

The scandal of women's emancipation. Femonationalism, right-wing sexual politics, and antifeminism

Abstract

In the past decade, several publications in gender studies have been grappling with conservative and reactionary politics stating to defend women and sexual minorities against immigrants. Sara Farris' concept of femonationalism offers explanations to the paradox of far-right actors pretending to care about women and sexual minorities and some feminists making racist statements. Yet Farris' methodology as well as her arguments show important short fallings. In a close reading of Farris' 2017 book, this article refutes her hypothesis of a conversion of far-right, EU, neoliberal and feminist politics and lays out alternative perspectives in order to develop a better understanding of the ongoing phenomenon. The article deconstructs the false opposition of heterosexual familialist migrant and Muslim communities versus queerfriendly feminist Europeans. In presenting recent feminist studies, the article suggests to understand paradoxical far right sexual politics in their familialist, capitalist and colonialist contexts.

In her 2012 article published in the *History of the Present* journal, Sara Farris suggested the term femonationalism to describe a convergence she observed between feminism, far-right parties and EU politics in France, Italy and the Netherlands. The term was a success partly because it profited from discussions on homonationalism, a term coined by Jasbir Puar in 2007 (Farris 2012; Puar 2007). Its meaning appears to be self-evident: if homonationalism describes a politics of cultural superiority through tolerance towards homosexuals, femonationalism seems to do the same for women: promote cultural superiority of societies that claim to defend women's rights over those that don't. Many authors quoting Farris use the term femonationalism as a sort of homonationalism for women and feminist issues. And there actually are some parallels: by homonationalism, people criticize a specific form of homosexual politics they do not consider emancipatory; femonationalism applies the same criticism to feminist politics. Yet a close reading of Farris' text and her following book from 2017 shows the many differences between Puar's and Farris' approaches starting with their theoretical and methodological backgrounds. Puar's writings stem from a poststructuralist and deconstructivist background, her method comes from cultural studies, she is interested in arrangements and assemblages of systems of meaning. Farris, however, is inscribed in a neo-Marxist and economist background that is often opposed to deconstructivism and poststructuralism. Puar wants to understand the workings of symbolic and cultural systems whereas Farris puts the accent on the economy and deducts all other social relations from that.

This article points important short fallings of Farris' notion of femonationalism and suggests that for some of the phenomena described by it, intersectionality might be the more appropriate

analytical tool. *In the name of women's rights*, Farris' book that details her argument from the 2012 article, is composed of five chapters accompanied by an introduction that lays out the general argument of the book. Observing a “surprising intersection among nationalists, feminists, and neoliberals” (2017, 3) in the public politics of the three analyzed countries, Farris criticizes the absence of a more materialistic analysis that considers the political economy underlying this intersection. Her essay and her book aim at filling this void. In what she calls an intersection of feminism, neoliberalism, and nationalism, she sees an ideological formation or even a political convergence that, even though it might not always be conscious, serves concrete economic goals.

Farris' central thesis is that white European feminists channel Muslim and non-western migrant women into care work in order to liberate themselves from that type of work (2017, 15). Throughout the book, feminism is described as a homogenous entity that only recently would have split into fractions of which one is allying with far-right parties and the European Union. This does not match feminism's actual multiplicity and complexity in the past and the present.

Who saves brown women from whom?

In the first chapter, Farris describes how feminist rhetoric arrived in the far-right parties of the three countries she studied.¹ She gives examples of how far-right parties present migrant women, especially Muslim women, as victims of “their” men that they consider to be migrant and/or Muslim. Thereby they are implying that Islam would represent a threat for cultural and national liberties. Furthermore, Farris gives examples of women² in or close to these parties that hold racist statements and from that, Farris concludes that feminism would have allied with far-right parties on this topic (2017, 41). Farris' examples to substantiate her described feminist front composed of intellectuals, organizations, public figures and so-called “femocrats” defending racist anti-Islam politics (42) always comes back to the same two or three mediated figures like Elisabeth Badinter or Ayan Hirsi Ali that can hardly represent all of feminist politics or seen to form any kind of organized “front”. Farris does note that strong feminist coalitions have contested and countered racist discourses that pretend to protect or serve women (2017, 44). Yet the fact that media have given more echo to the rare racist voices inspires Farris to repeat this focus on the single racist figures overestimating them to be a front and thus contributing to invisibilize the existing strong anti-racist feminist voices and actions. Farris

¹ Front National in France, Lega Nord and Alleanza Nazionale in Italy, Partij voor de Vrijheid in the Netherlands.

