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A Third-Sex Subversion of a Two-Gender System*
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The *hijrās* occupy a precarious position in the Indian social matrix, as their ambiguous gender identity provokes conflicting feelings of respect, ridicule, and contempt. Often discussed as a "third sex" by anthropologists, most of India's *hijrās* were raised as boys before taking up residence in one of the many *hijrā* communities which extend to almost every region of India. Since the late 1980's, a number of European and American cultural theorists (e.g., Nanda 1990, 1993, 1994; Bullough and Bullough 1993) have pointed to the visibility of the *hijrā* in Indian society in order to articulate the cultural possibility of a more liberating, non-dichotomous organization of gender. Yet the lifestories of the Hindi-speaking *hijrās* I interviewed in Banaras with Veronica O'Donovan during 1993 reflect a very different reality from that suggested by Nanda—a reality based on familial rejection, cultural isolation, and societal neglect. When the *hijrā* lifestyle is discussed with respect to this contemporary reality instead of historical or mythical representation, their identification as a uniquely situated third sex becomes much more complicated. In their narratives, the *hijrās* seem to view themselves not as the title of Nanda's (1990) book *Neither Man nor Woman* suggests, but rather as "deficiently" masculine and "incompletely" feminine. It may be liberating to believe in the existence of an alternative gender which is not limited by societal expectations, but even the *hijrā* must create self-identity by resisting and subverting a very real and oppressive gender dichotomy—a dichotomy that becomes very apparent in the *hijrās'* own use of feminine and masculine speech.

Although anthropologists and sociologists have alluded to the *hijrās'* unusual speaking styles in their research (Freeman 1979; Lynton and Rajan 1974; Nanda 1990), no one has attempted to analyze the *hijrās'* speech patterns from any sort of linguistic perspective. Lynton and Rajan (1974) remark that the Hindustani-speaking *hijrās* they interviewed "use 'he' and 'she', 'him' and 'her', indiscriminately" (p. 192)—a misleading statement since gender is marked not on pronouns, but on verbs and adjectives. Similarly Nanda (1990), in the introduction to her ethnography published almost two decades later, explains somewhat simplistically that "Indian languages have three kinds of gender pronouns: masculine, feminine, and a formal, gender-neutral form" (preface, xxii). Nanda interviewed *hijrās* from a variety of different linguistic communities, her conversations mediated by translators in Gujarati, Hindi, and Panjabi. Like Lynton and Rajan before her, she asserts that there is no apparent reason for the *hijrās'* alternations between these feminine and masculine forms, claiming that the choice of gender is completely arbitrary. But in defining all "Indian languages" as having three kinds of gender pronouns, Nanda makes a gross generalization, especially since India hosts well over 2,000 languages and dialects within its borders from a variety of language families. My reason for mentioning these incorrect synopses of linguistic gender in
previous research on the hijrās is not to dismiss such studies as invalid, but rather to illustrate how anthropological fieldwork can be enhanced by an increased awareness of, and attentiveness to, linguistic phenomena. Nanda’s work in particular, as the first ethnography to take the hijrās’ own lifestories as primary, is an essential contribution to anthropological research. Yet her study would have been even more informative had she approached the hijrās’ life narratives from a linguistic perspective as well as an anthropological one.

Although the three Hindi-speaking communities O’Donovan and I spent time with in Banaras are isolated from one another both physically and ideologically, patterns of gesture and speech occur and reoccur. Constrained by a linguistic system which allows for only two morphological genders, Hindi-speaking hijrās, when uttering phrases that are self-referential, must gender themselves as either feminine or masculine. In contrast to the assertions made by Lynton and Rajan (1974) and Nanda (1990), I found that the hijrās, in their daily interactions, alternate between feminine and masculine speech in order to express relations of power—alternations that reflect hierarchical orderings of power in the dualistic gender system that excludes them. Their use of language reflects a lifestyle that is constantly self-defining, as they study, imitate, and parody dichotomous constructions of gender in an effort to gender themselves. Since verbs and adjectives in Hindi are marked for feminine and masculine gender, with verbs being marked in all three persons, the hijrās’ attempts at alternating constructions of female and male selves becomes apparent in quite basic choices of feminine and masculine verb and adjective forms.

