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Gender Equality+ Under Threat*

RESEARCH

Gender in the crisis and remaking of Europe: re-gendering subsidiarity

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This article analyses the gender dimension of the European Commission's proposals to revise the governance of the European Union in response to the crisis by increasing the powers of the European Union level. The proposed change in the location of the subsidiarity boundary has significant gender implications: subsidiarity is gendered. The alternative strategies for economic growth and security have implications for democracy and gender equality. The concepts of 'gender regime' (and its social-democratic and neoliberal varieties) and 'project' are developed and applied. The possibility of the embedding of the gender-equality project in the new institutions proposed by the Commission is discussed.

key words European Union • gender • subsidiarity • economic growth strategy • security • gender regime

Key messages

- The future of the EU is shaped by the gender equality project.
- Subsidiarity is gendered.

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Introduction

Europe is being 'remade' during the 'crisis'. The European Commission (EC) has proposed revisions to European Union (EU) governance that would move more

decision-making from the member state to the EU level, consistent with the tradition of ‘ever-closer union’ as a response to the crisis. While the principle of subsidiarity, which is key to democracy in the EU, requires that decisions be taken at the lowest possible level closest to citizens consistent with effective decision-making, the practice of subsidiarity is contingent on a range of issues. Any assessment of the EC’s proposals requires understanding the gendering of the EU’s strategies (Lombardo and Forest, 2011; Kronsell, 2005, 2016). Only by gendering the analysis of EU strategies for economic growth (including fiscal) and security (including violence) can the implications of the alternative ways that the EU might respond to the crisis be understood (Elson, 2002; Mahon, 2006; Klatzer and Schlagen, 2011; Lombardo, 2017). While the EU has been important in promoting gender equality (Hoskyns, 1996), recent changes have raised questions as to the future (MacRae, 2010; Jacquot, 2015; Ahrens, 2018). Despite the narrowing of gender gaps in decision-making in some EU institutions, gender equality no longer appears to be a strategic priority for the EU.

This article investigates the changing gender of subsidiarity. This requires not only developing the theorisation of European integration to address gender, but also developing gender theory to address the macro level.

The EC response to the crisis

The EC (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) has been consulting on alternative future scenarios, which draw on different understandings as to what constitutes Europe and the way forward for economic growth, security and democracy. The five scenarios are: (1) carrying on; (2) nothing but the single market; (3) those who want more do more; (4) doing less more efficiently; and (5) doing much more together. These scenarios are differentiated in relation to six institutional clusters: single market and trade; economic and monetary union; Schengen, migration and security; foreign policy and defence; EU budget; and capacity to deliver. The EU’s (2015a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b) papers offer nuance on the classic EU agenda of ‘ever-deeper union’ by offering routes to greater integration that differ by institution and different speeds, including stasis. In addition to a focus on political economy, there is concern with security (both internal and external), and a concern for governance and democracy. The five future scenarios differ over the extent to which, and in which areas, harmonisation of standards is to be enhanced and enforced.

The economic growth agenda depends upon the policy architecture of the Single European Market, which although perhaps the furthest advanced part of the EU integration agenda, is nevertheless not yet complete. The agenda for the completion of economic and monetary union includes the enhancement of the EU level in EU decision-making by deepening the capacity of EU-level institutions to address financial and fiscal decision-making (see EC, 2015a, 2017b). The security agenda draws on the greater competence provided in the Treaty of Lisbon, and depends on the policy architecture of the European Area of Freedom, Justice and Security. This area is a significant addition to EU-level competence.

The proposals for the completion of economic and monetary union and for the enhancement of security significantly move the subsidiarity boundary since they would increase the political and legal capacity of the EU level and decrease that of the member state level. By potentially increasing the resilience of the EU against the

exploitation by global finance capital and threats to security, this might also deepen democracy for EU citizens. However, if this shift reduces democratic capacity, then it reduces the prospects for narrowing gender gaps. The implications of this move in the location of the subsidiarity boundary for democracy will depend on the meaningfulness of the ‘relaunch of the social dialogue’, the ‘dialogue’ with the European Parliament and whether gender-equality principles are incorporated into the new EU institutions. The outcome for gender equality depends on the relative strength of the gender-equality project in institutions at the member state and EU levels.

