

Transsexing the Self: A Comparative Study of Western Male to Female (MTF) Transsexual and Indian Hijra Autobiographies

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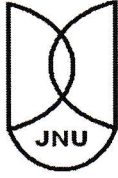
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Date: 21 July, 2017

CERTIFICATE

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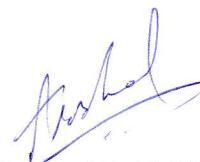
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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This thesis titled "*Transsexling the Self: A Comparative Study of Western Male to Female (MTF) Transsexual and Indian Hijra Autobiographies*", submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to be a comparative analysis of autobiographies by two principal subjects. On one hand is the classical transsexual author. She is the pioneering figure from both sides of the Atlantic. She is a pioneer for being the first in her respective country to pursue surgical interventions and write her 'transstory' from early to mid twentieth century. Since, there are numerous other classical transsexual autobiographies published in the West, only pioneers from USA, UK, Canada, and Denmark have been selected for this study.

On the other hand are the contemporary Indian hijra writers who have composed narratives of the self that challenge received ideas about being hijra and being a part of the hijra community from 2001 onwards. Hijra authors also pursue a vital surgical intervention to transsex the self albeit through illegal castration within the community or at the clinic. The event of sex reassignment is certainly at the heart of the classical transsexual as well as hijra autobiography even as trans technologies to achieve it may differ from text to text. Despite the fact that these are diverse texts, they indicate two sub-genres within the category of 'autobiography' that have been rendered irrelevant to contemporary queer politics or had their narratives and identities therein dismissed or manipulated.

This study will attempt to address the glaring lacuna in trans theory as well as other critical practices over the question of the classical transsexual subject and the hijra self. The yet to be recognized respective canons by both groups of authors have been overwritten through rescue narratives and even benevolent yet hegemonizing reconstructions. By reading the primary texts against the grain of dominant discourses that have sought to define and delimit both subjects, this study would focus on the pursuit of transsexing and the transsexed autobiographical self to excavate agency. Since the possibility of organizing an identity and its narrative around vaginoplasty or castration has not been considered in critical theory, secondary texts in this case would be supplemented by trans theoretical responses to the clinic's dominance in "creating" transsexuality; the anthropological view on the hijra community; as well as other hostile feminist, and queer interjections.

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INTRODUCTION

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET?

In the West, the notion of ‘transsexual’ as a category of identity may be regarded as a fairly modern one with a traceable short history. While cases of male-to-female (MTF) sex reassignment surgeries have been well recorded since the early twentieth century, it was not until the “atomic age” that fully transitioned transwomen started earning notoriety as a phenomenon of sorts. The First World had started paying attention to what they now regarded as remarkable objects of a medical miracle (Meyerowitz 51-97).

Hijras on the other hand, have been a visible minority in South Asia pursuing transition by castrating themselves for a far longer period. One could easily resort to the language of native nostalgia to make a romantic claim that hijras always had what the Western transsexual did not, until recently—besides, a strong sense of community—discursive heritage that stretches back to their presence in ancient scriptures (Dutta 825).

Romance and nostalgia, however, limit the scope of what can be discussed about either identities i.e. the Western MTF transsexual subject and the South Asian hijra self. This study is slightly more ambitious in its scope in that it seeks to be a comparative analysis of landmark autobiographies by authors who otherwise differ wildly from each other along the intersections of geography, historical eras, class, race, sexuality, etc.

On one hand are the contemporary Indian hijra writers who have composed narratives of the self that challenge received ideas about their community. On the other side lie those who should be ideally termed as classical transsexual authors or pioneers charting original ideas of (trans)womanhood in their particular countries. All texts chosen for this study may express similar notions of embodiment or share thematic trajectories like weaving an identity around the event of sex reassignment. However, the rationale behind selecting ostensibly disparate subjects is to not prove an essential universality at their core. The idea is to centralize two transgressive figures equally delegitimized by hegemonic as well as critical discourses.

PIONEERS FROM THE WEST

The primary texts selected for the purpose are intrinsically eclectic. Along the pioneering Western transsexual spectrum there are:

1. Lili Elbe from Denmark: Her posthumous autobiography titled *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* was possibly published in 1933, although, it is not clear. Lili Elbe holds the title of the world's first known transwoman to transition fully through surgeries during the 1920s in Germany. At the time there were no clinical protocols and the term 'transsexual' had not been coined.
2. Roberta Cowell from the UK: After Elbe, no autobiographies by transwomen seem to have been published in the Global North until Cowell. Roberta Cowell was a car racer and piloted a Spitfire plane for the Allied Forces during the Second World War. She wrote her autobiography post transition in 1954 titled *Roberta Cowell's Story: An Autobiography*.
3. Tamara Rees from USA: Rees was the second American after the famous Christine Jorgensen to obtain surgeries in Europe. Like the latter she also fought in the Second World War and pursued a career as a professional paratrooper before transition. Her short autobiography *Reborn* was published in 1955 and she remains the first American to tell her story in the genre.
4. Dianna Boileau from Canada: Boileau became the first Canadian transwoman to write her autobiography in 1972 titled *Behold, I am a Woman*. While many notable autobiographies were written in the US after Rees had made her debut, Boileau was the only Canadian to break the proverbial ice in her country as late as early seventies.

The rationale behind this selection is to underscore the writers' status as pioneers in their specific locations. Another aim behind these choices is to broaden the scope of

enquiry by considering as many non-American works as possible. Trans discourse is already heavily dominated by critical as well as autobiographical voices from the US.

THE SELECTION OF HIJRA AUTHORS

India is perhaps the only South Asian country where full-length autobiographical works by hijra writers has been published. However, this was not always the case. Hijra autobiographies did not appear till the turn of the millennium. The four known writers and their texts included in this study are:

1. Mona Ahmed from Delhi: Ahmed is the first known hijra author to write her autobiography *Myself Mona Ahmed* in the form of collected emails to her publisher besides other snippets as late as 2001. Ahmed is also probably the only author to forsake her community completely to live in exile in her ancestors' graveyard.
2. Living Smile Vidya from Tamil Nadu: Theatre performer Vidya wrote her story titled *I am Vidya* in 2007. Vidya's story first appeared online in the form of a blog and later in newspaper columns. It is not however, clear what parts of her story have been omitted from those previous publications.
3. A. Revathi from Tamil Nadu: NGO worker A. Revathi's book *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* published in 2010 is still fresh in Indian mass media memory. Hers is also a detailed memoir with highly descriptive illustrations from her life.
4. Laxminarayan Tripathi from Mumbai: Tripathi is perhaps the most well-known hijra activist today representing her community at several international and national platforms. Tripathi's 2015 autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* reflects her public persona faithfully.

There are indeed other autobiographical works by hijra authors not included in this study. The main reason is the comparative nature of the research. Firstly, hijra authors are also pioneers in their own right not only for being the first to write from their

respective milieus but because they had to confront anew centuries of marginalization to tell their stories. Therefore, their second narratives are focused on issues other than the primary negotiations of coming into being as a hijra individual. For instance, Tripathi's other book *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life* (2016) published under her shortened first name Laxmi is a discussion of her romantic and sexual explorations. Revathi's book *A Life in Trans Activism* (2016) details her involvements as a community leader. The exclusion of these texts is not to suggest that an empowered hijra subject is irrelevant to the project of analyzing trans life-writings. These two texts are not strictly within the scope of this study because they do not offer the *bildungsroman* of the first narratives common to all eight selected works.

Another text excluded from this study is Jereena's *Oru Malyali Hijadayedu Atmakatha* (The Autobiography of a Malyali Hijra). Writing from Kerala in 2006, Jereena is officially the second known hijra author to publish her autobiography. She is not included here owing to the lack of an authorized translation in English. One could perhaps, commission a translation but it is an ethical dilemma where the author's agency in what she wants to say may suffer.

PRESSING QUANDARIES

There are several questions that need to be answered through this comparative analysis. To begin with, how does the autobiographical narrative shape and is shaped by authoritative discourses on trans lives in the Global North and India? By authoritative, one refers to both supposedly liberating critical voices as well as older calcified transphobic discourses that continue to hold sway. Secondly, Do varied expressions in classical transsexual and hijra autobiographies form parts of a larger collective voice? Do they aim less to validate one's existence but more to define and direct the courses of the development of trans categories and their cultural production?

Granted, autobiography has been the most defining genre of expression for classical transsexual and hijra authors but what are some of the avenues where these works speak to each other as they speak out to challenge representations and influence ideas about being trans (medical/ social/ popular)? Can one see these persistent and evolving literary interventions as mere memoirs of sex reassignment procedures?

To locate answers, one is first interested in re-examining the creation of a new

historical category i.e. the modern Western transsexual. The subject's conception has been seen arising out of medicalized discourses (Meyerowitz; Stone). What has not been considered is the cross-cultural trans autobiographical imperative—the overwhelming need to tell a story with sex-change at its core. This crucial need may have shaped the very notion of transsexuality in the Global North. The role of autobiography perhaps, goes beyond that of seeking validation in this case. Unlike the pathological example of the homosexual, who as an object of medical discourse started speaking back in the language that constructed him through insistent enunciations followed by struggles against resultant boundaries, the autobiographical transsexual subject can perhaps be seen as helping create the very terms of how she should be constructed (Foucault 100-102).

On the other hand is the ancient and tightly knit hijra community with its own history of marginalizations and little control over discursive participation. Hijras may locate their roots in myths and history but simultaneous reverence and ostracism, does not translate into tangible empowerment. The late publications of hijra autobiographies in India could be symptomatic of this. One's objective would be to explore if these new stories inform an emerging Indian hijra politics grounded in the personal narrative, comparable to its medically focused Western counterpart. Therefore, is there a universal trans-cendental (pun intended) language that communicates between the two narrated worlds? Most importantly, is the autobiography the ultimate authentic source of the trans experience? Should it be considered the fountainhead for all trans scholarship to rely on? Consequentially, is the autobiographical output in congruence with the overall representation of trans subjects in contemporary critical discourses?

A NOTE ON THE METHODOLOGY

This study is acutely conscious of the lacuna in trans and allied scholarships over the erasure of classical transsexual and hijra agency. For example, ideas on bodily transitions include fantasized ideals in both oeuvres. While classical transsexuals are critiqued for presenting themselves to be intersex when they are clearly not, a defense of apparent deception as performativity is made only for trans subjects uninterested in bodily modifications (Halberstam 48,74; Hausman 101). An interruptive potential of these fictive constructions remains largely ignored. One seeks to bridge this gap by

turning the focus onto the classical subject's "limited personalism" as evident in her texts, as well as onto the hijra subject's hitherto invisibilized perspectives (Miller xiv).

This study would offer close readings of the transsexing and the transsexed body in the autobiographies. The event of sex reassignment is at the heart of the classical transsexual and hijra autobiography even as trans technologies may differ. The idea is to examine the crux and axes of trans identity, which is the narrated or imagined transformation. The idea of organizing an identity around sex reassignment surgery or even castration retains its radicality even as it is scantily discussed. Secondary readings therefore, include trans theory in dialogue with the looming shadow of the clinic as well as a hostile feminism; orientalized views that continue to define the hijra community in anthropology; besides other hostile queer interjections.

The methodological approach would involve an analysis of the autobiographical self in negotiation with hegemonic infrastructures and authoritative representations. For example, if a neoliberal NGO mobilizes hijra labour and interpellates her as male-bodied to affect HIV/AIDS infection control, may a hijra author hybridize her body in an anticipated response to this hailing? Furthermore, may we compare such narrative strategies with the classical transsexual authors' approach to a similarly ambivalent relationship with the clinic (Kavi 391-392)?

Correspondingly, benevolent discourses would be reviewed to observe if they reproduce previous oppressions. The clinic rejected "unreliable" autobiographies it had originally facilitated while depathologizing efforts of trans theory repudiated transsexuals for not adopting queer modalities of liberation (Namaste 62-63; Puar; Stone 224). Anthropology, and policy studies maintained orientalist reification by containing hijras in "descriptive generalizations" and reductive categories (Mohanty 34; Nanda; Singh et al). To address these re-colonizing acts, prominent critical ideas would be deconstructed in the light of the autobiographical texts. Moreover, a Foucauldean suspicion of confession-based coherent identities might be a common point of departure for many theoretical debates including the ones in trans theory and anthropology, which are weary of the very subject they seek to empower. One would have to engage the subjects' unrecognized polyvocality and multiplicities to contest crystallized assumptions like transsexuals' adherence to the clinic and alleged monolithic rigidity besides hijras' supposed primitive stability.

As far as the hijra autobiographer is concerned, her identity through her words has not been read at all. Trans theorists have focused on classical transsexual

autobiographies by pioneers as well later authors but reading hijra autobiographies is a more or less uncharted critical terrain. Notably, Euro-American centricism of trans theory does not belie its “untapped potential” for reading Third World subjects and their narratives (Stryker “(De)Subjugated Knowledges” 14). One is interested in going beyond observing exclusions or the mere recognition of hijras as a proof of global gender diversity (Morgan and Towle). The purpose would be to initiate filling the intellectual cleavage through a hijra centric enquiry that finds resonance but is not imitative of the First World counterpart. The critical gap in the study of hijra specificities may have been occasionally compensated by sparse critiques of representations with a reliance on anthropological constructions, or appeals for equal rights (Bakshi; Sukthankar).

Contemporary Indian queer thought on the other hand, has either been hostile to hijra presence or focused on the inherent liminality that involves being hijra (or proto-hijra) while endorsing regulated inclusion in grounded political action (Gupta). In this scenario, South Asia focused critical work cannot be seen as attentive to hijra lives. The sole Indian trans scholar, Aniruddha Dutta discusses specificities across the MTF spectrum in South Asia. Dutta’s interdisciplinary approach, however, does not touch upon narratives and other texts. Therefore, the approach of this research would be to not only call attention to the importance of the peripheral ‘I’ voice of the hijra subject but to also problematize its relationship with anthropology and other critical voices that have contributed towards its marginalization through omissions and dismissals.

THE STRUCTURE

In this regard, the first chapter will explore primarily through noted theories on the genre of autobiography, if there is such a thing that may be termed as the trans autobiographical imperative, a need to tell one’s story of transsexing the self. If yes, what are some of the ways, this imperative manifests itself and how is it expressed? The second chapter will magnify the lens on classical transsexual autobiographies by pioneering figures. It will employ trans theorist Sandy Stone’s idea of ‘posttranssexual’ and how it annihilates the original subject. Chapter 3 will be a similarly detailed look at what one may call the hijra canon. Since, the only way to read hijra autobiographies is the anthropological model outlined by Serena Nanda,

one will explore its failure to account for hijra reality and how the narratives challenge her orientalist vision by presenting complex and varied accounts.

Chapter 4 will be the first part of two chapters discussing points of convergences between the Western and the Indian texts. This first part will be based on how identity is constructed in the period before the crucial event of sex-change. Most importantly, it will consider how interpellation by external forces is channeled in the narratives and progressive transsexing may be achieved. As a next step, the fifth chapter will delve into the point of the climax in all autobiographies, namely, the highly anticipated moment of transition based in bottom surgery. Interestingly, it may be observed that the classical transsexual subject who undergoes a fuller transition including vaginoplasty view castration, much in the manner and method of her hijra counterpart, to be the moment of transsexing the self. This chapter will explore the act of castration and how it is placed across texts.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRANS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IMPERATIVE

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When Living Smile Vidya, a contemporary stage actor and author from Tamil Nadu is finally taken to the operation theatre where she would attain 'nirvana' through the excision of her male genitals, she is confronted by a mise en scene she could not have imagined before as a hijra person. She describes what she saw in the first few pages of her 2007 autobiography titled *I am Vidya*,

Many female names were scrawled on the wall, some in ink, others in charcoal. The room seemed to be reserved exclusively for transgenders. Our predecessors in the room had scribbled their names on the wall, presumably because they feared they could die on the operation table. That was their way of ensuring the survival of at least their names after the hazardous operation we called nirvana.

'Write you name on the wall, if you like,' Sugandhi Ayah said.

I didn't feel like doing so. I was certain I would live. Hadn't I struggled all the while just for that? I was hungry (Vidya 12-13).

Vidya planned to die another day and before she would, she had a far longer narrative to write. Her refusal to enter the chain of significations that may have been a source of strength for several others shows her status as a relatively empowered and educated hijra subject within what could be best described as a subaltern group. Her refusal is also significant for she would eventually enter the larger discourse of autobiographies. Although, she connects herself to the scribbled names by documenting their legacy and accords them a special place early on in the narrative. This gesture of inclusion of those hijra persons—who could not/ did not speak beyond a few syllables—opens up a discursive channel many in her own community would have remained disassociated from. Vidya's expansive textual loop by it's own virtue also reaches out to the great Enlightenment tradition of autobiographies as well as the constellation of life writing

since time immemorial. Most notably, she is empathetically aligned with trans autobiographies published from 1930s onwards in the West.

To draw these associations especially, the last with classical transsexual narratives that Vidya's autobiography represents is an assumption that comes easy and therefore, highly circumspect. Transgender as an umbrella term for a diverse community holds currency today even as the truncated prefix 'trans' has undergone constant shifts by gaining or losing a hyphen or an asterisk. Debates over inclusivity or the lack thereof, and what terminology should be styled to signify what, are most likely to continue (Currah et al.; Trans@MIT). This study, which is meant to be a comparative analysis of hijra and classical transsexual autobiographies commences with the borrowing of what noted genre theorist of autobiography Paul John Eakin has called "the autobiographical imperative" (Eakin 275-278). The use of trans extracted from transgender theory and practice requires a preliminary explanation before an addition could be made to Eakin's concept.

It would not be controversial to address the classical transsexual subject as a trans woman or transwoman in current critical or everyday parlance. It is likely that the pioneering autobiographers who were at pains to explain that they are quite simply "women" would protest. Formative and contemporary political voices in trans studies however, would see it to be typical of the classical subjects' Faustian pact with the clinic that contributed significantly towards constructing their identity. Popular representations also attest to the clinic's dominant role (Hooper; Phillips 9-11). The clinic wanted transsexuals and their discourse to disappear i.e. lose their trans specificity and acquiesce to heteronormativity and the subjects supposedly obliged wholeheartedly (Stone 230). This particular problematic of holding the classical subject in bad faith will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. As a point of departure it may suffice to say that transsexual pioneers who recorded and published stories of their lives represent a legitimate yet somewhat scorned legacy for the current trans movement. Trans discourse allows situating classical subjectivity as emphatically trans but it does so while holding it in contempt.

The hijra community on the other hand is nominal data or a reductively ethnic entity listed along with other genderqueer or non-conforming identities across the Global South such as the Xanith community of Oman or Fa'afafines in Polynesia (Towle and Morgan 678-679). Trans critical practice is yet to expand its area of focus outside Global North into other realities and their active textual productions.

Consequentially, to subsume the othered hijra subject—notably the autobiographer—within the trans continuum is a double-edged sword too. It is both empowering as well as a re-colonizing act. Former because it undoes the assumed notion of hijras as an isolated community and relocates them in a diverse and progressive global movement. Latter because the inclusion is tokenistic and the community is defined through motifs set in stone by orientalizing anthropological research as will be explored in detail in Chapter 3.

If one is to speak of a trans autobiographical imperative that includes the classical transsexual and the hijra subjects, the axis of marginalization within contemporary trans politics would undergird the discussion. ‘Trans’ as a deliberately open-ended category is still fecund for its rhetoric of inclusivity. A critical reconsideration of these marginal identities already present in it’s fold would not only be an act of introspection for the community at large but an intervention in received approaches to reading trans autobiographies, past and present.

THE MOMENT(S) OF ARRIVAL

British trans theorist Jay Prosser has contributed critically towards female-to-male (FTM) transsexual autobiography in his seminal work *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998). He is responsible for formulating the idea of transsexual autobiography in the phenomenological terms of cathartic reconstruction, and restorative home-coming. Before Prosser could chart a pathway to read trans, especially FTM autobiographies, he notes, “While theory is grappling with various forms of gendered and sexual transitions, transsexual narratives, stories of bodies in sex transition, have not yet been substantially read” (Prosser 4). Following Prosser’s landmark study, there has not been another. Although, it would be well to contextualize Prosser’s complaint within the larger context of the study of autobiography and genre criticism which peaked only as late as 1970s with Philippe Lejeune and his idea of the “autobiographical pact” or a writer’s contract towards truth claims (Smith and Watson 8-9).

Genre theorist James Olney, in the introduction to his edited volume *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* published in 1980, wrote—

There are various reasons why literary critics did not appropriate the autobiographical mode earlier than they did. First, there is the dual,

paradoxical fact that autobiography is often something considerably less than literature and that it is always something rather more than literature. In some tangled, obscure, shifting, and ungraspable way it is, or stands in for, or memorializes, or replaces or makes something else of someone's life. If part of the function of criticism is to judge (and surely it is), then it is not just a joke to say that judging an autobiography to be "bad" is very nearly the same as judging a life to be "bad" (Olney 24).

The "life", however may also be filtered through Paul de Man's use of the term "prosopopeia" in his significant 1979 essay "Autobiography as De-Facement". de Man's primary contention in defining prosopopeia is that autobiography becomes "the representation of an imaginary or absent person as speaking and acting" (Smith and Watson 139). His contemporary Paul John Eakin would go on to dismantle the overwhelming significance de Man accords to speech acts that work to extract and excise the very dancer from the dance (Eakin 278).

Eakin in his 1985 work *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* confronts this metaphorical elation of the narrative, which comes at the cost of the reduction of the narrator. He declares that "...the process of self-discovery is finally inseparable from the art of self-invention" (Eakin 55).

Also,

...if narrative forms are constituted by experience, they also shape it, for the content and form of experience are mediated by the prevailing symbolic systems in a culture, and narrative forms are prominent among them. The dialectical interplay between experience and narrative is necessarily cultural as well as psychological...(Eakin 132).

He goes on to develop a theory of autobiography where an autobiographical act can be an act of memory, an act of language and resultantly, the constitution of the self.

Therefore,

In order to develop the parallel between the acquisition of language and the writing of autobiography...we might say that it is the burden of autobiography to state "what we have learned we are". There are those who argue against the possibility of autobiography because they believe that the self is by definition transcendent and ineffable and hence resistant to any attempt to render its nature in language (Eakin 213).

Here, Eakin cites Jacques Lacan's famous dictum that "the unconscious is structured like a language" and therefore,

If the self in its origins is so deeply implicated in the emergence of language then we should be prepared to entertain the verisimilitude of the re-creation of self in the language of autobiographical discourse. If the self is itself a kind of metaphor, then we should be willing to accept metaphors of self in autobiography as consubstantial to a significant degree with the reality they presume to incarnate, a reality deeply linguistic, if not in the very texture of its being, at least in the quality of any knowledge of it that we may hope to attain.

In this perspective the writing of autobiography emerges as a symbolic analogue of the initial coming together of the individual and language that marks the origin of self-awareness (Eakin 213).

Autobiography and the invention of the self therein is an organic process for Eakin. de Man's project of de-facement by reducing the self into its own metaphorical extensions i.e. the autobiography is appropriated by Eakin. It now becomes an act of amalgamation for the subjectivity. Coming to the autobiographical imperative of this animated self weaved in language, he writes,

Even though no one can ever confirm the existence of the self as an ultimate fact, autobiographies attest by their very existence to the reality of the autobiographical imperative, the pain in the throat...that can be assuaged only by the creation of narrative. Readers in their turn reciprocate, for it is hard to undo the art of self-invention once it has been ably performed, hard to unhear the voice of presence in the text (Eakin 277).

A trans autobiographical imperative then takes for granted the pain in one's throat. It also takes for granted through the sheer existence of autobiographies, the manifestation of both the trans self and her need to write.

Danish painter Lili Elbe, the world's first known transwoman to undergo sex reassignment surgeries sometime in 1920s Germany does not speak of a pain in her throat. She has however, littered her narrative expressing not only her desire for expansive posterity but also her unique situation, and the process by which she conceives her text to incorporate all this. Hers is a heteroglossic text that integrates several voices from her life while she remains the protagonist and key narrator.

Dr. Norman Haire, a well-known sexologist of Elbe's time writes the introduction to her posthumous autobiography—the first of its kind—titled *Man into*

Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex (undated but presumably published in 1933). Besides discussing the novelty of being Elbe, he explains,

The Story of this strange case has been written by Niels Hoyer, partly from his own knowledge, partly from Lili's diaries, and partly from letters written by Lili and other persons concerned. The biographer states that the surgeon who performed the operation has passed his account of the case as correct (Elbe viii).

If Haire was concerned about matters of authorship he would have probably used the word 'composed' or 'assembled' to refer to Hoyer's role as the credited editor. His performative function instead is to benefit the reader with his clinical veracity and bestow a certificate of approval and truth on Elbe's lived reality. It is unclear who sought Haire's word as he was not involved in her diagnosis or procedures at all.

Haire however, contributes towards Elbe's autobiographical imperative by drawing attention to the nature of the text. It is a patchwork of notes, letters, oral accounts, and anecdotes that gravitate towards and contribute in constructing the persona of Lili Elbe. As Andreas Sparre (her previous male name in the book), she is resolute in narrating her story to Hoyer who is not aware at the time that he would be tasked or moved to put all the material together since his own motives are unknown. Hoyer recalls the time she first began to tell her story in his living room to clarify what she is going through. Hoyer illustrates the scene—

"I will tell you the story of my life, like an accurate chronicler," began Andreas, "so let it commence with my parents, whom you have both met. If I should grow tedious now and then, or too introspective—"

"I will run my blue pencil through it afterwards, as your Tacitus."

