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SWERF Necropolitics: Three Sites of Mistranslation and the Politics of Feminist Exclusion

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Abstract: The acronym SWERF, or Sex Work(er) Exclusive Radical Feminism, and its attendant ideologies, brings up a number of questions and potential schisms for the enterprise of feminist thought more broadly. This inquiry examines what it means for feminism to exclude, what the excluders believe is gained by protecting certain boundaries around which identities and practices are included, and the ideological foundations and consequences of this thinking. SWERF logics are understood as mistranslations of the radical potentialities of feminism, clustered around three sites: exclusion (against bodily autonomy), equivocation (between sex work and labor trafficking), and misrepresentation (of the sex worker as antifeminist monster). Each of these mistranslations underpins a SWERF necropolitics, an ethos (and praxis) of deathly exclusion which I argue is not only an effect of these logics, but a prerequisite for their persistence. Sex workers become the bad Other of these logics, resulting in feminist arguments for carceral control, surveillance and outing, and stigmatization, each of which creates conditions for loss of livelihood and life, as well as weakening other feminist goals premised on self-determination, harm reduction, and safety.

Keywords: sex work, feminism, SWERF, necropolitics, bodily autonomy

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Introduction: Mistranslation

Margo St. James, founder of sex worker rights organization Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) and service provision center St. James Infirmary, understood the necropolitical logics and consequences of anti-sex work thinking firsthand. In a 1999 law journal article, she underscored the way in which these divisions impact all women through broad, institutionalized misogyny: “As long as women remain divided into ‘whore’ and ‘madonna,’ there can be no economic justice for any woman, and women will be blamed for everything—from depreciating property values, to sexually transmitted diseases, and yes, to provoking their own rape and murder” (9). In the midst of a wider-reaching indictment of women’s movements which exclude sex work, St. James hit on a necropolitical tactic of the most insidious order, to render the most debased Other (the sex worker) culpable for social control over a broader category of subjugation (women, but most especially cash poor, migrant, or disabled women; women of color, or politically radical women, queer and trans people occupying feminized subject positions).

This investigation of SWERF necropolitics issues forth from an ontological question: what kind of feminism excludes women, femmes, and nonbinary subjects based on their survival strategies? More specifically, what is the faculty of a Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminism (hereafter, SWERF), and what is the modus operandi of a category of thought and activism premised on advocacy as well as othering? We can understand “feminism” as political in its aims for equity, cultural in how sex-gender is understood and portrayed in American society or elsewhere, and/or epistemological, in the ways in which individual
subjects consider their relationship to the category of woman. In each of these venues, the translation of feminism from *advocacy* for to *exclusion* of in service of a purer, more politically expedient, or less complicated doctrine, is both a net loss for a truly radical, transformative sense of feminism, and in fact undermines the category altogether. In this sense, SWERF logics are not feminist at all.

But in considering further the reasons why, and the ways in which, something called feminism might exclude sex working people, a violent and phobic specter emerges. This specter can reflect Victorian debates around purity, suggesting that sex working women are polluted by any choice to engage in sex work, as well as by the work itself. It can be premised on second wave feminist blind spots around race, class, and migrancy, failing (or choosing not) to register intersectional sources of both vulnerability and economic empowerment endemic to various forms of sex work. The specter also depends upon essentialisms regarding sex/gender identity and expression, seeking to disclude from the category of “woman” not only trans women, but also those who often occupy feminized subject positions due to the nature of their work and sex/gender embodiment. I deploy the concept of mis/translation to work through how anyone toiling under the mantle of feminism can arrive at exclusionary politics. Various SWERFisms translate feminism as protection of virtue, aspiration for (white, male, Western) measures of success, or as a pure contradiction to masculinity. But in the final analysis, SWERFism translates sex work as bad sex, and not as any kind of work, and therein lies the disposability of the worker.

I propose that the politics of SWERFism are the politics of death, a necropolitics that plays in the registers of institutionalized misogyny, white supremacy, and xenophobia—the discontents of capitalism at a stage when it hungrily seeks after an “Other,” a set of bad actors and disposable subject positions against which to measure value and values. The bad translations I track are, first, carceral in their commitments to deploying the violence workers and institutions of the state in service of advancing the cause of women. This variety of carceral feminism assumes that all transactional sex is coerced and therefore must be prohibited by punishing the client, the worker, or both. It conflates goals of feminism, women’s equal protection under the law, and those of the state (to surveil, control dissent, and to protect property). Each of these goals is bolstered by controlling the movement and economic self-sufficiency of the most marginalized subjects. Secondly, these translations are self-affirming, in that if men’s desire and/or heterosexual sex are inherently bad, then any expression thereof is polluted and antifeminist as well. Sex work is seen as the outgrowth of men’s violent and insatiable desire, and the eminent availability of women in an uncontrolled and uncontrollable marketplace. And finally, these translations are exclusionary, constructing feminism as bounded by forms of both work and sex which SWERFs deem un/acceptable. These exclusions need not end with the full-service, outdoor sex worker, but extend to other forms of non-reproductive, transactional sex and sexuality which do not meet whatever standard is proposed. In short, these are the translations of the survival and persistence of women, femmes, non-binary, gender nonconforming, agender, and, indeed, some men into exscription, excising, and execution. Stated at various levels of directness by SWERF necropolitics: better to be dead than be a whore.

My intervention works against SWERF logics, detailing three sites of mistranslation—bodily autonomy, coercion, and moralization—which give rise to brutalist, necropolitical commitments. Each of these three comprise primary nonstarters for SWERF arguments; for SWERFs, sex work threatens bodily autonomy, is definitionally coercive, and/or violates moral codes regarding uses of sex and labor. These sites are remarkable for a variety of reasons, but not least for their ahistoricism: the arguments of the NGOs, avowedly feminist philosophers, and elected officials can be mapped onto some of the same ones that fueled sex panic around “white slavery” and the anti-immigrant, anti-Black sentiment that promoted the passage of the Mann Act of 1910.

In what follows, I define necropolitics as a cipher for the feminist mistranslations that undergird SWERFism. After meditating on this use of the necropolitical, I detail each of the above sites and the ways
in which they stand as willful mistranslations which call into question the extent to which SWERFism is feminist at all (see Nagel 2015, for a forceful argument that it is not), and what it means to recode these logics as antifeminist. In so doing, I seek a more complete way of understanding the strange bedfellows that construct SWERFism and the prospects for a sex work inclusive feminism that might answer back. I close with a working definition of SWERF necropolitics and the logics which are best suited to combat it. Thus, my argument takes place in three steps: a definition (of necropolitics), three applications/excavations (within SWERFism), and a redefinition (of SWERF necropolitics) which issues forth from a rejection.

