

Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe

Edited by Mieke Verloo

‘We need to understand why opposition to gender equality is growing in Europe. With its superb range and innovative analysis, this book will inspire new thinking and new practices in response to this trend.’

– *Sylvia Walby, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and UNESCO
Chair of Gender Research, Lancaster University, UK*

‘This truly timely book fixates “opposition to gender equality” as an acute research priority. It deplores the fragmented state of our understanding yet makes great amends, scrutinizing varieties of opposition to equality through a series of strong case studies from different parts of Europe. The book’s ambition is huge and very much appreciated: it launches a brand new theory-grounded research program of great significance for gender+ equality scholarship in the years to come. An extremely important book!’

– *Hege Skjeie, Professor of Political Science,
University of Oslo, Norway*

‘When hundreds of protesters in Poland, France, and Italy are protesting against “gender ideology”; when the erosion of democratic institutions, as is happening in Hungary, becomes a matter of political reality; and radical right political parties are on the rise in Europe, the crucial question is: what went wrong? This excellent collection provides important answers in the context of gender+ equality policies, which have been one of the main target of these illiberal political changes. While gender+ equality policies have always faced opposition, this well-researched book not only shows that we are facing a new chapter in this oppositional project but also offers analytical and theoretical tools to counter its complex dynamics. For this reason, this volume is an indispensable and crucial read not only for scholars, but also for activists, politicians, and anyone fighting for social justice.’

– *Roman Kuhar, Professor of Sociology and Dean of the
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

‘Building on the social movement theory and social complexity theory, this book offers an original framework for understanding the varieties of opposition to the project of gender equality in Europe. The empirical chapters support the key conceptual points: that opposition to gender equality is dynamic, multi-dimensional, intersectional, and influenced by context-specific factors. The innovative framework contributes to an understanding of how the rise of opposition forces to gender equality is closely linked to class and an understanding of how to counter these oppositional forces. The book convincingly argues that future analysis of opposition to gender equality needs to focus more on intersectionality, especially regarding race and ethnicity.’

– *Birte Siim, Professor, Department of Culture and
Global Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark*



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VARIETIES OF OPPOSITION TO GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPE

In contrast to the wealth of studies on progress towards gender equality, opposition to gender equality is rarely studied, which makes it difficult to understand the positive and negative dynamics of gender equality as a political project.

The first of its kind, this timely collection examines the potential and challenges of our current scholarship on understanding opposition to gender+ equality in Europe. Divided into three parts, Mieke Verloo and her team of international experts begin *Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe* by theorizing the dynamics of opposition to gender equality policies in Europe. Part Two highlights oppositional actors (politicians, governments, citizens, policy makers, churches) and political arenas (parliament, courts, Internet), as well as different and opposing visions of gender+ equality. Part Three concludes with a framework for understanding oppositional dynamics on gender equality change.

Setting the agenda for future research, this book will be useful for students of gender and politics, social movements, European integration, and policy studies, as well as for high-level policymakers, students, and feminist activists alike. It will be an inspiration to thinkers and doers and to scholars and political actors.

Mieke Verloo is Professor of Comparative Politics and Inequality Issues at Radboud University in the Netherlands, and Non-Residential Permanent Fellow at the IWM, Institute for Human Sciences, in Vienna. She is the winner of the 2015 ECPG Gender and Politics Career Achievement Award. She was scientific director of large research projects on gender equality policymaking in Europe that designed methods to analyze the various meanings of gender equality policies across Europe, as well as their intersectional dimensions. She has extensive consultancy and training experience on gender mainstreaming and intersectionality for several European governments and institutions. Her latest research is on the rise and dynamics of opposition to gender+ equality in Europe.

Gender and Comparative Politics

Edited by Karen Celis (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) and
Isabelle Engeli (University of Bath)

The comparative research conducted in the field of gender and politics today is more than ever resulting in innovative theory building, applying novel research designs, and engaging with mainstream political science. The study of gender and politics has moved from the margins of political science to the center. Given the highly critical and activist roots of the gender and politics scholarship, it quasi naturally embraces intersectionality. The Routledge *Gender and Comparative Politics* book series aims to reflect this rich, critical, and broad scholarship covering the main political science sub-disciplines with, for instance, gender-focused research on political economy, civil society, citizenship, political participation and representation, governance, and policy making.

