

**Sex Change, Social Change:**

Reflections on Identity,  
Institutions, and Imperialism

**Viviane Namaste**

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**Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism**

by Viviane Namaste

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## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary feminist circles in Canada, the matter of transsexual and transgendered people has emerged as a public debate. Indeed, this question has exploded in recent years: a widespread and public controversy exists over the exclusion of Kimberly Nixon from the volunteer training program of Vancouver Rape Relief; the National Association of Women and the Law recently held a consultation on the human rights of transsexual and transgendered people in Canada; transsexual and transgender issues are discussed in feminist publications such as *Herizons*, *Fireweed*, and *La Gazette des Femmes*<sup>1</sup>; the School of Women's Studies at York University organized a symposium on this question in the fall of 2002; the issue was debated at the conference organized by young feminists of the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* in the fall of 2003; and many women's centres and social service organizations are in the midst of developing policies in this regard. Both inside and outside the university milieu, transsexual and transgender issues matter to feminists in Canada. This book seeks to offer both a contribution to—and an intervention within—the terms of the discussion.

Some feminists are pro-transsexual, and envision a world in which non-transsexual and transsexual women work side by side. Other feminists argue for the exclusion of male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals from women's groups and organizations, maintaining that the life experiences of MTFs are radically different from those of other women.<sup>2</sup> While feminists debate the merits of including transsexual and transgendered people in self-designated feminist arenas, they have provided less reflection on transsexual issues outside these terms of inclusion or exclusion. One of the central arguments of *Sex Change, Social Change* is that we need to

offer a sustained analysis of transsexual lives that moves beyond questions of identity, matters of who is or is not a woman, debates about whom we can include. At times I reject the position of feminists who argue for the exclusion of MTF transsexuals from women's organizations. Yet I also offer a critique of feminists who would consider themselves allies of transsexual and transgendered people. This book attempts to show the limitations of current debates on transsexuality in feminist communities, as well as the weaknesses of political organizing by TS/TG (transsexual/transgendered) people and their (feminist) allies.

Given the interest in TS/TG issues within feminist communities, a book devoted to this subject can make an important contribution. Yet the significance of this work lies beyond its timeliness. Increasingly, feminists, activists and scholars are beginning to write a history of transsexual and transgender activism, communities, and social movements.<sup>3</sup> Feminists know all too well that the histories we write are crucial: how we tell a particular story shapes our understanding of the issue. The writing of our history forms our consciousness, and determines the forms of political action in which we engage. In this regard, this book insists on the importance of discussing the lives of transsexual prostitutes, prisoners, and drug users. The history of transsexual activism in Canada is a history of prostitutes organizing themselves to get their peers the services they require. It is a history of transsexuals negotiating with the police and prisons. It is a history of individuals educating service providers of detoxification programs. Yet these issues are rarely discussed within current feminist debates on transsexuality. This absence tells us something important about the class-based interests of many feminists. By integrating the lives of transsexual prostitutes, prisoners, and drug users into public discussions of transsexuality in feminist communities, we can imagine forms of political action that make questions of poverty a political priority.

*Sex Change, Social Change* also occurs in dialogue with feminist theory. Historically, one of the most important criticisms of feminist theory and activism is that its framework too often reflects the values and experiences of certain white, Western, middle-class women. As a result, feminists have called for integrating questions of racial and ethnocultural diversity in their thinking and political action. The presentation of case studies in this book considers the extent to which discussions of transsexuality—even those positions favourable to transsexuals—do not adequately integrate race analysis into their frameworks. For instance, discussions of trans-

gender issues on university campuses invariably centre on questions of identity and consistently ignore the realities of street prostitutes. Since most transsexual and transvestite prostitutes working in major Canadian cities are people of colour, this absence speaks to the limitations of a feminist analysis on transgender issues. Paradoxically, while feminist theorists and activists are interested in transgender issues, they do not discuss the realities and concerns of most transsexual people of colour. Unfortunately, many feminists have yet to integrate questions of race and ethnicity into their analyses, despite calls in the field to do so for more than 20 years.<sup>4</sup>

