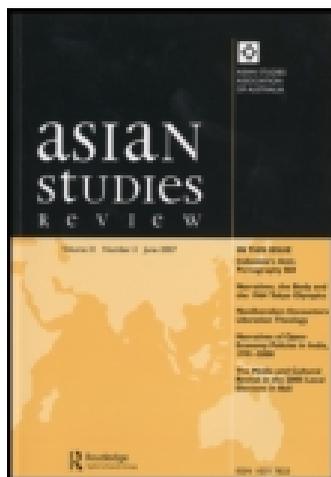


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Beyond Emasculation: Being Muslim and Becoming *Hijra* in South Asia

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Abstract: *Hijra, the icon of sex/gender non-conformism in South Asia, are “male-bodied” people who identify as female and sacrifice their male genitals to a goddess in return for spiritual prowess. While hijra draw on a narrative tradition that creatively mingles Hinduism and Islam, scholars suggest that hijra exhibit a special bias towards Islam. In recent times, as in the more distant colonial past, that association has been drawn on the basis of emasculation, the putatively defining ritual of hijrahood. Drawing on ethnographic research in contemporary Bangladesh, this paper challenges the association between emasculation and hijrahood. Becoming a hijra is a complex process. Hijrahood is an identity acquired through various and repeated ritual and gender practices that are described by my interlocutors as hijragiri, “the occupations of the hijra”. Those occupations are construed as acts of devotion to both Muslim saints and Hindu mother goddesses, an eclectic cosmological frame of reference that defines and is practically acquired in and through ritual practice. I argue that hijra transcendence of the categorical boundaries and communal politics that divide Hindu and Muslim in South Asia is best accounted for neither in terms of an abstract theological pluralism nor in terms of hijra’s ascribed and chosen affiliations with other subalterns. What Reddy (2005) refers to as hijra “supra” religious/national subjectivities emerge out of the plurality of their daily life practices and the incessant material and symbolic comings and goings through which “hijrahood” is constructed in South Asia.*

Keywords: *Bangladesh, hijra, Islam, Hinduism, syncretism, pluralism, emasculation, orientalism*

Introduction

Hijra, the proverbial third sex/gender in South Asia, are an institutionalised subculture of feminine-identified male-bodied people who desire “macho” men and who sacrifice their male genitals to a goddess in return for spiritual prowess.

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Scholarly interest in *hijra* dates back to colonial times, when the apparent recalcitrance and irreducibility of *hijra* to any neat conceptual category not only troubled the British colonial mind and European scholarly imagination but also posed a direct challenge to the classificatory imperatives of the colonial administration (Lal, 1999). Recent scholarship has added considerably to our understanding of *hijra*, and has complicated over-romanticised representations of the *hijra*, highlighting the myriad modalities of differentiation, including locality, kinship, globalisation, religion, language, gender and class, through which *hijra* subjectivities are produced and inflected (Cohen, 1995; Agrawal, 1997; Reddy, 2005; Hall, 1997; Nanda, 1999). Nonetheless, contemporary representations of the *hijra* may be seen as a continuation of a longstanding colonial attempt to contain their apparent unintelligibility (Gannon, 2009). More specifically, I suggest, there remain two conventional tropes on the making of hijrahood in South Asia that remain uninterrogated – namely, emasculation and Islam. This paper complicates stereotypical notions of hijrahood as inhering in and flowing from emasculation, and seeks to dismantle the presumed association between emasculation and Islam that, at least in the contemporary popular imaginary in India, has led to the further demonisation of Muslims.

The first part of the paper describes the multiple ways of being Muslim and becoming *hijra* in contemporary Bangladesh that challenge prior characterisations that construe *hijra* as Muslim because of their presumed association with castration. As the ethnography I present demonstrates, there is no single royal road to hijrahood in Bangladesh. There are both emasculated and non-emasculated *hijra*, *hijra* who are householding men and those who are exclusively feminine identified. Rather, it is through participation in various *hijra* occupations that they attain the requisite acumen and skills to become and be recognised, by both fellow *hijra* and the wider community, as *hijra*. Hijrahood in this sense is processual and best understood, following Bourdieu (1992) and his feminist interlocutors (e.g. Moore, 1994; Blackwood, 2010), as emerging in practice – that is, in the normative and transgressive inclinations and identifications they acquire as part of the process of doing and becoming *hijra*.

The second part of the paper introduces *hijra* origin myths and ritual practices, and describes a festival that celebrates the emergence of newly emasculated *hijra*. These myths, rites and practices variously combine Muslim and Hindu symbolism and are described by *hijra* as acts of devotion to both Muslim saints and Hindu mother goddesses. I also describe *hijra* participation in the celebration of a Sufi festival. My interlocutors' intricate negotiations and navigations of religious beliefs and practices, rituals, festivities, aspirations, moral geographies and cosmologies shed new light on Reddy's (2005) contention that *hijra* constitute true supra-national subjects on account of their transcendence of communal divides between Islam and Hinduism. I argue that *hijra* supra-localities are best accounted for neither in terms of an abstract theological pluralism nor in terms of an ascribed or chosen political affiliation with other subalterns. Rather, "supra" religious/national subjectivities emerge out of the plurality of *hijra* daily life practices and the incessant material and symbolic comings and goings that characterise what my interlocutors styled as the "occupation of the *hijra*".

Emasculation and Islam in the Conceptualisation of *Hijra* in South Asia

In her now classic ethnographic study of *hijra* in south-central India, Nanda (1999) argued that the tolerance and practical accommodation of so-called third gender people in India emanates from a Hindu veneration of androgyny. It is the practical belief of Hindus about *hijra* being sacrosanct intermediate beings, she contends, that accords the *hijra* a special status in India. For Nanda (1999, pp. 24–26), the practice of emasculation is a religiously inspired ritual sacrifice in return for which the *hijra* in India become spiritually powerful beings with the capacity to both bless and curse. Although Nanda does not read emasculation in terms of Islam as others do (see below), emasculation in her account emerges as the single most defining rite of passage through which not only are *hijra* bodies produced in India, but also “real” *hijra* set themselves apart from those they deem to be fake.