Economic growth

The EU has a goal of economic growth that is sustainable, smart and inclusive (EC, 2010a). All EU strategies to achieve this include the full employment of women. There are two competing approaches: the social model (social-democratic); and the competitive model (neoliberal).

The social model involves the full mobilisation of high-skill, high-productivity human resources through cooperation and participation of both social partners (employers and trade unions) in decision-making (Morel et al, 2012), including participation by both women and the labour movement (Huber and Stephens, 2000), in complex intersections (Maier, 2011). Economic growth is to be promoted by state investment in human capital, by public services for education and care, and by a rounded set of institutions to promote inclusion in democratic decision-making and the rule of law. The social-democratic growth model: seeks the full employment of women and men; requires regulations to remove discrimination that causes gender gaps in pay and conditions; regulates working time to facilitate combining work and care; and requires the welfare or social investment state to socialise care work (Elson, 2002; Mahon, 2006, 2010; Morel et al, 2012; Walby, 2009). Over the last quarter of the 20th century, the EU economic growth model explicitly combined gender equality and growth by attempting to reduce gender gaps in rates and conditions of employment through policies of equal treatment, reconciliation and gender mainstreaming.

The competitive model promotes the removal of state regulations on economic activity, which are understood to interfere with the decision-making capacity of economic entrepreneurs in a free market. Economic growth is understood to be more rapid if markets are free from regulation. The development of this model has been partly in response to the pressures of global capital (Brenner et al, 2010).

Some mainstream (Streeck, 2013) and feminist (MacRae, 2010) analysts despair that the EU has become a neoliberal machine, with detriments to equality and democracy. Others retain the notion that it is possible to recuperate the social model within the EU (Habermas, 2012), even if this is not currently occurring (Varoufakis, 2015). There is debate as to whether there is an inevitable tension between economic growth and gender equality. MacRae (2013) and Cavaghan (2017) situate the gender-equality project within the ‘social’ and outside the ‘economic’, as if there were an inevitable tension between gender equality and growth. Others situate the gender-equality project within both the social and the economic, and see no reason why there could not be a pro-gender-equality economic growth strategy (Morel et al, 2012); indeed,

rather than a trade-off between gender equality and economic growth, each supports the other (Walby, 2009).

The historical turn to a neoliberal project that creates tension between economic growth and gender equality was contingent and not inevitable. The crisis has been gendered, with fiscal consolidation and austerity at the member state level increasing gender inequality (Browne, 2011; Young et al, 2011; Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Walby, 2009). The ‘Troika’ (EC, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund [IMF]), which took over the governance of the fiscal under emergency regulations known as the ‘six pack’ in Greece, took a similarly gendered neoliberal stance to the fiscal (Wöhl, 2014). There is feminist resistance to this neoliberal turn in economic strategy (Durbin et al, 2017). The outcome to this is not yet clear.

Security

The EU is promoting security, both internal and external, by building an Area of Freedom, Justice and Security. There are competing approaches to the definition and achievement of security (Bickerton et al, 2011; Vaughan-Williams, 2015), and how it is gendered (Kronsell, 2016; Guerrina and Wright, 2016). The narrow, traditional approach focused on ‘inter-state war’ and a focused set of relevant institutions. This approach was revised with the end of Cold War and the perceived increased salience of terrorism and migration (Buzan et al, 1998; Bigo, 2006; Anderson, 2013). Ever-wider definitions extended to include armed conflict between non-state entities (Kaldor, 2007), inter-group and interpersonal violence, other challenges to state and societal survival such as climate change, and other forms of unnecessary harm (Galtung, 1969), potentially invoking all social institutions.

Traditionally, security has been regarded as the remit of decision-making by states as a core part of their ‘sovereignty’, even though there have always been exceptions to this. The increased capacity and competence of the EU level relative to member states in the field of security challenges this tradition. The EU security strategy was once understood as a peace project. Peace was to be developed through the erosion of the ethno-nationalism that generated militarism and by the development of shared political institutions that were needed to stabilise the economic growth strategy (Haas, 1958; Hallstein, 1973).