This book is also situated within the terms and debates of feminist post-colonialist theory. Post-colonialist theorists argue that critical scholars need to attend to the function of imperialism in their work, even when this is not always obvious. They demonstrate how our conceptual frameworks are deeply linked to the work of colonialism, and suggest ways to engage in critical inquiry that both understand and resist such forms of domination. For example, post-colonialist feminist theorists contend that we must understand the ways in which feminist conceptions of the person and of citizenship are marked by specific nationalist and colonialist traditions. We cannot take an appeal to “personhood” or “citizenship” at face value when these concepts become institutional mechanisms through which imperialism is achieved, denying rights to some humans, according them to others. My work in this book—particularly Chapter 8, “Against Transgender Rights”—seeks to take up this challenge in the context of transsexual issues. I demonstrate how current appeals to transgender rights are actually bound within much broader social and economic relations of imperialism. My attempts to think through these issues seek to learn from, and engage in dialogue with, the contributions of feminist post-colonialist theories. And, as elsewhere in the book, I am asking some tough questions about the shortcomings of feminist debates concerning transsexual and transgender issues. Current discussions of transgender issues in Canadian feminist communities never refer to imperialism. This absence forces us to question whether feminists have incorporated into their thinking and action the lessons from feminist post-colonialist theories. To be sure, many feminists understand these issues and can discuss them in the context of events related to colonialism, race, and/or globalization. But when confronted with a topic *seemingly* outside of these clearly defined areas, such as transsexuality, feminist academics and activists in English Canada have been silent on the **entire matter** of imperialism (see Chapter 8).

The chapters of *Sex Change, Social Change* take different forms: interviews, essays, a keynote address at a conference, an interview with a prominent Canadian transsexual militant, and political activist writing. They can be read in the order they are presented, or consulted in a different order that suits the reader. It is my hope that this book not only contributes to an increased understanding of transsexuality within feminist communities in Canada, but also gets people thinking about the very difficult work of community organizing, politics, and activism. Throughout the book I take strong stands, and hold positions not always popular within feminist, lesbian/gay, and even transsexual/transgender communities. Whether or not the reader agrees with me, I hope she or he recognizes the importance of stimulating dialogue on these issues. As I hope to make clear in these pages, what is at stake is not an acceptance or rejection of transsexuals within feminist communities. What is at stake is the conception and implementation of a feminist program committed to social change, one that takes seriously the lives and realities of poor people in Canada, truly integrates racial and ethnocultural diversity, and understands and challenges the workings of imperialism.

## NOTES

1. "Trans/Scribes" special issue of *Fireweed* 59 (2000); "Can a Transgendered Person Be 'One of Us'?" *Herizons* (Fall 2001): 22–3, 27; "Faut-il intégrer les transsexuelles?" *La Gazette des Femmes* 25.5 (janvier–février 2004): 9–10.
2. For specific examples, see the articles listed in Note 1. This issue will be clear through the case studies presented in this book.
3. See, for example, Eleanor MacDonald, "Critical Identities: Rethinking Feminism Through Transgender Politics," *Atlantis* 23.1 (Fall 1998): 3–12. For an American history of transsexuality, including some data on transsexual community formation and organizing, see Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
4. My previous comments with respect to the writing of a history of transgender communities and social movements are also relevant with respect to race. It is my hope that feminists will ensure that this history also includes the experiences of transsexual men and women of colour.

## Making the Lives of Transsexual People Visible: Addressing the Politics of Social Erasure

*The following interview with Viviane Namaste was conducted by Clarice Kuhling and Gary Kinsman, and was published in New Socialist 39 (January/February 2003): 31–4. The format here is slightly different from that of the published interview.*

**Q:** Can you briefly describe for our readers what "transsexual" and "transgender" mean?

**A:** The term *transsexual* refers to individuals who are born in one sex—male or female—but who identify as members of the "opposite" sex. They take hormones and undergo surgical intervention, usually including the genitals, to live as members of their chosen sex. Transsexuals are both male-to-female and female-to-male.

The term *transgender* is really popular in Anglo-American communities, and is used as an umbrella term to include all kinds of people who do not fit into normative relations between sex and gender. This would include, for instance, transsexuals, drag queens (men who perform as women on stage only, usually in a gay male club or social environment), intersexed individuals (people who are born with genitals that cannot be easily classified as "male" or "female"), drag kings (females who perform as men on the stage in lesbian cultural spaces), transvestites (heterosexual males who cross-dress in "women's" clothes and who receive sexual gratification from this act), as well as people who do not identify with either of the categories "male" or "female."

