

Gender and the economic crisis: Political parties as sites of feminist struggles

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the spaces provided by political parties for feminist knowledge about the economic crisis. The novelty of the article lies in applying theories about affects and emotions to traditional gender and politics debates. The article focuses on political parties' campaigns at the time of European parliamentary elections in Finland (May 2014). The empirical research material consists of in-depth interviews with MEPs and MPs and participatory observation in election panels on gender and the EU organized by women's movement actors and gender equality advocates. The findings illustrate an interplay between expert and affective knowledge and their contradictory effects.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2008 the Western world has lived through one of its most serious economic crises. What started as a financial crisis in the US with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers, spread to Europe as a general banking crisis that brought down national economies of countries such as Iceland, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy. The gendered consequences of the crisis are significant. Whilst the US dealt with the crisis through financial stimulus, the European Union (EU) preferred austerity politics. As a result of the cuts to the public sector services, benefits and jobs, women's unemployment, poverty and discrimination have increased with minority women being disproportionately affected (Karamessini and Rubery 2014). Harder economic climate has been combined with conservatism as evidenced for example by hardened attitudes in the European Parliament and Spain towards abortion

(Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2016; Lombardo and León 2014). The rise of populist right and left parties, islamophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments as well as racism and resentment towards migrants are gendered and include attacks on migrant and veiled women (Emejulu and Bassel 2015). At the same time progressive gender policies, gender policy instruments and institutions that might counter these trends have suffered from significant cuts to their resources.

In this article, my aim is to contribute to these debates by analyzing political parties as spaces for feminist resistance and struggles surrounding the economic crisis. Central to this feminist resistance is feminist knowledge about the gendered impacts of the crisis and its possibilities to shape political decision-making and policy-making. The current economic crisis is highly contested in political debates in terms of the factors that led to the crisis, economic and political solutions that have been adopted to solve it. Political parties have emerged as crucial sites of discursive and political struggles about the crisis as illustrated, for instance, by the electoral successes of the populist left and right parties across Europe that have challenged the dominant interpretations of the crisis. Accordingly, my central research objective is to analyze what kind of spaces political parties provide for feminist knowledge about gender and the crisis: what makes feminist knowledge effective and what limits its impact.

The novelty of the article lies in applying theories about affects and emotions to traditional gender and politics debates. Gender and politics scholarship applies a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches ranging from qualitative gender analyses to discourse analyses. Whilst feminist theory has debated extensively affects, emotions and bodies (Ahmed 2004; Hemmings 2005), debates in the field of gender and politics have not engaged with analyzing what affects do in politics or how to analyse these (Kantola and Lombardo 2017a and 2017b). My aim in this article is to bring the central insights about the work that affects do in feminist knowledge to gender and politics

debates. The central research questions of the article are: How do affects work in the election debates in relation to feminist knowledge about gender and the economic crisis? How do MEP candidates react affectively to knowledge about gender and the crisis and with what effects to feminist knowledge production?

I study these spaces in political parties to debate gender and the economic crisis in a specific time and place, namely the political parties' electoral campaigns at the time of European parliamentary elections in Finland (May 2014). Finland entered the crisis late when compared to other European countries. Along with Germany, the country favored tough austerity politics on Southern member states. By the time of the European elections, the effects of the crisis had become visible in Finland as well. The empirical research material consists of in-depth interviews with MEPs and MPs and participatory observation in election panels on gender and the EU organized by women's movement actors and gender equality advocates. I suggest that Finland offers crucial insights to feminist knowledge production about gender and the crisis. According to a number of popular indices, the country is advanced in terms of gender equality and offers a potentially fertile ground for understanding and countering the gendered effects of the crisis. Yet Finland has well documented difficulties to talk about gender and power and there is a strong consensus around 'good' gender equality and 'bad', 'too radical' feminism (Holli 2012; Ikävalko and Kantola 2017). Affect theory makes it possible to understand more deeply the potential and the limits of feminist knowledge in such a context.

The findings of the article illustrate interplay between expert and affective knowledge about gender and the economic crisis in the election panels. The effects of affective knowledge are to make gender equality more vivid, exciting and moving to both politicians and the audience in a political context where gender equality has become a technical issue of right measures. At the same time, the

