The integration process has had an impact on the domestic policies, politics and polities of European Union (EU) member states, on candidate countries and third countries targeted by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This impact is investigated by “Europeanization” studies. This chapter addresses the interaction of feminist and gender scholarship with the Europeanization literature and its different streams. Europeanization does not rely upon a fully-fledged, empirically tested theory, but rather derives from the analysis of top-down implications of what have long been framed as only bottom-up processes. As member states voluntarily conceded competences to a supranational entity, they got caught in a process of adaptation to EU norms, policy instruments and “ways of doing things” generating a number of scenarios for convergence, divergence or norm contestation, depending on domestic settings, actors and policy domains. Europeanization scholars have attempted to make sense of diverse situations, investigating facilitation and causality mechanisms, different logics underpinning norm adaptation and subsequent policy change, as well as actors’ configurations or conflicting discursive uses of the EU.

By changing the lens, Europeanization considerably complicated the picture well beyond the dynamics covered by what had so far constituted the main theories of European integration: Liberal intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalism and, more recently, neo-institutionalism. By shifting the focus to new dimensions such as ideas and discourses, it paved the way for a more substantial contribution to theorizing integration from gender scholarship, well suited to consider power dynamics at play in discursive framing or resources redistribution processes as those unfold by Europeanization (see also Lombardo and Kantola in this volume).

This dialogue has not been straightforward and has involved many scholars from Europeanization and gender and politics studies working in the realm of neo-institutionalism. Significant contributions have been made by countless case and comparative studies on many countries and policy domains, with a specific interest on soft Europeanization, particularly through gender mainstreaming. These studies have highlighted the importance of gender regimes (see von Wahl in this volume) in Europeanization outcomes, also capturing Europeanization as a scenario for norm contestation, rather than convergence, especially as the diversity of European polities considerably increased with the accession to EU membership of eight, later 11 post-Socialist states from central and eastern Europe. Although far more limited, theoretical dialogue...
Europeanization has also developed with the Europeanization literature, especially as most recent trends in this field are reflected in the literature about gendering Europe.

Those trends derive from the current crises of integration, no longer perceived as a one-way process, geographically diluted and heavily contested. Yet, gendering Europeanization theory in times of “de-Europeanization” (Agh 2015) is only paradoxical at first sight. Addressing the impact of Europe on the politicization and regulation of gender rights in EU member states and accession countries, offers ways to grasp some of the most revealing dynamics currently at play in Europe. At a time when the common European home is burning, gendering Europeanization studies contributes to revealing the origins of the fire.

To unfold this agenda, we will first disentangle what we understand by Europeanization, introducing the concept and key theoretical issues through which it has been framed in “mainstream” literature. Second, we will explore how gender scholarship has engaged with this literature and addressed “mainstream” questions. Third, based on a brief state-of-the-art we will reflect upon the original contribution from the gender scholarship to the current agenda of Europeanization studies. Our core argument is that gender rights have become one of the most divisive and politically loaded issues in the European public space, around which concepts of European identity are built, political alliances shift, and new cleavages emerge. Illustrating these dynamics through examples borrowed from recent EU cases studies, we will outline a potential research agenda to further gendering Europeanization literature.

“When Europe hits home”

As a scholarly concept, Europeanization is intrinsically different from integration theories which have progressively constituted the core – and roughly successive mainstreams – of the discipline, e.g. (liberal) intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalist (and multi-level governance) and the different streams of neo-institutionalism – all primarily attempt to explain why and how integration happens. Instead, Europeanization was forged by the mid-1990s (Ladrech 1994; Mény et al. 1996) to account for the implications of integration for national (and sub-national) polities, hence to make sense of how “Europe hits home” (Börzel and Risse 2002).

Integration theories have focused on processes by which member states were transferring fractions of their sovereignty to an increasingly complex supranational entity, also addressing the emergence of EU policies and of a new transnational administrative and political elite. Liberal intergovernmentalism underlined how member states shape the integration process through pursuing their own interests, whereas neo-functionalist highlighted the largely market- and policy-driven dynamics by which integration happened, such as the spill-over effect as driver for the expansion of EU institutions, capacities and competences. Multi-level governance addressed one of the key aspects of this logics of consequence: the emergence of a multi-layered governance system involving subnational, national and supranational levels and a variety of both hard and soft governmentality instruments. Neo-institutionalism analyzed that institutional arrangements matter and that EU integration is also shaped by institutions through the role of institutional paths (history), discourses and actors, which considerably complicates the picture encapsulated in the traditional “domestic interests vs. bureaucratic expansion” opposition (see MacRae in this volume).

