**READINGS Point 2 women's seminar July 2021**

1. Presentation of the discussion “Why and how are we trans-inclusive?“
2. Arya Meroni “Marxism and the oppression of trans people”
3. Sophia Siddiqui “Feminism, biological fundamentalism and the attack on trans rights”

<https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/>

1. Contributions from Marabunta (Argentina)

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**Why and how are we trans-inclusive?**

This session will start with an exploration of the relationship between trans liberation and women’s liberation and also the reality of trans oppression. It will discuss the dynamics and the impact of the backlash against trans rights – including both the influence of explicitly right wing forces but also the evolution of a ‘gender critical’ current in many countries and discuss what strategic questions our analysis of these questions poses for us within feminist movements

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**Marxism and the oppression of trans people**

The following text comes from notes for an educational for Anticapitalistas that I have reworked. The aim was to look back at the “polemics” posed by the new transphobic currents in feminism, from a theoretical and strategic point of view and in the context of the debates on the “Trans law”. It is not, therefore, a text that goes into the issues explored in depth or that claims to be exhaustive, but rather an introduction to the theoretical and strategic problematization of trans oppression from a Marxist perspective.

**1-Trans oppression: fantasy or material reality?**

 **A-Essentialism/materialism/Marxism**

1.A.1. The debate here is about “a woman doesn’t have a penis”, etc. The idea is not to go too far into the theoretical debate, but rather to draw out some general elements. Let’s just say that from De Beauvoir to Butler, it is quite easy to trace the thread of materialist thought on the question of sex and gender. When De Beauvoir said “one is not born a woman, one becomes one”, it was to highlight that “being a woman” is socially constructed by the cultural and ideological domination of men. For her, men and women are originally equal and biological differences are only specificities until the moment when relations of domination started to be put in place. These relationships are justified by the need of some humans to dominate other humans and to find a justification for this. This justification is the biological difference in the capacity to give birth: thus, those who do not give birth will dominate and subdue those who can. Otherness will be created from this domination.

1.A.2. Butler takes an even more dynamic dimension to the construction of gender, the heart of which is everyday practical experience. There is an active participation in the construction of gender roles: it is we who “perform” gender, that is, who produce our gender according to what we do. But as with De Beauvoir, it is not ideal (only ideas): there is a cultural, ideological, social basis to what we perform, it is part of systems of power. She uses the term “reiteration” of gender. That is to say that what we perform, what we produce as a gender of ourselves, is in fact a daily repetition of what society shows us as to what our gender should be: it’s all the pressure, all the expectations that are put on a person, etc. And of course, saying all this doesn’t mean that we don’t have a gender.

And of course, saying all this does not mean that there is no attachment to biological sex in the construction of gender. Even in Butler’s example of the doctor who genders the child according to the biological sex he sees, she doesn’t say that it’s fantasy, just an empty idea. Generally speaking, there are strong tendencies to assign a gendered role according to the sex of the individual and no one questions this a priori.

Afterwards, making proposals for the future, saying that this should no longer be the case, that individuals should be free to become whoever they want, is something else. And it should also be noted that everyone in the feminist movement seems to agree on these perspectives: it seems that in a very general way feminists demand the abolition of the system of assigning gender roles, binary categorization, etc. This gives an absurd dimension to the debate: why the opposition to so many people who question this today if the final objective is to put an end to all relations of domination, hierarchization and classification? There are parallels to be drawn with certain authoritarian currents on the left that call for communism but are radically opposed to all experiments in self-management today, or constantly denigrate squats, occupations, alternative spaces, on the pretext that they don’t help to bring down capitalism. Of course, in itself, creating an alternative here and now is not enough to collectively destroy the state and capitalism. But isn’t there also something at stake on the side of counter-hegemony in demonstrating that we can do things differently?

1.A.3 If Butler’s theory can help us to think about the construction of gender in everyday life, in its banality, and allows us to highlight the social dynamics at play, it seems to us that placing the oppression of trans people within the Marxist feminist theorization of social reproduction allows us to grasp its totality and to place it more generally within the power relations that govern capitalism. The theory of social reproduction was developed in the 1980s by Lise Vogel to provide a framework for Marxist feminist analysis of the oppression of women.

Broadly speaking, it considers that the set of human activities that allow the species to perpetuate itself – which we will call work – is organized by the ruling class in a given system of domination – in this case, capitalism – in order to maintain its power. In this case, under capitalism, it is a matter of the bourgeoisie maximizing its profits. To do this, workers must spend as much time as possible producing wealth, being paid as little as possible and being fit enough to produce. For workers to be fit enough to produce, they need to eat, sleep, wash, have rest activities, etc. The wage buys the goods needed for these activities, but it is not enough. Other work must take place to transform these goods – or to “care” for the workers: the work of reproducing labour power (cooking, cleaning, tending, caring, etc.). On the other hand, other activities are included in the work of social reproduction, those that allow the reproduction of the species (giving birth, educating, etc.).

In order to maximize profits, a division between productive and reproductive labour is organized: the aim is to ensure that the latter is not taken on by the bourgeoisie and is either unpaid or poorly paid so that it does not impact on the rate of profit. To do this, it is assigned to a part of the population and what makes it possible to subject a part of the population to this division of labour between productive and reproductive is macho violence – ideological, cultural, psychological, and physical violence.

Once again, this is a very quick and crude presentation, but it seemed important to us in order to situate the framework of the debate. Let us note, however, that this is a theoretical framework. In practice, another element must be considered which really determines how human activities are organized: the class struggle. Thus, the level of wages for productive work, but also the fact that reproductive work is done for free in the home or paid, that it is taken care of by public services, or that collective forms of organization from below exist, all depend on the balance of power between those who have nothing but their own strength but are billions, and those who have billions, are very few but have a political, ideological, economic, and military arsenal.

1.A.4. The interest in presenting the theory of social reproduction is also to re-situate Butler’s elaborations in order to clarify them. We could say, for example, that the construction of gender involves the assignment of specific roles in the system of commodity production / social reproduction of labour power. That what women will be asked to perform is, on the one hand, the capacity to participate in the social reproduction of labour power – that is, to take care of others, to educate, etc. – but also, increasingly, to integrate into the production system as labour power to be sold – and therefore, to have the capacity to multi-task, to combine their “two jobs”, etc.

Of course, the separation is not so clear-cut since many jobs held by women are paid social reproduction jobs: teacher, cleaner, nurse, cashier, etc.

1.A.5 So far, we have presented a framework for analysing the oppression of women. We feel it is necessary to situate the oppression of trans people (and not only trans women) within it, because we see this oppression as a form of macho violence to impose the imperatives of the capitalist mode of production, which cannot survive without the assignment of women to reproductive labour. Indeed, trans-identity functions as a “radical” transgression of the assignment of tasks specifically imposed on subaltern class individuals under capitalism and male domination. The very existence of trans people demonstrates that there is no “destiny”, that if we are subjugated and certain tasks and roles are imposed on us, it is because this is in the interest for some. This makes it possible to unveil the macho ideology that sustains the organization of production and capitalist reproduction.

1.A.6. By the way, there should also be studiesto find out how many trans people (men, women, or non-binary) do something else with their lives than work of social reproduction – paid or not. If we situate the oppression of trans people within the framework of Marxist feminist analysis, it is not only because it allows us to “unveil”, to de-naturalize the system. It is mainly because “materially” trans people have a particular place in the capitalist system – which happens to be the same as women.

So, when transphobic feminists declare that a woman has no penis, in order to declare the existence of trans women invalid, they are arguing the wrong thing. The real question, in a society based on material experience and not metaphysical questioning, would be: what is it to be a trans woman, to live as a trans woman?

When transphobic feminists say that trans women are men who want to infiltrate the feminist movement, do they think about the social, economic, and physical cost of being a trans woman? We must really question this. When you see the unemployment figures for trans people, the rates of murder or attempted murder, rape, exclusion, discrimination, suicide...is this all a price worth paying just to be able to “go into gender neutral spaces”?

Not all trans people are stars in Hollywood: the daily life of trans people is exclusion, precariousness, marginalization. And above all, it’s the fear of being assaulted in the street, of going home alone at night; in a heterosexual relationship, of being raped or attempted murder; at work, of being harassed; it’s a constant calculation of how to behave so as not to risk being excluded, it’s wondering if, depending on how you dress or how you present yourself in such and such a place, you’ll be OK... In fact, it’s experiencing sexism and misogyny, in addition to transphobia.

And this is one of the blind spots of neo-essentialist theory: by focusing on biological sex, transphobic feminists “forget” that we build an autonomous feminist movement because there is a need to unite against a common oppression, against violence experienced in common. If that’s not why we unite and fight, then yes, we can very well imagine movements based on genitals. But these movements that would seek to build themselves around the similarity of biology or the strict common experience (if you believe that you can experience exactly the same thing as another person) will also have to divide themselves between lesbians and heteros, between women who want children and those who don’t. Between those who work and those who don’t. Between those who have children and those who don’t, between those who work and those who don’t... because if the basis of a political struggle for emancipation is not what you are fighting against, what you want to emancipate yourself from, it is no longer a political struggle for emancipation, it is a “categorical”, depoliticized identity struggle.