candidates or the parties do not manage to draw links to *national* gender equality policies. The effect was further distancing the economic crisis, which made it harder for feminist struggles to address its gendered impact in Finland. I suggest that the affects of empathy and pity towards ‘the women in the other countries’ cemented this further. They worked to make the gender constructions stick by personalizing politics and, at the same time, pushed the gendered impact of crisis away from the national political sphere. Such affects also worked to overcome political divisions when the gendered pain of the others is shared in the political debates.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Feminist scholarship has generated a lot of research about the gendered impacts of the ongoing economic crisis. Whilst mindful of the fact that the economic crisis is context-specific and has taken national and local forms, feminist research has delineated some general gendered trends. Men’s employment in the private sector, for example, in construction businesses, was worst hit at first, but in the second and consequent phases of the crisis, public sector cuts erased women’s jobs. The austerity politics adopted by the EU and member states meant cutting down the public sector services (for example health care) and benefits that women relied on (for example pensions, parental and care leave payments) (Bargawi, Cozzi and Himmelweit 2017; Bettio et al. 2012; Hozic and True 2016; Kantola and Lombardo 2017c; Karamessini and Rubery 2014). Discrimination against young women and mothers in the labour market increased, cuts to benefits and especially pensions resulted in increases in elder women’s poverty, and minority women have been particularly effected (Emejulu and Bassel 2017). Cutting down the public sector is in many ways reliant on and reproduces gender roles that delegate major responsibility of care for women (Klatzer and Schlager 2014). Housing and

mortgage crisis in Spain and Ireland has forced single parents, many of whom are women, out of their homes (Wöhl 2017).

Changes in economic governance have had political repercussions. Decisions are now taken far away from political debate and civil society participation. A number of the new EU economic policy making institutions are distanced and insulated from democratic participation and politicians at European and national levels have little control over them (Kantola and Lombardo 2017c). New economic governance architecture signifies a lack of democratic spaces to debate the crisis in general and its gendered consequences in particular.

These are just some examples of the gendered effects of the crisis and the feminist knowledge about it. Feminist responses and struggles around the crisis are intimately connected to debates about feminist knowledge generation and its capabilities to 'affect' and move people: decision-makers who could make a difference in policy-making or the general public's perceptions about the crisis. In this struggle, 'feminist knowledge' takes many forms and ranges from academic research and gender expertise to activist and experience based knowledge (see e.g. Bustelo, Ferguson and Forest 2016). What makes feminist knowledge 'feminist', as opposed to knowledge about gender, is its challenge to unequal power structures, its reflectivity, its attempt to be inclusive, its emphasis on the need to understand intersectional dynamics and postcolonial legacies in knowledge production (Prügl 2016). Such knowledge is characterized by a constant struggle on how to have an impact and to remain critical: does feminist knowledge become 'governmentalized', namely compromised or co-opted when engages with political processes, actors and institutions, such as states, governments, international organisations? (Caglar, Prügl and Zwingel 2013). Feminist knowledge is also shaped by the resistance it faces when it is being implemented in policy making processes (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014). All of these interactions change the form of feminist knowledge. Indeed Foucault's

theories of power and resistance make space for such understandings: there are no pure versions of for example feminist knowledge but it is always shaped by the very ideology, political project or form of governmentality that it resists (Allen 2008; Heyes 2007: 116).

A number of scholars and activists have been frustrated by the lack of impact of feminist knowledge about the economic crisis on public debates and political decision-making. Rosalind Cavaghan (2017) shows how difficult it has been for gender equality actors to insert feminist knowledge into economic decision-making processes in the EU at times of the economic crisis. Similarly in Finland, the economic crisis and changes in state governance structures towards a 'strategic state' have pushed feminist knowledge production into new margins (Elomäki et al 2016). The priority given to the economy and neoliberal policy solutions at times of the crisis makes feminist knowledge more contested than ever. The political character of feminist knowledge is used to resist it as it is not considered neutral or objective and feminist knowledge is particularly contested in relations to economics (Prügl 2016).

These difficulties are evident in the political debates analyzed in this article. I analyse the debate around gender, politics and the economic crisis in Finland to understand more deeply the dynamics at play in feminist knowledge production and its possibilities to generate impact and the effects of this impact. I suggest that we need new analytical tools to generate new insights about these political processes and turn to the study of affects and emotions. I argue that affect theory enables an analysis of how political parties' discourses resonate not with the electorate but with politicians and what effects this has for feminist struggles within political parties. This helps me to make explicit some of the complexities that politicians have when discussing gender and the crisis.

I apply here a particular approach to affects, namely that developed by Sara Ahmed (2004, 2004a) who approaches affects through a constructivist perspective. Ahmed's perspective is closely related to and compatible with Foucauldian notions of discourse and power. Ahmed defines affects as 'what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connections between ideas, values, and objects' and as a determination which confronts 'the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near' (Ahmed 2010, 29). Affects, such as shame, hate, disgust, fear, or love, are defined as cultural (rather than psychological) practices (see e.g Clough 2007; Gregg and Seithworth 2010). They are material and bodily reactions that give value to particular bodies. Affects then have political implications as they align us in relation to prevailing ideologies or identities. In contrast to some other affect theorists, Ahmed does not make a definitive distinction between affects and emotions but uses the two interchangeably (for a discussion see Wetherell 2012, 158-159; Koivunen 2010, 9, 14).

