

Far Right, Gender and Femonationalism

International Colloquium, University of Lausanne (March 2026)

Call for Papers

Introduction

Over the past two decades, an increasingly dense network of reactionary campaigns targeting “gender” has steadily spread across the globe. What once appeared as scattered, localized protests have now penetrated mainstream politics worldwide, actively shaping policy-making processes and reframing how societies talk about gender, sexuality, family, and human rights. In the meantime, far right and conservative movements have paradoxically begun appropriating feminist and LGBTI+ language to legitimize and advance their own political agendas. Indeed, actors from the far right increasingly mobilize claims of women’s rights, LGBTI+ freedoms, and gender equality—often instrumentally—in opposition to migrant populations, religious minorities, or perceived ideological threats.

As “gender” emerges as an increasingly contested political battleground, it has become crucial to examine precisely how far-right actors both use and simultaneously oppose the notion of “gender”. **The CRAPUL and CEG research centers at the University of Lausanne invite scholars to an international colloquium tentatively scheduled for mid-March 2026.** This event seeks to critically interrogate the relationship between far-right politics and gender through three thematic axes, a fourth axis focused on methodology, and a roundtable on current research in the field. The colloquium will feature a **keynote address by Kathleen Blee** (University of Pittsburgh), a leading voice in the study of the gendered dimensions of the far right.

Axis 1 – Anti-gender politics at the far-right: actors, arenas and scales of campaigns

National governments, regional alliances, and transnational networks are increasingly aligning against the concept of “gender” and associated progressive policies. From Russia and Hungary’s so-called “anti-LGBT propaganda” laws, to recent policy shifts in the US under a renewed Trump administration, anti-gender politics have globalized rapidly (Smrdelj and Kuhar 2025). These mobilizations are not confined to single arenas: they draw upon alliances between state actors, religious institutions, advocacy groups, mainstream and alternative media, and civil society organizations. Despite frequently relying on localized narratives, these campaigns operate transnationally (Holvikivi, Holzberg and Ojeda, 2024, Caiani and Tranfić 2024), disseminating strategically adaptable discourses across diverse geopolitical contexts (Paternotte et al. 2024). While scholarship on anti-gender politics has expanded significantly over the past decade (Korolczuk, Graff and Kantola 2025), several dimensions remain promising sites for further inquiry.

Firstly, more attention could be paid to the blurred boundaries and complex interactions between media actors, political parties, and civil society organizations within anti-gender politics. Much of the existing literature has tended to address these actors separately, whereas closer analysis of their interdependence can illuminate how they collaborate, compete, and shape each other’s goals, discourses and practices (Datta 2021, House, Corêa and Paternotte 2023, Paternotte et al. 2024, Mariani 2025, Laquière 2025).

Secondly, the interplay of online and offline anti-gender activism represents another field of inquiry. Existing studies often examine digital and street-level mobilizations in isolation, which can obscure

the dynamic interactions between these two arenas (Righetti 2021, Julliard 2022, Stinton 2024). Notable exceptions, such as Harsin's analysis of anti-sex education campaigns in France (2018) or Evolvi's work on the hypermediated communication of the World Congress of Families in Verona (2023), demonstrate the value of approaches that trace how digital strategies both draw from and reconfigure in-person mobilizations. Furthermore, the transnationalization of anti-gender politics is increasingly facilitated by digital anti-gender activism, allowing actors to share resources, frames and, and tactics across borders (McEwen 2023, Caiani and Tranfić 2024).

Building on this, digital spaces constitute one important channel—alongside networks of organizations, transnational events, and institutional collaborations—through which anti-gender actors operate across scales, helping link local campaigns to broader national and global arenas. A multi-scalar perspective therefore remains crucial. Anti-gender politics unfold simultaneously in local arenas, within national politics, and across transnational networks. Exploring how these scales intersect can help capture both the embeddedness of campaigns in specific contexts and their capacity to circulate and resonate globally (McEwen 2023, Paternotte et al. 2024, McEwen and Towns 2025).