**B-Identities and neoliberalism**

1.B.1. It also seemed important for the discussion to come back to neoliberalism, because one of the arguments often put forward by some feminists to oppose the rights of trans people is that there is a “trans lobby” which is the “Trojan horse” of neoliberalism. In fact, this is a recurrent issue that goes beyond the trans issue. If we change the focus, for example, and go to the traditional left, what in France is called “the traditional workers’ movement”, we find the same type of attack against the feminist movement, the collectives of racialized or queer people. In fact, since the 1970s, the argument of the conspiracy of a pressure group that comes to divide the class struggle has been used all the time, whether it’s the “gay lobby”, “extremist feminism”, “Islamo-leftism”... These imaginary figures, often constructed by the extreme right, are sometimes or have been, used even on the left, to oppose all those who try to integrate into their analysis and strategy something other than the white, heterosexual, male working class.

The idea is that anything that doesn’t allow for the construction of a “traditional class identity” (basically, the image of the working-class hero, a straight white man who works in a factory) works against the class struggle by dividing, diverting the struggle, etc. We are caricaturing, but that’s what it’s all about, including when we say that we want women, racialized people or LGBTQI people, but only to strike in the workplace. The idea here is not to say that workplaces should be abandoned: but as oppressions have their own dynamics, the political subjectivation of the oppressed cannot occur only through the union for example. It has never worked like that. And after 50 years of neoliberalism, of breaking the legal right to strike in the workplace and of the crisis of trade unionism, it’s a good thing that it can work differently: otherwise, we would be condemned to defeat.

1.B.2. To try to put it in a nutshell, the “trans lobby Trojan horse of neoliberalism” is the idea that consumer society and individualism (apparently the main characteristics of neoliberalism) would produce a multitude of identities that could be freely chosen, and that this would go against women’s rights because it would mean diverting the feminist struggle towards these desires for recognition of identity.

To put it another way, the “trans lobby” is the fact that people think they are free thanks to the free market and advocate that feminist struggles allow this liberation instead of defending equality, the end of violence, etc. There would be a de facto antagonism between identity recognition and feminist struggle.

1.B.3. Let’s be clear: this definition of neoliberalism, which is widely shared by transphobic feminists – and a significant part of the mainstream left – is false. Neoliberalism as a project is not a broad programme of liberalization of individuals through consumerism and self-fulfilment.

Neoliberalism is a project for the sustainable restoration of capital’s profits, initiated in the 1970s in response to rising labour and social protest, some of whose main features are the individualization and casualization of working conditions and privatization to restore profit rates at a time when it is becoming difficult to find new markets.

Let us not forget that neoliberalism as a political project was first established in Pinochet’s Chile, or under Reagan and Thatcher: regimes that could not be accused of celebrating the proliferation of identities or promoting social freedom and fulfilment!

Generally speaking, the only freedoms that neoliberalism advocates are those of enterprise, free markets and free exploitation. The rest is amyth. The myth of personal fulfilment, for example, is a veneer that neoliberalism appears to offer, but the millions of proletarians who are crammed into dilapidated buildings, who are unemployed, who work at Amazon or are self-employed, who suffer burnouts in hospitals, schools, or supermarkets, are very far from being “fulfilled”. That these myths are taken up by the “left-boomer[[1]](#endnote-1)” in crisis who can’t redeploy for fear of leaving their comfort zone is a pretty serious problem, but it doesn’t take away the fact that it’s a myth.

1.B.4. And this is an important point in the debate. Identity politics were not born “in the market”. They began to emerge on a massive scale in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to feminist, LGBTQI, anti-racist and decolonial struggles. And if neoliberalism can still sometimes take on a progressive guise, it is only in reaction to the politicization of identity issues. Precisely to annihilate the revolutionary potential that can emerge from these politicizations, to prevent them from allowing a rise in the generality of anger, from allowing strategies to take shape, from allowing the subalterns to ally themselves. In other words, to avoid reliving the convergences between social, gender, race, and sexuality issues of the late 1960s and risking a period of revolutionary unrest. As we said, “in the last instance”, it is the class struggle that rules the world: and it is the action of the oppressed and exploited that forces the dominant to reposition themselves.

1.B.5.We won’t go into more detail here, the idea being to grasp that these questions of identity emerge from the struggles, resistances, and movements of our class. And if they started to become predominant in the 1990s, it’s not because they challenged class identity: it’s because after 20 years of neoliberalism, the fall of the USSR, the crisis of the communist parties and the unions, class identity collapsed, and people found possibilities elsewhere to motivate themselves politically and collectively.

So, of course, the system tries to appropriate these struggles and identities, and it’s not a question of saying that every identity question is in itself a potential for revolutionary transformation of society. What we need to understand, above all, is that these questions are dynamic, subject to relations of forces. Above all, in the age of atomization, they are sometimes the last places of collectives, resistance and struggle... And therefore, the first places from which revolts start again.

On the other hand, should we give up because the system tries to recuperate these issues? Is there anything immaculate, chemically pure, non-alienable under capitalism? The system that dominates the planet will always try to reclaim what we do until we take over and destroy it. But does that condemn us to doing nothing? In the last instance – as in the first – what is interesting, rather than looking for the “best possible ground” for revolution, is to start from reality and try to transform it. It is to deploy strategic questions wherever we can, precisely in order not to get caught up in the traps of neoliberalism.

1.B.6. And similarly, at a time when 15% of millenials declare themselves non-binary, it is no longer possible to treat this “issue” as if it were a fad of a few intellectuals. Instead of an “issue” or a “fad”, we believe that everything that touches on the identity of individuals must be considered as such and taken seriously, at the risk of cutting ourselves off from an ever-larger part of our class. Because, like it or not, when more than half of generation Z in the US define themselves as “non-straight”, this necessarily cuts across our class (unless we consider that there can be a majority of bourgeois in a national space).

Based on these two observations, if the feminist movement and, more generally, the left of social movements, do not manage to consider all this seriously, there will be fractures that will necessarily deepen. We insist on the “necessarily”: because we are talking here about what touches “the most intimate part” of individuals, and not only about what could be choices, tastes, political ideas. We can, for example, discuss what strategies to put in place based on identity issues – which we will do in the second part. Do we think that we should develop trans movements that are autonomous from the feminist movement? Is the goal of our activism to achieve formal equal rights or inclusive businesses? Should we stop talking about social classes and trying to unite different sectors, different identities, to build globality, and instead campaign for the simple recognition of plurality? Should we abandon the perspective of a social revolution and advocate individual self-realization by integrating fully into the capitalist system? All these are strategies, orientations, which can and should be criticized, and to which other orientations and strategies should be opposed. But to do this, there is a prerequisite: taking identities and the individuals who identify with them seriously.

Because if identities are not “revolutionary in themselves” – and the people who claim that they are often promoting the commodification of our struggles – what is certain is that if we condemn individuals from the outset, if we reject them, it seems more complicated to be able to make politics “based on” identities. For if, as we have said, neoliberalism is a system that tries to integrate part of the critique in order to neutralize it – and therefore to appear “open” to a whole range of questions – it should not be surprising if people who are rejected by the left prefer to try to integrate themselves into the system.

We are not playing on equal terms with capitalism: to keep our class under its yoke, the system has a whole economic, ideological, political, and cultural arsenal. An ambitious policy to build a new class consciousness and culture, to develop it on a mass scale, to propose a counter-hegemony, cannot be done without integrating and respecting all the “sectors” and struggles of our class. This presupposes that the radical left accepts and takes seriously all the struggles, that the feminist movement that wants a revolutionary transformation of society does the same, and that we can debate and democratize the debates around strategic questions – without which we will never be able to go beyond the day-to-day management of the banality allowed by the bosses

**2- Strategies**

**A-Strategic thinking about inclusiveness**

2.A.1. Beyond the theory, the idea is also to think strategically around the issues related to trans people – and thus, more specifically today, exclusion/inclusion in the feminist movement.

We emphasize the strategic issue: because if we consider the place of trans people in the feminist movement to be an important issue, it is not because of moral considerations, because “it’s right”, because “we have to” be inclusive. It’s important to point this out, because there have always been moralist positions in the labour movement, and sometimes the debate in the feminist movement about inclusivity can come from there, from this bourgeois/moral charity position.

But we don’t think it’s interesting to be an activist out of charity, out of a divine mission. As revolutionary Marxist activists, we think, for example, that it is the “working” class1 that is the revolutionary subject, not because we care about the “fate” of the “poor proletarians”, but because it is the class that holds the keys to the power of the bourgeoisie: without its labour – productive or reproductive – it is impossible to make profits.

This is how we integrate feminism into our revolutionary strategy: we think that feminism can be a movement for revolutionary transformations of society, not because it is morally right to defend women’s rights – for example, by opportunism, hoping that as they represent 50% of the population, they will want to participate in the proletarian revolution if we take care of their fate – but because it can be a particular space of political subjectivation given the role that women occupy in the system of production-reproduction, and because it can be a vector of radical transformations via the feminist strike notably. We’ll come back to this.

