



# Teaching Intersectionality

Putting Gender at the Centre

A book series by ATHENA

Edited by Martha Franken, Alison Woodward,  
Anna Cabó, and Barbara M. Bagilhole

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Anna Cabó and Barbara M. Bagilhole

**Teaching Intersectionality:  
Putting Gender at the Centre**

Teaching with Gender. European Women's Studies in  
International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms

A book series by ATHENA

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# **Teaching Intersectionality: Putting Gender at the Centre – Introduction**

*Alison Woodward, Barbara Bagilhole, Martha Franken*

## **Why intersectionality?**

Policy makers in all areas are confronted with the challenges of addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse citizenry in an increasingly multi-level setting. European and international legal developments on one level and civil society activism on the other produce serious challenges. The academic terminology behind some policy initiatives may seem complex or confusing. For example, intersectionality sounds as if it is about intersections in traffic policy. In fact, the concept of intersectionality refers to aspects of identity and how they interact and affect equality. Practitioners have already responded to concerns about gender equality through instruments such as gender mainstreaming or gender budgeting. But what would ‘equality mainstreaming’ mean? Can public authorities be experts on all of the different combinations of attributes that are associated with inequality? Are the dynamics of gender inequality the same as those of age or ethnicity? Terms such as equality, diversity, multiple discriminations, intersections, and integration fly about as the context of policy debate evolves. There is a pressing need for educational materials to encourage the dialogue between academic researchers examining the complexity of gendered inequalities and practitioners.

This book is designed to help teachers and practitioners gain insights into some of the most recent debates about issues of intersectionality in Europe. It focuses on the cross roads and interactions between various markers of inequality and how policy tools are evolving to address these problems. The aim is to provide some practical and not overly theoretical resources to help understand the debates and policy implications. It includes background papers on the concept of intersectionality and how it relates to other concepts such as diversity or mainstreaming with a focus on insights from gender studies. Academics who are introducing the concepts in their course work provide ideas about how intersectionality enriches traditional disciplines. Finally several chapters look at how the new legislation and concepts are playing out in public policy practice.

The resources presented here were produced for two events in Barcelona in 2009. The international conference “Intersectionality: Gender as a Red Thread” was organized by the ATHENA 3A working group “Strengthening the Societal Impact of Women’s Studies”, the Office of the Promotion of Equality between Women and Men of the Barcelona Region and the Francesca Bonnemaison House. An overwhelming participation of Spanish public policy practitioners at the international conference indicated the demand for training material for the new developments in equality policy. While ‘gender mainstreaming’ is becoming somewhat accepted in policy circles, there are other kinds of inequalities not addressed by this approach. The conference was followed by sessions of the ATHENA 3A working group where papers on the practical impact of intersectionality in educational and policy practice were presented.

The European Union Amsterdam Treaty and its Article 13 have generated legislation on non-discrimination. There are six grounds on which discrimination is illegal; gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and age. It also calls upon Member States to be proactive in promoting an equal society without discrimination. While gender was the first ground to be protected, the women’s movement has always recognized that women are not a homogeneous group. There are many inequalities among women and among men that must also be recognized and dealt with. The question is how to deal practically with these issues? How can we ensure gender remains a leitmotif in equality policy given the challenges of additional lines of equality targets and their interaction? What can be learned from the last decades of experiences with bringing gender equality issues into public policy? What are the early experiences with institutionalizing policy on discrimination in various areas of Europe and what new knowledge is needed? These are all questions that are high on the list of public policy makers assigned to integrate equality into their policy.

## **The structure**

The first set of resources looks at the development and definition of the concept of ‘intersectionality’ and how it relates to gender equality research and policy. At the European level, Johanna Kantola traces the separate policy tools for gender, race and ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation and pulls

apart the apparently converging practices in Europe. Judith Squires shows the antecedents of present gender equality policy and discusses what intersectionality can mean for gender mainstreaming and democracy while shedding light on the present development towards a multi-strand public agency for discrimination issues in the United Kingdom. Barbara Bagilhole further analyses the impact of the ideas of intersectionality on previous understandings of equality, and traces the effects on gender policy and relations. She provides guidelines for policy makers attempting to combine the mainstreaming of gender with issues of double or triple oppression. The selections stimulate thinking about the sources of multiple oppressions and why a simple additive approach to inequalities is insufficient.

The concepts introduced in the first section are illustrated in the second section by reflections from the field of activists. Lydia la Riviere-Zijdel shares her experiences with disability and homosexuality as a global gender activist. Her chapter provides an eye opening account of how many aspects of discriminated identities are often left out in policy thinking and in civil society itself. Gloria Wekker, using the tools of biography, suggests how colour and class intersect with gender and policy, bringing in the post-colonial experience. The generational issue for people with histories of migration and the special role of mothers are particularly apt illustrations of how intersectional thinking can open our eyes to the complexities of inequality and gender. Finally, Nadine Plateau analyses the ways in which ideologically different feminist movements in Belgium have gradually attempted to answer the challenges of ethnic diversity within the women's movement. These contributions provide concrete illustrations of what 'intersectionality' means in civil society action, and in individual histories. They can be used to help students see directly why insights into intersectionality can contribute to better policy and civil society politics.

The final section focuses on the practical side of intersectionality. The resources in this section consider specific cases in teaching practice and policy to provide illustrations of what including intersections can mean. Giuseppina Pellegrino looks at what an intersectional approach could mean for communication theory with an eye to keeping gender at the centre. Just as different academic disciplines will have different experiences with integrating the interacting diversities into programmes, so do the contributions of the different policy experts illustrate that gender and intersectionality are not automatically

partners. Martha Franken looks at the challenges of intersectionality with the eyes of a practitioner working with politicians and analyses the problematic gap between the theory (as seen in previous contributions to this book) and practice. Joz Motmans, Alison Woodward, Maria Bustelo, Soledad Bravo and Giovanna Vingelli look at how Flanders, Spain and Italy attempt to insert ideas about intersectionality in their present gender equality and educational frameworks.

## **How to use the book**

This varied set of conceptualizations and descriptions of the new thinking on intersectionality can provide lecturers and trainers with significant help in preparing sessions to inform students about the latest developments in non-discrimination and equality policies. For those in gender studies, we hope that these chapters show that bringing intersectionalities in does not necessarily put gender at a disadvantage.

Each contribution ends with suggestions for teaching, either in terms of thought questions to help make connections between the different themes in the book or in terms of exercises that can help make the material come to life.

Given the speed at which developments in this field are occurring, the resources presented here provide an up-to-date snapshot of developments in thinking about cross-cutting and interacting identities associated with inequality in different parts of Europe. Since the authors come from social movement, academic and policy backgrounds, they provide an insight into the complexity of the issue and roles of the various stake-holders. The resources provide tools for doing role-play sessions where students take on the position of different players in the equality policy process. The contributions also illuminate how facets of identity intersect with gender. As gender equality policy has been a forerunner, it provides experience and contrast with the other equality issues still to be articulated in pro-active public policy.

It is the intention that these materials can be integrated in existing courses on public policy and gender to provide comparative insights across countries, policy areas and in a European Union framework. The book is not intended as a stand alone course module but as a complement to existing materials. On the web-site ([www.rosadoc.be/athena](http://www.rosadoc.be/athena)), interested students wanting more detailed information and references can find the full texts of

several papers. The web-site also provides an extensive bibliography of the most recent European sources on the topic. Finally, as an extra resource, the full presentations of the sessions in Barcelona of the key note speakers are available as a DVD (Spanish/English) so that excerpts can be used to enhance classroom experience. Together, we hope the web-site, this publication, and the audio-visual record of the conference will stimulate classroom debate, social movement activism and policy practice.



# **Tackling Multiple Discrimination: Gender and Crosscutting Inequalities in Europe**

*Johanna Kantola*

## **Abstract**

The European Union (EU) equality policy has traditionally been based on a vertical approach, which means that each equality strand has been tackled separately. The Amsterdam Treaty 1997 that gave powers to the Community to combat discrimination on the grounds of gender, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation has also resulted in developing horizontal approaches, namely tackling intersecting inequalities. This chapter charts these developments. First it looks into the ‘separate strands’ equality policy where gender, race and ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation have been treated mainly in isolation from one another. Whilst gender policy concentrated on the norm *woman* (the white heterosexual working mother) and started only very recently to account for diversity, the other equality policy fields tended to ignore gender. Second, the article focuses on the new and emerging horizontal approach where inequalities are understood to intersect. In the EU language, this is called ‘multiple discrimination’ and the article explores the consequences of this for equality policies. The argument put forward is that the horizontal approach does not live up to its promise about providing space for intersectionality.

## **Introduction**

European Union equality policy has traditionally been based on a vertical approach, which means that each equality issue has been tackled separately. Gender and nationality have been protected with policies dating back to the signing of the Treaty of Rome 1957. Forty years later questions about discrimination gained heightened attention with the enactment of the Amsterdam Treaty 1997 that in Article 13 gave powers to the Community to combat discrimination on the grounds of gender, race and ethnicity, religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation.<sup>1</sup> For many, this addressed ‘an enduring weakness’ in EU anti-discrimination law. Commentators noted that

it was particularly remarkable that race and ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation, were recognised legally for the first time (Bell 2002; Hendriks 2005; Waddington 2005). It was also considered a victory among gender equality activists and policy makers as the Treaty gave a legal basis to combat discrimination in other areas besides employment (Helfferich and Kolb 2001: 144-146).

Article 13 has turned out to be a powerful tool to draft new anti-discrimination legislation and has been extensively researched (see Bell 2002a; 2002b; Meenan 2007, Waddington 1999; 2000). Three directives have been adopted on the basis of this Article: the Racial Equality Directive, the Employment Equality Directive and the Directive on Gender Equality in Access to and Supply of Goods and Services. Enshrined in Article 13 is a commitment not just to tackle each of these grounds separately (the vertical approach) but also to combat discrimination horizontally – across inequalities (Bell 2002b: 385). Article 13 resulted in a new focus on ‘multiple discrimination’ in Europe with a number of consequences for equalities bodies, legislation and activists.

These EU efforts to move towards an ‘integrated equalities agenda’ and to tackle multiple discrimination parallel feminist debates on intersectionality (see Crenshaw 1991; Verloo 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006; Hancock 2007; Weldon 2008). Decades of black feminist theorising have highlighted how feminist studies often took the white woman as the essential norm while anti-racism policies and activism used the black man as the norm, while both ignored the experiences of black women. Many feminist scholars now argue that focusing on people at the intersections of groups – black women, young black men, disabled women, lesbians or gay men – is most effective in understanding marginalisation and privilege (García Bedolla 2007: 233).

To address the legal and policy consequences of the discrimination faced by black women, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term ‘intersectionality’. She argued that black women are located at the intersection of racism and sexism and their experiences could be reduced to neither. The reliance of anti-discrimination law on a single-axis framework, where claims can be made on the basis of either race or sex but not both, deprives black women of the possibility to seek justice as black women (Crenshaw 1991: 57). A focus on the interaction of different structures of inequality results in a fuller and more developed picture of the oppression and discrimination faced by different groups of people (Weldon 2008).

Scholars are increasingly interested in exploring the potential that the EU developments entail for tackling varied inequalities (Kantola and Nousiainen 2010). A positive result could be that considering the six strands together has meant an increase in status for some grounds. For example, the Racial Equality Directive provided protection against discrimination in goods and services. This was later extended to provide protection against gender discrimination in goods and services. An integrated approach to discrimination is thought to provide ‘coherence, consistency, clarity and simplicity concerning individual rights to non-discrimination’ as well as ‘increased effectiveness and influence of the monitoring and enforcement authorities’ (Skjeie 2008: 296). It is also promoted because it may tackle intersectional or multiple discrimination better than single grounds legislation and law enforcement bodies (Kantola and Nousiainen 2008: 18; Skjeie 2008: 296; Squires 2009).

Yet feminist scholars are cautious about these developments. Feminist concerns about the EU integrated approach include the worry that the greater emphasis on for example race will be at the expense of gender issues (Kantola and Outshoorn 2007; Mazey 2002: 229). The integration of the relevant governmental agencies may entail the dispersal of expertise, loss of contact with the specific constituencies, and a diluted approach, or it might be an opportunity for the more efficient deployment of resources and a stronger approach (Walby 2005: 462). Feminists have inquired whether the equality tools needed by diverse disadvantaged groups are sufficiently similar so that they can share institutional spaces and policies rather than each needing their own (Walby 2005: 462). Mieke Verloo (2006: 222) argues in relation to gender, race, class and sexuality that these bases for inequality are so dissimilar that the tools to tackle one form of inequality (for example gender mainstreaming) cannot simply be adapted for other forms.

This chapter charts these developments. First it looks into the development of the ‘separate strands’ policy approach where gender, race and ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation have been treated mainly in isolation from one another. Gender policy concentrated on the norm woman (the white heterosexual working mother) and started only very recently to consider differences among women. Equally so, other equality policies had little eye for gender. Second, the chapter treats the emerging horizontal approach where inequalities are understood to intersect. In the EU language, this is being called

'multiple discrimination' and the article explores the consequences of this for equalities policy. It seems that the horizontal approach does not live up to its promise about providing space to intersectionality.

### **The separate strands approaches**

What is the background to the EU addressing the question of discrimination on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation? In what follows we examine the development of policy and tools, the current level of provisions, and the major actors and their claims.

### **Policy and tools in the EU**

#### ***Gender***

European anti-discrimination law first targeted only gender. The evolution of EU gender policy is often represented in terms of three phases: from equal opportunities to positive action and to gender mainstreaming (Rees 1998). The three approaches continue to co-exist in today's policy. Despite the early start on the field of legislating for equal pay in the Treaty of Rome, it took until the 1970s, for an expansion of efforts for equal opportunities. The enactment of directives on Equal Pay 1975, Equal Treatment 1976 and Social Security 1978, made the backbone for gender equality policy (Kantola 2010). In the 1980s, the EU supplemented its equal opportunities approach with positive action initiatives. In 1984, a Council Recommendation on the promotion of positive action for women was issued. However, the road for positive action has been difficult. The non-binding formulations created uncertainties and confusions around positive action measures as illustrated by ECJ cases *Kalanke* in 1995 and *Marschall* in 1997. Both cases exposed the lack of legal clarity on issues of equal opportunities and demonstrated a need for new political strategies to overcome women's structural discrimination (Lombardo 2003: 162).

Gender mainstreaming has the potential to change the masculine structures and policies by mainstreaming gender to all policy fields and legislation (Rees 1998; Squires 2005; Woodward 2003). Gender mainstreaming has been endorsed as the official policy approach to gender equality in the EU and its member states in the Amsterdam Treaty 1997. Recently feminist scholars have become increasingly critical of the lack of implementation of the policy in its more transformative form (Kantola 2010).

### ***Race and ethnicity***

Whilst gender equality policy seems to have moved beyond the narrow frame of anti-discrimination, for the other strands the Treaty of Amsterdam's anti-discrimination framework can be interpreted as empowering. Mark Bell (2002a: 55) differentiates four periods in the EU policy on racial discrimination: (i) immigrants and the EEC (1957-1984), (ii) the origins of the EU policy in combating racism (1985-1990), (iii) towards the Treaty of Amsterdam (1991-1999), and (iv) the Racial Equality Directive 2000. In the 1980s, the Council's opposition hampered the Commission and Parliament's efforts to combat racial discrimination on the EU level (Bell 2002a: 62). It was only when in the 1990s it was becoming evident that racism might affect the functioning of the internal market that opposition in the Council started to wither. The rise in extreme right parties and racist violence in Europe as well as emerging EU policies creating a 'Fortress Europe' galvanised a cross border EU lobby against racism (Bell 2002a: 68, Hoskyns 1996: 175). The lobby was pivotal in changing the views in the Council for the enactment of the Article 13 in the Treaty of Amsterdam that provided a legal basis for action in the field of racial discrimination.

### ***Disability***

The rights of disabled people have not been traditionally combated in an anti-discrimination framework but rather with an array of social policies. The emphasis has been on providing income, care and assistance (Hendriks 2005: 189). The initiatives at the EU level have been limited, leaving the social policy issue to member states. The Commission has traditionally used different soft law measures, for example in the form of action programmes to promote the social and economic rights of disabled people (Mabbett 2005: 99). The Treaty of Amsterdam represented a landmark for disability rights in Europe by providing a legal basis to tackle discrimination on the basis of disability (Hendriks 2005; Waddington 2005).

The Commission has also promoted 'mainstreaming' of disability in social policy. Mainstreaming here has a slightly different meaning from gender mainstreaming. The concept was introduced in the 1993 Social Policy Green Paper and was defined as acceptance of people as full members of

society, with opportunities for integrated education, training and employment and to lead their lives independently. Thus it implies education in ordinary schools rather than separate special education, avoiding institutionalisation where possible, and facilitating employment in an open labour market rather than employment in sheltered workshops. (Mabbett 2005: 108.) Later, the focus of mainstreaming was extended from social provision to the policy process, which Mabbett interprets as involving 'the procedural right to participate (or at least receive due consideration) in policy-making' (2005: 108). Again, similar to gender mainstreaming, the implementation of mainstreaming has not been successful and member states have accepted it only on a rhetorical level (Mabbett 2005: 109, Waddington 1999: 143).

### ***Sexual orientation***

The Amsterdam Treaty was unique for sexual orientation too in that it is the first and only legally binding international treaty that explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation (Kollman 2008: 9). Although the European Parliament and the Commission were receptive to lobbying efforts on sexual orientation (Kollman 2008: 9), no binding measures were put in place before the 2000s. In the member states, the most heated debate has dealt with the family rights of gay and lesbian couples. Europe has witnessed a recent rapid change from a bleak picture of 'second-class citizenship status of lesbians and gay men' in the EU (Elman 2000: 730) to the transnational diffusion of same-sex unions in Western Europe (Kollman 2008). Whereas in 1990, only Denmark legally recognised the same sex partnerships, by 2007 only three Western European countries, Greece, Ireland and Italy, withheld such recognition at the national level (Kollman 2008: 1). Kelly Kollman calls this the 'recognition norm' and argues that it has turned out to be a powerful catalyst of policy change in Western Europe. The situation remains bleakly different in the new member states, the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), where homophobia is rife. In the Directive on the Free Movement Rights of EU Citizens and their Families (2004), the EU mandates that member states recognise the legal rights of same-sex civil or registered partners if the host country has such a same-sex union law in place (Kollman 2008: 11).

### ***Current level of provisions in the different strands***

At the moment, directives on gender equality have a scope that extends from equal pay, equal treatment in employment and self-employment to pregnancy protection, parental leave, access to and supply of goods and services, and certain social rights. The most important directive on gender discrimination the Equal Treatment Directive (1976) was amended in 2002, and replaced by the Recast Directive (2006/54/EC) in 2009.

The speed with which the Racial Equality Directive was adopted in 2000 was remarkable. The directive forbids four forms of discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin: direct, indirect, harassment and instruction to discriminate (Bell 2002a: 75). The directive's scope is wide as it covers discrimination in employment, social protection, social advantages, education, access to and supply of goods and services. Article 5 of the Directive allows for positive action. The explicit inclusion of possible recourse to hypothetical comparators marks a step forward from the Equal Treatment Directive and is particularly relevant in areas where the ethnic minority population is relatively small (Bell 2002a: 75).

According to Mark Bell (2002a: 78) one of the most innovative aspects of the Directive is its focus on remedies and enforcement that build on the experience of gender equality legislation. One of the remaining problems is individual litigation: similar to gender equality legislation, no right of action for trade unions or other organisations to bring discrimination cases in their own name is provided. This makes it more difficult to tackle institutional forms of discrimination including institutional racism. (Bell 2002a: 78.) The Commission's report to the Council and the Parliament on the Racial Equality Directive shows that the directive has been particularly effective in terms of applying to all persons, beyond the fields of employment and requires member states to establish an equality body to promote equal treatment in relation to racial or ethnic origin (Meenan 2007: 7).

The Employment Equality Directive was adopted in November 2000 and prohibits employment related discrimination (including that related to vocational training) on grounds of religion or belief, age, sexual orientation and disability. Discrimination is defined as including direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and instruction to discriminate. In addition employers are obliged to provide a reasonable accommodation to disabled

people, unless this would amount to a disproportionate burden. Certain forms of positive action for all groups are allowed for in member states. (Waddington 2005: 109.) The directive does not contain a definition of disability, which means that it is up to the member states to define disability in national legislation when transposing the directive (Waddington 2005: 117).

The scope of the Racial Equality Directive is somewhat broader than that of the gender equality directives, while other ‘new’ grounds of prohibited discrimination only serve to protect against discrimination in employment (Kantola and Nousiainen 2010). In July 2008, the Commission presented a draft directive that would bring the other grounds on a par with the protection in the Racial Equality Directive. If the Commission’s legislative move is successful, gender equality would enjoy the weakest protection of the six grounds mentioned under Article 13. In a relatively short period of time, a reversal of the hierarchy of protection has taken place: the first has become the last. The situation has created unrest among the feminists involved in European politics and law (Kantola and Nousiainen 2010).

### **Actors and claims**

In the EU, the official institutions, such as the Commission, have played a key role in the construction of the European civil society. In other words, the Commission and the Parliament have created, sustained and institutionalised policy actors in Europe. The Commission has been motivated to do this, first, because it lacks the resources for detailed preparation of policies and thus the relatively small number of EU civil servants are keen to draw on expert knowledge. Second, consultation with civil society actors accords legitimacy to the Commission, whose position as an unelected body formally charged with policy initiation is, at least, ambiguous (Schmidt 2005: 140). Third, civil society has been an attractive partner also in terms of ‘privatisation of governance’ where civil society acts as a partner in governance, also a service provider. Finally, the Commission also prefers to listen to one centralised voice as a representative of different groups.

Civil society organisations created with the help of European Commission funding include the European Women’s Lobby (1996) and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) (1998). The European branch (1997) of the International Lesbian and Gay Alliance is the Lesbian Gays

Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) network that lobbies the EU to adopt policies that enhance the legal standing of gays, lesbians and transgender people (Kollman 2008: 9). It received some networking funds from the Commission. The European Disability Forum has been very active in lobbying for a disability directive similar to the Racial Equality Directive (Mabbett 2005: 104). Although these actors come together to co-operate for example in the European Social Platform, the institutionalised separation between the strands is evident. The claims for gender equality and equality in relation to race, ethnicity and migration were institutionalised into largely separate and discrete organizational forms (Williams 2003: 121). For example, the European Women's Lobby is currently seeking to develop a policy on intersectionality (Lombardo and Verloo 2009) after being initially worried about the loss of a focus on gender in such approaches (Rolandsen-Agustin 2008).<sup>2</sup> These civil society organisations engage in similar transnational interest formation that sets some constraints for their action. These differences reflect the different positions that the social groups have to political, economic and social claims. In the EU context, however, claims have to be framed with a language acceptable to EU level policy-making.

### **Horizontal approaches: Intersectionality and multiple discrimination**

The heightened attention to discrimination in the 2000s can be explained by two different narratives (see Kantola 2010). The usual story about equality policy in the EU would emphasise the economic frame and neo-liberal thinking behind the reforms. A declining labour force and increasing need for workers from outside 'Fortress Europe' necessitates 'diversity management'. Effective competition requires decreasing discrimination that distorts the labour market. Neoliberal governance and New Public Management as one of its manifestations, in turn, require efficiency in government and bureaucracy and favour joined up government. A number of case studies on different European countries have noted that the arguments in favour of creating an integrated equalities agenda and 'single equalities bodies' indeed centre around efficiency (Kantola and Nousiainen 2008: 7; Skjeie 2008: 301, Squires 2008: 143-4).

Another story might emphasise the strong human rights frame that has emerged in the European level of policy making. Sex was a well developed area of Community law and policy. Race and ethnicity, religion and belief were particularly relevant to human rights in the new member states of Central and Eastern European Countries. Deborah Mabbett argues that the inclusion of disability, age and sexual orientation “reflected the idea that a new generation of civil and social rights should be developed in the course of modernizing and restructuring the way that European welfare states regulate the life courses and family arrangements of their citizens” (2005: 106). Some commentators have indeed suggested that the enlargement of the EU to the East was the “backdrop, and to some extent the *raison d'être*” of the measures (Ellis 2002: 291). There was a need to make quick progress before progressive policy in the field would be slowed down by the entry of new more conservative member states. A further reason, according to Mabbett, was that the rights frame was attractive as it was so ambiguous (2005: 105). The scope and application of rights in different proposals was uncertain. It was also unclear to what extent they were declarations of policy intentions or restatements of established positions or provisions for additional protection for individuals (Mabbett 2005: 105).

The debates on intersecting inequalities have entered the European Parliament too, initiated by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. The debates seek to capture how Roma women are discriminated against because of their gender, ethnicity, social and economic background and disabled women on the basis of their gender and disability. Lívia Járóka (PPE-DE) who was the *rapporateur* for the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on the situation of Roma women in the European Union argued in the parliamentary debate (1 June 2006): “Instead of facing the problem of reconciling family and work, the average Roma woman must fight every day to put food on the table without having a job, waiting for benefits and at the mercy of loan sharks.” Her statement illustrates how a mainstream EU gender equality policy approach – reconciling work and family – does not further gender equality for Roma women but may be irrelevant for them.

The European Parliament also debated the situation of disabled women in the European Union. The debate took place on the basis of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality report, which highlights the dimensions of gender discrimination that disabled women face in their everyday lives in Europe.

## Tackling multiple discrimination in the EU

The issue of intersectionality is debated in the EU in terms of ‘multiple discrimination’. The meaning of the term is undergoing discursive struggles and in these struggles the meaning of the term will become ‘fixed’ (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). In particular, the emerging definitions narrow the debate down to discrimination omitting other measures and tools such as positive action or mainstreaming, assume inherent similarities between the social categories or an axis of inequality, and eclipse the issue of class and poverty (cf. Kantola and Nousiainen 2010; Squires 2009).

The tools that the EU has had to tackle multiple discrimination have been either weak or non-existent (see for example Bell 2002(a): 212-213). Over the past five years, multiple discrimination has nonetheless entered the EU equality policy making agenda with some tangible consequences for actors and policies in the member states. Some member states, such as Britain and the Central and Eastern European Countries, have brought the law enforcement agencies for the different strands together (Lovenduski 2007; Squires 2008b; 2009; Koldinská 2009). For others, such as Finland and Spain, the impetus to tackle multiple discrimination in both policy and legislation has clearly come from the EU directives (Kantola and Nousiainen 2008).

What is the legal basis for tackling multiple discrimination in the EU? The gender directives are single ground directives and do not mention multiple discrimination, but soft law measures, and the gender equality programmes in particular, contain references to multiple discrimination (Kantola and Nousiainen 2010). The Roadmap of Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010 has the declared purpose of “combating multiple discrimination, in particular against immigrant and ethnic minority women” (Nielsen 2008: 35). The preamble of the Ethnic Equality Directive states that “the Community should (...) aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality between men and women, especially since *women are often the victims of multiple discrimination*” and a similar provision is found in the Employment Framework Directive (Nielsen 2008: 33, emphasis added).

