



Feminist Security Studies in Europe: Beyond Western Academics' Club

Kateřina Kruliřov and Mila O'Sullivan

Abstract This chapter maps contemporary debates in feminist security studies (FSS) in Europe, showing the variety of issues studied via different theoretical and methodological lenses. While celebrating the richness of contemporary FSS debates, the chapter also highlights the asymmetry in knowledge production across the continent. FSS is clearly dominated by academics based in globally recognized 'Centers of Excellence' in Western and Northern Europe; yet our mapping also highlights scholarship in Central, Eastern, Southern, and South-eastern Europe. This underscores some obstacles scholars outside of the 'West' face when engaging with the discipline and calls for more inclusive transnational FSS debate in Europe.

K. Kruliřov

Department of Social and Political Sciences, Nottingham Trent University,
Nottingham, UK

e-mail: katerina.krulisova02@ntu.ac.uk

M. O'Sullivan (✉)

Centre for Global Political Economy, Institute of International Relations Prague
(IIR), Prague, Czech Republic

e-mail: osullivan@iir.cz

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary debates in feminist security studies (hereafter FSS) are rich and varied. Whether this richness lies in theoretical or methodological innovation, blending of scholarly disciplines, or studying issues others have overlooked, current scholarly debates show FSS as a dynamic, impactful, and influential discipline.

The key aim of this chapter is to map the depth and breadth of contemporary feminist security scholarship produced in Europe. Amidst the celebration of the rapidly growing and influential field, we identify existing silences, exclusions, and, importantly, possibilities for more productive feminist engagements. We follow the calls to engage with FSS ‘in its entirety’ (Shepherd 2013, 438) and strive to bring attention to less visible locations of FSS scholarship.

We argue that ‘Western’ FSS knowledge flows globally, yet the debates held in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Southern and South-eastern Europe do not sufficiently shape the discipline. FSS scholars continue to debate knowledge production asymmetry in terms of ‘Global South’ and ‘Global North’ (Shepherd 2013). The ‘North’ and ‘South’ remain geopolitically undefined; it is assumed that the reader knows where the border between the two lies. We argue that CEE, Southern and South-eastern Europe are difficult to categorize as such. Independently whether you place these countries in the imagined South or North, European FSS is dominated by scholarship produced in the UK, Nordic countries, and to a certain degree Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The rest of Europe appears mostly silent.

We therefore highlight existing scholarship produced both in and, importantly, outside of the dominant locations and uncover some of the challenges of this uneven feminist knowledge production. This, we hope, will open up a pan-European dialogue that could lead to more inclusive transnational exchanges and truly pluralistic feminist knowledge production. To this end, we firstly trace contemporary debates on what, where, and who is FSS. We identify what, inter alia, is missing from these

conversations, highlighting regional divides and asymmetrical knowledge production on the European continent. To celebrate the depth and breadth of FSS in Europe, we map the theoretical debates, methods, and variety of topics studied. In this overview, we highlight some of the FSS scholarship originating from CEE, Southern and South-eastern Europe. To show the asymmetries, we visually present the ‘density’ of FSS researchers in each country based on our list of nearly 300 scholars publishing on feminist security.

As any mapping exercise, ours is political and imperfect. This project is bound to miss some work. We hope that this initial mapping can provide a useful guide for security analysts and practitioners and open up new debates. Although this chapter is authored by the two of us, it is a result of a collective feminist effort. To map the scholarship as best as we could, we have not only analyzed leading academic journals, but also contacted our wide networks for help. It was the effort of many of our friends and colleagues that helped us create a more complete map of European FSS; needless to say, all errors and omissions are ours.

WHAT, WHERE, AND WHO IS FEMINIST SECURITY STUDIES?

FSS builds on early Feminist IR (e.g. Enloe 1983; Cohn 1987) which reconceptualizes security in multilevel and multidimensional terms as absence of violence, be it military, economic, sexual, or environmental (Tickner 1992, 128). Sjöberg (2011, 602) characterizes FSS as ‘the narrative generated by [FSS scholars’] arguments, disagreements, and compromises.’ The question of *who* and *where* gets to be part of this arguing, disagreeing and compromising, becomes key to our inquiry. Before we proceed to the question of who and where, we discuss *what* scholarly commitments FSS promises.