Increasing European integration in relation to security would change the gendering of decision-making on security. Security is gendered; indeed, its different practices and institutions can be differently gendered. Perpetrators of violence in peace and war are more often men, with complexly gendered hierarchies of decision-making (Enloe, 1983) and varieties of masculinity involved (Kronsell, 2016). Interventions to reduce conflict are gendered. The EU has supported the development of United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions to include women in decision-making in conflict zones, with the intention of reducing both the likelihood of a return to war and the likelihood of violence against women (Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Hastrup and Nadine, 2017).

Democracy

Within the EU, the principle of subsidiarity is core to its practice of democracy. However, where the subsidiarity boundary should be located is contested in both mainstream and gendered debates on the EU. The principle of subsidiarity, and the preference for the local or national over the EU level, while the traditional approach, has been challenged by the need to regulate global forces, such as global finance capital, which require a large-scale polity (Majone, 2005). The classic debate has been between the intergovernmentalists, who think of this as a zero-sum competition for political authority (Moravcsik, 1993), and the understanding of the EU as of benefit to member state political projects (Milward, 1992). Then, there is the question of whether democracy is lessened or enhanced by the move upwards. Some contend the former since it distances decision-making from citizens. Others suggest that it depends on the scale of the polity required to regulate global finance capital – small member states are less effective than the larger EU (see Majone, 2005). Streeck (2013) argues that the EU delivers neoliberal economic outcomes and is thus antithetical to the democratic will. Others suggest that it is contingent: if more institutions are governed by democratic principles and practices, then democracy would be deepened. Habermas (2012), for example, argues that it remains possible to give greater priority to the more democratic institutions within a more integrated EU when more decisions are taken at the EU level.

The inclusion of gender challenges traditional accounts of European political institutions and raises further questions about gendered democracies (Galligan, 2015) in a context where the extent to which the EU has delivered effective democracy for women has been questioned (Kantola, 2010; Dahlerup, 2018). Including more women in EU political institutions is important, but this does not have any simple relationship to the representation of women's interests (Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 2005; Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009), since these interests can be actively (re) constructed during such processes (Childs et al, 2010; Rolandsen-Agustin, 2012). Practices and institutions that might re-gender democracy extend wider than parliaments and executives, including legal institutions (Jacquot, 2014; Guerrina and Masselot, 2018), the 'public sphere' (Liebert, 1999), organised civil society (Bee and Guerrina, 2014) and coalitions (sometimes 'triangles') of feminists across state and civil society (Woodward, 2004; Guerrina et al, 2018). Each of these institutions has a different scale or reach (Mahon, 2006; Walby, 2009) and is differently gendered, so their relative significance in the overall ecology of decision-making has significance for the emergent macro gender regime. Attention should be paid to the gender-equality practices within these institutions, namely, equal treatment, gender balance in decision-making and gender mainstreaming, but this is not enough. The gendering of EU democracy concerns not merely the 'adding up' of the differently gendered meso-level institutions, but also how they fit together as a macro-level system. Are the institutions that better practice gender-equality principles (such as the European Parliament) more or less powerful than institutions that do not within the ecology of the multiple institutions that jointly constitute the democratic system as a whole?

Assessing changes in the quality of re-gendered democracy consequent on the changes proposed by the EC depends on: whether EU-level institutions have democratic principles embedded within them; whether the more democratic of the EU-level governance institutions, such as the European Parliament, have greater or

less priority in EU-level decision-making; and whether the EU-level strategies for economic growth and security are seen to require broad (democratic) participation for their better functioning or not. These are all gendered issues.

Gendering Europe

Building on this gendered analysis of economic growth, security and democracy, three further analytical developments are needed to understand gendered European integration: first, conceptualising gender at macro as well as meso and micro levels; second, conceptualising the EU gender-equality project; and, third, identifying the gender implications of subsidiarity – the gender implications of moving the boundary between governance at the member state or EU level up or down.

