Economic Crisis and the Politics of Austerity

Johanna Kantola and Emanuela Lombardo

The Routledge Handbook on Gender and EU Politics, edited by Gabriele Abels, Andrea Krizsán, Heather MacRae and Anna van der Vleuten (London: Routledge, 2021).

The last decade of gender and EU politics has been strongly marked by the economic crisis which began in 2008 and the austerity politics that followed. The national economies of European countries such as Iceland, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy were brought down and others were significantly affected. The Euro faced an existential crisis with the crisis in Greece spiralling. No sphere of society – including gender relations and politics – was completely out of the reach of the economic crisis.

Feminist researchers from different disciplines provide perspectives to these multifaceted gendered effects of the crisis: Economists have shown how – as a result of the cuts to the public sector services, benefits and jobs – women's unemployment, poverty and discrimination increased with minority women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds or with disabilities being disproportionately affected (Karamessini 2014a; Pearson and Elson 2015). Political scientists and sociologists documented how the harder economic climate was combined with a turn to conservatism. The rise of the populist right and left parties, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic sentiments as well as racism and resentment towards migrants have included attacks on migrant women and veiled women (Athanasiou 2014; Emejulu and Bassell 2017). At the same time progressive gender and wider anti-discrimination policies, policy instruments and institutions that might counter these

trends have suffered from significant cuts to their resources (Elomäki 2019; Jacquot 2017). Feminist cultural studies analyze the 'commodification of domestic femininities': the idealization and promotion of female resourcefulness at times of recession and cuts in family income in various television programs and series (Negra and Tasker 2014, 7).

EU's political engagements with gender and its gender policy during that decade and after cannot be understood without understanding the economic as well as the political effects of the crisis. Thus, it is necessary to write about *crises* in plural (Hozic and True 2016, 12; Walby 2015). The long-standing EU legitimacy crisis reached new heights with the crumbling of social rights of European citizens for example in Greece, with the 'troika' of the European Central Bank (ECB), European Commission and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) dictating austerity politics on member states. The EU Commission has since attempted to amend some of these injustices through the adoption of the so called European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) (Plomien 2018; Elomäki and Kantola 2020) combining both hard and soft law and representing an attempt to address the cuts to social rights caused by EU's austerity politics.

In this chapter, we first discuss mainstream approaches to economic crisis and austerity. Second, we focus upon different feminist approaches, which expose the costs of any gender-blind approaches (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a/b). We conclude with some future directions.

Mainstream approaches to the economic crisis and austerity

Whilst the economic crisis presented the EU an opportunity for adopting either stimulus or austerity politics, the Commission opted for austerity (O'Dwyer 2018). Austerity then is 'a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budgets, debts

and deficits' (Blyth 2013, 2). Austerity policies can be defined as a 'set of measures and regulatory strategies in economic policies aimed to produce a structural adjustment by reducing wages, prices and public spending' (Addabbo et al. 2013, 5). This agenda signified strengthening the deregulatory impetus within a new economic governance regime. Gender equality and wider social equalities were marginalised within the Commission's 'Europe 2020' economic strategy (COM 2010 (2020) final). This entailed institutional changes in the EU and in member states particularly. For feminist scholars it gives rise to questions such as: How are the shifts in the EU economic governance regime in crisis times and in the EU institutional balance affecting gender equality policy agendas and struggles for wider equalities?

In her award-winning article Myriann O'Dwyer (2018) argues that austerity is economically not sensible. A number of commentators have indeed argued that austerity solutions are based on the transformation of a financial crisis – the result of an over-financialisation of the economy and the prioritisation of the requirements of financial capital at the expense of paid and domestic economies (Walby 2015) – into a public debt crisis (Bettio et al. 2012; Busch et al. 2013; Rubery 2014). This conversion pushed European states to buy out the unsustainable levels of banks and household debts built up within the financial sector – bailing out failing banks – in an effort to re-stabilise the markets, which in turn then began questioning the ability of states to finance them (Rubery 2014), thus rendering borrowing on newly established sovereign debt increasingly expensive and unsustainable (Busch et al. 2013; Karamessini 2014a). This has had implications for the repertoire of policy responses, which policymakers could conceive of and their impact. In line with neoliberal economic analyses, Busch et al. (2013, 4) argue that the EU 'has interpreted the main cause of the crisis as debt and, based on this reversal of cause and effect' it has implemented severe austerity rather than growth measures, especially in the Eurozone countries, with negative social and equality impacts for the already indebted Southern European states.