² She does not show whether these women identify as feminist. For Farris being a woman seems to make one suspicious of feminism.

concludes that “feminism as an emancipatory project dedicated to women’s liberation (whether liberal, radical or leftist) has increasingly converged with non-emancipatory/Islamophobic and neoliberal political and economic agendas” (2017, 41), a generalization that even her own text contradicts and that cannot be sustained by empirical facts. All throughout the book, Farris makes “femocrats” responsible for pushing migrant/Muslim women into the care sector (for example 122, 123-24, 139), yet it remains unclear whether they identify as such or whether Farris labels them this way. Many times, she uses a paralleled wording of “feminists/femocrats” suggesting that both terms might be interchangeable (6, 7, 12, etc.). In Germany, “femocrat” is used by far-right discourses alongside other hateful creations like “feminazis” or “federasts” in order to vilify and denigrate feminism and LGBT politics.³

While Farris criticizes a “Western imaginary” of Muslim women as victims of Muslim male sexism, she, too, depicts migrant women and Muslims systematically as powerless victims of Western feminism and its supposed teleology of emancipation (2017, 9 and 140), a vision thus quite similar to the far-right discourse she criticizes and that omits all of Muslim migrant women’s action and self-organizing. She also washes away important divergences in feminist models and critiques of emancipation that have occurred in the past decades. These omissions give the impression that religious or veiled women cannot have political views that are antifeminist or conservative. Probably because of far-right’s heavy over-emphasizing on political Islamism, Farris chose to completely ignore its existence. Strapping migrant and Muslim women of all potential agency, it seems as if in Farris view, migrant and/or Muslim woman never struggle for personal freedom, individuality, freedom of choice in sexuality and reproduction, or life style. As opposed to that, I believe that women should be taken serious in their political agendas even if we don’t agree with them.

Farris emphasis on singular racist and conservative feminist figures omitting most of feminist’s critique of racism, but also the way in which she strips Muslim and migrant women of all agency opens the question whether this work should be seen as part of feminist research or rather be interpreted as an attack on feminism.

Populism, integration politics and “Western feminism”

In her second chapter, Farris states that femonationalism is not a populism (title of chapter 2) but would instead be based in economic interests. Her argument against populism serves to show that the phenomenon she wishes to point out is not a mere matter of rhetoric. In this

³ In Australia and the United States, this term is also used by the socialist feminists Hester and Zillah Eisenstein in order to attack feminist politics they consider to be too institutionalized.

chapter she also underlines the importance of nationalism in the rise of far-right politics in Europe. This might be the most valuable contribution of Farris' book. Feminism needs an audible critique of nationalism especially when governments of many countries legitimize their nationalist, racist and heterosexist politics with a supposed defense of women and sexual minorities. The actual politics practiced "in the name of women" often serve other interests, most of the time criminalizing immigrants, racially discriminated populations and the working class in depicting its men as a threat to women who need protection. Yet women don't need protection, they need violence to stop.

Farris critique of nationalism is nevertheless relativized by her third chapter in which she analyzes civic integration politics in the three countries that apply European Union directives concerning migrants. Farris criticizes a study by Christian Joppke that shows how integration programs in different European countries resemble each other to a degree that one might wonder whether these supposedly national cultures have been replaced by some sort of European culture (Joppke 2007). With this study Joppke criticizes neoliberal integration politics for their racism and their problematic constructions of national cultures. Yet, Farris accuses Joppke of stating that nationalism would lose its impact in European politics, even though the opposite is true, only that Joppke points out the contradictory ways in which nationalism and European politics interact. Instead of providing an in-depth analysis of European nationalisms, their networks and contradictions, Farris sometimes jumps to quick conclusions, for example when she states that the French far-right party *Front national*⁴ would not be nationalist but "westocentric" (2017, 54). Yet this statement contradicts all existing research on that political party (Crépon, Dézé, and Mayer 2015) that see nationalism as a core element of its ideology. It even holds nationalism in its name!

Farris' empirical basis for her central argument of feminists involvement in nationalist politics and racist assignation of migrant women to care work is weak: In the Netherlands, all examples Farris gives for femonationalism are taken from far-right men and women. In France, Farris admits that most (unfortunately not all) feminists are criticizing these politics, yet she insists on the fact that Blandine Kriegel⁵ who did promote racist politics (supposedly in order to defend secularism) is a woman. Is it enough to be a woman to be suspected of feminism? For Italy, Farris refers to a project named Crisalidis that was put into place by an organization called

⁴ After Marine Le Pen's failure at the 2017 presidential elections, the party was renamed *Rassemblement national*, yet as Farris' book was published before that and refers to an earlier historical period, I also stick to this name in this article.

⁵ Kriegel is a philosophy professor at Nanterre University that became more conservative with age. Her work focuses on political philosophy and democracy, not on feminism.

Nosotras (2017, 129). It is an organization of migrant and Italian women that Farris accuses of advising migrant women to look for work in the care sector, yet the organization is not contextualized inside Italian feminism. Is it exemplary for it or does it rather contradict most of Italian feminism?

In her forth chapter, Farris criticizes “Western feminism” for its emancipation norm that would be centered around wage work and therefore be based on the life realities of white bourgeois women for whom economic independence means independence from their husbands. Farris first states that the majority of bourgeois, “middle class”, and even working-class women would have become housewives after World War II (2017, 133). Later on, she acknowledges that at least in France, women have always represented a large part of the wage work force (135), an information she conceals when she discusses a supposed massive entry of white French, Italian and Dutch women in the labor market at the beginning of the new millennium. Farris makes this massive entry of women on the labor marked responsible for the lack of care workers in households that therefore would have been replaced with migrant women.

