



## **Transcending The Trans Taboo: An Incomplete Journey Into Janet Mock's Lonely Battles And Bedlam**

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### **Abstract**

It is a common notion that the biologically designated sex remains the same until the death of a person. This would hold good to almost ninety per cent of the population around the world who are cisgendered or more commonly called heterosexuals. But; it is imperative to construct a third gender who feels that they have the so-called, the otherness to establish their stronghold. They have the feeling that there is something more to cisgender which needs to be unearthed where the biology of an individual does not determine his course of actions and behaviour in society and the need to change one's biological and predetermined sex because the person is no longer comfortable with the way he was raised or viewed by the society. Janet Mock wanted to prove that it was normal for a being to behave otherwise after having been born as a male or a female. The dichotomy between sex and gender is still have to be reconsidered in the postmodern world that is full of multiplicities and pluralities. This is explored in this paper.

**Keywords:** Third Gender, transgender, pluralities, Janet Mock.

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## **1. Introduction**

“One is not born a woman but rather becomes one” (15), the eminent indelible quote of Simone De Beauvoir was something which changed the fate of feminism, and the way the world looked at women as a whole. Similar to this hard-hitting quote said above is another parallel which questions the position and existence of a third gender, Janet Mock, who openly said, “I was not born a boy but a baby” in an interview she gave to CNN with Piers Morgan. When one looks at the postmodern world, which is full of multiplicities and pluralities, it becomes open that gender binary, the dichotomy between sex and gender will still have to be reconsidered. It was always considered by almost all that the sex which one is biologically designated remains the same until the death of a person. This would hold good to almost ninety per cent of the population around the world who are cisgendered or more commonly called heterosexuals. On the other hand, it is imperative to construct a third gender who feels that they have the so-called, the otherness to establish their stronghold. They have the feeling that there is something more to cisgender which needs to be unearthed where the biology of an individual does not determine his course of actions and behaviour in society and the need to change one's biological and predetermined sex because the person is no longer comfortable with the way he was raised or viewed by the society.

Janet Mock, the first trans woman to openly declare that her biological sexual identity did not sufficiently label her or establish her as a complete being but it was the inner instinct which told her that the sexuality of a person is not determined by birth alone, it is also determined by time where the person realizes that there is a paucity in his body and his hormones and inner voices want him to be a female and a boy biologically need not behave like a boy, he can even behave like a girl because, a child is born only after a union between a male and a female and therefore the inborn genitals need not decide the physical, psychological and sociological trait of an individual. There has been constant negligence in the minds and attitudes of the world around to marginalize, penalize or segregate the set of people who do not come under the gender/sex binary. This is because the human mind does not wish to look beyond the dual space and therefore the third gender whose existence is seen is never realized or included. Janet Mock wanted to bring to the forefront the sufferings of a trans woman through her writings and wanted to prove to the world at large and herself, at even larger equations that it was normal for a being to behave otherwise after having been born as a male or a female. Mock believes that even anthropologists and historians have denied tracing the origins of the transgender community because they might have felt that the third gender or the third space was something which need not be explored for they were not considered worth exploring or discussing.

One has to remember that the third gender has now defied sexual selection as propounded by Darwin in his book, *On the Origin of Species*. To Darwin, the cycle of life has to go on to make sure that the life of earth progressed without any hampering. To this, he added that a male or a female did have an absolute choice to select its sexual partner to procreate. Nowhere even in the origin of species did Darwin mention that there is third sex which wants to alter its biological genital to the other sex for it feels its own body as a prison and does not want to live the sexual role assigned to it at birth. The third gender and its implications came to be known only after the 1950s when a certain group of people decided to alter their bodies for they did not want to live and experience the alteration which had taken place in their mother's womb. They wanted to redefine their biological, and physiological identity and wanted to change their biology at birth. One could find that historically, the Byzantine Empire did have a set of people who performed lesser elevated functions in a society which involved performing menial activities at court and other religious gatherings. These menials were a set of castrated men who wished to change their sexuality. Over time, the Christian teachings considered changing one's sex as blasphemy and therefore condemned them from these doings. After a point in time, history and other records of the past did not include any mention of the word called, the third gender. Gilbert Herdt in the book, *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* comments on the sexual and gender dichotomy that existed during the history of time and says,

