Vol. 25(2), 2025, pp.47-64, ISSN: 2072-0394(Print), ISSN: 2663-8886(Online)

Unheard Voices: The Interpellation of Transgender Identities in the Pakhtun Socio-Religious Context

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Abstract

This paper explores the reimagination of transgender identities in the Pakhtun region of Pakistan, recognized for its conventional norms, in the context of the Tabligh Jumaat/Dawah. By engaging Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, it unpacks how transgender individuals experience identity crises within this socio-religious space of purification. A qualitative research approach was employed, using non-probability sampling to interview eight transgenders. The study emphasizes how the Tabligh 'hails' transgender individuals, influencing their self-conceptualization and social identities amid the gender and larger religious-cultural dynamics. The Pakhtun societal milieu offers both opportunities for spiritual engagement and contravenes ingrained societal norms. This analysis, grounded in Althusser's Institutional State Apparatuses (ISAs), provides a nuanced understanding of transgender experiences and the potential transformative effect of the inclusive/exclusive socio-religious ecologies.

Keywords: Transgender, Identity Crises & Gender Order, Institutional State Apparatuses, Interpellation, Socio-Religious Participation in Pakhtun Context.

Introduction

The North-Western/Pakhtun region of Pakistan, celebrated for its tribal cultural heritage and unbending conformity to traditional norms, is undergoing a notable transformation as it interacts with existing complex identities and geopolitical dynamics in response to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and Talibanization, globally and locally. So, this paper presents an interesting case of (trans/re)formation through

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the interaction of transgender individuals (with)in the Tablighi Jumaat/Dawah.[1] The Tablighi Movement is an Islamic missionary initiative focused on spiritual rejuvenation and communal outreach. Likewise, the main research question explores the identity crises experienced by transgender individuals in the Pakhtun region who engage with the Tabligh, utilizing Louis Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation to explicate the underlying apparatuses of their identity formation and negotiation. Althusser's theory of interpellation suggests that individuals are 'hailed' into social positions by ideological structures and presents a critical framework for understanding how religious and cultural ideologies (in)form the identities of transgender individuals. In the arena of the Pakhtun region, where gender norms are rigidly defined and traditional roles are rigorously sustained, the intersection of transgender identity with the Tabligh Jumaat offers a unique lens to explore the reconstitution of the self and social identity embedded in a matrix of desire, shame, and piety. Transgender individuals in the Pakhtun region, traditionally marginalized and subjected to social exclusion, face distinctive challenges and opportunities when participating in the Tabligh. It highlights piety and religious compliance; institutional and communal alignment presents both a medium for deeper spiritual engagement and a potential site of conflict with pervasive cultural and gender norms. Such a dyad initiates a critical inquiry into processes through which transgender individuals leverage their identities within the framework of the Tabligh and its foundational ideological infrastructures—apparatuses.

The study will begin by providing a brief synopsis of the socio-cultural context of the Pakhtun region, redirecting the significance of the historical and contemporary status of transgender individuals and their experiences of joining the Tabligh Jumaat. Embedded in this situational/thematic groundwork, Althusser's concept of interpellation is utilized to scrutinize how the movement 'hails' transgender individuals, thereby influencing their self-conceptualization and social identities. It highlights how global religious movements intersect with local cultural practices to produce complex and contested identities, particularly for those at the fringes of the prevalent societal norms. Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) helps to make sense of how gender identities, particularly transgender identities, are mobilized ideologically in maintaining social order within Pakhtun Islamic communities. Such foundational debates about identity and morality reveal the value of gender order to the state and religious institutions (Connell, 2004). Moreover, the conservation of traditional gender norms as ISAs highlights both the mechanisms of

[1] Tablighi Jumaat is a group of people that is more closely associated with an evangelical or a missionary Christian group in the context of Islam. Dawah literally means the invitation to join/embrace Islam. We are focusing on the aspect of Dawah only in Tabligh and the inclusion of transgender into that group and its analysis. However, in the paper we will refer to it as Tabligh to convey the sense of Jumaat- congregation; Dawah-invitation, as explained.

control and the resistance they generate as counter-narratives and unpacks the concept of liminality (Turner, 1969; 2017). The element of desire in relation to ideology, therefore, relies on Althusser's interpellation through ISAs. Moreover, this analysis highlights control mechanisms, resistance, and the ongoing identity struggle, incorporating Žižek's (2019) concept of the sublime, where ideologies generate fictions at the collective unconscious level and shape the socio-cultural context.