While these theories focus on bottom-up processes (Börzel and Risse 2003, 55), new research objects emerged as result of the EU’s geographical and political expansion. Those primarily concern the relation of the EU to its parts – member states and regions with legislative capacity, but also to candidate countries and, ultimately, countries covered by the ENP in so far they are exposed to the influence of EU institutions and European law on their own internal
Thus, Europeanization initially emerged by changing the lens on integration: from the “uploading” of policy competency and interests’ intermediation from the state to the supranational level to the “downloading” of EU norms, ways of doing things and how it affects (sub)national policies (including policy standards, instruments and narratives), politics (including processes of interest aggregation and intermediation) and polities (including political and judicial institutions or public administration).

These top-down approaches initially explored the degrees of convergence of domestic policies and polities with EU norms. Through case studies carried out on different countries and policy areas, Europeanization scholars explored how the “goodness of fit” (Cowles et al. 2001) between the European and the domestic level determines the degree of adaptational pressure generated by Europeanization on member states. They considered the validity of the idea that “the lower the compatibility (…), the higher the adaptational pressure” (Börzel and Risse 2003, 5). Elaborating on rational choice and sociological institutionalism, such works evidenced two competing, yet not mutually exclusive logics: domestic change as a process of resource redistribution, by which domestic actors make use of the windows of opportunities opened by the misfit between national and EU norms, and/or as a process of socialization and learning by which those actors are exposed (notably via norm entrepreneurs or epistemic communities) to new rules, norms, practices or meanings, which they have to incorporate into their own practices or structures.

This discussion has been supported by numerous ever-finer grained studies which have revealed a myriad of configurations for domestic change, evidencing that domestic actors do not fit EU incentives smoothly, and underlining the specificities of the EU accession context. However, many of these studies fail to answer why policy change happens. Few works have adopted a broader, normative focus, driven by the strong conditionality of the EU accession process linked to the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria (Hillion 2014; see also Chiva in this volume) and the Eastern Enlargement (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005). Falkner and Treib (2008) attempted to draw different regimes – or “worlds” – of compliance among member states and candidate countries, based on variables such as domestic policy styles or institutional paths. But the “world of dead letters” they described for those countries, where adaptation to the EU norm often amounts to lip service, incidentally matched with (candidate) countries endowed with more complicated and/or recent paths to market democracy, contradicting the “goodness of fit” approach and raising suspicion of culturalist biases.

The Europeanization literature has become a fast-growing sub-field of European studies, despite (or possibly due to) its lack of a clear focus. Definitions flourished to capture this conceptual complexity, some being more authoritative than others, as Radaelli’s definition of Europeanization as

\[ \text{processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.} \]

(Radaelli 2004, 3)

However, such an extensive definition did not help clarify whether Europeanization was a new theory (Börzel and Risse 2003) or a mere principle for organizing empirical findings (Radaelli 2004).
Clarification attempts all fell short and disputes have regularly ensued around the degree of concept-stretching and the usefulness of the concept (for example, Radaelli 2000, 2012). Critiques have argued that Europeanization too often involves simply studying convergence/compliance with EU rule. Others show that the concept is often used in a very loose way to address how advanced a polity should be considered vis-à-vis European standards of democracy, or highlight how Europeanization as a concept fails to establish causal mechanisms between EU and domestic variables (Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2012).

A more fundamental critique undermines the status of Europeanization as a fully-fledged theory: arguably, Europeanization draws on other, more established theories for building its own hypotheses and gets operationalized. A large portion of the Europeanization literature has indeed developed at the intersection of different types of new institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996): historical, rational choice, sociological and discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2008, 2010). Elaborating on these three older “new institutionalisms,” Schmidt’s discursive institutionalism has proven to be the most useful for understanding Europeanization. It attempts to reconcile ideas and institutions by focusing on discourses as mediating factors for explaining why, how and when political actors internalize EU norms by exchanging ideas and (re)framing their strategic interests within the institutional settings in which they act. Schmidt’s insights thus help to tackle one of the Europeanization unanswered question: Under which circumstances and in which direction does domestic policy change occur? The over-representation of these four new institutionalist streams in Europeanization literature limited its capacity to evolve towards a new “grand theory” of European integration. As a further evidence of its dubious status, while new institutionalisms all feature along with older theories in the latest edition of Wiener, Börzel and Risse (2019), Europeanization does not; it is only addressed as a mere phase of European integration history.

