



Countering Oppositional Political
Extremism through Attuned
Dialogue: Track, Attune, Limit

OppAttune Democracy Co-Lab

*Care Democracy & Rising to the
Challenge of Everyday
Extremism*

5th – 6th February, 2026

AUP Center for Critical Democracy Studies (CCDS)
American University Paris

Drawing on OppAttune's conceptualization of everyday extremism, the Colab will consider how hostility is not confined to radical fringes but becomes normalized in ordinary settings. We will investigate together how extremism – threat construction, silent hostility, conspiratorial frames, transnational circulation, exploitation of crisis – is being actively mobilized against care and democracy. Care is framed as softness undermining strength, democracy as inefficiency undermining decisiveness. Both become targets of narratives that prepare citizens to turn their backs on others and accept authoritarian responses to contemporary social and political issues.

While care and democracy are often treated as separate spheres – one emotional or private, the other rational and public – the idea of Care Democracy offers a different perspective: that they build upon and sustain one another, and that they can create counter-narratives. An essential component of this Democracy Collab will be to examine how this perspective sheds light on the role of gender in the development of everyday extremism. Anti-gender mobilizations – attacks on feminism, LGBTQAI+ rights, and reproductive justice – converge with anti-care and anti-democracy narratives, delegitimizing interdependence and solidarity. Everyday Extremism appears to be gendered, and this finding is emerging across methods, different nations, online and offline spaces within OppAttune and other related projects. Against this backdrop, the Democracy Colab takes up the hypothesis that when care is devalued, withdrawn, or commodified, democracy begins to hollow out. And when democratic institutions erode, infrastructures of collective care collapse with them. Gender is central to this process, as both care and democracy depend on the recognition of interdependence, equality, and embodied vulnerability.

At its most concrete, care ethics holds that our responsibilities do not arise only from laws or abstract principles but from the concrete relationships that sustain life. It emphasizes attentiveness to others, responsiveness to their needs, and the responsibility to maintain the networks of support on which we all depend. Originating in feminist philosophy (Carol Gilligan, Joan Tronto), care ethics insists that dependence and vulnerability are not defects to be overcome but the very conditions of human existence, and that families, institutions, and societies must organize themselves to sustain these interdependencies fairly and justly.

The aim of this two-day event is to open a dialogue and enhance political attunement around a simple but urgent proposition: care and democracy are not parallel ideals, but mutually constitutive practices. To care is to enact a form of democratic attention; to democratize is to extend the field of those whose needs, voices, and vulnerabilities matter. The first day will be focused on stimulating talks and the second day on workshops and activities in the form of a student academy.

We invite you to reflect together on what it means to think of care as a democratic method, and democracy as an antidote to extremism, rooted in caring practice, grounded not in abstraction, but in situated, embodied, and often fragile relations. Building on the premise that care is not merely a private sentiment but a public method of attention, obligation, and world-making, the conversation will explore how practices of care – whether interpersonal, institutional, or epistemic – can become tools of resistance, critique, and democratic reinvention.

Key Questions

- In what ways do gender, nationalism and extremism intersect?
- How are narratives against care, democracy, and gender being mobilized within everyday extremism? **or** How do narratives of care, democracy, and gender become targets of everyday extremism?
- In what ways do anti-care, anti-democracy, and anti-gender discourses converge across Europe and beyond?
- How is everyday extremism embedded in exclusionary discourses, social practices and cultural violence connected with the perception of social welfare erosion and anti-migration feelings? And how does this intersect with gender, fertility and nationality?
- How can the Attunement Model help sustain dialogue in the face of hostility, and counter the erosion of solidarities?
- What would it mean to practice care as a democratic method, and democracy as a caring practice, in institutions, media, and everyday life?
- How can students, practitioners, and scholars together generate counter-narratives that frame care as strength, democracy as survival, and gender justice as foundational?
- Are there additional epistemological and operational benefits to building a specific concept of 'caring dialogue' or 'caring social dialogue', or even 'careful dialogue'? Could the implicit ambivalence of the concept of 'careful dialogue' as both caring and cautious be particularly valuable in alerting us to the need for sophisticated practices & skills that sensitively combine self-care and care for others in the face of constant threats to care, democracy and liberties?
- In what ways can the concepts of health and ecology contribute to a Care Democracy Model?
- What relevance do the societal areas of education and legislation/law enforcement have for a Care Democracy Model?
- How should the relationship between the concepts of care and liberty be conceptualized?

Day One: Public Colloquium

Thursday 5th February 2026

| Timing | Name of Session | Speakers |
|---------------|--|---|
| 10:00 – 10:30 | Arrivals (tea and coffee) | |
| 10:30-11:00 | Opening Note <i>Narratives Against Care and Democracy</i> | Prof. Stephen W. Sawyer & Dr. Zona Zarić , American University Paris, France. |
| 11:00-12:30 | Panel 1: Research & Policy <i>Everyday Extremism and the Crisis of Care</i> | Dr. Sandra Obradović , London School of Economics, UK. Dr. Adelina Hasani , Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), Kosova, Prof. Juliet A. Williams , UCLA, USA. |
| 12:30-14:30 | Lunch | The Amex (on campus) |
| 14:30-16:00 | Panel 2: Practices of Care and Democracy <i>Authoritarian Storytelling vs. Infrastructures of Solidarity</i> | Prof. Sandra Laugier , Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France. Prof. Alice Crary , The New School for Social Research NY, USA. |
| 16:00-17:00 | Networking (Tea and coffee) | |
| 17:00-18:30 | Panel 3: Media and Counter-Narratives <i>Collective Imaginaries Under Strain</i> | Prof. Tina Askanius , Malmö University, Sweden. Jullietta Stoencheva , OppAttune PhD candidate, Malmö University, Sweden. Dr. Joana Ricarte , University of Coimbra, Portugal. |
| 19:00 | Dinner | Rosemarie <i>149 rue de l'Université 75007</i> |

LOCATION: 8th floor room Q801, AUP Center for Critical Democracy Studies (CCDS), Paris.

