

Call for abstract

Deadline: 15 July 2026

International Conference

University of Verona

3-4 December 2026

“On Trial”

Claiming Feminist Justice in Dark Times - Between Law, Testimony, and Politics

Feminist justice and women’s rights are increasingly “**on trial**” **today** – contested, minimized, and put on the defensive in courts of law and in the broader public sphere alike.

In recent years, **trials addressing gender-based violence** have become central sites of public debate about justice, responsibility, and gender equality. High-profile cases – such as the Pelicot trial in France – have exposed both the possibilities and the limitations of legal frameworks in addressing forms of violence deeply embedded in **social structures of domination** and in **gendered norms of credibility and consent**. While courts of law play a crucial role in recognizing harm and assigning responsibility, feminist scholars have long questioned whether legal adjudication can adequately capture the structural nature of gender-based violence. This limitation concerns two interrelated but distinct dimensions of law, particularly salient in cases of gender violence: its *performance* and its *performativity*.

On the one hand, courtrooms are not neutral spaces. The **performance of justice** is governed by rituals, roles, and norms that regulate who is authorized to speak, how bodies appear, and how credibility is assigned. In this sense, the courtroom may reproduce forms of structural violence even as it seeks to redress harm. On the other hand, trials do not simply produce verdicts: they generate narratives about violence, victims, and accountability, shaping how harm is collectively

recognized and understood. The **performativity of trials** thus extends to the afterlife that legal definitions (think of highly debated terms such as *consent* or *femicide*), as well as narratives about victimhood and credibility articulated in court, may acquire in the public sphere.

This leads to a second, **metaphorical sense in which feminist justice is “on trial”**. We are living in what Hannah Arendt described as “**dark times**” — when the public realm contracts and becomes polarized, eroding “the ground on which we stand”, that is, the world we have in common. In contemporary public discourse — across social media, political arenas, and everyday language — gender-based violence is often minimized, deprioritized, or met with backlash. Persistent stereotypes, victim-blaming narratives, and sexist linguistic practices continue to reproduce a social imaginary in which relations of domination and submission are normalized. Feminist justice and gender equality are on trial not only in courts, but **in culture**.

What resources can feminist philosophy and critical theory offer in response? Rather than retreating into critique alone, this conference asks how feminist thought might contribute to more **transformative conceptions of justice** — and how concepts such as witnessing, care, and vulnerability might enable us to put dominant narratives and everyday language “on trial”. Not to assume the position of the judge, but to open a shared space of contestation over meaning and value. How do collective practices of claiming justice — **bringing testimony and witnessing from the courtroom into the public sphere**, as in #MeToo or in forms of solidarity surrounding public trials such as the Pelicot case — reshape collective understandings of violence and justice?

It is in this expansive sense that the conference returns to the etymology of the **forensic**, from the Latin *forensis*, “**pertaining to the forum**”. To put something “on trial” is not only to subject it to legal judgment, but to bring it into a public space of dispute — where narratives, norms, and forms of life can be collectively interrogated and transformed. This sense of the forensic recovers something essential: justice is not only adjudicated, but argued for, witnessed, and made collectively, through **a politics that aims to transform common sense and social imaginaries**.

This conference aims to bring feminist philosophy and critical theory into dialogue with socio-legal and political perspectives on gender-based violence and feminist justice. It explores how violence is framed, interpreted, and judged across legal, social, and political contexts, and how feminist theory can illuminate the limits of existing institutions while contributing to the reimagining of alternative forms of justice.

We invite submissions from researchers working in feminist philosophy, critical theory, political theory, legal theory, gender studies, or related fields. We particularly welcome contributions from early-career researchers and scholars from diverse geographical contexts.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

Adjudicating Gender-Based Violence: Law, Institutions, and Critique

- Feminist approaches to gender-based violence and gender equality
- Feminist critiques of criminal law and legal responses to sexual violence
- Institutional responses to gender violence and their limits
- Gender violence in international law and human rights frameworks

Power, Justice, and Feminist Theory

- Consent, coercion, and structural domination
- Feminist theories of justice, responsibility, care, and vulnerability
- The performativity of trials: speaking and unspeakable bodies in the courtroom

Testimony, Knowledge, and Accountability in Contexts of Violence

- Testimony, credibility, and epistemic injustice in cases of gender violence
- The ethics of witnessing and the politics of narratives
- Memory, victimhood, and legal recognition
- Autobiographical testimony and life writing in feminist struggles for justice

Beyond the Courtroom

- Women's Courts and Tribunals on Crimes against Women
- Alternative and non-institutional forms of feminist justice

Keynote Speakers



Leigh Gilmore

(The Ohio State University)

A scholar of life writing and feminist theory, Leigh Gilmore is the author of groundbreaking books including *The #MeToo Effect: What Happens When We Believe Women* (Columbia University Press, 2023) and *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (Columbia University Press, 2017). Her work focuses on testimony, credibility, and the political power of autobiographical storytelling in shaping struggles for sexual justice.



Anália Torres

(University of Lisbon)

Full Professor of Sociology at ISCSP, University of Lisbon, Anália Torres is the founder and emeritus director of CIEG (Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies). Her research focuses on gender justice and the ways in which social policies reproduce gender inequality, particularly in the fields of work and education. She is co-editor of *The Routledge International Handbook of Feminisms and Gender Studies* (2025).

In addition to the keynote lectures, the conference will include a **workshop dedicated to Women's Courts and feminist Tribunals on Crimes against Women**, bringing together scholars and practitioners working on gender violence and alternative forms of justice.

Submission Guidelines

Submission	Please submit as a single Word or PDF document: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An abstract of 300–400 words• A short academic biography (max. 100 words)
Deadline for submission	15 July 2026
Notification of acceptance	30 July 2026
Submission and inquiry:	ontrial.conference@gmail.com

Organizer

The conference is organized at the **University of Verona** by the **Hannah Arendt Center for Political Studies** in collaboration with **SAFI Network (SOCIETAS APERTA FEMINARUM IN IURIS THEORIA)**. The conference is part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie project *Rewriting Rights*, which explores the history of Women’s Courts and Tribunals on Crimes against Women – non-official tribunals that have emerged worldwide over the past fifty years to publicly document violence against women and articulate claims to justice beyond state institutions.

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For more information, visit:

- Website of the Arendt Center: [🌐 Hannah Arendt Center for Political Studies](#)
- Website of the Rewriting Rights-MSCA project: [🌐 Natascia Tosel, PhD-MSCA Project](#)
- Arendt Center’s Podcast series: [🌐 Women’s Courts: Feminist Theory in Practice](#)
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**Hannah Arendt Center
for Political Studies**
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