Nanda’s projection of *hijra* as a third sex has been critiqued by several scholars. Cohen (1995) takes Nanda to task for being indifferent to what he calls the “bloodied violence” of castration that individuals have to undergo to constitute an acceptable third category, while Agrawal (1997) argues that emasculation is emblematic of Indian non-acceptance, rather than accommodation, of sex/gender diversity. Reddy’s (2005) full-length ethnography illustrates that *hijra* as an identity is too complex to be read as merely a third sex/gender. Disclosing the multiple hierarchies of religion, caste, class, gender and sexuality within which *hijra* are situated, Reddy draws our attention to the contextual nature of thirdness and the “moral economy of respect” in terms of which various groups negotiate, contest and assert their authenticity and solicit recognition as *hijra*.

Reddy’s (2005, p. 4) concern to complicate and multiply, if not dismantle altogether, third gender categories informs the approach adopted here. However, this paper diverges from Reddy’s account empirically and analytically in two important ways. First, while Reddy acknowledges the variability and fluidity of *hijra* subjectivities and identifications, in keeping with Nanda, Cohen and Agrawal, she contends that emasculation remains the most important criterion by which “real” *hijra* differentiate themselves from false ones and the primary means by which *hijra* achieve some measure of respect in public culture. While in public *hijra* in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, often invoke the trope of being “born that way” – i.e. born without discrete male genitalia – in reality there are both *hijra* with a penis and those without, and *hijra* celebrate those gifted in the art of concealing the penis as much as they honour those who have undergone emasculation. Moreover, both *hijra* with penises and those without, known as *janana* and *chibry* respectively, are considered indispensable to the smooth and successful conduct of *hijragiri*, the ritual occupations of *hijra*. Neither *janana* nor *chibry* are accorded more authentic status within the *hijra* community. I argue that it is not on account of emasculation but rather by dint of one’s ability to learn and subsequently conduct *hijragiri* that one becomes, and is publicly recognised as, a *hijra*, regardless of one’s genital status.

Secondly, Reddy 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. Reddy maintains that *hijra* claims that “we are all Musalmans now” (2005, p. 99ff) are based both on daily religious practices, the celebration of Islamic

festivals and pilgrimage to Mecca and on the ritualistic observance of bodily practices that are marked by the *hijra* as Islamic – namely, circumcision and castration.

Reddy is not alone in highlighting the apparent elective affinities between Islam and hijrahood in India. Nanda (1999) maintains that the *hijra* are rooted in Hindu beliefs and practices, but she notes that they paradoxically display a special bias towards Islam. *Hijra*, she reports, talked nostalgically about their greater social prestige under the Muslim rulers. Drawing attention to the Mughal patronage of eunuchs in the royal court as harem guards, Nanda (1999, p. 23) argues that Islam in the Indian context provides a practical/historical model of accommodating the *hijra*. Jaffrey (1997) goes further in her quasi-historical account and suggests that *hijra* are the direct descendants of the Islamic institution of eunuchdom. She quotes at length from a report produced for the Indian government that states that it was only *after* the Muslim invasion that the practice of castration became widespread in India. In a similar vein, Taparia (2011) argues that *hijra* adopted Hindu practices as a consequence of the loss of their courtly prestige under the Mughal sultanate. From being a cruelly enslaved commodity under the Mughal, *hijra* actively exercised agency to transform the Islamic practice of emasculation into a culturally acceptable trope of idealised renunciation in Hindu-dominated India.

Reddy reads *hijra* self-identification as Muslim in Hindu-dominated India as a manifestation of a minority coalitional politics where *hijra* reputedly claim a special sense of affinity with Muslims based on their respective subaltern identifications (2005, pp. 113–14). She further contends that *hijra* identification with minoritarian Islam makes the *hijra* a true supra-local/national subject in the Indian context. While this way of construing *hijra* identification with Islam potentially opens up novel ways to reconceptualise hijrahood, it is also important to recognise that *hijra* practices may act to reinforce rather than subvert the Hindu cultural politics of virile masculinity. That *hijra* in India reportedly deem castration to be an exaggerated form of circumcision that renders them Muslim confirms stereotypical representations of Muslims as “incomplete men” (Ramaswami, 2007 pp. 118–19; see also Osella, this volume) and consolidates the dominant Hindu projection of Muslims as both “emasculated” and “hypersexual” (Hansen, 1996; Moodie, 2010, p. 539; see also Bhaskaran, 2004; Puar, 2005).

While in Hindu-dominated India *hijra* self-identification as Muslims because of their observance of Muslim-marked rituals may appear extraordinary, the ritualistic observance of Islamic identified beliefs and practices by the *hijra* of Bangladesh, most of whom come from Muslim families, is a rather ordinary feature of what Muslims in Bangladesh generically do. In the 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. Similarly, although there are also Hindu-born *hijra* in Bangladesh, they generally adhere to and identify with their religion of birth and there is no communitarian pressure on the Hindu-born *hijra*, or *chaiton* as the *hijra* call them, to become *surki*, the *hijra* term for Muslims. Nor do the Hindu *hijra* talk about becoming Muslims because of their initiation into the *hijra* community as Reddy suggests.

Muslim *hijra* in Bangladesh often situate their Hindu-marked cosmology and practices within the framework of an open and transcendent Islam. Although they argue that their gender liminal status transcends all religious and geographical borders, evidenced in their accommodation of both Hindu-identified practices and Hindu-born people, they nonetheless affirm their Islamic identity. It is this syncretistic practice enacted through *hijra* performative appropriations of both Islam and Hinduism that I intend to shed light on. I demonstrate that the categorical oppositions of Hindu versus Muslim are creatively collapsed in the enactment of *hijra* religiosity in terms of both faith and praxis. The study of the plurality of both Hindu and Islamic beliefs and practices of the *hijra* in Bangladesh sheds new light on *hijra* supra-locality while being critically attentive to the orientalist deployment of Islam/emasculation as the (chosen and ascribed) basis of that claim. The exploration of Islamic eclectic religiosity not only furnishes insights into the context-dependent nature of Islamisation but also helps reorient dominant approaches to the study of Islam.