Rather than asking what affects and emotions are Ahmed is more interested in what they do. In relation to the economic crisis, Beverly Skeggs and Helen Wood suggest that to ignore affect in these 'times of greed, avarice, cruelty and insecurity is to miss out the key aspects of the political air we breathe'. They continue to explain that these feelings are materialized: 'affects of greed and competition that produced the current economic crisis are now producing fear and insecurity in the majority of the population' (Skeggs and Wood 2012, 135).

Furthermore affects are not about individuals: they are deeply social and political formations (Hemmings 2005, 565). In other words, affects are not outside social meaning and they are not autonomous. Ahmed's (2004a) notion of *affective economies* means that feelings are distributed but not in a disparate way but organized socially. For example, ideas about disgust are learned and repeated over time and have been shown to shape class relations. Indeed, Margaret Wetherell (2012:

118-9) suggests that affect theory ‘needs to go intersectional’: it needs to account for the ways in which people are positioned different to affective structures and emotions in relation to the intersecting inequality categories of, for instance, gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. For example, critical race theorists argue that affect plays a role in both cementing sexed and raced relations of domination, and in providing the local investments necessary to counter those relations (Hemmings 2005).

One can also analyze the affects of empathy, knowledge and understanding of ‘the other’. Whilst such affects could potentially lead to more ethical political action in times of economic crisis, feminist scholars argue that there is a need to address the power relations behind empathy (Ahmed 2004). To target ‘other’ cultures is often to fix them, spatially, temporally and affectively (Pedwell 2014). Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) writes about the neutralizing politics of cultural recognition, whereby to care for ‘the other’ is to identify with ‘their’ culture, while ensuring that neocolonial and neoliberal modes of governmentality remain unimpeded. The neocolonial targeting of ‘other’ cultures for care or empathy for instance functions to construct particular cultural groups as backwards and inferior in relation to their ‘Western’ or ‘Northern’ counterparts and puts these cultures into differential geopolitical temporalities (Povinelli 2011, 3).

CONTEXT MATTERS: THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND GENDER IN FINLAND

The European economic crisis dominated the political debated in Finland from 2008 onwards. At the start of the Eurocrisis, Finland had a triple-A status with the creditors and a low debt-to-GDP ratio. Finland aligned itself with Germany, Austria and the Netherlands in shaping the tough response to the Eurocrisis (Jonker-Hoffren 2013). Paul Jonker-Hoffren (2013) suggests that the

‘sovereign debt crisis’ in Europe was framed in strong moral terms in Finland. He cites the editorials of daily newspapers, which were rife with statements such as ‘countries that lived carelessly on borrowed money’, ‘moral decay’, and ‘countries that handled their accounts badly’. The core message of both government and editorials was that the Eurocrisis was caused by over-indebtedness of for instance Greece and Portugal, which were argued to have ‘lived beyond their means, i.e. on borrowed money’ (Jonker-Hoffren 2013). The public debate thereby silenced the discussion about who actually sold these loans to Greece and Portugal. Jonker-Hoffren (2013) points out that the design of EMU resulted in the development of a huge trade surplus in Germany, subsequent capital flows to the ‘periphery’ and resulting (real estate) bubbles and increased (wage) inflation that harmed competitiveness.

As a result of the global financial crisis, however, Finland’s GDP declined in 2009 by nearly 9%, and growth remained modest in 2010–2011 and output declined once again in 2012–2013 (Holmström et al 2014: 2). Two key economic sectors of Finland (IT and forest industries) underwent structural changes, which increased unemployment. At the same time, the downfall of Russian economy and the sanctions regime against the country resulted in a collapse of trade with one of Finland’s main trading partners.

The then government worked hard in 2013 to raise public awareness about the ‘crisis’ at home and to create the right atmosphere for introducing austerity politics. Indeed, this article speaks more about the ‘crisis’ than austerity politics. This is due to the fact that there was indeed in the first place a need to create a sense of the crisis – discursively –, which could then followed by austerity politics (cf. Kantola and Kananen 2012). At the time of the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 ‘crisis’ was the dominant frame and austerity politics entered the political parlance after the parliamentary elections in May 2015 (see Elomäki et al 2016).

The government was, however, already formulating austerity politics partially out of the reach of political debate and contestation. Central to this strategy was to justify the measures with a discourse of 'EU requirements'. The Finnish government enacted a new law in 2012 (so called finance politics law no. 862/2012) to transpose the EU requirements about limits to budget deficit into national law. Other new governing tools for austerity politics included the plan for public expenditure (*julkisen talouden suunnitelma*) that set the overall framework for public expenditure for a three-year period. This too was justified with reference to EU requirements and both mechanisms set tight monetary frames within which the government had to act. Indeed, feminist scholars have argued that the new economic government regime at the EU level is increasingly distanced from democratic processes and from civil society participation (see Klatzer and Schlager 2014; Walby 2015). The structural reform package (2013) was more politically contested. It included a number of gendered elements: restrictions to the rights to childcare and a quota system for the Home Care Allowance; cuts to child benefits; an increasing emphasis on caring for the elderly at home. The implementation of the package was ongoing during the European Parliamentary elections in 2014.