It is worth noting the multivalent designations of SWERF, both in the current inquiry and in broader sociocultural and political parlance. SWERF is not a terminus any feminist seems to embrace: it can be used as descriptor for those identifying with a conception of feminist while refusing to include sex workers in this conception, certainly. But it also acts as a signifier for various other, exclusionary politics, as will be addressed in what follows. How a given hearer translates SWERF will depend upon their own subject position and commitments, phobias and limit cases for feminist thought, facility, and activism. Where SWERF fits into a feminist lexicography is, in my accounting, a bellwether for one’s (feminist) senses of “labor,” “woman,” “sex,” and “autonomy,” among others. To be clear regarding my own commitments: I operate from an anticapitalist, anti-carceral, anti-white supremacist, and anti-borders feminism willing to engage in the complications and coextensions that each of those commitments bring to the table, rather than siloing various feminisms and balkanizing the aims of radical struggle.

**A Few Initial Notes on Necropolitics**

In this opening section, I define necropolitics in terms which deem sex work as the disposable (and necessary) Other of SWERFism. In his monograph of the same title, Achille Mbembe describes necropolitics as a set of questions regarding responsibility to or fear of the Other (2019, 2–3). One of these is particularly poignant when considering survival work: “can we found a relation with others based on the reciprocal recognition of our common vulnerability and finitude?” (Mbembe 2019, 3). Necropolitics is premised on the idea that not only can we not, but we must also not found such a relation, relying instead on borders and enforced difference to promote political goals. In fleshing out his concepts of the countersexual and transgender embodiment, Paul B. Preciado reiterates this difference: “There is no sex without separation, segregation, partition. Sex making = Sex killing. Biopolitics = Necropolitics. It is the act of cutting and dividing that installs sexual difference” (2018, 108). Feminism ought not to regard amplifying or re/suturing sex difference as worthy goals; instead, any feminism wearing “radical” in its moniker should work against necropolitics, which is to say, against the carceral, and against capitalism. Radical feminism, in the sense which this anti-necropolitical inquiry seeks to revivify, holds that goals of sex-gender equity are inextricable from revolutionary anticapitalism and the dismantling of white supremacy. It is radical in its intersectional commitments to unifying the struggles of marginalized subjects and speaking truth to power, through practices of materialist labor analysis and standpoint epistemology, among others.

Certain strains of feminist thought are far from immune to necropolitical carcerality, and SWERFism reproduces and activates carceral discourses and institutions in pursuing its ends. This is nowhere clearer than in the language of organizations such as the UK’s Nordic Model Now, which seeks to decriminalize “all those who are prostituted” and enact laws which make “buying people for sex a criminal offense” (Nordic Model Now). Such language evacuates all agency from sex workers, displacing it entirely onto “buyers of people,” a designation which obviates any (human) physical or emotional labor in itself. But the organization’s definition of the purpose of criminal law belies a fundamental belief which is oppositional to that of radical, carceral abolitionist feminisms. The organization’s site states, “Criminal
legislation has the primary purpose of making it clear what we as a society consider unacceptable and discouraging people from doing those things” (Nordic Model Now). This might have as easily be written as “Criminal legislation around sex work has had the effect of harming the most marginalized workers, enabling police abuse and rape, and emboldening certain clients and the most institutionally immune to commit the most atrocious acts against workers of color, queer and trans workers, migrant workers, and others not equally protected by criminal law.”

These are prison logics, which Foucault suggests extend outward from punitive apparatuses into sociocultural life. He writes of “characteristic features attributed to repression, which serve to distinguish it from the prohibitions maintained by penal law” (1990, 4). These features include some of the necropolitical prescriptions I consider below: “a sentence to disappear” and “an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence” (4). In dehumanizing sex workers and revoking their agency, SWERF necropolitics silence and disappear any but the “perfect victims” whose experiences and testimony seem to justify their views. Foucault sees sexual repressions as bourgeois hypocrisy, albeit “forced to make a few concessions” (4), in which “illegitimate sexualities” could be “reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profits” (4). But under criminalization, sex workers are dis-integrated from both, and become nothing more than cautionary necropolitical examples, or inconvenient subjects who do not define themselves according to force, fraud, or coercion.

Furthermore, these necropolitics are mistranslations, of broad feminist goals for equality and safety through the lexicons of institutionalized and state-enforced racism, misogyny, classism, ableism, anti-migrancy, and queer and transphobias. They work to overwrite someone’s life experiences and subject position by reducing them to said subject’s work and survival strategies. These are death tactics, working from mortification in Erving Goffman’s (1961) sense of stripping down the carceral subject’s very humanity, with the carceral state acting as “total institution,” criminalizing and stigmatizing, self-perpetuating its system through self-perfecting and self-fulfilling logics. Writing about another subject position which was “sentenced to disappear,” Blackness in the Jim Crow South, Benjamin Kahan and Madoka Kishi see this necropolitical stripping down as becoming a nonsubject: “if enfleshment is a necropolitical operation of dehumanization,” one becomes “a being other than human, rather than just a nonhuman” (2020, 934). In considering a transfeminist intervention against the necropolitics of femicide in Mexico, Sayak Valencia notes how the reach of the concept and the institutions that enforce it extend beyond its original conception: “it is important to expand the scope of the term necropolitics beyond race and class to the governability of cis and trans women and those others that embody dissenting genders and sexualities” and are thus “produced in the collective imaginary as aberrant populations that may/must be demarcated as enemies to be brutally and violently destroyed” (2019, 184–85). SWERF necropolitics are the purposeful mistranslation of the work of sex work into the bad/repressed/prohibited sex and polluted/vacant/disposable subject position of the worker.

First Site. Translation as Exclusion: Bodily Autonomy

One of the overarching themes of these sites of bad translation is the economy of choice. Bodily autonomy would seem to be nonnegotiable for (radical) feminism of any kind: reproductive rights justice, relief and protection from gender-based and intimate partner violence, workplace safety, and freedom of sex-gender expression. SWERF ideology often operates from a direct challenge to this autonomy, through a few different pathways. Carole Pateman (1988) chooses an economic basis for her anti-prostitution argument, writing of the transactionality of sex work as inherently asymmetrical and thus a violation of the “sexual contract.” But this overwrites the contractual nature of transactional sex itself—if there is a problem with
enforcing or re/negotiating the transaction, how is prohibition likely to solve it? Beyond being rather sex-gender essentialist, this site essentially holds that sex workers are generally unable to negotiate their own bodily autonomy and navigate the locus of their own labor practices. Sex workers are at best objectified within the economies in which they participate; their choices are incidental to the acts in which they (passively or resistantly) participate.

