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## Open Forum – An epidemic of transphobia on French turf

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### **Introduction: Is transgender an epidemic?**

On September 22, 2022, a one-day international symposium took place in Rio de Janeiro: *Epidemia de transfobia*.<sup>1</sup> This was actually a counter-event organized in response to another international event, *Congresso Brasileiro de Transsexualidade*, whose opening lecture, planned on the same day in Belo Horizonte, was entitled: *A epidemia transgênero*. This four-day conference was to close exactly a week before the Presidential election in Brazil, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Four years earlier, Jair Bolsonaro had used the homophobic fake news of a ‘gay kit’ allegedly distributed in schools to prevail over his opponent from the Workers’ Party, and anti-trans political rhetoric had since played an important role in his campaign against ‘gender ideology’. However, the transphobic conference was soon cancelled<sup>2</sup> – probably due to widespread opposition, starting with that of the National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals (ANTRA). Still, the counter-event was maintained.

This symposium was organized at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, in partnership with ANTRA, by Prof. Anna Paula Uziel (UERJ) and myself in the context of our Brazilian-French research program (financed by CAPES-COFECUB): ‘Gênero ameaça(n)do’: ‘Gender as a threat / Gender under threat’, the launch of which had coincided with Bolsonaro’s inauguration in January 2019. In her first public speech, the new president’s minister of Women, the Family, and Human Rights, Damares Alves, borrowed a page from the French mobilizations against same-sex marriage when she declared: ‘Boys wear blue and girls wear pink’. Indeed, in the 2010s, both countries have been at the forefront of the campaigns against what is called in French *théorie du genre*. This transatlantic circulation was still visible in the program announced for the Belo Horizonte congress: Elisabeth Roudinesco, a French historian of psychoanalysis whose latest book, *The Sovereign Self*, had just been translated in Portuguese<sup>3</sup>.

In this polemical essay, the harsh denunciation of identity politics, whether sexual or racial, resonates with conservative attacks against minority politics. Her stance on trans people was made even clearer on a French TV talk show called *Quotidien*. On March 10, 2021, she talked about trans persons: ‘Of course, they shouldn’t be discriminated against. It exists. But I think that today there is a bit of an epidemic of transgender, there are far too many of them.’ Homosexuals have long been accused of proselytizing. Now comes an updated version directed against ‘transgender ideology’; that plays on today’s moral panic regarding trans children. ‘When an 8-year-old claims to belong to the other sex, what is this child entitled to...? [...] We can respond: “maybe, but you have an anatomy – so, you’ll see later if you want a sex change.”’<sup>4</sup>

Trans philosopher Paul Preciado soon retorted in the first person: ‘there were, and there are, trans children; I can tell you, and confirm it: I was one. And this I was way before what you call “an epidemic of transgender”.’ Hence the bitter irony of his title: ‘We are an epidemic’. The word resonates, not only in the present context of Covid-19, but also, since this is about a sexual minority, with AIDS – and beyond: ‘Are there too many trans persons, like in the 1930s some in Central Europe said there were too many Jews, Gypsies, Communists, homosexuals, or disabled people?’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Seminário Epidemia de transfobia’, Instituto de Psicologia / Clam / IMS, UERJ, September 22, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=lZaXjOPxVdc>.

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the link stopped working.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Roudinesco, *The Sovereign Self. Pitfalls of Identity Politics*, trans. Catherine Porter, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, & Hoboken, N.J., 2022 (French original publication: *Soi-même comme un roi. Essai sur les dérives identitaires*), Seuil, Paris, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> *Quotidien*, hosted by Yann Barthès, TMC Channel, March 10, 2021, excerpted on Twitter (now X): <https://twitter.com/lecoindeslgbt/status/1369756837436882953?>

<sup>5</sup> Paul B. Preciado, « Nous sommes une épidémie », *Mediapart*, 22 mars 2021: <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/culture-idees/220321/nous-sommes-une-epidemie>.

One might add that the trope of ‘contagion’ had already been (whether Roudinesco knew it, or not) at the center of an academic controversy in the United States about so-called ‘rapid-onset gender dysphoria’ (ROGD). In 2018, a peer-reviewed online medical journal, *PLOS One*, published an article by Lisa Littman about youths suddenly coming out as transgender as a result of ‘social contagion’ (peer and online pressure). But critics immediately pointed out that the methodology was deeply flawed: this study of parents could not be the foundation for a mental-health diagnosis of their children; moreover, the survey was clearly biased as it was conducted on websites that oppose gender-affirming care for trans youths, and denounce ‘trans ideology’. A post-publication review thus led to a revision of ‘the Title, Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion sections’.<sup>6</sup> As to ROGD, it has been soundly rejected by American professional associations (in psychology, psychiatry, medicine, etc.). In a word, ‘social contagion’ is a transphobic trope that prepared the ground for the rhetoric of the ‘epidemic’.

To understand this contagious discourse about an ‘epidemic of transgender’, coinciding with the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic (and of Covid-denial), we must analyze the current epidemic of transphobia in France, not only in national terms, but also in the light of international circulations. In order to do so, we can start with a comparison between two countries and two moments. While France did play a leading role in campaigns against so-called ‘gender ideology’, in particular at the time of massive mobilizations against same-sex marriage, it only joined the chorus against ‘trans ideology’ after other countries, in particular the United Kingdom. This may have to do with a difference in the handling of the issue in both countries.

In 2018, in preparation for a reform of the Gender Recognition Act of 2004, which required a diagnosis of gender dysphoria to allow sex changes, the British government launched a consultation: could self-declaration suffice? As a result of the polemic it ignited, in 2020, the Tory government decided not to modify the criteria in the GRA for legal gender recognition. In 2023, while London blocked a bill of the Scottish parliament that introduced self-declaration, the opposition Labour Party dropped it from its platform. In France, on the contrary, the 2016 Law on the modernization of justice went relatively unnoticed, even though it states that ‘not having undergone medical treatment or surgery or sterilization cannot motivate the refusal’ to allow a sex change.<sup>7</sup> The polemic only started in 2020, first in the name of feminism, and second under the authority of expertise. One of its legal consequences may have been that the revision of the so-called ‘bioethics laws’ in 2021 that finally gave single women and lesbian couples access to reproductive technologies still excludes trans persons.

