

Gender and Politics Research in Europe: Towards a Consolidation of a Flourishing Political Science Subfield?

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Abstract

Over the past twenty years, the field of “gender and politics” has flourished in European political science. An example of this is the growing number of “gender and politics” scholars and the increased attention paid to gender perspectives in the study of the political. Against this backdrop, we take stock of how the “gender and politics” field has developed over the years. We argue that the field has now entered a stage of “consolidation”, which is reflected in the growth,

diversification and professionalization of the subfield, as well as in the increased disciplinary recognition from major gatekeepers in political science. But while consolidation comes with specific opportunities, it also presents some key challenges. We identify five such challenges: (1) the potential fragmentation of the field; (2) persisting hierarchies in knowledge production; (3) the continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science; (4) the changing link between academia and society; and (5) growing opposition to gender studies in parts of Europe and beyond. We argue that both the “gender and politics” field and political science in general should address these challenges in order to become a truly inclusive discipline.

Keywords Academic knowledge • Anti-gender movement • Gender • Intersectionality
Political science • Sexuality

Introduction

Gender structures our understanding of all political phenomena and shapes such diverse issues as Brexit, COVID-19 or democratic backsliding (to name but a few). Indeed, the subfield of “gender and politics” has flourished in European political science over the last twenty years: there has been the establishment of a conference and a new journal; gender, sexuality and intersectionality in the study of the political (and indeed what counts as the political) is increasingly recognized by the broader political science community (Mügge et al, 2016); and a growing number of scholars have revealed and contested biases against gender and politics research in the discipline and its institutions.

We take stock of how the “gender and politics” field has developed over the past twenty years, taking 2001 as a starting point because it serves the purpose of this anniversary issue of *European Political Science*. The development of the “gender and politics”-subfield, however, has a longer history, and can be traced back to the late 1970s and 1980s (Costa and Sawyer, 2018; Lovenduski, 2015). Given that “Gender and Politics” can no longer be considered a “new” or “emerging” field of study (see Dahlerup, 2010 for a comparison), we ask in this article whether the subfield has now entered a new stage of “consolidation” and what this means for both the field itself and the discipline of political science. In order to answer these questions, we scrutinize different indicators of consolidation. For analytical purposes, we consider consolidation as a two-fold process, characterized by both internal and external developments. Internal consolidation relates to the growth and integration of gender and politics research into a specialist (sub)field and autonomous knowledge community in political science. External consolidation relates to the external recognition that gender and politics research has received from other (sub)fields and major gatekeepers in political science (such as major political science associations and journals).

For the purpose of this article, we define “gender and politics” as a subfield of political science that is primarily concerned with the study of gender, sexuality and/or intersectionality perspectives in the study of the political. We, the authors, are committed to promoting a broad understanding of gender and politics research; we recognise the matrices of oppression that shape our politics and our societies (Collins, 2002) and the importance of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis; 2012) as a lens with which to analyse “complex gender equality” (Verloo and Walby, 2012), comprising gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and

expression and other categories of social inequalities. We are aware that our knowledge is situated within a political science context mostly informed by the canons of the discipline in Europe and the US, which shapes the way we approach gender and politics research. This reminds us of the need to keep decolonizing the discipline (Medie and Kang, 2018; Mendoza, 2012).¹

In the following sections, we reflect upon the internal and external consolidation of European gender and politics research over the last two decades. We consider the growth and increased professionalization of the subfield, as well as the increased recognition it receives from the broader discipline of political science. Next, we discuss five key challenges that hinder the further consolidation of the field: (1) the potential fragmentation and disintegration of the field, (2) persisting hierarchies in knowledge production, (3) the continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science, (4) the changing link between academia and “society”, and (5) growing opposition to gender studies in several parts of Europe. We argue that both the “gender and politics”-field and political sciences more in general will have to take up these challenges in the future in order to “become a truly inclusive discipline” - a question the EPS editors rightfully posed in the call for papers for this anniversary issue.

The Consolidation of “Gender and Politics” - a Two-fold Process

Although the focus of this article is on how the “gender and politics” subfield developed over the past twenty years, what we find today builds on actions that started well before 2000 and are

¹ We understand decolonizing to refer to those strategies which include and amplify the perspectives of those outside of the west and the global north (understanding that these terms are themselves to some extent a construct of western imperialist epistemology) to disrupt and contest our understanding of subjectivities (Sabaratnam, 2011).

