

THE STATE WE'RE IN

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PHOTOS BY TARUNIYER

We commissioned the following text to the two authors of the book *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds* (2024), Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift. It describes the ongoing transphobic reaction in Britain, particularly crystallized by the British Supreme Court's April 2025 ruling. Against this, trans communities and allies forge practices of solidarity, care, and abolition feminism, resisting state violence and cultivating collective safety.

Transphobia, usually in the form of transmisogyny, has been a steady feature of Britain's media landscape, and its strongest ideological export product. Now, driven by funds from a fantasy writer, the imaginations of reactionary women, and some gay men, have wangled themselves into a ruling of Britain's Supreme Court. In a mind-bogglingly contrived argumentation from three judges, released in April 2025 about the category of "sex" in the light of the Equality Act, it seems that "biological" sex—the administrative one assigned at birth, based on a hasty visual inspection of a baby's genitals—is "real" because "women can get pregnant." Sex is thereby made to function as a protected characteristic under equality law, rather than the more social aspect of "gender." In Britain there's a huge tension between, on one side, the State and its institutions, such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the government, some sports federations and, on the other, people who protest the ruling. The protesters are not only trans people, their lovers, friends, but also a large constellation of union organizers, neighbors, and other indignant folk who flock together and show up to protests and are refusing to throw trans people under the bus.

Days after the ruling, trans people rushed onto the streets, with 30,000 people gathering in Parliament Square in London. Trans people, queers, gays, lesbians, and straight people came together to express their outrage at this misogynist and transphobic ruling.

The renewed rush of trans organizing by trans collectives, unions, organizations, and NGOs makes itself felt, heard, and seen.

Meanwhile, in meetings, where trans people gather and share among themselves, young trans people talk about living in their bedrooms and not getting out. (One of the loudest protest groups is Trans Kids Deserve Better.) The suffocating social atmosphere constrains our lives. In strategy discussions, we hear from trans allies that it is "inappropriate" to hold transphobic (usually transmisogynist) academics *personally* to account. This style of thinking protects those in institutions, and allows them to hide behind their offices. But why? Holding people to account is a solid way to change things—let people know what they do, and don't allow people to hide behind their institutional positions. At the same time, my partner learns at group therapy to think through the problem that both saviors and perpetrators think of themselves as "objective" and "neutral"—even "good"—and that there are many links between these two groups. Those of us who are figuring out how this influences them are left unheard and frustrated. Seemingly we are walking into a thickening cloud of heteronormative non-comprehension. Is that the state we're in?

On the streets, we make people aware of plans that the British Transport Police intends to strip search people on the basis of assumed gender. Our atmosphere as a group of protesters is good, there's performances and people are in awe and enjoy the spectacle. This is the state we're in. For the British Transport Police this means, of course, that male police officers get a pass to harass trans femmes, any femmes, really, women (trans and non-trans), and any intersex person—whose existence is all too often ignored. The



Fig.1



Fig.2

people on the streets react in horror, tourists ask incredulously “Do you do that here?”, especially when the link is made to the case of child Q, who was strip-searched in school by police officers in 2020. This police action was facing trial in the courts at the time of the protest. State-violence is state-violence. This is the State we’re in.

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Between the streets, our apartments and the group chats, in person and on our phones, we emphasize community safety as a conscious, everyday practice. We travel together, checking that our friends and fam made it home safe; we pool taxi funds from the door receipts of public events, pile-in three in the back of our tiny cars during and after the days of xenophobic race riots, dropping each person to their door; we encourage attending the gender clinic with a friend as “back up”; we set up martial arts skill shares; and go to the bathroom as a crew, like it’s high school (in fact it might be). We encourage practices of having people alongside you

to affirm your reality, your corporeality; to witness, when it occurs, violence or harm or neglect.