Because of these tendencies the European parliamentary elections created an important political space to debate the economic crisis and the austerity politics. A number of feminist actors, including femocrats, women and feminists within parties, and parties' women's organizations, made attempts to gender the political debate and to insert feminist knowledge into it. Indeed, the European economic crisis dominated the political debate in Finland. Six political parties were in the rainbow coalition government at the time of the elections (National Coalition Party, SDP, Green Party, Left Alliance Swedish People's Party, Christian Democrats). Only the populist right party The Finns and the Centre Party were in opposition. In comparison to many other countries, political scientists argue that Finnish politics is characterized by a lack of polarized ideological differences and in a search for a common

center ground (Paloheimo and Raunio, 2008, 21). Despite the prime ministerial party's attempts to lobby for support for the government's emergency package, the elections provided a platform for bringing out the ideological differences in relation to solving the economic crisis in Finland. After the elections, at first the Left Alliance and then the Green Party left the government.

In Finland, the links between political parties and the women's movement and women's organizations have been close and formalized in a number of ways. This contrasts a number of other countries such as the UK or the US, where the relationship of the women's movements to political parties (Evans 2016) or to the state (Kantola 2006) is constructed through more distance and autonomy. All political parties in Finland have women's organizations as a result of about 10% of state party funding being dedicated to women specific activities. The political parties' women's organizations work together in a cross-party organization Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations (*Nytkis*) along with other women's movement organizations. This close co-operation has been effective and has achieved lots of successes, mainly based shared framings of the political problems across the board (Holli 2006). Elections have always constituted an important moment for feminist lobbying.

However, more recent studies on the political debates about gender illustrate how the spaces for consensus among political women's organizations and their shared framings of gender policy issues have declined (Elomäki and Kantola 2017). For example, the right-wing parties no longer support statutory childcare rights, which is in stark contrast to the 1990s. Overall, political parties' gender equality discourses have become increasingly technical, gender equality is approached through numbers and practical easy solutions are sought to complex issues (Kantola and Saari 2014). Left leaning parties continue to be more willing to talk about gender structures and right parties place the emphasis on individual achievements. The economic crisis and the ensuing austerity politics have made these tendencies more evident and pose interesting questions for feminist research in this field.

Political parties are hence important sites for attempts to tackle the democratic deficit that EU's new economic governance mechanisms have created and to carve out spaces for political decision-making in economics. In this article, I explore what kind of spaces they provide for feminist knowledge about the crisis. A traditional approach for gender and politics scholarship would be to study election manifestos and other written documents of political parties. Political parties' election manifestos varied greatly in the 2014 elections. Some were detailed and focused on foregrounding the expertise of political parties (The Finns 15 pages, the Greens 24 pages, Christian Democrats, 16 pages). Others were short and relied on bullet points (The National Coalition Party, actual text on 2 pages). The manifestos reflect the official position of gender equality in these political parties and the inroads that feminist knowledge has made. Parties in Finland have different procedures by which they put together the manifesto but the political parties' women's organizations nearly always try to influence this through working group participation and motions for action.

The spaces that the election manifestos provide for feminist knowledge and gender analysis vary greatly in the EP election manifestos in 2014 in Finland. On the one end of the continuum, gender is very central and mainstreamed throughout in the manifestos of the Greens and the Left Alliance. There are some references to gender in the election manifestos of the SDP and the Swedish People's Party. At the other extreme, gender equality is not mentioned in the election manifestos of the Centre Party, the Finns, The National Coalition, and the Christian Democrats. Whilst economic crisis is central to all, its links to gender are prominent only in the manifesto of the Left Alliance with the Greens making some mentions of this too. The manifesto of the Left Alliance states: "Austerity politics is gendered, and it exacerbates the position of poor and immigrants" (p. 2). For the Green Party, securing 'Social Europe' plays an important role and women's rights are discussed in relation

equal pay and gender balanced representation in company boards, as well as reconciliation of work and family (p. 8).

Whilst manifestos are important official indications about the space that there might be for feminist knowledge about gender and the crisis, what is as crucial is how these are interpreted, adopted and picked up in actual political debates, an issue tackled in this article.