(slowly) materialising (Celis et al., 2013; Costa and Sawyer, 2018; Dahlerup 2010; Lovenduski, 2015 for overviews). We understand the development of “gender and politics” as a two-fold consolidation process resulting internally in a specialist subfield and externally in recognition by political science as a discipline.

Internal consolidation: growth, diversification and professionalization

Over the years, the gender and politics subfield evolved from a primary concern with the study of “women in politics” to the study of “gender and politics” more broadly (Lovenduski, 2015).

This evolution marks an expansion in research foci and strategies. Earlier studies were primarily concerned with making women’s political roles and activities more visible. Research questions developed out of a concern to explore the diversity of perspectives present in political life, to highlight women’s previously overlooked contributions to it, and to give a voice to their subjective experiences as marginalized groups. Recent studies pay relatively more attention to the study of gendered political processes, institutions and interactions. The research focus has shifted towards exposing and questioning gender hierarchies and inequalities in a variety of political phenomena. As part of this shift, increasing attention is also devoted to the study of men as “gendered beings” in politics (Connell, 2002) and the interactions between gender and other social markers such as social class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age and disability (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005); although these perspectives and voices are still at risk of being marginalized in the field (see below).

A defining feature of politics and gender research is its rooting in, and dialogue with, two distinct academic disciplines: political sciences and gender studies. Thus, its research is often characterized by a multi- and interdisciplinary engagement to a degree that is often usual for gender studies, but less so for “mainstream” political science (see also Costa and Sawyer, 2018). Scholars within the politics and gender field often draw from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds such as anthropology, economics, philosophy, sociology and others. A multi- or interdisciplinary lens allows gender and politics scholars to address political phenomena from a multiplicity of angles that enhance a comprehensive understanding of political problems. It also keeps scholars alert to the risk of becoming self-referential, which could narrow analytical capacities. Moreover, gender and politics research has also been shaped by different strands of political activism such as feminist, LGBTQI+ and anti-racist movements. Thus, politics and gender research can draw upon political sciences, gender studies, and activist involvement as related but distinct sources.

In European political science, since the late 1970s, a number of national political science associations (PSAs) created women’s caucuses and/or committees on the status of women (Costa and Sawyer, 2018: 246). The transnational ECPR Gender and Politics Standing Group established in 1986 (originally “Women and Politics”) brings together scholars around the world working on gender, sexuality and intersectionality in politics. The creation of this network proved to be foundational to the development, and eventual consolidation, of gender and politics as a subfield in Europe, not least because it “helped inspire activism and institutional transfer across European PSAs” (Costa and Sawyer, 2018: 245). Not only did such a network provide an intellectual network for those interested in similar research agendas but it also provided an important source of solidarity amongst scholars who very often found themselves to be marginalised within their own

departments, universities and national political science associations. Not surprisingly, such politics and gender groups appear often to be among the biggest and most frequented PSA sub-entities and moreover extended their scope over time to include sexuality politics and intersectionality (Costa and Sawyer, 2018). Similarly, the role of the ECPR standing group has expanded over time and it performs a number of important functions which have helped the field of gender and politics to flourish, including organising gender panels at “mainstream” political science conferences and, perhaps most importantly, the establishment of its own biennial conference, the European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG).

ECPG conferences have grown exponentially and mirrors the growth of the subfield, with the “sections” resembling often other political science subfields.² Despite the growth in numbers, and the accompanying professionalization, the importance of solidarity, empowerment and community remain core values of the conferences, particularly the desire to create non-hierarchical supportive and welcoming spaces, especially for first-time attendees. In addition to the many friendships that have been made over the years, important and valuable special issues and edited collections have been published, which grew out of conferences, workshops and panels of the standing group. As the subfield grew, so too did the number of research papers produced, and it became clear that despite the existence of a number of excellent gender and politics journals, there was a demand for more: accordingly, the *European Journal of Politics and Gender* was launched in 2017 (Ahrens et al, 2018). The journal, like the conference, is committed to intellectual plurality

² The first ECPG in Belfast 2009 had some 300 participants to the most recent in Amsterdam, 2019 which attracted over 850 attendees. The growth of the conferences Sections included: European Politics; Governance and Public Policy; International Relations; Political Participation and Public Opinion; Political Theory; Power and Representation; Research Methods; Social Movements and Civil Society; and extended in 2013 with a section on Intersectionality and one on Sexuality.

