#LGBTpropaganda #GenderTheory #Wokism: Expanding and blurring the boundaries of francophone anti-gender discourse propagated on Twitter

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Abstract

Based on a corpus of tweets compiled from November 2022 to February 2023, this article revisits digital anti-gender campaigns in France, 10 years after debates on same-sex marriage and adoption. Through a critical discourse analysis of 70 key tweets, it maps the semiotic community engaged in anti-gender discourse, revealing a heterogeneous group of actors ranging from the conservative right to the identitarian far right. The article identifies two patterns rooted in the "protect our children" rhetoric, which reshape the symbolic boundaries of anti-gender discourse. First, an expansion is at play, marked by the relative inclusion of LGB and feminist activists to reinforce the exclusion of drag-queens and trans people. Second, a blurring of symbolic boundaries between ethnic, religious and cultural factors emerges. This facilitates the articulation of a national-populist discourse that frames "wokism" and Islam as threats to children, to summon support for a white, Christian and heterocisgender political project.

Keywords

Critical Discourse Studies; Far Right Movements; Conservative Movements; Anti-gender; Anti-trans; Anti-wokism; Anti-Islam; Populism; Nationalism; Social Media; Twitter (X)

Introduction

On April 23, 2013, the French National Assembly adopted a bill that opened marriage and adoption to same-sex couples. On the eve of its adoption, streets and online spaces became privileged sites for the expression of positions in favor of this bill, as well as others firmly opposed to it. Independent websites emerged on both progressive and conservative sides, and social media became an extension of public debate.

The oppositional discourse propagated online manifested in various forms, including openly homophobic speech, such as the hashtag #GaysShouldDisappearBecause[1] (SOS

[1] In this article, all tweets have been translated from French to English. Appendix provides the original French text and English translations for all hashtags (Section 1) and quoted tweets (Section 2), along with information

Homophobie 2014), alongside anti-gender discourses focusing on the fight against "gender theory" (Cervulle and Julliard 2013), the protection of children and the "traditional" family (Cervulle and Pailler 2014), or the defense of religious traditions (Blanc 2016). Studies of these digital anti-gender campaigns have revealed controlled communication strategies, including the rationalized use of hashtags (Cervulle and Pailler 2014) and a lexicon of self-designation (Raschini 2016), as well as the use of formulas such as "gender theory" (Julliard 2022).

All these elements contribute to creating and structuring semiotic communities, which are "communities that share repertoires of signs, types of expression and writing practices" (Julliard 2022, 132). Semiotic communities shaped during these debates were characterized by their heterogeneous composition of actors (political organizations, associations, traditional and alternative media, individuals) (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Teicher 2017). They were also marked by various political positions, forming "unstable" and "contextual" coalitions ranging from the conservative right to the identitarian far right (Julliard 2022, 150).

A decade after the same-sex marriage debates, social media remains a privileged space for propagating discourse opposing "gender theory," "LGBT propaganda," or the more recent neologism "wokism."[2] This claim is illustrated by the "Protect Our Children" campaign, initiated by the French far-right party "Reconquête!" in September 2022. The campaign operated both offline and through a digital strategy, targeting national educational institutions. This included the creation of the "Parents Vigilants" website and eponymous Twitter accounts, a YouTube broadcast of an interview with the campaign spokesperson, and LinkedIn posts sharing testimonials against public schools. The orchestrated nature of this digital campaign was evident in this statement from the party's president, Éric Zemmour (2022), on his official website: "I want a massive presence on the internet; starting today, and I salute the digital army that we have raised, and which does just as much for our ideas as those who paste posters."

In 2023, as France marked the 10th anniversary of marriage equality, this quote suggests that digital anti-gender campaigns remain a current phenomenon. While existing

about the authors and their roles in the discourse. The complete dataset of original tweets is available in d'Estienne du Bourguet-Laquièze (2023).

[2] Refers to a recuperation of the word "woke", which means to be "awake or aware, especially to racial discrimination and social injustice". This word was hijacked by reactionary voices with the neologism "wokism," to characterize a particular social group (the "Woke"), allowing them to designate by extension all progressive forces, including anti-racist, feminist, and LGBTQ+ movements (Canet and Dupuis-Déri 2022, 28).

studies on these campaigns in the French context rely on discourse corpora collected up to 2017, this article revisits the topic using a corpus of tweets collected from November 2022 to February 2023. The analysis focuses on the following questions: Who contributes to the propagation of francophone anti-gender discourses on social media? What strategies are employed to do so? And what patterns can be identified from anti-gender discourses currently being propagated on social media?

This research stems from the understanding that digital spaces offer crucial insights into the evolution of socio-political discourses. Three key transformations brought about by the Internet and social media are particularly relevant. First, traditional media's communicative power has diminished "by the inability to reach large, captive audiences and by the ready availability of alternative sources of ideas and knowledge" (McQuail 2010, 545), reflecting a democratization of information production that enables social media users to construct their own means of communication. Second, the Internet's ubiquity extends users' social possibilities beyond their immediate environment, facilitating membership in new online groups (McQuail 2010), and thereby promotes the formation of "semiotic communities" as defined above. Third, social media enables users to "answer back" to authority figures or avoid them entirely (McQuail 2010). This last point suggests the emergence of new forms of interaction between entrepreneurs (political, media, or religious) and individual users.

The research questions emerged from two elements in Zemmour's quote. First, the rationalization of this digital campaign and the use of a military lexicon point to a propagandist use of social media—defined as "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior in order to achieve a goal that meets the propagandist's intention" (Garth and O'Donnell 2015, 313). Digital propaganda specifically comprises an "evolving set of techniques and mechanisms that facilitate the propagation of ideas and actions" (Sparkes-Vian 2019, 1).

Second, the initiation of the campaign "Protect Our Children" by a far-right party suggests a strategic use of social media for anti-gender discourse. Studies over the past decade have extensively documented how political parties and interest groups use social media as tools for communication, networking, and mobilization[3]. Notable in this context, Baider and Constantinou (2014) demonstrated the role of social media in reinforcing "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995) through their analysis of the Greek far-right party "Golden Dawn."