Niels completed the sentence (Elbe 58).

A Lejuenesque autobiographical pact of truth claims is made expressively with Hoyer¹ and simultaneously with the reader here even as the former himself commits to being her editor without discussing the possibility of publishing. The editor's conviction however is plain enough to suggest that the narrative will be efficiently recorded. This complicates Eakin's idea of the autobiographical imperative because a trans enactment requires literal repetition. Maybe many more times than the pure ordinary act of entering the symbolic.

¹ Elbe's collaboration with Hoyer and the question of authorship will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Transsexual autobiographies for Prosser, at least are always a secondary act of retelling with an intention to integrate the trans body into the proper wholeness it seeks. He contends,

In joining the split-gendered subject, autobiography transmits—in narrative—the integrating trajectory of transsexuality.

...In transsexual autobiography the trajectories of transsexuality and autobiography are entwined in complex ways, narrative and bodily form conducting each other. To begin with, the narrative transitions of autobiography allow the somatic transitions of transsexuality in an immediate and material sense. The autobiographical act for the transsexual begins even before the published autobiography—namely in the clinician’s office where, in order to be diagnosed as transsexual, s/he must recount a transsexual autobiography. The story of a strong, early, and persistent transgendered identification is required by the clinical authorities, the psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists who traditionally function as the gatekeepers to the means of transsexual “conversion.” Whether s/he publishes an autobiography or not then, every transsexual, as a transsexual, is originally an autobiographer. Narrative is also a kind of a second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be “read”.

Consequently, the published transsexual autobiographies that *we* read are always the transsexual autobiography a second time around. Herein lies another redoubling, with the written autobiography mirroring, reproducing, that first oral autobiographical scene. (Prosser 100-101).

Eakin would perhaps not read Prosser’s autobiographical subject to be involved in a primary act at the clinic because each retelling would function as formative as an immersion into language. Elbe is therefore, not twice or thrice removed from her original clinical utterance in front of Hoyer and inside her book. She has been coming into her narrative through her speech acts much before a cognizance of her identity as a woman.

The trans autobiographical imperative is thus, not concerned about trajectories and teleological reasoning. An arrival is implied in Prosser’s postulation that Eakin denies viscerally. Undoubtedly, Elbe’s narrative, much like many other MTF autobiographies—that were to follow in twentieth century Global North—labours towards a final point of integrity. As a matter of fact that is the voiced goal of

transsexing the self in these works but as far as the trans autobiographical imperative is concerned, a trajectory, if any, is circular and complete in its self. Elbe illustrates it well when she casually sits down with Hoyer to tell her story to him. Vidya in her refusal to write her name foreshadows her imperative that exceeds the temptation of immediate if simplistic posterity by scrawling her name on that wall.

A SAFE SPACE TO NARRATE THE SELF

Relying on Eakin's vision of organic wholeness for a trans subject guaranteed by her acquisition of language does have its obvious pitfalls. The oppression that comes with it is suggested by critic John C. Hawley in his 2015 essay, "Trans-Autobiographies as Sites for Decolonization". Hawley views classical transsexual autobiographies as a lost cause since the autobiographer is colonized to fit in the male/female binary by the very clinic that facilitated her coming into being. He expands that view even more problematically over all transgender subjects and says,

In the lives of perhaps of all transgender people much time is lost to the "language" of the binary gendered world. Beyond this ocean in which transgender people are willy-nilly compelled to swim, the language of day-to-day coping no doubt teaches an ability to hide behind language, rather than to use it for honest self-expression (Hawley 195).

Hawley here echoes and cites trans theorist Cressida J. Heyes from her 2007 book *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*. Heyes has touched upon classical transsexual autobiographies as being defined by "a set of tropes"; gender conformity being on top of the list. The case for Heyes is not so different from the necessity of "coming out" in gay and lesbian narratives. These tropes, she says and as Hawley quotes, "may well inspire post hoc interpretation of a life that fits a recognizable template" (Hawley 195; Heyes 209). Hawley terms this, "in effect a kind of reclamation of one's life, but according to a by-now expected schema" (Hawley 195).

The predictability of all transsexual autobiographies is perhaps problematic for Heyes and Hawley due to the political stagnant it represents. The clinical hold on the subjectivity is supposedly notorious in its demand for the perfect narrative. The transsexual 'patient' must prove that she is who she claims to be in order to gain

access to surgery. The gatekeeper of the surgery is the figure of patriarchal power who will validate her identity.

Former car racer and Spitfire Ace during World War I, Roberta Cowell as Britain's first known transwoman to undergo surgical procedures published her autobiography *Roberta Cowell's Story: An Autobiography* in 1954. While all the other classical authors in this study do refer to psychiatric and other clinical evaluations, Cowell is the only one to emphasize those acts as crucial to her comprehension of her identity. The psychiatrist's chamber is where her thoughts come together and make sense. She claims,

It was very plain that my feelings and emotions were badly tangled up and in need of being straightened out somehow. After giving the matter a great deal of careful thought, I decided to consult a psychiatrist.

...I would come into the doctor's inner office and immediately lie down on my back on a couch. Somewhere behind me the doctor would be seated, pen in hand, open notebook in the other. I had to say the first thing that came into my head. For the first few sessions (each lasting an hour) only matters of immediate importance were mentioned. Gradually, through association, I began to bring in thoughts of the past. The sound of the doctor's pen scratching in the notebook was a distraction at first; soon it became almost a reassurance, for at least I knew he was not asleep (Cowell 38-39).

The jarring scratches of his phallic pen turn from interruptive to enabling besides being indicative of his attention and by association, diagnostic gaze. Hawley and Heyes are vindicated through this plainly symbolic imagery alone that Cowell must be first defined through the instrumental gaze of the imposing figure.

However, this dubiously enabling scenario would quite simply be a transsexual *rite de passage* for Jay Prosser for his aim is not to liberate the autobiographer from compulsive and recurring narrative patterns but to understand the rehabilitating power of those. The anticipated autobiography that takes root in the first retelling at the clinic is a return of the body to its idealized realm just like the surgical act itself—

In its published retelling (after the diagnosis, as a repetition, and in writing) the transsexual bios, not surprisingly, typically appears as itself a highly formalized narrative. Reproduced in autobiography, transsexuality emerges as an archetypal story structured around shared tropes and fulfilling a particular

narrative organization of consecutive stages: suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/conversion; and finally the arrival “home”—the reassignment (Prosser 101).

Another phenomenologist Gayle Salamon who wrote the book *Assuming a Body: Transgender Rhetorics of Materiality* relocates gender dysphoria or dissonance valued by the clinic as essentially a material discord between the subject’s felt sense of being and her fleshly reality. Her idea of trans proprioception takes the argument of narrative predictability completely outside the anti-colonial dynamics of Hawley. She however, touches upon the “set of tropes” popular in autobiographies in a discussion on the 1974 MTF autobiography *Conundrum* by famous British travel writer and journalist Jan Morris who then became better known for coming out as transsexual. Salamon writes,

Conundrum did much to establish the structural conventions of trans autobiography, the order and manner in which the journey from mistaken to true sex is related to the reader, and many trans autobiographies adhere to this same form: descriptions, of the gender dilemmas of early childhood, an adolescent latency period, occasional escape from gender norms into some consuming pursuit of career, the decision to transition, and finally the sense of relief and peace gained from that transition (Salamon 173).

What is most striking about Salamon’s claim is that she credits Morris to determine how autobiographies would have come to be written. By the early seventies, several notable examples of a crystallized transsexual narrative besides Cowell included American writers like Christine Jorgensen with *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (1967); Tamara Rees with *Reborn* (1955); Hedy Jo Star with two autobiographies *I Changed My Sex!* (1963), and *My Unique Change* (1965) and; Lyn Raskin with her *Diary of a Transsexual* (1971) to name a few.

If the history of the “set of tropes” or a “recognizable template” or “structural conventions” is disputable then they may be seen as various sites of narrative potential that the trans autobiographical imperative holds in its fold. They may be conceived either at the clinic as Cowell shows or while talking to a friend across the living room as Elbe demonstrates.

There are several other exceptional instances. For Canadian pioneer Dianna Boileau in her 1972 autobiography *Behold, I am a Woman* written with the then prominent biographer and journalist Felicity Cochrane, the imperative appears to

reside in the performative. As a ten-year-old child, she is thrilled to attend church and take on the role of an altar boy. An added thrill is the long black cassock that appears like a dress and her fondness for it represents a desire she cannot yet fully comprehend. She writes,

I donned my black cassock, then carefully unrolled my treasured surplice. I noticed that there were some small puckers from holding it too tightly, but otherwise it was in excellent shape. I pulled it over my head, then smoothed it down. It reminded me of a girl's party dress—I loved to wear it.

My black cassock was at least three sizes too large. Because I was the youngest and the smallest of the altar boys serving at St. Michael's, it was impossible to get one to fit. Mother had tried to shorted in with safety pins around the hem, but it was still too long. I must remember, I thought, to hold it up when I walked up the altar steps. I didn't want to trip as I'd done the morning before (Boileau 38).

This ersatz transsexing attempt not only prefigures the obvious culminations of her narrative but draws attention to the importance of the safety of the space required for her subjectivity to grow fully. The soothing effect that the psychiatrist's office came to have on Cowell is something similar that Boileau experiences when she enters the place of worship. Also, because it is a refuge from being bullied at school. She says,

As I entered the church, an immediate sense of well-being and security came over me. No longer was I haunted by misgivings about my masculinity. I somehow felt warm and glowing, like the candles in front of the statues. They flamed until extinguished. My personal flame was doused when I went each day from the safety and peace of St. Michael's to the cruel taunts of the boys at school (Boileau 36-37).

When security is ensured and the inner flame alights again, Boileau is free to be and give her first performance with an actual audience—

I remember the day of my first recital vividly. I sat on a bare stage in the town auditorium. Before me was a grand piano that was a far cry from the out-of-tune upright, of unknown pedigree, at school. I was dressed in my best suit, which had been scrubbed and rescrubbed by Mother to a gleaming white.

I was nervous yet calm, conceited yet humble, and unbeknown to myself, boy yet girl. All these contradictions were contained within the framework of one blond ten-year-old boy (Boileau 41).

Boileau of course does not mention here or anywhere else in her book, a past Eakenian pain in her throat to tell her story. However, she includes this important incident to perhaps underscore like Cowell, the fecundity of a safe space where a trans subject may actually begin to speak.

Living Smile Vidya also exposes this instinctive allowance for the autobiographical imperative to even rear its head. She does so far more forcefully than Boileau or Cowell when she is on the operating table and finds herself silenced. She says,

I wanted to talk to the doctor, but the environment silenced me. They removed my skirt and made me lie down on the cot, and helped me overcome my embarrassment.

...I wanted to thank everyone, cry out loud to the doctor, his assistants, Sugandi Ayah, express my gratitude to them to my heart's content. I couldn't move my lips or open my mouth.

I thanked them silently. 'Thank you for removing my maleness from my body, thank you for making my body a female body. My life is fulfilled. If I die now, I'll lose nothing. I can sleep in peace,' I told myself (Vidya 15-16).

Being cold, hungry and physically exposed in front of the doctors and other staff, Vidya is also facing her moment of truth. More than anything tangible there is something abstract lingering in the "environment" or the ambience of the operation theatre. She has just refused to etch her name on the wall like many before her and perhaps, it is a cold businesslike approach of the people about to perform the surgery that discourages her to express even gratitude. Whatever may be the case, Vidya will have to wait for a better infrastructure to begin to iterate; an infrastructure certainly better than that of the current Indian clinic that allows for illegal castrations to take place and silences the criminalized hijra client effectively. Unlike Cowell and Boileau, she does not have access to even institutionalized and filtered expression. Autobiographical release and contributing to the meagre hijra discourse for her therefore, becomes a far more enabling gesture. Most importantly, it is a much more intensely experienced imperative to write.

COMPLICATING THE NOTION OF SPACE

Trans theorist Talia Ma Bettcher magnifies the effect infrastructure has on trans subjectivities in her 2009 essay “Trans Identities and First-Person Authority”. She paints a bleak picture of first person authority trans subjects are assumed to have. She posits the added burden of being free to discursivize only in safe spaces that are emphatically trans in that they are subcultural and full of supportive and diverse members of the community. First person authority may be a given for Bettcher but the subcultural space she refers to is required to be a First World metropolis like Los Angeles where she observes a learning opportunity for MTFs to not misgender FTMs. Above all, within this space, she claims, “Individuals’ self-identifications are generally accepted at face value” (Bettcher 108). Ergo when genital status is rendered irrelevant, trans subjects can engage with each other and themselves at a much more meaningful and respectful level (Bettcher 107-112).

Bettcher’s restriction of the first person authority both spatially and geographically is not the first. It finds an echo in Susan Stryker’s exploration of a San Francisco based sadomasochistic community in her 2008 essay “Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism”. Stryker sees a particular sexual practice as politically meaningful and transformative for a trans participant precisely because it takes place where consent is guaranteed and a familiar Western urban liberal ethos is markedly visible (Stryker, “Dungeon Intimacies” 44). The implication of combining both theorists’ stances would mean taking for granted that trans bodies must strictly circulate within trans only Western infrastructures and avoid being tainted by heterosexist economies.

It would perhaps be somewhat unfair to lament that the hijra subject does not figure in these liberating schemes for they are indeed meant to assume a contemporary Global North trans citizen. On the other hand, the classical transsexual subject is bound to be read as the inward looking pioneer who instead of seeking to build a subculture or even a localized community, sought validation from the cis normative majority. The supposed hubris of the latter and the complete erasure of the former in Bettcher and Stryker is enough to remind one that a safe space by an individualist subject may often be carved through improvisation.

Famous Indian hijra activist and TV celebrity Laxminarayan Tripathi from Mumbai seeks to draw attention to her autobiographical imperative as straddling two

discourses—hijra as well as the mainstream. She first explains how becoming hijra was a pedagogical process. Having been shown the way by senior hijras, she wants to know all about her heritage and legacies. In her 2015 autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, she writes,

I now spent almost all my time with the hijras. I had learnt enough about them to write a book, so to speak, and I was proud to be a part of the community. I knew about Arjuna who had become Bruhannada in the Mahabharata, and I knew about the Khojas who guarded the harems of kings. I also knew about Shabnam Mausi, the MLA from Madhya Pradesh, who was the first among us to join politics (Tripathi 51).

When she has been accepted by and welcomed into the community, she goes on to form an organization that would document a census of those who are ignored by the nation-state's official archives. She explains,

We decided to work independently and autonomously. We immersed ourselves in welfare work, aimed at empowering the hijra community and educating society. To us, the hijras were the ultimate subaltern, deprived of fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. We were slaves, non-persons. We had been suffering injustice for centuries (Tripathi 91).

Finally, she comes to the point where she realizes that her engagement with other hijras is meaningless if she doesn't expand her perspective. Having already performed as a dancer on TV and stage she looks to foreground her position as a budding public figure to tell her story. She says,

There is the ghetto and there's the mainstream. My dominant identity was that of a hijra. I wanted to live with hijras, but I also wanted to live in society. Luckily, for me, I was both a dancer and an activist. So, while activism enabled me to live in the ghetto, my dancing ensured that I was also a part of mainstream society.

The mass media was the route I took to be a part of the mainstream (Tripathi 118).

Tripathi would go on to give many interviews and appear on several platforms. The autobiography is but one culmination for her autobiographical imperative. The niche that she carved for herself expanded with her autobiographical excess that could not be contained within the pages of her book. The same could be said for pioneers who attained celebrity status much like Christine Jorgensen who was the first known

American to undergo surgeries and also became an enduring symbol of “the atomic age” in the 1950s (Meyerowitz 51-97).

Another American pioneer like the former paratrooper Tamara Rees, who was the second known individual to have transformative surgeries abroad in Europe like Jorgensen but first to write and publish an autobiography, the trans autobiographical imperative exceeds a focused desire to tell her story. She writes in her autobiography *Reborn* published in 1955—

After my return home, and because of the publicity in the hometown papers, I received thousand of letters and hundreds of phone calls. I am glad to say that the greater percentage of these have been favorable and amazingly enough, the greater percent of expressions of sympathy and encouragement have come from women. Naturally I have received some adverse calls and letters as well. Actually it is very shocking to read and hear some of the terms and expressions many of these people use. It certainly displays a gross intollance, not so much for myself, but for any minority problem [sic]...
 ...If I gain just a small portion of the population to the support of persons with social maladjustments, I will feel that the writing of this book and my own past experiences have been well worth while.

It is solely with this intent that the forthcoming picture and book have been written (Rees 56-57).

Discourse abhors vacuum. In the absence of a community, bouquets and brickbats perform a fostering function. Although, Rees never became a celebrity like Jorgensen or Tripathi, she nevertheless anticipated courting a much bigger fame than fan/ hate-mail. One could guess that her biopic never saw the light of the day but the short narrative closes with the above optimistic suggestion that she will continue to express herself possibly with an imagined audience that validates and celebrates her identity.

A safe space can thus be located outside physical immediacies to bolster the imperative. For hijra activist, ethnographer and writer A. Revathi from rural Tamil Nadu, a retrospective validation is found neither in locating community specific safe spaces nor in a sympathetic audience. Rather it is in the simple understanding that others in her own community are full of stories more painful than her own. In her 2010 autobiography *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*, Revathi refers to writing another book, which would later be published in 2012 titled *Our Lives Our Words*:

Telling Aravani Lifestories. In trying to document fellow aravani² lives, she talks about her revelations upon finding out how others of her community lived. There are no reflections or mirroring scenes to be found as she may have expected. Rather, Revathi experiences an epiphany. She writes,

I met aravanis in Namakkal, Theni, Vellore, Chennai and Erode. My accounts turned out to be more than a record of interview sessions—they expanded to include my experience of living with the aravanis, eating with them, sharing their troubles, listening to them, and heeding their feelings and thoughts. A few of them wondered what use a book of this kind would be. Some asked me who had paid me to do this work, and if they would get some money. Once they understood my intent, they agreed to be interviewed. I met thirty people over a period of six months. They shared with me their life experiences and their sorrows and joys.

I still shudder, recalling the way the aravanis I spoke to sobbed and screamed when they recounted stories of their mothers, lovers, husbands... I who had asked if I had been singled out for sorrow found through these interviews that many others were subject to enormous pain despite which they presented a smiling face to the world. My difficulties were nothing compared to some of the things I heard (Revathi 294-295).

What starts off as an auto-ethnographic effort becomes a point of departure for her story. Conversely, Revathi cannot document the lives of others as intimately as she can her own. The secondary project where she begins to carry the burden of authentic representation can only translate into a far less nuanced work than the original where she can detail her life freely. Her discursive extensions are still noteworthy like Vidya who provides the space for the etched names on the wall. Revathi goes a step ahead and includes the words of some who had not iterated.

² ‘Aravani’ refers to an MTF trans community in Tamil Nadu. Aravan was a legendary hero from Mahabharata who agreed to sacrifice himself in the war upon a condition that he be married first in order to have someone mourn for him. When no woman came forward, Lord Krishna assumed the form of a woman for the purpose. Later s/he mourned his death as his widow. The annual Koovagam festival in Tamil Nadu attracts hijra individuals and other trans women from India and abroad to ritually re-enact Aravan’s saga. Participant brides are believed to possess the soul of Lord Krishna as Aravan’s wife or Aravani. ‘Aravani’ also functions as a synonym for ‘hijra’ besides other trans identities in the region (Mitra).

DISCURSIVE DAMAGE AND THE HIJRA SUBJECT

At this juncture, it would be easy to say that Revathi and Vidya's textual efforts can only go so far because the hijra community is insular by nature. NGOs who work in the field of HIV/AIDS advocacy would certainly agree to that contention. While conducting health surveillance and outreach work for pan Indian trans communities as a high risk group as far as the contagion is concerned, the neoliberal NGO is also tasked with manufacturing rescue narratives and committing other epistemological violences. They may constrain the hijra subject as actually male bodied or biologically male therefore easily slotted under the broad category of being behaviourally homosexual (Kavi 391-392; Singh et al. 25-28).

This methodological solecism goes hand in hand with irresponsible statements circulated in critical works by benevolent queer scholars where hijra lives are important but as an afterthought. For instance, in their landmark 2005 LGBTQ anthology—first of its kind—*Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India* editors, Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan are quick to read hijra identity through the privileged lens of sexuality. In the introduction to the essays, they first make a ludicrous claim that “Hijras include men who go in for hormonal treatment, those who undergo sex-change operations and those who are born as hermaphrodites” (Narrain and Bhan 5). Their complete elision about the fact of lack of access to hormones by a subaltern group; the crucial difference between illegal castration at the clinic, and ritually practiced nirvana; and the by now offensive use of the word ‘hermaphrodite’ instead of the appropriate ‘intersex’ is shocking in the least.

Narrain and Bhan go on to claim that “For the hijra community, the sex one desires to be as well as the sex one desires to be with are both linked to a form of self-identity called hijra” (Narrain and Bhan 14-15). As a reductive assertion, it becomes highly circumspect an assumption for two main reasons: firstly, hijra sexuality cannot be glossed over by a vague mention of its inexplicableness. This exacerbates orientalised othering. Hijra sexual desire may manifest (or not) in hetero- or homo-erotic terms or outside the binary altogether. Secondly, given that Indian trans identities function in a gay male hegemony, steering the focus of hijra discourse away from gender towards a discussion of sexuality is as much of a discursive violence as the staid NGO view of hijra desire as really same sex desire (Khan 16-25).

In the 2013 publication *A People Stronger: The Collectivization of MSM and TG Groups in India* composed by Suneeta Singh et al. several neoliberal NGOs come together under the umbrella of United Nations to report on the successful harnessing of HIV/AIDS as a result of advocacy labours across the country. While the very white-paper nature of such reportage is designed to be self-congratulatory, negative aspects find their proper place and scapegoats. Singh et al. complain that—

Nevertheless, community action in the hijra community is limited. What constrains it? In the instance of the hijra, community action must take place to two ends: that of creating acceptance in mainstream society; and that of reforming the community internally to get rid of persistent archaic and exploitative practices. But despite some progress...the hijras have remained inward-looking. Their interaction with the outside world has tended to be limited to their livelihood—begging, giving blessings at weddings and births, and sex work. Although not much information is available, the internal structures of the community remain archaic, leaving little room to negotiate personal freedom at the individual level (Singh et al. 87).

On the other hand, Ashiwini Sukthankar in an essay titled “Complicating Gender: Rights of Transsexuals in India” in Narrain and Bhan’s anthology says,

The hijra identity has a historicity, it’s culturally located. Trans identity is urban, and has a strong class component. With respect to hijras, there are traditional ways and traditional rituals that are operative.

...The hijra discourse is very different from the discourse of transgender or transsexual persons. There are differences of class, of language, of the kinds of discrimination, harassment and violations faced. For me, when I think of transgender or transsexual persons, what comes to my mind is people who have greater access to information and have a very different class privilege (Sukthankar 165).

In the context of the trans autobiographical imperative, these stock views rife with stereotypical assumptions that are repeated not only in popular media but also policy documents or reportage such as those by Singh et al., the hijra writer seems to have her task cut out for her. Namely, to write herself against the grain of such ideas. Sukthankar’s astute observation that there is a marked division between who could be transgender/ transsexual and who may be hijra hits the nail on the head. Oddly

enough, the broad sweep of generalizations about “tradition” delimits the potential of both the hijra writer and reader on what to expect from a hijra narrative.

Photographer Dayanita Singh speaks of how she convinced Delhi’s Mona Ahmed to let her intercede and collaborate on her autobiography visually by taking Ahmed’s pictures and being her transcriber besides facilitating emails to their editor in Switzerland. The result was India’s first hijra autobiography *Myself Mona Ahmed* (2001). Singh mentions in her introduction to the book,

Two years ago, I wrote her a fax about this book, unsure about how she would react. I wrote, “A publisher would like to make a book with you about your unique self.” She wrote back to me, through my mother, and said that she was delighted. But she also wrote, “The whole world calls me a eunuch. You call me unique, which is true. I am very confused.” (Ahmed 15).

Ahmed effectively counters Sukthankar and Singh et al.’s assumptions of insularity by not only addressing herself alternately as eunuch and hijra throughout the narrative that unfolds but also emphasizing her individuality. Furthermore, her pun on eunuch/unique underscores her position on self-expression and signals an open-ended ‘yes’ to Singh’s query. She is “confused” and that becomes the locus for why she should or should not write her story. Her uniqueness is also what gives her the power to either dispel or dismiss or refute scholarly and popular generalizations drawn about hijra life. In a reproduced email to the editor, Ahmed writes,

Everyone who meets a eunuch, meets him for some purpose of their own, either it is money or to write articles about eunuchs, to find out what a eunuch is like inside, which we do not tell...In villages they are gifts of God; in cities they are men trying to be women, but no one has access to their souls.

Everyone makes their own little theories and no proper research. Some call us a man, some call us homos, some go to the Gujarat temple and think they have understood us. So many people have come to ask about my life story, because I know you will write it the way I want and will not add spice to sell. Also that you will not change my English to High English. It is fine like this.

There was a friend of Dayanita’s who used to come to meet me and wanted to write my story, but I have told her never to do so. I want this to be the only book about my life. Then there are journalists who are always writing made-up stories about eunuchs, because everyone is so curious about us. But the eunuchs do not like to tell their story to anyone outside the community.

Till today no journalist has written the truth about eunuchs. All the world wants to know is about our castration, but not how we feel, our emotions.