Multiple discriminations agendas started to emerge with the European Commission Green Paper *Equality and Non-Discrimination in an Enlarged European Union* in 2004. This Green Paper both evaluates progress since the enactment of the Amsterdam Treaty and seeks to set the agenda for future

reform. Overall there is an emphasis and a preference for an integrated equalities agenda in the Green Paper. For example, the Green Paper comments positively on the establishment of ‘single equalities bodies’ in some member states (European Commission 2004: 12). The Green Paper still operates with an economic and employment centred frame where the EU policies of non-discrimination are seen as a measure to create economic growth through a rise in the labour market participation (Rolandsen Agustín 2008: 511). The European Women’s Lobby (EWL) was sceptical towards the Green Paper’s integrated approach to equality and argued it might result in a decrease in the allocation of funding and resources to women’s organisations (Rolandsen Agustín 2008: 513). Other perceived dangers included eclipsing gender, conflicting interests (for example between religion and gender), and institutional competition (Lombardo and Verloo 2009).

Despite these worries, the EU multiple discrimination policy was further developed in a report financed by and prepared for the European Commission titled *Tackling Multiple Discrimination*. Again the labour market is considered the sector where multiple discrimination occurs most often (European Commission 2007: 5). The report recommends extending the scope of EU anti-discrimination legislation to cover age, disability, religion/belief and sexual orientation in the fields of social protection, social advantages, education and access to goods and services. It also recommends that multiple discrimination be factored into all equality mainstreaming (European Commission 2007: 7).

It is noteworthy that in the report the EU has opted for the language of multiple discrimination as opposed to intersectionality – the preferred concept in feminist theory. In the report, multiple discrimination is defined as describing:

A situation where discrimination takes place on the basis of several grounds operating separately. For instance an ethnic minority woman may experience discrimination on the basis of her gender in one situation and because of her ethnic origin in another. A different term used to describe this form of discrimination is additive discrimination (European Commission 2007: 16).

Intersectional discrimination, in contrast, refers to a situation where several grounds operate and interact with each other at the same time in such a way that they are inseparable (European Commission 2007: 17). Overall, the report illustrates that member state ministries, national equality bodies and

NGOs had little experience in dealing with multiple discrimination, let alone intersectionality.

The preference for the term of multiple discrimination is not in line with feminist debates on intersectionality. Multiple discrimination may be attractive to policy-makers because of its simplicity. It promises that the different axes of inequality are similar to one another, matter to the same extent and can be treated with anti-discrimination approach. Each of these assumptions has been challenged in feminist debates on intersectionality (for a discussion see Kantola and Nousiainen 2010). Mieke Verloo illustrates convincingly that the different bases of inequality are not similar and they are differently framed to be relevant as policy problems (2006: 221). The categories for inequality differ, for example, on the dimension of choice (one can choose her religion but not age), on the dimension of visibility (one can hide sexuality but not gender), and dimension of change (age and disability can change but many will not change their sex).

Second, feminist theory on intersectionality regards it as an empirical question as to which category of discrimination matters most in a given situation. Ange-Marie Hancock (2007: 64) differentiates between ‘unitary approach’, ‘multiple approach’ and ‘intersectional approach’ to the study of race, gender, class and other categories of difference in political science. The unitary approach addresses one category at the time (for example gender) as the most relevant or most explanatory, multiple and intersectional approaches address more than one (Hancock 2007: 67). For multiple approaches, categories matter equally in a predetermined relationship to each other. In intersectional approaches, in contrast, the relationship between the categories is an open empirical question. Intersectionality conceptualises the categories as resulting from dynamic interaction between individual and institutional factors.

Hancock further argues that it is the additive and multiple approaches that lead to competition rather than coordination between marginal groups. The unitary approach is universalising in that it considers one category as most salient for political explanation. It also assumes that individual memberships are permanent. This leads to ‘Oppression Olympics’ where groups compete for the title of being most oppressed to gain the attention and political support of dominant groups (Hancock 2007: 68). Most importantly, it leaves the overall system of structural inequality unchanged. The multiple

approach that treats for example gender and race as parallel phenomena results in the same problem. It produces “an additive model of politics leading to competition rather than coordination among marginal groups for fringe levels of resources rather than systemic reform that could transform the entire logic of distribution” (Hancock 2007: 70).

In the current EU approach multiple discrimination is defined with a narrow anti-discrimination frame. Sandra Fredman argues that: “Intersectionality becomes more visible through positive duties to promote equality than under a complaints led approach, since those responsible for instituting change are required to identify group inequalities and to craft solutions, rather than reacting to self-identified complaints” (Fredman 2008: 73). The duty to bring about change lies with those with the power and capacity to do so, not with the ‘victim of discrimination’ (Fredman 2008: 79-80.) However, similar constraints that are now present in combating intersectional discrimination can also appear to limit the use of positive measures. Authorities and employers may have a rather narrow approach to positive action, taking positive action as a means to economic utility rather than to equality as such. That at least has been the experience in Finland, where a positive duty to promote gender equality has been in force for more than two decades (Holli and Kantola 2007; Nousiainen 2008). Reliance on positive duties puts much faith in the expertise and motivation of the instances that are obligated to them.

### **Consequences: Towards single equality bodies?**

The Racial Equality Directive was the first binding legal instrument in the EU that obligated member states to set up bodies to promote equal treatment on the basis of race and ethnicity (Bell 2008: 40). Later the revised Equal Treatment Directive 2002 extended this requirement to gender equality bodies. The EU requirements about the competence and capacities of these bodies remain vague and much emphasis is placed on their ‘independence’: to assist victims, conduct surveys and publish reports (Bell 2008: 40).

Notably, the EU minimum standards for equality agencies do not refer to powers needed for proactive measures (Nousiainen 2009). This reflects the human rights based model to equality bodies. The Nordic tradition, in contrast, is based on the ombudsman type of bodies that can take proactive measures. Human rights bodies are responsible for presenting opinions,

recommendations and reports and disseminate information and do research. The emphasis is placed on the independence of the bodies to ensure neutrality and objectivity. Kevät Nousiainen (2009: 5-6) argues that the prevalence of these human rights norms for equality bodies in the EU downplays the features that are typical for equality bodies trusted with social policy aims and proactive promotion of equality. Independence from government may be important for monitoring purposes, but less useful when pushing for positive action or gender mainstreaming (Nousiainen 2009). The EU is thus promoting a particular model of women's policy agencies, which is proving to be particularly influential in the new member states of the Central and Eastern European Countries that did not have pre-existing bodies but are establishing them according to EU standards (Koldinská 2009).

The EU seems to encourage 'single equality bodies' that bring law enforcement and implementation of equal treatment on the basis of the different categories under one roof. This model is supported by the European Commission as a way to address multiple discrimination effectively (European Commission 2007: 5). Britain, for instance, has created an Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which has responsibility for enforcing equality legislation on age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status, and encourages compliance with the Human Rights Act (Lovenduski 2007, Squires 2008; 2009). The new member states in the Central and Eastern European Countries, which had no ombudsmen prior to entry to the EU, have followed a single equality bodies model from the start for economic and efficiency reasons (Koldinská 2009). Two Nordic countries, Sweden and Norway, which had a strong model of promoting gender equality, are following the same trajectory (Bergqvist et al 2007; Skjeie and Langvasbråten 2009). Finland, in contrast, has opted for separate equalities bodies and Austria too has created three separate Ombuds (for women and men, for religion/belief, age and sexual orientation, and for equal opportunities with regard to ethnic belonging).

## **Conclusion**

In theory, intersecting inequalities could be tackled either within specific equality policy fields (the vertical approach) or within an integrated equalities agenda (the horizontal approach). In the first approach, this would mean that gender

equality policy would need to account for the concerns of ethnic minority women, young black men, disabled women and lesbians. Similarly, policies on racial and ethnic discrimination would have to be based on an understanding of gendered hierarchies that these policies may perpetuate or reproduce. In the second approach, (an integrated equalities agenda), intersecting inequalities are more easy to grasp but also here there is a need to develop ways of ‘tackling multiple discrimination’ or accounting for intersectionality. This chapter has sought to highlight how the way that we frame the issue really matters. Do we talk about multiple discrimination or intersectionality and how does this shape the way that the issue is tackled? Whilst the EU directives are putting pressure on member states to tackle this issue, convergence is only limited and member states are opting for different solutions (see also Bell 2008). This will provide an interesting future agenda for research.

### **Teaching Reflections**

- How do the terms ‘multiple discrimination’, ‘unitary strands’ and ‘intersectionality’ lead to different policy approaches in terms of inequalities?
- You are the (Feminist) equality minister of a country that wants to join the European Union. Set up a policy machinery that takes account of the different strands of discrimination and inequality as identified in EU law. Would you give more budget room for one ground as opposed to another? Why? Defend your choices.
- Why do you think that feminist theorists seem to prefer an approach of ‘intersectionality’ rather than ‘multiple discrimination’?

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<sup>1</sup> Article 13 states: Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. (Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty 1999)

<sup>2</sup> See Lombardo and Verloo 2009 for a discussion of EU policy agencies as opposed to civil society actors.

# **The Ignored Aspects of Intersectionality**

*Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel*

## **Abstract**

Persons with disabilities as well as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) persons are the most neglected groups among the identities mentioned under Article 13. LGBT persons face the prejudices of society by being still regarded as abnormal, as undesirable persons, whose discrimination is maintained through religion and cultural norms. The fact that you could be a person with intersecting identities is hardly recognised and leads to even more discrimination in society at large and within the specific groups mentioned. EU legislation creates hierarchy among the various identities and hardly affects the attitude of or diminishes discriminatory behaviour by the dominant group in society.

## **Introduction**

“The Community should take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.” Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)

Article 13 of the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and the directives that resulted from it so far tackle discrimination, but we have to ask after more than a decade if it has not resulted in a hierachal interpretation (Hannet 2003). Some of the identities mentioned under Article 13 have been more in focus than others, and some have been the subject of multiple interpretations or even further discrimination by watering down the conceptual meaning of some forms of discrimination. The directives derived from Article 13 focus on issues where the Community benefits most, such as employment and economic sustainability (Waddington & Bell 2001).

The human rights aspects are more visible within the race and ethnic minority directive as it focuses on more aspects than employment only. This creates in itself a hierarchy among the groups mentioned under Article 13. The need to challenge racism is well understood by many people in the Community. Challenging sexism, disable-ism and homophobia is not always

given the same importance, which hampers the creation of further legislation for these specific groups.

Another complication of this piece of EU legislation is that it does not deal with the intersectional aspects of the identities mentioned. This so called single issue approach within the present EU strategy has specific pitfalls. There are certainly individuals who only suffer from one form of discrimination. For example, white women – considered as belonging to the majority ethnicity, claiming membership in the majority religion and living a heterosexual life without being regarded as disabled or too old or too young will only suffer discrimination on grounds of their sex. Men considered as belonging to a minority ethnicity, claiming membership in the majority religion and living a heterosexual life without being regarded as disabled or too old or too young will only suffer discrimination on grounds of their ethnicity. White men considered as disabled, but also belonging to majority religion and majority ethnicity, leading a heterosexual life will only suffer discrimination on grounds of their disability (Schiek and Monnet 2008). This list could be prolonged endlessly.

The concept of sex occupies a strange position in this. Within all groups targeted under Article 13 girls and women are more discriminated than boys and men (Rivière-Zijdel la 2001; Verloo 2005). So gender and sex are the integrating themes of basic discrimination we could say within all of these groups. This has lead many politicians to speak about the multiple discrimination of women. However, it is more correct to speak of intersectional discrimination.

All directives so far find their origin within a certain context. As the majority of EU politicians are still non-disabled white heterosexual men in the prime of life claiming membership in the majority religion, this base is already biased. When the Community is focusing solely on reaching the Lisbon target, with a further desire to play an important role on the global economy market, the emphasis lies on the growth of the economy first and the well-being of its citizens second. Moreover, as the majority of Member States share a similar cultural – mostly Christian and white – patriarchal history, certain identities mentioned under the scope of Article 13 are more difficult to tackle than others.

The Community has a heterosexual foundation. Many member states only abandoned discriminative legislation towards gay men and lesbian women a few decades ago. Religion often combined with politics has had a very negative

influence on the human rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons. Most groups under Article 13 are easily mentioned and targeted. LGBT persons are hesitatingly or not mentioned, and if so, rather under the abbreviation of LGBT, than speaking outright of lesbian women, gay men, bisexual and transgender persons.

The history of the atrocities against persons with disabilities has also been part of EU history. Even today severe discrimination of and violence against persons with disabilities is rife. As they are only mentioned within the directives of employment equality and goods and services, most aspects of their lives and the diversity of the group itself are not taken into consideration. Most Member States have not yet ratified the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD). This hampers further legislation as well as an attitude change. Disabled persons are measured against their costs rather than on their human rights, as we will see below.

### **Multiple discrimination or intersectional discrimination?**

Two different types of intersectionality have been defined in the literature: structural and political intersectionality (Crenshaw 1994). Structural intersectionality focuses on people's experiences: how inequalities and the product of their intersections impact on their daily lives. Political intersectionality deals with the level of political strategies, although it does not offer a model to understand structures (Verloo 2004; Verloo 2005). Multiple discrimination on the other hand assumes that discrimination takes place on all aspects at the same time. For instance, a black lesbian woman will be discriminated for being a woman, belonging to an ethnic minority and on sexual orientation simultaneously. This might be true if she is present within a white, heterosexual male surrounding. The question is which of all these identities prevails?

As a disabled lesbian woman I have experienced that it is seldom that all aspects discriminate at the same time. The most apparent are being a woman and disabled, but in a female context the aspect of disability plays a more predominant role than the fact of being a woman. The fact of being lesbian plays a secondary role, except in very traditional, religious women's groups.

In this sense it is more correct to speak of intersectionality. Discrimination occurs where the identities intersect with other identities. It should be regarded more as a variable wherein time, place and community are determinants. When the surrounding society is basically white, male and heterosexual, the aspects of ethnicity, sexual orientation and sex intersect.

In the disability movement I have experienced discrimination on the intersecting identities of sex and sexual orientation. The disability movement tends to be quite homophobic as disabled people desire to belong as much as possible to the majority norm (i.e. heterosexual). They already deviate from this norm through their impairments and all negative connotations attached to it. Like all social and political movements (except for the women's movement) the disability movement is mostly run by (disabled) men, which has put the women's agenda on a secondary and often tertiary place (i.e. impairment specific first and men second). I discovered a similar process within the LGBT movement that has difficulty with the aspects of being disabled, as the norm is beauty, virility, independence and so on.

## **Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation**

"Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice".

Preamble of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

This sentence of the Preamble of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights powerfully illustrates the profound relation between individual rights and EU policies dealing with freedom, security and justice. In plain terms, seen from a Community perspective these policies are there to serve people living in the EU and to better protect their rights. Sexual orientation and gender identity are personal characteristics of the individual, which are protected by anti-discrimination measures at national and European levels. Both the conduct and the identity of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, are protected by Articles 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (respect for private life and non-discrimination) (Wintemute 2005). The respect for fundamental rights is a general principle which Community law observes (ECJ 1996), and these fundamental rights do encompass the right to non-discrimination (ECJ 1977; 2002). A significant European Union

commitment to improving the situation of LGBT people was Article 13 in the Treaty of Amsterdam (see above). The Charter of Fundamental Rights was signed by a majority of Member States in December 2007, conferring on the Charter the same legally binding character as the EU Treaties themselves. The Charter includes in its non-discrimination clause (Article 21) sexual orientation and gender – including gender identity – as prohibited grounds for discrimination, and is the first international human rights charter to do so.

Although human rights for LGBT people entail many different aspects, same-sex marriage has been represented as the ‘ultimate cause’ for gay and lesbian rights and simultaneously it is the most disputed subject. Some member states have constructed laws to realise same-sex marriages, not only as a symbol of formal equality but as the fulfilment of citizenship (Hodson 2007). For example, the Spanish Parliament approved Law 13/2005 allowing for changes in the Civil Code on the subject of marriage. Spain placed itself in the footsteps of other European Union member states, which opened civil marriages to same-sex couples, i.e. the Netherlands and Belgium. Other countries like Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom have alternative registration schemes which are similar to marriage (see Appendix for the full list) (Bamforth et al 2005). But even with partnership protection LGBT families have discovered that the traditional family ideal is still a potent ‘conservative force’ to be reckoned with. As they are unable to match up to the ‘traditional’ family ideal, many LGBT families find that they still face discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion. The practical implications of having one’s most important and intimate loving relationship kept outside of a framework of legal protection and regulation can be devastating (Eskridge 1999).

In 2006 the European Parliament adopted a Resolution that condemned constitutional amendments explicitly prohibiting same-sex unions as a form of homophobia and also referred to the widespread disadvantage and discrimination suffered by those in same-sex unions.

In the Netherlands, lesbian and gay teachers at so-called Christian schools are not accepted to be married (to a same sex partner). And if they are unmarried, they are not allowed to reveal their sexual orientation. The government has been discussing this within the parliament for more than a year. Despite Article 13, which in the Netherlands even overrides national laws, discrimination is still happening.

Discrimination in many forms against LGBT people still occurs in our societies. Severe bullying at schools when a child is regarded as homosexual leads to psychological traumas and is a number one cause for suicide attempts. Within our multicultural societies, cultural differences in accepting sexual difference create more intolerance towards LGBT persons (Guter & Killacky 2004).

When I married my wife sixteen years ago, I was proud to call her my wife and to walk hand in hand through my neighbourhood in Amsterdam. Our suburb counts a variety of cultural backgrounds and nationalities. Walking hand in hand on the street is no longer safe. Being an openly gay or lesbian teacher in our suburb leads to all forms of violence.

It is sometimes suggested that religious prescription demands that ‘the family’ is understood to refer exclusively to heterosexual unions. Some people believe that their religion can justify, or even require, discrimination against LGBT people (Tremain 1996). Pope Benedict XVI has said that gay marriage would “obscure the value and function of the legitimate family” (BBC News, 2006). It becomes even more difficult if your sexual orientation is mixed with other identities, for instance with ethnic minority or race. Statistics show that LGBT people of Moroccan or Turkish descent have a chance to be expelled from their community or sometimes even killed because of their sexual orientation. Some fundamentalist Christians also exclude LGBT people from their communities or force them – through psychiatric or religious treatment – to live a heterosexual life (Evans 2003).

The disability movement itself is a rather homophobic movement. Being disabled entails exclusion from mainstream society and struggling for recognition and human rights. Marrying a non-disabled opposite sex partner is the ultimate dream of many disabled persons in order to rise on the ranks of ‘normality’. For LGBT disabled persons it is an even harder struggle to get recognition among other disabled people, but also among non-disabled persons. Disabled people are often still regarded as a-sexual beings, which leads to denying the possibilities of a different sexual orientation than heterosexuality, if any in the first place (Zakarewsky 1979; Shakespeare et al. 1996; Shakespeare 1999). The LGBT movement on its side also has difficulties with disabled persons. The admired values of beauty, virility, independence and feminism put being disabled in a problematic light. Most LGBT meeting centres, bars

and other public LGBT places are not (wheelchair) accessible, or easy to find for people with sight impairment or other disabilities, or open to LGBT persons with learning disabilities (Guter & Killacky 2004; Butler 2006).

The cloning of cultures clones the dominant race and majority norm (Essed & Goldberg 2002), for example, it is better to have heterosexual, non-disabled children. This majority easily silences the existence and the human rights of LGBT persons. Directives that include all aspects of the lives of LGBT persons can have an impact on attitude change in the Community. Only by legal pressure can issues like LGBT persons' human rights be enhanced. The fact that the United Nations first gave consultative status to the LGBT movement in 2008 shows that the world in the twenty-first century is still far from acknowledging that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is a fundamental condition within human rights.

### **Discrimination on the grounds of disability**

Persons with disabilities make up the world's largest and most disadvantaged minority. The numbers are damning: an estimated 20 per cent of the world's poorest persons have disabilities. The European Union counts 37 million disabled citizens. Estimations reveal that a majority still live institutionalised. The absence of disabled people in everyday life, not allowed to be integral and productive members of society, has an impact on society at large and on the individual disabled person her/himself. When disabled people are shown, the focus is more on their impairments or they are predominantly judged by a cost-benefit analysis (Barnes & Mercer 2005). Many of the prejudiced attitudes that still exist today have their roots in longstanding historical and religious influences and explain why disability equality has been called "the last civil rights movement" (Marin, et al. 2004).

The history of past atrocities committed against people with disabilities may seem remote. Certainly attitudes have become more benevolent and enlightened. But how much has really changed? The fallacies of the reasoning behind the eugenics movement are widely recognised. The issues surrounding the elimination of people with disabilities through incarceration, death and sterilisation, however, still remain. Though the rhetoric and rationales have changed, the means are more subtle. The actual numbers may have been reduced, but efforts to eliminate people with disabilities continue. The human

beings who in the past were sterilised as threats to racial purity, burned as witches, or sent to the gas chambers are now being “allowed to die for their own good” or sterilised for ‘hygienic reasons’ or “for the rights of the unborn child” in the case of learning disabled parents (Albrecht, et al. 2001).

The entire debate about gene manipulation to minimise the risk for certain impairments in infants is an exclusive medical debate in which disabled people and their organisations are not included. It puts to question the right to live as a person with a disability. At the same time anyone can, at any time, become disabled, or develop a physical or mental impairment. Perhaps a person’s need to distance him/herself from this harsh reality, makes it convenient to rely on received negative attitudes and historical stereotypes of disability. These stereotypical images are less troubling than accepting the individuality, the joy, the pain, the appearance, behaviour and the rights of disabled people.

In the European Union, paid work is a key signifier of class, status and power. Community initiatives like the Lisbon strategy even stipulate this. This means that people on the margins of the labour market encounter a variety of economic, political and social deprivations. This form of distributive injustice is widely experienced by disabled people throughout the European Union (Marin, et al., 2004). The latest figures for the EU suggest that more than 50 percent of disabled people are ‘economically’ inactive – neither working nor actively seeking work - compared with 15 percent of non-disabled people. Although unemployment amongst people labelled with ‘learning difficulties’ and/or designated ‘mental illnesses’ is especially high “for all impairment types labour market disadvantage is substantial” (NEP 2005: 15-16). Moreover, there are disproportionate numbers of disabled people in less skilled, lower paid jobs with fewer promotion prospects, and an over representation in specific occupations or congregated in sheltered workshops. Disabled people are particularly under-represented in professions and management jobs with higher earnings, job security and opportunities for promotion. Disabled men working full time earned on average 25 percent less than their non-disabled counterparts while the wages of disabled women were only two thirds that of disabled men (Thomas 1999; Burchardt 2000).

Hitherto official and sociological analyses of work and disability have failed to address in sufficient depth the various social and environmental barriers that confront disabled people in the labour market. As a consequence many writers from within a disability studies perspective drawing upon the

insights of the philosophy of independent living and the social model of disability have argued for a reconfiguration of the meaning of work in order to remove the stigma associated with unpaid labour (Rivière-Zijdel la 2001; Barnes and Mercer 2005).

Despite the many European, national and international regulations, initiatives and actions to advance the lives of persons with disabilities, legislative measures in which the human rights of people with disabilities are protected are scarcely in place. The passing of disability acts in several member states has not had the effect of meeting all human rights of people with disabilities. Imagine having your capacity to make decisions, sign contracts, vote, defend your rights in court or choose medical treatments taken away simply because you have a disability. For many persons with disabilities, this is a fact of life and the consequences can be devastating. When individuals lack the legal capacity to act, they are not only robbed of their right to equal recognition before the law, they are also robbed of their ability to defend and enjoy other human rights.

There is light on the horizon thanks to the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD is the response of the international community to the long history of discrimination, exclusion and dehumanization of persons with disabilities. It is historic and groundbreaking in many ways, being the fastest negotiated human rights treaty ever and the first of the twenty-first century. The Convention is the result of three years of negotiations. It was also the first convention ever that was negotiated by the European Union as a whole. The Convention came into force on May 8, 2008 (after the twentieth ratification). The CRPD ensures that the world's largest minority enjoys the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. It covers the many areas where persons with disabilities have been discriminated against, including access to justice, participation in political and public life, education, employment, freedom from torture, exploitation and violence, as well as freedom of movement. Under the Optional Protocol, individuals of States that are party to the Protocol who allege violations of their rights and who have exhausted national remedies, can seek redress from an independent international body.

The Convention is long overdue. It is over 25 years since the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons brought global attention to the issues affecting persons with disabilities. Therefore it is unbelievable that only 11 of

the 27 EU member states had ratified the CRPD by October 2009. From the EU as legal entity we hear the sound of silence.

When talking recently to the State Secretary of the Netherlands in charge of the ratification procedure of the CRPD by the Dutch government, she stated that “the costs are too high when all articles of the Convention need to be legally met”.

This implies that the cost of other people’s human rights is not at stake, only those of disabled people. Again there is only one side to the coin of the cost-benefit analysis. The benefits derived from the existence of people with disabilities are never taken into consideration, that is, the benefits for the medical world, the pharmaceutical industry, the care and service providers, all employees in the field of disability, including civil servants and politicians.

Although the CRPD is very inclusive of all elements of disabled people’s lives and it mentions specifically women and girls with disabilities, racial and ethnic origin, religion and belief, children and elderly, it failed to include sexual orientation. The debate on mentioning women and girls separately was already a tough nut to crack, but sexual orientation lost on all fronts: within civil society (including the disability movement) and in most UN member states, including the European Union, despite Article 13 (Rivière-Zijdel, la 2003).

In my concluding remarks as civil society co-ordinator for the women and girls paragraphs in the Convention I stated: “Today we celebrate a great momentum, as for the first time women and girls with disabilities are legally recognized by all UN member states. Today I personally feel also very sad, as one part of my identity is recognized as a woman with a disability, but another essential part of my identity is ignored, as discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not included in the Convention. This means that the international movement continues to ignore that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender disabled persons exist.”

Although the rights to raise a family, sexual and reproductive health are part of the Convention, the right to a sexual life, whether heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual is fully ignored. This brings us back again to the fact that disabled persons’ sexuality continues to be denied, which excludes a basic part of our existence.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter, based on the aspects of identity mentioned under Article 13 of the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, started off by questioning if all identities could lead to hierachal interpretation. Lifting out two of the aspects, that is, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and on the grounds of disability, from this EU legislation and putting emphasis on it, creates in itself a danger for hierachal interpretation (Molloy, et al. 2003). Nevertheless, both groups have been under-exposed over the past years. As all the different identities are mentioned under one Article, it also implies that the groups with these identities are ‘condemned’ to each other. The directives and the financial benefits derived from it need to be shared with six identity groups. On top of that, all identities can intersect within one particular group. We have seen that all groups have different backgrounds, different status in society, different histories, some more accepted than others, some with larger and more accepted movements behind them, which leads to different possibilities to claim their rights.

Article 13, the directives and the community programs derived from it, such as the EU anti-discrimination program EQUAL, did not lead to joint initiatives of the women’s, disability, anti-race, LGBT, religious and age movements. If they took place it was thanks to the special (financial) benefits of these programs. The LGBT movement in particular had a hard time being seriously included within programs and conferences under the EQUAL program. The disability movement was often excluded or marginally involved, because of accessibility issues and the extra cost involved with the participation of disabled persons (e.g. personal assistants, Braille documents, sign language interpretation, and special transportation).