Theoretical Framework and the Contextualization of the Pakhtun Community and Gender Norms

The Pakhtun community, predominantly located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan, is known for its distinct cultural and social practices governed by Pakhtunwali, a code emphasizing honor, hospitality, and compliance with traditional gender roles (Ahmed, 1980). Gender segregation and the rigid binary understanding of gender roles are ingrained in Pakhtun society (Khan, 2024). This cultural backdrop significantly influences the experiences of transgender individuals within the Pakhtun community. Likewise, gender identity is a cultural construct and a continuum of identity matrix marked by the global and local meaning-making processes, practices, and values (Bamberg et.al., 2011).

Althusser's Theory of Subject Formation and Interpellation

Althusser's (1971) theoretical framework offers a lens to understand how societal structures shape individual identities. Althusser theorizes that ISAs, such as family, education, and religion, play a crucial role in the interpellation of individuals into social roles and identities. This process of interpellation creates subjects who internalize and perpetuate the dominant ideology. Althusser's concept of ISAs is particularly relevant in analyzing how transgender individuals in the Pakhtun community experience identity formation and societal integration. Religious institutions, as powerful ISAs, often reinforce gender norms that marginalize transgender identities (Puar, 2007).

Tabligh, a form of Islamic missionary work, aims to promote Islamic values and practices among Muslims. Participation in the Tabligh offers a unique context to examine the negotiation of transgender identity within a religious framework. Research on religious movements like the Tabligh often highlights their role in reinforcing traditional gender roles (Janson, 2016). However, the engagement of transgender individuals in such movements remains a nascent area of inquiry (Dhar, 2024). This study addresses this gap by investigating how transgender individuals in Peshawar, KP, experience their (gender) identity by joining Tabligh in a bid for societal approval. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-religious dynamics at play and offers insights into the potential for inclusive religious spaces. Tabligh movements, notably the Tablighi Jumaat, are grassroots missionary

activities that aim to revive and strengthen Islamic faith and practice. These movements serve as ISAs by promoting specific interpretations of Islam that conserve traditional gender norms (Janson, 2016). The Tabligh emphasizes gender roles and norms through teachings of Tabligh, and this pro-status quo approach functions as a hailing mechanism, calling individuals to embody and perform gender in ways that align with historical and cultural precedents and become 'good subjects.' Our findings suggest that the participation of transgender in Tabligh enunciates a sense of collective identity and mutual monitoring by organizing communal religious activities as community-building and surveillance, simultaneously. Such an environment of community regulation acts as an ISA that disciplines gender nonconformity through societal pressure, effectively hailing individuals to comply with the accepted gender order.

The interplay of Tabligh as religious ISAs significantly impacts transgender Muslims, who often experience transitioning through their identities; oftentimes finding them at odds with the ideologies promoted by these ISAs. Notably, in relation to ideology, narratives become an important rhetorical device within Tabligh for creating discourses that actively hail the audience, as per our data. Tabligh utilizes *Kaar Guzari* – personal stories and testimonies to illustrate the benefits of adhering to traditional gender roles. These narratives act as hailing devices, presenting those who conform to traditional gender norms as models of piety and moral virtue, while portraying gender nonconformity as spiritually and morally problematic and therefore a 'bad' subject. Moreover, our findings suggest that transgender face exclusion from religious and social spaces due to the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Transgender Pakhtun Muslims feel psychological/emotional distress and, therefore, empathetic and knowledgeable socio-religious guidance is crucial to reconcile their faith with their gender identity. The socio-religious implications of ideal masculinity are valorized and policed by the ethnic frame of Pakhtunwali, where the key tenets reinforce heteronormativity as the logocentric truth. Hence, leading to the alienation of transgender individuals by relegating them to the margins and as underprivileged.