Let’s be clear: we are not saying that we should think of inclusivity as opportunism, that we fight for women’s rights, trans rights, racialized people’s rights, etc. just because it’s strategic. What we are trying to say is that we have an ultimate goal, which is the establishment of a society free from oppression and exploitation, from all relations of domination and authority. That to achieve this objective, we propose to develop the “conscious struggle for the conquest of power”, as Bensaidsaid, and that this requires the unity of the oppressed and the exploited, that is of the people who suffer from capitalism and the relations of oppression.

And it is in this sense that we propose a critique of moral inclusiveness or opportunism: That is to say, we don’t think that we should say that such and such a movement should include everyone because it’s good, but rather that we should ask ourselves “why” we want to include all the oppressed and exploited, and above all, that the whole of the oppressed and exploited should come to ask themselves “why” it is in their interest to fight in a movement for the revolutionary transformation of society, to unite in order to collectively take power from the hands of the bourgeoisie. Without knowing why we do things, we rarely ask ourselves “how to get there”, we don’t talk about strategy, we do things by habit. We end up “resisting” and locking ourselves into the posture of “resistance” and “rebellion”. We celebrate the riot, we incite a day of strike here and there, we let off steam in demonstrations, we yell at everything that’s wrong, before going back home, sharing a few memes, maybe writing something, we have a drink, before going back to work, to college or waiting at home for the return of the good weather.

But what we are proposing is not to “play” a little while waiting for the end of the world. The romanticization of the end of the world is a class privilege for those who will be able to escape to some place where it's always 25 degrees, near a lake, a 30-year supply of alcohol and a few servants who have already been hired so they don’t have to cook. For the vast majority of our class, however, it will be agony. What we want is to turn the table upside down, destroy the chessboard and start believing in ourselves in earnest.

2.A.2. It seemed important to us to dwell a little on this, because it also avoids being disarmed and falling into the trap of pinkwashing. Because, let’s be clear, the tendency to consider inclusiveness not as a tool but as an end in itself is a bias to cancel out the revolutionary potential of our movements and to submit them to the agenda of the “progressive” tendencies of neoliberalism. It is, in fact, about women, trans people, racialized people, LGB people, etc. of the bourgeoisie being “included”, “equal”, in the ruling class, having the same chances to exploit the rest of the population. We will come back to this, but this “progressive” tendency of neoliberal feminism is in fact the twin of the “conservative” tendency of the same neoliberal feminism. That is, both – TERF as well as LGBTQI-friendly – have the same basic goals: equal opportunities to exploit others. We need to keep this in mind: while our discussion here is only minimally about pinkwashing, that doesn’t mean that Kamala Harris’ feminism is any more our ally than JK Rowling’s. Trans people dying in migrant camps in the US don’t care about the appointment of Rachel Levine to the Department of Health.

2.A.3. As we said, trans people are overwhelmingly proletarians, so there is a major interest in thinking strategically about the inclusivity of trans people in movements that believe that to make revolution, the proletariat must become aware of its strength and confident in its abilities.

It’s in this framework that we should pose the inclusion of trans people... and inclusivity in general: because we want a revolutionary feminist movement of the masses and that cannot do without including the plural totality of the conditions of being women and of proletarian gender minorities. And so the question of whether or not to include trans people, beyond theoretical considerations, is a question of strategy and direction for the feminist movement. Is feminism to be a movement for formal equal rights, and thus, for equal opportunities in the capitalist system, or is it a movement that can participate in a revolutionary transformation of society?

**B-Feminism for the 99% or feminism for some**

2.B.1-Let’s go back to the thread of the conversation. There are transphobic movements within the feminist movement. It is not a question here of essentializing the positions, and undoubtedly what we are going to say is a little caricatural, for the sake of concision. When we look at the details, it often seems that those who are against trans rights are also against Muslim rights and have a very strong opinion on prostitution in favour of repressive abolitionism.

It is an alliance between bourgeois feminism and institutional feminism, between currents that think that the objective of feminism is to break the glass ceiling and that women can become company directors, between part of neo-liberal feminism (the “conservative” tendency that we mentioned) and what has become institutionalized feminism of the 1970s. It is a social-liberal state feminism, which can be found, for example, in the struggle against pension reform in France because it will penalize women, but which at the same time demands a hardening of the law of separation. It is a feminism that positions itself directly within the framework of the state and does not leave it: hence, for example, the very authoritarian turn of neo-abolitionism, which defends laws that give all power to the police, or the inability to think of the fight against gender violence outside the strengthening of the police state. It is a feminism that has not taken stock of 50 years of neo-liberalism or the impasse of reformism and thinks that progress can only be achieved within the framework of the state. Who thinks that women have everything to gain from ’compromise’, even if the compromise in question no longer exists?

Who doesn’t think that strategies can be redeployed from the real conditions of existence of the female proletariat and that these strategies can lead to something a bit more ambitious than the equalization of the chances to be exploited?

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the same tendencies not to take stock of the last fifty years also exist on the left – including the radical left. Let’s think of all those organizations that are no longer able to get out of their relationship with the state – what Bensaid called the “state culture” of the left – and lock themselves up in the day-to-day management of the struggle or comment on the situation without understanding how to really act on it.

2.B.2. Once again, this is quickly said and caricatured. There are also trends in bourgeois feminism that are trans-inclusive: here again, pinkwashing should not be ignored. The Biden administration comes to mind in a crude way. In a more subtle way, the policies of Disney and THQ, two companies that produce “inclusive” cultural goods and that to a certain extent allow a whole bunch of people to identify and build themselves up in a positive way, but that at the same time harass their employees and drive them to burn-out, underpay, dismiss, etc. And finally, there are those who militate for feminist “entrepreneurship”, open start-ups to support women victims of violence or target LGBTQI people in their recruitment.

We must see this as the other side of bourgeois feminism – in fact, the other side of neo-liberalism. There are progressive and conservative tendencies in neo-liberalism, they oppose each other but have the same end: maximizing profits. And like neo-conservative bourgeois feminism, progressive bourgeois feminism has only one perspective: equal opportunities to exploit others for the 1%, equal opportunities to be exploited in the same way for the remaining 99%.

2.B.3. By analysing both the economic and social situation of women all over the world and the feminist movements that have developed over the last ten years, we hypothesize that the feminist movement can be a lever for revolution: because women occupy a particular role in the social reproduction of labour power, because they are often the ones who manage and defend territories, because they are at the forefront of the struggles against privatization, the destruction of the planet and, more generally, against neo-liberalism, because feminist struggles are the bearers of transversality, direct and renewed democracy, mass self-organization, because the various national, regional and international coordinations that are developing are all spaces that can allow for the debate of collective strategies, etc. etc.

This hypothesis is embodied in a strategy – the feminist mass strike. And to develop this strategy, we advocate that the feminist movement should develop its own agenda, in total independence from the state, the unions and the political organizations. That it should be made up of as many self-organizing structures as possible – in every town, village, neighbourhood, workplace, university. That these structures allow for self-activity and are productive of other things – in this case, that they allow for a feminist and collective management of social reproduction to be opposed to the capitalist and individual management of social reproduction, to create the basis for spaces of dualities of power.

In other words, we believe that with an autonomous and self-organized feminist mesh that is both sufficiently localized and necessarily coordinated, the conditions can be realized for the feminist movement to be a mass vanguard movement that can carry along other sectors of our class, as was the case in October 2019 in Chile.

2.B.4. It is within this strategic framework that we pose the self-organization of trans people. The point of this paper is to argue that trans people need to be integrated as such into the revolutionary subject of feminism – and thus into the self-organizing frameworks of the feminist movement – but this does not exclude separate forms of organization that can fit precisely into the global feminist mesh.

There are at least two reasons for organizing in separate frameworks. Firstly, because society’s violence against trans people requires a certain capacity for self-organization to build solidarity and defend itself.

We talk a lot about transphobic feminists, but we should not forget that this is not only part of a left that is generally equally transphobic, but that there are also more pressing attacks from the far right and neo-fascist governments around the world. As has been said, neoliberalism is not a joyous celebration of political liberalism and our identities. That there are tendencies towards a return to liberalism in neoliberal parties should not make us forget this.

Around the world – including in northern countries – trans people’s rights are constantly under attack – when we have rights at all! From the murders of trans people in Brazil – claimed politically by the far right, to the attacks on trans people’s rights in the UK and Australia, to the fact that in France we have very few rights, and that the few rights we do have are constantly being questioned and debated by a whole bunch of people who have no “stake” in the issue.

So there is a need to organize to fight against these attacks and to try to win new rights. And this is even more necessary because too often the “scientific” and political discourse on trans issues comes from non-trans people. How many books on trans people have been written by trans people? How many laws? Who is proposing the “care” “pathways”? It is still doctors, psychoanalysts, white bourgeois men who saturate the official discourse – serious and recognized – on the existence of trans people.