RESEARCH DATA AND MATERIAL: ELECTION PANELS AND INTERVIEWS

Party manifestos and written documents such as parliamentary debates would constitute traditional data sources for researching political parties and the economic crisis at times of elections. In relation to the spaces to gender the crisis – as a manifestation of feminist resistance – these provide very little novel information. Rather the official documents show that there is very little space to discuss gender and the crisis in the party manifestos of the biggest parties in Finland. To address these shortcomings, I use election panels where MEP candidates debated gender, the crisis and the EU to study what emotions and affects do for feminist struggles. I suggest that this sheds more light on the crisis and gender constructions where affects enforce the discourses but also challenge them.

The main part of the research material consists of participant observation and research notes in four election panels or talks on gender and the EU held in Helsinki before the May 2014 EP elections (see table 1). Whilst political parties' election manifestos represent the official party line and are aimed for the general audience, election panels give an opportunity for individual candidates to bring forth their views on specific topics. The panels analyzed here reflect what Alison Woodward (2003) has called 'velvet triangles' as a form of feminist struggles. They were organized jointly by femocrats (feminists working within state bureaucracy), academics and women's movement activists, who are

united in their attempts to gender the political discourse jointly. Election panels are often aimed for a targeted audience and are on a specific topic, such as gender equality or social Europe. In relation to gender panels, there is a tendency to invite candidates who have something to say on gender equality and are ‘interesting’ to the audience. At the same time, because of the need to have candidates from all political parties (8 in the case of Finland), there are many panelists who are not experts on gender and are merely sympathetic enough to the issue to join the panel or interested in the publicity that the panel might provide. The panels are often chaired by a professional journalist who seeks to hold the candidates accountable to what they or their party say and have done in the past.

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In addition to the election panel data, I have also analysed an extensive interview data with Finnish politicians and party workers. I conducted 38 interviews with Finnish politicians and party workers in 2013-2015 covering the six biggest parties represented in the Finnish parliament. The semi-structured interviews mainly focused on the practices and structures of the political parties in relation to gender equality; gender specific organizing in the party (i.e. women’s organizations); gender equality policies of the party; and the role social media in the work of politicians. They lasted from 40 minutes to two hours and were later transcribed. All interviewees were promised full anonymity. For this reason, in the citations below I only give the broad position of the interviewee (politician or party worker), the party, gender, and the date of interview.

Finnish politics is far less hierarchical when compared to other Western countries and obtaining interviews with politicians is relatively easy. Women politicians and party workers across the political spectrum were particularly keen to share their views, and this included the radical right populist party, The Finns. My aim was to interview an equal number of men and women but in the end men

constituted 25 percent of the interviewed and were far more difficult to access and were more likely not to respond to my inquiries or postpone and cancel agreed interviews. The men in the Finns party especially refused to be interviewed about gender equality, perhaps reflecting their political stance on the topic.

For the purposes of this article, I have re-read the research material and focused on the parts where the European elections and the economic crisis is discussed. This was an explicit question in the interviews but notably there is very little material for the kind of analysis advocated here. The interviewees had clear difficulties to talk about the topic, which was the case for many of the election panel participants too. Hence the analysis has meant close reading some interview excerpts, which cannot be viewed as representative of the sample as such but as illustrating the qualitative trends in relation to gender, affects and the economic crisis in Finland at the time.

I approach these texts with the method of close reading that combines elements of textual analysis and discourse analysis. When tracing discourses and affects and their workings in the research material I am particularly interested in power and its relations. Whilst discourse analysis is a well-established methodological approach in feminist political analyses (see e.g. Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009), there is a tendency to treat affects as something that escapes established research methods: 'as less visible to the particular technologies of observation, seeing and listening that characterize the humanities, and particularly the reliance of many of our qualitative methodologies on language and sight' (Blackman and Venn 2010, 9; see also Hemmings 2005, 549). Others suggest that there is no need to build an opposition between working with affects and textual analysis (Liljeström and Paasonen 2010, 2).

Accordingly, I apply the same methods of analysis to tracing the affects in the text to discern what they do, how they circulate and where they stick and with what effects for feminist struggles. Close reading is always informed by theoretical and methodological questions and demands constant self-reflexivity (Liljeström and Paasonen 2010, 5–6). The method requires the researcher to choose extracts for close scrutiny and to bring her background and understanding of the contexts in question into the analysis. As alternatives to textual extracts these may involve thick descriptions of emotions, bodily reactions, silences, applause, comments, or sounds in election panels. For example, Sara Ahmed applies close reading in her work by reading the texts surrounding certain cultural and political phenomena, such as the asylum seekers in the UK, and by tracing how emotions surrounding these are public (2004).

GENDERED AFFECTS IN THE ELECTION PANELS

Affective and expert knowledge

In the four election panels analyzed here, the MEP candidates constructed the issue of gender equality as mainly relating women's political representation either in the form of the lack of a Finnish female commissioner or the sex of MEP candidates on parties' electoral lists. In other words, gender equality was in the first place reduced into this prominent easily understood issue about women's political representation in the form of numbers. This characterized the interview material too where a number of interviewees answered 'I don't know' to more substantive policy question about the linkages between European Parliament's elections, gender and the economic crisis (e.g. woman, politicians, National Coalition Party 20.3.2014).

