Introduction

The interest in trying to understand the emerging policies and governance forms in the broad area of EU relations has led to a range of work with the ambition to say something of a general nature about processes of European integration. The EU polity exhibits manifold processes of policy making, politics and institution building. Studies of European integration have often dealt with the EU as if it were the “zoologist’s unknown animal” and have subsequently tried to get to know the nature of the beast, as Thomas Diez (1999:598) puts it. Consequently, many refer to the ‘sui generis’ nature of the EU and with this intend that the EU is not easily classifiable due to its particularity. Yet, others claim that the EU is not unique but comparable to other social science phenomena and thereby can fruitfully be assessed through insights from such theoretical traditions. Despite the attempt to interpret the nature of the EU ‘beast’ from various angles there has been but a few attempts to look at EU integration using feminist analysis. Indeed, there is a rather extensive literature on gender in the EU, but it is typically limited to specific policies or areas and does not deal with the EU polity more generally (exceptions are Flynn 1996, Shaw 2000, Hoskyns 2003). The main focus has been on how gender is played out in specific contexts in the EU, most prominently in the employment and development sector. Although it is not possible, nor desirable to speak of a feminist integration theory, it is still possible to say something about how the ‘EU beast’ is envisioned from a feminist point of view. Hence, such an approach is not limited to considering what is commonly called women’s’ issues or equality issues. Viewed from a feminist position it is evident that the EU affirms, shapes but also challenges gender power relations in all areas of its activities. In this respect the EU can hardly be considered unique but mirrors other European political structures. What may be its particularity is how the
specific gender relations expressed within the EU affect European subjects and the potential for transforming gender relations.

The purpose of this paper is to critically discuss the different ways that the integration literature has explained the emerging EU polity with the aim to outline what a feminist analysis may contribute with to the various approaches. Here, I also find support in Ben Rosamond’s work, he argues that better scholarly analysis can be obtained through a theoretically reflexive approach (2000:3). The reflection done here is over integration theories and particularly regarding their relevance for the most pressing issues for feminist EU scholars. In other words, in this article I take a number of integration theories at face value and reflect upon some of their central premises with a feminist critical eye. The arguments are made through an overview of the major trends within EU integration studies and starts with the approaches generated from international relations and goes on to look at multi-level governance and constructivist approaches. The ambition is to show how a conversation between integration theories and feminist approaches can highlight new and different aspects of the EU as a political project.

Admittedly feminist approaches are varied and take multiple forms nevertheless, I will base my analysis on a simple understanding of feminism. To be brief, the assumption is that feminism is concerned with the social construction around sex difference i.e. gender. Gender is a main organizing principle of social relations and it is the power asymmetries associated with gender relations that is the main focus of feminist critique. Furthermore, gender is understood as a relational category i.e. masculinities and femininities do not exist independently, but only in relation to one another. Feminists are committed to social change and hence, strive to transform the power asymmetries associated with gender relations.

I. Integration and International relations

The EU polity has been largely centered in a supranational-intergovernmental dichotomy. This is somewhat limiting because it “results in theoretical explanations of European integration claiming that the key actors involved and the institutional context of their interactions are either supranational or intergovernmental” nothing more and nothing less (Branch & Øhrgaard 1999:124). The main theoretical contributions that attempt to place European integration more firmly within theories of international relations (cf. Moravcsik 1998) do so by considering EU either as a case of the evolution of an international regime or as the making of supranational institutions. For our purposes, Dorette Corbey (1995) made a useful characterization of four major theories of European integration from an international relations perspective. She distinguishes along two dimensions: between levels of analysis (national or European) and between main actors in focus (non-state and state). In the following we will use these four categories, and discuss each one in turn.
**Intergovernmentalism**

Intergovernmentalism as a theory of European integration, takes the state as the level of analysis and highlights the role that governmental actors play. The idea in intergovernmentalism is, quite plainly, that in a world of anarchy, insecurity and fierce economic competition the EU polity is the outcome of individual member states’ survival strategies. It follows that processes of institutionalization in the EU polity can be expected to proceed only as long as autonomous states feel that it is beneficial to them. If it is not, integration will slow down, stop or even reverse. Taking account of such assumptions, the European Union polity would be acceptable to states only as long as “it strengthens, rather than weakens, their control over domestic affairs, permitting them to attain goals otherwise unachievable” (Moravcsik 1993: 507). Moravcsik points to three core elements of this approach, the assumption of state’s rational behavior, a liberal theory of the formation of preferences and the analysis of intergovernmental negotiation (1993:480, see also Moravcsik 1998).