Studies by sociologist Margaret Maruani and other feminist work sociologists have shown that women’s participation in the wage work force has indeed increased since the 1960s and more rapidly in the 1980s. Yet there has not been a rise at the beginning of the millennium as Farris states. To the contrary, Maruani who bases her studies on the statistics of the French INSEE sees the peak to be reached by the early 1990s (Maruani 2006, 9). Furthermore, there are important differences between European countries, especially between northern and southern European countries that Farris does not at all address in spite of the fact that her study is affected by these disparities. In northern countries like Germany or the Netherlands, women have mostly been working part time, while southern women of Italy or Spain for instance, but also in France until the end of the 1980s worked full time.⁶ Maruani thus identifies a general tendency in France towards part-time work for women. For her, part-time work “has become the emblematic figure of the sexual division of the labor market” (Maruani 2006, 102).

In her earlier studies on the growth of women’s participation in the wage work force since the 1960s, Maruani was researching reasons for this growth. Why did it happen specifically at that time and why are the modalities of that growth so different in different European countries (Maruani 1996, 117)? After ruling out numerous hypothesis that would situate the causes in

⁶ This leads to artificially low numbers of women’s participation in people receiving unemployed money. Because Northern European women mostly worked part time, they do not earn rights to unemployed money and disappear from unemployed statistics. Southern European women to the contrary working full time are therefore also represented in the populations receiving unemployed money.

demography, fertility or family structures, Maruani concludes that besides differences regarding wage work sectors, the actual cause of women's massive integration in wage work in all European countries that she studied is education (1996, 125). This key factor needs of course also to be considered in the context of local infrastructure, availability of public child care services, maternity leave politics etc.

Who cares?

Another problem with Farris' argument stems from her definition of care work. Her use of the word seems to bare any involvement with the rich and complex feminist literature on that topic.⁷ Feminist scholars do not agree on what activities (paid or unpaid) count as care work. For Farris, only care and cleaning work in households qualifies for that matter. Yet many feminist researchers also count wage work in hospitals, ambulant care services, elderly care, school care and kindergartens, office cleansing, cleaning of public spaces, train stations, hotels or sex work as care work. When it comes to activities that have formerly been accomplished by unpaid women, one might also want to add the fast-food industry, an expanding sector that does not only prepare and serve cheap food but also delivers it massively even to people that are not affected by reduced mobility. Between a large notion of care work and the very limited one Farris uses, there are of course many shades and nuances and all of these definitions express political premises. Including fast-food (delivery) into care work, for example, would contradict Farris' thesis that men cannot do care work, because many migrant men are actually working, often undeclared and under terrible conditions, in this sector.

While Farris notes that European men have not accepted to participate in unpaid domestic work when European women left this sector for paid work, she nevertheless omits that these men, too, profit from racialized care work (Joseph 2017). Therefore, racially discriminated female (and I would add also male) care workers are not only exploited by white women that take most of the public blaming and shaming for making their emancipation "on the backs of their sisters". White men are rarely blamed for profiting from racialized care work. Also, not all white women profit from racialized care work, working class women are themselves working in the paid care sector rather than hiring racially discriminated care workers at their homes:

⁷ It is impossible to include an extensive bibliography on feminist works on care here and the debates had local specificities in the three countries Farris discusses. In France, for instance, materialist feminists strongly opposed feminist research on care in arguing that it would wrongfully promote feminine values or be too American to be translated to the French context. Nevertheless, a particularly rich field of feminist research on care developed in France. At least the important classics by Joan Tronto (2015, 1993), Eva Feder Kittay (Kittay and Szántó 2003) or Arlie Hochschild (2003) should have been mentioned by Farris yet are absent from her book. Her analysis of racism in care work could have profited from works like the one by Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2010).

Rather than “stealing jobs,” “clashing culturally” and “parasitizing” on welfare provision, these women are in fact the maids who help maintain the well-being of western European families and individuals. They are the providers of jobs and welfare: they are those who, by helping western European women to undo gender by substituting for them in the household, allow these “national” women to become workers in the “productive” labor market (Farris 2017, 165).

In the fourth chapter, Farris turns for the first time to some feminist studies though her choice might seem surprising: She starts with Olympe de Gouge and Mary Wollstonecraft and then immediately jumps to Elisabeth Badinter as if the women’s liberation movements of the 1970s had not happened or were well represented by this one person. Farris only refers to feminism and the women’s liberation movements in order to criticize their lacks and failings, not once does she see any positive impact coming from them. Instead, she states that the “feminist and femocratic convergence with anti-Islam agendas is not limited to rhetoric” (2017, 116). Before presenting what she calls a genealogy of feminist’s productivist ethics, she claims that migrant women would have a much harder time finding jobs in Europe than migrant men even though they often have higher qualifications (127). This statement contradicts her initial argument that men were actually discouraged from migrating while women were welcomed as long as they accept to work in the care sector (14-15). Because Farris has no concept of the sexual division of labor, she makes islamophobia solely responsible for pushing migrant women into the care sector and even accuses “western European feminists” of devaluing social reproduction (15). Farris states that women would have been less affected by the economic crisis of 2008 than men (136). Yet while the numbers she refers to do indeed show that during the crisis men’s wages went down by one percent while women’s wages remained stable, they were still inferior to men’s wages and most probably stagnated also because they are already at the lowest level possible. Or as Maruani puts it: “There are more working poor in France than there are people receiving unemployed money [...] Underemployment and working poverty massively concern women.” (Maruani 2006, 101). Farris accuses feminists of leaving their unpaid work places in their homes:

the work these women’s organizations and democrats ask migrant women to undertake is precisely the work from which western European feminists wanted to escape: namely, social reproductive labor (Farris 2017, 137).