Asad (1986), in his watershed essay 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam', took anthropologists to task for subscribing to the idea that Islam is what Muslims do. His critique focused on the problematic tendency to look at Islam through the dyads of low versus high or rural versus urban in ways that reproduced orientalist understandings of the religion. He urged anthropologists to interrogate Islam as a discursive tradition with a specific focus on the politico-economic regimes that render the orthodoxies of a particular time hegemonic. However, attending to orthodoxy can work to deflect attention from the way that Islamic orthodoxy is performatively shaped and co-opted by Muslims as much in daily life practices as in discourse (e.g. Schielke, 2009; Marsden, 2005). Soares and Osella (2009) propose the notion of "Islam mondain" as one way out of the epistemic impasse by focusing on the various real world situations that people inhabit and make sense of as Muslims. In other words, Islam mondain moves beyond an orientalist view of Islam as the all-encompassing cipher while also demonstrating that lived Islam and the cultivation of Islamic sensibilities is far more complex than approaches predicated on orthodoxy allow for or attend to. Adopting this approach here, the ethnography of *hijra* I present seeks to disclose not only the multiple shades of grey (Beatty, 1999) but also the multiple ways of being both Muslim and *hijra*.

***Hijragiri* and the Making of Hijrahood in Dhaka**

Hijra in Bangladesh predominantly come from working-class backgrounds and tend to reside in areas marked as lower class. In Hridoypur (a pseudonym), an area in Dhaka with a heavy concentration of slums, there are about 50 *hijra* spread across the area. Hridoypur is presided over by Jomuna, a nonagenarian *hijra* who lives outside the area in her/is¹ ancestral house. Due to infirmity, Jomuna has divided her/is area of ritual jurisdiction (*birit*) between two *hijra* disciples: Rina and Kalu. *Birit* refers more specifically to an area in which a group of *hijra* has sole access in terms of collecting *cholla* (alms) and performing *badhai* (the act of taking a newborn, especially male, child in the arms and dancing with it before demanding gifts in cash and kind). These two practices constitute *hijragiri*, the quintessential occupation of the *sadrals* *hijra* (see also Nanda, 1999, pp. 1–3). While the word *sadrals* in *hijra*

parlance literally refers to those who wear *sadra* or *sari*, the meaning of *sadrali* extends beyond mere sartoriality to refer to *hijra* who perform the aforesaid occupations in the name of two goddesses (see below). Not only do Rina and Kalu have oversight of Jamanu's *birit* in Hridoypur; they also travel to West Bengal in India at least once a year for ritual occasions and to help mediate disputes among *hijra* there.

Once a week, Jomuna drops by to check in on her/is disciples and the groups of *hijra* that they oversee on her/is behalf. Kalu, the most favoured disciple of Jomuna, is a heterosexually married *hijra* whose heteronormative family lives in another area, a 30-minute ride by rickshaw from Hridoypur. Unlike the stereotyped image of *hijra*, many *hijra* in Dhaka are in fact heterosexually married men who simultaneously perform the role of "macho" householding men and that of *hijra*.

Each *hijra* group in Dhaka has both *janana* (non-emasculated) and *chibry* (emasculated) *hijra* as members. Emasculation itself is not the single most important defining feature of hijrahood; nor does it correlate with one's status among fellow *hijra*. *Janana hijra* are an integral part of the *sadrali hijra* (those who follow the occupation of the *hijra* goddesses).² There are other groups of "male-bodied" feminine-identified people in Bangladesh. In mainstream discourse all men who publicly transgress normative masculine ideals are relegated to the status of *hijra*. Among non-normatively identified people, however, only those who carry out *hijragiri* are considered to be authentic, or *sadrali, hijra*.

Several *birit* are controlled and supervised by *janana hijra* under whose discipleship *chibry hijra* operate. These non-emasculated *janana hijra* also have specific ritual functions within the *hijra* community that the *chibry* (emasculated *hijra*) are not entitled to, and vice versa. For instance, the worship of the drum (*dhol puja*) that I discuss later in this paper is the exclusive privilege of the *janana hijra*, while emasculated *hijra* generally officiate at emasculation and associated rituals.

Janana hijra in Dhaka perform *hijragiri* in a location away from their heterosexual households where they have wives and children. This practice marks a significant departure from the extant narratives, where *hijra* are generally said to sever all ties with non-*hijra* kin. These movements in and out of heterosexual masculinity and hijrahood are not linked to ideologies about stages of the life-course (cf. Reddy, 2005, pp. 35–40; Osella and Osella, 2006, pp. 159–63; Taparia, 2011, p. 175). Rather, this movement between masculine and *hijra* subject positions is one way in which some male-bodied people explore various gender, erotic and ritual possibilities that are otherwise unavailable to normatively masculinised subjects in Bangladesh, an issue I explore at greater length elsewhere (Hossain, 2012).

As elsewhere in South Asia, there are well-established initiation rituals for people who seek to be inducted into hijrahood and become recognised as legitimate members of the *hijra* community. The most important is *asla*, a rite that establishes the relationship between a *hijra* disciple (*cela*) and her/is guru and marks her/is entry into a *hijra* house and symbolic descent group. The word "*asla*" derives from the term "*achol*", literally the end [or hem] of a *sari*. In *hijra* argot, "*asla khawa*" is a shorthand way of indicating that a *hijra* has become a *cela* under the *achol* of a guru. The very first question a *hijra* is asked when seen by another *hijra* is the name of her/is guru, and it is by the name of a guru or the symbolic house that s/he represents

that a *hijra* will be known throughout her/is life-historical trajectory in the community.

One very important skill new *janana hijra* are taught is the magical art of concealing their penises between their thighs in the twinkle of an eye, a sort of “performing art” in which most *janana* take exaggerated pride. While entrants master this art of the disappearing phallus over a period of time, *hijra* contend that it is only “real” *hijra* who are capable of acquiring this skill. For instance, Kalu, the *janana hijra* guru, was taught this art by her/is guru Jomuna, an emasculated *hijra*. According to both Jomuna and Kalu, realness or authenticity is not defined in terms of some embodied genital ambiguity or ritual emasculation, but in terms of one’s desire for normative masculine men and the subsequent mastery of skills and erudition to carry out *hijragiri*, the occupation of hijrahood. *Hijra* distinguish themselves from “*vabrajer chibry*” (people born with ambiguous genitalia), denying the latter authentic *hijra* status because of their inability to perform the art of phallic dissimulation or undergo emasculation, despite the rhetoric of being “born that way” that *hijra* invoke in public.