In looking at intergovernmentalism the notion of the state as the main actor of relevance is highly interesting. States are considered the most relevant actors in the cooperative processes of integration. The state is represented by a government that presumably acts in the state’s best interest. The state will cooperate and participate in an intergovernmental agreement only as long as it benefits the state’s interests. Here we may take note of the arguments of feminist in international relations theory as the intergovernmentalist approach to EU integration in many ways resembles realist theory. The state and its security become the primary concerns supported unquestionably by all citizens and this is also the source of the state’s legitimacy (Tickner 1992:28,43). The focus on the unitary state is an obfuscation, feminist argue, because it does not consider the power relations in what is named the unitary state. Instead, the concept ‘the state’ makes invisible the power relations beneath. The notion that states are the main and most powerful actors seeking to optimize their interest reflect a hierarchical relationship between inside and outside, i.e. what is inside or outside the state’s borders. Such hierarchy has much affinity with the way gender differences are socially constructed (Tickner 1992:8-9). There is a clear distinction and hierarchy between what takes place inside the state and what takes place outside it in intergovernmental relations. The boundaries spoken of here between state and society intersect with the gendered boundaries of public (man) and private (woman) in the notion of citizenship (Pateman 1989, Elshtain 1993). What we may do is to begin questioning the relationship between the state and the individual or in other words, deconstruct the boundary between state and non-state imbedded in the intergovernmentalist approach, as for example, Christine Sylvester does for realism (1994:114-115). If the
government is the representative of the state interest we may ask on what grounds is that authority established? Do we see gender dynamics also here, so that the government in it intergovernmental affairs is represented by men? If this is so, does it not point to a double hierarchy of inside/outside state and public man/private woman worth noting? We may encourage intergovernmentalists to consider the question of authority, i.e. who speaks for the state, on what grounds and why?

In Moravcsik’s account, as with other intergovernmental theories, state’s are actors without a gender (without sex, class, ethnicity as well). Yet, when ‘states’ meet in intergovernmental negotiations at summits or in Council of Minister meetings it is individuals who meet. Moravcsik’s idea that states relate to each other and interact in the process of integration—in intergovernmental negotiations—does not take note of the fact that it is and has been almost exclusively men speaking for the state. It is no coincidence. Citizenship which defines the rights and duties of the state subjects remain gendered in Europe, regardless whether we consider it in the legal, social and political dimension (Voet 1998). The ‘full’ citizen has been the male citizen hence, men have had the unquestionable authority to represent the state in intergovernmental relations (Peterson and Runyan 1999:69-106). At the Gothenburg EU summit of June 2001 of the official list of participants of 471 there were 5 women present; the Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, the Danish Minister of Economic Affairs Marianne Jelved, the Finnish President Tarja Halmen, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Luxembourg Lydie Polfer and of Austria Benita Ferrero-Waldier. This was one of the few summits with a higher representation of women. An intergovernmentalist approach can neither understand why men more frequently than women represent states, nor why this now seems to be slowly changing. That men and to a much lesser extent women, represent the state in intergovernmental relations is irrelevant to intergovernmentalism. Interpersonal or gender relations are unimportant, determined to be excluded by a strict hierarchy between system, state and individual level in the theory. This lacuna is not simply an omission but works to reproduce the existing gender relations apparent in intergovernmental negotiations where ‘state’s interests’ are articulated. The feminist argument would be that intergovernmentalism takes gender power relations as given and focuses on cooperative processes between men. Put in a feminist terminology: Intergovernmentalism reinforces processes of homo-social behavior between men who represent institutions of hegemonic masculinity—a terminology to which I will return shortly.

The domestic politics approach

1 Participants at the summit were heads of state, prime ministers, foreign ministers and occasionally ministers of finance meet.
The domestic politics approach is similar to intergovernmentalism in its focus on the same level of analysis, the state. However, while the domestic politics approach also sees the EU polity as a result of national interests, it pays closer attention to the interplay between different national actors and their attempts to influence national preferences. An example of this line of work is Christine Ingebritsen’s study of Nordic States and European Integration (1998). According to Ingebritsen, the national positions of the Nordic States in relationship to EU integration is an expression of different domestic interests and preferences that have been negotiated and compromised. Integration then, is explained by relating it to the benefits and positions of the majority interest in a domestic setting. The domestic politics approach may accommodate gender interests as it highlights the various interests in society and recognizes that there is both a range of interests within each state and that these interests can be conflicting. Some groups within the same state may benefit from and support European integration others may not. For member states it is necessary to articulate one national position and hence, governments must compromise between interests or allow the stronger and more influential group to dominate the national position. Potentially, this approach could make space for and reflect the interest of women. In any member state there are various organizations composed of women or working to further women’s interests thus, it would certainly be valuable to study to what extent such different women’s interest groups have influenced the member state’s agenda. We may note that Ingebritsen in her study, does not consider the interest of women as a relevant explanation of the Nordic approach to European integration, this despite the fact that the gender gap in attitudes to European integration continues to be significant. Heather MacRae’s (2001) study of the Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty point to the importance of a gender gap. She suggests that Danish women feared that further integration would interfere with their possibilities to reconcile work and family life and thus voted ‘no’ in the referendum. MacRae’s analysis thereby goes ‘deeper’ than a domestic policy approach and questions the idea of consensual national interests. Whereas a domestic politics approach does open for the consideration of women’s interest as a base for the national position in EU relations the question is whether it is actually done in research. MacRae gave gender significance Ingebritsen did not.

