

# Visibility Politics and Violence against Trans Women

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## Abstract

Modern LGBT politics has largely centered around the issue of visibility. In this essay, I will argue that this goal is harmful by investigating it through a broadly Foucauldian analysis, showing it to be a panoptic disciplinary apparatus meant to support a largely negative regime of biopower and necropower, reducing trans women to bare life in Agamben's formulation and sanctioning our murder. I will work towards suggesting an alternative praxis.

## Content Warnings

This essay includes discussions of transmisogyny, serophobia, and homophobia

## Keywords

LGBT theory, gender theory, trans theory, visibility, transphobia, transmisogyny, homophobia, serophobia

## 1 Visibility and Remembrance

### 1.1 Visibility and Discipline

In 2015, Houston, the most populous city in Texas, attempted to maintain an LGBT rights ordinance (the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, or HERO) at the ballot box. Despite millions of dollars spent by LGBT rights groups, including celebrity endorsements, Houston rejected the measure by an overwhelming margin. In large part, this has been attributed to effective use by opposition of the "bathroom terror": the conflation of trans women with sexual predators—a potent and prevalent transmisogynistic trope—and an unwillingness by supporters to challenge or address this trope. On November 20th, Transgender Day of Remembrance, the murders of 81 trans people (mostly trans women of colour) over the course of the year were remembered—the most reported in any year. And in the beginning of 2016, we see not only continued high murder rates (alongside threats of violence from public officials), but also a whole slew of new bills and ballot initiatives across the United States aiming to punish trans women and push us out of public life—two of which, as of this writing, have passed in North Carolina and Mississippi.

And yet, if all one saw were mass media, one might be tempted to think 2015 was the best for trans women yet. After all, many news outlets began to acknowledge our existence,

and many television shows and movies began featuring trans characters. The push for visibility, so lauded in LGBT politics, was, it seems, finally coming to fruition. What went wrong?

The liberal response would be to argue that this visibility was not enough, and that we should in fact push for more. And indeed, this is reflected in their actions, for the question of visibility has not ended, or even ebbed in its flow. Indeed, the liberal commitment in the face of this violence is to diversified representation in institutions such as mass media, the military, and public office. Recently, the military ended a ban on trans soldiers: limitations in the ways in which we can gleefully serve imperialism are lifting. The struggle for visibility has in fact extended: such that trans men and trans-masculine people (as well as some groups not part of the “community”, historically or otherwise, such as cisgender asexual people who lack same-gender attraction and polyamorous cisgender heterosexual people) have argued that, based purely on the issue of representation, they face more difficulty than trans women, and so should be further centred in LGBT activism.

I argue that the liberals fundamentally misunderstand the relationship between visibility, discipline, and violence, for their theory cannot provide a sensible explanation for the origin of transmisogynistic violence, nor the causes behind its intensification. That is to say: does visibility *in the liberal sense of the word* alleviate or intensify violence? I posit the latter. Specifically, referring to Foucault (1975):

The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protects. Visibility is a trap.[...] Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so. In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.

Let us unpack this: here, Foucault argues that visibility is not an escape from power, but an intensification of it, as it creates subjects that are easily surveilled and punished. When one is visible, one can no longer hide: this functions as a promise that all transgressions will be

noted and punished, thus disciplining subjects. Here, the devoted Foucauldian may object to our appropriation of panopticism, as the panopticon is meant to merely illustrate how *discipline* works, and that this is inappropriate for an account of violence. But this reading of *Discipline and Punish* can't account for transmisogynistic violence as anything other than a regression to premodernity. While the point made in this passage refers specifically to discipline, and how discipline can emerge without a central observer necessarily watching, we argue that discipline does not *supersede* sovereign power in a stagist fashion but in fact incorporates it. Indeed, we do this by reference to the Foucauldian notion of biopower, and that there are three primary ways in which this mechanism punishes trans women.

## 1.2 Transmisogyny and Healthcare

Much of this discourse on transgender politics ignores the fact that there has been, in the recent past, another moment of increased visibility for trans women, specifically in the 1970s. One might argue that this era began with the Stonewall Riots in 1969 (led by trans women of colour), the Compton's Cafeteria Riots of 1966, the publishing of Harry Benjamin's book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966, or even, perhaps, Christine Jorgensen's transition in 1952. The period definitely ended with the publishing of Mary Daly's 1978 book *Gyn/Ecology*, Janice Raymond's 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* and her 1980 article *Paper Prepared For the National Center for Health Care Technology on the Social and Ethical Aspects of Transsexual Surgery*.