Conceptualising gender at a macro level: regimes, institutions and projects

Gender relations exist at several different levels of abstraction: regimes (macro); institutions (meso); and practices/projects (micro). The analysis of each has something important to contribute to the analysis of gender relations. With the focus on 'Europe', the macro level of the gender regime (eg the whole of European society) requires analysis in addition to the meso levels of the gendering of specific institutions (eg European Parliament, EC) and the gendering of projects (eg EC strategies for economic growth and security).

Institutions are beyond the individual, being social systems that can reproduce themselves without the intention of the individual; they are gendered in different ways, which can change over time. Political institutions are a subset of societal institutions. They are gendered both in their gender composition (descriptive representation) and in their goals/projects/strategies (substantive representation). Among feminist institutionalists in political science (Waylen, 2007; Chapell and Waylen, 2013), the focus is on institutions rather than individuals or regimes, consistent with the wider institutionalist agenda (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Streeck and Thelen, 2005).

Institutions are important, but they are not sufficient for the analysis of changes in Europe, which requires both large-scale concepts of regimes as well as institutions. Analysis of gender regimes investigates the clustering of institutions into regimes. While both are types of 'social system', a gender regime has ontological depth in its inclusion of the institutional domains of economy, polity, violence and civil society, rather than a single institution (Walby, 2009). The mobilisation of the concept of gender regime facilitates the analysis of the intersection of multiple regimes of inequality, not only gender, but also class and ethnicity. This framework of varieties of gender regimes constituted by several gendered institutions facilitates comparisons of gender relations across time and space.

The gendering of the European Parliament is affected by its environment of other EU-level institutions and changes in European society; gender analysis needs to engage not only with institutions, but also with the macro level of society (regime) and with alternative projects/strategies. Within the analysis of the clustering of gendered institutions into varieties of macro gender regimes is a discussion as to the best way to make the distinctions between regimes. Many make the distinction between domestic and public gender regime, or a parallel distinction between, familial and de-familial (Esping-Andersen, 2009), between male-breadwinner and dual-earner

(Lewis, 1992), or between reproduction and production (Elson, 2002). However, while this distinction is necessary, it is not sufficient; in addition, it is important to include further distinctions, especially within the category of public gender regimes between neoliberal and social-democratic forms. There may be further distinctions too.

The distinction between neoliberal and social-democratic forms of the public gender regime is important for conceptualising the changes in gender relations during the crisis in the UK since 2008, in which women have seen their work intensified but have not been pushed out of employment into the home (Walby, 2015). The extent to which the crisis has led to a change in the form of gender regime from social-democratic to neoliberal, rather than from public to domestic, can be empirically investigated (see Lombardo, 2017).

EU-level gender-equality project

The EU has a distinctive gender-equality project – the concept of project rather than identity is used here to capture the priority given by the EU to some goals and actions rather than others. Project components include: descriptive and substantive representation; equal treatment; and gender mainstreaming (eg gender balance in decision-making and work–life balance). EU-level institutions vary in the extent to which they implement these; hence, variations in the balance of power between EU-level institutions are gendered.

Feminism is also better conceptualised as a project rather than as an identity (Walby, 2009) as this permits analysis of the fluid intersections with other projects and their mutual effects (Walby et al, 2012). So conceptualised, feminist contributions to intersectional political projects can be more readily identified and theorised. Feminist projects can become embedded in political parties, in governmental programmes, in specialised governmental machinery and in social formations (Walby, 2015).

The EU-level gender-equality project (EC, 2010b, 2015b) is a set of goals, principles, laws, policies, institutions, mechanisms and actors. This project is described in a plan and mobilised in a policy architecture. It started as a legal principle for equal pay in the Treaty of Rome, the founding treaty of the EU, and has developed over time into a complicated and far-reaching set of values and practices. The gender-equality project complexly engages with intersecting inequalities and projects, which shape its form (Huber and Stephens, 2000; Verloo, 2006, 2018; Walby, 2011; Verloo and Walby, 2012; Rolandsen-Agustin and Siim, 2014).