This site of translation centers on the broader SWERF view of sex work as the limit case for (women’s) bodily autonomy. The transactional nature of sex work renders consent impossible, or instantly revokable and unnecessary for the labor. This site translates economic exchange and survival as antifeminist betrayal and license to die. SWERF necropolitics grants bodily autonomy only to those deemed worthy; this means that (mostly men) buyers of sex have agency and (mostly non-men) sellers are reduced to non-agential bodies. Just as the question of whether non-cis-men possess bodily autonomy or agency in any sexual encounter works to silence or override any affirmative response, the question of whether workers possess the above in transactional sex takes their participation in the transaction as nullifying their agency to begin with. Wendy Chapkis has termed this sort of thinking “anti-sex feminism” (cited in O’Neill 2001, 23), represented in the “porn wars” era SWERFism of Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, figures whose cultural and intellectual influence has remained strong since the 1980s. Maggie O’Neill describes this sort of feminism as accounting for the sex worker as “strictly object” (2001, 23), and this rhetoric fetishizes passive-voiced terms such as “prostituted women” or “sex slave” which foreclose any measure of agency. In another agency-revoking formulation, Dworkin refers to prostitution as “renting sex” (1993, 119), which renders the worker’s consent disposable and somewhat beside the point: do we rent a surgeon’s or a mechanic’s hands? A therapist’s voice? A mover’s back and arms? When the laborer and their labor are defined strictly through the service provided, their subject position is evacuated.

Aren Z. Aizura considers this objectification of the worker in terms of sites of vulnerability, noting, “By displacing risk onto the individual, circumstance is cast as a question of rational choice: in making the ‘irrational choice’ to continue sex work [. . .] sex workers can be represented as willfully engineering their own deaths” (2007, 140). The economic realities of the marginalized subject position—sex worker—are displaced onto judgment regarding the work itself. Put another way, “reproductive workers (especially sex workers) must contend with a biopolitical matrix in which they are both subjects to be ‘saved’ and the targets of criminalization in order to reduce ‘risk’” (Aizura 2007, 142). This is the upshot of what Laura Agustín (2007) has termed the “rescue industry”: NGOs, activist groups, journalists, elected representatives, and celebrities signaling a commitment to saving women through reproducing patriarchal control over their activities. The feminist mistranslation, often promoted by rescue industry entities and actors, which evacuates the sex worker’s bodily autonomy casts the most precarious subject positions as simultaneously victim and transgressor. It goes beyond a character judgment or holding of one’s nose at a choice of employ they do not understand, such mistranslation renders sex workers “bereft of the capacity for meaningful choice” (Rev and Geist 2017, 121).

Beyond evacuating bodily autonomy, SWERFism mistranslates sex for compensation as inherently outside definitions of valid labor. If sex work is translated as equivalent with exploitation, as Kathleen Barry (1995) would have us believe, then the feminist position can only be its abolition. But these arguments are circular, premised on their own conclusions, and reductive—they exclude not only the worker’s reasons for engaging in their labor, but the material conditions which might make it safer (when necessary), more lucrative (when inequity is systemic), and easier to exit (when desired). Barry declaims, “when the human being is reduced to a body, objectified to sexually service another, whether or not there is consent, violation of the human being has taken place” (1995, 12). This central clause is the cipher for the SWERF translation: “whether or not there is consent.” There is, of course, a far more radical argument to be made regarding any form of consent under capitalism, but this mistranslation instead works through a succession of
iterations which remain influential in SWERF logic. The human becomes a body, the body is objectified in
its sex work with another body, consent is mooted as irrelevant, and, finally, a violation of the human has
taken place.

In further describing this SWERF translation, Lisa Maher notes that taking the position that all sex
workers are victims of exploitation and in no control of their circumstances leaves them “devoid of choice,
responsibility, or accountability” (2000, 1). This is the necropolitical echo of SWERF translation: the fully
objectified subject, in the loss of their agency, is devoid of responsibility, and thus there is no call to be
responsible to them. Recall Mbembe’s question of “reciprocal recognition”: one cannot reciprocate
responsibility and care if these qualities are nonexistent in the Other. The ultimate exclusionary
mistranslation of this site is decision-making, confusing a decision that the SWERF would never make with
one that someone else is incapable of freely making, when in reality, the degree to which any form of labor
or survival strategy is “chosen” is simply in inverse proportion to manufactured, often systemic
vulnerabilities. As a parallel example, the difference in classification between “political dissident,”
“refugee,” “smuggled person,” and “trafficking victim” entirely likely comes down to the ability of the subject
in question to afford one or the other of these labels, as well as who is asking and which answer they expect
or want to hear. The lack of autonomy or the ability to choose ultimately results from what Juno Mac and
Molly Smith summarize as the sense of “penetrative sexual acts as indicative of subjugation” (2020, 28)
and that “people (particularly women) are changed and degraded through sex” (30). I’ll return to
degradation and moral opprobrium in my third site, but for the moment, the tautological SWERF
translation: if sex is bad, then sex work is bad (although at least there is compensation, but that is apparently
insufficient to outweigh, and perhaps even amplifies, the bad).

This leads to a final question of this necropolitical site: is autonomy the goal of every feminism?
Melissa Gira Grant (2014) notes the unique way in which sex workers seem endlessly tasked with justifying
their labor, and the moment that they cease to enthusiastically endorse it is the moment they no longer can
consent. But Mac and Smith observe, plaintively, that “Through the lens of economic need, people’s reasons
for engaging in sex work reappear not as aberrant or abject, but as a rational survival strategy in an often
shitty world” (2014, 50). Teela Sanders, Maggie O’Neill, and Jane Pitcher add that within “wider contexts
of women making decisions about their circumstances, survival and future [...] some theorists move away
from the radical feminist perspective that reduces prostitution to sexual exploitation and force” (2009, 10).
This reduction is a direct affront to bodily autonomy, and is perhaps closer to a “sex agnostic” or “sex
conditional” feminism: your sexual behavior and labor are (provisionally) acceptable, so long as they do not
make me uncomfortable, and/or that no one else having that kind of sex or performing that kind of labor is
exploited or coerced in any way.