[3] For further discussion, see: Ackland and Gibson 2013; Lachapelle and Maarek 2015; Bennett and Livingston 2018; Jungherr, Schroeder and Stier 2019.

In the digital age, this concept manifests through everyday narratives circulated via social media to "reach the minds of those who want to believe in a national identity" and foster identification with what Benedict Anderson (1991, 6) terms as "imagined, intrinsically limited, political community" (Baider and Constantinou 2014, 215-17).

Based on these elements of understanding, this article will identify the strategies used in the corpus to facilitate the propagation of anti-gender discourses. It will also map the semiotic community engaged in this type of discourse and retrace its symbolic boundaries, which are redefined through these propagated discourses. The article begins with a description of the methodological approach, detailing the methods used to collect and analyze the corpus of tweets. The findings are presented in three sections. First, the vectors of propagation identified are outlined, revealing a heterogeneous set of actors from media, political, intellectual, and activist spheres. These actors reflect the different shades of right-wing and far-right movements in France, united by their ideological proximity to conservatism, defined here as a "common opposition to liberal modernity and its ideal of an open society" (Albertini and Doucet 2016). Second, analysis of discourses targeting drag-queens and gender detransition reveals an expansion of anti-gender discourse boundaries, reflected in the relative inclusion of LGB[4] and feminist activists within the anti-gender semiotic community to reinforce the exclusion of individuals questioning cisgender norms. Third, through examination of discourses against the Minister of National Education and schools, the analysis shows how anti-gender discourses merge with anti-wokism discourses, leading to a blurring of boundaries between gender, religion, and ethnicity. This pattern facilitates the articulation of a national-populist discourse that claims to protect French Christian identity against the perceived threats of Islam and "wokism," reframed with the "straw person fallacy" (Policar 2022).

Data Collection and Methods

To collect the corpus of tweets, I conducted three months of "peripheral" participatory observation on Francophone Twitter[5], enabling the systematic collection of tweets referring to specific keywords. This participatory observation is defined as "peripheral," being marked "by the desire to interfere as little as possible with the social terrain under study" (Serpereau 2011, 81-2). This approach applies particularly well to

[4] LGB is used to designate groups intentionally excluding trans people from their activism.
[5] The study focused on Francophone rather than French Twitter, as no computer code was available to enable geographical delimitation of the collected discourses, only linguistic delimitation.

Twitter, which "allows one to be at the heart of exchanges, thanks to open and public data, while remaining invisible, on the periphery" (Arsenault 2015, 42).

The data collection process involves accessing the Twitter platform API, configuring the RStudio console with the necessary code packages—primarily "RTweet" for tweet identification and "writexl" for exporting data to Excel—and authenticating to the Twitter API through RStudio. Once these steps were completed, data collection proceeded using four keyword categories, which were selected through triangulation of existing literature, exploratory Twitter surveys, and identification of salient elements from the contemporary francophone socio-political context:

- Wokism: woke, wokism, wokist;
- LGBT: LGBT lobby, LGBT propaganda;
- Gender: gender ideology, gender theory, manif pour tous;
- Others: detrans, detransition, heterophobe, heterophobia, cisphobe, cisphobia.

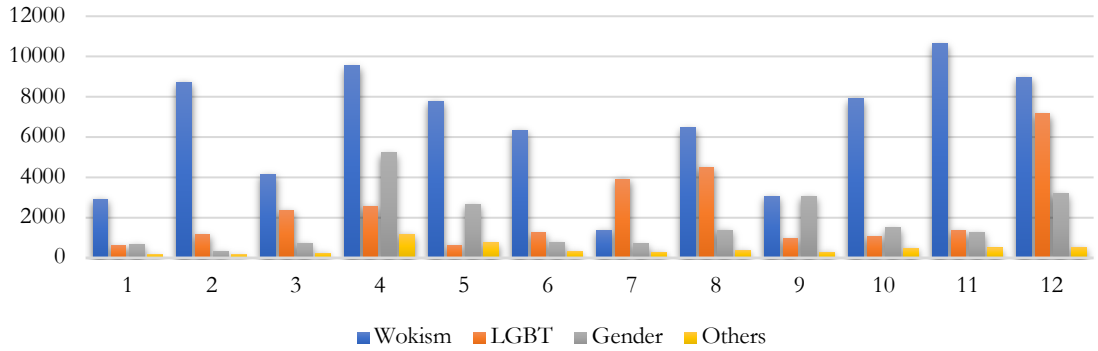
The data collection resulted in a corpus of 133,426 tweets, collected from November 13, 2022, to February 5, 2023. To analyse patterns within this large dataset, I present two visualizations: Table 1 shows the distribution of tweets across keyword categories, while Figure 1 illustrates temporal trends through a grouped bar graph, highlighting production peaks during the collection period.

Table 1: Distribution of Tweets Across Keyword Categories

Category	Count	Percentage
Wokism	78,090	59%
LGBT	27,853	21%
Gender	21,804	16%
Others	5,679	4%
Total	**133,426**	**100%**

Source: Author

Figure 1: Weekly Distribution of Tweets Across Keyword Categories



Source: Author

The generation of word clouds revealed the most frequently used words in tweets, including retweets. This visualization method highlighted particularly prominent tweets, which could be partially reconstructed from the word clouds. This approach enabled the identification of the most widely retweeted content during the collection period. For example, the word cloud representing the first month of data collection (Figure 2) predominantly displays text from two heavily retweeted messages. These tweets focused on two topics: the "Protect Our Children" campaign led by Éric Zemmour and Russia's legislative amendment that expanded its ban on "homosexual propaganda" to include "LGBT propaganda, sex change and pedophilia" (Viktine 2022).

Figure 2: Word Cloud of Most Frequent Tweet Content from December 2022

Source: Author

Through this word cloud analysis, 40 tweets were identified in the word clouds representing the three months of data collection. To provide deeper insights, additional tweets presenting an interdiscursive relationship with the main cases were selected, bringing the total sample to 70 tweets related to the corpus's main themes.

