

Article

# Feminism and Trans-Inclusionism: Enemies, Not Friends

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**Abstract:** Some insist that the feminist movement and the trans-inclusionary movement are engaged in a common struggle against patriarchy. I argue that they are not. The feminist movement is the struggle of the sex class women against the sex class men, while the trans-inclusionary movement is the struggle of the sex/gender nonconforming against the sex/gender binary. The two movements have different analyses of injustice, different goals, different enemies, and different friends. And, I argue, with trans women's demand for recognition as women, these movements have come into conflict.

**Keywords:** second-wave feminism; poststructuralism; gender-critical feminism; trans-inclusionism; political; Schmitt

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The high points of politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognised as the enemy.

– Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*

## 1. Introduction

Trans-inclusionary feminists deny that trans-inclusionary politics conflict with feminist politics. On the contrary, they claim, the sex/gender nonconforming and women are allies fighting a common enemy – patriarchy (Koyama, 2003, p. 252). Gender-critical feminists then appear irrational – transphobic and politically self-defeating – in their refusal to recognise trans women as women.

But consider the definition of 'patriarchy' employed by trans-inclusionary feminists: the "binary gender system" (Koyama, 2003, p. 246). This would startle second-wave feminists, who conceived patriarchy as the sex class system. According to Christine

Delphy, the women's liberation movement of the 1970s adopted the term 'patriarchy' to name the unique system responsible for women's oppression (Delphy, 1984, pp. 139–40). 'Patriarchy' thus occupied in the second-wave analysis the place of 'capitalism' in the Marxist analysis: it referred to a system of *class*, where the classes were men and women (Delphy, 1984, pp. 25–26). In light of this, the claim that the sex/gender nonconforming and women share an enemy appears to rely on a questionable or at least revisionist definition of the enemy.

In this paper I trace the unnoticed shift from patriarchy as the system of sex class to patriarchy as the system of the sex/gender binary. I do so in order to show that the sex/gender nonconforming and women have two wholly distinct enemies, that trans-inclusionary and feminist politics are two wholly distinct politics, and that these politics are now in conflict.

## 2. Patriarchy: A System of Sex Class

What animated the modern feminist movement, and what unifies its various thinkers, from Mary Wollstonecraft<sup>1</sup> to Andrea Dworkin,<sup>2</sup> is the belief that women *as women* are an oppressed class.<sup>3</sup> However, it was not until around the middle of the twentieth century, some one hundred and fifty years after the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that feminists began attempting to develop a systematic account of how women are oppressed.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, they looked to Marxism, theorising women as an economic class, exploited under capitalism. Margaret Benston, for example, argued that women are the group of people responsible for the production of use-values in the home. As the production of use-values, in contrast to the production of exchange-values, does not contribute to the economy, the labour required to produce it is not recognised as labour and so is not remunerated (Benston, 2019, pp. 3–4). Like workers, women produce, but unlike workers, women do not receive a wage in exchange for the use of their labour-power. In fact, Benston identifies *housewives*, not women, as an exploited economic class.

Feminists then attempted to extend the Marxist framework, positing the existence of a second system – patriarchy. Juliet Mitchell, for example, proposed that capitalism is the

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<sup>1</sup> Wollstonecraft (2004) sought to vindicate the rights of *woman*.

<sup>2</sup> "The nature of women's oppression is unique: women are oppressed as women, regardless of class or race" (Dworkin, 1974, p. 23).

<sup>3</sup> Zillah Eisenstein writes that "[a]ll feminism is liberal at its root in that the universal feminist claim that woman is an independent being (from man) is premised on the eighteenth-century liberal conception of the independent and autonomous self. All feminism is also radically feminist in that woman's identity as a sexual class underlies this claim" (Eisenstein, 1981, p. 4). Responding to the question, "What does 'feminist' mean?," Monique Wittig observes that "[f]eminist is formed with the word 'femme,' 'woman,' and means: someone who fights for women. For many of us it means someone who fights for women as a class and for the disappearance of this class" (Wittig, 1993, p. 105). Linda Gordon finds the "fundamental coherence in feminism as a social movement and as a social theory" in "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (Gordon, 1978, p. 107). Holly Lawford-Smith argues that a feminist is "a person who works for women's equality (whether of outcome or of opportunity), women's individual self-determination, women's liberation or women's interests (as the person understands them, whether or not that is also as they are); or who works against male dominance" (Lawford-Smith, 2025, p. 15). All of these thinkers offer capacious definitions of feminism, and all define feminism in terms of a belief about the condition of *women*.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the emergence of feminist theory, see Judith Grant (2021, pp. 31–53).

economic system, while patriarchy is the ideological system (Mitchell, 1975, p. 412). But in the Marxist framework ideology is produced by the economic system (Marx, 1972, pp. 64–65), so conceived as ideology patriarchy is not an autonomous system (Young, 1981, pp. 43–69).

Finally, feminists suggested an altogether new framework, one in which the primary system is patriarchy (MacKinnon, 1989, pp. 3–4). In this framework, sex occupies the place of relationship to means of production – as one’s ownership of the means of production determines whether one is a member of the capitalist class or working class, so one’s maleness or femaleness determines whether one is a member of the sex class men or the sex class women (Atkinson, 1974, pp. 41–42). ‘Men’ and ‘women’ are names for political classes,<sup>5</sup> the equivalents of ‘capitalist’ and ‘worker.’<sup>6</sup> Only with this framework did feminism emerge as its own movement, irreducible to another, did it transcend liberal feminism (liberalism applied to women) and Marxist feminism (Marxism applied to women) and become feminism *simpliciter*, “feminism unmodified” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 117).

Mere decades later, this framework has all but disappeared. In its place is another, in which ‘men’ and ‘women’ are categories of a *binary*, not of *class*. The difference between class and binary will become clear in due course, but the most significant difference can already be gleaned: categories of class are necessarily hierarchical, while categories of a binary are not. In what follows I offer an account of the disappearance of the class framework and the emergence of the binary one.

### 3. The Poststructuralist Turn

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault recounts a transformation in power. For a long time, he writes, power was that of a sovereign over his subjects (Foucault, 1978, p. 135). That power was ‘deductive,’ “a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself” (136). In the modern era power becomes instead ‘biopower.’ This power is ‘productive,’ “working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimise, and organise the forces under it” (136). It is ‘bio’ in the sense that it is directed at the body, disciplining, manipulating, fashioning it. Where sovereign power repressed the subject, biopower constructs it. Where sovereign power was centralised, biopower is diffuse. Where sovereign power was possessed, biopower is “exercised” (Foucault, 1980, p. 89). According to this history, the conception of power as possessed is now anachronistic and must be replaced with the poststructuralist conception of power as biopower.