### **In the name of feminism**

Anti-trans discourse that came to the surface in 2020 in the name of feminism prepared the ground for the outburst of Roudinesco, who is not identified thus. Of course, as transfeminist activist and scholar Karine Espineira has pointed out, TERF discourse has been present for years on websites that ‘have worked in silence: Sisyphe since 2002, and TradFem since 2013’.<sup>8</sup> The former (which is also a publisher), based in Quebec, offers ‘a feminist

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Littman, “Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria”, *PLOS One*, August 16, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>; notice of republication: March 19, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214157> (the original title was: “Rapid-onset gender dysphoria in adolescents and young adults: A study of parental reports”).

<sup>7</sup> Loi n°2016-1547 du 18 novembre 2016 de modernisation de la justice du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, article 56: [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/article\\_jo/JORFARTI000033418904](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/article_jo/JORFARTI000033418904)

<sup>8</sup> Karine Espineira, paper presented (in Spanish) at the UERJ conference on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 (see note 1), on the ‘epidemic of transphobia “made in France”’. See also her chapter: « La médiatisation des “enfants et ados trans” : des écrans TV aux chaînes YouTube, se raconter et s’affirmer au présent », in *Jeunes trans et non binaires. De l’accompagnement à l’affirmation*, Antoine Pullen Sansfaçon and

perspective on the world', and in France, the latter is devoted to the translation of English-language radical feminist texts, in particular Andrea Dworkin's. Their strong emphasis on abolitionism also leads both to embrace lesbian feminist Janice Raymond's 1979 virulent denunciation of 'the transsexual empire'.<sup>9</sup> But while the influence of these websites among activists is real, their arguments had not yet reached a wide audience. But #MeToo has been a game changer. As the feminist cause gained a new urgency in public discourse, some seized the opportunity to revive Raymond's attack against 'the she-male': who counts, who should count as a woman?

In 2019, Marguerite Stern, a former FEMEN activist, initiated a new form of feminist collages (phrases and sentences in black capital letters, each drawn on a white sheet of paper), generally focused on the denunciation of sexist violence. But on January 22, 2020, after a collage calling for 'sisters – not cisTERFs', she angrily complained that feminist issues had been hijacked by transactivists. This prompted her to leave the group of collage activists and post a long, polemical thread on Twitter<sup>10</sup>: 'the movement I have created turns against me'. According to her, 'transactivism' that concentrates all the attention is but 'a male attempt, once again, to prevent women from speaking up' – but this time, from within feminism. While feminism is about 'deconstructing gender stereotypes', she argues that 'men who want to be women suddenly start putting on make-up, dresses, and high heels'. Of course, 'I won't protest that it is cultural appropriation.' But 'we are women because we have vulvas. It's a biological fact.' This immediately leads Stern to a risky comparison with race: 'don't claim that you are women, no more than I would ever be so shameless as to darken my skin to claim I am black.' It is worth noting that in the United States, African Americans who denounced Rachel Dolezal for passing as black did not invoke biology – only the experience of racism.<sup>11</sup>

Stern asserts that 'freedom of choice is an illusion', as 'these choices result from a conditioning by the patriarchal system'. She thus ignores the fact that the slogan 'my body, my choice' has been crucial for a feminist defense of reproductive rights for half a century. However, other comparisons play an important role in her argument: "I am free to wear a veil", "prostitution is my choice", "I am trans, be tolerant": these are meaningless.' Unsurprisingly, anti-trans arguments appear in the continuity of abolitionist politics; but the parallel with anti-veil rhetoric already announces a convergence with the extreme right. In fact, in this thread, Stern also attacks 'intersectional feminists' in the name of a 'universalist feminism' – both terms having gained currency in France to characterize a sharp divide between those who take race into account, along with gender, and those for whom this concept can only be racist. Paradoxically, Stern's 'universalist' feminism (that her opponents would call 'White') is premised on biology. It is about sex, not gender.

This polemical thread was followed three weeks later by a collective text: 'Are "trans women" women?' It was published online on February 12, 2020 by *Le Huffpost*, whose editor removed it a few hours later due to protests, and apologized: 'The transphobic comments it contains run against the values advocated by *Le HuffPost* since its creation. Transwomen are women.'<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the argument of this open letter follows from the

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Denise Medico eds., Presses Universitaires de Montréal, Montréal, 2020, p. 62-77. See [sisyphe.org](http://sisyphe.org) and <https://tradfem.wordpress.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire. The Making of the She-Male*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1979 (published in the United Kingdom in 1980 by The Women's Press). This is not just a thing of the past: see her recent book *Doublethink. The Feminist Challenge of Transgenderism*, Spinifex Press, North Geelong, Australia, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> The thread starts here: <https://x.com/Margueritestern/status/1220063508261494785?s=20>

<sup>11</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> The controversy is recounted the next day in *Libération*: <https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2020/02/13/quel-est-le-point-de-depart-de-la-polemique-sur-la->

rhetorical question of its title. ‘In other words, is it enough to self-proclaim oneself a woman to be able to demand being considered as such?’ For the signatories, ‘being a woman is not just a feeling’. Indeed, women ‘have a double X chromosome and, barring malformation or abnormality, their genital system allows the gestation and delivery of children. The physical characteristics related to procreation correspond to biological sex, a concept distinct from that of “gender”, which refers to a social construction, and more precisely a system of oppression that organizes humanity into two groups, one dominating and exploiting the other. This exploitation of women is intrinsically linked to their biology.’ Gender discrimination is founded on sexual difference, but while the former should be opposed, the latter must be preserved.

The most novel point is the list of the first signatories. The initiator was Pauline Arrighi, a young feminist journalist and activist who had just published a book on feminism. The text was signed by Stern and Dora Moutot, women of the same generation who then became allies in this fight. Until then, Moutot was best known for an Instagram account called *Tasjoui* (‘Have you come?’), and an essay prolonging her critique of male heterosexuality entitled *Mâle baisées* (‘the book that denounces patriarchy under the sheets’); her polemical positions are often described as ‘essentialist’ (certainly not ‘universalist’). But there is also a transgenerational alliance with so-called ‘historic feminists’: not only Florence Montreynaud, best known for her abolitionist crusade (*Zéro Macho*), and Martin Dufresne, a translator from Quebec who works with the website TradFem, but also Annie Sugier, whose secular feminism has long been primarily directed against Islam.

