



## **Construction of the Hijra Identity**

A thesis presented by

Syeda S. Shawkat

ID: 16217005

To

The Department of Economics and Social Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree with honors

of Bachelor of Social Science in

BRAC University

[December, 2016]

## **Glossary**

- i. Maigga – Slang term for a heterosexual man who does not follow the dictated performance for his gender.
- ii. Guruma– The leader of the Hijra community in a given locality. The Hijra who is considered as the mother of everyone in that community.
- iii. Chela – The Hijra directly under the guruma/ subordinate. The person is considered the daughter of the guruma.
- iv. Nati – The Hijra under the chela. The person is considered the granddaughter of the guruma.
- v. Dhol – A double headed drum.
- vi. Gamcha - Is a thin, coarse, traditional cotton towel that is used to dry the body after bathing.
- vii. Laddoo – Type of ball- shaped sweets popular in Indian Subcontinent.
- viii. Gaye holud – Translates to turmeric on the body” is a Bangladeshi wedding ceremony.
- ix. Achol/ aanchal - means the end of a saree, the traditional Bangladeshi and Indian dress for women.
- x. Bharatnatyam – It is a form of Indian classical dance. It is a solo dance that was exclusively performed by women.
- xi. UNDP – United Nations Development Programme.
- xii. SSSHS – ShochetonShomaj Sheba Hijra Shongoton.
- xiii. Bondhu -Bondhu Social Welfare Society.

## Table of Contents

1. Abstract .....	4
2. Acknowledgment .....	5
3. Chapter 1: Introduction .....	6
4. Chapter 2: Methodology .....	11
5. Chapter 3: Childhood – Gender Struggle and the emergence of psycho-social identity .....	15
6. Chapter 4: Finding and relocating – Construction of the new Self .....	18
7. Chapter 5: Biases – Reinvention and solidification of Identity .....	27
8. Chapter 6: Struggles and demand in establishing identity on a large societal context .....	33
9. Chapter 7: Conclusion - Emancipation for a new identity and social status .....	37
10. Additional Remarks .....	39
11. References .....	41

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper was to be able to discern the various focal points that consist in the building of the hijra identity. The paper required a study of the different spaces in a Hijra's life, such as religion, government, the media, and their personal lives. I deployed the method of interpretivism, in my open ended one-on-one structured interviews with the participants. The field work was done in two phases in two separate physical spaces. For this paper I have drawn extensively from the works of Hossain, Nanda, Stenquist and Butler. The findings suggest a definite correlation between a traumatic childhood and the individuals joining the community, rather than the participants willfully chosen lifestyle choice. The gap with the mainstream societies is further solidified due to a lack of education. An important aspect of my research is to investigate the outcome of the 2006 formal acknowledgment from the government of the hijra community and understand in detail the process that was involved in establishing of the aforementioned law.

## **Acknowledgment**

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Associate Professor SeutySabur of the Department of Economics and Social Sciences at BRAC University. The door to Prof. Sabur's office was always open whenever I ran into a trouble spot or had a question about my research or writing. She consistently allowed this paper to be my own work, but steered me in the right the direction whenever she thought I needed it.

I would also like to acknowledge Teaching Assistant ArefinNoman at BRAC University as the second reader of this thesis, and I am gratefully indebted to him for his very valuable comments on this thesis.

I take this opportunity to express gratitude to all of the Department faculty members for their help and support throughout my time in BRAC University.

During the fieldwork I met a good number of people who helped me understand this topic with grace and thoughtfulness. Among them I would like to mention Ms. Ivan Ahmed Kotha who provided me with a lot of information and analysis that is directly included in the paper.

My gratitude also goes to Ms. Anjali, Ms. Lara, Ms. Joya, Ms. Asha, and Ms. Momo for their co-operation and company. I also place on record, my sense of gratitude to one and all, who directly or indirectly, have lent their hand in this venture.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to the members of the Department of Anthropology at BRAC University, my friends and family for their support.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **1.2 Introduction:**

#### **A curious choice**

The hijras were chosen, not because of any personal relationships with anyone from the community, nor because of any special interest in gender issues. My choice arose from simple curiosity. I was curious to find out who these anomalies were and how they lived their lives. Then in 2009, the hijra term came into light with the announcement that the term was now legal. The hijras would have passports. The media interest almost died out when in 2015 the government's social welfare department announced that they had planned to hire 14 Hijras in low-level positions in the country's first quota scheme, designed to benefit the much-stigmatized community, but the program is now in the midst of uncertainty after 12 of those who were selected for the jobs were in fact classified as "full-grown males," and failed to meet the standard medical test requirement. One hand, the doctors and government officials were deeming these 12 people non- hijra bodies. On the other hand, prominent Hijra leaders were frowning upon the screening process that would establish these men's hijra identities. Thus the personal interest developed even further and I wanted to understand what factors influenced a hijras identity – An identity that seemed to be personal, public and political all at once.

#### **Relevance of this research**

McKee (2004: 4) describes research to be “an enquiry [...] which adds something of value (in terms of its content) to our knowledge base or [...] to our policy development.”

This research aims to add to the knowledge to two areas of interest. Firstly, it adds to the knowledge void of the under-researched group of people which are hijras of

Bangladesh by looking at the formation of the hijra identity from a holistic point of view.

Secondly, according to Katrina Karkazis (Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience) “Bodies are not only biological phenomena but also complex social creations onto which meanings have been variously composed and imposed according to time and space.” This research also focuses on narrowing the various focal points which give meaning, transform and dictate the hijra identity.

While in the realm of social development, the research will not have any direct impact but the knowledge generated might have an accompanying influence. As mentioned by Papanagnou (2010: 18) social science research maintains an “enlightenment role” that steadily affects policy makers and the general public over time, as “knowledge slowly permeates[s] society”.

### **Defining Hijra**

A Nepali branch of knowledge notes that the word Hijra is derived from the Persian hiz. Hiz meant one who is “effeminate” “disdains women”, “a catamite” “According to Muzaffar Alam, a foremost Persianist, and hiz was from old Pahlavi Persian, a sister language of Sanskrit, before the eight century A.D. Hiz meant ineffective and incompetent. Other persianists suggest that the origin of hijra was hich, from the work hichgah meaning nowhere. It meant a person that is nowhere, a thing that has no place, no identity or personality of its own” (Problems faced by Hijras anithachettier). In Hindi and Urdu hijra words have various alternatives such as Hijra, Hijada, Hijara, Hijrah, and is pronounced “heejra” or “heejda”. In Bangladesh the hijras often pronounce the term as “heejla” and refer to their livelihood as “hijragiri”

A prime cultural definition of hijra is that they begin life as men, although, not completely like men. According to my key informant, Kotha, Hijras “are neither men, nor women, they are the beings in between and beyond the two codes”. In accordance to the UNDP the hijra is considered an umbrella term for all sexual minorities. The article states that “Hijra cultures are India’s answer to support systems for sexual minorities. Long before the West gave birth to gay lib, India’s homosexuals,

bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals and *kothis* found refuge under this umbrella” (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India. (2010)). the most noted expression of hijra is the female attire and their distinguishing clapping of hands. The hijras take female names when they join the community and use female kinship terms to address each other, such as, “aunty” “sister” and “grandmother”. Their communication consists of feminine intonations and expressions and when the participants of this research refer to themselves in feminine terms. For that reason I chose to refer to the hijras using the feminine pronouns such as she and her.