Following Foucault, many feminist theorists dismissed the second-wave analysis as antiquated, since in that analysis power is wielded – and by implication possessed – by men over women. For example, Nancy Fraser rejected what she (wrongly) considered

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<sup>5</sup> As Wittig writes, “the category ‘woman’ as well as the category ‘man’ are political ... categories not eternal ones. Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class ‘men’ disappears, ‘women’ as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters” (Wittig, 1993, p. 106).

<sup>6</sup> Notice that if, contra gender-critical feminism,\* ‘men’ and ‘women’ are names for classes rather than biological categories, they are nevertheless, contra trans-inclusionary feminism,\*\* co-extensive with ‘male’ and ‘female.’) \*The slogan of gender-critical feminism is ‘woman/[phonetic spelling]/noun/adult human female.’ \*\* “When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler, 2006, p. 9).

Carole Pateman's view of male domination: "a dyadic power relation between two individuals in which a (male) superordinate commands a (female) subordinate" (Fraser, 1993, p. 173). She asserted that male domination was now perpetuated not by individual men but by "impersonal structural mechanisms" (180). Similarly, Susan Bordo criticised the "old' feminist model," which "tended ... to subsume all patriarchal institutions and practices under an oppressor/oppressed model which theorised men as 'possessing' and wielding power over women, who are viewed correspondingly as being utterly power-less" (Bordo, 1999, p. 190). And, in the preface to *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler wrote that "[p]ower seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between a subject and an Other" (Butler, 2006, p. xxx).<sup>7</sup>

With its embrace of poststructuralism, feminism appeared to have lost its *raison d'être*: if in the era of sovereign power men *qua* men oppressed women *qua* women but now in the era of biopower they do not, what need have we for feminism? One obvious response to this question was: none at all. Interestingly, poststructural feminists did not come to that conclusion and renounce feminism. Instead, they sought, and in Butler's *Gender Trouble* appeared to find, a suitably poststructural feminism.

In Foucauldian fashion, Butler regards sex as a "regulatory ideal" (Butler, 2011, p. xi). That is, because one must have a sex to be intelligibly human, 'sex' is less a descriptive than a normative category, less what one does have than what one must have. In virtue of its normativity, sex compels bodies to conform to it, thereby producing them. As an example, surgeons have operated on intersex infants to make them more recognisably male or female (Dreger, 1998). In doing so, Butler would say, they eliminated a threat to the category of sex, shoring it up.

In designating certain bodies as intelligible, the regulatory ideal of sex simultaneously designates others as unintelligible (Butler, 2006, p. x). "This latter domain," Butler clarifies, "is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside" (x). In Butler's view, these unintelligible bodies are the victims of sex.

But which bodies, specifically, are unintelligible? If "'intelligible' [bodies] are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (Butler, 2006, p. 23), then unintelligible bodies are those which do not – presumably: the intersex body, the trans sexed body, the homosexual body, the bisexual body, the gender non-conforming body, the nonbinary body, the trans gendered body.

On Butler's account, it is the regulatory ideal of sex that has power, producing some as properly sexed and thus human subjects and others as abject. No longer that which men wield over women, power is instead that which produces the sexed/gendered subject.

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<sup>7</sup> She also wrote of her "hope that ... no one will be too quick to reduce power to hierarchy and to refuse its productive political dimensions" (Butler, 2006, p. xxvii). With respect to pronouns, there is no politically neutral option. The feminist analysis dictates the use of sex-based pronouns, while the poststructural/trans-inclusionary analysis dictates the use of gender identity-based pronouns. However, the use of gender identity-based pronouns is now the norm, having been more or less successfully passed off as a requirement of justice. Given that there is no neutral option, and given that there is a need to challenge the status of gender identity-based pronouns as an uncontroversial requirement of justice, I have opted to use sex-based pronouns.

We continue to need feminism, then, albeit for a different reason: subversion of the sex/gender binary.

#### 4. Feminism and Poststructuralism: Unrelated Analyses

This assumes that Butler's account is, as she asserts, *feminist* (Butler, 2006, p. vii). But consider her analysis alongside the second-wave analysis. In the second-wave analysis, *oppression* is the injustice, *men qua men* are the agents of injustice, *women qua women* are the victims of injustice, and the *liberation of women from men* is justice. In Butler's analysis, *unintelligibility/exclusion* is the injustice, the *sex/gender binary* is the source of injustice, *the sex/gender nonconforming* are the victims of injustice, and the *intelligibility/inclusion of those who deviate from the sex/gender binary* is justice. Consider also the politics for which Butler's analysis calls – a subversion ('troubling') of the sex/gender binary to "open up the field of possibility for gender" (Butler, 2006, p. viii) – alongside that for which the second-wave analysis calls – a struggle by women against men for their liberation.

Carl Schmitt's conception of the political helps to make clear that these are two different politics. Schmitt distinguishes the political from other "relatively independent endeavours of human thought and action" (Schmitt, 2007, pp. 25–26) such as the moral, aesthetic, and economic, observes that each such endeavour rests on its own distinction (the moral, the distinction between good and evil, the aesthetic, the distinction between beautiful and ugly, the economic, the distinction between profitable and unprofitable), and identifies the distinction upon which the political rests: friend and enemy (26).

The enemy is those against whom one must fight, while the friend is those with whom one fights. In the second-wave analysis, women are oppressed by men, so women, together, must fight against men for their liberation – women are the friend of women and men are the enemy of women. Friend and enemy correspond to female sex class and male sex class respectively.

In actuality, however, women sometimes side with men, and men with women. Perhaps, then, we ought to say instead that the friend is all who are loyal to the sex class women, while the enemy is all who are loyal to the sex class men. On this understanding, friend and enemy correspond to those with feminist consciousness and those with antifeminist consciousness, irrespective of their sex class.

But this falsely divorces loyalty from sex class. According to the second-wave conception of men and women as classes, men owe allegiance – friendship – to men, and women owe it to women. In other words, men are the true friend of men, and women are the true friend of women. This is why women are especially hurt when other women say or do misogynistic things – they rightly expect a solidarity from women that they do not from men. Individual men – including trans women – can develop a feminist consciousness of sorts, and they can support women in their fight for liberation, but they can thereby become only friends of a kind, not true friends.<sup>8</sup> Because it is not in their power to become members of the sex class women and thus people whose loyalty properly lies with women,

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<sup>8</sup> This provides an argument for the claim of many gender-critical feminists that "men cannot be feminists, only allies" (Lawford-Smith, 2022, p. 62), and for Holly Lawford-Smith's original definition of a feminist as "a woman who . . ." (Lawford-Smith, 2023).

their loyalty to women must always be suspect. For the same reason that women cannot fully accept men as friends, they cannot fully reject women, no matter how much they side with men. As they must remain suspicious of men, so they must hold out hope for the friendship of women.