These practices of care are a refusal to allow the organs of a racist, ableist, transphobic state, and its extra-legal “authorization” of harassment, to undermine our ways of being in the world. The state that we’re in understands that isolation is a means of control. Separability—a contemporary manifestation of the colonial divide and rule—is essential to maintain the order of the day. As we discuss in *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds* (2024), “when one pits the individual against the institution, the individual loses.” To stay standing within one while maintaining one’s difference is a challenge, given the tokenistic terms upon which you have likely been included into the institution in the first place. To be separated, or isolated, leaves one vulnerable in the everyday and in institutional contexts, to unrealistically face the world alone in the fantasy of the individual that enables exploitation and burnout.

The socialities of solidarity and support we assemble may counter the conditions of medical negligence, slow death, and institutional violence.

Trans communities have long known how to support each other to access transition-related healthcare—despite the policing of the gender clinics with their waiting lists of 1.5 to 10 years, and the “exceptionalization” of transness that reduces our access to medical resources readily available to non-trans folks—from hormone-based medication, to blood tests or affirmative surgeries. Trans practices refuse to get stuck in the waiting line, or to get stuck in the state that neoliberal racial capitalist authoritarianism has prescribed for us. Stuck in a State that promotes organized abandonment and hostile environments.

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In Britain, an atmosphere is actively being shaped through a form of AstroTERF (trans exclusionary reactionary feminists) activism where upper middle class and rich white women are claiming to speak in the name of “all girls and women.” Trans people are confronted with the stale trope that “they make people “unsafe”. As Tourmaline reminds us, this was the reasoning behind transphobic laws of the 1950-60s in the USA. The very presence of trans folk (and it used to be queers too) is again enough to shift the vibe. The State that we’re in, is so normatively misogynist, that those arguments are viewed with considerable interest by those at the top of society: they sit so well with the existing class structures, where people have to know their place. In contrast, on the streets, people are outraged, don’t mind trans people, and lots of older women are enraged because they recognize this shit from back in the day, which is the same day as today.

So, what’s going on in Britain? The unenthusiastically elected, neoliberal Labour government is failing to restart the floundering economy, and thus needs a diversion—trans people and migrants are again the chosen scapegoats, as they have been for a decade—cynically riding the wave of the billionaire driven anti-trans campaign. This scapegoating also aids the distraction from the actual sources of sexual harassment and violence,

in which all too often sons, exes, partners and uncles participate, in a scale of violence that has a strong chance to leave women dead. Last year, the count was two femicides a week in Britain. Women, meanwhile, are enthusiastic participants in the harassment of minorities, not just trans folk. Norms need transgressing (for change) and guarding (for stability), and upper middle class women are definitely after the latter.

Sometimes, when I’m a bit affected by the current situation, I open the papers simply to read little descriptions that state trans women are faster, stronger, better—even the chess federation has banned trans women, indeed the life of the mind is said to be more muscled. Being depicted as modern-day Valkyries, whose court photographer should rightly have been Alexander Rodchenko, rather than Nan Golding, is, however, not really heartening; reactionary misogyny never is. The self-victimization of some women gets center stage, while the roar of feminists is curated out of the responses, which makes it all the worse.

The pressure on trans provides a space to anchor anger of the *unregulated*. Anger about chaos leads to an investment in hierarchy, purity, and punishment. Conversations on trans in the mainstream media, courts, and institutions rely on hypothetical scenarios where women are victims of social power gone unchecked, that often offer the only outcome: more prohibition (no trans people here) and more restriction (the criminalization of solidarity, and of providing support in medicine). Articles in the media, discussions on TV, policy papers, and the Supreme Court Ruling rely on imaginary examples about trans people to flog a set of policies and create an atmosphere of “concerns,” which is a stand-in term for suspicion and projection of bias. These scenarios stage an entrance for the “all-knowing” petit-bourgeois narrator whose act it is to demand rules, which protects the moral environment of people deemed “at risk,” which are usually *white women*, who are “innocent” and “in need of protection.”

