

## Introduction

مکلب، ایک سیمن لوبق وک سویدن باپ مدرک دئاع یک سودرم ین سی  
سی۔ یک دئاع ہپ ہجم ین نہذ یری وج ایک لوبق وک سویدن باپ ن'  
ہ بس انم ہدایز انہک روتسللانیب وک تاب ہک سوہ یت ہجم سی  
ہ نہ نسُح اک یرعاش وت یہب ہیانک و زمر ہکنویک

I did not accept the restrictions imposed by men but accepted the restrictions that my mind imposed on me.

I think it is more appropriate to call it interlinear because symbolism is also the beauty of poetry.

—Ada Jafri (from Mahmood 2008)

### OPENING SCENE

One afternoon, as I walked down the lanes of Malvani slum, Bombay, I noticed that inside the Sakhiyani office (a community-based organization [CBO] for *hijras*) there were *hijras* shrieking with laughter. When I peeped in, I saw a group of ten *hijras* sitting inside. They had taken off their upper garments, and they were comparing the size of their breasts and teasing each other by recalling incidents when their *panthis* (boyfriends or clients) had complimented them on their breasts. They had developed their breasts by consuming or injecting female hormones in their body. Some had undergone

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silicone breast implant surgery. And some elderly *hijras* had worn tight-fitted brassieres and enhanced and accentuated the shape of their breasts by placing something inside or on the sides.

Geeta, who is a *hijra* in her late thirties had undergone silicone implant surgery at a state-owned hospital in Bombay. That afternoon she showed her breasts to the other *hijras* and claimed that her breasts were the biggest amongst those of her fellow *hijras*. She also claimed that she had consumed hormone tablets as well as undergone breast implant surgery. According to her, she was blessed with a 'double effect'. Her boyfriend 'Michael' was happy with her breasts and told her he would marry her. In response, she clapped her hands (in the *hijra* way, a sign of *hijra*-authentication to mark their identity and evoke a sense of *hijra* masculinity) and mocked him for the marriage proposal. She then laughed heartily.

Geeta is the head of the Sakhiyani office, the CBO in the slum that works on promoting the sexual health of *hijras*. She has rented a small room in the slum, and appointed staff to manage her book-keeping and conduct outreach work (such as sexual-health awareness) in the slum. Unlike other young *hijras* who go for sex-work in the evenings or elderly *hijras* who go to *badhai* events (offering blessings at people's homes on occasions of marriage or child birth), Geeta earns her living quite satisfactorily from the revenue generated at the Sakhiyani office. According to Geeta, she developed her breasts to look good, to enhance the femininity of her body. But sometimes, unknown to her boyfriend, she engages in sexual relationships with other men. She says that *hijras* cannot remain happy with just one man.

*Dhamni* ('breasts' in the *hijra* language) is a popular topic for discourse amongst all the *hijras* in Bombay. They are obsessed with the development of their breasts. And their fixation with developing big breasts is so strong that to save money they sometimes cut back on other expenses like food and house rent. Not only young *hijras*, but elderly *hijras* also sometimes desire to develop their breasts. According to them, they do not want to develop breasts to attract men, but 'breasts' would make their body more feminine and help them feel 'like a woman'. The *hijras* are not women, and they do not want to 'become' women. In fact, they laughed at and mocked some young *hijras* who behaved like women, in the sense of not clapping their hands in a *hijra*-like manner, and wanted to get married to a man. But for the young *hijras* the development of breasts is exciting. They go to each other's homes in Malvani slum or elsewhere in Bombay to gather knowledge about how they can enhance their breasts.

Geeta discouraged her *hijra-chelas* (disciples) from undergoing these sorts of breast development. She told them that these processes may prove to threaten their lives. Some of the *hijras* believed what she said, but others

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did not. Among those who did not believe her were her office accountants, Chappi and Priya. These *hijras* were high-school graduates and had joined the *hijra* community after completing their studies. Unlike other *hijras* who have little or no education, Chappi and Priya challenged Geeta's claims about the impact of breast development and consulted the local doctor. When they found that Geeta's statement was incorrect, they informed the other *hijras* in the slum. In fact, Geeta had made this statement to discourage other *hijras* in the slum from breast enhancement. She felt that if her peers started developing their breasts, then men, women and other *hijras* in the slum would give her less attention. Moreover, she feared that Michael, her boyfriend, might also transfer his attentions onto other *hijras* who might develop bigger breasts than her. Her emotional insecurity was so strong that she asked clinics and drug stores in the slum not to release any female hormone tablets or injections to any *hijras*. This caused confusion and disagreements between Geeta and other *hijras* in the slum.