In Butler's poststructural analysis there is no *agent* of injustice, no group of people who wield power over and wrong the sex/gender nonconforming; there is instead a *source* of injustice – the sex/gender binary. Here, we might say, it is the sex/gender binary that is the enemy and the sex/gender nonconforming who are the friend. The politics for which each analysis calls are thus altogether different. In fact, on Schmitt's view, the politics for which Butler's analysis calls is not a politics at all. "To the enemy concept," writes Schmitt, "belongs the ever present possibility of combat" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 32). An enemy therefore "exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity" (28). One cannot battle the sex/gender binary, as it is not a fighting collectivity of people. This is reflected in Butler's language: one can only 'parody,' 'subvert,' 'trouble,' the binary; one cannot vanquish it.<sup>9</sup>

To be clear, my claim is not that poststructuralist politics and second-wave politics are merely two different species of the genus 'feminism,' two different kinds of feminist politics; it is that they are two unrelated kinds, trans-inclusionism and feminism. An analysis is feminist insofar as it is one in which women *qua* women suffer injustice, and a politics is feminist insofar as it is one that is for women or, in Schmitt's terms, insofar as the friend – those for whom and with whom one fights – is women. The account of injustice (that is, the explanation of the origin or mechanism of the injustice), the view of the nature of injustice (is it inequality, exploitation, or oppression?), the belief about the scope of injustice (is the entire role assigned women unjust or only certain aspects of that role?; or is it instead the denigration of that role that is unjust?; are even our most scientifically valid expectations of women unjust?), and the vision of justice (a genderless world; a world in which women's role is valued; a sex-classless world; a sexless world) may vary, but the victim of injustice, the subject of the movement (women), may not. This definition of 'feminism' is true to the history of feminism. Radical feminism may be the only theory that successfully identifies women *qua* women as victims of injustice, but Marxist and socialist feminism too aspired to do so (Hartmann, 1979).

In Butler's analysis women *qua* women do not suffer injustice. People are distinguished by their conformity to or deviation from the sex/gender binary, just as in a Marxist analysis they are distinguished by their ownership or lack thereof of the means of production/economic class or in a second-wave analysis by their sex/sex-class. The distinctive groupings are 'sex/gender conforming' and 'sex/gender nonconforming,' just as in a Marxist analysis they are 'capitalist' and 'worker' or in a second-wave analysis 'men' and 'women.' In Butler's analysis men *qua* men and women *qua* women are not groups, much less oppressor and oppressed, just as they are not in a Marxist analysis. Men and women show up only *qua* members of the sex/gender conforming or nonconforming group, only *qua* cis or trans (or *qua* heterosexual or homosexual/bisexual, and so forth),

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<sup>9</sup> It has been suggested to me that trans-inclusionists do identify an enemy in the Schmittian sense – namely all those who oppose trans-inclusionary efforts (e.g.: gender-critical feminists, who oppose the recognition of trans women as women; psychiatrists who oppose puberty blockers; sports scientists who oppose the participation of male people in the female category in sports). However, according to Butler's analysis, these people are at best secondary enemies.

just as in a Marxist analysis they show up only *qua* members of the capitalist or worker group. *Qua cis* they are privileged, *qua trans* they are excluded, just as in the Marxist analysis *qua* capitalist they exploit, *qua* worker they are exploited. 'Cis woman' is the poststructuralist equivalent of the Marxist epithet, 'bourgeois woman' (Dohrn, 1969). With Butler's analysis, the terms 'men' and 'women' become, as Dembroff says, unnecessary (Dembroff, 2019). In Butler's analysis women only *qua* sex/gender nonconforming suffer injustice. Women *qua* women, women irrespective of their conformity to or deviation from the sex/gender binary, do not, just as in a Marxist analysis women irrespective of their economic class do not. Butler's analysis is not feminist, just as the Marxist analysis is not.

As contemporary feminists embraced Butler's account, a series of usurpations occurred: Butler's poststructuralist analysis of injustice usurped the second-wave analysis as the *feminist* analysis of injustice; the system of the sex/gender binary usurped the system of sex-class as the system of injustice with which *feminism* is concerned; the struggle for the inclusion of the sex/gender nonconforming usurped the struggle for the liberation of women as the *feminist* struggle; the constituency of the sex/gender nonconforming usurped the constituency of women as the *feminist* constituency.

The consequence of these usurpations is that women are dispossessed of a movement and of the language in which to describe this dispossession. As poststructuralism has appropriated their analysis of injustice, they can no longer refer to the injustice that *qua* women they suffer, so they can no longer say that an analysis that does not recognise this injustice and a politics the object of which is not to end it is not theirs, is not for women, is not feminist.

## 5. Feminism and Trans-Inclusionism: Conflicting Politics

I have recounted a dramatic moment in the history of feminism: the displacement of feminism by poststructuralism. Trans-inclusionary feminists see no such moment. In place of rupture, they see continuity. Finn Mackay, for example, finds in radical feminism views on sex and gender resembling those of queer theory (Mackay, 2021, pp. 46–47). She thereby presents the poststructuralist concern with the sex/gender binary as a second-wave concern.

But the radical feminist concern with sex-dichotomisation was a concern with sex class. Only because radical feminists conceived of the sexes as classes, 'men' and 'women' as two antagonistic categories, did they see sex as dichotomous.<sup>10</sup> Only because radical feminists dreamed of a future in which sex would not be class did they dream, as Dworkin did (Dworkin, 1974, p. 183), of a future in which sex was not dichotomous. Radical feminists spoke of a dichotomy, not a binary (a term that belongs to the poststructuralist vocabulary), and this dichotomy was not the sex/gender binary by another name. It was an aspect of sex-class. The binary, by contrast, is a feature of a poststructuralist world in which sex-class does not exist. When we consider the antithesis of each, the difference between the two becomes clearer: the antithesis of the sex dichotomy is sex-classlessness, the beneficiary of which is women, while the

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<sup>10</sup> Consider Atkinson: "part of the nature of political classes is their dichotomised aspect: white/black, rich/poor, and male/female" (Atkinson, 1974, p. 104). And Wittig: "There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses" (Wittig, 1982, p. 64).

antithesis of the sex/gender binary is diversified sex/gender categories, the beneficiary of which is the sex/gender nonconforming.

This brings something into view. Second-wave feminism and poststructural feminism are not divergent accounts of a single world (patriarchy), each emphasising a different aspect of this world (class and binary). Rather, they are accounts of different worlds – the former, a world in which the sex class men oppresses the sex class women, the latter, a world in which the sex/gender binary renders those who deviate from it unintelligible. Second-wave and poststructural feminists are not fighting one war against patriarchy, for the ‘patriarchy’ of each is altogether different. They are fighting different wars, the former against the sex class men and the latter against the sex/gender binary.