Moreover, in many places, this self-organization is made necessary by marginalization. It is no longer a question of organizing to fight, but also to live and survive. Squats, trans TDS collectives, self-help networks, etc., come to mind. In many countries – and especially for racialized trans people – self-organization is a vital issue.

And all this, of course, is not in conflict with the feminist movement. On the contrary, it is about inserting these frameworks into the general mesh of feminist self-organization, making them “parts”, spaces that combine, reinforce, respect and coordinate each other.

So the challenge of integrating trans people, as well as racialized women, the most precarious, working women, etc., is of course that of the protagonism, active role, of a feminism for the mass 99%, of a class feminism – in the broad sense of class, of course. This is the issue of the leadership of the feminist movement: is it a revolutionary movement or is it a movement to integrate demands into the agenda of institutional political parties?

2.B.5. In this perspective, we no longer put things in the same way. In this perspective, it’s not a question of knowing what we want – or at least, not only that – but why we want it, and above all, how we get there. It’s time, here too, to get out of the immediate demands/maximum programme for socialism dichotomy and to start thinking again in terms of transitional demands: all those measures, paths, proposals which, to be achieved, require putting our class in motion and on the road to revolution. Notably by developing self-organization and self-activity, by propelling certain questions to mass scales, by creating the collective, by allowing an “apprenticeship” of self-management, as Bensaïd said.

We must seriously rethink this question, because after 50 years of neoliberalism, if we still expect something from the capitalist state to improve our living conditions substantially, we’re in trouble. This does not mean that we should no longer demand things from the state. A lot of things, especially in the northern countries and in the current state of the balance of power, can only depend on the state for the time being: an increase in the legal time limit for abortion, the disarming of the police, the free change of gender on identity papers, etc. But that doesn’t stop us from breaking away from the state. But this does not prevent us from breaking with the “statist culture” that has been established on the left and which wants us to systematically position ourselves within the framework of “dialogue”, negotiation, and demand vis-à-vis the state.

We should always ask ourselves why we are making such demands, and whether we could not resolve the question “by ourselves”, whether “by ourselves” – or the process – is not more interesting than mere propaganda, whether it does not allow us to go to unexplored places.

 For example, the question of how to deal with gender violence: are we calling for a law, or are we trying to deal with the issue collectively, through feminist self-organization? A bit of both? How do we do it? To what end? We must keep in mind the final goal, and see if what we want, allows us to get there. Not because of a fetishization of revolution, but because, generally speaking, anything that is not in the collective interest is a great disservice to us or to other layers of the subaltern classes.

For example, does collectively and politically nurturing the idea that we should “change the police” for a better reception of victims move us towards this goal? Or would it not be a more ambitious proposal to develop a network of solidarity, strong enough and localized on the street corner, to welcome victims, deal with aggressors and propose popular self-education against violence? In particular, when it is now possible to hear on a massive scale that the police are a racist, sexist and LGBTQI-phobic institution safeguarding the interests of capital, should we try to “correct” them? Moreover, what would be the concrete implications of a police “reform” for a whole part of our class that is systematically attacked by the police? Is it desirable for a section of women to be able to trust the police, when this would undoubtedly send the vast majority of the oppressed back into an individual relationship with police violence?

This is just one example that deserves to be developed further, but it seemed important to press for a return to strategic thinking about our demands so as not to be locked into “non-choices”. For it is true that at an individual level, to protect oneself, filing a complaint is sometimes the only way out. But should we continue to make a virtue of necessity and consider the narrow margins of manoeuvre left to us by neoliberalism as the basis of our strategies?

And this is all the more true with the climate emergency and the destruction of the planet hanging over our lives. Can we still be satisfied with a few demands to improve our living conditions “little by little”, when every day we are getting closer to disaster?

2.B.6. If we keep this strategic thread in mind, then a whole bunch of debates get resolved pretty quickly. Let’s take the thorny “prostitution/sex work” debate and refocus on trans issues. It’s interesting to do that, because due to a lot of laws, discrimination, hatred, it’s the only possible paid activity for the vast majority of trans people in the world.

In this case, we can’t just say “let’s ask for laws to get prostitutes out of prostitution and wait for the police to do their job”. To do that is to take political power away from people who take action for themselves and give it back to the state and the police. We believe that the only political position that allows us to keep the path of building a movement for a revolutionary transformation of society is to support all those who self-organize and create networks of solidarity, outside the state and often against the police. This is the only position that allows us to hold both ends of the solidarity with an important part of our class – women, migrants, gender minorities, who die every day in marginality – and the proliferation of spaces that can claim to contest the political power of the state.

It is also the only position that allows us to be responsible “at our level”. For let us say it clearly and in all modesty: it is not a question of minimizing trafficking, but do we really think we can fight against the mafia today? In some countries, certainly, and then, specific strategies are deployed. But these do not involve the police: generally speaking, for whole sections of our class, the police are never part of the solution.

 Let’s not deny either that part of the bourgeoisie might want a legal sex work market to find new markets. No concept has strategic value in itself, it is what you do with it politically that makes it powerful in one way or another. For example, when American revolutionary anti-racist activists say “Black Lives Matter”, they give that slogan a different meaning than when Disney, Biden or Macron use it. It seems to us that what is interesting is to place ourselves on the side of the dynamics of struggle.

Now, to come back to our example, the notion of “sex work” is today a notion that allows a whole bunch of people to self-organize, to subjectivize, to create solidarity, mutual aid, to fight. In this framework, the only possible position for the development of a feminism for the 99% that considers the feminist strike – and therefore self-organization and self-activity – as a central element, is to integrate all the frameworks of feminist self-organizations that allow important parts of the proletariat to organize. This does not prevent us from being in solidarity with survivors – nor with those who are caught up in trafficking.

But the debate has too often been caricatured by those who support the “abolition/exclusion of trans people/fight against Islam” triptych. Because although nothing prevents us from standing in solidarity with sex workers and integrating them into our feminist strategy while standing in solidarity with survivors when developing a feminist movement for the 99%, it is not possible to consider as valid frameworks and demands that go beyond the relationship to the state and to integration with capitalism when one’s perspective is precisely to integrate feminism with the state. Because at bottom, this feminist current is not mistaken in its attack on trans women, Muslim women and sex workers, but also more and more on queer women: it’s about attacking the people who often constitute the bottom of the proletariat, the individuals who are the least easily integrated into bourgeois normality. It’s about creating scarecrows to normalize oneself: it’s hoped that by selling what’s most out of the norm at a time of fascistization of society – and on the number one enemy that Muslim women embody – one will be able to get some small improvements to the rights of some women.

2.B.7. Finally, it seemed important to stress that an ambitious policy for trans rights cannot be achievable under capitalism. And that we must do everything to demonstrate this so as not to fall into the traps set by neoliberalism.

Let’s try to imagine what it would be like in a society in which it were “normal” to be a trans person. What would have happened to get there? It would imply the end of gender stereotypes and gendered differentiation of individuals. The existence of real ’free choice’ and self-determination, free from coercion and discrimination. As we have said, transphobia is an integral part of macho violence. It is one of the coercive biases that separates men and women, productive and reproductive work, the possibility of maximizing profits and minimizing the costs of reproducing labour power. If there is no more transphobia, if there are no more constraints on the self-determination of individuals, then there is no more assignment... And so, if there is no longer any assignment, how can we justify the separation between the spheres – and the devaluation of reproductive work? In fact, the end of transphobia raises the question of social equality.

The same goes for the measures that could be put in place to really improve the living conditions of the 99% of trans people. For example, for trans migrants, the regularization of undocumented migrants. Free medical care, which means free access to health care. Equal conditions of access to employment: this implies real gender-neutral education for example. All these things go against the current trend of neo-liberal globalization, finance, and the free market. All things that seriously raise the question of integrating the trans liberation agenda into a revolutionary agenda – and never fighting the wrong fight. As we have said, what we should be interested in is the emancipation of all people, social equality, not equal opportunities to exploit other human beings.

2.B.8. It is therefore important that these demands are elaborated by the people concerned, but discussed and carried forward in mass movements: our objective is that our class should be aware of the need to undermine, for example, the hierarchization of gender, the sexual differentiation of roles, etc. The example of the Russian revolution in relation to feminist demands should also enlighten us on the fact that things only evolve according to the relations of force and the state of consciousness of our class, not by passing laws that can always be reversed.

Thus, taking into account trans issues must allow us to question gender stereotypes, heteronormativity and to attack both macho violence and oppressive relations. It is like the issue of lesbianism for example, which at the same time redefines heterosexual sexuality in that it confronts and popularizes the fact that there are other ways of doing – of doing sexuality and relationships – that are more respectful, less violent, more fulfilling, etc.

Popularizing the fact that trans existences exist and anchoring it as something “normal” for us allows us to question heteronormative sexuality, toxic masculinity and the injunctions to femininity as posed by macho dominance relations. We insist on one point: we say, normally, “for us”. Because it’s also about redefining normality, about having a perspective of “what normality for our class as a class that becomes aware of its revolutionary role” and not within the framework of neoliberal normality.

