

Gender and politics studies within European political science: contributions and challenges

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1. Introduction

Gender and politics has become a vibrant subdiscipline of political science over the past twenty years. To reflect this, political science associations organise conferences and panels on gender and politics, books, journals, specialized book series and journal special issues are published, and courses are taught at universities (Mügge, Evans and Engeli 2016; Ackerly and Mügge 2016). However, the contributions of gender and politics to political science remain to be fully recognized. In this foreword, we draw on our recent work to outline these contributions and the challenges that feminist analyses still face within political science (see Kantola and Lombardo 2017; 2017a; and 2017b).

2. Feminist contributions to Political Science

Gender and politics has made three main contributions to politics studies: first, it has inspired the rethinking of political questions and concepts from gender lenses; second, it has provided a variety of different analytical approaches to analyze politics; third, it has expanded the boundaries of 'the political'; and fourth, it has strengthened the link between theory and praxis. With respect to the first contribution, Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True (2011: 63) suggest that 'gender analysis opens up a whole landscape of new research questions as well as giving us tools to rethink old research questions' of power, institutions, agency, and democracy.

Second, feminist political analyses are extremely diversified. In our new book *Gender and Political Analysis*, we show how they range from a women approach (investigating the representation of women in political institutions), to a gender approach (exploring gender-biased structures and practices within institutions), a deconstructing gender approach (analyzing the construction of gender in political discourses and its effects on people), an intersectional approach (studying the interaction of gender with other inequalities), and a post-deconstruction of gender approach (such as new materialist studies on the impact of matter on the politics of gender and the cultural politics of emotions) (see Kantola and Lombardo 2017). Each approach captures aspects of political reality that oth-

er perspectives may have overlooked, and jointly they shed light on dimensions of power and inequalities that gender blind political studies tend to neglect.

Third, gender analyses have expanded the boundaries of ‘the political’ to include gender relations and issues formerly considered private. As the famous feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ shows, power relations are not abstract but rather embodied in gender subjects. Two main consequences for conceptualising ‘the political’ follow from this: the first is that power relations and values are considered gendered, because they reproduce gender norms and biases against women; the second is that gender analyses consider issues formerly defined as personal – or that are still *de facto* marginalised in politics in spite of their inclusion in existing legislation – such as sexual violence or child-care, as highly political.

Fourth, gender and politics research is especially apt to connect theory and praxis, something that politics as a discipline especially needs in current times of crisis and conflicts (see Kantola and Lombardo 2017a). Equality theory is engaged with real world problems questioning gender power hierarchies and suggesting ways to put equality into everyday practice. Gender and politics tends to be conducted through feminist theory and lenses. This normative component, on the one hand, has made it vulnerable to critiques of being ideological in the eyes of mainstream political science. On the other hand, the normative side of the feminist analysis of politics adds to its strength to explain, understand, and change relations of domination that take place in existing societies (Kantola and Lombardo 2017; Mügge, Evans and Engeli 2016; Ackerly and Mügge 2016).

The contribution of gender and politics studies to the field of political science and International Relations has nowadays partially been recognized so that Liza Mügge, Elizabeth Evans and Isabelle Engeli (2016: 2) argue that ‘Gender scholarship is gradually becoming part of mainstream political science, while retaining its distinct identity’. Indicators of this are the fact that gender and politics publications are increasingly present in political science journals that do not specialise on gender, at the same time that new gender-specialised political science book series are created; and gender and politics research is now embedded in national and international political science associations such as ECPR and IPSA.

3. Challenges for gender and politics studies

Despite the key contributions and the significant expansion of scholarship gender and politics studies still face challenges within the discipline. Dominant approaches in political science affect the recognition of gender studies in the field and influence the emergence and marginalization of particular gender approaches to politics, such as deconstructivist and new materialist ones (Kantola and Lombardo 2017b). Teaching of gender is still marginalised or inexistent in most political science departments, including UK and US (Foster et al 2013: 13; Mügge, Evans and Engeli 2016: 2). In their study of citational practices in political science, titled ‘What’s Queer About Political Science’, Nicola Smith and Donna Lee (2015: 50) argue that: ‘Far from being the broad and inclusive discipline it purports to be in modern textbooks, today’s political science is consciously marginalising issues of gender and sexuality and hardly doing justice to the political analysis of social relations that queer theorists have been successfully doing for quite some time.’

