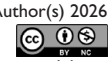
Check for updates

The Sociological Review

Article

Transgender trouble: The construction of an embodied enemy in anti-gender mobilizations in Belgium and Italy

The Sociological Review
1–20
© The Author(s) 2026

Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/00380261261431113
journals.sagepub.com/home/sor

Aurora Perego[1] **and Rylan Verlooy**[2*]

Abstract

Since the transnational emergence of anti-gender mobilizations, trans people's rights and identities have been increasingly contested. While existing scholarship has shown how anti-gender actors mobilize around the abstract common enemy of 'gender ideology', less attention has been paid to recent convergences against trans rights, and to the construction of trans people as targets of mobilization. Drawing on social movement scholarship and trans studies, this article examines how trans people are constructed as enemies within contemporary anti-gender and anti-trans mobilizations. We articulate a paired comparison of Belgium and Italy – two countries characterized by distinct legislative frameworks on trans rights – and conduct a thematic analysis of 46 documents published between 2020 and 2024 by anti-gender and anti-trans actors. We examine (1) the trans-related issues addressed in these texts, (2) the strategies through which knowledge about trans issues is produced and repressed, and (3) the ways in which trans people are constructed as an enemy across contexts. Our findings show that trans people are not positioned solely as part of an abstract threat but are constructed as an embodied enemy endangering society. Through a cognitive praxis that combines strategies of knowledge production and repression, anti-gender and anti-trans actors frame trans people and their rights as a danger to children, families, free speech and, overall, cisgender people. This construction of an embodied enemy sustains the mobilizing potential of anti-gender actors and reaffirms cisness as a societal norm. By foregrounding trans perspectives, this article calls for greater attention to how cisness operates in processes of enemy construction within contemporary exclusionary politics.

[1]University of Trento, Italy
[2]University of Antwerp, Belgium

*The authors are listed alphabetically but would like it to be known that they should be regarded as joint first authors with equal contributions to the article.

Corresponding author:
Rylan Verlooy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Antwerp, Sint-Jacobsstraat 2, Antwerpen, 2000, Belgium.
Email: rylan.verlooy@uantwerpen.be

Keywords
anti-gender, anti-trans, comparative analysis, enemy construction, knowledge production

Introduction

Since the 1990s, anti-abortion and pro-family organizations, religious conservatives and far-right groups have jointly engaged in anti-gender mobilizations, understood as a transnational project to act against so-called 'gender ideology', gender equality policies, LGBTQIA+ rights and reproductive rights (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Against this backdrop, gender has been constructed as an 'imaginary enemy' (Carnac, 2020) that threatens the 'natural order' of society (Garbagnoli, 2017). Since the 2020s, in a European context marked by high rates of transphobic violence (TGEU, 2024), anti-gender actors have increasingly converged with anti-trans actors to rally against gender-affirming healthcare, legal recognition of trans[1] identities, and even the existence of trans people themselves (Bassi & LaFleur, 2022; Cabral Grinspan et al., 2023).

This article investigates how trans people are constructed as enemies within anti-gender mobilizations by drawing from sociological literature on the identification of common enemies by collective actors (Melucci, 1996). This literature highlights that identifying antagonists is a crucial aspect of collective action, since 'it is only by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement' (Tarrow, 1998, p. 6). This theoretical lens allows us to innovatively examine the recent anti-trans convergences, illuminating similarities and differences with respect to ongoing processes of enemy construction in anti-gender mobilizations. We argue that the current pivoting of anti-gender opposition around trans issues expands previous understandings that locate the strength of anti-gender mobilizations in their identification of gender as an imaginary enemy. Contrary to the empty signifier 'gender ideology', the recent opposition to trans individuals provides an entry point to examine the construction of an embodied enemy – one that can be confronted and, ultimately, erased by dismantling cultural, medical and physical references to trans existence and rights.

To investigate this phenomenon, we articulate a paired comparison between Belgium and Italy, two countries characterized by different legislative frameworks on trans rights. Our comparative approach not only allows us to move beyond existing studies, predominantly focused on single cases (e.g. Gusmeroli, 2024) and on Anglophone countries (e.g. Amery & Mondon, 2025), but it also enables us to examine how the construction of the new *trans* enemy is taking place across different socio-political contexts. Empirically, we analyse 46 key documents produced by anti-trans and anti-gender actors located in the two countries between 2020 and 2024.

By combining anti-gender literature with social movement scholarship, this article expands current understandings of enemy construction, contributing to both anti-gender literature and social movement studies. It sheds light on anti-gender actors' potential to mobilize broader publics through the construction of embodied enemies. Furthermore, it provides social movement literature with a novel empirical examination of theories on collective enemy construction. In doing so, our research urges current sociological enquiry to incorporate trans perspectives.

Anti-gender and anti-trans mobilizations against a 'common enemy'

In the early 2010s, anti-gender mobilizations spread across Europe to oppose gender equality policies, reproductive rights and LGBTQIA+ issues (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017) through a common defiance of an alleged 'gender ideology', framed as threat to heterosexual families, Christianity, children and the 'natural order' of liberal societies (Garbagnoli, 2017). A central claim in anti-gender scholarship is that 'gender ideology' functions as an abstract enemy that facilitates the coalescing of different actors. 'Gender' is articulated as an 'empty signifier' (Mayer & Sauer, 2017), a concept that refers to the lack of a tangible object to be antagonized: '[Anti-gender's] enemy is not a concrete, embodied subject who can escape his grasp but an abstract, disembodied other whose existence is entirely malleable to his psychic needs' (Cattien, 2023, p. 102). The emptiness of this signifier allows diverse actors to use it in ways that resonate more within their particular contexts, thereby facilitating the transnational character of anti-gender mobilizations (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Nonetheless, focusing on the construction of gender as an abstract enemy might overlook ongoing processes through which anti-gender actors are conjuring embodied enemies against which to mobilize. We argue that examining such processes is crucial to advance our understandings of anti-gender actors' mobilization potential.

Sociological literature confirms that identifying problems and attributing responsibilities to antagonists is paramount for both individual and collective mobilization (Benford & Snow, 2000; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Individuals and groups are more likely to engage in cooperative collective action when they feel threatened (Van Dyke, 2003). Threats refer to both 'opponents or actions that have appeal to a narrow subset of participants within a movement' (Wang et al., 2018, p. 171) – including jurisdiction system and counter movements – and socio-political conditions or shifts, like economic crises and authoritarian governments.