Other complications are that women’s interests often are perceived in terms of specific interests and thereby considered less relevant for a common grounding of a national interest. Furthermore, women’s groups do not constitute powerful interest groups in any given member state. An example is women in the Scandinavian countries who, even though they have a high presence in politically elected institutions are not well-represented in interest groups. If we in addition, take seriously the insights of more critical approaches (such as the work of Connell

2 That this was the case at the time of the EU membership referendum and continues to be the case is verified for Sweden by the data from Statistiska Centralbyrån (www.scb.se)
1995, MacKinnon 1989, Ferguson 1984) who view the state in terms of a vehicle for the expression of the dominant interest in society, we ought to be particularly concerned about any claims of a common national interest based on interest mediation and compromise. According to Connell (1995) the state represents interest related to hegemonic masculinity embodied in institutions of the state apparatus. Institutions of hegemonic masculinity are those institutions that have historically been ‘owned’ by men and occupied by men’s bodies. Since such institutions have been largely governed by men they have also upheld norms associated with masculinity and heterosexuality. Obviously this has shaped agendas, politics and policies of such institutions. Feminists speak of hegemonic masculinity to connote that masculine norms are varied and multiple. Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant male norms. In order for them to be hegemonic it requires that cultural norms and institutional power mutually support such masculinity (Connell 1995:77f). Accordingly, we may suspect that in negotiations concerning EU issues the ‘state’ representatives will tend to secure the interests benefiting hegemonic masculinity. This means that states will not only be represented by men but also pursue issues and policies benefiting the interests of a dominant male collective.

An almost contrasting position yet a feminist one, is represented by Scandinavian feminists who tend to view the state as benevolent and open to women’s concerns and agendas. They consider Scandinavian countries as more ‘women-friendly’ because the polity includes women representatives and extensive welfare policies. Thereby, they tend to reflect women’s concerns more closely. Hence, we might look at the formation of state preferences and assess whether any difference between more ‘women friendly’ member states’ preferences and those less benevolent to women can be discerned. Clearly, an indication in that direction is the EU accession of Finland, Sweden and Austria which lead to an increased female presence in decision-making bodies. Some evidence also point to a more active gender agenda in the EU as another possible outcome, something which would merit more extensive research in the future.

In concluding, adding a gender dimension to domestic politics approaches could tell us more about the complexity of the power dynamics involved in state interest formation. We must keep in mind however, that to construct a woman’s interest is problematic. The notion of a specific woman’s interest has been fiercely and extensively contested within feminism because women’s interests are neither monolithic nor static. Women’s interests intersect with other interests most prominently related to class, ethnicity and sexuality and must always be related to the context of a particular time, place and circumstance. Furthermore, as most feminists argue, we should be weary of the difficulty in making a straightforward equation between women, women-friendly and feminist.
Neofunctionalism

In the following EU will be the level of analysis, the focus of both neo-functionalism and supranationalism. According to these integration theories the EU phenomena cannot simply be reduced to an aggregation of individual actors’ preferences. Integration is an outcome of the more or less spontaneous development of societal functions with such functions becoming increasingly sophisticated over time. Societies are shaped by interest groups and other societal organizations engaged in many diverse activities. Neo-functionalism downplays governmental actors and highlights non-state actors’ role in furthering integration. The European Commission is “the organizer and interest groups /are/ the catalyst of the process” (Corbey 1995:256). This approach is similar to the domestic politics approach as it highlights the importance of interest groups, yet the difference being that the groups are not limited to the domestic context and bound by state borders. Such groups are transnational and due to their transnational character develop interests that supercede the individual member states. Catherine Hoskyns argues that “patriarchal structures” firmly in place in the EU can only be “undermined through concerted action by a wide range of women forming alliances with other social groups” (2000:58). Hoskyns has in her work pointed to the importance of the European women’s lobby in challenging gendered politics of the EU (Hoskyns 1996 see also Elman 2003). Studies of the growth and role of transnational women’s movements and organization, following a neo-functional perspective can make valuable contributions to a feminist research agenda. Not the least because, the EU in general, and particularly the Commission, has historically valued the relationship with European wide interest groups and done so especially by financial support to those transnational groups that represent citizens’ interests.3 Hence, studies looking at how such groups are able to influence the political agenda seem highly relevant. The European Women’s Lobby is such an interest group working to raise issues about gender relations and further concerns of women.

Yet, another take on neo-functionalism would highlight the importance of and dominance by certain interest over others albeit, not restricted to the territorial boundaries of states or governmental relations. To date much less work has been generated looking at how the influence of feminist or women’s movement organization on the EU agenda fair in the relationship to other transnational interest and lobby groups present in Brussels. The lobby groups for business and industry are the most numerous with far more resources than other interest groups represented there. Since furthering human needs and social welfare is the primary concern of (neo-)functionalism, the governance structure should reflect this ambition

3 Questions can be raised as to which interests the European Women’s Lobby represent, and Amy Elman (2003) is in her work highly critical of how EWL relates to the European Women’s movement.
and perform the functions that assure that such requirements are accomplished (Rosamond 2000:33-34,50-57). If functionalist thinking has at all influenced the practical politics of the EU, furthering human needs has come to be equated with economic activities and trade. A central feminist critique comes to mind: the definition of human needs and social welfare does not stand outside gender power relations.