Heuristically gender social theorists and sexologists continue to divide their observation of human activity into two distinct categories, one signified by anatomical sexual characteristics, usually the genitals, and the other signified by cultural, psychic or behavioural characteristics, usually instantiated in social relations. Traditionally the former has been represented in sex factors while the latter have been encoded in gender factors (12).

Janet Mock decided to stick to the genre of memoir for her work, *Recreating Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More* for she wanted to reflect her insights on the issues of being ostracized for being a Mahu. One has to understand that there is a close difference between an autobiography and a memoir where the former explores the entire life of a person while the latter extends only to the pivotal point in the life of an author. Janet herself has accepted in one of her interviews that choosing to write her life as a memoir was a conscious choice because, the aforesaid genre offered her opportunities to introspect and also look at the world from the dimensions of not only herself but also through the eyes of her grandmother, her mother, her father and her brother. She wanted to encompass all the facets of her life, her thoughts, her fears, and her aspirations into a wholesome book through which she could tell the world that there was a community called the third gender and they also existed. It was time that they sought their recognition too. The name Janet Mock, as everyone knows is an inspiration from Janet Jackson. The novels were an outcome of her long introspections and speculations to become a change agent after she listened to one of the most famous albums by Janet Jackson called

the Velvet Rope. In the album recording, the singer might have penned her insights and inhibitions that caused her intense trauma. Janet Mock listened to the Velvet Rope and this was an awakening for her to write her book and tell the entire world that it was not abnormal to be a trans woman.

Mock describes herself as someone who is vehemently outrageous. This is because she was born into a mixed black race. The other was, that she suffered from extreme penury and the third and the most important of all is that she is a trans woman. she, therefore, did find herself three solid reasons mentioned above to prove that she need not be subservient and submissive at any point of time in her life.

The memoir style of writing she wrote is a justification of the cathartic process of recovery that she wanted to have in her life. Almost all the time in her life, she wanted to be open to herself, she wanted to be candid in the exposition of her body. Mock finally wanted to come out of the social and personal mockery that she had been undergoing since she was a child. All through her battle of life and through her writings, Mock always wanted to go against objectification by men. She did not want to be called a representative of the trans community but rather wanted to be considered as someone who records her life events as something excruciating because she is marginalized and ostracized. The writings and the interviews with Mock give shocking statistical evidence. In one of the interviews given to a newspaper The Guardian, Mock comes up with very upsetting statistics which present the position of trans women across the Northern and Southern frontiers of America. She says, “the statistics are shocking. More than 2000 trans people were killed between 2008 and 2016, the majority in South America. In 2014, research showed that 46% of the trans men and 42% of trans women had attempted suicide in the U.S.” (theguardian.com).

One of the most common concerns that the novel rises is the term, “Trans woman of color”. The entire reading of the novel centres on this buzzword because the word colour not only means to represent the blackness which she projects but it is the dominance of the white over the black. Mock wants to drive home the fact that the sufferings which the black trans women experience are more when compared to the ones experienced by white women who are trans genders. There exists a sense of colour complexity in the world of trans women too and she wants to write and raise her voice not to the black trans women of black American origin alone, but to the world over, especially to the large populace of the sections of black Brazilian trans women who suffer more than what she does or did.