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Feminists Engaging the State in Central and Eastern Europe
*Andrea Krizsán and Conny Roggeband, with contributions
from Raluca Maria Popa*

4 Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe

Edited by Mieke Verloo

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PART 1

Conceptualizing Opposition and Oppositional Dynamics



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INTRODUCTION

Dynamics of Opposition to Gender+ Equality in Europe

Mieke Verloo

Across Europe, examples of recent cases of opposition to gender+ equality are not hard to find. It can be direct, violent, and extremely visible, like when Swedish feminists receive online death threats (Sveland 2013; Strid this book) or like in France, where thousands demonstrated against “gender theory” and school programs tackling sex and gender stereotypes in 2014 (Borrillo 2015; Paternotte this book). It can be linked to the rise of the far right in Europe, as when the Sweden Democrats (one such party) strongly objected to the gender-conscious pedagogy adopted by public childcare facilities to help children handle, and reflect on, dualistic gender norms (Towns, Karlsson, and Eyre 2014). It can be ongoing, as is the case with Ireland’s abortion opposition (Kozłowska, Béland, and Lecours 2016; Qulity, Conlon, and Kennedy 2015). It can involve various types of actors, not just politicians and social-movement activists, but also bureaucrats and courts (Ahrens and Holzeithner in this book). At times opposition is also indirect and less visible, as in the case of successful UK shelters for victims of domestic violence being wiped out by outsourcing to non-expert commercial actors (Ishkanian 2014) or when regulations that impose gender mainstreaming in policymaking are set aside by those who are supposed to implement them (Ahrens 2017; Ahrens this book; Cavaghan 2017). Whatever the form, these varieties of opposition to gender+ equality in Europe are strongly linked to citizens’ attitudes towards gender and sexual equality (Spierings this book). As for the potential effects of this opposition, it matters tremendously how strong a country’s democratic institutions are and what power is in the hands of the respective allies and opponents of the feminist project (Verloo this book; Krizsán and Popa this book, Miškovska Kajevska this book).

Studying Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe

As strange as it may be, opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality is a relatively new subject in the study of the rise and fall of gender+ equality policies in Europe. Yet the crucial role of opposition should come as no surprise, as feminism by definition started as a movement or a political project that challenged the status quo, which has led it to face fierce opposition since its very beginnings (when or wherever one pinpoints it). Though over time the political victories of feminism have been many, whether they concerned women's right to education, political representation, or women making their own decisions about their body, sexuality, or sexual activity, no feminist victory has ever been complete or everlasting. Whether one looks at basic educational or political rights, economic or bodily autonomy, it is not hard to find countries in this 21st-century world where women's access to society or gender equality is non-existent, extremely limited, or incomplete. This is because the political efforts and victories of feminism have never eliminated their opposition, nor have they rendered opposition to feminism powerless. Opposition to feminism even seems to be growing (Council of Europe 2016a; Grzebalska and Soós 2016).

So, while opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality is not new at all, this book is part of a new and profoundly necessary surge of attention to opposition in research and in political analysis. Whether to better engage politically with ever more tenacious opposition movements or better understand their workings in a neoliberal networked society, we need to understand opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality more profoundly. Scholarly, there is much to gain from studying counterforces to the political project of feminism. As a recent field of study, gender and politics (Dahlerup 2010) has made tremendous progress in understanding what the causes and consequences are of gender inequality in politics, but gender and politics scholarship also has several problems and challenges: it frequently suffers from a progress bias, often has a too formal understanding of politics and at times it is locked in issue specificity, lacks an intersectional focus on gender equality, and is still very fragmented and one-dimensional in character.