With trans women’s demand for recognition as women, these wars collide. In the poststructuralist analysis, justice consists in intelligibility/inclusion and intelligibility/inclusion for trans women consists in the affirmation of their self-identification as women. Poststructural feminists must therefore insist on the acceptance of trans women’s demand for recognition as women. But in the second-wave analysis, trans women are, *qua* male people, members of the sex class men. For women, to recognise trans women as women would be to recognise enemies as friends. Women would then be unable to defeat their enemy. Women would have been defeated. Second-wave feminists must therefore reject trans women’s demand for recognition as women.

Second-wave feminists – or their contemporary counterparts, gender-critical feminists – confront this. They perceive that trans women’s inclusion conflicts with their goal of women’s liberation<sup>11</sup> and, refusing to relinquish their goal, they unapologetically accept that they are ‘trans exclusionary’ (Lawford-Smith, 2022, p. 61). By contrast, poststructural feminists refuse to confront this, insisting that trans women and women have shared interests, that trans-inclusion and women’s liberation are one and the same project, the project to eliminate patriarchy, the project of feminism (Heyes, 2003). These feminists “reject a feminism that excludes trans women” (Watson, 2016, p. 246). They insist that trans-inclusionism is “ally, not enemy” (Humphery, 2020) to feminism. They advocate a “transfeminism” (Koyama, 2003, p. 245).

This is in part, I think, because in the poststructuralist analysis sex class does not exist, so trans women cannot be members of the sex class men, the enemy of the sex class women. Their recognition as women is therefore not the recognition of enemies as friends, not the threat to women that it is in the second-wave analysis. But if sex class does not exist, then trans women also cannot be members of the sex class women, friends of women, as trans-inclusionary feminists often claim. Trans women stand in no relation at all to women *qua* women, who have been redispersed.

Poststructural feminists therefore cannot describe the inclusion of trans women in the class women as an expansion of the historical feminist subject, the sex class women. The analysis that legitimises the recognition of trans women as women is the same analysis that dissolves that subject. Having declared that “[a] feminism for the 2020s must be a feminism that can reckon with the existence and patriarchal oppression of nonwomen such as nonbinary, genderqueer, transmasculine, transfeminine, agender and Two-Spirit peoples,” Yves Rees continues, “A shift of this magnitude cannot be accommodated with window-dressing gestures such as the in-vogue language of ‘women

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<sup>11</sup> See *No conflict, they said* (n.d.).

and nonbinary people’ – rhetoric that subsumes nonbinary genders within the master category of ‘woman.’ Nonbinary thinking is not additive; it is transformative. It demands a structural remaking of the way we conceive and articulate a feminist politics” (Rees, 2022, pp. 124–25). Rees is right. The recognition of trans women as women is not the addition of trans women to the historical feminist subject; it is the obliteration and construction anew of this subject. The question is why Rees sees the new subject as still a *feminist* one, why she sees the new movement that represents this subject as a ‘transformed’ feminism rather than simply a new movement – trans-inclusionism.

Second-wave feminism and poststructural feminism have nonhomologous taxonomies. The second-wave taxonomy contains two *biological* groups – ‘male people’ and ‘female people’ – each of which is coextensive with a *political* group – ‘male people’ with ‘men’ and ‘female people’ with ‘women.’ The poststructuralist taxonomy contains instead two *social* groups – ‘assigned-male-at-birth’ and ‘assigned-female-at-birth.’ These groups are social in the sense that they do not exist in nature, rather they are the result of the social practice of assigning sex. The first group – assigned-male-at-birth – contains (at least) three groups – ‘trans women,’ ‘cis men,’ and ‘nonbinary,’ as does the second – ‘cis women,’ ‘trans men,’ and ‘nonbinary.’ The poststructuralist taxonomy does not contain the political groups ‘men’ and ‘women.’ It contains the terms, but they refer to radically different groups – cis men and trans men, and cis women and trans women. These groups comprise people who self-identify a particular way, not people who occupy a position of mastery or subjection. On reflection, I am not sure that they refer to groups at all, for I am not sure either that all cis women and cis men do in fact *self-identify* as women and men. Perhaps these terms have no place in the poststructuralist taxonomy, perhaps they linger as vestiges of the second-wave taxonomy. In the poststructuralist taxonomy, the political groups appear to be the ‘sex/gender conforming’ and the ‘sex/gender nonconforming.’ But if these groups are political, they must be so in a sense other than that in which ‘men’ and ‘women’ are, since ‘men’ and ‘women’ are political in the sense of oppressor and oppressed, a sense that poststructuralism rejects. Poststructuralism considers discourse, which produces the subject, powerful. So, strictly speaking, it is the ‘sex/gender binary,’ not the ‘sex/gender conforming’ and the ‘sex/gender nonconforming,’ that is political. Nevertheless, we can say that the ‘sex/gender conforming’ and the ‘sex/gender nonconforming’ are respectively beneficiaries and casualties of the sex/gender binary.

Second-wave feminism and poststructural feminism are, I am suggesting, not different analyses in a single language; they are different languages, neither of which can be fully translated into the other. For example, second-wave feminism’s ‘men’ has no equivalent in poststructural feminism. It may appear to – ‘assigned-male-at-birth.’ But ‘men’ names a *political* group (sexual master), while ‘assigned-male-at-birth’ names a *social* group, which itself has no political significance. The two may be coextensive with male people, but their meanings are different.

In order to present women’s liberation and trans women’s inclusion as harmonious goals, then, trans-inclusionary feminists must take one of four possible paths.

First, they can create a third, neutral language in which the claims of second-wave and poststructural feminism can both be stated. For example, they can say that feminism and trans-inclusionism are both against “gender injustice” (Jenkins, 2016, p. 395). Here, we have a third, neutral term – ‘gender injustice’ – which encompasses ‘men’s oppression of women’ and ‘trans women’s exclusion.’ Second-wave feminism’s struggle against the former and poststructural feminism’s struggle against the latter then appear two instances

of one common struggle. But the amorphous term 'gender injustice' becomes meaningful only once it is translated back into the languages of second-wave and poststructural feminism, whereupon it is revealed as two distinct concepts – 'oppression of women by men' and 'exclusion of the sex/gender nonconforming.'

Second, trans-inclusionary feminists can assimilate the claims of poststructural feminism to the language of second-wave feminism. Lori Watson and Catharine MacKinnon take this path, attempting to show that trans women are effectively members of the sex class women. Watson begins by suggesting that the question of whether trans women are women is the question of how they stand in relation to men (Watson, 2016, p. 250). She displays a second-wave understanding of 'men' and 'women' as the names of political classes, according to which all who stand in a relation of sexual subjection to men are members of the sex class women. Watson argues that trans women stand in this relation. They are, she writes, "routinely denied employment on the basis of their sex. Denied health care on the basis of their sex. Forced into prostitution for survival on the basis of their sex. Denied access to housing on the basis of their sex. Violently attacked, and all too frequently murdered, on the basis of their sex." "If," she continues, "subordination on the basis of one's sex is central to the social and political meaning of 'woman,' and it is, then what can possibly be the response to denying that trans women are precisely in this position?" (Watson, 2016, p. 250).