These tweets are analyzed as individual micro-discourses along with their associated meta-data. The analysis draws on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which traditionally aims to understand how discursive strategies produce and reproduce social inequalities, abuses of power, and domination (Fairclough 2013, 110-2). Fairclough's model conceptualizes discourse as "language in use" within its sociocultural and historical

context (Baider 2019, 15). This framework views discourse as a social practice that shapes reality, relationships, and identities (Baider 2019, 15). In this article, CDA examines strategic dimensions behind tweet propagation, analyzing their main themes and identifying the semiotic community gravitating around anti-gender discourses.

The methodology combines two critical discourse studies approaches: the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) and Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS). DHA enables meticulous discourse analysis through five analytical questions that examine linguistic designations, attribute assignments, argumentative structures, perspectival positions, and expression modalities (Wodak 2015, 5). These questions guide the identification of five distinct discursive strategies in DHA (Samaie and Malmeer 2017, 4). First, the referential strategy constructs groups of belonging and exclusion. Second, the predication strategy evaluates social actors through positive or negative labeling. Third, the argumentation strategy provides justification for these attributions. Fourth, the perspectivation strategy reveals the speaker's positioning. Finally, the intensification strategy modifies the epistemic weight of propositions.

Given the unique nature of social media data and its collection environment, the study also incorporates SM-CDS. Among various social network discourse analysis approaches, SM-CDS distinguishes itself by offering dual-level discourse contextualization through "media and situational" factors (Tamassy and Géring 2022). Following KhosraviNik and Unger (2016, 214), this approach considers specific medium and situational factors to enable more effective classification and nuanced analysis of social network data. Medium factors shape the technical and structural aspects of communication. These include synchronicity of interactions, methods of message transmission, message persistence, message size, communication channels, privacy settings, and anonymity features that determine how participant identities are represented. Situation factors influence the contextual and social dimensions of communication. These encompass message format and participation structures, participant characteristics (including demographic and ideological attributes), interaction purposes (at both individual and group levels), topic selection, tone (formal or informal), established group norms, and language choices including script selection (KhosraviNik and Unger 2016, 215). I added a "Query" line to the situation factors to identify the keyword used to collect the micro-discourse. Interrogating tweets and their metadata using this analysis grid enriched the analysis, particularly in identifying and defining the propagation vectors behind the tweets analyzed.

Vectors of Propagation: The "Fachosphere" as a Semiotic Community

Previous research on French digital anti-gender campaigns revealed a diverse coalition of actors spanning from conservative right to far-right political positions, including religious groups and conspiracy theorists (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Teicher 2017; Julliard 2018, 2022). The current analysis identifies similar propagation vectors in the corpus, encompassing political figures, individual actors, traditional and alternative media outlets, journalists, translation services, and both formal associations and activist groups.

The identified political figures are exclusively associated with right-wing and far-right parties: "Les Républicains" (LR), "Les Patriotes" (LP), or "Rassemblement National" (RN). Among party accounts, *@Reconquete_off*, representing Zemmour's party "Reconquête!" founded in 2021, is the only official party account present. The analysis also identifies seven "Reconquête!" members' accounts, including vice-presidents, local elected representatives, and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), demonstrating how the party has adopted anti-gender rhetoric.

Media identified by previous research reappear here as propagation vectors, such as conservative media *Le Figaro* and *Valeurs Actuelles* (Julliard 2016). The television channel *CNEWS*, which functions as the French equivalent of *Fox News* (Onishi 2021), is prominent both in the propagation of anti-gender discourses from its Twitter account and through the high digital activity of its columnists. *Sud Radio* emerges as another key actor. It is a regional radio station criticized since 2010 for providing platforms for conspiracy theories and far-right ideas in its programs (Conspiracy Watch 2011; 2022).

Among several alternative media sources, the most prominent is *Fdesouche.com*, "France's first political blog" (Julliard 2016). This press site faces criticism for employing a "cut-and-paste" strategy to spread disinformation aligned with far-right themes, such as the defense of French identity against the perceived threats of immigration and Islam (Lukasic and Salou 2023). Out of the 70 tweets analyzed, eight were produced by *Fdesouche.com*.

A significant development has been the emergence of translation accounts. Three such accounts were identified, each targeting a specific type of content to translate. As such, the account *@QuantumLeapTrad* translates conspiracy content, primarily sourced from the original American *@QuantumLeap* account. *@TrumpFrance*, founded by a group of far-right activists including Vivien Hoch, who was one of the main figures opposing marriage equality legislation in 2013, specifically focuses on translating Donald Trump's statements on themes such as anti-abortion movements, conspiracy rhetoric on COVID-19 and vaccines, and migratory and racial issues (Henry 2016; Lecot 2020).

Beyond political and mediatic vectors of propagation, three militant associations and collectives play significant roles. These include the account of *@ParentsVigil*, the collective behind the "Protect Our Children" campaign, alongside the accounts *@femelliste* and *@resistancelesbi*, which represent a *femalist*[6] collective claiming that "being a woman is a biological reality" (Femelliste 2023) and a radical lesbian collective (Résistance Lesbienne 2023) respectively. This unexpected presence of feminist accounts among the identified actors suggests the formation of "unlikely" alliances (Mathieu 1999). The study also identified a private social science institute, the Institut de Sciences Sociales, Économiques & Politiques (ISSEP Lyon), founded in 2018 by Thibault Monnier and Marion Maréchal, both members of the "Reconquête!" party. Individual user accounts, frequently anonymous, displayed identifiable characteristics through pseudonyms, profile and cover photos, and biography. These accounts typically belonged to supporters of the RN or "Reconquête!", individuals expressing patriotic sentiments without party affiliation ("France, my only party" and similar variations), Christian activists, sovereigntists, Eurosceptics, or conspiracists.

Given the political nature of this ensemble, anti-gender discourse appears predominantly concentrated within what Albertini and Doucet (2016) have termed the "fachosphere." This concept encompasses a nebula of actors from the identitarian right and far right, whose common denominator is "a shared opposition to liberal modernity and its ideal of an open society," and who have strategically used the Internet to "bypass the filter of the 'traditional' media and reach audiences directly" through social networks (Albertini and Doucet 2016). Although this denomination needs to be nuanced in light of the "unlikely" alliances identified in the analysis, it allows me to categorize and trace the boundaries of the semiotic community that centers around anti-gender discourses on Twitter (Julliard 2022). My findings reveal two patterns of anti-gender discourse that contribute to redefining the boundaries of this semiotic community, particularly regarding the integration of feminist and LGB activist accounts within the fachosphere. These patterns function as strategies of formation and transformation of symbolic boundaries, involving the expansion of symbolic boundaries, their contraction, and the blurring and modification of their meaning (Wimmer 2013, 49-61).

