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Arm the Dolls

What does “protection” mean in this patriarchal civilization?

Sarah Harpy

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On April 16th, 2025, the supreme court of the united kingdom ruled that the categories of female and male would be defined by one’s assigned sex at birth. Just a single step behind the united states in the sprint towards trans genocide, Terf Island has placed trans women not only squarely in its rifle sights, but directly in front of the media’s eager, waiting cameras. Social media exploded with videos of well meaning cis women and even some trans men (don’t laugh!) praising trans women for fighting for the rights of all women and all queer people and urging everyone to, as the now popular t-shirt says, “protect the dolls.”

But what does this actually mean? What does it mean to protect someone, really? In the face of the advancing transmisogynist state, of hormone bans, bathroom bills, stolen paperwork and the looming threat of deportation, what does it look like to protect someone? For this moment it seems to mean talking very loudly and publicly about what trans women bring to the table in our communities. Some of our broke sisters have highlighted our widespread poverty rates as a gender-class, ostensibly to get some kind of vol-

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<https://harpies.substack.com/p/arm-the-dolls>

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untary wealth transfer going. Really though, it seems to mostly mean buying t-shirts.

Let me assume good faith but let's also cut the shit, okay? I want to believe that everyone who says they're worried about trans women actually is, and i want to believe that they want to do something about it. I believe the same thing about everyone who bought a kufiya in 2024, but besieged Gaza is still daily crushed under zionist bombs and tank treads. Even more than that i believe that the hundreds of thousands of people who rose up in 2020 and rioted and marched and organized against police brutality wanted freedom for the New Afrikan nation. And yet five years later it's like that hot summer never happened. You don't load a gun with genuine belief.

If trans liberation is going to be the next radical trend to be picked up and discarded in a year, all while the state's assault on us escalates into a fever pitch, then i want to be the first to come out against this moment. Will trans women, always short on real allies, wind up alone again by the time we're legislated completely out of existence? The track record of the movements here in the imperial core is fucking awful, so that's what i expect, but we have a chance to intervene here and now before this goes sideways. So let me be blunt for a minute.

In *For Women Only: The Rape Movement in Iraq & Men's Anti-War Politics*, the anonymous author says "when the suits now talk of rescuing women, sisters should know the mass rapes have already begun." Trans women should know by now that when people who aren't us start talking about protecting us, that's them marking their territory. This outcry isn't about our freedom in a real way. This is about the leftovers of the women's and queer movements losing access to our reproductive labor, the work we do for the community and the movement. Just glance over the videos coming out now "defending" us, none of them are about our own worth as women, rather they're about what we do for everyone else (which i guess is how women's worth is measured anyway).

I've been saying this to trans women for years but let me now say it to everyone else. We have, for decades, been caught up in *your* movements, *your* communities, *your* organizations and it has gotten us *nothing*. Our foremothers Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson understood this. Rivera's disdain for the Human Rights Campaign was well known. In the 23 years since she died things have only gotten worse, genocidal even. It's fashionable to quote Marsha and Sylvia, to say that it was trans women of color who fought for all your rights and privileges, but only after both of them (and numerous other trans women of color) had their lives cut short by violence and illness and conscious neglect. And none of it means a thing.

So to everyone scrambling to show the dolls that they care i have this to say: we got here because of *you*. It was your politics, your lines, your gender-class interests that led us to this place. If you want to switch shit up now and try to help us get out of this mess then the best thing you can do is take real aim at patriarchal civilization, both in the ways you are oppressed by it and the ways you carry it into your lives and movements. In the meantime, as Sanyika Shakur said to euro-american radicals, slide any extra weapons our way. We don't need instagram videos, we don't need t-shirts, we need patriarchal civilization to be weakened by war on many fronts.

To my trans sisters let me say this: no one is going to dig us out of this pit except for us. We need our own politics, our own armed units, our own territory and neighborhoods, to manage our own hormone production. So long as we are dependent on patriarchal imperialism we are never going to free ourselves. It's one thing to recognize that it was the cis women's movement or the transmasculine queer movement or whoever else who led us into this quagmire, but blame is only useful for splitting off. We still have to dig ourselves out, we still have to recognize that it was our political weakness that allowed everyone else to take advantage of

us for so long. No one is coming to save us, no matter how many t-shirts they sell.

A real life example of what i mean. In Harlem recently a young trans woman of color, Jaia Cruz, was attacked by a man in a deli. The man struck Jaia repeatedly, calling her a faggot and a tranny. Jaia stabbed him in self defense and her attacker died. She was sent to Rikers island without bail and, after accepting a plea deal, got 15 years in prison. Her official sentencing is at the end of May and while there is a small movement to free her, very few of us trans women want to understand what Jaia Cruz's case means for us. As with CeCe McDonald back in 2011, Jaia Cruz's sentence proves that there is no legal way to defend yourself as a trans woman of color. White sisters haven't picked this up yet.

See plenty of settler trans women are already armed. It's popular and cute in our subcultures for white trans women to take thirst traps with their guns. This means almost nothing. Isolated gun fetishists will mean nothing when it comes to actually fighting a war against the state. A sister of mine compared them to those white settler rhodesian women who armed themselves against Zimbabwean revolutionaries. Without a revolutionary political-military theory and practice that sets us against the imperialist state and all of patriarchal civilization we, as settler trans women, are just as likely to die for white supremacy as we are to fight against it.

Was that blunt enough to shake things up a little bit? I learned the hard way (as we all do eventually) that niceties and saved feelings get us nowhere in real terms. The feminist (and anti-feminist) left has long relied on telling lies and claiming easy victories to avoid the hard, messy work of sharpening our practice and evaluating our failures. I know i must sound like a broken record at this point but this moment will be squandered without the intervention of sisters who patriarchal society would like to ignore, denounce as insane or fringe.

We are now, in a real way, gender outlaws. Not just because we violate unwritten patriarchal laws but because our very existence is more and more illegal. In this age of social media we have plenty of people sounding the alarm on these kinds of policies. What we need is a breakthrough in practical terms, new experiments in organizing and fighting against patriarchal civilization itself. We are, consciously or unconsciously, stuck repeating old forms of rebellion. Forms that didn't work even when they were popular. The euro-style Marxist party building org, the anarchist charity projects, the Maoist youth study groups, none are adequate to even begin the work we need to do.

So don't waste your time buying t-shirts or filming tiktoks. The undertaking that's sitting in front of all of us is too massive for any of us to shirk our duties, and anyone who doesn't pitch in is getting left behind. The fracturing that's happening now between dominant male fascism and gender outlaws isn't going to leave anyone untouched. Lines are being drawn and you might look down to find you don't like what side you wind up on. It's harder to make that choice than you think.

Arm the dolls.