Feminist sociologist Christine Delphy adds academic legitimacy to the list. Her abolitionist stance may well account for her signature. But, in addition to Sugier’s, the name of Fatiha Boudjahlat, whose virulent attacks against the Islamic veil in the name of ‘laïcité’ make her a favorite of right-wing media, renders Delphy’s presence all the more surprising: starting with the 2004 law prohibiting religious signs in public schools, she has been a leading voice against islamophobia. The fact that she is a key figure of materialist feminism probably accounts for this adjective in one of the opening sentences: ‘according to radical and materialist feminists, women are foremost female human beings’. However, and this is the ultimate paradox, far from relying on biology, Delphy has long claimed that ‘gender comes before sex’.<sup>13</sup> Materialism is definitely not biologism. Indeed, in 2019 (a year before the open letter) a symposium had taken place in Lyon, later published as a collective book: the title, ‘trans materialisms’, is no oxymoron.<sup>14</sup>

Arrighi has since pursued the open letter’s agenda, in particular with a 2023 essay against the transgender movement, and so have Stern and Moutot. In August 2022, *Planning Familial*, a well-established feminist NGO whose work on reproductive issues has helped women since 1960, was the target of virulent attacks on social media by far-right activists: a publicity campaign included a cartoon by trans artist Laurier the fox showing two bearded men, one of them pregnant: ‘We know that men too can be pregnant.’<sup>15</sup> In France, such an image seemed novel to most. The reason is simple: it is only since a 2016 ‘modernization’ of the law that a sex change does not require the person’s sterilization any longer. The polemic was so virulent that the minister in charge of equality between men and women, Isabelle Rome, declared on August 22 her ‘full support for the work of the *Planning Familial*’, ‘a

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[place-des-trans-dans-le-feminisme-1778259/](https://place-des-trans-dans-le-feminisme-1778259/) The text can still be found on Pauline Arrighi’s blog in French: <http://fleurfurieuse.blogspot.com/2020/02/tribune-les-femmes-trans-sont-elles-des.html>. It is translated into English on TradFem with the list of signatories: <https://tradfem.wordpress.com/2020/04/20/open-letter-are-transwomen-women/>.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Delphy, « Penser le genre : problèmes et résistances » (1991), in *L’ennemi principal 2: penser le genre*, Syllepses, Paris, 2001, p. 251.

<sup>14</sup> Pauline Clohec & Noémie Grunenwald eds., *Matérialismes trans*, Hystériques & AssociéEs publisher, Fellingring (Haut-Rhin), 2021.

<sup>15</sup> [https://x.com/Laurier\\_the\\_Fox/status/1559932404931784704?s=20](https://x.com/Laurier_the_Fox/status/1559932404931784704?s=20)

historic NGO that is essential for the rights of women and their access to contraception and abortion’.

But on the same day, Stern and Moutot gave a voice, an ostensibly feminist and therefore politically respectable one, to the extreme right’s transphobia. They jointly published in *Marianne*, a self-proclaimed ‘republican’ magazine, a call to the Prime minister, Elisabeth Borne: ‘We, as feminists, worry about what’s becoming of *Planning Familial*.’<sup>16</sup> For Stern and Moutot, ‘a pregnant man’ is a contradiction in terms: they label the bearded character ‘a woman (female) transidentified’. This requires denying the law that makes sex changes possible: ‘men (males) cannot be pregnant’: ‘this is a dead end in which administrative reality and the scientific reality of biology do not coincide any longer’. At the same time, speaking of ‘persons with a uterus’ (instead of women, in order to include men) is anathema to them: ‘we are not walking vaginas’ (although Stern had written that ‘we are women because we have vulvas’). This rhetoric was by now familiar.

But what is most remarkable is that these women’s call convinced the head of the presidential majority in the National Assembly, Aurore Bergé, to meet with them: despite the minister’s support for the *Planning Familial*, she tweeted in support of its critics: ‘equal rights cannot imply obliterating women’.<sup>17</sup> This is not an isolated case. A few months earlier, in December 2021, Dora Moutot had already met with the former deputy minister in charge of Women’s Rights, then of Citizenship, to plead against trans rights: ‘When the law against LGBT conversion therapies was about to be passed, I heard that certain *députés* and senators had added in the bill the notion of “gender identity”. I decided to inform Marlène Schiappa who met with me.’<sup>18</sup> But the senators resisted the pressure<sup>19</sup>, and her intervention did not stop the law against conversion therapies, definitively adopted in January 2022: it does concern both sexual orientation and gender identity.

The political fight has continued since. ‘These feminists return to a kind of essentialism that biologizes sexual difference’, gender studies scholar Ilana Eloit points out, ‘in whose name activists strike an alliance with reactionary movements.’<sup>20</sup> Indeed, ‘gender, reproduction, and women’s rights’, explains Karine Espineira, ‘are issues linked to conservative groups who always end up questioning abortion rights.’ Journalist Pauline Bock shows not only how Stern and Moutot’s letter to the head of government has been retweeted by *La Manif Pour Tous*, the anti-gay marriage movement, or systematically invited by right-wing media such as *Sud Radio*, but also how the two women openly support far-right masculinists like Julien Rochedy in France and the Canadian Jordan Peterson.<sup>21</sup> Claire Vandendriessche, a trans activist with *Acceptess-T*, argues that Moutot and Stern ‘are very transphobic, and their transphobia is permeable to fascism’ – a connection that has also been established in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.marianne.net/agora/tribunes-libres/mme-elisabeth-borne-feministes-nous-nous-inquietons-de-ce-que-devient-le-planning-familial>

<sup>17</sup> <https://twitter.com/auroreberge/status/1564695561797861380>

<sup>18</sup> Dora Moutot, « Ce qu’on me reproche »:

<https://www.femelliste.com/harcelement-cancel-culture-terfs-blog/harcelement-dora-moutot-terf>