- in terms of theoretical, methodological and empirical approaches. Its recent inclusion in SCOPUS rankings is testament to the quality of work published.

External consolidation: disciplinary recognition

Internal consolidation proved essential to develop breadth, depth and impact, not least within our own discipline, political science. As for external consolidation, the gender and politics research received growing recognition and has - according to Kantola and Lombardo (2016) - contributed to the study of politics in four crucial ways. First, it has encouraged scholars to raise new research questions and to rethink old ones. Rather than accepting the relative under-representation of women and gender issues in political life as an “empirical reality” (and therefore unworthy of scrutiny), gender and politics scholars have made them the centre point of attention, by asking what the causes and consequences of this under-representation are, and how we can assess the normative implications thereof.

Second, gender and politics scholarship has introduced a variety of analytical approaches to the study of the political. There is a strong belief that the analysis of gender cannot simply be added to existing frameworks, concepts, theories and methods, but that the latter also need to be refined and rethought. The concepts of “gender” and “intersectionality” have helped scholars to rethink the analysis of power hierarchies (Connell, 2002; Hancock, 2007; Collins, 2002). Standpoint epistemologies have questioned too strong claims on “strong objectivity” made in some domains of political science and have instead emphasized the role of “situated knowledge” (Harding, 2004: 81, 127).

Third, the subfield of gender and politics has also contributed to a new understanding of “the political”. Although many introductory textbooks on political science would show that “the political” has been defined in many ways by political scientists - ranging from the study of government and public life to the distribution of power - gender and politics scholars have specifically contributed to this discussion by drawing attention to the fact that “the personal is also political”. Hence, they have broadened the study of “the political” to include the study of the politics of everyday life (Phillips, 1998).

Fourth, gender and politics scholars have, perhaps more than other subfields, paid attention to the connection between theory and praxis. For many gender and politics scholars, their academic work is connected to, even rooted in, a form of feminist commitment, either inside or outside academia. Inside academia, they question processes of knowledge production and engage in “critical scholarship with an explicitly normative dimension” (Celis et al., 2013: 9), also opening doors for other marginalized issues, such as LGBTIQ+ studies. Outside academia, feminist scholars regularly connect with women’s movements and women’s policy agencies to ensure the societal relevance and embeddedness of their academic work.

Gender and politics is also increasingly mainstreamed in Europe’s major political science conferences, associations and top-ranked journals. Since the turn of the Century, gender and politics sections and workshops have become a fixture at the ECPR’s Joint Sessions of Workshops and General Conference (see Figure 1). The Joint Sessions, which are organized annually and accommodate usually between 25 and 30 workshops, have continuously hosted one or two “gender

and politics” workshops since 2007. At the General Conference, Europe’s largest gathering of political scientists, sections devoted to gender and politics are also a regular feature. Since the General Conference became an annual event in 2014, the yearly academic programmes have included between two and six sections with a topical focus on gender, sexuality or intersectionality perspectives, each accommodating between three to eight panels. A quick calculation based on the information available on the ECPR website indicates that on average four percent of the total number of panels organized at the General Conference include gender, sexuality or intersectionality as a primary focus (Figure 2). In recent years, gender and politics scholarship also features among the conference highlights, with several roundtables devoted to the topic in the period 2016-2020.

By contrast, it is interesting to note that the field has not become *more* mainstreamed in European political science conferences over the years. Figures 1 and 2 do not reveal a significant increase in the percentage of workshops, sections and panels over time, but rather a steady presence. Moreover, most workshops, sections and panels organized at the ECPR conferences adopt a focus on “gender” and “women”. “Sexuality” and “intersectionality” perspectives remain less evident.

