

# Study examines how the Spanish far right frames traditional perspectives as 'love'

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The rise of the far right in Western democracies in recent years has revived interest in how these movements and parties engage in politics. Given the generalizations that indicate that these ideologies are only

constructed based on hate speech, two researchers at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) argue that this political tendency in Spain also uses love and other positive feelings to a great extent, although it does so from its own perspective, which is based around the family, the nation and equality.

An article by Alexandre Pichel, a predoctoral researcher on the UOC's doctoral program in Humanities and Communication, and Begonya Enguix, a member of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and lead researcher of the Genders in Transition: Masculinities, Affects, Bodies, and Technoscience (MEDUSA) group, who is also supervising Pichel's thesis, examines how the far right in Spain uses love, and argues that this political tendency is motivated by feelings "that go far beyond rejection."

## **What role do rejected realities play among so much love?**

On March 8, 2020, a few days before the declaration of the lockdown for the COVID pandemic in Spain, and while a wide range of feminist demonstrations were being held in various Spanish cities, the political party VOX organized an event at the Palacio de Vistalegre in Madrid. At that event, the third largest political force in Spain's Congress of Deputies set out a large proportion of its arguments. After analyzing the main speeches that were given on that day, the researchers examine how the party's leaders use love as an element for division.

"Very conservative ideologies use love for the same reason as the left, the mainstream right and any other type of ideology. This political trend doesn't use love to hide its true face, which is a rejection of those who don't identify with its values. This political tendency loves—but the problem is what it loves. It loves a Spain which is a single nation and

exclusive. The far right generates hate for the things it loves, but that love is completely genuine," explained Alexandre Pichel.

As the researchers point out in the article, love is used as a tool for establishing a difference between "us" (traditional families, white men and native Spaniards) and "them," who may be the elite (embodied in the governing classes and feminism) or those who are different (non-traditional families or migrants). To that end, the leaders of the far right create this feeling in their speeches through their relationship with the family, equality and violence.

## **Love and the traditional family**

Over the last decade, defending the traditional family structure has become one of the cornerstones of the ultra-conservative discourse. The researchers observe that feminism and the LGBTQI movement are highlighted in these discourses as the main threats to a type of family unit that is identified as the only "normal and natural" one. In addition, in their article Pichel and Enguix conclude that this type of family provides a direct link with the past, tradition and the cultural legacy of previous generations, i.e. with some of the cornerstones of the most conservative discourse.

The experts point out that conservative ideas about the family define the political boundaries between opponents of the traditional family (who are identified as feminists and LGBTQI people) and those who protect, love and are willing to pass on Spain's national and moral, natural sexual and gender values. The researchers argue that within the discourse of this political doctrine, "feminists, queers and leftists betray the moral norms of the nation and aim to destroy Spain and the traditional family."

## **Love for equality**

"On the far right, equality stems from the idea of a completely uniform society. If the Spanish people is uniform, then inequality is impossible," explained Pichel. "On the other hand, in leftist movements and feminism, equality is considered in terms of a concept that understands and highlights differences in order to create an open community.

The far right believes that gender quotas are restrictive of gender equality, since they don't understand the need to specify differences. The same applies to sex education in schools. This idea of equality leads ultra-conservative schools of thought to masculinize and heterosexualize a uniform society."

Love plays a role in this area. This love is for the traditional woman, the central figure of the family, for example. From this perspective, the researchers argue that the most conservative facets of Spanish politics believe that women have already reached their maximum levels of intelligence, freedom, strength and independence, and as such they have no need for feminism.

In their study, the UOC experts point out that love is once again used to divide and to build a wall between conservative-leaning Spain, and feminism and everyone who defends policies for gender equality.

## **Love and its relationship with gender violence**

The authors believe that the discourse of the Spanish far right uses the distinction between gender violence and sexual violence to maintain an ambivalent narrative. On the one hand, they use it to accuse feminism of criminalizing men with regard to gender violence. While, on the other hand, they use it to portray immigrant men as potential sexual abusers. As the researchers say in their paper, "nativism, nationalism, and xenophobia are entangled with affects and violence in a complex way."

"The link between [love](#) and the family, Spain and its idea of equality is the result of what the British sociologist Jeff Hearn calls the hegemony of men. If we look at the affective and political mechanisms that are used, we can see how the defense of men is present in each one," said Pichel. "The far right loves the [family](#) in order to protect the concept of paternal domination, it loves the country to restore the role of men as national leaders, and it loves equality to defend men against the advances made by feminism."

The paper is published in the journal *South European Society and Politics*.

**More information:** Alexandre Pichel-Vázquez et al, Framing Gender through Affects: Antifeminism and Love in the Spanish Far Right (Vox), *South European Society and Politics* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2022.2115185](#)

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