**Second Site. Translation as Equivocation: Exploitation, Coercion, and Trafficking**

Radical feminism must oppose any form of forced labor, as it challenges bodily autonomy and reproduces
hierarchies and hegemonies around consent and self-determination. SWERF logics tend to participate in
reducing labor trafficking to sex trafficking, and sex trafficking to “sexual slavery,” with no attention to
predictive factors and labor and migrancy conditions that lead to any of it. A radical feminism requires a
nuanced labor analysis which is careful to clear space for the voices of purported trafficking victims of any
kind, and not to rely on sensationalizing individual experiences of coercion as evidence for the
unacceptability of all commercial sex. The discourses around anti-trafficking are too frequently a cover for
heteronormative sexual moralizing, anti-migrant moral panic, SWERF pearl-clutching, or a combination
thereof. In his summary of rescue industry thinking, Svati Shah notes, “I think the anti-trafficking discourse
rose to power because of alliances between anti-prostitution feminists and governments looking for a way to further regulate migration” (cited in John and Gopal 2021, 388). Each of these translations works from a nexus of justificatory apparatuses; essentially, how to prohibit sex work and make the lives of clients and/or workers so difficult that they will either choose to stop engaging in transactional sex or be unable to do so. But “sex trafficking,” scare-quoted here for the breadth and unclarity of the term, as well as the imaginary it provokes, is a political non-starter. This is a necropolitical imaginary, pinning the value of sex working subjects to their salvageability, and they only need to be saved if they are first rendered victim. MacKinnon bemoans instances when this SWERF translation fails: “No one defends trafficking,” whereas, much to her chagrin, “some people are for” sex work (2011, 895). Of course, being “for” sex work is hardly prerequisite to want it to be as safe for workers as possible. Nonetheless, there is a prevalent set of mistranslations around trafficking that smuggle in sex work prohibitionism behind the guise of discourses around rescue and rehabilitation.

Shah labels this set of mistranslations a “discursive” problem: “where using the framework of ‘trafficking’ as the main filter for producing knowledge about sex work is never really questioned” (2019, 379). Necropolitics produces the bad Other of sex worker, SWERF anti-trafficking discourse (provisionally) uses this “filter” to translate this subject position into “trafficking victim.” Elizabeth Bernstein has done a great deal of work around this mistranslation, which I am labeling an equivocation, drawing attention to the moralistic and cis/heteronormative underpinnings of SWERF antitrafficking discourse. She writes:

As members of the class fraction that is most likely to reap strong material and symbolic rewards from marriage, anti-trafficking activists are heavily invested in the maintenance and reproduction of this status and are ready to enlist the state apparatus on behalf of the gendered and sexual interests that are most pertinent to themselves: a version of “feminist family values” that is premised on liberal understandings of formal equality between women and men, and the safe containment of sexuality within the pair-bonded couple. (Bernstein 2018, 76)

“Containment” of one kind of sexuality is the same as “exclusion” of another, and the stakes, as Bernstein notes, are high for many of these activists.

But more than just these liberal understandings of equality—which sound something like “gender blind” rhetoric, akin to “post-racial” or “color blind” thinking—this anti-trafficking rhetoric fundamentally shifts and refocuses certain feminist goals. Bernstein tracks ways in which contemporary anti-trafficking campaigns seek to link “the sexual exploitation of prostitution” to “specifically nonnormative (and racially as well as class-specific) forms of heterosexuality that have become the exclusive political targets” (75). This link is neoliberal cover for necropolitical exclusion, giving cause to link nonnormative sexualities with the nonnegotiables of exploitation and trafficking. The means of challenging these political targets are various, but they once again tend to reduce to bad (men’s) and degraded (women’s) sexualities. It is the latter which dominates much of this site of contemporary SWERF mistranslation.

This mistranslation requires a coherent public-facing conception of the victim. Bernstein cites Jo Doezema’s (2001) account of Western feminists’ “wounded attachment” to the imaginary of the “third world prostitute” and the enfolded concept of the “injured body” of “the third world trafficking victim,” which ultimately “serves as a powerful metaphor for advancing certain feminist interests, which cannot be assumed to be those of third world sex workers themselves” (2018, 73). Whereas in the first site, necropolitics rendered the Other dispensable by virtue of sex workers’ inherently coerced status, the second renders them non-agential, voiceless victims and thus of no account. Mariam Kaba (2021), in her work with Project NIA and Survived and Punished, decries this “perfect victim” thinking, though it goes beyond just the purported victim’s status or narrative, it extends to the rescuer’s prescriptions for all others who share
that status. Victimhood becomes an earned currency under this equivocation, and the sex worker, who seeks to either distance themselves from trafficking discourse or give reasons why their story cannot be distilled into pure victimhood, is elided and excerpted from the discussion.

In her work on disentangling sex work and trafficking in the Caribbean, Kamala Kempadoo accents the highly sex-gendered features of this mistranslation: “the continued reliance on ‘victim’ in anti-trafficking work” privileges “external forces in the conceptualization of the trafficked person” (2011, xxiii) which seems as antifeminist a formulation as possible. If self-determination is not a primary goal of feminism, including SWERF or anti-trafficking iterations, then what is? Kempadoo further notes how this victim narrative denies “women agency or subjectivity in the process. Such a conceptualization sustains an image of women as pure, unblemished, and innocent prior to the trafficking act, as clean passive slates that are consequently imprinted and given character by and through the actions of men” (xxiii). Perhaps even more than sustaining this image, SWERF anti-trafficking logics are premised upon woman-as-latent-victimhood and man-as-like-predator. Aizura offers another way to compare SWERFism to victim-fetishizing anti-trafficking work, noting that “the criminalization of sex work has been inextricably linked to the desire to ‘save’ sex workers from themselves” (2007, 139). Whereas anti-trafficking rhetoric operates from an oppressor/oppressed dichotomy, anti-prostitution admits of “pro-sex” feminist views that seek to sanitize sexuality and desire, cleansing them of the illicit and oppressive desire of the sex work client, and “anti-sex” feminist views which could only account for sex work as “self-trafficking.”