Shared feelings of being threatened and common identification of those responsible for such threats allow the delineation of boundaries (Diani & Pilati, 2011; Gamson, 1997), enhance in-group solidarity (Hunt & Benford, 2004) and collective identity building (Melucci, 1996). Common threats are also crucial to the development of cross-movement alliances, since the identification of external enemies helps constituencies overcome differences and fosters out-group solidarity (Perego, 2023; Van Dyke, 2003). By sustaining both in-group solidarity and cross-movement alliances, the identification of threats and enemies has the potential to transform single contentious episodes into social movements (Melucci, 1996; Tarrow, 1998).

Against this backdrop, studies focused on the Anglo-American contexts suggest that recent anti-trans convergences are driven by processes of enemy construction (Amery & Mondon, 2025). Indeed, since 2020, anti-gender mobilizations have increasingly rallied against trans people and their rights across Europe (Bassi & LaFleur, 2022; Pearce et al., 2020), adding a new dimension to the opposition against 'gender ideology'. In addition to ad hoc anti-gender organizations, various actors – including trans-exclusionary feminists and LGB organizations, parent organizations, religious institutions and political actors across the spectrum – have mobilized to oppose gender-affirming healthcare, legal recognition of trans identities and anti-discrimination legislation. Following Serano (2018), we refer to these actors as 'anti-trans' to emphasize their antagonistic character.

Anti-gender and anti-trans scholarship points to three main reasons for this contestation. Firstly, historical analyses reveal that opposition against trans rights was always already part of the Vatican's anti-gender stance (Case, 2019). Secondly, the increased visibility of trans people, of their healthcare needs, and of legal recognition, as well as the increased visibility of anti-gender mobilizations, has created opportunities for different actors to converge against trans rights and promote TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) rhetoric (Cabral Grinspan et al., 2023). Thirdly, trans issues potentially challenge stable and binary cis-heterosexual gender norms because they conjure different ways of navigating these norms (Bassi & LaFleur, 2022).

Studies on the mainstreaming of transphobia in Anglo-American contexts link it to processes of othering and enemy construction (Amery & Mondon, 2025). Through such processes, sex differences are naturalized and trans people homogenized, thereby feeding populist discourses where cisness is deemed inherent to 'the people', and transness is a threat defended by 'the elite'. Scholars have further shown that anti-trans projects are particularly motivated by the protection of cis white womanhood, uniting trans-exclusionary feminists and far-right groups in configurations of trans womanhood as a site of danger for white cis women (Gill-Peterson, 2024a). Consequently, racialized women are more likely to be targeted by anti-trans mobilizations (Pearce et al., 2020). As Gill-Peterson (2024b) points out, this is not a new phenomenon but rather a recent iteration of transmisogyny. The transnational vilification of trans people and their rights thus challenges current understandings of the articulation of 'gender' as the abstract enemy is the most effective strategy in anti-gender mobilizations.

Indeed, sociological literature emphasizes that there is a notable difference between the identification of abstract and embodied enemies. According to sociologist Melucci (1996), 'conjuring up a distant, unreachable enemy does not provoke conflictual collective action, but instead engenders ideology, myth, and rites' (p. 58). In his understanding, identifying common enemies is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence and sustenance of collective mobilizations. Such enemies need to be conjured in 'a tangible antagonist whose action affects the actor's reference field' (Melucci, 1996, p. 59). The construction of close and embodied enemies allows collective actors to move from ritual actions to contentious struggles with higher potential to mobilize individuals and achieve (or resist) social change. This insight suggests that anti-gender actors need to identify an embodied enemy if their struggle against equality is to be sustained. However, current anti-gender literature has yet to engage with this understanding of enemy construction.

Politics of knowledge and construction of an embodied enemy

Sociological scholarship shows that enemies are not only identified but also *constructed* through cognitive processes and meaning-making practices in which collective actors both define themselves and their opponents (Melucci, 1989). These definitional processes are produced through a 'series of social encounters' (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 57) that entail interaction and conflict not only within groups but also between groups and their antagonists (Melucci, 1989). These encounters may be framed in diagnostic

terms through the punctuation of problems and attribution of responsibilities to antagonists (Benford & Snow, 2000). They may also be given meanings through a 'cognitive praxis' (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991), understood as practices of knowledge production that 'turn an issue into an object of common concern around which collective action can grow' (della Porta & Pavan, 2017, p. 5). In collective actions, enemies are hence constructed not only through strategic framing processes (Benford & Snow, 2000), but also through repertoires of knowledge production (della Porta & Pavan, 2017) on antagonists perceived as external and dangerous.

Scholarship has increasingly examined anti-gender politics of knowledge, showing the productive and repressive character of anti-gender's epistemic project (Paternotte & Verloo, 2021). In analysing the gender knowledge of the far-right in the Netherlands, Verloo (2018, p. 22) conceptualizes the crucial role of episteme, 'a system that produces and organizes knowledge and truth', in the construction of gender as an abstract enemy. On the one hand, anti-gender actors attack knowledge produced by gender studies and feminist scholars. They use scientific lexicon, appeals to 'biology', and cherry-pick studies without profoundly engaging with the literature to construct a veil of legitimacy (Pearce et al., 2020; Prearo, 2023). On the other hand, anti-gender actors introduce new epistemic institutions and articulate exclusionary understandings of gender and sex (Paternotte & Verloo, 2021). Furthermore, they promote their exclusionary views by diffusing their contents through policy-making institutions (Lavizzari, 2025), media (Verhoeven & Verlooy, 2025) and social media (Băluță, 2024; Pavan et al., 2025). To our knowledge, studies on the nexus between knowledge and the construction of embodied enemies have not been undertaken.

To address this gap, this article examines the construction of trans people as an embodied enemy in anti-gender and anti-trans mobilizations through a comparison of Belgian and Italian anti-gender and anti-trans texts. We address the following research questions:

1. Which issues are discussed by anti-gender and anti-trans actors in relation to trans people and their rights in Belgium and Italy?
2. How is knowledge about trans issues produced across contexts?
3. How are trans people and their rights constructed as an enemy across contexts?