Contestations and conflicts around genital status do emerge when the *birrit* (ritual jurisdiction) of one *hijra* group is trespassed by another *hijra* group, regardless of whether the trespassing *hijra* are *janana* or *chibry*, and notwithstanding the fact that all *sadrals hijra* groups are composed of both *janana* and *chibry hijra*. *Chibry* berate *janana* not only because they have male genitals but also for their failure to live up to the ideal of asexuality. *Janana* castigate the *chibry* for contravening Allah’s will by altering their God-given male genitals, and argue that on the day of judgment the severed organs will turn into snakes to bite the *chibry*. *Janana* also talk about the decision taken by *chibry* to undergo emasculation as being driven by their desire to control *birrit*, because emasculation conforms to the public understanding of what a *hijra* is – i.e. a person born with missing or defective genitals. Internally, however, *chibry cels* of *janana hijra* in Hridoypur or elsewhere in Dhaka never challenged their gurus based on genital status. *Chibry* status does not entail either a greater share of the monies collected or a lesser workload.

Islam Mondain and Hijrahood in Bangladesh

Kalu, a non-emasculated *hijra*, has under her/is command around 20 *hijra*, many of whom are emasculated. Sathi, an emasculated disciple of Kalu, lives next to a mosque in the middle of a dense bazaar where “*musolli*” – as the devout are commonly referred to – say their prayers five times a day. Sathi is a *sadrals*, one who publicly dresses in female attire on a regular basis and performs *badhai*. Sathi is also a part-time sex worker who brings clients to her/is room. According to Sathi, *musolli* have never complained about her/is presence and she is on very good terms with the imam.

In Hridoypur *musolli* occasionally accost *hijra*, encouraging them to take up the path of Islam. The advice meted out to the *hijra* centres on the importance of saying prayers five times a day and following the Islamic lifestyle. *Hijra* approached by these *musolli* were not asked to give up their *hijra* identifications; nor were they ever upbraided for their sartorial cross-dressing presentations, as is often assumed to be the case in Muslim majority societies.³ In fact, a number of my *hijra* interlocutors in

Hridoypur and elsewhere participated in *chilla*, a practice whereby groups of Muslims journey together for a period of time from one place to another to preach Islam.

Sonia, now in her/is late 40s, underwent emasculation some 10 years ago. After being with a *hijra* group in Medinipur in India for about 10 years, s/he recently bought a house in Hridoypur and has settled there. Recently, Sonia performed *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and since her/is return has been working with the local mosque as a volunteer in weekly Islamic preaching. Sonia dresses like a man during her/is service for the mosque. S/he also works as the branch manager of an NGO working on the sexual health of the *hijra* in the area. In the office and house s/he stays dressed like a woman in line with the *hijra* lifestyle.

Like Sonia, many *hijra* in Bangladesh aspire to perform *hajj*, though only a few can manage it due to financial constraints. *Hijra*, as one of the *hajji hijra* once told me, are the custodians of the grave of the prophet and hence are venerated in Islam (see Marmon, 1995). Once they come back as *hajji*, their status in their community and the wider society increases. *Hijra* who make the pilgrimage perform it as men and never as women, regardless of whether or not they are emasculated. When asked why they perform *hajj* as men, *hijra* argued that the whole world could be deceived but not Allah. As Roksana, a *hajji hijra*, later told me, “You can lie to the whole world but not to Allah. He sent us in men’s bodies but we went against his will by removing what Allah had given us”. Most of the *hijra* who have performed *hajj* have resumed their *hijra* lives and continue to have sexual partners upon returning to Bangladesh, though they may deny the latter publicly.

During fieldwork conducted between September 2008 and September 2009, I joined the *hijra* groups of Hridoypur in observing *Shab-e-Barat*, the night of fortune on 15 *Shaban* of the *Hegira* Calendar.⁴ People say that the fate of mankind for the next year is written on this glorious night. Hence, Muslim men across Bangladesh meander from one shrine/mosque to another and say optional prayers repeatedly. Like the normative majority, *hijra* celebrate this day with a great deal of verve. Along with the *hijra* group in Hridoypur, I visited two major shrines in Dhaka located on opposite sides of the city. Often used by devotees and by peripatetic travellers coming from other areas of Bangladesh as a resting place, shrine premises are also major cruising sites for *hijra*. Unlike the mosques that require *hijra* to adopt masculine sartorial comportment, *hijra* typically visit these shrine premises dressed in female attire. The custodian of one shrine (*khadem*) told me that Islam is the religion of peace, and that people of all stripes, regardless of their occupational or religious affiliations, were welcome at the shrine, a view that runs counter to those of other Islamic establishments in Bangladesh (see Bertocci, 2006, for multivocality in Bangladeshi Islam). On that evening, however, the *hijra* of Hridoypur, including emasculated ones, were all dressed in normative male attire.

As we reached the first shrine, we bumped into another group of *hijra* dressed in Panjabi and pyjama, typical male attire in Bangladesh. After exchanging greetings, my *hijra* friends started to rebuke Tina, a *hijra* who had turned up dressed in female attire. “At least today you could have been real to respect this day,” someone said. Echoing these sentiments, Tina’s *gothia*, *hijra* from the same group of similar rank, launched into a tirade berating her/im for not dressing like a man. Utterly embarrassed, Tina remained silent.

Later, we moved to another shrine in the city along with Tina. There were several *hijra* groups spread across the shrine premises. Every time we spoke to a new *hijra* group the first thing they pointed out was Tina's female attire. One of the *hijra* said to Tina, "We have been sinning throughout the year by having penis in the arse. You should have at least been respectful today". When I enquired why the *hijra* were so unhappy, one *hijra* told me, "You can deceive the whole world but not Allah who created us as men, not as women. So dressing like a female on this night amounts to sinning and disrespecting Allah". Significantly, the opprobrium emanated only from fellow *hijra* and not from other devotees. At the shrines and along the way on our long walk across Dhaka, we did not encounter any heckling from the travelling bands of devotees.

Although Tina did not respond to the more senior *hijra* who criticised her/is sartorial faux pas, she did respond to the criticism of more junior *hijra*, explaining her/is conduct by saying s/he was an activist working for the rights of what s/he referred to in English as "transgender". Tina was linked with a *sadrili* group and had a guru who was both a *sadrili* and an NGO leader. Tina only worked with NGOs and never undertook the *sadrili* work. More importantly, Tina argued that as a "transgender" person s/he needed to stick to her/is feminine identity. Recently, Tina has become a national figure because of her/is health activism. Some of the organisations s/he works with promote transgender as a more respectable and authentic form of *hijra* self-identification.