One of the interviewed political party workers suggested that the economic crisis had further reduced the space to discuss gender equality issues in politics:

One has to be particularly courageous to go and say in a political debate that ‘do you all understand that these issues of people getting older, and the public sector services have gender dimensions, and public investments and austerity politics have a gender dimension too’. The reactions are like: ‘we are now talking about important issues, don’t come here to stutter about irrelevant things’ (woman, party worker, Left Alliance, 30.10.2014).

The interviewee describes a familiar process where feminist knowledge and gender expertise about gendered consequences of the crisis are pushed into the margins. It requires particular strength – ‘courage’ – by the gender equality advocates to overcome the affect of shame (see Ahmed 2004) caused by resistance to feminist knowledge where it is deemed irrelevant and repetitive – ‘stutter’ of issues already known. Here the affect of shame worked against articulations of feminist knowledge about the crisis in the political debate.

A closer analysis of the discussions about gender and the crisis in the election panels, however, shows a more nuanced repertoire of feminist knowledge. I discern a distinction between *affective knowledge* that was personalized and emotional, and *expert knowledge* that consisted of facts in the form of statistics and information and knowledge about institutions. With affective knowledge I mean information that is transmitted by appealing to emotions of both the speaker and the audience and which moves them in diverse and distinct ways. This can be identified, for instance, by appeals to personal stories or by bodily reactions in the speaker and the audience. Expert knowledge, in contrast, distances the facts from the people who are behind them, and focuses on the societal, as opposed to individual level.

In a Foucauldian sense, there is no implication that either form of these knowledges is truer: for example, that affective knowledge would be more ‘populist’ and expert knowledge would be more ‘reliable’. Neither should one interpret that there is a dichotomy between the two. However, distinguishing them analytically in this particular political debate makes it possible to analyze what these affects do in the debate. I argue that the interplay between these two forms of knowledge about gender and the crisis shows the power of affective knowledge. Its effects were to excite the audience, to bring finally life to feminist struggles on gender equality, but at the same time, it risked lapsing to empathy and pity towards the ‘other women’, as discussed below, and to distancing the crisis from the national context. The research material also illustrates that affective knowledge was gendered: its usage by women and men created different reactions in the audience as discussed below.

A social democrat woman politician spoke about the distinction between affective knowledge and expert knowledge in one of the interviews. For her, a superficial stance ‘against the EU’ was an easy election theme that emotionally moved people.

Few candidates bother to open the issue more, I mean the issue of what the financial crisis is really about [...] and how we need European wide solutions to it (woman, politician, SDP, 20.3.2014).

This distinction between expert and affective knowledge was seen in two different expert talks that preceded the election panels too. In one event, a Green Party woman MEP gave a talk about the economic crisis and women. She gave information about the impact of the crisis on women in Europe detailing the increases in women’s unemployment, the gendered impact of the cuts in social and health services, social benefits and public sectors salaries, discrimination against pregnant women and young mothers (especially in Italy), cuts to gender equality programs, and the failure to gender mainstream austerity measures. The crisis was placed elsewhere: all of the examples and information related to Southern European countries and not to Finland. The issue that generated most discussion

with the audience was youth employment, the EU's actions on this and the difficulties of small enterprises in southern Europe to get credit (*Eurooppalaiset* 23.1.2014). 'Women' in the title of the talk was indicative of the way in which gender was a statistical variable, out there, easily identified and measured, and there was little talk about the wider societal structures that reproduce inequalities. In this example, expert knowledge as a form of feminist knowledge failed to move the audience to talk about gender. The effects of the crisis on different women were bypassed by a focus on young people.

Another event also hosted an expert talk on gender and the crisis, this time by a male law professor who was also a member of the CEDAW Committee (Nytkis/Tane 7.5.2014). In this remarkably emotional talk, the professor argued that the EU had broken its own treaties in terms of women's human rights. The CEDAW Committee had observed violations of women's fundamental rights in Greece. He too listed the gendered setbacks in the labour market, pensions, social security, the rise of the far right, financial support to male dominated sectors, public sector run down, but he also talked about domestic violence and prostitution, harder attitudes towards the poor, and difficult position of minority women.

In this affective talk, he accused the EU and showed empathy towards the women in Greece. The audience was responsive judged by the applause, questions and later references to the talk in and outside of the panel that followed. The most common sense was that he had transferred knowledge about the suffering of women in Greece that was not otherwise available in Finland. Affects at work here were those of empathy attached to the Greek women as victims of human rights violations, and anger towards the European and international institutions that had exacerbated the human costs of the crisis. Affective transfer of knowledge was also effective, made more so by the gender of the speaker, a man talking about women's rights. Empathy, sympathy and compassion have traditionally been

constructed as feminine modes of care but have recently been overtaken in international politics by men (Pedwell 2014: 30).