[6] Femalist is an emic term used to describe feminist movements whose claims are based on a biological conception of being a woman. Members of these movements often identify as gender-critical feminists, with their activism primarily opposing the rights of trans individuals. They also reject the label "TERF", which they perceive as carrying a negative connotation online, and criticize those who use the term to describe them.

"Protect Our Children": Two Patterns of Anti-gender Discourse on Twitter

Research has extensively documented how anti-gender discourses frequently center on the protection of children as a key rhetorical strategy (Husson 2015; Julliard 2017; Olivesi 2017). The continuing significance of this theme is demonstrated by the occurrence of the word "child" in 53% of the tweets in my dataset. My analysis of tweets referring to the protection of children identified two patterns of anti-gender discourse: first, the expansion of the semiotic boundaries of anti-gender discourse, and second, its integration into anti-wokism discourse, a process that blurs the boundaries between "gender," "wokism," and "Islamism."

Expanding the Semiotic Boundaries of Anti-gender Discourse

Existing literature has shown how discourses referring to the protection of children were used to call for the defense of the traditional family model. To justify the opposition to so-called "gender theory," these discourses advanced naturalistic arguments such as respect for "the laws of nature" (Olivesi 2017) and religious arguments such as the preservation of "the order of creation" (Julliard 2016). At the same time, these arguments reaffirmed the difference between genders and the resulting gendered roles within the heterosexual nuclear family (Husson 2015). Although these discourses were mainly focused on opposition against marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, some studies had already identified a second dimension, operating through debates of a physiological nature (Olivesi 2017) and a discourse stigmatizing trans people and "voluntarily indeterminate" bodies (Julliard 2017).

In the corpus analyzed, a shift occurred. Discourses focusing on same-sex families have been replaced by discourses focusing on drag queens and trans people. This shift suggests an expansion of the semiotic boundaries of anti-gender discourse, which, through the integration of LGB and feminist activists, enabled the exclusion of people questioning "gender differences" (Julliard 2017). This pattern has a two-fold structure.

First, analyzed tweets explicitly oppose drag queens story readings to minors:

> 🔞 Drag-queens and the LGBT lobby are relentless: they want to touch children! They are obsessed with children! We say NO! ❌ NO to @SebVincini's Departmental Council of @HauteGaronne hosting a drag reading on February 4 at MJC Roguet in #Toulouse.

Through this tweet, Arthur Cottrel, a member of "Reconquête!", expresses the party's rejection of the "relentlessness" of drag queens and the "LGBT lobby," understood as the threat targeting children. The threatening nature of this statement is reflected in the opening of the text with a "forbidden to under 18s" emoji and the use of words that could refer to a

physical threat ("relentless," "touch," "obsessed"), as well as the repeated use of exclamation marks. This discourse cultivates fear by reactivating the stigma of grooming that has accompanied gay communities since the 1970s both in Europe and North America (Sibalis 2010; Redien-Collot 2023). The text employs "we" to present the group's position, reflecting a strategy of perspectivation (Samaie and Malmeer 2017, 4). This rhetorical approach positions "Reconquête!" as actively opposing what they frame as a threat, emphasizing the party's collective stance through the use of the first-person plural. This opposition is also intensified through the use of capital letters to say "NO," exclamation marks, and a red cross emoji. The text concludes with a predication strategy (Samaie and Malmeer 2017, 4) which holds Sébastien Vincini responsible, thereby pitting the National Secretary of the Socialist Party against the "Reconquête!" party. A tweet from BFM TV news channel reported that the contested event had "finally been deprogrammed by the town hall," revealing one of the objectives of the first tweet: to put pressure on local elected officials to cancel drag queen readings and prevent children's exposure to gender performers.

To understand the dynamics behind anti-drag reading campaigns, it is relevant to turn to American literature, as this type of mobilization has proliferated in the US in recent years. Analyzing 203 anti-drag mobilizations online and offline in the US between 2022 and 2023, Martiny and Lawrence (2023) reveal a heterogeneous set of actors behind these campaigns, including anti-LGBTQI+ groups, far-right and white supremacist groups, parental rights activists, anti-vaxx groups, and Christian nationalists. The main narratives of anti-drag discourses portray drag performers as "groomers," drag shows open to all ages as "child abuse," and LGBTQI+ identities as an "ideology" (Martiny and Lawrence 2023, 17). By reactivating the "groomers" stigma to designate drag queens, a shift takes place in the discourse, moving away from the sexual dimension to focus on the gendered dimension that drag-queens inherently question. Ultimately, this strategy has already rallied cisgender gay men to this rhetoric, as illustrated by the far-right American organization "Gays Against Groomers" (Martiny and Lawrence 2023, 15).

Second, the tweets analyzed put the emphasis on gender detransition, which refers to someone who stop making changes (social, legal, medical) that they made to live according to a different gender to the one assigned at birth (Cambridge Dictionary 2024). Discourses on detransition are often instrumented by conservative and anti-trans movement, as in this tweet: "United States: this former soldier had become a trans icon. Now in 'detransition', he wants to protect children. 'I've been propagandized', 'used', 'naive'."

Published by alternative media *Fdesouche.com*, this tweet includes both a hyperlink to the article on their website and photographs showing the subject as a trans woman and pre-transition in military uniform. The tweet translates the testimony of a "trans icon" who has detransitioned, using a fallacious argument of authority: suggesting that his past notoriety as a trans woman legitimizes his current stance. The three words characterizing his testimony —"propagandized, used, naive"—describe the transition as deception, manipulation, and abuse. The subject positions himself as a victim, deflecting responsibility for their own choices onto those who facilitated their transition—whom they now characterize as threats to children.