Practical gender politics in Europe to date have only further underlined that for one, social welfare is secondary to economic growth and security. Secondly, there is much hidden behind the category human pertaining to gender, class, ethnicity, citizenship etc. with correspondingly varying needs. Thus, economic actors have indeed been privileged by EU integration and the most pressing and overriding concern has been free trade and expanding trade relations. This is somewhat troubling since we know that women are weekly represented among economic actors in the public arena, and that the EU policies to date have favored the traditional male breadwinner model. Taking the European trade union federation (ETUC) as an example Myriam Bergamashi (2000:159) states that although women form “40% of the total trade union membership, they are underrepresented in decision-making bodies”. She continues: “there is no indication that this gender ratio is changing” because women remain outside the collective bargaining process both at national as well as the EU level (2000:169-172). This suggest that the functions that are increasingly being coordinated and integrated at the EU level through transnational interest formations do not only represent feminist politics, such as the European women’s lobby does, but that the long standing interest formations may represent a particular type of gender politics which has not yet been addressed by neo-functionalist work. To do so neo-functionalist approaches need to take a broader view of the interest groups in terms of their resources and their representativity. Can we say something about the interest groups in these terms, do they tend to further the interests of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ or is there a pluralism of varied interests expressed in the plethora of Eurogroups in Brussels? Neo-functionalist approaches have an unproblematic view of power—a liberal view—and therefore seldom raise the question of who is represented at the expense of what interests. They may have to do so in order to address more adequately the gender dimension of functional integration.

The idea of ‘spill-over’ is another important contribution of neo-functionalism. For activities to work smoothly there is a need for some authoritative arrangement and common regulation, for example EU harmonization directives. Once in place, the common norms agreed upon will not only make activities run easily but also further encourage activities, eventually it will spill-over into related issue areas and increase activity there. From the notion of spill-over we can note how EU activities and regulation has increase over the years to include more and more functional areas. A pertinent example is the environmental issue area, which was a concern to only a few when it was first discussed in the late 1960’s and indeed not considered
an area for the EEC jurisdiction. Yet, today there are around 250 directives and regulations dealing with the environmental issues. When environmental concerns were first introduced on the EEC agenda it was considered related to social and consumer issues (Kronsell 1997). However, when it comes to women’s or equal rights, spill-over effects have been much less extensive although discussions on equal rights in the Community started also in the 1970s. Policies on the equality of women have been limited and confined by the creation of the common market and equality has, until very recently, been considered in relationship to labor. From a neo-functionalist logic, one may therefore raise the question, why spill-over is so rampant in some issue areas like environmental concerns, and less so in other areas, like gender issues or equal rights?

**Supranationalism**

Supranationalism, like neo-functionalism, takes the EU as the level of analysis. EU is perceived as an arena where governmental actors meet to negotiate and bargain. They strike package deals, link issues and reach compromises and they learn not only to cooperate but also the value of common norms. In this process national preferences may also change. Stone Sweet and Sandholtz’s theory of supranational governance is one such example. Their theory resembles the neo-functionalist approaches of Ernst Haas and Karl Deutsch (Stone Sweet & Sandholtz 1997:300) with the important difference that it highlights the role of national governments over interest groups. They explain integration or the expansion of supranational governance in Europe by the growth in transaction patterns that have become transnational and more widespread in certain sectors, particularly in the areas of trade in goods. When obstacles to these transaction patterns arise, and when they take the form of different national regulations, then it incites an agreement—a supranational norm—that can very well initially be in the form of an intergovernmental agreement. As Stone Sweet and Sandholtz argue “...once movement toward the supranational pole begins, European rules generate a dynamic of their own…” (1997:310). This dynamic is institutionalized. Hence, the supranationalist also differs from the neo-functional approach in the prominence they attribute to institutions. Over time systems of supranational rules evolve. This because new obstacles to transaction arise, perhaps as a result of previous rules or because their content is unclear or disputed or because circumstances change. Subsequently, the new or changed rules guide future interactions because people will change their behavior in accordance with the rules. Institutionalization means that “…policy outcomes become ‘locked in’ channeling politics down specific paths and closing previously plausible alternatives” (Stone Sweet & Sandholtz 1997:313).

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4 The principle of gender mainstreaming is a different trend in gender policies aiming at the questioning of male norms in institutional practices of the EU
Supranationalism, suggests that EU agreements once put into place take on a dynamic of their own which is largely independent of the actions of individual member states.

This supranational dynamic is evident regarding gender issues. The European institutions have been crucial for setting the agenda for the political debate on gender in many European countries particularly where women’s representation and engagement in the political and economic sphere has been lower than other member countries. Here, supranational norms more generally and legislation like equal rights specifically, have been an important driving force to assure that every member state adopt equality legislation. Gender mainstreaming is another such norm adopted at the EU level (Caporaso..) introduced by the women’s movement and have had important consequences for the development of gender assessment of policies in the various member states (Gemma Carney). The impact of equality norms is not limited to actual legislation but also includes EU Commission studies, databases and various programs, all contributing to raising the awareness of gender issues and women’s rights in countries were it would otherwise not be salient on the political agenda (cf. Krook, 2001). Gardiner (1999), for example, argues that in Ireland more rights associated with women’s citizenship have come as a result of supranational, i.e. EU cooperation than from national institutions. It can be concluded that supranationalism as a theory of integration has a potential for the accommodation of a feminist agenda. How the adjustment to supranational norms regulating gender relations varies between states, for example between Nordic countries and Mediterranean countries, are additional issues to be studied within such framework. The enlargement countries represent yet, a different gender history having gone from particular socialist gender regimes with extensive citizenship rights, through a backlash and rather conservative gender regimes today. Future EU membership have a potential for a normative impact. Checkia makes for an example that such processes are on their way. Swedish feminist legal experts are commissioned by the EU to develop Check equality legislation and harmonizing it with Community law. To explore the enlargement countries’ adjustment to EU norms about gender representation and equity may contribute extensively to the understanding of the dynamics of supranationalism.