The new Council directive that was launched on July 2, 2008, focuses on “the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation outside the labour market”. It sets out a framework for the prohibition of discrimination on these grounds and establishes a uniform minimum level of protection within the European Union for people who have suffered such discrimination (COM(2008) 426 final). This directive supplements the existing EC legal framework under which the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation applies only to employment, occupation and vocational

training. It further gives the same possibilities to disability, age or sexual orientation as were given to racial or ethnic origin in an earlier directive.

Although well meant, a hierarchy occurs again as the race directive focuses only on one identity, the new directive again on four identities. It gives the impression that each of them is not important enough to be tackled under one directive, which has been claimed especially by the disability movement. Disability involves already so many different aspects, such as the different impairment groups that have in themselves many different needs to be met, the member state where you live (rich or poor, with or without disability acts), and so forth.

Disabled people are specifically mentioned under Article 4 of this directive, “Equal treatment of persons with disabilities”, which is the result of the movement’s push for a specific disability directive, but strangely enough all other groups are not specifically targeted. The words lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender are nowhere mentioned, let alone tackled under the religious and cultural dominance of heterosexuals.

Some of the text in the directive is very tendentious, using words for instance as ‘effective’ or ‘reasonable’ or ‘respect for traditions’, which leaves a lot of leeway to governments and law enforcement agencies (Waddington and Hendriks 2002). This means again that the identity groups mentioned under this directive have once more to ‘combat’ each other for the resources, the attention and their rights.

Sometimes the impression is given that groups that make the most trouble in society will have their rights met earlier. But it could also be argued that the most oppressed in society will stand up and will not be pushed back (Freire 1972). It is clear that some movements have a longer and different history than others. It is easier to talk about anti-racism, especially with the recent developments in the United States of America through the election of President Barack Hussein Obama, the first black president of the USA, than to talk about homophobia, or disabilism. But could this new president have been an openly gay or lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender person? President Roosevelt was always portrayed without his wheelchair, as his advisors claimed that he would lose credibility, as everyone would have known he was disabled.

Although some countries of the European Union have openly lesbian and gay politicians, within the European Commission or the European institutions and also within the majority of Member States they are hardly visible or

present. The same can be said for politicians with a disability. With the dream that came true for so many black people and descendants of former slaves in the United States with the election of President Obama, LGBT persons and disabled persons have to keep their hopes and dreams up that one day European Commissioners or Presidents of EU Member States will be openly lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender and/or a woman or a man with a disability. The many atrocities against persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender persons have shaped their history, but also strengthened their movements. No one wants to have a decrease of what has been achieved, but dangers lie around the corner. In economic crises communities become less tolerant and the survival of the fittest is more upfront.

The European Union and its member states as civilised democratic societies cannot and should not turn back the clock and must continue what they have started by enforcing anti-discrimination and human rights legislation which results in specific actions. Only then will a real paradigm shift in the attitudinal thinking about persons with disabilities or being lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, from an ethnic minority, with whatever belief or religion, or of whatever age will become a reality.

### **Teaching Reflections**

- Does EU legislation create a hierarchy among the various identities? If so, how? What does this hierarchy look like?
- For which target groups will the new (proposed) directive be most important?
- In which order does Intersection come up when people face ‘multiple discriminations’? Why would that be?

## Appendix

Table 1. Simplified overview of national laws concerning same-sex couples in EU Member States

**Civil marriages open to same-sex couples:**

- a. Belgium
- b. Netherlands
- c. Spain

**Alternative registration scheme (very) similar to marriage:**

- a. Denmark
- b. Finland
- c. Germany
- d. Netherlands
- e. Sweden
- f. United Kingdom

**Alternative registration scheme entailing (considerably) less rights and responsibilities than marriage:**

- a. Belgium
- b. France
- c. Czech Republic
- d. Hungary
- e. Luxembourg
- f. Portugal
- g. Slovenia

Source: Baraldi, 2007

Table 2. Overview of national laws allowing adoption by LGBT couples in EU Member States

**Second-parent adoption:**

Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

**Joint adoption:**

Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Source: Baraldi, 2007

# **For Diversity Against Discrimination: From Gender Mainstreaming, through Multiple Discrimination, to Intersectionality**

*Barbara Bagilhole*

## **Abstract**

Policy practices in the field of Equal Opportunities and Diversity have changed throughout the European Union member states. The first major thrust was 'gender mainstreaming'. Then with the recognition of diversity, it moved to notions of 'multiple disadvantage'. Now the scene is set for a further move to an 'intersectional approach', which adds a more sophisticated analysis to the previous ideas of just adding discriminations one on top of another.

## **Gender mainstreaming**

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context and time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender mainstreaming was clearly established as the global strategy for promoting gender equality through the Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

### **Definition:**

Mainstreaming a gender perspective in all types of activities (referred to as gender mainstreaming) is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a means to the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

Gender equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration – recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.

In addressing the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels, Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.

It is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

Mainstreaming is not about adding on a 'women's component', or even a 'gender equality component', to an existing activity. It involves more than increasing women's participation. Mainstreaming:

- situates gender equality issues at the centre of policy decisions.  
entails bringing the perceptions, experience, knowledge and interests of women as well as men to bear on policy-making, planning and decision-making.
- can reveal a need for changes in goals, strategies and actions to ensure that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes.
- requires changes in organizations – structures, procedures and cultures – to create organizational environments which are conducive to the promotion of gender equality.
- does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes, and positive legislation; nor does it do away with the need for gender units or focal points.
- requires systematic use of gender analysis, sex-disaggregation of data, and commissioning of sector-specific gender studies and surveys.

Gender mainstreaming as an equality instrument has been seriously encouraged by the European Union. Equal opportunities was included as a key pillar within the European Employment Strategy in 1997, constituting an overt commitment to gender mainstreaming. However, the Equality pillar disappeared in 2003 with the reform of the Lisbon process. As a result the visibility of gender issues has faded. In the EU, issues of migration, immigration, race, and religious belief are beginning to dominate the agenda due to various recent occurrences, for example, the riots in Paris, and the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands. It has become increasingly common to talk about diversity and multiple discriminations in the EU. This identifies the six key strands as requiring measures to combat discrimination: sex, racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation. Gender mainstreaming is now seen by some as a potential way forward for Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming which incorporates these other strands of social differentiation. Gender mainstreaming has been a useful strategy, and has continuing potential. However, the main concern is that gender equality may lose out in the milieu of diversity. A recent survey carried out by the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2007) on perceptions of and attitudes to discrimination against the six different equal opportunities and diversity strands may be a worrying indication of gender equality slipping down both the public and politicians' agenda. Indicatively, the table of contents of the report listed gender as the last category for examination, with ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, and religion or beliefs before in this order. When questioned on the occurrence of discrimination against different strands, 53% of the respondents thought it was rare against women, whereas 64% thought it was widespread against people of minority ethnic origin (see Table 3 below).

**Table 3. Perception of discrimination on the basis of attributes**

	Rare	Widespread
Ethnic origin	30%	64%
Disability	42%	53%
Sexual orientation	41%	50%
Age	48%	46%
Religion or beliefs	47%	44%
Gender	53%	40%

Adapted from *EuroBarometer 263 (2007), Discrimination in the European Union*, Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

In a similar vein, the respondents thought that being a woman was the least disadvantageous group to belong to in terms of equal opportunities. Whereas 79% thought it was disadvantageous to be disabled, only 33% thought being a woman would be so, and even 4% thought being a man would be a disadvantage (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4. Would you say belonging to certain groups is a disadvantage?**

	Disadvantage
Being disabled	79%
Aged >50	77%
Ethnic minority	69%
Homosexual	62%
Religious minority	39%
Woman	33%
Man	4%

Adapted from *EuroBarometer 263 (2007), Discrimination in the European Union*, Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

In summary, of the six strands of equal opportunities, discrimination on the grounds of minority ethnic origin is perceived to take place most widely and disabled people are seen as most disadvantaged. Significantly for this chapter, gender is consistently perceived as at the bottom of the hierarchy of disadvantage, which puts it at risk of falling lower down the political agenda.

However, there are still marked differences in the experiences of women and men. Overall, the gendered domestic division of labour and time is still skewed firmly in men's favour, so that women enter the public spheres of the labour market and politics with a disadvantage. In the labour market, occupational segregation, greater concentration in part time work and the gender pay gap mean that women remain more likely than men to be low paid. Women are more likely than men to be poor and they carry the main burden of managing poverty. Domestic violence stunts the lives of many women. The litany of gender injustice continues. A glass ceiling still governs differential gendered access to top jobs and women are still dramatically under-represented in all key areas of public, political and economic life. The majority of public appointments, senior civil servants, members of the legal profession,

directors of companies, key actors in the media and individuals holding senior positions in universities are men.

### **Multiple discrimination**

We now have to incorporate the social differentiations of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and age into Equal Opportunities and Diversity policies. The 'big three' (gender, race and disability) has moved on to the 'new six'. Also, it is important to acknowledge that the social differentiations under consideration (gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and age) do not create homogeneous groups. Social movement campaigns stemming from the different groups involved in Equal Opportunities and Diversity (EOD) have each had to independently fight and lobby long and hard for political and legislative recognition. Thus each piece of legislation won has concentrated on one EOD strand without consideration of the other strands. Within this piecemeal legislation, the only possible recourse is for individuals to identify with only one group for the purpose of tackling a case of discrimination, for example, a black woman has to decide whether to fight her case on the grounds of sex or race discrimination, but cannot use both.

It has become clear, with the production of statistics on inequality broken down in a more sophisticated way that there is no longer, if there ever was, a uniform story of blanket disadvantage for any of these groups. Therefore, it is timely to acknowledge, confront and deal with the actual problems of separate and relative deprivation, and sometimes conflicting experiences and interests, both between different categories of disadvantage and even within these categories themselves.

The development of the recognition of multiple disadvantage in legislation, policy and practice needs to be analysed and understood in order to facilitate genuine social change. At first terms like 'double' then 'triple' oppression were used to try to conceptualise this complexity of people's experiences and disadvantage. For example, Crenshaw (1991) presents a graphic analysis of who can make it through the trap door in the 'glass ceiling', which tends to imply a multiplication factor in disadvantage:

“Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked – feet standing on shoulders – with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a single factor brush up against the ceiling ... A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who – due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below – are in a position to crawl through. Those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below” (p. 65).

This implies a rather simplistic multiplication and add on effect of the burdens of disadvantage rather than a complex and sophisticated analysis of the interlacing of disadvantage differently at different times demanded by the intersectionality approach. It is not enough to add on mixed categories such as ethnic minority women or disabled women into existing frameworks. As Begum (1994: 17) pointed out; “Potentially the list [of oppressions] is endless, but simply counting the different types of oppression will not tell us anything. Notions of ‘double disadvantage’ or ‘triple jeopardy’ do nothing to facilitate understanding of multiple and simultaneous oppression”.

A fairytale analogy can be used to explain this phenomenon. Three minority ethnic women assume the role of Snow White, rather than the Black Queen. They each in turn respond to the question: “Mirror, mirror on the wall, what is the greatest oppressor of us all?”. The first woman argues that, being black, racism is the main cause of her oppression. The second explains that her life is dominated and controlled by men. Therefore, sexism is her greatest oppressor. The third woman says that it is not possible to respond because her gender, race and class are all causes of her oppression.

### **Intersectionality impact in gender policies**

The idea of ‘multiple disadvantage’ has moved from a rather crude idea of ‘adding up’ disadvantages to a more sophisticated level still, of thinking that disadvantages are not cumulative but interactional – that is, their effect runs more than one way. For example, racism is infected and changed by sexism for black women, and vice versa – the sexism they encounter is infected and changed by racism.

Feminism and the women's movement have always struggled with the dilemmas of equality and difference; equality with men versus being different from them. This dilemma is now compounded by the contemporary agenda of heterogeneity and diversity of the different strands of Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy. Diversity can pose particular challenges to gender theory, and gender equality policies and legislation. It highlights that it is not enough to focus on gender equality or discrimination, but one needs to understand and study inequalities and discrimination in plural.

The term intersectionality was first highlighted by Crenshaw in 1989 (Crenshaw 1991). Initially, Crenshaw defined the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways race and gender interact to shape multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences, moving away from what was perceived as a mono-focus approach on white middle-class women's interests.

However, its very complexity must in some way be contained to allow its utility for the reality and practicality of Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy making. The potential for Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy development has to function in the context of the 'Realpolitik'.

'Intersectionality' acknowledges and illuminates where disadvantages interplay and coincide or conflict between and within groups where new policy approaches need to be considered. Thus intersectionality alerts us to the need to fine tune policy in a more sophisticated manner than in the past, once we have assessed its impact on people with more than one social differentiation that creates disadvantage, for instance, disabled gay men or lesbian mothers. For example, the experiences and consequences of racism and racial discrimination differ in important ways for black women and black men, and the experiences and consequences of sexism and gender discrimination differ in important ways for white women and black women. Intersectionally informed policies can address issues that may be only relevant for people at a certain period in their lives, for example, policies for lesbian mothers with small children, or for young black men.

A Canadian experience shows that in the market for rental housing, single black women may have a particularly difficult time in finding apartments, especially if they are recipients of social assistance and/or single parents. Many landlords buy into various stereotypes and believe them to be less dependable.

On the basis of sex alone, this discrimination would not be apparent. Similarly, if considering race alone, this discrimination would not be evident.

Thus using standard discrimination analysis, courts would fail to see that there is discrimination against those who are single, black and female. It is the singular identity of ‘single-black-poor-single parent-woman’ which is the subject of discrimination in the housing market. (Symington, 2004)

An example of how an intersectional approach might be used in policy making can be shown by the issue of violence against women. An analysis by race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, and age could be used to identify any categories that potentially need further and specialist interrogation. Then further analysis can be made of the particular groups identified to see how the issue actually works in practice made visible through their day to day experiences. This could then be used to produce specialized positive action measures to tackle the problem.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to briefly analyse the changes in practices in Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy development. It suggests that the picture has become necessarily more complex as we uncover disaggregated data on the six strands identified by the EU. We have moved from ‘gender mainstreaming’ as a tool for gender equality; to the recognition of diversity and ‘multiple discrimination’; to the sophistication of an intersectional approach, which does not just add up disadvantage but instead looks at how the disadvantages intersect and affect each other in different contexts and at different times. The challenge for Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy makers and developers is to tame its complexity so as not to become impotent.

## **Teaching Reflections**

This chapter would be useful background reading to allow teaching that addresses the following questions:

- Is ‘gender mainstreaming’ a useful tool in policy making which seeks to eliminate inequality between women and men?
- Perceptions of discrimination and disadvantage vary between the social groups. Why do you think this is so?
- Is ‘intersectionality’ a useful approach to handle the complexity of multiple discrimination?

## **Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and Gender Mainstreaming: Potential and Pitfalls<sup>3</sup>**

*Judith Squires*

### **Abstract**

The growing pressures on EU member states to address multiple inequalities have generated equality reviews in countries across Europe, with significant numbers of states changing their institutional arrangements for promoting equality. Advocates of these reforms have frequently argued that they will provide new ways of negotiating multiple and cross-cutting equality considerations, raising hopes that equality institutions will be better able to engage with issues of 'intersectionality'. Meanwhile, critics fear that the changes will detract from achievements made and expertise gained in relation to particular equality strands. In this context, this article focuses on the likely impact of the multiple inequalities agenda on gender mainstreaming practices.

### **Intersectionality**

The concept of intersectionality focuses attention on the locations at which (Crenshaw 1991; Brah and Phoenix 2004) or processes by which (Marx Ferree 2008; Prins 2006) marginalised groups experience not only multiple but also particular forms of inequalities. It has become particularly significant in relation to European equality practices in recent years given the growing concern to address multiple strands of inequality (Verloo 2006). Scholars have noted that legal frameworks tend to compartmentalise people's experiences into 'prefabricated' legal categories (Grabham 2006; Grillo 1995), failing to reflect the complexity of social identifications. While some socio-legal scholars suggest that improvements in the legal and state apparatus will facilitate the recognition of intersectionality (Ashiagbor 1999), others are sceptical about the potential for legal frameworks to negotiate intersectionality (Cooper 2009), and still others are critical of the concept of intersectionality itself, arguing that it fails to engage in a sustained way with the wider processes that create inequalities (Conaghan 2009: 29).

Most of the discussion and activity generated by the multiple inequalities agenda has focused on anti-discrimination law (Bell 2008: 36), and the introduction of reforms to national legislation in line with EU directives (see chapter by J. Kantola). In the United Kingdom a single equality body has been established, replacing three existing equality commissions, bringing together work related to several different aspects of equality, including age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion and gender, and for the first time providing institutional support for human rights (Squires 2007). Meanwhile, new British equality legislation has been introduced in order to implement European directives that outlaw discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age in employment and vocational training, including the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations of 2003 and the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003. In addition, a UK Equality Bill is to be introduced to simplify discrimination law, replacing nine major pieces of legislation and around 100 statutory instruments with a single Act. This equality shake-up is wide-ranging and significant, but also focuses attention on anti-discrimination legislation rather than on other equality policies. A return to an anti-discrimination focus has clear implications for the pursuit of gender equality, which has – during the last thirty years – developed sophisticated positive discrimination and gender mainstreaming tools to supplement the anti-discrimination approach. The key question here is what impact the focus on multiple discrimination and intersectionality has on the potential for implementing gender mainstreaming.

## **Gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming is now an international phenomenon, widely advocated as an effective means of bringing a gender equality perspective to all policy arenas.

Adopted by the United Nations at the 1995 conference on women in Beijing and then taken up by the European Union, its member states and international development agencies, gender mainstreaming is now an international phenomenon. Gender mainstreaming, best understood as a set of tools and processes which help to integrate a gender perspective into all policies at the planning stage, operates by requiring those involved in the policy process to consider the likely effects of policies on the respective situation of women

and men, and then revise proposed policies if necessary such that they promote gender equality rather than reproduce gender inequality.

Mainstreaming promises to address gender equality at a structural level rather than focusing on ameliorating the specific symptoms of inequality. It therefore appears to address the limitations of previous gender equality policies, including anti-discrimination laws and positive action remedies. The limitation of anti-discrimination laws lies in the concept of equal treatment, where the measure against which women are evaluated is a male norm, meaning that the presumed impartiality of anti-discrimination laws masks an androcentric bias (Fredman 2001). The limitation of positive action laws and strategies, by contrast, is that they may essentialise women's experiences, ignoring the differences between women. In this way the presumed justice of positive action measures may reproduce gendered stereotypes, which marginalizes the diversity amongst women and men. Mainstreaming promises to avoid each of these limitations, by questioning the neutrality of the presumed 'norm' against which women are judged, and by enquiring into the reality of people's lives via gender impact assessments, which should in principle be sensitive to the diversity amongst women and men. By focusing on the causes of inequality, it aims to anticipate the future consequences of existing inequalities and seeks to prevent their future reproduction. In this way mainstreaming questions the presumed neutrality of bureaucratic policymaking, highlighting the way in which apparently impartial policies might reproduce existing inequalities by failing to address their structural impact. Moreover, whilst anti-discrimination and positive action laws focus on gender inequality in isolation from other forms of inequality, mainstreaming has the potential to take a more holistic approach to inequalities.

While the theoretical potential of gender mainstreaming is therefore significant, evaluations of its practical implementation to date have been somewhat more circumspect. Many scholars have noted that the transformative potential of mainstreaming frequently gets supplanted by more technocratic approaches in practice, focusing on the use of 'gender experts' and the establishment of mainstreaming 'routines' within state bureaucracies. A distinction is therefore drawn between participative and technocratic forms of mainstreaming. Participative mainstreaming entails a focus on the participation, presence and empowerment of women via consultation with civil society organisations. Technocratic approaches entail a focus on experts and the

bureaucratic creation of evidence-based knowledge in policy-making (Squires 2005). Where mainstreaming has been adopted in a substantive way, beyond rhetorical commitment, it tends to be in the technocratic rather than the participative form. Nonetheless, one can discern attempts to implement both participative and technocratic forms of mainstreaming. For example, in Britain the Government aimed to use gender mainstreaming to “complement gender equality policies to form a twin track strategy” (Cabinet Office 1998). In addition to the Equal Opportunities Commission, a quasi-autonomous state agency created in 1976 and charged with working to end sex discrimination, the Government established the Women’s Unit (WU), a cross-cutting unit within Whitehall, to ensure a coordinated approach to gender equality across government departments. At the outset gender mainstreaming was interpreted as involving consultation with women’s organisations (WU 1998: 25), suggesting that the WU adopted a participative rather than a technocratic approach to mainstreaming. Harriet Harman, the Minister for Women, was quoted: “For the first time, women’s issues are put firmly at the heart of government. I will open a new dialogue with women.” (*The Guardian* 4 June 1997) Initially, the WU clearly focused on the participation and empowerment of women via consultation within civil society organisations (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2002). However, when the WU was restructured into the Women and Equality Unit, with a remit to improve the position of women in ‘measurable’ ways, the Government’s commitment to mainstreaming took a more technocratic form (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2004).

Elsewhere it appears that the complexities in taking gender as a frame of analysis, coupled with the linguistic difficulties inherent in translating ‘gender mainstreaming’ into a wide range of languages, has meant that many organisations have adopted some of the mainstreaming tools in the absence of an overall gender framework (Daly 2005: 436). As a result, evaluations of the success of gender mainstreaming tend to focus on the effective implementation of these specific techniques of policy praxis, bracketing larger questions about social transformation.

These techniques focus on bureaucratic mechanisms. By contrast, in the participative-democratic model a ‘gender perspective’ is argued to be best grasped by listening to women’s articulations of their policy concerns, focusing on deliberative and consultative input rather than on statistical quantitative data. This requires the creation of an advanced consultation exchange between

non-governmental groups and the policy administration (Donaghy 2004). However, few forums for consultation with civil society organizations have been created to date.

There is then a debate as to which model of gender mainstreaming best realizes the transformative potential of mainstreaming theories, with a growing body of literature arguing that current practical implementation strategies are becoming increasingly technocratic. More recently, this debate has been complicated by the emergence of another set of concerns: namely whether and how one might extend mainstreaming practices to multiple inequalities.

### **Gender mainstreaming and diversity**

Mainstreaming is most frequently understood as a policy for gender equality. However, mainstreaming approaches are no longer applied in relation to gender alone. Other inequality issues, including race and disability, are increasingly being ‘mainstreamed’. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity to advocates of gender mainstreaming. The danger is that the specificity of gender equality issues may be marginalized if discrete mainstreaming processes are introduced for diverse equality strands, yet the potential also emerges for addressing questions of intersectionality within mainstreaming practices, rendering the ‘gender equality perspective’ that is introduced into the policy arena more sensitive to differences amongst women.

In the context of the EU’s multiple strand anti-discrimination policy the specific techniques of a technocratic form of mainstreaming are now being applied to race, disability and age, though in a fairly limited way (Shaw 2004). This extension of mainstreaming practices to other forms of inequality needs to be understood in the context of the move within the European Union away from its earlier focus on gender equality to address multiple inequalities.

It is in this context that one might argue that '*diversity* mainstreaming' is beginning to emerge. However, this still leaves the more challenging, but potentially more transformative, task of developing a 'diversity' perspective – as opposed to a gender, race or disability equality perspective – as a frame of analysis. The promotion of diversity has emerged as a central political priority within Europe over the last few years. While the concept of equality has been central to the European Union’s legal order, with the Charter of Fundamental

Rights enshrining a range of equality principles (Shaw 2004), the concept of diversity has also been explicitly recognised in the EC Treaty: Article 149 EC protects the ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’ of the educational systems of the Member States, whilst Article 151 EC calls upon the Union to respect the ‘national and regional diversity’ of Member States (Shaw 2004). Additionally, in 2003 the European Commission launched a five-year, EU-wide information campaign, “For Diversity – Against Discrimination”, aiming to “promote the positive benefits of diversity for business and for society as a whole” (European Commission 2004: 13). These developments have led commentators to suggest that EU equality policies now comprise three strands: ensuring formal anti-discrimination, working towards substantive equality, and managing diversity. The EU claims to be in favour of an integrated approach to combat ‘multiple discrimination’ (European Commission 2004: 3). There ought therefore to be potential to take the lessons learnt from attempts to develop gender mainstreaming practices and to apply them to a newer agenda of diversity mainstreaming.

One can be rather sceptical about this shift from an exclusive focus on gender to a more wide-ranging concern with diversity and multiple inequalities. There are concerns that ‘diversity’ is conceived primarily as a means of producing greater economic productivity, rather than social justice (Wrench 2005); and that the creation of institutions and laws that address multiple inequalities via the establishment of equality commissions and policy agencies will erode many of the institutional gains made by feminists during the past decade. There are also fears that the recognition of multiple inequalities will generate a ‘hierarchy of oppression’ in which different equality groups fight over scarce resources and institutional access. Moreover, there is a profound concern amongst many feminists that other equality strands may have demands that run counter to those of women’s equality groups. The recognition of ethnic minority and religious group rights may limit and erode the pursuit of gender equality (Skjeie 2008), leading to anxieties that a multiple equalities agenda may undermine rather than facilitate gender justice. The extension of mainstreaming processes to fields other than gender has therefore been perceived by some feminists as a worrying development, signalling a diminution of concern with gender and a marginalization of feminist concerns in the policy agenda.

Yet it is hard to discern normatively persuasive grounds for refusing to extend equality considerations to other oppressed social groups, and in practice many feminist have been keen to benefit from the diversity agenda. For instance, the role of women's organizations in the creation of a single equality body in the UK suggests that how feminists respond to the diversity agenda will depend both on the status of the women's policy agencies relative to other equality strands and the dominant normative framing of gender equality in relation to questions of intersectionality. Where women's policy agencies have the greatest relative status and where gender equality has been conceived in a way that fails to consider issues of intersectionality, the diversity agenda is likely to be perceived primarily as a threat (Squires 2007). Where, as in the UK, other equality strands have achieved legal or institutional gains from which women may benefit, and where feminists have accepted the importance of intersectionality considerations, the diversity agenda is likely to be perceived primarily as an opportunity for advancement.

Issues surrounding difference have been subject to an 'extensive theoretical investigation' by feminist theorists (Shaw 2004: 3), who have recognized the importance of understanding intersectionalities and multiple identities. For instance, intersectionality was central to debates in Britain at the end of the 1970s concerning the 'triple oppression' of black, working class women (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983). More recently, a concern with 'intersectionality' was central to feminist preparations for the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism (Yuval-Davis 2005). There are good feminist reasons for being concerned with intersectionality, and for looking for ways in which gender mainstreaming practices might take multiple inequalities and the intersections between them into account more systematically than has been the case to date.

However, the multiple inequalities agenda has largely taken the form of an anti-discrimination approach to date, and has not yet really echoed the developments in gender equality, which moved from anti-discrimination alone to embrace issues of equality of outcome and mainstreaming processes (Rees 1999). There is still some way to go in terms of developing mainstreaming processes that address multiple inequalities. My concern here is to argue that, given the plurality of equality agendas held by diverse groups and the difficulty of ascertaining these by bureaucratic mechanisms, the role of inclusive deliberation should be stressed. This transforms mainstreaming from a technocratic tool to an institutional manifestation of deliberative democracy.