In the end, SWERF anti-trafficking discourse comes down to carceral control. Ren-Yo Hwang details prison logics which underlie various institutions’ substitution of punishment and surveillance for safety and care. Hwang accounts for this carcerality as a kind of totalizing subjectification: “The doubling down of state securitization, domestic warfare, and state-sponsored strategies of gender-responsive antiviolence as prison reform simply demonstrates the fungible capacity of the state to define safety as safekeeping of carceral subjects—the necropolitical as carceral care” (2019, 567). The friction in this doubling down is palpable, and devastating in practice: trafficking survivors, or those presumed to be, are viewed through the lens of “safety as safekeeping,” which in these instances generally means to remove them from the circumstances that led them into trafficking to begin with. Save for specific instances of kidnapping or other extreme rendition and coercion, most trafficking survivors have specific goals in mind which render them vulnerable to illicit and dangerous means of accomplishing them. Through his research on trans migrant sex work, Nicola Mai (2018) refers to these goals as “mobile orientations,” or a desire/need to exit desperate, violent, or otherwise oppressive circumstances for almost anything else. “Safekeeping” in this instance is the opposite of “safety” for people in precarious situations due to sociopolitical, cultural, or personal factors that render them vulnerable to trafficking of any kind. At the same time as these anti-trafficking efforts attempt to safekeep, they also render trafficking survivors (and, often, sex workers of various ilk) as “carceral subjects,” i.e. necropolitical others, symbolic at best, disposable or irrelevant at worst.

These carceral subjects become in turn the objects of “carceral care,” a many-tentacled operation of Foucauldian prison logics which extend beyond the most immediate targets of SWERF necropolitics. Aizura notes ways in which “Transgender sex workers are neither the ideal victim subject of sex-trafficking rescue narratives nor deemed as worthy of rescue,” while at the same time “Risk operates on an axis with the capacity to criminalize, move along, eject, and arrest. The assumption of sex work operates as a convenient method of criminalizing trans women” (2007, 140). Risk becomes a currency for othering and allowable exclusion and death. This circular carcerality operates in a similar manner in anti-migrant policies and logics, under the same guise of anti-trafficking safekeeping. Shah notes a “synergy” between “contemporary anti-trafficking discourse” and “anti-migrant policies of many governments” (2019, 377). This synergy is a co-implication: If ‘trafficking’ was a way for a segment of Western radical feminists to
accomplish their longstanding agenda of banning all forms of commoditised sex, including pornography and prostitution, then the policies they would propose in the name of feminism would also appeal to governments seeking to further restrict labour migration” (378). The necropolitics of SWERFism and anti-migrancy are coextensive and mutually supportive. This translational site silences both survivors and workers alike, and reinforces protections of cisgender normative sexualities, desire, and survival.

There are, however, retranslations of trafficking into discourses which might render migrants and sex workers alike safer. Mac and Smith (whose research emerges in part from their activist work with SWARM in the UK) frame the circuitry of SWERF anti-trafficking thus: “Carceral feminists hold that if we could abolish prostitution through criminalising clients and managers, the trafficking of women would end, as there would be no sex trade to traffic them into” (2020, 58). This approach, has of course, proved not only patently unsuccessful in achieving its stated ends, but has also further marginalized the most precariously situated workers. Mac and Smith seek a retranslation from this site: “We disagree not only on the solution but on the problem: for carceral feminists, the problem is commercial sex, which produces trafficking; for us, the problem is borders, which produces people who have few to no rights as they travel and work” (80). These people produced by borders are the carceral subjects noted above, adjuncts for xenophobia, transphobia, and misogyny alike. Mac and Smith offer a pointed set of prescriptions which serve to further suggest the commitments of SWERF anti-trafficking: “Carceral feminists want to tackle commercial sex through criminal law, giving more power to the police. For sex workers, the solution includes dismantling immigration enforcement and the militarised border regimes that push undocumented people into the shadows and shut off their access to safety or justice—in other words, taking power away from the police and giving it to migrants and to workers” (80). These are more than divergent translations—differences of opinion—they are fundamentally separate and oppositional commitments, all under the banner of feminism. One is forced to choose a set of translations: of the predictive conditions, of the problem, of the symptoms, of the solutions, and of the consequences thereof.

Third Site. Translation as Misrepresentation: Moralizing against Women

At this site, sex workers come to be metaphorized and abstracted, even as particularly lurid (and, generally, imagined) accounts of their work are presented as evidence of them being a blight on women’s movements and generally obstructing the cause of sex-gender equality. This third site tracks professionalized feminism through the moralizing machinations of SWERF logic. The mistranslations of this site presage the variety of disposability which clears territory for necropolitics. I proceed through a few of the iterations of mistranslated ethical or moral imperatives, which naturally emerge from the same saviorist/victim-fetishizing logics as the previous site.

First, the sex worker as dangerous, monstrous, “vectors of disease” (Nova 2016). On one hand, this viewpoint produces the carceral subjects, and subsequent carceral care, noted above. But there is a category difference between the carceral subjects of anti-trafficking, as well as the prescribed remedies, and those of sex workers not perceived as trafficking survivors, even when the moral interests of the prohibitors are similar. Sarah Lamble details international sex work controls: “imprisonment, militarization and border controls are offered as antidotes to the precarities and insecurities of the contemporary neoliberal political order, by protecting against the dangerous others who threaten those who benefit from that order” (2014, 152). The same forces operate in what Gira Grant defines as the “prostitute imaginary,” a nexus of cultural and carceral presumptions that result in a tangle of sanctions against sex working people and what they represent. She suggests of this imagined Other that “This is the character laws are made for: a fantasy of absolute degradation who is abandoned by all but those noble few who seek to rescue her” (2014, 17). In
this taut formulation we find the victim, the savior, the carceral, and the fantasy all bound up in the figure of the sex worker.