Despite these limitations, Europeanization studies have contributed to shaping scholarly interest for the largely unexpected ways “Europe hits home”, usefully broadening our understanding of European integration as both a bottom-up and top-down process. Europeanization as convergence was quickly challenged by eastern enlargement, which dramatically increased the diversity of historical experiences, party systems, welfare states, policy styles or gender regimes, despite its unprecedented conditionality (Caporaso 2008). The real-life experiment of 11 countries – including nine post-socialist states – joining the EU between 2004 and 2013 thus demonstrated that divergence and norm contestation are the rule, rather than the exception.

Europeanization through a gender lens: “going soft” vs. meaning contestation

Gender is a good test case for Europeanization. Gender scholarship has actively contributed to Europeanization’s fortune, especially if compared to its earlier, rather limited contribution to theorizing integration (Kronsell 2012). This is certainly due to the attention paid – both from gender and politics and from EU scholars – to the consolidation of gender equality as a pillar of the European Employment Strategy (1994) and as an objective of the Union enshrined in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, and the corresponding adoption of gender mainstreaming by EU institutions, policies and (funding) instruments. As the EU was expanding the implementation of gender equality through the broader agenda of non-discrimination held in the new directives adopted from 2000 onwards (see Solanke in this volume), it provided member states and subnational entities with a broad set of incentives for Europeanizing gender. Those included treaty provisions, directives, European Court of Justice’s case law (see Guth and Elfving in this volume), and one of EU’s most sophisticated soft instrument: gender mainstreaming. For EU
integration scholars (Mazey 1998, 2000; Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Shaw 2000), gender equality policies perfectly fitted the spill-over narrative, as EU institutions had found in gender equality their “Trojan horse” for expanding competencies from the market to social policies (Hoskyns 1996). From a neo-institutionalist perspective, mainstreaming gender throughout EU policies and funds offered a number of scenarios for the dual logic of consequence and appropriateness of Europeanization to unfold (Beveridge 2012; Jacquot 2010). Women’s interests’ intermediation through the European Women’s Lobby also received some attention, mainly at EU level (Helfferich and Kolb 2001; see also Lang in this volume).

Initially, few studies discussed national implementation of EU gender equality policies; the first attempts explicitly focusing on the Europeanization of gender and anti-discrimination policies mostly came from the Europeanization literature (Caporaso and Jupille 2001; Geddes and Guiraudon 2004). Liebert (2003) coordinated the first substantial contribution from gender scholarship. In her study, feminist institutionalism was mobilized to map Europeanization patterns in the field of gender equality policies in six member states, identifying three drivers to the Europeanization of gender equality policies: institutional (EU legislation, policy and legal sentences); cognitive (frames that help mobilizing public opinion and reframing public policy issues); and interaction mechanisms (related to developing political representation and building transnational advocacy networks). Liebert’s mechanism-based theoretical framework thus attempted to bring together two different strands in Europeanization literature through a gender lens: the top-down strand, focused on convergence, and the horizontal/comparative strand, focused on contestation. With its increased diversity in terms of institutional legacies and gender regimes, eastern enlargement also prompted interest for Europeanizing gender in (new) member states (Krizsán 2009; Roth 2008) as well as for comparisons between the latest enlargement waves in terms of EU gender equality acquis transposition (Galligan and Clavero 2012). More recently, the Europeanization of gender interest intermediation also received some attention, for example through the “NGO-ization” of ILGA-Europe, the umbrella of LGBT organizations in Europe (Paternotte 2016).

Gender scholars have engaged with Europeanization literature most directly through discursive institutionalism, emphasizing the role of ideas and discourses in shaping political change in order to make sense of Europeanization as conflict. Lombardo and Kantola (in this volume) illustrate that discursive politics approaches have flourished (Bacchi 2009; Kantola 2010; Lombardo et al. 2009; Verloo 2007). Rather than approaching discourses as mere rhetorical devices, these scholars have focused on their meaning and contestation, showing that concepts like gender equality have no essential meaning but are rather shaped by political goals. Changes in meaning result from the activities of different policy actors trying to steer the concept’s meaning in their intended direction through different strategic framings adapted to specific political and institutional contexts. These approaches, which consider frames not only as intentional strategic interventions to shape discourses but also as unintentional (based on deeply entrenched gender norms or stereotypes, for instance), have permeated the analysis of Europeanization of gender equality policies.