Various theoretical frameworks have examined transgender identity issues in relation to state-making practices; however, it would be an interesting insight to view transgender identity as a place-based identity and engage territorialization and resistance studies in relation to subject formation (Schwarz et.al., 2024). Engaging human geography as a space is significant in subjectivation (Miggelbrink, 2020) and "purification of space" enquiry (Sibley, 1988). Such key discussions are driven by the rejection of differences to bring a nuanced perspective for our analysis. Understanding gender order as a state-making process through territorialization practices is essential because the exclusion of transgender individuals from socio-religious space remains a critical conflict in identity contestations. However, this analytic is insufficient for theorizing the more complex manifestation of non-state actors who co-produce and regulate gender norms. Scholars

have examined how marginalized individuals resist exclusionary gender practices through protests, legal challenges, and symbolic forms of resistance against the state (Herman, 2015; Gentile, Kinsman & Rankin, 2017). While resistance studies are instructive in showing the various forms of marginalization resistance, they are less familiar with the ideological and functional means through which people are marginalized by and through the ISAs. Moreover, Turner's concept of "liminality", "liminoid experiences" (1969; 2017), and Althusser's theory of interpellation instantiate identity formation, supporting the research objectives of this paper. Turner deciphers liminality as a flux/transition or ambiguity, often happening during rites of passage where individuals experience a suspension of usual social norms and roles. Transitional/Liminoid experiences run with this idea and spring forward towards modern contexts outside formal rituals, where individuals voluntarily enter zones that challenge societal norms and hierarchies. Notably, the tension around the gender identity crisis can be comprehended through a liminoid lens. Fluidity across genders or reconsidering one's gender identity presupposes a phase of liminality, where individuals embody ambiguity and transformation (Merlini & Aboim, 2025). This process unsettles traditional gender norms and roles, carving a niche for constellating new identities and meanings.

Althusserian interpellation (1971) proposes another lens on how transgender identity is constructed within societal frameworks. Among transgender individuals, this process of interpellation is kaleidoscopic and oftentimes contradictory. Our argument mobilizes ISAs as a theoretical lens showing how hegemony is maintained through relentless ambivalences between the state's regulatory mechanisms/organs and the ideological forces embedded within increasingly diverse institutions typically understood as outside the state. Transgender identity crises, thus, can be understood as an ongoing negotiation between prevalent ideological interpellations of gender and the individual's self-perception (Shelley, 2006). The fleeting/liminoid phase that Turner (1969, 2017) outlines provide a framework for understanding how transgender individuals may attempt to rework these interpellations, resignifying new meanings and identities beyond the regulated spaces of conventional normativity. Hence, the association between liminoid experiences and Althusser's interpellation theory corresponds to how transgender individuals often transition through a liminal space where they contest and rearticulate societal norms and gender expectations. This process is both a self-exploration and a social negotiation, reflecting cultural shifts towards understanding/accepting diverse gender identities.

Research Question

How do transgender negotiate their identities by interacting with the Tabligh Jumaat in the Pakhtun context. Furthermore, how the Institutional State Apparatuses (ISAs)— the family, religion, and the economy inform, restrict, or (trans)form such identity articulation(s)?

Research Objectives

- To explore how Althusser's interpellation informs the identity construction of transgender individuals that is situated in the intersectional structures of ISAs.

- To analyze how desire, shame, and piety overlap in influencing transgender identity negotiation by utilizing Žižek's concept of the 'sublime'.

- To facilitate nuanced discussions on gender, religion, and ideology by contextualizing transgender experiences in the geo-political and sociocultural settings of the Pakhtun region.

