

Fighting for our reproductive freedom:

Past and present feminist struggles for abortion care

International workshop

- 10th of April 2025
- University of Fribourg, Switzerland
- Campus Miséricorde : avenue de l'Europe 20, 1700 Fribourg. Room MIS 04 4112/MIS 03 3118



Photo from Marie Sautier. 2019. Swiss Feminist Strike. Lausanne

Conference conveners:

- Marlyse Debergh (Swiss National Science Foundation, University of Fribourg and University of Bern. Research associate at the University of Amsterdam and the University of Geneva)
- Pauline Milani (University of Fribourg)

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Over the past few years, due to recent politics, there has been a growing interest in abortion in the media, in academia, and in international organizations. We have witnessed attacks on abortion rights such as the overturning of Roe versus Wade in the United States in 2022. Furthermore, abortion is still forbidden or restricted in many countries, and 45% of abortions performed worldwide are considered unsafe (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024)¹. In countries such as Switzerland, although abortion is authorized under certain circumstances in the first trimester of pregnancy, it is still regulated by the penal code, despite the recommendations of the WHO (2023) that abortion should be fully decriminalized². However, feminists have also celebrated recent victories. For instance, in 2024 France became the first country to write the right to abortion in its constitution. In Latin America, in 2022, Colombia legalized abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy.

This workshop aims to stimulate international and interdisciplinary exchanges, and to open up new directions for research on abortion, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and reproductive justice more broadly. By bringing feminist, transnational and intersectional perspectives into conversation, experts will discuss the following questions:

What is the legacy of past feminist struggles for abortion care? What are the challenges pro-choice feminists currently face? Why and how is abortion currently criminalized? What do travelling for abortions and abortion pills tell us about reproductive violence and feminist resistance? What is the future of abortion politics?

This workshop gathers scholars from different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, history, gender studies, and geography), public health professionals and feminist activists. Various subjects connected to abortion politics will be covered: past and present feminist movements for abortion care in different contexts, the criminalization of abortion, transnational travel for abortions, gestational age timing politics, and self-managed abortion. This workshop will also be an opportunity for networking and collectively imagining a reproductive justice future for abortion politics.

This event is supported by the University of Fribourg and the Swiss National Science Foundation.

The event is free, but registration is required. Please register before the 31st of March (see below).

¹ WHO (2024). Abortion Key Facts. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion> (Accessed 31.01.2025)

² WHO (2023a). Abortion care guideline. Common approaches to abortion regulation. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240423120015/https://srhr.org/abortioncare/chapter-2/common-approaches-to-abortion-regulation-2-1/> (Archived 23.04.2024).

Program

10:00-10:15: Welcoming note

❖ **Keynote n°1 10:15-11:45: What are abortion trails for?** (Room MIS 04 4112)

Keynote: Deirdre Duffy (Lancaster University)

Discussant: Cordelia Freeman (University of Exeter)

11:45-13:15: lunch

❖ **Roundtable n°1 13:15-14:45: Why and how is abortion still criminalized ?** (Room MIS 04 4112)

Academics: Irène Maffi (University of Lausanne), Rishita Nandagiri (Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, King's College London)

Public health and activist: Susanne Rohner (Umbrella organization Sexual Health Switzerland)

Chair: Carolin Schurr (University of Bern)

14:45- 15:15: Coffee break

❖ **Roundtable n°2 15:15-16:45 From past to present feminist struggles for abortion right** (Room MIS 04 4112)

Academics: Audrey Bonvin (University of Fribourg), Véronique Mottier (University of Lausanne and Jesus College, University of Cambridge)

Public Health and activist: Patrícia P. (Women Help Women)

Chair: Caroline Rusterholz (University of Fribourg)

16:45-17:15: break

❖ **Keynote n°2: 17:15-18:45 Abortion Pills against Abortion Bans: Power, Politics, and Pharma** (Room MIS 03 3118)

Keynote: Sydney Calkin (Queen Mary University of London)

Discussant: Giulia Zanini (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

18:45-20:00: Apéro and social gathering

Keynote speeches

❖ What are abortion trails for?

