
Project Title: Managing the Margins: Public Administration and Lives of Hijras of Lahore, Pakistan
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Problem Statement: *Hijras* of Pakistan are a group of heterogeneous individuals with contested identities which can broadly be categorized as sex and gender queer. Even though no moral or religious justification exists for the social exclusion of the *Hijras* in Pakistan, their status in society is that of a pariah. Until 2009, *Hijras* were not legally recognized as “persons” by the state as no third-gender category was available in the National Identity Card. Similarly, they did not have the right to vote till 2012. Apart from legal problems, *Hijras* also face multiple problems in civil society which include abandonment by their families, illiteracy, lack of access to health services and employment opportunities. Despite their marginalized status in society, no systematic investigation of their social and institutional experiences has so far been done. More importantly, there is a limited understanding of the lives of *Hijras* and their intersection with the legal and administrative machinery of the state of Pakistan. This limits the understanding of their problems and effectiveness of any policies implemented to improve their social conditions.

Statement of Objectives: Situated at the intersection of multiple social, political and administrative literatures related to identity, inclusion and citizenship, this project focuses on *Hijras* of Pakistan to empirically investigate the following research questions: 1) Did formal recognition by the state results in any (material or symbolic) change in the lived experiences and self-identity of the *Hijras*? 2) Which social institutions are important for the daily lives and self-identity of the *Hijras*? How do these institutions intersect with the identity, citizenship and agency of the *Hijras*? 3) How do interactions with front-line workers influence social and self-identity of the *Hijras*? What is the attitude of front-line workers towards the *Hijras*?

Methodological Approach: To answer my research questions, I am conducting ethnographic interviews with 30-50 *Hijras* of Lahore, Pakistan. My summer project will primarily focus on in-depth interviews with 10-20 street-level bureaucrats in various government departments of Lahore, Pakistan. These departments include Social Welfare Department, National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), and Police. In these interviews, I will focus on trying to understand the interactions of *Hijras* and frontline workers of government and the implications of this interaction on the personal identity and citizenship of the *Hijras*. In addition, I will focus on elucidating the attitude of the government employees towards policy changes related to the *Hijras* and their social situation. This phase of my research focusing on the street-level bureaucrats will last for about 3 months. The fieldwork will be carried out in Lahore, Pakistan lasting about six months.

Intellectual Merit: This research project will make multiple contributions to socio-political theory. First, this project will help in understanding the nature and dynamics of state influence on lives of marginalized individuals and the implications of this interaction for social equity in society. Second, this research project contributes to the small but growing literature concerned with the “politics of the subject”¹ and focused on marginalized populations in public administration theory². Third, an unanswered question in broader socio-cultural literature is the nature and amount of autonomy available to individuals having limited formal inclusion in society. Recent years have seen multiple authors arguing for or against the reformatory potential of such groups. *Hijras* are one such group of individuals who do not have the right to marry, to have sex and to have children, and cannot access various services of the state. Therefore, analyzing how *Hijras* respond to this systematic marginalization in their daily lives will contribute to finding the answer to the question of agency of in-existent individuals. Fourth, by analyzing impact of formal changes in law on lives of the *Hijras* and the focus on the front-line workers will help us understand whether changes in formal law also influence the behavior of street-level bureaucrats and if the behavior of street-level bureaucrats influences the effectiveness of changes in the legal status of the *Hijras*.

Broader Impact: This project will help understand what social inclusion means for the *Hijras* and what policy changes they think can improve their experience in society. These findings will be shared with the relevant policy makers, concerned non-profit organizations and *Hijra* leadership working for the improvement of living conditions of the *Hijras*. In addition, the results of this research will be published in the form of academic article/s or a book which will help improve understanding of the experience of marginalization in general and that of *Hijras* in particular.

¹ Catlaw, T. J. (2007). *Fabricating the people: Politics and administration in the biopolitical state*. University of Alabama Press.

² Dahl, A., & Soss, J. (2014). Neoliberalism for the common good? Public value governance and the downsizing of democracy. *Public Administration Review*, 74(4), 496-504.