Methodology

Case selection

This research articulates a paired comparison (Tarrow, 2010) between Belgium and Italy. This comparison allows us to investigate processes of enemy construction across different socio-political contexts, illustrating whether anti-gender actors develop similar discursive and knowledge production strategies, regardless of the context in which they are embedded, or whether they adapt such strategies according to what may resonate more in their countries. By doing so, this comparison accounts for the role played by different contextual conditions in the construction of embodied enemies.

Belgium proudly takes on a national identity of gay-friendly country and is considered as a legislative 'LGBT paradise' (Eeckhout & Paternotte, 2011). Compared to Italy,

it has an extensive legislation on trans rights, first passed in the early 2000s (Meier & Motmans, 2020). Under the current trans law, which was implemented in 2018, people can change their registered (binary) sex based on self-determination. In 2019, the Belgian Constitutional Court ruled that the 2018 trans law is discriminatory for gender fluid and non-binary people, leading to a first adaptation, which now allows for someone to change their sex marker unlimitedly. However, a solution for the discrimination of non-binary people is still to be found (Meier & Motmans, 2020).

In contrast, Italy lacks a comprehensive legislative framework on trans rights (TGEU, 2024). The Italian trans legislation was enacted in 1982 (Marcasciano, 2018), allowing trans people to access gender-affirming healthcare and have their documents rectified after a long process of medicalization. Until 2015, the law required trans people to undergo sterilization to have their documents rectified, nullified the weddings of trans people who had married before their transition and denied custody of their children in the case of divorce (Voli, 2018). Furthermore, due to the rejection of the so-called 'Zan bill' in 2021, the country lacks legislation to tackle hate crime on the grounds of gender identity.

Despite these differences, since the early 2020s the two countries have witnessed an increase in anti-gender mobilizations (Lavizzari, 2020; Verlooy, 2024), as well as in anti-trans campaigns (Gusmeroli, 2024; Prearo, 2023). In Italy, anti-gender politics is highly institutionalized (Lavizzari, 2025). Since the early 2010s, collaborations between anti-gender organizations and right-wing parties to oppose reproductive and LGBTQIA+ rights have consolidated. Furthermore, anti-gender and right-wing actors have recently converged around anti-trans claims mobilized by both anti-trans feminists and anti-trans parents (Pavan et al., 2025; Verlooy, 2024).

Regardless of the scarcity of investigations on anti-gender mobilizations in Belgium, research shows that, although the country was long considered exempt from resistance against equality (Bracke et al., 2017), anti-gender politics has become more visible in the public sphere (Verlooy, 2024). In particular, transgender rights have been increasingly contested in public debates, either directly in opinion pieces (Verhoeven & Verlooy, 2025) or under the guise of anti-woke activism (Dhoest, 2025).

Data and methods

This investigation relies on an original dataset of 46 key documents on trans rights produced between 2020 and 2024 by anti-gender and anti-trans actors located in Belgium and Italy (illustrated in Table 1 – The lists of Belgian and Italian documents are available in Tables 1A and 2A respectively in our methodological Appendix).[2] The documents were selected through a purposive sampling process aimed at creating a rich-in-information sample (Patton, 2015) by considering several criteria. Firstly, we identified prominent national anti-gender or anti-trans actors, encompassing both individual actors (such as activists, intellectuals and professionals) and collective actors (such as organizations and grassroots groups). Secondly, we sampled documents with a national scope and circulation and, in the case of Belgium, also with wide circulation within their language sphere. Thirdly, we selected different types of documents to maximize their variation (Patton, 2015) in terms of terminology used and claims discussed. In the case of Belgium, we included documents in Dutch, French and English.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sampled documents.

	Belgium ($n = 23$)	Italy ($n = 23$)
Type of document		
Blog post	3	13
Book	4	1
Organizational document	2	1
Parliamentary document	1	2
Petition	1	2
Public statement	-	2
Report	-	2
Opinion piece/Column	10	-
News media interview	2	-
Author(s)		
Trans-exclusionary feminist (organization)	5	6
Anti-trans parent organization	3	6
Anti-gender organization	-	9
Politician/Political institution	2	2
Healthcare professional	6	-
Journalist	2	-
Humanist (organization)	2	-
Academic	1	-
Publication year		
2020	-	2
2021	3	8
2022	7	3
2023	3	6
2024	10	4
Language		
Bilingual Dutch and French	2	-
Dutch	11	-
English	2	-
French	8	-
Italian	-	23

The documents were coded separately by the two authors through a hybrid approach (Boyatzis, 1998). The codebook was jointly created by the two authors based on previous studies on two main dimensions: the topics discussed in the documents (Prearo, 2023; Verlooy, 2024); and the strategies of knowledge production and repression through which such topics are discussed (Korolczuk & Verloo, 2024). During the first round of coding, each coder added inductively generated codes whenever available codes would not fit the data to allow for national specificities. We performed a second round of coding with the newly generated codebook (Table 3A in Appendix). The coding process was undertaken separately, but we held regular meetings to enhance comparability.

We analysed our data through a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to identify common and different themes across the documents, as well as patterns of knowledge production and repression. We firstly examined relationships between codes within each document and secondly analysed those relationships across the documents. When we found similar patterns across the whole corpus of data, we created a theme. This phase was undertaken by the researchers separately. Afterwards, we compared our findings across country through a cross-case logics (Miles & Huberman, 1994) aimed at exploring patterns of similarity and divergency.

Positionality

We have approached this research from a commitment to better understanding anti-gender and anti-trans mobilizations, thus contributing to improving the conditions of trans people while their rights are increasingly under attack. These attacks are not abstract to us: they affect our personal lives, friends and communities. As precarious scholars positioned within white, cis-heteronormative, capitalist and ableist social structures, we benefit from these systems while maintaining a critical distance from anti-gender and anti-trans actors. Reflecting on these structural positions has been crucial to practise a situated ethics in our analysis.

Furthermore, each of us is fluent in at least one of the languages of the documents we analyse, and we both grew up in the countries in which these materials were produced. This positional proximity afforded us contextual knowledge that shaped our interpretations, while also requiring ongoing reflexive attention to potential blind spots. This attention was fostered by the several discussions we held to improve the comparability of our analysis.

