

WORKING PAPER **310**

Building Identity While
Managing Disadvantage:
Peruvian Transgender Issues

Giuseppe Campuzano
July 2008

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First published by the Institute of Development Studies in July 2008
© Institute of Development Studies 2008
ISBN: 978 1 85864 535 2

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Typeset by IDS, Brighton UK. Printed by RPM Print & Design, Chichester UK.
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Building Identity While Managing Disadvantage: Peruvian Transgender Issues

Giuseppe Campuzano

Summary

Sexuality issues have gained considerable discursive space in the last two decades in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Yet due to the attention drawn in the early years of the epidemic to homosexuality, this discursive space has largely framed men – both homosexual and heterosexual – as the primary sexual actors, whether as agents in sexual relationships or as transmitters of sexual diseases, and obscured all other sexual agents. Heterosexual women have been seen as unlikely perpetrators of either sex or disease. Lesbians, including bisexual lesbians, have been left out of the question altogether, as if the HIV/AIDS crisis has nothing to do with them. And transgender and intersex sexuality issues, including those related to the epidemic, have been sidelined by the rigidity of the male/female gender dichotomy that underpins the discussion. Sexuality only enters this framework as a factor of ill health or ‘risk’, which permits little of many peoples’ actual experiences of sexuality, including pleasure, to be recognised. This paper draws on a two-year research project with transgendered people (*travestis*) in Lima that explored issues of identity considered important by many *travestis* in Latin America and on the socio-economic struggles that most face. It begins with a consideration of some of the conceptual issues that confront *travestis*, in particular in relation to the polarised gender categories of male/female. It goes on to place *travesti* issues in a ‘development’ framework, emphasising the ways in which *travestis* actively manage and challenge the many aspects of their disadvantage and social exclusion. Rather than a litany of the effects of social stigma, the discussion offers some key points for development in ways that do not threaten *travesti* identity. It illustrates some positive examples of work with *travestis*, as potential ways forward.

Keywords: transgender; sexuality; violence; discrimination; participation; citizenship; poverty.

Giuseppe Campuzano is a Peruvian philosopher and independent researcher. Since 2003 he has run the 'Travesti Museum' project, an investigation on Peruvian transgenders (*travestis*) confronting authorised history with queer studies to develop alternative ways to reach diverse communities. This project provides a better understanding of contemporary *travestis* and is a useful tool for the empowerment of *travesti* communities. His publications include 'Struggles for Gender Rights in Peru' in *Sexuality Matters (IDS Bulletin 2006)* and 'Gender, Identity and Travesti Rights in Peru' in *Development with a Body: Sexuality, Human Rights and Development* (edited by Andrea Cornwall, Sonia Correa and Susan Jolly, 2008, London: Zed Books). He has just published a book that illustrates his four year research project on *travestis*, *Museo Travesti del Perú* (2008, Lima: IDS).

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Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible by a grant from Sida, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Swiss Development Co-operation (SDC) for the Participation Team's Participation, Power and Change Programme. I want to specially thank my *travesti* friends and peers for making this paper possible with their encouraging stories of resistance, and Kirsty Milward who did a really great job with the editing.

Preface

Sexuality has been sidelined by development. Associated with risk and danger, but hardly ever with pleasure or love, sex and sexuality have been treated by development agencies as something to be controlled and contained. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has broken old taboos and silences, and begun to open up space for the recognition of how central sexual rights are to everyone's wellbeing. But more is needed to take us beyond the confines of narrow problem-focused thinking about sexuality towards approaches in which pleasure and desire play as large a part as danger and death do today.

Sexuality is a vital aspect of development. It affects people's livelihoods and security, their wellbeing, and sometimes their very survival. Sexual rights are a precondition for reproductive rights and for gender equality. Lack of sexual rights affects heterosexual majorities as well as sexual minorities – lesbians and gay men, transgendered and intersex people – who are so often denied basic human rights and subjected to violence and exclusion. In some countries, women are denied a choice of partner, subjected to coercive marital sex and restricted in their mobility. Pervasive homophobia places those married men who desire other men, their male partners and their wives at greater risk of HIV and AIDS. Adolescents schooled into abstinence learn little about their bodies or their desires, and may be more vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection as a result. And sex workers are routinely denied basic legal and employment – as well as broader human – rights. Rare is the environment which allows people to live out a fulfilling and pleasurable sexuality of their choice and that empowers people with a sense of their right to say 'yes' as well as 'no' and enjoy safe, loving relationships free of coercion and violence.

The turn to rights in international development offers new openings for the articulation of sexuality and development, and new opportunities for realising sexual rights. It is ever more important to affirm these rights in the face of mounting opposition from religious and other conservatives, who would deny people the right to loving relationships of their own choosing, or rights over their own bodies. This paper is part of a series of working papers that explore the connections between sexuality, participation, human rights and development. Together, they seek to bring fresh thinking to the challenges of realising sexual rights for all. These publications were made possible by a grant from Sida, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Swiss Development Co-operation (SDC) for the Participation Team's Participation, Power and Change Programme.

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For further information about IDS' work on sexuality see:
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1 Introduction

Sexuality issues have gained a great deal of discursive space in the last two decades in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, partly due to the attention drawn in the early years of the epidemic to homosexuality, this discursive space has largely framed men – both homosexual and heterosexual – as the primary sexual actors, whether as agents in sexual relationships or as transmitters of sexual diseases. To a large extent, this framing persists in the contemporary sexuality agenda.

Within this framework, all other sexual agents have been obscured. Heterosexual women have been seen as unlikely perpetrators of either of sex or disease. Lesbians, including bisexual lesbians, have been left out of the question altogether, as if the HIV/AIDS crisis has nothing to do with them. And transgender and intersex sexuality issues, including those related to the epidemic, have been sidelined by the rigidity of the male/female gender dichotomy which underpins the discussion. In this context, *travestis* – a term used in Latin America to describe male to female transgenders but also a range of visible sexual minorities whose identities do not conform with conventional gender binaries – have generally been ascribed with their ‘natural’ gender/sex, sometimes with the addition of a ‘wrong-time/wrong-place’, and the issue of ‘bi-genderism’ has been steadfastly left out of the frame (Jolly 2007). At the same time, sexuality only enters this framework as a factor of ill health or ‘risk’. This framing permits little of many peoples’ actual experiences of sexuality to be recognised, including the pleasure associated with it. It also further obscures the realities of those, like *travestis*, who have not been policy targets.

This paper sets out to contribute to challenging this framework by focusing on some issues of identity considered important by many *travestis*, and on the socio-economic struggles that most face. It begins by elaborating some of the conceptual issues that confront *travestis*, in particular negotiations they undertake around the polarised gender categories of male/female. It goes on to place some *travesti* issues in a ‘development’ framework as a step towards more general recognition of the specificity of some of these issues. The discussion draws on an elaboration of Chambers’ ‘web of poverty’ which guides the description of the contemporary situation of *travestis* in Peru. It draws on a two-year research project with *travestis* in Lima which explored how *travestis* perceive and challenge their situation. Importantly the discussion thus attempts to emphasise the ways in which *travestis* actively manage and challenge the many aspects of their disadvantage and social exclusion, so that rather than a litany of the effects of social stigma, the discussion merely offers a suggestion of how to read this situation and some key points for development, in ways that do not threaten *travesti* identity. The paper concludes by offering some positive examples of work with *travestis*, which represent potential ways forward.

2 Relationships between gender and sexuality

Predominant beliefs, in Latin America as elsewhere, make rigid connections between gender and sexuality, holding both as 'natural' and fixed, rather than socially and culturally acquired. In some settings, such as those where ideas are largely shaped by Christianity, this connection is also seen as sacred and deviations from it summarily rejected.