Basu (2013, 455) reminds feminist scholars of the debt we owe to women’s movements—not only the Western white activists, but crucially also the ‘third world, black, and queer feminists.’ FSS often focuses on lived experience, positionality, reflexivity, and emancipation of marginalized subjects (Shepherd 2013; Sylvester 2013; Wibben 2011a). It pays attention to the complexities of power and context and ‘is directed toward transformations of gendered hierarchies inherent in relations of insecurity that make people vulnerable’ (Basu 2013, 457). FSS should also take on an obligation to be resolutely anti-imperialist (Wibben 2011a).

The ongoing debate of what FSS is and should be, including its relation to the mainstream, provides an interesting insight into disciplinary dynamics. In 2011, *Politics & Gender* published a Critical Perspectives section on FSS (Lobasz and Sjoberg 2011, hereafter CP). All the authors of the CP section were based in the US. This was noted in the 2013 'The State of Feminist Security Studies: Continuing the Conversation' Forum (hereafter 'Forum,' Shepherd 2013). Shepherd (2013, 438) warns against constructing 'FSS in the image of White Western femininity' and calls for sympathetic, systematic, and critical engagement with FSS 'in its entirety.' Parashar (2013, 440–441) notes that the 'complete oversight' of works produced 'in locations where "(in)security" is not a matter of discourse alone but is embodied in everyday living and in "doing" research.' The Forum discusses some European FSS, but none of the European scholars in it are located outside of Western/Northern Europe. Sylvester (2013) highlights scholarship produced in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Norway. McLeod (2013) is the only scholar who cites non-Western research.

Sjoberg (2016, 52) further addresses the issue of representation and notes that postcolonial scholarship and concerns are not fully incorporated into FSS scholarship. She calls for FSS to be both 'substantively and representationally inclusive' (ibid., 55). Nearly a decade since this debate, FSS does not appear to be truly inclusive. Haastrup and Hagen (2021) focus on one of the key FSS research foci, the UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and note that the key Centers of Excellence on WPS are based in universities located in the Global North. Parashar observes that 'intellectual economy of WPS privileges normative whiteness and the voices of western feminists who command resources, claim expertise and advance theories to understand conflict outside of the global north' (cited in Haastrup and Hagen 2021, 3).

The ongoing FSS conversations clearly call for inclusion of the Global South. What these debates omit is the (lack of) inclusion within the broader European continent. FSS knowledge is produced in and around a few centers of scientific excellence (Henry 2021), and the rest of Europe remains invisible. The body of edited volumes produced in recent years within the frame of FSS and feminist IR demonstrates this exclusion, albeit the diversity of scholars and themes included vary (e.g. Gentry et al. 2018; Davies and True 2018; Ní Aoláin et al. 2018; Väyrynen et al. 2021). Similarly, one has to look very hard to find the work of scholars from CEE, South-eastern and Southern Europe in top feminist and IR journals.

WHAT IS MISSING?

Our visualization of FSS scholarship in Europe (see Fig. 3.1) clearly displays the regional asymmetries in academic knowledge production mentioned above. Such differences have been sometimes referred to in feminist research through geopolitically defined categories of European ‘core’ versus ‘semi-periphery,’ East–West divisions, or ‘in-betweenness’ (Blagojevic 2004; Kulawik 2019). Scholars emphasizing local context have used these concepts to show that feminist knowledge produced from the semi-periphery is considered as ‘semi-knowledge’ and ‘never quite there’ (Blagojevic 2004). Other feminist scholars have, however, called for more transversal feminist dialogue and more localized research with transnational relevance (Nyklová 2017, 54; Pereira 2014). They argue that the narrative of difference has limited the mutual travel of feminist thought between what is referred to as the core and the semi-periphery (Cerwonka 2008 in Nyklová 2017, 54), reinforcing rather than challenging the existing hierarchies in knowledge production (Nyklová 2017, 55).