While the term *transgender* is currently one of the most popular, it needs to be pointed out at this stage in history that increasingly, transsexuals object to being included under a catch-all phrase of *transgender*. They argue that the health care and social service needs of transsexuals are quite specific, and that this specificity is lost when people use a vague term like *transgender*. Furthermore, the popularity of the term *transgender* emerges from the Anglo-American lesbian and gay community. While this discourse may have meaning for some transsexuals who understand their lives in these terms, it does not speak to the transsexuals who do not make sense of their lives, and their political struggles, within the confines of a lesbian/gay framework. It is important to point this out, because most of the Anglo-American writers and self-designated activists on “transgender” issues come out of the lesbian/gay community and express themselves in those terms. My empirical research contradicts this underlying assumption, since most of the transsexuals I have interviewed do not articulate their needs according to a lesbian/gay framework.

All of this to say that questions of language are deeply political!

**Q: Why did you title your book *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*?<sup>1</sup>**

**A:** Most of the academic approaches to transsexuality argue that transsexuals are produced by the medical and the psychiatric establishment. Alternatively, they use the case of transsexuality to illustrate the social construction of gender. There are all kinds of examples of this type of scholarship, and unfortunately, it does not appear that things are about to change in the near future.

There are a couple of things that need to be unpacked in this type of work. First, this work is always, and only, about identity. It limits itself to how and why transsexuals decide to live as members of the opposite sex. Or it uses transsexuals to speak about the relations between social norms and gender identity. What is left out of these accounts is any real understanding of what everyday life is like for transsexuals. So while critics are churning out books, articles, and essays on transsexuals and the transgendered, they have nothing to say about the very real circumstances in which transsexuals live. They cannot offer us even a tiny piece of information about transsexuals and the law, or access to health care, or the struggles that transsexuals have with employment, or the situation of transsexuals in prison.

So my book begins with a critique of this kind of intellectual work. And I argue that, if we actually do some empirical research on some of the matters most pressing for transsexuals—civil status, access to health care, the decriminalization of prostitution, abusive police practices—we discover that transsexuals are quite literally shut out and excluded from the institutional world. They do not have access to many kinds of services, such as shelters for battered women. And so then I begin with this empirical data and I raise two questions with respect to theory. In the first instance, I argue that the theories concerned with the production of transsexuality have got it wrong: transsexuals are not, in point of fact, produced by the medical and psychiatric institution. Rather, they are continually *erased* from the institutional world—shut out from its programs, excluded from its terms of reference. And the second question I raise comes out of this reflection: I inquire about the relevance of writing theory that cannot make sense of the everyday world, and that actually contributes to the very invisibility of transsexuality that a critical theory needs to expose. This is part of a much broader debate in the university, especially within the social sciences, about the role and function of an intellectual. And I argue that if theory and university scholarship erase transsexuals in much the same way as do different institutional practices, then they are really part of the problem that needs to be understood, and not at all critical inquiry.

**Q: What are some of the institutional forms of discrimination and oppression that transsexual and transgendered people face in patriarchal capitalist societies?**

**A:** There are a variety of forms of discrimination. Access to services is one of the major barriers: detoxification programs especially, state funding for surgery, access to hormones in prison, access to emergency shelter. Much of this access is dependent on the individual attitudes of service providers. So when someone is uneducated about transsexuals and transvestites, they may refuse access to services based on misinformation or prejudice. Another type of discrimination comes out of a total lack of institutional policies for transsexuals. This is especially true for female-to-male transsexuals. In these instances, some people cannot get services because bureaucrats do not have a clear written directive.

Access to the media is a whole other form of institutional discrimination. Transsexuals are often required to give their autobiography on demand:

How long have you known? Are you operated? How did your family take the news? These kinds of personal questions can provide some insight into the lives of transsexuals, but they are also, in a sense, quite invasive and rude. It is astounding to me that within 15 seconds of knowing an individual is transsexual, some [interviewers] feel comfortable enough to ask transsexual individuals to describe the physical appearance and sexual function of their genitals. How is it that cultural taboos regarding speaking openly about sexuality and genitalia with people you do not know well, go out the window when it comes to transsexuals? One of the effects of this demand is that it is difficult for transsexuals to address the real issues: cops who harass street prostitutes and escorts, access to health care and social services, changing one's name and sex.