The alternation between feminine and masculine self-reference in Hindi is quite easy to discern linguistically. The past tense of the verb honā ‘to be’, for instance, is realized as thā with masculine singular subjects, the with masculine plural subjects, thī with feminine singular subjects, and thī with feminine plural subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Past tense forms of honā ‘be, become’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 1 ma thā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 2 tu thā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sg. 3 va thā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 1 ham the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 2 tum the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pl. 3 ve/ap the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The habitual, progressive, and intransitive perfective verb forms in Hindi similarly show gender concord with the subject. These three aspectual tenses are formed by the addition of suffixes and verbal auxiliaries to the verb stem: aspect is indicated through the addition of explicit markers of various kinds to the stem; tense is indicated through the presence of one of the basic forms of honā ‘to be’ (i.e., present, past, presumptive, subjunctive). Again, the appearance of one of the vowels -ā, -e, -ī, or -ī signals the number (singular vs. plural) and gender (feminine vs. masculine) of the subject of the verb.
TABLE 2. Selected examples of first person verbal marking with jānā 'to go'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb tense</th>
<th>1st person masculine</th>
<th>1st person feminine</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>māi jāṅgā</td>
<td>māi jāṅgī</td>
<td>I will go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>māi gayā</td>
<td>māi gayī</td>
<td>I went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Habitual</td>
<td>māi jātā hū</td>
<td>māi jātī hū</td>
<td>I go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Habitual</td>
<td>māi jātā thā</td>
<td>māi jātī thī</td>
<td>I used to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>māi jā rāhā hū</td>
<td>māi jā rāhī hū</td>
<td>I am going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>māi jā rāhā thā</td>
<td>māi jā rāhī thī</td>
<td>I was going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Perfective</td>
<td>māi gayā</td>
<td>māi gayī</td>
<td>I went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfective</td>
<td>māi gayā hū</td>
<td>māi gayī hū</td>
<td>I have gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfective</td>
<td>māi gayā thā</td>
<td>māi gayā thī</td>
<td>I had gone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inflecting adjectives also agree with the nouns they modify in gender, number, and case, with -ā or -ē agreeing with masculine nouns and -ī with feminine nouns. Moreover, inflecting postpositions agree with the gender of the head noun, so that, for example, the postposition translated into English as 'of' will appear as kā when modifying a singular masculine noun, ke when modifying a plural masculine noun, and kī when modifying a singular or plural feminine noun. The hijrās' varied use of these forms, as well as their varied use of first, second, and third person verbal forms, reflects a unique dual-gender position in a society that views them as neither fully feminine nor fully masculine.

Since the majority of hijrās are raised as boys, they must learn how to project a new gender identity when they adopt the hijrā lifestyle—an identity which distances itself from masculine representations in its appropriation of feminine dress, social roles, gesture, and language. These appropriations often become self-conscious emblems of gender construction in the hijrās' narratives. Sunita, for instance, who although once associated with a hijrā community in Banaras now lives outside of the city with a male companion, views gender as something to be put on in the way one would put on a sāṛī (a dress traditionally worn by Indian women), an investiture which eventually leads to the acquisition of women's language:

(2) When I have put on a sāṛī, then I have to act like it. If I walk around like a man, then what's the advantage to wearing a sāṛī? When I've put on a sāṛī, grown out my hair, and put on earrings, I've become a woman so I will live as a woman. Emotions inside mean nothing. When I wear a sāṛī, I am a woman only. I walk like a woman. I laugh like a woman. Those who come here to be hijrās—those who understand everything about themselves—will begin to dance and sing. Then everything happens. Whoever knows his heart will feel at home. Whoever doesn't know his heart won't think right. If she wears a sāṛī, then she has turned into a woman. It is then that she will speak in the feminine.