A simple approach to gender inequality considers the degrees of inequality, articulated in the concept of a ‘gender gap’. In some contexts, this simple approach is powerful, for example, the gender pay gap and the gender gap in descriptive representation in parliament. However, in others, for example, assessing different strategies towards reducing gender inequality, the comparative analysis required is more complicated. It needs a theory of change in addition to descriptions of gaps. Theories of change consider the implications of changes in one institution for changes in another.

The EU gender-equality project is led by the principles of equal treatment (especially in the economy) and of gender mainstreaming (including in work–life balance and gender balance in decision-making). Substantive representation is encoded

in the principles of equal treatment and gender mainstreaming, while descriptive representation is a component in the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

‘Equal treatment’ is a legally binding principle since it is in the Treaty of Lisbon. However, its application is specified and limited in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It applies only in the economy, in the regulations for the Single European Market. It is narrow and powerful, with a set of supporting legal and policy institutions for its implementation. Over the years, its meaning and field of application has been significantly widened, for example, to the sale and distribution of goods and services. In feminist theory, it is variously a clear simple principle or insufficient to address diverse approaches to the domestic division of labour.

‘Gender mainstreaming’ is a supposedly legally binding principle since it is in the Treaty of Lisbon. It is the application of the principle of gender equality in all branches of policymaking. However, its application is weakened by its loose specification and the small scale of any dedicated institutional machinery (Jacquot, 2010; Abels and Mushaben, 2012; Ahrens, 2018).

Work–life balance is an example of gender mainstreaming. This is a principle embedded in economic policy. It is more effectively mobilised when the economic policy in which it is embedded promotes full, high-skill employment rather than enhanced competitiveness at the firm level. It is consistent with the promotion of publicly funded care for children and others. In a de-gendered form, it is core to the practices promoted by the theory of the social investment state since it assists the building of human capital.

Gender balance in decision-making is an example of gender mainstreaming. This is a principle articulated in some policies, but is not legally binding. It has been mobilised in some circumstances but not others. There is no legally based institutional mechanism to take it forward. However, it appeals to powerful values of democracy and fairness, which have assisted its application. Within feminist theory and practice, there are debates as to the mechanisms that best achieve such balance without backlash, from quotas to voluntary targets.

The relationship between the descriptive representation and substantive representation of women within the EU gender-equality project is subject to intense discussion (Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 2005; Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009). Understanding differences in ways of entrenching gender-equality principles in law and institutions adds nuance to this debate, as does the extent to which the constitution of gendered political projects changes gender itself (Childs et al, 2010).

Among the political institutions at the EU level, there are varied levels of gender representation. The European Parliament has the highest proportion of women in senior decision-making positions. The relative positioning of the European Parliament in the context of all the EU-level decision-making bodies affects the extent to which women are involved in key EU-level decisions. Achieving gender balance in decision-making is a frequently held objective in the EU, but it is not a binding legal principle. It has been achieved in some institutions (political, public policy, economic, security) but far from all. Among EU decision-making entities, the European Parliament is an example of an institution in which the gender gap has narrowed substantially over recent years. Others, including the Council of Ministers, EC and European Central Bank, retain a substantial gap (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018). Decision-making in the EU is made in separate institutions and is also made by institutions in concert. When several EU institutions are involved

in reaching a shared decision, there is sometimes a hierarchy among them. In those circumstances, the relative positioning of institutions that have narrow or wide gender gaps in decision-making within the overall set of institutions involved in a decision can have significant implications for the outcome. A particularly important case is whether the European Parliament (which has a narrow gender gap) has a significant role in decisions on strategy on political economy or on security. An increase or decrease in its prominence in joint EU-level decision-making has implications for the overall gender balance in decision-making in the EU. Hence, the overall system matters, in addition to the specific institutions.

Gendering subsidiarity

The location of the gendered subsidiarity boundary is contested and changeable. While the Lisbon Treaty, in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union, identifies as foundational the values of democracy and equality, and Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union states that the EU shall ‘promote’ ‘equality between women and men’, the division of responsibility between the EU level and member states in pursuing these matters is governed by the principle of subsidiarity (EU, 2007a). The location of the boundary is determined by the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, to the specific case:

Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level.