Our ultimate goal is societal change, not making music videos for Gucci.

1. The term “left-boomer” is not to be taken in its sociological definition (which corresponds to an age group) but rather in its political definition. We consider that it easily condenses a whole bunch of characteristics of this part of the left that lives in the past and doesn’t understand the current evolutions of the world (for example, the left that still considers it relevant to talk about the “centrality of the working class” in order to oppose workplace intervention and the rest of the militant “sectors”, which thinks that the unions are the alpha and omega of social struggles, which is often authoritarian, practices “black humour”, hardly questions its internal practices, and last but not least, whether reformist or revolutionary, still thinks that there is a way to use social change and that it has remained unchanged since 1917/36/68/81 depending on the current).

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**Feminism, biological fundamentalism and the attack on trans rights**

Across Europe, the far Right is mobilising around sexual difference and for the forced imposition of heterosexual norms by drawing on biological arguments to border the ‘other’. Whilst we are familiar with the ways in which the far Right have long organised against the racialised ‘foreigner’ through anti-migrant and Islamophobic rhetoric, we are now seeing the ‘othering’ of anyone who does not subscribe to the tenets of the heteronormative nuclear family. Issues around reproduction, sexual difference and the family are now a key political battleground. As trans rights in the UK come under attack from powerful government and media voices, as well as ‘gender critical’ feminists, ***Sophia Siddiqui*** warns of the multiple dangers ahead when/if we cede territory to far-right ideas on innate biological difference.

Emblazoned on a bus that travelled around Madrid in 2017 was the message, ‘It’s what biology says: boys have a penis. Girls have a vulva. Say no to gender indoctrination’. A few months previously, the same vehicle was [**ordered**](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2017/03/01/inenglish/1488358583_324566.html) off the streets by the City council, this time featuring the message: ‘Boys have a penis. Girls have a vulva. Don’t let them fool you. If you are born a man, you are a man. If you are a woman, you will continue to be so’. The ultra-conservative group Hazte Oír (Make yourself heard) was behind the campaign. In 2019, Hazte Oír launched [**another**](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/03/01/inenglish/1551428604_932895.html) bus campaign, this time against ‘feminazis’, calling for the repeal of the 2004 gender violence law and legal protections for the LGBT community.

The far-right Vox party in Spain, which is expected to enter a ruling coalition in Madrid after the conservative People’s Party failed to secure a majority in the [**recent**](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/04/voting-under-way-madrid-snap-election-dominated-covid-spain) Madrid regional election, has backed the agenda of Hazte Oír, which, as well as targeting the trans community, has campaigned relentlessly against abortion rights and attacked LGBT groups and women’s associations. Yet despite this track record, on 23 March, Lidia Falcón, the president of the Feminist Party of Spain, joined forces with Vox against the recently [**proposed**](https://www.thecambridgeglobalaffair.co.uk/collaborators/the-debate-around-spains-new-trans-law) Trans equality law in Spain, taking part in an [**event**](https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20210323/6604603/partido-feminista-vox-unen-ley-trans-consideran-peligrosa-anticonstitucional.html) organised by Hazte Oír entitled ‘Dismantling the trans law. If you are born a girl you will remain a girl’. Why are some feminists peddling the far-right agenda?

#### **Enforcing heterosexual norms**

The rigid biological notion that ‘a man is a man, a woman is a woman’, is central to how the far Right mobilises across Europe in order to enforce heterosexual norms. Hours after Viktor Orbán’s ruling Fidesz party won a vote to rule by decree indefinitely during the coronavirus pandemic, Hungary’s parliament passed a [**law**](https://ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/hungary-rolls-back-legal-protections-puts-trans-and-intersex-people-risk) making it impossible for transgender or intersex people to legally change their gender, further compounding the marginalisation that trans people already face. But as could have been predicted, attacks on trans rights did not end there but were quickly followed by proposed restrictions on the rights of LGBT people as a whole. In the following months, the Hungarian parliament approved a draft [**law**](https://www.dw.com/en/lgbt-rights-hungary-passes-law-banning-same-sex-adoption/a-55947139) that would effectively ban adoption by same-sex couples and tighten up the definition of marriage and the family unit. ‘The mother is a woman, the father is a man’, the amendment said.

#### **Protecting the traditional nuclear family**

The attack on LGBT rights in Hungary is part of a wider anti-equality stream running through European politics that discriminates against anyone who does not subscribe to the tenets of the heteronormative nuclear family. Gay and lesbian couples, trans people and progressive groups that advocate for reproductive rights and gender equality continue to be demonised under a vague and malleable  [**‘gender ideology’**](http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/) – a useful tool to deflect from the failures of governments to handle multiple crises; instead blaming the ‘dictatorship of gender’ for the ills of society. Anti-gender movements forge a [**‘symbolic glue’**](http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/) between a variety of groups including religious fundamentalists, mainstream conservatives and far-right parties, all of which share the goal of preserving the traditional nuclear heteronormative family.

Moral panics around ‘LGBT ideology’ have been central to electoral campaigns, with Andrzej Duda cementing his presidential campaign in Poland in 2020 through rallying against the LGBT movement, [**calling**](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-53039864) it a ‘foreign ideology’ that is ‘worse than communism’, and pledging to ban the teaching of LGBT issues in schools and to restrict same-sex couples from adopting children. This is part of a concerted effort led by a close alliance between the ruling Law and Justice party and the Catholic Church, with the Archbishop of Krakow [**warning**](https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/02/archbishop-warns-of-rainbow-plague-amid-lgbt-tensions-in-poland) of a neo-Marxist ‘rainbow plague’ that would infect Poland. The equation of LGBT people with infection, plague and sexual deviancy legitimises [**violence**](https://www.france24.com/en/20191009-poland-s-lgbt-community-targeted-in-run-up-to-elections) on the ground, creating an increasingly hostile environment for queer people on a day-to-day basis. Activists have shown how [**one third**](https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/25/a-third-of-poland-declared-lgbt-free-zone/) of Poland, has become ‘LGBT free zones’ through the passing of resolutions in around 100 towns and regions declaring themselves free of ‘LGBT ideology’. Although these resolutions are unenforceable, they have fuelled the culture wars of Poland’s extreme-right authoritarian government.

#### **In defence of ‘sex’: gender critical feminists against trans rights**

The erosion of transgender and LGBT rights go hand-in-hand for a far Right that demonises anyone who disrupts the heteronormative vision of the family. However, we know that these views are far from limited to the far-right fringes.

The past few months have seen a backlash against trans rights in the UK, led by ‘gender critical’ feminists who contend that sex is immutable and cannot be changed.**[[1]](https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/?ml_subscriber=1700117811193452081&ml_subscriber_hash=x1m9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=are_some_feminists_inadvertently_peddling_a_far_right_agenda&utm_term=2021-06-03" \l "_edn1)** Those rallying around ‘sex based rights’ almost exclusively use this argument to justify the exclusion and separation of trans people from gendered spaces and from the wider feminist and LGBT movement. What should be of concern to those advocating for a strong civil rights framework that protects all minorities from discrimination, is how ‘gender critical’ feminists play into the hands of far-right street forces and extreme-right electoral parties which would like to abolish anti-discrimination protections altogether. Time and time again, they use the same biological arguments that a ‘man is a man, a woman is a woman’, to debase the rights of trans, intersex and non-binary people – often in the name of ‘women’s rights’. Alarmingly, these ideas are fast gaining political traction, which could have a damaging effect on global feminist and LGBT movements by reinforcing conservative ideas about gender and sexuality.

Instead of accepting the myriad expressions of being a sexual subject and showing tolerance to the ambiguity that comes with being a human being, proponents of ‘gender critical’ feminism often represent trans people as sexual offenders and threats to the safety of women – arguments that hinge on their belief that trans women are not women. This clearly violates the rights and dignity of those that do not conform to the gender binary, which is protected by domestic and [**international**](https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/International-Human-Rights-Law.pdf) human rights legislation. Safe spaces for all women and trans people are paramount, everyone deserves to feel and be protected – but this must not be based on the demonisation of those who do not conform to gender binaries. **[[2]](https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/?ml_subscriber=1700117811193452081&ml_subscriber_hash=x1m9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=are_some_feminists_inadvertently_peddling_a_far_right_agenda&utm_term=2021-06-03" \l "_edn2)**

Just as scientific racism centred on supposed biological differences to classify humans in a rigid racial hierarchy, ‘gender critical’ feminists are propelling biological arguments that essentialise sex and its relation to gender identity, contending that sex is purely biological depending on what reproductive organs you have.**[[3]](https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/?ml_subscriber=1700117811193452081&ml_subscriber_hash=x1m9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=are_some_feminists_inadvertently_peddling_a_far_right_agenda&utm_term=2021-06-03" \l "_edn3)** Their arguments amount to a fundamentalist approach to biology, that labels anyone who doesn’t conform to a normative view of ‘womanhood’ or ‘manhood’ as abnormal, which ultimately increases the [**vulnerability**](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_-_trans_report_final.pdf) of an already vulnerable group of people by segregating them as ‘other’.