Review of the Literature

The intersection of transgender identity and religious participation, particularly within Pakhtun contexts, has gathered growing academic interest. The intersection of spirituality and gender identity offers a significant lens to engage with a critical dialogue within scholarly debates (Toscano, 2017). This literature review explores relevant research on transgender experiences in religious settings, the socio-cultural dynamics within the Pakhtun community, and the application of Althusser's theoretical framework on subject formation and interpellation. These insights are crucial to inform the analysis and discussion of data findings and emerging themes in this paper. Transgender individuals often experience complex pathways when engaging with religious practices and communities.

Earlier research demonstrates that transgender community persistently encounters grave challenges within religious communities, including exclusion, stigmatization, and the pressure to fit in (Yadegarfard et al., 2013; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Such problems intensify in settings where religious tenets reinforce binary gender norms (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Within Islamic contexts, transgender experiences oscillate largely depending on cultural, regional, and sectarian divergences. For instance, in some muslim-majority societies, transgender individuals may receive approval within certain cultural frameworks, while in others, they face severe discrimination (Boellstorff, 2004). Similarly, Kugle (2010) examines how Islamic jurisprudence has historically grappled with concerns of gender and sexuality, noting both inclusive and exclusive interpretations. Notwithstanding these variations, the overarching propensity is one of marginalization and an ongoing hustle for transgender individuals within many religious blocs.

South Asia, including Pakistan, has a long history of recognizing gender diversity, exemplified by the *hijra* / *khwaja sirah* community. They are often considered a third gender, have been part of South Asian societies for centuries,

though their social status has fluctuated over time (Nanda, 2014; Pamment, 2010). In Pakistan, *hijras* have gained legal recognition, but societal acceptance remains limited (Bashir, 2023).

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, aims to safeguard the rights of transgender individuals, although implementation and acceptance challenges persist (Khan, 2021). However, the more recent revocation of this Act clearly indicates implementation challenges and contextual complexities in relation to legal provisions (Riaz & Awan, 2023). However, the Pakhtun regions of Pakistan require more attention towards such anti-structural concepts and practices that are driven by patriarchal and normative codes of Pakhtunwali[2] And defy deviant behaviors by associating them with local narratives of honor and shame. This cultural framework poses significant barriers to the acceptance and inclusion of transgender individuals, reinforcing traditional gender roles and marginalizing those who deviate from the norms.

Research Methodology

This study was carried out in the city of Peshawar, centering on two primary locations: Iqbal Plaza in Faqirabad and Auranzeb Plaza on Dalazak Road. These sites are recognized as hubs for transgender individuals living under disadvantaged conditions. Data collection was facilitated by two educated transgender individuals who had transitioned out of the transgender profession into formal employment. Their involvement was crucial due to their fluency in the specific transgender language, which posed initial comprehension challenges for the primary researchers. During fieldwork, the enumerators demonstrated a noticeable change in demeanor when entering transgender premises. Given that the principal researchers were females, the enumerators advised against prolonged stays in these environments for safety reasons. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants from two distinct groups: (1) transgender individuals who had engaged in the Tabligh (preaching) for some time but remained active in the transgender community; (2) former transgender individuals who had fully committed to preaching and left the transgender community. In-depth interviews with active transgender individuals took place in their guru's *adda* (a communal living space rented by a senior/elder transgender), while former transgender individuals were interviewed at a preaching center in Peshawar. The enumerators facilitated access and interviews within the preaching center, which is typically off-limits to females. A total of 08 in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview

[2] A cultural code of conduct and values is mandatory for Pakhtuns/Pashtuns to live by and perform (Jan & Aman, 2015).

guide with transgender individuals aged 18 to 25. Participant selection was based on their engagement with preaching, with durations ranging from a minimum of four *sehroza* (each *sehroza* comprising of and literally meaning as three days) to a maximum of four months. Educational backgrounds varied from primary level to MPhil. We used purposive and snowball sampling techniques since our sample was not homogeneous in terms of social stratification (Creswell, 2013).

Data collection involved a combination of hand-written notes and a few recorded interviews, conducted only after obtaining formal permission from the participants. The data was subsequently analyzed thematically, guided by the research questions and objectives. The enumerators revised the analyzed data to guarantee accuracy and significance to the transgender subject formation. The analytical lens of Althusser's interpellation theory was applied to the findings to refine the analysis of identity formation.