Farris makes of paid work a political dogma that simply does not exist in feminist theory. It is true that journalist Betty Friedan promotes such a view (Friedan 1963), but she can hardly be seen to represent all of feminist theory and certainly not feminist research. Feminism does not acclaim paid work, but most of it does promote economic independence which is not the same

thing. Farris accuses feminists of having contributed to devaluing care work in refusing to do it for free. Yet revaluing and claiming (better) wages for care work has been at the heart of feminist politics for the longest time, or in the words of sociologist Kathrin Schrader: “Feminists have always tried to make care work visible as work, to value it in aiming at obtaining wages for it.” (Künkel and Schrader 2019, 10) All the “wages for housework” campaign –that Farris completely ignores– was based on that premise.⁸ How could Farris possibly miss this crucial point? Why does she dismiss large parts of feminist theory yet claims to speak about feminist theory and politics?

In anticipating criticism, Farris explains that the convergences she describes between the European Union, feminism and far-right political parties would not suggest they were identical. She rather wants to point out elective affinities between them:

The understanding of the convergence of feminism and neoliberalism on economic integration policies for migrant women—that is, one crucial facet of femonationalism—in terms of a performative contradiction enables us to advance a radical critique that shows the negative consequences of these policies for gender justice in general (2017, 144).

Insisting on these supposed convergences, Farris does not at all detail the important differences between these very different political actors. In her attempt of saving racially discriminated women from racially privileged women, Farris produces problematic categories that trap entire populations into a victim position without caring about their actual needs, analysis or points of view.

In her fifth and last chapter, Farris discusses the possibility of considering migrant women in Marxist terms as a reserve army of labor. For Marx, the reserve labor army was part of a system that puts pressure on employed workers (so they would not complain too much) and simultaneously allowed for flexibility in order to adapt to the recurrent crisis of capitalism. In this context, Farris positively refers to the Bielefeld school studies (a German materialist feminist tendency, 167) while presenting a thesis that goes completely against their approach. Whereas the materialist feminists of the Bielefeld school insisted on the contribution of housework to the surplus production in capitalism even though housework cannot be considered to be productive in a narrow sense of that term, Farris instead aligns with classical Marxism in denying any contribution of housework to surplus value at all (2017, 172). If one understands surplus value with Marx as the fringe the capitalist makes in paying the worker less than the

⁸ It should be conceded that this campaign was not equally strong in all the countries Farris studies.

value he produces, one can –this time without Marx– understand how care work affects surplus value: the salary is a political value that is negotiated between the workers and the capitalists with the first structurally pushing towards a raise and the latter pushing to lower the salary in order to increase his profit. The salary serves to reproduce the worker with housing, food, health, clothes but also the production of new workers. If the worker has a wife (and a mother, a grand-mother, a sister, a neighbor, a cousin or even children) that do(es) this work without being paid, this reproduction will cost less than if several workers (cleaners, babysitters, cooks, caretakers, delivery workers, sex workers etc.) would do this work on a salary basis. The unpaid care workers often have another shift of paid work creating the famous double day that feminists have been criticizing. The fact that care work today is more often done on a salary basis than this has been the case in the past and that unpaid care and housework has slightly diminished⁹ makes European wages more expensive (even though important disparities between different European countries persist). Capital has been the big winner of the so-called feminization of labor in the sense that it has initially promoted the wage difference between men and women with the argument that men gained a so-called family wage that unpaid women also profited from. Yet women never received this family wage supporting another person or taking care of them. If historically the family wage was supposed to cover the reproduction of an entire family, the end of this model should have logically led to a reduction of work time making unpaid reproduction possible for everyone. Another solution could have been to double everyone's wages in order to decently pay people for the necessary reproductive work. Any which way, a fair and equal division of care work worldwide should be the ultimate goal.

The scandal of women's emancipation

The existing uses of femonationalism have little to do with Farris' definition of femonationalism even when it is referred to. The book seems to be much more often quoted than it is read. Consequently, the term is more often used to describe the hypocrisy of far-right actors pretending to defend women while actually grasping for legitimacy for illegitimate racist politics than to describe a convergence between feminism, the EU and far-right parties.

This criticism is necessary because nationalism animates hateful and exclusionary politics. And the critique of political economy is important to feminism because sexism has an important economic dimension. Unfortunately, Farris chose to construct an artificial opposition between feminist politics on the one side and antiracist and anticapitalistic politics on the other even

⁹ This tendency cannot be stated definitely considering that ongoing social budget cuts push women back into poorly or unpaid care work in several European countries.

though for large parts of feminism they need to go together because most women are suffering from all three relations. Yet Farris does not use the term intersectionality even though it could have been helpful for her study. She only uses the word intersect or intersecting in referring to the convergence she sees between the European Union, far-right parties, feminism and neoliberalism. Yet an intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) informed perspective allows to criticize those factions of radical and materialist feminism that make of sexism the most important social relation from which all the others are deducted. Instead of bringing together feminist gender theory and the critique of political economy, Farris enlarges the already existing gap between them.¹⁰