#### **Protecting characteristics or protecting conservative beliefs?**

The UK [**Equality Act 2010**](https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights)  prohibits discrimination on numerous grounds including both sex and gender reassignment. Beliefs can be protected if they are compatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others. However, in a deeply worrying development, the EHRC, the statutory regulator of alleged breaches of the Equality Act in the UK, formally intervened at an employment appeal tribunal in a discrimination case by a woman whose contract was not renewed because her colleagues were upset by the climate created at work due to her anti-trans views.**[[4]](https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/?ml_subscriber=1700117811193452081&ml_subscriber_hash=x1m9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=are_some_feminists_inadvertently_peddling_a_far_right_agenda&utm_term=2021-06-03" \l "_edn4)** The judge [**ruled**](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/maya-forstater-transgender-twitter-jk-rowling-b1838151.html) at the initial employment tribunal in 2019 that her ‘gender critical’ views were ‘not worthy of respect in a democratic society’… [as] it is incompatible with human rights of others’ and therefore not protected under the Equality Act.

In contrast, the EHRC [**stated**](https://legal.equalityhumanrights.com/en/case/upholding-right-freedom-religion-or-belief) that a ‘gender critical’ belief ‘is a philosophical belief which is protected under the Equality Act religion or belief protections’. This has been reinforced by Baroness Falkner of Margravine, the EHRC’s new chair, who [**said**](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/women-must-be-heard-on-transgender-identity-says-new-equalities-chief-kqttljxmd) that ‘women must have the right to question transgender identity without being abused, stigmatised or risking losing their job’ and states that women must have the ‘freedom of belief’ to be able to criticise ‘gender identity’. This EHRC intervention has been described as a ‘kick in the teeth’ by Stonewall and other LGBT groups in an [**open letter**](https://www.consortium.lgbt/ehrc-open-letter/) to the EHRC, which expressed  ‘frustration and disappointment’. How can ‘freedom of belief’ be protected when it infringes the human rights of others? Instead of protecting victims of anti-trans discrimination, it seems the EHRC is more concerned about protecting women who would like the freedom to discriminate against and exclude trans people.

Now, Stonewall, the largest LGBT charity in Europe, which has also drawn the wrath of the LGB alliance (a group that despite being criticised for being ‘trans-exclusionary’ was recently given [**charity status**](https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/trans-exclusionary-group-lgb-alliance-has-officially-been-recognised-as-a-charity/)), is at the centre of a relentless media attack,**[[5]](https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/?ml_subscriber=1700117811193452081&ml_subscriber_hash=x1m9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=are_some_feminists_inadvertently_peddling_a_far_right_agenda&utm_term=2021-06-03" \l "_edn5)** with claims that the organisation has ‘lost its way’ by becoming ‘embroiled in the trans issue’ (despite being named in tribute to riots in 1969 led by trans and gender non-conforming people). It appears that Stonewall is now the latest target of the ‘war on woke’[**6**], with moral panics being [**propelled**](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-9608277/MARY-HARRINGTON-group-fighting-homophobia-clashes-gay-rights-champion-theres-issue.html) around ‘the sinister power of a multi-million-pound lobbying giant, with tentacles that reach deep into hundreds of public and private organisations, to use that power to silence anyone that deviates from woke orthodoxy’. In the midst of mounting pressure,**[[7]](https://irr.org.uk/article/feminism-biological-fundamentalism-attack-on-trans-rights/?ml_subscriber=1700117811193452081&ml_subscriber_hash=x1m9&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=are_some_feminists_inadvertently_peddling_a_far_right_agenda&utm_term=2021-06-03" \l "_edn6)** the EHRC [**exited**](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/24/human-rights-body-exits-stonewall-uks-diversity-scheme) Stonewall’s Diversity Champions scheme due to concerns around ‘value for money’.  Liz Truss, the equalities minister, is now [**pushing**](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/liz-truss-urges-official-withdrawal-from-stonewall-diversity-scheme-9df7pvsrn) for all government departments to withdraw from the scheme.

If they come for me in the morning they will come for you at night’

What happens to trans rights today will have ramifications for anyone who lives outside of gender norms. With gender critical views gaining traction, we must be attuned to how these ideas play into both the far Right and electoral extreme Right’s agendas, which ultimately has implications for all minorities.

It is cause for concern that some of the most vocal attacks on trans rights come from within the queer and feminist community, particularly at a time when LGBT and reproductive rights are being eroded across Europe. Nobody from a minority group, should be campaigning for the erosion of other people’s rights in an attempt to border ‘the other’. The denial of solidarity between trans women and feminists, creating a false dichotomy between the two, detracts from issues that affect us all, such as rollbacks on reproductive rights, the epidemic of gender-based violence, attacks on LGBT rights and the entrenchment of nativist politics across Europe. Arguments that demarcate who is a ‘woman’ and who is deemed ‘other’ play directly into the far-right agenda, contributing to a right-wing moral panic and drawing lines around who is entitled to rights and who is not. We must resist this at all costs.

This article builds on ideas from a forthcoming piece, ‘Racing the nation: towards a theory of reproductive racism’ by Sophia Siddiqui, which will be published in Race & Class in October 2021. Subscribe to our newsletter to receive the piece in your inbox when it is published.

**Footnotes**

[1] ‘Gender critical’ feminism arose from second wave feminism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which understood feminism as a response to male power, which for them, is embodied by the male penis. Therefore, anyone who embodies maleness is considered a potential threat.

 [2] Discussions around the need for safe spaces for all women and trans people need to be worked through in order to advocate for maximum civil rights for everyone, in a way that does not violate the human dignity of others. In response to the notion that trans rights are a threat to single-sex spaces, the charity Mermaids UK state there is ‘no evidence we’re aware of, from the police, local authorities, shops, refuges or anywhere else besides, that predators have used the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 to gain access to women’s spaces.’

 [3] Scientific developments demonstrate the falsity of the belief that sex is somehow innate and immutable, see for example, https://slate.com/technology/2018/11/sex-binary-gender-neither-exist.html

 [4] To read more about the EHRC intervention at the employment tribunal appeal and its implications for equalities, see When equalities are marketised, rights suffer. For an analysis of the history of the EHRC and the recent controversy over its workings, see From CIAC to EHRC

 [5] Articles include Matthew Parris ‘Stonewall should stay out of trans rights war’, The Times, 22 May, 2021 and ‘When a group set up to fight homophobia is at war with a lesbian champion of gay rights it is no longer fit for purpose’, Daily Mail, 22 May 2021.

[6] Woke started as a positive term for social awareness, particularly of racism, but is often twisted by the right to invole pretentiousness

 [7] On 7 May, Sex Matters published an open letter to the EHRC arguing that ‘it is disproportionate, and inconsistent with the Equality Act, to drive people who believe that sex matters from the workforce, simply on the basis of their belief, in order to protect transsexuals and gender non-conforming people from a theoretical risk of harassment.’ The authors called for the EHRC to review its membership of Stonewall’s Diversity Champions scheme, claiming it contributes to ‘a culture of fear and compliance for gender critical people in the workplace’.

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*A queer once said to me “tranis don’t have a closet”. I wonder then . . .*

*What complex mechanism has this humanity developed on its optic nerves, its retinas, its corneas and its pupils in order not to see them? Why make such an effort to make invisible an existence that is so materially real?*

**Dear Comrades**, it was very difficult for us to decide which texts, debates, dialogues and experiences would be the most interesting, and at the same time opportune, to enrich the debates we are having and the texts that are already being proposed. Also, like all of you, the time we have to spend on our precarious work and the care tasks we are responsible for, as well as the development of many other militant tasks in which we are engaged, generate concrete limits to our possibilities of contributing to such an important exchange. We apologise for this.

We have decided to share with you some valuable texts that have been written between **2008, 2009 and 2010** and that have been gathered in "Construyéndonos, Cuaderno de Lecturas Sobre Feminismos Trans" (Building Ourselves, A Book of Readings on Trans Feminisms). All of them have been written by activists, some of them, moreover, come from academia or are constructed from a theoretical study. It seemed important to us not to speak for trans women and trans men, but to hear their own voices, to listen to what they have said about the debate on the participation of trans people in the feminist movement. We believe that these clips can be used to trigger debates and raise questions for us.

We would also like to clarify that in our country, many feminists use the terms: transgender person, transsexual person, female trans person, male trans person, trava and travesti to describe the different identities with which they, people of different genders, name themselves. **Respecting this self-perception of themselves, which on many occasions become categories of collective organisation, with the recognition of all the rights inherent to individuals and collectives**. We do not meanthat each identity means the same as the other, but that we respectfully take the way in which people name themselves and that we celebrate the differences that are (sometimes in embryo and sometimes developed) forms of dissidence with the established order, with the capitalist cisheteropatriarchy.

