

## Review - Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues.

Written by Petra Ahrens

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# Review - Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues.

<https://www.e-ir.info/2017/02/03/review-gendering-european-integration-theory-engaging-new-dialogues/>

PETRA AHRENS, FEB 3 2017

Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues.

By Gabriele Abels und Heather MacRae (eds.).

Opladen, Berlin and Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers. 2016.

Numerous textbooks and articles are dealing with EU integration theories – why one more? The answer provided by editors Gabriele Abels and Heather MacRae is equally simple as convincing: the need for a “(...) potentially fruitful debate between (...) EU studies and integration theory-building, which is to date, by and large, gender blind and (...) gender analysis of the EU which is so far negligent of integration theory-building” (p. 28).

The standard textbooks for EU politics often introduce classic approaches like neo-functionalism, intergovernmentalism or multi-level governance but seldom include any notion of gender perspectives or feminist theory. One of the rare exceptions, the edited volume(s) by Wiener and Diez (2007; 2009), dedicated one chapter to gender perspectives on EU integration but this section remained somehow detached from other theories in the same volume(s). Those traditional integration theories lacking gender perspectives also miss opportunities to fully grasp EU integration has been illustrated by Kronsell (2005; 2016). Gender studies or feminist research, on the other hand, often did not explicitly make use of EU integration theories. For instance, the Oxford Handbook of Politics and Gender (Waylen et al. 2013), covers a vast literature on political theories and concepts, but the literature on EU integration is distributed across different chapters.

In sum, the thirst for a comprehensive book thoroughly integrating EU integration theories and gender studies can now be satisfied by the edited volume *Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues*. So, no more excuses – neither to neglect gender perspectives in EU integration theories nor to neglect EU integration theories in research on gender and the EU. Consistently, the editors Gabriele Abels and Heather MacRae follow their primary objective of initiating a comprehensive overview how gender perspectives can help refine EU integration theories.

The edited book contains – next to the introduction and conclusion – three parts that are organised along major theory strands: (1) classic integration theories, (2) modern approaches, and (3) new concepts. This well-organized structure allows readers both familiar and new to the field of EU studies to quickly pick their favourite integration theory or to delve into new theories. In addition, the introduction by Abels and MacRae systematises EU integration theories and research on EU and gender and puts them into perspective for those who are not familiar with neither of the research strands.

The first part on classic integration theories covers federalism, neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism. Petra Meier asks on federalism where gender perspectives might fit best since gender studies analysis' using this theory were mostly lacking or often not explicitly employed federalism as a theory. She determines good matches when investigating which federal systems lead best to gender equality or which systems allow for broader participation of women – as activists, politicians or average citizens. Examining neo-functionalism, Heather MacRae shows how this theory will become more precise when integrating gender perspectives even though the lack of attention to power

## **Review - Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues.**

Written by Petra Ahrens

relations as a core element of neo-functionalism remains as the main barrier to efficiently do so. Anna van der Vleuten, eventually, unfolds intergovernmentalism as a probably soon reanimated theory in light of current EU crisis' and the connected return to the nation states as a research focus. Here, she suggests avoiding former blind spots by looking at issue-specific actor constellations while including feminist activism by state and non-state actors and the institutional setting. Van der Vleuten, however, also dissects the shortcomings of the "dinosaur intergovernmentalism" (p. 77) hampering a dialogue with gender studies, for instance, its concept of power that does not take into account structural features.

The modern approaches in the second part comprise multi-level governance, social constructivism, Europeanization, and law as the object and agent of EU integration. With multi-level governance, Gabriele Abels discusses one of the most prominent contemporary theoretical approaches to EU integration. Even though the majority of scholars applying this theoretical approach remained gender blind, Abels highlights the extensive literature on EU and gender aspects and the obvious fit between the two. Emanuela Lombardo explores how social constructivism was fruitfully used for EU integration studies since the late 1990ies. She identifies the role of social constructivism as EU integration theory on the one hand and as core theory of women's and gender studies on the other hand. By showing how the two research strands overlap to a large extent, she specifies the significant potential gender studies bring for further extending and substantiating social constructivism as an important EU integration theory. In the next chapter, Ulrike Liebert introduces Europeanization as another comprehensive key approach to EU integration and illuminates how its comparative perspectives have diversified over the years and now comprise a broad range of explanatory concepts. Similar to multi-level governance, Europeanization studies to a large extent continued to be gender blind and neglected the rich literature on Europeanization from gender studies. By reviewing this body of research, she elucidates how Europeanization studies, in general, would have benefitted by extending their theoretical and methodological toolbox, for instance, by picking up the discursive methodologies of gender studies and its focus on the construction of meaning (p. 167). Jessica Guth, finally, introduces a more interdisciplinary approach when presenting law as the object and agent of EU integration and in particular for gender equality. Although this theoretical approach is still in its infancy for both, integration research and gender studies, Guth asserts the necessity to understand the European Court of Justice not only as providing a legal framework but also as an actor shaping policies and processes by setting up norms, norms that also steer gender relations.