Farris' critique of femonationalism is based on the scandal of the white woman who no longer wants to do the housework for free. This neoconservative discourse is even promoted by those women who actually profit from feminist struggles like Marine Le Pen whose party clearly does not promote Le Pen's life style (Scrinzi 2017). Yet oppression and exploitation of women by women need to be understood in their intersectionality and on all the different social levels it is happening. The same can be said for resistance to this oppression. The solution is neither moral, nor individual but requires the fundamental reorganization of society and its economy. It requires another division of labor and resources that block exploitation and bring justice. Large parts of feminist research are working for this goal. Farris' Manichean vision recalls the feminist sex wars and its division between good and bad girls.¹¹

Behind feminist debates and the Right Wing's focus on sexuality, we think are social and political changes wrought by capitalist transformations and the women's movement during the 19th and 20th centuries, most notably the breakdown in the traditional bargain women made, and were forced to make, with men: if women were 'good' (sexually circumspect), men would protect them; if they were 'bad,' men would violate and punish them (Vance 1982, 38).

Migrant women that Farris imagines to be heterosexual, family-oriented, as mothers dedicated to their families and communities deserve her solidarity whereas women (migrant or not) that leave the households, seek economic independence from men, out there for pleasure and fun, do not deserve the same solidarity. However, the bourgeois heterosexual family is itself a

¹⁰ This lack of knowledge concerning feminist theory is also characteristic of other studies on gender and the far right. Sara Garabagnoli seems to ignore for example that materialist feminists in France have been strongly opposed to gender studies since the late 1980s until today. Yet surprisingly Garabagnoli refers to this theoretical tradition in order to criticize so-called "anti-gender" politics. Cf. (Garabagnoli and Prearo 2017)

¹¹ It is a US feminist debate in the early 1980s about lesbian subcultures, pornography and the place of sexuality in feminist theory.

colonialist, capitalist and racist institution as Cathy Cohen and Paul Gilroy have pointed out (Cohen, 1997; Gilroy 1993, 85).

I claim that it is crucial to not only focus on convergences but to also look at the actual differences between the political projects of the actors Farris analyzes. Considering the actual political projects promoted by each actor, the important differences between feminism and far-right parties like the former *Front national* (FN) are striking. The Front national for example is known for their Eurosceptic politics (Reungoat 2015) even though recently their position on the EU has been complexified, therefore claiming their alliance with EU politics comes as a surprise and is not sufficiently documented in the book. As for their supposed alliance with feminism, one can point out that in none of the communes where FN is the ruling party have they ever done anything in favor of women's rights, women's lives or those of LGBTQ populations. Therefore, their rhetoric of defending women can be called hypocrite or opportunistic. Every single time FN politicians address women or LGBTQ populations it is in order to blame what they call Islamism and what most of the time actually means Muslims, Islam and migrants.¹² The only political measure ever proposed by FN supposedly "for women" or "for homosexuals" is the deportation of migrants and increasing the policing of national borders. There is no feminism in the *Front national* party. As Francesca Srinzi observed for France, and the activist research collective Fe.In for Germany, the increased presence and visibility of women, gays and lesbians in far-right parties and organizations should not wrongfully be taken for an expression of far-right feminism. The only reason these women, gays and lesbians receive attention is to deflect from these party's actual politics. German lesbian AfD party leader Alice Weidel helps to shut down voices that criticize AfD party program's homophobia. Muslim AfD party member Leyla Bilge regularly makes performances where she rips off a burqa on stage under which she is wearing a mini skirt in German flag colors (Sanders et al. 2019, 181). This does not make AfD an antiracist party, on the contrary, it helps to deflect from their racist party program. The group of "Jews in the AfD" helps to deflect from the party's actual antisemitism (Sanders et al. 2019, 188). This political strategy needs to be understood as a way of gaining legitimacy for illegitimate politics. The far right is very conscious of their own strategy and in France has termed it "undemonizing", a successful political strategy of mainstream their hateful positions in society and become eligible for larger

¹² In Marine Le Pen's political program that is called the 144 points for her presidential campaign of 2017, the only time she addresses women is in order to alert against Islamism.

parts of the voters (Dézé 2015). The far right tries to profit from feminism's legitimacy and success. This does not make them feminist.

The situation is different for the feminists accused by Farris of converging with far-right parties and the EU. The overquoted examples of Elisabeth Badinter and Ayan Hirsi Ali cannot be equated with FN politics even though some of their statements qualify as racist. Badinter has been an activist in the MLF, the French Women's liberation movement and worked to better women's situation. Some consider that she tries to impose her vision of women's emancipation on all women which results in a form of emancipatory norm that is based on a white bourgeois model. Others have criticized her for being too optimistic about women's situation and gender equality in France (Delphy 2003). Badinter shares this approach with other personalities like Sylvia Agacinski, Mona Ozouf, Catherine Louveau, Françoise Picq in France and Alice Schwarzer in Germany most of which see themselves as feminists, have promoted women's rights and tried to better women's situation. Even though some of the racist statements match with the far right, this makes a huge difference with FN that are not feminist at all and have never done anything for women at all. It needs to be considered that they are but one tendency of feminism and conservative and racist tendencies have always existed in feminism. Far-right, nationalist, colonialist, and racist politics have very often in history tried to legitimate their hate and crimes in presenting it as a protection of women, for example the lynching of Black men in the US (Wells 1892). Many conservative and right-wing women claimed to be feminist like eugenicist Margaret Sanger, the temperance movement (Walkowitz 1980) or *völkisch* fascist "feminists" in Germany like Sophie Rogge-Börner (Meyer 2014).