Day Two: Student Academy

Friday 6th February 2026

| Timing | Name of Session | Facilitator |
|-------------|---|---|
| 10:00-10:30 | Arrivals (tea and coffee) | |
| 10:30-11:00 | Opening Note <i>Narrative Group Work as Care & Democracy in schools</i> | Dr. habil. Harald Weilböck, Cultures Interactive, Germany. |
| 11:00-12:30 | Workshop 1 <i>My Democracy, My Care</i> | Lucie Reed & Lily Kozlowski, American University Paris, France. |
| 12:30-13:30 | Lunch | The Amex (on campus) |
| 13:30-15:00 | Workshop 2 <i>Building Communities</i> | Dr. Friederike Windel & Dr. Roman Zinograd American University Paris, France. |
| 15:00-16:00 | Reflections and closing remarks | Dr. Zona Zarić , American University Paris, France. Dr. Sandra Obradović , London School of Economics, UK. |

Conceptual background

The corrosion of democracy today is carried less by the open violence of ideology than by the quieter work of narrative. Not grand doctrines but everyday stories, fragments of conversation, ironic memes, repeated jokes, sediment into what seems like "common sense", but what they normalize is hostility. The OppAttune project refers to them as silent narratives, but also everyday extremism. They travel across borders and ecologies, online and offline, slowly shifting the texture of what can be said and what counts as legitimate.

It is through such narratives that both care and democracy have come to appear suspect. Care is figured as weakness, indulgence, dependency, democracy as inefficiency, disorder, the plaything of elites. Each is recoded as a liability. Alongside these, anti-gender mobilizations have gained prominence: feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive justice are recast as "gender ideology," a supposed threat to family, nation, and order. The result is a political imaginary in which solidarity itself is cast as danger, and authoritarian closure presents itself as strength.

Nancy Fraser's account of the crisis of care¹ helps to make sense of this convergence. Capitalism, she writes, is parasitic on the labor of social reproduction, yet relentlessly

¹ Nancy Fraser, 'Contradictions of Capital and Care', NLR 100, July–August 2016 DOI: doi.org/10.64590/nt2

undermines it. Care sustains life but is treated as waste, externalized onto women, migrants, precarious workers. The hostility towards care in public discourse is symptomatic: "welfare dependency", "burdens on the taxpayer", "undeserving outsiders" all reproduce the fantasy that one can live without dependence, that sovereignty requires severing ties.

The same dynamic erodes democracy. Institutions are hollowed out, their substance transferred to technocratic bodies or financial markets. What remains is a shell, procedural form without capacity. In that vacuum, narratives of betrayal and conspiracy theories proliferate. Yet research into echo chambers provides inconclusive evidence. Studies suggest people often choose news based on perceived credibility rather than simply avoiding dissonant information, and that echo chambers may reflect pre-existing societal divides rather than being caused by social media. Given this mixed evidence, there needs to be a fresh assessment of how echo chambers operate within the dynamics of everyday extremism and gender-related polarisation.

Across Europe, welfare debates reveal how closely these assaults intertwine. Solidarity is being treated as a scarce good, to be rationed among insiders; migrants are presented as abusers of health care and social services, demanding exclusion in the name of national preservation. These narrative acts recast the welfare state as a fortress under siege, where every gesture of care becomes a vector of decline. Similar dynamics appear in attacks on "woke" policies: programs of racial justice, gender equality, reproductive rights are narrated as decadence, as betrayal of the "real people." Care - understood as attentiveness to vulnerability, to inequality, to historical wounds - is portrayed as weakness, as chaos, as a threat to sovereignty.

The parallel delegitimizing of care and democracy points to a deeper structural affinity. Both are practices that insist on relational interdependence: care recognizes our vulnerability to one another; democracy institutionalizes our need to deliberate with others. These anti-care and anti-democracy narratives trivialize or delegitimize care (as "weakness," "dependency," or "feminized" politics) while mocking democracy as "naïve" or "ineffective". To contest these hostile narratives, we must tell different ones - stories in which care is strength, and democracy is the name we give to the difficult work of living together in difference.

Countering such narratives requires precisely what OppAttune calls "political attunement": the capacity to remain in dialogue even amid opposition, to resist the lure of simplification into us/them binaries. In Nancy Fraser's terms, it requires a re-politicization of both care and democracy as sites of struggle over the organization of social reproduction and collective self-rule. The counter-narrative needs not to be merely defensive but generative: to insist that care and democracy are not fragile luxuries but the very conditions of possibility for a liveable world. To this end the two-day event will develop praxis that enables delegates particularly post-graduate and early career researchers to develop care democracy practices that rise to the challenge of everyday extremism.