There appears to be a transformative potential in the establishment of gender related and equality norms on the EU agenda. The legal system makes it possible to challenge as well as enforce such norms when they are not implemented in the member states. This has been done in the context of the European court. Supranationalism in Stone Sweet and Sandholtz version has affinities with legal approaches to EU integration (for example Weiler, Burly & Mattli 1993). The emphasis is on the possibility of the European court and the litigation system to protect and generate equity norms. Accordingly it is the court, rather than any of the other EU

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5 Personal e-mail communication with Karin Lundström, February 28, 2003.
institutions, which drives integration forward by means of legally trying domestic law against EU norms and through citizen litigation. There is a certain likeness between legal feminist work on EU (Flynn 1996, Shaw 2000) and the supranationalist approach. The normative role attributed to the EU court may explain why feminist legal scholars (see for example Lundström 1999) seem to find EU more interesting than feminist political scientists or feminist international relations scholars do. Supranationalism with its focus on the dynamics of norms may be useful ways to understand how norms of equality and gender mainstreaming are perpetuated within the EU system.

The Supranationalist focus on rules may be both its strength as indicated above and simultaneously, its weakness. Although norms may be more generally understood in practical research, there is a tendency to mainly look at the texts of written directives. The institutions where the norms are embedded and the political and administrative processes that precede a norm become less relevant. Hence, institutions are reduced to intervening variables when the focus is more on the rules rather than the dynamic that they create. We will return to this later in the text. Most of the gendered practices of the EU as well as in the member states can be traced to well-established, highly institutionalized norms not necessarily fully expressed in written text. Moreover, such norms often deal with areas that are not directly—or, at first sight— not immediately related to gender issues. As many feminist have argued the problem of gender relations is related to dominance of the male-as-norm in most policy fields affecting individual lives. This constructs women either as invisible or as the deviant case. Hence the norms that are related to gender issues are formed well outside the realm of what is commonly understood as equality or gender issues. Quite clearly, a concern is whether supranationalist theory can adequately address well established norms and norms systems for their gendered dimension.

If we venture to look at the extensive work on the EU polity and policy in recent years it is noticeable that much of that research does not fit neatly into the four integration approaches described above but falls outside them. A noticeable development is the move away from a one-way view of EU as a phenomena for international relations theory. In the following we

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6 Male-as-norm is an important concept in feminist work and shows the power asymmetries of social relations: the male almost exclusively has a privileged position and is the norm. Because the male is norm, sex and gender is invisible, i.e. men do not have a gender, only women do. An example is that women’s groups are accused of furthering specific interests although exclusively male organizations can very well represent common interests. In many cases therefore women appear as deviant. To exemplify I want to point to some social categories: the worker, farmer, professor, soldier, politician may appear to be gender neutral i.e. they include both men and women. While we will not speak of the male farmer, male soldier or male politician (but of the male nurse) we often say women farmer, female soldier, female politician indicating that its gender is invisible and the female is a deviant case.
will proceed to look at two other contributions to the study of the EU integration, one is the constructivist approach and the other is the multi-level governance approach.

II. Constructivism and the EU

A special 1999 issue of the Journal of European Public Policy was dedicated to constructivism’s possible contribution to the study of integration. The editors proposed that:

“A significant amount of evidence suggests that, as a process, European integration has a transformative impact on the European state system and its constituent units. European integration itself has changed over the years, and it is reasonable to assume that in the process agents’ identity and subsequently their interests and behavior have equally changed (Christiansen et al 1999: 529).” As they argue, this change is not easily perceived when the EU is studied from the perspectives hereto discussed because such approaches largely neglect processes of identity formation. In the same volume, Checkel (1999:545) suggests that the constitutive dynamics whereby learning, socialization and routinization lead to normative diffusion and regard fundamental issues related to agent identity and interests which can not be captured adequately by the previously presented integration models. The constructivist focus on process implies that institutional norms, actors’ interests and identities are formed through interaction and thus, can change. Constructivists emphasize the social context within which policies, polity and identity are created through human interaction and are hence, not given. Constructivism as Guzzini (2000:159) argues “does not deny the existence of a phenomenal world, external to thought” but it does however challenge the notion, and he goes on “that phenomena can constitute themselves as objects of knowledge independently of discursive practices.”

