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Editorial: Facing contemporary antifeminism: a call for intersectionality

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[Facing contemporary antifeminism: a call for intersectionality](#)

Introduction

We live in a paradoxical political moment: feminist movements across the globe have achieved landmark legal and institutional advances over the past several decades, yet mobilizations against feminism and gender equality and justice are simultaneously intensifying, diversifying, and going transnational. Anti-gender campaigns led mostly but not exclusively by far-right populist parties, reactionary religious movements and online misogyny networks no longer operate at the political margins. They have entered parliaments and governments, shaped laws, and influenced public policy all over the world. The question confronting those interested in gender, social movements and political science is no longer whether antifeminism is a serious political force but how to analyse it with adequate complexity, and how feminist theory and practice should respond to it.

This Research Topic was conceived precisely out of that urgency. Its animating conviction is straightforward: antifeminism cannot be understood in single-axis terms. It is not merely a backlash against women's rights, nor simply a product of far-right extremism, nor reducible to toxic masculinity, though it implicates all three. Contemporary antifeminism is an ideologically intersectional phenomenon entangled with racism, nationalism, neocapitalism, religious orthodoxy, classism, ableism, and cis-heteronormativity in ways that both amplify its reach and obscure its workings. Meeting it requires analytical tools of comparable complexity. The seven articles gathered in this Research Topic make precisely that case, from multiple disciplinary perspectives and geographical contexts.

Antifeminism as an intersectional ideology

Goetz provides a reconceptualization of antifeminism itself as an “intersectional ideology” that is, an ideology whose power derives precisely from its entanglement with other systems of oppression. The author's hypothesis and theory article develops

this argument with rigor, examining German feminist debates in the wake of the mass sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/16. Drawing on Karin Stögner's concept of an "intersectionality of ideologies," Goetz demonstrates that the far-right instrumentalization of those events relied on a simultaneous racial and sexual logic: feminist critiques of sexualized violence were systematically displaced by a racialized narrative that constructed men of North African and Arab origin as uniquely dangerous. The result was a form of femonationalism and the appropriation of women's rights discourse in the service of anti-immigration racism, which could only be exposed through an intersectional analytical lens.

The insight at the heart of this analysis—that no right-wing critique of sexism can be found that is not simultaneously racialized—carries significant methodological implications. It means that studying antifeminism as a gendered phenomenon alone will systematically misrepresent it. The structures of racism, xenophobia, and colonial hierarchy are not external to antifeminist discourse but constitute its very logic. This demands that feminist scholars resist the temptation to analyze gender in isolation and commit to more productive work of intersectional analysis, even when it complicates straightforward political narratives.

Antifeminism across actors and regions

The original research by Roque et al. on women's mobilization and antifeminist discursive framings in Portugal's far right provides a close-grained analysis of how antifeminist discourse is constructed and deployed within a Southern European context where the far right has experienced a significant recent resurgence. Their work situates the Portuguese case within broader European trends while attending to its national specificities, including the complex legacies of the Estado Novo dictatorship and the forms of Catholic social conservatism that have historically shaped gender politics in Portugal. By centering women's mobilization within these actors, the study also resists the temptation to treat antifeminism as a purely masculine project, exploring the active roles women play in constructing and legitimizing antifeminist discursive frameworks, namely as political representatives with significant social media presence. This matters because women's participation can make antifeminist messages appear more palatable, moderate, or legitimate, even when those messages undermine gender equality. By reframing women's rights, security and freedom as being endangered by Islam and "gender ideology," women in the far right position themselves as the "true" defenders of women against misogynist migrants and policies that benefit trans people, while at the same time opposing feminist movements, gender equality policies, LGBTQIA+ rights and reproductive rights.

This Research Topic also shows that antifeminism must be studied across the full political spectrum and across diverse geographical settings and not only within explicitly conservative or far-right formations with anti-migration agendas. Such a limited focus would risk naturalizing the assumption that antifeminist sentiment is contained within identifiable reactionary movements

in the Global North, leaving unexamined both the subtler forms it takes in other spaces and its specific configurations in non-Western and postcolonial contexts.

One of the most pressing findings to emerge from this Research Topic concerns the presence of antifeminist ideas not in the obviously hostile spaces of far-right politics but in the educational institutions where the next generation of citizens and educators is being formed. The original research by Idoiaga-Mondragon et al. at the University of the Basque Country examines antifeminist ideologies among university students enrolled in education programs in Spain, a context in which significant feminist legal advances coexist with rising reactionary pushback, particularly among younger populations. The degree of endorsement varies across the narratives identified in the study, but their presence in a population of future educators who will shape the gender attitudes of children and adolescents makes the findings particularly concerning. Educators do not merely transmit knowledge; they model attitudes toward authority, difference, and social justice, and hold considerable power over younger students' developing worldviews. The article's call for robust feminist and intersectional content in teacher education programs is therefore both a curricular recommendation and a democratic imperative.