Findings: Trans rights and knowledge strategies

Our findings centre on three dimensions: the trans-related topics addressed in the data (RQ1), the knowledge strategies employed in the texts (RQ2) and the construction of trans people as an enemy (RQ3).

Trans topics

To investigate *which issues are discussed by anti-trans and anti-gender actors in relation to trans people and their rights*, we compare the results of our thematic analyses. Although multiple issues are addressed in the data (Figures 1A and 2A in Appendix), we focus here on three salient issues through which anti-gender and anti-trans actors discuss transness: gender dysphoria, gender-affirmative healthcare and free speech.

Gender dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is a major concern of anti-gender and anti-trans actors across the two countries, especially its (reported) increase in youth. In the documents, the recent

'explosion of gender dysphoria' is understood as causing 'an influx of young people, especially girls, to gender clinics' (BE_2024_2).[3] The texts describe gender dysphoria as the distress caused by an incongruence between sex assigned at birth and experienced gender identity. However, gender dysphoria is also framed as the symptom of 'an underlying problem that needs to be addressed' (BE_2024_2), rooted in three sets of causes that are equivalent in both countries.

Firstly, the texts attribute gender dysphoria to mental health vulnerabilities, encompassing 'a very high number of associated psychiatric disorders [. . .]: anorexia, autism, depression, psychotic disorders, trauma related to sexual assaults' (IT_2023_2), as well as autogynephilia.[4] These documents claim that gender dysphoria arises from past traumas and mental health conditions that lead individuals to feel discomfort with their body and identity.

Secondly, slightly less than half of the texts in both countries discuss social contagion hypotheses, arguing that gender dysphoria is caused by the exposure of children and adolescents to trans peers or to social media content, leading them to mistakenly believe that they are trans. This phenomenon is framed as being particularly dangerous for trans masculine youth, who are described as more easily susceptible to peer pressure. While these theories are explicitly cited in both countries, the Belgian documents introduce a distinction between 'trendy transgenders' and 'classic transgenders' (BE_2021_1, BE_2023_2, BE_2023_3). The former refers mainly to trans masculine people whose dysphoria has allegedly manifested suddenly (also referred to as 'Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria'[5]), while the latter mainly concerns trans feminine people who are said to show signs of dysphoria since childhood.

Thirdly, in both countries, dysphoria is attributed to 'trans activism' and 'gender ideology', allegedly diffused by activists who pressure and harm children (BE_2021_1) by making gender-affirmative healthcare more accessible (IT_2021_2). In line with previous studies, our findings show that anti-trans claims intersect with positions against 'gender ideology' (Prearo, 2023) to argue that children need to be protected from trans activists.

Healthcare

Gender-affirming healthcare is the most discussed issue in both Belgian and Italian anti-trans documents. Our thematic analysis shows that, across the two countries, gender-affirming healthcare is described as simultaneously harmful and ineffective. These descriptions are developed by addressing gender-affirming healthcare on its own and by discussing it together with other concerns.

Gender-affirming healthcare is considered harmful to the patients' physical and mental health. Several texts argue that it is damaging and mutilating: 'I hope we soon realize that we should not mutilate children' (BE_2024_4). Such 'mutilations' are considered the cause of severe psycho-physical problems that are currently overlooked (IT_2021_4). Gender-affirming healthcare is further presented as harmful to LGB people, especially to lesbians, because, according to the authors, it functions as conversion therapy:

> Let's defend our young lesbians, our tomboys, and our feminine boys from this new form of gay conversion therapy. (BE_2024_8)

> The vast majority of young girls who transition could be young lesbians transformed into heterosexual 'men' through an out-and-out conversion therapy. (IT_2021_08)

These arguments are formulated to support the claim that gender-affirming healthcare should be forbidden for youth, who are in some documents considered to be up to 25 years old.

In addition to harmful, gender-affirming healthcare is considered ineffective. This is argued by maintaining that it does not sufficiently alleviate mental health vulnerabilities, as shown by the following extract:

> In a good number of cases I'm aware of, appropriate treatment for depression and anxiety has completely resolved the dysphoria. [. . .] Although some practitioners involved in paediatric transitions insist that transitioning itself will also resolve other problems, there is no evidence that this is actually the case. (IT_2023_04)

In other texts, it is further argued that gender-affirming healthcare currently provides a 'quick fix' (in the form of surgeries and hormones) to gender dysphoria:

> [Research] concluded that neither hormones nor surgery provide any benefit in terms of long-term mental health and alleviation of suicidality, which calls into question the unilateral approach of positive affirmation therapy. (BE_2024_2)

While a concern for the effective outcomes of gender-affirming healthcare is not necessarily an expression of anti-trans politics, this reasoning taps into the ambiguity regarding the goal of medical treatments (Oosthoek et al., 2024).

As an alternative to the ineffective and harmful gender-affirming healthcare, many authors propose 'therapeutic alternatives' to treat gender dysphoria, although that is not further specified or illustrated:

> If gender care is really about care, then it should be clear that these people should be guided towards self-acceptance, not denying reality and affirming a problematic self-image. (BE_2021_1)

This text de facto argues for the suppression of gender identity, which can be considered a form of conversion therapy of trans people, who are forced to live according to their gender assigned at birth. However, some Belgian texts argue that conversion therapy for trans people does not exist and problematize its legal prohibition. Remarkably, Belgian opposition to gender-affirming healthcare is sometimes joined with expressing support for trans people and priding oneself with the tolerant image of the country: 'Let's continue protecting and supporting sexual minorities but we reject the radical transgender ideology. We live in one of the most tolerant countries toward sexual minorities' (BE_2023_3). This explicit support for trans people's rights, even after calls to repudiate them, was not present in the Italian texts.

Free speech

The last prominent issue that is addressed in the data is the issue of *free speech*. While this theme is discussed with a broad range of issues, our analysis shows that free speech is often invoked to specifically discuss trans issues. In both countries, it is argued that 'gender ideology' and trans activism threaten the right to free speech, acting as a 'gag' that does not allow people to freely express their opinions:

> But the hold of this ideology is such that few people dare to criticise it, or not too loudly, or only in private circles. Because the weapon of the trans activists is formidable: with the slightest question, the slightest attempt at opposition or even debate, you'll be branded transphobic and 'cancelled' in the public media. (BE_2024_3)

Within this framework, people would be impeded from speaking out against gender-affirmative healthcare due to a permeating '(trans)gender ideology' that accuses them of transphobia. The authors portray themselves as part of the majority of the population who are victims of a minoritarian, yet oppressive, group of trans people that affects their right to free speech and thereby threatens democracy. Debates on free speech and on the so-called 'dictatorship' of the (trans) minority are regularly weaponized to position anti-trans politics as a defensible opinion of concerned citizens (Ahmed, 2016).