The emergence of the gay rights' movement largely rested on the back of trans women of color. This can be seen as the result of two inter-related yet distinct causes: the flourishing fruit of the New Left, which brought about militant social movements; and the brutal destruction of the (largely impoverished, and often controlled by organized crime whether in a blue suit or not) urban spaces where trans women (mostly sex workers) lived by police. It is also to be noted that within the popular imagination, to be gay and to be trans were the same thing (as indeed, both emerge from the nature of the modern binary gender system), as can be readily seen through the use of terms such as "invert". With the rise, then, of what is now called the gay-rights movement, came a marked rise in the visibility of trans women.

And what emerged from this but the destruction of the rights of trans women? For the movement brought (and indeed, continues to bring) betrayal upon betrayal: the GLF, in its quest for a moderate, reformist agenda, kicked out Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson; TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists, though the term is inaccurate in that many TERFs are indeed liberal feminists, and only trans women are targeted) harassed and threatened to murder prominent trans women such as Beth Elliott and Sandy Stone. Raymond's 1979 book was a seminal work of second-wave feminism, a masterpiece so influential it can be considered second only to *Gyn/Ecology* and *The Feminine Mystique*, and, perhaps, *The Second Sex* and the *SCUM Manifesto*. Its influence reverberates to this day, continuing to define the priorities of feminism as genocide towards trans women first and foremost, on par only with its devotion to the exploitation of women of colour.

Most insidiously, the state of trans healthcare was pushed back. As discussed in *TERFs & Trans Healthcare* (2013), the US government considered trans healthcare, flawed though its perspective was by use of a Harry Benjamin approach, medically necessary prior to Janice Raymond's 1980 paper. Insurers could not reject coverage of trans healthcare and poor trans people could freely access it. After the paper, in the Reagan administration,

coverage of trans healthcare was dismantled—a position that only began to crumble in 2014. Combined with the legalization of employment discrimination against trans people in *Ulane v. Eastern Airlines* and the beginning of the AIDS epidemic (which hit trans women hard, though we may never know the numbers due to Reaganite masterful inaction and the pervasive misclassification of trans women as “men”), the impact on trans women was devastating. Indeed, *TERFs & Trans Healthcare* (2013) cites a statement from the State of California Department of Insurance noting that suicide is highly correlated with the denial of trans care to trans people, which ought not be a surprise.

We understand this through the Foucauldian notion of *biopower*, defined thusly in Foucault (1976):

The right which was formulated as the “power of life and death” was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword.[...]One might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death.[...]In concrete terms, starting in the seventeenth century, this power over life evolved in two basic forms; these forms were not antithetical, however; they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations. One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births, and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*. The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed. The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology—*anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life—characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps not to kill, but to invest life through and through. The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. [...]Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body. If one can apply the term *bio-history* to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of *bio-power* to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations*

and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life. [...] For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.

Biopower, according to Foucault, is thus the power to foster life or disallow it, and it is exercised through the various institutions that track and care for someone's biological existence and health. This of course includes the medical fields. I especially want to call attention to the *negative* function of biopower as described here by Foucault. This function, he repeats emphatically, is *not* the ancient power to kill, and indeed, while the death-function is crucial, what I am calling attention to here is the power to *disallow* life: to withhold the care-taking functions of biopower. This can mean to refuse healthcare, and indeed to use the whole bureaucratic apparatus of biopower to make the pursuit of life and treatment impossible: creating narrow criteria for treatment that forces people to put themselves in very real danger in order to be considered (what is referred to as Real Life Experience), making treatment dependant on an exaggerated performance of "traditional gender roles" (defined by the whims of the doctor: at one point, treatment could be rescinded if the "result" would not be beautiful, i.e. fuckable, in the eyes of the doctor) and a number of difficult-to-obtain prizes (such as letters from—largely unsympathetic, to say the least—therapists), refusing insurance coverage (and making health insurance in general unaffordably costly), postponing and defunding research of diseases epidemic to the population (most infamously, AIDS) and the effects and interactions of treatment, &c, &c. Much of this was already implicit in Harry Benjamin's procedures for treatment in *The Transsexual Phenomenon*: it was extended and rendered deadlier through the devoted works of Raymond and Reagan.

### 1.3 Transmisogyny and Murder

We now turn to the question: why do men murder trans women? This can be analyzed through Foucault's development of *biopower* in the final lecture of Foucault (1975-6).