### **Research Questions**

My research thus seeks to unpack the anomaly that hijra is to the rest of the community. By keeping in mind the strict and forced performativity and the existing power relations existing within the community and of the community with that of the rest of the society, the following are my queries:

1. What constitutes as the Hijra identity?
2. How has the government’s formal acknowledgment of the hijra community affected them?
3. What are the negative and positive impacts of the policy change?
4. Is the policy that has been made, a complete, sound and functional policy?

### **1.2 Historical Background:**

The transgender or the Hijra community has vastly been affected by the various cultural, religious and social developments throughout history. Given below is a short trajectory of how the history progressed.

#### **Ancient Bengal:**

In traditional Hinduism, references are made between Transgender, generally recognized as ‘Hijras’ and numerous Gods and deities. The God Ram, who is a popular characteristic in Hinduism, approved and blessed intersexual; Krishna and Vishnu, frequently transformed with female and male characteristics to protect from demons and have no distinct sexual grouping. Such symbolism and references with



the religion inevitably produced respect and power to the 'Hijras' positioned in the Hindu community.

### **Mughal Era:**

According to Hahm, Islam acknowledges persons who are born biologically indistinct and offers them with the equivalent rights as men and women though the rights of men and women are different in Islam and it is unclear as to which way they should have this right. During the Mughal Era, 'hijras' who were known as 'eunuchs' could be found in the Islamic Courts, garbed in turbans. The customary roles of the eunuchs were to guard the ladies of the harem and the children. Thus, 'Hijras' in the Mughal Period were given a position which provided them with respect and power.

### **The British Period:**

In the beginning of the British period in the Indian sub-continent 'Hijras' were protected and received benefits by some Indian states through entry into the 'Hijra' community. The benefits comprised of provision of land, rights of food and smaller amount of money from agricultural households in particular areas which were ultimately removed through British legislation.

### **Bangladesh before 1971:**

The place of Hijra changed in the society towards the end of the British rule. With the removal of the benefits, 'Hijras' steadily turned to the course of begging, prostitution, dancing at weddings, and incidents of scaring people for money were also recorded. Such change in their activity under the altered social reality was deemed as robbery and was found offensive. They were not valued in the social sphere as they were previously. Under the governance of Pakistan, the State used to provide allowance for 'Hijra' in their old age, which continued proceeding the independence of Bangladesh but later uplifted. In addition, when the knowledge and awareness of medical science spread over the society, the culture of 'Hijra' and their gender identity have been denied and pointed out as a sexual and mental disability by the biological scholars of biological sciences and doctors.

Earlier scholarships pertaining to sexuality in colonized Asia show that Western imperialism had an effect on sexual practices in South Asia. In turn this caused a new order in gender norms and de-legitimization and more often than not criminalization of what was in recent times seen as tolerated sexual practice (Loos 2009, p. 1314 -15). It is apparent that Hijras were considered to be excluded from the sanctioned Western notions of heteronormativity, where local variations were delegitimized (Loos 2009 p. 1315). Proceeding the colonial times in South Asia, Hijras have sought the likelihood to use self-identification method that undoubtedly surpasses what in the west was seen as radical forms of self-representation. With that in consideration the most appropriate question in order to experience the reality is: "Just who are Hijras?" (Lal 1999, p.121)

## **Chapter 2: Methodology:**

This self-reflexivity is a very important aspect of ethnography. It is during this that I, as a researcher, came across my own biases, assumptions and understood my position of power. I carried my field work in two phases. In phase one I chose a posh coffee chain and we talked over mugs of strawberry smoothies. This setting was my comfort zone. Since my contact has gone there a few times and I knew the barista, the establishment did not cause us any problems. The premise of our meeting was that I would buy her food. I spent about 7/800 TK on her. I had a set of questions which I started off the interview with, the rest of the evening I let her take me to whichever part of her life story she wanted to. Based on my first contacts interview I created the structure of my further interviews. I also started recording them. This helped the later interviews to be much easier for me to conduct.

In-between the two phases of my field work, I participated in a Feminist conference called “Femcon”. The subject of this conference was feminism in Bangladesh. They held caucuses for two minority groups. One of them included the Hijra sex workers. This caucus gave me insight into their political stance, how they see themselves in relation to the government, and the expectations they have. Many other issues such as health were discussed. This served as a focus group for me where I understood the community as a whole. I also observed their cultural performance and throughout my field work I have slowly understood the fact that the people I interviewed identified themselves as artists. Albeit to some extent they seem to be limiting themselves with the politicized sexuality of their bodies. This helped me give my research a more definite direction.

My second research locale was a shanty town in Manda, Komolapur. In my twenty years of living in Bangladesh, I have never been there or heard of the place. This was the first marker of my hierarchy within the society. With that in mind, I went and visited the locale. I met with my key informant, Kotha Hijra who was one of the affluent Hijra leaders. She lived in the locality which is the primary reason for choosing the location. She arranged for me to speak to her *chela,nati* and *natir chela* and so on. That is to say, they were all within her fictive Hijra family. This already

built a sense of trust between me and the participants. I was welcomed in their homes and as a researcher that gave me access to their personal lives. I had six participants (all within the income bracket of 10000 taka per month) that I interviewed in total and all were or are involved in sex work. The reason I chose open ended interviews are because I employed the method of interpretivism. I asked them who their emergency contact was and through their answers I understood who was the closest to them. In most cases it was not their immediate family and this opened up a portal of conversation. Throughout the interviews I employed various strategies such as this. In the beginning of my interviews one of the participants lit her cigarette and offered me one, and I accepted. This created a social bond that can be often seen to be practiced by the men in our society. Smoking is a tool of social interaction and I used that to further solidify my rapport as someone they could feel more comfortable discussing personal issues with.

For this field visit I was told I had to pay the hijras I would be meeting. This put me in an ethical dilemma. As an unbiased researcher I am not allowed to be paying the informants in case they only tell me what I want to hear. At the same time after I finished each of their interviews I understood that the payment was a) me reimbursing them for the time lost while talking to me. As most of them sleep in the morning after the night work they have b) previously when Kothaapa helped a foreign researcher to meet Hijras, she paid each of them 400tk each after talking to them. This made Kothaapa's girls question whether she was stealing money from them or not. To save her face she asked me that I have to pay them even if it's less as I am a student. During the interview process there were many times Kothaapa brought this up. Giving me the impression that this was an issue of concern and she is aiming to be transparent to her family members.

Another challenge for me was accessibility of information. Right after the first phase of my field work one of the prominent LGBT activists, Xulhaz, was hacked to death in his apartment. This caused the entire community and communities affiliated with them to go underground. In fact I had trouble trying to interview a few more people I contacted including first informant herself as they could not move around freely

anymore. I had also tried contacting several NGO workers but they refused to discuss the community for fear of harm to the Hijras.

During my second field visit I was accompanied by a male friend who represented the middle class male in this patriarchal society. The reason being I could not travel there alone for fear of safety for myself as a female researcher with no funds; this is a limitation in Bangladesh. My second visit was only a few weeks after terrorist attack in one of the most affluent areas in Dhaka. Throughout the city there was prevailing sense of fear which also acted as obstacles in many ways. As roads were blocked off I could only visit on weekends due to traffic, many people refused to comment or discuss the issues pertaining with this community with me, and in fact while I was conducting the interviews my male friend was approached by local *mollas* and asked for information about him. This showed that Kothaapa, although is aware of threats against her, is unaware of being under surveillance.