In Belgium, free speech arises in critiques on 'woke', which play an important role in Belgian politics (Dhoest, 2025). 'Gender ideology' and activism are framed as a particular instance of 'woke activism', as illustrated in the following quote: 'The woke doctrine poses: "Trans women are women, point. They are already struggling enough." Every comment made in this regard is misplaced' (BE_2021_3). This author indirectly frames trans women's identities as a legitimate topic for debate that is supposedly obstructed by 'the woke doctrine' carried out by trans activists.

In Italy, references to freedom of speech centre on the Zan bill, which is framed as a 'liberticidal law' (IT_2020_01) for its intent to prohibit hate speech on grounds of gender identity and sexual orientation. According to the texts, the introduction of the law limits the possibilities to object '(trans)gender ideology' and activism and thus constitutes an infringement of freedom of speech. The Zan bill is thus instrumentalized to advance anti-trans claims in the country under the guise of threats against free speech (Gusmeroli, 2024; Prearo, 2023).

Knowledge strategies

To answer our second research question, *how knowledge about trans issues is produced*, we look at the strategies of knowledge production and repression employed in the texts (Figures 3A and 4A in Appendix). Scholars have distinguished between the productive and repressive politics of knowledge of anti-gender actors (Korolczuk & Verloo, 2024), which we also identified in our data.

A central strategy of knowledge production consists in recounting individual cases and anecdotes to support anti-trans arguments. On the one hand, the texts refer to specific individuals by name, presenting them as either local or transnational exemplary figures of the harm of gender-affirmative healthcare. Exemplary individuals referred to in both Belgian

and Italian texts are often de/retransitioned people, whose testimonies are used to argue for a ban on gender-affirmative healthcare. On the other hand, texts refer to individual anecdotes. The Italian case shows that anecdotal knowledge production strategies also occur in institutional settings, such as the national parliament, where an MP enquired about a hospital providing gender-affirming healthcare based on the following statement:

> *According to information received by the undersigned*, it appears that at the Careggi hospital in Florence children with an average age of 11 who go there, are not provided with psychotherapeutic or psychiatric assistance, and that the hospital has no child neuropsychiatry department at all. (IT_2023_5, emphasis added)

In anecdotical references, authors refrain from adequately citing sources and describing the incidents. Both strategies – individual and anecdotical knowledge production – are used to stir moral panics against transgender people (Amery & Mondon, 2025).

Another strategy of knowledge production concerns the use of external sources and statistics to support the arguments of the texts. In both Belgium and Italy, the most used sources include studies and opinions of healthcare professionals, academic research, foreign and national jurisprudence, and statistics. While local actors and sources differ, foreign actors and documents cited in both countries largely overlap.

To further support the trans-exclusionary agenda in both countries, debates on science are mobilized to challenge gender-affirming healthcare. Previous studies show that, through the adoption of a scientific-sounding register, social contagion theories function as a tool of knowledge production that aims to delegitimize gender dysphoria and trans identities (Hsu, 2022). Similarly, Belgian and Italian texts construct a scientific aura by quoting scholars, healthcare professionals and manuscripts published in academic journals. The latter mainly include editorials, letters to the editor or opinion pieces that fail to ground their arguments in empirical evidence. In addition to grey literature, Italian documents often refer to statistics and numbers without citing the sources. These findings indicate that in both countries anti-trans arguments are narrated through pseudo-scientific terminology with the aim of increasing their legitimacy (Prearo, 2023), while not being substantiated by adequate scientific research.

In addition to knowledge production, our analysis also highlights strategies of knowledge repression. Amongst them, we find the dissemination of discriminatory and transphobic arguments. This strategy is much more prominent in Belgium, where trans people are consistently misgendered and referred to by their gender assigned at birth: ‘You have probably already seen them, the men who compete in women’s competitions because they identify as women’ (BE_2022_7). Such explicitly transphobic rhetoric was more rarely articulated by Italian anti-gender and anti-trans actors, who have an interest in presenting themselves as legitimate, democratic commentators (Prearo, 2023). This interest is shared by Belgian actors as their anti-trans rhetoric is regularly accompanied by them expressing ‘support for equality’. Another strategy concerns the delegitimization of scientific studies on gender-affirming healthcare. In Italy, the emphasis lies on the so-called ‘Dutch protocol’, a widely used medical approach to treating gender dysphoria, criticized for putting youth at risk:

> The so-called 'affirmative therapy' for children with gender dysphoria was invented in the Netherlands in the mid-1990s and then exported worldwide. Around ages 9–11, puberty is 'blocked' with triptorelin, a drug typically used for prostate cancer, breast cancer, and other conditions. At 16, treatment progresses to cross-sex hormones (testosterone and oestrogen) and surgery. In the U.S., however, double mastectomies have also been performed on girls as young as 13. This is the so-called 'Dutch protocol,' and for years, whatever you had to say about it, you were labelled transphobic and fascist. (IT_2024_01)

Belgian texts mostly target WPATH, the World Association of Transgender Health: 'The question is how seriously we should take WPATH, how scientifically based its guidelines are. I have my doubts' (BE_2024_6). While critiquing research on gender-affirming care is not anti-trans as such, anti-trans actors resort to this strategy by criticizing the scientific bases of research on gender-affirmative care by citing grey sources and without extensively engaging with all the literature.

These findings indicate that knowledge on trans issues is created through productive and repressive processes that, while being different in their forms and scopes, are jointly articulated to '[establish] a truth' (Verloo, 2018, p. 21) that facilitates the construction of trans people as an enemy.

Constructing the trans embodied enemy

The findings illustrated in the previous sections suggest that trans people are constructed as an embodied enemy through strategies of knowledge production and repression. We build on these findings to explore *how trans people and their rights are constructed as an enemy* (RQ3).