The EU's neoliberal regime and its emerging institutional configuration have heavily influenced the policies in the aftermath of the crisis; the new economic governance regime has reorganised the coordination of economic policy along the lines of 'disciplinary neoliberalism' (Cavaghan and O'Dwyer 2018; Kantola and Lombardo 2017a). The latter 'involves both a discourse of political economy and a relatively punitive program of social reform' (Gill and Roberts 2011, 162). Strict rules of fiscal and monetary policies are imposed on member states that have bailed out failing banks. The main institutional actors shaping this new regime are the European Council, the ECB, ECOFIN (i.e. Council of Economic and Finance Ministers), the Eurogroup, the European Commission, and political leaders of the member state governments, enjoying Germany the greater relative power in this process (Klatzer and Schlager 2014). The European Parliament has limited voice; for instance, it does not control the European Stability Mechanism and the European Semester.

EU crisis responses have primarily comprised efforts to encourage and coordinate states' reduction of sovereign debt through various instruments and discourses designed to enforce states' reductions in public spending. The austerity agenda includes measures that promote deregulation and liberalization of the market, including the labour market, through the reduction of labour rules, the decentralization of collective bargaining from state to enterprises, and cuts in wages (Busch et al. 2013; Klatzer and Schlager 2014).

The new e regime comprises institutions, rules, and procedures to coordinate member states' macroeconomic policy. The Commission's 'Europe 2020' strategy sets the framework for the surveillance of member states' economic policies through new governance mechanisms. These are the 'Euro Plus Pact', the 'Stability and Growth Pact', the 'Fiscal Compact' and a 'Six-pack' of EU

regulations that tie member states into a commitment to keep their annual budgetary deficit below 3% and their debt below 60% of GDP, targets established with the adoption of the EMU (Klatzer and Schlager 2014; Maier 2011). The new economic governance tools challenge representative democracies by moving powers from parliamentary to executive branches of polities both at the national and supranational levels (Bruff and Wöhl 2016, 98; Kantola and Lombardo 2017a).

In particular, the 'Stability and Growth Pact' included expenditure and debt rules and severely increased sanctions for Eurozone countries. The 'Macroeconomic imbalance procedure' gave the European Commission and ECOFIN the power to guide member states' economic policy and sanction incompliance. The 'Fiscal Compact', an international treaty, severely constrains member states' (except UK and Czech Republic) fiscal policy and imposes debt reduction. The 'Euro Plus Pact', adopted in 2011 by initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, put pressure on member states to adopt reforms in the labour market, health, and pension policies aiming at greater market liberalization. It set the basis for the EU intervention in wage policy, since it considers wage policy a key factor for promoting competitiveness (Busch et al. 2013; Klatzer and Schlager 2014). A so-called 'Six-pack' of EU regulations entered into force in 2011 to implement the 'Euro Plus Pact' with the objective of 'enforcing measures to correct excessive macroeconomic imbalances in the euro area' (Bruff and Wöhl 2016, 98-99). The 'European Semester' reinforced the EU surveillance of member states' economic and budget policy procedures and decisions, establishing an annual cycle of pre-set economic targets member states have to achieve (Europe 2020), translation of these targets into country objectives through National Reform Programmes combined with Stability Programmes (where each member state plans the country's budget for the coming three or four years), EU recommendations to member states, and European Council and Commission monitoring of implementation and imposing of financial sanctions to member states in case of incompliance (Elomäki and Kantola 2020). The 'European

Stability Mechanism', through an intergovernmental treaty adopted in 2012, establishes the rules for providing EU financial support to member states in economic difficulty; loans are subject to strict conditionality and structural economic reforms through a process controlled by the EC, in cooperation with ECB and IMF (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a).

These macroeconomic policies aim to stabilize the European economy, stimulate growth and achieve price stability; concurrently, they narrow the definition of the role of government in the macroeconomic arena, thus reducing the ability of the state to act as the financier and employer of last resort (Maier 2011; Rubery 2014). These policies are thus politically contested, due, among other things, to the high social costs in terms of increasing inequality (Klatzer and Schlager 2014; Rubery 2014).

Indeed, gender analyses criticize that gender has not been mainstreamed neither in policy design nor implementation of 'crisis measures' (Bettio et al. 2012; Karamessini and Rubery 2014; Klatzer and Schlager 2014; Villa and Smith 2014; 2011; Weiner and MacRae 2017). Only in 9.8% of the cases some assessment of national measures from a gender perspective was conducted (Bettio et al. 2012; Villa and Smith 2011). The European Employment Strategy, which had formerly integrated gender, has progressively made gender invisible, so that it would have disappeared completely from EU2020, if it had not been reinserted last minute after amendments from specific member states (Villa and Smith 2014; see Milner in this volume). Even the 'European Economic Recovery Plan' makes no mention of 'gender', 'women', or 'equality', a fact that was criticized by the Commission's Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. As gender experts denounce, 'the "urgency" of a response to the crisis seems to have pushed gender mainstreaming further down the priority list', including the basic presentation of gender-disaggregated statistical data (Bettio et al. 2012, 97-98). There was some consensus in the European

Parliament's Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) about the importance of tackling the gendered aspects of the crisis. However, political disagreements about austerity broke this consensus between the political groups (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2016).