The clause 'on the basis of their sex' is obfuscatory. Once we specify the sex (female) on the basis of which members of the sex class women are subordinated (raped, prostituted, battered, harassed) by members of the sex class men, Watson's suggestion that trans women (male people) are subordinated on the basis of their sex, just as members of the sex class women are, becomes implausible. As Watson proceeds to acknowledge (Watson, 2016, p. 250), trans women are subordinated on the basis of their deviation from the gender aligned with their sex. I am also not sure that trans women are rightly described as suffering *subordination*, as women are. In the second-wave analysis, women suffer sexual subjection – subordination – to men. Much of the injustice that Watson claims trans women suffer is *discrimination*. Subjection / subordination and discrimination are distinct types of injustice: the former involves being under the authority of another, while the latter involves being treated unfairly by another.

Watson might respond that what matters is *that* trans women are 'subordinated' as women are, not *why* they are. But *that* and *why* cannot come apart. The reason for which one is wronged is the reason for which one is wronged in the particular way that one is – it is because women are female that they are treated as rapable.<sup>12</sup>

Consider Watson's claims of injustice: "denied employment ... Denied health care ... Forced into prostitution for survival ... Denied access to housing ... Violently attacked, and all too frequently murdered" (Watson, 2016, p. 250). As she neither elaborates nor cites empirical studies that would allow me to interpret her claims, it is difficult to evaluate them fairly. Nevertheless, I can say the following. (As an aside, empirical research examining discrimination against trans people overwhelmingly relies on self-reports (Granberg et al., 2020, p. 1; and Van Borm & Baert, 2018, p. 582), measuring the extent to which trans people *feel* that they have suffered discrimination, not the extent to which they *in fact* have. I find it difficult to see how any person could know that they were the victim of,

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss this at length on pp. 19–21.

for example, hiring or housing discrimination. To know this one would have to know that the other candidates were not more suitable, and to know this one would have to know about the other candidates and about the needs and preferences of the employer or landlord.) Nevertheless, supposing that Watson's claims are true, this does not show that trans women are subordinated *as women are*. If the injustices that Watson identifies appear to be those that women *qua* women suffer, they do so only until they are filled out and analysed. For example, trans women and women may both be denied healthcare, but once we specify the healthcare that each is denied (gender affirmation treatment and contraception and pregnancy termination respectively), and once we analyse the denial of this specific healthcare, what appears one phenomenon ('denial of healthcare') emerges as two distinct and unrelated phenomena (in the poststructuralist analysis trans women are denied gender affirmation treatment because, as the condition of being trans is unintelligible, this treatment is assumed unnecessary and damaging, while in the second-wave analysis women are denied contraception and termination because, as the sexual subjects of men, their reproductive capacities belong to men).

Watson's most persuasive claim that trans women stand in the same relation to men as women is that trans women are forced into prostitution. In the second-wave analysis, women are a sex class in the dual sense of 'sex:' women are, in virtue of their sex, members of a class whose subjection to men is *sexual*. In this analysis prostitution is the essence of women's condition, the rightful condition of all women *qua* women, even if it is the actual condition of only some. Though relatively many trans women may be forced into prostitution, I am not convinced that they are forced into it for the reason that women are (Norma, 2023). Women are forced into prostitution because men, as members of the male sex class, have a "sex-right" (Rich, 1980, p. 645), which women, as members of the female sex class, have a duty to uphold. Trans women do not have this duty. Empirical research suggests that trans women turn to prostitution because they consider it their only means of making money (Sausa et al., 2007, pp. 772–73).<sup>13</sup> They can turn to it because it exists, it exists because women are channelled into it, and women are channelled into it because men have a right to sexually command women. In other words, trans women may be forced to turn to prostitution, but they are not required in it; women are.

Similarly, MacKinnon suggests that the question of whether trans women are women is the question of whether they are oppressed "in the way women are distinctively oppressed" (MacKinnon, 2023), and cites their sexual violation as evidence that they are.<sup>14</sup> But the feminist *theoretical* claim – MacKinnon's own claim – is that women are

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<sup>13</sup> Sausa, Keatley, and Operario also identify a sense of community as a reason for which trans women turn to prostitution (Sausa et al., 2007, p. 772).

<sup>14</sup> Although it is often said that trans women suffer sexual violence, little detail about this violence is given. Nevertheless, some of the detail that is given – Katie Kirkland identifies "genital verification" as a form of sexual violence (Kirkland, 2019, p. 11), and the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey lists "health care provider or doctor" as a possible perpetrator of sexual violence (James et al., 2016, p. 206) – suggests that the sexual violence suffered by trans women is a phenomenon distinct from the sexual violence suffered by women. If research into sexual violence against trans people operationalises 'sexual violence' differently to research into sexual violence against women, then it is misleading to present the findings of the former as comparable to the findings of the latter, that is, as showing that trans people, *like women* (or, *more than women*), suffer sexual violence. Moreover, claims about sexual violence against *trans women* are often made on the basis of data that relate to *trans people*. In "Exploring Transgender Law and Politics," MacKinnon writes that "trans women are far more often sexually violated than they violate anyone" (MacKinnon, 2023). In the footnote accompanying this claim, she writes, "This is deduced from the extremely high figures of sexual abuse of trans *people*." As

sexually violable,<sup>15</sup> in contrast to men, who are sexually inviolable. To be clear, both women and men can be sexually violated. But only women are for sexual violation. The analysis to which this claim belongs is predictive. It predicts, for example, that the more a violation of a woman is *sexual*, the less we shall see it as a violation of her. This prediction appears accurate: the less rape involves *physical* assault, that is, the more rape is a sexual assault alone, the less it appears rape rather than sex, an improper use, an abuse, rather than a proper use.<sup>16</sup> With respect to a man, the analysis predicts the opposite – the more a violation of a man is sexual, the more we shall see it as a violation of him. Consider the story of Jude in Hanya Yanagihara’s novel, *A Little Life*. Were this the story not of Jude (a male person) but of a female person, would it retain its gravity? Would it remain a story of the repeated sexual abuse of a child or would it be instead a story of sexual adventure? Would it appal or would it arouse? The analysis predicts also that almost any violation of the female body can be conceived as *sexual* (and as such not a violation). If a violation of the female body is sexual precisely because it is violating (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 140), then any act that is conceivable as violating is thereby conceivable as sexual. Again, this prediction appears accurate: the torture and murder of a woman is understood as ‘sex games gone wrong’ (Yardley, 2021). And, since the violation of the male body is not, *qua* violation, sexual, we would expect that violations often assumed sexual of the female body are not so assumed of the male body.