The sexuality agenda around HIV/AIDS and elsewhere has to some extent challenged, at least in principle, the rigidity of this connection, so that sexuality is less often seen as automatically following from gender. But it has done less to shift the belief that sexuality is 'natural' – so that the search for a biological foundation for homosexuality and bisexuality continues. And it has done very little to challenge or question the male/female gender categories which shape the terrain.

Travesti experience, however, defies insertion into fixed male/female categories, or into the categories of sexuality these are taken to imply. *Travestis*, for example, who present themselves as 'females' according to manners, dress, and make up are often assumed to be homosexual, including by other *travestis*. Embedded in this assumption is sometimes a further one: that *travestis* are *travestis* because this offers one way of being gay. But *travestis* may straightforwardly identify with neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality. Some, for example, may wear women's clothes primarily for aesthetic reasons – because it feels good. Many *travesti*, sex workers and others, are involved in heterosexual emotional and sexual relationships, may have female partners and children, and may continue to perform 'active' penetration beyond sex work situations – although they may also keep these relationships private.

For many *travestis* it is gender, their own gender, which is the primary issue – and not their sexuality. Sexual identity may, however, offer a route to exploring gender identity. Indeed, as Cáceres and Rosasco's (2000) interviews with *travestis* reveal, young people may identify with homosexuality not so much because of a fixed sexuality, but because it offers an explanation for their difference:

When you are at school and you make a gesture or movement, your classmates say to you 'oh! that sissy ...'; so you already have the idea that you are a sissy, and that's how little by little they keep on ... influencing you so ... when you are a little bigger and you have knowledge you would think that you are a homosexual, won't you? ...

(An unidentified *travesti* talks, cited in Cáceres and Rosasco 2000: 100, my translation)

2.1 Challenging gender dichotomies

Gender normativity, which divides people into the two exclusive categories 'male' and 'female' leaving no room for any other, is very deep rooted, and is applied

equally to transgender communities, resulting in a conflicting *travesti* gender discourse which in many cases is confined to male-female dichotomous categories. Even the most progressive legal discourses, like those in Belgium, Germany, UK and Spain, where people now have the right to change sex, have not come to terms with ambiguous gendered self-expression. Occasional *travestism*, transiting back and forth between genders, or remaining in an in-between state, are not accounted for or addressed (Campuzano 2006: 36).

This lack of space for different gender options than idealised masculine or feminine; or dimensions, such as aesthetic (someone in a dress for the simple reason that it feels good, so no actually going for sex, and, if yes, not necessarily with a man), or political. In addition to the interactive process of gender and power dynamics, this results in significant limitations such as the exclusion of *travestis* from social policies and from civil society.¹

Box 2.1 Known historical and contemporary transgender identities

- the Acault, Burma
- the Assinu and Galatura, Mesopotamia
- the Bacchá, Central Asia
- the Bajasa, the Celebes
- the Bakla, Philippines
- the Baptaí, Thrace
- the Basir, Borneo
- the Calusari, Eastern Europe
- the Enaree, Sythia
- Polynesian Fa'afafine, Samoa
- Fakaleiti, Tonga,
- Rae rae and contemporary Mahu in French Polynesia
- the Galli, ancient Rome and Phrygia
- the Hijra, Jogappa, Jogta, Sakhibhava and Shiv-shakti in South Asia and contemporary Hijra and Kothi
- the Kathoey and contemporary Phet thee and sam Sao praphet song, Thailand
- the Kelabim, Phoenicia
- the Kocek, Ottoman Empire
- the Mak Nyahs, Malaysia

1 Elected President Alan García's (2006–2011) opening discourse www.elcomerciope.com.pe/EdicionOnline/Html/2006-07-28/onIPolitica0549038.html (25 August 2006), was judged as inclusive by many politics and journalists as he included women, children, illiterate and poor people. However, he said not a word on sexual minorities. It seems as if the ground-breaking step of having two *travestis*, a lesbian and a gay man as candidates to the election, had never occurred.

- the Maori Takatapui tane ki wahine
- Greco-Roman Megabyzos
- the Menang and Waria, Bali, Indonesia
- the Meti, Nepal
- Islamic Mukhannathun
- the Muxe and contemporary Vestida, Mexico
- Norse Seid
- Shaman, Alaskan and Siberian
- the Serrer, Africa
- the Xanith, Oman
- the 80 plus distinct indigenous manifestations of North America including the Aranaruaq, Keknatsa'nxwix, Wergern, Osha'pu, Tubas, Alyha:, Aiyahkwew, Agokwa, Boté, He'eman, Winkte, Kwido, Pádleehi, Lhamana, Mixu'ga, Koueta – the contemporary Two-spirit.

And yet transgender identities, which defy gender binaries, have a long history all over the world, as the list in Box 2.1 suggests. Many of these identities continue to have a contemporary presence, and other identities have also emerged.

Concerning the contemporary context, Jolly (2007) suggests:

intersex people who do not totally match the medical criteria for male or female at birth; transgender people who identify as neither male or female; transsexuals who may well wish to identify as male or female but whose bodies and legal identities do not initially match the sex category they feel fits them best; bisexuals whose desire is not limited to one sex category; and sadomasochists and fetishists whose sexual desires may also disrupt gender binaries.

All these realities, in addition to the great number of alternative identities from the past identified worldwide, clearly demonstrate how poorly fitting gender dichotomies really are:

Trans makes the processes of gender explicit and exposes the way in which we are all 'passing' as sexed and gendered subjects and exposing discrepancies between biological sex and gender.

(Surya Monro 2005)

2.2 Contemporary *travesti* encounters with gender and sexuality in Peru

In Peru, as in other places, *travestis*, like other sexual minorities, have been kept invisible throughout history and society. The prevalent culture of machismo does not accept disturbances to heteronormativity, and is so frightened to confront it that when 'seeing' it is unavoidable these 'gender disrupters' are treated as

traitors. Incidences of the invisibilisation of deviations from gender norms are many, and often profound: for example, when an American student studying the impact of art on countering discrimination against sexual minorities told her landlord in Cusco about her project, he answered at once, 'There are no such people in this country, you are wasting your time'.²

More recently, *travestis* in Peru have begun to be 'rescued' from their invisibility, and have come to public attention. But they have had to pay the price: they are seen as representing the 'exotic' and comedians and journalists are the most powerful exploiters of pre-conceptions about them. Archival research of newspaper reports and articles between 1966 and 1997 amply reveals this tendency to exaggerate and perpetuate certain aspects of *travesti* identity, sufficiently so that many *travestis* themselves internalise and reproduce them. This incomplete and in parts inaccurate characterisation of *travestis* has produced a contradictory relationship between Peruvian journalism and *travestis*.³ On the one hand, it has resulted in misunderstanding of *travestis*, including by *travestis* themselves. On the other hand, such reports remain the only documented statements of the situation of contemporary *travestis*.

2.2.1 Negotiating gender identity

In fact the world of *travestis* is much more varied and complex than this stereotyped reporting implies. *Travestis* are indeed often deeply engaged with their gender identities, but not always in the same kinds of ways – there is rarely a simple or finite movement from one gender identity to another. Some *travestis* strongly subscribe to female identities, and put in a lot of work to maintain female appearance. Others are more ambiguous both about their identity and their appearance. Still others may move between gender roles, or play out specific aspects of both.

Kulick (1997, cited in Jolly 2007) describes, for example, a *travesti* community in Brazil as having gender rather than having sex in their intimate emotional relationships. These *travestis* are clear that sex with boyfriends involves penetration only by the boyfriend, who is not allowed to touch the *travesti's* genitals. As Jolly comments, 'This kind of sex does not generally bring them orgasms, but it makes them feel like women, which is what they want'. Playing the stereotypically passive feminine sexual role reaffirms their femininity. The same *travestis*, in the course of sex work, penetrate their clients, so they may complement different ways of pleasure.

Many *travestis* also work hard to take care of families – partners, parents, siblings, nephews and nieces, and a few have children of their own - and for some this is an expression of feminine values of responsibility and love. Work outside the home is perhaps more easily associated with these feminine values in Latin

2 9 May 2006, Alison Rand pers. comm.