We identify similar limitations in the flow of feminist security knowledge. Gender research emerged rather late in the ‘semi-periphery’ in the 1990s as part of social sciences and humanities discipline, around the same time as feminist IR and later FSS in the West. Today, Gender Studies occupy an academically insecure position in most of the semi-periphery countries (Aavik and Raili Marling 2018). Most feminist security-related research focusing on local themes can be found in Sociology, Gender Studies or Women’s Studies, although FSS is sporadically emerging in the discipline of IR as well (Gasztold 2018; O’Sullivan and Krulišová 2020).

Our analysis reveals that the lack of recognition of feminist IR and the FSS subfield is a shared trait outside of Western and Northern Europe. Available research attributes this absence to conventional local academic cultures. In Italy for instance, the important feminist tradition that links grassroots activism and academia is missing in the field of IR and security studies.ⁱ In the Czech Republic, the masculine IR foundation entails a hierarchical and rivalry ‘macho’ culture, which ignores and/or devalues feminist research (Nyklová et al. 2019, 16). In Poland, security studies are dominated by men with practical experience (ex-military, police officers, secret services) who ‘react allergically’ to gender topics.ⁱⁱ

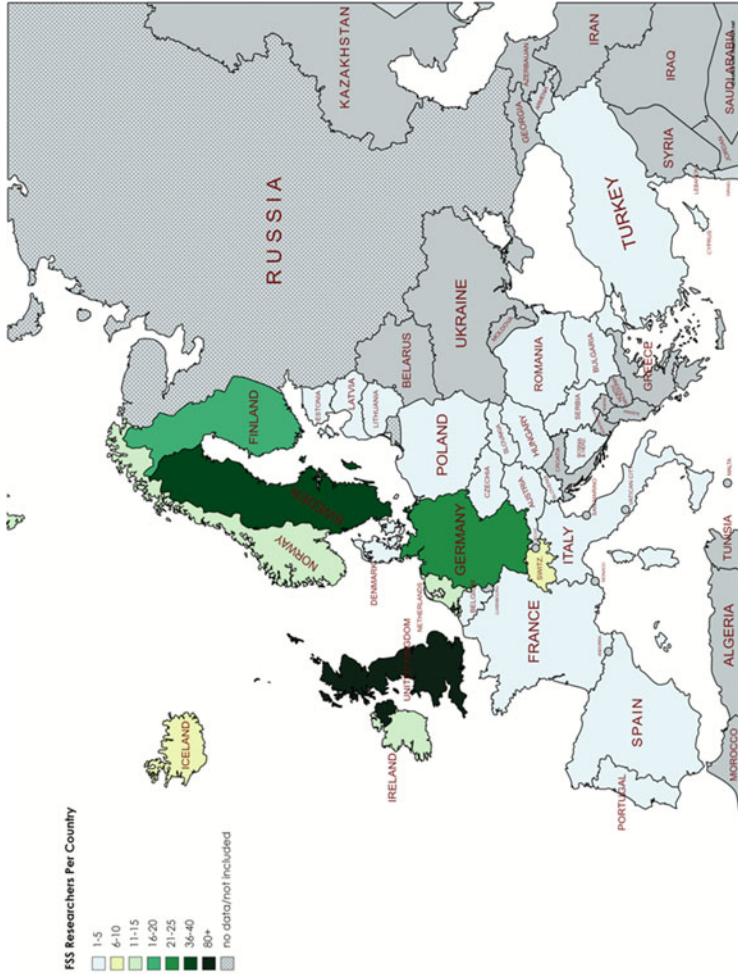


Fig. 3.1 Feminist security studies in Europe (Source Map created using mapchart.net, data ours)

FSS has neither been academically established within the discipline of IR in most of South-eastern Europe. Specifically in the Balkans, many feminist scholars writing on related topics would not consider themselves to belong to FSS, as security studies is, with notable exceptions, still perceived in terms of ‘hard’ security.ⁱⁱⁱ Similar response to our inquiries came from Estonia, France, Italy, Slovakia, or Turkey, all indicating the absence of FSS as an established academic field. Scholarship produced from these locations is thus limited in scope and influence over the FSS field.