The scholarly ambition of this book, then, is to understand the political dynamics of the rise and fall of gender+ equality projects by focusing on the various configurations of oppositional activities in Europe; in short, to better understand the dynamics of gender+ equality change through its varieties of opposition. The focus is on Europe for two reasons: The first is Europe's long and diverse history of engagement with feminism. The strength of its engagement is visible in the European Union's reputation and track record as an innovator and promoter of gender+ equality against a background of ongoing actual gender+ inequalities across Europe (EIGE 2013; 2015). It also shows in the Council of Europe's ongoing efforts to gender mainstream all its activities on democracy and human rights (Council of Europe 2016b). Yet even if both the European Union and the Council of Europe set standards to the member states' legal and policy choices,

the engagement with feminism and the meaning given to gender equality vary tremendously across European countries (Verloo 2007).

The second reason is related to the existing literature, which, though it has flagged the relevance of the *context* of feminist politics to its potential success or failure in principle, has so far left the specifically Western and European elements of this context undertheorized. The Eurocentric and Westerncentric nature of much of the scholarship has meant that these aspects of the context are taken for granted rather than articulated, described, and analyzed. While this is always problematic, it is particularly dangerous now that 21st-century Europe is facing an accumulation of new and old dangers. Of these, the decline of democracy, the transition back to illiberalism, and rising neoliberalism, neo-nationalism, and political violence in Europe are particularly in need of more attention.

Politically, this book thus wants to engage with the contemporary European developments and structural settings that underpin this current intensification of oppositional dynamics on feminist politics and gender+ equality, and will have key roles in the present and future strengthening of such oppositions. To understand these dynamics, it is important to focus on the interaction between structure and agency. Oppositional activities develop in the structural settings of interdependent domains such as polity, economy, violence, civil society, education, and sexuality. The current background against which the oppositional dynamics play out in the context of Europe shows a complex configuration of changing structural elements: a worrying decline of democracy; a reduction in government power; an increased marketization of politics and public services; a serious reduction of the political space for civil society; intensifying political hierarchies and polarizations; growing political surveillance and violence; strengthened academic capitalism; ongoing gender-based violence; and renewed attempts at controlling and restricting sexual and bodily autonomy. These structural changes not only present bureaucratic gatekeepers that have always been hesitant to embrace gender equality with more opportunities to block or hinder gender-equality progress, but they also open up many new avenues for opposition, facilitating the emergence or intensification of the activities of two sets of actors in particular: actors that are linked to far-right, extreme right, or populist radical right parties and movements, and actors that are linked to organized (and especially centralized) religions. Both sets of actors have recently created larger political spaces for themselves in Europe, although their actual political engagement and power differ across countries. More classic groups of actors that are active in politics in Europe such as employers and trade unions can also still be found frustrating and blocking attempts to advance gender+ equality.

With this book, we intend to address questions such as: What facilitates, fosters, hinders, generates, or eliminates opposition? Which feminism is being opposed exactly? Are some feminisms more vulnerable to opposition? Are some measures and policies more contested than others? Or more opposed by specific actors? Are any particular persons targeted by this opposition, and if so, why? And are some

forms and types of opposition potentially more successful than others? Can opposition maybe also foster greater feminist strength? In this book, we thus intend not just to address the specifics of how opposition functions in our current times, but we will also take on more theoretical challenges to understand what are the most productive ways in which we can theorize opposition, this also in order to be better equipped to analyze the actors, strategies, and dynamics of opposition.

In order to further articulate these questions and contribute answers, this book will present a more precise conceptualization of opposition and oppositional dynamics, revealing which actors can be active, which have been observed to be dominant where, and what the structural features are that strengthen or foster oppositional dynamics. It will pinpoint the current shortcomings in scholarship on feminist politics and gender+ equality policies, and highlight which existing or emerging scholarship has the potential to contribute to studying oppositional dynamics to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies. In its conclusions, this book will present ideas about how to more fully understand the positive and negative dynamics of gender+ equality change.

In this first chapter, the focus is on defining the problem at stake, both in its scholarly and political dimensions. This means defining what we understand as “opposition to gender-equality change”; figuring what out the problem is with opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies in Europe; improving our scholarship so as to contribute to a feminist politics that has effective strategies, tools, and techniques to engage with, and address, such oppositions. This chapter ends with a brief description of the following chapters and their place in this ambition.