The other issue with respect to access to the media is the whole affiliation with lesbian/gay and feminist communities. As I mentioned earlier, most of the self-designated activists emerge from lesbian/gay and/or feminist communities, and they frame the issues in these terms. This means that transsexuals who do not make sense of their lives according to lesbian/gay discourse have no voice. And I reiterate here that based on my empirical research and observations within the milieu for more than 10 years, the majority of transsexuals do not make sense of their lives in lesbian/gay terms. Yet we never hear these voices. And even though we have some empirical research that challenges an equation amongst transsexuals and lesbians/gays—I refer here to my research as well as that of Henry Rubin, whose book on female-to-male transsexuals, *Self-Made Men*, has just been published by Vanderbilt University Press in 2003—our research and observations are ignored both by critics in queer theory as well as by transgender activists who align themselves with queer politics. So to return to the notion of institutions, transsexuals experience discrimination to the extent that they cannot express themselves in their own terms.

The last institutional barrier I want to cite is that of consultation. So often, the government develops policies without consulting transsexuals at all. Or in certain cases, consultation happens with middle-class non-prostitute transsexuals, who represent their unique interests without ensuring that the broader needs of transsexuals are addressed.

**Q:** Could you tell us a bit about the struggles of transsexuals in Québec and the institutional relations they are up against when trying to get their “sex” changed on official documents?

**A:** Legally, Québec is a civil code jurisdiction, and within civil code jurisdictions, the body is legally inscribed as a matter of public order. This is quite different than the legal situation within a common law jurisdiction. What this means practically, in terms of name and sex change, is that transsexuals can only change their name after surgical intervention on the genitals. This legal framework is quite specific to civil code countries, and goes back to a long legacy of the Napoleonic Code. In terms of everyday life, this creates all kinds of problems: a female individual begins to take hormones, lives as a man without detection, but their identity documents remain in the female name. Employment, access to health care, and everyday situations like picking up a registered letter from the post office become very problematic.

The situation is especially complicated for female-to-male transsexuals. The *Direction de l'état civil* (Office of Civil Status) clearly states that a male-to-female transsexual must undergo a vaginoplasty—the construction of the vagina—in order to change name and sex. Yet in the case of female-to-male transsexuals, in at least 1997 and 1998, the Office invoked a rather vague criterion of structurally changing the genital organs. It did not say if this meant a phalloplasty (the construction of a penis), or if it referred to removing the uterus and the ovaries alongside undergoing a double mastectomy and taking male hormones. So things are not always clear, and my research indicates that at certain times there is no standardized policy in this area. However, on a more positive note, it appears that since the late 1990s, the *Direction de l'état civil* is more clear with respect to the surgeries and procedures required for change of name and sex in the case of female-to-male transsexuals (hysterectomy, double mastectomy, hormone therapy).

In recent times, a court ruled that a male-to-female transgendered person in Québec can add a female name to their birth certificate.<sup>2</sup> It will be interesting to see what kind of impact this has for transsexuals in Québec, and if the access will be universal. The ruling specifies, for instance, that this modification can be made if the individual can demonstrate that they have lived as a woman for five years. Certainly, for transsexuals who “transition” and are able to keep their jobs, providing such evidence is not difficult. But for individuals who do not work in any kind of legal economy, and who do not go to school, the proof of such an identity, established through official documents—pay stubs, school transcripts, credit cards—is less certain. In this regard, while the ability to change one's name after five years is a definite improvement over not being able to do so at all



before genital surgery, it is important to reflect on whether the administrative procedures favour middle-class transsexuals.

**Q: What is the significance of the challenge to the two-gender dichotomous (male/female) system that transgendered and transsexual people raise? How can radical activists who are not transsexual or transgendered take up this critique of gender relations in the daily work that they do?**

**A:** This question comes up again and again on the left. I am happy to have the opportunity to answer it, in a sense to undo this question, because it helps to illustrate some of the issues that I have raised in my previous answers.

Let me begin by briefly summarizing some of the underlying assumptions of this question. The question follows a line advanced by some self-designated transgender activists and repeated over and over again by queer theorists in universities. It argues that the binary sex/gender system, the exclusive division of the world into “men” and “women,” is oppressive. And this argument further contends that this is oppressive not only to transsexuals, but indeed to men and women who consider themselves “properly” sexed and gendered. And having made this critique of the binary sex/gender system, this position then goes on to state that social change can happen through some kind of disruption or displacement of the sex/gender system. That’s where transgendered people come in, located within this framework as those who successfully challenge the status quo and point out a new way of going forward.