Sophie Jacquot (2017) has analysed the fate of the EU gender policy in the midst of the economic crisis. She concludes that the economic crisis has exacerbated the already ongoing stagnation in EU gender policy. Parallel to changes made in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, EU gender equality policies experienced a number of institutional and policy shifts that locate the EU as 'the most striking example of a U-turn in the importance attached to gender equality as a social goal' (Karamessini and Rubery 2014, 333). Although before the crisis gender was not effectively mainstreamed into the EU macroeconomic policies (Villa and Smith 2014), it was in employment policies through the European Employment Strategies (O'Dwyer 2018). However, the EU has shifted its priorities and gender equality is not treated as a social goal and it is not integrated in employment policies any longer. The shift in context helps to understand this gender invisibility in the EU employment agenda (Villa and Smith 2014). In the 1990s, the rise in women's employment improved labour market performance in the member states and was thus considered important for the EU economy, the neoliberal model was accompanied by developments in the social democratic model, and the entry of gender equality supporters such as Sweden and Finland all favoured the integration of gender into the EU employment policies. The economic crisis context is less favourable to gender equality due to a stronger neoliberal ideology in member governments; in addition, 'the key actors in favour of gender equality had been side-lined both internally in the Commission and externally among member states' (Villa and Smith 2014, 288).

A significant shift occurred in the second Barroso Commission in January 2011, when responsibility for gender equality moved within the European Commission from DG Employment,

Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities to DG Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship; two dedicated units on gender equality policies and on legal matters in equal treatment were also transferred (e.g. Ahrens 2018). The responsibility for gender equality in the workplace is still in DG Employment, but no dedicated unit on gender equality is left in the DG. This administrative shift unrooted the portfolio for equal opportunity and non-discrimination from their traditional base (DG Employment), provoking deep political and strategic consequences on EU gender equality policies (Ahrens 2018; Jacquot 2015; see Hartlapp et al. in this volume). It might be detrimental to gendering European integration in a moment in which a new EU economic governance regime is being built in response to the 2008 financial crisis to strengthen the coordination of national economic, labour market, and social policies (Klatzer and Schlager 2014). It came precisely at the time in which the Council and the Commission, through mechanisms such as the European Semester and the 'Six-pack legislation', tightened control over member states' economic and employment policies, with the consequence that the institutional shift of gender equality from DG Employment to DG Justice 'distanced gender equality from employment policy and spread gender equality input thinly across the Commission' (Villa and Smith 2014, 288). This could weaken the EU Equal Opportunities unit's capacity of mainstreaming gender into economic and social initiatives.

While the institutional shift boosted new developments in 'justice', evident in the legally binding directives (Directive 2011/99/EU, Directive 2012/29/EU) against some forms of gender-based violence, Jacquot (2015, 2017) argues that it contributed to locate gender equality even more within a legal perspective of rights, and it changed the interconnectedness of the administrative, political, academic, and activist actors. The increased weight of member states in times of economic and institutional crisis, with a greater role of the Council of Ministers (see Abels in this volume), blocked developments in EU gender equality policies, as exemplified in the withdrawal of the

revision of the maternity leave directive proposal and the blockage of the women on corporate boards directive proposal (Jacquot 2017). Eventually a work-life balance directive was approved in 2019 through the EPSR signalling some positive shifts. The enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries further favoured the spread of neoliberal ideologies and, in some cases, more traditional notions of gender equality (Villa and Smith 2014, 288; Zbyszewska 2017; see Chiva in this volume). This shifting context, radicalized by the urgency to respond to the Eurozone crisis, tilted the balance between economic and egalitarian goals towards a promotion of neoliberal economic goals. In the crisis context the EU shifted its priorities and seemed to forget its commitments to gender equality goals (Karamessini and Rubery 2014).

Gender approaches and their contributions

Five different approaches to the gendered politics of the economic crises and austerity and each analytical perspective sheds different light on various questions: (i) women and the crisis, (ii) gender and the crisis, (iii) deconstruction of gender and the crisis, (iv) intersectionality and the crisis; and (v) post-deconstruction of gender and the crisis (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a/b). Depending on the approach, crisis definitions and concepts to make sense of it vary. The distinctions between these approaches are analytical as most research combines them in a quest to answer empirical real-world puzzles. We suggest that analytically frameworks such as these help to discuss the underpinnings of the approaches and their compatibility.

First, a number of feminist economists map the effects of the crisis on women by using a *women and the crisis approach*. They analyze the different waves of the crisis where men's employment in the private sector, for example, in construction businesses, was worst hit at first, and how in the second wave, the public sector cuts started to erase women's jobs, as well as the public sector services and benefits that women relied on (Bettio et al. 2012; Karamessini and Rubery 2014). In

the field of politics, this has signified studying the numbers of women and men in economic decision-making and banking. Walby's (2015, 57) question 'Would the financial crisis have been different if it had been Lehman Sisters rather than Lehman Brothers?' makes us ask whether a more diverse composition of corporate boards would have moved financial leaders to take less risky decisions (for a critical discussion see Prügl 2016; True 2016). Feminist scholars have argued that it has been a men's crisis in the sense that men have been the dominant actors in the institutions that have inflicted the crisis and attempted to solve it (Pearson and Elson 2015, 14). Whilst taking 'women' and 'men' as relatively unproblematic and unitary categories, the approach has the strength of providing factual evidence for policy-makers about statistical patterns of the crisis as well as arguments for activists about who is represented in the institutions involved in solving the crisis and whose voice is heard in policy-making.