Having a male present also gave me an insight into how the participants perform their genders. Their demeanor with me was more welcoming and carried a sense of sisterhood, which again added to my rapport. On the other hand, their demeanor towards my friend was sexually aggressive, exaggerated bodily gestures with hints of fascination and mistrust.

Last but not the least; I carried an online survey to understand the psyche of the educated urban Dhaka of the Bangladeshi society. I received 40 responses with an age group of 17 and above, with at least an undergraduate degree. I asked questions such as “If you saw a woman being harassed, would you intervene” and “If you saw a Hijra being harassed, would you intervene?” The difference in the answers for these two questions gave me an insight into the shift in perspective due to gender. Various televisions shows regarding Hijras and movies has also helped me grasp the general perception of Hijra.

Through the above mentioned methods and secondary research of articles, journals and newspaper articles, I have put forth the rest of my chapters. In a qualitative research there is no one truth, therefore this paper has been written with that in mind.

This research represents the reaction that took place when I, the researcher, met with my participants.

### **Chapter 3: Childhood – Gender Struggle and the emergence of psycho-social identity**

The Bangladeshi Society remains a society where traditional values, relationship to the rest of the family, social circle and social expectations shape a significant part of an individual's identity. Therefore, emancipation of individual traits is not easy and is shaped by the existing criteria... Additionally, concepts such as shame and honour play an important role in all contexts above and social obligations in order to protect the family's honour also include gender performance. In other words, someone, that is perceived by the masses as a traditional male should act in a manly manner in order to not bring shame on the rest of the family (Bondhopadhyay & Ahmed 2010, p. 22- 23). Childhoods of all six participants were spent dealing with the constant taunts of the people around them. Growing up, Lara liked playing 'like' girls. When her male friends would call her to play with them she would not show any interest. They would ask her to play ball and she would want to play hopscotch. They would call her *Maigga*. The boys would ask her to take baths with them but Lara would bathe at the pond with the girls. She would cover herself with a *gamchato* to show modesty and make pretend breasts just like her female friends. Her friends also liked playing with her. They would make flower necklaces and put them on the head. Lara dressed up from when she was a kid and for her, it's a god's gift. At wedding all the boys danced the 'boy dance' but Lara would dance like girls and the girls enjoyed it.

During her childhood years, Anjali always felt different and wanted the things girls did. She would play dress up with girls and wear *sarees* out of *gamchas*, as her mom for lipstick, nail polish. As her mother had five sons, she was happy to have someone who fulfilled her desire for a girl. She grew up with taunts from her neighbors and her brothers about how she wasn't exactly like a man. When she got older she felt alone and hurt for a long time. The girls taunted her saying he was a man and the men never accepted her. There was no space for her. Eventually around age 14/15 she decided to join the community. Every culture has different expectations from individuals at different ages. The predominant norms present in the Bangladeshi society have more or less always forced the Hijras to give up their families, as discrimination and abuse

are common factors in an adolescent Hijra's life. In some instances, feminine males are often considered as creating societal problems starting from damaged reputation of the family (Islam Khan et al. 2009, p. 444). In the participants' lives their biggest bullies were often found in their families, sometimes it was their brother, such as in Lara's case that used to lock her up as his friends would taunt him about how she is not a man. Other times such as Asha's father, would beat her up due to continuous taunts from his friends and family. The stigma of being a Hijra in the Bangladeshi society starts within the family constellation. It has been shown that the reason many Hijra seek a life outside of the normative constellation is to protect their families from further societal stigmatization. This has proven to be more visible as siblings enter into the institution of marriage, where the one sibling whom does not get married is then perceived as conspicuous (Ana 1990, p. 116). My research paper aims to take the reader through the various stages of a Hijra's life. In such, a major part of their emotional construction have been through traumas sustained in childhood, specifically, around the time of puberty when they were judged not for their sexual preferences but by the way they were performing their genders. Often they go through emotional, physical, sexual and mental abuse. Child traumatic stress occurs when children and adolescents are exposed to traumatic events or traumatic situations, and when this exposure overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced.

Depending on their age, children respond to traumatic stress in different ways. Many children show signs of intense distress—disturbed sleep, difficulty paying attention and concentrating, anger and irritability, withdrawal, repeated and intrusive thoughts, and extreme distress—when confronted by anything that reminds them of their traumatic experiences. Some children develop psychiatric conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and a variety of behavioral disorders. While some children "bounce back" after adversity, traumatic experiences can result in a significant disruption of child or adolescent development and have profound long-term consequences. Repeated exposure to traumatic events can affect the child's brain and nervous system and increase the risk of low academic performance, engagement in high-risk behaviors, and difficulties in peer and family



relationships. Traumatic stress can cause increased use of health and mental health services and increased involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Adult survivors of traumatic events may have difficulty in establishing fulfilling relationships, holding steady jobs, and becoming productive members of our society (Defining Trauma and Child Traumatic Stress). All the participants I interviewed have mentioned how they did not feel like studying when they were young. This is a very important point to consider as this has a ripple effect on the rest of their lives. All of them have difficulty studying, take part in high risk behavior, have tried to self-harm and fail to keep long standing romantic relationships. This in turn makes it hard for them to get work in the next stages of their lives. The cycle of no education, no work and being kept in the margins of the society becomes an unfortunate spinning wheel of the Hijra life. One such case is of Anjali Hijra who is currently working as a NGO consultant and a sex worker. She is currently saving up to go to India to have her surgery. During the interview she mentioned that in many instances her *guru ma*Kotha had found her trying to hang herself, or cut herself. Anjali further explained that when she gets upset, she does not know what to do and ends up self-harming. As far as difficulties in relationships go, all the participants have recounted having boyfriends who took their money and fled. This hints towards choices in men which stemmed from their low self-esteem.

Therefore from an early childhood, individuals from this community are forced to suppress their feelings towards the opposite sex, deal with their confusion about which they are their place in gendered society and most of all abuse of various kinds. The self that emerges is a self that is unsure, insecure and dealing with post-traumatic stress which renders them incapable of keeping long term relationships.

## **Chapter 4: Finding and relocating – Construction of the new Self**

### **4.1. The Community**

The Hijra community has rules, but more to the point they have created their own tools for communicating such as '*ultabhasha*', supposedly the reverse bangle language. This active measure separates them from the rest of the normative society as well as works as a form of protection. Social agents constitute reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social agents (Butler, 1988, p. 519-531). For someone who was new to the community, the task of integration was daunting as they all approach the community with a sense of apprehension about the Hijras. Lara "I was afraid of Hijras even though we were all the same. Everyone else wanted the same things I wanted, liked and enjoyed the things I wanted but I was still afraid of them. I couldn't understand the language they spoke." Initiation into this community meant initiation into the ways of life, ways of thinking, dressing and even talking. In this chapter I have outlined the different perspective the members received once they joined the community.