The above ethnographic vignettes further nuance the various, at times contested, forms of hijrahood that are embodied and practised in South Asia. The spatial shifts between masculine comportment, and in some instances householding status, and feminine-identified hijrahood are but one part of a larger process of movement that typifies *hijra* life and work both in a geographical sense – where *hijra* routinely travel between and across national boundaries – and in the sense of moving between different sorts of social settings and occupational positions and ritual statuses. It is evident that being a *hijra* does not stand as a roadblock to one's participation in Islamic practices, from daily prayers to roadside preaching. Many *hijra* aspire to become, and be acknowledged as, good and pious Muslims, and their efforts to do so often require them to negotiate their own and others' expectations of what is and is not appropriately Islamic in relation to their own and others' expectations of what does and does not define hijrahood. That was evident both in their rebukes of the *hijra* who dressed in female attire during the ritual celebration of *Shab-e-Barat* and in stories about the requirement to perform *hajj* as men, where the final arbiter was not neighbours, fellow *hijra* or mullahs, but Allah.

The practical toleration and accommodation of the *hijra*, however, is paradoxically being challenged in recent times with the rise of NGO-led sensitisation and training programs among the imams. While those undergoing training are expected to promote the message of safe sex as part of their sermons, their exposure to such donor-led training has led to a heightened awareness of *hijra* sexual activities. For instance, several imams who received such training later routinely denounced the *hijra* as sinners as part of their weekly preaching in several mosques I visited in 2009.

From an outsider's point of view, *hijra* may seem to be involved in a delicate balancing act that requires them to meet the demands of normative Muslim masculinity in some spaces while at the same time maintaining an attachment to a

hijra subject position that entails a systematic steering away from those masculine comportments on other occasions. These contradictions and dilemmas between normative masculinity and hijrahood are not simply externally imposed, but are the product of disagreements and debates within and among *hijra* themselves about what constitutes true religious piety and authentic gender identities. This picture is further complicated, as I discuss below, by the fact that central aspects of hijrahood are implicitly if not explicitly marked Hindu.

Hijra Cosmologies and Ritual Practice in Bangladesh: Maya Ji and Tara Moni

In *hijra* households I visited in Dhaka, drums known as *dhol* frequently hang on public display. *Hijra* consider drums to be sacred. Every time *hijra* go out to perform *badhai*, the ritual practice of demanding gifts on the occasion of the birth of a newborn, they honour the drums. On one occasion after a day's hard work of *badhai* and *birit manga* (alms collection in the marketplace), a group of disciples gathered at Kalu's house, where s/he was entertaining Jomuna, the senior *hijra* guru. On entering Kalu's home, Moina, the *hijra* who plays drum during *badhai*, slung the drum onto its hook and wearily sat down on the ground. Jomuna immediately took her/im to task for not paying respect to the drum. Before setting out and after returning from *badhai*, she said, *hijra* should pay respect to the drum. If respect is not paid to the *dhol*, I was told, the *oli*, a red sack that *hijra* carry to keep the alms both in cash and kind, does not cool down. After a shared meal, we drank locally made alcohol and relaxed. Suddenly, Jomuna burst into tears and cried out, "Now that I am old you people are less respectful of me. Remember when I was young I was a beauty. People always marvelled at my ability to sing and dance. And you are all so unskilled and good for nothing". She cursed her/is disciples, invoking the names of Maya Ji and Tara Moni: "Maya Ji will punish you all for your misdeeds and negligence towards me. Don't forget you too will become infirm one day".

Maya Ji and Tara Moni, whom Jomuna invoked to solicit her/is disciples' deference and berate them for being inattentive, are the two *hijra* goddesses most associated with, and in whose names *hijra* commonly undertake, *hijragiri*, the *hijra* occupations of *badhai* and *birit manga*. The story of these two *hijra* goddesses and their association with the defining occupations of hijrahood is recounted in origin myths that were told to me by a few older *hijra*. The majority of my *hijra* interlocutors had little knowledge of these origin myths. Generally, when I asked about how the subculture of *hijra* emerged, I was simply told that it was bequeathed to them by previous generations of *hijra* and that *hijra* the world over followed the same practices as devotees of the goddess.

Below I reproduce the origin myth of these two goddesses as it was narrated to me by three senior *hijra*, who presided over three influential *hijra* groups in Dhaka. The myths I reproduce below are not verbatim accounts, but have been constructed from the different accounts given by the three *hijra*. The contents of the myths described to me by those three *hijra* were more or less structurally isomorphic, but the style and the context of narration differed.

It was the age of truth. In the first place, there was only one *hijra* called Maya Ji and s/he was alone. S/he was a true ascetic without any worldly lusts. S/he

devoted her/his life to the service of Allah. Temples/shrines were her/his abode. S/he was a *janana*; that is, a *hijra* with a phallus. Yet s/he was neither a male nor a female, as despite her/his having male genitalia s/he was never a male at heart. S/he had the preternatural power to vanish her/his phallus with three claps. S/he could also bring it back with the same. S/he lived alone for years serving at the temples and shrines and then one day s/he implored Allah to send her/im a companion. In response, Allah sent Tara Moni as a disciple to her/im. Tara too was a *janana* and was blessed with magical powers. They would use roosters to traverse the length and breadth of the earth and entertain people. Roosters were their divine vehicle. Maya would lead the rooster while Tara would sit in the back. They would don *sari* and put on ornaments made of clay. Every day when they set out for their destination they would ask the clay to turn into ornaments, which they would then wear. Upon their return at dusk they would break the bangles and bracelets. They were purely asexual and it was their asexuality that gave them the power to perform miracles.

Once, during a visit to a king's house, Tara Moni fell in love with the prince. Tara Moni was so enamoured of the prince that s/he turned the prince into a garland using her/his magical power, and then left. When they had arrived home and were sitting down to eat, Maya Ji found that although two plates were laid out, whenever Tara served out the food, the two plates magically broke into three. When this first happened Maya put the food back and served it again, but it made no difference, and s/he came to realise what her/his disciple had done.

Having deduced Tara's sin, Maya convulsed with anger and asked the earth to split. Immediately, the earth cracked open and Maya fell into the hole and vanished from the earth [the place that Maya Ji slipped into is now apparently the site of a temple somewhere in India, although my informants did not specify an exact location]. As she was falling, Tara grabbed her/his hair and implored Maya to tell her/im what s/he (Tara) could do to lead her/his life after her/his departure. Maya Ji then told her/im, "Since you have become debauched you have lost all your powers and from now on you will lead a cursed and despised life. Now you are no longer asexual and pure. From now on you will have to get rid of your genitalia artificially, beg from door to door, and dance at births and entertain the people for your livelihood.