<sup>19</sup> Alison Terrien, « ‘Thérapies de conversion’: le Sénat ne cède pas aux sirènes d’une prétendue idéologie du genre », *Causette*, 9 décembre 2021: <https://www.causette.fr/societe/en-france/therapies-de-conversion-le-senat-ne-cede-pas-aux-sirenes-dune-pretendue-ideologie-du-genre/>

<sup>20</sup> Maxime Macé et al., « Entre féministes Terf et extrême droite, des passerelles idéologiques pour un même combat antitrans », *Libération*, September 12, 2022:

[https://www.liberation.fr/societe/sexualite-et-genres/entre-feministes-terf-et-extreme-droite-des-passerelles-ideologiques-pour-un-meme-combat-antitrans-20220912\\_KDJZLO3HVJFINFJRDMEU3AEGV4/](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/sexualite-et-genres/entre-feministes-terf-et-extreme-droite-des-passerelles-ideologiques-pour-un-meme-combat-antitrans-20220912_KDJZLO3HVJFINFJRDMEU3AEGV4/)

<sup>21</sup> Pauline Bock, « Planning familial: les anti-trans, « caution progressiste des réacs », Arrêt sur image, 5 septembre 2022: <https://www.arretsurimages.net/articles/planning-familial-les-anti-trans-cautions-progressistes-des-reacs>

<sup>22</sup> « Entre féministes Terf et extrême droite, des passerelles idéologique », *Libération*, *ibid.*

*Omerta*, a new pro-Russian media close to the radical right, planned to show three documentaries for its launch, on November 16, 2022: one on the Ukrainian front, one on Armenia, and, more surprisingly, a transphobic one – that had managed to involve trans activists, scholars, and medical specialists, under false pretenses. What is remarkable is the circulation of issues, from geopolitics to sexual politics. The debate announced between Moutot and then *Valeurs Actuelles* journalist Charlotte d’Ornellas, one of the stars of the far right, confirms a convergence that is very far from a feminist agenda, all the more so since this young woman rejects feminism because of her anti-immigration stance.<sup>23</sup>

However, both Moutot and Stern reject this accusation: they just advocate common sense. While the former ‘cannot see how insisting on simple biological facts is related to being supposedly on the far right’, the latter does acknowledge certain ‘external similarities’; but ‘in that case, a large part of France could be labeled far right’.<sup>24</sup> And indeed, this may be true... Their biologism has become even more explicit since they stopped invoking feminism to found a movement, or least create a website, called in French *Femelliste*: ‘to be a woman is a biological reality’.<sup>25</sup> Their 2023 manifesto of ‘femalism’ had among its first signatories public figures who combat feminism, such as public radio journalist Brice Couturier, or literary scholar Claude Habib – and only one medical professional: retired pedo-psychiatrist Caroline Eliacheff. Common sense now supposedly meets expertise.

### **Under the authority of expertise**

In parallel with the defense of women in the name of feminism, anti-trans attacks soon started focusing on the protection of minors; and this has developed under the authority of expertise. At a time when medical power over transitions recedes, the public discourse of ‘experts’ gains ground on trans issues. This is a familiar logic: in the late 1990s, opponents of the PaCS (*Pacte civil de solidarité*), a form of civil union that would eventually lead to adoption and reproductive rights, invoked psychoanalysis and anthropology to counter demands for equality.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, ‘experts’ had already played an important role in defining the so-called ‘bioethics laws’ that regulate access to reproductive technologies. In France, just like homophobia, transphobia is the hate that dare not speak its name. Expert respectability makes it possible to denounce ‘trans ideology’ today, just like ‘homosexuality’ (*sic*) a generation ago.

The opening of this second anti-trans front has come in reaction against a pro-trans prime-time television documentary that was meant, according to its producer interviewed in *Le Monde*, to ‘change the way people look at trans children’.<sup>27</sup> It was first shown on the French-German TV channel ARTE in December 2020. Sébastien Lifshitz is well-known for several documentaries on older queers (*Invisibles*, 2012), on a pioneering trans performer (*Bambi*, 2013), and on high-school girls coming of age (*Adolescentes*, 2019). *Petite Fille* is about a seven-year-old, and her mother’s fight for her child’s recognition as a girl.

But this plea for tolerance did not meet with unanimous approval. The magazine *Marianne*, that has played an important role in campaigns against minority politics, felt

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<sup>23</sup> Pauline Bock, «Fausse journaliste: Le ‘piège’ du film ‘Omerta’ sur les trans» Arrêt sur images, November 16, 2022 : <https://www.arretsurimages.net/articles/fausse-journaliste-le-piege-du-film-omerta-sur-les-trans>

<sup>24</sup> «Entre féministes Terf et extrême droite, des passerelles idéologique», *Libération*, *ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.femelliste.com>

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Borrillo and Éric Fassin, eds., *Au-delà du PaCS. L’expertise familiale à l’épreuve de l’homosexualité*, PUF, Paris, 2001 (first edition: 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Interview of the film’s producer Muriel Meynard by journalist Clarisse Fabre: «*Petite Fille*: J’ose espérer que ce film aidera à changer le regard sur les enfants trans», *Le Monde*, November 24, 2022. [https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2020/11/24/petite-fille-j-ose-espérer-que-ce-film-aidera-a-changer-le-regard-sur-les-enfants-trans\\_6060890\\_3246.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2020/11/24/petite-fille-j-ose-espérer-que-ce-film-aidera-a-changer-le-regard-sur-les-enfants-trans_6060890_3246.html)

uneasy about this ‘political project’<sup>28</sup>: ‘Start a democratic debate on the subject? “I don’t see how there could be one”’, replied the producer. ‘In fact, in this documentary, divergent opinions are systematically presented as transphobic.’ As a consequence, this ‘emotional perspective blocks and stigmatizes any rational treatment of what is today a major societal issue’. Two arguments merge here: on the one hand, trans children are an issue that requires a political debate; on the other hand, the trouble with the documentary is that it has a political agenda. In this perspective, democratic rationality requires experts, not activists.