Lombardo and Forest (2012) attempted to bring this agenda forward, developing a common analytical framework for studies carried out so far on parallel tracks. Simultaneously, they also sketched a first research agenda for gendering Europeanization studies. Initiated under the EU-funded QUING project, this framework has been pursued since then by scholars located in different parts of the enlarged EU and working on a wide range of issues such as, for example, gender-based violence (Kriszan and Popa 2010), the politics of gender at the subnational level (Alonso 2017), the institutionalization of intersectionality (Kriszan et al. 2012) or the politics of LGBTQ rights (Kuhar 2012).
While ‘Europeanization as contention’ has largely pervaded the analytical frameworks of gender scholars, the opposite does not apply to the same extent, even as (female) European integration scholars well positioned in the field (Abels and Mushaben 2012; Abels and MacRae 2016) have called for the gendering of Europeanization in theory and practice. This is mainly to be addressed as the result of the most recent trends in Europeanization literature leading to stretching the concept further in empirical and geographical terms.

De-Europeanization? Gendering Europe in troubled times

Times have changed in addressing the Europeanization of domestic policies, politics and polities. The Euro-debt crisis has left profound divisions, evidencing the limits of European solidarity (see Kantola and Lombardo in this volume). These wounds have been revived by the 2015 migratory (Schengen) crisis (see Krause and Schwenken in this volume) and, even more recently, by the initial lack of EU coordination in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Brexit has shown that the integration of the continent was not a one-way process but could be reversed at any moment by a majority vote in any of the EU member states – with severe gender consequences (see Guerrina and Masselot in this volume). The legal disputes arising from coordinated attacks on the EU’s rule of law demonstrate that eastern enlargement has not fully bridged the East–West divide, and has contributed to a redefinition of political cleavages around different understandings of Europeanness throughout Europe.

The multiple crises have monopolized much of the EU agenda for the past decade, leaving little space for expanding social and civil rights or challenging inequalities. From 2009 to 2019, no major policy innovation has thus been pushed forward by the European Commission (see Hartlapp et al. in this volume). The initiatives that have passed have been of mixed success. The 2017 Social Summit, the first in 20 years, led to the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights, but this was heavily criticized for its non-legally binding nature and lack of ambition. In 2015, a directive aiming at expanding maternity leave to 18 weeks was withdrawn. Four years later in June 2019, Directive 2019/1158 on work–life balance for parents and carers was adopted, but many of the innovations proposed by the European Commission had been removed due to the opposition from some member states (Chieregato 2020). Whether this directive will constitute a new landmark remains to be seen, especially as welfare states have been put under even greater pressure in the aftermath the Covid-19 crisis.

Similarly, after the 2013 accession of Croatia to the EU, the pace and geographical scope of eastern enlargement have been increasingly contested, relegating the Balkan states to the margins, as shown by the 2019 rebuke in the European Council to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia (a decision reversed in March 2020). Following armed conflicts with Russia ignited in 2008 and 2014, Georgia and Ukraine remain caught in the nets of the ENP, with very little chance to join the club. Turkey, officially still a candidate country, has demonstrated an ever greater defiance towards the EU, especially in relation to the war in Syria and the control of refugees’ paths to Europe. Even inside the club, European scholars have struggled to understand self-proclaimed (Hungary, Poland) and “wannabe” (until recently, Romania and Slovakia) illiberal democracies viewing (top-down) Europeanization as the ultimate evil (see also Siim and Fiig in this volume).

If the “ever closer Union” branded in the EU treaties and the enlargement process have both lost their compass, where does this leave Europeanization? Ironically, the weakness of the concept makes it possible for it to be redefined as a process through which references to EU values, legislation and policies become an asset for political conflict. These conflicts may arise when the EU’s core principles – the rule of law, freedom of movement, intra-European solidarity or
gender equality are being renegotiated, contested and stretched in order to fit reactionary political aims that may be pursued by forces fundamentally opposed to EU integration.