Data Findings

This section delivers the findings and analysis of the interviews with the transgender participants in alignment with the framework of Louis Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation and ISAs. This work explores the dynamics between transgender identity-formation and religious practices, specifically about the Tabligh, in the Pakhtun context of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan. The analysis is built on the following emergent themes: acceptance and identity, societal perception and stigma, the impact of Tabligh on transgender lives, familial relationships, economic struggles, and the intersection of social roles and desires.

Acceptance of Identity versus Acceptability

The data illustrate a considerable attention towards the acceptance of one's transgender identity as a core aspect of personal well-being. Our first participant emphasized the importance of this acceptance, stating,

> *"If you say that you are a man and you enact femininity, then you are deceiving yourself and others, too—a denial."*

This illustrates the inherent conflict and societal deception faced by transgender individuals who made an effort to conform to the traditional gender roles, reinforcing Althusser’s view of interpellation, where societal norms compel individuals to recognize and accept identities assigned to them despite their inherent inclinations. Another participant discussed a lifelong struggle with gender identity, marked by efforts to conform to male behaviors despite an inherent sense of being different. This participant's experience underlines the continuous internal conflict between societal expectations and personal identity, echoing Althusser's formulation of the dis-identifying subject who negotiates self-awareness/expression and induced traumatic feelings.

Familial Relationships, Stigma, and Bullying

The analysis of familial relationships reveals strained dynamics due to gender identity issues. While one of the participants described a particularly strict and disapproving mother in contrast with a more empathetic father, another participant initially faced family conflicts but later gained acceptance. Two of the participants shared an improved familial acceptance post-Tabligh, indicating a potential positive influence of religious involvement on family dynamics. Societal perception of transgender individuals is marred by stigma and ridicule. Our second participant highlighted the public humiliation, particularly regarding the voice pitch and frequency, which becomes an instant mockery. This public shaming contributes to feelings of degradation and exclusion, reinforcing societal rejection and the inability to integrate fully into either male or female roles. Another participant articulated the bullying experienced even during the Tabligh activities, noting that plain/normative clothing did not prevent transgender from identification and harassment. This chronic stigmatization emphasizes the hard-wired societal resistance to accepting transgender individuals who exist outside the binary gender norms. One of the participants described a complex relationship with their family, who struggled to accept their identity but eventually came to terms with it, expressing, *"I got married and have 02 daughters, and I am on good terms with my family now."* Nevertheless, such a repositioning from a transgender life to participation in the Tabligh is a complex trajectory informed by Althusser's interpellation and the politics of gender identity.

The Tabligh, Social Normativity, and the Transgender Experience

The participants' experiences with the Tabligh articulate ambivalence about its role in their lives. Although the Tabligh offered a structured environment and a sense of community, yet it was marked by social/moral regulation. Our first participant found it challenging to suppress their natural demeanor during religious activities, leading to a feeling of constant unease and humiliation. This struggle unravels the tension between the desire for religious participation and the need for societal compliance with gender behavior(s). In contrast, our third participant experienced positive aspects of the Tabligh, such as learning more about religious rituals with precision. However, they admitted that while religious practices could be improved, their inherent gender identity remained unchanged, indicating a spiritual disengagement from gender identity. Such a disconnect complicates an ambiguous relationship between religious piety and fixed gender binaries.

Financial Barriers and Dependency

Economic disadvantage is a significant component of the transgender trajectory, often worsened by societal exclusion from mainstream employment. The first participant relied on friends for financial help during Tabligh activities, while the eighth participant explained how financial exploitation and limited opportunities caused transgender individuals to remain in the transgender profession despite

personal aspirations for change. Our fifth participant mentioned getting financial support from a cousin in Saudi Arabia, which enabled participation in Tabligh. However, the participant also mentioned the financial requirements as a binding prerequisite for their participation in Tabligh. These findings outline underlying systemic concerns of economic dependency and restricted opportunities within religious contexts. Various transgender individuals join the transgender community due to financial necessity, considering it a sustainable means of livelihood despite the associated stigma and abuse. The economic pressures further complicate their quest for identity and acceptance, as survival often takes precedence over personal reality. Notably, reorienting towards a Tablighi lifestyle frequently requires financial support from families or friends, as earnings from transgender activities are deemed unsuitable for religious purposes. The economic dependency exacerbates their vulnerability, forcing them to negotiate a delicate balance between subsistence and the desire for a cohesive and socially approved identity. Economic independence and reliance on Tabligh were recurrent motifs in our findings. One of the participants noted,