But one cannot prosecute an imaginary; what SWERF necropolitics needs is a monster, in the figure of the client, the pimp, the worker, or any combination thereof. Grant goes on to describe this aporia of SWERF logic: it can at once “appear to believe that those engaged in sex work are not yet capable of being real women” (21), and at the same time objectify the worker and their work in order to evacuate their humanity and their subj ection. Grant notes this contradiction powerfully: “Sex workers know they are objectified; they move in the world as women too, and through their work they have to become fluent in the narrow and kaleidoscopic visions through which men would like to relate to them as sexual fantasies embodied” (73). Being the object of fantasy is not de facto becoming a carceral subject; fantasy drives an enormous machinery of American entertainment and politics. As such, sex workers “know they also serve as objects of fantasy for women: as the bad girls to fear and keep far from and, on occasion, to furtively imagine themselves as” (73). This necropolitical double bind leaves little space for the individual experiences of workers or their needs or concerns, the fantasy silences and elides and it renders the monstrous Other. As objects of desire (whether bad or good), sex workers’ subject positions appear wholly externally determined; again, they become subject-less, divorced from the material conditions of their labor as well as what it “represents” to them. The consequences for sex workers’ agency are decisive, as Grant notes: “It’s objectification, too, when these ‘supporters’ represent sex workers as degraded, as victims, and as titillating object lessons, and render sex workers’ whole selves invisible. Their capacity for social relations is dismissed, their lives understood to be organized almost entirely around what others call their sexual availability and what sex workers call their labor” (73). Lacking social relations, reduced to their labor even as the viability or acceptability of that labor is constantly subject to question are reification, the carceral, disposable, necropolitical Other is produced.

Aizura codes this prostitute imaginary as a bureaucratic horror fantasy: “The representation and regulation of sex work are structured by understanding individual sex workers as monstrous and prostitution itself as a monstrosity” (2007, 139). This monstrosity, under SWERF logic, is alternately based in bad sex, debasement, and, ultimately, antifeminism. It is perhaps unsurprising that SWERF logics turn to the carceral apparatuses of the state to represent (as victim or criminal) or regulate sex work. When SWERF researchers such as Melissa Farley offer blanket judgments regarding “empirically demonstrated psychological harm of prostitution” (2005, 957) in one sentence and that “techniques for harm reduction in prostitution are indicative of the physical and emotional dangers of indoor prostitution” in the next, they reflect the ways in which the greatest risk factors for sex working people result from their inability to access workplace protections that ought to be available to all. Sanders, O’Neill, and Pitcher note the ways in which this thinking is then naturally extrapolated to “women’s position in society in general” (2009, 7), which is the exact inverse of Gail Pheterson’s (1993) influential concept of “whore stigma.” Does how we treat sex workers tell us more about how we treat women and feminized subjects, or does how we treat the latter suggest more about the treatment of the former? Perhaps they are inseparable: the necropolitics of sex workers becomes the necropolitics of (migrant, of color, cash poor, disabled, drug using) women.

And so this mistranslation is a necropolitical misrepresentation, seeking to level experience in order to other the sex workers and reduce their work to their own bad choices, and vice versa. Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes of the “ubiquitous” figure of the “sex worker” among others, including “global teenage girl factory worker” and “domestic worker;” and she notes that “although these representations of women correspond to real people, they also often stand in for the contradictions and complexities of women’s lives and roles” (2003, 527). This standing-in has little to do with the workers themselves and serves only to promote “a divide between false, overstated images of victimized and empowered womanhood, and they negate each other” (528). This kind of division has permeated each of the sites of bad translation thus far,
but reaches its fullest expression when feminisms are compelled to render moral judgment on the behaviors of women.

Mac and Smith reflect on the self-reflexive corner into which misrepresentational SWERF logic paints itself: “Stuck in the domain of sex and whether it is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for women (and adamant that it could only be one or the other) it was all too easy for feminists to think of The Prostitute only in terms of what she represented to them. They claimed ownership of sex worker experiences in order to make sense of their own” (2020, 18). One of the great strengths of truly intersectional feminism, and a lesson of Black and migrant feminisms in particular, is the value of standpoint epistemology and the narrativizing of (particularly marginalized or silenced) experience. But it is in fact antithetical to that epistemology to assume its extrapolation and automatic applicability to the lives of others, legislating what is good or bad when it comes to survival, up to the point when it harms another or hampers their ability to survive.

Much of this mistranslation comes down to the pervasive specter of “bad men’s bad desire” and the sex worker as receptacle for this degradation, utterly irrespective of (and perhaps only enhanced by) any testimony to the contrary. Veronica Monêt reflects on her sex work experience: “I reject the idea that a penis entering a bodily orifice is an act of violence or a claim to territory or the use of a resource. I am not degraded by sex. I am not a resource or property that can be devalued through use” (1997, 238). This is the razor’s edge of pro-sex/anti-sex SWERF logic: can the body or the subject be degraded by sex, first, and can sex be rehabilitated from degradation, whether transactional or not? In her meditation on the prostitute imaginary, Virginie Despentes notes ways in which a “particular image of the prostitute that we love to display—stripped of all her rights, deprived of her independence and her capacity to decide” (2010, 74) serves as “a way of reminding men that their sexuality is necessarily monstrous, that it creates victims and destroys lives. Because masculine sexuality must remain criminalized, dangerous, antisocial, and threatening” (75). Sex work is mistranslated as a conduit of bad men’s desire, which, according to Despentes, is hardly “an inherent truth,” but rather “a cultural construction” (75). She concludes, client sexuality “must remain a problem” (75). Preciado puts it another way: “The prostitute’s utterly degraded social status functions to punish her for daring to make money at all” (2018, 120). This is the materialist reality of SWERF mistranslation, of the carceral subject: punishment for survival.

In another register, this third site concerns diminution of the subject and concomitant explosion of the representation. Mariana Valverde writes of this dynamic, “Claiming sexuality as the site of the oppression of women tends to reduce the complex social and economic factors that determine our oppression to a kind of quasi-natural phenomenon where sexuality, particularly male sexuality, is static, not something that changes throughout history” (1987, 31). On the surface, this is pure anti-sex translation: sexuality as site of oppression. But in practice, it tends to reduce down to transactional-sex-outside-the-bounds-of-state-sanctioned-agreement as oppressive. Reduction here (to one’s work, to the kinds of sex one has, or does not) serves as exclusion, and neoliberal human rights discourses only deepen this mistranslation. Sanders, O’Neill, and Pitcher account for this exclusion through the nomenclatural category of “the prostitute.” They cite how the ideological shift from “fallen woman”/victim narrative to “a perspective that was based on human rights, sexual freedom and diversity amongst women’s experiences” (2009, 9) was “symbolized by a change in language, as the use of the word ‘prostitute’ was considered problematic because it separated out this category of women from all women, and explained her existence only through her identity as a ‘prostitute’” (9). This (exceedingly limited and limiting) explanation leads us to the final manifestation of mistranslation within this third site: sex work as a result of exclusion, rather than a potential (or very real) solution to social, financial, cultural exclusion.