...I am thankful to you, Mr. Walter, that you will tell our truth. At least, my truth will be told. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Blessings

Myself

Mona Ahmed (66-67).

The fact of Ahmed's narrative despite her protestations is that it is obviously interceded like Elbe's and also contingent upon the invisible yet omnipresent editor besides Dayanita Singh's authority with her constructive gaze upon Ahmed's sex and person. Ahmed does not give a comprehensive account of her life and her autobiography is a series of glimpses into her past and present. The intention of the imperative is underlined halfway into her story and it becomes clear that although Ahmed is bothered by the issues of representation she mentions above, she will not address all of them. Ahmed's uniqueness may or may not escape the reader in the end but this particular email is testament to her stance on her intervention into launching a discourse where none existed before.

The rich hijra orality and other context bound performative texts within the community may be fleeting and un-archived but Ahmed's debut as the only hijra autobiographer of her time sparks what could become (as it still has not) a new literary canon. It is unfortunate that Ahmed's narrative along with other hijra autobiographies remains ignored even by queer scholars. A hijra specific trans autobiographical imperative is weighed continually down by having to challenge and also recover from critical and popular discursive damage as Ahmed explains lucidly. Prosser's transsexual body looks to integrate her bodily self retrospectively but the hijra task is innately dynamic and rhizomatic.

Critic and journalist Bhaswati Chakravorty may oppose this broad view. In a scholarly essay published in the 2007 critical anthology *The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India*, edited by Brinda Bose and Shubhabrata Bhattacharyya, she presents the suspicious approach over hijra expression that could perhaps be explanatory of by now expected and confident reductions by the queer, the popular, and the policy maker. Chakravorty says,

Out of the experience of the outcast life comes deftness at self-fashioning. The hijra, once allowed to compete for political position, has shown remarkable skill in turning miseries and prejudices into constructive propaganda, occasionally going along with popular beliefs just to make a point (Chakravorty 379-380).

Chakravorty is referring to a particular hijra discourse. One of participation in electoral politics. Since there have been several popular hijra candidates to fight elections, Chakravorty suggests they employed the rhetoric of sympathy to win votes. What is clear in her postulation is that hijras in their struggle for power cannot be trusted to speak the truth about themselves. As Ahmed says, the hijra soul is unreachable for the intention of the researcher or the curious enquirer is exploitative. It is the collective cultural failure that we continue to read hijra lives with this wary methodology.

The trans autobiographical imperative in both classical transsexual and hijra texts appears to be shaped from the dynamics of hostility. Pre-conceived notions that affect one's reading could perhaps be allayed by a return to the Eakinean idea of self-invention entangled in the workings of language. That is though, but one view. Genre critic Udaya Kumar in the introduction to his 2016 polemic *Writing the First Person: Literature, History and Autobiography in Modern Kerala* seems to sum up above arguments when he mentions that—

Theoretical discussions of autobiography have been riddled with paradoxes: the genre is seen as the modern individual's medium of expression yet history is also traced back a very long way; its truth claims invoke the immediacy of self-intuition and the privileges of a first-person account but it is often aimed at convincing a public through strategies of persuasion; it refers to an interior realm inaccessible to others; yet one that is constructed in a language commonly shared. The generic regularities of autobiography, on a closer look, turn out to be anything but stable. Readers who search self-narratives for a literal, verifiable correspondence to reality are bound to be disappointed: yet, self narration invariably makes some sort of claim to truth even if in the end it reveals only the truth of deception (Kumar 12).

Kumar echoes Eakin's conviction without putting any of his eggs in Lacan's basket. His idea of "the truth of deception" as possibly—dare, I claim—the ultimate frontier for the study of autobiography. What may be more plausible is that the truth of

deception (where the trans autobiographical imperative may also be already directed) could provide answers about the befuddlement of past and contemporary models in studying classical transsexual or hijra narratives. It is the perceived notion of the transsexed self as an unreliable and unstable text *par excellence* that the next two chapters will attempt to explore.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SHAME OF SHAMELESSNESS: REVISITING TRANSEXUAL PIONEERS

HISTORICAL GESTURES

Following the arrival of transgender theory in the 1990s, historian Joanne Meyerowitz composed an exhaustive documentation titled *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. This 2004 publication remains to be read by trans theorists as a celebration of a discourse from below because a dispassionate Meyerowitz does not privilege representations or self-representations over historical facts. However, she provides an in-depth study of a notable pioneer figure, Christine Jorgensen and her autobiography. In 2008, another US focused landmark belongs to trans theorist Susan Stryker. Her book *Transgender History* takes a bird's eye view of all major trans movements and political resistances. Although, autobiographical narratives are duly noted they are not accorded utmost importance as sites of identity formation in Stryker's work.

Critical dialogue on autobiography can only be said to begin when lesbian feminist, Janice Raymond, in 1979 wrote what could perhaps be described as the single most hostile polemic against transsexuals titled, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Targeting, especially, a particular individual named Sandy Stone, Raymond claimed that the latter had usurped and polluted the lesbian-feminist purity of a San Francisco based music collective, Olivia Records, by her presence. Raymond's broader argument was that MTF transsexuals encroach upon and violate women's bodies and spaces by simulating an artificial femininity while remaining essentially male. She used Stone as the main example of deceit and abstract rape against biological women identified women.

As has been noted in various transgender theoretical texts, Stone's much delayed response to this attack came in her essay, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" in 1991. The article went on to become the "protean text" to launch multiple critical enquiries in trans studies (Stryker and Whittle 221).

The burgeoning field of trans theory now sought to theorize the trans subject across the spectrum of transgender identification. Transsexuality was the most visible

face of the community owing to the scandalous appeal of autobiographies that had been increasingly visible in the literary market early twentieth century onwards. On the other hand, trans studies were going to be principally grounded in not the rich heritage of personal albeit sensational narratives but feminist and queer views on gender and sexuality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE “POSTTRANSSEXUAL MANIFESTO”

As a landmark and primary text, Stone’s manifesto sought to break free from the by now crystallized idea of the transsexual that sparked feminist hostility with all its charges of patriarchal intrusion in women’s spaces; reification of stereotypes; manipulation; or downright fraud. While Sandy Stone’s critical legacy has been rhizomatic, transgender theorists do not seem to have recovered what is explicitly purged in her primary iteration since i.e. the figure of the pioneering autobiographer. By pioneers, one refers to a handful of earliest known transsexuals in their respective countries on both sides of the North Atlantic. Namely, Lili Elbe (Denmark), Tamara Rees (USA), Roberta Cowell (UK), and Dianna Boileau (Canada). Stone in her texts does not discriminate between the early autobiographer and what she terms, the “monolithic transsexual”, one who has captured the popular imagination and established the dominant idea of transsexuality.

In her autobiographical narrative, the monolith came to reproduce staid ideas of what counts as a woman; gave misleading pseudoscientific claims; exaggerated notions of surgical success, besides making numerous other contestable declarations. Perhaps, this is why the classical transsexual autobiography—a sizeable body of published works that spans several decades being the defining genre of choice for MTF trans writers—has not been canonized in the strictest sense of the word by trans theorists. It floats still in the shadowy recesses of lowbrow pulp fiction and bathroom literature. For examples, a writer like Canadian Dianna Boileau provides several instances of vicarious pleasures for the curious voyeur looking for predictable trappings of being trans. On discovering her look in her autobiography *Behold, I am a Woman* published in 1972, she writes—

I was kept pretty busy. Mother became one of the members of the international team of Avon representatives. I helped her prepare the orders after they arrived from Montreal by packing them into small individual parcels for the

local housewives. In my case, this had an added advantage because I used to sneak samples of lipstick, rouge, and nail polish. In the privacy of my room, I spent hours daubing myself with cosmetics. When I think of these early experimentations, I have to smile. To an onlooker, I probably looked more like an amateur female impersonator. I suppose these early tests with cosmetics were no better or worse than those practiced by any teen-age girl at the same age.

With the money I earned by delivering cosmetics for mother and by being receptionist for Dr. Challis, I began to acquire the basics of my first female wardrobe.

I sent away for a wig I saw advertised in a copy of *Chatelaine* because there were no wigs to be bought in Fort Frances. The community was not known as the fashion center of Canada.

I expanded my wardrobe to include nylons, shoes with spike heels, dresses, and an assortment of seductive lingerie. I lived under the delusion that I was a full-fledged woman.

All this was carried out in the secrecy of my bedroom late at night after Mum and Dad were in bed. I did manage summon enough courage to walk around the block one evening just before dusk.

The gray light of the waning day blurred the vision of a transformed Clifford, replete with blonde wig, to any curious neighbors who might have been peeping (Boileau 58-59).

Boileau teases her readers just enough to draw them in the furtive yet essentially innocuous experiments of hers as a teenager. If the mundane details of acquiring feminine accretions strengthens the gaze of the reader looking at her dress herself up, she redirects one upon the anticipated gaze of her peeping neighbours. The double gaze validates and constructs her precocity as a feminine woman. A cycle to be repeated throughout the narrative.

For Stone, the time is nigh to recognize that the picture of gender roles holds transsexuals captive in a cycle of such tropic repetitions. The only recourse is to be “posttranssexual”. It is a call to establish an identity free from the didactic gender binary towards building a new movement that involves a coming out similar to gay and lesbians. A perpetual coming out perhaps, because to be visibly trans is to constantly reiterate one’s political stance writ on one’s body. More specifically, hers

is a rebellion directed against the normalizing imperative of the clinic that insists on trans subjects to blend into the heterosexual matrix and disappear without a trace of any trans difference whatsoever. Namely, to pass for unremarkable ciswomen. Stone explains that passing equals disappearing and therefore dilutes the possibility of political action. Ergo, one must not pass. She writes—

I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forego passing, to be consciously “read”, to read oneself aloud—and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to write oneself into the discourses by which one has been written—in effect, then, to become a (look out—dare I say it again?) posttranssexual (Stone 232).

A point of departure and a conceptual conflation that Stone seem to receive unconditionally from Raymond is that passing means malicious deception. Since most transsexuals do not publish autobiographies, one cannot hold authentically representative, the existing ones and confirm that the act of passing was always committed with an intention to deceive.

Boileau illustrates the need to pass in mid century Canadian towns and cities, the likes of which are not particularly tolerant with gender variance. Boileau passes successfully in most situations to live plainly as a cis woman, something, which is her goal besides “a growing desire to throw away forever all vestiges of manhood, (which) became my main preoccupation in life (Boileau 61).” The need to pass is entwined with the need to negate and obliterate masculinity. She cannot even bring herself to have sexual intercourse with a man she is dating because the stakes are too high. In her own words,

Despite the fact that Roderick pleaded with me to let him make love to me, I could have no part of it. If I had, the secret of my male gender would be known, and I personally had too much to lose—Rod (Boileau 92).

Roderick could have surely spurned her for her biological maleness but what Boileau does not mention is possible violence and threat to her life at the hands of the same lover. There are certainly other volatile incidents, situations, and reactions she is likely to suffer from anywhere if she fails or refuses to pass. The basic survivalist condition to be transsexual in her universe is to pass. Discursive obliteration that Stone is rebelling against when applied retroactively to the classical subject requires stepping outside the language of transsexuality as constructed so far. Boileau inherits the medicalized ideals and a pre-decided narrative. However, is the transsexual

subject really so helpless? Is every transsexual writer prior to the posttranssexual awakening nothing less than a string puppet of the medical-industrial complex? Stone collates these concerns and asks if the transsexual can speak at all.

CAN THE TRANSSEXUAL SPEAK?

In the preface to her autobiography, Dianna Boileau writes—

The most difficult task in writing this book is getting the right perspective on myself. It is only human to color facts with imagination and dreams. I am interested, not in the way I have imagined the world, but in the way medical science and the world have re-created me from male to female.

By no means has my life been a series of tragedies. I've really never taken anyone very seriously, least of all myself. My life has been a combination of laughter, fear and sadness.

I want not only to record occurrences but to leave for posterity the ideas that life—because of my unique situation—has forced me to accept. The pages of this book are a storehouse of memories gathered along the path of life. I personally have quietly accepted the penalties imposed upon one who fails to follow the conventions and mores of the masses (Boileau 6).

It is easy to be misled by her first three lines as it is easy to regain confidence in her authorship by the next paragraph. She breaks her resolution to offer a medicalized perspective against her own unique individualistic view almost immediately. As the book unfolds, the reader realizes the relevance of the medical miracle is incidental to how she feels as a woman. Neither is the book a mere “record” of incidents but an unfolding of events and situations that form an erratic *bildungsroman*.

The impossibility of a transsexual agency in Stone could also be responded to by focusing on the authors' very act of publishing autobiography. It could be considered a leaping gesture against hiding a true self even as it describes and promotes duplicity in everyday life. Stone does not deem the mere existence of autobiographies as evidence of an *a priori* moment at all. For her, the power of the monolith may prevent future political mobilization because the autobiographies also prioritize an individual's survival in a transphobic world than collectivizing and fighting for visibility as trans.

On the other hand, rhetorically, the virtue of being transsexual may not be seen as automatically disruptive; something similar to what Judith Butler had observed lesbian bodies to be in a discussion on butch and femme relations in the 1993 essay “Imitation and Gender Insurbodination”. Instead of seeing lesbian bodies mimicking heterosexuality one may accord a performative sexual act subversive power of destabilizing signifiers and producing varied meanings (Butler “Imitation and...” 307-320).

Stone’s approach is one of grounded actions that involve not offering alternative interpretations on an existing trans body as such but through active participation against popular readings that have done much disservice to the community. This involves placing the blame for allowing and promoting those interpretations—such as feminist charges—on that very transsexual community. The posttranssexual moment comes at the cost of obliterating the original. Stone writes, “...it is difficult to generate a counterdiscourse if one is programed to disappear (Stone 230).” Elsewhere in the essay she says,

...the transsexual currently occupies a position which is nowhere, which is outside the binary oppositions of gendered discourse. For a transsexual, as a transsexual, to generate a true, effective and representational counterdiscourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes, which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible. How then can the transsexual speak? If the transsexual were to speak, what would s/he say (Stone 231)?

There are several things to take into account before one gets to Stone’s rhetorical question. Primarily, the existing discourse may not count as a genuine counterdiscourse because the authors are blatantly complicit with heterosexist patriarchy and the medico-legal industrial complex. The disappearance could refer to the clinic’s hypothetical practice of inculcating transsexuals to build a false history in order to present themselves as natural born females. It is interesting to note that the success of this enterprise would have meant a complete erasure of transsexual autobiography before its first moment of iteration because the classical subject is actually at pains to describe the surgical process.

Applying Stone’s approach to the case of the first American transsexual autobiography by Tamara Rees published in 1955 titled *Reborn*, one may note that life prior to transition takes up most of her short narrative. The explicit projection of

Rees as first an effeminate then masculine man and later as a feminine woman would be circumspect for Stone even though such a narrative choice may hint at a careful subversion of the clinic's idea of progressive gender dysphoria precisely through extreme compliance with normativity. The benefit of doubt or a close reading is lost in Stone's rhetorical questions that evoke the Spivakean subaltern. It is so because she completely dismisses any authority or authenticity one may attach to a monolith who cannot be trusted to be herself. The most vital clue left by Rees on finding a voice of one's own yet function and speak from within the confines of a repressive language is in the very first few lines of her autobiography. She writes,

This story has its beginning early in the childhood of a person born on May 15, 1924 in Kansas City, Missouri. The family consists of a father, mother and three living children and one still born. The story concerns myself, the middle child, born a male and surrounded by an older brother and a younger sister (Rees 5).

Not having had the privilege of an enlightened genderqueer vocabulary in the sexist 1940s, Rees struggles still to separate cold biological fact from her reality. She begins with an almost heartless objectivity by addressing herself in third person overwhelmingly framed within a heteronormative patriarchal family structure. She goes as far as to include the stillborn child to perhaps, underline the predestination of biological violence on bodies that fail. She marks herself as the protagonist in first voice in the last line amongst the other dead and living. The voice as a counterdiscourse rises unexpectedly from the biological rubble.

Rees may still not qualify for Stone's contemporary agenda. The latter is explicitly looking for expressive representatives who will refuse to speak in the language of gender dimorphism, instead of barking up its tree, and set themselves free from the clinic's dictums. The liberating paradigm shift must come at the cost of disowning the entanglement of transsexual identity that is historically seen to begin at and with the clinic. Foucault's landmark assessment in *The History of Sexuality* of the homosexual figure as a nineteenth century medical invention that began to talk back in the language that created him cannot become the model of a reverse discourse for transsexuals due to an added burden (Foucault 100-102). The implication is one of invisibility that is conferred along with the act of passing. Therefore, a nuanced idea of the author coerced into complicity juxtaposed against her explicit rebellion may only be revealed when one reads against the grain of the dialectical critical chain.

Such complexity is rendered impossible to imagine through a revolutionary demand of becoming posttranssexual. Posttranssexuality must overwrite the classical transsexual subject.

The nineties would see the publishing of works like Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1995), a postmodern pastiche that flouts every formula and convention of classical transsexual autobiography. Such gestures may have only been possible after the agenda Stone's manifesto laid out besides the overall growth of the transgender movement in the US. It of course does not follow that candid, artless or honest autobiographies attesting to individual truths have proliferated since then and the pioneer transsexual and her formulaic narrative is a relic.

Trans theory, however, disavows its primitive subject for a queerer inclusive future. This sacrifice does not account for those who never spoke or wrote or published be they irrelevantly conservative or discernibly liberal. Therefore, one of the exit routes from Spivak's eponymous essay would involve sagacious convenience. The subaltern may never be able to truly speak ergo the critic is helpless—if not complicit—so long the power and the language to represent the abject lies squarely outside her reach. The critic may then focus on a subject she can actually study without committing any sort of epistemological violence. This new subject automatically creates an artificial binary. One where the other may be seen as either speaking in a false tongue or not speaking at all while the new self is the harbinger of liberation.

OBLIGATION AND OBEDIENCE

The classical transsexual author who has been interpellated and damaged beyond repair lies in a precarious position. Stone notes in the beginning of her essay that autobiographies are a vital part of "The Obligatory Transsexual File" or "O.T.F." that everyone who seeks transition keeps yet they are not considered as reliable documents by doctors and therapists especially, by a clinic like Stanford that went on to standardize transition protocols (Stone 224-228). Stone does not rely on this noteworthy point to contest feminist objection of transsexual complicity with the medical industrial complex to intrude upon biological women.

Interestingly, the pioneers did not seek to form a pedagogical community in their stories of individualism at all. They write of a lonely struggle against society. Boileau says emphatically, “Of course I realize today that I was not a normal boy. I led a lonely life, I grew up very much by myself and within myself” (Boileau 28). Later, when she has exhausted all her options to obtain surgery, she writes a desperate letter to the actor Elizabeth Taylor in a last ditch effort to appeal to the star’s well-known charitable nature. Boileau tells her,

I have always felt that any individual who continuously ponders on one’s problems, thrusts them so completely out of proportion they become absolutely insurmountable and unbearable. Accordingly, life which can be so full becomes the hell on earth so many of us create for ourselves. I must say that, if only out of sheer obstinacy, my life to date has been relatively full and anything but dull...During this time, I truly took inventory of what I had left and as usually happens, when one door closes another opens. I became determined to accept myself in the glaring light of what I really was and pursue an irrevocable solution (Boileau 182-183).

It is important to note that Boileau mentions prominent names like April Ashley and Christine Jorgensen to contextualize her situation for Taylor in her letter. Although she does not rely on previous autobiographies or stories anywhere in her narrative written as late as early seventies when several trans celebrities had made headlines in other First World countries.

For transsexuals who may have been eager to reproduce in themselves the ideal surgical candidate, the inclusion of autobiographies in the O.T.F. may serve a purpose other than one of utility; that of acknowledgement like Boileau’s or perhaps, pleasure. Moreover, one may either view the unreliable autobiographical act as retrospective resistance to the clinic or even disassociate completely the autobiographical from the clinical since the former relies only on the proper subject it imagines. One may also assert that the clinic’s power subjugates subliminally and leaves a disciplined subject that writes. Alternatively, there is no evidence of an insistence on writing autobiographies from the clinic to justify its practices either. Thus, the axis on which classic autobiographies rest warrant a closer look with a reading that would not undermine the oppressive power of the clinic, neither would it give up transsexual agency as a point of departure.

A negotiated identity established in retrospect, would not present a clear break from the transsexual to the postranssexual. Stone's manifesto would be undermined in allowing such interpretations because her argument warrants a chronological-historical imperative. The logical flow of her essay implies that transsexuals have portrayed a certain sensibility and convictions to obtain surgeries and become invisible by being obedient subjects of the clinic and that chain needs to be broken.

Tamara Rees illustrates well the ambivalent relationship between the earliest transwomen and the clinic. The dynamics may not necessarily be one of utter obedience even as gratitude and submission is expressed across works. Chinks from a power struggle and active negotiation still show through in certain expressive passages. Rees recounts her earliest painful memory of seeing a psychiatrist—

By now I realize my parents must have been disturbed about my attitudes. They tried to force me to go out and play more, but I hated athletics and at school I developed an awkward shyness about exposing myself in the boy's gym. My parents began to notice this trend of unusual mannerisms and unrest so they did something very unusual for people of that time. They took me to a psychiatrist. My only memory of this man is one of distaste and mistrust. He was an elderly gentleman, wore dark glasses and had an odd way of looking at me (Rees 4).

As an adult she seeks surgical intervention after much deliberation. Christine Jorgensen at the time was the only example available to US doctors and surgery was unimaginable within the country's borders. Rees says,

My psychiatrists' first attempt, which was in common with all psychiatrists, was to suggest various types of compromise. As is known in all phases of life, one must be prepared to compromise on most situations, but where is the compromise in a situation of this sort. I felt that most of the suggestions would merely create another and perhaps greater problem than that which I now suffered (Rees 32).

What an otherwise sympathetic Joanne Meyerowitz had termed a "fierce and demanding drive" appears instead to simply be a resolute insistence for bodily autonomy (Meyerowitz 130-167). The reality of gatekeeping by psychiatry and surgeons meant that transsexuals had to deploy their best convictions at hand. Stone and others may recognize this approach as a useful narrative tool but simultaneously undervalue it as a valid political stance.

A SIMPLE QUESTION

Stone focuses largely on the first known transsexual autobiography ever composed by Lili Elbe in early 1930s titled, *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* to raise several objections against autobiographical voices. Vital issues are raised in asking the simple question—“What sort of subject is constituted in these texts?” (Stone 224). One hopes to find answers after Stone without jettisoning the autobiographer and the subject herself.

Stone does not employ Bakhtinian concepts to refer to Elbe’s heteroglossic text with multiple voices although it is a unified story originally written in German posthumously by Elbe’s close friend Ernst Ludwig Harthern Jacobson AKA Niels Hoyer on her earlier interactions with him. *Man into Woman* is a collage of letters, diary entries, the editor’s own voice, and other texts to form an autobiographical story. Stone has called it a “partially autobiographical account” and a “second-hand” narrative (Stone 224, 225). The story involves a married Danish male painter Einer Wegener who is called Andreas Sparre in the book. The narrative opens with a portrait of a young bearded Wegener. Overleaf expands the title thusly,

Man into Woman

An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex

The true story of the miraculous transformation of the Danish painter Einer Wegener
(Andreas Sparre)

Edited by

Niels Hoyer

This undated “fourth impression” of the English translation clearly indicates Hoyer’s position as an editor and not writer. One may also not claim Elbe to have put pen to paper for several important passages. In certain quoted lines it is hard to tell who contributed towards a particular material. Some parts were narrated orally to Hoyer by Elbe herself. Others include Wegener’s wife’s letters. All these texts collapse into one

whole and give Lili Elbe shape. First person voice changes to third and back. Immediately after having been validated by Haire's authoritative voice in his introduction, as was noted in the last chapter, Hoyer, in a Foreword writes,

In accordance with Lili Elbe's last wishes, I have arranged the papers she left behind in the form of this book. It is a veracious life story, recorded by a person whose earthly course assumed the shape of an unparalleled and incredible tragedy of fate, the life story of a person whose afflictions were outside the range of our ordinary ideas (Elbe xiii).

Stone agrees in a footnote that the "lexical profusion" of pseudonyms and names hold much promise for further study but from the point of view of the multiplicity of the self (Stone 233 n. 14). For her this is a cycle of representations (Stone 224). Hoyer brings to life his friend's story through a chain of linked primary signifiers and it may therefore not be the ideal location to unpack transgender politics where emerging identities may suffer at intimately bound hands. Stone's project is one of deconstructing the monolith. Her thrust in investigating the construct appears to involve the purity of the subjects' identity bifurcated neatly according to the gospel of sexual dimorphism.

Interestingly, Stone also refers to American entertainer Hedy Jo Star who wrote an autobiography in the 1960s (Meyerowitz 198). Stone overlooks Tamara Rees as the debuting American author and claims that Star was the first to publish hers in mid-1950s and quotes her saying,

"I wanted the sensual feel of lingerie against my skin, I wanted to brighten my face with cosmetics, I wanted a strong man to protect me". Here in 1991 I have also encountered a few men who are brave enough to echo this sentiment for themselves but in 1955 it was a proprietary feminine position. Besides the obvious complicity of these accounts in a Western white male definition of performative gender, the authors also reinforce a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification. They go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory in between (Stone 225).

Elsewhere, Stone refers to the classical subjects' denial of "mixture" akin to a Nazi sensibility. The blame is squarely on the "canonization" of the category of transsexual by the clinic that put a straitjacket on any possibility of contradictory multiplicities (Stone 226-229).