Constructivism focuses also on institutions, as does supranationalim, with the difference that institutions are not merely viewed as intervening variables (Checkel 1999:548). Rather, institutions as ‘thick’ or embedded considers institutions as “the nexus where structures and agency intersect (Checkel 1999:557)”. Christiansen (1997:1350) too, proposes that constructivist analysis can be fruitful because the institutions are the middle ground between micro and macro politics of European integration and can bring to the fore the contradictions that are the particularities of this institution. Patricia Mann argues that one way to fruitfully approach institutions is to focus on and take seriously how individuals negotiate in the complexity of institutionalized relations of domination, yet, at the same time pointing out how political struggle and organization may take form (1994:31). Individual actors do not have the sole role of reproducing and upholding institutional norms, they are also important change agents because institutions have constraining as well as enabling effects simultaneously.
(Aspinwall & Schneider 2000:4; Christiansen 1997:74). In the organizational environment, contradictions often arise and individuals have to deal with them in every day practices.

Actors engaging in organizational activities tend to search for a meaning in what they do in their daily work. In doing so they often appeal to institutional norms. In order for communication to be possible and for the exchange and interaction between the individual actors in their daily activities to be comprehensible, individuals, be they representatives for governments, interest groups or the Commission, in every such act recreate the institutions of which they are a part. March and Olsen (1989) calls such a process the creation of meaning. Individual actors in organizations engage in identity politics. As the search for meaning in their work, they both adopt and reaffirm the practices of that organization and make it a part of their professional identity (Aspinwall & Schneider 2000:4, 9). Any individual taking part in the activities of an institution is part of a structure or system. The institution is also situated, that is, it is part of “a historically derived system of shared meanings which define agency and make action intelligible” as Guzzini (2000:165) puts it. This implies that a reaffirmation of the institutional norms takes place in every communicative act. Put differently, the reaffirmation takes place for example when organizational actors speak to each other or represent the organization toward other organizations as they articulate the norms and values of the institutional setting in which they are a part. An example is the prevalent use of EU specific language. Eurospeak includes juridical terminology and obscure abbreviations. Eurospeak works to connect those inside the institutions, they can recognize each other by speaking the same language, simultaneously it works to exclude and set apart those who are outside it. Such discourses work both in a narrow sense in specific policy areas and more broadly as a development of a specific integration language. Such discourses give meaning and direction to the process of integration (Christiansen et al 1999:541).

Also when individuals engage in institutional practices that are not verbal, they reaffirm those same institutional norms as expressed in the practice itself. Hence, apart from communication, norms also develop around practices such as problem solving methods and working routines. The EU, like other institutions, are ‘path dependent’: once certain choices are made, they constrain future possibilities. Earlier choices are influential in determining how an issue will be handled in the future. Jeffrey Lewis, while referring to the Council of Ministers, suggests that we think of the possibility that the normative environment of the institution itself can construct interests and identities (Lewis 2000:266). In the literature on administrations this is often called standard operating procedures. In everyday work-relations path dependence is often expressed colloquially as ‘the way we do things around here’. The approach suggests that norms and norm setting is much more than agreed-upon formal norms, formal as well as informal norms reflect practices of power. Such power practices both restrict and make certain behavior possible.
The constructivist perspective of the EU influenced by feminist critical work considers organizations as deeply embedded in their environment. Embedded implies that institutions are open systems and hence, the set of norms reflected in the activities of a certain organization form part of larger social orders. Thus, the norms and values expressed in an organization, formally or informally, form part of a larger spectrum of power relations predominant in the time and space where the organization is situated. Social orders are often encompassing, have distributive effects and thus, privilege certain groups over others. Social orders then have much to do with the practice of power. Power works both discursively and institutionally. The discursive is expressed in communication and in texts, while the institutional practices can also be expressed in the material aspects of the organization.

Constructivist approaches have commonalities with feminist agendas because, as Locher and Prügl argue, they share an ontology of becoming – seeing the world not as one but as one becoming (2001:114). These affinities notwithstanding, constructivism could be served well by feminist contributions because of the way feminist have addressed aspects of power, which in constructivism is often downplayed or left external to construction. That power is both enabling and constraining and that institutions not only delimit our world but systematically distribute privilege and thereby create patterns of subordination, is a core concern for many feminist theorists (Locher and Prügl 2001: 117) and thereby could highlight the way power is integral to processes of European integration.

An example of this type of work is Elisabeth Prügl’s (2001) study of the Common Agricultural Policy. She shows how the discursive dimension of a patriarchal order, in the name of the family farm, informed and underpinned the debates about the common agricultural policy (CAP) both in the EC/EU and in Germany and France. She traces the EU’s early and unquestioned commitment to regulated agriculture through the model of the family farm and makes explicit how gender aspects of agricultural policy are part of a larger gendered order. A striking feature of her research is that the family farm is an economic organization much different from others because its activities are regulated both through the rule of private and family law. This is an extremely important area of research not the least because of the large political and economic role that agricultural politics have played in the EU had and is likely to play in future enlargement.

