QUEERING GLOBALIZATION: A THROUGH MY EYES JOURNAL

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I grew up knowing something wasn’t right about me.

I grew up in a rough area, was told I had it better than some, but I always felt out of place, like I had to hide who I was to avoid getting into trouble.

I remember the day this was taken, I had just convinced my momma to let me grow my hair long, but she wouldn’t let me wear clothes like my sisters! I didn’t want to be in the photo wearing that ugly orange polo.
I would sit with my mother and watch her sew every day always asking if I could help pick colors and thread the needle.

I never wanted to play sports, or shoot guns, or wrestle

I had no interest in typical boy things

So I began my transition.

Finally when I reached the age of 17 I realized I am meant to be a woman.
I saw doctors and was diagnosed with gender identity disorder, one advancement my country has seen from the Western World’s influence.

My brothers and father never understood, still don’t, but my mother has always been there for me, even when it meant the dissolution of her marriage. She told him that her child, and my personal identity, meant more to her than his financial support.
We have struggled, we still struggle, but challenges make you powerful. God gave me this life because He knew I was the only one strong enough to live it. I have met the challenges given to me and have thrived.

I am independent.

I am a woman.

I am confident.

I am proud.

I am powerful.

I am a woman.
Now I work as a sex worker on the streets of Cape Town.

Transgender people are some of the most invisible in Africa, where rigid gender stereotyping continues to stifle freedoms. Many are forced to hide their identities and live on the margins of their communities or risk being vilified as immoral and unchristian by the conservative majority.
Some say sex work is immoral, undignified, and a violation of human rights, I disagree and I resist stigma, by campaigning for the right to sell sex with dignity, and for the complete decriminalization of sex work.

Because of globalization, we now have sectors of the city that are very poor, and dangerous, places police don’t like to go, and this is where sex work thrives.

Decriminalization would recognize sex work as work as defined by the capitalist system, and thus sex workers would enjoy the full protection of labor and occupational laws.
South Africa and Botswana are the only African countries with laws explicitly allowing official documents to be changed to reflect a person’s desired identity, although medical evidence of transition is usually required.

And I am proud to say my name was changed from Michael to Michelle three years ago and I have yet to look back.
As a resident in a urban part of South Africa, I have seen the affects of globalization. The region's foundational economic structures have been reshaped by South African-led regional economic integration against the backdrop of globalization, neoliberal reforms and the new local policies.

Retail and tourism brands — from supermarkets and clothing stores; to electronic goods distributors, cinema complexes and fast food franchises; to hotel chains, safari companies and airlines — have increasingly served as icons of South African business expansion and have caused the rapid urbanization of our cities. Prices have gone up.
Here in the slums we live without fear of the police, and learn quickly how to survive on the streets. When we first started having to work in these parts of town, when the police and society deemed our work dangerous and us as social pariahs, we became stronger.

We formed groups, worked together to make sure we stayed safe, made sure we all got home each night. Figured how to get us help if we needed it, even if that meant bandaging in a dirty apartment at 2 am.

We also used the capitalist system to further our economic stability. We began charging higher prices, rates for different acts, and if clients are determined enough, we make good money.

I am now able to own my own apartment, in a city where otherwise I would probably be living on the streets, or in a cheap apartment with 5 random people in a dangerous part of town.

But because we recognized the changes to our city, and see the growing influence of the outside world, I can live a life I want to live, and live unashamed of who I am.