By bringing into relief Star's insistence on certain desires that constitute the cookie cutter feminine ideal of her time, Stone draws an interesting parallel of some contemporary men who state the same wishes she terms as "brave". The next paragraph makes clear the reason why the men of early 1990s are brave and not the transwoman of mid-1950s. It is because they don't seek surgical transition to fulfill those wishes and therefore, break the mold of binaries in their implicit refusal to fit into the symbolic order unlike the conservative transsexual. Stone here denies pioneers their rightful place in the history of gender rebellion, and sounds dangerously close to hostile lesbian feminism of Janice Raymond; or a pathologizing Lacanian view of Catherine Millot in *Horsexe: Essay on Transsexuality* (1990) that reduces transsexuality to psychosis; or the skewed historical materialism of Bernice Hausman in *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (1995).

Hausman has especially, gone as far to claim that transsexuals have piggybacked on the research on corrective surgeries for intersex infants. To show a psychotic or manipulative subject perverting medical technology serves as a lesson for the posttranssexual, to allow for mixture and not obsess over the sanctity of the target gender. What are the implications of the rhetorical strategy that Stone is unable to take into account? One will have to return to Elbe's bisexually divided self to investigate along with other first autobiographies.

CONSEQUENCES OF STONE'S RHETORICAL CHOICES AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESPONSE

Intersex Conviction

In *Man into Woman*, protagonist Andreas Sparre starts as a male painter of landscapes married to a woman artist, Grete Sparre who takes interests in portraiture. Grete coaxes her husband to put on a ballerina's costume when her model fails to attend a sitting. This single act sparks Sparre's interest in cross-dressing and the couple starts venturing out as Lili and Grete. Grete Sparre paints numerous painting of Lili and they travel across Europe. Andreas Sparre starts experiencing mysterious pains and nose bleeds. He begins to sense that Lili is asserting her presence over his own body and feels torn between the two personalities. The new personality proves to be more dominant and keeps demanding more hours over Andreas's existence. The Sparres go

to Germany to find an obliging doctor for a cure with the help of sympathetic friends. Dr. Kruetz orders several tests and concludes that shrunken ovaries are present in Sparre's body, which need to be replaced by a fresh pair besides other obvious operations. Elbe's was not going to be the only narrative to rely on what one may here term an—intersex conviction. Although, hers illustrates the theme in the most detailed manner. First, Hoyer claims in the introduction,

One doctor treated him with x-rays, and later on Andreas attributed the shrunken state of the female sexual organs which were found in his abdomen to the destructive effect of this x-ray treatment...Some of the doctors to whom he went thought him neurotic, some thought him homosexual; but he himself denied the truth of both these diagnoses (Elbe vi).

Later in the narrative, the doctor who decides to help Andreas attain transition also tests him thoroughly when he declares, "For I think you possess both male and female organs, and that neither of them have sufficient room to develop properly. It is fortunate for you that you have such pronounced feminine feelings. That's why I think I shall be able to help you (Elbe 25)."

When Andreas finally finds a doctor to begin surgeries, the doctor running his blood tests attests to the fact again. He says,

Hardenfeld has told me that he too regards the masculine element in you as by far the least considerable part of your being, which in his opinion from the emotional standpoint, reveals between eighty and one hundred percent of feminine characteristics. The examination of your blood has yielded a similar result (Elbe 55).

In the first British autobiography published in 1954 by Roberta Cowell *Roberta Cowell's Story: An Autobiography*, the author makes vague suggestions at a physical condition while hiding the fact of her illegal castration outside the clinic performed by Britain's first transman, an aristocrat, and a medical student named Michael Dillon (Hodgkinson)³. Cowell relies on the intersex conviction but does not offer as much explanation as Elbe. In the preface to Cowell's book, A.R. Millbourn, the Canon of the Cathedral at Bristol emphasizes on her intersexuality. He writes,

Yet the general reader can hardly fail to be impressed by the dispassionate way in which the writer records her own observations of herself, and the

³ Cowell's castration will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

courage with which she has faced the business of presenting them. Neither task can have been easy; but I fancy she would ask no better reward than the consciousness of having done something to furnish material for the medical psychologist and the geneticist, and to help towards a fuller knowledge of the psyche with its mysterious workings and of the biological foundations of intersexuality (Cowell 3).

Cowell presents her unambiguous male self as Robert, a typical rough middle class English lad who grows up to take interest in sports. He realizes that he wants to make a career in racing cars and eventually enlists himself to fight in the Second World War as a Spitfire Ace. After getting released as a prisoner of war from the Nazi camp, he returns to England to set up a business. Already suffering from posttraumatic stress, Cowell is haunted by existentialist questions and someone's remark about his physiognomy immediately prompts him to visit a doctor. Upon psychological tests it is revealed that he is actually a repressed woman. The psychological attribution is then confirmed through physical examinations that show typical feminine characteristics of fat distribution etc. to support the thesis that he really belongs to the opposite sex. A vague revelation of "some degree of hermaphroditism" makes him realize that he has repressed his femininity so far and puts himself onto the corrective transition path (Cowell 42).

Alternatives to the Intersex Conviction

Not all pioneers followed the formulaic trope of being intersex as has been implied by Hausman. In the case of American writer, Tamara Rees, the suspension of the unambiguous male life does not rest on convincing the reader of a purported intersexuality. Rees does not rely on a Cowell like alibi of a mysterious biological repression that gives way to psychological symptoms either. It is an opposing kind of repression. A deliberate avoidance of confronting her true self; something she notices as early as puberty. She writes,

Upon entering High School in Fresno, California, I completely withdrew from associating with either the boys or girls. From the boys because we shared no mutual interests and my mannerisms, interest and physical development made it readily apparent to them that I was "different". The girls would not accept

me because my interest in them was merely to share their interests as one of them (Rees 7-8).

She identifies the fact that she had repressed her feminine self so much that it gave her depression and she set out to prove herself as a man to avoid ridicule, censure and possibly violence. The repression never becomes the cause célèbre for her as it does for Cowell but plays an important part because she lived a large part of life as a self attested lie, namely, in the manner and method of a masculine man. Rees starts as a happy little boy in a middle class white American family who grows up to realize his gender dissonance. He withdraws from society and decides to join the navy. He trains to be a paratrooper and during the Second World War becomes a fighter pilot.

Upon his return, he gives up paratrooping when a colleague falls to his death. Unable to bottle up his feelings anymore, Rees decides to pursue surgical intervention in Holland like Christine Jorgensen's by-now famous example. The surgeries follow a transcontinental bureaucratic nightmare to obtain the right passport even as she is harassed and stalked by the Dutch Vice Squad. Rees's priorities as a narrator are not about her feelings. She is more interested in seeing from the outside how she is perceived and how she is treated first as a man then as a woman in a world ill prepared to conceive of her existence as a transsexual.

A curious contradiction in her narrative is that she insists on surgical intervention only for the intersex even as she does not claim to be one. In the beginning of her story she decides that her intersexual excuse is pointless in the face of bureaucracy—

While my psychiatrist was willing to cooperate in my request, he stated that he objected to that which I contemplated. We first corresponded with Dr. Christian Homburger of Copenhagen, Denmark who happens to be an eminent hormone specialist and not the surgeon that most people, due to a recently publicized case, had thought him to be. Dr. Homburger advised that upon consideration of my case a certain regimentation of hormonal treatments should be attempted for a period of at least six months. At the same time he stated that surgical transitional type transformations would not be possible in this country due to the recent enacted laws of the country, whether there appeared a biological justification or not (Rees 32).

After attaining transition in Copenhagen based on her innate repressed feminine self she reveals another opinion by saying,

I pointed out earlier that the necessary steps towards achieving this goal are lengthy and even doubtful. I would like to state at this time that other persons who might think they have justification, either physically or psychologically for such a transition, should first undergo a prolonged period of psychiatric evaluation and physical tests in this country. This will save them both time, disappointment and money because it is quite possible that there will be no justification for such a transition and unless the physical factors were present, I doubt seriously that any ethical surgeon anywhere in the world today would administer this type of transitional therapy to any person regardless of psychological factors.

Things shift radically in 1972 for Dianna Boileau in *Behold, I am a Woman* as Canada's first known person to undergo gender reassignment. Boileau does not rely on the intersex conviction either and refers to early gender dissonance. She does regret the fact later that her case is purely psychological and not physical but it does not deter her from constantly looking for an opportunity to transition. Born as an orphan boy, Boileau is teased for being a "bastard" while living with his foster family in Winnipeg. As she learns to cross-dress and venture outside, she decides to move to a big city and live as a woman. The masquerade is broken several times and she goes on to become an alcoholic. She obtains documents in her feminine name well before the surgeries and goes on to overcome great financial and emotional difficulties to obtain complete transition.

In the light of the four plotlines of classical transsexual autobiographies by pioneering subjects, it is clear that the narrative transition from perfectly masculine man to perfectly feminine woman is neither simplistic nor uniform as Stone's sweeping generalizations would imply. The division persists through the haunting theme of intersexuality but the approach and reasons are remarkably varied in all four cases. Furthermore, transition as a personal matter may or may not be channeled through the intersex conviction and it may or may not be the vital trope to justify surgery. Elbe, Cowell and Rees could still feel the need to maintain narrative purity interrupted only by referring to an innate sense of femininity. Boileau does not need to do so in a more liberal North American ethos after the moment of sexual revolution even though she belongs to a somewhat conservative Canadian hinterland with the domestic Vice Squad harassing her so much that it ultimately leads to a violent road accident.

The Denial of Mixture

The unambiguity of maleness or femaleness in the split identity of the autobiographers denies Stone's ideation of mixture. This gesture may hold a purpose. As an apologist for the classical subject, one may perhaps appeal to the then zeitgeist or attest to the fact of oppressive gender realities in the early twentieth century West. Someone like Roberta Cowell may have had little choice but to maintain the binary. She begins her story with the following lines—

For the first thirty-three years of my life I was Robert Cowell, an aggressive male who had piloted a Spitfire during the war (WW2), designed and driven racing cars, married and become the father of two children. Since May 18th, 1951, I have been Roberta Cowell, female. I have become a woman physically, psychologically, glandularly and legally (Cowell 5).

Could one consider that in a time of great changes, transsexual writers needed a strong alibi to explain themselves? This vague justification might hint at the lip service Rees pays by advocating surgery only for the intersex (even if it's added as an afterthought) despite the direction her explicitly transsexual positive story takes. An apology, however, does not inform one why repression is the main vehicle for both Rees and Cowell. It does not explain why Boileau regrets that she was not intersex either.

Stone's concerns are primarily against consuming unmindfully a dishonest text and holding it up to be representative of a community as it has already caused much damage and fuelled transphobia and that the authors do not allow for mixture. What an ideal mixture looks like may be Bornstein's pastiche but one may assume that it would also mean a revision of the classical autobiography by holding it up to strictly postmodern or contemporaneous standards. Ideally for Stone, the autobiographer would either confess to male-bodied homosexual attraction or any other sexual predilections. She may speak plainly about surgery without euphemism, or suggestions, or gratuitous symbolism. She would avoid aspiring to staid stereotypes and own up to androgyny in varying degrees. In the least she would not be so utterly invested in simulating somewhat mystical feminine qualities. Most importantly, she would not lie about being intersex or slyly justify her present feminine self by glorifying her macho past. She would own up to the collision of many voices within herself.

The posttranssexual is everything the classical transsexual is not and perhaps the pioneer autobiographer is not even what the average mid-century transsexual woman was to become—other pioneers who chose unpublished silence and anonymity as a steep price for acceptance. In this regard, according to Hausman, her own study and any similar effort suffer from a unique dilemma. She writes,

The analysis of these “official” transsexual autobiographies is not unproblematic, however. Because most transsexuals do not write their life stories, those autobiographies authored by transsexuals about sex change cannot be taken to be representative of the “average transsexual”. Yet books by transsexuals about sex change hold a position in contemporary transsexual culture.... Thus, while transsexual autobiographies (or even most) transsexual subjects, they are indicative of the establishment of an official discourse (or set of discourses) regulating transsexual self-representations and, therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity. The autobiographical texts help institute a certain discursive hegemony within a community whose members have a substantial investment in mimicking the enunciative modality of those who have been successful in achieving sex transformation (Hausman 142-143).

Hausman echoes Stone even as their political positions could not be more different from each other. Both, however, dismiss the classical transsexual as a valid figure for an enabling politics. The former does not allow a feminist subjectivity for an unprecedented political self while the latter ushers in a new subjectivity in accordance with feminist and queer integrity. Hausman’s entire project is dedicated to provide a Foucauldian understanding of the growth of transsexual surgeries. She famously calls transsexuals “dupes of gender” but goes on to construct them as manipulative subjects who deceive everyone to obtain surgery (Hausman 140). With this move she extends Raymond’s thesis but does not resort to vicious personal attacks like the latter. The idea of an official or “public” transsexual perpetuating certain ideologies is, however, unstable and problematic because one cannot simultaneously view an autobiographer as both influential to the extent that she directs the course of all surgical candidates as well as somebody who is colonized by the clinic that in turn dictates her *raisons d’être*. To do so would be to rob her of whatever agency one may ascribe to somebody actively producing her life story.

If not representative, she may be seen as a significant supererogatory presence in the “O.T.F.” (Eakin 200). Most pioneers themselves did not have the luxury of

collecting literature as little to none seems to have existed before their own. Writing as late as 1954 in Britain, Cowell summarizes Elbe's story and claims, "I did not hear of Lili's case until my own treatment was well under way. When I read the book about her life, I noticed many similarities between her history and mine" (Cowell 66). Also, the rationale behind the autobiographical texts' "discursive hegemony" is never considered to be one of vicarious reading pleasure once by any of the theorists mentioned above. Granted that fantastic projections have no place in a realist autobiography; fabrications, omissions, pseudoscience, and half-truths find plenty of space. The autobiographical transsexual self is precisely projected to be unmistakably heterosexual (before and after transition), perfectly feminine according to the fashionable dictum of the day, and selective in what details could be revealed. More interestingly, the lasting power of these partially imagined realities lies in the fact that they are as individualistic as they are formulaic.

NOT POSTTRANSSEXUAL, NOT TRANSSEXUAL

While the perfect classical subject is not posttranssexual, she is not transsexual either. Elbe, Cowell and Rees do not use the term transsexual to address themselves. Granted that the term was coined much later but they still do not use a term to denote transition either. In the seventies, Boileau refers to the word upon diagnosis and quickly lays it to rest. Notably, the title of her book says, *Behold, I am a Woman*. Is it because 'transsexual' is a diagnostic category that does not allow for emotional/textual investment at all? How will then a category like posttranssexual function? Terms like Eonism, Genuine Trasvestism and Inversion were earlier used to explain varying identities along the trans spectrum at different times during developments in sexology but never gained currency in pioneering personal narratives or life writing (Stryker *Transgender History*).

A potentially descriptive nomenclature may not hold ground in autobiography. Blatant lies about intersexuality then can be seen in a different light altogether. One may say—*I am not meant to become a woman. I am a woman. This is the starting point for all my future narrative extensions*. In the face of no lodestars to chart the road ahead, intersexuality becomes the most convenient, not to mention the safest hinge for the autobiographer. The perfect alibi cushions against an uncertain future as

well as practical threats to one's life. Roberta Cowell illustrates the fear despite being protected by her intersex conviction. Before going under the knife, she writes—

My nurse came in. She was a dear, and I took to her at once. Looking at my companion and myself, she tactfully asked which was the patient. I was put to bed, and then had to deal with a stream of caller. Doctors, surgeons, friends had to be coped with. Finally I was left to peace. As soon as I was alone I knew that I was scared stiff. I was off on an unknown road to an unknown future. And I was the first human being to tread this unknown road.

So many things could happen. The operation might not succeed. (After it was all over I learned that several of the experts present thought the operation could not be performed, and others thought it might be performed, but that the results would not be satisfactory. I might be desperately uncomfortable afterwards; I might be in great pain. Perhaps the story would leak out, and life afterwards would be impossible.

Soon enough I told myself, I would know the answers to all these questions. In the meantime I could do nothing but relax, hope the worst would not happen, but not be too surprised if it did (Cowell 54).

Consequentially, portrayal of a discrete male self and later female self presents transsexuality as a thematic accident. The transsexing situations that certainly have a history and location become unutterable and it's easier to disassociate the transing self from the male past and preserve him in a distant time where he belongs after he has had his narrated moment in the sun. The trope stretches the expected diagnostic concept of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) or even the later formulation of Gender Dysphoria to such an extreme that it appears to mock the clinic through adherence. Could one read subversion in this approach? This alternative transubstantiation of sorts that only lets in easily discernible categories and refutes Stone's ideal of 'mixture' which seems like a strict model of rebellion invested in the truth of the body.

The classical approach is clearly one of a twofold negation. Firstly, that of a perfectly portrayed masculinity prior to the transsexing moment. Secondly, of repressing the trauma faced at the clinic. Not because surgery will be taken away but because if mixture was expressed freely, surgery could not have been achieved at all owing to censure and strict protocol. Surgery is irreversible and already accomplished

at the time of composing the autobiography. One may now exert narrative control by justifying and reconstructing at will, a life, retrospectively.

Hausman may or may not be historically accurate about trans readers mimicking prominent autobiographers. It seems more of a prejudiced assumption that transsexual readers imitated their supposed ideals and acted in accordance to achieve surgery. It is plain to understand that the cynical and gatekeeping clinic would soon become anything but less than alarmed at claims of trans clients pretending to be intersex or misrepresenting medical investigations in their literature. However, intersex convictions do take precedence within some narratives as Hausman notes but she ignores the fact that this may occur due to and with a simultaneous disavowal of male-bodied sexuality that may resemble auto-eroticism or homosexuality. Stone would simply call it the erasure of heterological difference (Stone 229). Elbe, Cowell, Rees and Boileau as pioneering transsexuals across the West meet the criteria of erasing their sexuality and show disgust with same sex desire in various ways.

Stone is concerned in the manifesto that a preoperative ritual of penile masturbation called “wringing the turkey’s neck” is always missing from the narratives and that goes on to make these stories dubious texts (Stone 227). Hausman notices twice that Stone mentions this twice (Hausman 146). The glaring omission is not surprising as the sexuality of the classical transsexual as presented in the autobiographies is diffuse and not genital focused.

Boileau writing in her relatively more liberal times expresses the same fear and loathing of homosexuality and recounts her childhood abuse by a male paedophile. She even rejects both a gay suitor and a married lesbian woman attracted to her. Elbe makes a strong distinction between her two alter egos and wants to have vaginal intercourse only if she can give birth to a child eventually, thereby pursuing the last surgery (implanting of donated ovaries) that fails and causes her death. Andreas before the transition also tells Hoyer that he is not a homosexual to stress on his intersex conviction yet again, something that must stand in contrast to the degeneracy that accompanies taboo desire. Hoyer writes,

Andreas shook his head calmly. “My word on it Niels; never in my life. And I can add that those kind of creatures have never shown any interest in me”...I will honestly and plainly confess to you, Niels, that I have always been attracted to women. And to-day as much as ever. A most banal confession (Elbe 53-54)!

Cowell maintains the distinction from being a heterosexual “normal” man to its ideal female counterpart. She also makes it clear early on that her transsexuality is not to be conflated with homosexuality—

This incredible thing was not an overnight change. I had always known that my body had certain feminine characteristics. My aggressively masculine manner compensated for this, at least as far as normal men and women were concerned, but homosexuals invariably took me for one of themselves. I was not a homosexual. I was horrified and repelled by homosexual overtures, and this loathing included any boy who showed the slightest sign of being a ‘sissy’. I could be friendly with other men, but I could not bear any form of physical contact with them. It was impossible for me to stand having someone link his arm in mine, and even shaking hands was unpleasant (Cowell 5).

And elsewhere she stresses on her continued normality,

In my own case, I was never either a transvestite or a homosexual. My sexual inclinations were normal until the period of hormonal imbalance began. While my body was undergoing changes, all inclinations died. When they appeared again, they were re-oriented. But this re-orientation was normal, since I was then a woman (Cowell 25).

Rees avoids confrontations with homosexuals and fears being mistaken for one. On having run away from home as a teenager she wrote,

While at my grandparents, my anxieties were further intensified because here I had no outlet. This was a very formative period in my life and my frustrations had just been further intensified by homosexuality, which I realized without even knowing why. Had I remained free in the world or even in a large city, it is quite possible that I might in time have embraced homosexuality as an outlet for my greater frustrations but being in a small country town there is no apparent opportunity to appease any unusual departures let alone those which I was undergoing. Therefore, I buried myself in my studies and had no close associates my own age nor did I desire any (Rees 10).

Sexual pleasure in the texts has to be sought elsewhere. On the other hand, the concept of autogynephilic transsexuality has been widely criticized by trans theorists for being a transphobic rhetorical tool and none of the authors express desire in those terms either (Bailey; Serano). In fact, open admittance to any desire is not a common thread in the narratives. One is led to ask—given the homophobia of the authors—if

penile masturbation would be considered as an essentially unfeminine act veering towards homosexuality owing to the male bodied fact of one's self. The autoerotic may cross over to other meanings that transsexual phenomenology has not answered through proprioception yet. (Prosser; Salamon). A justification is revealed by Rees who is hounded like Boileau by the Dutch Vice Squad as they suspect her to be a homosexual ergo an unlawful degenerate. Once in Copenhagen to get operated upon she finds,

The police called up my landlady every few days and inquired as to how I was living, paying my bills and was I bringing men home with me. They also asked at what times and how often I went out and when I came in. This was at first annoying and I protested vigorously, referring them to my doctor where inquiry could be made which would guarantee that persons of my type are known to be asexual. This means that they are not interested in sexual relations of any type and feel no drive in this direction.

Being asexual one is safe from added violence and censure. Therefore, instead of dismissing the absence of sexuality as symptomatic of denying mixture, one may, perhaps try to more empathetically catch the invisible in the act of invisibilizing. Hoyer quotes Elbe quoting himself,

I have read your confession, page for page, as you know, and I perceive something like timidity peeping out of avowal. You are a woman. Sometimes you are afraid of saying the last thing, for the last thing is the completely naked and the brutal. But all truth, in fact, is brutal. Much of it is even shameless, and there are very few people who can understand and endure the most intimate and perfect shame, that is the shame of shamelessness (Elbe 260).

The posttranssexual may have severed oneself from the transsexual but the shame of shamelessness is now found to be twofold. It either involves paying hurried lip service to the heritage of a shameless canon or to denounce it completely. The posttranssexual fashioned after Haraway's cyborg would not need originary myths and looks for partial affinities. Invariably, the former marginalizes or uproots identities invested in those old chattels! Critical dialectics from Raymond onwards also depends on the renunciation of the classical subject as the only way forward for the trans movement. A more inclusive politics need not be founded upon reactionary bombastic rhetoric. It need not continually overestimate the condition of visibility when transsexuals along

with other trans persons continue to face transphobic violence as well as homophobic attacks by being read as representative (and outrageously so) figures of all queer communities even in the First World metropolis.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW TO READ A HIJRA CANON

A VERY SHORT HISTORY

There are only five known autobiographies published by Indian hijra writers. The first autobiography titled *Myself Mona Ahmed* was written by Delhi based Mona Ahmed in the form of collected emails and photographs. Ahmed dictated episodes and ramblings from her life story to photo artist Dayanita Singh who also captured her muse in varied poses and intimate scenarios. The result was a glossy coffee table book interspersed with Ahmed's words along with black and white images by Singh.

The dynamic text shifts from Singh's cool professional gaze posturing as familiarity to Ahmed's candid confessions to her reminiscences and regrets. Nostalgia inducing Kodak moments meet documentary drama in *Myself Mona Ahmed* that came out as late as 2001. The book was clearly a product of a newly liberalized Indian economy. The novelty of an indigenous sexual outcast explained through visual textual material that offsets tasteful sensationalism could have appealed to booksellers both abroad and India.

After Ahmed, a long gap persists in the publication of hijra literature. It was not until five years later in 2006 that Jereena from Kerala wrote her autobiography titled, *Oru Malayali Hijadayude Athamakatha* (Life Story of a Malayali Hijra), which has still not been translated from Malayalam into any other language. In 2007, Living Smile Vidya from Chennai compiled her blog posts and added other aspects of her story in an autobiography titled, *I am Vidya*. Her story was first serialized in a Tamil newspaper and then published upon completion. Another Tamil writer, A. Revathi wrote a more detailed account of her life titled *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* in 2010.

More recently in 2015, prominent hijra activist from Mumbai, Laxminarayan Tripathi came out with an English translation of her 2012 autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* originally composed in Marathi. After Ahmed's debut several media reports have dubbed each autobiography upon its release as the first of its kind ("First-ever..."). The poverty of the hijra discourse is self-evident in this suspended act of continued interpellation as marketable novelty.

A SHORTER CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Before Ahmed, hijra discourse did not exist apart from snatches of interviews in popular media or through other mainstream representations like Bollywood films. More unfortunate than the lack of hijra texts is perhaps, the lack of critical voices within contemporary postcolonial research. Hijra autobiography is commented upon in a handful of scholarly essays, which seem to emphatically offer benevolent ideas about hijra inclusion in Indian society by focusing on the key messages of the works (Abraham; Kodad and Kazi; Mondal; Tanupriya).