It was three months later, in March 2021, that Roudinesco decried an ‘epidemic’. But in fact, she was not the one who led the anti-trans movement; she was only echoing a discourse that had very recently spread like wildfire – in part in reaction against the documentary. Eliacheff (mentioned above) and Céline Masson, both psychoanalysts, launched a manifesto in February 2021, soon signed by hundreds, from all walks of life (including some of their colleagues), targeting ‘ideological discourses about children and teenagers’ and ‘the impact of medical practices on children diagnosed as “gender dysphoric”’. They immediately launched a website (if not an association) called *Observatoire de la Petite Sirène* (a name that mirrors *Mermaids*, the British charity and advocacy group for transgender youth, soon to be under fire after a tabloid investigation). A third of the manifesto was devoted to criticizing *Petite Fille* – both the documentary, for its bias and its potential influence, and what it seemed to reveal about medical practices. Eliacheff and Masson published in 2022 an essay on ‘the making of the transgender child’ that expands on the manifesto; the first of its four chapters is also devoted to this film.<sup>29</sup>

The manifesto relies heavily on English-language references, such as Littman’s study of ‘rapid-onset gender dysphoria’ – without mentioning the post-publication review and the revisions that followed. The book does, though, but still validates it, as methodological critiques are ascribed to activist pressure. It is also inspired by the British campaign against Tavistock’s *Gender Identity Development Service* (GIDS) in London (which will become the last chapter of Eliacheff and Masson’s book): a former patient, Keira Bell, who had taken puberty blockers at the age of sixteen, then medically transitioned and had a double mastectomy at twenty, later regretted and sued the clinic. The High Court ruled in December 2020 against Tavistock, judging in particular that, before the age of sixteen, it was doubtful that one could be competent for such decisions; but the manifesto does not mention the January 2021 appeal, that was to overturn the decision in September of the same year (while the website has not been updated, the 2022 book does discuss the new ruling, but only to minimize the judicial turnabout).

In fact, Eliacheff and Masson are not exactly ‘experts’ in this field. On their website, Eliacheff’s bio insists on her essays – on mothers and daughters (with sociologist Nathalie Heinich), criticizing contemporary ‘victimization’ or defending a ‘secular’ position against the Islamic veil. Masson is a professor in a psychology department; but her work focuses on the impact of the Shoah on familial memory, and her bio emphasizes her involvement in a research network on racism and antisemitism. Apart from trans issues, her other media interventions resonate with attacks on (so-called) ‘woke culture’ as she accuses the new antiracism that has developed on campuses of being racist. And it is worth noting that neither woman works with trans youths (which may not be such a bad thing after all).

Indeed, as is the case in other countries, the *real* experts, with an actual professional practice, are not heard in this polemic. ‘What troubles me is that these positions are not based on any clinical experience’, explains Jean Chambry, a pedo-psychiatrist who is the head of one of the three centers in charge of trans youths in France. ‘It’s really too bad to be so little

<sup>28</sup> Violaine Des Courières, «Pourquoi le documentaire *Petite Fille* sur une enfant transgenre recouvre un projet politique», *Marianne*, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020: <https://www.marianne.net/societe/sciences-et-bioethique/pourquoi-le-documentaire-petite-fille-sur-une-enfant-transgenre-recouvre-un-projet-politique>

<sup>29</sup> Caroline Eliacheff and Céline Masson, *La Fabrique de l’enfant transgenre*, L’Observatoire, Paris, 2022.



open to patients one doesn't follow.' In the same article by Rozenn Le Carboulec, his colleague from another center, Laëtitia Martinerie, also laments that these polemics 'are usually based on misconceptions and misunderstanding about trans identities. We keep our door open for these people so that we can explain to them how we work. And above all, we encourage them to meet and talk to these kids'.<sup>30</sup>

But Eliacheff and Masson rely on other sources, that replicate the bias of Littman's article – their main academic reference: parents, whose opposition to their kids' transition logically explains the transphobic conclusions that are drawn from their testimonies. Their website offers a link to *Ypomoni*, a parents' association that denounces the medical care of trans youths, sarcastically summarized thus: 'You don't feel good about yourself, so, maybe you were born in the wrong body?' Never mind that this formulation is outdated both in trans and in medical circles. 'More and more teenagers who experience disorders that go with their age, because of a mimetic atmosphere, or under someone's influence, or the pressure of social networks, ask to switch genders.' This is exactly Littman's argument about 'social contagion'. 'What are the precautions to be taken, and at what age does one have a right to mutilate a healthy body? No law limits these practices. There is no reflection to ensure that these demands for a transition are justified.' Clearly, this is a far cry from the legal and the medical reality.

But none of this has much incidence on the media reception of anti-trans discourse. In May 2021, three months after the manifesto, far-right magazine *Valeurs Actuelles* devoted its cover to 'The Transgender Madness'.<sup>31</sup> It set the tone for mainstream media discourse. As Habib published an essay on *La question trans*<sup>32</sup>, siding with novelist J.K. Rowling against philosopher Judith Butler, she was invited in September by archconservative philosopher Alain Finkielkraut on his weekly radio show on *France Culture*<sup>33</sup> to debate with a liberal foil, Serge Hefez<sup>34</sup>, and a week later published a long exchange in the right-wing magazine *L'Express* with sociologist Arnaud Alessandrin, a specialist of trans identities. As the journalist noted in her introduction, Habib's starting point: 'why so many trans persons?', is reminiscent of Roudinesco's 'epidemic'.<sup>35</sup>

In this context, Eliacheff and Masson continued their media campaign. The same magazine published four days later their open letter about children changing sex signed by 'about fifty shrinks (*psys*), doctors, and intellectuals denouncing "an ideological control of children's bodies" in the name of the emancipation of the "transgender child" [...] who claims not having been born "in the right body"'. According to them, 'what is happening in neighboring countries could quickly happen in France' (a threat that had surfaced during the summer against the imminent peril of 'cancel culture'). Among the signatories, lesbian TERFs Marie-Jo Bonnet and Christine Le Doaré, philosopher Elisabeth Badinter, a liberal feminist turned neoconservative critic of feminism, feminist historian Liliane Kandel, her ally in the name of 'laïcité' against the 'main enemy', Islam, academic critics of 'islamo-leftism' like Dominique Schnapper and of 'woke religion' like philosopher Jean-François

<sup>30</sup> Rozenn Le Carboulec, «Comment les mineurs trans sont pris en charge : face à la désinformation, des médecins racontent», Mediapart, April 4, 2022: <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/040422/comment-les-mineurs-trans-sont-pris-en-charge-face-la-desinformation-des-medecins-racontent>.