In the texts, we find explicit blame against so-called 'trans activists', which is articulated through two main strategies. Firstly, they are presented as a threat to free speech and children's safety because of their alleged attempts to spread 'gender ideology': 'Health care for children suffering from gender confusion has been guided by activism and [is] based on ideology' (BE_2024_1). Secondly, trans activists are presented as an oppressive minority that endangers the (rights of the) majority: 'Yet there is a category of activists who believe that inclusion should come first. Opposed to this is the 99.999% of sportswomen who feel that former men have nothing to do with them' (BE_2022_6). Presenting trans women in sports as not-belonging and threatening to their cis colleagues is a well-documented strategy of anti-trans actors (Pearce et al., 2020). The analysed extract, however, also presents trans activists as threats precisely because they argue for inclusion in sports. Through these two strategies, trans activists are constructed as an adversary other, whose existence is simultaneously framed as outside of societal norms and constructed as a dangerous threat to these norms (Amery & Mondon, 2025).

Furthermore, our analysis indicates that not only activists, but also trans people in general are constructed as an embodied enemy through subtle strategies, in particular with respect to healthcare and gender dysphoria. Trans people are presented as responsible for causing gender dysphoria and promoting dangerous healthcare practices, thus becoming the embodied antagonists of the 'majority' of our society:

> The social influence is extremely strong [. . .] a form of social contagion that has even been acknowledged by WPATH President Marci Bowers. For the record, Bowers is the trans surgeon known for having performed live surgery on Jazz Jennings, the top ambassador of trans-identifying children and star of the reality show I Am Jazz. These days, people are less eager to talk about Jazz, who is now severely obese and suffering from psychiatric disorders. (IT_2024_01)

The cognitive praxis through which trans people are constructed as an enemy entails the creation of a collective self that needs protection. As exemplified in the following quote, the collective self is formulated in terms of 'the majority' that consists of those whose gender identity can be recognized by the state in a binary, stable way: 'Why should the concern to satisfy the legitimate demands of minorities be met in a way that necessarily undermines the equally legitimate concern of people in the majority to have their identity recognised?' (BE_2023_2).

Building on this evidence, we argue that the analysed documents develop a cognitive praxis that contributes to the construction of trans people's existence as a threat to cisgender majority and as a danger to sex and gender normativity: 'When a man says he is a woman, or vice versa, that has a huge impact on other people. Many social conventions rely on the fact that you can recognize someone's sex' (BE_2024_4). In this author's understanding, trans people are responsible for deconstructing gender norms, which is considered a dangerous tendency possibly leading to 'discrimination' and 'rape'. The deconstruction of these norms is framed as an ideology spread by trans people that harms children: 'The consequences of ideologies that promote so-called "perceived gender identity" in opposition to biological identity are a true "ticking time bomb" placed in the hearts and souls of our children' (IT_2024_04).

Our analysis hence shows that, despite contextual differences, anti-gender actors across the two countries construct trans people as an embodied adversary through an encompassing cognitive praxis that both entails and stems from interconnected knowledge production and repression strategies. They explicitly portray trans activists as a social danger, and more subtly frame all trans individuals as part of an intolerant minority who threatens 'the natural order' (Garbagnoli, 2017) based on the gender binary.

Discussion and conclusion

This article shows that, despite the different contexts and developments of anti-gender mobilizations, anti-trans claims are very similar in Belgium [and] Italy, and that trans individuals are constructed as an embodied enemy through a shared cognitive praxis. Trans individuals are presented as the adversary other that threatens the majority, understood as the collective self that needs protection and is characterized as being cisgender (Gill-Peterson, 2024a). Building on sociological literature arguing the identification of a tangible enemy bridges diverse actors and sustains joint mobilization efforts (Melucci, 1996), we purport that the recent anti-trans surge reinvigorates the mobilizing potential of anti-gender politics precisely because trans people are constructed as a tangible threat, rather than them being merely part of an abstract 'gender ideology'. The construction of trans people as an embodied enemy is thus informed by cisness and signals a broader

antagonistic relation to transness that bridges diverse actors, including some trans-exclusionary feminists, far-right actors, anti-gender actors and anti-trans organizations, and that sustains joint mobilization efforts (Melucci, 1996).

Through the theoretical lenses offered by trans studies, we contend that the construction of trans people as an embodied enemy is not just a form of transphobia, but also a 'renewal of cis social ordering' (Heaney, 2024, p. 3). Previous research by trans scholars demonstrated that anti-gender attacks are informed by the underlying assumption that life and society are inherently cisgender (Elster, 2022). The current success of anti-trans campaigns has intensified this assumption of cisness as a societal norm (Ahmed, 2016; Gill-Peterson, 2024a), which can be understood as 'the biologizing ideology that these social roles of sexual difference adhere to assigned sex based on the appearance of genitals at or [. . .] before birth' (Heaney, 2024, p. 10). Cisness is thus a constitutional element of anti-gender and anti-trans actors' field of reference (Melucci, 1996) that is affected by trans people's existence. Therefore, the threat that trans people pose to this field of reference needs to be neutralized, according to anti-gender actors, not only by dismantling the social, medical and legal infrastructures upon which trans people's existence relies, but also by constructing trans people themselves as enemies to this cisgender collective self. In this way, anti-trans narratives attempt to eradicate transness from public life, thereby upholding cisnormativity (Amery, 2025).

Our examination of the anti-gender shift towards the construction of an embodied enemy (trans people) has crucial implications for both anti-gender and social movement scholarship. Firstly, our research indicates that constructing embodied enemies constitutes a crucial step in the continuation and rooting of anti-gender mobilizations across different socio-political contexts. While we focus on trans people as an embodied enemy, we urge scholars to investigate which other marginalized groups are constructed as a tangible enemy in both anti-gender mobilizations, as well as other exclusionary agendas. Close examination of such processes might foster our understandings on how hateful politics develop and diffuse, as well as how they can be effectively countered.

Secondly, our article advocates for a more in-depth consideration of trans perspectives in anti-gender and broader sociological research. Current sociological investigations on gender and sexuality rarely pay attention to the specificity of trans issues that may trouble the dominant frames through which gender and sexuality are studied (Bey, 2021). Similarly, anti-gender scholarship often disregards attacks on transness (Amery, 2025). Instead, we suggest that future research should consider transness and cisness as fundamental lenses through which to study anti-gender mobilizations. 'Trans' is indeed a fundamental category through which gendered and sexual formations can be understood because it might provide 'the fullest understanding of the gendered political realm' (Bey, 2021, p. 194). Building on these considerations, we urge anti-gender research to consider how cisness and transness operate in anti-gender mobilizations.