Sunita continues this discussion by explaining that when she looks like a woman, she correspondingly walks, laughs, and talks like one, employing feminine-marked verb forms like those mentioned in excerpt (3) below, among them khāṭāf hū 'I eat' and jāṭṭīf hū 'I go'. Alternatively, she explains that when she wears a kurtā or lūṅgī, both of which are clothes traditionally worn by North Indian men, she speaks as a man, employing masculine-marked verb forms like khāṭām hū 'I eat'.
If I'm going to have a conversation with a man, then I won't wear a sārī. When I wear a sārī, then among us the conversation will be in the feminine; when I don't wear a sārī, then it's men's conversation, yes. For example, if I wear a lūngī-kurtā [dress and shirt worn by North Indian men], then it's like, "I eat[^m], "I go[^m]." [But] when wearing a sārī, I speak like a woman, "I eat," "I go." It's not difficult. He who knows just knows, right? He just knows that he's a hijrā. Now he's put on a sārī, now he's put on a lūngī-kurtā, so he's become masculine like a man.

Yet even though Sunita describes the acquisition of feminine speech as an unconscious process which merely coincides with the decision to wear a sārī, she is critically aware of the social meanings attached to her linguistic choices. In her conversations with us, Sunita almost always referred to herself in the first person feminine, yet she adamantly explained that her choice of linguistic gender is variable, and moreover, that this choice is intimately bound up with the role she decides to play in an interaction. It is when she wears men's clothes, she later elaborates, that she gives orders to her housemates or speaks more formally with a non-hijrā man, using the polite form of the imperative. This style of speaking is at odds with the self she presents when she cooks breakfast or dinner in the kitchen, an activity which prompts her to chat casually with other hijrās and neighborhood women in feminine speech, using intimate and familiar forms of the imperative.

Sunita's choice of language, then, is contingent not only upon the social role she is performing at the moment, but also upon the addressee, whose gender calls for an appropriate level of politeness. She is highly aware of the fact that her speech changes with the gender of the hearer, explaining in excerpt (4) that when she converses with a woman she speaks as a woman; when she converses with a man she speaks as a man.^[5]

[^m]: I walk.

[^4]: mujh ko koī bāt nahī lagātī hai/
  maī aurat jaisā bohtī hū, ... ādmī
  se ādmī jaisā bāt kartaī hū, ... *jo
  jaisā mīltā hai us se vaisā hī bāt
  karta hū/ ... jaisa koī ā gayā to
  kahta hai [in rapid speech, falling
  intonation], "kyā bāt hai"/ ...
By the end of the passage, however, it becomes clear that when Sunita claims, "I speak just like the person I meet." she actually means that she makes her speech correspond to the level of intimacy she feels with the addressee. If a male stranger comes by her house uninvited, then using rapid speech and falling intonation, Sunita will respond kya bat hai 'what's the matter?'—a response which for her represents "men's language." Yet if the male visitor is someone she is intimate with, and even more importantly, if he is someone who wants her to perform a task that she does not want to perform, then she will employ feminine-marked phrases like maai ja rahif huu 'I am going', maai khai rahif huu 'I am eating', using slow speech and rising intonation. Sunita later comments that she employs the latter, more-feminine style primarily in her conversations with male friends, who allow her to become fully feminine. By assuming what she refers to as a submissive and coquettish posture, she is able to have ha ha hi hi—an interjection which connotes pleasure, laughter, and flirtation.

The acquisition of a feminine persona is not an easy transition for all hijras, nor is the female/male gender construction as clearly delineated as it is for Sunita in her narratives. Priya, a hijra from one of the hijra communities in Banaras, wrestles with the symbolic import of feminine and masculine speech in her everyday interactions. Unlike the other hijras we interviewed, Priya leads a quiet and secluded life away from her group, seeing her fellow hijras only during their morning song and dance performances. In the home she shares with a small family, she dresses and speaks only as a man so that her housemates will feel comfortable with her presence, her femininity visible only in her topknot, earrings, nose ring, and understated eye make-up. Priya spent the first sixteen years of her life as a boy, yet never felt wholly comfortable with this role, ultimately deciding to undergo castration so as to adopt the hijra lifestyle. Since she had spent most of her boyhood adhering to male roles and representations, this transition was not an easy or fluid one. She explains in excerpt (5) that the acquisition of women's speech in particular was a long and laborious process, so much so that it eventually interfered with her status as a hijra since group members "always and only speak as women when together." Her hijra peers, for instance, aware of the trouble she was having from the outset, would jokingly refer to her as bhaiya 'brother' or caca 'uncle', designations which brought her great grief:

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(5) ghar me, to ... mardanah paahle tham/ to mardanah bolii boltee-boltei hai/ ... jab hijra ko janaa parta hai to parivartan karnaa parta hai, [Hijras] werei masculine before, so in the home they are always speakingi in the masculine. When the hijra has to leave, he has to make a change.
Here they didn't speak like boys.
When I left home—when I left home, my speech at home was masculine so I spoke masculine. Everybody was calling me bhaiya 'brother', bhaiyaa, they were calling me caca 'paternal uncle', caca, they were speaking like that. So it took a lot of time to make a change, it took time to make a change. But after speaking and speaking for a very long time, it eventually became a habit—in about six or seven months.

Priya's transition from male to female speech, then, was a highly conscious process, one that required several months of practice (or in Priya's own words bolte-bolte bolte-bolte 'speaking and speaking, speaking and speaking') before it adat ho gayi 'became a habit'. It is interesting to note that Priya, unlike Sunita, consistently employs the masculine first-person singular, using masculine-marked verbs like ayam 'came', instead of the feminine counterpart ayi.

Throughout her conversations with us, Priya emphasized again and again how necessary it is for hijras to achieve fluency in women's language. Indeed, the use of feminine speech is so expected within the hijra community that the use of masculine reference will provoke angry retaliation. Priya adds in excerpt (6) that hijras "even give curses like women"—meaning that they refrain from using those curses which involve negative reference to the addressee's mother or sister:

(6) nahay banaras me nahai hai .. banaras me koii mardanii jananaa—koii parasand nahai kartii hai .. mardanii kah do to jhagri kar leegi / .. apne logoo me to bolte leegi .. to aurat jaisii .. gali bhii dega .. to aurat jaisii .. mardanii gali

nahi detem hai hijra .. aurato jaisii ..

No, it's not that way in Banaras. In Banaras, no one--no one likes to be known as a man. Address someone in the masculine and we'll fight. Among ourselves we speak like women. We even give curses like women. Hijras don't give curses like men, but like women. So we will never say "your mother's..." or "your sister's...", we won't say them. We won't give these curses. [We curse] like women. Men say "your mother's...", "your sister's..." she's a saali ['wife's sister'; a term of abuse directed to women], etc., these kinds, "he's a little saali" ['wife's brother'; a term of abuse directed to men]. We won't say that.

It is interesting that when Priya includes herself as a member of the hijra community and speaks in the first-person plural, her self-reference switches from the masculine to the feminine. When explaining how she and the other hijras in her community
curse, for instance, she employs feminine-marked future forms, among them *jhagra kar lēgī†* we will fight†, *bolēgī†* we will speak†, *gālī bhī degī†* we will give† curses‘. *kahēgī†* we will say†. Although she identifies herself as masculine when referring to herself independently of other hijrās, she constructs herself as feminine when viewing herself as part of the larger community, a community which aggressively identifies itself as feminine. This is perhaps related to the fact that she almost always refers to hijrās collectively in the feminine. In excerpt (5) she used the masculine, but her choice of gender there seems to be determined by the term hijrā itself, a noun which is grammatically masculine and which acts as the understood subject in most of her sentences.

The antipathy towards masculine linguistic forms which Priya alludes to in excerpt (6) is also reflected in the hijrā naming system. When a new member enters the hijrā community, she is given a woman’s name to replace the name of her former, more male self. The hijrās are discouraged from referring to each other with these remnants of their previous lives, yet tellingly, they often employ them in disputes. If a hijrā is in a fierce argument with another member of her community, one of the most incisive insults she can give is to question her addressee’s femininity by using her male name. This is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that hijrās are intensely aware of how they are perceived, not only by their peers, but by other Indians as well. Sunita, for example, is critically aware of how she is addressed when outside of her home. While many men encounter her on the street by using the intimate imperative *cal hat*, a form which, when used between strangers, translates rudely as ‘move it’, she claims that others use the polite form *cal jāte* or ‘please move’. It is this latter group of people, she says, who are most likely to address her in the feminine form in public, an address which for her symbolizes respect.