The question of whether trans women are oppressed as women are is not the question of whether they are sexually violated; it is the question of whether their sexual violation *means* what it means, *is* what it is, when its victim is women.<sup>17</sup> The second-wave analysis implies that it cannot be, because in the system of sex class it is the female body that is penetrable, violable. *Qua* male, trans women may be sexually violated, but their sexual violation is not their proper treatment. Compare the response to the concern that opening up female bathrooms to trans women will leave women vulnerable to rape – “women will get raped in changing rooms anyway” (quoted in Stock, 2021, pp. 245–46) – to the prolific commentary on trans women’s vulnerability in male bathrooms. Compare the indifference expressed at the prospect of women’s rape to the horror expressed at the prospect of trans women’s. *Qua* female, women are violable. Their rape is natural, inevitable, right. *Qua* male, trans women are inviolable. Their rape is unnatural, evitable, wrong.

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trans people includes female people, claims about sexual violence against trans women may be trading on data about sexual violence against women. Indeed, according to *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, “transgender men (51%) and non-binary people with female on their original birth certificate (58%) [were] more likely to have been sexually assaulted, in contrast to transgender women (37%) and non-binary people with male on their original birth certificate (41%)” (James et al., 2016, p. 205). MacKinnon cites two other studies: (Flores et al., 2021; and Hoxmeier, 2016). The first methodologically distinguished trans women from trans men and found that rates of victimisation did not differ between the two. The second did not methodologically distinguish trans women from trans men, thus permitting no reliable claims about trans women.

<sup>15</sup> “To be rapable, a position that is social not biological, defines what a woman is” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 178).

<sup>16</sup> McLean and Goodman-Delahunty found that police officers are more likely to believe that the complainant has been sexually assaulted when she has been physically injured (McLean & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008). Interestingly, Lundrigan, Dhami, and Agudelo found that physical violence alone is not enough to increase the likelihood of a conviction in stranger rape cases (Lundrigan et al., 2019, p. 9).

<sup>17</sup> Feminists – MacKinnon included – have never considered men’s sexual violation evidence that they are oppressed as women are, understanding that it has a different meaning than women’s violation (Pateman, 1990, p. 402; and MacKinnon, 1987, p. 234).

MacKinnon makes a further, novel attempt to incorporate trans women into the second-wave analysis. “Having been surrounded by born women who do not identify as women particularly, and reject feminism as having nothing to do with them,” she writes, “it has been inspiring to encounter transwomen who do identify as women, actively oppose violence against women including prostitution (in which those who engage have little choice), and are strong feminists. ‘Woman’ can be, in part, a political identification” (Williams, 2015). Here, MacKinnon suggests that trans women are the friend of women and that in virtue of their friendship they are women. In other words: trans women are feminists; feminists are women; therefore, trans women are women. But how, or in what sense, are feminists *women*? An observation of Marilyn Frye’s provides the beginning of an answer. Discussing women’s responsibility to resist their oppression, Frye writes,

it has seemed that we must require of each other the most fundamental change, namely, a shift of our primary loyalty from its attachment to the masters and their institutions to an attachment to our sisters and our liberation. Loyalty and identity are so closely connected as to be almost just two aspects of one phenomenon, so if we are right in expecting or requiring such things of each other, we must be assuming that humans, that women, are capable of choice and of change at the level of our very identities – of what and who we are – in spite of the coerciveness of oppression. (Frye, 1985, p. 216)

Frye does not explain how loyalty and identity are connected, but she is right. In pledging allegiance to a group, we identify ourselves as people who will fight with them for their ends, as people who are, for political purposes, one of them. In the case at hand: in expressing loyalty to the sex class women, feminist men identify themselves as, in the fight of women against men, women. We now have an answer to our question: feminists are politically women. Notice two implications, both unacknowledged by MacKinnon: first, not only feminist trans women but also feminist men are women; second, antifeminist women are not women. These implications make it clear that the political sense of ‘woman’ is metaphorical. In pledging allegiance to a group, people do not claim to be literally one of them, rather, they claim to be *politically*, that is, for the purpose of the war, one of them. And only the group has the authority to accept outsiders as politically one of them. Should they judge outsiders’ expression of loyalty insincere, they can and must reject them.

‘Woman’ acquires its political sense from the relationship between sex class and loyalty that I described earlier. Because members of the female sex class – women – alone are properly friends of their class, an outsider who expresses loyalty to that class acts *as if they were* a woman. ‘Woman’ can therefore function as a term of political identification only while it functions as a sex term. An outsider who expresses loyalty to the sex class women can be said to act as if they were a woman, only while ‘woman’ refers to the members of the female sex class – female people. MacKinnon’s argument for trans women’s womanhood relies on the very sense of ‘woman’ that it would displace. In fact, MacKinnon’s argument is not for trans women’s but for feminists’ womanhood. Only insofar as trans women are feminists are they women (in the political sense). All in all, then, MacKinnon succeeds in showing that specifically feminist trans women *can* become women in a political and metaphorical sense.

It is possible that in different circumstances it would make political sense to accept feminist trans women’s offers of friendship and confer on them the status of women in

the political sense.<sup>18</sup> Those would be circumstances in which trans women do not pose a significant threat to women's liberation, and in which their friendship is politically useful to feminists (perhaps because it aids them in their efforts to abolish prostitution<sup>19</sup>). If those were once the circumstances,<sup>20</sup> they are no longer. Now, in virtue of their number and their demands, trans women do pose a significant threat to women in their fight for liberation. And if they once offered friendship to women, they now demand that women forsake their class and support trans women.

Katie Kirkland is another who attempts to assimilate the claims of poststructural feminism to the language of second-wave feminism. She argues that feminists are obligated not to contribute to oppression in any form, since in condemning women's oppression they implicitly condemn oppression as such (Kirkland, 2019, p. 7). She then argues that denying that trans women are women perpetuates their oppression (7–12). Therefore, she concludes, feminists are obligated not to deny that trans women are women.

I am not convinced that the condemnation of *women's* oppression entails an obligation to avoid contributing to *others'* oppression. Consider Kirkland's reformulation of her argument: "feminists view (or ought to view) a more just society as their end. If they are (implicitly) committed to this claim, then feminists ought not perpetuate injustice or oppression of any kind" (7). But *feminists* are those whose end is a society more just in one specific way – women are free. When feminists succeed in bringing about this society, they will no longer have reason to exist. The feminist project is neither less *nor more* than that of freeing women. That Kirkland misrepresents feminism becomes apparent when we consider this: if feminism ought to view a more just society as its end, then so ought every other movement that condemns an injustice – socialism, environmentalism, disability rights, trans-inclusionism, anti-racism, and so on. All social movements would then be indistinguishable from one another. It is a feminism whose specificity has been elided, a feminism that is not feminism but social justice-ism, that has an obligation not to contribute to others' oppression.