### **4.2. Perception of sexuality**

"One's genitals are not the same as one's sex. Sex is a vast continuum of personality possibilities, a frontier still scarcely explored after thousands of years of human development. The standard medical literature uses the term intersex as an umbrella term for three major subgroups with some mixture of male and female characteristics: the so-called true hermaphrodites, whom Sterling stems herms, who possess one testis and one ovary (the sperm- and egg-producing vessels, or gonads); the male pseudo hermaphrodites (the "merms"), who have testes and some aspects of the female genitalia but no ovaries; and the female pseudo hermaphrodites (the "ferms"), who have ovaries and some aspects of the male genitalia but lack testes. Each of those categories is in itself complex; the percentage of male and female characteristics, for instance, can vary enormously among members of the same subgroup. Moreover, the inner lives of the people in each subgroup-- their special needs and their problems, attractions and repulsions-- have gone unexplored by science." (Fusto-Sterling, 1993).

In Bangladesh, there is no data or popular concept of the sexes outside the traditional binary two. It is extremely difficult to estimate the frequency of each of these additional sexes. In the context of the Bangladeshi society, it would be difficult to conduct such a research due to intolerance for conversation around sex and sexuality.

Therefore, the recognized and accepted sexes are male and female. The recognized genders are woman and man. The recognize sexuality is, heterosexuality. Sterling in her essay call sexes ‘a vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories’ (Sterling, 1993). This idea of the sexes is missing from the general consensus of the educated middle class of Bangladeshi society. Therefore, it is of my no surprise that with the socio-economic background that most of the Hijracommunity comes from do not enable the Hijras nor their families to be familiar with such a concept. They know from a very early age, that what they want is not what is accepted or desired by the rest of the society. Lara mentions how she would often stand in front of a mirror and wonder why she was so remarkably different in the things she wanted from her male cousins of the same sage.

The idea that sex is a rainbow, a continuum, so to speak is an idea they encounter only after their first encounter with the Hijra community. Lara remembers the first time she met a Hijra she was afraid of them, but she understood that they desired the same things as her. After their initiation into the Hijra community, its members are aware of the varying degrees of sexualities, gender and sex. With the help of NGO’s, they learn the western concepts of genders such as transvestites, lesbians, gays, transgender and are very much aware of the existence of other groups beside them.

### **4.3 Media influence**

“Media plays a critical role in shaping our culture. While media usually depicts socially acceptable and recognizable scenarios, it also attempts at shaping public opinions. The influence of media is not bound by gender, age, or race. The process by which we identify not only people, but also vocabulary, speech patterns, gestures, and behaviors, objects and activities as either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ is called gender typing” (Waters & Ellis, 1996, p. 94). Gender stereotypes are schemata about

traits and behavior that are perceived as typical of average or “normal” men and woman. Sometimes a characteristic that is positively associated with one sex is seen as negative or abnormal attribute in another. (Waters & Ellis, 1996, p. 94) Looking at the Bangladesh media, it has been noted that the Hijras have an overly sexual attitude, are aggressive, manipulative and of immoral personal. At the same time, a woman is termed delicate, fair, soft spoken and in hopes to please a husband and her in-laws. During my research, all the participants referred to the kind of desires a woman has or what a woman wants out of her life. Joya believes a woman is soft spoken and takes on the submissive role. Therefore, she mimics the role of a woman in a relationship and in her sexual encounter she subjects herself as the one who is at the “bottom”. What is interesting to notice here, is even within a community that is familiar with the concepts of gender fluidity, the binary coding of gender spread throughout the Bangladeshi culture is still existing and shaping notions of them. One of the most serious consequences of the influence of stereotypes is that as a member of a society, a person may actually accept his beliefs about masculinity and femininity and incorporate those beliefs as important elements in his or her own self-concept. If that person’s traits and characteristics fail to meet the social ideal, the result is frequently low self-esteem and sometimes even depression (Walters & Ellis) in my interview with Anjali Hijra I asked about what she thinks a woman means. Anjali explained a woman is someone who dreams of having a family, husband, in-laws, and gives her husband a child. And that is also what she wants but as she is a Hijra she know this will never happen. If she finds a partner his family will never accept her. She is aware that there are things she cannot do. Her admittance was marked with longing and sense of failure was apparent to the researcher. A similar way of thinking was noticed in Kothaapa’s account of her love life. She actively took part in getting her partner of ten years gets married to another woman who he has a child with. Her reasoning being, she cannot give him what he invariable must want desire in his life. Whether her partner was of the same mind remains to be seen by this researcher. Therefore, there seems to be a sense of insecurity that lurks in the minds of the Hijras which comes into play in their romantic and sexual lives.

#### 4.4 Gendered practice

When Simone De Beauvoir claims “One is not born, but, rather *becomes* a woman” she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition. In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed: rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized reputation of acts*. For Butler in her essay *Performative acts of Gender and Constitution*, “Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. When I was first introduced to Asha, she flashed me her breasts and pressed them. At first glance she seemed the flamboyant and sexual but when we spoke for a bit, her demeanor changed. She was a serious intelligent thoughtful girl. Through this I saw her one gender practice that she performed. Throughout the interview I noticed small bodily movements such as sitting crossed legged or fluttering their eyes flirtatiously at my male acquaintance. At the same time, there was a complete lack of “hands clapping” which is a gesture, strongly associated with Hijrahhood, during the interviews. This gives a window to two separate levels of gender performance within this community; one that has been adopted and repeated where, the constituting acts not only constitute the identity of the actor, but constitute that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief* (Butler, 1988. P. 519- 531). If the performance is to be divided in two levels, the first level which is practiced within the community, even without the presence of another person around, is a compelling illusion not just for the sake of others, but one’s self. The second level, includes the hand clapping, the overly sexualized personality, flirtatious tone are the performance that they put on for the sake of others and on behalf of the community. The idea is similar to the concept of Goffman’s dramaturgy. He believed that when we are born, we are pushed onto the stage of daily life. According to him our socialization consists of learning how to play one’s assigned roles from other people. One enacts their roles in the company of others, who are in turn enacting their roles in interaction with them. He believed that whatever we do, we are playing out some role on this stage. In it there is a front stage and a back stage.

In the front stage we *perform* - this could be seen through the lens of Goffman's concept of impression management which refers to our desire to manipulate other's impression of us on the front stage. As given temporal duration within entire performance, "acts" are a shared experience and 'collective action' (Butler, 1988, p.525)

#### **4.5 Norms, Rituals, and the fictive relationship within the community**

Norms are society sanctioned modes of behavior. When an individual varies from this informal understanding of behavior, he/she is shunned or has to suffer through consequences which may vary from the less extreme, such as to be frowned upon, to the more physically harmful, such as being sexually assaulted to fatally beaten. Not unlike all societies, Bangladeshi society also has some governed norms, and rituals (more on this later). As established earlier on this paper, notion of heteronormativity arbitrarily creates norms that support the two gender definitions and nothing more. Therefore, when a hijra is practicing cross-dressing, she invariably is going beyond the designated norms for her male body. It is of no surprise then that the hijra body is subjected to public taunts, economic and social inequality, as well as sexual harassment. This stems not only from the general public, this notion of norms is equally embedded into the mind of the general consciousness, where the policemen are more inclined to believe a man following his gender (wearing men clothes, 'masculine' gestures), than a hijra who is so violently disregarding her boundaries as a male body. A Hijra's life, in this context, can be a cautionary tale for those who go beyond the societal norms. One of Kothaapa's experiences speaks boldly in the favour of this, "We have gone through a lot together. As a dance group we are all certified in *bharatnatyam*. Early on our days as a dance group, we were invited to perform in a *gayeholud*. After the performance ended around midnight, some of the guests asked us to join them for drinks. They took us to an old abandoned building and started getting aggressive and asking us to have sex with them. We told them we didn't do that kind of work, but it didn't seem to matter. There were around 8 men and all of us were raped repeated by each of one of them that night. Some of us were bleeding but they wouldn't let us go to the washroom to clean up.