This first thematic axis thus invites work that treats anti-gender politics not only as a reactive force, but as a strategically evolving and productive political force (Paternotte 2021). Contributions may address how various actors collaborate and compete, the continuities between online and offline repertoires, and the circulation of discourses and practices across scales. Concepts such as *multi-positionality* (Bereni and Revillard 2012), *movement-parties* (Caiani and Císař 2018, Minkeberg 2019, Lavizzari and Prearo 2019), *hybrid repertoires of contention* (Milan and Treré 2022), and *glocalization* (O'Sullivan and Krulišová 2020) may provide useful entry points. Rather than seeking closure, this axis opens a space to trace the ways anti-gender politics slip across divides, redraw boundaries, and reshape the ways to study the relationship between gender and far-right.

Axis 2 – Femonationalism and homonationalism: when the far right uses gender as a weapon

While anti-gender politics have become a defining feature of contemporary reactionary and far-right movements and parties, these same actors increasingly mobilize the language of gender equality and sexual rights. This ambivalent engagement—simultaneously opposing “gender ideology” while invoking the defense of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights—has become central to the legitimization strategies of nationalist projects. Often captured through the notions of femonationalism (Farris 2017) and homonationalism (Puar 2007), which respectively describe how feminist and gay rights rhetorics are used for nationalist ends, these dynamics stand at the core of the mainstreaming of the far right (Mondon and Winter 2020).

Far-right parties have increasingly presented themselves as defenders of women and gays against so-called patriarchal cultures (Köttig et al. 2017, Scrinzi 2024). By depicting Muslim populations as incompatible with gender and sexual rights while simultaneously framing Western societies as gender-equal, they have turned gender as a political weapon to advance exclusionary agendas. At the core of femonationalism lies the racialization of sexism (Calderaro 2023, Scrinzi 2024), whereby sexism and gender-based violence are externalized as problems imported by migrant and non-white men.

While scholarship has mostly focused on political parties in analyzing these dynamics, social movements—including a myriad of groups, collectives and organizations—actively contribute to femo- and homonationalism through street mobilizations, online activism and media interventions. Think tanks, policy institutes and intellectual organizations further consolidate these narratives by producing analyses and theories that frame women's and LGBTI+ rights in opposition to cultural differences.

Together, these actors provide the ideological and political resources that legitimize exclusionary nationalist projects under the guise of protecting women and sexual minorities. This axis invites contributions that address the variety of actors and modalities through which the far right engages with gender. While concepts such as *instrumentalization*, *co-optation* (de Jong and Kimm 2017) or *symbolic glue* (Kovats et al. 2015) have shed light on key strategic dimensions, there is a need to move beyond this lens to interrogate the ideological, political and organizational reconfigurations at play in far-right movements around gender. Contributions reflecting on analytical and theoretical tools to capture these phenomena as well as empirical accounts of their manifestations across different political, social and cultural contexts, are particularly welcome.

In addition, the growing visibility of women within far-right movements calls for renewed attention to how gender dynamics shape femonationalism. While women remain underrepresented numerically in most far-right movements, their influence has significantly grown. They now hold prominent positions not only as leaders of populist radical right parties (Geva 2020, Worth 2021) but also as active, high-profile participants in grassroots movements (Blee and Deutsch 2015, Pilkington 2019, Blee 2021) and online activism (Leidig, 2023). The emergence of new far-right women-only collectives (Della Sudda 2022), some of whom explicitly engage in the appropriation of feminist language and claims (Calderaro 2025), invites us to reconsider how gender dynamics shape femonationalism. Furthermore, electoral analyses reveal evolving patterns of female support for populist radical right parties (Spierings and Zaslove 2015), particularly in contexts like France where the radical right gender gap has closed, with women voting for these parties at similar rates to men (Mayer 2015). These developments raise important questions about the dynamics of circulation between electoral support, party membership, and grassroots activism: how do women move across these spaces, and what factors attract them not only to far-right voting but also to active participation in grassroots movements? This axis also invites proposals that explore how gender dynamics shape ideological repertoires, recruitment strategies, and collective identities within the far right.

Axis 3 – Movement and countermovement dynamics: contesting far-right gendered politics

In this context, how do feminist, LGBTI+, and antiracist movements interact with reactionary actors? Far from constituting separate and self-contained camps, these mobilizations are intertwined: they confront one another in parliaments, streets, and digital arenas, borrow each other's vocabularies and tactics, and continually reshape the broader field of gender politics. While the movement-countermovement framework has shed light on these antagonisms, it also risks reinforcing a binary that obscures the relational and co-constitutive character of these dynamics (Avanza 2018, Corredor 2019). This axis therefore invites proposals using a configurational approach of these contentious politics (Fillieule and Broqua 2020), interrogating not only how opposition unfolds, but also how it transforms the strategies, identities, and repertoires of all actors involved.