This article contributes to three lines of investigation. To social movement studies, we offer an empirical contribution to the understudied concept of tangible enemy construction (Melucci, 1996). We contribute to anti-gender literature by articulating a perspective that centres trans people and their rights, which are often disregarded. Following this, we hope that a trans perspective also encourages anti-gender scholarship to consider the tangible enemy constructions in anti-gender mobilizations and their entanglements with

other exclusionary agendas. To trans studies, this article offers an empirical contribution to how contemporary configurations of cisness shape the construction of trans people as 'troubles', thus sustaining political efforts to shrink their rights and, ultimately, attempts to erase their existence.

To conclude, while our research does not focus on the political consequences of the construction of trans people as an embodied enemy, in Italy a new bill on gender dysphoria will soon be discussed in the national parliament. Although at the time of writing this article the parliamentary discussion phase has not started, the proposed bill echoes the findings of our research: gender dysphoria is presented as an illness, and children should be protected from trans indoctrination. This example provides us with an indication of the tangible consequences of processes of trans enemy construction within national institutions: not only do these processes increase the mobilizing potential of anti-gender actors, but they also feed and foster anti-trans policy-making, thus endangering trans people's lives on multiple levels. We acknowledge that a comparison of two European countries does not allow us to generalize our conclusions beyond Belgium and Italy. Further examinations are needed to better understand how trans people are constructed as an embodied enemy in anti-gender movements in other contexts. More research is also needed to assess the political, symbolic and material consequences of the construction of trans people as the embodied enemy of anti-gender politics, not only in Belgium and Italy, but across Europe and beyond.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Petra Meier, Alexander Dhoest and elena pavan for their feedback and advice. We also thank the CCINDLE colleagues with whom we discussed earlier versions of this work. Finally, we extend our thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, which helped us to clarify and strengthen our arguments. Additionally, the authors acknowledge support from the Trento Sociology Department APC initiative for the open access publication of this work.

ORCID iDs

Aurora Perego https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1576-6757
Rylan Verlooy https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8349-0707

Funding

This work has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the CCINDLE project [grant agreement number 101061256]. UK consortium partners are funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant numbers 10051932 and 10048433]. Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency or UKRI. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. We use 'trans' and 'transgender' interchangeably to refer to gender variant people including, but not limited to, trans women and men, non-binary people, transsexuals and cross-dressers (Bettcher, 2014). We acknowledge that these terms became popular in institutionalized Anglo-American contexts after which they travelled to Europe (Gill-Peterson, 2024b). While these terms can resonate less in non-Western contexts, their usage in this article is justified by our focus on two European countries.
2. Due to length limitations, our methodological Appendix is available online.
3. The documents were analysed in their original language. The passages included in this article to illustrate our analysis were translated into English by the authors. We have stayed as close as possible to the original text, also taking over transphobic terminology. Each document is identified by a unique code created as follows: *country_year of publication_number of document*).
4. Autogynephilia is a theory employed by anti-trans actors but is not accepted in scientific communities as a cause for gender dysphoria. The theory claims that trans women's dysphoria arises from (sexual) embodiment fantasies of having a woman's body (Serano, 2020).
5. 'Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria' is widely criticized by trans healthcare professionals and scholars for its methodological faults and reluctance to take trans and healthcare perspectives into account (Hsu, 2022).

References

Ahmed, S. (2016). An affinity of hammers. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *3*(1–2), 22–34. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334151

Amery, F. (2025). Three elements of cisfeminism: Arrogant perception, will to power and attachment. *Sexualities*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607251337578

Amery, F., & Mondon, A. (2025). Othering, peaking, populism, and moral panics: The reactionary strategies of organized transphobia. *The Sociological Review*, *73*(3), 680–696. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261241242283

Băluță, O. (2024). What is in a name? Alternative gender knowledge and the retrogressive worlding of radical right digital media. *Feminist Media Studies*, *24*(5), 1078–1094. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2274280

Bassi, S., & LaFleur, G. (2022). Introduction: TERFs, gender-critical movements, and post-fascist feminisms. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *9*(3), 311–333. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-9836008.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*, 611–39. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611

Bettcher, T. M. (2014). Trapped in the wrong theory: Rethinking trans oppression and resistance. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *39*(1), 383–406. https://doi.org/10.1086/673088

Bey, M. (2021). Trouble genders: 'LGBT' collapse and trans fundamentality. *Hypatia*, *36*, 191–206. https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2020.52

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage.

Bracke, S., Dupont, W., & Paternotte, D. (2017). 'No prophet is accepted in his own country': Catholic anti-gender activism in Belgium. In R. Kuhar & D. Paternotte (Eds.), *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality* (pp. 41–58). Rowman & Littlefield.

Cabral Grinspan, M., Elliot, I., Paternotte, D., & Verloo, M. (2023). Exploring TERFness. *DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, *10*(2), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.21825/digest.90008.

Carnac, R. (2020). Imaginary enemy, real wounds: Counter-movements, 'gender theory', and the French Catholic church. *Social Movement Studies*, *19*(1), 63–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1708307

Case, M. A. (2019). Trans formations in the Vatican's war on 'gender ideology'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *44*(3), 639–664. https://doi.org/10.1086/701498

Cattien, J. (2023). Perfect enemies: Anti-genderism, racism and the threat of abstractness. *New Formations*, *109*(109), 91–109. https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWf:109.07.2023

della Porta, D., & Pavan, E. (2017). Repertoires of knowledge practices: Social movements in times of crisis. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, *12*(4), 297–314. https://doi.org/10.1108/qrom-01-2017-1483

Dhoest, A. (2025). Them! Ingroup-outgroup dynamics in Flemish anti-woke discourses on X. *Discourse, Context and Media*, *65*, Article 100886. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2025.100886

Diani, M., & Pilati, K. (2011). Interests, identities, and relations: Drawing boundaries in civic organizational fields. *Mobilization: An International Journal*, *16*(3), 265–282. https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.16.3.k301j7n67p472m17

Eeckhout, B., & Paternotte, D. (2011). A paradise for LGBT rights? The paradox of Belgium. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *58*(8), 1058–1084. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.598414

Elster, M. (2022). Insidious concern: Trans panic and the limits of care. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *9*(3), 407–424. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-9836064

Eyerman, R., & Jamison, A. (1991). *Social movements: A cognitive approach*. Penn State Press.