A few oral histories were recorded and analyzed by anthropologist Serena Nanda earlier in 1999 in her book *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. Before Nanda, the hijra story as testimony had appeared in Zia Jaffrey's 1998 book *The Invisibles: A Tale of the Eunuchs of India* that extends the sympathetic scope of human-interest journalism but remains locked inside the genre. However, it was Nanda who provided an overarching interpretative model to read hijra identity, which has remained more or less unchallenged till date.

In 2005, anthropologist Gayatri Reddy both critiqued and extended Nanda's project. She provided a more in-depth and localized study of Hyderabadi hijra communities but went on to organize and limit hijra identity around the singular theme of "respect" in her work *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*.

More recently, linguistic anthropologist, Kira Hall in several articles has tried to expound on Pharsi, a coded dialect like Polari (underground language used by British gay men in the early twentieth century) used by hijras as a unique blend of Persian, Hindi and Urdu. Hall notes how hijras subvert norms and communicate furtively with each other using Pharsi under evidently hostile conditions since public exposure and hostility is a part of everyday hijra life. Hijras in these scholars' works remain an object of study and not composers of their story.

Testimonies are also found to be edited and interceded by the researcher. In the context of reading autobiographies, Hall's studies are outside the scope of this study and Jaffrey's book is limited by its benign approach. Reddy extends Nanda's thesis more or less even as her own thematic concerns are projected onto the people she interviews and in typical anthropological modus operandi, becomes a detached participant and observer. The Nanda model of interpreting hijra identity seems to

emerge as the most significant. However, the four known and accessible autobiographies may be read to evaluate the relevance of Nanda's anthropological approach.

CONTEXT TO THE NANDA MODEL

Serena Nanda's model to read hijra identity consists of several caveats and a prejudiced focus to fit the community into stereotypes. Firstly, Nanda's expertise and discursive authority makes it hard for any real life hijra subject to contest her within her academic sprawl. The critical dialogue she sets the tone for is unlikely to be negated by the autobiographical either when she has mapped an interpretative guide to study the community. Rebellious gestures such as Ahmed's imperative to dispel exploitative and misguided research (as discussed in Chapter 1) can nevertheless be found. Mumbai's Laxminarayan Tripathi begins the last chapter of her autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* with the following words,

I write this final chapter not as a scholar, but as a practicing hijra with hands-down experience. If scholars differ with some of my facts and interpretations, I am willing to stand corrected.

The word 'hijra' is a term of abuse. Its variants in colloquial language include expressions like number sex, number nine, and chakka. The word 'hijra' derives from the Urdu word 'hijar'. A hijar is a person who has walked out of his tribe or community. Thus, a hijra is one who has left mainstream society, comprising men and women, and joined a community of hijras. But the hijra community isn't a monolith. Its history and culture varies from state to state (Tripathi 171).

A hijra monolith is precisely what Nanda would create for scholars to understand through certain identifiable tropes. The modus operandi of Nanda is one where she approaches her subjects with suspicion. She candidly reveals her own bias when she talks about her selection procedure of subject matter,

In the course of telling a life story, selection always occurs in the mind of the narrator as certain events are revealed, others omitted, some exaggerated, elaborate, or minimized. These narratives were elicited by my interest in hijras and are subject to selection in response both to my particular interest and also by each narrator's wish to present a certain picture of herself. Thus when

Meera says to the hijras that they must tell me everything so that I get the “right information” means that information consistent with Meera’s desire to present herself to me in a certain way. Similarly, when Sushila says, “Why should I lie? I was also a prostitute,” she is already suggesting that people do lie about such things, as indeed hijras do (Nanda 113).

Nanda places the blame as much on herself as she does on her subjects. Dayanita Singh attests to the opinion that hijras are a somewhat mysterious community that manages their image cleverly. In the introduction to *Myself Mona Ahmed* she claims, Every few months, the “true story” of a eunuch is published somewhere, yet eunuchs are very media-savvy and will allow journalists and researchers only limited access, if any—always strictly controlled by the eunuchs themselves (Ahmed 9).

Elsewhere, Ahmed contradicts her by saying,

Today I also feel that eunuchs are an underground society. Nobody has reached the bottom of this, nor will they ever be able to. They have their own rules and do not listen to judges or the police. They have their own government. Those who do not obey them are thrown out of their community. This is why no researcher can get the true story of the eunuch’s life. All the books just take one point, be it some celebration of the eunuchs or their castration...(Ahmed 65).

The problem is perhaps in the gaze and not what is underneath the supposed cover. The obsession with the truth of hijra or “eunuch” life has sadly resulted in sweeping accounts that have fuelled transphobia, hijra-phobia and little has changed in the life of the subaltern. The four to five autobiographers who had to transcend their circumstances and often own communities to shine as examples of survival, cannot really claim to speak for the rest in this regard. Still, the meagre canon of hijra autobiography does well to illustrate that one can attempt to read hijra life outside the “right information” or “one point” that can be exaggerated to perform a perverse metonymic function.

The autobiographies deconstruct anthropological investigatory framework as perhaps, a point of departure and not the guidebook to understand a diverse community teeming with stories yet untold. Living Smile Vidya attests to the split between mainstream society and the hijra individual (and community) that prohibits empathy in several passages. In *I am Vidya* she writes,

People, I generally feel they are living in a good world, a world free from corruption, violence, betrayal, treachery, obscenity and greed, but how many slings and arrows of outrageous fortune has this world directed at me! These missiles have made my heart go numb (Vidya 99).

And elsewhere,

India freed herself from slavery 60 years ago. Amidst our achievements and failures, democracy has remained intact, strong. Dalits have a voice, feminists are heard, they can hold rallies, demand their rights. But transgenders are the Dalits of Dalits, the most oppressed women among women. They enjoy no equality, no freedom, no fraternity. They continue to lead a wretched life devoid of pride and dignity.

Very rarely do people even talk about us or write about us. Are we do undeserving? I cannot understand.

We grow up in families amidst parents, siblings and relatives. They day we realize our difference and try to express it, we are driven out mercilessly. Does anyone have the minimum awareness about us? We are objects of ridicule. Film songs treat us as freaks. Everytime I come across such lewdness, my blood boils. Why can't people who depict us so, understand our pain and suffering? Society marginalizes us constantly. Tirunangais⁴ have no family, no jobs, no security, no nothing.

These nowhere people gather together in India's different states and form a family or families with their own rules, their own traditions and rituals, they laugh and cry together, they somehow manage to eke out a communal living (Vidya 101).

Vidya retroactively foreshadows several important limitations with unsympathetic popular representation, the general mindset as well as scholarly interventions that claim to speak on behalf of the subject. Vidya's "nowhere people" or Tripathi's *hijjar* or Ahmed's "eunuch" are all aligned in their multiplicities in potentially deconstructive ways against the staid idea of what a hijra is supposed to be.

⁴ 'Tirunangai' or 'thirunangai' is the defining term for the hijra community's counterpart in several Tamil speaking locales. Both Tamil authors A. Revathi and Living Smile Vidya use the word as interchangeable with and a synonym for 'hijra' besides 'aravani'.

THE NANDA MODEL

Nanda's main thesis as the title of her book suggests is that hijras can only be defined as the third sex since they are neither men nor women. Evan B Towle and Lynn M. Morgan in their revelatory essay "Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the "Third Gender" Concept" (2006) contend that—

The "third gender" is a uniquely Western concept produced by a society just beginning to grapple with the theoretical, social, political, and personal consequences of nondichotomous gender variability. It is thus an apt rhetorical and analytical device for the current historical moment, because it can accommodate contradictory social impulses; it signals both tolerance for cultural diversity and adherence to Western categories. Rather than accept uncritically the need for a "third" gender category. Though, we should ask how "our" narratives about "them" (cultural others) reflect our own society's contradictory agendas concerning sexuality, gender, and power (Towle and Morgan 671).

More succinctly, they conclude,

The "third gender" concept is by nature flawed because it subsumes all non-Western, nonbinary identities, practices, terminologies, and histories. Thus, it becomes a junk drawer into which a great non-Western gender miscellany is carelessly dumped (Towle and Morgan 676).

Nanda who labours over the thirdness of hijras repeatedly in her work is far from being introspective over what her polemic would reflect about Western anxieties. Her concept is partly conceived by the explanations offered to her by the participant subjects as well as her own orientalist interpretations of the hijras' difference from both gender dimorphism in general and the elusive Western trans identities that depend on a specific movement towards womanhood. She begins by asserting—

A second disjunction has to do with the cultural definition of hijras as neither men nor women and the experienced gender identity of many hijras as women. Thus, whereas many hijras did indeed tell me that they were neither men nor women, other hijras answered my questions by saying, "We hijras are like women", and proceeded to enumerate the ways in which they felt and behaved like women...The concept of a psychologically compelling desire that motivates a man to live as a woman is not well understood in India generally

and certainly not among the lower-middle and lower classes from which hijras are generally recruited. This may be part of the reason that hijras say that they are “born that way”...Given that small number of people born with a physical condition that would be called hermaphroditic, it would probably be well to assume that most hijras are “made” rather than “born that way” (xix-xx).

In her deliberate rejection of a radical hijra conception of womanhood, Nanda comes to establish the monolith of her own. The reason for her rejection to see hijras along a transfeminine spectrum is plain prejudice against the apparent lack of trans awareness in India. She also ignores the intersex conviction of being “born that way” that has been made much of by Bernice Hausman in the case of transsexual autobiographies as has been discussed in the last chapter.

Comparatively, some hijra autobiographies rely on the intersex conviction as yet another fact of being along with the multiplicity of being both the third sex as well as a woman. Hijra ideas in autobiographies also belie any easy formulation. However, for Nanda, the “disjuncture” becomes the defining point as she repeatedly pursues the idea of hijras as the third sex AKA “neither man nor woman”. Her insistence on the Eastern split from the West becomes clear when she says,

Although we in the West associate the surgical removal of the male genitals with a completely feminine gender identity, this should not be assumed for India. Of the 10 hijras I met who had the emasculation operation, all but one had done so only after many years (5 to 15) in the hijra community, and the decision to have the operation was not uniformly associated with a desire to become, or the feeling that one was already, a woman. As I have noted, the operation is connected with the cultural definition of the hijra as neither man nor woman; for some individuals, the operation transforms them into hijras, not into women (Nanda 118).

The “cultural definition” that Nanda magnifies presents only a part of the many ways hijra community seeks to define itself. In the autobiographies, varied ideas can be found to negate a simplistic view. Living Smile Vidya writes a story about being born in a Dalit family where education is of prime importance. She grows up to get an M.A. degree in Linguistics and also has plans for pursuing Ph.D. Her gender dissonance and growing alienation with her surroundings prevents her from continuing her life in the garb of a biological male. She decides to run away and join a hijra household. Her initiation includes learning how to beg for money and travel to

many cities. She is finally able to save enough to obtain illegal castration at a hospital. She goes on to leave the hijra community without severing ties. She manages to get a job, and live on her own. Vidya's project is dedicated to locating her reality as a woman, which is obtainable only by joining the hijras. She reverts the gaze of the other upon her sex and person to illustrate this point. She writes—

I was a girl. Unfortunately, the world saw me as a boy.

Inwardly, I wanted to be a girl, but I made every effort possible to hide my femininity from the outside world. I took particular trouble to remain inconspicuous at college, my unpleasant memories of my bitter experience at school still fresh in my mind, I tried to lead a false life of strenuous attempts to swagger like a man and speak like one (Vidya 40).

And elsewhere,

I had no problem with people recognizing my femininity but hated it when they made fun of me on that account. Worse was when they imagined I was a man sexually or romantically interested in a woman. I could not bear comments that linked with a girl in such a manner. To you I may seem to be a man, but I am a woman at heart. How can I tolerate any suggestion that I am in love with a woman (Vidya 56).

The gaze is double-bound. It recognizes but also brings violence in its wake. Including the violence of perception. Vidya reveals the key lapse with Nanda's anthropological model. Not because it lacks a generous humanist perspective but because it draws certain criteria for being a hijra and justifies those choices as a fault of the larger cultural ethos. The idea of the third sex may or may not be relevant to Vidya since being hijra is to be a part of a unique transfeminine spectrum in its own right. In Vidya's short narrative, the stress is on womanhood. In others' it may point elsewhere.

A young Revathi faces many conundrums with respect to her sex and gender. In *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Story*, she woefully says,

A woman trapped in a man's body was how I thought of myself. But how could that be? Would the world accept me thus? I longed to be known as a woman and felt pain at being considered a man (Revathi 15).

In seeking answers to these questions and others, Revathi would set herself on the path to becoming hijra. She is born in a poor household in rural Tamil Nadu and is often harassed for being an effeminate boy. Revathi meets a few people from the hijra

community and decides to join them. She travels extensively from Delhi to Mumbai to Bengaluru and works as a prostitute in those cities. She faces abuse at every turn, especially from men and the police, but also from her family where she keeps going back. Ultimately, she finds peace in working for an NGO and making silent amends with her family.

Laxminarayan Tripathi takes a completely different direction. Her life story about becoming a hijra is also a story of finding fame as a minor celebrity and international activist who represents Indian trans communities at conferences abroad. Unlike other hijras, she remains living at home and finds the two worlds colluding with her in the midst. She also adheres to the tradition of hijra pedagogy but charts her own way within as well as outside the structure. She writes,

I learnt everything about hijras from Shabina. She acquainted me with their history, their traditions, their lifestyle, and their sources of income...I began to realize that the hijras were a culturally rich sub-sect. Not everyone could become a hijra—it took guts...A hijra is neither a man nor a woman. She is feminine, but not a woman. He is masculine, a male by birth, but not a man either. A hijra's male body is a trap—not just to the hijra itself who suffocates within it but to the world in general that wrongly assumes a hijra to be a man...I now voraciously read everything I could lay my hands on about the hijras, and talked to many people. The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced. Yes, that was the answer. I was a woman and the world must see me as such.

I decided to become a hijra (Tripathi 39-40).

The moment of epiphany is somewhat banal but the desired identity is hybridized. The fact of being neither man nor woman, or the third sex sits comfortably with the idea of becoming and being known as a woman. Interestingly, Tripathi decides not to opt for castration later in the narrative but ultimately that does not undervalue her status as a hijra in her or the community's eyes.

Mona Ahmed on the other hand is disowned first by her family for being feminine, then for joining the hijras, and later by her new family for refusing to obey hijra norms. Ahmed adopts and raises an orphan who her guru takes custody of due to Ahmed's many purported failures in staying cordial with her hijra family. However, this drives her existential crises and exacerbates the quintessential hijra dilemma of being and becoming. Dayanita Singh in her introduction to the book explains—

It was only many years later, after Mona was thrown out of the eunuchs community and she became an outcast among the outcasts, that she told me that she wanted to tell her own story. She was no longer living in a double exile and started to question her identity in a way that was completely new to me. She wanted to tell the story of being neither here nor there, neither male nor female, and finally, neither a eunuch nor someone like me. She would always ask me, "Tell me: what am I?" I first assumed that a writer would have to tell her story, but after she dictated some e-mails to me, I realized that I probably underestimated her and that she could tell her own story, weaving together fact and fiction (Ahmed 16).

Elsewhere, Ahmed writes,

A eunuch has a male body, but the spirit is female. Why does it happen? No one becomes a eunuch by choice, meaning no one says, "I want to be a eunuch." But there is no other way. Even when men do not have the castration and keep a moustache, their mannerisms still give them away. Why me, even you can tell. Yet you cannot say a eunuch is a homosexual. We are the third sex (Ahmed 63).

Womanhood, being eunuch, and third sex come together again with the added dimension of negated homosexuality which will be dealt in greater detail in the next section. Ahmed echoes not the ease of Tripathi or the emphatic insistence of Vidya but her own specific crises that accompanies the burden of defining the community despite the extreme individualism it suggests. Therefore, Nanda's reliance on an abstract Eastern/ Indian culture to define a hijra is at best incomplete without taking seriously the testimonial evidence she nevertheless cites. The autobiographies clearly show that the third sex illustrated through disavowal of sexual dimorphism is meaningless.

Interestingly, much of Indian trans political gains have depended heavily on the rhetoric of the third sex and civil rights victories such as the right to define oneself in the category of that third sex have been won much to the chagrin of the cis male gay dominated queer community that pursues the right to sexuality and nullification of the Section 377 of Indian Penal Code that criminalizes sexual acts other than heterosexual peno-vaginal intercourse (Ghosh and Mehra; Johari). The movement has been well documented in Indian and international media and it is not to say that Section 377 does not affect the trans and hijra community or that they are

underrepresented in the movement. Being the more visible and vulnerable members of Indian LGBT community hijras are a significant part of the struggle. However, the fact remains that the rhetoric of the third sex maintains a tangible hold on the hijra individual and decides what kind of politics trans persons in India can pursue and Nanda's model could be the key to deconstruct these margins.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND HIJRA IDENTITY

Appositely, one must turn to the addition of homosexuality to the hijra identity matrix. Nanda does not dispute the male-bodied biological fact of a hijra person. Any sexuality that can be located on a hijra body must be channeled through a homosexual orientation since the language is limited. It would be interesting to note that in the previous chapter, one saw how transsexual autobiographers displayed homophobia precisely to avoid being its victims, or maintained a Puritanical distance from sexuality altogether lest they be considered perverse and the privilege of transition is taken away. Hijras who are the objects of Nanda's study speak of having husbands and having sex with men in exchange for money. They also speak of being too spiritually enlightened to have sex and portray their castrations as proof of bodily denial. This contradiction is not acknowledged by Nanda as yet another disjuncture even as she looks up to mainstream Indian culture that would reinforce the idea of the third sex. She writes in the beginning—

The dominant cultural role of the hijras, as we have seen, is that of ritual performers. It is also true, however, that hijras often engage in homosexual prostitution...Hijras who act as homosexual prostitutes cloud the clear-cut distinction described earlier: They may be "real" hijras (in that they are emasculated), but they are also engaging in an activity that is contrary to the hijra ideal as ritual performers who have renounced sexual desire and activity. Many Indians are not aware, or at least do not acknowledge publicly, that many hijras are homosexual prostitutes...In spite of the undeniable fact that many hijras earn a living from homosexual prostitution, to view their social place as one of institutionalized homosexuality is to overlook the important cultural role the hijras play as ritual performers, a position linked to their definition as an ambiguous gender category—neither man nor woman (Nanda 9-12).

Revathi finds her budding desire for men shameful. She says, “I longed to be with men, but felt shamed by this feeling” (Revathi 15). When one of her friends is raped she is horrified to learn that there is only one way for a hijra to have sex—

When I said that I did not want to have sex that way, and, above all, I desired to become a woman, marry an educated man and only then have sex, they laughed derisively. I was told that it was not all that easy to become a woman. Only if I went to Mumbai and Delhi and stayed for years with those who wore saris and had undergone ‘operations’, could I hope to become one (Revathi 19).

Her friends’ rape foreshadows her own later as an adult in Mumbai. Even though she had started work as a prostitute primarily to find pleasure, she learns that it was not how she thought it would be. She regrets her decision and says,

I had not chosen sex work in order to make money. It was because I could not really repress my sexual feelings that I had opted for this life. I was beginning to discover the horror and violence of this choice (Revathi 110).

Revathi’s early foray into exploring her sexuality is not expressed as homoerotic by any means. It was simply traumatic instead. To call her experience of violence, disgust and eventual coming to terms with her desires, ‘queer’ is also unfair for it is still a lofty term for subaltern subjects. ‘Queer’ may be restrained to the upwardly mobile English speaking urban upper-middle-to-middle-class LGBT citizens who are able to mindfully import Western ideas of activism and support groups. Most importantly, these lesser oppressed and somewhat privileged groups can assert bodily autonomy for consensual sex in spaces far safer than a hijra practicing prostitution on the streets.

Revathi was to find organized empowerment in a neoliberal NGO much later in life. While growing up and spending her initial years within her impoverished community, the available sexual vocabulary did not mark her in the simplistic terms of male or castrated male having sex with another male either. There was a steep gap in how she saw herself and how the hijra-phobic world perceived and treated her. This cleavage is where the unique dilemma of hijra sexuality disappears from the view of anthropological ventures and also NGOs’ representations of hijras as homosexual prostitutes.

There is no hijra specific sexuality to speak of still. Meanwhile sexual violence may be as problematically formative of identity as sexual desire. There is no

scope for nuance when only biological originality has to become the basis of assignation in certain taxonomy.

Rape as a seemingly unavoidable part of hijra sexuality is also acknowledged by Ahmed. She says,

In India, when eunuchs become 12-13 years old, people rape them, have homo sex with them, and leave them nowhere. Then they have to have castration to join the eunuchs. It is these dirty people society should reject and not us for becoming eunuchs (Ahmed 47).

The intersex conviction comes full circle with becoming hijra as well as the act of violation in this case. Ahmed does not comment on her own sexuality so it is difficult to fully glean her stance on mature hijra sexuality. Tripathi's more liberal view speaks of her privilege of being an upper caste person in a metropolis like Mumbai. Tripathi goes to visit a famous gay cruising public park, Maheshwari Udyaan as a confused child and meets the famous queer activist Ashok Row Kavi of the Humsafar Trust who tells her to not let society convince her that she is not normal just because of her attraction towards boys. He asks her to come back to the park when she has finished her school education and grown up. Tripathi is also however, sexually abused and gang raped by several boys during childhood. At first she recognizes her desire after the initial violations are over. She is still far too young to channelize and express her own feelings of gender dissonance complicated by the trauma accompanied with sexual awakening. She writes,

Although I had gotten rid of the unwanted attention I received from Shashi's *tapori*⁵ friends and such like, I now myself began feeling attracted to boys in general. While I did not want some boys anywhere near me, I was attracted to others and strongly desired them. I wondered if this happened because inwardly I was a woman. I was only in the fourth standard then. How was I to know (Tripathi 10)?

Having grown up, she fulfills her promise to Kavi and returns to the park for reasons of affinity and companionship. However, homosexual infrastructures and spaces are not for her because of her more important goal to become a woman. She declares,

The gays of Maheshwari Udyaan provided solace, but then they saw themselves as men. That alienated me from them. I wondered why they did

⁵ Tripathi here is referring to the older boys who routinely raped her as a child. 'Tapori' in a Mumbai Hindi dialect could mean 'goon' or 'ruffian'.

not regard themselves as women, for, to me, then, being homosexual and being a woman meant the same thing. Perhaps, it was the unconscious desire to be heterosexual, but when I was attracted to a man, I did not think of myself as a man. I thought of myself as a woman. That is why I became a drag queen, donning women's clothes and dancing at parties (Tripathi 29).

Once Tripathi starts performing in bars and clubs in drag, her womanhood is validated in a much more satisfying way. However, in other parts of the narrative she seems to consider her romantic and sexual experiences as discrete from her journey to womanhood or becoming a hijra.

An interesting break in the story occurs when she comes close to having sex with a white transman in Amsterdam and the discovery that her potential partner was once female makes her shudder with horror (Tripathi 98). This incidence where Tripathi is repulsed by the idea of a postoperative transman's body may be exemplary of conservative hijra values. It could also show the belligerent knee jerk response of someone who carries the privilege of being male bodied in an unequal patriarchal society that relegates hijras to the margins but still allows them expression and renders a female bodied expression of any sexuality so impossible that even the subaltern is horrified when confronted with another avenue of liberation.

Tripathi, through her honesty, allows the reader space to draw a more nuanced understanding of hijra specific sexuality as she seems to employ it against the Nanda model. Her gesture in refusing to take hormones but opting for breast implants and not attaining nirvana (castration) is testimony to her defiance of any narrow idea of being hijra (Tripathi 156-157).

The alienation of hijra autobiographers from homosexuality is emphatically at the point of being considered male. "Homosexual prostitute" is then a double pejorative that does not even begin to capture the complex reality of a hijra sexuality. When Nanda points out that the management of hijras in Indian culture is achieved by institutionalizing their sexual function as such, this also negates the agency of the subject who either does not have the luxury of terminology as in Revathi's case or refuses to identify within a subscribed role as Tripathi illustrates, and also sets her own limits of desire.

RITUAL FIXATIONS?

Two other ways that Nanda employs to restrict hijra identity in her anthropological model is through their ritual function and artificial kinship structures. She discusses how hijra identity finds validity through myths and legends. These are sometimes acknowledged but are simply not given enough importance in autobiographies. Nanda builds it as a classic East versus West phenomena and adds—

In Hindu mythology, ritual, and art—important vehicles for transmitting the Hindu world view—the power of the combined man/woman as a frequent and significant theme. Indian mythology contains numerous examples of androgynes, impersonators of the opposite sex, and individuals who undergo sex changes, both among deities and humans. These mythical figures are well known as part of Indian popular culture, which explain the ability of hijras to maintain a meaningful place for themselves within Indian society in an institutionalized third gender role (Nanda 20).

Nanda is especially known for her detailed observation of the castration ritual, which is organized around the worship of the Hindu goddess Bahuchara Mata. The problem with Nanda remains one of a reductive approach to hijra practices. Not all hijras get castrated ritually. Hijra castration will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters 4 and 5 on transition. However, at this juncture it should be noted that while Ahmed does not reveal the details and Tripathi does not undergo castration, Vidya and Revathi take the non ritual based medical route albeit illegally. This does not affect their position in the community and the act itself is not presented as a direct appeal to spirituality or goddess worship.

Vidya chooses to address her estranged family and her dead mother to validate her newly reclaimed womanhood instead. In an evocative opening passage she writes, Amma, Amma, I have become a woman. I am not Saravanan any more. I am Vidya. A complete Vidya. A whole woman. Where are you Amma? Can't you come to me by some miracle, at least for a moment? Please hold my hand, Amma. My heart seems to be breaking into smithereens. Radha, please Radha, I am no longer your brother, Radha. I am your sister now, your sister. Come to me, Radha. Chithi, Manju, Prabha, Appa...