Another example is the power dynamics in the discourse on economic activity analyzed in the work by Annica Kronsell (1997:46-49; cf. Threlfall 2003). Starting from EU statistics (Eurostat 1995) it is evident how the male breadwinner model dominated the discourse on labor and economics in the EU. The full-time working male is the model for economic activity. In these labor statistics the population is divided into economically “active” and “in-active”. 56 % of the women within the EU were placed in the category in-active and out of
this group of *inactive* women, 46% were *inactive* for what was called “other reasons”. Most probably these women are taking care of their families and the household yet, it is not recognized in the statistics. Thereby it provides the EU with unpaid reproductive labor, necessary for economic activities yet, left completely unrecognized as such. Moreover, 68% of the men in the EU are considered economically *active*, full-time work is considered *typical* work and is what men do for the most part (96%). On the other hand, part-time and/or temporary work is a more common form of work among the women within the EU. As women become more involved in the workforce, this is also the type of work that increases among the female labor force, yet, is considered *atypical* work in the EU statistics. In addition we may note both the segregation of the work force where women tend to cluster in service jobs and the pay differentials between men and women doing the exact same jobs. It is thereby rather clear that the discourse on economic activity is infused with gender power relations articulated in terms of the male-breadwinner model. Similar kinds of polarization according to gender is notable also within the area of public research and higher education (Eurostat 2001) and in the entrepreneurial sector (Eurostat 2002). In the EU construction of the farmer and the worker gender politics are at play as suggested here. It takes the form of assumptions about the various identities of the EU citizen which are embedded in its institutions. Such construction of gendered identities have serious material impacts on the EU citizens and thus, warrant critical analysis.

### III. Multi-level Governance

Many students of administration, policy processes, of organizations and governance recognize familiar features and processes in the EU integration process. Thus, it is not surprising that scholars familiar with theories of policy processes, networks, lobbyism or the implication of institutional norms, will also see the EU polity as a research dimension to which they can make important contributions. And indeed they have done so. The failure of integration theories to explain day to day EU-relations is partly explained by international relations scholars’ interest in the success or failure of integration over time and less with the more mundane interactions of everyday activities in various issue areas. Multi-level governance theories hold a somewhat contrasting position and argue that it is in the various issue areas and in the practice of everyday politics that the phenomenon EU is created.

An example is Beate Kohler-Koch (1996, 1999) who wants us to vision EU as a case of new governance. She sees EU as a governance form which is the outcome of a number of parallel processes: of states pooling their sovereignty; the influence of a discourse of integration over time; spillover effects and path dependency in policy making. Perhaps most importantly, new governance is the result of the increasing power of the market and the private sector at the
expense of state actors and the public sector. Some key characteristic of new governance is that governance takes place in networks, where partnership relations between different actors are important (cf. Jönsson et al. 1998). Grande too argues that “European policy-making can thus best be conceived as an integrated system of multi-level bargaining.” The difference or uniqueness, between this approach and neo-functionalism, is not the fact that there are multiple sources for interest group intermediation and mobilization but that there is not one central authority. Authority is fragmented (Grande 1996:325f). Zürn (2000:185) who characterizes the EU as a multilevel system does so based on two distinct features. Firstly, because regulations issued in different areas are so interlinked and intertwined that they hardly can be separated out, secondly, because the EU institutions are autonomous from national bodies. Both factors lead to a multi-level system of fragmented authority.

Scholars who take a starting point in a view of EU as multi-level or new governance framework often look at processes of Europeanization (for example: Börzel 2000; Jordan 1999) as an indication of new form of governance. Europeanization is “…an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy making” (Ladrech 1994:68). It can be called a new governance form because domestic politics are increasingly becoming intertwined with EU policies at all levels of governance. It is not a top-down process but more like the weaving of strands of issues and trends across traditional borders and administrative levels. The study of diverse sites of Europeanization can possibly “contribute to a better understanding of the logic and the diversity of patterns of multi-level governance” according to Benz & Eberlein (1999:330). They see a multi-level governance framework as useful because it can highlight the possible power sharing that takes place between different levels of government and does not assume one center of authority. However, as their research results show, there is nothing that is uncontested or proves that a new governance structure has actually emerged, only a tendency that it is moving in such a direction. Old power structures prevail while new patterns emerge, they conclude (Benz & Eberlein 1999: 343).

Theories of multi-level governance as a framework for analysis can be useful for a feminist agenda because it moves beyond the unitary state, the interest groups and the supranational norms to outline a complex system of interactions, levels of authority and an ever-increasing amount of actors. Yet, as Rossiilli (2000:5) suggests, a multi-level governance interpretation of the EU “conceals the hierarchy among different institutional levels.” Indeed, so far much of the work in this line of research has been busy with trying to describe and pin-point developing processes. Much effort has been devoted to process tracing with a mainly descriptive ambition, as in the vast research done of policy making in various issue areas of the EU. Such studies often start from a multi-level governance framework. Though, policy
process and policy studies seem absolutely crucial to understanding the multi-level governance patterns evolving in the EU, it is clear that such research has been less concerned with power relations. To argue that power is distributed at different levels of authority and among various groups thus not preclude that power may be very unevenly distributed. Not surprisingly, this approach too could be well-served by some feminist critique of emerging multi-governance structures in the EU, a more explicit example on how that may be done follows below.