These entanglements manifest across multiple spaces. Digital platforms amplify antagonism by enabling the rapid circulation of discourses and practices, while street-level confrontations and public controversies, notably around abortion or sexual and affective education, demonstrate how opposition crystallizes in local contexts. Antagonism also reverberates internally within feminist and LGBTI+ organizations, where encounters with reactionary actors may provoke strategic innovation as well as new tensions. In this respect, ongoing debates on institutionalization and NGO-ization (Beck, Habed and Henninger 2023, Ana 2025) underscore how pressures of competition and legitimacy reshape the agendas and organizational forms of progressive movements. Human rights-oriented institutions and NGOs, such as Planned Parenthood or ILGA-Europe, are also at the

forefront of these struggles. As frequent targets of anti-gender campaigns, they have responded by consolidating coalitions and forging transnational alliances to resist nationalist appropriations of feminist and LGBTI+ rights (Ana 2024, Kiening and Blindon 2024, Peroni 2024). Examining these strategies sheds light on how solidarities are organized across scales, how resistance practices circulate, and how coalitions emerge in the face of reactionary politics. Similarly, reactionary movements, far from monolithic, are themselves confronted to internal divisions on how to advance their agenda and what issues to prioritize (Avanza 2018).

Conceptual frameworks such as *hegemonic competition*, *movement-counter movement interaction*, or *reactive politicization* provide valuable tools to grasp these dynamics. At the same time, attention to everyday forms of politicization is crucial, whether through the conservative appropriation of feminist concepts and practices, or through the creative responses crafted by progressive actors navigating increasingly antagonistic environments. This axis thus welcomes contributions that move beyond binary understandings to analyze how antagonisms generate new strategies, identities, and repertoires, and how these entanglements reshape contemporary struggles over gender.

Axis 4 – Doing fieldwork on gender and the far right: Methodological perspectives

This axis welcomes methodological contributions that address the practical, epistemological, and ethical challenges of researching the intersections between gender and the far right. Scholars in the field have long highlighted the complex dilemmas in engaging with actors who explicitly oppose gender equality or promote racist, exclusionary and hateful politics (Blee 2007, 2018, Ashe, Busher, Macklin and Winter, 2020). Issues of access and rapport-building (Damhuis and De Jonge 2022, Ellinas 2023) are compounded with the emotional work involved with studying such contentious objects (Hochschild 1983, Norocel 2025).

How can we account for the affective dimensions of conducting research on/with the far right, such as discomfort, hostility or detestation involved in sustained engagement with these actors, both offline and online? We particularly invite contributions that embrace an emic approach in investigating what Avanza (2008) calls “ugly movements”, borrowing Tarrow’s (1994) expression. Unlike external perspectives, taking seriously the actors’ own categories, worldviews and practices is associated with heightened emotional labor and the challenge of navigating contradictory feelings of empathy and repulsion. How to render these movements analytically intelligible while resisting simplification, caricature, or the risk of normalizing their exclusionary politics? This axis also welcomes proposals on what feminist epistemologies can bring to the study of these movements.

The rise of digital activism and transnational online networks (Fielietz and Thurston 2019) has opened new opportunities for observations and analysis, while at the same time raising new methodological and ethical concerns. Digital ethnography, computational tools, and access to large datasets raise questions related to platform governance, anonymization, and the handling of sensitive data. We welcome proposals on how these methods can enhance our analysis of such movements while addressing the ethical and practical issues they pose.

How to submit a proposal?

Proposals for papers should be sent by **30 October 2025** to charlene.calderaro@unil.ch and ugo_laquieze@unil.ch with the subject line “Proposal FRGF 2026”. Proposals of maximum 500 words must be written in English and accompanied by a short biographical sketch of the author(s), including e-mail address, institutional affiliation and main research interests. They should present the

research questions, the data and methodology, and the results. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by mid-November. Working papers of around 5000 words (maximum 7000 words) will be expected by 20 February 2026. The colloquium will be held over three days in mid-March 2026, at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. The exact dates will be announced in the notification of acceptance.

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