Under the principle of proportionality, the content and form of Union action shall not exceed what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaty.

Whether the proposed move of the subsidiarity boundary supports or hinders the gender-equality project depends on whether the EU level or member state institutions are more effective in promoting gender equality. In other words, it matters whether the EU level has legal competence to act on the principles of equal treatment in a narrow or broad range of policy fields. The legal basis for the application of the principle of equal treatment by EU-level entities is found in Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union in relation to non-discrimination in specific fields of the Single European Market, and in Article 157 in relation to equal pay (EU, 2007b). Any extension of the application of the principle requires EU legislation.

Whether the gender-equality project is promoted more effectively if governance is at the local, member state/national or EU level also depends on whether member state- or EU-level institutions have adopted the gender-equality project more effectively. At the member state level, the proportion of women in decision-making (descriptive representation) varies significantly between countries and between institutions within countries. In some member states, women are better represented in political and policy institutions than at the EU level; however, in others, they are less well represented. Women were 37% of the Members of the European Parliament in 2017, while in

the parliaments of member states, the percentage of women ranged from 10% in Hungary to 43% in Sweden (European Parliament, 2017). Then there are questions of substantive representation. In the EU context, the equal treatment mechanism is powerful since not only is it legally based in treaties, but it has a long-established set of institutions to support its implementation; however, its field of application is narrowly defined under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Gender mainstreaming, while also legally based in treaties, is weakly institutionalised, though its potential field of application is broad, including gender balance in decision-making and work–life balance.

Gendering the EC’s proposals and strategies

The EC’s (2017a, 2017b) White Papers for the future of the EU27 – with their five possible scenarios – are largely presented as if gender were not relevant to them. Indeed, the term is almost entirely absent; there is very little mention of gender in the reflection paper on the social dimension or of democracy in the summaries of process. However, these proposals are deeply gendered, even though this is not made explicit in the White Papers. Mainstreaming gender into European strategies for the future requires the identification of alternative strategies and analysis of their gender implications. The strategies under investigation are those for economic growth (political economy) and for security (violence) with implications for governance and democracy. The gender dimension is examined through the lens of the EU’s gender-equality project (discussed in the previous section).

The EC’s proposals are to change the governance level of the political economy and security strategies more towards the EU level and away from the member state level, which is intended to pool powers for more effective action to address global challenges, especially the instability that can be generated by deregulated global finance capital (discussed in the first section of the article). Gendering means identifying the gender dimensions of the changing strategy for economic growth, security and democracy. This means identifying not only the gender gaps, but also the trajectory of change in gender relations likely to be produced by the strategies. This requires not only a rich description of gender gaps within relevant institutions, but also a theory of change in gender relations. This means, in turn, a theory as to how changes in one gendered institution can cause changes in other gendered institutions. This requires a theory of the gender system, or regime, in which these systems (institutions) interact and mutually shape each other. In this way, the question as to whether changes in Europe constitute progress or regress for gender equality can be investigated.

The institutions making up the economy and security are governed at both the member state and EU level. These forms of governance are gendered, but differently so, since the member state polity and the EU polity are not the same. Shifting some governance of the economy and security from the member state to EU level means changing the gendering of the governance of these institutions (economy and security). Analysing the changes in gendered governance requires the identification of the gendering of governance at the member state and EU level to analyse the gendered implications of this proposed change in level of governance. It requires the identification of the nature of the gender-equality project at the EU and member state levels, and how this EU gender-equality project is applied to the economy and security.

Within the EU, there is a policy architecture made up of principles and mechanisms to take forward the gender-equality project. This includes, as noted earlier: the legally binding principle of ‘equal treatment’, which is applied to the economy and related areas; the principle and policy of gender mainstreaming; and the principle and policy of gender balance in decision-making. The areas to which these principles and policies apply are specified within the legal and policy framework. While the principles are generally accepted, their precise field of application is more contested. The principles and policies that apply to gender are different from those that apply to class, where a different policy architecture is relevant.

