of queerness after the experience, even as a divine being endowed with power? This narrative addresses hunger and desire rather than gender. Nonetheless, it is through the gendered experience that Narada comprehends the limitations of the physical realm. A mother who weeps for her children and subsequently treads

upon the bodies of her deceased children to sustain herself raises profound questions. Is the illusion here the expectations of motherhood? Motherhood is a state of being that places the child before the individual. What implications does this have for our understanding of humanity if categories remain inflexible in the face of contradictions and complexities?

Is there only one way for transness to manifest? A challenge persists in integrating contextual or supralocal trans experiences within broader trans politics. A monolithic theory may obscure the nuances of conflicting subjective and contextual experiences. The issue of a hijra claiming their space within trans politics, as dictated by the English-speaking world, aligns with what Spivak (1993) asserts regarding the subaltern. The subaltern is "not to describe 'the way things really were' or to privilege the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of history. It is, rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (Spivak, 1993, p. 76). The effort is therefore misplaced in seeking visibility that demands unification. Instead, there should be room for contextual experiences, aberrations, differences, and exceptions. One can embody queerness through a discursive and intentional effort to resist oppressive norms beyond their choice of partners, gender performance, or social relationships. The hijra, as more than merely trans or gay in a Western global lexicon, challenges the notion that a unified language is the sole model for comprehending trans experiences. There should not be a demand in queer politics for a comprehensive theory that renders all forms of queerness intelligible or neatly categorised. Perhaps the hijra can be valid, or perhaps not. Rather than conforming to a singular identity, one may also choose never to identify as a hijra.

Trans variance embodies trans joy. Eisenberg-Guyot and Rotolo (2022, p. 285) assert that a trans perspective entails seeing "each other through, between, and beyond transphobia and points toward seeing itself as a site and strategy of trans politics". The hijra extends and redefines this perspective into a realm of further possibilities. Recognising the hijra as a vernacular contributes to this trans joy, moving beyond the

desire to align with binary norms or palatability. Instead, it reveals that transness can manifest in myriad forms, including in those who may not exhibit the conventional markers of trans identity. Trans identity and experience are lived and shared communally. While the roots of their identity stem from forces that are socially and historically significant to highlight, transness is simultaneously personal and universal. This understanding has the potential to alleviate the very fears surrounding transness that often provoke apprehension, thereby offering liberation, as the hijras have always understood.

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