Priya is also aware of the social meanings attached to her use of language, so much so that she hides her female speech and mannerisms while at home with her landlord’s family, giving us glimpses of it only when she relays group interactions. In contrast to Sunita, then, who sees language as something which can be used to enhance the performance of a gender role, Priya sees language as a deeply personal matter. When explaining the structure of her own hijrā community, she carefully frames her discussion in terms of father/son relationships, perhaps in an effort to make her explanation more acceptable to outsiders. When she describes why hijrās like herself have chosen to live apart from the community, she compares the leader of the group to a father and its members to sons, explaining that “when families have several children, some sons live with their father, others live apart from him.” She maintains this use of masculine kinship terms, however, only when speaking in the third person about other hijrās from the adopted standpoint of an outsider. When she mimics her own interactions with other hijrās in the community, especially when using first or second person to do so, she shifts to feminine speech. At a number of points in her conversations with us, Priya pointed out that the speech she was using was very different from the speech she would use in the hijrā
community. When we questioned this claim, she produced as evidence a number of sample conversations that might occur among in-group members, employing feminine marking on first and second person verbs:

(7) to ham logō mé cācā vagārah nāhi, kahtē hai' na, ki apne se mausī, mausī, kahēgīf, ... mausī kahēgīf, ... apne guru ko guru bolēgīf, ... musalmān log rahēgīf to bolēgīf, khalā, ... khalā guru, ... aise ham hī bāt kartī hai' ... zyādātar se strīlig calta hai' is mē ... strīlig, ... auratō kī bācīt is se caltī hai' ... jab sath-sath rahatīf hai', to hamesā strīlig mē bāt kartīf hai' ... abhi ki vo ā jāēngīf, to ham isī kapre mē hai, magar bāt vahi hogā ... "kyō gayīf thīf," "kāhā thīf," "kya kar rahīf thīf," "kāhā gayīf thīf," ... "to badhāi kyū nāhi āyī," "kāhān kāhōgīf," / ... āpas mē ham log aise hī bolī hai, "maī kar rahīf hū," "maī já rahīf hū," "maī kha rahīf hū" // So among ourselves cācā 'paternal uncle', etc., isn't said, we callī ourselves mausī 'maternal aunt', mausī, we sayī mausī. We callī our guru guru. If Muslim people are presentī, they'll say khalāf 'maternal aunt' [an urdu term], khalā guru. This is the way we talkī. Mostly it's in the feminine—in the feminine. It's like the conversation of women. When we'reī together, we always talkī in the feminine. If someone [a fellow hijār] were to come here right now, I'd be in these clothes [lūṅī, kurtā], but our conversation would be like this: "Why hadī you [intimate] goneī?" "Where wereī you [intimate]?" "What wereī you [intimate] doingī?" "Why didn'tī the badhāī [expected payment for a performance] comeī?" "Willī you [familiar] eatī?"

Although Priya referred to her guru as dādā 'paternal grandfather' in the beginning of one conversation with us, she later refers to her guru as dādī 'paternal grandmother' when she reconstructs a group interaction which revolved around her, describing her by using feminine-marked adjectives.

In light of both Priya's and Sunita's clearly articulated reflections on their alternating uses of feminine and masculine speech, it is interesting that Aruna, the leader of a second Banaras community, adamantly insists that hijārs never speak as men. Like Priya, Aruna creates a number of feminine-marked phrases as examples of hijār speech, together with a number of intimate second person imperatives, such as tū khā le 'you [intimate] eat!' and tū pakā le 'you [intimate] cook!' Since imperatives in Hindi are not marked for gender, Aruna's inclusion of these forms as examples of feminine speech works to support Sunita's claim that intimacy and familiarity is normally associated with women's language:

(8) hā/hamesā auratō kī bolī bolīf hai' kabhī bhī ādmi ke jaisā nāhī bolīf hai'/ ... jaise, "maī já rahīf hū ī" "jā rahīf bahan," "tū khā le," "tū pakā le," "maī ābhi ā rahīf hū" // Yes, we always speakī women's speech. We never ever speakī like a man. It's like, "I'm goingī," "sister is goingī," "you [intimate] eatī," "you [intimate] cookī!" "I'm comingī nowī."
Aruna usually makes linguistic claims like those in (8), however, only after issuing a stream of assertions which might be said to constitute the hijā 'party line', namely, that hijrās never have castration operations, never have relations with men, never take on new names, and never speak as men. Aruna, who has a high-profile in her district of Banaras, is very aware of how her own self-presentation affects societal opinion, especially in light of the recent increase of anti-hijrā violence in northern India; she is more interested than the other hijrās in projecting a self that conforms to societal expectations—a self that is both ascetically motivated and anatomically determined. Although studies by Indian journalists and sociologists (e.g., Mitra 1983; Sharma 1989; Singh 1982) have worked to dispel the cultural myth that hijrās are born as hermaphrodites, reporting in-depth about the life-threatening testicle and penis castrations that hijrās endure, a large portion of Indian society still clings to the belief that all hijrās were born with ambiguous sex organs. Aruna's insistence that the hijrās have always had feminine names and have never spoken in the masculine serves to support this perception, affirming a cultural belief that the hijrā lifestyle is not socially constructed, but rather something that begins at (or before) birth.

Most of the hijrās we interviewed, with the exception of Priya who became a hijrā as an adult, primarily employ feminine marked verbs when speaking in the first person or when speaking to other hijrās in the second person. When using the third person to refer to other hijrās, however, the hijrās are much less consistent, their choice of marking dependent on the relative social status of the referent in question. When the hijrā speak in the third person and express distance from the referent, particularly when the referent is perceived as either a superior or a subordinate, they tend to make greater use of the masculine: in contrast, when the hijrā express solidarity or familiarity with the referent, they tend to make greater use of the feminine. In excerpt (9) below, for example, Sunita explains how the most well-known hijrās in Banaras, namely Idu, Shanti, and Shabdana, came to be so important within the hijrā community. When describing how hijrās reach positions of power in the hijrā network, and how she herself will someday aquire a position of power, Sunita switches back and forth between feminine and masculine reference. Hijrās rely not only upon their own internal systems of law and order, but also upon elaborate familial structures which delegate various feminine roles to different members of the group, among them dādī 'paternal grandmother', nānī 'maternal grandmother', mausi 'mother's sister', cācī 'uncle's wife', and bahin 'sister'. Fundamental to this system is the guru-disciple relationship, which Sunita describes using only masculine terminology: she uses the masculine dādā 'paternal grandfather' and the masculine celā 'male disciple' instead of the feminine dādī 'paternal grandmother' or feminine celī 'female disciple'. Although Sunita sometimes employs feminine marking on the verb when referring to Idu, Shanti, and Shabdana, particularly in the first few lines of the following excerpt below when the three of them act as subjects of a particular action, she consistently employs the masculine kinship term dādā when relating their social status:
It is interesting that at the end of the passage, when Sunita imagines herself in the same position of power as these three elders, she refers to her future self with the feminine kinship term dādī. This shift indicates that Sunita feels obligated to use the masculine when signaling respect for, or distant from, the referent in question—an employment which is of course unnecessary when she refers to herself.

A different sort of distancing by use of the masculine gender occurs whenever Sunita refers to Muslim hijṛās, with whom, as a Hindu, she feels somewhat at odds. Although Muslims and Hindu hijṛās often live together harmoniously in the same communities—an arrangement rarely found in mainstream Banaras where the tension between Muslims and Hindus is quite pervasive—Sunita seems to feel...
somewhat threatened by Muslim hijrās, as they hold powerful positions within the Banaras hijrā network, and indeed, throughout all of northern India. The distance Sunita feels towards Muslim hijrās is reflected in her use of the singular musalmān, itself considered masculine, and in her employment of third person masculine-marked verb forms when Muslim hijrās act as subjects, as in the short narrative reproduced in (10):

(10) maî hindā hū, to apnā hindā kā kām kartī, jo musalmān hai, vah apnā musalmān kā kām kartāṁ hai, apnā dharma nībhātāṁ hai, maî apnā dharma nībhātī fī hū/ I'm Hindu so I practicef my Hindu customs, he who is Muslim practicesm Muslim customs. He performsm his dharma, I performf my dharma.