Proposed economic growth strategy

Policies towards the fiscal are central in differentiating strategies for economic growth. Fiscal expenditures are gendered; hence, decision-making on fiscal matters is saturated with gender. The ‘fiscal’ encompasses public expenditure on welfare states and includes state expenditure – social investment – in public services for care. ‘Gender budgeting’ is an explicit example of gendered fiscal practices. The gendered nature of the fiscal has significant implications for the nature of the gender regime: its form; changes between domestic and public forms of the gender regime; and, further, changes between the social-democratic and neoliberal public forms of gender regime.

Gender equality is differently positioned in the economic growth strategy as the EU has shifted from a social-democratic to a neoliberal form. At one time, gender equality was fully integrated as a necessary component of the EU’s economic growth strategy – when it took a social investment state/social-democratic form. If economic growth rests on short-term ‘competitiveness’, then gender equality is displaced from its position as a necessary central feature of the strategy to become either irrelevant (merely a luxury) or in tension with the strategy (in its use of resources). In the social-democratic model, public investment in human capital and the regulation of labour markets are necessary to remove discrimination and enable the combination of employment and care. In the neoliberal model, such matters are left to competition between private firms, so public policy for gender equality becomes an optional extra rather than a necessary part of the strategy.

While there has been a substantial shift in the direction of the competitiveness strategy in the EU, there is still some support for the social investment state. The role of feminist analysis in the development of the economic growth strategy remains significant – this is a contested intellectual and policy space. It is not yet clear whether fiscal priorities might include the social investment in care services that supports gender equality. However, the movement of the Gender Equality Unit from a Directorate-General concerned with the economy to one concerned with security (Ahrens, 2018) has not helped the visible inclusion of a gender-equality perspective in the economic growth strategy. The issue for gender democracy in respect of the fiscal is whether the new institutions proposed to take these fiscal decisions, such as the European Fiscal Board, are mandated to have a gender balance in their membership and whether gender equality is written into their constitutions as a priority goal.

Proposed security strategy

The place of gender equality within the EU security strategy is currently minor. Historically, security was a secondary part of the EU agenda (despite peace being key to the founding of the EU) and gender equality was not significant. Since the Treaty of Lisbon expanded EU competence on internal and external security, the EC has established a programme on violence that includes gender. However, gender remains a small part of the external security agenda. As already noted, security is gendered in several ways – violent crime significantly perpetrated against women in gendered situations and institutions, for example, domestic violence and inter-state security, especially in conflict zones, is gendered. Violent crime is part of the ‘internal’ security agenda. Although EU-level competence has limits if it does not have a cross-border dimension, many aspects of gender-based violence do have such a dimension. There is an emergent set of directives and other actions to support victims and the prosecution of offenders, and to develop relevant EU-wide information systems.

In policies under the remit of external relations, narrowing the gender gap in decision-making in conflict zones has been shown to improve the quality of decisions and to reduce the high rates of violence against women in these situations. There is a significant gender field that has been developed around the UN Security Council resolutions concerning women, peace and security, to which the EU has contributed. Yet, the extent to which the EU security agenda is gendered is underestimated. The EC White Paper does not currently recognise the gender dimensions of security. The gender-equality project is minimally included in the new institutions being formed to address European security. Yet, there are significant proposals as to how the gender-equality project could be mainstreamed that have been developed by feminist scholars and activists in the field.

Conclusion

Gender relations are a significant dimension of the remaking of Europe in the crisis. This article has addressed the question of how the gender dimension in these processes is best conceptualised. It has shown the importance of understanding the gendering and re-gendering of subsidiarity, of the relocation of the subsidiarity boundary. It has shown the importance of extending the repertoire of concepts to include not only the gendering of institutions, but also the gendering of projects (here, the EU strategies for economic growth and security) and the gendering of regimes of inequality (here, the social-democratic and neoliberal forms of the public gender regime).