Now I think we see something new emerging in the second half of the eighteenth century: a new technology of power, but this time it is not disciplinary. This technology of power does not exclude the former, does not exclude disciplinary technology, but it does dovetail into it, integrate it, modify it to some extent, and above all, use it by sort of infiltrating it, embedding itself into existing disciplinary techniques[...] How can a power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings? How, under these conditions, is it possible for a political power to kill, and to expose not only its enemies but its own citizens to the risk of death? Given that this power's objective is essentially to make live, how can it let die? How can the power of death, the function of death, be exercised in a political system centered upon biopower? It is, I think, at this point that racism intervenes [...] On the one hand, racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship: "The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals

are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I—as species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate.” The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer[...]So you can understand the importance—I almost said the vital importance—of racism to the exercise of such a power: it is the precondition for exercising the right to kill. If the power of normalization wished to exercise the old sovereign right to kill, it must become racist. And if, conversely, a power of sovereignty, or in other words, a power that has the right of life and death, wishes to work with the instruments, mechanisms, and technology of normalization, it too must become racist. When I say “killing,” I obviously do not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on[...]At the end of the nineteenth century, we have a new racism modeled on war. It was, I think, required because a biopower that wished to wage war had to articulate the will to destroy the adversary with the risk that it might kill those whose lives it had, by definition, to protect, manage, and multiply. The same could be said of criminality. Once the mechanism of biocriminal was called upon to make it possible to execute or banish criminals, criminality was conceptualized in racist terms. The same applies to madness, and the same applies to various anomalies. I think that, broadly speaking, racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or a population, insofar as one is an element in a unitary living plurality.

Here we see that though biopower may foster life, it too may also serve a purpose of punishing by not only withholding its life-affirming powers, but also through a narrative of increased biological fitness through violence against a subjugated group: what Foucault terms here racism (for that is a particular formation of it, historically, from Galton through Hitler), but what may also explain homophobia and transmisogyny (especially when one considers medical experimentation on gay and trans people, such as the unfortunate case of Patient B-19 and the Clockwork Orange-style—nay, more reminiscent of *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*—“treatment” he received (described in the horrifying 1972 papers *Septal Stimulation for the initiation of heterosexual behavior in a homosexual male* and *Pleasure and Brain Activity in Man: Deep and Surface Electroencephalograms During Orgasm* by the perpetrators of the “experiment”, Drs. Robert Galbraith Heath and Charles E. Moan), or, indeed, the procedure of lobotomy and electro-shock therapy that were zealously and with extreme prejudice inscribed on the bodies of the abnormal in the mid-20th century). And while biopower does not stand on its own as a disciplinary apparatus, it can and does make use of existing disciplinary technologies of power (indeed, embedding itself into them), such that a panoptic mechanism in service of biopower should not surprise us. Thus, we see here the following:

Biopower, through a narrative of inferiority and degeneracy (as well as biological fitness), can incorporate the death-power without a reversion to premodern forms of power, and does so by encouraging violence towards “degenerates” among the “superior” elements of the population. It does this by embedding itself and modifying existing disciplinary mechanisms, such as the Panopticon.

Mbembe in his paper *Necropolitics* (Mbembe (2003)) criticizes Foucault’s formulation of the biopolitical death-function as subordinate to disciplinary structures, instead offering a framework of *necropolitics/necropower* (as an addition, not a replacement) which has sovereignty exercised through the creation and maintenance of zones of death, where terror and death create power together, as they are the forms of domination but also resistance. Mbembe is specifically referencing late-modern colonialism, especially the Israeli Apartheid, but I find that this framework is useful in understanding the murder of trans women of colour. In particular, in his discussion of Apartheid, Mbembe (ibid., p. 27) articulates an interesting definition of sovereignty: “In this case, sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not.” This is perhaps the most salient point in the article with regards to the precarious state of trans women of colour. But let us examine this in its context, Mbembe (ibid., p. 26-7):

Frantz Fanon describes the spatialization of colonial occupation in vivid terms. For him, colonial occupation entails first and foremost a division of space into compartments. It involves the setting of boundaries and internal frontiers epitomized by barracks and police stations; it is regulated by the language of pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action; and it is premised on the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. But most important, it is the very way in which necropower operates: “The town belonging to the colonized people...is a place of little fame, peopled by men of ill repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees”. In this case, sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not.