## Diversity mainstreaming

In relation to mainstreaming practices, an additive model of intersectionality suggests that a series of discrete impact assessments are needed (assuming a technocratic mainstreaming model), possibly supplemented with consultation with a range of spokespeople for the various inequality strands (allowing for a more participative-democratic rendering of mainstreaming). However, neither of these processes promises to address issues of transversal intersectionality. For this, a more deliberative approach to mainstreaming is required. The transversal approach to intersectionality suggests that mainstreaming processes should be concerned with equalizing participation within decision-making institutions and processes in order to allow people an equal capacity to shape the social and physical world in which they live. Given that equality of power is not a present-day reality, strategies need to be engaged to pursue this ideal, notwithstanding the likelihood that this ideal will never be fully realized (Cooper 2004: 83). Gender, like class as well as race, sexuality ‘et cetera’, should not remain as a meaningful form of difference beyond its pernicious manifestation as an organizing principle of inequality.

The difficulty faced by mainstreaming strategies aiming to eliminate oppressive classifications is that demographic data and disaggregated statistics can be important in order to highlight the need for reform, yet the production of statistics highlighting the effects of the social dynamics of inequality, and classifications that they require, may serve to police people’s identities and ironically enable further discrimination to occur (Cooper 2004: 88). For instance, without gender-disaggregated data one cannot establish that inequalities exist, which is precisely why the strategy of gender mainstreaming calls for the adoption of a ‘gender perspective’ and the production of gender disaggregated statistics in all policy-making processes. Whether this is compatible with ‘undoing’ gender in the long run, or whether it entrenches a group identity approach within all decision-making processes is as yet unclear. However, one obvious way of negotiating this difficulty is to complement the role of ‘objective’ empirical indicators of inequality, which inevitably require group classification, with more deliberative processes, which do not demand that a person’s identity be categorized in advance in order for their inequality to be depicted.

The shift from identity to transversal politics therefore demands that we shift our attention away from the idea that people represent groups by virtue

of a shared identity, and towards the idea that advocates can broaden their horizons by engaging in dialogue with others. The claim to speak for others cannot be based on identity alone; it must be a product of a dialogic process. Transversal feminist politics depend on as comprehensive a dialogic approach as possible (Yuval-Davis 2005: 35), which suggests that the elitism of professional NGOs and the expertise of those engaged in evidence-based policy-making may need to be countered by other, more deliberative, devices.

It therefore makes sense for proponents of mainstreaming to engage with theories of deliberative democracy, which have attempted to explore “discursive mechanisms for the transmission of public opinion to the state.” (Dryzek 2000: 162). Advocates of deliberative democracy – in a move akin to that made by advocates of mainstreaming – suggest that the idea of democracy revolves around the transformation, rather than simply the aggregation, of preferences. The point of democratic participation is to manufacture, rather than to discover and aggregate, the common good. A deliberative decision will have taken all relevant evidence, perspectives and persons into account, and will not favour some over others on morally arbitrary grounds (Williams 2000). Legitimacy here requires not only a lack of bias but also inclusivity.

In other words, both deliberative democracy and mainstreaming in its participative form focus on the rule-formation process and aim at impartiality through inclusivity. It is for this reason that it makes sense to think about mainstreaming in relation to deliberative democracy. What deliberative democrats offer theorists of diversity mainstreaming is a concern with the quality and form of engagement between citizens and participatory forums, stressing in particular the importance of political equality and inclusivity, and of unconstrained dialogue (Smith 2003: 39).

The emphasis that deliberative democrats place on inclusion and dialogue offer rich resources to counter the technocratic tendency in the integrationist model of mainstreaming. Where the integrationist model emphasizes the importance of expertise and creates an elite body of professional experts, a deliberative rendering of diversity mainstreaming would emphasize the importance of dialogue with diverse social groups. Deliberative innovations such as citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polls and deliberative mapping are growing in number and significance (see Smith 2005: 39-55). Evidence suggests that these mechanisms do indeed facilitate the capacity to produce recommendations on complex public policy issues that are

informed by a wide variety of experiences and viewpoints (Smith 2005: 55). For this reason, mainstreaming theorists have much to gain from exploring the possible synergies between deliberative innovations and their own equality strategies.

An exploration of the potential for integrating deliberative transmission mechanisms into a transformative model of mainstreaming could generate a model of mainstreaming that is deliberative, rather than bureaucratic or consultative; that aims primarily to denaturalize and thereby politicize policy norms, rather than to pursue neutral policy-making or to recognize marginalized voices. The strengths of this potential model are that it would be sensitive to diverse citizen perspectives without reifying group identities, and would allow multiple inequalities to be considered in the policymaking process without hierarchies of oppression being perpetuated.

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of the multiple inequalities agenda and a growing focus on diversity challenges the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming. It does so in three key ways. Firstly, by focusing attention on anti-discrimination laws, rather than mainstreaming practices. Secondly, by providing a rationale for dismantling the women's policy agencies that have primarily taken responsibility for gender mainstreaming practices. Thirdly, by further complicating the, already complicated, process of mainstreaming equality considerations into all policy areas. Possible responses include: the embrace of an additive form of intersectionality and use of integrationist mainstreaming entailing multiple discrete impact assessments in relation to six strands of inequality, plus their intersections; the use of agenda-setting mainstreaming to bring the voices of diverse groups experiencing combined inequalities in particular into the policy process; or, finally, the use of transformative mainstreaming to develop deliberative, as opposed to bureaucratic or consultative, mechanisms of inclusion. While this last option is clearly challenging – both to conceptualise and to operationalise, it is nonetheless worth articulating as an ideal to which one might aspire when attempting to negotiate the implications of multiple inequalities agenda for gender mainstreaming practices.

## **Teaching Reflections**

- Does the emergence of the multiple inequalities agenda make it more difficult to pursue gender mainstreaming?
- Should gender mainstreaming be a technocratic or a participative process? What techniques are most appropriate to the pursuit of gender mainstreaming?
- Is ‘diversity mainstreaming’ feasible and/or desirable?

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<sup>3</sup> An early version of parts of this paper was published as ‘Diversity Mainstreaming’ in *Cahiers du Genre*, no.44, 2008, 73-94.



# **Into the Promised Land? The Feminization and Ethnicization of Poverty in the Netherlands**

*Gloria Wekker*

“But I personally do not need any of these super sophisticated charts and magical graphs to tell me my own momma done better than she could and my momma’s momma, *she* done better than I could. And *everybody’s momma* done better than anybody had any right to expect she would. And that’s the truth!” (Jordan, 1993: 65-80)

## **Abstract**

In this article, an intersectional analysis is made of older, migrant women in the Netherlands and their economic situation, paying attention to the intersections of gender, age, class and ethnicity. Reflecting on an imaginary situation that my mother might have lived as an older female migrant, gradually a more general picture of the organization of poverty for older (migrant) women emerges.

My aim with this article is twofold: 1. I want to show the surplus in knowledge that is produced by an intersectional analysis as opposed to an analysis that only takes gender into account. 2. As my main methodology I use a narrative approach, which, when necessary, will be complemented with sociological data. The article thus also serves as an exercise in multi- or interdisciplinarity. Importantly, the article wants to remind the reader of the richness of qualitative data and to explore the possibilities of applying such methods, in teaching and in policy.

## **Introduction**

In the week when I was thinking about my contribution to the Barcelona seminar on intersectionality, for which I had been asked to illuminate intersections of gender, age, class and ethnicity in the Netherlands, the matter of “aging women and poverty” came to my attention. This was triggered by the publication of the Emancipation Monitor, a two-yearly report, which informs among other things on the labour market position of women in the Netherlands. The latest version, 2009, showed several significant trends. In the first place, only 40 percent of Dutch women are economically independent,

i.e. only four in ten women are working enough hours to be economically independent of a partner. Economic independence is calculated to be a net income of nine hundred Euros a month. Notwithstanding its progressive image, the Netherlands has long had a bourgeois ideal of women remaining at home to take care of their husband and children. Even now, in 2009, the characteristic model is that men work full time (1.0), while women overwhelmingly work part time (0.5 to 0.8). Secondly, of all different ethnic and ‘racial’ groups in the Netherlands, Surinamese women scored best both in terms of labour market participation (sixty-one percent) and the percentage being economically independent, which amounted to forty-seven percent versus forty-five percent for white Dutch women. Previous research had shown already that this is due to Surinamese women working longer hours, irrespective of their personal home situations. This high labour market participation, which does not necessarily translate into higher wages, is often connected to the history of their female ancestors, who had to work fulltime during slavery. Thirdly, the report showed that the older women were, the less chance they had of being economically independent. Combined with ethnicity, it was clear that older women with an ethnic minority background, especially Turkish and Moroccan women, had a chequered, interrupted or non-existent labour history, which made them the worst off (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek and Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2009).

In this article, I will take my mother’s imaginary situation as an older female migrant as a start-off point for a reflection on the position of older migrant women in the Netherlands generally. I am specifically interested in the ways in which the four axes of signification, gender, age, class and ethnicity work together to produce poverty, far too frequently. After a reflection on each of the separate axes, I will conclude by offering some recommendations for policymakers on older (migrant) women.

### **Into the promised land....**

Thinking about older migrant women and poverty, my deceased mother came to my mind. She never made it to a ripe old age, but died when she was sixty years old in 1982, worn out by a combination of a frail constitution and a life burdened by worries and care for others, including her six children. With an average age of women in the Netherlands of 81.6 years,<sup>4</sup> my mother

was cheated out of over two decades, which could well have been the best of her life, in the sense that her children would have been raised and she could have started to enjoy being spoiled by us and having grandchildren. Looking at where my father, my siblings and I wound up, her life would have been one of leisure. But, her profile might – under a particular set of unfavourable circumstances, importantly including the loss of my father – have placed her within the parameters of financial danger: the combination of her age, gendered, ethno-racialized and class positions might in advanced age have set her up for a seriously jeopardized position.

Through her marriage, my mother, of working-class background, had become part of the middle class, but even so her economic situation was very tenuous, during our first decade in the Netherlands when my father had temporarily gone back to Suriname, a former Dutch colony, and she had to raise her – at the time – five children as a single parent. She had come to the Netherlands, in the early 1950s, with my father, when they were both twenty-nine years old. As a police officer in Suriname, my father was, after six years of service, entitled to go on leave to the ‘mother country’ with his family. This regulation certainly was not set up by the colonial administration for people like my father, but he was one of the first Surinamese civil servants who had the rank to qualify for this perk. My father had already started to learn Latin in Suriname, in order to study law in the Netherlands, which was not possible in Suriname at the time. My parents were accompanied by their – then – five children, of whom the oldest was eight years old and I, the youngest, was one year old.

We lived in Amsterdam during the first decade of our stay, and these were the grey years of post-WWII social reconstruction, with a severe lack of housing and most houses being in a dilapidated state. There was widespread poverty in those years and a glaring absence, where once the Amsterdam Jewish population had lived. After spending a couple of weeks with the Salvation Army on one of the canals in Amsterdam, we finally, coincidentally or not, found housing in the old Jewish quarter, the so-called Plantation-neighbourhood, above a bakery, which – beside the fact that it always smelled very nice and the bakery warmed our house a little bit in winter – meant that mice were our frequent guests. There was no shower in the house. Every Saturday we went with the entire family to the municipal baths. I mention this small detail and this little weekly excursion because it looms very large in our

family memory. My parents, and especially my mother, were indignant that we did not have an indoor shower. After all, had we not been taught to expect that everything in the Netherlands would be modern and advanced and that Suriname, where we *did* have an indoor shower, was backward? The inversion of the ‘normal’ state of affairs did not stop to irritate and exercise her.

By way of locating myself, I include a paragraph of a short story “Het beloofde Land”/ The Promised Land”, which I wrote in 1995 about the migration of my family, but especially about my mother. I believe that this narrative still is true for the lives of many migrant women, of the older generation, today:

I have come to see my mother’s life as a bridgehead, over which an army of young soldiers, her children, her husband and other family members climbed into ‘the promised land’. At a certain moment, the bridge collapsed under the weight of all the footsteps; some feet walked fast and without looking back into the new country. Others walked back and forth over the bridge, could not decide whether they would stay here or go back. Sometimes there were traffic jams on the bridge, when family members had to be housed. All of a sudden, twelve additional people in our house. When they were gone, the next branch of the family arrived from the Dutch Antilles; fourteen of them, this time. To say no, to refuse service, was not something the bridge did. My mother is the one who paid the highest price for our migration (Wekker 1995).

In this portrait of our family migration history, several characteristic features come to the fore that are true for older migrant women today. I will make three remarks about this fragment.

1. It shows the often overlooked centrality of women to the migratory project. Whether, as often in the case of Surinamese and Antillean women, women come as single parents accompanied by their children, or whether they form part of a so-called nuclear unit, in which they join their husband, as is more typical among Turks and Moroccans, women form the backbone of migration. Thus, in the ‘New Migration’ studies much more attention is paid to the motives and practices of women, than has traditionally been the case, when women were only treated as dependants of men (Anthias 2000). It is important to look at the gendered processes of insertion and mobilisation of women into migration.

2. It is the importance of women's unpaid labour that comes to the fore; women in black, migrant and refugee groups (as well as in the majority-white population) still disproportionately engage in this kind of labour, in comparison with men. But since for migrants 'home' is the only place that they can call their own, these tasks take on even more emotional and economic significance. As the fragment shows, we also need to take into consideration that first migrations set in motion transnational chains of follow-up movements of other people from the same village, city or home land, who need to be taken care of. My mother's labour was largely invisible to the outside world and, I am afraid, also to us, the members of her family. She did the necessary, repetitive, mind-numbing, unappreciated, reproductive labour, without which none of us could have survived or blossomed. In the fifties and early sixties, the labour of housewives was still largely unaided by technologies like washing machines and driers. This labour has gone unnoticed for centuries and we should not knowingly repeat this gesture in our policies. Knowledge about the invisibility of women's labour, produced in the course of the second feminist wave, should be central to our understandings and to policy-making. The long term consequences of performing a lifetime of unpaid, invisible labour come, among other things, in the form of truncated pensions and old-age benefits.

3. The vignette finally points to the importance of class. Class obviously is one of the variables that should be taken into account, when we think about aging women and their economic situation. Let us, however, not fall into the trap of what Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* (2002) terms the "lazy, racially encoded chains of thought" that would have us assume that all migrants are, by definition, working-class. This is what tends to happen in commonsense thinking about the various variables – gender, 'race'/ethnicity, class, sexuality, nation – that together give meaning to our lives, to our identities and to the way society is structured and saturated with inequalities along these various dimensions (Wekker en Lutz 2001). Class makes a huge difference in women's lives and in the case of black, migrant and refugee-people, class is usually immediately collapsed into lower-class existence. As often as that may be the case, it is not necessarily so and we need to be vigilant of such collapses.

## The organization of poverty for older women

“In the Netherlands, poverty is not only feminized, it is coloured. According to the Poverty Monitor (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau and Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2003), one third of non-Western ethnic minority households are on a low income, compared with eleven percent of white Dutch households. Poverty is thus particularly prevalent among non-Western households. Nineteen percent of poor households in the Netherlands belong to non-Western ethnic minority groups, which is two and a half times as high as their share of the population. The majority of them are single parents and older people” (The Age + project, 2005: 21).

People’s income in the Netherlands after sixty-five years of age consists of two parts: first, an occupational pension that is built up through work and, second, a state pension for everyone, which is built up on the basis of residence in the Netherlands during forty years, the years between being fifteen and sixty-five. Every one of those forty years counts for two-and-a-half percent of the total amount of the state pension (AOW<sup>5</sup>).

As far as one’s occupational pension is concerned, the unfavourable position in which *all*women find themselves with regard to their old age pensions finds its origin in the still widespread belief system that holds that men are and should be breadwinners and that women are the ones responsible for the care of children, the household and should only work part time outside the home. When women overwhelmingly work in part time jobs, they correspondingly build up much less pension than men. Additionally, many older women of different ethnic backgrounds never worked or, if they did work, were not allowed to participate in building up a pension through their companies (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek en Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2009). Here, we find overwhelmingly that a gendered regime organizes disadvantage. With regard to the second part of their pensions, the state-sponsored pension, since a fully realizable pension is acquired after forty years of residence in the Netherlands, this full pension is not possible for many black, migrant and refugee women. Many of them arrived after their fifteenth birthday and thus cannot reach the full, hundred percent of that pension. A history of migration consequently disadvantages particular groups of women – who are not only, but still overwhelmingly, black, migrant and refugee women – in addition to the general gendered disadvantage that they suffer from.

## **Dominant versus intersectional thought**

The particular style of arguing that I am unfolding here is an instance of intersectional theory. I am not only interested in processes having to do with gender, I also and immediately want to bring ‘race’/ethnicity and class into the picture. In other words, I am not considering the various dimensions of difference, as is the case in much dominant, commonsense thinking, as separate and having nothing to do with each other. The underlying logic in commonsense thought is that something either has to do with gender or with ethnicity, but not with both at the same time. This binary logic constructs and splits the world in two categories, for example, ‘*autochtoon*’ versus ‘*allochtoon*’ (terms to which I will shortly return); ‘man’ versus ‘woman’; ‘heterosexual’ versus ‘homosexual’; young versus old; which are not only mutually exclusive, but which stand in a hierarchical relation toward each other, with the first term demarcating the unmarked, thus a more favourable, a more valued positioning. Moreover, in dominant thought patterns the unmarked term is mostly bracketed; it is ‘normalized’, or made into the ‘normal position’, and implicitly defined as non-marked and thus non-problematical. Thus in most policies and debates about emancipation or about multicultural society, masculinity and whiteness are simply not taken into account as particularly powerful positions and it is only ‘them’, that is, women or black, migrant and refugee-people who are targeted as being in need of transformation (Wekker en Lutz 2001).

In dominant thought, to distinguish between the majority-white population and ethnicized minorities, the binary ‘*autochtonen*’ and ‘*allochtonen*’ is most frequently used in the Netherlands, in everyday language, in policy circles and in the media. This is still the most common and supposedly innocuous set of terms to talk about ‘us and ‘them’. Literally the terms mean ‘those who are from here’ versus ‘those who have come from elsewhere’. While this may seem innocent enough, for insiders it is immediately clear that the terms construct and install ‘race’ and class. The racial constructedness of the term ‘*allochtonen*’ is clear from two indicators: in the first place, it is not meant to include people coming from *all* elsewhere. On the contrary, we actually only mean people who originate in a very limited number of countries. It is not the British, Belgians or Americans. We mean people-of-colour, notably members of the four largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands: Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans. In the last few years, the concept of ‘*allochtonen*’

has been narrowed to Islamic people, who are constructed as the ‘Ultimate Other’, who cannot possibly be integrated into Dutch society, but it was not very long ago that Surinamese and Moluccans occupied that position. In the second place, whereas people who had ancestors in Poland, France or Italy, can, after a couple of generations, put a successful claim on ‘Dutchness’, this is not so easily accomplished for the grandchildren of Surinamese, Moluccans, and Moroccans, who will remain *‘allochtoon’* until the n-th generation, even if they themselves have been born in the Netherlands. Visible, racially constructed difference precludes them from being included in the Dutch nation.

By using *‘autochtoon’* and *‘allochtoon’*, a successful way was found to talk about ‘race’/ethnicity and class, without actually having to use those distasteful words. To openly talk about ‘race’/ethnicity was considered a most uncivilized gesture in the Netherlands, since WW-II. The binary *‘autochtoon’* and *‘allochtoon’* allows a continuation of the national, self-flattering fiction that ‘race’ does not matter in the Netherlands. It is because of these and similar phenomena in other European, ex-colonial nations, that ‘racial Europeanization’ importantly consists of the denial, the forgetting, the glossing over, the erasure of ‘race’ (Goldberg 2006, Wekker 2009).

Intersectional thinkers argue that the axes of differentiation that structure our lives are always already connected to each other. Class, for instance, always already has gendered and ethnicized manifestations; correspondingly, when we talk about gender, we are also and simultaneously making statements about class and ‘race’/ethnicity and the same goes when one takes ‘race’/ethnicity as the entry point of an analysis. Intersectionality helps to think about the differences that come together in the positions of older migrant women in various European metropolitan centres. Their positions warrant our serious attention in terms of their health situation and their income now and in the future. Intersectional theory is one of the contributions that especially women-of-colour have made to feminist thought during the first and second feminist waves. Gradually others have taken up their insights.

Intersectional theory is based on thinking about ‘difference’, which involves and implicates all of us. This thinking goes against the grain of dominant thought; it complicates things, but it is more inclusive. It says: we are all in this multicultural society together and it does not do to a priori bracket particular positions, as is the case in commonsense thought. In the next paragraphs, I will briefly discuss the axes of gender, ‘race’/ethnicity, age

and class. These dimensions are among the important ones which structure the ways in which society is organized; they are social ordering principles. They are operative at different levels: at a personal, a symbolic and an institutional level. First, I will illustrate how two of these important differences, gender and ‘race’/ ethnicity operate at different levels. Subsequently I will make a far reaching proposal for policy making and finally, I will present some conclusions.

### **Gender and ‘race’/ethnicity**

Gender is the layered social system that gives meaning to the biological differences between men and women. How does gender operate at the three levels?

- On the personal level, gender organizes society by attributing characteristics to women and men: women are socialized to be emotional and caring, while men supposedly are rational and less prone to enter into nurturing relationships.
- On the symbolic level, gender assigns differential values to the activities of women and men: generally masculinity is evaluated more highly than femininity. Masculinity and femininity give significance to our lives, to us, to the things we undertake. For example: when there are many women in a particular profession, that profession will not have a high status (education, nursing, the care sector). As soon as more men enter the profession, its status will rise.
- On the institutional level, gender sets a mechanism in motion that builds on a ‘natural’ conceptualization of gender. For example: women take care of the household and men are breadwinners. We not only are confronted with a different valuation of these activities, but there also is an institutional translation: women still do not get the same remuneration for the same labour as men; women do not build up pensions at the same rate as men and women disproportionately suffer from a fall into poverty.

From these illustrations, it is clear that gender not only structures the lives of women, but it also and simultaneously has deep impact on the lives of men. In a comparable way, dimensions like ethnicity, class and age are operative at

the same three levels. In addition, all these dimensions work simultaneously. Let me try to illustrate this. Ethnicity is the social system that gives meaning to ethnic differences between people – to those differences that can be made on the basis of people's origin, appearance, history, culture, language and religion. I understand 'race' and ethnicity as two sides of the same coin. When 'race'/ ethnicity are being discussed in a Dutch commonsense context, but also in many academic discourses, it is predominantly 'they'/ The Other/ '*allochtonen*' that come to mind, not '*autochtonen*'. Just as masculinity remained outside the scope of analysis for a long time, so in the framework of ethnicity being white is such a 'naturalized' category that its meaning has hardly become a topic of study in Europe. Ethnicity covers, in intersectional thought, both marked and unmarked modalities, thus not only Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese 'have' an ethnicity, but also the dominant position, whiteness, is an ethnicity and one that is particularly powerful. Thoroughly 'normalized' and 'naturalized', posing as 'nothingness', it is generally not presented as such, but being positioned as white brings with it – in its intersections with other meaningful axes – a knapsack of 'unearned privileges' (McIntosh 1992). Like gender, 'race'/ethnicity structures our personal experiences, it gives content to the symbols surrounding and constructing different positionings and it gives rise to institutionalized inequities in society. It is clear that these dimensions structure meanings for people at the personal and symbolical levels; one only has to think of the differential consequences of applying for a position when one's last name is 'Jansen' or 'Al Husseini'. The diverging percentages of joblessness for white Dutch and black, migrant and refugee-Dutch people or the discrimination faced by the latter in a variety of social settings, is quite telling.

In one of the few publications devoted to the position of older, migrant women in a comparative European perspective, the AGE+ report (2005), there is a divergence in the quality, the preciseness and the intersectionality of the data. Data are presented on the UK, the Netherlands, Austria, Italy and Germany. Although there is still a lot to be desired, the UK, followed by the Netherlands, present the most in-depth, complicated data. It is no coincidence that within the context of European Women's Studies these are also the countries where intersectional thinking has made most headway. Many European countries have yet to come to terms with their own colonial pasts, with the existence of 'race' or with the notion that they have become countries of immigration.

## **The implicit subject of policy making**

In policy today, we see a shift toward client-centred thinking. In other words, there is a change to centrally situate the questions, needs and demands of citizens. This is also evident from an instrument like gender mainstreaming. Of course, it is important that gender is part of the process of policy development and implementation, but it is not enough. It is a missed chance when policy makers foreground instruments that are only targeting gender, while the other axes of signification are left to the side, as if they had no meaning. It is important that all policies, whether in the field of poverty eradication or health care should take the relevant differences that exist between people into account. My radical proposal is that, if one wants to reach as many people as possible with a policy, then the imaginary subject should not be the norm – a white middle-class man or women – but a person who deviates in many respects from that standard. The implicit subject in most policy is a white man or woman, who speaks Dutch fluently, is autonomous, can take care of him/herself financially, has a sufficient body of knowledge to make informed choices, and does not suffer from racism.

I want to highlight the principle that what is good for a subordinate group is also good for the groups and individuals who are situated in more favourable positions. What is good for black, migrant and refugee-women, such as new ways of thinking about labour or more just and equitable ways of calculating pensions, is also good for other women and men. The reverse is not true.

## **Conclusions**

It is important to note that in the domain of policy making, the gathering of statistics has become the hegemonic methodology: the master's tool. Whereas I do believe that sometimes it can be important to gather complex, intersectional, inclusive data, it should not close our eyes to the importance of storytelling and narrative approaches as a way of opening up difficult terrain.

- Within Europe there is still a lot of work to be done in thinking through the ways that our societies have changed. It is important that intersectional thinking becomes part of the toolkit of policy makers all across Europe, not only to do justice to the complexities

of changing populations, but also to make European data about aging women comparable.

- In light of a European history that is shot through with inequities and ultimate violence against groups of people who were deemed to be inferior, we should be aware that to make good policies is not just a matter of correcting some obvious flaws here and there, but that we be prepared to look at the systematic nature of exclusions, asymmetries and hierarchizations on the basis of ‘race’ and ethnicity. Only in that way will we be able to overcome the devaluation of black, migrant and refugee women.
- Connections should be forged between organizations of aging women, policy makers and Women’s Studies in various European nations in order to make good policies to prevent the majority of aging black, migrant and refugee-women falling into poverty.
- I propose that the implicit subject of policy making in general should be black, migrant and refugee-women. What is good for them will also be good for groups and individuals situated differently in society, while the reverse is not true.

On closing, I want to return to African American poet and essayist June Jordan, who in the article “*Many Rivers to Cross*” (1985: 26) relates the moving story of the death of her mother. In a moving tribute, she concludes:

(...) And I think all of this is about women and work. Certainly this is all about me as a woman and my life work. I mean I am not sure my mother’s suicide was something extraordinary. Perhaps most women must deal with a similar inheritance, the legacy of a woman whose death you cannot possibly pinpoint because she died so many, many times and because, even before she became your mother, the life of that woman was taken: I say it was taken away. (...).