<sup>31</sup> *Valeurs actuelles*, May 27, 2021 : <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/clubvaleurs/societe/transgenre-aux-sources-dun-delire-societal>.

<sup>32</sup> Claude Habib, *La question trans*, Gallimard, Paris, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> «La question trans», Répliques, France Culture, September 9, 2021: <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/repliques/la-question-trans-2578295>.

<sup>34</sup> Serge Hefez, *Transitions. Réinventer le genre*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> «Transgenres, la question polémique», interview by Claire Chartier, *L'Express*, September 15, 2021 : [https://www.lexpress.fr/idees-et-debats/transgenres-la-question-polemique-l-entretien-croise-claude-habib-arnaud-alessandrin\\_2158077.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/idees-et-debats/transgenres-la-question-polemique-l-entretien-croise-claude-habib-arnaud-alessandrin_2158077.html).

Braunstein, as well as psychoanalysts long mobilized against gay marriage such as Christian Flavigny and Jean-Paul Winter.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, in-depth investigation by journalist Rozenn Le Carboulec for *Mediapart* confirms the numerous connections between the *Observatory* and the groups mobilized against same-sex marriage, quoting Constance Lefebvre, from the trans-inclusive feminist collective *Toutes Des Femmes*: “There is a very visible continuity from *La Manif Pour Tous* and movements against the “ideology of gender” in 2014-15 to the current movement that shares the same ideas. And actually, you realize that it’s partly the same people.”<sup>37</sup> The rhetoric turns out to be quite similar in all these moments and movements: protecting children.

But why so much passion? And why then? The campaign takes place in the context of the parliamentary debates that led (as seen earlier) to the January 30, 2022 law banning conversion therapies, including for trans persons. Of course, in order to refute accusations of transphobia, Eliacheff insists that ‘we are only interested in minors. We believe that current treatments do not take into account the changes in the group that defines itself as trans: a majority of teenage girls, with prior psychopathological disorders, enrolled by social networks. We believe that most of these teenagers, in reality, are not trans.’ Hefez retorts that ‘their starting point is that a teenager’s trans identification is pathological and should be rectified. It is a conversion therapy without the name – exactly the way of handling young gays thirty years ago.’<sup>38</sup> Indeed, both *Ypomoni* and the *Observatory of the Little Mermaid* have lobbied Parliament to limit the ban on conversion therapy to sexual orientation<sup>39</sup>, just like Moutot at the same time, though in vain.

They were more successful with the government. Of course, the ministry of National Education could not ignore any longer the existence of trans students. In December 2020, a couple of weeks after *Petite Fille* was shown on television, Fouad, a seventeen-year-old trans woman committed suicide after lycée Fénelon, her high school, refused to let her wear a skirt in class. Three months earlier, in September 2020, administrative transphobia had already caused Doona, a nineteen-year-old trans student at the University of Montpellier, to throw herself under a train. The ministry of National Education convened a working group, but was unhappy with the resulting document, considered ‘too militant’. A bowdlerized version was published in a September 2021 circular, leaving out a fundamental point: ‘self-determination’, which would allow students (not official documents, not even their parents) to choose how they want to be called, that is, the gender and first name that identify them.

This reaction was to be expected: the minister, Jean-Michel Blanquer, was then one of the harshest and most vocal critics of minority politics, in the name of universalism, as well as of so-called ‘islamo-leftism’, in the name of ‘laïcité’ – as if the fight against discriminations were synonymous with identity politics.<sup>40</sup> But Masson’s intervention certainly did play a role. This was facilitated by her connection, as the director of a network

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<sup>36</sup> «Changement de sexe chez les enfants: "Nous ne pouvons plus nous taire face à une grave dérive"», *L'Express* (online), September 19, 2021: [https://www.lexpress.fr/idees-et-debats/changement-de-sexe-chez-les-enfants-nous-ne-pouvons-plus-nous-taire-face-a-une-grave-derive\\_2158725.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/idees-et-debats/changement-de-sexe-chez-les-enfants-nous-ne-pouvons-plus-nous-taire-face-a-une-grave-derive_2158725.html)

<sup>37</sup> Rozenn Le Carboulec, «Mineurs trans: Des groupuscules conservateurs passent à l’offensive», *Mediapart*, May 17, 2022: <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/170522/mineurs-trans-des-groupuscules-conservateurs-passent-l-offensive>. See also the collective analysis by LGBT groups: “Qu’est-ce que la Petite Sirène?” <http://petitesirene.org/>

<sup>38</sup> Eve Szeftel, «Caroline Eliacheff, du genre tenace», *Libération*, 2023: [https://www.liberation.fr/portraits/caroline-eliacheff-du-genre-tenace-20230116\\_PHPNUMXOBFROQCVCV2RFEMJ6A/](https://www.liberation.fr/portraits/caroline-eliacheff-du-genre-tenace-20230116_PHPNUMXOBFROQCVCV2RFEMJ6A/)

<sup>39</sup> Rozenn Le Carboulec, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Cy Lecerc Maulpoix, «Élèves trans: la circulaire dont Blanquer ne voulait pas», *Mediapart*, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021 : <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/021121/eleves-trans-la-circulaire-dont-blanquer-ne-voulait-pas>

of Research on Racism and Antisemitism (RRA), with the interministerial committee on Racism, Antisemitism, and LGBTphobia (Dilcrah), whose scientific committee was presided by sociologist Smaïn Laacher, who also happened to be a member of the *Observatory's* own scientific committee. Following these revelations, Espineira ended up resigning from her position in Dilcrah's scientific committee. Due to the controversy, it was soon to be disbanded<sup>41</sup>, its last president Laacher and former president Schnapper notwithstanding.<sup>42</sup>

However, the context cannot be reduced to its French dimension. Indeed, Eliacheff and Masson have not only borrowed from English-language campaigns; they have also disseminated their own beyond national borders, in particular in French-speaking contexts. This internationalization is most visible in a new collective text (this time, on 'gender change', rather than 'sex change') published on July 7, 2022 in *Le Point*, another right-wing magazine, initiated by a group of French and Belgian professionals. This connection is reinforced by the publication, the same day, in *La Libre Belgique*, of a parallel text initiated by psychiatrist Jean-Pierre Lebrun and others, which is signed by two hundred practitioners from Belgium.<sup>43</sup> The French version comprises one hundred and forty signatures from eight countries. The text is meant for the media and addressed to them: 'We, scientists, doctors, and academics in the human and social sciences, call on public and private media in France, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and other European countries to accurately present serious studies and scientifically established facts concerning "gender change" for children in shows addressing a wide audience.'<sup>44</sup> The internationalization thus coincides with a shift from political lobbying to media interpellation.