Nihils Rev and Fiona Maeve Geist note precisely this as they detail accounts “limiting sex work (for trans people, especially) as elemental to lives shaped by institutional rejection,” and as “a consequence of rejection rather than a potential solution to it” result in the “social recognition of trans prostitution as
absolute abjection” (2017, 119). Exclusion begins at the institutional level, whether as result of white supremacy or willful indifference (recognizing these can be one and the same) and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for the most marginalized sex working subjects. The necropolitical algebra is: sex workers are the product of social abnegation and thus must be either reintegrated (if worthy) or further abnegated (if resistant or sufficiently polluted). In a study of Brazilian trans sex workers, Julieta Vartebedian draws out necropolitical ways in which “prostitution allowed us to think about the politics of life and death and how there is a sharp division between those trans subjects who ‘deserve’ to live and those who do not” (2018, 155). The workers in Vartebedian’s study labor under a form of legalization, but nonetheless tend to be “situated as abject-others without value as citizens in a neoliberal scenario which, paradoxically, renders them economic value as racialised and hypersexualized” (156). What is most interesting about this rendering is that even in the absence of direct legal sanction, there are stigmatizing (which is to say, SWERF logic) systems and practices that continue to abject these workers.

The effect of such laws, as summarized by Clare Sears has historically been “to either exclude, confine, or conceal the visibility of sex work and sex workers” (2013, 557). Each of these is a tactic of necropolitical othering, separating or obfuscating the bad Other from the social good. “Neo-abolitionist” models of sex work legislation have been almost exclusively premised on “exit” rather than in any material way making the working conditions safer or alleviating the risk factors for the most potentially dangerous sex work conditions. But under a SWERF necropolitics, this makes sense as a kind of deterrence model for client (and subsequently, worker alike): why make something safer if abolishing it is your sole aim? Sanders, O’Neill, and Pitcher note,

> By prioritizing ‘exiting’ as a means of facilitating social inclusion, rather than offering recognition, rights or redistribution to sex workers, inclusion becomes a tool facilitating ‘rehabilitation.’ This approach cuts off possibilities for a broader understanding of social inclusion and social justice in relation to the complex experiences, structures, processes and practices of sex work for the women and men involved. (2009, 128)

This “broader understanding” is antithetical to SWERF logics, which cannot admit of any possible understanding besides their own and their allies. These allies include those current and, more typically, former workers who are willing to extrapolate their own negative experiences onto legislating against all sex work, presuming the representativeness of their worst intervals in the trades. Mac and Smith describe the willful elision of SWERF accounting: “Those who experience sex work as miserable, violent, or exploitative but continue doing it are left politically bereft, pushed out by pro-sex politics in the sex worker movement and invisible to (or strategically unacknowledged by) carceral feminists, who consider the only legitimate victim to be one who has exited or will imminently exit prostitution” (2020, 39). Legitimacy is premised on acquiescence to carceral subj ecthood and the “natural” desire to reverse or escape that subject position. In the end, this is necropolitics, a politics of exclusion and self-confirming logics that are more than happy to find moral high ground standing on the backs of de-subjectivized subjects and accounts which conflict with their own.

It is worth a final note to point out that the moralization of exclusionary feminism operates in uncannily similar ways in “gender critical” or anti-trans feminism. Alison Phipps sees this TERF thinking very much of a piece with SWERF (see also Lewis 2017):

> This lack of humanity is political whiteness—the thicker end of the wedge. Transexclusionary and anti-sex-work feminism amplify the mainstream movement’s desire for power and authority, and pursue it by policing the borders of feminism and womanhood. The mainstream preoccupation with threat becomes an overt ‘us
and them’ mentality, and the necropolitical desire for annihilation is deliberately turned on more marginalised people. (2020, 135)

These similarities are about policing borders and promoting segregations of various kinds, as Preciado noted earlier in this paper. Necropolitical desire is ultimately premised on annihilation, whether a gnashing, lurid wish to disappear the abject and the fallen, or a subconscious uncaring towards those who refuse to submit (whether this refusal stems from material inability, politically opposition, or other commitments to positive change without erasure for the communities and subject positions impacted). My final section thinks with and against this desire, the carceral specter which is the necropolitical consequence of SWERF mistranslation of the political and material realities of sex work.

**SWERF Necropolitics**

Necropolitics, as noted in various guises above, is first about separation: what is an allowable loss of life, who is included in struggle, who/what behaviors/identities qualify for protection or uplift, and which others require censure, reorientation, repression. In the introduction to *Queer Necropolitics*, Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco seek to interrogate “the ways in which sexual difference is increasingly absorbed into hegemonic apparatuses, in a way that accelerates premature death for those who are unassimilable in liberal regimes of rights and representation and thus become disposable” (2014, 1). I recode this unassimilability into untranslatability, the sex worker made legible by SWERF thinking only in terms which are politically expeditious for abolition, criminalization, and exclusion. In these closing pages, I frame a few accounts of the necropolitical arising from the mistranslations above. In highlighting these necropolitics, I trust that another translation is possible, one that reads the struggle and persistence of sex workers as survival under carceral capitalism and evidence for decriminalization and decarceration, rather than an invitation for further state intervention and violence.

In its carceral, exclusionary ethos, SWERF necropolitics is an allowance for death. Elijah Adiv Edelman details ways in which violence against sex workers is “ignored or erased in media reports, at the governmental level, and, perhaps most disconcerting among most local and national ‘LGBT’ rights organizations” (2014, 174). These organizations are presumed by nature to hold feminist values, and their willingness to exclude violence against sex workers (a designation in which queer, trans, and nonbinary/gender nonconforming folks are overrepresented) speaks to more than an oversight or misplaced priorities. Edelman argues that “this disregard—the implicit exceptionality of violence and death of trans feminine bodies of color—reflects not only a form of queer necropolitics but also a form of what I term *necronationalism* that dually relies on hetero- and homonationalistic discourses of viable life” (174). This manifestation of necropolitics hinges citizenship-subjecthood on “good” work, and allows for (if not mandates) those engaged in “bad” work to perish. These are powerful (and ancient) politics of division and legislating ethics:

> [Q]ueer necropolitics, as referring to the relationships between sexualities, violence and new modalities for population control, provides the tool to not only unpack how queer(ed) bodies are allowed to die but, in a homonecronationalist sense, how these queer deaths serve homonationalist agendas which valorize whiteness, domesticity and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture invested in consumption. (Edelman 2014, 175)
These agendas end up enforcing phobias around bad queerness as well, which further reinforces disposability. Cristine Jacques Ribeiro, Camila de Freitas Moraes, and Livio Silva de Oliveira write of queer necropolitics as “practices that are managed through death, invisibility, and exclusion processes” (2021, 3). Denying safer access to, and promoting the stigmatization of, highly sex-gendered labor practices are just such exclusion processes. In the article cited at the open of this inquiry, St. James warns “As long as abolitionist feminists work hand in glove with law enforcement to craft new ways to promote prohibition, they abdicate the right to later complain that any sexual liberties, including abortion and a woman’s right to control her body, are also being restricted” (1999, 9). It is a polemical figuration, but St. James’s frustration is backed by years of experiencing this exclusion firsthand, and understanding the deadly insufficiency of half measures.