I suggest that the affect of empathy was more effective and moving to the audience when employed by a man. It became truer and generated hope in the sympathetic audience that its message will be heard in the wider society that does not necessarily value women as experts. There was hope that there would be a politicisation of the issue of gender in the wider society in relation to the economic crisis. Anger, in turn, is an affect that would easily attach to women, as ‘angry young women’ or ‘angry feminists’ (see Ahmed 2010a on feminist killjoys) and diminish their credibility. Again it made the man speaker appear genuine and enforced his message. As a member of the CEDAW committee, the professor also embodied international, UN based, human rights expertise as opposed to national gender equality expertise. This gave ever more leverage to his critique of EU’s failures in its own human rights politics at the time of the crisis.

Empathy for ‘other women’

Expert knowledge about the European austerity policies and its policy making structures and personal affective accounts of the suffering of the ‘other women’ alternated in the MEP candidates’ talks in the panel that followed the speech of the professor.

Unlike her party in its election manifesto, the National Coalition Party woman MEP and candidate spoke explicitly about the need to gender the crisis and to gender mainstream the austerity policies. She suggested in the debate that the failure of the EP to influence the Commission and the Council on this was a competency question. The European Parliament was effective in the fields where it had competency but, for example, there was not basic services directive that would guarantee minimum

standards of services or social rights to EU citizens and those residing in member states. This made it harder to even try to tackle the social effects of the crisis. She called for more powers to the parliament in social questions and more EU regulation in these fields where analyzing and impacting on the gendered impacts of the crisis would be crucial.

The Green party candidate (ex-minister, MEP and MP, woman), in turn, called for strengthening fundamental rights in the EU treaties. She argued that the atmosphere in the EP had become more conservative as evidenced by the voting patterns on the Estrella report on sexual and reproductive rights and health that was rejected by the parliament (see Kantola and Rolandsen Agustin 2016). The EU was constructed by these politicians as a safeguard of women's rights if only it had enough powers to act. However, its role was coming under challenge by more conservative forces. The knowledge of the candidates was based on their long inside experience in the institutions and decision-making.

Personal knowledge and experience made more populist accounts. I am using 'populist' in a Laclau's (2005) sense where populism signals an attempt to construct and to interpellate 'the people', to speak out to the public in a language that moves them. The Swedish People's Party candidate related about her personal trips to Spain and Greece:

I have stayed couch surfing with people and experienced how highly educated women did not get jobs... People's lives have grown so miserable that they could no longer determine what kind of a life-path they want. (The Swedish People's Party, woman candidate)

She spoke about 'Roma women and girls whose eyes had hardened'. Personal experience was in this way important as was relating it with emotions – the candidate nearly cried. Again it made it more genuine, first-hand knowledge. It was slightly less legitimate than the professor's emotional talk as

evidenced by the panel chairperson's comment a bit later asking the candidate to be shorter in her comments:

No travel stories this time, please! (Panel chair, woman)

The citations illustrate how structural intersectionality – discrimination and inequalities faced by Roma women (Crenshaw 1991; Ahmed 2004) – were distanced in the Finnish political context by the idea that they represented the pitiable experiences of the 'other women'.

The right populist Finns Party woman candidate countered the focus on Greece by relating about poverty in Finland:

I have gone to the Finnish market places and we have a million people in poverty at the moment. 80 percent of this million are women and children. (The Finns, woman candidate)

Getting very agitated she continues to say that we cannot close our eyes from this – framing poverty and inequality as majority questions thereby erasing any legitimacy of attempts to focus on questions of race and ethnicity. The Left Alliance woman candidate, in turn, countered the attempts to construct a dichotomy between 'the people in the market places of Turku and Greece' who all find austerity politics unjust. She wanted to question Finland's positions as the hardest defender of austerity politics in Europe alongside Germany.

The examples above show that the political discourse about gender and the crisis centered on the constructions of the 'people', both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. Affective knowledge played a crucial role. The positive interpretation is that affects moved the candidates and the audience of the panel and created space for different feminist and non-feminist struggles around the topic. Emotions and affects of empathy showed how gender equality and equality politics matter. Empathy made the gendered crisis personal and carved space for legitimate interventions as opposed to the party

manifestos where gender concerns were framed in technical and traditional ways, or had no place at all. Empathy can indeed be a positive force that, as an affect, challenges the constructions between us and them (Povinelli 2011; Pedwell 2014). In this case, it also had a positive impact on the making the importance of gender equality policy more vivid in a country where it has become a technical issue of right policy measures.