This passage invites comparison with Priya's reference to Muslims in excerpt (7) above: musalmān log rahēgī f, to bolēgī f, khālā, khālā guru 'If Muslim people are presentf, they'll sayf khālaf 'maternal aunt' [an urdu term], khālā guruf. Priya not only pluralizes the masculine musalmān to musalmān log 'Muslim people' so as to include the feminine, she also employs feminine-marked verb forms like rahēgī f and bolēgī f. Sunita's use of the third-person masculine in (10), then, perhaps reflects her own opinion that Muslims are below her on the social hierarchy, evidenced in her insistence throughout her interviews with us that Hindu hijrās existed long before Muslim hijrās, and moreover, that it is only hijrās from low caste backgrounds who convert to Islam and eat meat.

A comparable instance of such distancing can be found in Aruna's references to Sunita. After a fairly serious argument with Aruna, Sunita left Aruna's community in Banaras and went to live with a male partner in a neighboring village outside the city. In a manner consistent with her claims, Aruna almost always uses feminine forms when referring to other hijrās; yet when she refers to Sunita, who apparently insulted her authority as mālkin of her community, Aruna uses the masculine. Two examples of this employment are reproduced in excerpt (11):

(11) bacpan se yahi kām hai/ ... ab jākar [a neighboring village] mē rah rahām hai/ ... merā jajmānī hai, to maî un logō ko de detī hū/ He [Sunita] has beenm here since childhood, [but] now he left and is livingm in [a neighboring village]. It's the home of my patron, but I gave him away to those people.

Through the use of masculine-marked postpositions like kām 'ofm' and masculine-marked verb forms like rah rahām hai 'he is livingm', Aruna is perhaps signaling that Sunita is not only estranged from her, but also inferior to her.

An interesting kind of masculine self-reference sometimes occurs when the hijrās refer to themselves as boys or tell of their childhood. As mentioned earlier, Aruna rarely employs masculine first person verbs, yet at two points in the telling of her lifestory—when she was recalling her past and explaining how she came to
realize that she was a hijrā—Aruna does in fact employ the first-person masculine, as reproduced in (12):

(12) hā/ māi bolīf ki paṭna mē rahne se merā to beizzatī hogā/ merā ghar válō kī māi aisā dūr calīf jāā, ki logo mē beizzatī nahī hogā/ ... koi log puchēge, kahēge, to kah dēnge kī pānī mē rāhkar mar gayīf/ ... merā gaṅgā ji ke kināre ghar thā, merā mābhāp bolā ki "calor/ ... jāne do/ isko acchā lagegā"/ ... to māi gyārah baje rāt ko āyāf ... apne ghar se/ ... māi apne guru ke yahā pāc sāl se bātām huām//

I told them that dishonor would come from my living at home. I would go so far away from the people at home that there would be no dishonor among them. If some people would ask them [about me]—would talk—they should say that I drowned in the water and diedf. My house was on the bank of the Ganges. My mom and dad said, "Come on, let him go, it will be okay." So at 11:00 at night, I leftm home. I wasm sittingm at the house of my guru at five years of age.

During this short narrative, Aruna moves from feminine self-reference in the first line to masculine self-reference in the last two lines, shifting directly after she reproduces a childhood interaction between herself and her parents. Nanda (1990) alludes to similar linguistic shifts in the preface to her own ethnography when she explains her translation techniques, remarking that she translates pronouns which refer to the hijrās as feminine, unless "referring to the hijrā in the past, when he considered himself a male" (xviii, preface). The linguistic shift in the above excerpt perhaps reflects the fact that Aruna, like many of the other hijrās we interviewed, has what might be called a discontinuous gender identity—an identity which gradually changed from masculine to feminine after arrival in the hijrā community. As in the previous two examples, the hijrā's use of masculine marking in this case might reflect her own distancing from her previous self, a self that continuously provides an unpleasant reminder that her femininity is appropriated instead of genuine.