3 This contradictory relationship may be very old, as suggested by an article published in Lima in 1791 ('Carta sobre los Maricones' in *Mercurio Peruano* newspaper).

America than elsewhere, as the macho culture of male recklessness often produces a situation where women's outside work, undertaken alongside parenting and other domestic responsibilities, is the main source of income. This association has also recently been reinforced by a programme established by the Alejandro Toledo government, which provides a monthly subsidy directly to mothers of children under five in rural and indigenous communities, in return for a commitment to invest in the education and health of their children.⁴

The association between *travestis* and family care as an expression of feminine values also has something of a *travesti* precedent in the figure of the *muxe* – the Zapotec transgender from Mexico. In a traditional family, the *muxe* is often considered by his mother as 'the best of her children' (Miano 2001: 127–8). Like unmarried daughters in the *mestizo* family tradition, the *muxe* takes care of children and the elderly, cleans the house and courtyard, cooks, and feeds the animals. *Muxe* also have a reputation for being industrious, and for contributing earnings to family maintenance.

Gender identity transitions are not always towards the feminine, however: a *travesti* candidate, Jana Villayzán, on questioning why several men had turned up to a series of meetings, learned that many men in the eastern lowland region of Peru, the Selva, are brought up in spaces dominated by *travestis*, and hence assume that *travesti* is their gender. Over time, some discover that being a *travesti* is not really their thing, and they turn into 'males' – but retain strong ties with the *travesti* community.

Gender appearance – including the gender implications of performing certain kinds of work – may also be manipulated, or arranged, for strategic reasons, or simply because it feels right. For example, Jana feels that she has become 'more proper' since she started doing more desk work. Belissa Andía, another *travesti* candidate, has lightened her already dyed blond hair in order to better reach sex workers whom she does fieldwork with: 'they have stopped calling me ma'am' (Jana Villayzán, Belissa Andía, pers. comm.). I also have to deal with the barrier that my 'gay', or 'butch', look, puts between me and other *travestis* when we first meet, when they take me to be a 'stranger', a liar, or assume I am too frightened to show my 'real identity'. During a countrywide conference on 1 July 2005, and after I had declined to be added to the gay group in order to vote, a Cusco *travesti* activist came up to me and said, 'I don't have it clear, you said that you are not gay ... so you are heterosexual, aren't you?' She had assumed that if I am a genital man and appear male, and I do not consider myself as gay then I have to be straight.

Gender appearance can sometimes provoke such strong reactions – amongst *travestis* and beyond, that those who appear as women part-time; or who dress partly as men and partly as women; or effeminate men are often rejected from the *travesti* community/identity, as my personal experience because I match with all the above and also consider mine as a *travesti* identity. Yet *travestis* are a compound of masculine and feminine, and not all fully espouse 'feminine values'.

4 www.mimdes.gob.pe/noticias/discur_12ene_ninez.htm (26 August 2006).

Part of the problem lies in the fact that it is very difficult to escape gender normativity, equipped as we are with tools such as languages which are imbued with gender categories: nouns with fixed genders; adjectives which express gender; pronouns which mark gender. It is interesting to note that some languages are less restricting in this way: in Aymara, in Peru, nouns and pronouns are not marked according to gender (Guzman 1984). Some languages may better facilitate challenging gender dichotomies than others.

In strongly gendered languages, at least, work within gender dichotomies is not likely to make progress in challenging them – indeed it is more likely to consolidate male/female identities. This is one major reason why it is important to move beyond a ‘gender fixation’ in *travesti* discourse, and explore the many other concerns affecting *travestis*’ lives.

3 The *travesti* web of deprivation ... and resourcefulness

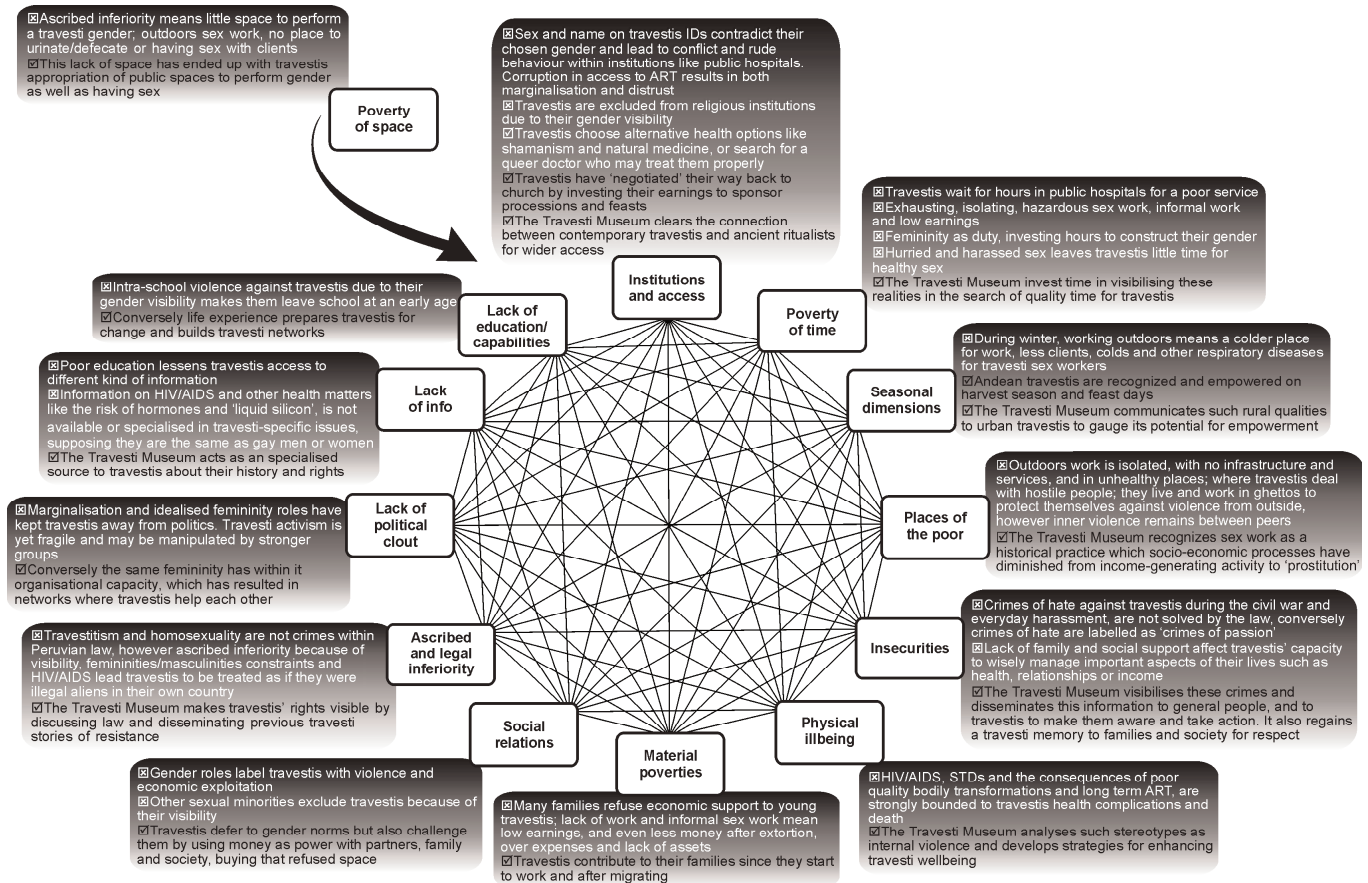
Although issues of gender and sexuality are central concerns for *travestis* – precisely because these are directly linked to the general denial of their rights – other aspects of their lives are equally important but have received much less attention. This section explores *travesti* wellbeing in terms of the dimensions of work, health, violence and political identity, and how these interact with each other, offering a suggestion of how the present *travesti* situation can be read. As Argentinean *travesti* activist Lohana Berkins articulated, ‘I am a *travesti*, a woman, Socialist, Indian, fat, of colour, poor, labourer. I am all these things and much more. And I fight to build up a world where I will be accepted for everything I am.’ These other dimensions of *travestis*’ lives are key to development agendas, and offer some avenues through which *travesti* issues can be addressed in development work without threatening their identities.