What Is Opposition to Feminist Politics and Gender+ Equality?

For the purposes of this book, opposition to gender+ equality will be defined as *any activity in which a perspective opposing feminist politics and gender+ equality policy is articulated in a way that can be expected to influence or is actually influencing politics or policymaking at any stage.*

Defining it like this—rather than, for instance, merely as any social movement explicitly opposing gender-equality—involves making key choices about the visibility of opposition, about what is gender, about the location of opposition in political and policy processes, and about its potential impact. To see opposition as an *activity* means focusing on what is done by actors, not on what is caused by abstract structures. The theoretical reason for this is that structures can only be the cause of anything if they lead to actors’ actual engagement or activities in a certain direction (or to the absence thereof). Moreover, to see it as an activity *in which a perspective opposing feminist politics or gender+ equality policies is articulated* means seeing opposition as not only intentional—since such articulation can very well be

a side-effect of other dominant intentions—but restricting our understanding of opposition to those activities that can be found or analyzed to oppose an element (or multiple elements) of feminist politics or gender+ equality policies, a feature that is necessary to enable solid empirical research. Going beyond gender+ equality, whether as a normative value or as an existing state of reality, this definition describes what is being opposed as *feminist politics and gender+ equality policies*, a more dynamic focus that includes what is affecting and what is potentially changing gender+ equality outcomes. The choice to name both *politics and policies* is also deliberate, highlighting that it is not only policymaking that brings forward societal change but also feminist politics more broadly, as it includes actors from movements, political parties, and social and political institutions, as well as bureaucrats, scholars, and individual citizens. It would therefore be a mistake to restrict relevant opposition to only those activities that directly oppose bureaucratic or legislative proposals for instance, excluding oppositional activities that articulate a broader intention to hinder feminist politics or a more far-reaching ideology against feminist objectives. The choice to use *gender+* as a label for the policies flags the importance of paying attention to the intersectional inequalities that are interwoven with gender inequality, and this intersectional understanding extends to the understanding of feminist politics as necessarily intertwined and engaged with other structural inequalities shaping gender inequality. The phrase “*articulated in a way that either can be expected to influence or is actually influencing*” is included to focus on what matters most and enable theorizing on which kinds of opposition could potentially be successful. To understand the potential influence of any given opposition, it is important to comprehend feminist politics and gender+ equality policies as interventions in specific societies. Even in the context of Europe, this means vast differences in the actual ongoing gender+ inequalities and the political and policymaking opportunities and legacies. Contextuality needs to be part of theorizing because the potential impact of oppositional activities depends on the social, political, and historical context. Given that feminist politics is politics and gender+ equality policies are a form of policy, what happens to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies will always be subject to the usual dynamics of political and policy processes. That is why the last part of the definition, “politics or policymaking at any stage”, stresses that opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies can appear at each stage of these processes, in the agenda-setting stage as well as in the development, improvement, implementation, or evaluation stages—the type of actors that can be expected to be active differs depending on the stage under consideration (e.g. lobbyist in the policy-development stage, street-level bureaucrats in the implementation stage), and the type of opposition that occurs can be expected to vary across stages too. This book is intended to explore just such issues, such as which relevant actors or forms of opposition are linked to specific policy stages, in order to improve our understanding of the dynamics of gender+ equality change.

Why Study Opposition to Feminist Politics and Gender+ Equality in Europe Today?

As noted earlier, there are two reasons to study opposition to gender+ equality change in Europe:¹ there is a strong political drive related to worrying current developments in Europe and another more academic drive to push forward existing scholarship.