The marginalisation of gender approaches in political science, despite their recent gradual integration in the discipline, argue Celis et al (2013) still exists because men are overrepresented in the field, and because the discipline reproduces androcentric biases. Concerning the first point, ‘women are underrepresented at virtually every level of the discipline, from graduate school to APSA leadership, and they continue to face gender-related obstacles in their professional lives. Moreover, women and politics scholarship remains somewhat marginalized in the discipline’ (Tolleson-Rinehart and Carroll 2006: 512). In the European context, Drude Dahlerup (2010) relates the progressive institutionalization of gender and politics within the ECPR, through the creation of a standing group and a specialized conference on politics and gender. And at the same time she reports ‘resistance and even anger’ on the part of ‘male oligarchs’ in the ECPR as gender studies developed and women demanded more leadership positions in the organization, because according to Dahlerup (2010: 91-92) this ‘represented an attack on the fundamental self-perception of academia as being free from any bias and being strictly based on merit as its selection criteria. The university seems to be the last institution in society to recognize that gender is a structuring factor in all institutions, even in academia.’ Feminist scholars make similar diagnoses on the lack of integration of gender in political science for contexts as different as the UK, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Spain, or Finland (Evans and Amery 2016; Bonjour, Mügge and Roggeband 2016; Abels 2016; Sauer 2016; Alonso and Lombardo 2016; Kantola 2015).

Feminist political theorists and epistemologists have shown that knowledge and science have been constructed on the basis of androcentric biases that have privileged the questions, issues, and methods relevant to hegemonic men (Harding 1991; Hekman 1990). Political science is not an exception in this respect. The theory of political science has been developed within a line of thinking that, from Aristotle to Machiavelli, Locke and the contractualists, has justified the right of men to rule over women and public affairs and the subordinate position of women and their association with the private domestic sphere. Although feminist scholars have exposed and challenged the gender stereotypes present in male-dominated classics of political science (Pateman 1995; Shanley and Pateman 1991), ‘the notion of a separation of the public and private spheres persists today’ (Celis et al 2013: 7), with the symbolic association of women with the private and men with the public sphere of politics. The very concepts of politics, power, citizenship, or the state have been conceptualised in androcentric ways, reflecting the experience, interests, and values of embodied dominant male subjects (Lister 1998; Brown 1988; Pateman 1988). ‘These ideas have again affected what has been deemed suitable subject matter for the academic discipline of politics’ (Celis et al 2013: 7).

The experience of being excluded from the mainstream has made gender studies of politics particularly open to inclusion and diversity, so to challenge marginalisations and build bridges between different approaches in political science. According to Birte Siim (2004: 97), gender and politics approaches have adopted a ‘methodological pluralism’ that has challenged the ‘methodological split in political science between different schools, for example between “rationalists” and “social constructivists”’. Siim recognizes the existence of a dialogue within feminist political research between empirical studies, comparative context-aware analyses, and discourse analysis inspired by post-structuralism (2004: 97). She traces the emergence of interdisciplinary ‘conversations’ in

feminist political research between ‘political theorists, gender theorists and comparativists, as well as between neo-institutionalists and social constructivists’ that did not generate methodological splits but rather ‘productive tensions between different positions’ (2004: 98). These dialogues have contributed to build an agenda around three main elements: ‘the contested and constructed nature of key concepts; the principle of diversity and differences among women’, and ‘the inter-relation between discourse, agency and institutions’ (Siim 2004: 99). In this way, feminist political research has shown political science the ‘potential strength of methodological pluralism’ (Siim 2004: 98).

Gender and politics studies are characterized by a huge variety of approaches (Kantola and Lombardo 2017 and 2017b). The value and contribution of gender approaches to political science lies precisely in their diversity, because each of them is able to capture aspects of political reality that another perspective had overlooked. It is therefore tremendously important that the contributions of gender and politics to political science receive wider academic recognition within the discipline, so that scholars may enjoy the benefits of a more complete range of analytical approaches for understanding, explaining, and transforming the political.

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