Second, the *gender and the crisis approach* investigates the gendered impacts on the crisis. Focussing on gender as opposed to women calls for an understanding of the wider societal structures that reproduce continuing patterns of domination and inequality. Gender norms underpin finance, production and reproduction resulting in women's overconcentration in the reproductive sphere (O'Dwyer 2018; Pearson and Elson 2015, 10). Neoliberal policy solutions, which require cutting down the public sector, rely on and reproduce traditional gender roles that delegate major care responsibility to women. This changes national and European gender regimes (Walby 2011; 2015); the EU austerity policies represent a 'critical juncture' that could revert long-term progress achieved in gender equality (Rubery 2014). Gender equality policies and institutions – including gender mainstreaming –have been downscaled in numerous countries when they would be needed the most to counter gendered crisis effects (Klatzer and Schlager 2014). Patterns of the feminization of poverty and increases in gender violence point to the ways in which the economic, political and social consequences of the crisis are gendered in complex ways. At the same time there is

increasing space to understand how gender intersects with categories such as race and ethnicity, disability, and class resulting in differentiated crisis impacts (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a/b).

The impact of EU policy responses on member states' gender equality varies depending on factors ranging from the characteristics of *gender regimes*, especially in relation to women's integration in waged labour and extent to which employment and social policies are able to free women from unpaid care work (Karamessini and Rubery 2014; Wöhl 2014; Walby 2009). despite women's increased integration in the labour market, their higher presence in public sector occupations (education and health) and their greater involvement in part-time and temporary jobs, make women more vulnerable to recession and austerity (Rubery 2014). Intersectional differences relate to class, migration (e.g. migrant women encounter more disadvantages in the labour market than native women), nationality, geographical location (e.g. regional disparities in women's employment rates), and age (e.g. young women's difficult integration in the labour market and old women facing higher retirement ages due to pension reforms) (Karamessini 2014b; Karamessini and Rubery 2014).

Gender equality in Southern European countries was strongly affected. In Greece, for example, we see the 'deterioration of employment and social conditions of both women and men' (Karamessini 2014b, 183); while fiscal and structural adjustments are spreading part-time among male workers, the 'crisis has interrupted women's progress towards gender equality in paid work through their better integration in employment', thus, the restructuring of the welfare state will negatively affect women. Changes in wage determination system, employment, and welfare state have impoverished vulnerable and middle class women and men, increasing the proportion of jobless households. In Spain, from 2010 onwards, gender equality institutions have been downgraded or eliminated at the central and regional levels, and care and gender equality policies dismantled and reoriented towards more traditional goals (Lahey and de Villota 2013; Lombardo 2017). This could reverse significant

progress achieved in the last 20 years (González and Segales 2014). In Italy, most policy reforms reinforce existing gender imbalances, in a context of high gender pay gap and gender segregation in the employment; budget cuts will reinforce traditional gender roles in family division of paid and unpaid work because 'By cutting childcare and elderly care, funds for disabled and immigrants the entire burden of missing welfare is shifted to women' (Verashchagina and Capparucci 2014, 266).

Other EU member states are affected, too. In the UK, EU austerity policies have increased labour market problems. As Rubery (2014, 139) states: 'Women's prospects of both secure employment and reasonable pay and conditions are being eroded by the shrinkage and downgrading of public sector employment while labour market opportunities for lower skilled men are also converging towards those found in the female-dominated private services, with lower pay and more non-standard employment often taken up on an involuntary basis.' The biggest austerity-triggered falls in disposable income have been experienced by the most vulnerable women – lone mothers, single women pensioners and single women without children, while working-age couples without children have been least affected (Pearson and Elson 2015). Despite state cuts in care policies, women are not voluntarily exiting the labour market, thus dual earner households are currently resisting, though in conditions of increased labour exploitation for both women and men, and care exploitation for women (Walby 2015). In Poland, despite a comparatively good economic performance at the outset of the crisis, the government imposed strict austerity policies, unpopular to citizens and labour unions and detrimental to women due to the increased privatisation of care provoked by public cuts. Polish politicians' willingness to belong to the 'EU neoliberal vanguard' revealed that the crisis was functional to the consolidation of the country's ongoing neoliberal reform project (Zbyszewska 2017). Even in the Nordic countries, e.g. Finland, neoliberal austerity policies have arrived later than in other European states, but in 2015 have hit the women-friendly welfare state with cuts in the public budget that will shift the burden of care from the state to families, that is to women (Elomäki

and Kantola 2017). There too the 'political usage of the EU' is discernible, namely justifying domestic austerity politics informed by political ideologies of governing parties with reference to the EU requirements (Kantola 2018).