Deirdre Duffy (Lancaster University)

Within both restrictive and supposedly liberalised regimes, combinations of actors and infrastructures facilitate abortion access. These groups adopt a range of different guises, engage in diverse activities, and identify with different names and labels. Scholarship on reproductive justice, resistance, governance, and abortion activism – as well as activist mobilisations and their allies – have highlighted the critical role these interventions play in the experiences of abortion seekers. Equally significant is how they (re)shape imaginaries, material realities, and political geographies of abortion. This (re)shaping work is brought into view as we foreground them analytically. This paper, based on a sustained effort to look at and think through activists and activism supporting abortion access in different contexts, considers how these abortion trails and abortion trailworkers are not just forms of struggle but sites of transformation. Using abortion trails, it asks us to reconsider what reproductive autonomy and contestation look like and how they can orientate reproductive and abortion politics towards different trajectories.

❖ Abortion Pills against Abortion Bans: Power, Politics, and Pharma

Sydney Calkin (Queen Mary University of London)

Far-right governments want to rollback abortion rights at home and abroad. But do their laws and litigation really matter for abortion access? Medication abortion has transformed the geography of abortion, by making it less tethered to clinical spaces and state legal frameworks. A global movement for self-managed abortion is working to decriminalize abortion – first, by widening its availability and lowering the stigma surrounding it. In this talk, I offer one account of medication abortion and its global impact - following mifepristone from its manufacture in India, through its cross-border journey, to examine its political effects in Ireland and the USA. Medication abortion pills are small, cheap, and mobile: what difference might they make in the politics of abortion?

Speakers Bios

Audrey Bonvin is a Swiss National Science Foundation postdoctoral researcher in contemporary history at the University of Fribourg and a lecturer at the School of Medicine of the University of Lausanne. Since 2023, she has been conducting research on anti-abortion movements in Switzerland between 1970s-2000s, as part of the project led by PD Dr. Pauline Milani, "L'antiféminisme en Suisse, 1971-2001 : discours, pratiques et circulations transnationales". Her work adopts a socio-historical approach to conservatism and focuses on international Christian organizations, the cultural Cold War, and public health (particularly addictions). Her doctoral dissertation, published in 2024 by Alphil, examined the international Moral Re-Armament movement (*L'utopie conservatrice du « Réarmement moral » : discours et mutations d'un mouvement international, 1961-2001*). She has worked as a teaching assistant, undertook academic exchanges at Sciences Po Paris and Oxford and studied history and sociology at the universities of Fribourg, Belfast (QUB), and Sydney (UTS).

Sydney Calkin is a Reader (Associate Professor) in the School of Geography at Queen Mary University of London. She is the author of *Abortion Pills Go Global: Reproductive Freedom Across Borders* (University of California Press, 2023) and the editor of *After Repeal: Rethinking Abortion Politics* (Zed Books, 2020). She is the Primary Investigator of Pharmaceutical Geographies of Self-managed Sexual Health (2024-2029, funded by UK Research and Innovation). This is an interdisciplinary project with a team of social and chemical scientists to study informally acquired pharmaceuticals and the therapeutic communities that use them for abortion, HIV prevention, and transgender health.

Deirdre Duffy is a Senior Lecturer in Global Social Inequalities in the Sociology Department at Lancaster University (UK). Her work focuses on reproductive governance and abortion access in restrictive and liberalised medico-legal regimes in the Global South and Global North. She has a particular interest in how facilitators and geographies of journeys to abortion care are conceptualised and analysed in different disciplinary lenses and the implications of this on advocacy, policy, and practice. Deirdre has actively contributed to scholarly and policy debates. Her work has been published in journals including *Feminist Review*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Signs*, and *International Affairs* and her monograph *Abortion Trail Activism: The Global Infrastructures for Abortion Access* was published by Bloomsbury Open Access in 2024. In 2021, she was appointed lead researcher on the evaluation of abortion care provision in the Republic of Ireland for the Independent Review of the Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, the first review of abortion access following the liberalisation of abortion access.