**Europeanization “beyond Europe”, as conflict or “De-Europeanization”**

As a result, the research agenda has largely shifted from top-down approaches, once the trademark of Europeanization, to more bottom-up perspectives. The focus of these perspectives covers a wide range, from assessing different degrees of convergence, to conflicting usages of references to EU norms and policy framework, and from a scenario of greater integration to competing scenarios of disintegration. From a Europeanization perspective, this does not mean that the EU no longer affects interest intermediation and national polities, but that its impact can hardly be viewed as generating predictable effects. EU law still prevails, but it is increasingly contested. Domestic agents continue to refer to EU law and policies, but frequently use these to support their views opposing further integration. Policies implemented at the (sub)national level still bear the mark of EU recommendations, methods and funding, but those no longer provide sufficient legitimacy to prevent divergence and conflict. Whereas new efforts are invested in theorizing crises (Wiener 2019, 262), Europeanization scholars focus on different directions.

First, Europeanization expanded towards less politically loaded fields such as climate, energy or research and innovation policies. Although politics also matters in those fields, the pressing and multi-faceted reality of climate change, or the geopolitics of energy and innovation in which the EU member states have a shared understanding of the threats posed by isolationist US and aggressive China and Russia, have led to increasing the pace of EU integration in those areas, with growing convergence as a result.

Second, numerous studies address Europeanization outside the EU and candidate countries in countries covered either by the ENP or EU international development policies, where despite the multiple crises in which it has been lately submerged, the Union remains a powerfully attractive supranational entity. As the EU has also become an important actor of international development, its impact both on member states development agencies or NGOs, and in beneficiary countries, has been increasingly assessed in terms of Europeanization (see Debusscher in this volume). Understandably, the geographical expansion of Europeanization beyond the EU or even beyond Europe (Schimmelfennig 2012) contributes to further blurring the concept, leaving it frequently disconnected from European integration dynamics.

A third trend consists in focusing on conflicts of norms, rather than norm adaptation. The litmus case brought to ‘Europeanization as conflict’ is Turkey, where a fully-fledged process of de-Europeanization appears to have been reinforced since the failed coup attempt of July 2016 (Gurkan 2019). This process evidences that even in those areas where convergence had been relatively far-reaching, reversal can happen, triggered by the rejection of norms and principles powering the rationale of EU policies. Conflicts around the rule of law, independence of the judiciary or freedom of the press in central European countries also provide case studies to empirically analyze how different usages of the reference to Europe (as a body of values and institutions or a culture under threat) compete, challenging foundational principles such as the supremacy of EU law.

While studying Europeanization only in those areas where convergence prevails, outside Europe or primarily as conflict should lead to posing crucial theoretical questions, it is worth underlying that above outlined streams essentially correspond to empirically oriented research and have not yet materialized in fully articulated theorization efforts.
Reflecting new trends in the Gender and EU scholarship

The gender and EU literature reflects these trends to a different extent. With respect to the first, less politically loaded policy fields, we can observe that whereas an increased number of scholars are tackling the gendered dimension of climate change, there are few works that have addressed this dimension in the field of EU policies. Allwood (2014; in this volume), for instance, underlines the persistent invisibility of gender in EU climate change policy, despite endorsing the role of champion both on advancing gender equality and fighting climate change. Similarly, Linková and Mergaert (in this volume) show that in the area of research and innovation policies the gender agenda has gained momentum for two decades since the EU Commission’s first communication on women in science (1999). While there is an extensive literature on the rationale for such a policy, relatively little has been written about the gendered impact from a Europeanization lens. Abels and Mushaben (2012) and Mergaert and Minto (2015) highlighted the gap between the gender agenda brought forward by the EU Commission to the member states and the research sector, and the degree to which it permeates its own policy instruments such as framework programmes and funding schemes. Mergaert and Lombardo (2014) took this agenda forward by analyzing the specific resistances opposed to gendering EU research policies, again primarily at the level of EU Commission services. To date, national (or sub-national) policy settings have been primarily addressed through grey literature (EIGE 2015), evidencing a variegated landscape where, despite the diversity of academic and research environments as well as country-specific resistances, Europeanization keeps generating convergence. Beyond those isolated contributions it is yet arguably the last stream, i.e., “Europeanization as contention” or conflict, that offers more avenues for the gender and Europeanization scholarships to interact.