Figure 1 here

Figure 2 here

Turning to the integration in political science journals, we consider the percentage of articles with a primary focus on gender, sexuality and intersectionality views in ECPR's five major journals in Table 1. Each of these journals has a broad issue focus and welcomes contributions from a variety of subfields. Overall, the percentage of articles on gender and politics is not high – ten percent at best, but more often (much) lower; yet, some journals (e.g. EPS in 2001-2005 and 2016-2020) have increased the number of gender-related articles by publishing special issues or thematic sections on the topic. In the absence of a comparative yardstick, it is difficult to assess the level of gender mainstreaming in absolute terms. More important, therefore, is an assessment of over-time evolutions. In line with the findings for the conferences, there is also no clear upward trend in the number of publications on gender-related topics over time across the different journals (with the exception of EJPR). Rather, the overall picture that emerges is one of over-time fluctuations and stagnation. A combination of factors might account for these patterns, including author considerations regarding journal “fit” and success rates (Closa et al., 2020), the composition of editorial boards and the gendered consequences thereof (Deschouwer, 2020), the gendered nature of the review and publication processes (Teele and Thelen, 2017; Stockemer, Blair and Rashkova, 2020; Grossman, 2020), and the growing number and impact of more domain-specific journals.

Table 1 about here

Gender and politics has also become more institutionalised within political science curricula, through both elective courses and integration within existing programs (see EPS Special Issue 2016 for an overview). More prizes and awards have been named after women alongside the recognition of the contribution of gender and politics scholars to political sciences, while the

number of women recipients increased (to some extent), despite a persistent “Matilda effect” (Costa and Sawer, 2018). Several PSAs have formally committed to monitoring gender equality in their organization, for instance, IPSA’s 2009 Gender and Diversity Monitoring Report or ECPR with its annual Gender Study (since 2017) and its first Gender Equality Plan (2018). Finally, mainstreaming gender and promoting gender equality and diversity has become an unavoidable (although not preclusive) criterion for grant applications to several funding agencies, not least the European Union research frameworks. Yet, despite these promising points, the picture across Europe is much more ambivalent as the future key challenges in the next section show.

Future Key Challenges

While consolidation is a critical moment in the development of any field, it comes with specific opportunities and also presents some key challenges. As the previous sections discussed, the consolidation story is more nuanced - there is no “increasing” mainstreaming of gender. It is rather a story of fluctuation and perhaps even stagnation, at a rather low level, if one looks at the number of sections, panels and articles on gender in mainstream conferences and journals.

We have identified five key challenges that correspond to the processes of internal and external consolidation. Internal consolidation can be challenged by (1) potential fragmentation and disintegration and (2) persisting hierarchies in knowledge production. External consolidation, in turn, can be contested by (3) continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science, (4) the changing link between academia and “society”, and (5) growing opposition to gender studies in several parts of Europe and beyond.

Potential fragmentation and disintegration

Growth - both in terms of depth and breadth - also introduces the challenge of “keeping the crowd together” while forging strong networks beyond subfields and often also other disciplines. Similar to the experience of political science as a discipline more broadly, a growing field often goes hand in hand with the development of more specialist niches, self-contained “knowledge communities”, and separate “reward systems” (Costa and Sawyer, 2018: 267; Jenkins, 2018; Vickers, 2015: 20). While such increased levels of specialisation have important benefits, including the development of particular knowledge and increased diversification, it also has some drawbacks. Specialization might result in disintegration and fragmentation. When different subfields (“gender and political representation”, “gender and European Union politics”, “gender and social movements”, ...) become separate “knowledge communities” operating as “self-contained silos made up of self-referential networks” (Vickers, 2015: 20), the focus might shift from exchange *between* communities to exchange *within* communities. Not only might such a development limit the transfer of knowledge and innovation from one silo to another, it might also lead to the creation of “echo-chambers of disconnected knowledge” (Christensen and Ball, 2019: 19). This is obviously at odds with the initial multi- or interdisciplinary foundations of gender and politics - a field that has prided itself in the fact that it values cross-boundary exchange.

Confronting hierarchies in knowledge production

For gender and politics scholars, the social locatedness of the researcher and the conditions under which research is produced are crucial for thinking through *how* to confront persistent hierarchies in the knowledge production process (Collins, 2002; Harding, 2004). Feminist and LGBTIQ+ scholars have challenged the exclusion of women and sexual minorities and the marginalisation of gender and sexuality as legitimate frames of analysis within political science, thereby emphasising the importance of representation and diversity within the discipline. As such, it is vital that we acknowledge, confront and create strategies to resist the hegemony of voices from the global north, especially the voices from white scholars occupying positions of privilege (Medie and Kang, 2018).