Cordelia Freeman is a senior lecturer in geography at the University of Exeter, UK. Her research centres on abortion and reproductive justice in Latin America with a focus on the abortion pill misoprostol and the activist groups who facilitate access to it. As well as academic publications, Cordelia has led a range of creative engaged projects such as a documentary, investigative journalism podcasts, and graphic novels. She is the author of the book *Magic Misoprostol: Reproductive Justice and Abortion Liberation in Latin America*, forthcoming with Bristol University Press.

Irene Maffi is Professor of social anthropology at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lausanne. A specialist of the Arab world and Europe, she has conducted research in three main domains: political anthropology, anthropology of sexuality and reproduction, and more recently anthropology of migration.

Véronique Mottier is Associate Professor at the Centre for Gender Studies of the University of Lausanne, and at Jesus College, Cambridge. Her research interests focus on gender, sexuality and race; eugenic policy-making; reparative justice. Past books and edited volumes include *Schicksale der Fremdplatzierung* (co-edited with A. Grob & R. Knüsel, Schwabe, 2024); *Genre, droit et politique* (co-edited with C. Bosvieux-Onyekwelu, Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2022); *The DSM-5 as political battleground: gender identities, sexual norms, and female desire* (special issue Psychology & Sexuality, co-edited with R. Duschinsky, 2016); *Feminist politics of reproduction* (special issue Feminist Theory, co-edited with N. Gerodetti, 2009); *Sexuality: A very short introduction* (OUP, 2008); *Genre et politique* (co-edited with T. Ballmer-Cao & L. Sgier, Gallimard, 2000) and *Politics of Sexuality* (co-edited with Terrell Carver, Routledge, 1998). For full list of publications see: <https://cambridge.academia.edu/MottierVeronique>

Rishita Nandagiri (she/her) is a feminist, interdisciplinary researcher focusing on reproductive (in) justices in the Global Souths. Her research has offered new empirical evidence on self-managed abortions in India, new conceptualisations of safety and risk in abortion and reproduction, and a critical interrogation of population policies as a form of reproductive governance. Her current research explores criminal investigations of suspected self-managed abortions in Great Britain. Along with Dr Lucía Berro Pizzarossa, Rishita forms one half of the collaborative writing project Lucía Nandarossa. She is currently a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, King's College London.

Patrícia P. has been an abortion activist with Women Help Women (WHW) for 10 years. She holds a degree in Anthropology, a post-graduation in Human Ecology, and one in Women's Studies, all from Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

Susanne Rohner has more than 15 years of experience in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. She is responsible for advocacy at SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland, the federal umbrella organisation of the Swiss centers for sexual and reproductive health and the professional associations active in the areas sexuality education and counselling on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland is an accredited member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). With the advocacy team, Susanne provides the secretariat for the parliamentary group for sexual health and rights and the contacts to international organizations such as IPPF, UNFPA and the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. She is also responsible for the Swiss collaboration with IPPF in the context of Countdown 2030 Europe. Susanne has studied history and political sciences at the university of Berne. She has worked for several years as a journalist and has worked as a campaigner for

gender-quotas in politics ahead of the Swiss referendum in 2000. She got a Certificate on Advanced Studies of the University of Berne on “gender justice and globalisation” in 2018.

Caroline Rusterholz is Professor of Social History at the University of Fribourg and Assistant Professor at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. She has published widely on the history of sexual and reproductive health in Britain.