The opinion article by Babu and Joseph on antifeminism as moral governance in India extends this intersectional framework into a postcolonial democratic context, where caste hierarchies, majoritarian Hinduism, and heteropatriarchal norms fuse into an ideological apparatus that systematically erases Dalit and queer lifeworlds. Their postcolonial, subaltern-centered framework constitutes a decisive challenge to Eurocentric analyses that presuppose secular, individualistic frameworks and consequently fail to account for the structural roles of caste and sacralized gender regulation. In contemporary India, Babu and Joseph argue, antifeminism functions as the moral infrastructure through which normative citizenship is constructed and exclusion rendered legitimate rather than a peripheral backlash. These insights should prompt scholars working in other non-Western contexts to interrogate the limits of frameworks developed primarily in relation to Euro-American cases.

Feminist responses: solidarity and intersectional transformative practices

This Research Topic is not limited to mapping the terrain of contemporary antifeminism; it is equally committed to the issue of feminist responses. How do feminist movements, scholars, and activists build effective counter-strategies against an ecology of adversary that is ideologically flexible, transnationally coordinated, and capable of appropriating feminist language for reactionary ends?

The original research by Toktarbekova et al. on contemporary strategies of women activists in Central Asia maps feminist organizing in a region characterized by intersecting pressures from post-Soviet state structures, religious institutions, and globalization. In Kazakhstan and neighboring countries, women activists are developing creative hybrid strategies that combine digital organizing with local cultural knowledge, forging

intercultural alliances and navigating the complex interplay of tradition and modernization. Their experience underscores that feminist strategies cannot be imported wholesale from one context to another; they must be responsive to specific political economies, cultural histories, and religious landscapes. Their experience also shows that cross-regional solidarity and information-sharing remain vital political resources.

The conceptual analysis by [Moura](#) on feminist masculinities offers one important set of answers. Grounded in feminist care ethics, [Moura](#) theorizes feminist masculinities as forms of male identity and practice organized around care, vulnerability, accountability, and political commitment which constitute a counter-narrative to antifeminism and a practical political resource. The empirical analysis of four international initiatives demonstrates that such projects are most effective when genuinely embedded in broader feminist and intersectional agendas, linking gender transformation to racial equity, LGBTQIA+ rights, and structural change rather than confining themselves to individual behavioral shifts. The author suggests that the success of feminist masculinities as a political project depends on its refusal of the single-axis frame and its willingness to understand men's relationship to feminism as mediated by race, class, sexuality, and other structural positions. Feminist masculinities, [Moura](#) argues, represent both an ethical aspiration and a pragmatic basis for reimagining masculinity in ways that sustain equity, empathy, and care.

The opinion article by [Serra and Dickinson](#) is a particularly conceptually innovative contribution in this Topic. It situates antifeminism in relation to the contemporary far right's hostility toward autism and neurodivergence. Drawing on an intersectional framework, [Serra and Dickinson](#) argue that antifeminism is intrinsically intersectional since it attacks non-conformity at its core by calling for a racialized and able-bodied system that differentially disciplines those who fail to comply with norms of bodily and cognitive normativity. The far right's simultaneous glorification of certain neurological traits as masculine superpowers and their pathologization in others exposes a logic of selectivity that is only legible through a frame attending to race, gender, and disability together. Their article makes a compelling case for forging feminist solidarity with neurodiversity and crip activism movements, insisting that such alliances are not peripheral to feminist politics but constitutive of any genuinely intersectional feminist project.

Conclusions

The seven articles in this Research Topic make several interconnected contributions to the field. They establish empirically and theoretically that contemporary antifeminism cannot be understood through a single-axis lens, and that its political efficacy derives substantially from its ideological entanglement with racism, nationalism, colonialism, classism, ableism, and other systems of oppression. They do so across a range of disciplinary perspectives and article genres, from original empirical research to conceptual analysis, hypothesis and theory, and opinion. They also expand the

more common geographical scope of inquiry, engaging cases from Portugal, Germany, India, Spain, and Central Asia.

This Research Topic also illuminates the need for more comparative empirical work on how antifeminist movements operate across different political systems and cultural contexts, including greater attention to the Global South. It also needs more sustained engagement with the specific vulnerabilities of groups positioned at multiple intersections of marginalization: Indigenous women, queer and trans people of color, disabled women in contexts of structural poverty.

Facing contemporary antifeminism is a democratic necessity, and it requires the full resources of intersectional feminist analysis: its insistence on the mutual constitution of systems of oppression, its commitment to the perspectives of those most marginalized, and its refusal of analytical shortcuts that pursue clarity at the cost of distortion. Thus, identifying the forms of cross-movement solidarity that feminist resistance will require remains critical, and we hope this Research Topic contributes to the broader project of building feminist theory and practice adequate to the political moment we inhabit.

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