Research into this former soldier's online presence reveals that he leads anti-gender campaigns on social media, especially on Instagram, where he combines a Christian nationalist discourse with a conspiracy discourse on pedophilia and Satanism, while also integrating an anti-drag rhetoric by describing drag queens as "groomers."

Another tweet from *@DubreuihlMarcel*, the founder of alternative media *Le Média en 4-4-2*, shared the testimony of Oli London, describing them as an "influencer turned man after his detransition, [who] denounces #woke teaching that targets children." This represents another instance of using detransition testimony as a fallacious argument of authority to construct narratives about threats to children. Additionally, *@DubreuihlMarcel*'s accompanying statement—"this is why drag-queens have been banned from reading about gender to 3–6-year-olds, listen up..." —confirms the interdiscursive relation with the first issue presented.

As with anti-drag campaigns, discourses on detransition initially emerged in the United States, enabling American literature to initiate an analysis of such discourses. Slothouber's research (2020) identified three key narratives accompanying detransition discourses. First, a socio-political climate "too accepting of trans identities" would overlook people who detransition to remain "politically correct." Second, these discourses address the need to protect children from misdiagnosis (and therefore gender transition). Finally, the fear of misdiagnosis would be intensified by the idea that gender dysphoria could be the result of "social contagion" (Slothouber 2020, 90). This research identifies another strategy in discourses on detransition: promoting the idea that people who detransition exist in large numbers (Slothouber 2020, 92). Here, this strategy is illustrated by a tweet from media *Valeurs Actuelles*:

> 🔴 Gender detransition: these ex-trans individuals who regret (and let it be known).
> ➡️ Consequence of the trans phenomenon: many people regret taking the step. These detransitioners warn about the damages of surgery and treatments.

This tweet cultivates fear through a strategy of intensification by numbers, while framing surgery and treatments in terms of the damage these procedures can create. According to Turban et al. (2021), out of 17,000 transgender individuals surveyed, 13.1% reported detransitioning, with 82.5% of these citing at least one external driving factor, such as family pressure or social stigma. These findings bring a much-needed layer of complexity to the idea that "many people regret taking the leap."

Furthermore, discourses on detransition are in line with the pathologizing and medicalizing discourse transgender movements have been fighting against since the 1960s. The tweet below, posted by *@femelliste*, reflects the pathologizing dimension and the victim framing that accompany discourses on detransition:

> 🗣Detransitioner's testimony: 'I just don't want children to be sterilized because they have mental health issues. I receive death threats for expressing this idea'.

These discourses surrounding detransition provide a bridge between conservative and religious anti-gender actors and biological essentialist who support groups like Femelliste, the latter defining womanhood as "for females, those members of the biological sex category who typically produce large, immobile gametes" (Lawford-Smith 2023, 40). In the corpus analyzed, this type of discourse is found in a tweet from a trans-exclusionary lesbian collective *@ResistanceLesbi*: "Recent testimony from a teenage girl who 'transitioned' as early as 13 and then 'detransitioned' at 16 in the US." This tweet is accompanied by hashtags such as *#surgery*, *#topsurgery*, *#lesbians*, and *#transmen*.

Both these examples illustrate renewed divisions within feminist and LGBTQI+ movements. These divisions have led to the formation of "unlikely" coalitions, as illustrated by this tweet from *Fdesouche.com*:

> 'Being a man or a woman is a decision': When sex disappears in favor of gender theory, feminists Dora Moutot and Marguerite Sterne launch the 'Femalist' movement to counter these ideas.

The tweet includes a video clip from *Sud Radio* featuring an interview with Dora Moutot and Marguerite Sterne, demonstrating how these self-described feminist activists have been integrated into the "fachosphere."

In this section, analyzed tweets reveal a shift in the semiotic boundaries of anti-gender discourse specifically in its discursive practices and central themes. Whereas previous

research identified a concentration of discourses against same-sex marriage and adoption (Cervulle and Pailler 2014; Husson 2015; Julliard 2016), these issues are absent from the analyzed corpus. Instead, the tweets focus on two main themes: first, they frame drag queens as a threat through strategies cultivating fear and associating them with "groomers." Second, they emphasize gender detransition, using fear-cultivating strategies, false authority figures, pathologizing language, and victim framing—all of which are strategies previously identified as digital propaganda techniques (Mahood and Rane 2017; Sparkes-Vian 2019).

This evolution from targeting same-sex relationships to questioning "gender differences" represents an expansion of the symbolic boundaries of anti-gender discourse, to use Andreas Wimmer's (2013) notion. This expansion occurs through the fusion of previously excluded categories, particularly anti-trans LGB and feminist groups, which move from "threat" to "threatened," thus becoming part of the semiotic community. However, this inclusion is relative, as it reinforces the symbolic boundary between the "fachosphere" and its perceived opponents, here represented by transgender people and drag queens.

This observation aligns with the findings of House (2023), who shows how the inclusion of "femalist" activists in anti-gender coalitions serves to legitimize, amplify, and give meaning to right-wing populist movements and their exclusionary policies. Though the motivation of "femalist" actors for joining these coalitions needs to be clarified, one can hypothesize they gain visibility and resources. This shift in discourse also aligns with what Corrêa, House, and Paternotte (2023, 487) describe as the fourth wave of anti-gender campaigns, characterized by global reach, diverse actors, and a focus on transgender people.

The analysis also reveals how French discourse adopted two key narratives that originated in the United States. Additionally, discussions about current events in Russia and Eastern Europe were also present in the corpus. Tweets about the banning of "LGBT propaganda" in Hungarian and Lithuanian schools employed populist discourse—which typically portrays a powerless majority opposed to an illegitimately powerful elite that undermines the "legitimate" claims of the majority (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, 310). In targeting European and French institutions, these tweets merge anti-gender discourses with anti-wokism discourses, forming the second pattern identified in this article.

Blurring the Boundaries between Anti-gender, Anti-wokism, and Anti-Islam Discourses

Existing literature has documented the instrumentalization of anti-gender discourse to condemn French schools and educational institutions, described as propagators of "gender theory" (Harson 2017; Gallot, Khemilat and Pasquier 2018). For instance, using a

corpus of tweets collected between 2014 and 2017, Julliard (2022) exposed the articulation of racist and anti-feminist tweets targeting the former Minister of Education, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem.