The EC’s proposals to remake the EU to meet the challenges of the crisis are gendered, even though this is not explicit in their documents. By neglecting to discuss the gender dimension, they miss the opportunity to consider how to advance the EU’s fundamental values of equality and democracy. This requires the explicit treatment of gender relations in EU strategies for economic growth and for security. By including the principles of equal treatment, gender mainstreaming and gender balance in decision-making in the constitutions of the new entities being proposed by the EC, the efficiency of the economy, the security of the society and gender equality could be improved. This would require policy on narrowing the gender gaps in decision-making, with special attention for newly restructured institutions, and on including gender equality as a priority goal. The gender-equality project could

be mainstreamed into the strategies of the EU on economic growth and security in this way.

Gender redefines the economic growth strategy. The inclusion of the gender dimension could make visible the continued existence of a social model/social-democratic dimension (the EU is still a significant defender of equal treatment, equality in decision-making and social investment in care services) despite the turn towards neoliberalism of the EU economic growth strategy. The contestation over the gender-equality project is simultaneously a contestation over the balance between social-democratic and neoliberal strategies within the EU.

The fiscal is gendered since it concerns public expenditure and social investment on care services that affect the gender division of labour and the form of the gender regime. There is potential for the proposed European Fiscal Board to institutionalise gender balance among its decision-makers, and include in its key goals the promotion of the full employment of women and the promotion of childcare at the Barcelona standard.

Gender redefines security. Including violence against women in the category of security, and noting the recent EU actions to reduce it, means that there are some progressive moves on security from a gender dimension, in addition to the more regressive ones concerning securitisation.

Gender redefines democracy. Gendered democratic forces are still advancing, even though labour movement forces for democracy are weakening. Moving decisions from the member state to EU level is not necessarily a neoliberal move; it depends whether the gender-equality project is embedded in the newly forming or restructuring institutions. The contribution of the feminist project to the deepening of democracy has potential. Overall, the inclusion of gender in the analysis of Europe makes visible the tensions arising from contrary directions of travel on the projects of social democracy and neoliberalism since changes in gender and class relations are not always aligned.

The challenge of analysing changes in Europe through a gender lens requires the development and refinement of macro-level concepts to capture variations in gender relations. It requires building on the concepts of gender inequalities and gender gaps, of descriptive and substantive representation, and of gendered institutions, and including macro-level concepts of gender regimes. This develops the work of the feminist institutionalists, who successfully argued that institutions are gendered, and locates institutions in regimes, in the sense that each institution (system) takes all other systems as its environment. The increased prominence and power of one institution changes the environment within which other systems operate. So, for example, it matters whether the European Parliament, which encodes both descriptive and substantive representation of women more than most other European-level institutions, is present and powerful in decision-making in the reshaped political architecture of the EU.

The concepts of 'regime' and 'project' are recommended for inclusion in the repertoire of gender analysis. A regime is a system, which is a system of systems. A regime is at the macro level, while many institutions are treated as if they are at the meso level. A gender regime may take a domestic or public form. A public gender regime may take a neoliberal or social-democratic form. The concept of project is preferred to identity since it is more social and less individualised. A project is carried by practices rather than people (though people are, of course, involved). A project is a set of goals and purposes. Projects can be in alliance; projects can be coalitions;

projects can merge or hybridise. Gender equality is a project in the EU. The EU has its own version of the gender-equality project. The EU gender-equality project is articulated through principles (eg equal treatment) and practices (eg gender balance in decision-making), as well as being carried forward by multiple actors.

Subsidiarity is simultaneously a legal concept and a political concept; it is encoded in law, yet politically negotiated. It is a practice, an institution, a system. Subsidiarity is gendered. Subsidiarity is gendered because whether a practice is governed by the EU level or by the member state level affects the gendered nature of the governance involved. The EC's proposals for ever-greater union, which will change the location of the subsidiarity boundary, are gendered. Whether this change is to the detriment of gender equality depends on the extent to which the EU gender-equality project is mainstreamed into the new or reformed institutions that will be created or developed. This includes whether there is gender balance in those appointed to run the institutions and whether the promotion of equality between women and men is included as a priority goal. There are alternative gendered futures.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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