Now we turn to the American inner city, where trans women and especially trans women of colour are said to live. Specifically, let us examine the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, areas of Manhattan prior to gentrification (a can of worms in its own right) among others. These districts, which, from the 1970s onwards, were often far away from the richer areas now known as “gay villages” or “gaybourhoods”, were known as places of ill repute and often controlled by organized crime, both in its police and in its Mafia incarnations. They were primarily populated by sex workers, many of whom were trans women, and especially trans women of colour as white people were at this time leaving the city for the suburbs. Police conducted regular raids and imprisoned trans women sex workers for prostitution and “female impersonation”. Trans women sex workers were unable to find any other jobs, and outside of these districts, any housing: landlords refused to rent to them. And with the processes of “urban renewal” and later gentrification, even these districts were carved up and hollowed out: made inhospitable and unaffordable.

Now let us return to Mbembe, who says:

To return to Fanon's spatial reading of colonial occupation, the late-modern colonial occupation in Gaza and the West Bank presents three major characteristics in relation to the working of the specific terror formation I have called necropower. First is the dynamics of territorial fragmentation, the sealing off and expansion of settlements. The objective of this process is twofold: to render any movement impossible and to implement separation along the model of the apartheid state. The occupied territories are therefore divided into a web of intricate internal borders and various isolated cells. [...] Under these circumstances, colonial occupation is not only akin to control, surveillance, and separation, it is also tantamount to seclusion. It is a *splintering occupation*, along the lines of the splintering urbanism characteristic of late modernity (suburban enclaves or gated communities)

An American red-light district is not a gated community, nor is it a West Bank town. But it, too, serves to seclude its inhabitants: and in the course of time, with gentrification, it too, is carved up and hollowed out. Note of course that this particular analysis does not capture any lived reality common to *all* trans women in the current day: indeed, this analysis is best situated in the 1960s, as now the specifics have changed, though the underlying mechanisms remain in place—especially for trans women of colour, who are often in similar living situations to the 1960s conditions I describe, and who bear the brunt of violence today.

Unfortunately for a straightforward reading, the analogies grow more strained from here on, and seem to move away from the point I am here addressing about the murder of trans women.

Let us summarize what we have found thus far:

Biopower may be used to punish “inferior” groups through a narrative of increased biological fitness, which sanctions murder. It makes use of disciplinary mechanisms to facilitate this. This is furthered through necropower, by which means sovereignty, defined as the power to choose who is disposable, creates zones of death: death, which creates power and resistance. We see these phenomena reflected in the murders of trans women of colour. A common narrative surrounding the trans woman's “inferiority” and her biological danger to the body politic has been constructed through the medical field's treatment of transness as a disorder to be cured (“gender identity disorder”)—related to similar treatment of gayness, the association of trans women of colour with AIDS (which becomes especially chilling when one remembers the proposed “solutions” to AIDS from the Right, such as quarantine, to say the least), the association of fictional serial killers and rapists with trans women (such as Norma(n) Bates in *Psycho*, Dr. Frank N Furter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs*, and Him in *The Powerpuff Girls*: notice how the latter three pieces of fiction are acclaimed by feminists and gay men)—an association which has fuelled the “bathroom terror” myth, alongside the ubiquitous routine in comedy of a man realizing he had sex with a trans woman (usually a sex worker) and reacting with a mixture of disgust and anger. But even beyond this, just look at the discourse surrounding the murder of a trans woman by a man with whom she had sex: she is said to have “had it coming” for “trying to turn him gay”—indeed, this is a permitted

legal defence in 49 of the United States, known as “trans panic”, and has been used on numerous occasions, including the high-profile murder of Jennifer Laude, a trans woman of colour sex worker, by US Marine Joseph Scott Pemberton. Thus, trans women have been marked as disposable, and thus acted upon by necropower: our deaths are a result of sovereignty, and create power.