In my study, the Twitter account of then-Minister of Education Pap Ndiaye appeared in 6% of tweets. While the tweets analyzed avoided racist rhetoric, they demonstrated the persistence of populist anti-gender discourse against educational institutions. These tweets also articulate different types of discourse to label the Minister. This labeling process is illustrated in the following tweet:

> We learn on CNews that Minister Pap Ndiaye's agenda has been checked. Nothing on education, but lots of meetings on LGBT and anti-racism. In short, leftist and woke propaganda at work. Our children will have a hard time to make progress.

This tweet, from an individual user, makes two arguments. First, the label "woke" encompasses both LGBTQI+ and anti-racist movements, consolidating them under an umbrella term that supposedly represents all progressive struggles (Canet and Dupuis-Déri 2022, 28). Like "gender theory," this integration process allows "wokism" to function as an "empty signifier"—a discursive construct that means so little that it can be used to mean many things (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, 27). As Laclau (1996, 40) points out, the potential of empty signifiers in political discourse can "bring equivalent homogeneity to a very heterogeneous reality," allowing diverse empirical facts to support a single ideological agenda. This instrumentalization is reinforced by the absence of a consensual definition of "wokism," making it a key notion to establish "chains of equivalence," facilitating coalitions among various actors (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, as cited in Mayer 2018)—as seen in the "fachosphere," which spans far-right political figures to LGB and feminist activists.

The tweet's second argument—"our children will have a hard time to progress"—relies on a fallacious definition: "Minister Pap Ndiaye's agenda has been checked. Nothing on education." This framing suggests that the Minister of Education neglects his main functions, specifically helping "children progress." Similar tweets label Minister Pap Ndiaye as "committed to the ideology of race and gender," "an ambassador of LGBT propaganda," or a collaborator of "wokism," thereby condemning educational institutions and their supposed complicity in spreading "gender theory." These tweets employ populist discourse to pit an elite "collaborating with wokism" against a threatened, powerless people.

This populist discourse not only creates antagonism but also rallies support for the "Reconquête!" political project:

> 🔴 Your children's school is threatened. Act against immigrationist and LGBT propaganda, wokist education and the collapse of school standards. Protect your children: protegeons-nos-enfants.fr/petition #ProtectOurChildren.

This tweet, published by the official twitter account of "Reconquête!", frames the threats to "your children's" school through a strategic list: first several political issues, followed by "the collapse of school standards"—an argument designed to resonate with parents who may not respond to the previous threats. The populist framing of anti-gender discourse around education serves to promote this party, which invites parents to sign the "Protect Our Children" petition. The deliberate grouping of issues is telling, as it links migration with LGBTQI+ issues and "wokism." This association is echoed in this tweet:

> 🟡 At EDHEC Lille, LGBT propaganda is on full display with "pride week". Against the great indoctrination of your children, act: protegeons-nos-enfants.fr #ProtectOurChildren.

Produced by *@ParentsVigil*, this tweet reveals a new discursive formula of "great indoctrination," deliberately echoing the far-right concept of "great replacement." This concept, produced by Renaud Camus, warns of a demographic threat supposedly posed by Islam and Muslim people, who are accused of targeting Caucasians in "their own territories in a context of 'multiculturalist deculturation'" (Camus 2014, as cited in Wakil 2021, 18).

This discursive convergence points to a national-populist discourse, which relies on "the polarized opposition between 'us' and 'them' in vertical and horizontal dimensions" (Brubaker 2017, 1192). The vertical dimension is a characteristic of populism, as previously defined by Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis (2017, 310-11). In my study, this vertical dimension is illustrated by the condemnation of national institutions and their representatives. The horizontal dimension refers to the boundaries of the "nation," defined in opposition to "Others"—people who, regardless of citizenship, are deemed outside the national community (Brubaker 2017, 1192). This horizontal opposition manifests in associating "wokism" and "Islamism," presented as the ultimate threats to children.

In the analyzed tweets, this association between "wokism" and "Islamism" takes various forms as users highlight perceived threats in schools. For example, one user responds to a video of children singing *as-salamu alaykum* in a public pre-school: "The outrages to the secular republic inflicted on us by woke culture and radical Islam!" Here, the discourse pairs "woke culture" and "radical Islam" as joint opponents of the "secular republic." This discourse also promotes Christianity as a national cultural norm, as illustrated by another tweet about the suicide of a middle-school student who was being harassed because of his homosexuality:

> Before the arrival of Christianophobic populations, the presence of homosexual children at school went unnoticed. Moreover, the #LGBT lobby was not there, to claim their difference. 🙏#Lucas

The tweet presents two arguments about the 13-year-old's suicide. First, it claims that "Christianophobic" populations—implicitly referring to Muslims—were responsible for the teenager's harassment. Furthermore, the "LGBT lobby" encourages children from sexual and gender minorities to assert "their difference," thereby exposing them to harassment. This framing deflects from the central issue: opposition to LGBTQI+ education in schools as part of anti-discrimination measures, which the various political figures represented in the "fachosphere" actively oppose.

Against this backdrop, tweets position Islam and "wokism" as threats to children, while offering a third way:

> It's up to you to choose for your children, Islam based on values of enslavement, wokism based on immoral values and unrestricted freedoms, or Christian values based on love, forgiveness of others... It's up to you to choose for your future and that of your children.

This tweet creates a false dilemma, contrasting Christianity with Islam and "wokism"—discrediting both to promote Christianity. This strategy merges religious and national identities, echoing the rhetoric of American Christian nationalist movements (Whitehead and Perry 2020) and what Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy (2016) theorize as "hijacking" of Christianity to embody national identity. Social media has become crucial for Christian national-populist entrepreneurs to reach their audience (Freire 2014), deploying a culture of fear (Walker 2024), as shown in this tweet:

> Little girl raped and throat slit, French women raped, grandmother assaulted, inclusive writing, vegan, burkini, non-gendered bike lane, meeting forbidden to whites, wokist education minister, war imposed by Macron. Decadent France 2022.