The spectacle of imaginary and *superior* trans femmes and women (which is the source of their assumed violence) depicted by self-victimizing women detracts from dealing with actual violence of misogyny that is omnipresent. The embarrassment



Fig.3

of the present violence is that it emerges from people known to each other. With the hypothetical violence depicted in one-way scenarios comes a real-life call on strengthened hierarchy provided by patriarchs to provide safety, rather than acknowledging that it is those very hierarchies that are the cause of violence. Transphobia directly leads to an increase in misogyny, as it encourages women to police

women. In this way, trumped up anxieties around transness function as a gateway-drug to a broader politics of purity, paving the way for an expansion of xenophobia and nationalism.

I offer this imagery to inform a durational strategy emerging from community engagement, rather than legal or union challenges to laws or policy. Rights

might protect (some of) us (for a while), but they won't set us free, and anyway need engagement to come to life. The acute problem is the fascist imaginary that emerges from the banality of omnipresent petit bourgeois thinking. Working on the wider imaginaries about environments, supports moving out of single-issue activism and building solidarities: if this mind-set naturalizes, they'll be coming for everyone.

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Indeed, violence is the order of the day – to divert attention from Britain's flatlining economy, one among most of neoliberal Europe. Cuts to disability benefits and welfare are balanced with investment in the arms industry and the military. "Human rights" are out, "war-fighting readiness" is in; business as usual is now supplying weapons to nations enacting genocide. The New Labour Management does Military Keynesianism, reaffirming the centrality of the arms trade, defense, and war to the social and economic order; what grows are fires and floods, carbon emissions and death tolls, land theft and mass displacements upon the legacies of empire—Palestine was of course occupied by Britain prior to the Nakba, enabling the foundation of a Zionist state. The affective economy of fear—Putin in the East, terrorists in the Middle East, migrants in your neighborhood, trans people in your changing room—means that policing is needed at every front. Violence is an essential aspect of state control, and the first six months of 2025 have seen a spike in deaths in police custody, and hard repression of domestic protest and resistance.

The politics and practices that counter this affective economy of fear is abolition feminism: a feminism that refuses prisons, borders, walls, state violence; and that is *logically* inclusive, working to dismantle the apparatus of control while undermining its function, including the enforcement of sex.

Naturally, the strategic scapegoating of transphobic, conservative feminisms aids the distraction from institutional violences, as Aviah Day and Shanice McBean argue in *Abolition Revolution* (2022), such targeted harassment pivots away from critiques of systematic violence. As we discussed in this text, transphobic feminisms pose hypothetical situations—in which cissexist women have an encounter with a trans person that makes them feel uncomfortable—and appeal for legal recourse to "secure" these spaces where such encounters may take place, from the bathroom to the boardroom. The appeal to the State for protection entails giving consent to be policed—for policing, by officers, but also by each other, is the means through which, in this case, protection is harnessed. Such transphobic feminisms hence situate themselves as part of the institutions that have historically been bastions of transphobia, racism, homophobia, ableism, and of course misogyny—be that be that British Law, police, establishment newspapers, or the military. Moreover, the appeals to the protection are dependent on the active erasure of transphobic violence, from quotidian abuse and public harassment to femicides, including institutional violence and neglect from the gender clinic to the prison. The existence of violence against trans people is denied and studies on it discounted (or the very existence of trans people is categorically denied), as other supposed forms of violence are foregrounded—the subject of whom, in this imaginary, is women, always assigned female at birth, threatened by difference "embodied" by trans people (or trans thoughts or trans healthcare). The discomfort of a majoritarian group is centered, claiming their vulnerability and innocence, in their appeal for protection amid their fear of the scapegoated. The denial of transphobia means that it can be enacted without reprimand, for one cannot be accountable for a form of violence that one doesn't recognize as existing. Furthermore, the denial of violence and the legal protection of norms opens the field for more human rights violations, in a material and economic context that affected the mass deaths from disability benefit cuts, COVID-19, and the Grenfell Tower fire—all of which disproportionately impacted Black, brown and/or poor people.

