

## A keyword analysis by Adri M.

*"For silence has never brought us anything of worth." - Audre Lorde*

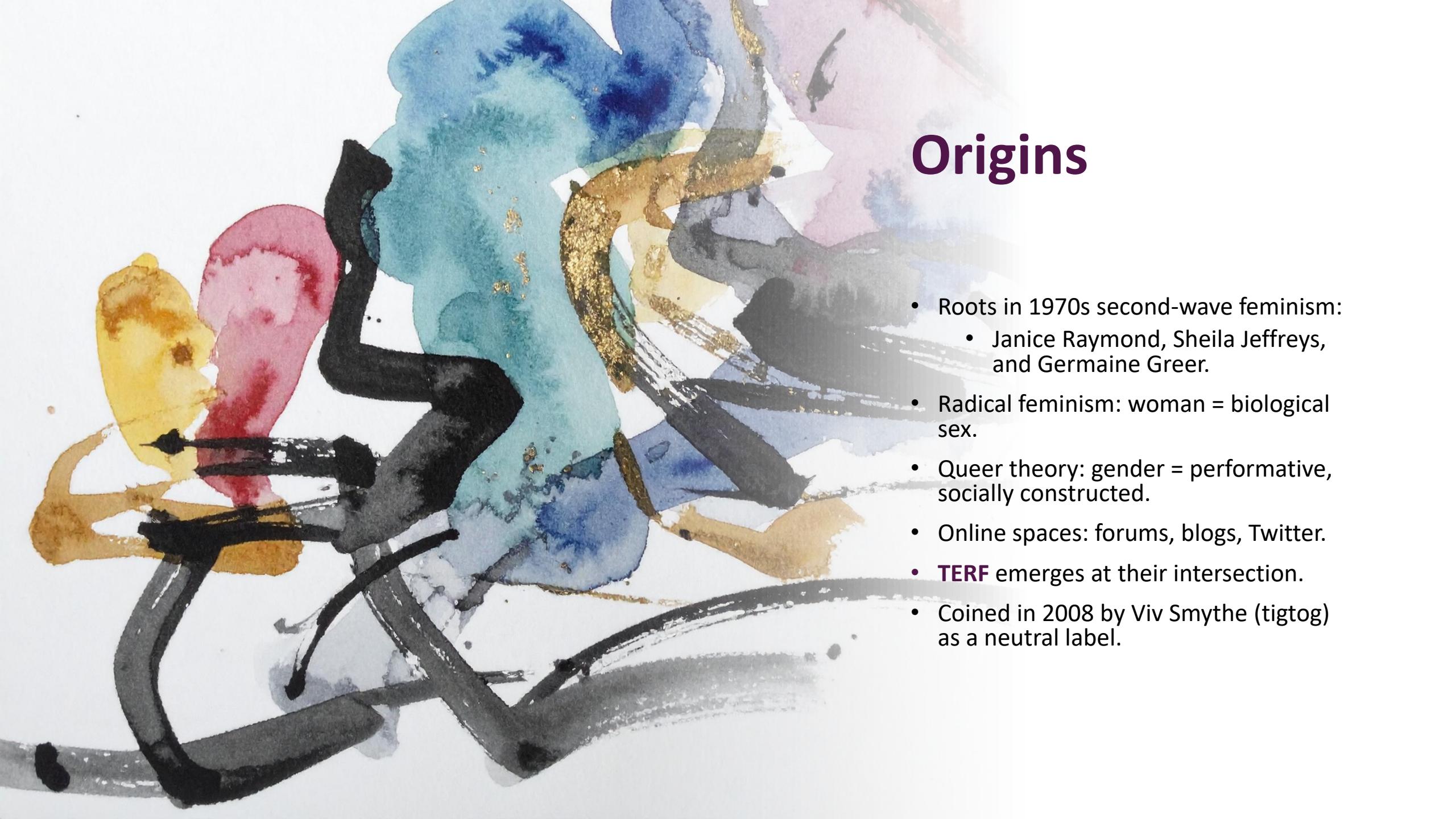
# Overview

- Meaning.
- Origins of TERF.
- Why it's a keyword.
- Development and circulation.
- Performative and political power.
- Contemporary meanings and debates.
- Conclusions.