These tendencies have always been struggling with the much stronger leftist and emancipatory tendencies in feminism. Those feminists are often closer to deconstructivist and queer tendencies in feminism, the exact tendencies Badinter has openly attacked in the early 2000s (Badinter 2003). Like LMPT, Badinter also criticized radical feminism. Yet the mere fact that she needed to write this book also shows that deconstructivist, queer and antiracist feminisms are strong in France, and the same is true for other countries.

The last actor of Farris' big conversion theory is the European Union, a gigantic apparatus with a multitude of institutions, political fractions and lobbies that are most of the time dominated by the views of German and French capital. The EU *Gender Equality Strategy* and open declaration of defending sexual minorities rights converge with some feminists and LGBTQ agendas and some feminist and LGBTQ organizations have actively been lobbying at the EU level in order to pressurize homophobic and sexist governments. Whether this is a legitimate

form of politics is a complex and ongoing debate in feminism and LGBTQ politics that is lead under the key word “institutionalization”. Feminist and LGBTQ activists have institutionalized on different levels in different countries and local communes. Some of the people involved in these politics consider themselves as being part of a project to change the heterosexist common sense. Yet good ends do not justify all means and EU *Gender Equality Strategy* is explicitly part of an EU international relations and imperialistic economic politics. It is a complex discussion that is completely lacking from Farris’ book. Considering that the officially promoted European human values have recently been replaced with an agenda defending a so-called European life style that serves to justify chasing, mistreating and killing refugees in the Mediterranean, the Alps, the Sahara, the Balkans (Iveković 2016) and at the Belarussian border, one can understand Farris will to criticize. Yet sexual politics have played a paradoxical role European politics. Far-right organizations in several European countries such as the PIS in Poland or Victor Orban in Hungary have presented the EU promotion of women’s and LGBT rights as a form of neocolonialism and fear to be replaced by Muslim migrants. This strategy has proven successful in some contexts to promote nationalist and familialist ideologies. These developments show the paradoxical character of far-right sexual politics and question Farris’ analysis of EU sexual and gender politics.

Sexual modernity as a (neo)colonial discourse vs precolonial authenticity

The concepts of homo- and femonationalism are attempts to understand why far-right organizations and parties claim to defend women and sexual minorities. It is also an attempt to explain why there are now some more women, gays and lesbians in far-right organizations and parties as well as among their voters (Brouard 2016). These concepts aim to explain the relative inclusion of sexual minorities and women that is conditioned to their participation in nationalist politics and also remains generally low (as opposed to the votes that have indeed increased, cf. Amengay, Durovic and Meyer 2017). Their partial inclusion risks worsening the situation for those who refuse to participate in the national project, all the queers that cannot or do not want to follow the conjugal procreative life style of familialist nationalism.

Yet Nikita Dhavan has criticized a certain state phobia in the writings of homonationalism critics like Jasbir Puar (2007) and Joseph Massad (2007). Dhavan argues that they don’t distinguish between the different levels of the state, for instance welfare, administration, police and law (Dhavan 2016). Instead, she requests that all antiimperialist and antiracist criticism should be accompanied by a critique of reproductive heteronormativity, a criticism that is all too often left aside by these authors or even opposed to antiracist politics in Farris’ case (2017,

chap 3.3). Differentiating the multiple levels of the state and the ways in which their politics sometimes even contradict would have allowed for a more nuanced analysis of actual gender and sexual politics toward migrant women in France, Italy and the Netherlands where local initiatives sometimes oppose national political rhetoric for the better or the worse. Sociologist Momin Rahman criticizes Puar and Massad for essentializing precolonial societies in omitting entanglements of colonial and colonized populations in the colonizing process as also Paul Gilroy has shown in the Black Atlantic (Rahman 2015). Sodomy legislations for example have sometimes been preserved by decolonial governments. Similarly, some colonized men have profited from the colonizers sexism to improve their political power over women as some anticolonial feminist scholars have shown (Oyewumi 1997, 186-209; Lugones 2007).¹³ The complex relation of sexual politics and coloniality (Quijano 2007, 168-178) has been analyzed and debated by multiple anticolonial researchers especially in South America, a debate that is completely absent from Farris' book leading to an artificial opposing of feminism and anticolonialism (chap. 3.4). While some consider that the patriarchal order was installed with colonialism and that precolonial societies had more divers and fluid gender and sexual practices (Lugones 2010, 742-759), others instead warn against idealizing precolonial societies. They claim that these societies were also marked by inequality based on gender, race and class (Femenías 2019; Silvia. Rivera Cusicanqui 2010; Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui 2007). And yet others consider that while women's oppression in the so-called modern society is indubitably colonial, this does not mean that there were no other forms of women's oppression in precolonial societies (R. Segato 2003; R.L. Segato 2014; Mendoza 2019) or as Rita Segato puts it "The gender trop is playing another drama, yet its lexicon has been ceased by another grammar." (R.L. Segato 2010, my translation).