Geeta has never gone out for *pan*, or sex work. But on some evenings, she has assisted her *hijra-chelas* to get dressed. Some of them who have developed breasts through hormonal supplements feel a sense of insecurity about the size of their breasts. But those *hijras* who have undergone silicone implants do not have to shape their breasts before going out for sex work. It is important to note that every *hijra* house has a long mirror which is regarded as an essential object for daily survival. A mirror in the front room of one's house, beside which are laid out accessories like bangles, necklaces, jewellery and other ornaments, marks a fundamental part of their life. The mirror for them symbolizes a deity which is adorned with dazzling lights, small and big. Whenever they dress, or even when they critically appraise themselves in the mirror, the lights around it are switched on. They look at their reflections countless times – at their appearance, improvements in their looks and the development of their breasts. The focus of their dressing is to highlight their breasts. According to them, men are obsessed with large breasts; the more they enhance them, the more they can entice men. Also, around their mirror, they usually stick poster-photographs of Bollywood actresses whom they find most attractive. When asked about these, they reply that they aspire to be as feminine and beautiful as these actresses.

When dressing themselves, *hijras* stand in front of their mirror naked. They first put on their brassiere, consciously choosing a size smaller than their own, to help make their breasts appear larger and their cleavage look 'sexy'. After putting on their brassiere, they insert pieces of cloth under their breasts so as to create a rounded shape. Thereafter they put on 'cup-shaped concave pads' to make their breasts look larger and well-shaped. They then dress in Western clothes like tops, denim pants and high-heeled shoes. Sometimes, if

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they have shaved their legs, they prefer to wear a skirt. They believe that their *panthis* would prefer to see their 'saaxy' (sexy) legs which would add to their income, and that exposing the body and skin in addition to enhancing their breasts is very 'Western', symbolizing high-value *hijra* prostitutes. They prefer to keep their hair long and wear a ribbon shaped like a rose or sunflower. Their application of cosmetics is heavy and bold, including red glossy lipstick, thick foundation and thickly applied eye make-up. This flamboyant clothing and style creates an image in the public eye of flashy '*hijra* prostitutes'. After dressing, they look in the mirror from different angles – front, side and back – which brings them a sense of satisfaction and a smirk on their face, indicating perhaps their thoughts of how beautiful they look and how many *panthis* or men they would be able to entice.

### THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF BELONGING

The account narrated previously features an extensive mobility, curiosity and a reflexive ability to locate a sense of embodying sentiments of the contemporary *hijra* subculture in the city of Bombay, which evokes a bio-political interplay and embodied practices of breast development and consumption of hormonal supplements that firmly anchor to an expression of corporeal aesthetics strongly desired by the *hijras*. This emerging cosmopolitan consciousness creates a feeling of excitement and a desire of being 'feminine' with an implicit gendering. It attests to the way in which commodity and consumption infuse in prefixing the legitimacy of art and gendered contouring. Michel Foucault's (1976 [2008]) reflection on bio-politics mediates the strange way that 'life' and 'law' interrelate in modern politics. On further reckoning, Foucault's 'biopower' in the context of modernity observes the body through new regimes of power-knowledge, eluding norms and demands by judicial forms to protect life. In fact, the operation of 'law' and 'governmentality' crosses the boundaries of politics – inciting social hierarchization of the body's regulation (Campbell and Sitze 2013: 49).<sup>1</sup>

Hormones and the development of breasts in *hijras* further reinforce a corporeal indication of a new concept of race that tends to revitalize the biologism of the body in a controlled and hierarchized political re-fixation. In other words, sexualization has been able to develop an artificial unity of the specific anatomical elements: the breasts that function to conduct gendered symbolism on the one hand and an erotic zone of pleasure on the other. Further, the body's intelligibility formulates a radical expenditure of the boundaries of the body's surface that qualifies the constitution of 'anatomo-politics' (Lemke 2010). Addressing these new forms of social life within the

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*hijra* subculture creates the condition for a new recognition that deeply delves into the intersection of body and agency, politics and resistance. Further, the erotic comprehension of their body as seen as an experience of desire figures a strong logic of their feminine being. Upon reinterpreting *hijra* embodiment, gendered meanings offer a socially specific representation of their localized sexuality. That being said, the multiple positions of the *hijras* in city-spaces mark their lived-experience, material conditions and their economic and political status so as to assert their subjectivity which is beyond cultural specificity.