Third, the *deconstruction of gender and the crisis approach* discerns the ways in which the crisis is discursively constructed and how these constructions are gendered and gendering. It allows to understand how some solutions are favoured over others and how gender is silenced, side-lined or employed in particular ways (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a/b). In other words, discursive constructions of gender offer particular subject positions and close off others. These constructions have effects, they can politicize or depoliticize the crisis in particular ways and they impact on perceived solutions. Using this approach, scholars inquire who defines and narrates the crisis, and how is the crisis constitutive of new and old political identities, institutions and practices (Hozic and True 2016, 14). How is knowledge about the crises conditioned and informed by patterns of power (Griffin 2016, 180)? Penny Griffin (2015, 55) suggests that there is a prevalence of governance responses that 'centralise women's "essential" domesticity or fiscal prudence, prevailing representations of men as public figures of authority and responsibility, and techniques of governance that exploit these'. Such techniques include gender quota systems based on the assumption that the presence of women's bodies balances out hypermasculine behaviour, or austerity measures that are instituted on the foundational assumption of women's reproductive work as inferred but unpaid.

Feminist scholarship has studied how neoliberalism has fundamentally shaped the context where feminisms operate and explored *governance feminism* and *market feminism* to grasp their changing forms and practices (Kantola and Squires 2012; Prügl 2011). Griffin (2015, 51) speaks of 'crisis governance feminism' as a 'form of feminist strategy friendly to existing neo-liberal governance

and supportive of the resuscitation of neo-liberal global finance'. The concepts illustrate how feminisms may have adapted to the neoliberal context by adopting a role of providing gender expertise into existing policies rather than engaging in more radical political critique (Elomäki et al. 2019). This is not simply a crisis of neoliberalism (Crouch 2011). Instead neoliberal economic policies have become entrenched in relation to the EU. On the one hand, this could have the potential to transform resistance: new forms of feminist autonomous movements appear (Elomäki and Kantola 2017), and the strengthening of national and international feminist alliances (Lombardo 2017). On the other hand, the crisis may generate new challenges for feminist and intersectional struggles for equality in the harder political climate (Emejulu and Bassel 2017; Jacquot 2017).

Austerity politics has been accompanied by de-democratisation. The new forms of economic governance are closed off from democratic debate, participation, and civil society lobbying. It has indeed become harder for many feminist organisations to lobby governments and the EU. As economic austerity discourses are dominant equality needs to give way to the perceived economic necessities. There is a powerful discursive construction of exceptional times when equality cannot be afforded and is for the good times. Moreover, changes in the new economic governance regime of the EU and new undemocratic regulations in the member states, such as the constitutional securing of the annual budget deficit below 3% and the 2015 'Law of Citizens' Safety' in Spain – strongly opposed by civil society renaming it 'gag law' due to the restriction of freedom of expression and other human rights it contains – have made political institutions especially impenetrable for citizens and activists.

Fourth, *intersectionality approaches* explore the inequalities, marginalisations and dominations that the interactions of gender, race, class and other systems of inequality produce in times of crisis, such as the differentiated impact of austerity policies on migrant minoritized women or men (Bettio

et al. 2012), female refugees in countries like Greece (Athanasiou 2014), younger unemployed women and older women who see their pensions reduced or cut (Bettio et al. 2012; Karamessini and Rubery 2014) and women with disabilities. Heteronormativity is deeply implicated in the dominant narratives about the economic, social and political crises although their implications are detrimental to LGBTQ communities (Smith 2016, 231-232). In the UK, for example, there has been a silence about the impact of government's austerity policies on sexual injustices with the issue of same sex marriage dominating the agenda (Smith 2016, 232). Intersectionality shows how different organisations and movements representing different groups can be pitted against one another in a seeming competition for scarcer resources, or, alternatively it can point to new alliances and solidarity at times of crisis (Bassel and Emejulu 2014). Populist right parties seeking to protect 'our people' can resort to racist or even fascist discourses that challenge the human rights of racialized others in European countries (Norocel 2013). European media and politicians demonised Greeks as 'whites but not quite' drawing on racialized constructions of otherness, underpinned by presumed 'laziness' and 'criminality' (Agathangelou 2016, 208).

The EU member states dynamics in times of crisis has also implied a turn to conservatism and de-democratization, which have gendered and racialized consequences (Verloo 2018). National governments worked to formulate austerity politics out of the reach of public democratic debate and civil society contestations. From Finland to Spain, national governments adopted new laws to transpose EU requirements about limits to budget deficit into national law, with negative consequences for women, who are especially affected by public cuts, and for social and gender equality policies (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a). In Spain, the undemocratic reaction of the conservative government to citizens' anti-austerity struggles has been a restriction of freedom of expression and other human rights through the 2014 'Law of citizens' safety', which civil society has strongly opposed, renaming it the 'gag law' (Lombardo 2017).

