

The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice by Shon Faye

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Shon Faye's first book, *The Transgender Issue*, is an uncompromising text underpinned by a socialist framework that sets out "an argument for justice." *The Transgender Issue* resists palatable and often depoliticised ideals of trans "rights" and "equality" in favour of the language and praxis of liberation. The book acknowledges the ways in which systemic and structural forms of oppression and violence reduce the liveability of all lives while focusing specifically on their impact on trans people. Faye does not aim to create an argument that would facilitate the inclusion of trans people in a corrupted capitalist society organised by misogyny and racism. Rather, Faye aims to explore what forms of living otherwise become available to us when we consider transness as a liberatory framework. As a result, Faye's text demonstrates how the demand for trans liberation echoes and overlaps with the demands of workers, socialists, feminists, sex workers, anti-racists, and queer people. In doing so Faye creates a thesis for change dedicated at its heart to coalition.

Staying with the methodological distinctions in *The Transgender Issue*, it is meaningful to acknowledge how Faye orchestrates moments in which trans people can speak *through* her position as a writer. In this narrative-disrupting intervention, Faye contests the persistent expectation that trans individuals need to employ autobiography as a method in seeking and establishing justice. Faye echoes the concerns of scholar Viviane Namaste (2000, 273), who, in her seminal book *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, asserts "autobiography is the only discourse in which transsexuals are permitted to speak." Faye contends that while trans memoirs have been important in destigmatising and demystifying trans people's understand-

ing of themselves, the requirement that trans people consistently write from the position of the confessional reduces the methods and genres available to us when speaking both publicly and politically. Faye (2021,15) delivers a short and concise remedy for this requirement: “you don’t have to know the intimate details of my private life to support me.”

As such, Faye’s writing moves to decentre herself and employs a methodology that is cognisant of the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, and education structure who speaks and who is listened to. Faye (2021, 15) makes known the intersections of her social identities that allow for this book to be manifest—namely that she is a “middle-class, white trans woman with a university degree and a strong support network of friends and family.” In doing so, Faye acknowledges the ways in which class and race are instrumental in producing a “hierarchy of verisimilitude” (Malatino 2020, 40) which favour white and middle/upper class trans people. In this sense, race and class are undoubtedly mobilising forces in constructing transnormative subjectivities which reify transness within racial capitalist understandings of gendered subjects. In response to the codes of transnormative discourse, Faye moves to amplify the voices of trans people who are not as routinely heard. This method is evident in Faye’s writing as she becomes embedded in various community contexts, speaking and sharing information, capturing the texture of people’s stories while wholly maintaining their dignity and personhood—a practice not often achieved by the media when telling stories about trans lives.

Trans lives are increasingly presented as controversial culture war topics to “debate” across the UK and (increasingly) Irish media. Faye’s book demonstrates that over the past five years, public discussions about trans experiences have been dominated by a media frenzy that rarely includes trans people. We are reduced to a talking point, a debate, or an “issue.” Despite increased “positive representation” for trans people, largely localised in media outputs from North America, the material reality of trans life remains unchanged. This is a central motif throughout the text as Faye asserts that positive representation does nothing on its own to achieve redistributive justice. This lack of redistributive justice in the wake of the transgender “tipping point” is evident in the rise in anti-trans attitudes, transphobic legislation, and trans-antagonistic violence that has been reported since 2015 (Carlisle 2021; Haug 2021; ILGA-Europe 2022). Ultimately, *The Transgender Issue* communicates the ways in which media representation—when produced within the cosmology of capitalism—is uninterested in facilitating the protection of trans people. Thus, instead of prioritising representation, in seven incisive and illuminating chapters, Faye addresses a myriad of aspects relevant to trans life, without ever being dogmatic, to orient us toward more ambitious possibilities for justice.

Each chapter is layered with a combination of theory, qualitative and quantitative research, and professional anecdotes, providing a comprehensive introduction for anyone encountering anti-capitalist, transfeminist, abolitionist, and trans liberatory theory and ideals for the first time. In addition to trans people and representation, Faye addresses the needs of trans children and young people; healthcare and institutional transphobia in medical contexts; the significance of class in the experiences of trans people; the centrality of sex worker liberation in trans liberation; state-orchestrated violence against trans people; and the urgency for solidarity between trans peo-

ple, the LGBTQI+ community, and feminists.

This book's structure builds on its liberatory ambition in that it engages the reader in a considered education, outlining the reality of trans oppression before introducing the abolition of capitalism, carceral violence, and white supremacy as central tenets of trans liberation. Throughout the book, transphobia is revealed as a direct product of capitalism, racism, and state power, and transphobia persists because these forces remain unchallenged. In an invigorating and intelligent conclusion, Faye makes direct calls to us not individually, but collectively. Faye is explicit in acknowledging that the existing freedoms afforded to trans people have all been championed by left-wing politics, however she is firm that our full emancipation will never come through parliamentary politics alone. Instead, Faye leaves us with a rubric for "a transformed future" built on protest, civil disobedience, mutual aid, and coalition.

Trans people in the UK and Ireland have recently been subjected to the legitimising of trans conversion therapy (Gallagher and Parry 2022); the publication of anti-trans rhetoric leading to the boycott of Ireland's most popular broadsheet (Trans Writers Union, n.d.); ongoing discrimination toward trans women in sport (Ingle 2021, 2022); a lack of appropriate and timely transition-related care (Ferreira-Carroll 2021); and outspoken transphobia from world leaders (BBC Sport 2022; Hayes 2022). Faye's book seems almost clairvoyant in its anticipation of what has come since its publication in the context of trans life in the UK and Ireland. In the wake of this ongoing anti-trans rhetoric and violence, *The Transgender Issue* is a book that rarely leaves my bag. This text is considered, rigorously researched, measured, and convincing, and has proved invaluable to my work in advocating for the needs of trans young people in Ireland. I recommend this book wholeheartedly as I am certain it will offer endless learnings to those arriving in search of information and to those already deeply invested in our fight for liberation. I am grateful for the precision, candour and dedication demonstrated in this book but mostly I am grateful for the logic for hope and possibility that Faye has provided us with.

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AVAILABILITY OUTSIDE THE UK

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