The *hijras* in Bombay move literally and symbolically beyond their traditional way of life (kinship-centric), involving themselves with the commodity world of consumption and beautification. Fashion therefore becomes a cosmopolitan legitimacy and a democratic ideal that arguably develops within a specific nexus of the sexed condition of the primordial unity of the material body to that of the social perceptibility that is attuned to desire. Desire is transcendental. It can break open history, politics and meaning to a state of ‘becoming’ (Biehl and Locke 2017: 16–17). The Deleuzian inscription (Smith 2007) helps here to unveil the ways in which the *hijras* struggle to articulate desire, suffering and their own sense of knowledge to immerse themselves in a particular configuration and embody cultural representation to build their individual subjectivity (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). Saba Mahmood’s (2005) interpretation of ‘desire’, as not opposed to resistance, conceives desire as a capacity for action made possible by concrete historically specific relations. ‘Desire’ linked to ‘intentionality’ brings forth different modalities of agency (see also Ortner 2006). What makes this a different analytical perspective on agency is that it escapes the binary of resistance–subordination, further raising questions of resignification of norms and having implications on the possibilities of narratives and new experiences. In this sense, the analytics of feminization within the *hijras* crafts the endeavour of anthropology to understand the emergent, the open, the polysemic and the uncertain. The dynamic narrative processes are derived from the embodied encounters in one’s lived experience. Desire therefore is an enunciated effect of the subjects’ position that could expand and challenge the dominant theories of (bio)power and structural violence. Stating this from a subaltern position – ‘desire’ is inseparable from ‘becoming’. It is *not* an agency or determination as restricting a structuration, if social and subjective. Instead, it is an articulation of lives, the voices of individuals, which awakens with a dimension of experience.

In this book, the reality reference to the body and its embodied project critiques foundationalism and addresses gender as a discursive construct or an effect produced at the level of the body (Balsamo 1996). The system of differentiation considers an openness that moves beyond the sterile debate of

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the external, that is, the social perception of gender. Instead, this embodiment is sensed with a subjective experience of desire that further involves an ontological condition. Borrowing from James Mensch (2020), my claim to embodiment grasps the Kantian refutation of ‘idealism’: the openness of our ‘selfhood’ involving the ecstatic quality of feeling that makes the dimensions of experience relate how consciousness is shaped. In other words, Kantian transcendence and ‘selfhood’ is a ‘sense’, a subject of experience that involves the ‘space’ in which the body is situated – a relation in its own consciousness of the body’s self-affirmation with spatial relations. Thus, the book also talks about, in addition to *hijras*, the varied gendered embodiments of gender transgressors which is not just ‘the flesh’. Embodiment as evoked is the frame of consciousness building a gender(ed) customization of the body’s aesthetics – the feminine value but not female, but of course one that mediates through the intersection of the socially available gender-meaning. Additionally, the re-signification is portrayed in a multitude of embodied forms which further conveys the non-boundaries of the already-given embodied strategies.

To note further, the embodiment is not only a belonging, but a sense of ‘becoming’. In sum, it is a cultural and corporeal dialogue that the gendering of bodies is related to a fantasy of being feminine, or ‘becoming’ a woman. The gendered discursivity conceives an account of a transgressive process to a state of a ‘metaphysical rebel’ (Jenks 2003). Relating further, ‘rebel’ to the pure negation of the rule limits boundaries of the already existing subcultural tradition, to a dynamic force of cultural reproduction, breaking through and reaffirming a new cultural order. The point to investigate is the real presence of these corporeal transgressions, which rest on the features of modernity accelerating desire. Modernity’s self-determination of the will and unconstrained acts act on their desires. These transgressive modes account for an internally determined willing that questions the institutionalized authority of the gender structure – a clandestine attack claiming democratic social change. Charles Tilly’s ‘dispersed resistance’ orchestrates ‘transgression’ as a distinct form of resistance that performs politics and life with new analytics of efficacy (Scott 1992: 8–9).