In UK and France, minority women's daily experiences of economic, social, gender, and race inequality before *and* after the 2008 crisis move Emejulu and Bassell (2017) to speak of 'routinised crises'. As the authors write: minority women's 'persistently high unemployment and poverty rates are not 'exceptional' and not necessarily problems to be addressed through policy action since they are indicators of capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy operating as intended. Once we understand minority women's precarity as the banality of everyday life we can begin to understand the fallacy of the construction of the 2008 economic "crisis".' The crucial question that intersectional analyses of the crisis such as Emejulu and Bassell raise is: a crisis for whom? (Cavaghan and O'Dwyer 2018).

A number of countries have witnessed dramatic changes in civil society activism and political party systems as a result of the crisis. New forms of resistance include, for example, new political parties, such as the rise of left populist parties like Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, or strengthening of radical right populist politics in other parts of Northern and Eastern Europe, France, Germany or the UK (Kantola and Lombardo 2019). At the same time as some groups and peoples have been empowered others have been further marginalized reflecting, for instance, the existing gendered and racialized inequalities.

The hard climate of neoliberalism and austerity has been combined with overt racism in European societies, brought to the surface with the so-called refugee crisis since 2015 and for example the UK's Brexit vote in 2016, and gender conservatism pushing women away from the labour market. Whilst institutional racism has underpinned European societies before the crisis, few would dispute that racist incidents have surfaced across Europe and been legitimized by the radical right politics of political leaders.

Finally, the *post-deconstruction and the crisis approach* has yet to enter gender and politics research (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a). Post-deconstruction signals a diverse set of debates on feminist new materialism and affect theory that comes analytically (not chronologically, Lykke 2010, 106) 'after' reflections on the deconstruction of gender (Ahmed 2004; Hemmings 2005). These approaches are interested in understanding what effects, emotions, and bodily material *do* in gender and politics, beyond discourses (Kantola and Lombardo 2017c). The economic crisis makes the analysis of issues such as the material underpinning of the current political economy, its entrenched relations to neoliberalism, states' biopolitics and emotions and affects and their bodily impacts particularly important (Coole and Frost 2010). Emotions and affects, such as anger, shame, guilt, and empathy circulate in the economic crisis. For instance, Cossarini argues that in the recent social movements against capitalism and austerity politics from the Wall Street to Indignados in Spain emotions play a key role in the constructions of the 'political subject – *the people* – as well as in today's struggle for democratic legitimacy and the resistance to the emptying of democracy by global-market forces' (Cossarini 2014, 291). Post-deconstruction analyses suggest that these emotions are social and involve power relations (Ahmed 2004). For instance, the 'austerity' agenda has been accompanied by a moralising discourse 'that passes on the responsibility to citizens together with a feeling of guilt, making easier for governments to impose public expenditure cuts and to increase social control of the population' (Addabbo et al. 2013, 5). Another example is that of Northern women politician's expressing empathy towards 'the other women' in the South, that can read as an affective expression of power that fixes the Southern countries economic and gender policies as failed (Kantola 2018; Pedwell 2014). Feminist analyses using these approaches show that neoliberalism and violence constitute the vulnerabilities of the bodies affected by the crisis and protesting against it (Athanasiou 2014).

Conclusion

The economic crisis and the austerity that followed in Europe and the EU need to be understood from a variety of feminist analytical perspectives. We have discussed both the austerity politics adopted by the EU actors, its gendered consequences, and the feminist analytical perspectives which can be used to analyse these dimensions. The economic crisis resulted in a primacy of the economy, arguments based on economic growth, side-lining of gender mainstreaming and gender equality as a value in itself. Feminist analyses show the severe costs involved in such short-sighted and partial, gender blind, approaches and make a strong case for understanding the economic crisis and austerity from feminist perspectives. The consequences of the economic crisis are not just about policies and the inclusion of a gender perspective in policy fields. Both the economic crisis and austerity have also had profound effects on the EU polity: its democratic legitimacy and functioning.

In future, research about gender inequalities in political representation, political, social and economic rights, which are at the heart of the solutions to the problems caused by the economic crisis and austerity, will be much needed. Future research will also be able to account to the shifts in gender equality policies the economic crisis resulted in. Feminist research into the economic crisis and austerity has also illustrated the dire need for more feminist research in the field of economics and political economy as it would enable a deeper understanding of the hegemonic position of the austerity solutions adopted to the crisis and challenging them.

References

Addabbo T, Rodríguez-Modroño P, Gálvez-Muñoz L (2013): Gender and the Great Recession: Changes in Labour Supply in Spain, *DEMB Working Paper Series* **10**.

Agathangelou AM (2016): Global Raciality of Capitalism and “Primitive” Accumulation. (Un)making the Death Limit? in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.): *Scandalous Economics: Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 205–230.