While the denial of *travesti* rights has been extensive in most circumstances, such that most *travestis* struggle for resources and recognition in all of these dimensions, this is not an attempt to explain how stigmatisation functions in order to demonstrate to *travestis* the likelihood of their defeat. On the contrary, it is important to emphasise that *travestis* have survived against considerable odds, and that they have done so by drawing on a noteworthy resourcefulness. Thus the following attempts to draw attention to how *travestis* have coped with, or turned around, adverse circumstances, as well as what those circumstances are.

The analysis draws on Chambers’ (2005: 42–7) ‘Web of Deprivation’, originally envisaged to capture the interconnectedness of various aspects of poverty, and later developed in relation to sexuality (Jolly 2006: 2). For the purposes here it has been further adapted into a ‘*Travesti* web of disadvantages and resourcefulness’ (see Figure 3.1). The analysis also draws on action research conducted over two years with *travestis* in Lima, Peru, concerned with how *travestis* challenge their present situation and with disseminating this information both to other *travestis* and to the general public. In emphasising the social resourcefulness of *travestis*’ management of poverty issues, as well as eliciting new

strategies for social inclusion, the analysis also intends to demonstrate how Chambers' web can be used as a tool for transformation.

Figure 3.1 *Travesti* web of poverty disadvantages and resourcefulness



3.1 (Sex) work

The continuous exertion of their bodies in labour that is underpaid and undervalued leaves them exhausted. Their work is hazardous, seasonal and leaves them vulnerable to outside harm. They are forced to use and sell their bodies as an instrument. They rarely have time to recuperate or rest, and are reduced to what their bodies can do. These processes inscribe on their bodies and link them to diseases, degenerating illnesses and death.

A. Parasuraman, 'The Labouring Body' (Chambers 2005: 18)

There is a profound lack of work options for *travestis* all over Peru. In Lima, the options are limited to sex work and hairdressing. A very few find other kinds of work, either by suppressing their *travesti* identity, or through close relationships, and sometimes combined with migration. La China Pau, for example, lived in Lima working as a cleaner before making her *travesti* identity known. During the process of developing this identity, she worked as a seamstress, and finally as a sex worker. Later she migrated to Como in Italy, where she worked as a sex

worker, underwent genital reconstruction surgery (GRS) and met her partner. Today she works with him as his secretary.

Migration is a very significant element of many *travestis* work/life strategies. Migration routes include rural-urban migration within Peru, with Lima as the main destination, and international migration in particular to Milan and Como in Italy. Usually, migration takes place within the context of sex work.

In some areas, such as Central and South Andes, a few alternative work options are available. In these areas, *travestis* also work in petty trade and in mining. Since this work does not attract stigma, it allows *travestis* a much greater degree of inclusion in their communities. In areas such as these – which have experienced less economic development than other parts of Peru – *travestis* have also sometimes managed to retain or reclaim their former positions as key figures in certain rituals, as South Asian transgenders, *hijras*, have done. In some places this takes the form of being called on as skilled dancers, the main attraction on annual feast days. Sometimes, *travestis* sponsor part of the celebrations. In certain patron saint rituals, such as in Celendin, Cajamarca, the one responsible for dressing Virgin Del Carmen throughout the month-long celebration is a local effeminate man, who is also the son of the local priest. Some of these roles – such as the feast day dancing – involve considerable investment, saved despite generally low wages/resources, in expensive costumes to earn their right to participate.

Nevertheless, these local *travesti* traditions are important, and knowledge of them should be made more widespread amongst the general population and amongst *travesti* groups elsewhere. I have previously argued that the low levels of economic development in these areas have permitted the building of a bridge between *travestis*' rich gender heritage of the pre-Hispanic era, and today. These bridges may not be too solid or fully constructed, but they are enough to allow some measure of inclusion (Campuzano 2006: 36).

3.1.1 Sex work as total exposure

The man doesn't really know what is he exposing himself to, does he? Neither do I know what I will be exposed to in the end. The man doesn't know if I will suddenly take his car away, and if I get into his car, the man might tell me he will give me a thousand and then in the end just shoot me, I don't know. It is always about being on the defensive.

Vanessa talks on 20 May 2005

Total exposure seems a good synonym for sex work, both for *travesti* sex workers and their clients. Sex work is exhausting, hazardous, isolating and informal work with generally low returns. Low returns are often exacerbated by theft. The casual nature of the work means irregular earnings, no health insurance, and no pension. It offers little or no income opportunities during old age to people who are often isolated from their natal families and generally have no children of their own to look after them later.

It is also carries health risks, not just of exposure to STDs and HIV/AIDS, but also

to the cold. It is nearly always outdoor work, so winters mean not only less clients and earnings, but also standing in the cold with no warm clothes, and hence vulnerability to colds and other respiratory diseases. There is a 'poverty of space' associated with *travestis* in general, as also their sex work. Sex work usually takes place in polluted and unhealthy places, and there is little infrastructure to support it – so that there is a lack of clean spaces to urinate and defecate, have sex with clients, or change clothes.

It is also physically and psychologically isolating work, which is often subject to the harassment of hostile police – which further limits the 'space' available to *travestis* – and sometimes hostile clients, delinquents and peer sex workers. Sex itself is often a hurried and harassed act in inadequate spaces. The stigma on sex work also invokes other restrictions for *travestis*, sometimes self-enforced, such as limited or no access to public resources such as hospitals and basic education. Although *travesti* sex workers often live in ghettos to protect themselves from stigma and violence from outside the community, the competitive nature of their work also nurtures internal violence between peers. *Travestis* have to pay a kind of 'taxation' to the men who keep them, like a permanent 'dowry', from their earnings from sex work; also when migrating to their 'mothers', *travestis* which sponsor others emotionally and economically, so they pay for the new arrivals' travel expenses while burdening them with some sort of unspecified contract.

In these circumstances and despite the Peruvian common expression as an 'easy life', sex work is rarely 'enjoyable'. As Vanessa (*ibid.*) said: 'Men really think I like sex a lot, just because you are on the street. Many think that but it isn't true ... Who is going to be like this just for the fun of it? Stand up just for the fun of it all night long? No.'

Nevertheless, *travestis*' work – their sex work – is not an unmitigated miserable experience. And neither are their lives, including their sex lives, entirely defined by their work. Sex work is not only about illness, and sex is not all about work. It can include pleasure, and *travestis* do orgasm at work. Many *travestis* also have partners/ 'husbands' with whom they have pleasurable interactive relationships, including sexual relationships. In general deprived of space, and offered no place specifically for pleasure, *travestis* make everywhere into a 'pleasure space'. Amongst local *travestis*, money quickly earned is also quickly spent, sometimes on drugs and/or alcohol which offer elements of short-term pleasure. Life is lived a day at a time. For international migrant *travestis*, money earned abroad can offer opportunities to return to Peru for the desired – and cheaper – bodily transformations, as well as to 'buy' the respect previously missing in many social relationships. For some, better income opportunities can offer the possibility of being accepted by their families where previously they were not.

The positive elements of these 'pleasures' are clearly sometimes ambiguous. One *travesti*, Jenny – possibly in response to what she believed the researcher wanted to hear – grouped 'husbands, alcohol, and drugs' together as bad ways in which money is usually spent, in contrast to the purchase of goods to obtain a better social position (Cáceres and Rosasco 2000: 111). Husbands and families sometimes expand their expectations and demands as the incomes of migrant *travestis* increases. For some, the acceptance gained within their families ends or diminishes as income diminishes in old age. The gap between the individual

wealth of some international migrants and the poverty of their home communities can also produce social and personal stresses.