And if feminists do have an obligation to avoid contributing to the oppression of others, that obligation must be derivative of and subordinate to their commitment to ending women's oppression. This means that when ending women's oppression conflicts with avoiding contributing to the oppression of others, feminists must choose the former over the latter. Suppose, for example, that abolishing prostitution is necessary to ending women's oppression,<sup>21</sup> while preserving it is necessary to securing sexual fulfillment for disabled people (Fritsch et al., 2016). Faced with a choice between ending women's oppression and avoiding perpetuating the sexual deprivation of disabled people,<sup>22</sup> feminists must choose the former (just as disability rights activists must choose the latter).

At any rate, Kirkland's second argument – that denying that trans women are women perpetuates their oppression – fails. It relies on two claims: denying that trans women are

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<sup>18</sup> As Schmitt writes, "The criterion of the friend-and-enemy distinction in no way implies that one particular nation must forever be the friend or enemy of another specific nation" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 34).

<sup>19</sup> I am thinking here of MacKinnon's emphasis on trans women's opposition to prostitution.

<sup>20</sup> Evidently, second-wave feminists such as Robin Morgan (1978), Mary Daly (1978), and Janice Raymond (1979) did not think those were the circumstances even in the 1970s.

<sup>21</sup> This is the view of radical feminists.

<sup>22</sup> Radical feminists would object to this, arguing that the choice is between ending women's oppression and upholding disabled men's male sex-right (Jeffreys, 2008).

women reinforces the notion that trans identities are illegitimate (Kirkland, 2019, pp. 7–12), and this notion underlies trans women’s oppression. But denying that trans women are women is denying their legitimacy as women, not their legitimacy as human beings. It therefore cannot reasonably be said to contribute to violence (as Kirkland claims) or indeed any treatment that does not respect their humanity.

The third possible path is the inverse of the second: trans-inclusionary feminists can assimilate the claims of second-wave feminism to the language of poststructural feminism. Dembroff takes this path. She identifies the theoretical foundation of patriarchy as a set of three beliefs:

- ‘Male’ and ‘female’ are a natural, immutable and exhaustive binary.
- All males should be masculine, and all females should be feminine.
- Masculinity is incompatible with and superior to femininity (Dembroff, 2019).

She then adopts Kate Manne’s conception of misogyny as the “law enforcement branch of a patriarchal order” (Manne, 2018, p. 63). However, while Manne defines misogyny as a response to *women’s* violation of patriarchal rules (Manne, 2018, p. 63), Dembroff, in an unacknowledged change, drops ‘women’: “When *someone* ‘steps out of line’ and fails to comply with their assigned gender role, misogyny appears on the scene” (Dembroff, 2019). This change is consistent with Dembroff’s conception of patriarchy as the system of the sex/gender binary, a conception on which to step out of line is to deviate from one’s assigned gender role, an act that can be performed by *anyone* and so an act for which anyone can be punished. Once *hatred of women as women*, ‘misogyny,’ revised by Manne and then by Dembroff, becomes *punishment of all people as patriarchal norm violators*, thus extending to violence against the sex/gender nonconforming. Dembroff can then claim that women and the sex/gender nonconforming have a common enemy – misogyny and by implication patriarchy.

On closer inspection, however, ‘misogyny’ no longer extends to women. According to Dembroff’s definition, women *qua* patriarchal norm violators suffer misogyny; women *qua* women, women irrespective of their conformity to or deviation from patriarchal norms, do not. ‘Misogyny,’ a term the literal meaning of which is hatred of women, no longer refers to the hatred of *women* at all. It refers instead to the punishment of *patriarchal norm violators*, a group to which women only incidentally belong. Assimilating ‘misogyny’ to the language of poststructural feminism, Dembroff displaces women as the subject of the hatred of women (while continuing to trade on the association of ‘misogyny’ with ‘women’). The “explanatorily powerful, unifying story” (Dembroff, 2019) that she provides erases the oppression of women *qua* women.

The fourth possible path is combining second-wave terminology and poststructuralist terminology. Watson does this, employing garbled locutions such as “false sex dualism and binary gender hierarchy” (‘binary’ and ‘dualism’ belonging to poststructural feminism, ‘hierarchy’ to second-wave feminism), “gender-based violence because of one’s sex” (‘gender-based’ belonging to the depoliticised lexicon of poststructuralism, ‘sex’ to the politicised lexicon of the second-wave), and “liberation from sex and gender” (‘liberation’ evoking the second-wave analysis, ‘from sex and gender’ evoking the poststructuralist analysis in which ‘men’ is replaced by the ‘sex/gender binary’ as the agent of oppression) (Watson, 2016, p. 49). The result is incoherence: how is violence “gender-based” and yet “because of one’s sex”?, what does it mean to be liberated “from sex and gender”?, do trans women suffer discrimination “because they are not seen to fit adequately the

sex-role stereotypes of either femininity or masculinity” or are “they subordinated on the basis of their place in the sex/gender hierarchy”?, and what is the “sex/gender hierarchy”?

Katharine Jenkins also takes this path. She proposes two compatible senses of ‘gender’ – class and identity, thus combining the second-wave conception of woman with the poststructuralist one. To reconcile the two senses, she redefines ‘class’ as ‘subject position,’ so that ‘man’ and ‘woman’ become names for subject positions. She then claims that although subject positions emerge within a system, they can, once they exist, be assumed by those for whom the system does not intend them. Gender as class thus yields the possibility of gender as identity (Jenkins, 2016, pp. 407–8).

But Jenkins does not explain how a subject position can be *legitimately* assumed in ways that “depart from, and may even run counter to, the logic of the system within which it is developed” (407–8). If a subject position exists within a system, then why are those who, according to the system, *wrongly* assume the position not simply mistaken? In the sex class system the subject position ‘woman’ is properly that of the female person and the subject position ‘man’ is properly that of the male person. A male person who claims the position ‘woman’ as his own misunderstands that position, misuses the term ‘woman,’ is, in short, mistaken. Identity is not a valid sense of ‘gender’; it is a misuse of it (Bogardus, 2020, pp. 62–63).

Jenkins’ attempt to reconcile gender as identity with gender as class is misguided. Gender as class and gender as identity are not “two aspects of the matrix of practices that constitutes gender” (Jenkins, 2016, p. 408). Or, class and identity are not aspects of a single phenomenon, gender. The (second-wave) world is one in which the concept *gender*, much less *gender identity*, has no place (Jeffreys, 2014, pp. 4–5). Where *sex class* politicises *sex*, *gender* – the social in contradistinction to which *sex* is the natural – implicitly depoliticises *sex*. Similarly, the (poststructuralist) world is one in which *sex class* has no place. Jenkins combines a concept from one language – *sex class* – with a concept from another – *gender identity*, tellingly renaming the former *gender as class* (and then, indicative of the inhospitability of *class* to *identity*, renaming *gender as class*, *gender as subject position*) in order that the two might appear to belong to one language.