Looking at current developments in Europe and the more visible opposition in recent years, it is important to realize that opposition to gender+ equality change is not new at all. From a historical perspective, opposition to gender+ equality change can be found from the earliest days of feminism in Europe, as is testified by the long delays in changing laws that were exposed as gender unequal early on or in rectifying legislation and regulations that had a detrimental impact on women's lives. Examples abound: Olympe de Gouges' advocacy for women's rights and social justice (she was also a strong advocate against slavery) in the context of the French Revolution that is said to have signaled the start of European democracy was effectively silenced through her death by guillotine in 1793 (Scott 1992). It took the Netherlands 20 years to make marital rape a legal "possibility", only concluding the political struggle in 1992 after its first emergence on the political agenda in 1972 (Roggeband 2002). Ireland still does not have a law that gives women access to legal abortion because decades of feminist struggles have not been able to counter the ongoing opposition, while in other countries where abortion is a legal option, access to it is problematic because of a lack of facilities or because of opt-out possibilities for medical personnel (Githens and McBride Stetson 2013). There are also various obstruction methods, including violence (Krook 2016), hindering countries' compliance with legally adopted quota regulations, resulting in impotent quotas that cannot increase the share of elected women.

The historical nature of opposition to feminist politics shows that, as is often the case with "new" topics in academia, it is not so much the social phenomenon in itself that is new, but the academic attention to the phenomenon (Verloo 2001). The new or renewed attention to opposition to feminist politics, however, is also based on broader and increasing political worries about the decline of general political opportunities favorable to social justice, such as the substantial destruction of the welfare state and the changing landscape of politics and democracy in Europe (Merkel 2014). Recent scholarship has three main axes of attention regarding the current political dangers and challenges in Europe.

One is about the emergence, spread, and growth of far right, extreme right, and populist radical right parties in Europe, particularly analyzing the positions that these parties take on gender+ equality and the consequences that their politics of racializing based on migration background and religion have for gender+ equality (see the special issue of *Patterns of Prejudice* on gender and the radical right, edited by Akkerman 2015; Spierings and Zaslove 2015; Spierings et al. 2015;

Mayer, Ajanovic, and Sauer 2014; Meret and Siim 2012; Mulinari and Neergaard 2014; Kinnvall 2015; Köttig, Bitzan, and Petö 2016). Another can be found in the renewed surge in scholarship on class inequality and gender triggered by the financial and economic crisis, the growing dominance of neoliberal capitalism, austerity measures leading to the marketization of new domains such as academia, the retrenchment of the welfare state in Europe, and the ongoing exclusion of racialized others (Rubery 2015; Walby 2015; Karamessini and Rubery 2013; Klatzer and Schlager 2014; Leschke and Jepsen 2014; Thorsdottir 2014; Villa and Smith 2014; Ferree and Zippel 2015; Bassel and Emejulu 2014). Perhaps influenced by this new attention to the actors and factors hindering progress towards gender equality, and certainly fueled by the emerging scholarship on sexual equality, the last years also saw growing scholarship on the role of organized religion in opposing feminist and sexual-equality politics (Tremblay, Paternotte, and Johnson 2011); Paternotte, van der Dussen, and Piette 2015; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017).

While there are strong political motives driving the increased attention to opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality, there are also more academic motives, as such a focus on opposition can illuminate our theoretical understanding of gender+ equality change. And there in fact is much room for advancement on theory. Though gender+ equality change theory has made tremendous progress over the last 20 years, the current theory is still fragmented and compartmentalized, both in its attention to issues and in its theoretical paradigms—not to mention that it is also still under-intersectionalized. While comparative studies on issue-specific gender-equality change have provided important theoretical concepts and, at times, hypotheses, they often remain locked in issue specificity, focusing on quota (Krook 2010; Celis, Krook, and Meier 2011; Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012), abortion and reproductive rights (Githens and McBride Stetson 2013; Engeli 2012), or on violence (Weldon 2002). There also is a certain progress bias inherent in a dominant focus on identifying positive drivers of change such as feminist actors in civil society and in formal politics and policymaking (Weldon 2002; Johnson 2006). It is not that the existing theory pays no attention to veto points, lack of political will, watering down or perverting feminist initiatives, or straightforward obstruction (see, for instance, Waylen 2014; Prügl 2011; Outshoorn 1991; Verloo 2005), but that the forms opposition takes are not theorized enough.