What this origin myth discloses is that *hijra* in Bangladesh, though Muslim by birth, trace their genealogy to two *hijra* goddesses. The origin story also highlights the fact that both Maya and Tara were devoted to both temples and shrines. In the Indian context, Nanda (1999, p. 33) notes that *hijra* worship a mother goddess called Bahuchara Mata, whereas Reddy (2005, p. 97) notes a similar goddess known as Bedraj Mata. During my fieldwork, unsure as to whether Maya Ji was perhaps the same goddess by a different name, I once showed some *hijra* a poster of the Indian *hijra* deity Bahuchara Mata perched on a rooster. They immediately identified the goddess seated on the rooster as Maya Ji. Yet what is striking is not only the

difference in the plots of these origin myths – of Maya Ji and Bahuchara Mata, the mother goddess whose temple is in Gujrat – but also the way in which both Maya and Tara devoted themselves to both temples and shrines and prayed to Allah.

Hindu scriptures and popular culture contain references to numerous instances of sex/gender subversion (Pattanaik, 2002). *Hijra*, as both Nanda and Reddy suggest, also often invoke such gender-transitioning gods and goddesses to authenticate their position in Indian society. In Bangladesh, although *hijra* routinely invoke the name of Maya Ji in the company of fellow *hijra* and understand *hijra* occupations to be in some sense acts of devotion prescribed by those founding figures, they do not generally refer to these origin myths as a means of legitimating their position in the wider society. In fact, there are no widespread beliefs about *hijra* being endowed with sacred powers among the general public.

One of the central themes that emerges from the numerous tales that both Reddy and Nanda recount is the lack or loss of genitalia in the origin stories of *hijra* selfhood and sacredness. For both Reddy and Nanda, *hijra* are a group of religious “men” who sacrifice their genitals to the mother goddess in return for the power to confer blessings. In contrast, both Maya Ji and Tara Moni were *janana* (*hijra* with a penis) who could make their penises disappear with their magical claps. This mythical status corresponds to the real life context of many of the *sadrals* *hijra* in Bangladesh (*hijra* who lead their lives according to the prescriptions of Maya Ji), who are not only non-emasculated, but also often heterosexually married, living both the lives of *hijra* and of masculine householding men. One of the misfortunes that is said to have befallen subsequent generations of *hijra* as a result of Tara Moni’s deceit was that they lost the magical ability to make their penises disappear on command. Today *janana hijra* are taught the physical art of *ligam potano* (“vanishing the penis”) by their gurus as part of their initiation. At the same time, the myth explains why at least some of the subsequent generations of *hijra* undergo a more radical form of vanishing via emasculation. That there is neither any consensus nor any clear status differentiation based on genital status among *hijra* in Dhaka can perhaps in part be explained in terms of the cultural resources that this founding myth offers different sorts of *hijra* to legitimate and consolidate their positions.

Baraiya: Welcoming the Reborn Chibry Hijra

Kalu, a *janana hijra*, supervised several emasculation (*chibrano*) rites for her/is disciples during my fieldwork. *Baraiya*, the most elaborate ritual, marks the completion of the 12-day liminal period following emasculation during which convalescing *hijra* are segregated from the outside world and prepared for their reincorporation into the community as reborn *chibry* (*hijra* without penis and scrotum). Although *baraiya* is the final stage of a longer ritual process, I elaborate here only the rituals surrounding *baraiya* and not those pertaining to the pre-emasculatation and emasculation phases.⁵

The rituals are generally performed in private without non-*hijra* outsiders present, but both *janana* and *chibry hijra* from other areas are frequently invited to attend the celebrations. From the night before the *baraiya*, the initiand wears a yellow *sari*, which is changed only after the ritual cleansing. Before the bath, which is conducted by senior *hijra*, turmeric is smeared over the initiand’s body. Afterwards, the initiand

is brought back to the room and dressed in a new yellow *sari* provided by her/his guru. A thick dab of vermillion is applied to the forehead. The initiand is then brought to the room where the ritual is conducted. A senior emasculated *hijra* draws the figures of Maya Ji and Tara Moni in red on the wall. Five different types of fruit, five pieces of betel leaf, sweets, five candle lights and five small earthen bowls are placed on the altar. After the space is ritually cleansed, the initiand is made to sit before the altar and special mantras invoking the name of Maya Ji are chanted. Fruits are exchanged between the *chibry* and a *janana*. The *janana* who receives fruits from the *chibry* initiand is believed to get a “call” from Maya Ji in her/his dream, at which point the *janana* must undergo emasculation. The initiand then genuflects before Maya Ji and Tara Moni. Immediately after the submission, the initiand becomes possessed and blacks out. Water is poured into the initiand’s mouth to bring her/im back to consciousness and a coconut is thrown on the ground. All of the participants in the ritual then scramble to pick up the broken pieces of the coconut. During this ritual the initiand is said to communicate directly with Maya Ji. Later, when the initiand regains consciousness, a senior *hijra* feeds her/im a piece of meat marking the end of the 12-day period of abstinence.

While an elaborate ritual such as *baraiya* deserves fully-fledged analytical treatment, my purpose here is to highlight three aspects. First, emasculation and the subsequent conduct of *baraiya* may be seen as conferring a ritually sanctioned subject position that fulfils the prescriptions of Maya Ji. Yet the same mythic story also legitimates *janana* as being akin to the original *hijra* goddess. The question of *hijra* authenticity is further complicated in this mythic tale as in contemporary times because of the discrepancies between an idealised asexuality and the economies of desire that lie at the heart of *hijra* life. Unlike the situation in India, where emasculation is at least partially embedded within a broader cultural logic of asceticism and renunciation (Nanda, 1999, pp. 29–32; Reddy, 2005, p. 91), in Bangladesh emasculation primarily confirms one’s non-masculine and feminine-identified status rather than transcendence of sexual attachments and desire. This is precisely because, as I demonstrate elsewhere (Hossain, 2012), erotic pleasure is deemed by both *janana* and *chibry hijra* to be located in the anus rather than the penis.

Secondly, many *hijra*, including some newly initiated members of the *hijra* group conducting the *baraiya*, had little prior knowledge of the origin myths behind the rituals: that synoptic knowledge is held by senior *hijra* gurus and partly underpins their ritual power. Rather, for the majority of *hijra*, it is only through their participation in specific ritual contexts that they acquire knowledge of these origin myths.