The “death policy” (St. James 1999, 9) endorsed by SWERF necropolitics does indeed “endorse the reproduction of stigmas [. . .] denial of city spaces, and even homicide” (Ribeiro, Moraes, and Oliveira 2021, 3). SWERFism traffics in stigma and denial as two of its predominate rhetorics, and as Ribeiro, Moraes, and Oliveira note regarding “sexualities understood as dissidents,” it is in heteronormativity as “a social construction that insists on being hegemonic with the ultimate aim of decimating specific populations” (4). SWERF necropolitics, whether overtly premised on heteronormativity—protecting the sanctity of reproductive sex, attempting to limit (mostly) men’s access to transactional sex and (mostly) non-men’s access to remuneration for said transaction—or the anti-sex conception of all penetrative sex as founded on power imbalance, seek to unmake specific populations. The authors conclude, “it is possible to take violence into account as a guiding variable for public behavior for historically stigmatized social groups. These stigmas constitute a situation of vulnerability that helps us understand the splits between imagined and real violence and the nuances of this diffuse sense of insecurity and feeling of fear” (Ribeiro, Moraes, and Oliveira 2021, 5). For necropolitics, the “situation of vulnerability” is both the result and the cause of sex work, and the eradication of the latter can only result in the amelioration of the former.

But beyond simply standing as an allowance for loss of life, SWERF necropolitics are defined by carcerality and structural and institutional violence more generally. Prison logic is a logic of disposability, disappearing physical manifestations of perceived social problems and divorcing them from the structures that perpetuate them. Maurizio Lazzarato refers to necropolitics as the “power to deprive others” (18); in this case, deprive them of work, of security, of the ability to persist. Phipps notes the highly racialized nature of these politics of deprivation: “The feminist ‘war machine’ is white. And white rage is necropolitical rage: political whiteness is characterised by a desire for power and punishment” (90). This power is power over rather than power of, directed towards some of the most institutionally silenced voices. Phipps later notes, “The reactionary feminist will to power is then realised in necropolitics that harms these more marginalised women, under the guise of fighting powerful, conspiratorial lobbies and asserting rightful ownership of womanhood and feminism” (152). These would include the fictitious “pimp lobby,” reference to which publicly reared its head at the hearings around a District of Columbia decriminalization bill (Brown 2019). As Phipps sees it, “the authoritarian overtones of political whiteness reach a crescendo” as “Sex workers are deliberately criminalised; trans women are denied access to space and resources” (152), and the undesirable aftereffects of criminalization (more workers forced to work in unsafe conditions and/or ensnared by the criminal legal system) continue to accrue. These denials can be accounted for as “expressions of structural violence” which “put entire populations in harm’s way, leading to greater burdens of morbidity and mortality among disadvantaged groups” (Padilla and Rodriguez-Magda 2021, S27). SWERFism clears the path for this structural violence by providing ideological cover for carceral systems under the false specter of rescue. Valencia notes how this “necropolitics expands as the ‘constitutive outside’ [. . .] that fences us and wants us lifeless and segregated” (2019, 183). SWERF necropolitics keeps the most marginalized sex
workers and their loved ones and dependents in constant proximity to harm, from police, straight jobs, and a subset of clients emboldened by understanding workers’ lack of access to state labor protection.

As Betania Santos et al. frame it, necropolitics “intervene in sex workers’ lives and labor under the guise of reducing ‘exploitation’ and eliminating ‘dangerous’ and ‘degrading’ conditions, impeding sex workers’ ability to work while simultaneously ignoring prostitutes” (2020, 9). This “impeding while ignoring” speaks to SWERF logics that seek out only accounts that reinforce their political agendas. Pippa Grenfell et al. similarly describe “Policing and public health interventions into sex workers’ lives: necropolitical assemblages and alternative visions of social justice” (2022, 287). But these are the only tools available to this necropolitics, which fails to imagine that the police, courts, medical industry, and labor under capitalism cannot be perfected towards sex-gender equitability.

Working from a public health perspective in their research, Grenfell et al. come to a truly abolitionist conclusion: “Decriminalisation—advocated by sex workers, health and human rights agencies internationally—is a vital first step to undoing the necropolitical conditions that threaten sex workers’ safety, health, and rights” (293). Whether through legalization or various levels of criminalization, SWERF logics require the state and its violence workers to “save” sex workers. But true carceral abolition can never be a purely negative project—tearing down prisons means building up mental and physical health care support and transformative justice initiatives, defunding police means funding public education, reproductive rights, community centers, food distribution. As such, the authors continue, “Yet meaningful change also requires tackling institutional racism, xenophobia, misogyny, transphobia, classism, and discrimination against people who use drugs, across criminal justice, immigration, health and social-care systems, and the repeal of drug, immigration, and civil legislation used to target marginalised communities” (Grenfell et al. 2022, 293). Laurel Westbrook notes a similar phenomenon, detailing a “matrix of violence” enabled by “social institutions that protect some people from violence while enabling violence against others” (2023, 415). It is a “process of necropolitics” that “results in high levels of inequality demonstrated by distinct patterns of violence in terms of sex, gender, race, sexuality, class, age, and ability” (415). SWERF logics play into the politics by displacing the presumed (and real) violence within the sex trades onto the better organized and highly retributive violence systems of the state. Westbrook, similar to Grenfell and others in this study, concludes: “alternative solutions must be pursued, including altering how institutions work within the matrix of violence by making sex work safer, decreasing employment discrimination, and reducing transphobic attitudes held by some cisgender people” (436). The antithesis of necropolitics: safety, anti-discriminatory, against queer and transphobia; an ethics of actual care rather than carceral care; a politics of inclusion over exclusion; abolition against carcerality; self-determination over solipsism. There is another way, and SWERF necropolitics can and will be structurally unmade only if and when it is championed.

References


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