Though there are exceptions where issue-specific research leads to theory building with a much wider impact (especially on violence, see Crenshaw 1991; Walby et al. 2015), what often remains unexplored in issue-specific research is the extent to which issues are linked to different social and political domains, and thereby to different actor configurations, discourses, and material-resource opportunities. The research's theoretical paradigms and empirical comparative work are equally fragmented. A large collaborative project such as the “state feminism project” (McBride and Mazur 2010) has theorized progress towards feminist goals, and does so mainly around two sets of actors (women's policy agencies and

women's movements). The landmark comparative work of Htun and Weldon (2010) on progress towards women's rights necessarily had to use "thin" data to determine its substantial indicators. Other large comparative research projects such as *MAGEEQ* and *QUING* have predominantly focused on discursive politics, filling an existing gap in knowledge about gender+ equality policies, but at times losing sight of the roles of actors, resources, and political opportunities. The scarce attention to intersectional inequalities in both research and theorizing on gender-equality change also presents a substantial challenge to our understanding of the dynamics of gender+ equality change, as we are left wondering when and where are which other inequality dimensions decisive for gender inequality outcomes. If we are to understand and prevent the social exclusions resulting from particular gender+ equality politics, we need to answer this question, combining, translating, and integrating insights from existing theoretical and empirical research.

Linked to the problems of fragmentation and the lack of attention for political and structural intersectionality, there is one more issue that has to be highlighted in discussing the existing theorizing on this topic: these theories' blind spot for the contexts in which gender-equality change attempts take place. More specifically, research about Europe too often takes democracy and the welfare state for granted, therefore failing to theorize the importance of both democracy and welfare state with their corresponding master frames, opportunity structures, and actors. Europe is hardly ever analyzed as a set of countries that are positioned differently on democracy, nor are the European varieties of democracies analyzed in their ongoing dynamic changes. Recent shocks such as the exclusion of Hungary from the Freedom House list of democratic free countries have apparently not yet been processed, and promising theories on democracy such as Tilly (2007) and Walby (2009) have not been used much in comparative political research. The bulk of research on gender and democracy in Europe has a numerical fallacy in its dominant focus on the number of women in parliaments and governments (Lombardo et al. 2007). Research on gender-equality policies, on the other hand, more often relates to varieties of welfare states, but these studies are mostly restricted to the old Europe (almost 30 years after the end of the Cold War!). It is very rare to see comparisons across all EU countries, and even rarer to see them expanded to the wider set of Council of Europe member states. There is a clear need to recognize the variety of European democracies as a crucial factor impacting on the countries' differential chances of bringing forward gender+ equality (see also Chapters 2 and 3 in this book).

Moreover, politics and gender research in the European context have mainly studied religion as a component of inequality reproduction, as linked to racialization, as linked to immigration in Europe (Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos 2013), as related to clashes between religious and other rights, or in the context of multiculturalism and gender (see Lépinard 2012; Lettinga and Saharso 2014; Rosenberger and Sauer 2013; Siim 2014). The attention has been focused on

marginalized and racialized faiths in Europe such as Islam, and only recently is there attention for the role of organized religion—mainly the Catholic Church and the Holy See—in opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies (van de Wal and Verloo 2009; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Paternotte, Piette, and van der Dussen 2016). Though there is also some attention for the role of the Orthodox Church as an organized actor against gender and sexual equality (see Spehar 2012; Rivkin-Fish 2013; Drezgić 2015), it is still limited. Yet, in view of the current developments in Europe, it is urgent that we include dimensions of democracy, organized religion, and the welfare state into our understandings of contextualized oppositional dynamics of gender+ equality change.

Who Are the Most Important Actors Engaging in Oppositional Activities?