EUROPEAN FEMINIST SECURITY STUDIES: THEORIES, METHODOLOGIES, ISSUES

European FSS scholars have been shaping FSS through their theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. There are a number of ongoing academic conversations that resonate throughout the discipline with European scholars at their core. While it is difficult to discuss all of these, below we offer some examples of feminist research conducted in Europe. We pay special attention to research produced outside of Western/Northern Europe and also highlight some issues and areas European FSS have not yet discussed.

ISSUES AND SILENCES

European feminists have studied the ‘everyday’ security and militarization for some time (Basham 2013). They also focus on identity (Stern 2005), trauma and memory (Ketola 2021), embodiment (Wilcox 2015; Dyvik 2016), or affect (Åhäll 2018; Chisholm and Ketola 2020).

A number of researchers discuss the causes and consequences of sexual violence against women and men in and out of armed conflicts (Kirby 2013; Swaine 2018; Schulz and Touquet 2020; Zalewski et al 2018). Analyses tend to focus on sexual violence perpetrated during war outside Europe: for example, Schulz (2018) studies sexual violence against men in Northern Uganda; Baaz and Stern (2009) focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo; Boesten (2014) studies Peru. The few exceptions seem to be studies on Europe’s recent conflicts. These focus on domestic violence in politically contested Northern Ireland (Doyle and McWilliams 2019) and on gender-based and sexual violence during and after war in

South-Eastern Europe (Kostovicova et al. 2020; Meznaric 2019; Žarkov 2007; Subotić and Zaharijević 2018).

Feminists also focus on the questions of agency and activism during conflicts (Mladjenovic 2001); sexuality (Močnik 2017); transitional justice (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2015); R2P (Kolmasova and Krulisova 2019); gender in/and DDR and SSR (Duriesmith and Holmes 2019); peace-building (Partis-Jennings 2017); peacekeeping (Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2015); or post-conflict justice (Brown and Ní Aoláin 2015; O'Reilly 2018). Closely related to this are discussions on militarization and militarism (Grzebalska 2016, 2021), hegemonic and military masculinities (Woodward and Duncanson 2017), or feminist perspectives of wartime memory sites (Reeves 2020). The link between the focus and location is clear here—the UK has a large military and is, like Sweden, engaged in field operations outside of Europe (Duncanson 2013; Kronsell 2012). European FSS also discusses issues of health (Harman 2021) and reproductive health (Thomson and Pierson 2018).

Another key area of investigation is the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. The UK, being the home of the WPS 'Center of Excellence,' produces most knowledge on WPS alongside with the Nordic countries (Kirby and Shepherd 2021; Olsson and Gizelis 2015). WPS is central to the study of feminist foreign policy which is similarly based in Sweden (Aggestam et al. 2019) or the UK (Thomson 2019). WPS research has been indeed thriving, focusing on themes such as arms trade and political economy of militarism (Acheson and Butler 2019), exclusion of refugees from European WPS policy (Holvikivi and Reeves 2020), climate change (Cohn and Duncanson 2020), but also institutions like NATO (Wright et al. 2019) or the OSCE (Jenichen et al. 2018). Feminist scholars have also approached WPS through lenses informed by the political economy of conflict and called for re-bridging feminist security and feminist political economy (Lai 2020; O'Sullivan 2020; Stavrevska 2020).

There is limited research produced on gender and conflict from the locations outside of the 'Centers of Excellence.' Yet, there is a reason for optimism; FSS scholars outside of the core produce introductory FSS texts in local languages (Gasztold 2018; Krulišová and Rychnovská 2020) and engage with productive academic conversations with the West. This

is the case of the monograph *Feminist Perspectives on Terrorism* (2020) by a Polish academic Aleksandra Gasztold. FSS research is also gaining ground in Spanish (Romero 2021) and Portuguese academia (Deiana 2018; Palacián De Inza 2019). Among the studied issues is the question of nationalism in the adoption of WPS agenda in the Balkans (Subotić and Zaharijević 2018), Ukraine (O’Sullivan 2019), or the emergence of WPS policy out of hostile anti-gender setting in the Czech Republic (O’Sullivan and Krulišová 2020).