When things were getting too loud, we could hear the police siren outside; the men immediately fled the scene, leaving us bleeding and unable to move. Once the police saw us in that state, they assumed that we must be prostitutes and that we had only gotten caught in action. We were asked to get on the police pick-up truck. Now, this was 10 years ago. Most of us hadn't come out to our friends and family. So the idea of our family members bailing us from jail while we were still in our *sarees* terrified us. We begged and tried to reason with the police in the back of truck on our way to the station. In the end, they said they would let us go if we performed oral sex on all of them. And we did.

After a few hours, they dropped us off on the road. We walked home in the middle of the night, violated and badly hurt. The next morning I took my girls to the clinic that a local NGO was running back then. I started a support group for us and we all formed a pact that night; we promised we would always carry condoms in our bags.”  
– Kotha

In this instance it is easy to see the different stages of biasness the group has had to endure through in only one night. The men assumed the group must be sexually promiscuous since they are hijras, the police assumed they must be prostitutes since they are hijra, and they assumed that their families would not accept them if they found out that they are hijras. All three actions happened with the knowledge that these ‘men’ were not adhering to the societal norms or behavior and therefore must face the consequences. This sort of social and mental pressures forces the hijras to create a version of them that survives on negotiations. Every social interaction is a form of negotiation with the society, where a hijra is allowed to cross-dress as long as she stays hidden in the fringes of the society.

And in these fringes she has to harness a community, relationships and network which are all intertwined and mostly fictive. Fictive kins are relationships that are non-real, and not established through marriage or blood. In many cases Fictive kins can be defined as a form of address which expresses familiarity, as a public validation or for replacement kin (Ibsen & Klobus 1972). Fictive kin works in a way where it imitates the existing and true relationships. It manipulates gaps in real kinship networks. All

of six hijra participants in my research and nearly all, according to my key informants have broken or no ties with their real blood kins. Consequently when the hijras join the community, they become part of a kinship network that establishes a familiarity and closeness between people who are by all means, strangers. 'Fictive relationships serve to broaden mutual support networks, create a sense of community, and enhance social control. In essence, fictive kin ties elaborate social networks and regularize interactions with people otherwise outside the boundaries of family. Unlike true kinship bonds, fictive kin ties are usually voluntary and require the consent of both parties in establishing the bond. The idea that you cannot pick your relatives does not apply to fictive kin.' Even as the kinship seems to be fictive, they are not being taken as such. Since fictive kinships mimic blood relationships, they also mimic the bindings, limitations and taboos that come with them. Just as an aunt and her niece have taboo against having sexual relationships, but is not unheard of. Similarly, within this hijra community, sexual or romantic relationships between members do occur. Though there is no strict taboo, it was understood by the researcher that such relationships are not encouraged or fairly looked upon. Kothaapa mentions one such couple where the hijra had sexual relations with her customer who later joined the community and became her chela. In such instances, the lines can be muddy and the conversations are usually avoided.

In order for the kinship bond to be forged the individuals go through initiation rituals. Rituals are very important component of every culture. They not only form collective experiences such as large scale political and social processes, but also have big influences on the most intimate aspects of our self-experience.

When an individual is at first introduced to the hijra community, she joins with a reference to an existing member of the community. The initiate then becomes the "chela" while the person who brought her in becomes her "guru". In a ceremony the new member is introduced to the community. During the ceremony, the initiate sits on a floor that is cleaned using water to keep the cool. The guru sits on a raised platform (or chair). The guru asks the initiate whether she is joining the community because of hunger or lust. Once the initiate responds by saying that she is joining



because of hunger, the guru takes her *achol* and puts it over her; a proverbial roof over her head. The initiate then stands up and greets everyone around the room. The guruma welcomes her new *chela* with a *laddu* wrapped in beetle leaf. The initiated chela will now learn the *ultabhasha* which is a language that the members of the community share. Same language further strengthens the bond as well as works as a fort, behind which the hijras form an emotional and mental support system for each other.

Throughout his life there are few choices that the hijra would make. One such choice is the removal of the male organs. In the community, a hijra who has undergone a certain ritual of removing their male genitalia is considered more of a hijra – or a hijra that is given more respect- than one who has not. In fact during this research, it was found that a guru who has not gone through this operation can be challenged for her position.

While many may term this as mutilation, it must be acknowledged that none of the members are forced due to peer pressure. In the end, it is still an individual's choice to make. The key informant compares the rituals to the running of the bull in Spain, where every year men flock to participate in a fatal ceremony where they are required to run with the bulls to prove their manhood.

The ceremony requires a 3 month long preparation where the individual has better food than usual in order to be able to make more blood. The night before the surgery the members of the community celebrate by drinking and dancing. In the meantime the mentioned hijra is taken to a different room quietly so she can undergo surgery. The hijra is given some medicine and one of the elders performs the surgery with two long knives cutting off the male appendage at once.

The elders then insert a twig from the wood apple tree into the urinary tracts in order to stop the blood. They also employ the usage of warm water and warm straw to combat any infection and so that the bleeding stops. They also put intense ash to stop the blood flow.

In the festivity after the surgery, the hijra who has by now healed wear yellow sarees. The members give presents to the Hijra. They all greet her and welcome her as if she has been born again and she becomes a high ranking hijra in the community.

It must be noted that even after an individual joins the community after almost overriding their previous identities, even within their own community there are various nuances and processes which further affects their seemingly stagnant identity.

Rituals are important in solidifying self-identities and the various ceremonies that the hijras have including an annual festival where Hijras from different localities gather, builds on their identities. Like other forms of pilgrimage, these spaces of “arrival” allow visitors to establish a sense of communion with other like-identified people and, at the same time, experience new dimensions of selfhood. Ritualized activities constitute, reproduce and reestablish ideals of identity, while remaining flexible to new scopes of subjectivity. (Fictive Kin)

## **Chapter 5: Biases – Reinvention and solidification of Identity**

### **5.1. NGO**

The dominance of NGOs in Bangladesh mirrors a wider restructuring of the civil society in Bangladesh, more relevant to this research, the Hijra community. Ray and Katzenstein (2005) suggest ‘NGO-fication’ as moving towards ‘more protest-oriented forms of organizing within the social movement sector’. Drawing from the works of Basu and Alvarez, Roy suggests “As in the case more globally, NGOs constitute controversial actors within the feminist political field especially as they become, on the one hand, key players and, on the other, less representative of a specific kind of feminist politics in becoming more trans nationalized and professionalized” (Twin signifiers of process of ‘NGOization’; see Basu, n.d. and Alvarez, 1998). During this research it was noted NGO’s such as ShochetonShomaj Sheba Hijra Shongoton (SSSHS), Bondhu Social Welfare Society (Bondhu), Lighthouse, AsharAlo, and ICDDRDB have significant impact on the Hijra community. More specifically SSSHS, Bondhu and ICDDRDB have done workshops on sexually transmitted diseases, distributed condoms and introduced western concept of sexuality and genders which previously the Hijra population were not completely unaware of. The existence of NGOs has been successful in, if not completely, in introducing knowledge of STDs and condom usage within the prevalent Hijra population of urban Dhaka. Many of the participants volunteer and hold jobs in the different NGOs. This not only gives the Hijra a political platform, it also gives their Hijra bodied identity a socio-political stance. An official position within the society, more often the only one in their lives as Hijras, may provide the Hijra with one small glimpse of living able bodied citizens. Being aware of westerns notions of sex and gender also not only connects the Hijra body on a transnational level, but at the same time helps them understand and establish their identity of selfhood more definitively.