Ahmed S (2004): *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ahrens P (2018): *Actors, institutions, and the making of EU gender equality programs*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Athanasiou A (2014) Precarious Intensities: Gendered Bodies in the Streets and Squares of Greece, *Signs* **40** (1), 1–9.

Bassel L, Emejulu A (2014): Solidarity under Austerity: Intersectionality in France and the United Kingdom, *Politics & Gender* **10** (1), 130–136.

Bettio F, Corsi M, D’Ippoliti C, Lyberaki A, Samek Lodovici M, Verashchagina A (2012): *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Situation of Women and Men and on Gender Equality Policies*, Brussels: European Commission.

Blyth M (2013): *Austerity. The History of a Dangerous Idea*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Bruff I, Wöhl S (2016): Constitutionalizing Austerity, Disciplining the Household. Masculine Norms of Competitiveness and the Crisis of Social Reproduction in the Eurozone, in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.): *Scandalous Economics. Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 92–108.

Busch K, Hermann C, Hinrichs K, Schulten T (2013): *Euro Crisis, Austerity Policy and the European Social Model. How Crisis Policies in Southern Europe Threaten the EU's Social Dimension*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, URL: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/09656.pdf (download: 10 December 2019).

Cavaghan R, O'Dwyer M. (2018): European Economic Governance in 2017: A Recovery for Whom?, *Journal of Common Market Studies* **56** (Annual Review), 96-108.

Coole D, Frost S (2010): Introducing the New Materialisms, in: Coole D, Frost S (eds.): *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1-46.

Cossarini P (2014): Protests, emotions and democracy. Theoretical insights from the *Indignados* movement, *Global Discourse* **4** (2-3), 291-304.

Crouch C (2011): *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Elomäki A (2019): Governing Austerity. Governance Reforms as Facilitators of Gendered Austerity in Finland, *Australian Feminist Studies* **34** (100), 182-197.

Elomäki A, Kantola J (2017): Austerity Politics and Feminist Resistance in Finland. From Established Women's Organizations to New Feminist Initiatives, in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe. Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 231-256.

Elomäki A, Kantola J (2018): Theorizing feminist struggles in the triangle of neoliberalism, conservatism, and nationalism, *Social Politics* **25** (3), 337-360.

Elomäki A, Kantola J (2020): European Social Partners as Gender Equality Actors in EU Social and Economic Governance, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1-17, URL:https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13018

Elomäki A, Kantola J, Koivunen A, Ylöstalo H (2019): Affective Virtuosity: Challenges for Governance Feminism in the Context of the Economic Crisis. *Gender, Work & Organization* **26** (6), 822-39.

Emejulu A, Bassell L (2017): Whose Crisis Counts? Minority Women, Austerity and Activism in France and Britain, in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe. Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 185-208.

Gill S, Roberts A (2011): Macroeconomic governance, gendered inequality, and global crises, in: Young B, Bakker I, Elson D (eds.): *Questioning financial governance from a feminist perspective*, London: Routledge, 155-172.

González E, Segales M (2014): Women, gender equality and the economic crisis in Spain, in: Karamessini M, Rubery J (eds.): *Women and austerity. The economic crisis and the future for gender equality*, London: Routlegde, 229-247.

Griffin P (2015): Crisis, austerity and gendered governance: A feminist perspective, *Feminist Review* **109** (1), 49-72.

Griffin P (2016): Gender, Finance and the Embodiment of the Crisis, in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.): *Scandalous Economics. Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 179-203.

Hemmings C (2005): Invoking Affect. Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn, *Cultural Studies* **19** (5), 548-567.

Hozic AA, True J (2016): Making Feminist Sense of the Global Financial Crisis, in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.): *Scandalous Economics. Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3-20.

Jacquot S. (2015): *Transformations in EU Gender Equality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jacquot S. (2017): A policy in crisis. The dismantling of the EU Gender Equality Policy, in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Crisis in Europe: Politics, Institutions, and Intersectionality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 27-48.

Kantola J (2018): Gender and the Economic Crisis. Political Parties as Sites of Feminist Struggles, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* **25** (3), 361-382.

Kantola J, Lombardo E (2017a): Gender and the Politics of the Economic Crisis in Europe, in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe: Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-26.

Kantola J, Lombardo E. (2017b): Gender and political analysis: Exploring hegemonies, silences, and novelties, *Feminist Theory* **18** (3), 323-341.

Kantola J, Lombardo E (2017c): *Gender and Political Analysis*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantola J, Lombardo E (2019): European integration and disintegration: Feminist perspectives to inequalities and social justice, *Journal of Common Market Studies* **57** (S1), 62-76.

Kantola J, Rolandsen Agustín L (2016): Gendering transnational party politics: The case of European Union, *Party Politics* **22** (5), 641-651.

Kantola J, Squires J (2012): From state feminism to market feminism?, *International Political Science Review* **33** (4), 382-400.