Of course, some of these are best known for their ideological fight against 'islamo-leftism' and 'woke culture': in addition to those who signed in *L'Express* the previous year, one could name (among others) Yana Grinshpun, a linguist who tirelessly denounces gender-inclusive language, or François Rastier, another linguist who since he retired virulently attacks Critical Race Studies. In their book, while they never mention Moutot or Stern, Eliacheff and Masson cite the sociologist of art Nathalie Heinich, who denounces an 'ambient totalitarianism' (*'totalitarisme d'atmosphère'*) and the philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff, a specialist of racism who now devotes himself to attacks on antiracism presented as *'immigrationnisme'*.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, Roudinesco's phrase 'epidemic of transgender' was picked up by Heinich in the infamous Sorbonne conference against 'Deconstruction' in January 2022, introduced by the Minister of Education, Blanquer himself, in which Taguieff denounced 'an ethnocide of vast proportions' (thus avoiding the phrase preferred by White supremacists: 'Great Replacement').<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Rozenn Le Carboulec, «Mineurs trans: la délégation interministérielle contre la transphobie en pleine crise», *Mediapart*, June 20, 2022: <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/200622/mineurs-trans-la-delegation-interministerielle-contre-la-transphobie-en-pleine-crise>

<sup>42</sup> Smaïn Laacher and Dominique Schnapper, «Grâce à l'expertise des chercheurs, le conseil scientifique de la Dilcrah constituait une originalité», *Le Monde*, February 18, 2023: [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2023/02/18/grace-a-l-expertise-des-chercheurs-le-conseil-scientifique-de-la-dilcrah-constituait-une-originalite\\_6162389\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2023/02/18/grace-a-l-expertise-des-chercheurs-le-conseil-scientifique-de-la-dilcrah-constituait-une-originalite_6162389_3232.html)

<sup>43</sup> «Est-il justifié et souhaitable de conférer à des enfants et à des adolescents le droit, à partir de leur seul "ressenti", de changer de genre?», «Carte blanche», *La Libre Belgique*, July 7, 2022: <https://www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/2022/07/07/est-il-justifie-et-souhaitable-de-conferer-a-des-enfants-et-a-des-adolescents-le-droit-a-partir-de-leur-seul-ressenti-de-changer-de-genre-5Q7SQSPCIVGF5LTMCLJOYEKLBO/>

<sup>44</sup> «Changement de genre des mineurs: l'appel de personnalités aux médias», *Le Point*, July 7, 2022: [https://www.lepoint.fr/postillon/changement-de-genre-des-mineurs-l-appel-de-personnalites-aux-medias-07-07-2022-2482447\\_3961.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/postillon/changement-de-genre-des-mineurs-l-appel-de-personnalites-aux-medias-07-07-2022-2482447_3961.php)

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Eliacheff and Céline Masson, *op. cit.*, p. 91 and 88.

<sup>46</sup> Lucie Delaporte and Mathilde Goanec, «Un vrai-faux colloque à la Sorbonne pour mener le procès du "wokisme"», *Mediapart*, January 8, 2022: <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/080122/un-vrai-faux-colloque-la-sorbonne-pour-mener-le-proces-du-wokisme>

This politics of coalition is what explains, for example, the prize attributed to Eliacheff and Masson after the publication of their essay, on November 13, 2023, by the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, to reward works on feminine psychology. As journalist Rozenn Le Carboulec points out, no one (including themselves) can tell how their work is related to ‘feminine psychology’; but the link with two members of the Academy, philosophers Chantal Delsol and Rémi Brague, is easier to establish, as they had already signed anti-trans manifestoes written by the recipients. This venerable institution is not shy about its ideological positions, as it has opposed opening marriage to same-sex couples in 2013 and five years later opposed opening access to reproductive technologies for all women, beyond heterosexual couples.<sup>47</sup>

What the mobilization initiated by Eliacheff and Masson reveals is a fear that professionals will not control trans persons any longer. In 2019, the World Health Organization adopted the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of its International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11). It is significant that this was announced on May 17: ‘International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia commemorates the day in 1990 when the World Health Assembly stopped classifying homosexuality as a mental disorder.’ The new change (that came into effect in January 2022) removes trans identity from its list of diseases. ‘ICD-11 has redefined gender identity-related health, replacing outdated diagnostic categories like ICD-10’s “transsexualism” and “gender identity disorder of children” with “gender incongruence of adolescence and adulthood” and “gender incongruence of childhood”, respectively. Gender incongruence has been moved out of the “Mental and behavioral disorders” chapter and into the new “Conditions related to sexual health” chapter. This reflects current knowledge that trans-related and gender diverse identities are not conditions of mental ill-health, and that classifying them as such can cause enormous stigma.’<sup>48</sup> ‘Self-determination’, which is the legal translation of demedicalization, is thus the catalyst of a moral panic. Paradoxically, it seems to affect those who are not in charge of trans youths.

### **Conclusion: Intersectional transphobia**

TERF activism in France cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon. Various contexts, within and beyond the national borders, have to be taken into account to explain this reaction. First, it is against a new generation of inclusive feminists in the era of #MeToo. Second, it is against legal transformations, in particular the end of sterilization and the ban on conversion therapies, that reflect social evolutions in the wake of *Mariage Pour Tous* law. Third, it is against new medical classifications by the WHO that depathologize what used to be called ‘transsexualism’. But what is remarkable is that this reactionary panic among (former) feminists denouncing “an epidemic of transgender” in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic has gained a wide audience: never before had trans issues been so visible in French public debates. While of course the negative version has prevailed in the media, a more positive though less vocal one emerges in society. The polemic is clearly in reaction against this new visibility.