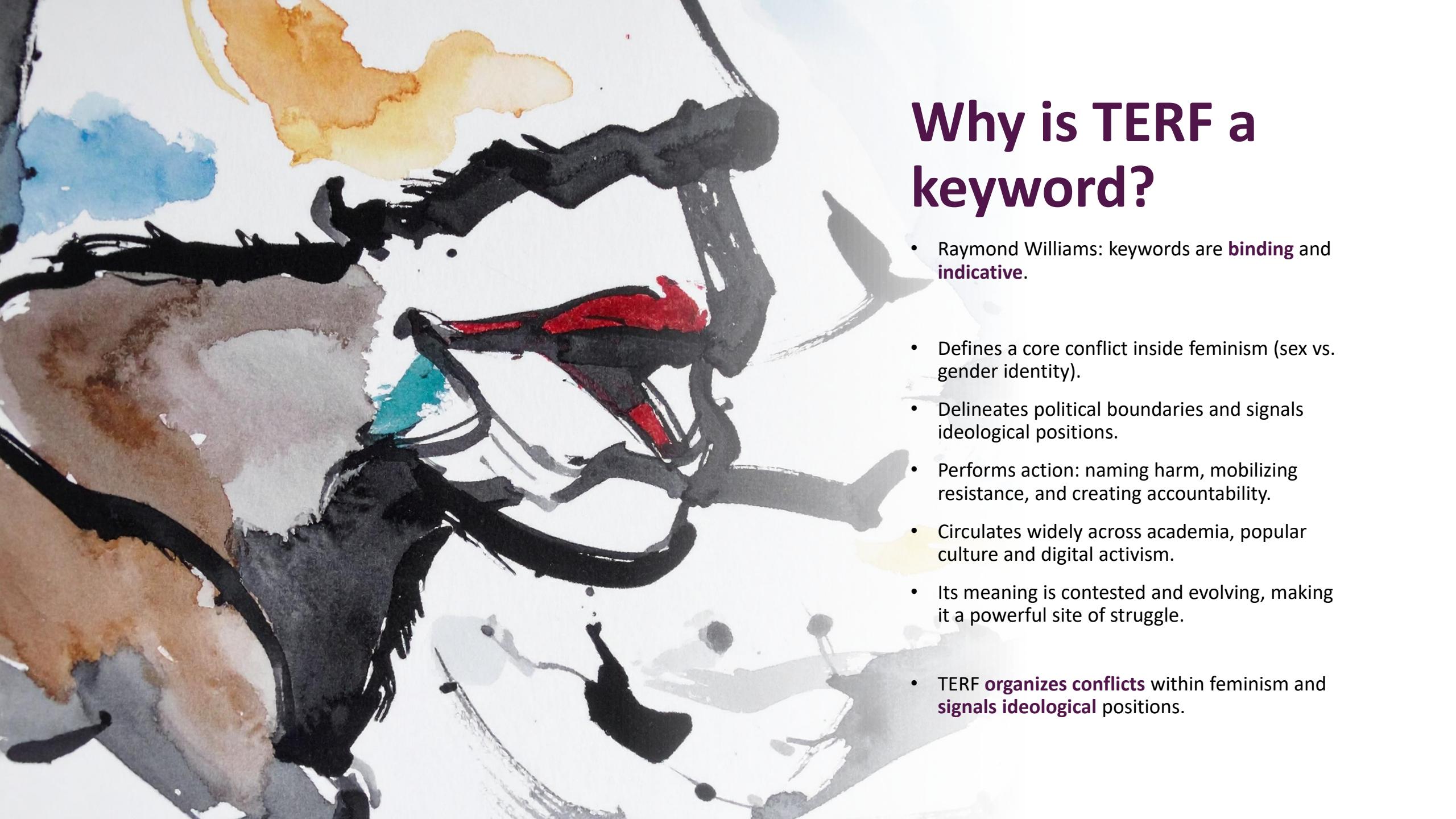
# What is TERF?

- **TERF: Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist.**
- Feminists who define womanhood exclusively by biological sex.
- Rejects inclusion of trans women in women's spaces, feminist movements, politics, healthcare, human and legal rights.



# Origins

- Roots in 1970s second-wave feminism:
  - Janice Raymond, Sheila Jeffreys, and Germaine Greer.
- Radical feminism: woman = biological sex.
- Queer theory: gender = performative, socially constructed.
- Online spaces: forums, blogs, Twitter.
- **TERF** emerges at their intersection.
- Coined in 2008 by Viv Smythe (*tigtog*) as a neutral label.