Karamessini M (2014a): Introduction – Women's vulnerability to recession and austerity. A different context, a different crisis, in: Karamessini M, Rubery J (eds.): *Women and Austerity: The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London: Routledge, 3-16.

Karamessini M (2014b): Structural crisis and adjustment in Greece. Social regression and the challenge to gender equality, in: Karamessini M, Rubery J (eds.): *Women and Austerity: The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London: Routledge, 165-185.

Karamessini M, Rubery J, eds. (2014): *Women and Austerity. The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London, New York: Routledge.

Klatzer E, Schlager C (2014): Feminist perspectives on macroeconomics. Reconfiguration of power structures and erosion of gender equality through the new economic governance regime in the European Union, in: Evans M, Hemmings C, Henry M, Madhok S, Waring S (eds.): *Feminist Theory Handbook*, London: SAGE, 483-499.

Lahey K, de Villota P (2013): Economic crisis, gender equality, and policy responses in Spain and Canada, *Feminist Economics* **19** (3), 82-107.

Lombardo E (2017): Austerity Politics and Feminists Struggles in Spain: Reconfiguring the Gender Regime? in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe: Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 20-230.

Lombardo E, Bustelo M (2012): Political approaches to inequalities in Southern Europe. A comparative analysis of Italy, Portugal, and Spain, *Social Politics* **19** (4), 572-595.

Lykke N (2010): *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, London: Routledge.

Maier, F (2011): Macroeconomic regimes in OECD countries and the interrelations with gender orders, in: Young B, Bakker I, Elson D (eds.): *Questioning financial governance from a feminist perspective*, London: Routledge, 11–37.

Negra D, Tasker Y (2014) Introduction: Gender and Recessionary Culture, in: Negra D, Tasker Y (eds.): *Gendering the Recession. Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1-30.

Norocel C (2013): “Give Us Back Sweden!” A Feminist Reading of the (Re)Interpretations of the *Folkhem* Conceptual Metaphor in Swedish Radical Right Populist Discourse, *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* **21** (1), 4-20.

O’Dwyer M (2018): Making sense of austerity. The gendered ideas of European economic policy, *Comparative European Politics* **16** (5), 745-761.

Pearson R, Elson D (2015): Transcending the impact of the financial crisis in the United Kingdom. Towards plan F—a feminist economic strategy, *Feminist Review* **109** (1), 8-30.

Pedwell C (2014): *Affective Relations: The Transnational Politics of Empathy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Plomien A (2018): EU Social and Gender Policy beyond Brexit: Towards the European Pillar of Social Rights, *Social Policy and Society* **17** (2), 281-96.

Prügl E (2016): “Lehman Brothers and Sisters”. Revisiting Gender and Myth after the Financial Crisis, in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.): *Scandalous Economics. Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 21-40.

Prügl E (2011): Diversity Management and Gender Mainstreaming as Technologies of Government, *Politics and Gender* **7** (1), 71-89.

Rubery J (2014): From women and recession to women and austerity: A framework for analysis, in: Karamessini M, Rubery J (eds.): *Women and Austerity: The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London: Routledge, 17-36.

Smith N (2016): Toward a Queer Political Economy of the Crisis, in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.) *Scandalous Economics. Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 231-247.

True J (2016): The Global Financial Crisis's Silver Bullet. Women Leaders and "Leaning In", in: Hozic AA, True J (eds.): *Scandalous Economics. Gender and the Politics of Financial Crises*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 41-56.

Verashchagina A, Capparucci M (2014): Living through the crisis in Italy: The labour market experiences of women and men, in: Karamessini M, Rubery J (eds.): *Women and Austerity: The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London: Routledge, 248-270.

Verloo M, ed. (2018): Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe, Routledge.

Villa P, Smith M (2014): Policy in the time of crisis. Employment policy and gender equality in Europe, in: Karamessini M, Rubery J (eds.): *Women and Austerity: The Economic Crisis and the Future for Gender Equality*, London: Routledge, 273-294.

Villa, P, Smith M (2011): *National Reform Programmes 2011: A Gender Perspective*, External report commissioned by and presented to the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice, Unit D1 "Equality between men and women".

Walby, S (2015): *Crisis*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Walby, S (2011): *The Future of Feminism*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Walby, S (2009): *Globalization and Inequalities. Complexity and Contested Modernities*, London: Sage.

Weiner E, MacRae H (2017): Opportunity and Setback? Gender Equality, Crisis and Change in the EU, in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe, Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, Gender and Politics, 73-93.

Wöhl S (2014): The State and Gender Relations in International Political Economy. A State-theoretical Approach to Varieties of Capitalism in crisis, *Capital & Class* **38** (1), 83-95.

Zbyszewska A (2017): Gendering Poland's Crisis Reforms. A Europeanization Perspective, in: Kantola J, Lombardo E (eds.): *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe, Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, Gender and Politics, 117-137.