Artificially opposing racialized and colonized heterosexuals on one side and queer or feminist whites on the other thus resembles the hypocrite far-right discourse analyzed above. This constructed opposition has also been analyzed and criticized by Yılmaz-Günay (2014). It is also to be found in Farris' uncritical and caricatural opposition of "feminists/femocrats" and "Muslim and non-western migrant women" suggesting that Muslim and migrant women could not be feminist. In order to remedy these short fallings and allow for a more accurate analysis of the described phenomenon, the concept of intersectionality helps to shed light on structurally produced blind spots. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) analyzed how the firing of Black women by the company General Motors could not be attacked as discrimination because white women and

Black men as distinct groups had not been fired. Her concept of intersectionality called for a sensitivity towards the fact that many people's lives are structured by several social relations requiring to think beyond simplistic identity politics especially when practiced by state institutions. Intersectionality echoes earlier feminist interventions like the publication "All women are white, all Blacks are men, but some of us are brave" (Smith, Hull, and Bell-Scott 2015). It has become a key concept in gender studies even though some have criticized racism in its traveling process to European countries (Ait Ben Lmadani and Moujoud 2012). Applied to femonationalism, intersectionality helps to point out the theoretical production of blind spots: in Farris' view all (children of) migrants are heterosexual and aspire to build heteropatriarchal families; all white Europeans are queer or queerfriendly and fight for women's emancipation. The created blind spot regroups on the one hand all the queer (children of) migrants as well as on the other hand all the European homophobes and heterosexists. Thus, individual compositions with social structures could be taken into account allowing to nuance these all too caricatural oppositions.

The intersectional perspective allows for a more accurate understanding of far-right sexual politics than does the concept of femonationalism and can help to point out their nationalist, naturalist, familialist and racist political agenda. Far-right sexual politics can be understood with Theodor Adorno as a contemporary form of propaganda (Adorno 2019). As the far right does not have anything real to offer to their voters (Ivaldi 2015) because their actual politics cannot gain a political majority, they fill their lack of reflection and their theoretical void with an overinvestment in form. Examples for France are the political happenings of *La Manif Pour Tous*, or *Generation Identitaire*. Adorno calls the historic national-socialist propaganda politics "tricks" that bare an uncanny resemblance to today's far right politics: so-called populism, "fake news", the blunt lie, etc.

In the 2000s, far-right conservatives and anti-racist politics were increasingly polarized on the issue of sexual politics, yet some of them seem to converge in the general statement of homosexuality and women's rights being the ultimate expression of sexual modernity and western countries' cultural superiority. But why should sexual diversity and women's rights represent cultural superiority or modernity? What other criteria could societies and populations display in order to appear as modern?

An intersectional and anticolonial perspective helps to deconstruct this discursive cul-de-sac. It understands the bourgeois heterosexual family to be itself a colonial and modernist product. Therefore, the artificial opposition between sexual freedom and racism needs to be

deconstructed. This includes criticizing the underlying premise of migrant's or colonized people's natural heterosexuality, whether it is considered to be a threat to Western values, a proof of authenticity and naturalness, or a necessary strategy in combating neocolonialism.

Protecting helpless women and heteronormativity

Furthermore, a distinction between feminism and a rhetoric of “defending or protecting women” is necessary and would have allowed Farris to avoid too quick conclusions of seeing feminism where actually classical far-right sexual politics occur. Scholars like Nira Yuval-Davis have shown that protecting women is a central part of nationalism because of women's role in the gendered construction of national identity (Yuval-Davis 1997). Far-right discourses mobilize a deep fear of women's and children's sexuality. The participants of conservative mobilizations in France attacking sexual diversity programs for teachers claimed that these programs would teach children masturbation (Massey 2017). The actual program was a brochure directed at teachers helping them deal with a diversified class room situation in order to not discriminate against LGBTQ children or children with LGBTQ parents. The same moral panic is expressed by former German health minister Jens Spahn when he argued against the legalization of the-day-after pills in Germany warning that women would lustfully eat them like candy (Spahn 2014). Similarly, Marine Le Pen in France spoke about “comfort abortions” (L'Express 2012). The underlying argument is that letting women's and children's sexuality develop freely might undermine father's rule. Therefore, far-right attacks against feminism have been interpreted as a reaction to feminist's successes that actually changed society (Avanza and Della Sudda 2017; Sanders et al. 2019). French historian Christine Bard speaks of a backlash

In its own way and in opposing it, it testifies of the advancements in equality. It sanctions the greater visibility of women in public space, of their actions to liberate themselves from male domination in private and in society more generally (Bard, Blais, and Dupuis-Déri 2019, 38, my translation).

Bard equally observes the centrality of sexuality in this form of antifeminism. She states that today's antifeminism tries to re-privatize sexuality in order to put women back under patriarchal control:

Antifeminism is aiming at taking back control over women in sexuality, in reproduction through husband's and father's 'right's': the right to oppose an abortion, the right to the indissolubility of the parental couple, the unconditional right to children's education (Bard, Blais, and Dupuis-Déri 2019, 37, my translation).