But despite these ambiguities, development programmes which remain rooted in the 'rescue and rehabilitation' model of approaches to sex work are strikingly inappropriate. While advocacy around general sex worker rights has mainly moved beyond these approaches, there remain examples of programmes for *travesti* sex workers which continue to, or have recently started to, try to 'help' *travestis* give up sex work in favour of more respectable professions. Due to leadership changes within the *Asociación Cristiana de Travestis de la Virgen de la Puerta* (a formerly important *travesti* Christian group in La Victoria, Lima), for examples, this organisation adopted the 'rehabilitation' approach, encouraging *travestis* to replace sex work with trades such as tailoring. Although some *travestis* associated with the programme have given up going to meetings, they have not stopped doing sex work, and only two out of more than 20 have begun to study to acquire a different skill.

A few initiatives for sex workers elsewhere offer a more practical approach which is to be welcomed: the Casa Xochiquetzal, founded in 2006 in Mexico, for example, is a self-financing home for old-age female sex-workers. Closer to home, candidates for election to the Lima Council recently proposed a health insurance plan for sex workers which could offer real benefits.

Travesti sex work has been performed for generations, and constitutes a significant part of *travesti* culture. Former transgender communities performed sacred hallucinogenic-sexual activities for several centuries, so some aspects of the *travesti* sex work culture of today have historical roots. Although there are unpleasant aspects to this work, it is usually not directly forced and often includes elements of respect as well as some sources of pleasure. It is clearly the main livelihood option for transgenders in nearly all locations. And importantly, there are no clear boundaries between sex work and other spheres of life. What is required is not rehabilitation, but support and rights (see Choike 2006).

3.1.2 International migration

International migration, as noted earlier, has become a popular strategy amongst Peruvian *travestis* over the last three decades, not least due to the availability of free antiretroviral treatment (ART) and other medical attention in Italy. It is supported by a well-developed network of earlier migrant *travestis* who help with paperwork, accommodation and contacts in the new city. Tamagno, for example, writes

Lucy arrived in Milan 7 years ago [1996] and is acknowledged amongst Peruvians as the *travesti* who offers most help to new arrivals from Peru. Because of the 'work' she does (prostitution) and the networks she has, she has managed to buy a fine apartment in Milan where she accommodates all the Peruvians that keep on arriving who have neither a place to live nor contacts. Peruvians call her place 'The house of the Pilgrim', because she charges less than a convent [...]

(Tamagno 2003: 237, my translation)

The migration journey is, however, fraught with hazards, often without clear boundaries between voluntary aspects of migration and aspects associated with trafficking. It begins with the 'ritual' of building a relationship with a 'mother' capable of paying for the trip and willing to 'adopt' a 'daughter'. Succeeding in acquiring this 'mother/daughter' relationship depends on a variety of circumstances such as affinity, fondness, good looks, or wit. The next step of the journey is often bodily transformations as the journey continues, via Argentina and other stopovers – and more recently via Brazil, which has apparently become 'easier'. Many *travestis* have to wait for years in each stop and some never reach their final destination.

Lucia, for example, was finally travelling to Como, where her 'mother' and friends were already established. Her first stop was Brazil and everything went smoothly until she arrived at her next stop, Hungary. Here, something had not worked out properly and she was unable to go on into Italy. Initially she stayed in a hotel in a poor city with neither friends nor language, while her friends tried hard with her papers. At first these friends also sent her money, but later she had to work – without knowing clearly how much a Hungarian Forint was worth. Eventually she found a man who gave her shelter, and located a charity restaurant to eat at. But finally, returning to Peru seemed preferable to staying where she was, so she gave herself up to the police. She returned to Lima, however, with a debt of Euro13,000 – impossible to pay off locally. So within a year she left to try her luck again.

Once in Europe, new arrivals have to start re-paying 'mothers' for their 'investment' according to various arrangements, in addition to payments to pimps to 'rent' the street and to be defended from other pimps. But many *travestis* succeed and eventually make good enough money to send regular remittances to families and 'husbands' and occasionally to friends.

3.2 Health

The economic situation of most *travestis*, combined with their cultural background which attracts considerable discrimination, hinders their access to standard health care. As a result, most maintain traditional/alternative health habits such as shamanism and auto-medication. Modern health issues significant in the *travesti* community such as HIV/AIDS and bodily transformations are also often undertaken without modern medical supervision. Some take ART, often without continuity, sent by migrant *travesti* friends – who also often help out with funeral and burial expenses. Many *travestis* inject liquid silicon into their bodies to increase buttock, hip or chest size; some also auto-medicate the ingestion of hormones to increase female appearance (see Campuzano 2006: 36).

Some *travestis* do attempt to access modern health systems, for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, for cosmetic surgery implants, or for general health complaints. But the discrimination they receive in public health institutions is alive and kicking, and these institutions also suffer from infrastructure constraints and inefficiencies which make accessing them time-consuming and exhausting both for *travestis* and the general public. These difficulties have many different faces.

Despite Peru's current neoliberal economic policies, workers are still offered a country-wide health insurance which they are eligible for on regular payment of a fixed percentage of their income. Treatment under this insurance scheme is in specific social-security hospitals. However, in the seven years I have been attending the HIV/AIDS programme as well as many other different departments of one of the biggest social-security hospitals in Peru, I have only come across three other *travestis* accessing these services. Part of this restricted access is self imposed: *travestis* see these hospitals as meant for 'formal' workers, which does not include them.

Conversely when I attended the HIV/AIDS programmes of different public hospitals – which mainly attend the unemployed or people whose jobs don't include a health plan – *travestis* were all over the place. Corruption in the system further militates against *travestis* accessing ART, as does the insidious discrimination. More recently, when working together with public hospitals on the potential of ART to stop HIV/AIDS related stigma,⁵ it was distressing to see how discrimination processes against *travestis* have been perfected. This is despite the fact that the Ministry of Health⁶ has promised sustainable and universal access to ART⁷ and the current Peruvian Constitution after the 2005 constitutional reforms protects this decision in barring discrimination on account of 'origin, race, sex, language, religion, opinion, economic condition or any other condition' Constitución Política del Perú 2005, Title I, Chapter I, Article 2.2, my translation).

General discrimination is compounded by institutional issues. In particular, the sex and name on *travesti* IDs contradict their gender choice, which leads to a variety of conflicts, rude behaviour on the part of hospital staff, and elaborate attempts on the part of *travestis* to conceal their gender choice while attending the hospital. Such contradictions encourage the harassment of *travestis* to cut their hair and dress according to the gender on their ID – a version of harassment which has a long history in both biblical and colonial edicts (Campuzano 2006: 34). Recently, even some *travesti* counsellors once chosen for their more successful intervention in their communities, have been forced to 'change' in order to keep their jobs (MD Javier Salvatierra pers. comm.).

Added to these difficulties is the fact that specialised information for *travestis* is not available, because health information supposedly for sexual minorities in general actually focuses on the gay population. In addition, HIV/AIDS counselling

5 These observations took place in the context of work with the Research Network on Sexualities and HIV/AIDS in Latin America, Faculty of Public Health and Administration, University Cayetano Heredia, 2005–2006. www.ciudadaniasexual.org/expresiones/expo16.htm (7 September 2006). www.ciudadaniasexual.org/expresiones/muestra17.htm (7 September 2006).

6 See www.minsa.gob.pe/portal/03Estrategias-Nacionales/03ESN-ITS-SIDA/esn-vihlinacc.asp (7 September 2006)

7 The effects of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) on the cost of ART clearly threaten this promise. The argument that FTAs also expand labour opportunities so that people will be able to afford more expensive medicine looks very thin when travesti work limitations are borne in mind, never mind the fact that people requiring ART are likely to be too sick and weak to capitalise on these new 'opportunities'.

has not yet moved on from terminal to chronic illness issues, despite the presence of ART, making much of it less relevant.