Thirdly, *hijra* in Bangladesh generally recognise that emasculation and *baraiya* contain Hindu elements. Those markedly Hindu ritual aspects include the act of genuflection before Maya Ji and Tara Moni, the two primordial *hijra* archetypes, the drawing of vermillion on the forehead, and the chanting of mantras invoking the names of the two archetypes. *Hijra* are not alone in Bangladesh in ritual practices that may be deemed syncretistic, or perhaps more accurately pluralistic (Schendel, 2009; Bertocci, 2001). *Hijra*, however, are far more conscious of the markedly Hindu aspects of their rites: many *hijra* understand *hijra* occupations to

be Hindu in origin. Some travel to India specifically because of the assumption that their performances are likely to be better recompensed because of the sacred power that status is seen to confer there. Crucially, however, participants in these rituals, whether in the everyday performance of *hijragiri* or as newly emasculated initiands, do not see themselves as *becoming* Hindus by virtue of their participation in or conducting of this rite. Nor do they identify as such. In fact, *hijra* expressed utter consternation when I raised the question of whether they identified as Hindus or Muslims. One of the *hijra* whose *baraiya* I attended told me adamantly that s/he was no less a Muslim after the *baraiya* than s/he had been before. None of the *hijra* I spoke to saw any contradiction between their allegiance and devotion to Maya Ji and their Islamic identification. Moreover, while Maya Ji and Tara Moni may be Hindu goddesses and founding figures of hijrahood, they are not the only mythical figures of *hijra* origin stories or the sole object of *hijra* devotion.

***Sinni*, the *Hijra* Festival in Memory of a Sufi Saint**

In Bangladesh, *hijra* celebrate *sinni*, a Sufi-identified religious practice in memory of the saint Khaja Moinuddin Chisti, an influential and popular Sufi saint in the sub-continent. One *hijra* founding myth centres on Mariom, a true ascetic disciple of Khaja when he first arrived in India to spread the word of Islam. *Hijra* express a desire to visit Khaja's shrine, which is located in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Mariom, like Maya Ji, was a *janana hijra*. Since Mariom was incapable of conception, s/he requested Khaja Baba to grant her/im the power to conceive. Her/is wish granted, Mariom became pregnant but was unable to give birth as s/he didn't possess a vagina. During labour and unable to bear the excruciating pain, Mariom took a sword and cut her/is belly open to let the child out. Both Mariom and her/is child died immediately. Both were buried near Khaja's shrine. Every year, both *hijra* and Muslims from around the world pay homage to the shrine of Mariom *hijra*. *Hijra* also maintain that during the yearly "*urs*" (death anniversary) festivities of Khaja, *hijra* are the first group to have the sole right to spread their mats around Khaja's grave.

During my fieldwork, I was able to attend a *sinni* organised by Alo, an emasculated *hijra* in her/is late 40s. There were about 40 *hijra* dressed in colourful *sari* sitting in groups in the field. Curious neighbours were looking on from a distance. Swarms of children stood close by to watch the *hijra* gathering. Alo's husband (*parik*) sat in a corner packaging the food (*tobarok*) to be given out to the guests, along with a few other *hijra*. The imam of the local mosque and an apprentice had come to perform *Milad*, a special prayer offered in the name of the prophet Muhammad. As the imam started to chant verses from the Quran, the *hijra* remained silent. Towards the end of the prayer the imam implored Allah to take care of the *hijra* who had organised the program. The imam, his apprentice and Alo's husband were served food by a few *hijra* while the others moved back to the field. In the meantime, the imam left the premises with a packet of sweets, looking completely satisfied. I struck up a conversation with him, and asked what he thought of the *hijra*. The imam said that *hijra* should be loved more than the general public because they were "handicapped". After a while, Mejba, an old *hijra* who had been

basking in the sun on a mat in the open field, suddenly started clapping. *Hijra* came out of their post-lunch torpor, gathered around Mejba, and asked Rahman, a disciple of Alo, to sing. After fine-tuning the strings of the drum, Rahman started to croon, and some of the *hijra* proceeded to dance. Rahman and others rendered around 10 devotional songs themed around Allah, the prophet and the heroic conversion of Hindus to Muslims by Khaja Baba on the sub-continent. In addition, their songs challenged a particular kind of Islamic orthodoxy recently on the rise in Bangladesh. I reproduce one such song below, in translation:

Why was the sky trembling?
Why was the earth dancing?
Why was the great saint crying on that day?
That is because Khaja on that day sang.
Songs and music are the grand manifestation of Allah and his prophets.
Those who call songs and music “prohibited” are actually poets.
Why do you call them “prohibited” when you don’t know the nuances?
Without fighting, open the holy Quran and the Hadith.
Why did Belal play the drum?
Why did they sing on the day our beloved prophet left this universe?
Singing songs in cadence is like reciting the Quran.
Shah Alam in the Veda⁶ says there are two kinds of songs and the devoted practitioners of music are pious people.

These lyrics not only highlight the love of the *hijra* for the saint Khaja and the prophet Muhammad, but also challenge narrow literalist scriptural interpretations of Islam. Aside from viewing music and songs as godly, which many of the militant Islamic groups consider sacrilegious, it also calls those who oppose music and song “poets”. As the singer of this song later explained, in the early history of Islam, many composed poems in a bid to excel the Quran and so claim prophethood. The lyrics thus castigate, in a counter-discursive move, those who consider song, dance and music un-Islamic. Finally, the song also mentions that in the Veda, Shah Alam – literally the king of the world – calls the practitioners of this genre of music pious people. For *hijra*, the songs, music and invocation of Mariom, like Maya Ji and Tara Moni, are not un-Islamic. Rather, they regard song and music to be esoteric ways to connect with Allah, who they believe created all things.