> "*I sustain myself financially through joining the Tabligh, or friends help me.*"

Economic challenges lead to societal exclusion, which pushes them into marginalized/low-paid professions.

Tensions Between Institutional Roles and Desires

The socially-assigned roles restrict transgender individuals through a moral pressure to submit to the traditional masculine roles as exemplified by Althusser's concept of interpellation. Families, driven by societal norms, enforce these roles to 'correct' the perceived deviant behavior, causing distress and internal conflict for transgender individuals. The trauma shared by one participant highlights the emotional and the psychological toll of this forced conformity as follows:

> *"If you know you are a she-male you shouldn't get married and ruin your wife's life*".

Ideological projection and exploitation intervene with the sexual orientation of transgender that taps into their identity-related issues. Transgender individuals' fear of sexual danger and their experiences of exploitation and abuse can be understood better by utilizing Žižek's (2019) concept of the sublime object of ideology. Society's stigmatization and dehumanization of transgender individuals transform their sexual desire into a perceived (and, therefore, fictional in the Žižekian sense) sexual danger, justifying abuse and exploitation (Catalano & Griffin, 2016; Kaufmann et.al., 2010). This ideological projection serves to maintain social control by framing transgender individuals as threats that need to be controlled. The

existence of *tommiyan* (young boys who cross-dress by wearing makeup and perform) highlights the hierarchical nature of interpellation within the transgender community itself. *Tommiyan*, who are positioned within socio-economic privilege and validation, accentuate how socio-economic status frames the degree of societal acceptance and respect, indicating the stratified nature of ideological systems.

The intersection of Althusser's construct of interpellation with Žižek's perspective of the sublime object of ideology (2019) introduces a comprehensive framework for understanding the contradictions between social roles and desires, and the conversion of sexual desire into sexual danger. The controlling logic of interpellation forces transgender individuals into roles that cause momentous psychological and emotional harm, while the ideological projection of transgender bodies as sublime objects substantiates their exploitation and abuse. It is important to note that the ideological accounts of abuse are sometimes internalized as an accepted way of tolerating abuse that devastates the emotional and psychological well-being. The mistreatment and manipulation of transgender individuals are rationalized through the ideological construction of their bodies as (ideological) sites of danger and deviance (Herman, 2015). This rationale serves to maintain social control and perpetuate their marginalization through policing bodies by problematizing the nexus of violence, gender identity, and embodiment, where bodies become sites of hailing good/bad/dis-identifying subjects.

Hierarchical Nature of Interpellation

The framing of transgender individuals versus *tommiyan* reveals interpellation's hierarchical dynamics, influenced by the socio-economic status. The findings foreground the nuanced interplay of identity, societal perception, religious involvement, familial relationships, and economic struggles in the lives of transgender. This classification impact's identity, societal perception, religious involvement, familial bond, and economic barriers. Althusser's interpellation and Žižek's sublime highlight a crisis of recognition shaped by societal and religious expectations, emphasizing the need for social inclusion.

We can analyze religious institutions such as ISAs affecting transgender identity-formation by mobilizing Althusserian interpellation. These ISAs often coerce individuals into conforming to imposed/hegemonic identities, suppressing inherent gender expressions. This interpellative disruption taxes the transgender to inhibit their authentic gender identity. However, despite the powerful hailing by religious ISAs, the resistance/struggles of the transgender highlight their agency as counter-narratives. Their experiences of rejection and humiliation uncover the limitations and contradictions within the ideological framework, revealing spaces where ideological control is contested. Such counter-spaces, therefore, offer a diverse, learned process that develops over time in certain stages. Nonetheless, its presence is impacted by both macro factors and micro-interactions (Jensen & Larson, 2021).