Look at me Appa, look at my dissected body. This is a mere body. Can you see that I can bear all this pain? I can take any amount of pain, Appa.

Look at me Appa. Look at me as a woman. Accept me as a girl, Appa (Vidya 17).

For Ahmed who was born and raised Muslim, the moment of ritual only comes at the naming ceremony of her adopted daughter. This is also linked to her becoming a mother ergo a “complete woman”. She writes,

I distributed sweets in the whole neighbourhood and recited the azaan (Muslim prayer) in her ears and had her head shaved, as is the custom here. At night, we had a music party. I danced with joy, knowing that I was now a complete woman (Ahmed 83).

Such evidence of multiplicity and diverse hijra ethos is absent in Nanda’s conception of hijra’s institutional function in Indian society. In her model, the society justifies and tolerates hijra presence and the subject in turn validates her own existence through retelling religious myths and performing blessings. This simplistic back and forth between the oppressor and the oppressed does not explain how the envelope of hegemony opens up in alternative ways.

Ritual obsession for Revathi is as much of a moot point as it is for Vidya. However, it finds comforting resonance when Revathi is under local anesthesia. She says,

The nurse covered my eyes with a strip of cloth and asked me to say ‘Mata Mata’, and I did. I kept repeating the goddess’s name. The doctor continued to talk to me, even as he did the operation (Revathi 73).

The chanting calms her down as it does Nanda’s case study who is ritually castrated at home in the traditional manner. The only difference is that in the traditional ritual, everyone chants the mantra but the pledge to induce a trance for her benefit before a cut is made. Here the pledge being at the mercy of the surgeon chants for herself as directed by the nurse who seems to be familiar with hijra mores. This clinical inversion of ritual is an unremarkable event in that it is not subversive of tradition but a redirecting of sorts.

Revathi is again reminded of her heritage when offered black tea by a nurse in post operative care because it is something only experienced hijras were supposed to know. It is evident that native knowledge and urban medical expertise meet at a very superficial level yet neither need to justify each other. The taboo may also intensify or appear differently under the shadow of illegality and medical malpractice but the scenario in the autobiographies is presented as a logical progression.

Hijra identity itself may be formed along the axis of negotiated pathways that are far more complex than ritualistic purity fixed in time by Nanda. Also, someone like Tripathi who refuses to partake in nirvana altogether, travels the world and participates in high level advocacy work is everything Nanda's ritual obsessed hijras are not. Her privilege may be unique but her resistance is not.

KINSHIP STRUCTURE AND ALIENATION

All autobiographers also feel alienated by the very community that sustains them at some point in their stories. Tripathi is perhaps the most famous and illustrative example while Ahmed is a complete outcast. In the light of these examples, not only does Nanda's focus on rituals and kinship seem limiting but also as gratuitously magnifying of what may be quotidian hijra life.

The particular overestimation of kinship structures by Nanda overrides the highly individualistic ideas of the autobiographers. Hijra groups for the writers are dynamic and impermanent. Hierarchies are negotiable and gurus expendable. Nanda also cites several examples that belie her theory of hijra obedience yet she draws the conclusion that overall—

This dependence of hijras on their community is entirely consistent with the values and organizational principles of Indian society: a willingness of individuals to submit to hierarchy, a combining of resources and expenditures (as in a joint family) as a means of economic adaptation, and a conviction that there is no security without a group. This holds for men as well as women in India, so that most hijras, regardless of the extent of their feminine orientation, find these values and organizational principles congenial and appropriate in cultural terms (Nanda 48).

Nanda's willful ignorance of hijra group dynamics comes at the cost of setting up a stereotype of communal conservatism. Nanda's hijra figure is a product of the community by the community. There is no room for lost biological ties and the autobiographers bust this myth in different ways. In Ahmed's case, she is a double outcast. She looks back on her life and wonders if castration was the right choice as the finality of the act also meant severing ties with her hostile family,

I always feel guilty in my heart that if I had not been castrated, I would be ok, and since I was castrated, then I should have been a good eunuch, but even

that I could not be. I do not like to under anyone's control. This is the way I am, what can I do (Ahmed 103)?

On the other hand, as she has been disowned by her hijra family and her daughter is snatched away from her, she wonders if her value as a productive member of the clan was what the kinship was really all about. At a certain point during narration she calls the current age as not *kaliyug* but *moneyyug*. She goes on to realize that other hijras who supported her simply wanted her for her earnings—

If I was able to be like other eunuchs and obeyed them like a slave, then I would not be in this state. But I wanted to live an independent life, which was unacceptable to my guru. For 40 years, they were good to me, because I was able to sing and dance. But by the age of 52, my body began to become weak and I got lazy in my work. Then my guru started to fight me on every point and tortured me physically, but even more than that mentally. My guru always needed support. That is why he stole even Goonga, my dumb servant and took my chelas (disciples) away as well, and when Ayesha became 7 years old, he took her away as well (Ahmed 130).

Losing her daughter as the single most painful incident in her story renders Ahmed incapable of building a new life. She moves to her ancestors' graveyard and builds a house amidst their tombstones. She tries to raise animals hoping to attract her daughter home but they also die. Nevertheless, she persists and keeps the company of neighbourhood women.

Meeting Singh gives Ahmed hope in the human connection and she is somewhat assured about not being objectified and used as she has been previously by everyone including her biological family. Ahmed's sharp pathos underscore her deep sense of alienation. She ends her narrative with an imploring letter to her daughter asking her one last time to come back. One may not employ Nanda's model at all to analyze Ahmed's longings and hopes. The elaborate kinship system surely functions to keep hijras relatively safe from outside world but Ahmed represents the crack in any descriptive generalization one may subscribe to a little too faithfully in discussing a marginalized community.

Tripathi presents another conundrum in deciding what is more important, the hijra support system with its hierarchical demands or one's own parents? Tripathi's moment of truth comes easy, as she is not a tragic failure by any means. Her budding fame makes her guru angry—

But I had detractors too. Lataguru continued to sulk. She felt I had been co-opted by the world of glamour, and she was totally opposed to this. To her way of thinking, I was a publicity-hungry sort. She also disapproved of the fact that I lived with my parents. She was possessive and orthodox, and believed that a hijra had no right to stay with her family (Tripathi 72).

In a surprising move, Lataguru moves into the same building as Tripathi to claim her right over her pledge. Tripathi works hard to reconcile her two households and manages to achieve some semblance of normalcy and balance.

Revathi and Vidya do not address the problem with as much rigour as Ahmed and Tripathi but they do talk about how the split causes pain. Vidya doesn't address the concern directly but it seems that her education and ambition to live independently trumps her affinities with the close-knit hijra community. After transition, Vidya keeps coming back to her house only to find mixed reactions if not outright hostility. She says,

My situation was no different from that of thousands of other tirunangais. Just like them, I too could not live in my own home, with my own family as a tirunangai...When I demand that they henceforth treat me as a woman, address me as one, interact with me as with a woman, we are in conflict, they refuse to accept me as I am...I tried to plant a small seed of confidence in my family—even if I was not exactly overflowing with confidence with myself.

'Don't worry about me. I am educated and can survive...' (Vidya 86-87)

And when she does survive to tell the tale, she laments, "social acceptance of tirunangais did not end with my rehabilitation" (Vidya 137). Supererogatory work for the community by the autobiographer is unfortunately an imperfect task. She has lived to become an example for the rest of the community to maybe follow but she has also outgrown that very community.

For Revathi, it is simply a matter of practical issues that eventually confront one. A hijra is not bound by anyone. She claims,

If a hijra does not like her guru, then she must move out and be on her own.

But as I had seen, living alone was not easy and brought with it a host of new problems. Ultimately, she feels as far removed. "Unlike others, I could no longer fully inhabit aravani culture (Revathi 303).

Revathi reconciles her dislocation by her work unlike Tripathi. She does not seek to become a representative figure but continues to work at the grassroot level with her

NGO. In Nanda's model, individualistic hijras who pursue interests outside the group do not exist and the image of a tribe with erased individuality has captured the popular imagination: That all hijras must be alike, indistinguishable from one another. This oversimplification is a peculiar epistemological violence that has strengthened the idea of the hijra monolith amongst other factors. However, the autobiographers seem to offer avenues of recovery from the monolith by their virtue of presenting highly personal accounts.

CHAPTER FOUR
CONVERGENCES PART I: PRE-SURGICAL RHETORICS OF BEING AND NAMING

INTRODUCTION

Sophie Labelle is a contemporary Canadian trans artist who draws and writes a popular comic-strip on various social media platforms called *Assigned Male Comics*. Her work seems to justify and go well beyond Sandy Stone's prophetic insistence on becoming posttranssexual. Labelle's politics is away from surgical compulsions and she focuses instead on identification and being. A key message delivered in one of her comic posters reads, "Trans girls don't "want to be girls"; They are girls." (Labelle). The verb 'are' is circled in red. This conviction underlies her entire oeuvre from launching the Facebook page in October 2014 till date. Her protagonist, a pubescent trans girl who navigates transphobia, appears to reassert through her actions that transwomen are women not because they may or may not choose to pursue surgeries or hormone enablement but because they simply are women.

To read classical autobiographies or even contemporary South Asian narratives from Labelle's shockingly simple conviction that transwomen must not be reduced to their gender expression could also be a lesson in the telos of trans liberation. From the earliest records such as those of Chevalier d'Eon of Enlightenment France to politically righteous memes as exchanged on Facebook by trans and genderqueer millennials across the world today tell a linear tale; one of following the logic of intellectual (and political) progress. Consequently, there is a danger in overestimating a Labelle like trans empowerment against not only the classical subject already rendered artificial by Sandy Stone, but also against the crudely castrated Third World hijra who now becomes even further removed from the image of the postmodern and progressive trans person as a renewed barbaric other. On the other hand, the hijra stance on achieving a specific sexed embodiment may also appear in stark contrast to the supposed clinical perfection of the classical transsexual.

However, the two narrative strains do intersect and inform each other at various points of convergences even as they may differ wildly in content and context. The two schools of thought speak to each other by cutting across their historical and

geographical locations and present a continuum that has been and continues to be ignored by contemporary trans political practice. Explicitly, the autobiographies share one common thread that is transformative surgery, which remains at the heart of all narrative. A sole exception is Laxminarayan Tripathi's autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* where she effects a rhetorical gender reassignment through bureaucratic means i.e. acquiring a ration card and passport underscoring her correct gender (Tripathi 82-83).

It should be no surprise that the great event of sex change is at the heart of all works. Interestingly, the varied approaches to a 'before and after' of that change interweave a network of retrospective empathy not only for one another but for an anticipated trans reader as well. The aim of this and the next chapter is thus, not to limit the identity of transwomen or hijras to a single event but to contextualize the historical (and contemporary) need for the authors to express their desire to transsex the self and construct a narrative around that act of transing.

There are several common themes delineating a pre-surgical sense of being a woman in the autobiographies. The overarching theme of interpellation is complicated by childhood gender dissonance; introspection; and preliminary transvestital projections. Tools of narration such as suspense building; underlining performative underpinnings; and anticipation for sexed perfection are tropes that reverberate across texts underlining the themes. The trans-historical and trans-geographical dialogues (puns intended) begin at junctures of thematic and methodological commonalities that also exemplify the uniqueness of each life-writing project.

FORCED FEMINIZATION?

Lili Elbe as the first known autobiographer in *Man into Woman* ever sets the tone for future autobiographies. She also anticipates the theme of forced feminization that has become a staple of exploitative trans pornography and erotica. In forced feminization stories a cruel female mistress emasculates a man and he discovers that he either derives sexual pleasure from being feminized and/or that he may be transgender. There could be several other variations on this theme as is evident in Dave Ekins and Richard King's sociological investigation on transvestite sissy maid subculture in their 2006 book *The Transgender Phenomenon* (Ekins and King 35-37, 147-180; Khan 59-63). The 2015 British and Hollywood crossover film adaptation of Elbe's

autobiography titled *The Danish Girl* is told through the point of view of her wife Grete and has been criticized by trans writers for adhering to the theme of forced feminization that belittles—and to an extent perverts—the original narrative (Hooper; Baker).

Forced feminization is not seen as a legitimate technology of the trans self perhaps due to the problematic association with heterosexist transvestism; fetishizing; and autogynephilic sexuality. If transwomen are assumed to be motivated by getting sexually aroused by the idea of their feminine selves, the narrative becomes exploitable for commodification (Bailey; Ekins and King 37). What has not been noted is that Elbe was perhaps the first to gently suggest the thematic move and still go on to develop a trans positive narrative. Elbe's projections were only mildly evocative which the filmmakers seem to have capitalized on and exaggerated. Elbe's first brush with femininity in the book occurs when Grete makes her sit for a painting since a female model fails to show up. Elbe writes,

At first I declined rather shortly. Grete chaffed me, abused me, implored me, petted me, and a few minutes later I was standing in the studio on costume and high-heeled shoes. We both laughed as through it were a great joke. And to make the disguise complete, Grete fetched out a carnival wig from the depths of a trunk, a fair, very curly wig, and drew it over my head. Then she attacked me with rouge and powder while I submitted patiently to everything (Elbe 64).

The seemingly amusing scene changes tone only on the account of Grete's "attack" with makeup. When a friend of Grete named Anna shows up in the middle of Grete painting her husband, she says,

‘You shall receive a particularly lovely musical name. For example, Lili. What do you say to Lili? Henceforth I will call you Lili. And we must celebrate this! What do you say, Grete?’

“And Grete merely nodded, looked now at Anna, now at the child about to be christened...” (Elbe 65).

Elbe agrees to it all and concurs that—

For, strange as all this may sound, it was not I who dressed up as Lili, but both for me and for Grete Lili very soon became a perfectly independent person, in fact a playmate for Grete, her own playmate and her toy at the same time (Elbe 68).

Within the span of four pages, Lili submits eagerly and any agency accorded to her may be read from the point of view of a masochist's playful manipulation of phallic power, Grete and Anna being phallic mothers to an infantilized Elbe. If one is to confront the taboo of forced feminization outside the confines of an Oedipal structure, one could turn to the act of interpellation that Elbe actively embraces (Deleuze). Being recognized and hailed as a trans subject is excavated more fully by authors like Mona Ahmed, Dianna Boileau and A. Revathi.

THE PULPY PROMISE

Dianna Boileau in *Behold, I am a Woman* relates interpellation with her own existentialist questions of identity in a disjointed sequence. She opens her narrative with a prologue about a car accident where her best friend Rosemary is severely injured and a stranger named Jim takes them to the hospital—

A moment later, the nurse was called away by a young intern. This was my chance. I had to leave, but only I knew why. I was guarding a secret within my very being; I just couldn't stay in the hospital.

“Please take me out of here,” I said to Jim. I knew I couldn't stay in these surroundings for one more second (Boileau 18).

The reader is invited to partake in the intrigue as a medical examination could reveal her genital status and she could risk humiliation or arrest being already involved in a car crash. She escapes and later receives a call from the hospital.

“I'm from the hospital. I'm sorry to have to tell you—your friend Rosemary passed away and hour ago. I'm very sorry, Miss Smith. We did everything we could to save her. Now, if you could possibly give us some more details about...”

I dropped the phone to the floor, leaving the receiver dangling from its cord. The silence seemed endless.

From afar, I could hear a faint voice calling...

“Dianna. Dianna...” (Boileau 22)

Boileau's story published as a cheap paperback sold for 25 cents in 1972 (as is evident from the cover page) lives up to its pulpy promise of voyeuristic pleasures with familiar stock elements of a by now formulaic transsexual autobiography. The passage from the prologue above could thus be easily ignored for labouring towards a

suspense that will be resolved later. While Boileau would certainly go on to do that it should also be noted that she is called Dianna earlier but the prologue ends with that faint voice. It could be the hospital personnel still on the line or more likely a flashback of Rosemary (who lay dying on the highway earlier and calling out her name); someone who supported and respected her “secret”. Boileau here mirrors the by now banal interpellation she has previously desired. The reader also learns that Boileau gave a fake last name at the hospital as Miss Smith for reasons of maintaining anonymity as a deviant in a cold bureaucratic infrastructure of the hospital that is likely to turn her over to the police. These complications over why the protagonist is moved by her own name is left hanging in the classic page-turner style of pulp fiction.

As the first chapter begins on the next page, she reclaims her first name and allows the reader to understand the import of it all. She writes,

The distant echo of the name Dianna would not always have evoked a response. I officially became Dianna on April 20, 1970, courtesy of a team of doctors at the Toronto General Hospital. They anatomically changed me from a male to a female. Prior to that time, I was Clifford Boileau, although for many years I lived under the alias of Dianna. You see unbeknown to me or my parents, I was born a transsexual.

For my life history to be complete, I should list all my blue-blooded ancestors. This I am unable to do. I personally don’t know or think about them.

All I do know, with any degree of certainty, is that I was born a boy in a Winnipeg home for unwed mothers (Boileau 23).

Boileau is born both a “transsexual” and a “boy” but Dianna exceeds both categories. Her lack of genetic history adds to the impending freedom her chosen name would represent. Both Elbe and Boileau share this moment of recognition as the foundation of what their respective narratives will go on to establish. Elbe’s first step towards an organic transsexual identity as a seemingly unwilling transvestite husband is incomplete without being christened with celebratory wine. Similarly, Rosemary’s faithful acknowledgement of Boileau’s humanity (and as a consequence, her femininity) comes through her proclaiming her “alias” Dianna.

VIOLENT RECOGNITION

Ahmed like Boileau evokes her childhood but it is the male gaze that helps her recognize her identity. Unlike Elbe and Boileau she does not get a name and phallic mothers to construct herself but is called by the slur that is 'hijra'. In her first email to the editor at Scalo, the Zurich based publishing house that would incorporate her words and publish her autobiography, she writes,

Dear Mr. Walter

Received your email and I am so happy to read it. Now I am going to tell you everything about me as you like.

I was born on the 9th of November in Old Delhi. In my family we have a book where all birth dates and death dates are written down.

I was born at home, in a middle-class family. I came after two sister. Everyone was very happy that after two girls a boy was finally born in the family, especially my father. He fed 200 people to celebrate his son's birth. I was naturally his favorite child, but once I started to grow, he started to feel I was not a boy and started to distance himself because I had very female mannerisms. Even I never felt as a boy and always sought the company of girls...At the age of 12, my mannerisms were completely like a woman's. This angered my father a lot. People in the area started to realize I was a eunuch. This broke my heart, and the boys in school would taunt me. God gave me a man's body, but he also gave me a woman's spirit. That's why they would all call me hijra (eunuch).

My father was a very angry man, and he always beat me, saying, "Why you are walking just like a girl? Why you are talking just like a girl? You are a boy and you must be hard. Don't play with girls; play with boys!" But the boys in school and the neighbors made fun of me. Then I started to realize I was different from other boys (Ahmed 46-47).

Hostile recognition brings in its wake an acute sense of sudden awareness of one's difference. It is also much harder to write a new name when the birth is recorded and sex assigned in the family tree. Unlike Boileau, Ahmed is not free to begin her narrative with her chosen name. Unlike Elbe, Ahmed is not christened by women who seek to objectify her. Ahmed's first utterance thus, recall a shame of being interpellated not simply as 'hijra', here used as a slur for being an effeminate child

and not as a reclaimed marker of a marginalized community. Denouement of empowerment to her is denied from the beginning. The luxury of a first name's open-endedness is replaced by the taunts of schoolboys and her father's corporeal punishment. Being "like a girl" and being 'hijra' is equitable but the latter noun sums up the entire complexity of what Ahmed can become. Ahmed can only challenge the simplicity of this obligatory narrative trajectory when she becomes the prodigal child later in her story.

Ahmed is also rhetorically "forced feminized" despite being feminine herself. If forced feminization, is then to be recovered and re-appropriated as a valid trans technology then one will have to reclaim and multiply its meanings and implications beyond the *fort/ da* mechanics of mainstream pornography. Ahmed who is simply recognizing her femininity is still doing so by means of violence visited upon her. Contrariwise, one may not romanticize the hijra narrative of constant trauma and threat to life as an essential part of being hijra. However still, that violence has already been reclaimed by Ahmed in this passage by acknowledging the original moment of identification and recording her life outside the constraints of the family's book of names.

NAME OR SLUR?

Growing up in a conservative small town in southern US during the 1920s, Tamara Rees echoes Ahmed in her autobiography *Reborn*. Although, she would not face outright violence till later in life. Like Ahmed she does not name herself but is duly categorized within slurs meant for the gender deviant. Unlike Elbe, Rees had cissex/ cisgender female role models from the earliest. She explains,

Upon becoming established in our new home I immediately cemented a relationship with the girl who lived next door and what time I spent playing at all was done mostly with this girl and several of her friends. The long dresses and high heeled shoes and also the old kettle style hats of that era are very clear in my memory. I also recall that that we used to dress in her mother's old clothes and play house or other fantasies of that age. This was my greatest delight and almost my only pastime outside the home. I did take some pleasure in playing on the "rings" and several other pieces of playground equipment but

I never joined in any group games and had no interest whatever in games with boys.

This became quite apparent to the boys and of course they began to call me sissy, pansy and similar names along these lines. They tried to pick fights, and I in turn went all the way to avoid fighting. I just didn't have the courage. When I got mad, instead of fighting, I cried (Rees 5).

Later as an adolescent, her transvestital projections affirm her bodily sense of being transsexual—

At this time I was also dressing secretly in my sister's clothing and I am very certain that this has never been known to any member of my family. These periods of dressing in my sister's clothes had been carried out at various times over a period of five years, but was now expressing itself more and more frequently and my desire for expression and release became so compelling that my unrest became a problem which I could no longer direct (Rees 8).

A. Revathi in rural Tamil Nadu faces the same issue of defining herself from the slurs she hears uttered by other people as a feminine boy. She begins her narrative *The Truth About Me* with the symbolic practice of drawing 'kolam' or auspicious flour/ chalk powder art on the ground outside her home. Through a spiritually significant yet traditionally feminine art combined with doing domestic chores she still does not recognize her gender dissonance because the repetitive citation of feminine practices comes naturally to her. She writes,

My sister and brothers went to the school in town. I think I must have been around ten, studying in Class 5. I would go to the village school along with the girls from the neighbourhood and return with them. I played only girls' games. I loved to sweep the frontyard clean and draw the kolam every morning. I even helped my mother in the kitchen, sweeping and swabbing, washing vessels. My work was certainly not tidy, not like that of grown-up women. But all the same, I would do it with confidence. On days when the kolam outside the yard opposite ours was more beautiful, I would smudge the marks with my feet and flee before I was discovered.

As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister's long skirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid. I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground, and everyone would laugh. No one thought much of it then, for I was little.

They reasoned, ‘He’ll outgrow all this when he grows older’, and I did not say much else. But boys at school, as well as men and women who saw me outside the house, would call out ‘Hey, Number 9!’, ‘female thing’, and ‘female boy’. Some even teased me, saying, ‘Aren’t you a boy? Why do you walk like a girl? Why do you wear girls’ clothes?’ I understood that I was indeed like that. In fact, I wanted to be so (Revathi 3-4).

Despite being hailed as gender deviant, Revathi is perplexed because she does not know that the predestined path for her femininity involves joining the hijra community yet. She only knows that she wants to be a girl because that is the only way she knows of being—

I did not know that I behaved like a girl, it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy. It was like eating for me—just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so (Revathi 7).

Her identification as a hijra would come only much later as a teenager when she meets other hijras and sees reflected in them the possibility of a different reality.

DANCING QUEENS

Before Laxminarayan Tripathi, who retains her original name for it being gender neutral does not begin with her story of being interpellated through homophobic and hijra-phobic slurs. She focuses on the performative aspect of her identity. Having been a sickly child who was also frequently raped and molested by older boys, Tripathi deals with her trauma through what becomes the ultimate tool for subversion for her i.e. dancing—

My fragile health, however, did not prove a damper to my love for dance. I love dancing. In childhood, Bollywood songs invariably set my feet dancing to their tune. As a result, in school I was always selected by my teachers to perform on stage. The stage had a hypnotic effect on me. Once on it, I would forget who I was and danced to a frenzy. Nothing, not even my chronic breathlessness and cough, acted as a deterrent. I thus came to regard the stage as an oasis in the desert of ill health.

But my flamboyance on stage made some people uncomfortable. In patriarchal, misogynistic cultures such as ours, dancing is seen as a womanly

pursuit. So I was teased. People began to call me a homo and a chakka. They couldn't see the cathartic and therapeutic effect that my art had on me. All they could see was that though I was a man, my body language was that of a woman.

Yes, it's true that I was like a woman. My mannerisms, my walking and talking style were all feminine. But what was it so? I did not know. I wasn't of the age to answer this question. Loner that I already was, I drifted even further into my cocoon (Tripathi 4).

Tripathi's use of the word 'cocoon' is both telling and misleading. Telling because it adheres to the autobiographical convention of constructing a *bildungsroman*.

Misleading because Tripathi maintains her identity as more or less evolving yet stable as far as her gender expression is concerned. She does not undergo ritual or clinical castration thereby denying a pre and post split other authors provide. Dancing becomes a recurring motif through which she shows how she remains the same the more she grows as a person. She mentions,

Dancing saved me. It was the therapy I hadn't given up, in spite of going through turbulent times. In a way, it was my dancing, complete with my feminine movements of the waist, that contributed to my being thought of as effeminate. But I didn't care. I couldn't care less when I was younger, and I couldn't care less now (Tripathi 23).