**As for trans masculine people**, we can only say that we are amongst feminists who consider that masculinity is not exclusive to cis heterosexual men (masculine lesbians have clearly taught us that...) and it would even be more appropriate to speak of masculinities, in the plural. We have no doubt that trans masculine people do not occupy any place of privilege within the capitalist and patriarchal social structure. Quite the contrary. In our country, three months after the disappearance of Tehuel, a trans boy from the slums of the south of the province of Buenos Aires, who left his home to look for work and never came back... We continue to demand that he appears alive now! And we hold the State, the repressive forces, the Judiciary and the institutional violence against trans people responsible.

Continuing with to clarify language and the political content that is at stake through it, **we would like to say we do not use the expression "include" or "tolerate"**, because in our territory this implies placing oneself in a hierarchical position above others. If some of us are in a position to enable others to be part of feminism or our struggles, it means that we believe that there are feminists who are more authoritative than others. And even more so, if we think that this inferiority is given because the people in analysis do not share our genitals. Just as we repudiate the hierarchical category on the basis of which patriarchy organises a system of values that places women in inferiority over cis-males (and even more so if it is white, heterosexual, bourgeois), we also repudiate the hierarchies that are imposed on us among ourselves. In the same sense, **we also do not speak of "minorities"** insofar as *it hides the normative heterosexuality that is operating so that there are people who deviate from the supposedly natural pattern*. In the same vein :*To refer to gays, lesbians, transvestites, transvestites, transsexuals as "diversity" is typical of a liberal conception. To speak of dissidence expresses a political gesture of rupture in which it intends to turn its discourse and actions. We are not diverse, we are dissidents to the norm*.

Before moving on to the selection of texts promised at the beginning and to close, we would like to provide some data that give an idea of **the reality of trans people’s lives in Argentina** (despite the Gender Identity Law, of public order for the entire national territory, and the enactment of regulations that establish the application of a minimum labour quota for the incorporation of trans people in public employment). Life expectancy does not exceed 41 years (the figure varies between 35 and 41 years of age). HIV, industrial silicone and murder are the leading causes of death. In 2018, it was estimated that the transgender community was made up of around 10,000 people, although this is an estimate provided by independent bodies and organisations, because even today, censuses still respond binarily. Ninety per cent of transgender people are outside the formal market, live in poverty and 95 per cent work as prostitutes in situations of extreme marginalisation and violence. The vast majority of adult transgender people dropped out of secondary school because of violence towards them; excluded from the public education system, they lose social ties and lack basic labour qualifications. Likewise, the number of transgender people who are deprived of their liberty has increased, of which 86% of those detained are in pre-trial detention (that is to say that, for our criminal and human rights system, they are innocent, without conviction and awaiting trial or the resolution of their judicial process). Violence by the repressive forces is commonplace.

We hope this is a good contribution to the meeting and to the struggle!

*~ Comrades of the Social and Political Current, Marabunta ~ Argentina*

**The absolute control over our bodies**  Lohana Berkins

I know that many people wonder what a travesti is doing here. Because many people have the wrong idea or are full of myths about what a travesti is. I should also say that I am also a feminist. The first problem we transvestites have is that neither society nor the state recognises transvestism as our identity. One of the biggest opponents we have is that of the church hierarchy. The Church has absolutely demonised us. For example, they think that if you listen to a transvestite, you will end up being a transvestite. They think we are contagious. They can rest assured that no one will be transformed by listening to me.

Another thing is the issue of why we can talk about many things, but what we are most afraid of is the body. I love my body perfectly. As Lucienne Stoine said in 1845: "I don't want the right to own property or to vote, if I cannot keep my body as an absolute right". So that is where our problem begins. The Latin American reality is that transvestism occurs between 8 and 10 years of age. The first thing that happens is a family expulsion, and a social expulsion afterwards. This society is not yet prepared to give them any kind of support.

In Argentina there are three transvestite organisations, and we work with a direct population of 3,000 transvestite women. The life expectancy of transvestites in Argentina and in almost all of Latin America does not exceed 30 years of age... The leading cause of death for transvestites is killed by the police, without any state investigation. Another cause is the indiscriminate use of surgery. The capitalist system has created a single model of woman: pretty, sweet, very beautiful, which is what the patriarchy consumes. So we, when we begin to live our reality, as the only alternative for survival that we have left is prostitution, if I go to work on the streets, the most I can get is a pittance, because I weigh 92 kilos. So, the idea of image is so strong that the women end up being victims of this issue. Because what society tells us is: "OK, this boy doesn't want to be a man, let him be a woman. But not just any woman. But a splendid woman", like Brazil's most famous transvestite, Roberta Clos. "Like Roberta Clos or nothing". These are the models that are being imposed. There is a lot of violence in this area. The fact that we are condemned to prostitution is also an attack on our own self-esteem.

I suffered seven years of imprisonment because I challenged this society and said "this is who I am". In Argentina, more than 9 years ago, we started to organise ourselves. The most profound change came about through getting to know feminism, feminist lesbians. Then we started to fight, and we have a programme called "Construyendo la ciudadanía travesti" (Building transvestite citizenship). Obviously, the word "citizenship" has nothing to do with liberalism, but in a much broader and revolutionary sense.

We aim at four things: education, health, housing and work. In Argentina, there are still very strong laws that punish transvestism. So that you understand what I am saying, I am absolutely proud to be a transvestite, and if I were born again, I would choose exactly the same thing. But this society operates a binary thing of men and women. When you are born, the midwife looks between your legs and says: "he has a penis", or "she has a vagina". She attaches a sex to genitals, and a gender to sex. And as the comrade said, it is not the same to be a man or a woman, much less in such a patriarchal society, in a society as patriarchal and macho as Latin American society.

 So, if you don't behave in accordance with your genitals, you have to behave like the other option, which is to be a woman. What we are saying is that we are neither a man nor a woman. I am a transvestite, a person who has a genitals and who can live perfectly constructed under another identity or under another gender, which is feminine. For now there are not so many models. Maybe, 2000 years from now, they will be able to say: "women, men, transvestites... and an endless list", when they refer to genders.

We started to attack bourgeois hypocrisy. Because in the world, the most chaste men, if they see us prostituting ourselves, they call us "sinners", and if we ask for our rights, they call us "communists". Then we start attacking the bourgeoisie, the bourgeois hypocrisy. Because if there are 10,000 women comrades standing around every night, it's because there are 10,000 men who buy sex from them. At night, all well and good; but during the day they say: "kill them, lock them up, they are the devil". This is hypocrisy. Society demands punishment for those who prostitute themselves, but not for those who consume sex in this way.

We started to fight back. In Buenos Aires, the state spends 300 million dollars to support the police, which is the same repressive police of the process, and doesn't want to spend even ten dollars on education, on training, on seeing us as subjects of rights.

Within all these issues, we can also be socialists, and I can be a feminist. It's not that the only thing I am is a transvestite. When I was talking about the issue of the "myth", people think that we are libertines, that we are in bed all day, like a Venus goddess, smoking joints, lying around, and that we don't give a damn about the world. That's another stereotype. In our community there is a bit of everything, there are comrades who can be like that, blonde comrades, comrades who are 92 kilos, communist comrades, we have a diversity. And we have that diversity because we are people. I'm going to say that transvestites are something strange when we shit out of our ears, or piss out of our noses. As long as I do it in the places you do it, I don't see the wonder

That's when society starts to get a bit crazy. Because it's not that it bothers them that we exist. I go around the world, I look like a chubby lady, and everything is fine. The problem starts when we start asking for rights. When we say: "don't keep killing women, give us work, education, housing, health". That's when society becomes frantic.

It becomes quite difficult for us. Someday I would like to have a big event, there will be lesbian, gay, transvestite comrades, participating without discrimination within the movements of struggle. Because it happens that some struggles seem to be much more valuable than others. If it is about victims, we have victims. If it is about prisons, we know the prisons. If it's about repression, we have repression. So, I don't see why we can't think in a totalising way, and ask for all rights.

Why, if I go to a march against the IMF, against Yankee imperialism, why can't they support our struggles too? We have to talk about these issues as an everyday thing, because we are everyday too. We live in communities, we live in houses, we have families, friends, we think. So, the point we want to make is that we are sure we have to change this society. I am fighting to change society. I am absolutely against imperialism, I love freedom. But not a conditional freedom. I love absolute freedom, that everyone can live as they want. I absolutely love being a transvestite. Why does it seem like it's from another world?

So, the demand that we are making is the construction of a society without any kind of oppression, even if it seems longwinded to say "his" and "hers" and “theirs” We talk about "the revolutionaries" using a male name (in Spanish the masculine “encompasses women”), and where are the female revolutionaries? They were here.

We have to break the schematic gender thing. That the man has to be the super-macho who shouts and hits, and the woman who cooks and goes around with her little girl. There are revolutionary women who have wielded a rifle. And there are men who can cook, and they are no less revolutionary.

Another issue is that of affection and the body. Why can we talk, and if at this moment I say "let's take up arms", everybody gets on board, but if I say "let's get naked, let's touch each other", absolute panic starts? Why should I feel ashamed of my body, if the most valuable thing we have is the body? It is the body for life, the body for fighting, the body for everything. It is the most absolute asset we have.