## 6. Conclusion

Women and the sex/gender nonconforming are fighting different wars. As trans women demand recognition as women, these wars come into conflict. So, feminists now must choose for what and for whom they will fight: for women’s liberation or trans women’s inclusion, for women or trans women. While gender-critical feminists have chosen (women’s liberation), trans-inclusionary feminists continue to stridently deny this conflict.

In the aversion of many feminists to postmodernism, Wendy Brown perceives a wariness of politics. Feminists, she suggests, fear being unable to ground their views in truth and to dismiss their opponents’ views as false because they fear having to leave the domain of debate and enter the domain of struggle – of politics (Brown, 1995). They fear having to confront their enemy. So, they represent their enemy as mistaken rather than at war with them, in need of being educated rather than defeated.

What Brown perceives in the wariness of postmodernism, I perceive in the trans-inclusionary refusal to confront the indissoluble conflict between women’s liberation and trans women’s inclusion. As modernist feminists fear leaving the domain of debate, trans-inclusionary feminists fear leaving the domain of harmony. So, they repudiate

the notion of an enemy (“[t]he effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms,” writes Butler (2006, p. 18), or, when pressed, they identify the sex/gender binary – a piece of discourse, an inanimate object, not a people – as the enemy. A war against the sex/gender binary is a war against *nobody*. Yet, for this war against nobody, trans-inclusionary feminists are intent on finding allies. “The greatest legacy of radical feminism,” writes Breanna Fahs (on the basis of what, I am not sure), “has been the laying of groundwork to understand not only the importance, but the *absolute necessity*, of solidarity” (Fahs, 2024, p. 493). The greatest legacy of radical feminism, I would argue, is its confrontation with the painful reality that feminism discovers: unlike downtrodden men, who remain men among men, women “live in the midst of a society that regards us as contemptible” (Dworkin, 1981, p. 42). We will find friends only in women.

To what end does trans-inclusionary feminism gather allies? Against whom does it intend to struggle alongside those allies? Why is the friendship of women not friendship enough? Why must “[a]n effective feminist politics . . . be concerned with the rights and welfare of *anyone* who faces misogyny as a result of challenging patriarchy’s core commitments” (Dembroff, 2019) [emphasis added]? Why is a feminism that is concerned with women alone *politically ineffective*? Why, if not because women alone cannot be effective political actors? Why is “[t]he category ‘woman’ . . . at its most politically effective when it is opened out to account for differently gendered bodies” (Hines, 2020, p. 713)? Those differently gendered bodies being male bodies, why is the category ‘woman’ at its most politically effective when it includes men?

In 1970 Evelyn Reed (1970) criticised the women’s liberation movement: “To oppose women as a class against men as a class can only result in a diversion of the real class struggle,” she wrote. Feminists who encourage women to struggle for women’s liberation are selfishly and destructively diverting women from the *real* class struggle, from the struggle against the *real* enemy.

Having too long suffered in politics what women suffered in life – subordination of their needs to men’s (Firestone, 1968, pp. 4–5), radical feminists perceived Reed’s criticism as itself the diversionary tactic and audaciously persisted in pursuing an analysis and a politics in which the real class struggle is the struggle of women and men. This pursuit culminated in MacKinnon’s *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, which provided the outline of such an analysis. It seemed then that feminism had emerged, finally and irrevocably, as an autonomous politics.

But in a failure of courage it then retreated, exchanging the safety of subservience to Marxism (Marxist feminism) for the safety of subservience to trans-inclusionism (trans-inclusionary feminism). A feminism subservient to trans-inclusionism is a feminism that need not fight its own war, that need not risk defeat, that need not stake its life. The trouble is that a feminism subservient to trans-inclusionism has not avoided defeat; it has accepted it in advance.

In the tragedy (or farce) that is history repeating itself (Marx, 1907, p. 5), trans-inclusionary feminism is Marxist feminism,<sup>23</sup> Robin Dembroff (“This is no time for unnecessary division” (Dembroff, 2023)) is Evelyn Reed, and gender-critical feminism is

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<sup>23</sup> Or perhaps worse, Marxism. For, unlike Marxism and trans-inclusionary feminism, Marxist feminism considered women a class.

and is not the women's liberation movement. The latter understood that women required a movement of their own but assumed that this movement would co-exist harmoniously with leftist movements. Anne Koedt, for example, argued for a "female revolution," but she saw this revolution as "within the general revolution" (Koedt, 1968, p. 26). Why is it that men consider their revolution the general revolution from which the female revolution is a diversion, while women consider their revolution a specific part of the general revolution? Why do women not see that the *general* is, as ever, *men* (working men, Black men (Christian, 1987, p. 60), trans women), that, as a revolution for men, the general revolution is antithetical to the feminist revolution, that the misogyny of leftist men is an expression of rather than a deviation from their politics (Morgan, 1978, p. 195)? Despite the contempt in which men of leftist movements held women (Morgan, 1978, p. 198; Echols, 2019, pp. 31, 45), second-wave feminists could not conceive that these movements might be, more than insufficient, antagonistic to their own. I think this can only be because they did not, in their heart of hearts, believe that the *real* injustice was the oppression of women by men, not the exploitation of some men (workers) by other men (capitalists) (Delphy, 1984, pp. 132–33). Because they did not believe this, they could not imagine choosing oppressed women at the expense of downtrodden men. But, as feminists, nor could they imagine choosing downtrodden men at the expense of oppressed women. So they had to deny the possibility of a conflict between the two. That some radical feminists have become trans-inclusionary now appears predictable. They could not choose women *qua* women, women irrespective of economic class, over men *qua* men, men irrespective of economic class, then, and they cannot choose women *qua* women, women irrespective of gender identity, over men *qua* men, men irrespective of gender identity now.

Gender-critical feminists have pursued women's interests in opposition to downtrodden men's. For this, for acting as though the real injustice is the oppression of women rather than the exclusion of men, they have suffered the full wrath of leftist men. This wrath has disabused them of the notion of a general revolution or interconnected revolutions. It has clarified for them that men will tolerate the pursuit of women's interests only so long as it does not impinge on their own, which, of course, it must. It has reminded them that downtrodden men are nevertheless men and as such are not their friend (how can feminists have thought otherwise?) Freed from unreal loyalties,<sup>24</sup> gender-critical feminists are breaking out of history.

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<sup>24</sup> I take this phrase from Virginia Woolf (1986, p. 90).

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