Since extremism is socially constructed, so could be the alternatives. If extremism is learned, so can rights-respecting attitudes and actions. Addressing extremism shapes its presence/eradication, transforming societies towards inclusivity. Transgender interactions with religious institutions reveal power dynamics, societal struggles regarding gender, and the tension between personal identity and social approval.

The transgender participants' engagement in sex work and other precarious means of livelihood starkly reflects their economic marginalization as a result of ideological structures that shape and constrain their identities. Interpellation, as theorized by Althusser for transgender, establishes that economic exclusion forces them into roles that align with societal stereotypes of transgender people, such as sex work. This (mis)alignment is not an accidental outcome of choice but a by-product of interpellation where the institutional ideology constructs and perpetuates prescribed roles for such marginalized groups. Hence, by responding to these roles, the transgender individuals inadvertently reinforce the very stereotypes that reinscribe their social disadvantage to become a good/bad subject or achieve the desirable Žižekian sublime. Pursuing Tabligh, *per se*, as a means of escaping this cycle, unfolds the tensions between their socio-economic realities and a desire for a life of dignity. Similarly, the transgender individuals are confronted by hegemonic interpellation due to constant sexual violence and exploitation; it reinforces their marginalized status. Althusser's concept, thus, reveals these experiences as embedded within societal ideology, continuing their vulnerable positioning.

Emotional and Psychological Impact

The psychological burden of acceptance is an emotionally complex trajectory of transgender(ed) experience in a traditional society, in accordance with our findings. Our second participant shared the psychological burden of societal rejection, explaining,

> "*I often meet my family, but I feel suffocated there, I can't sleep well, I do get scared, and because of societal intolerance, I don't like to go home.*"

The emotional well-being of transgender, especially in their adolescence/youth, is completely jeopardized as they are traumatized and have no resources and alternatives for healing or coping mechanisms. Social exclusion significantly reduces their chances of economic growth and, hence, multiplies their oppression as a chronic issue of stress, poverty, and exclusion. Some of the participants shared how religion provided them emotional relief. For some, participation in Tabligh provided emotional respite and a sense of purpose. Our fourth participant said,

> "*I have spent four months in Tabligh, and it brought me towards good deeds; my prayer feels better*."

This might not be the dominant view, but it does indicate the spirituality experienced by transgender through the opportunity of participation in Tabligh; nonetheless, the participant mentions spirituality in isolation without connecting it with their gender identity. However, such a dissociation of spirituality and morality in the socio-religious Pakhtun context is nearly impossible to establish due to deeper intersections of identities and institutions that are political constructs.

Identity Crisis and Ideological Apparatuses

Transgender individuals face profound identity crises due to contradictions between their biology, desires, social roles, and interpellative forces. Althusser's theory unpacks how the ISAs and economic structures (un)subscribe to fragmented identities. Families, as the primary ISAs, socially condition and often lead to the rejection or pressure to conform to the assigned gender (hetero)normativity, exacerbating transgender individuals' identity struggle. Religious authorities further complicate these struggles, as participation in Tabligh offers a sense of belonging but enforces rigid gender norms, resulting in an additional social disadvantage in case of non-compliance. Economically, transgender individuals are pushed into marginalized roles, perpetuating stereotypes and vulnerabilities. Althusser's concept of interpellation facilitates an understanding of how these ISAs marginalize transgender individuals by embedding them in cycles of exclusion and inequality.

