

## Book/video reviews

*Sons of the Movement: FTMs Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape.* Jean Bobby Noble. Toronto: Women's Press, 2006; 150 pages; ISBN 0-88961-461-X; \$29.95 (paper).

*Sons of the Movement* is a book whose time has come. Its very title is an exciting index of Noble's call for attention to the complex - he says "incoherent" - cultural significance of female to male (ftm) transgender subjects. Despite the conflicted status of "transgender" within women's and feminist communities, ftms are, Noble argues, not just interlopers within the women's movement and feminism, but sons of these movements. This thin (but packed) volume proceeds to take us through an intricate analysis of what we miss when we ignore what ftm subjectivities and cultures reveal about the intersecting discourses reveal about of feminism, gender, race and class.

For instance, in Chapter Four, "Our Bodies Are Not Ourselves," Noble applies the language of becoming (frequently a term of transgendered self-reference) to an analysis of class and race. He offers a moving account of his own transition from working class lesbian to middle class ftm, which displays not just a transition of gender, but a movement from what he calls "off-white" to white. Two other chapters focus on the prominence of boyhood within popular culture as a mode of inspiring masculinity that is on its way to manhood without fully arriving. "Zoom, Zoom, Zoom: Emergent Boyz, Bois, Boys in Popular Culture," charts the appeal of the boy as a transitional metaphor in cultural texts from Mazda commercials to films such as *Fight Club*. The other, "Boy to the Power of Three: Toronto's Drag Kings" describes (and thus helps to create a performance archive) of three waves of drag king movements in Toronto. The last chapter of the book "'Strange Sisters': Toronto Femme Frenzies" - perhaps the boldest of the book - shows us how the incoherence of transgender intersections also offers us a vocabulary for articulating a nuanced understanding of femme figures within queer communities. At the heart of every chapter in this book is an idea of arresting power - an idea that showcases just how

intersectionality itself undoes our easy assumptions about the separate spheres of class, gender, race, feminism, and sexuality.

Unfortunately, *Sons of the Movement* is also a book whose time came too soon. Its short chapters made one want more...and less. More analysis of what is at stake in the transitivity of boyhood, more and slower analysis of examples, in all chapters, more copyediting. I wanted more of all these things and less summary of the scholarship on whiteness as a problematically unmarked construction and the scholarship on butch-femme history. Such summaries no doubt flag Noble's careful charting of his influences, but they frequently delay and, in some case truncate, exposition of his own interventions within and responses to these histories. One more round of revisions to this book as a whole would have sharpened both its claims and its prose.

It is perhaps a sign of the sad state of academic affairs that, as he claims in his introduction, Bobby Noble felt he could not traffic and thereby test and expand, the ideas and the prose of this book through the institutional frameworks the university offered him during his graduate school training (although he is quite careful to acknowledge his intellectual debts). But this book and Jean Bobby Noble himself (that "guy" who, in a lovely turn of phrase, claims he is "half lesbian") are themselves flickers of hope that the landscape of gender and sexuality studies is far less coherent - more full of possibilities we could not have predicted in advance. We have a lot more to learn from the sons of the movement. And *Sons of the Movement* is an important contribution not just to the "post-queer" landscape, but to the landscape of ideas writ large.

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*Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism.* Viviane Namaste. Toronto: Women's Press, 2005; xii + 136 pages; ISBN 0-889691-452-0; \$24.95 (paper).

Viviane Namaste makes a significant contribution to changing how feminist activists, scholars, teachers, and students think and talk about transsexual lives and politics in Canada. Arguing that we must shift our analyses away from identity and towards questions about how imperialism and institutional frameworks structure and erase transsexual experiences, Namaste places the everyday at the centre of this inquiry. Her work in this volume is deliberately challenging and provocative, not simply because it goes against the grain of a great deal of feminist thinking about transsexuality that privileges identity, but because her insistence on considering national and linguistic imperialism in relation to feminism forces us to re-vision Canadian feminist history to evaluate the foundational and shaping role racism, nationalism, and imperialism plays/played in this history and organizing.

The variety of texts in this volume is eclectic and speaks to Namaste's extensive efforts to bridge the (sometimes real, sometimes imaginary) gap between activism and academia. This book contains interviews with leftist and trans academics, activists, and artists, a letter to nominate PASAN (Prisoners' HIV/AIDS Support Action Network) for the TFC Trans Planet Outstanding Organization Award, a chapter dedicated to women's studies teaching, the keynote address for the 2001 Sexin' Change conference in Toronto, and a chapter that uses two case studies about how imperialism is implicitly supported in contemporary struggles for the legal rights of transsexual people. All of these pieces address the tremendous foundational impact of transsexual prostitutes, prisoners, and drug addicts on transsexual politics and activism. Namaste seeks to undo the gentrification of transsexual activism and history and the institutional erasure of such key actors. These pieces highlight issues such as the restrictive imperative for transsexuals to understand their lives through an LGBQ framework, the refusal of the media (even the serious, "legitimate" media) to take transsexual stories on their own terms and demand that transsexuality be told only on an autobiographical basis, and how struggles for health insurance benefits tied to employment and human rights legislation actually work to further entrench anglo imperialism and deny the foundation of contemporary transsexual politics.

Namaste's chapter, written in collaboration with Georgia Sitara, on teaching the Kimberly Nixon case is especially demonstrative of how shifting the focus from identity to institutions and imperialism when talking about transsexuality moves us in more politically productive directions than the abstract and rather unanswerable question, "Who is/is not a 'woman'?" Namaste suggests that if we move beyond this, there are many possibilities for a rich analysis of this case, including the opportunity to problematize "women's experience" as a universal product of being sexed female at birth; thinking through the troublesome and disturbing feminist recourse to analogies between race and gender; and making links between feminist appeals to the law and the state and the general support of imperialism and nationalism in feminist histories.

Considering the Nixon case (and, by extension, anything we discuss about transsexuality) as not solely a question of identity pushes us out of comfortable abstraction and into the messy dissonances of transsexual and feminist theory and politics.

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Made in India: Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/national Projects. Suparna Bhaskaran. Palgrave: NY, 2004; 180 pages; ISBN 1-4039-6726-1; \$33.95US (paper).

Taking to task poststructuralist theories that shape anthropological research, Suparna Bhaskaran's book, *Made in India: Decolonizations, Queer Sexualities, Trans/national Projects* examines multiple perspectives on feminine and queer Indian subjectivities through the matrices of both national and transnational practices. Her own dis/placement as a diasporic Indian, who was seen to be the "native informant," interested only in "all things Indian" (2), begins her search for a way to think through the colonial roots of anthropological discourse and to make those colonial connections salient to the articulation of "the modern woman" and "queerness" in India. Each chapter in the book, which can be read as an independent essay, engages with various, often contentious, western theories which are often at odds with the lived realities of the people about