The previously less visible post-socialist region and the fragile contexts East of Europe have gained some notice in FSS scholarship across Europe with the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine and with growing anti-gender tendencies globally. Western feminist scholars produced works on Russia as an illiberal norm entrepreneur in Ukraine (Ketelaars 2019), the gendered impact of economic insecurity in Ukraine (Mathers 2020), or on Putin’s gendered securitization of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kuteleva and Clifford 2021). A rare example of transnational European cooperation is the volume *Women’s Everyday Lives in War and Peace in the South Caucasus* edited by Ziemer (2020) and a collection entitled *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories* (Altnay and Pető 2016).

Pető is also one of the key scholars writing on transnational anti-gender movements in Europe. This interdisciplinary research reveals that ‘anti-gender ideology’ campaigns create new insecurities in the form of cyber violence, reproductive health insecurity, gender-based violence, or threats of physical destruction to feminist scholars (Pető 2021). Korolczuk and Graff (2018, 802) explain that antigenderists have used the term ‘cultural wars,’ and other militarizing narratives such as ‘fight’ or ‘weapon,’ whereas their key focus has been on the politics of reproduction. Given the transnational character of this phenomenon, the existing scholarship engages with wider European locations, contributing thus to more pluralistic feminist exchanges. Such exchanges also inform the edited volume on anti-gender campaigns in Europe (Kuhar and Patternote eds. 2017) with contributors from the Netherlands but also France, Poland, or Hungary.

THEORIES AND METHODS

FSS offers both a critique of existing main/male stream theoretical discussions and, perhaps more importantly, theoretical innovation. In terms of

critique, European FSS actively engages with other European IR and security studies theory. As apparent from our discussion below, FSS theorizing is a domain of Western/Northern European academia.

The feminist critique of the Copenhagen School starts with Hansen's (2000) work and recently culminated in a still ongoing discussion between Howell and Richter-Montpetit's (2020) critique and Hansen's (2020) reply. Scholars also use the securitization framework to focus on gendered issues (e.g. Brown 2008; Gray and Frack 2019). Security as emancipation, the core tenet of Aberystwyth school, has also been extensively debated by FSS (Åhäll 2016).

FSS engages with disciplines other than security studies or IR. Several European researchers analyze security policies and issues via feminist institutionalism, demonstrating the relevance of this framework for FSS (e.g. Thompson 2019; Chappell and McKay 2021). Researchers who study feminist foreign policy highlight not only the lack of gender lens in foreign policy analysis (e.g. Haastrup 2020), but also engage with the English School (e.g. Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016) or postcolonial approaches (e.g. Achilleos-Sarll 2018; Stachowitsch and Sachse 2019). Researchers focus on political economies of gender (in)security (e.g. Rai 2013) and debate the convergence of FSS and Feminist International/Global Political Economy (Elias 2015; Stern 2017; Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2017; de Almagro and Ryan 2020). There is also a growing network of scholars who identify their research as feminist peace studies (e.g. Wibben et al. 2019). A lot of work also closely engages with International Political Sociology (e.g. Tidy 2018), critical terrorism studies (e.g. Pratt 2013), or critical military studies (see Gray's chapter in this volume). Queer theory forms another framework with which FSS scholars engage. Works by Richter-Montpetit (2018), Leigh and Weber (2018), or Hagen (2016) are just some examples of queer conceptualization of security. Race is a key element of study of security. For instance, Pratt's (2013) work focuses on race and sexuality in relation to the WPS agenda.

The FSS commitments discussed earlier allow for variety of methodologies. Feminist research often challenges conventional ways of knowing. Many FSS scholars employ what Halberstam (2019, 13) calls 'scavenger methodologies.' Such methods 'seek to centre subjects, processes, and practices historically excluded, ignored, and minimised' (Kinsella and Shepherd 2020, 299). FSS thus aims to democratize the production of knowledge, which results in exciting methodological innovations, while

allowing use of conventional methods to answer questions about gender and security.