I cherish the mercy and the grace of women’s work. But I know there is new work that we must undertake as well: that new work will make defeat detestable to us. That new women’s work will mean we will not die trying to stand up: we will live that way: standing up.

I came too late to help my mother to her feet.

By way of everlasting thanks to all of the women who have helped me to stay alive I am working never to be late again.

## **Teaching Reflections**

In this article three particular ways of approaching the position of older women and poverty are illustrated.

- How and in what way does the narrative way of telling the story of poverty of older women by foregrounding the story of her own and others' mothers give us insights that statistical studies might miss?
- In what ways can students identify a practice of intersectionality, that way of theorizing in which gender is always explored in relation to other axes of signification?
- Look for examples of how this contribution is at an intersection of the Humanities with the Social Sciences, and thus is an exercise in interdisciplinarity. How in academic and practical practice can interdisciplinarity be an example of the intersectional and its challenges?

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<sup>4</sup> Men's average age is 77.2 years (CBS, 2005). HYPERLINK "<http://www.cbs.nl>" www.cbs.nl, (accessed February 22, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> AOW is Algemene Ouderdoms Wet, the General Law for the Elderly, which gives a state pension to people from their sixty-fifth birthday. Currently, in March 2009, the government has proposed sixty-seven as the eligible age.



# **The Women's Movement and the Challenge of Interculturality: The Case of French-Speaking Belgium**

*Nadine Plateau*

## **Abstract**

This chapter presents the key findings of a small-scale study about the recent questioning of the Belgian women's movement by groups and organizations of migrant women or women of migrant origin. It particularly explores the confrontation of the French-speaking women's movement with the issue of multiculturalism.

It first examines the evolution of the women's movement between 1970 and the new millennium. In spite of political and ideological differences, feminist groups, which were mainly composed of middle class women, worked together to build a political project responding to their needs and claims. In the course of time, the tendency to relegate to a minor position all antagonisms linked to social or ethnic origin contributed to strengthening the coherence of the movement. The homogeneity of Belgian feminism was further reinforced by the introduction of Equal Opportunity Policies in the mid 1980s.

It then analyses how the two women's mass movements in French-speaking Belgium (*Vie Féminine* and *Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes*) responded both to the claims of women of migrant origin and to their recent criticism of a mainstream model of feminism. Their specific political affiliations account for quite different approaches to the sociological reality of multiculturalism.

This chapter aims at highlighting the practice and reflection of feminists working with grass-roots women of migrant origin. It also points out the opportunity multiculturalism offers to the women's movement to redefine its priorities and its strategies while taking into account the new local and global context.

## **Introduction**

On 19 October 2006, a meeting was organized in Brussels on the following topic: «Gender and Interculturality. Towards a debate in the Women's Movement». For the first time in feminist circles, the speakers came from

associations run by minority groups (women of migrant origin, mostly Moroccan and Turkish but also Sub-Saharan). The other feminist associations had been invited to come and listen to the presentations and to participate to the discussion that followed. On that memorable day, two important things happened: first, the women's movement<sup>6</sup> was questioned, criticized from within by women claiming to be feminists but dissatisfied with the way they were treated in this movement; second, all the participants expressed the desire not to let themselves be divided and shared the feeling that it was high time to reflect and to find new ways of doing feminist politics.

The reflection had started earlier in the women's movement, though rather sparsely in the nineties and most often focused on what was labelled the migrant issue. It developed and became more systematic in the new millennium, especially after a Commission on Intercultural Dialogue had been launched in 2004<sup>7</sup> which asked representatives of civil society among which feminist associations, for advice. But so far, the multicultural issue<sup>8</sup> had mostly been addressed by the various feminist groups not as a thematic issue for all its members but as a specific issue affecting only a part of the women. Evidence of this approach is given by the existence of so-called migrant commissions within associations or of separate groups composed of minority women. On the contrary, and this is quite the novelty, the questioning now pertains to the social relations between women themselves within the movement (a previously missing theme in Belgian feminist literature). This does not mean that problems were not duly recognized (the discrimination of minority women in schooling, housing and employment had already been documented) but that they were not perceived as everybody's problems. So the meeting mentioned above marks a symbolic step in the evolution of the women's movement: it is the first effort to seize the opportunity of acknowledging the existence of power relations within the movement, that is of articulating gender, class and ethnic origin, in order to think the feminist political project all over again.

### **The homogeneity of the Belgian women's movement**

In spite of political and theoretical differences, the women's movement has developed into a rather homogeneous cultural whole in the last forty years. This is mainly due to the fact that it has responded to the life experiences, needs and claims of women predominantly belonging to the middle class.

A second reason for this homogeneity is that while working out its political project, the movement privileged commonalities, with a tendency to minimalise the antagonisms linked to social and ethnic origins. When looking at the issues of *Chronique féministe*, the review of the *Université des femmes*, since 1982, one is struck by the absence of articles dealing with migrant women in Belgium whereas the problems of Third World women were regularly reported. Why this silence? Apart from the fact that inner divergences were concealed in the movement, it is to be remembered that migrant women or women of migrant origin were perceived by feminists (as well as by left-wingers, trade-unionists etc.) as a socio-economically disadvantaged group rather than as an ethnic community. This was a rather positive approach since migrants were neither racialized nor stigmatized, but it also meant that the specificity of the oppression on ethnic or cultural grounds undergone by these women was not acknowledged in the feminist texts of the 1970s and 1980s.

A third reason should be mentioned to account for the coherence of a movement it is what Chandra Mohanty holds to be the implicit conviction that the Western World is the primary referent in theory and practice (Mohanty, 1988). Indeed, all feminists shared the same Christian heritage notwithstanding the disappearance of the Christian religion from the public sphere, and all of them took for granted the concepts of democracy and human rights as they have been wrought in the Western world.

In addition, the homogeneity of the movement was further reinforced by the Equal Opportunity Policies introduced in the mid 1980s and early 1990s through the impetus given by the United Nations and European Union. By dictating priorities on the political agenda, those liberal-minded institutions contributed to generalizing the image of a rather bourgeois and reformist feminism and to spreading a model of the emancipated working woman. The concrete and positive effect of such policies in Belgium should not be underestimated – in particular in the field of women's political participation and struggle against violence – but the insistence on such seemingly luxury issues as the glass ceiling or the under-representation of women in science coupled with the silence among femocrats regarding clandestine or paperless migrant women made this a feminism with little attraction for women faced with serious socio-economic problems and racist discrimination.

This cultural homogeneity, which goes hand in hand with cultural hegemony, was smashed into pieces at the end of the 1990s when minority

women questioned the very model of feminism because they felt discriminated by feminists themselves. One may wonder why minority women who had not been heard before suddenly appeared in the public space. I would argue that two factors might explain their sudden social visibility. First, the Belgian policy transition from equality policies to diversity policies at the end of the 1990s, led to dramatic budget increases while more categories of people (women, migrant, homosexual, disabled and elderly people) were targeted. Nouria Ouali highlights the ambiguity of this policy change: on the one hand, people were locked in categories; on the other hand, the diversity policy allowed those groups to become more visible and to make their demands known (Ouali, 2008).

Secondly, minority women became more and more conscious of their specific cultural identity in the context of so called culture clash widely spread by the media. In this respect, the headscarf debate played a prominent role: it greatly contributed to creating a deep desire to oppose the Western model of social integration – considered imperialistic – and to making up a new one. The hegemony of the mainstream movement got contested by minority groups: they criticized the fact that their problems were taken into account as being specific and not general; they opposed the prevailing emancipation model raising the controversial issue of the *référentiel religieux* (religious referential). This politicization process was widely attested at the meeting of 19 October 2006. The criticism came not solely from the Muslim women, though they played the greater part in making the issue of power relations visible.

Given the multiple and sometimes diverging interests, the women's movement – this set of conflicting groups and associations – is thus doomed either to divide further and fragment into numerous units without any connection or to re-structure itself and redefine its aims and strategies. The central issue in this respect is according to me the position mainstream groups will adopt. This is the reason why I have focused on the two French-speaking mass movements which were originally very close to the two main political parties in Belgium, *Vie Féminine* (Female Life) linked to the Christian party and *Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes* (Socialist Provident Women) linked to the Socialist party. I will draw upon a small-scale study based on the analysis of material produced by those movements and on semi-structured interviews with their representatives. The findings set out here should be considered as a first step in identifying a series of salient issues deserving further research.

## **“Vie Féminine”: A feminist movement of social and intercultural action**

Created in the 1920s, *Vie Féminine* is historically linked to the Christian world which has always admitted and provided a separate space within its institutions (political party, trade union etc.) for groups with particular interests. So there has always been the possibility of a *niche* for women, seen as a specific population having specific needs and demands. This recognition has allowed women to organize themselves autonomously and to get experience and competence so that they could make their claims heard.

Though *Vie Féminine* has long lost its Christian label and has become an autonomous movement, the organisation still has a particular relation to religion. Over the last twenty years, *Vie Féminine* has actually encouraged women to position themselves critically towards their religion (be it Christian or Islamic) as is demonstrated in a booklet entitled *Sacrées Paroles* published in 2003. The sacred words are neither the priest's nor the imam's but the women's words. Women have an expertise; they have a capacity to live religion in their own way and not in function of what they are told.

*Vie Féminine*, which has been a mass movement since its creation and is well established all over Brussels and Wallonie, provides a great variety of services like training and childcare. They actively work with what they call the *milieu populaire*, a working class population among which a good proportion of women are of migrant origin. Interestingly, *Vie Féminine* is the only French-speaking association that took into account – as early as 1970 – the issue of migrant women by creating *Action immigrée* (Immigrant action), a reception structure for the women of the first migration wave. It was a section within the movement that was exclusively in charge of Italian, Moroccan and Turkish women and endeavoured to solve the problems common to all those women (language, housing, schooling, and later, the right to vote, the right to asylum, etc.). Since the 1980s, the women of migrant origin that had been integrated in these structures first as social workers, later in decision-making positions, had felt uneasy because of the ghettoizing effect of the structure. In fact, *Action immigrée* contradicted the need for an opening claimed by the movement by categorizing migrant women. Hafida Bachir, the current president of *Vie féminine*, remembers how disturbing it was «to be the migrant social worker for migrant women» (Bachir 2008: 148). *Vie Féminine* then started a long lasting reflection which resulted in working out an Intercultural Project and brought

*Action Immigrée* to an end in 2001. The relation of the movement to the issue of migration was utterly transformed: from then on interculturality, understood as the recognition of differences and the necessity to face conflicts, was expected to be mainstreamed in all activities and at all levels.

Hafida Bachir's view of feminism is that of an ongoing work with grass-roots women: "Our feminism is not locked. My feminism, I am building it with the women who are here now (...) I hope it will always be an unfinished process" (Bachir, 2008: 151). In the same interactive way, feminist social work consists in accompanying women, moving with them in a permanent two-way exchange. Women are thought to be able to care for their own projects and social workers should support them and help them set up and carry out these projects. However this does not mean social workers are neutral. For instance, faced with the case of a battered woman, they should make it clear that violence between partners is not acceptable and at the same time show that tools exist not only to understand what you live as a woman, but also to fight, to change things. Social workers share responsibility for what *Vie Féminine* calls *les options féministes fondamentales*, that is, the non-negotiable, universal principles such as dignity, equality and respect for women's physical and moral integrity. Consequently, behaviours or traditions such as forced marriage, honour killing, and repudiation cannot be tolerated given these universal principles.

It is also in the name of the principle of gender equality that, after having talked with the concerned women, *Vie Féminine* took an official stand against the ban on the headscarf in schools because this rule would prejudice women instead of fighting patriarchy. Hafida Bachir goes even further when she declares: "Putting the blame on veiled women is not sexism nor feminism but simply racism" (Bachir 2008: 152). Nonetheless *Vie Féminine* remains watchful, being aware of the risk of instrumentalising women and of making Islam more visible in Europe.

### **The Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes: A feminist and secular movement**

Founded in 1922, the *Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes* or *FPS*, the other great mass movement in Brussels and Wallonie, is historically close to the Socialist party, which does not recognize particular interests: it focuses on the general interest, on what is common to all human beings. So, even if there used to

be women's groups in the party or in the trade union, these groups only existed to strengthen and support the struggle against capitalism. Today the *FPS* are autonomous but there remain deep links with the socialist family as for instance their attachment to the principle of *laïcité* (secularism).<sup>9</sup> Unlike *Vie Féminine*, religion is for the *Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes* a stumbling block, something threatening both for *laïcité* and feminism.

As a mass movement the *FPS* target the *milieu populaire* characterised by a good proportion of women of migrant origin especially in large cities but they have never created special structures to take care of the particular needs of migrant women. Migrant women used to get integrated through the local structures of the *FPS* (the training courses and the health or child care services) and of the socialist party, union etc. But this sort of 'total menu' offered to women by the socialist world became obsolete in the 1990s, especially with the population of migrant origin. Now engagement is done *à la carte* and the *FPS* have to re-consider their work with working class women and in particular with migrant women. Actually, the issue of multiculturality was only raised in 2004 – in the context of the public debate around the values of *laïcité* – by social workers who were asking how to deal with veiled women or with demands like women-only schedules in swimming pools. This concern was shared by the leaders of the movement who wondered how to work with women from different origins, cultures and religions within the framework of a movement that calls itself secular and feminist.

The *FPS* then started a reflection on values (in particular feminism and interculturality) with their social workers with a view to clarifying what was meant by intercultural work. They did not want to produce a catalogue of positions or answers but insisted on social workers having a real knowledge of what they support. In this reflection, the notion of *laïcité* plays a central role: "we are convinced that the values we defend – whether feminism or interculturality – will only make sense if permeated by *laïcité*. We are not saying that secular societies are more equal than others, no, but all the same we think that *laïcité* is the best means to reach equality" (Plasman & Pinchart 2008: 159).

Just like the workers of *Vie Féminine*, the *FPS* do their social work along the line of non-negotiable values: *laïcité*, feminism, citizenship, equality, solidarity (i.e. not exactly the same as those of *Vie Féminine*). Given the upsurge of several *revendications communautaires* (communitarian demands) within the population targeted by *FPS*, the focus is on the defence of *laïcité*

as it is felt to be threatened by the emergent claims linked with the religious Islamic practices: wearing the headscarf, non-mixed public space, and so forth. This fear of intrusion of the religious into the public space leads to *a priori* positions. We can measure the difference between *Vie Féminine* and the *FPS* in the way they relate to veiled workers. *Vie Féminine* is not opposed *per se* to the presence of a veiled worker, as what matters is the conception of the work and the critical vision of religion, whereas the *FPS* welcome veiled women among the public but cannot accept veiled social workers because of the principle of *laïcité*.

## Conclusions

*Vie Féminine* and the *FPS* certainly do not represent the whole women's movement in French-speaking Belgium. The line of fracture between them, which replicates the one separating the Christian from the Socialist world, is not so clear-cut in the rest of the movement. Actually the numerous groups and associations which belong to the feminist *nebula* responded in various and complex ways to the multicultural challenge. Yet the study of the practice and reflection of *Vie Féminine* and the *FPS* allows an insight into the impact of a group's political or philosophical tradition on its perceptions and strategies. In fact, the very conception of feminism, the sort of political engagement and the relation to religion significantly influences the mode of dealing with the multicultural reality.

In this regard, islamophobia, which is perceptible in some feminist declarations, appears to be a major obstacle in the intercultural project. It is the fear of an Islam thought to be threatening feminism and democracy (universal values) because it supports gender inequality and intrudes in the public space. But all in all, the big divide between the supporters and opponents of the headscarf ban has more to do with politics and racism than with religion and feminism. It is the very idea of superiority of western values underlying islamophobia that has a racist connotation. Such a deeply entrenched conviction cannot but hinder any attempt to re-define the priorities and strategies of the women's movement.

At last, all feminist groups agree on sticking to the *universal* values of feminism, without which there would not be a feminist movement. The cleavage seems to be rooted in the way the universal is conceived: as an *a priori*

value to respect at all costs or as an ideal value yet to construct. The *FPS*, as other feminist groups, focuses on defending the gains of feminism while *Vie Féminine* and others insist on building a new one. It is difficult to conclude in a clear way as regards the future of the women's movement faced with migrant women's criticism. Not all the associations are ready to start the process of re-construction and re-formulation of the priorities of the movement but all are aware of the importance of this process. There is some good reason to hope unequal social relations between women within the movement will be at least acknowledged if not challenged. A positive sign is the fieldwork carried out by the *FPS* and *Vie Féminine* with grass-roots women. Both work from needs at local level, both privilege concrete actions, and even if their values differ (*laïcité* does not make sense for *Vie Féminine* and *FPS* will never rely on religion), their feminist practice provides a space which stimulates their capacity not only to transform and adapt to new contexts but also to re-formulate their mission and the means to achieve the new goals.

## Teaching Reflections

- What are the main differences between *Vie Féminine* and *Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes*?
- Why did the Belgian women's movement develop into a rather homogeneous cultural whole, in spite of political and theoretical differences? How does this compare with other European women's movements?
- The article illustrates how both political parts of the women's movement in French-speaking Belgium dealt differently with multiculturalism and women with histories of migration.  
Why do you think the Christian and Socialist groups took different approaches?
- Why has the 'multicultural' issue not been dealt with as a thematic issue for all women, but rather as a specific issue affecting only part of the women? How does this relate to Wekker's contribution?
- How can intersectionality contribute to this debate in the women's movement?

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<sup>6</sup> I use the expression women's movement to refer to the *nebula* of associations varying in age, size, financial means and missions which all aim at promoting women's emancipation.

<sup>7</sup> At the same time in France, the Stasi-commission published its recommendations and the French government enacted the law banning the wearing of religious symbols within public schools.

<sup>8</sup> From among the numerous terms used in Belgium to refer to the same phenomenon, I have chosen *multicultural* because it refers to the concrete reality of the different cultures co-existing in the same space as opposed to the word *intercultural* which suggests a project of social blending.

<sup>9</sup> Unlike France where a strict separation between Church and State is established by the law, Belgium enjoys a regime of neutrality. Religious and non-religious philosophical or secular humanist organizations are recognized and subsidized and state-run schools provide religious and non-religious moral teaching. *Laïcité* should be understood here as the humanist philosophy which assigns religion to the private sphere.

# **An Intersectional Approach to Gender and Communication: Beyond the 'Media Gaze'?**

*Giuseppina Pellegrino*

## **Abstract**

In this article an intersectional perspective is proposed to analyze the relationship between gender and communication. By definition, communication is a process understandable at the crossroad of multiple disciplines, gazes and perspectives. However, most of the research focuses on the media as actors of gendered social constructions, overlooking the role other sources and institutions played historically in elaborating unequal and asymmetrical models of communication. The focus on the mass media as main constructors of gender models derives from the resilience of a mathematical model of communication, whose components are basically black boxes, emptied from the situatedness of communicational contexts, actors and messages. Intersectionality could help to elaborate a more complex model of communication, multi-theoretical and multi-oriented, able to go beyond the primacy of the 'media gaze' to analyze and deconstruct gender communication. Intersectional theory provides a framework to inquire about the link between multiple differences and communication. In this respect, the new media, along with the concepts of located accountability and gender citizenship, allow articulation of multiple differences and understanding of how patterns of cumulative power and oppression can be either reproduced or changed through communicational models and representations.

## **Rationale of the argument**

The starting point of this article is the stereotypical and reductionist character of gender relationships depicted by the mass media. When looking at advertisements, stereotypical representations of sex and gender (especially female) occur through objectified, discriminating or extremely simplified models and characterize the communicational mechanism of the message. It is not by chance that Goffman (1979) noticed and analyzed the semiotical patterns of gender reproduction in this communication field. Thirty years after his

analysis, the state of the art in gendered advertisements has not changed much. Looking at a recent campaign by McCann Erickson for a beer, with the slogan “Thank God I’m a man”, it emerges how male-female relationships have been crystallized without fear of exceeding the boundary of all the possible (and the worst) stereotypes about men and women’s socialization habits and reciprocal expectations.

Even if gender-sensitive advertisements are becoming more frequent, they remain exceptional and limited to the context of public communication campaigns whose diffusion and visibility is far different than the commercial ones. Assuming the unbalanced relationship which still characterizes gender mediated communication as a departure point, this article aims to go back to the original multiplicity of both gender and communication, inquiring about possible crossroads with an intersectional approach to enrich and enlarge the prevailing (reductionist) media gaze on gender and communication.

The article is structured as follows. First of all, two alternative models of communication will be presented, comparing the transmission model with a dialogue model, based on an etymological analysis of the term ‘communication’ (Giaccardi 2005).

Such a comparison is aimed at showing how the transmission model, due to its pervasive influence in Communication and Media Studies (it was used and adapted by Roman Jakobson in the 1950s (Jakobson 1971)) obscured for a long time the roots of communication and its ambivalent character, as well as the potential to take into account multiple differences (including those based on sex and gender). Attention will be drawn to the pervasivity of mediated communication which is both enabling and constraining a gendered analysis. On the one hand, the traditional (mass) media are trapped into a strong stereotypical representation of gender. On the other hand, the new media with their distributedness, universality, convergence and interactivity open up new possibilities of enlarging and enriching gendered representations and communication across multiple differences (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2006). Differences in terms of sex, gender, age, ethnicity and race, class, and so on are carriers of different meanings, power relationships and power structures, which are crucial to shape individual and collective identities. In this respect, an intersectional approach is complementary to the situated perspective of feminist objectivity and can be integrated with the concept of gender citizenship as civic discourse (Haraway 1991; Gherardi 1995).

In the end, it is argued that spaces and opportunities for breaking down the stereotypical mass media representations can emerge from an intersectional approach, so as to enable alternative, more aware discourses on gender, communication and oppressive structures. Implications for teaching practices, methodologies and content are also highlighted.

### **Communication from transmission to dialogue**

The concept of information and its transmission is often associated with that of communication, in particular since the formulation of the mathematical theory of communication by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver. Such a formulation, born out of the pioneering studies on Cybernetics and Information Theory, maintained a long and strong influence in Communication and Media Studies, to the extent of constituting the nuclear core for analyzing inter human verbal communication.

Shannon and Weaver's model, in fact, was adapted by Roman Jakobson, who added elements like context, message, contact and code of communication to their abstract scheme. According to Shannon and Weaver, information is a statistical unit measuring signals going from an information source to a destination source. Their aim was to minimize interferences or noise sources running on the communication channel and impeding an optimal transmission.

Such a model, even in its adapted version, poses challenges and problems to a conceptualization of communication as a complex social process shaping individual and collective identities, as this article wants to argue. First of all, it is an abstract, and mathematical representation of communication as transmission of information. This abstractness originates the reductionist character of the model, which interprets communication as a mechanic passage of signals from a transmitter to a receiver, despite the differences and contextual characteristics which instead affect the communication process. The linear model elaborated by Shannon and Weaver and adapted by Jakobson therefore reduces communication complexity to a universal and abstract entity, statistically measurable, that means information.

This approach does not help to problematize the multiple differences which can be both created and reproduced through communication processes. The transmission model is, amongst other things, gender-neutral and it obscures

those differences in term of sex, gender, ethnicity, age, religious beliefs, which are constitutive of the situated and located identity of participants to the communication process.

As an alternative conceptualization of communication, an etymological analysis of the term will be proposed, so to emphasize the situatedness, multiplicity and contextuality of senders and receivers.

In this respect, three different roots of ‘communication’ can be identified from Latin (Giaccardi 2005).

The first one goes back to *communis/communitas* (common/community) that means to have something in common with somebody/something, to share, to have relationships. Communication, therefore, is about constructing and sharing common worlds, but also sharing an affective, emotional dimension (linked to the community).

The second etymological term is *cum munus* (*cum* is ‘with’, *munus* is ‘gift/obligation’). This origin emphasizes the ambivalent and even contradictory status of communication. Communication is at once a gift and an obligation, which entails reciprocity of exchange.

Last but not least, communication can be associated with *moenia* (the city walls). This interpretation goes back to material boundaries and barriers between physical spaces but has to do also with less material, visible and tangible differences which can (re)produce distances and incomprehension between senders and receivers. Communication can either overcome or reinforce barriers.

Overall, this analysis leads to a dialogic concept of communication. Dialogue implies a relational effort in acknowledging differences, otherness and multiplicity. Missing such acknowledgement and rejecting this effort would transform communication into a monologic, oppressive and normative exercise. Many of the oppressive structures which produce intersectional discriminations arise when the original meanings of communication are neglected and an abstract, forcedly universal approach to it prevails. In this sense, intersectionality emphasizes the original constituency of communication as an ambivalent and multiple process whose results are located and contextual and cannot be generalized. When this happens, it is at cost of a dangerous oversimplification which further increases oppression and discrimination.

## **The primacy of the media gaze in observing the gender/communication crossroad**

Moving from transmission to dialogue when talking about gender and communication is a first step, necessary but not sufficient to clarify how gender can be differently communicated and taken into account. The second step to configure a more inclusive relationship between gender and communication passes from the recognition of the primacy of mediated communication in inquiring the crossroad of gendered communication. It is of relevance to say that even such a crossroad between gender and media studies cannot be taken for granted, as it does not represent a mainstream approach in either communication or gender studies. Therefore, an intersectional approach would further enlarge, and enrich, a perspective which is neither widespread nor stabilized.

As Thompson (1995) pointed out, the emergence of the mass media and the extended spatio-temporal accessibility they enabled are constitutively part of the project of modernity. On other hand, the mass media communication with its rules, hierarchies and agenda setting power, enforces a stereotypical representation of gender identities, which is particularly evident in the case of commercial advertisement. Indeed, along their history, the mass media have been creating and reinforcing stereotypes not only on gender, but also concerning race, class and culture.

Nowadays, we assist day by day in the reproduction and enforcement of simplified, rigid and sometimes caricatural depiction of peoples, cultures and differences. Evoking a shadowy and dangerous ‘Other’, threatening as an enemy the boundaries of ‘our’ civilization, is a daily exercise accomplished by the mass media, more and more extreme in its tones after the 11<sup>th</sup> September and the subsequent declaration of a global War on Terror.

Stereotypes produced and perpetuated by the mass media also constitute a privileged point of observation to analyze how gendered identities are reproduced, what kind of expectations, values, beliefs and behaviours are associated with men and women in specific spatio-temporal contexts. Over time, various types of stereotyping mechanisms have been imposed on the ‘evidence’ of sexual difference, so leading to body objectification (of female and, more recently, male bodies), confirming dependence and inferiority (or fragility) of women *vs.* men, or configuring women *to* men by force.

Stereotypes contribute to reinforce a linear, non-problematic approach to gender relationships, depicting them as highly predictable, rigid and oversimplified. In this respect, they guarantee a normative function, as well as the need for ontological safety, reassuring us about the fact that the world is out there and works according to regular, predictable patterns. In the end, stereotypes pertain to the transmission model of communication rather than to the dialogic one. Stereotyping gender (or any other source of difference) means not to pursue that relational effort which is the pre-condition for acknowledgement, recognition and respect of multiple differences. In fact, one of the constitutive characteristics of stereotypes is the resistance they present to attempts at change and transformation.