Post-Tabligh transformation/reformation, explored through Althusser's interpellation and gender identity politics, is another important element of gender identity. The assimilation of transgender individuals into the Tabligh community/discourse in our findings presents a complex interplay of identity, power, and desire, engaging Althusser's interpellation. For transgender individuals, transitioning into Tabligh entails a dual interpellation: they are hailed by both the transgender community, which offers belonging and survival, and the Tabligh community, which demands strict adherence to the religious norms. This results in unresolved identity conflicts. The Tabligh community's emphasis on religious purity and gender conformity complicates their feminine identity, and hence, the heteronormative identity becomes sublime in Žižekian terms to be desired but remains meaningless. They experience a sense of belonging to neither community fully, demonstrating the impact of interpellation on their identities. Gendered tensions limit transgender identity-formation, tracing deep-seated (hetero)normativity that does not facilitate hailing. The (sublime)desire for acceptance and a stable identity often clash with societal and religious norms, underlying the influence of interpellation (Bradford & Syed, 2019).

Tabligh and Social Transformation

The Tabligh reinforces identity by supporting religious practices and providing a support system. However, it also pressures transgender individuals to conform to traditional gender roles. A participant noted that during Tabligh,

> *"People have made jokes about us... We feel embarrassed/shy because while announcing, sharing "6 points/principles" or during Tabligh, the door-to-door visits, people identify us as a "Transgender" who has come from that area because of our personality and nature."*

Participants, in general, shared their experiences on how the actual tension due to an inability to change core identity remains unresolved, irrespective of their involvement in Tabligh. Another participant articulated,

> "*We have a woman's soul, not a male soul, and it cannot be changed... No matter where you go to the Tabligh or madrassa, it's about the soul and it cannot be changed.*"

These participants elucidate the constant negotiation between their authentic selves and the identities imposed upon them by societal structures. Participation in Tabligh represents an attempt by transgender individuals to find acceptance and religious fulfillment. However, the inherent conflict between their fluid identities and the gender norms prescribed by Tabligh practices leads to further alienation and misrecognition due to (hetero)normative interpellation of gender binaries in Tabligh (Bunch, 2013). In the context of gender order, the aim of praxis is not only to analyze and understand why forms of unjust and unequal socio-gender relations are reproduced but also to help envision and develop alternative futures that are not so unjust. (Margulies, 2018). Framed in this way, we can read Althusser's theory of the ISAs as how hegemony operates within the ISAs through a formulation of how ideology functions materially in the maintenance of state power. This perspective helps us understand how the act of hegemonizing works to continuously repair the deep-seated emotions as a result of class and gender conflicts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our analysis recommends promoting inclusivity and support for transgender individuals, enacting policies protecting their rights, implementing community awareness programs, creating safe spaces within religious institutions, providing tailored mental health services, offering education and employment opportunities, establishing support networks and community centers, conducting ongoing research for advocacy, and encouraging religious institutions to adopt inclusive practices. Such an inclusive approach resonates with principles of equality and human rights, redefining the cultural and social matrix by affirming diversity.

Althusser's framing of interpellation and the (sublime) desire in Žižekian fashion is well-aligned with the participants' experiences. They are recurrently hailed by societal

norms that define and confine their identities within the binary gender framework. This hailing unfolds through various ISAs, including family, educational institutions, and religious organizations, which collectively reinforce the marginalization of transgender individuals. The participants' interaction with Tabligh exemplifies a complex negotiation with these ISAs, as they negotiate a place/space within a religious context that often views their identity as incompatible with its norms in Peshawar, KP, Pakistan. This re-emphasizes the role of the state and religious institutions in regulating gender identities and offers insights into the contrivances through which social order is upheld and contested. Economic challenges, furthermore, complicate identity-formation for transgender, and need critical policy attention for their social inclusion by providing skill-based learning opportunities. Furthermore, the provision of employment pathways/initiatives for financial inclusion will facilitate their agency-building in a sustainable manner. Drawing on Althusser, Turner, and Žižek, we can tap the complexities of gender politics and work towards more equitable and inclusive social structures/spaces. These situated/nuanced and lived-in accounts of the transgender individuals within religious communities offer insights into the intricate interplay of interpellation, identity, power, and desire. This study makes a significant contribution to our collective understanding of the diverse human experience. It invites us to reimagine our world as one where every voice, every embodied truth, remains inclusive and celebrates humanity in its diverse forms on the margins, as well.

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