The four hijrās who make up a third community in Banaras, all born into Hindu families who ostracized them, have now adopted the religious practices of the Muslim families they live with—families who in many ways suffer a similar marginalization as residents of a city that is thought of throughout North India as the "holy Hindu city." The 80 year old Chandra is the dādā of the group, and after 69 years of speaking like a woman, we rarely heard her use any masculine speech. The third time we visited her, however, Chandra's favorite disciple had fled back to her own village after a serious financial scuffle with another community member. Chandra was feeling intense rage at the cause of this dispute, as well as deep grief for her loss. Wailing merā betā, merā betā 'my son, my son' and clapping in anger, Chandra screamed about the punishment that the hijrā who precipitated the fight would receive, venting her anger entirely through use of the masculine first and third person. It would seem that for the hijrās, as Priya suggests in excerpt (6), anger is an emotion which is best expressed in the masculine. Perhaps rage is a gut-level reaction that recalls the masculine forms that the hijrā produced prior to her
entry into the community, or perhaps masculine forms are simply a dramatic and forceful tool for venting such rage. Regardless of the reason, the hijrā is clearly aware of the social meanings such forms convey.

I would like to conclude this article by suggesting that such gendered negotiations, although perhaps particularly overt in the Hindi-speaking hijrā community, are not unique to alternative gender identities: rather, women and men of all communities manipulate cultural expectations of femininity and masculinity in order to establish varying positions of power. Yet the structure of these manipulations is influenced by, and indeed sometimes determined by, societal ideologies of femininity and masculinity. While the Banaras hijrās challenge such ideologies in their conflicting employments of masculine and feminine speech, their employment of linguistic gender is nevertheless influenced by a very traditional and dichotomous notion of gender. While they tend to make greater use of the masculine when conducting business, giving orders, speaking with men, or signaling distance from the referent, they are more likely to employ the feminine when requesting, cooking, flirting, speaking with other women, or expressing intimacy and solidarity. Occupying an ambiguously-situated position in a society that has marginalized them, hijrās are perhaps more attentive to these linguistic ideologies than their non-hijrā peers, enacting and contesting them in their everyday projections of self.

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NOTES

1. For more extensive discussions of transsexuality in Indian tradition and mythology, see Goldman (1993), Nanda (1990), and O'Flaherty (1973, 1980).
2. The term Hindustani, although seldom used today, refers to one of the lingua francas which developed during the last two centuries as a result of increased trade and pilgrimages between linguistically disparate regions. Although for the British administration the terms Hindustani and Urdu were essentially synonymous, Indian speakers distinguished Hindustani from Urdu as a more colloquial and less refined language.
3. More precisely, masculine forms of inflecting adjectives end in -ā in the singular direct and -e in the singular oblique, plural direct, and plural oblique cases; the feminine forms always end in -ī, whether singular or plural, direct or oblique.
4. I have chosen pseudonyms for all of the hijrās appearing in this article and have avoided giving the names of the three hijrā communities we researched to preserve their anonymity. I have also chosen to use 'her' and 'she' to refer to the hijrās since they prefer to be referred to and addressed
in the feminine. (It is interesting to note that when Indian journalists are sympathetic to the hijrás they tend to refer to them in the feminine, but when unsympathetic they use the masculine.)

5. The superscripted $l$ and $m$ in the Hindi transcriptions and English translations stand for feminine and masculine marking, respectively. Other transcription conventions I have used include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;&gt;</td>
<td>pauses of one second or more, measured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>syllabic emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>false start</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>embedded quotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>extra-linguistic commentary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have tried to transcribe each of the Hindi passages as spoken, maintaining any anomalies in gender agreement which occurred in the interviews. In excerpt (3), for instance, there are a number of markings which are inconsistent with standard Hindi, such as when Sunita treats the feminine noun bât 'conversation' as masculine, modifying it with the postposition kë$m instead of kë$l. These agreement inconsistencies are related to the fact that many of the hijrás we interviewed spoke a number of languages and dialects, the most common of these being Northern Bhojpuri. Like Hindi, Bhojpuri features gender-marking in all three persons of the verb, although the distribution of these markings and their phonological realizations are quite different. I plan to discuss gender inconsistencies like those in excerpt (3), together with the hijrás use of Bhojpuri, in a subsequent article.

6. Interestingly, Sunita's claim here parallels an earlier claim that she made when we asked her about her use of Bhojpuri as compared to Hindi. "When I speak with a Bhojpuri speaker I speak Bhojpuri," she explained. "When I speak with a Hindi speaker I speak Hindi."

REFERENCES