The *sinni* festival described above was in fact conducted by the same group of *hijra* who participated in the *baraiya* detailed earlier. The *hijra* who organised the *sinni* festival was the one who drew the pictures of Maya Ji and Tara Moni on the wall before the newly emasculated initiand’s genuflection. Although the two rituals I have described – one focused on Maya Ji and Tara Moni, and the other on Mariom and Khaja – are commonly associated with Hinduism and Islam, respectively, most *hijra* are not troubled by this eclectic appropriation of Hinduism and Islam; nor do they elaborate a syncretistic theology to explain their ritual co-mingling. Muslim *hijra* express their allegiance to Maya Ji and Hindu-born *hijra* express devotion to Mariom, without seeing any necessary contradiction between their allegiance to one and adherence to their natal faith community. Some *hijra* told me that Maya Ji and Mariom were in fact the same, while others argued that Allah sent both Maya Ji and

Mariom as two examples from two religions so that none could claim any moral superiority over another's lineage.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to extend Reddy's (2005) suggestion that *hijra* might best be thought of as supra-local subjects. *Hijra* in India as well as in Bangladesh often say that they transcend boundaries of class, caste and religion and, as indicated in the introduction, have historically confounded attempts to classify and categorise them. For example, in his study of the *hijra* in the nineteenth century, Preston (1987) discloses the British colonial administration's move to distinguish between Hindu and Muslim *hijra*, although in reality *hijra* embodied a plethora of both Hindu and Islamic beliefs and practices. Reddy (2005) contends that Indian *hijra* religious syncretism cannot be explained merely in terms of an essentialised South Asian cultural pluralism. She hints at the possibility that *hijra* are supra-local/national subjects in Hindu-dominated India, where *hijra* share a sense of solidarity with the minority Muslims. It is the bodily basis of that putatively shared identification that I have challenged – namely, emasculation, an act that has been consistently viewed as *the* defining ritual act through which one becomes a *hijra* and that has, both in recent times and in a more distant colonial past, been seen to connect the *hijra* and Islam. Gannon (2009), for example, maintains that one of the dominant representations of *hijra* in the British colonial imaginary strategically juxtaposed the *hijra* with Islam and emasculation in a bid to claim a superior moral position over the Muslim rulers to substantiate British colonial governance. British colonialists read the institution of eunuchdom and the practice of emasculation under the Muslim rulers as the direct corollary of Muslim licentiousness.

The ethnography presented here, however, calls into question the centrality of emasculation in the production of hijrahood. There are both *hijra* with a penis and those without, some of whom move between *hijra* and normative masculinity and others who live as *hijra* on a more permanent basis. Against a focus on the singular ritual act of bodily transformation, I “processualise” *hijra* by taking into account the shifts back and forth between various ritual, sexual and gender statuses that make up hijrahood in South Asia. Hijrahood entails the attainment of ritually sacrosanct skills and acumen about various forms of gender and religious expression and their dexterous and persistent demonstration before both fellow *hijra* and *non-hijra* on a daily basis. In this paper I foreground in particular the processual production of hijrahood in both Muslim and Hindu-marked ritual practice. Hijrahood is produced and enacted, above all, through taking on the *occupations* bequeathed to *hijra* by both Maya Ji and Mariom: it is through their participation in such daily performative rituals and festive occasions that they not only acquire knowledge of those mythical founding figures but also come to experience themselves and be acknowledged as *hijra*.

In speaking of *hijra* religious belonging, I have noted that although the majority of *hijra* in Bangladesh identify as Muslim, they generally do not invoke Islam or Hinduism, or religion *per se*, in the crafting of their selfhood. Although the conduct of *hijragiri* (*hijra* occupations) requires its adherents to transcend the parochialism of both Islam and Hinduism, *hijra* never posited hijrahood as a form of syncretistic cult

emerging at the interstice of Islam and Hinduism. My interlocutors expressed utter consternation and incomprehension at my suggestion that they were either syncretistic or Hindu. Nor did my interlocutors ever interpret their Hindu-marked practices and beliefs as an expression of subaltern alliance. Rather, hijrahood is seen as an occupation that requires its adherents to practise various forms of sexual, religious and gender pluralism (Peletz, 2009).

We ought, in fact, to be cautious about imputing political intention to these sorts of practices not only because they may hold different sorts of meanings from those ascribed to them by those concerned with policing or celebrating the transgression of categorical boundaries, but also because the consequences or effects of those practices may be quite the opposite of the intentions ascribed to them. That is to say, *hijra* identification as Muslims in India does not necessarily create coalitional politics but may, as I suggested at the outset, simply reinforce pre-existing tropes of effeminate or hypersexual Muslim men.⁷ Similarly, although the Muslim-born *hijra* in Bangladesh engage in markedly Hindu-identified rituals they do not identify themselves as Hindus; nor do they participate in those Hindu-identified rituals as a political act of shared solidarity with Hindu minorities in Muslim majority Bangladesh, even if one consequence of that is a less rigid and potentially more “pluralistic” religious sensibility that challenges the extremism of some contemporary forms of Hinduism and Islam.

Notes

1. The third person singular pronoun in Bengali is uninflected by gender. I use “her/is” instead of “her” to demonstrate the context-specific and fluid nature of *hijra* gender performativity. Although scholars have conventionally used “her” in the representation of the *hijra*, this convention works to reify *hijra* as a feminine subject position that people who fail to be either adequately masculine or normatively feminine adopt, foreclosing the possibility of reading *hijra* through other optics, most notably masculinity (Hossain, 2012).
2. Reddy (2005, pp. 59–63) describes *zenana* in South India as referring to a group of non-emasculated, non-*sari*-wearing *koti* (sic), also spelt *kothi*, who are categorically distinct from, but related to, *hijra* but have separate lineages and occupations. In Bangladesh, *janana* is used in *hijra* argot to refer to *hijra* who have, or are presumed to have, a penis. It is not a self-ascribed identity category; nor do people who are described as *janana* form a social group distinct from fellow *hijra*.
3. See also Murray and Roscoe (1997) for historical examples of varied practices of cross-dressing in Muslim societies.
4. Hegira, the journey of prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622, marks the onset of the Muslim era. This event became the starting point of the Muslim calendar during Umar Ibn Al-khattab’s (634–44) caliphate. Shaban is the eighth month in this lunar calendar.
5. While I acknowledge the psychoanalytic connotations of “emasculatation”, I do not use it to refer to the reductive theories of the oedipal complex. Rather, I deploy the word to refer to the *hijra* act of *chibrano*, a ritualised event in which the scrotum and the penis of an initiand are removed with a knife by a ritual cutter known as “*katia*”.
6. The Veda mentioned in this song is the Hindu scripture, as the *hijra* later confirmed and explained this “interpolation” by saying that “Allah and Hari (Hari is a local way of designating Hindu supreme beings) are the same”.
7. In her paper on the electoral success of *hijra* in India, Reddy (2003) argues that despite *hijra*’s affinity with Islam, *hijra* politicians, far from identifying with Muslims and transcending the nation, were complicit with the hypermasculine project of Hindutva-inspired nation-building in India.

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