However, at the same time, it was evident in the debate that empathy as an affect does build distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. A woman MEP described this when stating ironically in the research interview:

It is this Finnish sense of self-satisfaction. This idea that ‘we have invented this thing called gender equality, and it is perfect in this country, and everything is well here, and everyone else is behind’ (woman, MEP, National Coalition Party, 30.11.2014).

As suggested above, this self-satisfaction was prominent initially in relation to economic policy too and the Finnish public debate about the crisis was characterized by moral arguments about the failures of Southern European countries in their economic management (Jonker-Hoffner 2014). There was a very fine balance in the political election debates that was often explicitly crossed over to the side of blaming the Greek, looking down upon their economic management, public sector and gender policies. We do see a fixing of Greek culture in the debate, a slippage from the desire to critique the banking sector or neoliberalism to seeing these as ‘their’ problems, the other culture’s problems (see Povinelli 2011; Pedwell 2014). One of the effects was to distance the gendered and gendering impacts of the crisis from the national context of Finland. Automatically when talking about the crisis and gender, the MEP candidates talked about Greece or Spain as opposed to the government politics in Finland.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have focused on the spaces that political parties provide for feminist struggles about the crisis and feminist knowledge generation and its impact. During the politicized moment of European parliamentary elections in 2014, a number of feminist actors, including femocrats, women and feminists within parties, and parties' women's organizations, made attempts to gender the political debate. Participatory observation in election panels and interview data with politicians and party workers enabled an analysis of how affects worked in relation to feminist knowledge about the crisis. On the one hand, the economic crisis made it harder to debate gender equality due to the dominance of economic and financial necessities as opposed to human, social or women's rights. On the other hand, affective knowledge about the crisis made gender equality concerns more vivid and moved people to talk about them.

Analysis of feminist knowledge, political parties and affects illustrated how affects worked in different ways in the debates and the findings of the article have offered some positive readings as well as grounds for concern. Affective knowledge livened up a debate on gender equality, which often remains on a technical level and generated an impression that gender was a crucial concern. Empathy for the figure of the suffering 'Greek woman' too had the positive effect of bringing life into gender equality, of moving the candidates and the audience, and breaking barriers between the people of Europe. At the same time, empathy also built distinctions between 'us' and 'them' constructing and fixing for example the Greek people as inferior to a Finnish 'us' in their economic and gender policy. This was well in line with the dominance of moral arguments about the crisis in Finland where member states, such as Greece and Portugal, were blamed for lax spending and borrowing, and deemed morally dubious. The analysis in this article showed how affects worked to constitute the

Finnish community and nation and its identity as a 'model country for gender equality'. This, in turn, hindered the discussion on the gendered effects of the crisis in Finland and ways to tackle these.

The election panels illustrated the interplay between expertise knowledge and affective knowledge about gender and the economic crisis. Affects of anger and empathy attached themselves differently to the women and men using them, which explains the desire of many women politicians to steer away from emotions. Empathy had the positive effect of bringing life into gender equality, of moving the candidates and the audience, and breaking barriers between the people of Europe. However, in the debate empathy also built distinctions between 'us' and 'them' constructing and fixing for example the Greek people as inferior to 'us' in their economic and gender policy.

In terms of feminist struggles, the research material provides opportunities to compare parties' official lines to those of the actual MEP candidates on issues of gender. Some of the conservative/right MEP candidates tended to be as conservative on the issue of women's political representation as their parties' manifestos' lack of focus on gender equality might lead one to expect. Others were far more radical, which suggests that the feminist struggles and resistance to mainstream gender blindness was individualized in the right/conservative parties. Gendering the debates was an individual 'choice' that was tolerated but not warmly welcomed in these parties. For left/green parties, gender was more of a collective and shared concern. The election panels illustrated too that gender and the crisis moved the candidates and the audience far more than the printed party documents such as party manifestos might lead us to expect. One of the key contributions of the article has been to explore how affects worked to produce this outcome.

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Table 1: Election panels and public talks on gender and the European Parliamentary elections in Helsinki in 2013–2014

Date of the election panel	Organiser and title of the panel	Political parties that participated	Number of women MEP candidates	Number of men MEP candidates	Available material
4.12.2013	Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations (Nytkis)	All parliamentary parties (8)	8	0	
23.1.2014	Women in Europe association (<i>Eurooppalaiset</i>) morning coffee event	Green Party woman MEP	1	0	Powerpoint presentation online
7.5.2014	'Does euro have a gender?' seminar and an election panel organized by Council for Gender Equality (TANE) and Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations (<i>Nytkis</i>)	All parliamentary parties (SDP missing due to an accident)	6	1	Available in youtube
15.5.2014	Women in Europe association (<i>Eurooppalaiset</i>) election panel	7 parliamentary parties (National Coalition Party missing)	7	0	