# Why is TERF a keyword?

- Raymond Williams: keywords are **binding** and **indicative**.
- Defines a core conflict inside feminism (sex vs. gender identity).
- Delineates political boundaries and signals ideological positions.
- Performs action: naming harm, mobilizing resistance, and creating accountability.
- Circulates widely across academia, popular culture and digital activism.
- Its meaning is contested and evolving, making it a powerful site of struggle.
- TERF **organizes conflicts** within feminism and **signals ideological** positions.

## How it spread

- Digital platforms amplify debates.
- Decentralized feminist activism.
- High-profile figures: J. K. Rowling, Germaine Greer, Kathleen Stock.
- Politics. Scape-goats.



## How it is different

- More precise than “gender-critical feminist” or “transphobe”.
- Born inside feminism, not imposed externally.
- Highlights structural harm, not just disagreement.

## How it performs

- Not just a label: it acts.
- Marks exclusionary ideology.
- Creates community defense.
- Mobilizes collective resistance.





## Changes with context

- **TERF** functions differently depending on the context:
  - Trans/queer communities: warning label.
  - Academia: analytic category.
  - Media/politics: resistance; slur.

# Critics' Arguments

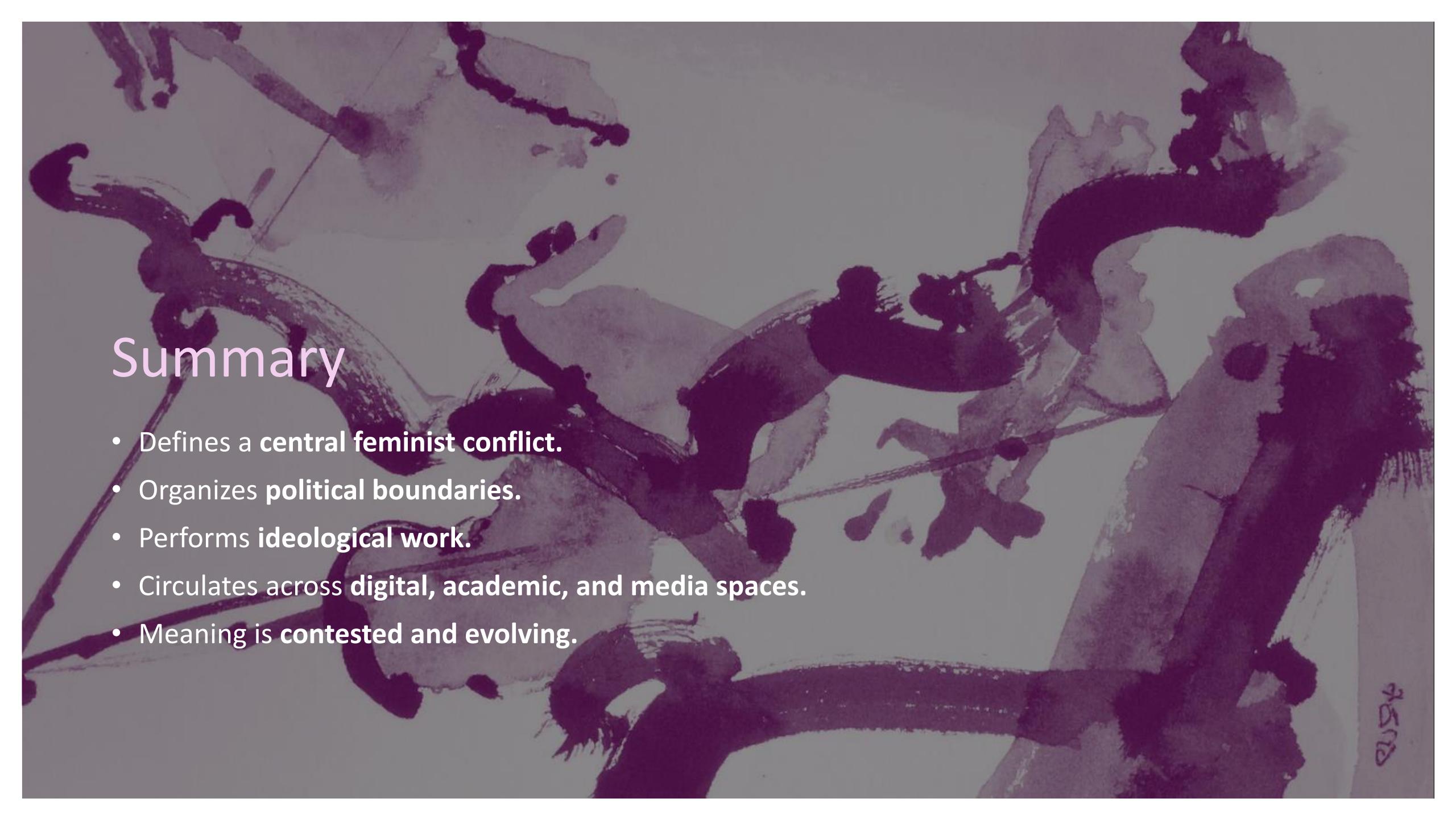
- Is derogatory.
- Silences debate.
- Oversimplifies philosophical disagreements (Lawford-Smith, Allen).