Gender scholars interested in the impact of EU norms, policies and soft instruments appear to be especially well-equipped to make sense of the unexpected impacts of Europeanization dynamics. Key aspects include the role of soft policy instruments developed in the fields of gender equality and anti-discrimination, in shaping gender advocates’ agendas, cognitive learning processes, repertoires of contention and discursive references to the EU. Gender mainstreaming has been supported by the unfolding of EU gender equality strategies, the incorporation of gender equality into structural (such as the Social European Fund) and regional funding schemes, as well as in some specific EU policies such as research and innovation. Beyond providing insight into the multi-layered impact of soft policy instruments, this scholarship also highlights that these processes are far from producing homogeneous effects and do not occur without contention and resistances.

Another crucial contribution is that references to the EU legal and policy order can be mobilized by domestic actors: (1) even in the absence of any EU hard law (or policy) on a specific issue and (2) by both supporters and opponents of convergence with the EU norms. Evidence now abounds that during the latest EU enlargement round, initiated in 2004, gender advocates in parliamentary politics or civil society have discursively framed their claims by referring to EU accession conditionality or ‘Europeanization as modernization’ even in the absence of EU hard law. This was the case, for example, in passing legislation on gender-based violence, (Kriszan and Popa 2010), or in the battle for same-sex marriage recognition (Forest 2018).

The backlash on gender rights in several central and eastern European member states has further shown that discursive-sociological approaches derived both from neo-institutionalism and feminist institutionalism are well-fitted to grasp the complex “usages” of Europe. In Hungary and Poland, antagonistic references to the EU are thus mobilized both to support gender rights and by those defending a concept of Europeanness rooted in traditional Christian family values, which EU
norms and institutions are believed to undermine (as in the case of the countries’ veto against EU accession to the Istanbul Convention on violence against women; see Roggeband in this volume). In Croatia (2013), Romania and Slovakia (2015), these discursive frames of Europeanization were pitted against each other during debates over the (non)recognition of same-sex marriage and the enshrinement of heterosexual marriage in the constitutions. In Croatia, this debate followed immediately on an earlier referendum in which EU membership had been approved by a wide margin. A similar majority approved the Church-supported bid for constitutionalizing heteronormative marriage. During the campaign conservative voices carefully crafted their message, insisting that the recognition of same-sex marriage went far beyond EU requirements on gender-related issues (Kuhar 2012). Additionally, the implications of the De-Europeanization process in Turkey for gender equality have been extensively covered in Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Cin (2020).

**Towards a common research agenda: gender, the new cleavage of Europe?**

With the surge of right-wing populisms, many with a clear anti-gender agenda, across Europe, as well as the unprecedented challenges to European integration posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the analytical apparatus developed by the gender and Europeanization literature can make a crucial, but as of yet undefined, contribution to the field. As shown in Liebert (2016, 167), in the aftermath of the Euro-debt crisis, gender approaches to Europeanization provided lessons “on how to make gender equality work despite the double pressure of fiscal consolidation and (...) structural reforms on the one hand, and the present anti-feminist, anti-modern tide of Euroscepticism on the other hand” and thus “help rebuild citizen’s trust in the EU.” As both debt and trust deficits are deepening, it is again necessary to underline that the gender and EU scholarship does not occupy the position it should in assessing the current stage of EU integration. Its long-standing interest in, and capacity for, addressing ‘Europeanization as contention’ through diverging discursive and political usages of Europe on domestic and transnational EU polities, as well as its focus on one of the most cross-cutting cleavages in an ever-more divided Europe, makes it especially well-placed for this research.

From the mid-2010s, gender equality has generated unprecedented mobilizations (Kuhar and Paternotte 2018) with multiple demonstrations drawing in millions (Spain) or hundreds of thousands (Poland, Ireland, Switzerland) of participants. Opposition to granting gender rights has also mobilized large crowds in France (millions of participants in the Manif pour Tous demonstrations, protesting same-sex marriage legislation) or Poland (tens of thousands to support family values). Referenda called by broad-based unions of conservative forces and backed by the Catholic church to oppose state legislation on same-sex marriage (Slovenia) or support constitutionalizing heterosexual marriage (Croatia, Slovakia and Romania) have also mobilized large numbers, some of them (in Croatia and Slovenia) eventually achieved their goals. This opposition plays a central role in the rhetoric of the most recent wave of far-right populist parties, even in countries that usually rank among the most progressive on gender issues, including Finland, Spain and the Netherlands.