Reflecting upon the aspects of academia which give (and facilitate the giving of) lifeblood to its multiple intellectual projects - such as conferences, publishing, secure and permanent posts - quickly reveals the epistemic privileges and regimes that are sustained: conferences which are too expensive to attend and sometimes require visas; Anglo-American normative assumptions regarding what constitutes a research paper - both stylistically and substantively; and networks which reinforce patterns of exclusion within the job market. Thinking honestly about the power implicit within the gender and politics field necessitates that we act differently and devise new ways of working that offer not only greater accessibility but also offer a radically different vision of what academia could be. In this instance then we call for a greater reflection on praxis, and specifically recalling the role that social movements play as a key source of gender and politics research.

How we conceptualise the field of gender and politics necessarily shapes *who* we seek to include, and what flows from that in terms of *what* we consider legitimate and important knowledge. Interdisciplinarity and its importance for gender scholars is a critical aspect of this; avoiding the temptation to police the boundaries of politics and political science in order to create intellectual synergies across a variety of fields (Ashworth, 2009). Refusing to shut down or close off what we consider political science to constitute is important, and mirrors concerns within feminist and LGBTIQ+ social movements (Braidotti, 1991), especially when we, as gender and politics scholars, recognise that politics is about power and that power is gendered (Ahrens et al, 2018). Creating opportunities and spaces in which we pay attention to the politics of privilege but also to the politics of experiential knowledge, of standpoint theory, and of the politics of language, provides us with the opportunity to reimagine a more open and engaged political science. Bringing together the core strands within our field with theoretical frameworks which have not traditionally served as dominant frames or paradigms - notably postcolonial and decolonial theory - will raise fresh questions and challenges for us as a discipline forcing us to revisit received wisdoms, established concepts and traditional methods; for example, by making better use of decolonial research methods and better integrating participatory action research (PAR) into our methodology.

The reproduction of hegemonies and continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science

The ongoing questioning of hegemonies and marginalizations in political science is another key challenge for politics and gender subfield. Despite the evidence of its expansion and increasing consolidation in European political science, dominant approaches within the discipline, that

according to a political science textbook open to pluralism such as Colin Hay's (2002) are rational choice theory, behaviouralism and new institutionalism, still tend to treat gender and sexuality issues as a marginal area (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Smith and Lee, 2015: 50). Gender and sexuality teaching and research in European political science and other departments tends to be marginalized (Mügge et al., 2006), demonstrating a resistance to mainstreaming gender by actors that seek to maintain their privileged status quo (Verge et al, 2018). Men are overrepresented in the discipline and political science still perpetuates androcentric biases (Celis et al, 2013). While, at the initiative of the ECPR, European political science journals are beginning to analyse their gender publication gap (Grossman, 2020; Closa et al, 2020), identifying a gender submission gap of 22 percent of at least one woman author in European Political Science Review and 27 percent woman leading author in the European Journal of Political Research, studies show that women are still underrepresented in political science publications despite their number in the discipline (Teele and Thelen, 2017). Gender citation gaps, produced by implicit biases, lack of senior women scholars, and men's tendency to cite men, are problematic for women's career advancement and create the perception that men's research is more important than women's (Brown and Samuels, 2018). Maliniak et al's (2013) analysis of IR top journals shows that articles authored by men obtain 4.8 more citations than women-authored articles in the period 1980-2006, after controlling for many variables. It was thanks to academic-activist platforms such as Women & People of Color Also Know Stuff³ that the lack of gender and diversity in conference panels, as well as the devaluing of women and people of colour's expertise in public institutions and the media was exposed (Wallace and Pepinsky, 2019).

³ See <https://womenalsoknowstuff.com> and <https://sites.google.com/view/pocexperts/home>, accessed 2 November 2020.

The relatively marginal status of gender and politics within political science not only underestimates the scope of this subfield but also influences the type of feminist political science approaches that are more accepted in the mainstream. Out of the five feminist approaches to political analysis that Kantola and Lombardo discuss in “Gender and Political Analysis” (2017), two have become more dominant in gender and politics debates: a women approach, that focuses on the role and position of women, and a gender approach, that focuses on the wider social structures that reproduce domination and inequalities. Approaches that focus on the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, age and other inequalities, are recognised as important within the field, but are not consistently applied in research. Two approaches remain more marginal: discursive approaches, that focus on how gender is contested and constructed in political debates, and post-deconstruction approaches, that focus on the role of affects, emotions and bodily material in gender and politics.