Conversely, abolition feminisms have been built through coming together in grief and resistance, politicizing our experience of violence and

emphasizing the role of the state —especially police officers, immigration enforcement, and prison guards—in directly perpetrating harm, abuse and death, while unpacking the structural, systemic, institutional and interpersonal forms of anti-blackness, racism, ableism, sexism, whorephobia, and transphobia that motivates such actions. Our practices of community safety are rooted in the histories of Black, Asian, queer, trans, and sex worker communities, understanding their legacies across decades and generations. They are born out of a deep engagement with problems of violence, closely linked to social, economic, material, and institutional struggles. While this includes personal experiences of harm and loss, or experiences of those we are in relation with, or who we are in community with, ie. in a direct or imaginative network with, who we may or may not know. Understanding violence in this manner requires an openness to learning and recognition of forms of harm as experienced across our differences, and this openness has the potential to tend towards solidarity and transformation. Solidarity and transformation require agency in action (not limited to knowledge of oppression and harm, “understanding it”), alongside an affective capability to acknowledge the emotive closures of the status quo, including the shutting of empathy to those scapegoated or Othered and thus the acceptance of violence against them. Community safety depends on such affective recognition of harm: it builds upon it, coalescing collectives around activities of resistance and intervention, working to reduce the conditions of harm.

If abolition works to build worlds that reach beyond the boundaries of our neoliberal lives, it is important to feminist analytics and worlding to recognize the deep relationships between transphobic and transmisogynist violence, violence against gender non-conforming people, and misogyny.

That it is up to all of us to practice transfeminism, not just trans and non-binary people—to recognize, refuse and undo the violence that assures the gender binary. This may be key in interlinking collectives and communities through difference and solidarity, while proposing and connecting through coalitional struggle—be that through community safety, healthcare and abortion access, reproductive justice, liberatory harm reduction, workers’ rights, climate justice, anti-imperialism, and our refusal of consent to policing. Solidarity and liberation in these movements can start with direct, concrete, interpersonal support in our everyday lives, learning through practices that we’ve so much to teach each other. ■

Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift are co-authors of *Trans Femme Futures: Abolitionist Ethics for Transfeminist Worlds* (Pluto Press, 2024) and co-editors of *Radical Transfeminism* zine.

Nat Raha is a poet and activist-scholar. Her fourth book of poetry is *apparitions (nines)* (Nightboat Books, 2024). Her recent critical writing appears in *Social Text*, *Queer Print in Europe*, *Transgender Marxism*, *Gestures: A Body of Work* and *Third Text*. Performance work includes *epistolary (on carceral islands)*, co-commissioned by Edinburgh Art Festival, Scotland and TULCA Festival of Visual Arts, Galway, Ireland, 2023. Nat teaches in Fine Art Critical Studies at the Glasgow School of Art.

Mijke van der Drift works on transfeminist and anti-imperial ethics through philosophies of movement, collective action, and counter-cultural production. Mijke published in *Alternatives*, *Social Text*, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, with Cambridge University Press, and many other outlets. Mijke is Tutor (Research) at the Royal College of Art, London and co-chair of its Union branch. Mijke is a founding member of the arts collective *Red Forest*.

Fig.1 Activists stage a sit-in at Liverpool Street Station, London, protesting the British Transport Police’s transphobic strip search policy. / Photo by Tarun Iyer (May 24, 2025).
Fig.2 Thousands assemble in St. James’s Park, London, the day after the British Supreme Court’s ruling on a trans-exclusionary definition of “woman.” / Photo by Tarun Iyer (April 19, 2025).
Fig.3 Crowds holding placards in Parliament Square, London, following the British Supreme Court’s ruling on a trans-exclusionary definition of “woman.” / Photo by Tarun Iyer (April 19, 2025).
Fig.4 A protestor carries a trans flag while marching through London, following the British Supreme Court’s ruling on a trans-exclusionary definition of “woman.” / Photo by Tarun Iyer (April 19, 2025).



Fig.4