As was already suggested, multi-level governance takes place in networks where relationships between individual actors are important. Policy making in networks is characterized by involving only a smaller and immediately concerned set of actors in a particular issue-area which accounts for its potential efficiency. While this may be a way to circumscribe formal hierarchies in the decision structure in an effort to achieve more efficient decision making, it does not necessarily increase accountability and transparency of the decision making process. Not the least because there is a tendency to move toward more informal relations in networks. As decisions become more specialized and hence, complicated, the role of experts or civil servants in decision making also tend to increase. While these actors may not hold any formal powers, still many policies are finalized in an early stage of the policy making process, and the final decision making power of state representatives often turns symbolic. This is supported by research, for example, in the field of environmental politics (Kronsell 2001). It is clear that we here have a dilemma between efficiency and democracy. It becomes increasingly difficult in such a multi-level governance structure, to hold any specific actor accountable for the decisions taken. This appears to be valid both for europeanization, i.e. as policy-making and implementation relates to the member states internal policy process, and for the activities taking place in and around the EU institutions. Elgström and Jönsson (2000:696) argue that “/n/networks are usually associated with informality” because informality creates trust between actors, feelings of solidarity and fosters a consensus culture. Indeed, in the workings of the EU such features seem to be esteemed. Informal ministerial meetings, for example, are scheduled with this deliberate purpose. No decisions are taken and the main aim is to create a congenial atmosphere where the ministers can get to know each other.

While the tendency to interact more informally and in networks that go outside administrative borders, makes for more efficient politics when the degree of complexity arises, we need to be aware of the fact that network formation and informal relationships although they do involve individuals employed by governments and EU institutions may involve actors who are not democratically accountable. An example is the substantial amount of policy making that take place in the myriad committees immediately associated with the Commission and the Council. These committees are part of the formal policy process although, not subject to much
transparency. M.P.C. Van Schendelen (1998) considers the EU Committees as Influential Policymakers in his edited volume on the subject. In a recent correspondence with Professor Van Schendelen I wondered about the possible gender composition of these committees. He responded: “…there is no good list of all committees. Their compositions are even almost a secret. For the case studies of the book we almost have to lobby for the entrance to a committee and for getting information about members, agendas etc.”.7

Networks are a form of elite collectives for decision-making. This means that certain groups in society are going to be closed to this form of participation. Women experience difficulties in entering male dominated elites and may find it difficult to develop the informal relations that usually go along with elite membership. To serve a feminist agenda one of the most important tasks would be to study these emerging networks in terms of their gender representativity. Who are the individuals composing these networks and what are their issues of concern? Personal factors are important for network formation because they give rise to trust, loyalties and familiarity. At the domestic level network building is often based on long-term development of personal relations. These are cultivated in professional life and through education, the military service and private associations. Often such associations are subject to divisions based on gender, class and ethnicity (Kronsell 1997, 175-185). In her work on social networks, Astrid Hedin puts it in the following way: “People tend to form network ties with socially similar individuals” (2001:125). The historic exclusion of women from private associations, so crucial for the public scene, fosters a homo-sociability, i.e., the seeking, enjoyment and/or preference for the company of the same sex (Alvesson and Billing 1997:71; Cockburn 1991:188-190), which means that women will have a constant disadvantage in the policy process because they do not have these personal relations to rely on. So while men might not consciously or overtly exclude women, they may have a tendency to favor connections with other men in work, research and leisure time, hence reproducing in these networks the homo-social environment in which they are a part and making it difficult for women to engage in it. These are issues that need to be taken seriously within a multi-level governance approach if it is to reflect feminist agendas, to date there is little evidence of such work taking place.

Conclusions

The underlying assumption of my argument has been that the European integration process is a process that affirms, shapes but also challenges existing gender relations. Starting from a feminist position the article has critically assessed the core principles of international relations, constructivist and multi-level governance approaches for their potential in including

7 Personal e-mail communication, June 15, 2001.
gender in the study of the EU. Integration theories have been concerned with trying to understand the ‘nature’ of the integration process, yet have made but minimal contributions to understanding its gender power dynamics. It has been shown that this lacuna stems from rather rudimentary and unproblematic views of power in integration theories. Power is simply assumed in the hands of the state for intergovernmentalism, and held by powerful national interest groups in the domestic politics approach. Neofunctionalists assume an unproblematic pluralist view of power, and from a slightly different angle, so do multi-level governance approaches. While supranationalists recognize the potential of norms and institutional dynamics their main focus is on formal and legal power. It is basically this simplistic view of power that makes it difficult to address gender relations outside the legal framework. Although lacking these aspects in the integration theories, the article has suggested ways for the different approaches to develop a more gender sensitive research agenda.

The constructivist approach seems most conducive to feminist research because it deals with identity and institutions within an agency-structure framework. Feminist critique is generally pursued from such a framework as well. Though an important difference is that constructivism does not privilege certain power relations, while feminism does. Its foremost research interest is gender albeit, that considerations of other social categories like, class, ethnicity and sex often are included. Feminism’s strength is its understanding of how hierarchies of power are expressed in embedded institutions. Its weakness may be that it sees gender relations in everything, perhaps even where it is not. However, if feminists are correct in assuming that gender is a main organizing principle of social relations, then gender has certainly been under-researched in EU-studies. Thus, it would be well worth taking seriously the suggestions made here to include considerations about gender relations within the framework of existing integration theories and thereby broaden the field both in terms of integration theory and feminist research.
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