## Supporters' Arguments

- Supporters argue **TERF**:
  - Names structural harm.
  - Clarifies exclusion.
  - Creates accountability.

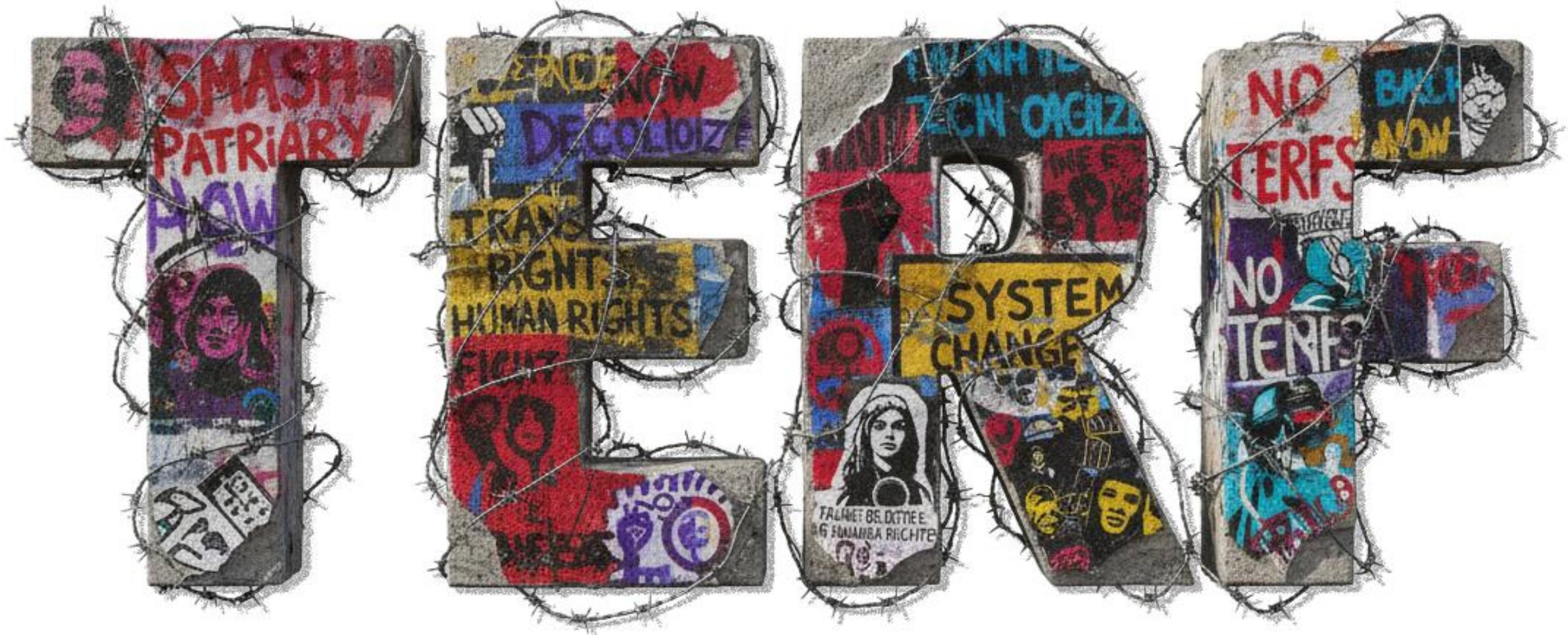


# Summary

- Defines a **central feminist conflict**.
- Organizes **political boundaries**.
- Performs **ideological work**.
- Circulates across **digital, academic, and media spaces**.
- Meaning is **contested and evolving**.

# Conclusion

- TERF has evolved from a descriptor into a powerful symbolic keyword that not only names a political struggle but actively shapes it. It shows how language can become a site of struggle.



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