I insist on this issue of struggles. I think we absolutely have to rethink and include. I also fight for the landless, I am absolutely moved by poverty, I fight against the rich, I fight against all kinds of oppression. The only thing I leave you with as a reflection is that you join our struggle. That is all.

**The bodies of feminism (extracts)** Josefina Fernández

The entry of the concept of gender into the feminist domain constituted a real interpretative shift that gave the movement a firm stage for both theoretical and political struggle. The questioning of the *biology-is-fate formula* formed an important part of a theoretical model for explaining the differences between men and women and gave a sustained impetus to feminist strategies from the 1960s onwards. However, the initial optimism derived from understanding these differences as the result of the production of cultural norms will begin to show its problems when faced with the category Woman,], capable of representing the whole of the female gender in an undivided way. The voices of lesbian women, and also the voices of black women, will be the first to denounce a feminism that, behind this category Woman, does not recognise the singularity that assumes subordination by virtue of race, class and/or sexuality. Just as in the early 1970s, lesbian feminists began to question the homophobia of heterosexual feminism, in the 1980s black women warned of the racist attitudes present in a movement whose main commitment was to eliminate sexist oppression. As bell hooks (1982) points out, many white feminists assumed that by identifying themselves as oppressed they were liberated from being oppressors. The dangers of a political project that, while neglecting class and race divisions, kept some aspects of social hierarchy intact were already in place. The supposedly universal sisterhood was beginning to show its feet of clay, and the Woman identity was beginning to show its exclusionary and therefore violent character. The fragmentations that black feminists and lesbian feminists introduced into this category at that time were the antecedents of the subsequent theoretical debate on the usefulness of the differentiation between sex and gender, which took place in the 1990s. As Susan Bordo (1990) says, the theoretical performance and productivity of the gender category began to be a cause for mistrust and scepticism.

Although a little later than in some other countries, this debate arrived in Argentina and became established in the academic spaces of gender studies, but hardly at all in activist spaces. The gradual appearanceof cultural practices such as transvestism and transsexualism in the country at the end of the 1990s provided an opportunity for a new interrogation of the sex/gender binary model, an invitation to review not only the uses of the category of gender but also that of the body and the very constitution of sex.

Some of us local activists became strongly involved in this issue and, when a national feminist meeting was held in 2000, we proposed the incorporation of transvestite feminists in an attempt to begin to discuss the issues that, as I pointed out, had been circulating until then in academic circles without dialogue with transvestites themselves. For those of us who made this proposal, transvestism presented itself to our eyes as that nomadic subject of which Rosi Braidotti (1994) speaks, a subject that has no passport - or has many - that enables it to enter the sex/gender system; a cultural practice that resists settling into socially codified ways of thinking and behaving, into the dominant representations of the self. Transvestites wear a body that does not conform to the norms of the modern body order and, in this sense, transgress the boundaries of normative sex and gender. It is a body that is not clearly aligned to the prescriptions of sex, gender and sexuality.

But the initiative to include transvestite feminists in the meeting resulted in a fleeting electronic debate that finally led to an almost majority rejection of the participation of the group in question.

The reasons given were diverse but, in general terms, they all shared at least one argument: the weight of the differences between being a woman and being a transvestite. These differences, which were not detailed, led to a conclusive "to be a feminist entitled to participate in these meetings, you have to be a woman".(...)

**A final reflection**

(...) transvestism, like other nomadic identities, not only exposes the power pact on which the bipolar and biocentric gender order is built, but also disrupts it and subjects it to exploration. In this sense, identities are returned to the terrain of politics, in the sense that Ranciere (1996) uses this term. Taking up the Foucauldian distinction between police and politics, Ranciere denominates the set of processes wherein the coming together and consent of communities, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and functions and the systems of legitimisation of this distribution take place, “police order” or simply “police] The police, the philosopher will say, is an order of bodies that makes one activity visible and another not, that one word is understood as belonging to discourse and another to noise. Conversely, politics is an activity antagonistic to the former, which displaces a body from its assigned place, makes visible what it had no reason to be seen. Political activity is a mode of manifestation that undoes the sensitive divisions of the police order. The passage from the police order to the political consists in being counted as speaking beings, and this implies participating in a process of becoming through which the places and identities assigned to the police order are transformed into instances of the experience of a dispute. Political subjectivation removes the subjects from their own evidence and leads them to a new, now political, scenario. In this sense, recovering the political character of identity practices means undoing the divisions that police the order of bodies that distribute the ways of doing, being and saying.

The problem faced by the transvestites who wanted to participate in the feminist meeting has two faces. On the one hand, identities such as transvestite identities show us that gender is not an expression of sex, thus undoing the internal organising nucleus of identities, that police order in Ranciere's sense. On the other hand, they reveal how the attributes of sexual identity, gender, body and sex are established in our culture.

Membership of socio-sexual categories is determined by representations of gender and sexual acts, through meanings imposed on the body and its functions, through readings about the body or the sex of the body, and through the essentialisation of genital anatomy as a key text to sexualise/generate the body. And we already know that the range of interpretations experienced by the body is less determined by the anatomy than by the interpretations and prescriptions given to that anatomy.

In any case, the de-essentialisation of identities raises at least four issues for feminism: that gender categories themselves are less stable and unified than we think, that gender identity can be experienced as transitive, liminal and discontinuous, that the supposed stability of gender identity is an ongoing process that depends on particular social contexts and practices, and therefore that the criteria for membership of gender categories can and should be debated.

Gender was undoubtedly an operation that opened the door to a process of political subjectification, wrenching women out of our own evidence and into the political arena, but I fear it has made us its hostages, it has left us trapped in that police order from which it once managed to evade.

If bodies prevent their incorporation into a universal singular model, then the very forms that subjectivity takes cannot be generalised. Subjectivity cannot be elaborated according to the universalist ideals of humanism; there is no concept of the "human" that includes all subjects without doing violence, without forgetting, or in a residual way. Liberating the body from the biological and pseudo-naturalistic approaches with which it has been thought of is a task that feminists have yet to accomplish. It is not an easy job. As Grosz says, within our intellectual heritage there is not even language available with which to refer to an embodied subjectivity that resists dualism and elaborates alternatives to it. We need metaphors different from those that have dominated the history of philosophy, we need to start thinking of the body as a plural, multiple field and abandon that which functions as the delegate or representative of others. A field as a discontinuous, non-homogeneous, non-singular space, a space that admits differences.

For those of us who feel challenged by identities such as transvestites, the time has come to start thinking about how to project these debates into a less excluding and more emancipatory politics.

**Whose feminism is this, then? The unspoken racism of the trans inclusion debate (excerpt)**

 Emi Koyama

The room was full of women in their forties and up, and almost all of them looked white and middle class. I felt intimidated even before the presentation started, because it seemed like everyone knew everyone except me. (...)

I heard the room full of white women applauding, agreeing with the comment that they "all trusted each other" and "felt so safe without race mattering", clearly stating that she, as a white woman, did not feel threatened by the presence of black women, and it made me nauseous.(...)

Obviously, many lesbian feminists - the same people who continue to resist the inclusion of trans people in "women's" communities - have learned nothing from the vast contributions of black women, working women, women with disabilities, etc., even when they have had many opportunities to learn in the past few decades. It's not that there wasn't enough information about black women; they simply don't care about putting racism into action, because they have a veiled interest in maintaining that dynamic. The racist feminism that Audre Lorde so eloquently denounced is still alive and well.

I no longer feel that continued education on trans issues in women's communities will change their oppressive behaviours in any meaningful way unless they truly want to change. It is not the lack of knowledge or information that keeps oppression going, it is the lack of feminist compassion, awareness and principle.

Speaking from the perspective and tradition of black lesbians, most if not all of the reasons for excluding transgender women are not only transphobic, but also racist.

To argue that transgender women should not enter the space because their experiences are different would be to assume that all women's experiences are the same, and that is a racist assumption. The argument that transgender women have experienced a degree of male privilege does not exclude them from our communities, once we realise that not all women are equally privileged or oppressed. To suggest that the security of the Territory would be at risk overlooks, perhaps deliberately, the ways in which women can exercise violence and oppression against each other. Even the argument that "the presence of a penis would anger women" is misleading, because it ignores the fact that white skin is as much a reminder of violence as a penis is. The racist history of lesbian feminism has taught us that any white woman who thus excuses one form of oppression has and will excuse other forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, and discrimination based on physical or mental ability.

**Footnotes**

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 Taken from "POP: Protocol for Popular Organisations. AUTHORXS: La Ciega, Colectivo de abogadxs populares e independientes. Second Edition 2019. PIXEL Editora. pixeleditora@gmail.com. La Plata, Argentina. P. 115

 Ibid

 Most of the information was obtained from "https://latinta.com.ar/2018/03/ser-trans-argentina/" and then cross-checked with reports from agencies (Fundación Huésped and Comisión Provincial por la Memoria, for example) and organisations (such as ATTTA).

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