The hegemonies and marginalizations reproduced within gender and politics are as problematic as those occurring in mainstream political science with gender studies. As crucial political phenomena such as democratization, democratic backsliding, economic crises, Europeanization or Covid-19 crisis need the whole plurality of political science perspectives to maximize the explanatory capacity of science, different feminist approaches to political analysis are needed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the political in all its angles (Guerrina et al, 2018; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). Consequently, implementing practices that make space for a diversity of voices, subfields, and approaches is crucial in the road to construct a truly inclusive and intellectually heterogeneous discipline.

The changing link between academia and “society”

Linking “theory” and “practice” (i.e. praxis) is central to most feminist scholarship, and to gender and politics debates too as indicated above. Rather than simply describing and explaining “the political”, feminist political analyses seek to promote gender equality and diversity in social relations and politics (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). As Brown (2002) argues, connecting theory and political praxis is, indeed, needed to prevent debates within increasingly professionalized disciplines such as political science, from becoming self-referential and thus narrow in their analytical and imaginative capacities. Brown criticizes US political science as a professionalized discipline becoming accountable only to itself, where political scientists are their own audience and judges, and its existence justified by peer-reviewed journals, conferences and prizes (Brown, 2002: 565).

The intimate and necessary link between academia and societal practices potentially constitute vulnerabilities within gender and politics scholarship, too. The rise of (radical) right populism has fuelled distrust in “elitist” or “leftist” science and constrains the relationship between academia, academic knowledge and the society. Gender and politics scholars have demonstrated the multiple ways in which feminist academic knowledge and societal critique can become co-opted and compromised, thus losing its critical political edge when trying to fit with the prevailing logics of neoliberal governance (Caglar et al, 2013; Griffin, 2015; Prügl, 2016). New concepts such as market feminism (Kantola and Squires, 2012), governance feminism (Prügl, 2016), or crisis governance feminism (Griffin, 2015) describe the transformations that engaging with neoliberal politics and policy-making brings for feminist knowledge. Consequently, some scholars

argue that governance feminism has been markedly silent about the gendered underpinnings of global governance and financial governance, focusing instead on supporting institutional measures to enhance women's participation (Griffin, 2015: 66).

Academic feminist actors face particular challenges of not being heard when they engage in political debates about the economy, especially in the context of neoliberalism and the dominance of austerity politics. Simultaneously, academic feminist actors who are willing and able to negotiate the terrain of such a political context have adopted specific strategies to do this. Such strategies require both “discursive virtuosity” (speaking the right language without compromising one's agenda) but also “affective virtuosity”, a term that Elomäki et al (2019) have coined to move forward from the pessimistic governance feminism interpretations of these engagements to instead point to the ambivalences in the engagement with the neoliberal governance. Whereas discursive virtuosity is about manifesting command of contradictory aims and discourses in equality work (Brunila, 2009), affective virtuosity entails not only the competence to analyse and negotiate the conflicting emotions in the room but also within oneself. Affective virtuosity then requires controlling one's feelings and emotions in gender equality work that is done with practitioners, yet it also makes openings for moving forward the gender equality agendas in hostile environments (Elomäki et al, 2019).

Growing opposition to gender studies programs and research

Finally, growing opposition, known as “anti-gender movement” (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017), challenges gender studies programs and research both Western and Eastern Europe. Gender studies

departments and courses at universities have been attacked and denounced as nests of “gender ideology”. Several governments and research agencies restricted funding, abolished accredited study programs, defamed “gender” as conspiracy theory, denounced certain gender and sexuality research topics as ideological and unscientific, or publicly discredited respective scientists as a privileged elite spending taxpayers’ money on irrelevant issues.

The anti-gender movement grew over the last fifteen years, emerging from groups of so-called “concerned citizens”, who were closely linked to the new evangelisation processes of the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually they have grown into a broad network of not only religious, but also nationalist, radical right-wing and other actors, united in their struggle against a seemingly unstoppable and irreversible process of ensuring gender equality and sexual rights.