However, it is important to recognize that in the field of public communication campaigns, more responsible, gender-sensitive and difference-sensitive models of communication, especially on the advertisement front have emerged, along with guidelines and policies for gender equality in communication promoted by public bodies.<sup>10</sup> Also in the commercial advertisement field, a call for more balanced and equal representations of gender, race, ethnicity, age and so on can be noticed. It is disputable whether such initiatives, even if important, can contrast the overwhelming and still gender biased amount of commercial advertisements.

This article calls for an intersectional approach in order to tackle two crucial questions: is it possible to reconcile (mass media) communication with multiple differences? How can tensions towards gender equality be concealed with emphasis on difference and diversity in communication? The proposed answers draw from an intersectional approach as a starting point to enlarge and de-construct prevailing mass media representations and search for alternative models of communication, going beyond the ‘traditional media gaze’.

### **Intersectionality, communication and identity**

Intersectional theory, born out as a critique of White Western Women’s Feminism, (Yuval Davis, Kannabiran, Vieten 2006) highlights how differences are sources of inequality and oppression, as multiple as types of positions characterizing individuals, groups and also systems. In this respect, positionality describes how we are positioned in more than one dimension of difference (and oppression). Intersectionality makes visible and problematizes how

power structures are linked together, preserving social, political and economical inequalities. Therefore it allows us to take into account the multiplicity of oppressive structures and interlinkages of power relations which reproduce them: intersectionality makes possible ‘mapping the margins’ (Crenshaw 1994).

Framed by legal feminists, intersectionality emerged over the last years as a powerful discourse affecting the public policy field, as a result of exogenous pressures represented by EU directives. In this respect, intersectionality contributed to set up the latest stage in the development of gender equality regimes, based on the acknowledgement of multiple inequality strands and of cumulative discriminations (Squires 2009). Discrimination occurs on the basis of various sources of difference in identity (e.g. gender, age, race and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and religious beliefs, as stated in Article 13 of the EC Treaty). These differences are not just adding to each other, but their effect is combined and cumulative, which means it corresponds to more than the simple sum of components.

What is the role communication can play when looking at differences which become sources of inequalities and discriminations? Since intersectionality emphasizes reproduction of differences as a basis for oppressive structures, it goes back to the issue of communication as a social process which can both enable and constrain new positionings of individuals, groups, systems. As already stated, communication, especially in the mass media, can have strong normative and normalizing functions with reference to individual and collective identities, as it happens through the reductionist mechanism of stereotype. However, communication has also to do with sharing and constructing worlds of common meanings and values. At the same time, it can enforce barriers and boundaries between different worlds instead of bridging and connecting them.

Such an ambivalent status of communication, and its unpredictability, due to the emergent character of conflicts and negotiations, is crucial to consider when we go to the issue of how individual and collective identity is reproduced through communication practices. Such practices, in an intersectional perspective, are the result of differences (class, gender, age, ethnicity, race) and asymmetries which situate each participant to the process in a specific, peculiar position of difference, power and complementarity towards other participants. These positions contribute to situate each one in

power structures and relations, according to different roles, voice and access to communicative competences/resources.

Oppressive structures are often enforced or worsened by limited access and the development of communication opportunities, including those based on new media and ICTs. The much debated phenomenon of ‘digital divide’, therefore, is fractured along different lines of difference, differentiation and inequality, which jeopardize participation and empowerment by those positioned at the crossroad of multiple, discriminated identities.

An intersectional approach to communication could help to emphasise the constitutive multiplicity of communication as well as to inquire into the discursive practices and narratives which reproduce existing patterns of inequality in different contexts. Three different concepts are considered to be constitutive of such an approach: the feminist epistemology of located accountability; the new media as an articulation of a more pluralistic public sphere and the gender citizenship as civic discourse.

### **Bridging an intersectional approach to communication and gender**

In order to bridge an intersectional approach to communication and gender, it will be argued that intersectionality takes into full account the feminist claim of a situated epistemology, based on local and locatable knowledges (Haraway 1991). The plurality and multiplicity of knowledge (knowledges), along with the awareness of speaking and coming always ‘from somewhere’, is the starting point to include multiple sources of difference in the analysis of identity and communication, instead of bracketing (and neutralizing) powerful positions and subsequent discriminations. In particular, it seems to be very fruitful to use the concept of ‘located accountabilities’, as transferred from feminist reconstructions of objectivity to the field of technology production and use. The starting point of located accountability is the acknowledgement that translations and alignments between hybrid components (human and non-human, in the case of technology; different identities and cultures in the case of intersectionality) are always partial and local (Suchman 2002). Such an awareness calls for a partial and local assumption of responsibility, able to take into consideration how multiple discourses and differences can co-exist together and search for an equal legitimization.

Co-existence of strands of multiple inequalities and their transformation into sources of acknowledged diversity requires two more steps. First of all, it is important to recognize and re-affirm how traditional media provide always partial and simplified versions of cultural, social and economic differences through the power of the stereotyping mechanism. On other hand, the new media with their distributedness, ubiquity, interactivity and de-centralizing logic (one for all, the Internet) have proved to offer a far more diverse range of information sources, giving people the chance to speak out from their specific positionings, not bracketing anymore their multiple differences and inequalities.

Emerging web-based forms of aggregation and participation such as blogging, citizen journalism and online activism make clear that new and personal media constitute alternative spheres to develop dialogue through/across differences, to raise awareness with reference to power inequalities and asymmetries, and to intervene on them. The flexibility and openness of the new media allow new spaces of debate, discussion and exchange. However, it must be recognized that even the new media and the Internet as a gigantic information infrastructure embed (and reproduce) multiple lines of differences/positions from which access, construction and empowerment of new dialogic spaces are made possible. It is not just the fact that some groups participate far less than others in the new media potential of change, but exactly the fact that the classification systems on which new media (as well as public policies for gender equality) are based, by definition create 'other' categories, residual identities and orphans (Bowker and Star 2000). This is the case of 'class' (and economic difference) in Article 13 of the EC Treaty. The real challenge of an intersectional approach to communication cannot be separated from acknowledging the constitutive partiality and locality of classifications, and recognizing their cogency when they become standards.

Furthermore, an intersectional approach to gender and communication implies changing the concept of gender citizenship we assume. Gender citizenship can be framed as legal recognition, cultural integration, specific resource, substantial equality, moral obligation to work, civic discourse (Gherardi 1995). These concepts go back to the different strands and trends in gender equality regimes, from a formal and legal recognition of equality, to the anti-discrimination measures assuming the male as normative parameter, to the positive action approach affirming the specificity of women's contribution

to society. In light of an intersectional approach, gender citizenship as civic discourse has a particular relevance. Civic discourse interprets citizenship as the result of practice-based relationships instead of as a formal ascribed status. Civic discourse as practice entails creating different discourses of belonging and identity, in which gender and sex are amongst the possible sources of difference and inequality, no more the only or the privileged ones.

The three concepts proposed to bridge intersectionality to gender and communication allow valuing difference, while taking into account the issue of (in)equality: recognizing differences makes it possible to think of new regimes and strategies to correct and balance cumulative discriminations, also from a communicational viewpoint (e.g. the new media and the new practices they enable).

### **Implications for teaching: (de)constructing communication and gender through intersectionality**

What implications can be drawn from an intersectional approach to communication in terms of teaching contents and methodologies?

Intersectionality is a subject in itself but the focus in this contribution aims to use it more as a methodological tool than a list of topics linked to gender. In fact through intersectionality it is possible to renew both the contents and the methods of teaching gender and communication. The first added value of an intersectional approach resides in its emphasis on the multiplicity and cumulativeness of processes. Teaching gender in such a perspective implies a continuous and transversal process of reference to multiple categories as sources of difference and inequality. This has to do apparently with the methodology of teaching.

The second added value is the potential for (de)constructing the category of communication, going beyond a traditional approach which limits the influence of communicational processes on gender to the mass media stereotypical action. In this respect intersectionality provides a more complex picture of variables and processes which can be included in the analysis of gendered communication. This is concerned with a different articulation of the topic ‘gender and communication’.

Last but not least, intersectionality mirrors and echoes the composite layering of contemporary social contexts, bringing teaching practices closer

to the scenarios where gender and communication emerge as social, situated practices. This last dimension is relative to the transformative and performative potential of teaching and learning, especially when these processes are concerned with the critique and re-formulation of power, politics and policies as in the case of intersectionality.

## Conclusion

Despite the stereotyped, gender-biased vision of the world offered by most of the mass media, new opportunities have arisen for an intersectional analysis of gender and communication. Communication as a social process contributes to build up individual and collective identities, creating and reinforcing, especially through the mass media, an oversimplified, immutable and rigid representation of gender relationships as well as of sex, race, age, cultural and religious differences. The gendered communication proposed in public communication campaigns is not sufficient to balance the gender-biased action of traditional media and their tendency to crystallize differences in either gender-neutral or sexist, discriminatory discourses.

On other hand, the plurality and multiplicity enabled by new media, the personalisation of communication, and the re-construction of communicational processes as always ambivalent and partial can inform a different approach to communication as a source of power inequalities and *locus* to reproduce (and contrast) oppressive structures. An intersectional approach, adhering to the feminist epistemology of situated knowledge, can make communication and participation less prone to the dominant logics of discrimination and inequality, as long as it takes into account that any kind of classification inevitably creates orphans, exclusion and silence and that privileging one source of inequality means to neglect and to create ‘others’. It is also crucial to embed an intersectional approach to gender teaching contents and methodologies.

Communication should allow more sharing (shared codes are necessary to construct common worlds of meaning) but it can also enforce oppositions, crystallize differences and jeopardize dialogue. In the end, the possibility and potential to accomplish dialogue and acknowledge multiple differences which found oppressive structures depend on how much the social and inextricably identity-linked character of communication is taken into account.

## **Teaching Reflections**

How can intersectionality usefully be used as a methodological tool in teaching communication science in other areas than advertising? Considering the arguments here, what are the implications of an intersectional approach for rethinking in other disciplines?

How does intersectionality bring teaching practices closer to the scenarios where gender and communication emerge as social, situated practices?

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<sup>10</sup> For an Italian example, see <http://www.poliedra.it/eikon/>

## **Visions for Politicians: Opportunities and Threats of Intersectionality**

*Martha Franken*

### **Abstract**

The concept of mainstreaming gender (and/or diversity) is presented from the viewpoint of a policymaker, with a specific case from Flanders, discussing the use of the Gender Impact Assessment tool, followed by comments about the concepts of anti-discrimination and proactive policies that are used in the European legal framework.

### **Working with mainstreaming for gender or diversity**

To look at the concept of mainstreaming in practice we need to get into the skin of a policymaker. In this book we have seen the need to develop policies that reflect the diversity of the population in whatever policy domain with a direct impact on the population, be it health policy or mobility or culture. Just imagine that you are a policymaker in mobility, how can you make your policy promote equality in terms of gender and/or diversity?

The chapter asks you practically: how do you do that? There are many features of diversity and strands of difference. How do you start a policy, keeping the diversity of the population in the back of your mind? How can you take gender into account as a separate strand? Finally why would you do that? As a policy maker do you think that each one of the various target groups is a different strand or do you look for intersections and connections?

Mainstreaming is just one of the tools that can be used for working on gender or diversity. Mainstreaming certainly is not a goal in itself. But even in using the tool of mainstreaming, you need other instruments to start up the processes that are necessary to mainstream gender or diversity into all policy domains. The concept is so all encompassing that it needs to be cut down into manageable pieces to work in practice.

The Flemish Authority has developed several instruments to implement gender and diversity policies in different policy domains, but we will look here at one example that I followed closely: the Gender Impact Assessment tool (GIA). This tool has been temporarily abandoned but as we saw in Judith

Squires' contribution a new future can be acquired for this instrument if real gender mainstreaming policies are picked up again.

The original version of the Gender Impact Assessment tool was developed by Mieke Verloo in the Netherlands in the early nineties. The Flemish Government ordered a 'translation' of the GIA for Flanders, (which was developed by the Free University of Brussels (VUB), by Alison Woodward and Petra Meier in 1997). The Flemish GIA was initially developed for keeping *gender* into the back of our minds. In a later stage an adjusted instrument for local governments (the LGIA) was developed. Then we tried to refine the questionnaire for other target group issues besides gender. The whole process of developing and implementing these instruments for the analytical phase of the policy process started in 1996 and ended in 2004 when a new government entered after the elections.

## **Where does a Gender (or Diversity) Impact Assessment fit in the policy process?**

Policy processes consist theoretically of four phases:

- the analysis of a problem;
- the decision on how to solve the problem;
- the implementation of the solution;
- the evaluation, and then the process can start all over again, because this provides a new analysis.

A Gender Impact Assessment instrument is basically a detailed questionnaire to gather information about the situation of the specific target group in society. If you want to analyse a problem you have to know what the particular situation of your target group is in relation to your policy problem. From this analysis you can draw your conclusions as to which decision needs to be made so that the policy will promote the well-being of your target groups. The purpose is to find out how the intended policy (idea, concept, law) will affect the target group and whether this will improve or deteriorate the situation for the target group.

There are several good examples of how carrying out a GIA changed an intended decision into something that better covered the needs of the population. Let us look at an example from the Netherlands and simplify the

case a bit to make the point clear. In a certain region there was a problem with public transportation and mobility. Initially the analysis was that there were not enough buses riding to bring everyone to their destination. The local politicians proposed that more buses were needed during peak hours. This was expensive as new buses had to be bought and personnel hired. The women's movement succeeded in having a Gender Impact Assessment carried out on this policy intention, before the policy was put into practice. The results were astonishing: the analysis showed among other things, that more women took the bus than men, and that women needed the bus more in between the peak hours rather than at the peak hours. In order to solve the real problem, there were enough buses. They just had to change the riding schedules. By carrying out a Gender Impact Assessment the authority saved money and helped more people.

The Flemish Gender Impact instruments have been worked with very intensively in several projects and cities. While the results may never have been as spectacular as the Dutch example, the process of working with the tool was an eye opener for many civil servants and other actors involved. It worked especially as an instrument for awareness-raising. All the actors involved in this process learned a lot about mainstreaming and its challenges. The process of learning involved in using the instrument was the most rewarding result of the projects.

Working with a new policy instrument is never easy. Some of the problems in doing Gender Impact Assessment were:

- the consistent lack of data and statistics about women (or any target group) in order to answer the questions involved. There was an immense lack of statistics about the situation of women on the local level (as well as at the Flemish level) about the situation of women in a certain policy area. The process often stranded on the first question: how many women affected by the policy are poor, single with or without children, aged, or disabled? Governments have statistics about the poor or about public housing or the disabled, but the data are seldom disaggregated into figures for men and women – so policymakers often do not have the right instruments to analyse a problem.

- the lack of real political will to implement the results of the analysis. High level gender advisors ask for more *real* political will. The request for REAL political will is quite remarkable because it means that it is widely acknowledged that something like UNREAL political will exists. In most countries it seems decision-makers tend to think that the problems of women or other target groups do not need to be taken seriously. Even if there is research and data on specific problems, politicians do not always want to ‘believe’ the results if this means they have to change their ideas. In Equal Opportunities Policies it seems as if the limits of the impact of research in certain areas have been reached. The research is often not convincing enough to change decisions. Just imagine this: many policy solutions are decided without asking the right questions or analysing a problem thoroughly.
- the fact that a policy process in reality seldom follows the theoretical stages of preparation with analysis, decision, implementation and evaluation. The four stages tend to overlap and there is a lot of improvisation and informal decision-making by people in power that is beyond the reach of other actors in society.
- the difficulty in monitoring the results of implementing the policy in the later phases of the policy process. The Gender Impact Assessment is an analytical tool, but how do you monitor the implementation of a decision taken? Making an analysis about a target group is one thing but getting the results implemented is another and much harder goal to reach. There you may be confronted with implementing a decision that people do not like, or the actors involved in implementation may be different from the ones that have been involved in the analysis. This often means low commitment, the decision gets watered down, and many new obstacles show up along the way. Much attention has been paid to developing analytical tools, but not many efforts have been made to develop monitoring tools. There is often a lack of consistency in policy research. New tools can be developed through research, but often there

is no money to use them, or the track is abandoned and new things are started up. We seldom see fundamental research (as an initiative of researchers) to develop new instruments to follow up on the effect of policies. The women's movement is also not sufficiently persistent in pursuing the following up of an objective to its bitter end. A further problem for consistency is that in policymaking there is a high rate of 'shopping' or hopping on new targets, methods and research, which is deadly for reaching the ultimate equality goal.

- contradictory needs of different target groups. Sometimes the analysis of a problem shows that the solutions might be different for different target groups. This is an issue that is very relevant when we consider intersectionality. The question is then which decision do you take?

In this first part we looked at a specific sub-tool in the mainstreaming approach, the GIA. There are other tools to address the practical process of mainstreaming, and many more need to be developed. If we want to continue mainstreaming gender and diversity policies much still needs to be done. After 15 years of working with Equal Opportunities Policies, I am more than ever convinced that we constantly need to think of new strategies to make progress for any of the target groups. If we abandon a strategy we have to think clearly why we do so. Policy makers need to gather allies in the group of researchers, civil servants, politicians and civil society to work consistently for clear goals. This is even more important given the changes in the European context, which I will discuss in the next section.

## **Concepts in the European legal framework**

The European directives as we saw in Kantola's chapter focus more on the issue of *anti-discrimination* than on the issue of *intersectionality* as such. This means we need two types of policy:

- proactive policies to prevent and avoid discrimination, and to promote equal opportunities for citizens – this is related to Intersectionality;
- sanctioning policies – to sanction whoever violates the law. (For the rest of this paper we will not go into this kind of policy – that of the sanctioning);

In my experience there is great variety in how national governments are organising these two policy tasks into definite structures. Everyone is trying out models, and the challenges range from gathering or dividing the attention for six target groups of the European directives into one or more equality units, to implementing the directives themselves. One of the main problems is that *it is very different to be working on a pro-active policy for a target group or to implement the sanctioning policies*. There is some overlap of activities, but as long as no one sees that there is a difference between positive duties and sanctioning, the problem will not be solved. The *difference* lies mainly in the *focus for your policy making* (the vision, or the mission of a service) when you want to work on equal opportunities for a target group or when you want to sanction discrimination.

Many governments struggle to get this straightened out, but the best solution is probably to have different units do the different jobs. As the European policies are going through a process of getting this set up, this accounts also for the disarray in national policies. I am sure the structural mechanisms will still change quite a bit in the near future, although many governments just changed their structures because of the 2004 directive. And a new directive is in the making!

This also leads us to the difference in focus between the EU directives and those from the policies worked out by the Council of Europe. The EU policies are embedded into the employment strategy and social agenda, because the EU began as and still is an organisation that focuses on the common market and employment. Therefore we now see the limits to their ability/capacity to change things in the target group's daily lives that goes beyond the EU competencies. The Council of Europe on the other hand is a Human Rights organisation and can look into the cultural, educational and media issues in life. National governments and regional governments have to take not only EU considerations but also these other issues into account when setting up their machineries. A further layer of obligations comes from the UN Conventions for different target groups (CEDAW, CERD, CRPD). All of these concepts have to be condensed into institutional mechanisms to follow up the different instructions from different international levels. There is not one all encompassing instruction that makes it clear for governments what they have to be working on.

Taking into consideration these frameworks, let us consider a policy-maker's ability to develop pro-active equal opportunities policies in the new European context. What will this mean in terms of focussing on the pro-active part of the policy job? In order to prevent discrimination you have to take action to convince people not to discriminate against others and make sure that they are not only convinced but also change their attitudes and act accordingly. These are three different things: raising their awareness of the problem, inviting people to *change* their *attitudes*, and inviting people to *change* their *behaviour*.

### **Awareness raising**

In Equal Opportunities policies most projects are focused on awareness raising as one of the goals for the policy. Many actions and projects set up by governments throughout Europe are trying to convince people that diversity is an added value in society and that we should not discriminate. In many of the international instruments and documents the focus lies on sensibilization as a policy goal. We have to raise people's awareness about stereotypes of ethnicity, gender and so forth. But when people are aware of the problem, then what?

### **Changing attitudes and behavioural changes:**

Even after all the efforts for awareness raising, getting people to act in a non-discriminatory way is much harder to achieve. In other policy domains we see that most people change their behaviour not because policymakers tell them that attitudes or behaviour are unethical or morally not acceptable, but because certain behaviour is being sanctioned directly. People get fined for driving too fast, and limit their driving because oil becomes too expensive. When people have to pay for their 'bad' behaviour they correct it, but as soon as the attention of the government drops, the behaviour may return. Only a small minority in the total population will act as convinced and responsible citizens after many awareness raising campaigns. When people have been forced to change their behaviour (due to all sorts of reasons, like a changing society) for a sufficiently long time it might be possible that it really influences their attitudes, which in itself has a positive impact on future behaviour. Some rules become socially so accepted that this has a positive impact on attitudes too. Let

us take environmental policy as an example. We have been sorting garbage in separate containers now for more than 10 years. A majority behaves this way now, and the behaviour is even socially enforced. Moral tales such as Al Gore's movie about climate change have a bigger audience today than they would have had 25 years ago when the environmental movement began.

The environmental movement succeeded in going beyond awareness raising to changing attitudes and behaviour. We can only wonder why the feminist movement has been less successful in reaching most of its goals even after more than 100 years. Are gender attitudes so deeply rooted that they are impossible to change? How can it be made clear to citizens that they will benefit from changed gender behaviour? Will they benefit directly or is it only society that benefits?

In Equal Opportunities policies little behavioural change can be perceived unless strict rules are applied such as quota laws. The European Commission's message that involving target groups in the labour market is economically important (no waste of talent) is not convincing enough for employers to hire migrants or handicapped people, nor to elevate women on the power scale. Policymaking in Equal Opportunities has not been directed enough towards behavioural changes. In most national and international levels policy statements limit themselves to awareness raising and not to change behaviour. Goals are not set far enough, why not? Why is there a hesitation in formulating more effective goals? Why are more effective strategies to change attitudes and behaviour not used? It is necessary that we think more about *goals we really want to reach* and about *strategies* to really change things in society.

## Conclusion

This chapter looks at the concepts used in equal opportunities from the viewpoint of policymakers. Research brings us many new approaches and concepts, and policymaking at international, national and regional level always evolves further and further trying to cope with the theories, and with the practical obstacles that cross the path when trying to solve problems. We all know that the trend towards diversity policies is causing a backlash on gender, but it is also true that many members of other target groups still have a huge gap in front of them that has to be closed. It would be good

if we succeed in defining the appropriate goals for each of the target groups, the obstacles and opportunities at the intersection of the discriminating mechanisms; and the common causes for the target groups to work on together.

Many instruments have been developed for dealing with the practical organisation of diversity or gender mainstreaming policies, but the time has come to really think about the differences between a pro-active policy for each target group and the sanctioning and non-discrimination issues. Furthermore, when developing pro-active policies, the goals have to be set further than awareness-raising only. Policies that succeed in ending all inequality by changing people's attitudes and behaviour have to be implemented.

## **Teaching Reflections**

- Try to imagine yourself in the role of each of the following: a policymaker, a researcher concerned with fundamental questions, a researcher designing practical tools and instruments for policy-making, and the representatives of different target groups.
- Choose a policy area (transport, energy, health care, etc.) and try to define the exact frame of thinking in each setting and to formulate possible goals and strategies for the policy from that angle. Keep gender as a transversal theme for all goals and strategies. How would each one of the above actors differently approach the questions in your policy area?
- The chapter suggests that environmental policy is more successful than equal opportunities policy. Why do you think this is so? Think up new ideas for changing behaviour so that the goals that you formulated can be achieved.



## **Equality, Diversity and Intersections: Policy Practice and the Place of Gender**

*Joz Motmans and Alison Woodward*

### **Abstract**

How are public administrations applying the ideas of diversity and mainstreaming in dealing with ethnic minorities and gender? This case study uses a critical frame analysis approach to evaluate the frames used for considering diversity and utilizing mainstreaming in two policy areas in Flanders. The case examines the equal opportunities and the integration areas, looking at key policy documents to see the extent to which the two use similar problem analysis and the extent to which there is potential for cooperation in a horizontal approach to equality. The equal opportunities office has a multi-strand approach, but not an intersectional one. The new integration area has a single strand focus. The potential for an intersectional mainstreaming approach seems low.

### **Diversity, integration and intersectionality applied in Flanders**

Thanks to developments at the European level in anti-discrimination law (see Kantola, Squires and Bustelo in this volume) intersectionality is no longer merely of theoretical or legal interest, but has immediate relevance for public administration and policy making.<sup>11</sup> While gender activists had developed a battery of concepts, utilized by the women's movement to influence policy makers, the new concepts coming out of multiple aspects of inequality do not always have a civil society behind them. Ill-defined concepts have a strange way of travelling through public administrations. Terms like *diversity*, *integration*, *mainstreaming* or *intersectionality* can be used vaguely or in contradictory fashion when the concept has not been nailed down by activists, stakeholders and practitioners. The following case study examining the usage of '*diversity*' and potential for consideration of intersections in Flemish policy making, demonstrates that the road travelled can lead to considerable losses for separate issues such as gender along the way. Flanders is both a territory and a governmental entity in Federal Belgium. Since developing an autonomous administration in the early nineties there has been concern for equal opportunities, but the focus changed, as both the policy environment and

actors evolved. From 1995 on competencies for equal opportunities between men and women achieved ministerial status.

The Flemish equal opportunities administration was an eager student of international developments. It can be argued that the concepts of gender mainstreaming and horizontal insertion of gender awareness were important from the very first in the department responsible for Equal Opportunities. (Celis and Meier 2006; Godemont and Motmans 2006). The equal opportunities responsibility was always combined with other tasks. Policy on equality, which was initially focused primarily on gender, developed a growing attention for other equality issues. The first minister responsible for equal opportunities focused not only on women and men, but also in various combinations on other disadvantaged target groups (often referred to as ‘minorities’). When the task moved to the more powerful minister of Welfare and Health (Vogels/Byttebier), the ministry also had responsibility for gays and lesbians, the disabled, and ultimately the aged. It was the first time that there was no clear hierarchy between women/men and the ‘other’ target groups. This invoked a lot of protest from the women’s movement who claimed: “we’re not a minority group” (Godemont & Motmans 2006: 76). This broadening strategy continued after the elections in 2004 when the responsibility for Equal Opportunities moved to a third ministerial location combined with transport, mobility and social economy. In the initial government formation statements of 2004, politicians claimed that gender equality had been achieved and other issues such as disability (easily combinable with the responsibility for mobility) sexuality, and race/ethnicity could need more attention. An important change was the move of the target group “migrants and *allochtone*” to the Ministry responsible for integration in the present government, leaving the Equal Opportunities minister with the subjects of inequality of gender, sexual identity and physical accessibility (Motmans 2008b:10).