### **5.2. Media**

Cultural stereotypes strongly influence our perception of people, particularly, when specific information is limited and when the issue of gender itself is salient. (Walter

& Ellis). While the prominent Bangladeshi newspaper, The Daily Star's news is followed, it can be seen that there is a general progression in the frequency of the times news pertaining to Hijra was reported. While reporting news about the Hijra community, the media practices a tendency to sensationalize. It can be seen that one hand, the news is putting forth the criminal behavior of the community, on the other hand, if a member of that community is harmed for reasons not related to their gender practice, the focus still remains on their supposedly indistinct gendered bodies.

### **5.3 Body modification**

The term 'body modification' refers to a long list of practices which include piercing, tattooing, branding, cutting, binding and inserting implants to alter the appearance and form of the body. (Featherstone, *Body & Society*, 1999). Body modification can be looked at from a functionalist theory standpoint, where we find Durkheim's idea of social facts. Social facts are the values, cultural norms, and social structures which transcend the individual and are capable of exercising social control (Wikipedia). Social facts establish a form of 'informal dress code' which body modifications, in the case of Hijra, violate.

Within the Hijra community a number of body modification are practiced: Piercings are done to establish a 'feminine' appearance and fit in with their gender description, surgery within the community using only traditional tools as well as surgery with a doctor where modern medicine is taken. A less extreme form of body modification to fit a certain role is that of makeup: makeup is a way to modify one's appearance, making it a body modification, and the last form of body modification that the community takes part in is that of a sex change. Many of the members work two to three jobs in the hopes of one day being able to afford a sex change operation in India as it is not available in Bangladesh.

Depending on the level of one's modification, Hijra's social status within the community can also be influenced. Someone who has gone through the surgery of removing their male organ is considered to be a 'true' Hijra compared to someone who still has their appendage. At the same time, not all members want to get their sex

change. The distinction must be made here that of living as a Hijra and the desire to live as a woman.

Among the body moderations mentioned above, in the context of a woman many are considered 'normal' behavior, but in the context of the Hijra community the same body modifications are considered as an act of deviance by the same society. One way of looking at this is through the conflict theory, according to which it is the social elites who define what the norm is and what is deviant behavior.

#### **5.4 Choosing their profession**

Within this marginalized community, some Hijra are further marginalized based on their work. Guruma's do not support the Hijra involves in prostitution. All the participants in this research have been or are involve in prostitution. For Anjali, she chose to be involves in sex work and not "*Hijragiri*" or "*chada*" collection – subsequently called, "*badhai*" or "*cholla*" Hijras – as it required her to beg, get taunted and be on the roads for hours. Instead as a prostitute she works from 10 pm- 1 am at night, with the usual encounter of 5/6 customers a night. Her earnings come around 2-5 hundred per night. Some Hijra take the mornings off to sleep as they work at night, others get involves in a second job such as a beautician or volunteer at a local NGO. Hijras with more affiliation with NGO are understood to be having a better standing within the community. At the same time there seems to be a division based on the Hijra who identify themselves as the traditional Hijra and the members of the community who refer to themselves as the western concept of transgender. What sort of standing one has within the community also constructs one's Hijra identity.

#### **5.5 Network to strengthening social position**

Social Network Theory is the study of how people, organizations or groups interact with others inside their network. Understanding the theory is easier when you examine the individual pieces starting with the largest element, which is networks, and working down to the smallest element, which are the actors. There are three types of network, one of which is Socio-centric network, which are closed networks by

default. (What is Social Network Theory). In the Hijra community there is an underlying web of network that appropriates many of the actions taken by the community and the individuals. To earn money through hijragiri, traditionally hijras would visit houses with new born children. They would know which house had a new born child by seeing wet clothes spread outside of the house for drying. They would dance and sing as a form of celebration and bless the child and hijras were considered to have spiritual elevation. In the modern times with the privacy of apartment buildings, the availability of information is not easy. Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault 1998: 63). Power is also a major source of social discipline and conformity. According to Foucault, power transcends politics but rather an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon. During the course of this research, it was noted that hijras maintain a vast network system both within and outside of their community. In a sense, it can be seen as their resistance to different modes of domination. In this network, they have apartment guards, chauffeurs who inform the hijras about any new born and get a commission from the hijras earnings. To avoid social harassment, the research participants had one pharmacist from whom they bought condoms in cartons. Hijras always maintain connections with few police men in order to avoid being further harassed by them.

While this concludes their network with external actors, Hijras maintain a more closed network within themselves, where each guru of different localities – international and national- maintain ties which further solidify their exchange of information, way of living, and new opportunities for business.

## **5.6 Religion**

Drawing from Reddy’s paper, Hossain “suggests that Hijra demonstrate a heavy bias towards Islam. Despite being born Hindus and despite their recourse to Hindu cosmology to justify their position in Indian society, Reddy’s Hijra subjects generically identify as Muslims” (Hossain, 2012, pp.497). Reddy presents the

Hijras claim that “we are all Musalmans now (Reddy, 2005, p.99ff). Hijras in Bangladesh have been similar in their approach to maintaining the division between Islam and Hinduism. When asked about which religion Anjali follows, she claims she is a Muslim. In a point of fact, all the six participants in this research strongly associate with Islam. A few such as Asha, and Kotha are saving up to one day perform, Hajj, the religious pilgrimage for Muslims. Many of the Hijra rituals are embedded in Hinduism. To the researcher’s surprise, the Hijras interviewed for this research are clear on the distinction that they are Muslims but that their ‘culture’ follows the Hindu cosmology. “In Bangladeshi context Hijra concurrently observe both Hindu-identified and Islamic beliefs and practices. Yet Muslim-born Hijra in Bangladesh do not identify themselves as Hindus based on their ritualistic observance of Hindu marked practices and beliefs. Rather they take pride in being Muslim despite their recourse to a Hindu cosmological frame of reference” (Hossain, 2012, p. 498). As Reddy suggests there is no differentiation within the community between those who are Hindu-born Hijra, or *chaitanand surki*, the Hijra term for Muslims. Many of the Hijras are welcomed by the muezzins in their local mosques. During religious festivals such as Eid or shab-e-barat, the Hijras attend mass prayers in mosques dressed in traditional men garb of Panjabi. When asked about how they would want to be buried, Hijra’s most often responded by saying, “I came into this world with five sets of limbs and I will also have to go back with these five”. Similar response was gathered when I queried about their choice of dressing as a man when going to the mosques or when they will take part in Hajj. For them, “Allah made me. He knows what I am. I can fool the rest of the world, but I cannot fool him” Hijras temporarily reject their self-identity as a Hijra not because of cultural or social stigma but as respect to their God. It must be noted here how Hijras constantly shift between their own identities as a Hijra and of that was prescribed to them at birth. Although Hossain in his paper suggests that “the majority of Hijra in Bangladesh identify as Muslim, they generally do not invoke Islam or Hinduism, or religion per se, in crafting of their selfhood” (Hossain, 2012, p. 510), a distinction must be made about the two self-identities that the Hijras have constructed throughout their lives. They have to maintain an identity that is religious and one that is not heterosexual in

nature. Hansen believes that assimilation of one identity does not require abolition of existing identities. Roccas and Brewer suggest “compartmentalization”, whereby a person maintains multiple identities, but each identity is specific to a certain context, whereas Paul puts forth the idea of “merging” where each identity is set to co-exist peacefully until loyalty to one identity threatens the cohesion of those united by it (Wiseman, 2014, p. 20)