Existing scholarship has not yet identified the most important actors acting in opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies. Without drawing borders between them too strictly, oppositional actors can be expected to come from three different areas. The first is the formal domain of the polity, of political decision-making, policy development, and implementation, involving actors from parliament, government, courts, and the state bureaucracy. Organized religion also is part of this domain, as it “governs” its members in various ways and is often intertwined with the state (Walby 2009). Even if these actors at times might act favorably to gender+ equality change, we can expect them to be oppositional actors because of the ongoing existence of gender inequality regimes, which tells us that continuing gender inequality has to be in the interest of the actors who are currently powerful in the polity. Such actors can also be expected to have enough resources to engage in opposition activities.

The second area where oppositional actors can be found is the domain of civil society. These are actors such as social movements, interest groups, and other parts of civil society engaging with the state in political processes and in decision-making contestations. Within this second area, a distinction has to be made between the actors working for and those against equality and social justice. Those who work for equality and social justice mainly focus on gender, or predominantly on one specific other structural inequalities (such as class or race), and they may have varying levels of institutionalization (Verloo 2006). While opposition can clearly be expected from groups engaging in anti-equality activities, opposition can also come from actors in favor of equality and social justice when those feel the need to compete with feminist endeavors.

The last area is comprised of all other domains of society, where powerful domain actors may use their power to engage in activities that oppose feminist politics and gender+ equality policies in that domain. Given the tenacity of economic gender inequality, the economy is a crucial domain from which oppositional actors can be expected, as many powerful actors from corporations

and industry might see gender+ equality as going against their (profit-making) interest.

Introducing the Book and Its Chapters

Looking at opposition to gender+ equality in Europe, and how we can best understand and study it, our challenges are both theoretical and empirical. This book addresses the strong need to understand gender+ equality politics as intersectional and dynamic, driven by both actor- and structure-based dynamics, by both discursive and material power mechanisms, and as interventions in specific societies. The most promising theoretical strands to address these issues are social-movement theories and social complexity theory, this book contends, and these theories will be further presented and discussed by Roggeband in Chapter 2 and by me in Chapter 3.

As a whole, this book aims to showcase and understand the differentiation in oppositional actors and activities, and the oppositional dynamics at different stages of the political and policy process, including which actors oppose gender+ equality. In doing this, the book presents knowledge about the overall chances for feminist politics and gender+ equality policies to succeed or fail.

The book consists of three parts. Part I describes the challenges and opportunities that come with this book's ambition to understand the dynamics of opposition to gender-equality policies in Europe. The conceptual challenges are many. This part addresses how a concept such as opposition links with scholarship on social movements and the countermovements they at times generate. Part I also presents theoretical ideas that help understand opposition as dynamics, as interactions between what happens in society and in policy making, as interactions between gender-equality actors and actors pushing against gender equality, and as a phenomenon that can change form and substance along the various stages of policy making.

This first chapter addresses these challenges and presents some preliminary conclusions (such as a definition of opposition to gender equality). Conny Roggeband and Mieke Verloo, in Chapter 2, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Making Sense of Opposition to Feminisms from a Social-Movement Perspective" and in Chapter 3, "Understanding the Dynamics of Opposition to Gender-Equality Change: Lessons from and for Social Complexity Theory", then each take on a particular set of theories that can be expected to offer building blocks for a comprehensive understanding of opposition to gender equality in Europe. While Roggeband draws lessons from social movement theory, showing what is and what is not useful for the purposes of this book, Verloo presents an operationalization of Sylvia Walby's social complexity theory. Jointly, these theoretical contributions are the main resources for the overall conclusions of the book in Part III.

Part II has eight empirical contributions, case studies on opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality in Europe that each address crucial dimensions

for understanding the dynamics of opposition to gender+ equality in Europe. In Chapter 4, “Patriarchy Fights Back: Violent Opposition to Gender Equality in Online Contexts”, Sofia Strid not only details the intensity and prevalence of online violence against feminist politics but also theorizes what can explain this form of opposition. Strid conceptualizes this oppositional violence as a means of the relatively powerful to maintain their economic, social, and political power positions.

