

**Feminist Enlightenment and Politics /
Feministische Aufklärung und Politik
Conference CFP
Wednesday 25th-Saturday 28th June 2025
Monte Verità, Ascona (Switzerland)**

Keynote speakers:

Astrid Dröse (Universität Tübingen), **Sarah Richardson** (University of Glasgow),
Ritchie Robertson (University of Oxford)

‘Women it is said have no business with politics.—Why not?’ (Charlotte Smith, *Desmond* (1792))

‘Demandons des Représentantes à l’Assemblée Nationale.’ (*Étrennes Nationales des Dames* (1789))

‘Die Weiber, nicht für öffentliche Ämter bestimmt sind.’ (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796))



A Meeting of the Female Canvassers in Covent Garden, William Carey (1784)
Courtesy Lewis Walpole Library

Debates about women and politics raged across Europe throughout the eighteenth century. Although women were denied direct political representation, scholars have shown that women were actively involved in the world of eighteenth-century politics. Far from being unconcerned with contemporary politics, women attended public events such as the trial of Warren Hastings (1787-1795) and debates at the Houses of Parliament in great numbers, facilitated political discussions in salons across the continent, and were key figures in political campaigns such as the 1784 Westminster election. In the wake of the French Revolution, women campaigned for active citizenship, as Olympe de Gouges demanded in *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1782). Women were also instrumental in promoting abolition campaigns and reform movements. As monarchs, empresses, queen consorts, and courtiers, women across Europe exercised political power and authority through official and non-official channels.

‘Feminist Enlightenment and Politics / Feministische Aufklärung und Politik’ is an international and interdisciplinary conference which examines the role and presence of women in

eighteenth-century political debates across Europe. The conference brings together researchers specialising in the long eighteenth century across Europe from the fields of literature, history, philosophy, politics, and legal studies. The conference is a bilingual event English and German. We also welcome papers in other languages (French and Italian) and will offer to translate papers. The conference is part of the international project Feminist Enlightenment across Europe. (<https://feministenlightenment.eu/en/>)

We will consider the following research questions, among others:

- What constitutes the political subject in Enlightenment Europe?
- How did the law influence debates about married and unmarried women and active citizenship?
- Which media helped circulate women's political thinking and participation?
- Which forms of politics sought to achieve gender equality, and which actively sought to prevent it?
- How did class, religion, and race intersect with reflections on (gender) equality?
- What tactics were developed after the Rousseau-like attack on the postulate of equality designed in the early Enlightenment?
- How does the question of nation intersect with the universal impetus of Enlightenment norms?

We invite abstracts for 20-minute papers focusing on the conference theme. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Debating societies;
- Women at court;
- Wives in the diplomatic world;
- Political theory from the perspectives of gender and race;
- The role of literature in political discourse;
- Networks of correspondence and sociability;
- Women and political practice;
- Politics and material culture;
- Women and local politics

Please send a **250 to 500-word abstract** in the language of your choice and a short biographical note to Anne-Claire Michoux (anne-claire.michoux@es.uzh.ch) by **28th February 2025**. Proposals are welcomed from scholars at all career stages. Acceptance will be communicated in March.

Conference organisers:

Anne-Claire Michoux (University of Zurich)

Gideon Stiening (LMU München)