Translating the meaning of transgression in this book inspires two important debates. First, transgressions in the form of resistance that co-opt identity play by various means of protest by gendered representations; or, in other words, the varied ritualistic performances, both social and political, to violate hierarchies, like the Urs carnival in Ajmer, queer pride rallies, World AIDS Day in Bombay – emphasizing the spatiality or the reification of space to a development of networks and spatial dynamics, creating discursively generated culture-specific ideas. This can be further related to Saskia Sassen’s (2008) idea of ‘global mobility and the new organization of space’, showing

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alliances in a peculiar involvement with the regional, national and global manner of regulation (see also Sassen 2012). Such transcendences further break the dualist thought with a critical attention to how the material reference to spaces and human acts is 'relationally ordered' to an integrating matrix of 'action' (Linklater and Mennell 2010). In other words, transgressions and space-making are organized around the performance of action. In the words of Dieter Lapple (2001), transgression categorically relates to the meaning of 'action', prefiguring the organized ways to create an epistemological idea of space within the purview of freedom that further creates spatial indeterminacy. This can be taken further to the immanent relationship of space and action, demonstrating an integrated sense of belonging as composing a relational arrangement of material properties within relational mobility of corporeal belonging (Merriman 2012). Again, these sorts of 'play or inversion', or a sort of carnivalesque resistance with either fun or protests, motivates a grotesque discourse violating the dominant one. These sorts of representation also enact the power of transgression to critique the dominant ideological content and to challenge the interpretive frames.<sup>2</sup>

Second, transcendence is an intersubjective experience that struggles to negotiate the subjective capacity of the desiring subject within a discursive position. This determining autonomous self in terms of the Kantian strategic move is truly 'free' only by virtue of 'an activity'. Therefore, philosophy's deeper determination is to arrive at an insight that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche call 'internally determined by her own willing' (Gemes and Janaway 2009). The 'will' in fact is the rational state that vitalizes the varied performative, phenomenological and conscious experiences (Dudley 2002). This critical self-reflexivity that tries to understand the intersubjective dialogue refers to the discursivity of the inner differentiation. Further to this sense of 'experience' is how consciousness is shaped. Attuned to these larger debates of corporeal transcendence, the political standpoint of identity in difference-politics has shifted to micro-narratives from the concept of 'subject' to the vision of 'agency' (Benhabib 1986). More broadly, the paradigm shift is a signal to the materialization of social thought in the context of vitalized and dynamic biological experiences. The varied performative metaphor, as stated in this book, decentres the intellectualist and discursive subject to a point of affective experiences. It rethinks the agentic potential to a point of critical empiricism. My attempt is to cross the epistemic threshold of a state-led management of biological life. I adopt an organic approach to re-read ethnographic (re)configurations of gender(ed) minorities that are already racialized, classed and biologically determined. But my anthropological insight refutes a universalizing model or any sort of interrogated operations of power. Rather, my approach attempts to reflect the history of inquiry. In other words,



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it conceptualizes the aesthetics of gender(ed) significance that are coupled with their lived experiences, embodiment, their personhood, self-making and the preconditions of intersubjectivity. And that adds to the strength of the ethnographic content of the book as detailed in the embodying subjective mark – focusing the senses, emotions and the essential and affectual fluid materiality and sociality.<sup>3</sup>

## CONCEIVING MODERNITY, OTHERWISE

The era of reflexive modernity understands the implication of remapping of inequalities and social vulnerabilities as an expression of power relations in the national and global contexts (Beck 1992). This cosmopolitan remapping of inequality has to take into account the parameters of social inequality that no longer rely on the premise of the distinction between the national and the international. Territorial, political, economic, social and cultural boundaries are mutually reinforcing within a transnational frame of reference. Capitalist convergence and homogeneity point to the fundamental role of difference in mobilizing capital, labour and other resources. To reckon, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) convincingly argues that the idea of nation, nationality and national belonging does not hold any fixed entity. Instead, it is a symbolic principle of organizing a new transnational process. Anna Tsing (2009), writing on 'transnational supply chain capitalism', focuses on labour mobilization in supply chains and the performance of gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion and citizenship. The configuration and political functions of border zones allow an analytical distinction between processes of nation-formation and territorialization. Crucial here are the diverse territorial regimes as embedded in new transnational systems of regulation. But the specific importance of the nation state in this context is evident in the frames of reference of transnationalism that the globalization process derives from the transformation within dynamic ambivalences and opportunities that cut across national boundaries (Sassen 2005; Levy 2016; Sznajder and Beck 2010; see also Levy and Sznajder 2005).