Chapter 5 tackles forms of opposition that are less visible and present their own particular challenges. In “Indirect Opposition: Diffuse Barriers to Gender+ Equality in the European Union”, Petra Ahrens uses an extensive analysis of EU policymaking to develop a typology of three indirect forms of opposition to gender equality that can be helpful for a more comprehensive conceptualization. In Chapter 6, “Contesting Gender Equality in Domestic-Violence Policy Debates: Comparing Three Countries in Central and Eastern Europe”, Andrea Krizsán and Raluca Maria Popa focus on the action—reaction dynamics between opponents of domestic-violence policies and social-movement actors, showing how opposition to framing domestic violence as a gender-equality problem affects feminist mobilization. In Chapter 7, “A Feminist Opposition to Gender Equality? Making Sense of the Social Democratic Party’s Internal Struggle Over Extending Parental-Leave Quotas in Sweden”, Christina Bergqvist, Elin Bjarnegård, and Pår Zetterberg focus on the tension in left-oriented parties between social-justice claims based on class and based on gender. They show that proponents and opponents of parental-leave quota extensions in Sweden had very divergent understandings of the problems at stake and widely different motivations for their strategies. Combined with differences in their intra-party power positions, this led to a defeat for the proponents of the fathers-leave quota.

Elisabeth Holzleithner’s Chapter 8, “Subversion from Within: Opposition to Gender Equality in the Court of Justice of the European Union”, shows how the European Court’s interpretations of European laws on sexual and gender equality define the success or failure of governmental opposition to gender and sexual equality. In Chapter 9, David Paternotte presents “Unpacking Oppositional Success: The French Laboratory”, in which he carefully analyzes the many factors that contributed to the remarkable success of the *Manif Pour Tous*, a movement against sexual and gender equality originating in France. In Chapter 10, “Popular Opposition to Economic Gender Equality and Homosexual Lifestyles”, Niels Spierings analyzes oppositional attitudes to gender and sexual equality, revealing more than just the positive trends and analyzing who are the strongest opponents. In the last empirical chapter, “Suspending Democracy, Harming Gender Equality: The 2013 Law on Pregnancy Termination in Macedonia”, Ana Miškovska Kajevska convincingly analyzes how the absence of democracy directly leads to increased power for opposition to abortion rights.

Together, the case studies cover all regions of Europe. Across the chapters, the authors showcase the variety of actors engaging in opposition: politicians,

experts, and civil–society groups (Krizsán and Popa); femocrats and policymakers (Ahrens); male and female politicians (Bergqvist et al.); courts and governments (Holzleithner); reactionary individuals and media (Strid); the Catholic Church and related groups (Paternotte); and citizens (Spierings). Krizsán and Popa, Paternotte, as well as Holzleithner pay extensive attention to discursive dynamics and how these impact on the opposition’s (potential) success. In these case studies, all authors engage with the question of how to grasp the dynamics of opposition as linked to the role of various actors and to the interplay between material and discursive mechanisms.

Part III then presents a framework for understanding oppositional dynamics to feminist politics and gender+ equality policy change, and thus improve our assessment of which actions could best address (and defeat) which forms of opposition. In the final chapter, “How To Study Varieties of Opposition To Gender+ Equality in Europe? Lessons from this Book, Conceptual Building Blocks, and Puzzles to Address”, I then assess the value of the theoretical elements presented in Part I (actors and mechanisms, variations of hidden opposition and silencing, high-potential building blocks from social movement and social complexity theory) against the empirical material presented in Part II. This chapter identifies which of these building blocks seem most promising and why, also flagging the challenges and puzzles ahead. By covering the lessons that can be learned from both the theory and the case studies about opposition to feminist politics and gender+ equality policies, this book hopes to better understand opposition successes and highlight valuable routes for possible action against opposition.

In addressing these questions, this final chapter aims at being an inspiration for further research and for further debate about the rise and fall of gender+ equalities in contemporary Europe.

Note

- 1 In line with Schimmelfennig (2016), Europe here is meant as “including all countries that stand a theoretical chance to become EU members. This includes Turkey, the countries of the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), and the Western former Soviet republics (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) but not Russia, i.e. currently 44 European countries. The European micro-states are excluded, too.” (:19)

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