### **The environment of Europe and Flanders: Enter diversity**

These shifting accents were in tune with the evolving European level discussion on non-discrimination. Within the Flemish public administration, gender equality was not only attended to by the equality administration, but also by departments such as employment. Thanks to its close following of European debates, the Flemish employment department began increasingly to pursue

a rhetoric of '*diversity*' – which had its origins not only in the new slogan for the implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam's Article 13, 'For Diversity/ Against Discrimination' but also in the literature being used in human resource management among multinational employers. This discourse fit well with the broadening of target populations. However, as we will see, while the Equal Opportunities administration retained an eye for gender despite the evolving European shifts toward diversity, the labour and employment administration began to focus more on ethnic minorities. This was related to the European Social Funds' own increased focus on '*diversity*'. Further, the decree on Employment was revised in terms of the new European laws about '*race*'/ ethnicity and discrimination. The same happened to the new decree on Equal Opportunities in Education.

Another policy environment change came from the political reality of Flanders itself. The federalization of Belgium coincided with increasing political strength for far-right nationalist political formations. In particular, the party Vlaams Blok rose to power with an anti-immigrant standpoint. Regionally it has been close to being the biggest political party in some big cities since the Black Sunday election in 1991. The situation of visible minorities or obvious '*foreigners*', was exacerbated by anti-Islamic phobia after 9/11 and this put the question of '*integration*' high on the agenda. The diagnosis of the problem varied. It was seen as an issue of inequality (in terms of access to education, the labour market and services), culture (in terms of language acquisition and separatism) and '*diversity*' (as a human capital resource). These different visions collided within the public administration with the previously adopted approaches to gender equality, such as mainstreaming and open methods of coordination. The variety of approaches to equality issues led the public administration to see if a horizontal approach would be possible. Was there a potential to go beyond the '*target-group*' approach and toward intersectionality? What would be the costs for particular target groups such as '*women*'?

The Flemish Research Centre on Equal Opportunities examined whether different equality issues could be pursued horizontally across administrations. An impetus for this project was the concern that an integrated or horizontal approach to gender equality across policy areas using the mainstreaming philosophy, and then across all policy areas pursuing '*diversity*' as a horizontal issue, would lead to losses. Specifically, the terrain conquered by gender equality thinking and the heritage of theory and empirical data so painstakingly

established seemed threatened. The study focused specifically on the two target groups which had politically and informally sometimes been seen as main competitors for the equality policy resources, people with a history of migration and ethnic/cultural specificity and ‘women’.

Various departments of the public administration claimed to be doing ‘equal opportunities’ or to be concerned with ‘diversity’ but this was filled in with very different sets of targets and distribution of resources. For the education administration ‘equal opportunities’ referred to ‘migrants’ and their socio-economic situation, while for the equal opportunities minister many target groups were present and gender was explicit with a substantial administrative tradition. The Employment Department had shifted focus from gender to increasingly being concerned with ethnicity and disabilities.

The government of 2004-2009 created yet a new ministerial responsibility for social integration (*inburgering*) with an attention to mechanisms to increase the integration of new-comers and older resident minorities (particularly from poor non-EU countries). This policy area was twinned with policy concerns for ethnic and cultural minorities. Just as gender and other equality grounds has moved between ministers, so too has the concern with policies for integration. Both the location of responsibility for the somewhat vague target group of ethnic minorities and the terminology referring to the problem have shifted actively in this period. Minority policy, integration policy, diversity policy, and *in-citizenizing* (*inburgering*) policy are all titles used to refer to efforts to address social equality and other issues coupled to immigration in the last 40 years in Flanders. The location of this policy responsibility in Flanders also reflects changing accents, as it moved from the administration for Families and Social Welfare to the Agency for Internal Management. The sector of integration was renamed as the ‘diversity sector’ (Motmans 2008b: 14) since under the current legislation its scope of work has been reoriented towards society as a whole, instead of only minority groups.

The analysis focused particularly on two ministerial areas: equal opportunities and integration/*in-citizenizing*, comparing and contrasting how these actors used the concepts of *diversity* and *mainstreaming*. Equal opportunities policy and integration policy both offer a perspective for a horizontal (and even intersectional) approach to equality. To what extent do these two policy areas dealing with equal opportunities incorporate an intersectional approach? The research aimed to compare the policy structure, actors and legal frame

for equal opportunities with those for integration. To measure the degree each has been sensitive to cross-cutting, and intersecting inequalities as well as their sensitivity to the different target groups, the critical frame analysis methodology developed by M. Verloo and collaborators (Verloo 2007) has been utilized. Motmans (2008 a, b) carried out an intensive analysis of key policy documents. The documents were screened using a set of ‘sensitizing questions’. The questions aimed to discover how the problem was described and what possible solution was proposed. The actors or voices responsible for creating the problem and for dealing with it were identified. Particularly important were questions aimed at identifying the dimensions of gender and ethnicity and eventual intersectionality in the policy document, including social categories that are identified, identity, behaviour, norms and symbols and institutions. At the end of the analysis a balance of the role of the different elements and the eventual contradictions was made. The aim was to discover the degree to which the texts demonstrate sensitivity to intersectional issues, and an integrative approach to inequalities, with an eye to the presence, and possible interaction of different forms of discrimination. A further aim was to analyze the compatibility of approaches to diversity and mainstreaming to see whether cooperation would be possible.

### **The results of the Critical Frame Analysis: Diversity and mainstreaming**

The term *diversity* turned out not to be ‘new’ in Flemish policy. In fact it was already used in the late nineties by the first Equal Opportunities Minister (Motmans 2008b: 9). Although gender and inequality between men and women were the most visible priorities, from the very first, different inequalities came variously on the target screen. ‘Women and men’ (called *gender* from 2004) and ‘persons with a handicap’ (called *functional difficulties* from 2004) were a constant for the equal opportunities minister from 1995 on. Sexual orientation in various terminologies is also explicitly mentioned by all except one (in 1997, see Motmans b 2008: 9). The common impression that Flemish Equal Opportunities Policy (EOP) was only about gender turned out to be false. The Equality Ministry identifies *diversity* in terms of difference between social groups, but also leaves the door open for intersectional thought by noting that aspects of individual identities are not independent but interact with each other. The present Flemish minister for EOP understood *diversity*

as ‘differences between social groups’ and *emancipation* as the ‘individual development and growth of persons within those groups’. She puts diversity as the next step within the historical evolution from ‘equal rights for women’, to ‘a gender focused approach’ (with attention for men) (cited in Motmans, 2008 b: 224). She states “A definition of *The man* or *The women* is actually impossible. (...) therefore I go in my policy much further than the classical male-female division and plead for a broad and wide ranging diversity policy” (Motmans 2008b 224 quoting Van Brempt 2004). The Equality Minister claims to have a specific eye for the effects of the interaction of mechanisms of inequalities depending on different markers such as gender, ethnicity, age, or religion (Motmans 2008b: 225). Recognizing diversity as such is in her opinion ‘not enough’ to be able to speak about EOP. A ‘diversity policy’ should leave behind the Us-versus-Them way of thinking. Efficient policy making is the motivation behind this differentiated way of thinking (Motmans 2008b: 224-225).

The diversity approach of the integration ministry is much narrower. ‘*Diversity*’ here applies primarily to ethnic-cultural minorities and the new cultures of differing migration streams. These varied populations “... have far reaching influences on the daily life of the original inhabitants” (Keulen 2004:2, cited in Motmans 2008b: 225). Although not specifically investigated in this project, it seems to be the case that ‘*diversity*’ in general in the Flemish administrations outside of Equal Opportunities such as those dealing with employment and education is also used primarily to refer to ethnic and cultural minority issues and disadvantage.

The mainstreaming strategy of making all areas of public administration responsible for the various equality issues, whether stemming from gender concerns or from concerns of other target groups, is a challenge at the heart of thinking about intersectionality in public policy. Both the integration and the gender equality/equal opportunities departments aim to make other administrations responsible for their issues, and thus ‘*mainstream*’ them. But what would ‘mainstreaming’ ‘*equality*’ entail? For example, the Integration Ministry hopes that separate local offices for ethnic and cultural minorities will be dissolved, and that all administrations will be capable of dealing with the ethnic differences between the clients without a specialized window for ‘foreigners’.

The idea that all public policy makers should be made responsible for promoting gender equality was written into law in Flanders and in Belgium. Bodies were created at the central level to do gender mainstreaming. In the Flemish situation, the dispersion of specialized resources on gender equality and the potential lack of budgetary resources make it difficult to track successful gender mainstreaming checks on policy. Given these mixed experiences it is problematic that the much less clearly defined terrain of discrimination and integration on the basis of ethnicity, culture, language is to be mainstreamed, despite the very specific needs of some of these publics and their complicated situations. In theory, the idea of intersectionality and mainstreaming would imply that the two streams of gender equality/equal opportunities and integration/diversity would flow together in a wider public administrative and policy ambition to develop positive duties in all areas for promoting equality. However, few of the documents examined gave evidence of this kind of cross fertilization in conceptualizing problems and solutions, even if tactics, such as mainstreaming were being borrowed.

Even though the examination of policy discourse does not give much basis for believing there is a conceptual foundation for working horizontally, recent developments have been moving that way. As pushing gender mainstreaming through hard requirements seemed difficult, the Flemish administration borrowed the ideas of European Open Methods of Coordination. The translation of gender mainstreaming into the “Open Coordination Method (OCM)”, is now anchored by law (*Decreet houdende een kader voor het Vlaamse gelijkkansen- en gelijkebehandelingsbeleid* (2008) (Motmans 2008: 13). *Ethnicity* too has started to adapt the OCM approach. In the proposition for “Flemish law on ethnic minorities” one of the articles inserts ‘ethnicity’ in the same way as ‘gender’ for the OCM. This could mean that the upcoming minister of Equal Opportunities (after the elections in June 2009) will be in charge of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity, coordinating the horizontal (mainstreaming!) obligations of the different ministers.

The critical frame analysis approach revealed that the two ministries have different analyses of the sources of the problem. The Equality Ministry identifies structural causes of inequality as well as aiming to empower individuals to emancipate themselves. The women’s movement and academic investigation were influential in shaping a frame that does not blame the victim, be it the woman or the visible minority, for their situation. Instead it looks at the wider societal

causes. The analysis of the Integration Ministry puts much of the responsibility for ‘fitting in’ (*in-citizenizing*) on the individual member of a cultural or ethnic minority. It is less interested in seeking the structural reasons for social and economic disadvantage. A dichotomization of ‘Us versus Them’ is never far away.

These differing analyses also predict a different role for the state. If the reasons for disadvantage are structural, then the state has a role in addressing them, while if it is through individual shortcomings and lack of effort, the authorities have less to do. The disadvantages of the ethnic and cultural minorities are seen in both policy areas as being a bigger societal ‘Problem’ than the problem of gender. The disadvantage of women is not a societal threat in the same way as that of visible minorities.

We can conclude from these observations that the state is considered to be more responsible for remedying equal opportunities questions than for ‘diversity’ policies. In the diversity concept used by the Integration Ministry, other sources of diversity such as gender are virtually ignored. There is more attention to the diversity within the group of women within equality policy, than attention to differences within the group of ethnic minorities in integration policy (Motmans 2008b: 225). The responsibility of bringing about change and reducing the distance of disadvantage is placed on the ‘minority’ individual. While for the group ‘women’ there is partial recognition that their position is intrinsically linked to structural barriers, for the group of ethnic and cultural minorities few structural roadblocks are delineated. Visible minorities should themselves integrate and not hide behind a group identity to evade their responsibilities (Motmans b 2008: 228). The conclusion of the analysis of the problem and policy solutions seems to offer little hope for the eventual integration of Flemish equal opportunities policy with the policy for integration of (new) comers.

### **Evaluating the retention of gender in intersectional policy areas**

To what extent would it be possible to do horizontal/integrated and mainstreamed policy in Flanders on these two equality issues, and thus come a step along the way to facing up to issues of intersectionality in terms of equality and non-discrimination policy?

First of all, the idea of ‘*diversity*’ is compatible with gender equality approaches, but this successful combination needs to rely on an advanced

intellectual conceptualization of difference in society. However the question of whether the naming of the different targets or strands (and thus a multi-strand approach) also meant that there were crossing of strands and an understanding of intersections including a resonant presence of a gender analysis in other target groups remains unanswered. Elsewhere in Federal Belgium, equal opportunities for women and men (gender) attained a separate status with its own semi-autonomous gender institute. In Flanders from the start of the administration for equality issues different target groups fell under the same administration. During the legislation of 2004-2009, thanks to a minister sensitive towards intersectional thinking, attention for gender-related issues went towards ethnic women. In contrast, in looking at integration policy, no other sources of difference, or strands, could be detected. Gender was pertinently absent.

As we have seen, how ‘diversity’ is filled in can differ. Equal Opportunities includes gender as a central part, while Integration only has eyes for ethnic cultural minorities even while using the term ‘diversity’. The two sectors also strongly differ in the degree they are concerned with intersectionality, who they see as responsible for causing the problem, and how the problem of inequality should be solved. Part of an explanation for the differences might be the differing policy histories of the two sectors, with the issue of gender inequality having a longer policy history and more actors from civil society involved than the integration sector and the minority question. There is also a significant ideological difference in the leadership of the two policy departments. The findings of Motmans’ comparison of policy offices dealing with discrimination and equality issues in Flanders suggest that a marriage between the ministries would be full of conflict with the present policy frames and approaches, as there are only a few areas of commonality. The Equal Opportunities (EO) can count on policy knowledge coming from experienced experts on gender, which helps inform its work with other disadvantaged groups as well as opening the administrative mind to crossing strands of disadvantage and even intersectionality.

The position of the integration policy apparatus as a new authority working from the top down on society puts it at a disadvantage in being able to include other equality issues. Another factor that may work to inhibit an integrated policy for equality is the organization of civil society itself. It, too, is not intersectional but organized in identity groups. Each target group or strand has its own set of civil society organizations, which are vertically organized, as

policy has been in the past. For the women's movement, there are organizations of minority women, but cross-sectional organizations for the other targets/ claimants of equality policy are few and far between. Creating a single desk for these issues risks losing the present positive contacts with civil society representation – and it can hardly be the intention that the public administration should restructure civil society in its image.

International and EU experience in establishing an integrated equality policy (EU, UK, Northern Ireland, and Sweden) shows that this task is not simple (Cortier 2008, Woodward 2007) even in places where the integration had been requested by civil society. Gender activists and experts have been particularly opposed to the interfolding, precisely because of the different analyses of equality and types of expertise available. The policy history of equality and integration issues in Flanders provides only limited support for a horizontal approach to these issues. Such an integration, while perhaps seeming efficient in terms of public management, may risk losing substantial policy expertise as well as civil society support.

## Teaching Reflections

- In Flanders, civil society actors were involved in consultation about equal opportunities policies, but to a much lesser degree in the case of integration policy. To what extent do you think that civil society involvement can stimulate a horizontal approach to equality policy?
- What evidence do you find of the influence of the European Union on equality and integration policy approaches in Flanders? To what extent is the influence of the European Union important in policy work in your area?
- Why do you think there are contending different definitions of the problem in the area of integration as opposed to the area of gender equality?
- What arguments are there for keeping gender equality as a separate policy area and not combining with other target groups?  
What arguments would support a grouping of equality issues?

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<sup>11</sup> This case study is based on Motmans 2008 a & b. The project was carried out by the Flemish Research Centre on Equal Opportunities (Universities of Antwerp and Hasselt) and promoted by Karen Celis, Petra Meier and Alison Woodward. Detailed references have been kept to a minimum due to considerations of length.

## **Gender Politics in Spain: The Challenge of Intersectionality?**

*Maria Bustelo, Soledad Bravo Letelier*

### **Abstract**

This chapter is an analysis of equality policies in Spain from the point of view of intersectionality and multiple discrimination. The concept of equality in Europe and in Spain has been broadened to include other forms of discrimination, based not only on gender. Equality in this broad sense is becoming a political priority for the Member States of the European Union but this does not mean it is also a priority in policies in practice in all member states. To begin with, the authors clarify concepts of intersectionality and multiple discrimination, and how those concepts are connected or linked with policies, how to strengthen the relation between theory and practice. In the article we will find tools for the analysis of equality policies from a theoretical perspective, focusing on the European context and the case of Spain. Analysing the Spanish situation is a good exercise especially in teaching context, due to the quite short history in gender equality policies but at the same time impressive progress in a short period of time.

### **Introduction:**

#### **The concept of equality and the use of intersectionality in Europe**

As we have seen in previous chapters, the concept of equality in Europe has been broadened to include other forms of discrimination, based not only on gender, but also along other lines of inequality, such as ethnic origin, disability or functional diversity, age, religion or sexual orientation. The issue is the extent to which different forms of attributes are combined and how to combat complicated discriminations. The concept of intersectionality originates from critical race and feminist theory, in recognising the diversity of women and analysing the exclusions that can be generated against women who are at the intersection of different inequalities (race, sexual orientation, functional diversity, etc). This discourse is based on the analysis of Crenshaw (1991) regarding how the strategies aimed at one inequality are, in general, not neutral toward other inequalities. The concept of intersectionality endeavours to

analyse and take into account not only the different inequalities, but also the interactions that occur between them.

We will refer here to two types of intersectionality:

- ‘Structural intersectionality’: inequalities and their interactions are directly relevant for individuals in our society.
- ‘Political intersectionality’: inequalities and their interactions are relevant for political strategies.

Intersectionality recognises the diversity of women, and it therefore brings with it the need to pay attention to the interdependences between the different inequalities, since strategies in relation to one inequality are not normally neutral with regard to others. The concept of ‘political intersectionality’ urges us to reflect, from the point of view of formulation of policies, on the dynamics of privileges and exclusions that emerge when it is not taken into consideration that individuals may be caught up in the interaction of different inequalities (Lombardo and Verloo 2009).

Adopting a more ‘intersectional’ approach in the fight against inequalities may stimulate the development of policies that are more inclusive and of better quality. Intersectionality is not an easy or well-known concept, and it may create opposition when it comes to incorporating it into the formulation of our policies. The fight against inequalities has mainly been from a ‘unitary’ or single-focus approach, centred on the fight against one single inequality. When references are found to more than one inequality, the analysis refers to the concepts of ‘double discrimination’ or ‘multiple discrimination’, which exist in a rather supplementary fashion, and do not therefore represent any move towards to the concept of intersectionality.

The following table reflects the comparative analysis carried out by Hancock of the intersectional, multiple, and unitary approaches:

**Table 5. Conceptual differences between approaches for studying race, gender, class and other differential categories in political science, Hancock (2007)**

	Unitary Approach	Multiple Approach	Intersectional Approach
<b>How many categories are addressed?</b>	One	More than one	More than one
<b>What is the relationship between the categories?</b>	The category under examination is the primary one	The categories are equally important within a predetermined relationship of certain categories with others	The categories are equally important. The relationship between categories is an open empirical question
<b>How are the categories conceptualised?</b>	Static at the individual or institutional level	Static at the individual or institutional level	Dynamic interaction between individual and institutional factors
<b>What levels of analysis are considered feasible in one single analysis?</b>	Individual <i>or</i> institutional	Individual <i>and</i> institutional	Individual <i>integrated with</i> institutional

### **The concept of multiple discrimination**

According to Hancock, multiple or supplementary approaches result in competition rather than coordination between marginal groups. She refers to the ‘Olympics of Oppression’ where groups compete to see which is the most oppressed and can obtain the most attention and political support. With this multiple approach, the general system of structural inequality does not change. Moreover, not all inequalities have been addressed at the same rate, nor do they share the same origin or the actual mechanisms that cause inequality to reoccur (Verloo 2006).

## **Anti-discrimination political strategies and the ‘mainstreaming’ of equality**

The gap between theory and legal practice has widened: Intersectionality presents challenges to anti-discrimination legislation. Those persons at the intersection of different categories suffer not only discrimination but also social and economic marginalization (Kantola & Nousiainen 2009). However, the anti-discrimination strategy tends to address the individual, and not the structural aspect, as it is a political strategy of a rather reactive nature (which reacts to acts of discrimination), and not so much a pro-active strategy (which carries out preventive and formative actions so that discrimination does not occur). This contrasts with other more developed and innovative strategies to address inequality, and which have been developed in relation to the equality of gender, such as affirmative action and gender ‘mainstreaming’. While the application of a mere anti-discrimination approach may be innovative in relation to a certain inequality, for gender equality policies it can represent a step backwards.

## **Spain’s responses: equality policies**

In Spain, the recent socio-economic and demographic changes in society have resulted in the inclusion of new social problems such as immigration, dependent persons and gender discrimination in political agendas. All these changes have generated a certain consciousness of the diversity of the population and the recognition of the responsibility of the State to face up to the problems that this diversity can generate. However, there is not a sufficient level of concern in relation to the current situations of multiple discrimination, let alone an adequate analysis of the possible interactions of the different inequalities. In reality, at this stage, only a few incipient and weak signs have been shown of institutional change with regard to multiple inequalities.

In Spain, there is a clear tendency to carry out a ‘Unitary approach’ for the policies, in other words, inequalities are addressed institutionally in a separate manner and gender takes clear priority over the rest. Likewise, little attention has been paid in Spain to the concept of intersectionality by Spanish academia and it has been somewhat linked to European research projects. This contrasts with the excellent performance of Spain in gender equality policies in recent years, which have resulted in new governmental instruments, as well as legislation and specific plans. Why is Spain reacting so slowly to this discussion of multiple inequalities and intersectionality? In order to answer

this question, we shall focus principally on the sphere of the state, since it is at this level where the first signs of intersectionality in institutions are emerging. To do this, we intend to review the policies of equality in Spain, the instruments, the transposition of European legislation into our laws, the proposal of a New Equality Act, and, lastly, the opposition that we find to the concept of intersectionality and the discourse regarding European diversity.

### ***Institutional development***

The national feminism movement in Spain developed mainly from the mid-1980s, when the Instituto de la Mujer (the Women's Institute) was set up at a central level. Likewise, from that time on, the governments of the Autonomous Regions promoted various institutional and political initiatives in the area of equality. For example, in Catalonia, there is a new governmental department called the “Department of Equality and Citizenry” created in 2006; in the Basque country, the Basque Institute of the Woman “Emakunde” attached to the Department of the Head of Government has existed since 1988; and in Andalusia, the Department of Equality and Social Matters has been in existence since 2004.

At the state level, after eight years of a conservative government in Spain, the first government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-2008), carried out major changes to gender policies. It had a commitment to a gender-balanced Government, and approved important acts, such as those on gender-based violence (2004), homosexual marriage (2005), dependence (2006) and equality (2007), and it created the **General Secretariat for Equality Policies** in 2004. The Secretariat has a higher rank than the Institute and is situated under the Ministry of Employment and Social Matters. Together with the Women's Institute and attached to the Secretariat, the Special Government Delegation against Gender-based Violence was created. This Delegation was set up as a result of Organic Law 1/2004 of 28 December, on protection measures for women who are victims of gender-based violence.

The most recent change in the area of equality was the creation in 2008 of the **Ministry of Equality**. Although the Ministry is clearly identified with gender policies, its organic structure and the departments that it consists of also reflect the inclusion of other inequalities (for example the inclusion of the Institute of Youth).

The Ministry is divided into two sections:

1) **General Secretariat for Equality Policies.** Further subdivided into:

- Government Delegation against Gender-based Violence
- Directorate General for Equality in Employment
- Directorate General against Discrimination
- Women's Institute
- Council for the Participation of Women

2) **Equality Sub-secretariat**

- Institute of Youth
- Council of Youth

The specific functions of the Ministry of Equality are stated in Royal Decree 1135/2008 of 4 July, in which it is stipulated that “The Ministry of Equality is the department of the General Administration of the State which is in charge of the proposal and execution of government policies of equality, elimination of all kinds of discrimination against persons on the basis of sex, race or ethnic group, religion or ideology, sexual orientation, age or any other condition”. Although the Ministry shows a clear sign of including and considering inequalities other than gender inequalities, it is basically designed to draw up regulations, activities and measures aimed at promoting equality between men and women, and to promote the political participation of women.

***Political strategies and instruments***

The political action carried out in Spain in the area of gender is based on the concept of equality of treatment between men and women, and it is on the basis of this premise that the pillars of a policy have been built, with this policy, during recent years, mainly employing strategies such as transversality or gender mainstreaming and affirmative action. Both these strategies are aimed at incorporating the gender perspective into all areas of public policy and promoting the socio-political participation of women. In accordance with these strategies, the Equality plans constitute the main policy instruments. They contain a series of objectives and actions to be carried out within a specific period of time by the governments. In Spain, the First Equality of Opportunities Plan for Women appeared via the Women's Institute in 1988,

and from that point on, five more have been developed, the most recent being the Strategic Plan for equality of opportunities (2008-2011). In addition to these political instruments, after almost twenty years of use of the plans as the main and almost exclusive instrument through which gender policies were drawn up, a series of new mechanisms of political action have been developed recently in Spain. These are the equality acts and the Gender Units, with the latter aiming to give support to administrative structures in incorporating the gender perspective into their public gender policies.

In the legislative sphere, in addition to Organic Law 3/2007, of 22 March, for effective equality between women and men, we find eight autonomous Acts from the autonomous regions, six of which are prior to the State Act.<sup>12</sup> The State Act addresses a whole series of inequalities and discriminations against women—gender-based violence, discrimination in the workplace, the lack of socio-political participation, among others—with the idea that the public powers should exercise their competences for the eradication of each and every one of the forms of discrimination against women, with the objective of achieving both a legal recognition of equality, and a real recognition on the part of society.

### *The absence of intersectionality in Spanish gender equality policies*

In addressing multiple inequalities, the recent European developments have not made as great an impression on the current political discourse in Spain, as transversality or gender mainstreaming did in the 1990s. A move toward intersectionality is still a long way from making its mark in public policies and, furthermore, even generates certain opposition. In recent years, Spanish society has experienced a series of socio-economic and demographic changes, which have generated new citizen requirements and, in turn, have called for new government responses. The incorporation of women into the labour market, immigration, the increase in life expectancy and, consequently, the growth of the dependent population, make up a whole series of social realities which lead to a new understanding of citizens as a collective group. These citizens are becoming increasingly diverse and are increasingly subject to multiple inequalities. This new social scenario calls for the interaction between the various inequalities to become a matter of public policy. However, there is a tendency in Spain to develop policies based on a ‘single-focus’ approach,

without taking into consideration the complexity and diversity of social realities. In any case, the main references where other inequalities outside the issue of gender are taken into account are to be found in more recent texts and rhetoric, marked by a more progressive ideology. An example to illustrate this is the recent National Plan for social awareness and the prevention of gender-based violence (2006) which also takes disability into account.

Likewise, since 2004 —when the current Government was consolidated—and up to the present day, references can be found to social class, in relation to matters regarding unequal treatment in domestic work. Furthermore, the category of social class is interwoven with ethnicity, when matters relating to immigration policies are addressed. Moreover, certain reflections on age emerge in the debate on the recognition of elderly women who have worked in caring roles all their lives, or in the Equality Act where it addresses the issue of motherhood and related issues, which affects mainly young women. The area for which we find the fewest references is that of ‘citizens’ personal status’, in other words, matters relating to marital status, sexual orientation, reproduction, abortion and so forth.

The social scenario that we are currently living in encourages the development of a ‘multiple perspective’ and its inclusion into policies of gender equality. Similarly, political instruments such as equality plans, by virtue of their transversal nature which allows other problems to be taken into consideration, along with the fact that various actors and institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, are involved, could facilitate the inclusion of other inequalities alongside that of gender. However, in practice and in political reality, this is not happening. The truth of the matter is that the recent efforts to address multiple inequalities through public policies are related to the political need to approve an Equality of Treatment Act. This is driven by the necessity to review the transposition of the European Directives and the compliance of our legal system with European legislation.