3.3 Violence ⁸

Crimes of hate and institutionalised physical harassment are the direct manifestations of violence directed against *travestis* in Peru. But these manifestations have deep roots, held in place by a history which carefully and forcefully drew boundaries around the genders, and by contemporary cultural expressions which reproduce and reinforce these structures. Figure 3.2 illustrates the cycle or 'web' of violence that this combination produces.

3.3.1 Direct violence

There is a long history of crimes of hate against *travestis* in Peru. During the 20 years of our recent civil war (1980–2000), many *travestis* were killed in Lima and other cities by right-wing and left-wing groups as well as by military and civil forces.⁹ The Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and paramilitary groups had claimed responsibility on several assassinations.

Unfortunately, violence against *travestis* did not end with the end of the civil war. On 12 November 2004, Heidi was beaten, tied up and asphyxiated with adhesive tape in her home, by three men who stole her possessions. On 26 November 2004, another *travesti* who had previously been violently murdered was cremated to hide her body. According to the police, this was a crime with no apparent motive. TV news reports speculated, however, on a settling of scores by drug dealers. On 19 February 2005, Marcela was beaten and stabbed to death by her partner, after a 16-year relationship. Several months later, her killer was captured and testified that he killed her because she frequently beat him and raped him while he was sleeping, and he could not stand the shame. On 10 July 2005, La Gitana was beaten to death and thrown through a skylight inside a building.¹⁰

Travestitism and homosexuality are not crimes according to Peruvian law. However on the basis of an article which proscribes 10–30 days of community service for those who 'make immoral or indecent proposals to a third party in public spaces',¹¹ *travesti* sex workers are often illegally harassed and injured.

On 22 July 2005, *serenazgo*, municipal security force officers, battered and injured a group of *travesti* sex workers, one of whom was captured and covered with tear gas. Their women peers were left alone. On 19 November 2005, two

8 This chapter is based on *Violence Theory* (Transcend 2004).

9 TRC Final Report (2003, volume II chapter 1.4.3); ICCHRLA (1996).

10 2005 Annual Report on BGILT People Human Rights Situation in Peru (Bracamonte and Alvarez 2005: 35–47).

11 Penal Code, Third Book, Offences. Title IV, Offences against Good Customs. Article 450, Other Offences (Código Penal del Perú 1991).

travestis were assaulted by *serenazgo*, one of whom suffered serious injuries caused by the *serenazgo*'s dogs. While the legal functions of *serenazgo* have not been clearly specified, they clearly do not include either the use of tear gas, nor the right to batter or detain people.

In July 2006, repeated raids were scheduled and carried out by the Lima Council against several discotheques. Although Lima Council argued that they were just maintaining law and order and that their actions were not focused on any single community, these raids were performed only on gay discotheques, and only *travesti* customers were arrested.

These are only a few cases highlighted by local newspapers and reported by BIGLT activists to the ombudsman, police and Lima Council itself. However it is estimated that only one out of every five cases is reported at all, and that one crime of hate against sexual minorities occurs every five days. Sexual minorities often fail to report crimes because they do not trust public institutions, particularly the justice administration. Sometimes crimes of hate are invisibilised by the media deciding not to specify the identity or sexual orientation of the victim. The family of the victim also often keeps sexual identity of the victim quiet because of the stigma it would imply.

Violence against *travestis* – combined with social marginalisation – has generated a profound insecurity which has psychological manifestations such as anguish, shame and guilt. Sometimes this carries itself back to their own bodies as contra-violence – whether in the form of repeated bodily transformations or in the form of violence within their intimate relationships (Campuzano 2006: 36). *Travestis*' relationships combine love, economic exploitation and physical abuse. Altogether, there is a systematic concealment by identifying those crimes of hate as 'crimes of passion', therefore as individual cases not linked to any community, the police are ready to file and forget them.

3.3.2 Structural violence

Violence against *travestis* is not only a contemporary issue, it has been structured through the direct violence exercised by colonialists, who repressed any gender identity or sexual orientation which contradicted or challenged heteronormativity (Campuzano 2006). In addition to this, colonialists built on and elaborated social hierarchies, creating structured inequality which has been upheld by successive 'democratic' and military governments, despite claims of social change. *Travestis*, who transgressed imposed gender norms, were pushed to the very bottom of these hierarchies, and even today suffer from an ascribed inferiority in every dimension of wellbeing.

During the 2006 general election, Ollanta Humala's campaign was based on the struggle for indigenous identities, which were similarly diminished by colonialism and neoliberalism. This campaign had the potential to be, and styled itself as, part of a revolutionary discourse, but in reproducing transphobia and homophobia it in fact drew on the same unequal social structures it claimed to challenge. Which indigenous people was Humala talking about? Was he including *travesti* poor indigenous people? Clearly not. Yet inequality on the basis of transphobia and

homophobia have become so normalised that Humala was the favourite for marginalised sectors.

A further result of colonial repression was that *travestis* were thoroughly invisibilised – another effect which has survived to this day. With the economics focus of contemporary knowledge institutions, even the poorest people have become more visible than *travestis*. Data on *travestis* as a group simply does not exist: there are no records of the numbers of *travestis* killed during the civil war, for example, or of the numbers of migrating *travestis*.

This structural violence continues to be reproduced through the institutions of the state. In education, for example, almost every Peruvian school is strongly influenced by Christian mores and military macho stereotypes, thus deviations from gender normativity are simply out of the question. Sexual minority students have to deal with the prejudice of teachers and psychologists, as well as their improvisations on how to deal with this ‘problem’. The difficulties of these relationships worsen if a student decides to go public with a minority sexual or gender identity, which often attracts violence from other students. The relationship usually ends in dismissal or with *travestis* themselves giving up school.

3.3.3 Cultural violence

While direct violence is carried out by delinquents and state security forces, and structured violence by the state and society; there is third kind of violence, a symbolic one.

Christianity constitutes an essential element of the culture and society in this region, but the influence of the Christian church institutions on the situation of *travestis* has been somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, many of these institutions – both Catholic and Protestant – have been responsible for a large proportion of social stigma around *travestis*. The majority support and disseminate hatred against *travestis* and other sexual minorities, using and abusing the belief of both followers and the population in general to distort the actual message of Christ. These right-wing segments of the church have gained ground in recent years with the support of Pope John Paul II, who effectively put an end to the progressive Catholic doctrine of Liberation Theology in Latin America by backing the highly conservative Opus Dei and other groups.

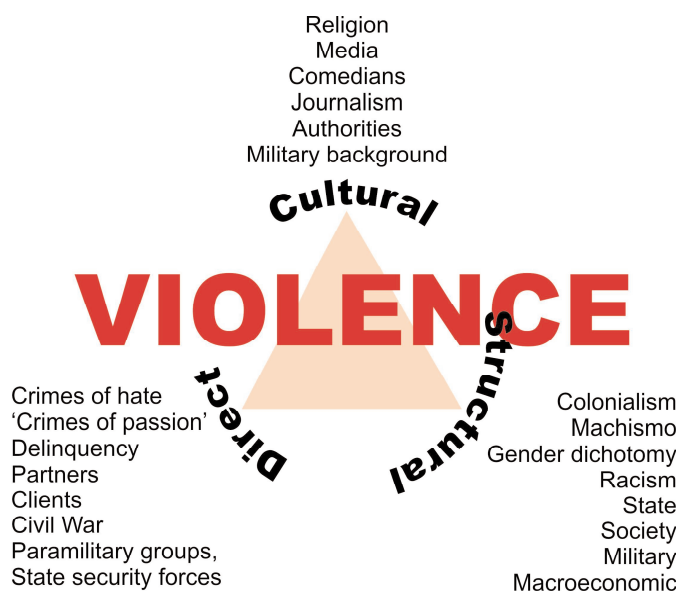
On the other hand, some parts of the church have promoted – and continue to promote – studies on *travestis* and struggles against the stigma they suffer. Father Gustavo Gutierrez’ social work with the poor, for example, has taken root in Peruvian society through the form of popular religiosity. Similarly, the *Asociación Cristiana de Travestis de la Virgen de la Puerta* was the result of *travestis* and priests working together in a relationship of respect which built upon their similarities instead of their differences. Sarita Colonia, a saint of the people, symbolises this relationship: both Sarita and *travestis* are women, half-blooded, poor, victims and not accepted by the Catholic Church. In some places, *travestis*’ sexuality remains embedded as a sacred attribute to contemporary faith, embodied by sex work earnings allocated to buy dresses and accessories for the statue of the *Virgen de la Puerta* and to pay for the procession expenses, while

faith in Virgin Mary and Sarita grows and internationalises with migrant *travestis*. Added to this complex situation is the fact that religion, like sex work, is an important part of *travesti* lives, thus instead of putting religion out of the question, it should be taken into account when working within *travesti*'s complexities from a respectful point of view.