The third part contains the four new concepts institutionalism, politics of scale, governmentality, and civil society and the public sphere. Announcing the four chapters as "new concepts" can, in fact, be understood equivocally: they are often (still) new to gender studies as well as EU integration theories. Toni Hastrup and Meryl Kenny present the different strands of institutionalism and how they were applied to EU integration so far. Then they turn to Feminist Institutionalism as a means of completing the older institutionalisms by explaining how feminist perspectives help to answer questions on asymmetric power relations. Sabine Lang and Birgit Sauer review the relatively new concept of the politics of scale as a possible theoretical approach to EU integration. Politics of scale would help to investigate EU integration regarding its layered and intersecting arenas along the three dimensions space, access and agency, and reach. Such a perspective would not only produce a better understanding of the processes of EU integration in general, but it would also furthermore allow addressing these aspects as part of critical feminist theory-building. By elaborating on Foucault's concept of governmentality, Stefanie Wöhl puts power relations at the core of her theoretical reflections. As EU research only recently picked up on governmentality, Wöhl reflects on its general applicability before exemplifying the explanatory power of combining governmentality, EU integration, and gender studies with the example of EU economic governance. In the last chapter, Gabriele Wilde reviews the diverse (and often gender-blind) research on civil society and the public sphere. Following up this criticism, she recommends developing a more comprehensive, feminist consideration of the political allowing understanding gender relations as constitutive for EU integration and political mobilisation.

In their conclusion to the edited volume, Hans-Jürgen Bieling and Thomas Diez react to the offered dialogue and highlight that – next to the already suggested extensions through integrating gender perspectives into existing theories – scholars should not forget that „Gendering European Integration Theory“ also necessitates intensifying feminist theory-building, for instance, by theorizing how gender is constructed through EU integration.

Thankfully, all book chapters follow the same structure and thereby allow for easy access. First, the particular theory

## **Review - Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues.**

Written by Petra Ahrens

is laid out covering the varieties of each, followed by detecting gaps from a gender perspective and how these could be solved, before presenting research or case studies already combining the theory and gender studies and suggesting future joint ventures. Through this systematic structure, the editors managed to provide an excellent literature review of every theory permitting to use the volume like an encyclopaedia. Each chapter ends with a collection of discussion questions, essential readings and further references that make the book a useful resource for those teaching EU studies or courses on gender equality.

The chapters as a whole are all successful in putting forward links between EU integration theories and gender studies and – in suitable cases – in carving out overlaps and similar theoretical foundations. This specification comes in handy for imagining how to practically transfer which theory for which kind of research question keeping in mind the core aspects. An exposed point in this regard is undoubtedly the sensitivity for questions on power and power relations: the power to shape, the power to participate, the power to decide.

Unanimously, the edited volume was written from the perspectives of gender studies and – without question – all authors are experts in the theory presented. To the announced dialogue, however, I would have warmly welcomed contributions by “gender-blind” scholars on the different theories and where they would have started to integrate gender perspectives or where they would see the specific contribution of gender perspectives in refining theory. The conclusion honours this perspective; however, more of such chapters or as alternative joint sections would have satisfied the wish for more dialogue. It remains to be seen, whether the dialogue offered will be entered by “gender-blind” researchers – with new answers, new questions, more of the already started fruitful debate. The edited volume, at least, brilliantly illuminates how such a dialogue deepens and widens perspectives for both sides.

### **References**

Kronsell, Annica, 2005: ‘Gender, Power and European Integration Theory’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 12(6): 1022-1040.

Kronsell, Annica, 2016: ‘The Power of EU Masculinities: A Feminist Contribution to European Integration Theory’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 54(1): 104-120.

Waylen, Georgina Karen Celis, Johanna Kantola, and S. Laurel Weldon (eds.), 2013: *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*. Oxford: OUP.

Wiener, Antje and Diez, Thomas (eds.), 2007; 2009: *European Integration Theory*. Oxford: OUP.

---

### **About the author:**

Petra Ahrens is Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellow at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) and conducts the research project “Effects of Institutional Change on Participatory Democracy and the Involvement of Civil Society Organisations (DemocInChange)”. She obtained her Dr. phil. in Sociology from the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany, where she was also Assistant Professor at the Chair of Sociology of Work and Gender Relations, Department of Social Sciences. Her research focuses on European integration, gender equality policies, public policy and transnational social movements. She is co-editor of the German feminist journal *Femina Politica*. Her PhD thesis will be published in 2017 as book entitled *Actors, Institutions and the Making of EU Gender Equality Programs: Roadmap to Nowhere?*.