## **Chapter 6: Struggles and demand in establishing identity on a large societal context**

### **6.1 Law and the Government**

The legal system of Bangladesh is derived from the English common law system, and it was inherited during the British colonial era (Godwin 2010, p. 22). Under the constitution of Bangladesh, any discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, sex and caste is prohibited (Sexual Rights Initiative 2009, p. 1). By contrast the penal code 1860 section 377 clearly states a prohibition of carnal intercourse against the order of nature. The punishment may range up to ten years of imprisonment (Sexual Rights initiative 2009, p. 3), or ay even extend to lifetime of incarceration (Godwin 2010, p. 23). The ambiguity of the law can also penalize heterosexual activities considered against the order of nature. Consequently, there has been no case tried under this section of the penal code ( Sexual Rights Initiative 2009, p.3) but it has been used in a normative sense; where it is considered acceptable for law enforcement agencies and others to bully persons that do not comply with the heteronormitive structures of the Bangladeshi society (Godwin 2010, p.22). The position of a Hijra in this case is ambiguous as, as an institution the Hijra body is given protection by the constitution, but at the same time sought to be penalized for engaging in homosexual activity. This raises a question about the understanding of the state of what a Hijra body means. The key informant of this research, Kothaapa, mentions how in many instances they were not shunned for being Hijra in various religious activities in the local mosques. Although once there was more media coverage about the community and it was invariably understood by the locality that hijras often engage in same-sex intercourse, they were called sinful. Therefore, a Hijra body is still acceptable, as long as the body refrains from being a sexual one. For a Hijra this ambiguous position with the law and the government creates an imbalance in their place in the society, invariably affecting their sense of identity. Question remains, are they criminals or are they law abiding citizens?

## 6.2 Doctor

In a 2015 international online news article Mehtab's states that "these jobs are meant for the hijras. And unless we are sure that they are hijras, we can't give them the jobs". There were 12 jobs that the hijras were given an allocation from the government. Albeit all 12 were rejected, on account of a medical test which was performed by a doctor. The news was met with outrage from the hijra community, but the rest of the mainstream society remained unbothered. The medical professionals have a huge in. Often times, the hijras do not receive proper medical care. In recent times due to the spurge of NGO backed hospitals and chambers, the members of the hijra community have an easier access to the basic health care services. Even so, if a hijra simply walked into a hospital without having a previous connection with the medical staff he/she will have to go through a series of harassments. It was reported to the researcher that a doctor might refuse to treat the hijras, other medical staff will frown upon the hijra, and the hijra would not be welcomed in the ward to share beds with other patients. Many a times the medical staff would not know which ward to put the hijra patient in and a doctor might ask more money from a hijra knowing that she does not have many options. While it was reported by some of the participants that they never face such harassments, in these cases, the patients only go to NGO backed clinics or they dress as man and get treated.

There are two things happening in a hijras life when there is need for medical care. In one instance he/she often just ignores seemingly minor problems, in other cases they get treated for only the basic health problems that small times, poorly funded clinics can provide.

In the end a hijra body suffers neglect for the treatment of his or her body. This occurs not due to any compelling medical evidence but due to the social control over the hijra body.

### **6.3 Police**

“Gross human rights violation has often been reported by civil society movements lobbying for the rights of the Hijra community. Violation occurs in forms of abduction, arbitrary arrests, detention, beatings and gang rape by law enforcement agencies and other. There have also been reports of molestation, both on physical and psychological levels, of people with non-heteronormative gender expressions and attributes. Left with very few options, many Hijras turn to occupation within prostitution and drugs” (Sexual Rights Initiative 2009, p.4). Kothaapa works as part of a dance group, in her earlier days in the Hijra community; her group was invited to dance at the *gayeholud*. The groups work ended around midnight when they were asked by some of the guests to have drinks with them. They were taken to an old building where they were all forced to have sex. Every member of the dance group (who were all Hijras) was raped around 8 times that night. They were bleeding and were not allowed to clean themselves. Later that night there was a raid by the police. The entire Hijra group was arrested. According to the police it was obvious that they were lying and that they were all actually prostitutes. Kothaapa and a few of the members were still not open to their family members about their Hijra identity. They offered money and pleaded to let them go. The police negotiated that they will let the group walk, condition being they would have to perform oral sex with the officers. Indeed, Kothaapa and her group met with their demand. At the end of the night they went back to their communal house and remained there untreated both mentally and physically.

### **6.4 Local People**

Ward draws from Schilt and Westbrook to illustrate that many nontrans (“gender normal”) people believe that Tran’s people hide their true gender and engage in acts of gender deception that are rightfully punishable by outing or violence. This perception of being deceived is intensified in instances in which gender ‘normals’ experience sexual desire for trans people and subsequently question their own heterosexuality. Through thoughtful analysis of the encounters between “gender normals” and “gender deceiver,” the authors illuminate the mutually constitutive

relationship between the gender binary and heteronormativity. They add evidence to a growing body of research that reveals that one of the primary functions of the gender binary - including processes of doing gender- is to ensure the transparency and authenticity of heterosexuality and homosexuality. (Ward, *Gender & Society*, 2009, p. 437). A form of this attitude can be observed in Anjali's account of her night out during her working hours on the streets. A man wanted to have sex with her without paying her, when she refused; he was agitated and slapped her in the face. The next day, a mob of men came to drive the seemingly deviant sexual beings out of their locality. Anjali and the other Hijras, who shared the block, ran for their lives. A less extreme version of this can be seen in the participant's childhoods. When Lara was growing up, her brother locked her up in school for an entire day during the summer holidays when everyone was out. He was angry because his friends tease him about his brother who acts like a 'lady boy'. He took it upon himself to fix her public behavior as their parents would not take any such actions.