There is a number of scholars who use quantitative methodologies to examine issues of gender and security (e.g. Joshi and Olsson 2021; Forsberg and Olsson 2021). This scholarship tends to be based in the research centers that are home to the conflict databases, notably PRIO and Uppsala. For instance, Kreft combines statistical analysis (2019) and qualitative methodologies (2020). The majority of the FSS scholars, however, use qualitative methodologies.

Studying texts and images, which could also be linked to the so-called discursive, narrative, and visual turns,¹ forms a large part of contemporary FSS. Discourse analysis is used to analyze variety of policies and practices (Gentry 2016). Wibben (2011b), for instance, develops a feminist narrative approach to security. The method of visual analysis is applied by Cooper-Cunningham (2019) or Wright and Bergman-Rosamond (2021). Feminist researchers also engage with variety of empirical sites. For example, scholars who focus on conflict textiles (Andrä et al. 2020) use curation as a method of knowing.

European FSS offers examples of ethnographic research (e.g. Björkdahl and Selimovic 2018; McLeod 2013) and excellent studies using interviews with various gendered actors (e.g. Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2009). Scholars also engage directly with actors inside hegemonically masculine institutions as ‘critical friends’ (Wright et al. 2019). Importantly, feminist scholarship considers how to study silence (e.g. Kronsell 2006) and unease (Baaz and Stern 2016). There are also a number of reflective pieces on various aspects of subjectivity and fieldwork (Bliesemann de Guevara and Bøås 2020; Cole 2017).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

FSS is a disciplinary home for a wide range of research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methods. It challenges and enriches mainstream IR and Security Studies. European FSS is a home full of researchers who

¹ Furthermore, feminist scholarship makes important contributions to the other seemingly endless array of so-called turns (e.g. the emotional, affective, corporeal turn, material, everyday, etc.) now fashionable in security studies; indeed, much feminist work predates the nomenclature of such ‘turns’ at all (e.g. Enloe 1983; see Stavrianakis and Stern 2018, 8).

largely practice what they preach: self-reflection, inclusivity, and ethical research, as well as speaking truth to power. It can no longer be seen as marginal; if you have not engaged with it you have not been paying attention. We see ourselves as part of this disciplinary home; it brings us a lot of joy, scholarly inspiration, and, importantly, support.

Our aim was to celebrate the existing FSS research in Europe as well as to point out its shortcomings. We hope that our chapter speaks to debates about the production of knowledge. This mapping shows there is now a strong FSS network of scholars based in Western and Northern Europe which dominates knowledge production and shapes the discipline. They produce innovative and engaging knowledge that often crosses disciplinary lines, offers new methodological tools, and informs policies. This scholarship has been highlighting the dominance of Global North for nearly a decade now. However, in these discussions, a large part of the European continent appears to be left out. Central and Eastern, South-Eastern, and Southern Europe do not clearly belong to either the North or South and the limited FSS scholarship produced there does not shape the discipline.

Our mapping shows a strong connection of location to research agendas. Sweden's feminist foreign policy gets scrutinized by Swedish feminist academics. Active engagement of Nordic countries in conflict management—be it mediation or peacekeeping—results in publications, funding, and establishment of research centers. Large militaries draw feminist attention in the UK. Yet, the rest of Europe has its issues too—be it anti-gender movements and their impact on the security of feminist scholars, women's political activism, or local iterations of continuum of violence. Such studies are often based in different disciplinary homes—Gender Studies, Sociology, or History and rarely speak to FSS.

We hope this chapter will encourage further research into the conditions of knowledge production outside Western and Northern Europe. We also hope that it reaches those who, similarly to us some years back, had to struggle for institutional recognition of their feminist scholarship. Finally, we wish that our discussion will stimulate more transnational FSS scholarship and mentorship collaborations. There are indeed so many pressing issues European FSS should address, be it the hypermasculine far right/populist leadership; gendered health security including reproductive injustice; gendered diplomacy; feminist peace analyses; or local iterations of WPS.

NOTES

- i. Communication with an Italian academic based abroad, May 2021.
- ii. Communication with an academic from Poland, May 2021.
- iii. Communication with Elena Stavrevska, May 2021.

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