The military

Like the Church, the military actively encourages hatred of sexual minorities by its promotion of macho stereotypes and trans/homophobia within the army itself, but also amongst the general population. But like the church, this institution is also not homogenous, and can be challenged by other institutions of the state. In an interesting case recently, police officer Jose Antonio Alvarez Rojas was dismissed from service for marrying a *travesti*. But on 14 February 2005, the Constitutional Court ordered him to be reinstated. In discussion of this case, the ex-director of the National Police of Peru, General Eduardo Perez Rocha announced 'Yes there are cases of homosexuality within the National Police. I knew some of them and they include even colonels on duty'.¹²

Figure 3.2 Travesti violence chart



4 Politics

Travestis have been generally seen by others and usually themselves as apolitical, too occupied in 'feminine' matters like beauty and pleasure, and working as beauticians and sex workers. On the other hand *travestis*, like women, have

12 *Ibid.*

managed pretty well to organise themselves, and in recent years some have also burst into activism. This emerging political force remains fragile, however, and is subject to various tensions.

An important tension is in the relationship between transgenders and other sexual minorities. Transgendered people are usually considered part of the gay community – an association which in many ways makes sense in the face of their intertwined histories and common struggles for visibility and inclusion. However, there are very significant differences between the two groups, which have become emphasised as both groups have gradually gained visibility and gays and lesbians have made their way into society by observing gender normativity rules. *Travestis* have remained reluctant – and are perhaps unable – to join them, because to agree with such gender rules would deny their gender difference which remains central. This position, while prioritising gender, has resulted in the marginalisation of *travestis* within the sexual minorities' agenda¹³ and hence the enduring invisibility of particular transgender issues to society in general. Gender disruption has become the 'face' of sexuality that nobody wants to see (see this 'visibility-invisibility syndrome' on Figure 3.3).

Travestis as a group also have some tensions with the women's movement. Some feminist groups actively attempt to support *travestis*' struggles for inclusion, and engage in dialogue – such as illustrated by the TV programme 'Barra de Mujeres' which sought serious discussion of how the struggles of women and *travestis* do and do not overlap. On the other hand, Lourdes Flores, the most popular woman candidate for the 2006 presidential election, drew strongly on the 'women's vote' on account of her own gender, while also offering anti-abortion policies and consenting to the power of the church. Herself rich, white, and educated, she addressed 'we women' as the 'force for development',¹⁴ but it seems unlikely that she meant sex worker women, for example, or *travestis*, most of whom see themselves as women.

While *travestis* have gained some ground in establishing identity, they do not at this point constitute a coherent political grouping – an issue which makes their emerging political voice vulnerable to manipulation by stronger groups, and exacerbates some of these tensions. During the 2006 election, for example, so-called sexual minorities took part as candidates for the first time. A lesbian and a *travesti* were nominated as parliamentary candidates, and a gay man and another *travesti* as candidates to the Andean Parliament. Although they were not in direct competition with each other, the two *travesti* candidates, who belonged to different left-wing parties, confronted each other. While such discussion could eventually be beneficial, this confrontation was at that time a distraction, probably unhelpful while *travestis* are still politically fragile.

13 This visibility issue remains since the very beginning of BGILT communities: '[after the Stonewall Riots,] when the time came to make deals, the GAA [Gay Activists Alliance] dropped the portions in the civil rights bill that dealt with transvestitism and drag – it just wasn't possible to pass it with such "extreme" elements included' (Bronski 2002).

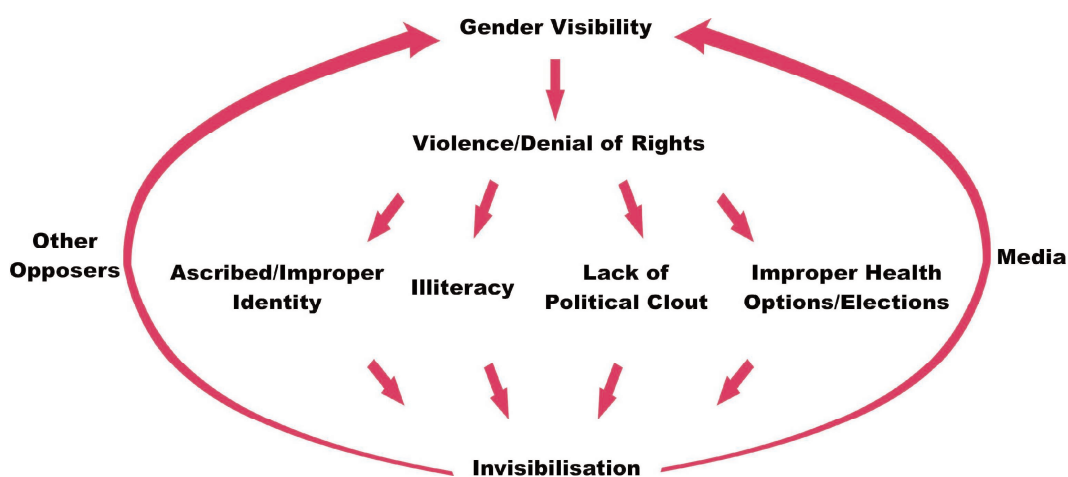
14 www.lourdes2006.com/Home/vVerNoticia.aspx?noticiald=106

In the same election campaigns, a series of stencils depicting a feminine silhouette with the sentence 'Victoria is anti-capitalist' signed by *Raíz*, a LGBTI group lead by gay men could be seen on the several walls in red-light districts. While this may be a respectful opinion, it is also a sweeping statement and certainly not a social reality for many *travestis* here and now. Many *travestis* have 'bought' their space in society – into families, neighbourhoods, and consumer society – as beauticians and through sex work, including migrant work, and some of them are satisfied with this. Political statements of this kind merely serve to sustain the barrier between politicians and a group that is just starting to think politically.

The media have also difficulties in taking the emerging *travesti* politics seriously. Belissa Andía, one of the *travesti* candidates, had more access to the media than the other sexual minorities' candidates, mostly due to the campaigns she has led against the *serenazgo's* harassment of *travesti* sex workers. However, the media introduction to the *travesti* topic was flippant, and focused primarily on her gender identity by portraying her combing her hair and making up, rather than on her political voice.

While these examples illustrate some of the hazards of this nascent politics, it is also important that a solution is not sought in a political ghettoisation of *travestis*, or in the rejection of other sexual minorities or masculinities. Alliances will surely be needed and relevant, but these should arise out of a stronger *travesti* identity and vision.

Figure 3.3 Visibility–invisibility *travesti* body syndrome



5 Ways forward

There are many examples of work and ideas at different levels which could usefully improve the situation of *travestis*. These range from action to remove obstacles to resource access for *travestis*, to work on identity and rights, and to theoretical work on gender dichotomies.