Gamson, J. (1997). Messages of exclusion: Gender, movements, and symbolic boundaries. *Gender and Society*, *11*(2), 178–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124397011002003

Garbagnoli, S. (2017). Italy as a lighthouse: Anti-gender protests between the 'anthropological question' and national identity. In R. Kuhar & D. Paternotte (Eds.), *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Protesting against equality* (pp. 151–173). Rowman & Littlefield.

Gill-Peterson, J. (2024a). Caring for trans kids, transnationally, or, against 'gender-critical' moms. In E. Heaney (Ed.), *Feminism against cisness* (pp. 197–216). Duke University Press.

Gill-Peterson, J. (2024b). *A short history of transmisogyny*. Verso Books.

Gusmeroli, P. (2024). Is gender-critical feminism feeding the neo-conservative anti-gender rhetoric? Snapshots from the Italian public debate. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, *28*(3), 382–399. https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2184908.

Heaney, E. (Ed.). (2024). *Feminism against cisness*. Duke University Press.

Hsu, V. J. (2022). Irreducible damage: The affective drift of race, gender, and disability in anti-trans rhetorics. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *52*(1), 62–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2021.1990381

Hunt, S. A., & Benford, R. D. (2004). Collective identity, solidarity, and commitment. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 433–457). Wiley.

Korolczuk, E., & Verloo, M. (2024). *Report on anti-gender mobilizations' interventions in knowledge production*. https://ccindle.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/D2.5-Report-on-anti-gender-mobilizations.pdf

Kuhar, R., & Paternotte, D. (Eds.). (2017). *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Lavizzari, A. (2020). *Protesting gender: The LGBTIQ movement and its opponents in Italy*. Routledge.

Lavizzari, A. (2025). The anti-gender movement and the populist radical right in Italy: A symbiotic relationship. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *8*(1), 207–233. https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088y2024d000000047

Marcasciano, P. (2018). *L'aurora delle trans cattive*. Edizioni Alegre.

Mayer, S., & Sauer, B. (2017). 'Gender ideology' in Austria: Coalitions around an empty signifier. Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality. In R. Kuhar & D. Paternotte (Eds.), *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Protesting against equality* (pp. 23–40). Rowman & Littlefield.

Meier, P., & Motmans, J. (2020). Trans laws and constitutional rulings in Belgium: The ambiguous relations between sex and gender. *Politics and Governance*, *8*(3), 242–252. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i3.2851

Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. Hutchinson Radius.

Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, D. S., & Minkoff, D. C. (2004). Conceptualizing political opportunity. *Social Forces*, *82*(4), 1457–1492. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2004.0082

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.

Oosthoek, E., Stanwich, S., Gerritse, K., Doyle, D. M., & de Vries, A. L. C. (2024). Gender-affirming medical treatment for adolescents: A critical reflection on 'effective' treatment outcomes. *BMC Medical Ethics*, *25*, Article 154. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-024-01143-8

Paternotte, D., & Verloo, M. (2021). De-democratization and the politics of knowledge: Unpacking the cultural Marxism narrative. *Social Politics*, *28*(3), 556–578. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab025

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.

Pavan, E., Perego, A., & Scianna, M. (2025). Between pillars and micro-foundations. Digging deep into Italian anti-gender rhetoric on social media. *Comunicazione Politica*, *3*, 329–354. https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.3270/117873

Pearce, R., Erikainen, S., & Vincent, B. (2020). TERF wars: An introduction. *The Sociological Reviews Monographs*, *68*(4), 677–698. https://doi.org/10.1177/003802612093471

Perego, A. (2023). Solidarity through difference? How Italian and Spanish LGBTQIA* organizations frame solidarity through an intersectional lens. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *44*(4), 508–524. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2023.2250036

Prearo, M. (2023). The anti-gender and gender-critical roots of the Italian anti-trans parent activism. *DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, *4*(1), 115–117 https://doi.org/10.21825/digest.89996

Serano, J. (2018). *Thoughts about transphobia, TERFs, and TUMFs*. Medium. https://juliaserano.medium.com/thoughts-about-transphobia-terfs-and-tumfs-b77a18c1a225

Serano, J. (2020). Autogynephilia: A scientific review, feminist analysis, and alternative 'embodiment fantasies' model. *The Sociological Review Monographs*, *68*(4), 763–778. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934690

Tarrow, S. (1998). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, S. (2010). The strategy of paired comparison: Toward a theory of practice. *Comparative Political Studies*, *43*(2), 230–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009350044

TGEU. (2024). *Will the cycle of violence ever end? TGEU's Trans Murder Monitoring project crosses 5,000 cases*. https://tgeu.org/will-the-cycle-of-violence-ever-end-tgeus-trans-murder-monitoring-project-crosses-5000-cases/

Van Dyke, N. (2003). Crossing movement boundaries: Factors that facilitate coalition protest by American college students, 1930–1990. *Social Problems*, *50*(2), 226–250. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2003.50.2.226

Verhoeven, E., & Verlooy, R. (2025). Debating transness: A critical investigation into trans topics in opinion pieces. *Bulletin For Applied Transgender Studies*, *4*(4), 243–264. https://doi.org/10.57814/x35w-9m72

Verloo, M. (2018). Gender knowledge, and opposition to the feminist project: Extreme-right populist parties in the Netherlands. *Politics and Governance*, *8*(3), 20–30. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i3.1456

Verlooy, R. (2024). Anti-gender mobilizations and transgender rights: Unpacking recent evolutions in Belgium. *Tijdschrift Voor Genderstudies*, *27*(4), 351–374. https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2024.4.004.VERL

Voli, S. (2018). (Trans)gender citizenship in Italy: A contradiction in terms? From the parliamentary debate about law 164/1982 to the present. *Modern Italy*, *23*(2), 201–214. https://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2018.8

Wang, D., Piazza, A., & Soule, S. A. (2018). Boundary-spanning in social movements: Antecedents and outcomes. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *44*, 167–187. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041258