Now, having given a brief overview of what I see as some of the underlying assumptions of the question, let me return to the division I made earlier between “transsexual” and “transgendered.” I said that more and more, a lot of transsexuals take a critical distance from the term *transgendered*. And this question allows us an opportunity to think through why. The question assumes that “transgendered” people will see their bodies, identities, and lives as part of a broader process of social change, of disrupting the sex/gender binary. Now many transgendered people make such an argument: you can read it in the works of Leslie Feinberg, Riki Ann Wilchins, or Kate Bornstein.<sup>3</sup> But many transsexuals do not see themselves in these terms. They would situate themselves as “men” and as “women,” not as “gender radicals” or “gender revolutionaries” or “boyzzz” or “grrrrrls.”

Most transsexuals I know, and most I have interviewed, describe themselves as men or women. And there is a sense in which this position cannot be understood in relation to the question posed, “What is the significance of the challenge to the two-gendered dichotomous system that transsexual and transgendered people raise?” Because transsexuals seek to have a different embodied position within that system. I hope it is clear here what I am trying to do—I hope to show how asking the question in this way forces transsexuals to speak a language that is foreign to us. And while it may have meaning and relevance for *transgendered* people, it has very little to do with the everyday lives of *transsexuals*.

Now it is usually assumed, in universities and even in progressive movements for social change, that people who adopt “essentialist” positions are not politically progressive. But you know, I think that the interest in social constructionism in the Anglo-American university is in danger of blinding people to the very good political work that one can do from an essentialist position. And I will go out on a limb here—because to be a good thinker and activist and teacher means taking some risks—and I will say that in the case of transsexuals, essentialism has such a bad name!

Let me cite an example to help illustrate my case. It is so often assumed, as the question posed to me does, that in disrupting a binary sex/gender system, transgendered people are in the forefront of social change. I cited the works of Leslie Feinberg and Riki Ann Wilchins earlier. Both of these writers are located within this framework: they advocate a “transgender” revolution. Now, this is supposed to be a position that is so much more sophisticated than those “terrible” essentialist transsexuals. And the position advocated by Feinberg and Wilchins is the one cited by critics in queer theory. These are the authors who make it onto the course outlines of university studies. And it is all done by well-intentioned, well-meaning teachers who would situate themselves as allies of transsexuals.

But let us examine in more depth some of the political work of Feinberg and Wilchins. Wilchins has been not only active, but instrumental, in lobbying for the delisting of gender identity disorder from the manual of psychiatrists, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*. And Feinberg also supports such a position, notably in publishing the “International Bill of Gender Rights” in her book.<sup>4</sup> This Bill also contends that gender identity disorder has no place in the psychiatric diagnostic manual. If such a lobby is successful, it will mean that it will be impossible to pay for sex-reassignment surgery either through a private

insurance company or through state/provincial health insurance. In this light, the activism of Wilchins and Feinberg supports the privatization of health care. (Feinberg represents herself as a Marxist activist, which is the biggest irony of all!) So here we have a case of some transgender activists, influenced by social constructionist theory, who argue that they are the cutting edge of social change. Yet they are involved in political work that is deeply conservative.

Now let us contrast this with the work of some transsexuals like Margaret O'Hartigan, who has been instrumental in ensuring that sex-reassignment surgery is paid for through state health insurance in Minnesota, and who has offered a trenchant critique of the funding of health care services in Oregon, including services for transsexuals. Now, O'Hartigan is an essentialist: she is not making any claims to disrupting the sex/gender binary, she is not hailing herself as the new vanguard of third-wave feminism. What she is doing, is the highly unglamorous work of research, lobbying, and activism to ensure that all transsexuals can have access to health care, regardless of their economic or financial resources. So here we have an example of an essentialist (gasp!) who is, in my opinion, doing some excellent political work.

Yet I want to go even further. In certain discussions in a university context, there is an acknowledgment that essentialism can be useful politically. Judith Butler, for example, recognizes that while her theoretical work interrogates the sign of "woman," it is at times necessary to invoke the category "woman" in order to make political gains.<sup>5</sup> This argument, of course, could easily be extended to the case of transsexuality: that one needs an identity of "transsexual" in order to advance things politically. I can accept the terms of this argument. However, what I am saying today also goes far beyond this idea. I think that academics and activists set a very dangerous precedent if we maintain that people's identities are acceptable only if and when they can prove that they are politically useful. Who gets to decide what constitutes "politically useful" anyway? To my mind, this still reinforces a dynamic in which transsexuals have to prove themselves: you see, we're really all right because we use our transsexual identity for some good law reform. I refuse to accept these terms.