### *The transposition of European Directives*

The following directives need to be transposed into legislation by the various member states including Spain.

European Directives:

2002/73/EC and 2004/113/EC: Bodies promoting equality, including the General Secretariat of 2004 and the Ministry of Equality (2008). Council for the Participation of Women (Act 3/2007)

2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC:

- ***Act 51/2003*** of 2 December, on equality of opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility of disabled persons.
- ***ACT 62/2003*** of 30 December, on tax, administrative and social order-related measures:
  - Council for the Promotion of Equality of Treatment and Non-Discrimination of Persons on the basis of Racial or Ethnic Origin (Royal Decree 1262/2007).
- ***Other regulations and bodies:*** Forum for the social integration of immigrants and the Spanish Observation Body on Racism and Xenophobia; Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom; National Council on Disability; and the State Council for the gypsy community.

The incorporation of Directives 2002/73/EC and 2004/113/EC into the Spanish legal system have taken the form of the setting up of the Women's Institute and the recent creation of the General Secretariat for Equality Policies (2004), the Ministry of Equality (2008), and also the Council for the Participation of Women, created as a result of Organic Law 3/2007, for effective equality between men and women. And although this institution has still not been established, it constitutes a priority for 2009 according to the General Secretariat for Equality Policies. With regard to the transposition of Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC in Spain, this is reflected in Act 62/2003 of 30 December on tax, administrative and social order-related measures, which announced the creation of the Council for the Promotion of Equality of Treatment and Non-Discrimination of Persons on the basis of Racial or Ethnic Origin (Royal Decree 1262/2007), although this Council has still not been formally established as yet. Amnesty International claims that civil society was not consulted on the creation of this Council or on its composition, with the criteria for this representative composition still not having been specified.

In addition to the matter of gender equality, other Acts and initiatives instigated in compliance with Directives 2000/43 and 2000/78 can be found. This is the case with Act 51/2003 of 2 December on equality of opportunity,

non-discrimination and universal accessibility of disabled persons, as well as the Forum for the social integration of immigrants, and the Spanish Observation Body on Racism and Xenophobia (2006), both created by virtue of Act 4/2000 on the rights and freedoms of foreign persons in Spain and their social integration;<sup>13</sup> the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom; the National Council on Disability; and the State Council for the gypsy community.

Despite these comprehensive legislative and institutional initiatives, Spain is criticised by the European institutions. In June 2007, the European Commission issued a report to Spain on account of not having correctly complied with the European Directive. The Commission basically claimed that, beyond measures relating to labour issues, the legislation does not incorporate effective measures to address equality of treatment. The definition that Spanish legislation applies to discrimination diverges a great deal from that proposed by the Directive; it does not specify the justification of indirect discrimination, and there is a certain inconsistency or shortcoming in relation to the provisions aimed at helping victims of discrimination. In light of these European claims, it is evident that there is a long way to go before achieving effective compliance with the European regulations. However, the Ministry of Equality appears to be taking into account states of discrimination —other than those based on gender—in order to adapt itself to the new political guidelines. In fact, Spain, through the General Secretariat for Equality Policies, has a very active and favourable attitude to the approval of a new European directive to extend and implement the principle of equality of treatment among persons of different religions and beliefs, disabilities, ages and sexual orientations.

### ***The future Act on Equal Treatment***

A new Ministry of Equality work group is currently drawing up a formal proposal for a new Act on Equal Treatment. In this initial phase of the Bill, the various states or categories of discrimination specified in the European Directives (age, sex, religion, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation) are being taken into consideration, as well as the issue of gender existing as a transversal factor. Likewise, and although this has not been discussed in depth, the idea is to create a Single Body that must address the issue of protection and equal treatment and propose the appropriate services for the inequalities specified. The Ministry of Equality's work group is using the European

experience and concepts but particularly the anti-discrimination focus as a reference and is taking into consideration Spain's compliance with the European regulations. The basis of the approach of this bill is motivated by an anti-discrimination focus, but also by policies to promote equality. However, there is a strong European influence and the clear predominance of a strictly legal approach which ends up imposing the concept of anti-discrimination more than the concept of the promotion of equality or the transversality of gender. In fact, the term that is usually most often used is that of discrimination as opposed to inequality. This Act adopts an approach aimed at the promotion of rights and the prevention of discriminatory crimes (Bustelo 2009).

## **Arguments and opposition**

In Spain, the debate on intersectionality is currently at an embryonic stage and the issue has not been addressed in depth. At the same time, at a certain level a discussion is beginning to emerge, and this is also provoking opposition. The fact that a move toward the approach of multiple discrimination exists is the result of the influence of European discourse and legislation. By virtue of this influence, the problems of the European approach are reproduced in the Spanish arena, for example, there is a clear rivalry between the different groups representing each inequality. Equally, the main approach appears to be a simple 'fight against discrimination', which tends to 'forget' the evolution made through gender policies whereby structural inequality is analysed and strategies have been developed such as gender mainstreaming or transversality.

Moreover, we are currently witnessing how policies of equality in Spain are paying increasing attention to diversity. There is a growing and genuine interest on the part of the Ministry of Equality not only in the approach of multiple diversity but also in that of intersectionality. However, there is also serious opposition from the feminist movement, the academic and political sphere, with arguments such as "it is women who suffer the most structural and significant inequality".

The approach of the work group has been shaped from a diversity perspective trying to take into consideration other inequalities beyond the issue of gender that are calling for political attention. The work group has done this by taking the category of gender as a transversal element that is integrated into each of the inequalities, while maintaining its supremacy to a certain extent.

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, we believe that it remains to be seen whether the proposal for a new Act on Equal Treatment will be made through the simple application of the European discourse, or if it will go beyond the requirements of the EU, promoting and making room for more innovative forms of dealing with diversity. During the 1990s, gender mainstreaming had a more immediate influence on Spanish policies of equality than the more recent multiple discrimination approach, which is of a simpler nature and not as innovative. Moreover, the method of addressing inequalities (which are in competition with each other) provokes inevitable suspicion and opposition from gender-focused organisations and feminists. At this time, there is a clear requirement in Spain to promote a serious and in-depth debate between the different groups representing other inequalities, especially in the feminist movement and within the division of academia dedicated to gender studies. It remains to be seen what degree of development the intersectionality approach will have in the Autonomous Regions, as the unequal level of development of gender policies in Spain could give rise to very different results.

## **Teaching Reflections**

- This chapter illuminates the problems that introducing new categories of protection produce at the level of the national policy making process. Pick a country you know well. Can you find information on how equality policy was reviewed in connection with the new European Directives? Was new policy adopted? Do you see similar debates and oppositions to the situation in Spain? Why or why not?
- Do you think the fact that Spain is a ‘new’ democracy that made rapid progress primarily on gender and sexual orientation equality has something to do with the resistance to an intersectional approach? What other factors may be important (such as the strength of gender equality institutions or the type of organisation of the women’s movement)?

## **Intersectionality in Italy: State of the Art**

*Giovanna Vingelli*

### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to provide an outline on the status of intersectional theory in Italy. The analysis is mainly based on internet research and the analysis of the Italian current literature on gender issues, which seem not yet to be widely discussed in terms of ‘intersectionality’. The analysis revealed that in the Italian debate and literature, little attention has been paid to this concept, both on a theoretical and on a policy making level. However, in the Italian context, there is open space for further reflections. Academic feminism, which tends to be interdisciplinary in most cases, might offer a rich field of debate by connecting the intersectional approach and the anti-racist and post-colonial framework.

### **Intersectionality in Italy**

The intersectional approach, in which gender is analysed by interacting with other axes of difference and, thus, power (ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc.), is by now quite common in some areas of Women and Gender Studies, feminist theory and feminist organisations, though not in the Italian debate and literature, in which the (changing) relationship between different types of inequalities is an open theoretical and empirical question. In fact, a preliminary Google research on ‘intersectionality’ indicates 94,200 results in English, while the same research in Italian (*intersezionalità*) finds not more than 90 (for example in German the word *Intersektionalität* accounts for 7,600 results).

This might also depend on a certain slowness, with which Anglo-Saxon terms and concepts are finding their way into other languages and contexts. As a matter of fact the term was only recently highlighted in the United States around the 1990s. Typing the keywords ‘*intersezionalità gender*’ Google finds only twenty-one sites in Italian, which are mainly connected to European projects – involving Italian partners – and research centres. Few results are connected to theoretical insights, even though gender issues are significantly discussed in the Italian debate, however with no explicit use of gender as an

intersectional concept. What happens when feminists face challenges of gender, race, class, and nation at home rather than abroad?

## Feminism in Italy

Scholars have long recognized Italy's feminist movement as distinctive. Since the 1960s, the Italian feminist movement has inspired many forms of vibrant mobilization. Some of the primary issues raised by the Italian feminist movement were the highly contentious issues of the centrality of housework, the production/reproduction dichotomy – combining gender and class in an analysis of patterns of inequalities – violence against women, reproductive rights, often challenging the rigid gender norms of a culture centred on the traditional family and heavily influenced by the Catholic Church.

Feminists have conducted much research and theoretical analysis on women's social status and women's struggles. Already in the feminism of the 1970s, the question of differences among women emerged rather soon in relation to groups and within themselves. The Italian feminist discourse developed a distinctive notion of sexual difference as a condition of women's liberty, not of gender equality.

According to Donatella Della Porta (2003: 55):

"The common discourse that combined parity and diversity was that of a new citizenship with equal rights for different groups. While the discourse on parity was not stigmatized, the theme of diversity was central for the definition of identity: Women are different from men, but they are also different among themselves. ... Moreover, there is recognition of differences not only toward the outside, but also among women ...[this] had been felt as a challenge to the myth of sisterhood, [but] in the 1990s, instead, it was accepted as a matter of fact, and even appreciated as an enrichment for the movement".

Italian women mobilized on behalf of these issues. From these efforts, a number of reforms were made towards establishing rights for Italian women, however very little has been recently made in the effort to link the concept of difference to the notion of 'multiple discrimination', or use of the concept of 'gender as intersectionality' as a paradigm shift from the predominant representation of gender. An important feature of the academic knowledge production on gender in Italy has been its interdisciplinary approach, and its main orient-

tation towards theoretical, philosophical, historical and literary aspects. However, the relevant feminist literature seems insufficiently concerned with the new theorization of intersectionality, apparently for two reasons: first, the notion of difference has been deeply analyzed from a theoretical point of view, but it has not necessarily involved any methodological shift; second, gender issues tend today to be discussed from the angle of ‘equal opportunities’, with hardly any theoretical attempt to move beyond the traditional signifier of ‘gender’. The difficult insertion of innovative theoretical frames in the Italian context could also be connected to the growing institutionalization of Gender Studies, especially in universities. This has been problematized in discussions of pedagogy by such authors as bell hooks and Gayatri Spivak (1993). For hooks, the interdisciplinary challenge of anti-racist pedagogy can be unsettling: “Many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a subject only multiple ways and multiple references” (bell hooks 1994: 36). The equal opportunities debate is even proposed apart from differences among women, depending on their ethnic background, sexual orientation and other locations: in many cases, it signifies non-indigenous, non-migrant, able-bodied and heterosexual women. Age – and to a certain extent sexual orientation – are an exception, as some of the recent studies on gender issues take into consideration these dimensions (see, for example, Leccardi 2002).

This is much clearer in the debate on gendered migration. Italian feminists have responded slowly to this agenda. A theoretical remark has to be made concerning the use of the category of ‘race’ in the Italian context. In Italy such a concept has only been used very recently. This is related to the fact that Italy is still perceived as a recent immigration country. However, critiques have been advanced by some scholars about the specificity of the racialisation processes of migrants in Italian society. Among others, Alessandro Dal Lago has shown how Italian society constructs migrants as a social threat and tends to control them through the idea of ethnic and cultural difference (Dal Lago 1999). Unlike much published work in Italian, and a growing rich and heterogeneous literature on female immigration to Italy, few authors adopt an integrated form of analysis where gender, ethnicity and class are seen to be interconnected constructs. Wendy Pojman, in her work on migrant women and feminism in Italy, Donatella Barazzetti (gender and care), Giovanna Campani,

(gender, ethnicity and class), Ruba Salih (gender and transnationalism), Francesca Scrinzi (cultural consumptions and migrant women), are among the authors trying to adopt an intersectional approach, though not necessarily using the word intersectionality. Another important exception is the work of Silvia Gherardi – in her interest in exploring the multiplicity and diversity of gendered identities in organizational patterns – and the work of Laura Corradi, analyzing how the influence of gender is further affected by the interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors (Corradi 1991). Gherardi's theoretical reflection, again not using the concept of intersectionality, is directed “to expose the alleged uniformity of gender” (Gherardi 1995:19). It is worth noting that both Pojman and Salih are not Italian-born, and according to Giovanna Campani this could be one of the reasons for their innovative stance:

“The lucidity Wendy Pojman demonstrates, is made possible probably thanks to her external point of view: she is not too much involved in the Italian feminist movement, which is deeply torn between a feminism of socialist and communist tradition, relying on emancipation through work and equal opportunities, and a feminism of difference, with philosophic and psycho analytic inspiration. Wendy Pojman ascribes exactly to this division the difficulty that Italian feminists – but also researchers often influenced by feminism – had to recognize the importance of the immigrant women in Italy, with regard to gender relations in Italian society.” (Campani 2007: 12)

Migrant women seem not to be involved within the framework of the national constituency of gender, nor the interlocking among gender, ethnos and class that is the dominant methodological approach in research on female immigration.<sup>13</sup> Gender, ethnos and class appear just under the pattern of triple oppression, or such categories as ethnic origin, age, and sexual orientation are ‘added’ to the analysis. An intersectional approach could challenge the ideology surrounding women’s rights and suggest that while domestic work created specific forms of social marginality – and racialization – for migrant women, it paradoxically allowed Italian women to convey their new social identities within and outside the family. This is a trend which meets uneasily with the framework of an inclusive feminist project for women, showing both the ‘colour blindness’ of the Italian gender debate and the structural constraints affecting migrant women in Italy.

In the 1970s, the Italian theoretical elaboration of the social and economic function of reproductive work played a crucial role in establishing the relations between patriarchy and capitalism as well as questioning the public/private divide. However, reproductive work today puts into question the interplay of gender, ‘race’ and class, and the heterogeneity of the category of ‘women’, blurring the same notion of ‘domestic work’, and calling for new insights into the production/reproduction link. In other words, is there a ‘new language of reproductive work’ that applies to migrant work? These new forms of ‘reproduction’, more and more commodified, and largely performed by migrant women, are only beginning to be explored in the Italian debate (Ongaro 2001; Barazzetti 2007). In conclusion, it seems that Italian feminist traditions have not fully analyzed exclusionary practices beyond gender and class. Since migration to Italy intensified, feminists have not managed to bring the historical structures of race – re-made in relation to migrants – to the centre of their theoretical insights and practices, and even their anti-racism is consequently weakened. At the same time, not enough attention is paid to the voices of migrant women, and the contradictory frames they experience. As Pojman points out: “For multicultural feminism to succeed, native feminists will have to turn to migrant women. They will have to confront the meanings and implications of women on the move to the merging of first and third world feminism.” (Pojman 2006)

To sum up, an analysis of issues covered by gender theorization in Italy shows up that the most covered issues are women’s politics and employment, with a special focus on work life balance and care work. Even studies on gender and violence have gained limited attention in the national debate, with scarcely any connection with the international level. Most of the studies on intimate citizenship focus on reproductive rights, abortion and more recently the law on medically assisted reproduction (Law 40/2005), which has hardly any reference to different intersected axes of analysis.<sup>14</sup> As regards intimate citizenship there is a small availability of studies on homosexual partnerships and gender. The few existing studies often focus on the male–homosexual experience and prefer to analyze life conditions and discriminations rather than gender partnership and policy-oriented issues (Bertone et. al. 2001). This reflects both the cultural taboo that these issues have represented until recently in Italy, and the peculiar structure of a welfare state based on the unpaid work of women within heterosexual ‘normal’ families.

Finally, in Italy it is still uncommon to find that the intersectional approach is taken into account when addressing gender equality policies and strategies. Models of intersectionality of gender, race, and class did not inform policy making, nor did they change the organization and priorities of government policy toward women.<sup>15</sup> The focus on policy analysis, from a gendered point of view, should be rather crucial: according to Rossana Trifiletti

“There is a clear discrepancy between the good level of theoretical analysis which has produced innovative, leading and striking conceptualisations and have often been acknowledged abroad (Balbo, Saraceno, Negri) and a radical lack of concrete, empirical analysis, serious and systematic at a time, of single policies from a gender perspective. We risk not being able to contribute to the comparative and systematic analysis that European feminist have started and which we all wish would impact on the necessary reform of national welfare states toward a European model.” (Trifiletti, 1987: 174)

### **Options for synergy: Teaching intersectionality?**

Beyond the academic debate, it seems that the concept – and practice – of intersectionality is today brought up by feminist NGOs reflecting on gender, transnational feminism and North/South relations within anti-globalization movements and international cooperation. A growing interest in the approach of intersectionality could help forge alliances among transnational feminist groups and academic production, and between feminist and other groups (Pitch 2004). An example of this latest synergy is the meeting in Venice (29 June 2008), organized within the Equal “PONTI” Project by the Province of Venice’s Women Resources’ Centre with the collaboration of CdIE - Centro di Iniziativa Europea. Almost a hundred women from all over Italy, mainly involved at different levels in gender equality issues, had the opportunity to debate on the issue of intersectionality between gender equality – and other levels of differences/inequalities (ethnicity, class, sexual orientation etc.) – and mainstreaming strategies. The meeting emphasized two main trends: on the one side, the implementation of the gender mainstreaming approach; on the other side, the increasing contiguity among equal opportunities policies, women’s politics and antidiscrimination policies in a broader sense, targeted not only at gender differences but also including ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability. The workshops, thanks to the

contributions of experts in gender issues at many levels (politicians, researchers, professors, local authorities' consultants) started to answer such questions, also opening up new scenarios and perspectives.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis revealed that in the Italian debate and literature on gender issues, little attention has been paid to the concept of intersectionality. The interconnection of gender with other differences and categories such as sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, ethnicity, has not been fully integrated in Italian Women's Studies. As the QUING project also noted, ethnicity became a subject of interest during the 1990s, though not intersected with gender. The considerable number of studies on migrant women and qualitative research collecting immigrant women's voices and experiences often do not go beyond the traditional analysis of 'adding' gender to the main core of immigration. In other words, gender, ethnos and class often appear in the framework of victimization (or triple oppression), or such categories as ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation are simply added to the analysis, in order to further stress factors of vulnerability into the general gender framework.

Intersectionality is being used by scholars in different disciplines – anthropology, comparative policy studies, cultural studies, gender studies, history, legal studies, political science, and sociology – and by diverse activist groups. Yet a review of the Italian debate and literature has shown how slightly the concept has been focused on, both in theoretical reflections and as a heuristic device (Hill Collins 1998). However, in the Italian context, there is open space for further reflections. Academic feminism, which tends to be interdisciplinary in most cases, might offer a rich field of debate. Intersectionality means neither a new theory nor a totalizing theory: within feminist education and research, the intersectional approach might give new theoretical insights and a critical edge. Today, feminist activism in Italy appears to be more aimed at the attainment of formal equality between men and women, and it benefits from the larger public participation of women as well as from the widespread legitimization of the idea of equality. The limitation of this approach is clear in the overlapping of gender studies and equal opportunities research, the latter carrying more weight in the Italian scenario. However, the intersectional approach might influence Equal Opportunities curricula and teaching, focusing on anti-racist

and post-colonial frameworks and experience. Today, overt and implicit expressions of racism and intolerance toward migrants have become apparent throughout Italy. Through the intersectional approach, teaching Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities could add to an understanding of – and challenge – the social production and reproduction of power relations at all scales.

## Teaching Reflections

- How could a growing interest in the approach of intersectionality help forge alliances among transnational feminist groups and academic production, and between feminist and other groups?
- Can the gender mainstreaming approach accommodate anti-discrimination politics in a broader sense, targeted not only at gender differences but including ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability?

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<sup>12</sup> Not even was the intent of Italian radical feminists, still affirming that women's relations are the only – extremely contingent – foundation of their feminist political practice.

<sup>13</sup> The replacement of the homologated image of migrant women, who are victims of triple oppression, with a more complex vision, has been the topic of two important conferences: the seminar "The thousand and one woman", organized by the city of Milan in 1990, and the conference organized in Ancona by Giovanna Vicarelli in 1993: "Cittadine del mondo. Donne migranti tra identità e mutamento."

<sup>14</sup> Some other topics, such as religion, are almost completely neglected in the discussion, even within feminist studies.

<sup>15</sup> Among the few examples, publications like "Donne, Migrazione, Diversità" (2002).

## **Notes on Contributors**

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### **Soledad Bravo Letelier**

Soledad Bravo graduated in law from the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, and specialized in family law at the University of Barcelona. She is a postgraduate on *gender rights and equality of opportunity* and holds a master's degree in *gender policies: equality agents*, from the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona. She has worked as a lawyer in several family care services and in services for women who have suffered gender violence. She is a founding member of a feminist group promoting women's networking and information and communication technologies (ICT) and a member of the Association of Women Lawyers. She has taught courses and lectured at conferences on women's rights, gender violence, women and ICT, and immigration. She contributed to the drafting of the *law for a new deal for citizenship of women and men* in 2006. She currently works for the Gender Equality Policies Office of Barcelona Provincial Council.

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With a doctorate in Political Science, Maria Bustelo is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the Complutense University, Madrid (UCM). She leads the UCM team in the European Research Projects QUING (*Quality in Gender+ Equality Policies 2006-2011*) and MAGEEQ (*Mainstreaming Gender Equality 2003-2005*). She has worked as an independent consultant for Spanish public administrations and agencies, the European Commission, and NGOs in the field of gender programmes and policies, training and programme evaluation. She is also the director of the Master on Evaluation of Programmes and Public Policies (UCM) and a member of the Board of Director Committee of the National Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and the Quality of Public Services. She has several publications on gender equality policies and the analysis and evaluation of public policies.

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Anna Cabó currently works at the Gender Equality Policies Office of Barcelona Provincial Council (Spain) as the director of the Francesca Bonnemaison Centre. In the Athena network she is a member of the Task Force and one of the coordinators of working group 3A (The Societal Impact of Women's Studies). She was formerly the director of the Francesca Bonnemaison Library for around 15 years.

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Director (emerita) and Coordinator for International Equal Opportunities Policies in the Staff Services of the Flemish Government, Equal Opportunities Unit in Flanders, Belgium. She set up the Equal Opportunities Unit within the Flemish Authority between 1996 and 2005, and pioneered the development of Flemish Equal Opportunities Policy in the administration. Martha was a member of the CDEG Bureau (Council of Europe) from 2005 until 2008, and she is currently a member of the AOIFE Council and co-coordinator of working group 3A (The Societal Impact of Women's Studies) of the Athena Network. She works in the field of *creative coaching* as a policymaker and feminist.

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Researcher at the Policy Research Centre on Equal Opportunities at the University of Antwerp since 2002 after graduating in Clinical Psychology (University of Ghent) and receiving a postgraduate in Women's Studies (University of Antwerp). His main research interests are: equal opportunities for LGBTs, gender equality, and the role of social movements in striving for equal opportunities. He is currently finishing his PhD on the social mobilization of the transgender movement.

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Giuseppina Pellegrino received a PhD in Science, Technology and Society from the University of Calabria, where she is currently Assistant Professor in the Sociology of Culture and Communication. Her research interests concern ICT in organizations, technoscience in the laboratory, mobility and new technological infrastructures, as well as gender in the media and in public communication.

### **Nadine Plateau**

Involved in the women's movement since 1970, Nadine Plateau co-founded the first women's house in Brussels in 1975. She joined the Université des femmes in 1982 and was a member of the editorial board of its review «Chronique féministe». She is also a co-founder of Sophia (1989), a bi-communitarian network aimed at promoting women's studies in Belgium. Currently she is president of the Education Commission of the Conseil des femmes francophones de Belgique. As a retired educator, she consults in her fields of expertise, including equal opportunity in education and the initial and in-service training of teachers. She also conducts research.

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Judith Squires is Professor of Political Theory and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University of Bristol (United Kingdom). Her publications include *The New Politics of Gender Equality* (2007), *Women in Parliament: A Comparative Analysis*, (2001); *Gender in Political Theory* (1999); *Feminisms* (co-ed.) (1997). She is currently working on gender mainstreaming, diversity and issues relating to the institutionalisation of intersectionality.

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Professor Gloria Wekker is a socio-cultural anthropologist (PhD, UCLA 1992) at the Department of Gender Studies in the Arts at Utrecht University. Born in Suriname, Wekker moved to Amsterdam and has worked in many social and governmental organizations. She is a co-founder of Sister Outsider, organizing black and lesbian women in Amsterdam. She has published widely, among others on constructions of Afro-Surinamese women's sexual subjectivity. For *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (Columbia University Press, 2006), she received the Ruth Benedict Prize of the American Anthropological Association (2007).

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## Teaching Intersectionality: Putting Gender in the Centre

How to deal with gender, women, gender roles, feminism and gender equality in teaching practices? The ATHENA thematic network brings together specialists in women's and gender studies, feminist research, women's rights, gender equality and diversity. In the book series 'Teaching with Gender' the partners in this network have collected articles on a wide range of teaching practices in the field of gender. The books in this series address challenges and possibilities of teaching about women and gender in a wide range of educational contexts. The authors discuss pedagogical, theoretical and political dimensions of learning and teaching on women and gender. The books in this series contain teaching material, reflections on feminist pedagogies, practical discussions about the development of gender-sensitive curricula in specific fields. All books address the crucial aspects of education in Europe today: increasing international mobility, growing importance of interdisciplinarity and the many practices of life-long learning and training that take place outside the traditional programmes of higher education. These books will be indispensable tools for educators who take seriously the challenge of teaching with gender. (for titles see inside cover)

The concept of intersectionality is at the heart of debates about the future of equality policies in Europe. How do different identities interact and affect the opportunities for individuals and groups in society? Public policy used to focus on one or another aspect of equality, such as gender, sexual orientation or physical abilities. The question today is how 'equality' can be addressed while taking into account multiple identities and interlocking patterns of discrimination. The volume "Teaching Intersectionality: Putting Gender at the Centre" reviews recent discussions about intersectionality departing from the insights from gender studies. The aim is to provide students and policy makers with theoretical resources and practical policy examples to help understand these debates. Learning from the experience with gender equality policy and improving equality policy for all is a central concern. The book includes examples demonstrating how new European Union legislation is playing out in policy practice and invites readers to use the resources for research and training.

The books are printed and also published online. Contact [athena@uu.nl](mailto:athena@uu.nl) or go to [www.athena3.org](http://www.athena3.org) or [www.erg.su.se/genusstudier](http://www.erg.su.se/genusstudier) to find out how to download or to order books from this series.



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