The politicization of gender rights in relation to the defence of nationhood and ethnic homogeneity, traditional values, Christian Europe against the alleged threats of Islamization or secularization is no longer confined to post-socialist Europe, but is increasingly pervading the discourse of anti-establishment political forces in southern, continental and northern Europe. Social media and other non-conventional mobilization strategies for which gender patterns appear to play a great role, facilitate this politicization, and may give masculinist and anti-feminist claims an unprecedented influence on new party programmes. Gender scholarship also highlights that nationalist and ultra-conservative forces engage in strategies of cooptation of the gender rights
agenda(s), in the name of European values, articulating women’s and LGBTQI’s rights as worthy of protection from the alleged rise of non-European populations. This was repeatedly shown during the recent migratory crisis.

Such blatant contradictions are of great relevance to analyzing the current stage of European politics and polities, but they cannot be understood without insights from the gender literature. This should not be done only from the perspective of comparative politics, tackling the populist challenge to Europe (see Siim and Fiig in this volume), but also through the gender and Europeanization literature, which brings together institutional, cognitive, behavioral and discursive elements to shed light on how the battle over gender rights has become the new game in town, and drawing out competing usages of Europe in the domestic politics of gender equality (Liebert 2016, 161).

Similarly, the politics of sanction, unfolding between the European Commission and Hungary and Poland for breach of the rule of law, need also be read through a broader context where the politicization of gender rights plays a key role. Even the ENP and EU foreign policies appear to be captured by this cross-cutting cleavage over gender issues. Although primarily aimed at provoking divisions rather than achieving concrete goals, the aggressive political agenda of Russia towards the EU, can hardly be understood without referring to the notion of “gayropa” articulated by Russian foreign policy theorists (Foxall 2019). This vision presents Russia and its allies as the refuge of the hierarchical sexual order, in contrast to a corrupted EU, which is embodied by its policies and institutions that propagate “gender theory” (Moss 2018). This, however, does not mean that the relation of the EU to its margins should be only understood through this clash of norms and discourses. From a post-colonial perspective, Kunz and Maisenbacher (2015) analyze the ambivalence of the EU itself, arguing that colonial practices of Othering and hierarchical Self-Other definitions are also being reproduced through the ENP.

Several questions remain. What are the potential theoretical implications of these political developments? And which way forward? On every single of those topics the gender scholarship can bring valuable insights, including how the EU dis-/empowers itself by de-/legalizing soft policy instruments, as the case of EU gender equality strategies shows. But those contributions have not yet formed a coordinated agenda, nor do they necessarily belong to the realm of European studies. They have remained isolated from each other, carried out from a variety of perspectives including social movement literature and feminist discursive institutionalism. Considering the cross-cutting relevance of the politicization of gender rights in relation to the politics of EU (dis-)integration means that a more coordinated and multi-disciplinary agenda is necessary. This agenda could further contribute to analyzing the impact of Europe on domestic politics and polities, as well as transnational Europeanization paths for gender equality advocates and their opponents. Thus, there must be more intense theoretical interactions between gender scholars and Europeanization scholars.

Another important aspect of a potential common research agenda consists of the growing, although often ambivalent attention that gender scholars pay to intersecting inequalities. This attention has developed to a large extent among those researchers tackling the politics of gender in a European comparative perspective. They have demonstrated that, at the EU level, the shift from gender equality to broader anti-discrimination policies failed to materialize in something other than an uneven focus on multiple discriminations, while the member states and regions were expressing growing interest in tackling intersecting inequalities (Kriszan et al. 2012). Because it contradicts standard policy styles, intersectionality is seldom genuinely institutionalized. When it is mentioned, it is primarily found in soft instruments such as policy programmes or plans. Since the crisis of European integration is partly rooted in its failure to tackle a variety of inequality grounds as they actually interact with each other, it remains necessary to further investigate the
institutionalization of intersectionality in Europe when gendering Europeanization theory. This endeavour is not only timely, but more urgent than ever as European integration has taken a dangerous path towards democratic delusion and dilution, and desperately requires a socially inclusive and genuinely democratic re-foundation.

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