5.1 Making resources accessible

On the one hand, some solutions are very simple: at the Alberto Barton Health Centre in Callao in Lima, the mornings are spent looking after mothers and their children. In the afternoons it welcomes *travestis*. There, *travestis* are called by the names they have chosen, and not by those which appear in their IDs. Many of them have travelled long distances to visit the homosexual and *loca* (effeminate) doctor who looks after the health centre. But they would rather do this than attend more local centres because the doctor understands them.

There are also missed opportunities which could be turned around. In every hospital or health centre there is at least one mutual aid group for PWAs, but the rich experience that these sites could generate from interaction between different communities is wasted. *Travestis* have a lot to share concerning sexuality in general – in terms of the experience of going public and of social marginalisation; concerning illness, such as how to deal with HIV and other STDs within their lives; and on the subject of sex work. Actively making these spaces accessible to *travestis* as a space for exchange could result in all involved acknowledging that their sexualities overlap much more than they previously thought. These are sites at which the discussion of HIV/AIDS and sexuality could reach far beyond ideas of ‘high risk’ and ‘low risk’ groups, to focus on the interconnections between individual people.

5.2 Working on sex worker rights

Claiming rights as sex workers is central to *travestis* wellbeing. Approaches which frame sex workers as immersed in a ‘state of prostitution’, without offering solutions, are simply disempowering for *travesti* sex workers. Perhaps surprisingly, these approaches, or parts of them are remarkably common even amongst the many human rights groups working with *travestis* across Latin America. These groups are the same ones that consider themselves ‘open’ or ‘judgement free’, but relatively often a Judeo-Christian ethic is discernible at their core.

Rather, what is needed is a direct approach to governments to ‘recognize sex work as just another income-generating activity’ (Choike 2006) and hence eligible for measures to build a safer and healthier work environment. Putting sex work in the same category as other forms of labour has the potential to considerably reduce the stigma on it, thus facilitating social inclusion for sex workers including *travestis*. In addition, it prepares the path towards much better working conditions such as steady jobs, safer earnings, health insurance arrangements, pension arrangements and vacation allocations. Finally, recognising sex work as work like any other considerably reduces the vulnerability of sex workers to harassment and abuse by delinquents.

Positive work on sex work crucially involves working with all stakeholders on ways to move beyond the violence to which it is currently vulnerable. This includes working with clients, pimps, peers and police officers, as well as sex workers. It also involves actively protesting against the current US anti-prostitution policy which bans the funding of any group which advocates sex worker rights. This policy should be acknowledged as a challenge to a historical practice which

neoliberal socio-economic processes themselves are responsible for diminishing to 'prostitution'.

5.3 Working on identity: the *Travesti* Museum of Peru

The *Travesti* Museum of Peru is an initiative which aims to affirm *travesti* identity by disseminating information on the rich historical tradition which they have links to, and by generating dialogue on the situation of *travestis* today. It reaches out to *travestis* in an interactive manner, prioritising the learning from them that this initiative promises. It also reaches out to the general public, to provoke mainstream Peruvian society into recognising *travestis*' historical heritage, and to bring into question prejudices and misconceptions about *travestis*.

To date, the Museum has carried out two different projects. The first was an investigation and presentation of *travesti* pre-Hispanic origins through to the present. The second examined four decades (1966–1997) of *travesti* history through local journalism, focusing on *travesti* identity, harassment, murder and resistance. The material gathered is offered in an interactive way, through flyers, questionnaires, boards and recording booths to obtain visitors' feelings, opinions and proposals. The displays have been shown in conferences, cultural centres, markets, museums, parks and universities, and information has been distributed in North, Central and South Lima, Arequipa and San Martin. The Museum plans to visit other cities as well.

In representing the Peruvian pre-Hispanic *travestis* in terms not of maleness or femaleness, but in terms of the social and ritual balance they personified, the Museum sets out not to restore the richer gender landscape of the past but to initiate a process in which *travestis* and everyone can become aware of the many possibilities that gender implies. Similarly, in making *travestis* aware of the crimes committed against them, the purpose is not to encourage vengeance, but to start out on the long road from truth to reconciliation. Bringing the victims' names and life stories to light, as well as their deaths, is an act of 'visibilisation' to start the dialogue and build the political consciousness of this 'invisible' community.

It is hoped that the Museum will also act as an affirming example and inspiration to other transgender activists to research their gender heritage, in places where there is some discernible continuity – such as that represented by the *mahus* in French Polynesia, the *hijras* and *kotis* in South Asia, the *muxes* in Mexico. However, all over Peru much work remains to be done to continue to spread this information, as well as to turn all the opinions and suggestions gathered into quantitative data for policy change. There is great potential to develop more and different kinds of material out of this participatory process and to extend and expand the dialogue. Different *travesti* communities from the same area could be brought together to discuss similarities and differences in their situations. Ways should be sought to reach indigenous transgender communities, and to learn from them. But it is essential that all these efforts remained '*travesti* owned', which would involve sensitivity, caution and introspection on the part of all non-*travestis*. Although this presents a difficult task, it is vital that *travestis* struggle more effectively against the invisibilisation and violence that their community is going through today.

5.4 New forms of activism

In the context of the 2006 election campaign, the *Travesti* Museum of Peru also experimented with new forms of activism. The Museum printed and distributed flyers calling people to protest the ‘crimes of hate against *travestis* carried out by the Shining Path, the MRTA, right-wing groups and state forces , ... the complicity with these crimes, manifested through an electoral campaign where hatred makes central part of some candidate’s offers, ... the manipulation of women, while women’s situation remains unequal and contradictory’ (*Travesti* Museum of Peru flyer, 6 April 2006). Two days before the general elections, the *Travesti* Museum took to the streets for its first time. The group of activists included the Andean Parliament *travesti* candidate and the Peruvian Parliament lesbian candidate. Twenty-four big format prints of local press articles on the difficult situation of *travestis* were displayed. These were attached to a huge wall that usually displays photographs of female socialites, included Lourdes Flores, accompanied by slogans on the power of women and their important role in society. The message was this: there is a great diversity of Peruvian women, including *travestis*, but they live in very different circumstances. The image of women that ignores these other groups merely manipulates, excludes and harms women’s lives.

This event ‘invaded’ a male political/public space not only with *travestis*’ histories but also with their bodies, and it was this that got them heard. In the process, *travestis* returned to a former red light district not to perform sex work this time, but to express their voices.

5.5 Working on gender dichotomies

I defend my right to be complex.

Leslie Feinberg (1998)

So what will it take to move beyond gender dichotomies? Can we work within the languages available to us to do this?

We can begin by getting rid of fixed ideas of heterosexuals and sexual minorities as homogenous populations dominated by men and with two clean-cut genders, by making visible the diversity within these communities. We can talk of the pre-Hispanic ‘gender continuum’ or a ‘fluent gender’; we can talk of ‘overlapping gender’, ‘bifurcations’ and ‘imbrications’ as Jolly (2007) does; we can talk of the ‘gender pluralism’ or ‘fields or groupings’ of gender proposed by Monro (2005). We can talk of ‘rainbow alliances’ between different sex and gender minorities, and we can move beyond LGBTI labelling. We can promote respect for sexual and cultural diversity, as Gosine (2004) does.

We can also look to the models that we have. *Travestis*, transgenders, cross-dressers, intersex, transsexuals are the best examples of what we are overlooking, what we are missing in the bi-gendered world. Their struggles to manage a richer gender than the dichotomy allows – their ‘gender trips’ – may be the best answer we can give ourselves right now.

The emerging discussion on sexuality offers an opportunity to explore these struggles and learn from them. But in order to use this opportunity, the notion of sexuality itself needs to lose the 'risk factor' framework in which the discussion currently locates it, and gain a framework of inclusion and dialogue. Taking up this opportunity also requires that the actual performers of the spectrum of sexualities should be included, so that they can move from being spectators, to the actors that they really are.

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