## **Chapter 7: Emancipation for a new identity and social status**

According to a study done by Hahm (2010) on Human Security of Hijras in Pakistan, there are three dimensions of human security. These are personal security, financial means and community building. The study concludes that what affects human security for Hijras are age, location, family wealth, and gender. The social construction of gender is something that plays an important role in the sense of security for the Hijras, as it influences several practical insecurities, such as lack of access to the job market, lack of access to the education system and the lack of access to health care facilities. Hijra accounts irrefutably demonstrate a simple anthropological theme, as focused upon by Ruth Benedict (1934) that the margins of a culture are intimately associated to its center and that understandings of the abnormal and the normal mutually reinforce each other. The role of the hijra, both as experienced and as conceptualized by other, also challenge us in various ways, representing the construction of gender oppositions but also the possibilities of gender diversities. An in the end, the everyday lives of hijras inspire us, as they disclose the countless ways the human beings, even under the most adverse circumstances, become mediators in shaping their own lives, creating meaningful identities and resisting, in minor and major ways, the oppression of stigma, marginality and poverty. (Vanita, 2002)

In conclusion, during the research of this paper, the various focal points which make up the Hijra identity slowly emerged. The choice of expressing oneself stems from a personal desire but the ultimate expression is influenced and to some extent marred by the socio-political and cultural strains in Bangladesh. The Hijra body may draw rituals from both Hinduism and Islam, the influences remain only on the cultural context and do not pose as a mode of separation within the community; whereas, political, social and cultural ideologies and policies greatly influence the Hijra body's status, place within the community and home, and demands. The community is still on the fringes, but now it is gradually making its way to the forefront. Even so, the focus it is garnering leaves a lot to be desired. There is a definite gap within the government initiatives and field work done to substantiate the policies. While this

particular research was rather small-scale, this researcher hopes that this inspires other anthropologists and academics to investigate the various nuances and gaps which have only been mentioned in this paper.

### Additional Remarks:

A few responses from the online survey:

### How do you think Hijras earn a living?(38 responses)

Not in a way they probably would choose to

Dancers and baby blessers

begging, selling sex, miscellaneous things

It's very difficult for Hijras to earn a living, especially in our country. They often have to resort to charity, low paying jobs on the fringes of society or even sex work to get by.

By doing various kinds of jobs, more so work in entertainment

Singing/dancing/prostitution/begging

Begging

In general they go around collecting money, but a lot may actually have other jobs

Begging.

In Bangladesh? I hear "chadabaji" (Extortion) or something like that

I see most of them in my area live on donation and charity, few of them I personally know that lives on selling drugs and many by prostitution. And very very few of them actually have a job or works in an NGO or social services.

Begging, prostitution, petty theft.

A laughable amount, sadly

N/A

Since our society doesn't see them as normal human beings they cannot have a proper source of earning

Grabbing, begging, prostitution

Harassing offices and pedestrians for money

The way we usually see...asking money from stores and random people. But hey.if u gotta do that for a living, you do that. It's not like they are given opportunities.

Extortion

They forced people for the Money in Public places

Through asking for money, welfare

As far as I know, they harass people to get money

Through suffering collecting money from men and others

I assume normally, getting a job

Extortion

It varies from society to society, and often due to circumstances in a manner undesirable and objectionable.

Differs from person to person just like straight people

Collecting 'chada' from around the city, often through use of verbal abuse

Donations, prostitution, entertainment.

Collecting money for living

I am not equipped to answer this question

Begging

Working where they are allowed to work, otherwise just forcefully begging

Mostly through prostitution as they find it hard to get other jobs

I thought they got money from the government.

Mostly by blackmailing people.

In Bangladesh, I saw them earning through harassing people.

It's the responsibility of government.

### Have you ever had an interaction with a hijra? What was your experience?

Yes. It was a positive experience	<b>18</b>	<b>46.2%</b>
Yes. It was a negative experience	<b>15</b>	<b>38.5%</b>
No	<b>6</b>	<b>15.4%</b>

### Are you aware of the government's policy on Hijra?

Yes	<b>13</b>	<b>35.1%</b>
No	<b>23</b>	<b>62.2%</b>
Other	<b>1</b>	<b>2.7%</b>

### Would you be comfortable sharing a work space with a hijra?

Yes	<b>25</b>	<b>64.1%</b>
No	<b>3</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
Indifferent	<b>11</b>	<b>28.2%</b>



## **Reference**

- Bangladeshi hijras angry over gender testing for government positions. ( 2015, July 1). *Aljazeera America*, p. 1.
- (2010). *Hijras/Transgender Women in India: HIV, Human Rights and Social Exclusion*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- (2013). *Transgender Health and Human Rights*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- Hijras, ethnic groups to get SME loans. (2015, June 10). *The Daily Star*.
- The Hijra Pride. (2015, January 23). *The Daily Star*.
- Hijra facts needed in textbooks. (2016, June 19). *The Daily Star*, p. 1.
- Hijra shot at Uttara. (2016, February 09). *The Daily Star*.
- Hijras assault youth, push him off bus. (2016, November 30). *The Daily Star*, p. 1.
- Hijras legally 3rd gender but yet to get rights. (2016, July 24). *The Daily Star*, p. 1.
- Butler, J. (December, 1988). Performatice Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 519-531.
- Chase, C. (1998). Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism. 189-211.
- Chettiar, A. (2015). Problems Faced by Hijras (Male to Female Transgenders) in Mumbai with Reference to Their Health and Harassment by the Police. 752-759.
- Conrad, P. (1992). Medicalization and Social Control. 209-232.
- Dasgupta, S. (Submitted, April 2015). From Transgender to Third-Genders. 1-21.
- Defining Trauma and Child Traumatic Stress*. (n.d.). Retrieved from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <http://www.nctsn.org/content/defining-trauma-and-child-traumatic-stress>
- Ellis, J. W. (1996). Advertising and Culture. *The Selling of Gender Identity*, 91-103.
- Fasuto-Sterling, A. (1993). The Five Sexes. 20-25.
- Feinberg, L. (1992). Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come. 133-143.

- Hahm, S. C. (November 2010). Striving to Survive: Human Security of the Hijra of Pakistan. 1-66.
- Hijra, L. o. (n.d.).
- Hossain, A. (December 2012). Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming Hijra in South Asia. 495-513.
- Hubbard, R. (1996). Gender and Genitals: Constructs of Sex and Gender. 157-165.
- Hubbard, R. (1996). Gender and Genitals: Constructs of Sex and Gender. 157-165.
- Karim, M. (2013, November 11). Hijras now a separate gender.
- Klobus, C. A. (1972). Fictive Kin Term Use and Social Relationships: Alternative Interpretations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 615-620.
- Kosut, M. (2015). Tattoos and Body Modification. 32-38.
- Laws of Bangladesh*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs: <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/>
- Nanda, S. (2000). Hijra and Sadhin: Neither Man nor Woman in India. 27-41.
- Nanda, S. (2002). Life on the Margins: A Hijra's Story. 159-173.
- Reza, P. R. (2015, June 01). Bangladesh wants 'third gender' to serve as traffic police. *Global Voices Online*.
- Schneider, J. W. (August 2009). The Reaches of Heteronormativity. 433-438.
- Siddiqi, D. M. (2011). Sexuality, rights and personhood: tensions in a transnational world. 1-11.
- Stenqvist, T. (2015). The Sociat Struggle of Being Hijra in Bangladesh- cultural aspiration between inclusion and illegitimacy. 1-52.
- Vanita, R. (2002). Dosti and Tamanna: Male-Male Love, Difference, and Normativity in Hindi Cinema. 146-148.
- Vernon W. Cisney, N. M. (December 28, 2015 ). Biopower: Foucault and Beyond.
- What is Social Network Theory*. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://socialnetworking.lovetoknow.com/What\\_is\\_Social\\_Network\\_Theory](http://socialnetworking.lovetoknow.com/What_is_Social_Network_Theory)
- Wilchins, D. V. (1997). One Percent on the Burn Chart: Gender, Genitals and Hemaphrodites with Attitude. 215-222.