This tweet uses a enumeration strategy, alternating between alleged threats from immigration and Islam, and those from "wokism" and "gender theory," to promote a white nationalist discourse that blurs the symbolic boundaries between ethnic, religious, and cultural factors (Wimmer 2013). Similarly, previous tweets achieved this by framing white populations as victims, universalizing Christian discourse, and reaffirming heterocisgender norms (Wimmer 2013, 62). This strategy positions people of color and people with immigrant background, Muslims, and LGBTQI+ (especially TQI+) as outsiders to the imagined community, thus illustrating the horizontal dimension of nationalism. The tweet's final elements sarcastically blame France's "decadence" on the government, highlighting populism's vertical dimension.

In this section, my analysis shows how associating "wokism" and "Islamism" in anti-education tweets constructs two threats to children. Anti-wokism discourse combines "gender theory" and "LGBT lobby and propaganda" with "race theory" narratives, creating an anti-progressive discourse (Canet and Dupuis-Déri 2022). Meanwhile, discourses on Islam and immigration reinforce Muslim stigmatization and stoke fears of "conquering Islam" that have persisted in French society since the 1980s (Asal 2020), with Muslims remaining the main target of far-right movements for decades (Policar 2022, 118).

This parallel between "wokism" and "Islamism" is built by distorting both concepts with the straw person fallacy, which involves "distorting the opponent's position by attributing to it an implausible, fabricated and easily refutable point of view, and then arguing against this fabricated version as if it were that opponent's" (Blair 1983; Policar 2022, 118). Linking "wokism" with "Islamism" allows the propagators of such discourses to position both as "straw persons" in opposition to their definition of national community—white, Christian, heterosexual, and cisgender. Such opposition is constructed through alarmist discourse and the use of a range of propaganda techniques, including fearmongering, victim framing, sarcasm, and false dilemmas. By presenting these groups as threats, anti-woke and anti-Islam entrepreneurs can stage a fight against these straw persons and reposition themselves as defenders of French identity and the nation's children through a proposed "third way." This strategy serves two purposes: first, it reinforces an imagined national community that excludes those associated with either straw person. Second, it advances a populist discourse by blaming the current government for these supposed threats. This is exemplified in a tweet of a Le Figaro editorialist, Ivan Rioufol:

> No, Mr. President #Macron, you are not a Resistance fighter: with #papndiaye in Education, you collaborate with #Wokism. You do not impede #Islamism in its conquests. You falsify history by saying that 'France has always been a land of immigration'.

Conclusion

Based on a qualitative analysis of tweets collected between November 2022 and February 2023, this article revisits existing knowledge on digital anti-gender campaigns in France, ten years after the national debates on marriage and adoption for all. Three main contributions emerge from this analysis.

The analysis of propagation vectors behind these discourses reveals a heterogeneous set of political, media, and activist actors. This set of actors, designated as the "fachosphere" (Albertini and Doucet 2016), functions as a semiotic community sharing discursive practices

and central themes, through which they express a common opposition to liberal modernity. While positions within this community range from the conservative right to the identitarian far right, as outlined in previous research (Julliard 2022), some "unlikely" profiles stand out —notably LGB and feminist activists. To explain their inclusion in the "fachosphere," this article identifies two patterns, based on the rhetoric "protect our children," which help redefine the symbolic boundaries of this semiotic community gravitating around anti-gender discourses.

First, the call to "protect our children" grounds discourses opposing drag queens readings for minors and warning against gender detransition. These discourses operate through several propaganda strategies: stigmatizing association of drag queens with "groomers," fallacious arguments of authority from people in detransition, trans-exclusionary radical feminists positioning themselves as victims, and fear-mongering discourses. The focus within these discourses on drag queens' readings and gender detransition suggests an expansion of the symbolic boundaries of the "fachosphere." Through the fusion of former categories of exclusion, identified anti-trans LGB and femalist groups are integrated into the semiotic community. This inclusion is relative, however, as it reinforces the symbolic boundary between the "fachosphere" and the "Others"—particularly transgender people and drag queens. This first pattern aligns with the coalition-building process described by House (2023) and with what is described in the literature as the "fourth wave of anti-gender campaigns" (Corrêa, House and Paternotte 2023, 48). Nevertheless, the incentive for "femalist" entrepreneurs to associate with such actors remains unclear, though increased visibility and resources may be factors. Future research should examine whether these coalitions are merely strategic and contextual, or if deeper alliances can emerge between actors with seemingly opposing positions.

Second, the call to "protect our children" enables a populist discourse condemning schools, the Minister of Education, and national institutions. While this dimension of anti-gender discourse is well-documented (Harson 2017; Gallot and Pasquier 2018; Julliard 2018), my analysis of anti-school tweets reveals a new pattern. The Minister of Education, Pap Ndiaye, is labeled an "ambassador of LGBT propaganda" and a "collaborator of wokism." This labeling strategy contrasts an elite "complicit" with "wokism" and "gender theory" against a powerless, threatened people who can be saved by the "Reconquête!" party. Additionally, anti-school rhetoric integrates anti-gender discourse within anti-wokism discourse, which connects to discourse against "Islamism".

This pattern results in blurred symbolic boundaries between ethnic, religious, and cultural factors, highlighting the relevance of an intersectional analysis. These boundaries blur through propaganda strategies including false dilemmas, universalized Christian discourse, white victimization and, here again, fear-mongering discourses. The strategy also distorts "wokism" and "Islamism" through the straw person fallacy. This facilitates national-populist discourse that excludes those associated with these straw persons from the imagined national community, while blaming institutions and government for these threats. In this way, the "fachosphere" creates the space and conditions for an alternative political project that appeals to their imagined community, though reactive in its semiotic expression.

For further research, I would like to stress the transnational circulations identified in the corpus. These narratives, imported from the United States, Eastern Europe, and Russia, appear to constitute what Bennett and Livingston (2018, 132) call "alternative information systems"—networks that bypass traditional media and provide audiences with emotionally satisfying beliefs. These systems help radical right-wing movements and parties in the West undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions and destabilize competing parties and governments (Bennett and Livingston 2018, 134-5). This transnationalization aligns with Paternotte and Kuhar's (2018, 332) vision of anti-gender campaigns as part of a complex constellation of global actors rather than isolated national phenomena. These findings emphasize the need for deeper investigation of the transnational dimension of digital anti-gender campaigns. However, previous research has been limited by difficulties comparing languages used in online discourses (Wallaschek et al 2022), suggesting the value of a transnational approach focused on specific linguistic contexts.