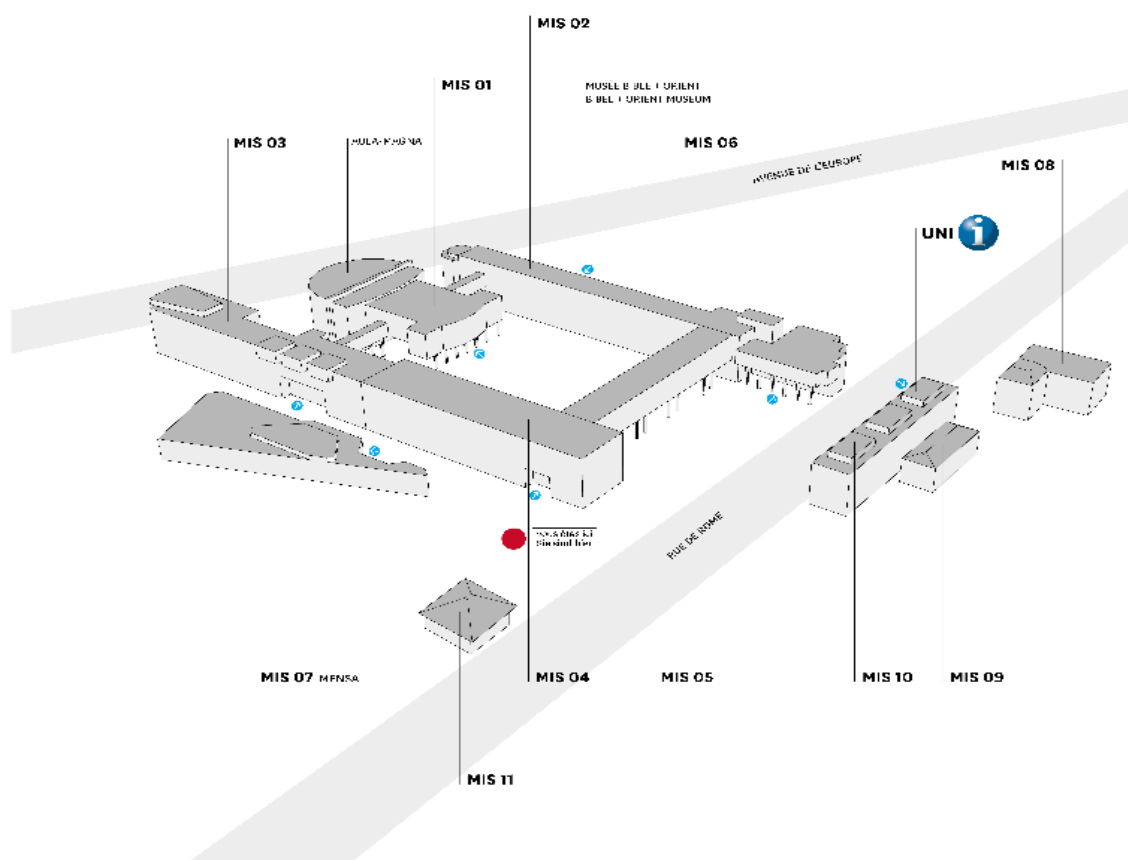
Carolin Schurr is Professor of Social and Cultural Geography, co-director of the mLAB, and vice-president of the Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies at the University of Bern. Her research focuses on reproductive geographies, reproductive mobilities and intimate geopolitics.

Giulia Zanini is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, in Italy and has a special interest and expertise in the fields of reproduction, health and gender. She has conducted research and published on assisted reproduction, donor conception and transnational reproductive flows in Mediterranean countries, on barriers to access to abortion and abortion travels, and on reproductive trajectories, including permanent childlessness in Italy. She is currently researching the socio-technical making of reproductive and pregnancy time and its consequences for care by leading an interdisciplinary and transnational research project through the ERC StG-funded project PregDaT. Pregnancy Dating Challenges: Technologies and Unequal Geographies of Abortion and Childbirth Care.

Practical information

Venue

University of Fribourg, avenue de l'Europe 20, 1700 Fribourg, Campus Miséricorde



Registration

To register to the event, please fill in the form in this link before March the 31th:

<https://framaforms.org/fighting-for-our-reproductive-freedom-past-and-present-feminist-struggles-for-abortion-care>

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