TERFs have benefited from a polemical convergence with self-proclaimed ‘experts’. While they usually do not sign together, and despite the fact that their social status is radically different (in terms of age, professional situation, public legitimacy), they objectively work for the same cause. This would not have been possible without the support of various media that have systematically published their texts, however repetitive they may be, but also without the political legitimization of figures from the government and the

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<sup>47</sup> Rozenn Le Carboulec, «Un prix polémique remis à l’Observatoire de la Petite Sirène», *Mediapart*, November 27, 2023: <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/271123/un-prix-polemique-remis-l-observatoire-de-la-petite-sirene>

<sup>48</sup> “Gender incongruence and transgender health in the ICD”, World Health Organization, 2023: <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/gender-incongruence-and-transgender-health-in-the-icd>

presidential majority, despite political gestures in the direction of trans rights. This is yet another example of the trademark ‘*en même temps*’ proudly proclaimed by President Emmanuel Macron: two contradictory moves ‘at the same time’.

Finally, as we have seen time and again, both TERFs and ‘experts’ have prospered in a context of ‘anti-woke’ polemics. Eliacheff and Masson’s invitation to talk about their book not only in Paris, Lille and Lyon, but also in Brussels and Geneva, has each time provoked opposition and sometimes virulent demonstrations by trans activists.<sup>49</sup> This hostile reaction has enabled anti-trans activists to join the chorus of voices condemning ‘cancel culture’ (though only when it originates from minorities). In the Catholic daily *La Croix*, against their opponents’ alleged intolerance, Eliacheff and Masson thus call for a ‘debate’ about trans lives. ‘Criticism is an integral part of debate; not lynching, which cancels the very possibility to speak, reminding us of forms of totalitarianism’.<sup>50</sup> The words ‘lynching’ and ‘totalitarianism’ resonate with contemporary attacks against the concepts of ‘gender’ and ‘race’ and those who use them, within and outside of academia. This Orwellian democratic claim makes it possible to ignore or deny their strong links with anti-democratic politics.<sup>51</sup>

In fact, one might argue that the resentment expressed in the epidemic of transphobia is not so specific: if the various strands of reactionary politics converge, it may be because all express a fear that, as the world changes under the pressure of minorities, their dominant positions based on sexual or racial privilege might be questioned. The sexual panic epitomized by the ‘epidemic of transgender’ can thus be approached as a synecdoche for a broader panic caused by the possibility of a loss of control of the world – of sex, race, nation, and more. The strong connections between the rhetoric against gender studies, homophobic and transphobic discourses, reveals how these reactionary positions are estranged from what they call ‘gender feminism’. Many signatories of the various texts have nothing to do with trans issues; but they are actively involved in campaigns against gender studies and gender-inclusive language (in the name of the Republic), as well as against the very word

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<sup>49</sup> At the University of Geneva, the uproar redoubled with the invitation of Éric Marty on April 30, 2022, less than three weeks after that Eliacheff and Masson, for his book: *Le sexe des modernes. Pensée du neutre et théorie du genre*, Seuil, Paris, 2021. See “A second lecture considered transphobic is blocked at the University of Geneva” (the lawsuit against the students was eventually dropped): <https://www.rts.ch/info/regions/geneve/13105173-une-nouvelle-conference-jugee-transphobe-bloquee-a-lunige-qui-porte-plainte.html>

Political scientist Antoine Idier has firmly criticized Marty’s essay on his blog:

<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/antoineidier/blog/170522/propos-du-sexe-des-modernes-et-d-un-probleme-plus-general-la-critique-de-gauche>.

Two weeks later, a second post elaborates his critique further:

<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/antoineidier/blog/300522/le-livre-homophobe-et-transphobe-de-marty-la-critique-culturelle-et-la-psychanalyse>.

Marty has responded with indignation on his own blog:

<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/eric-marty/blog/190522/reponse-antoine-idier>.

Idier denounces “‘left-wing’ critics”: “I wonder how *Mediapart*, *Libération*, and *Le Monde*, can unanimously praise such a reactionary, homophobic, transphobic, and racist book.” I would argue that this has to do with the intellectual status of the author. The book itself displays erudition that is radically different from the essays and manifestoes discussed here. Indeed, while Eliacheff and Masson quote him, Marty does not, nor does he mingle with these people: his signature does not appear in any of their texts. This is why I do not discuss his intervention. Roudinesco occupies an intermediate position as she can rely on her past work to preserve a form of intellectual legitimacy despite her media pronouncements. However, both contribute to what could be called an “ambience of transphobia.”

<sup>50</sup> Céline Masson and Caroline Eliacheff, *La Croix*, December 6, 2022 : « ontroverse sur les mineurs trans : « La critique fait partie du débat, mais pas le lynchage » <https://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Controverse-mineurs-trans-critique-fait-partie-debat-pas-lynchage-2022-12-06-1201245318>

<sup>51</sup> See Éric Fassin and Caroline Ibos, *La savante et le politique*, Flammarion, Paris, 2024 (forthcoming) ; and Éric Fassin, *State Anti-Intellectualism and the Politics of Gender & Race. Illiberal France and Beyond*, Central European University Press, Vienna, 2024 (forthcoming).

islamophobia, along with 'Islamists' or simply Muslims (in the name of *laïcité*), and against the very word 'race' and Critical Race Theory, or simply racial minorities (in the name of universalism).

This comes at a time when Marine Le Pen's National Rally has coopted all these terms to parade as the best defenders of the Republic in the name of secular universalism. This is why opposing 'universalist' feminists to 'intersectional' ones does not even begin to describe the situation. Not only are the former opposing universalist values such as liberty (in particular for trans persons) and equality (especially for Muslim women), but in fact, they are truly intersectional in that they articulate logics of race and gender (as well as class, though indirectly). At the same time, this intersectional transphobia is anything but feminist. If we are to keep the acronym TERF, based on recent French political history, it may thus be time to change what it stands for: Trans-Exclusionary Reactionary Femalists – or in French: *'femellistes'*.