I cited the case of Margaret Deidre O'Hartigan earlier, arguing that she was involved in some critical health care activism. Now, in very specific and practical terms, she and other activists in Portland, Oregon, engaged in a very detailed reading of the kinds of state coverage offered to its

citizens.<sup>6</sup> And they found significant gender differences with respect to the ranking of different procedures for reimbursement. So for instance, state coverage paid for testicular implants in the case of a male who has lost his testicles, but did not allow for breast implants in the case of a woman who loses her breasts. This kind of activism, then, shows a clear gender bias in social policy. And in point of fact, the activism is not particularly premised on any kind of transsexual identity. So my earlier statement that this was good work being done by an essentialist is a bit unfair. The work is good, period. And whether or not O'Hartigan is an essentialist is irrelevant. So that is one of the points I am happy to make here today. In many university and activist contexts, essentialist identities can only be accepted to the extent that they clearly satisfy some unspecified political agenda. And I am saying something quite different, albeit perhaps unpopular in social constructionist circles. Accepting transsexuality means accepting that people live and identify as men and women, although they were not born in male or female bodies. And that this needs to be kept separate from political work. Some transsexuals situate themselves on the left, and do their political work from this perspective. Others are moderate, or deeply conservative politically. I want to say that if we accept transsexuality in and of itself, then we don't need to make it conditional on a particular political agenda.

So I hope it is clear, then, how the question posed to me contains all kinds of assumptions that I do not accept. And so one of the things I hope to do is to encourage people to be deeply critical of the kinds of information and knowledge available on transsexuals, perhaps especially the knowledge advocated by "transgendered" people. In practical terms, this means reading more than Leslie Feinberg, Riki Ann Wilchins, Kate Bornstein, or Judith Butler.

That being said, and in a critical spirit of solidarity, I would encourage people in the labour movement and in progressive circles to openly critique the "party line" when it comes to transsexuals and transgendered people. Feinberg and Wilchins and many others like them are invested and implicated in precisely the forms of economic and global capitalism that progressive people seek to understand and transform. You know, I think in the past five years, transgendered people have become so trendy. And sometimes I have a feeling that in part because of this trendiness, people are afraid to criticize what transgendered people say because they don't want to be called "trans-phobic." Don't get stuck there: some

transgendered people are involved in regressive political work and it needs to be denounced.

I want to say two more things before concluding. Firstly, I want to encourage people to learn about what is going on here in Canada. Transsexuals have such a rich history in Canada, and prostitutes have been the first ones to organize to get services for transsexuals—in Montréal, in Vancouver, and in Toronto. Yet so much of the writing in English on transgendered people is produced by Americans. By studying how transsexuals have organized here in Canada, we can reframe some of the questions that people ask. Of course, since I live in Québec, I would also encourage English Canadians to learn French, since it would allow them a whole other way to see and understand the world. But that's another interview!

I think it is most useful to think about these questions not in terms of the individual rights of transsexuals, but in terms of how these issues link with those of other marginalized populations, or with the functioning of the state in general. And I think that leftists can play a very important role in this regard. I am thinking, for instance, of a panel that Trish Salah organized around labour and prostitution at the Sexin' Change conference in October 2001 in Toronto. Prostitute activist Kara Gillis actually noted that this was one of the first times she had been invited to a specifically union/labour context, despite the fact that her activism frames prostitution as work. So organizing these kinds of events allows people to make broader connections and shifts the focus from a narrow one of "transsexual rights." Prostitute activist Mirha-Soleil Ross argued that day, for instance, that the decriminalization of prostitution would have a more positive impact on the lives of most transsexuals than any kind of human rights legislation. So that is something progressive people can do: integrate transsexual activists into your work not to speak about gender and transsexuality, but to make broader links concerning the regulation of marginalized people.

## NOTES

1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
2. The background and ruling of this case are available online at [www.micheline.ca/page034-1-etat-civil.htm](http://www.micheline.ca/page034-1-etat-civil.htm).
3. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to*

*Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon, 1996); Riki Ann Wilchins, *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1997); Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

4. Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*.
5. Butler, "Gender Insubordination," in Diana Fuss, ed. *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991): 13–31.
6. Filisa Vistima Foundation, "Re-prioritization of Coverage for Transsexualism through the Oregon Medical Assistance Program," (February 28, 1998). Available from Filisa Vistima Foundation, PO Box 82447, Portland, Oregon, 97282, USA.