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Appendix: Analysis of Social Media Posts and Their Context

This appendix presents key social media content analyzed in the study, including original French tweets and their English translations. The data is organized into two sections: (1) frequently used hashtags and (2) representative tweets from various actors in the French anti-gender discourse sphere.

All tweets have been preserved in their original form, maintaining the integrity of emojis and hashtags that were present in the source material. The translation process focused on capturing not only the literal meaning but also the underlying tone and intent of each message. This dataset spans a four-month period from November 2022 through February 2023. Each entry includes information about the account type and the actor's role in the broader discourse.

Section 1: Key Hashtags and Their Translations

French Original	English Translation
#PropagandeLGBT	#LGBTpropaganda
#ThéorieDuGenre	#GenderTheory
#Wokisme	#Wokism
#LesGaysDoiventDisparaitreCar	#GaysShouldDisappearBecause
#ProtégeonsNosEnfants	#ProtectOurChildren

Section 2: Representative Tweets by Actor Type

Account	Type of Actor	Content (English)	Content (French)
@ArthurCottrel	Member of far-right political party "Reconquête!"	🔞 Drag-queens and the LGBT lobby are relentless: they want to touch children! They are obsessed with children! We say NO! ❌ NO to @SebVincini's Departmental Council of @HauteGaronne hosting a drag reading on February 4 at MJC Roguet in #Toulouse.	🔞 Les drag-queens et le lobby LGBT sont acharnés : ils veulent toucher les enfants ! Les enfants les obsèdent ! Nous disons NON ! ❌ NON au Conseil Départemental de @HauteGaronne de @SebVincini qui héberge la lecture drag du 4 février à la MJC Roguet à #Toulouse
@F_Desouche	Alternative media	United States: this former soldier had become a trans icon. Now in 'detransition', he wants to protect children. 'I've been propagandized', 'used', 'naive'.	États-Unis : cet ancien soldat était devenu une icône trans. Aujourd'hui en "détransition", il veut protéger les enfants. "J'ai été propagandisé", "utilisé", "naïf".
@Valeurs	Traditional media	🔴Gender detransition: these ex-trans individuals who regret (and let it be known). ➡️ Consequence of the trans phenomenon: many people regret taking the step. These	🔴 Détransition de genre : ces ex-trans qui regrettent (et le font savoir) ➡️ Conséquence du phémonène trans : de nombreuses personnes regrettent d'avoir franchi le pas.

		detransitioners warn about the damages of surgery and treatments.	Ces dé-transitionneurs alertent sur les dommages de la chirurgie et des traitements
@femelliste	A self-described feminist collective	Detransitioner's testimony: 'I just don't want children to be sterilized because they have mental health issues. I receive death threats for expressing this idea'.	🗣Parole de détransitionneuse : « Je ne veux juste pas que des enfants soient stérilisés parce qu'ils ont des problèmes de santé mentale. Je reçois des menaces de mort parce que j'exprime cette idée ».
@Reconquete_off	Political party "Reconquête!"	🔴 Your children's school is threatened. Act against immigrationist and LGBT propaganda, wokist education and the collapse of school standards. Protect your children: protegeons-nos-enfants.fr/petition #ProtectOurChildren	🔴 L'école de vos enfants est menacée. Agissez contre la propagande immigrationniste et LGBT, l'enseignement wokiste et l'effondrement du niveau scolaire. Protégez vos enfants : protegeons-nos-enfants.fr/petition #ProtegeonsNosEnfants
@ParentsVigil	Collective associated with the campaign "Protect Our Children"	🟡 At EDHEC Lille, LGBT propaganda is on full display with "pride week". Against the great indoctrination of your children, act: protegeons-nos-enfants.fr #ProtectOurChildren	🟡 A l'EDHEC Lille, la propagande LGBT bat son plein avec la "pride week". Contre le grand endoctrinement de vos enfants, agissez : protegeons-nos-enfants.fr#ProtegeonsNosEnfants
@MaryC7773	Individual user	We learn on CNews that Minister Pap Ndiaye's agenda has been checked. Nothing on education, but lots of meetings on LGBT and anti-racism. In short, leftist and woke propaganda at work. Our children will have a hard time to make progress.	On apprend sur CNews que l'agenda du ministre PapNdiyaie a été consulté. Rien sur l'enseignement mais bcp de réunions concernant les LGBT et l'anti-racisme. Bref, la propagande gauchiste et woke à la manœuvre. Nos enfants vont avoir du mal à progresser.
@holste_max	Individual user	Before the arrival of Christianophobic populations, the presence of homosexual children at school went unnoticed. Moreover, the #LGBT lobby was not there, to claim their difference. 🙏#Lucas	Avant l'arrivée des populations Christianophobes, la présence des enfants homosexuels, à l'école, passait inaperçue. Par ailleurs, le lobby #LGBT n'était pas là, pour revendiquer leur différence. 🙏#Lucas
@patrioteFr75	Individual user	Little girl raped and throat slit, French women raped, grandmother assaulted, inclusive writing, vegan, burkini, non-gendered bike lane, meeting forbidden to whites, wokist education minister, war imposed by Macron. Decadent France 2022.	Fillette violée et égorgée, femmes françaises violées, grand-mère agressée, écriture inclusive, vegan, burkini, piste cyclable non genrée, réunion interdite aux blancs, wokiste ministre de l'éducation, guerre imposée par macron. France décadente 2022.
@ivanrioufol	Journalist	No, Mr. President #Macron, you are not a Resistance fighter: with #papndiaye in Education, you collaborate with #Wokism. You do not impede #Islamism in its conquests. You falsify history by saying that 'France has always been a land of immigration'.	Non, Mr le Président #Macron, vous n'êtes pas un Résistant : avec #papndiaye à l'Education vous collaborez avec le #Wokisme de salon. Vous n'entravez pas l'#islamisme dans ses conquêtes. Vous falsifiez l'histoire en disant que 'la France a toujours été une terre d'immigration'.