The anti-gender movement ideology has penetrated and became part of some official state politics as well. Best-known is certainly the decision of the Hungarian government in October 2018 to revoke the accreditation of gender study programs in Hungary. Orbán’s successful attack on university autonomy and academic freedom led to Central European University (CEU) moving to Vienna, while Hungarian Academy of Sciences lost its institutional and financial autonomy (Pető, 2018). Similar anti-gender attacks increasingly appear also in other European countries, such as Poland, Italy, France, Romania and Bulgaria (Engeli, 2020; Kuhar and Zobec, 2017; Paternotte and Verloo, 2020).

The denunciations, particularly when unchallenged by (political) science associations, threaten the gender and sexuality subfield: public funding calls exclude gender topics, scholars

avoid gender-related topics out of fear from political consequences or simply by political interventions into research processes (Paternotte and Verloo, 2020). Over the years, we have witnessed several attempts of the anti-gender actors to establish an “alternative” field of knowledge production by negating “gender” as a concept and dismantling post-structural research in social sciences and humanities. Scientific journals run by anti-choice organizations, research institutes run by politicians or methodologically problematic studies, pushed through a peer review process and published in scientific journals, remain a key challenge for science and particularly gender and sexuality research⁴ (Kuhar, 2015; Paternotte and Verloo, 2020). However, these attacks are also an opportunity for additional internal consolidation of the scientific field, as they create an increasing solidarity among politics and gender scholars.

Conclusion

Over the past twenty years, the field of “gender and politics” has flourished in European political science, which is exemplified by its internal growth, diversification and professionalization, and increased disciplinary recognition. This consolidation creates specific opportunities, but also brings several key challenges which will require new, innovative and feminist thinking to safeguard gender and politics research in the twenty years to come.

Regarding internal consolidation, we ought to address internal hegemonies and marginalizations within gender and politics by practicing academic reflexivity (Bacchi, 2009) or developing awareness regarding biases that shape political analyses. This includes among others

⁴ On a positive note, opposition could also become a potential source of internal consolidation as it could create solidarity among politics and gender scholars.

practicing openness to theoretical and methodological pluralism, interdisciplinary work, the combination of different feminist approaches to political analysis, and the continuous contestation of unequal norms and practices in the subfield. One way to respond to this demand is by organizing conference sections more along research topics or problems, and less along political science subfields, thereby potentially breaking up “knowledge communities” and promoting interdisciplinarity as an advantage.

Important steps still need to be taken to support the participation and career (in terms of conference fees, awards, networks) of minority scholars, early career scholars, scholars from the Global South and scholars at risk. Next to earmarking support funds and fee waivers, one additional practical step could be to further explore online participation as a possibility to make conferences more accessible for those with limited travel opportunities.

External resistances to gender and politics research come in the form of continued marginalization of feminist political analysis and growing anti-gender attacks in several parts of Europe. Making political sciences more inclusive thus requires not only a strong commitment, but also targeted actions by all actors involved. PSAs can recommend to and support journals in a) recruiting gender-race-sexuality diverse editorial boards, b) including gender experts among reviewers by default, and c) regularly inviting special issues on gender and politics research. They can also promote positive action policies (quotas, awards, and recognition of support) for gender, sexuality and intersectionality research(ers). Further core actions can include making data on inequality visible and accessible, monitoring resistance, and encouraging and rewarding

collaborations across political science subfields in conferences or journals with some of them specifically addressing opposition to gender equality in the discipline.

For the broader societal context, issues of gender, sexuality and intersectionality require further consolidation in European political science curricula in order to ensure the continuation of the subfield through new generations of scholars and practitioners. Such a focus needs stronger (supranational) institutional commitments protecting academic freedom and gender equality, such as limiting research funding for institutions without a gender and diversity equality plan. Simultaneously, research into democratic backsliding, particularly in terms of how it endangers (political) scientific research and academic freedom, requires strong support from funding agencies, PSAs and universities.

Considering the fact that (political) science is accused of being detached from “ordinary people” and everyday life experiences, we also need more thought and discussion (and research) into how to make a bridge. Engaging more with stakeholders and making more social impact research available can help to bring theory and praxis closer together. Concomitantly, developing and sharing individual and collective strategies of alliances and empowerment to make gender mainstreaming work and cope with resistances, might help to break through the status quo within academic, political, and economic institutions.

In sum, we need to return to the origins of gender, sexuality and intersectionality research.

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