#### 1.4 The Trans Woman as Homo Sacer

Now I would like to move to another recent elaboration of biopower in a way that, perhaps, will render its relationship to recent “bathroom bills” more clear—for while Foucault’s understanding of it does much to clear the fog, it does not fully flesh out its negative powers. Specifically, I would like to concentrate on Agamben (1995). I also would like to note an area where the account in Mbembe (2003) converges. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben not only extends Foucault’s notion of biopower, but situates it in the context of the Schmitt-Benjamin correspondence. Agamben distinguishes between two forms of life: *βίος*, or social life, and *ζωή*, or bare life—or, perhaps more succinctly, “citizens” and “bodies”, separated by law. The figure of *homo sacer* (sacred man), an obscure part of Roman law, is a citizen whose *βίος* is removed, and who is thus reduced to *ζωή* and deprived of any rights. Crucially, in Roman law, *homo sacer* could be killed freely, but not sacrificed: indeed, *homo sacer* was both outside and inside law (as Roman law did not apply to the *homo sacer*, but the *homo sacer* was still “under its spell”) and thus the mirror of the sovereign, who is outside law (as sovereignty is defined by the ability to transcend law in what Carl Schmitt called an *Ausnahmestand*) and within law (as a natural person, who can be condemned). With the rise of bourgeois democracy, sovereignty remains, but becomes a collective rather than individual responsibility, shared by citizens, who have become subjects. And biology “bestializes man”—reducing humans to animal qualities—and creates a norm by which people are judged. These effects combine to confuse the distinction between *βίος* and *ζωή*, with the result being that the subject is now a biological object, with political rights. Indeed, the nation itself is a population: the bare lives of its citizens. Modern biopower emerges from this. This also means that Others can be killed through expulsion: the Other is expelled and thus reduced to bare life, and thus can be killed like the ancient *homo sacer*. This is done through Schmitt’s *Ausnahmestand*, in English, the *state of exception*. The state of exception is a normal part of modern politics, so thus: social life is only given with the understanding that it can be removed through a state of exception.

There are some objections to Agamben’s theory of *homo sacer*. However, many of them focus on the use of his theory in a historical context, as he claims that biopower, though it may be more marked now, has essentially existed since antiquity. As this article is primarily concerned with the contemporary, we will not discuss them in greater detail. Another criticism of Agamben is his inattentiveness to race, which is of crucial importance given the difference in rates of violence against trans women based on race (with the brunt of the burden going to trans women of color, especially black trans women)—and indeed, the racial and sexual marking of the violence of bare life in most of the examples Agamben uses. Mbembe (*ibid.*)’s extension of biopower does account for this. We thus rely on a convergence of Agamben’s notion of *homo sacer* and Mbembe’s *necropolitics* to tease out how the recent legal restrictions operate.

Agamben’s account clarifies the mechanics of so-called “bathroom bills” and simi-

lar law, such as new TSA rules that treat trans bodies as “anomalies”, which are to be proclaimed as such during security for all passersby to hear. The lack of any practical enforcement method beyond proclamation is because the purpose is not merely to bar trans people (specifically, trans women) from public spaces (though this is indeed *a* purpose), but to increase their visibility, and thus intensify violence against trans people and the discipline of gender as a whole. When this is effected trans people will effectively be banned from these spaces anyhow. This converges with Mbembe’s description of sovereignty as the right to decide who is disposable and necropower as power generated from the creation of zones of death (as discussed in the previous section): trans women of colour have been marked as disposable, and public bathrooms a spatial zone of death: indeed, law enforcement officials (alongside activists and presidential candidates) have quite explicitly threatened physical violence against trans women who dare to use public restrooms—as if trans women weren’t already in danger using public restrooms, especially the men’s restrooms that the more “reasonable” counterparts advocate we use.

To sum up what we have found so far: a liberal regime of increased visibility plays into a panoptic apparatus that seeks to create easily surveilled and disciplined subjects. This apparatus enables the use of the negative functions of biopower and necropower to sanction the murder of trans women and the elimination of us as a class: indeed, the recent “bathroom bills” are an attempt to intensify this through the removal of trans women from social life, and thus our reduction to bare life.

### 1.5 Avoiding Assimilationism

I do not wish for what I have said to be construed to support an assimilationist perspective, or, more glibly, *invisibility politics*. This is obviously even more harmful: being the approach taken by the GLF and the HRC, it makes life worse for the least “normal” and establishes a new, smaller frontier of “abnormal”. Rather, the point I am attempting to make is that *visibility for visibility’s sake is a risk without a reward*. Thus, our praxis will not be to shove trans women back into the closet and hope to never be represented again.

## 2 Towards an Effective Praxis

An effective praxis will not aim for visibility at all costs, but will instead focus on countering a hegemonic narrative of trans women. It will not rely on the tactic of showing trans men forced to be in women’s restrooms due to bathroom bills: that only furthers the imagery used to advance bathroom bills. It will not call on celebrities to tell people what to believe and what to vote on. It will not spoonfeed theory, enshrining harmful myths in order to get a little morsel of truth across. And an effective praxis will focus not on the most “invisible” groups, but rather on the groups most marginalized and most harmed—and within the LGBT umbrella, that is, and always has been, and likely will be for the foreseeable future, trans women of colour.

But really, apart from that, I’ve got nothing. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent. We must investigate this topic in the future.

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