Tripathi in the first passage was careful not to use the word 'hijra' as one of the slurs hurled at her. She recalls 'homo' and 'chakka' as synonyms for 'hijra' instead. The distinction between her and Ahmed is that Tripathi is a notable trans activist writing from 2015 Mumbai while the former does not have an abiding public image as a representative of the hijra community to maintain in the media. 'Hijra' for Tripathi then is perhaps, the name of the community that must be retrospectively respected enough to have her repress its use as a slur by others.

Laxminarayan Tripathi has also been credited for coining the neologism "hijrotic" in a radio interview, which according to her encapsulates the essence of hijra subjectivity and defines the potential of hijras. Writer Subuhi Jiwani explains it in her essay titled "Hijrotic: Towards a New Expression of Desire". "By coupling the words hijra and erotic, hijrotic brings together hijra subjectivity, rarely thought of as desirable or desiring, and eroticism. It is, then, more than an adjective: it is an utterance, an act, of self-affirmation" (Jiwani). The hijrotic approach therefore,

exceeds eroticism and suggests a rhetorical embalming well beyond the terms of sexual identity. It is also well evident in Tripathi's autobiography that she refuses to handover the power to name her to anyone other than herself even as she retains her assigned name. Moreover, her bodily integrity as biologically male yet emphatically hijra allows her to shift the narrative focus onto performative tropes.

Living Smile Vidya in *I am Vidya* on the other hand, is not as empowered when she begins her story. Before she utters her chosen name into the pages of the book or even discuss her childhood gender dissonance and trasvestital projections she must underscore her inherited identities. Those of poverty and being dalit in small town Tamil Nadu—

When I was born the first time, my parents named me Saravanan. I was their sixth child, born after years of prayers for a boy child. In fact, their first had been a boy, unfortunately still born. Four girls followed, two of them succumbing to unknown diseases. In the circumstances, I realized pretty early in life what joy my arrival must have brought to my parents.

My family wasn't exactly well off. My father Ramaswami was known as Nattamai or chieftain in Puttur, next to Tiruchi. The title must have been somebody's idea of a joke, for my father was hardly any kind of chief, certainly not the kind immortalized by Tamil cinema. He was a municipal worker of the lowest rung, a sweeper. He married my mother Veeramma in 1973. They started life together in a small hut they built on an unoccupied piece of land on Attumanthai (flock of sheep) Street... The pain and awareness of their oppression on the basis of their caste haunted my parents all their lives. Their intense yearning for a son must have sprung from their desperate hope that he would change the course of their abject lives (Vidya 18-19).

Her second birth as Vidya does not set her free from poverty and caste burdens. On the contrary, the inheritance multiples. Vidya's narrative is still optimistic and seeks to free her identity from her origins. On the cover page of her book, the title reads, "I am ~~Saravanan~~ Vidya". Granted that the typeset might not have allowed the crossed name in the title to be reproduced on the pages inside so there it reads, "I am Vidya". The red line cutting across her assigned male name still reflects her painful journey. The process of unfettering in her story is also not based on interpellation as a hijra by others.

Vidya's focus after her family shifts to her early experiments with clothes. She writes of her precocity—

I am the princess,

A fresh new rose.

Will my dream come true?

The radio was playing the popular film song and I was dancing to the tune, wearing my sister Manju's Indian skirt. I was six or seven then. I though I didn't fully understand the meaning of the words, I enjoyed the lilt and tenderness of the words (Vidya 25).

Like Tripathi, dancing plays a strong role in her construction of the gendered self. When she is hailed and constructed as deviant and feminine, it is through a slightly elder child's disgust at her activities—

I stayed there for a while. I then got up quietly. I felt no one would take any notice of me whatever I did. I went into the middle house. I put on one of Manju's skirts. I shut the door and started to dance.

I am the king's daughter.

A fresh new rose,

Will my dreams come true?

I danced for a long time, cannot remember how long. I felt the gaze of someone looking at me through the window. I turned and saw it was Fathima Akka. About Manju's age, she lived on our street.

'Yuck! Look at Saravanan. He's dancing wearing a girl's clothes.'

Now the story was out in the open. 'What are you doing dancing like a girl at such an unhappy time?' Appa slapped me (Vidya 28-29).

The "unhappy time" was her mother's impending funeral. Being too young to fully comprehend the quantum of death, Vidya was engrossed in the overwhelming desire to be herself. She begins by feeling invisible enough to do whatever she wants and quickly feels the presence of a hostile gaze on her person. This dramatic coming out of sorts under the shadow of death foretells the turn Vidya's narrative will take.

Castration will be the rebirth and reward of staying true to her identity despite the constant attacks by a father who feels betrayed by a son who was supposed to be his deliverance from misery. The refrain of the song "will my dream come true?" repeated twice during this early stage is an enduring question that will not be resolved till the moment of truth arrives.

ANOTHER QUESTION OF LIFE AND DEATH

Roberta Cowell in her previous life, as illustrated in *Roberta Cowell's Story*, was a male car racer and when the Second World War broke out she enlisted as a British soldier. A male Spitfire Ace, Cowell is captured along with the others in Nazi territory and taken as a prisoner of war. Once at the desolate camp she, as a man had plenty of time to deal with her existentialist questions. As discussed in Chapter 2, Cowell maintained the myth of her being an undiagnosed intersex person. As a consequence she does not write about experiencing early dissonance at all. The suspension of belief is that she naturally repressed her feminine self and did not discover it until a psychiatrist and other clinicians teased out the truth about her body and soul.

While under Nazi eyes, Cowell lived with the threat of immediate death or death through slow torture. Impending violence proved to be a catalyst and made her discover dark humour. However, a constant pinprick of her inner self was something she could not locate. She claims,

I was put into a tiny cell, containing a plank bed and a very small, thin blanket. After a preliminary interview, when I gave my name, rank and number, I got three weeks of solitary confinement. The first week was absolute hell. I had never sat still before with nothing to do, and the days passed incredibly slowly. I had no idea how long it was going on for, but sincerely hoped it would not be very much longer. By the end of the first week I began to get accustomed to it and after three weeks I was quite prepared to continue indefinitely. I would ponder on deep, philosophical questions, such as “Who am I, and what is it within me wants to know?”

I later discovered that someone else once spent fifty-three years in deep contemplation on this particular problem, without finding the answer, so perhaps it is not surprising that I failed to solve the mystery myself (Cowell 28).

It would have been exceedingly dangerous for Cowell to admit to any amount of innate femininity while in Nazi prison. She was careful enough to avoid any suggestion of deviance including that of sexuality. It is not clear whether Cowell wrote while in prison or merely mused to herself in isolation. Given that her autobiography like most classical transsexual autobiographies was written once a

certain sense of rehabilitation has been achieved shows that she is relying on her memory.

Once safely back home in England, Cowell was prompted to see the doctors upon various provocations from others' gaze such as a tennis partner noticing her somewhat protruding breasts. She says,

The biggest shock to my self-esteem was my discovery, through these tests, that my unconscious mind was predominantly female. The evidence of the tests was far too forthright to be denied. And, as the analysis proceeded, it became quite obvious that the feminine side of my nature which all my life I had known of and severely repressed, was very much more fundamental and deep rooted than I had supposed.

Like all people who have just entered analysis, I had made my own diagnosis of my case—and my own prognosis, too. I had confidently expected that the analysis would uncover, and clear up, an unconscious fear of losing my masculinity. I expected to find traces of the Oedipus complex and signs of repressed conflict between animal instincts and moral upbringing. My diagnosis, in short, was as technical as I could make it—and wrong. I did not expect to find that, freed of repressions, I was psychologically a woman (Cowell 40).

Cowell's persistent question "Who am I?" is overly dependent on clinical aid unlike Boileau who was an orphan born with an empty history. Cowell's male past overwhelms her narrative much like Rees's who also enlisted in the navy and became a paratrooper. Although the latter declares her reason to do so was so simply to prove to the world that she was a man. Cowell's aim is to convince the reader that she was completely ignorant of her "condition". This is not to say that Cowell's story could be judged as betraying the trans community that was yet to come into being. It only shows that Cowell also refuses to be interpellated unless she is hailed in her own preferred manner.

CONCLUSION

Elbe is happy to be bestowed a name even though she would go on to choose her last name on her own after the river Elbe. Boileau recognizes the importance of being called by her first name by those who matter to her before she is ready to meet the

world. Ahmed comes to terms with the violence the slur 'hijra' brings with it. Rees and Revathi also realize early in their childhoods that their bodies in motion are marked and othered swiftly. Tripathi and Vidya manipulate the genre of autobiography effectively to focus on their dancing bodies as the site for identification and anticipated re-signification of their gender. Cowell, through her silence, takes the reader in another direction altogether and allows herself to be interpellated only by the clinician that too as explicitly intersex and not transsexual.

The highly anticipated surgical moment may now be seen as framed through the rhetorics of being and naming. A young Mona Ahmed projects gendered perfection when she asks her new hijra friends—

So I saw that all eunuchs look just like girls, no hair on their arms and legs, and I asked them, “Why are you looking so smart?” They told me that, after castration, they become like this (Ahmed 50).

The promise may not be the same across autobiographies but Ahmed's longings here show that the community can be built through mutual myth making. However much one is hailed to be from the transphobic other, there is recourse and healing available. On the other hand, the oft violent reality or looming threats of endangerment foreshadow the constant struggle the classical or hijra subject must undergo.

Classical transsexual and hijra writers may both define and deconstruct the formulae they themselves suggest. As the treatment of interpellation in all the autobiographies considered shows, these dynamic narratives escape their own clichés by adding to the matrix yet another dimension of sexed embodiment or a highly specific instance of gender expression. Pre-surgical naming through unwelcome slurs or naming oneself or resisting external influences to define one's identity are prime examples of the urgent autobiographical imperative at work.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONVERGENCES PART II: THE CASTRATION PIVOT

FRANKENSTEIN AND HIS MONSTER

Forced feminization in the last chapter was discussed for not being a valid technology of the trans self owing to mainstream appropriation and exaggeration. Exploitation through misrepresentation of those along the margins of sex and gender is never surprising. However, reading trans narratives as already poised against the grain of hegemonic views of sex reassignment could oddly enough still be a novelty. Hostile critical views discussed in the previous chapters such as those of Bernice Hausman and Janice Raymond line up comfortably with the orientalism of Serena Nanda as well as the liberating rhetoric of Sandy Stone. The pursuit for sex change in a classical or hijra subject is so far thought to manifest in the subjects' overall machinations and investments. Such approaches have exacerbated the discursive damage to the autobiographer who is either castigated, as is the case with the pioneer or ignored, as has been the Third World other. Thus, critical priorities up to now have been entangled in matters of offense and defense.

Specific discussions on the transsexual body and transsexual phenomenology like those of Jay Prosser and Gayle Salamon emphasize proprioception and phantasmatic extensions as perhaps viable trans technologies. Susan Stryker charts a different trajectory in her landmark essay in trans theory, which has been more or less true to the vision of Stone's posttranssexuality. Published in *The Transgender Studies Reader* edited by Stryker along with Stephen Whittle in 2006, Stryker's essay titled "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" allows her to direct a "transgender rage" against the clinician. The allegory of relations between creator and monster is obvious. Stryker is breaking free from the rigid constraints and heteronormative designs of the gatekeepers of surgery who remain untouched and seem God like in their supposed scientific objectivity. She is also reveling in the forbidden knowledge of her own monstrosity. Stryker's monster body like the posttranssexual body borrows from the vocabulary of Donna Haraway's cyborg with unfinished parts and affinities effectively rejecting originary myths. Stryker writes,

These are my words to Victor Frankenstein, above the village of Chamounix. Like the monster, I could speak of my earliest memories, and how I became aware of my difference from everyone around me. I can describe how I acquired a monstrous identity by taking on the label “transsexual” to name parts of myself that I could not otherwise explain. I, too, have discovered the journals of the men who made my body, and who have made the bodies of creatures like me since the 1930s. I know in intimate detail the history of this recent medical intervention into the enactment of transgendered subjectivity; of resistance to the coerciveness of gender: physical alteration of the genitals. I live daily with the consequences of medicine’s definition of my identity as an emotional disorder. Through the filter of this official pathologization, the sounds that come out of my mouth can be summarily dismissed as the confused ranting of a diseased mind (Stryker “My Words...” 249).

By addressing Frankenstein without his customary and iconic title ‘Dr.’, Stryker becomes intentionally irreverent. She mocks his hubris for trying to contain her pluralities into the straightjacket of the term “transsexual”. A term she had been brainwashed to internalize and adhere to. Most importantly, Stryker draws attention to the dismissal of the autobiographical imperative of the monster as she is not to be taken seriously despite all the attempts at discursivizing. She echoes Stone who as discussed in Chapter 2 had claimed that a “counterdiscourse was impossible to generate when the transsexual is “programmed to disappear” i.e. designed to immerse herself in the image of cis-heteronormativity (Stone 230).

Stryker’s argument suffers from the same caveats as Stone in that the monster body performs the function of teleological reasoning. She imagines a historical break from the monolith looking into the future of more pluralistic trans identities. The political point of departure is also defeatist and reactionary because any existing textual evidence (in particular of the classical transsexual) is tainted by clinical dictum therefore, not worthy of a re-reading. Furthermore, one who was diagnosed as transsexual by the clinic but had not yet imagined herself to ever be a part of an organized resistance is excluded automatically i.e. the heteronormatively driven pioneer autobiographers who had adopted strategies of negotiations and gender conformity within the matrix of the clinic (Skidmore).

On the other hand, the hijra body is completely irrelevant to the monster given the privilege of 1990s US focused trans political awakening (post Judith Butler) it still

cannot afford. The castrated hijra unlike the monster has not confronted the quack or the doctor exploiting an illegal and illicit demand. Her body remains a “brutalized terrain for the circulation of capital” (Varadharajan 109). This body has the least in common with the excesses of the now empowered monster.

What can perhaps be gleaned from Stryker’s symbolism is its potential as citation from the original Mary Shelley text. As a crudely patched experiment, the monster body suffered and had embarked on a quest to end that suffering. For Stryker, this anguish is channelized into a highly motivated rage that would transform into power and bring about social change (Stryker “My Words...” 253). For the autobiographer, though the pain of the flesh is extremely concentrated and highly specific. It cannot be separated from the moment it is captured in. Neither can it be divorced from the entanglement of the clinic because it is in active participation with the “maker” in a particular *mise en scene*. Therefore, the inverted prodigality of Frankenstein’s monster that Stryker uses can only stretch so far.

OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

As far as the suffering of the body is concerned, sex reassignment described (or consciously glossed over) in the texts is first and foremost the pain of castration and not vaginoplasty. I mention this because Stryker’s symbol appears to demand the significance of assemblage (hormonal and reconstructive surgery) where as negation (of male genitalia) seems to be emphasized in the autobiographies as the crux of transsexing the self. As a first step, complete oriechtomy with or without penectomy appears to be the crucial locale.

Castration is more than an event that connects the classical subject to the hijra subject despite the sharp differences in their class, race, geography, and overall privilege. It is the most palpable moment in the narratives that signifies freedom from the male appendage and the first sigh of relief from the shackles of biological destiny. The pain the procedure brings and the manner in which it is expressed or repressed shows its place in the autobiographies. From all the texts included in this study, A. Revathi’s autobiography *The Truth About Me* gives the most detailed description of what she has undergone. She says,

I lay writhing in pain for nearly two hours and then felt this huge pressure on my chest. Bile rushed up to my throat and I threw up the black tea. At that

time it seemed as if I would surely die. But actually, I felt better, the burning was less acute, the pain too was bearable, and my heart had stopped beating wildly. I felt like I had been born again. I slipped into a dreamy sleep and did not know who cleared up my vomit and cleaned me.

...On the third day after the operation, they remove the tube and we are expected to pee normally. We did not even have a nightgown those days and had to go the bathroom in our saris [sic]. Holding our saris high and away from the operated area and walking with our legs far apart, we had a time of it. If the pee did not flow freely, we had to be careful and not force it out, for the pain would be unbearable, and there would be bleeding. When I think of that time, I shudder even today. As for shitting, that was an ordeal and if I had to take a deep breath to force things out, my nerves felt as if they would snap. I was also scared that the stitches would come off.

...He said he would remove a portion of the stitches and the rest would fall off on their own. It felt like a sharp and painful pinprick when he unpicked them. I closed my eyes and gritted my teeth as before. I had to put up with all these painful procedures, if I wanted to become a woman (Revathi 75-76).

Revathi's experience reflects Vidya's who also draws a comparison between how she was treated by the hospital during castration and later when she underwent an appendectomy. During the first surgery she explains in her autobiography *I am Vidya*,

They dumped me on a bare cot immediately after the operation. The pain was unbearable and kept getting worse all the time. I was screaming and shouting all the time. I begged the nurse to give an injection to kill the pain while she was negotiating a higher tip...

...The hospital discharged me immediately. No medicines were prescribed, no regimen was recommended, no after effects or side effects were explained. It was up to me to manage all that on my own.

Sugandhi Ayah took us gingerly by autorickshaw to the Cuddapah railway station. The way we limped, with legs spread wide, drew laughs all around. I bore all the taunts stoically for the sake of my impending freedom.

...My experience was akin to spring cleaning an old house, removing the cobwebs and dust, swabbing the floors and whitewashing the walls. My woman's body no longer had a male protuberance. This sense of freedom was

uppermost in my feelings as I came back to Pune after nirvana, 40 days of recuperation and the ritual initiation into womanhood (Vidya 107-109).

When she is back on the operating table a second time, things turn around dramatically—

I had to undergo a million tests before the operation. How on earth did I survive all those? My operation was performed in a spacious theatre, on a comfortable bed, too. Luxuries, I hadn't known before. Many people were around me, but I couldn't open my eyes, or sense who they were. I was told the operation was successful, but the pain was intense. I screamed in agony. Radha said, 'How did you go through the earlier operation if you find this one so difficult to bear da?' I once again showed irritation at her calling me 'da' (Vidya 122-123).

For castration, the doctors simply want to know whether Vidya is HIV positive or not. The illegality of the procedure allows the staff and doctors to also dehumanize her. The second time she is amazed at the "luxury" of being treated like a respectable and bona fide client. What is discernible in both Revathi and Vidya's writing is their ultimate goal of nirvana. The former must "put up" with it all bravely to become a woman and Vidya anticipates her "freedom". For Vidya, the pain of the appendectomy is as unbearable as castration even as her sister Radha assumes she would sail through it now. The only difference is the way a hostile clinic has the power to turn either experience into a nightmare because of trans/ hijrophobia and little regard for deviant life.

Metaphorically, Vidya is castrated again when her appendix—an organ understood widely to be vestigial—is purged. This time from the inside and both castrations are as urgent for her survival. The pilgrim's progress and patience that Revathi represents is fleshed out in Vidya's comparative analysis of the immediacy of negation as enablement.

WHO'S THE IDEAL FELDGLING?

Mona Ahmed does not enter the clinic from the back door like Vidya and Revathi. She is castrated by another hijra for a small payment without the popular ritual involving goddess worship. Ahmed in *Myself Mona Ahmed* writes,

I cried loudly. It was so painful. She removed all my private parts. I lay down on the earth and felt I was about to faint. Blood was flowing like anything. As I was about to faint, she would slap my chilly and say, “Don’t sleep” [sic]. After many hours, the blood stopped flowing, and in the morning they washed my body with hot water. I felt many pains when they were washing. After the washing, they took some hot mustard oils and applied them on my wounds. For six days, they did the same oil treatment after washing, twice a day. For six days, they did not give any chilly or mutton things, only bread and jaggery (unrefined sugar), vegetables and fishes (Ahmed 50-51).

Ahmed claims to experience the feminizing effects of castration as were earlier promised to her by the acquaintance.

After the castration, my body became like a beautiful woman’s. Skin became softer; body hair vanished; little breasts appeared, and my voice changed. They loved me deeply and cared for me, and I started to feel that this is where I belonged. I started to dance performances with Sona and Chaman, because while I was in my home, I used to learn Khatak from Shambu Maharaj. My father and uncle came to take me home, but I knew that this was where I belonged and refused to go home (Ahmed 52).

Lili Elbe echoes this liberating miracle of immediate feminine transformation. However, her friend and editor of the book, Niels Hoyer does not accord the pain of her first surgery (castration) and focuses on the great describable change instead. Hoyer in *Man into Woman* writes,

When Andreas woke up again, in violent pain, it was almost noon. He opened his eyes with a shriek...

“Did I make much noise?” he enquired.

“Well, just a little,” said one of the nurses with a smile, “and the strange thing was that your voice had completely changed. It was a shrill woman’s voice” (Elbe 128).

It is important to note again that the narrator’s voice in Elbe’s text keeps shifting. Elbe writes an optimistic letter to Grete about expecting the events to unfold well and in the next instance Hoyer takes over and explains how Elbe as Andreas drifts in and out of post-operative daze. Unlike Ahmed, Elbe’s femininity is recognized first by the nurse and not herself. There will be more surgeries for Elbe to endure but the magic of castration is vital for future transformations to take place.

The anticipated freedom in this first flush however, could easily dissolve. Maybe it is so because for Elbe there are other steps to complete. For the hijra subject, castration is termed nirvan for the ultimate freedom it represents. On the other hand, Vidya's sister unmindful of her deliverance still refers to her with the masculine term of endearment 'da'. While Vidya is merely annoyed for having her hard earned femininity invalidated here through an act of possible micro aggression or unintentional force of habit, the small incident represents that the labour of transsexing like Butlerian gender performance as a citational practice of repetition is never complete. Lili Elbe speaks of this impossibility through allegorical empathy. She illustrates an intimate scene following her surgery. Her doctor whom she addresses as "The Professor" arrives to see her recuperating and declares her fit to leave the hospital—

He looked at her with a smile and shook his head. "No; it is high time for you to go out into the world and try your wings."

The same evening Lili found a bird's nest. It was built under the roof of the covered passage which led from the Professor's private quarters to the clinic. A small family of sparrows. The father sparrow and the mother sparrow were twittering and the young sparrows were chirping. Perhaps a little family quarrel, thought Lili. Suddenly a young one fell out of the nest and remained lying helpless on the path. It fluttered its embryo wings and tried to fly, but in vain. The wings were not strong enough to bear it. And the parents came hurrying out of the nest on to the path and hovered about their young one. Their twittering sounded a note of real terror. They could not get the youngster back into the nest. Then Lili stooped down, took the little bird in her hand, stroked it carefully, and felt the little heart beating against her hand. Suddenly the Matron was standing beside her.

"But why are you weeping, Frau Lili?"

Mutely Lili handed her the little bird. "It has fallen out of the nest and cannot yet fly. And the parents cannot help it. It makes me think of myself. I too cannot yet..." (Elbe 215).

Elbe sees herself in the likeness of a fledgling and implies that her castration is to be seen as both the climax of her *bildungsroman* as well as the foundation for further growth. This moment of stasis in between is the site for fear. Elbe sincerely wishes not to leave the hospital but forever remain in the largely feminine space of the

hospital with its assuring calm and security. Her trans subjectivity takes root in that time and place she wishes to freeze for its beauty of perfection that she has come to idealize.

Other authors have not had the same privilege. Vidya and Revathi were quickly dismissed from their respective hospitals, and before Ahmed could dance to make a living as she mentioned, she had another trauma to face. She explains,

But the day after my castration, I started to have regrets and wondered what I would do, because I did not like to go from house to house to beg and bless the public.

Meanwhile in Delhi, my family was searching me. They caught all my friends and asked the eunuchs, “Where is my son?” They threatened my friend that if he did not tell them where I was, they would have him arrested by the police... When he saw me, he wept and cried so much and broke the walls of the hut and said, “What have you done?!” He gave some money to the eunuch who had castrated me and took me away to Delhi and we stayed in his friend’s house.

After 2-3 days, I took a good bath with hot waters and wore pant shirt and went to my family with that boy... When they saw my face, they asked me why I was so weak, so I told them I was sick, and I wanted to go to a hill station with this boy, so they gave me some money and said to me, “Go as you like, but write us a letter from there and come back in a week.” So I went to a hotel in Delhi, and that boy went to the eunuchs and asked them, “Now what should Ahmed do?” They said, “Wash the wounds with hot water and she will be alright in two weeks.” (Ahmed 51).

Ahmed’s recovery from her premature castration as a young hijra is interrupted because of her family’s interventions. She has to keep moving from one place to another and bear the postoperative pain while keeping up appearances. As a fallen fledgling she has little choice.

BLOODY HUMOUR

Dianna Boileau who crosses the border into New York to get castrated is neither an ingénue nor underprivileged like Ahmed. She however, must move to avoid getting persecuted by the law. Boileau uses humour to address not only the pain of castration

but also the grave legal consequences of her choice. She opens the case in *Behold, I am a Woman* with a funny one liner that arouses the reader's interest in what could have transpired. She says, "One does not usually associate castration with roast beef, but I do" (188).

Later when she would get food poisoning from the steaks she ate before fleeing New York she would come to associate her castration with literal meat. This jarring connection between consumption and excision is unexpected in a classical transsexual autobiography. Boileau's irreverent candour gets darker when she talks about completing the procedure. Upon reaching New York with another transwoman named Una who would be her partner in crime, she writes,

I assumed it would be painful, and I was right.

After thirteen needles in various parts of the groin, an incision in the scrotum, muffled, stifled screams, hushed conversation between doctor and nurse, glaring lights, rentng flesh, sundry sutures—Dianna, the half-drunk man became a very sober eunuch.