These crucial yet sometimes lacking perspectives on antifeminism are also developed by a German feminist research collective. They interpret the leftist's lack of understanding antifeminism as a way of covering up the left's own short fallings in sexual and feminist politics (Sanders et al. 2019, 136). For some leftists, claiming that feminism is nowadays to be considered right-wing makes it easier to oppose it or legitimate their continuous refusal to consider feminism. Yet this also ignores the longstanding tradition of leftist feminism. For Farris work, taking into account this paradoxical character of far-right sexual politics (Möser, Ramme and Takacs 2022) instead of limiting her scope to discussing the rhetoric of defending women would have helped to avoid confusing it with feminism and maybe made for a more differentiated discussion of actual feminist work on the sexual and racial division of labor.

Far-right discourses in France by Eric Zemmour, Alain Soral, Renaud Camus, in Germany by Thilo Sarrazin, Volker Zastrow, Gabriele Kuby, Birgit Kelle, Akif Pirinçci or Charles Murray in the United States are intersectional in their own way, an intersectionality of hate, as Christine Bard put it (Bard, Blais, and Dupuis-Déri 2019, 22). They are racist in their construction of incommensurable differences and national identities; they are racist in lying about numbers of immigrants and fertility. Yet they are also extremely heterosexist and familialist: they attack white bourgeois women who selfishly do not produce enough babies leading therefore to an abolition of a supposed Western culture, the feared “great replacement”. These paranoid positions express the anxiety of depending on women for their imagined cultural superiority, a position driving their misogyny.

Thilo Sarazzin's version is also classist, as he particularly attacks bourgeois white women for not producing enough babies to prevent this replacement by working class and Muslim/migrant babies. The French protests against gay marriage, *La Manif Pour Tous* (LMPT), has been shown to be a rather bourgeois or upper-class movement (Labussière 2017; Fradois 2017; Tricou 2016). Yet class matters in far-right politics are a complex issue. Dorit Geva sees LMPT as an inner-bourgeois conflict (Geva 2019). Religious, monarchist and aristocratic fractions of French upper-class would be challenging the dominant symbolic capital of a more liberal and educated fraction of French bourgeoisie. Her paper complexifies a discussion that has so far mostly stigmatized the working class for their supposed lack of sexual modernity quite similarly to the way Muslim populations have been presented. Didier Eribon's and Edouard Louis' writings have been taken –somewhat against their intention– as proof of working class' sexual underdevelopment (Eribon 2009; Louis 2014). Their individual escape to the bourgeois milieu appears as a safety mission to civilized and sexually modern territory. How can this same civilized harbor of bourgeois sexual modernity be simultaneously responsible for the hateful

expressions of LMPT homophobes taking to the streets? Geva's hypothesis suggests that Eribon and Louis have joined a specific fraction of French bourgeoisie, the educated liberal part, while large parts of French bourgeoisie are marked by homophobic attitudes. Thus, both social classes are not homogenous entities but rather composed of different political fractions that pursue different political and social projects.

Geva underlines LMPT's specific secular discourses. LMPT did not base their protest against gay marriage in god's will, but in supposedly "scientific" arguments. This strategy allowed for alliances with many different conservative and reactionary fractions of the bourgeois right: the aristocrats, the monarchists, the neo-fascists and the pious. Geva also shows how this type of mobilization is part of a more general attack of right-wing forces in several countries on current models of science with always the same model of counter-science: they oppose evolution theory, vaccination, climate change and research on stem cells (Geva 2019, 24). Yet this type of "alternative science" is attacking rationality in a very different way than feminist theory has done this in the past. While criteria for what counts as scientific vary in time and space, the very political and social negotiation process of these criteria is invested by feminist research –even though feminism among other struggles has criticized its imperfection, its discriminative and sometimes violent character. Feminists get involved in this struggle in order to produce better science, a stronger objectivity (Harding 1990, 1994) assembling multiple situated knowledges (Haraway 1992). Both the Frankfurt school and feminism in criticizing rationalism (instrumental rationality or androcentrism) do not seek to abolish science or rationality. They show the limits of science, its potential deadly dangers when it refuses to critically examine its premises, its notions and its relation to the world and the society that produces it. Since the early 1930s, the Frankfurt school has analyzed the rise of fascism in a study on workers and employees before fascism (Fromm and Bonß 1980), a study that was followed by the famous study on the authoritarian personality (Adorno 1950, 1973).

The critique of reason and rationality as well as far-right attacks of feminism need further study including those by feminist and gender studies. Femonalism could have been a useful concept to criticize the rise of right-wing ideology and the role sexual politics play in it. And while it is true that some feminists promote racist and conservative views, this article has shown that equating feminism with far-right parties and a supposed EU plan to replace white women with migrant women in care work is of little analytical value. Farris' specific concept of femonalism does not help to understand the paradoxical character of far-right sexual politics or the ongoing important controversies within feminism and LGBTQ sexual politics. While nationalist positions in feminism could simply be called nationalist feminists, far-right

rhetoric of protecting women or sexual minorities should be identified as racist propaganda. Feminist research can help to analyze the rise of the right because the right has chosen gender and sexual politics to promote and legitimate their hateful ideologies. This does of course not mean that women have a natural predisposition to peace or justice, an ideology Gabriele Dietze warns against (2020). Feminist and queer research simply provides helpful tools to combat far right attacks against women's and LGBTQ people's rights as well as their attacks on independent and critical research.

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