John Urry's (1995: 167) 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' models a reflexive subject who delights in desire of consumer discernment – featuring extensive mobility, curiosity about other cultures and broadening sentiments for cultural embodiment. Again, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is firmly anchored within 'consumer culture' and the cultural symptoms of 'consumer citizenship' that define modern experience as cultivating feelings and excitement for modern urban life such as fashion, design and culture. These affective and desirous elements of feelings, fantasies and lifestyle consumption outline the complex



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articulation of difference within the cultural production of cosmopolitanism and consumption (Nava 2002; Jones and Leshkovich 2003). The 'aesthetic' of cosmopolitan-making has deeper implications, such as creating new forms of engagement with the logic of cross-cultural differences and the commodification and capital investment of spaces – establishing a mode of marketing cultural difference within consumer logic (see also Binnie and Skeggs 2004: 39; Beck 2005). Sznajder and Beck (2006) evoke cosmopolitanism as a transgressive potential of hybridity, relating to a kind of 'benign multiculturalism' that allows a democratic consumption based on material artefacts. To elaborate further, the modern cosmopolitan self thus formed relies on the hierarchies of race, class and gender that further transcend these differences (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 16–18; see also Calhoun 2002; Featherstone 2002). But primarily, consumption depends upon ethico-political orientations concerned with the de-territorialization of modes of membership and affiliation. That is to say, citizenship culturally traverses the nation state, imagining shared identity interests, exposures, inclusivity as well as exclusivity.

## A RADICAL EMBODIMENT

The subjective meaning of this cultural difference is a discrete form of consciousness and a structure of feeling, precisely a political site of consumption practices based on collective engagement. And in the light of this, collective representation in the form of national identity is open to diverse solidarities through interlocking and interdependent relations across borders (Brunkhorst 2005: 47–48; Held 2005). And further, adding greater hope is the new material condition of 'global cities' with a new international division of labour managing global production networks, new geographical formations and complex border-zone facilitation (Sassen 2001 [1991]: 327). Again, cross-territoriality and the sovereign social and political agency allows us to focus on what Arjun Appadurai (2000) calls 'post-national social formations', arguing further about a global order exhibiting 'grassroots globalization' or 'globalization from below' – instancing pluralized world political communities.

In order to explain these deliberations as opposed to economic supra-global tenets, cosmopolitan sensibilities also address self-determination with respect to cultural pluralism (Aboulafia 2010: 84). Also, to consider here is Jacques Derrida's *The Monolingualism of the Other* (1998) that reflects the gendered representations in this book (see also Chow 2008). Decentring the '(inter) national' particularity of minority groups, I have tried to avoid geopolitical determinations and any stable discursive structure. As Derrida suggests, 'monolingualism' motivates 'nationalist aggressions' or 'monoculturalist

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homogenized-hegemony'. In line with Derridean understanding, this book reflects a critique of any particular linguistic specificity or a condition of cultural belonging. To undertake this deconstructive challenge is to advocate disarticulation – a reconceptualization of 'language' and nationality (cultural) – and to avoid traps of gendered nationalism within cultural-linguistic singularity. Against the differentiated and essentially alienated conditions of these marginalities, this book attempts to offer intrinsic multiplicity or plurality as voiced by the disempowered. Following this understanding as implicit in this project allows us to rethink the particular community and the subculture with a resonance of rejection of national identity and beyond any nationalist determination – iterating a cogent method of non-systemic boundless flows of people, information, capital, representation, and so on. This methodological proposition conceives of continuous movement and absolute flows to understand the chaotic, indeterminate horizons across spaces that fundamentally form the conviction of this piece of work.

Establishing this reasoning, this book uniquely positions a provincial approach to facilitate a re-inscription of modernity from the hidden logic of coloniality. Contesting this level of content is a focus on de-Westernization, engaging with the question of difference to problematize interconnected and interdependent worlds of unity within 'otherness' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 14). In this localized perspective of cosmopolitanism, Pollock (2000) reflects that indigenous and native narratives could be part of national identity as a further inclusive strategy. Participation of the 'provincial', which was earlier unacknowledged, sees vehement objection by global politics of power and a closer emphasis on geopolitics and internal coherence within national borders. This decentring and provincial cosmopolitan lens brings new understandings in harmony, consensus, cohabitation and multiculturalism as echoed in the post-colonial writings of Homi Bhabha (1994), Edward Said (1994), Martha Nussbaum (1996) and Ania Loomba (1998). This particular multiculturalism is not devoid of globalism and bourgeois cosmopolitanism. On the contrary, an intrinsic advocacy of world citizenship asks for corroborative reference of mapping cartographies of cohabitation to a point of 'alternate globalization' (Sassatelli 2012) – in other words, Negri and Hardt's (2004) 'multitude' whose global interests would converge against the privileges and established power of 'imperialism' and the 'Empire'.

Thus, the thrust of this work is to pose questions on 'local', parochial, rooted representations that may coexist with trans-local, transnational and modernist worldviews of the cultural hegemony of identity construction. Homi Bhabha, who possibly coined the term 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', writes of the impact of the historical-colonial situation in post-colonial times, where an absolutist conception of culture and identity caused by globalization