I dressed and joined Una. As we left, the doctor handed us prescriptions for pain-killers, which we immediately filled in the hospital pharmacy.

Surprisingly, both Una and I felt elated. The drugs and the freezing still numbed any pain, and we were both so deliriously happy to have had this done that we felt giddy with joy.

I hadn't really planned on spending the post-operative hours flirting in the motel cocktail lounge, but that's just what transpired.

Una and I sat sipping our drinks, secretly marveling at what had just happened to us.

Suddenly, without warning, the pain struck. I felt a warm trickle of blood ooze down my legs.

...For three days we suffered together.

A telephone call to the front desk left unwanted cleaning women at a cautious distance. The same method wad used to order sandwiches that we requested be left outside our door.

Neither of us could walk. It was too agonizingly painful; so we perfected a way of crawling on all fours to open the door slightly and grab the tray to pull it inside.

On the fourth day, we were able to survey the room and each other. It horrifyingly revealed bloodstained towels, sheets, and blankets. In all, it looked more like a case of an illegal, unsuccessful abortion than a castration (Boileau 194-195).

Boileau and Una then leave the hotel before they are fully healed and head to the airport for their return to Canada. The illegal procedure does not allow them to be hospitalized until recovery. Boileau was feminine presenting and even had appropriate documents in her name unlike Una so she could have indeed been arrested on suspicion of abortion. The state of New York legalized abortion in 1970 (three years before the rest of the US) but since Boileau does not mention the exact year the incident took place, it is hard to conclude over that particular risk although her autobiography is published in 1972 (Perez-Pena). Interestingly, surgical castration as a choice remains illegal outside the recommended protocols for sex reassignment to this day almost universally.

Boileau would remain a “eunuch” for a long time because she is unable to fund her vaginoplasty until the end of her story. It becomes a cause for depression besides a constant threat of public humiliation. Castration for Boileau brings with temporary pain a temporary relief.

REPRESSION AND LIES

Roberta Cowell hiding the truth about her castration makes for a noteworthy intertextual connection. Her repression in her autobiography *Roberta Cowell's Story* is deliberate and conscious also because she must fear legal and other consequences of her choices. She refers to a vague corrective first procedure to maintain her intersex conviction—

Later in the day I was visited by my surgeon. He removed the catheter and some packing. He told me that the operation to correct the congenital absence of vagina was completed. Perhaps a tidying-up operation would be needed at some future date, but it was too early to say.

There was still no pain, and only minor discomfort from swelling, but as soon as possible I was put into a hot bath, and the swelling was reduced. Everyone I encountered was kindness itself, and I was quite at ease. The stitches were taken out, a few at a time. Some were excruciatingly painful,

being in a terribly tender spot, but finally, with extreme care, the last of them was removed. Less than two weeks after my admittance to the nursing home I was back in my own house.

Ideally, it would have been best at this stage to have gone right away and started life afresh somewhere else. This was impossible; I had to stay in London to be near my doctors. But the operation had made a tremendous difference to me psychologically. I now had a self-assurance I had lacked before my metamorphosis was complete; I felt different enough to be able to face the awkwardness of my position with what I can best describe as aplomb. I now broke away from all activities which had to be carried out in trousers. It was by now almost impossible to pose as a man, anyhow; the masquerade was repugnant to me besides, as I felt that I was now truly a complete female (Cowell 55).

Cowell seems to have had a conspicuous lacuna in her narrative to fill with the details of her suffering but she chooses not to. Plausible fear ensures that the mask of relative effortlessness protect her secret. It's only the fault of the nerve endings that make the pain a given summed up with the adjective "excruciating".

Cowell's autobiographical imperative, however exceeds her magnum opus. It has been revealed only in 2015 that Cowell had invited a friend Liz Hodgkinson, author and journalist, a peek into details of her life to reconstruct posthumously more truthfully than she was able to. Cowell's narrative and especially, her unmentioned castration in the light of Hodgkinson's *Telegraph* article "The true story behind Britain's first transsexual woman" takes on a new life. This reconstruction through revelation is although, predicated on the motif of a familiar strip tease exploitative of trans identities. The vicarious pleasure it gives to the reader about the sensational "truth" unfortunately robs the autobiographer of her agency. Hodgkinson's article is valuable not because of what it exposes but how in the context of castration pivoting her transsexual identity, Cowell emerges as both the victim of her circumstance and the one negotiating her place in the narrative. Hodgkinson writes,

In order for Roberta to legally re-register as female on her birth certificate in 1951, she underwent a secret, and highly illegal, castration, which allowed her to present herself as intersex [sic].

...Amusing, insightful, captivating, generous and warmhearted—
somebody with whom many fell in love—Betty seemed to take a huge shine to

me. She began spending Christmases with us and before long, made all her documents available to me, so I could write a book commemorating her quarter-century as a woman.

It was from these letters that I discovered she was not, as she had made out, wrongly assigned at birth, but had undergone an orchiectomy to remove both testicles by fifth-year medical student, Michael Dillon—who himself had the world’s first sex change operation from female to male after beginning life as Laura.

Having fallen passionately in love with Roberta, Dillon risked his future medical license to perform the operation, which then allowed for a vaginoplasty to be conducted by Sir Harold Gillies, Harley Street’s highest paid surgeon, who had made his name rebuilding the shattered faces of soldiers injured in the trenches of the First World War.

When I confronted Betty, she insisted it was Dillon who was living the fantasy, not her—threatening me with lawyers if I made the full story public.

Only after her death could the truth come out (Hodgkinson).

Interestingly, Hodgkinson went on to write a book about transsexual surgery as well as one about Dillon, the world’s first transman but not about Cowell. It is hard to imagine what Cowell’s experience may have been like on the operating table but the slivers that Hodgkinson offers together with the autobiographer’s sombre declarations, a weak image paints itself and connects to the similarly plain account Tamara Rees has left in her autobiography *Reborn*.

A SILENCE AND AN ALTERNATIVE

Rees in *Reborn* is factual and to the point. Like Cowell, she leaves little space for her first surgery to be thought of as acutely distressing. Rees originally intended to get operated in Denmark following the successful and by then famous example of Christine Jorgensen who became the first American transsexual. As I mentioned earlier, Jorgensen was the first known person assigned male to undergo surgery and return to her country as a woman but Rees was the first to publish her autobiography, a fact not emphasized by trans historians so far. Rees also had to go to the neighbouring country of Netherlands due to a change in Denmark’s laws regarding surgery for foreigners. She records the event thusly,

On the morning of January 5th I entered a small very quiet hospital located in Amsterdam and here underwent the first phase of a series of operations which were to follow. Without any question in my mind, or apprehension, the anesthesia was administered and I went to sleep (a deep sleep) from which I knew I was to awaken into a new life with the past behind me. In effect the surgeon's knife would sever all of this in one swift stroke. I could not help but wonder with some sense of nervousness, what this future might hold for me, but certainly there was hesitation at this point because I knew that while this operation would be a decisive factor, that it also meant the beginning or the end for me.

My next recollection of life was upon awakening in a lovely heavily paneled private room overlooking the park. It would appear that my first reaction upon awakening was to scream. I can really give no explanation for this act because actually there was no experience of pain at this point. The only thing I recall is a dim remembrance of a nurse coming to my bed, who spoke no English whatsoever, but the tenderness and understanding which her actions conveyed to me were such, that words could not express and I began to relax feeling reassured (Rees 36).

The space between Rees's growing apprehension and their resolution is short as her words move swiftly yet carefully towards anesthetic escape. Though, her scream of painlessness is as quick, it is perhaps a generative void where other authors' castrations could be projected. For that matter, one must assume that Rees is getting castrated here for a first surgery as she does not divulge any specific details whatsoever. The vagueness of her phrase "the first phase of a series of operations" is the only evidence on must rely on.

While Cowell's omissions could be explored through Hodgkinson, Rees's are impossible to apprehend. One could draw the conclusion that in the light of Jorgensen's highly publicized case and all the negative implications that accompanied it, Rees may have been extremely weary. Her repression of castration is also then mindful. She may have not wanted to cut a sorry figure but to create through her writing an image of a person who deserved and actually went through surgeries more or less effortlessly despite not being intersex (as also previously discussed in Chapter 2). This could be interpreted as a negation of the negation that enables. The labour of Rees's body is therefore not only in suffering the pain but also in insisting on her right

to glide over and dismiss it. The flash of her painless scream therefore, speaks through its operative silence. It betrays her resolve only when a trans reader or author acknowledges through her own bodily travails what Rees chooses to leave to imagination.

A complete negation of the negation may be observed in the crucial event of Laxminarayan Tripathi achieving transsexing through bureaucratic means in her autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*. As mentioned earlier, Tripathi consistently refuses castration or any other surgical intervention. The pivot for her is in the reordering of paperwork. When she is invited to attend a conference in the US, Tripathi must acquire a passport. However, she is not able to get one due to the conflict in her assigned sex on the family's ration card and her lived gender reality. She writes,

I now had only one alternative left: the conversion certificate. Early next morning I went to the Sion Hospital to explore the possibility of obtaining such a certificate. I spoke to the first doctor I met, who happened to be Dr. Hema Jayrajani. When she heard my strange tale, she agreed to put me through a medical test. This worried me because I wasn't castrated, nor had I opted for hormone therapy that would give me the physical characteristics of a woman, breasts and such like. But Dr. Jayrajani was sympathetic. She scribbled out a certificate for me that said that though I was born male, and was a male biologically, my social and psychological identity was that of a woman. This expedited matters. My ration card was ready—all I had to do was to go and pick it up.

...I plonked down on a chair and handed my file to Superintendent Prashant Mohite's assistant. He leafed through my papers, scrutinizing every document as if I was a RAW agent. The he pronounced his verdict: the papers were okay. Hurrah, but my passport wasn't going to be issued to me for free. It cost Rs. 2,500, which was the fee at the time for an urgent passport. I looked into my handbag and found that I was short of the amount by a thousand bucks. My old friend Mistri saab came to my aid. He magnanimously lent me a thousand rupees. I promised I would return his money at the first opportunity, but he junked the idea and said, 'Give me only your blessings.' It was the advantageous side of being a hijra (Tripathi 82-83).

Tripathi as a radically situated hijra does not expressively find the moment of any nirvana like freedom in negating the biologically male self. Neither does she find dénouement in finally acquiring a passport. However, the event is important as it allows her the freedom of movement and an official recognition as sexed citizen despite flouting the rigid norms.

Her subversion of cold bureaucracy employing its own tools is a unique intervention. Expert knowledge in this case is not only the clinician or the hand that wields the tool of exigency to deliver from biological destiny, but the passport and ration officers at various levels who range from hostile to benevolent to sympathetic. The negated part is not only the previous mention of her sex as male on the old ration card but the issuance of a new pair of documents altogether that would be likely to multiply and reinforce her identity further. The state's power exercised over trans bodies is of course illustrated well in other autobiographies too when the authors talk about attaining the correct papers and certificates. In Tripathi's text however, it is the only and therefore utterly crucial and literal enactment of transsexing.

Except for Tripathi, castration as pivot across autobiographies is largely determinable. However, it would be mindful to note that all the works are involved in illustrating a life lived through constant changes of circumstances. Furthermore, as is clear from the previous chapters, there is no singular transsexing methodology or approach that the authors mark as supreme or valuable.

Sexed perfection may be out of anyone's reach and the narrative drive is surely not a mindless race for acquiring as many secondary sexual traits as possible. The authors' pursuit instead is a deeply felt need expressed through available language of the clinic or a viscerally guided identification with a fellow hijra. In the context of the autobiographies, castration therefore, cannot become a symbol of trans liberation/ deviance/ rebellion/ etc. It is a historically situated act that pivots the autobiographers' need to transsex in their individual situations. Alternative examples of narrative strategies like the unique case of Tripathi or a Rees like avoidance of the matter or a Cowell like fabrication are sobering instances of investing too much in a singular aspect of multifaceted and individualistic autobiographies.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of this study has been towards attempting a dismantling of available theoretical approaches that have proved to be inadequate in reading both the classical transsexual subject as well as the hijra self. In the first chapter on the trans autobiographical imperative of the writers it was observed that Eakin's ideation involves looking at the invented self from the Lacanian lens of entering the symbolic, therefore, already involved in an organic process of being through language. However, trans theory informs one that the subject commits to the act of synthetic re-iteration. Moreover, the adherence to the symbolic involves being subject to its violences as well. The question of a safe narrative space or a safe space to narrate the self therefore was considered in the light of the autobiographies that show how it need not be a strictly curated locale but may be an abstract or tangible place one can carve for oneself. This act of speaking about oneself in novel infrastructures is by itself an act of asserting one's identity. Especially, in the case of how scholarly and institutionalized hostility defines and shapes the imperative of a hijra subject to write about herself and is given a specific direction. For instance, her need to talk about her life is complicated by her need to explain the misconceptions about being hijra.

In the second chapter, one turned to a magnified view of pioneers' autobiographies and the classical transsexual subjectivity therein. The main challenge of this section was to confront the idea of the classical transsexual subject as a monolith who speaks in the tongue of the clinic. It was demonstrated that the relationship between the clinic and the autobiographer is ambivalent and not one of master/ slave dynamics by relying on the evidence already found in the primary texts. The chapter also considered the consequences of the assumption that all classical writers were puppets at the mercy of the medical industrial complex pulling the strings. A major assumption that all authors pretended to be intersex was dispelled by pointing out to alternatives as well as the hitherto unnoticed nuances involved in the narrative strategy of showing an intersex conviction. An argument was then made that the classical transsexual subject demonstrates a politics that is outside the idea of posttranssexual as well as queer modalities.

The next chapter took a detailed analysis of the only available model to access hijra narratives i.e. the anthropological approach. First the idea of the third sex or

hijras as simply neither men nor women was taken up. This was followed by a discussion on hijra sexuality and its connotations with homosexuality. As a next step, the idea that hijra subjects are fixated on rituals and belong to a strictly coded hierarchical kinship structure was deconstructed. Overall, the oversimplification in understanding the community was argued against using textual evidence from the autobiographies.

The next two chapters talked about points of convergences where the twain meet and seem to be in dialogue with each other. The purpose of these chapters was to not prove commonalities or universality of experience but to build symbolic bridges of intertextual empathy across history, geography, class, race, etc. It was hypothesized that the moment of transsexing in the narratives is the moment of surgical achievement. In this regard, the fourth chapter was an exploration of how transsexing is also realized through the pre-surgical rhetorics of naming and being. The chapter began with the narrative trope of forced feminization as an invalidated trans technology. Interpellation and the struggle over it was then discussed in the light of all autobiographies and the instances they show about being hailed through slurs and the violence that accompanies the act.

The fifth chapter as the second part of ‘convergences’ sought to read the importance of castration (as a first or the only surgery) common to all the authors across the Atlantic and India. It began with considering the viability of the notion that the trans body is akin to Frankenstein’s monster. It was argued that being a teleologically focused concept, only the idea of the suffering trans body may be extracted from it. The varied ways in which the authors describe or repress the surgical procedure of castration was then illustrated to emphasize it as a pivoting moment. Also, it was argued that alternative instances to castration underscore the subjects’ plurality.

A CONCLUSION OF CONCLUSIONS

What is clear from the analyses undertaken so far is that both the Western and the Indian subjects are aligned along the act of transsexing the self and yet may not be taken to be representative figures owing to their remarkably diverse perspectives and narrative positions. The “transstory” if one may begin to call it as such, is intrinsically varied.

On the other hand, it would be fallacious to assume that despite cosmetic differences or examples of diversity, the transsexing story or transstory is fixated on achieving an end and proceeds to present an exhausting account of the means to do so. The narrative drive towards the all important moment of sex-change makes for narrative glory but the story does not end when it is accomplished. There is also an autobiographical excess that needs to be talked about. This excess arises from the imperative to tell the story and leaks outside the confines of the published work.

Authors may end their respective autobiographies with a unique dilemma or keep a channel for the life behind the narrative resolutely open; namely, lived reality summed up in words that exceeds it's own pages. When Lili Elbe is done telling her story to Niels Hoyer in the living room she opens up about the possibility of its publication. Towards the end of this final scene, she picks up a volume and reads from it. Hoyer recalls the scene in the last few pages of her text in the following manner—

“If I should not return, may it be appropriate to conclude my book with these words from Hans Jager.”

With a trembling voice Lili Elbe read the passage:

“ ‘When I myself am no longer here, I want my sad book of love to be my legacy, a testimony that I once lived. I imagine that this book will be read, read as few books are, by all who are unhappy in love, into whose hands it shall fall year after year, and I feel as if I could shake them all by the hand. And I have such an unspeakable longing; it is in fact the only longing that I have, to say farewell to all—oh, none can realize what ultimate peace this would be for me’ ” (Elbe 286-287).

Elbe knew her surgeries were experimental and ergo dangerous. She was aware that she would probably not live to tell her story herself. The denouement for her autobiographical imperative and it's excess comes from the expressively anticipated fact that she will not be forgotten like the Norwegian philosopher Jager whom she quotes. Jager lives in Elbe's words as much as he lives when read by others. He also gives breath to her life. This mutual exchange during that moment in her living room foreshadows the future readers who will read Elbe reading Jager and justify both her imperative and it's excess.

On a parallel note, Mona Ahmed has written two different endings, one as an email addressed to her editor and another as an open letter to her adopted daughter

who was taken away from her by her guru named Chaman. In both endings, the narrative is opened up albeit from different locations; not so much for posterity but for the life that remains to be lived by Ahmed. To the editor she calls Mr. Walter, she says,

I have slept between the mortuary on one side and new graves on the other. But this jungle is more peaceful than Chaman's place. I cannot be a slave to anyone. I cannot take orders from anyone, ever. I do not like advice from people. I want to do as I like. Whether it is my good or bad [sic].

Now we are eating grapes, so we send this to you, and then we will write more things.

Blessings,

Myself

Mona Ahmed (Ahmed 143).

Ahmed juxtaposes the graveyard of her ancestors where she has built her home with the suspended moment of eating grapes with Dayanita Singh as she presumably types the email on her behalf. It is possibly the last email they ever composed together to the editor but the promise to write more things lingers. Conversely, in her letter to her daughter, she says,

I wanted to make a palace for my princess. I started to build the waterfall for you to play in. I even built an entire zoo for all your animals, but the animals all died. I just want to be near you all the time. I have many problems here. They stole my dog and poisoned my monkey. If you were with me, I could face any problem in the world. But now I am alone, all alone in the graveyard.

Waiting for the day when you will return to me.

Abboo (father) (Ahmed 151).

It should be noted here that Ahmed's choice in addressing herself as the daughter's father instead of mother may represent either the hybridized sensibility discussed in Chapter 3 where the hijra subject can be momentarily homosexual, the third sex and a woman. It could also reflect a misgendering by her daughter who may have called her "abboo". Whatever may be the case, Ahmed's focus like in the first ending remains on the possibility of things to come.

This melancholy anticipation is in stark contrast with that of A. Revathi's who ends her narrative talking about the possibility of being given a managerial position at the NGO Sangama where she found much happiness and satisfaction. Her last lines read—"Though, I'd had my chances, I had not chosen to become a boss—I had chosen to remain alone, alienated from the community. Finally, I went back to work at Sangama" (Revathi 304). The brevity here makes for an already abrupt ending to seem even more unexpected. It is obvious that she is simultaneously cut off from her community in that she now lives alone and has restricted her associations at a professional level through NGO work but when even that chord is severed when she refuses to take up more responsibilities, she is perhaps, completely isolated. A balance is achieved when she immediately decides to go back but her stance on being with her community remains ambivalent.

Similarly, Laxminarayan Tripathi offers an abrupt ending in the last chapter where she discusses myths surrounding hijra identity. She says,

I have also heard of feminists who are against transgender people. They argue that although we feel we are women, there is a huge difference between *feeling* that one is a woman and actually *being* a woman. According to them, it is only a woman who can conceive and give birth to a child (Tripathi 180).

Tripathi is talking about a group that has come to be known as TERF or Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists in popular social media based trans discourse. It is unclear whether she is hinting at the attitudes of contemporary Indian feminists who may ignore trans issues due to such essentialist prejudices, or if she is making a political statement against the likes of Janice Raymond who Sandy Stone and much of trans theory is responding to by scorning the classical transsexual subject. To end her narrative thus begs the thought that the hijra subject is not on the roster of feminists anywhere, never mind trans or queer scholarship.

Two autobiographies end with an appeal to the readers. Those of Tamara Rees and Living Smile Vidya. Rees writes, "You, Society, are the Judge and Jury [sic]. In the name of God temper your judgment with mercy" (Rees 57). Vidya on the other hand says, I do not ask for heaven. I beg to be spared from living hell. I plead for me and fellow tirunangais [sic]. Thank you for your understanding (Vidya 143). Both Rees and Vidya accord the last word to make a case for both themselves and their respective communities. The imperative that culminates into the excess is transferred onto the reader.

Two narratives appear to have perfectly happy endings. One of them betrays the open-ended nature of the autobiographical excess somewhat evocatively. Roberta Cowell is ready to attend a ball and writes,

My hand is on the door-knob. I am trembling violently. Pull yourself together, girl. Yes, all right, then, have another look in that full-length mirror, if you think it will give you more confidence. In a few moments the dream of your life will be coming true. No jerkiness, hands flowing from the wrist, perfect poise. Just behave as though you were quite used to all this.

...Now I must speak to my host and hostess, and I must keep my voice low and soft. And now I'm dancing, and all the blood in my body has turned to music. The past is forgotten, the future doesn't matter, and the glowingly happy present is even better than I had hoped.

I am myself (Cowell 80).

The finality of being herself is beset by the suspense of how others in attendance will receive her. While she has already illustrated enough evidences of passing successfully for a ciswoman in public, she chooses to end her narrative with this anticipated debut at a ball. It is not that her femininity stands a standardized test through dance but only those moments of validations carry importance that she herself curates or attends to. Her autobiographical excess stretches out in several other unseen incidents to come that the reader can now imagine for herself.

Conversely, Dianna Boileau ends her story with the following final scene where she steps out of the hospital—

As I threaded my way precariously through the maze of corridors at the Toronto General Hospital, refusing the usual assistance of a wheelchair, I wore a carefree look and attitude because at last I was carefree. As carefree as the burden of being Canada's first sex-change would allow one to be.

My world, on that Monday morning, was a kind of Valhalla—I wore the air of a woman aware she is truly feminine.

As I walked down the hospital steps toward the waiting taxi, my suitcase in hand—I experienced a sort of rhapsody, an ecstasy before the cadence: Behold, I *am* a woman (Boileau 208).

Boileau is probably the only author in this study to refer to herself as a pioneer. That too in the last page of her narrative. While an interpretation of her autobiographical excess can always be imagined like in Cowell's case, Boileau uses the stroke of

‘being’ to foreclose her story perfectly. She refers to the title of her autobiography and asks the reader to literally behold her status as a woman. The vocabulary of ‘being’ with that of being beheld freezes the image. She exercises excruciating narrative control to encapsulate her entire story into the very title with which the reader began thereby leaving one no choice but to follow her all the way into the full circle she draws. It is not to say that her autobiographical excess cannot squeeze itself out. Boileau may have left several instances within her story to imagine the unsaid and the unmentioned. The excess remains. Towards the end, however, it is denied a passage in lieu of projecting a certain point of view.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Given the paucity of critical material relating to classical transsexual autobiographies, future works could look towards building an overarching (and more sensitive) models to interpret narrated trans lives, past and present. Trans theory jettisons the historical subject it seeks to liberate. The paradigm shift towards a queerer and inclusive future must sacrifice the conservative subject utterly invested in binary projections. An ideal interpretative model or theoretical intervention would seek to canonize the classical subject and her narrative legacies, however. There are also several case studies such as early sexological explorations of the “inverts” who were read as showing symptoms of homosexuality and not trans identities (Prosser 140). A future study could excavate these narratives and accord them their proper place in the trans canon. For other scholars interested in classical subjectivities prior to transsexual surgeries or after, various personal methodologies by individuals who have spoken about transsexing themselves could be considered outside the oft limiting rhetoric of trans theory such as Sandy Stone’s posttranssexual or Susan Stryker’s monster body.

As far as hijra subjectivities are concerned, future studies could turn their attention to personal or interceded narratives found in different infrastructures such as cyberspace or traditional media and develop an interpretative model outside the limited ideas of anthropological studies. Critical considerations of hijra orality also seem to be completely absent. One could initiate a comprehensive project that compares representations with self-representations. Moreover, with the abiding image of the hijra individual as representative of her insular community is a damaging idea, one could delve into a hijra phenomenology after Prosser and Salamon to locate

individual realities through hijra specific meanings in texts and bodies in discursive circulation.

Research that would find focus in comparative works is likely to initiate further dialogue between the trans texts themselves. While one could offer comparisons between starkly different trans cultures as this work has attempted to do, there are sharp differences within South Asia that warrant a consideration. As noted in Chapter 1, Ashwini Sukhthankar's comment on the class caste split between the hijra and the transgender/ transsexual communities is the perfect point of departure to entertain intersectional questions of class/ caste/ language within India (Sukhthankar 165). One could also look at a materialist assessment of the absence of hijras in subaltern studies and trace dominant narratives that have been built since hijra presence in ancient scriptures to Bollywood's objectification of hijra bodies today.

Margins may push other margins so a comparative research will have to be cautious to not privilege one identity over another—or at least recognize such inevitability if so happens—lest it defeats its own political purpose.

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