Redefining Realness has a lot of influences, to begin with. Although the novel begins with the primary dedication to her boyfriend Aaron, who wanted the book to be published because he wanted to see the girl baby inside Mock ever since she was born or named Charles by her parents. The other stigmatic influence which the novelist experienced was the watching of the documentary titled, “Paris is Burning”. The entire documentary focuses on the lives of Drag queens across New York City and other pockets of the United States. The movie provided a whole gamut of suffering experienced by the gays, lesbians, drag queens and the trans genders. The entire movie was a peep into the way the tenets of race, sexuality, class conflict, segregation and exploitation were manifested in a melting pot like the U.S. Although the country welcomed a lot of other cultures and practices, it was negligent about the entry of the so-called trans genders because the country, as well as its people, could not accommodate the fact that sex cannot be altered and therefore anyone who surgically alters their sex is not normal and must therefore not be allowed into the society. This resulted in many trans living on the fringes of society. They had no business or vocation to cling to and therefore were into drug pedalling or whoring.

Mock had a chance to watch the movie when she was in grade nine and she, therefore, found empathy and solidarity when she watched the movie. She realized that she was not the only person who lived or felt the same but there were others across the globe. The writings and reflections which she had shared in her memoir were to awaken the rest of the trans who were hiding much like her who thought that it was a crime to be a trans. All through the memoir, Mock talks about the truth, the inconvenient truth that kept on telling her through a voice within that she was not what her body projected. She knew it with perfect certainty that she was a trans woman but never did have any opportunity to prove her womanliness to the world around for the world saw it as a sense of artificiality or a makeover.

More importantly, the feminists, especially the singer Beyonce in her song, *Drunken Love*, had stigmatized the trans genders stating that they were taking the place of the feminists by calling themselves women. When the trans become and feel like a woman then the point of having a battle between sexes would turn pointless. No feminist was ready to include trans women into their realm because the feminists wanted a separate realm for themselves in writing and speaking because to them the gender bender concept was trash. Having a third gender which resembled their own was unimaginable. The following quote from the memoir presents the fear, the panic and the psychological dismantling that the author went through to let her instincts of femininity out. She says,

Growing up, I learnt that being trans was something which you did not take pride in, therefore I yearned to separate myself from the dehumanizing depictions of trans women that I saw in popular culture from Venus Xtravaganza's unsolved and underexplored murder in *Paris is Burning*, to the character of Lois Einhorn, in *Ace Ventura, pet Detective* and Dil in the crying game, to numerous women exploited as modern-day freak shows on Jerry Springer and Maury. (5)

The birth, parentage and childhood of Janet was one of the reasons for her shattered psyche. As a child, she had no one to listen to her, the changes that went inside her or the voices which ran within her to tell her that she was abnormal. Her father Charles had always wanted her to be a man and behave much more like a man because he was against the entire defective personality that he had as a boy. Another important aspect of the memoir and the life of Mock is the image of attire. As a child of six, Charles, the then Janet found pleasure in wearing the skirt of her grandmother. Although her grandmother did not much approve of it and dismissed it as a child's play, Charles found a sense of satisfaction in wearing the dress of a woman. Although the attire was of an older woman, the level of satisfaction which she derived was unimaginable. Another concern of Janet about the attire she was to wear was at the beginning of the work, *Redefining Realness*, where she says, "I was shopping for my dresses". The aspect of clothing is an important concern in the work of Mock because as a trans woman she did not have the set of clothes which made her feel comfortable partly because the stores supplied outfits which suited either men or women and there were no specific store which had the share of clothes kept exclusively for them.

## 2. Conclusion

The entire memoir has one watchword which goes around in circles, it says, "being exceptional isn't revolutionary, its lonely" (7). The memoir decries the pains and pangs of Mock for not being someone whom society expected. She wrote to make sure that the trans women do have a lot of unspeakable problems and therefore they must be addressed. Moreover, the primary concern that the author rises in her memoir is the lack of resources the trans woman face in life, be it in the dress they wear, the books that speak about their problems or the people who stand up for them. Janet wants to drive home the fact that the plight of transgender is much inferior to the lesbians and the gays because they have laws erected to protect their interests and inhibitions. The same is not the case with the transgender who suffers because society stigmatizes them without knowing what their pains are. All that every trans woman wants from society is a space for themselves and acceptance from the rest of the members of society as a whole.

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