
Beyond Multiple Inequalities:

Transversal Intersectionality, Diversity Mainstreaming and Participative Democracy

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The recent wave of pan-European developments in equality bodies and laws in relation to ‘multiple discrimination’ considerations (Kantola and Nousiainen 2009: 460-1) has accentuated the importance of intersectionality amongst feminists, who have long recognized the importance of understanding intersectionalities and multiple identities (hooks 1981, 1989). There are good feminist reasons for being concerned with intersectionality, and for considering the ways in which gender equality practices might take multiple inequalities and the intersections between them into account more systematically than has been the case to date. Nonetheless, this essay argues that neither the growing concern with multiple inequalities nor the widespread reforms of anti-discrimination laws and institutions underway across Europe recognise intersectionality in a robust fashion. While these developments do much to highlight the existence of multiple inequalities and juxtapose these within sin-

gle legislative and governmental structures, they do not as yet facilitate engagement with combined inequalities. For this three developments are suggested: firstly, the adoption of a transversal rather than an additive approach to intersectionality; secondly, the adoption of mainstreaming tools in addition to anti-discrimination measures alone; and thirdly, the development of a participative democratic articulation of mainstreaming practices.

CONTEXT: MULTIPLE INEQUALITIES

The European Union has extended its earlier focus on gender equality to embrace multiple inequalities (Verloo 2006) and now recognizes, in article 13 EC, six key characteristics as requiring measures to combat discrimination: sex, racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion, and sexual orientation. This shift is generating equality reviews in countries across Europe and the creation of new institutional arrangements for promoting equality.

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, with significant numbers of states recently changing their institutional arrangements for promoting equality. The specific nature of the institutional changes is of course shaped by the diverse legal frameworks, political structures and citizenship practices in place throughout Europe. Several countries have created 'single equalities bodies' that bring law enforcement and implementation under one roof. Other countries have opted for separate equalities bodies. In some countries, umbrella institutions are created as broad human rights agencies.

For example, 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). In addition, 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. A UK Equality Act was also introduced in 2010 to simplify discrimination law, replacing nine major pieces of legislation and around 100 statutory instruments with a single Act. Meanwhile, Norway has recently introduced significant changes to its anti-discrimination and equality machinery. As of January 2006, a joint Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, accompanied by an adjudicating Equality Tribunal, have been responsible for combating discrimination and promoting equality on a range of protected grounds. This includes three comprehensive laws – the Gender Equality Act (1978), the Discrimination Act (2005), which cover discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, skin color, language, and religion, and the act prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability (The Discrimination and Accessibility Act, from 2008) (Skjeie and Squires 2008).

Notwithstanding the diversity as national developments, there is evidence of a shared determination to address multiple inequalities – via a political, legal and institutional multiple inequalities framework. Advocates of such 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'.

TRANSVERSAL INTERSECTIONALITY

Feminist scholars now tend to differentiate between three approaches to inequality: unitary, multiple, and intersectional (Hancock 2007: 64), arguing that the unitary approach is universalising in considering only one category of discrimination at the time (Hancock 2007: 67). Multiple approaches acknowledge plural categories, but tend to produce ‘an additive model of politics leading to competition rather than coordination among marginal groups’ (Hancock 2007: 70). Significantly, the concept of intersectionality focuses attention on the locations (Crenshaw 1991, Brah and Phoenix 2004) or processes (Marx Ferree 2008, Prins 2006) by which marginalised groups experience not only cumulative or multiple inequalities, but also particular forms of combined inequalities.

With intersectional approaches, the relationship between the categories is more frequently understood to be a product of the dynamic interaction between individual and institutional factors (Hancock 2007: 64). However, there is debate amongst feminists as to whether to interpret intersectionality as an additive or a constitutive process, framed by identity or transversal politics (Yuval-Davis 1997). One of the strengths of the additive approach popularized by American scholars (Crenshaw 1991) is that it remains attentive to the distinctive nature of each inequality strand, avoiding an oversimplistic assumption that all inequalities are of the same order and therefore amenable to the same sort of policy response. It allows one to differentiate between different kinds of differences (Yuval-Davis 2006:199). Meanwhile, the danger of this approach is the tendency for each axis of discrimination to become isolated from all the others. By contrast, an alternative epistemological approach that introduces a more dialogical view upon diversity (Benhabib 1992) challenges both the false neutrality of the unitary approach and the fragmentation of the multiple approach, al-

lowing for a more dynamic view. From the transversal perspective, any attempt to essentialize ‘blackness’, ‘womanhood’ or ‘working-class’ as a specific form of concrete oppression conflates identity politics narratives with descriptions of positionality (Yuval-Davis 2005).

Transversal approaches to intersectionality entail three key features (Yuval-Davis 2004: 16): first, a dialogical standpoint epistemology, which recognizes that as the world is seen differently from different standpoints and dialogue between these different standpoints will produce a fuller knowledge (Hill-Collins 1999: 236); second, the principle of encompassment, in which differences are recognized as important but encompassed by a broader commitment to equality; third, a distinction between positioning, identity and values, whereby people who identify themselves with a social category can have very different social and political values (Yuval-Davis 1997: 204). Together these three principles make an interactive universalism possible, as participants engage in dialogue to negotiate a common political position, mutually reconstructing themselves and others in the process (Benhabib 1992: 227).

While this transversal conception of intersectionality has theoretical appeal, its practical implementation has been eclipsed to date by a more additive approach. While there are cases that might plausibly be understood as examples of transversal intersectionality, such as the reasoning of the Norwegian Equality Ombud (Siim and Skjeie 2008), the majority of attention to date has focused on the difficulties of implementing an additive model. While intersectional legal approaches acknowledge the need to frame and plead discrimination claims on more than one ground, technical difficulties frequently require claimants wanting to do so to make and prove each claim separately (Conaghan et al. 2007). If there are practical difficulties in establishing cumulative discrimination (Goldberg

2009), the challenges surrounding the identification of combined discrimination is greater still. Some maintain that intersectional discrimination exists where the discrimination is the combined rather than cumulative product of two or more discriminatory grounds, yielding an experience which is qualitatively distinct from the sum of its discriminatory parts (Conaghan et al. 2007). According to this argument, claims of intersectional discrimination will have to be framed in a manner that differs from claims for cumulative discrimination (Hannett 2003) and further it challenges the anti-discrimination framework. This suggests that transversal intersectionality cannot easily or readily be institutionalized within a framework that conceptualizes equality as anti-discrimination alone.

DIVERSITY MAINSTREAMING

Largely focusing on cumulative antidiscrimination issues, the multiple equality agenda has failed to engage with those developments in gender equality that moved beyond anti-discrimination to embrace mainstreaming processes (Rees 1998). Given the limited evidence of a transversal approach to intersectionality being developed within the framework of antidiscrimination law, it is worth noting that an intersectional approach to inequality can also be found in mainstreaming practices. Having emerged in relation to one equality strand, mainstreaming provisions are being reworked to accommodate gender, race, disability, and other dimensions of discrimination and disadvantage, including class, sexuality, and religion. Within the EU mainstreaming it is now being used to address race inequality (Shaw 2005) and disability (European Commission 2005). Numerous national and regional administrations pursue 'equalities mainstreaming' (Chaney 2003, Donaghy 2004, Mackay and Bilton 2000) and many development agencies promote the concept of disability mainstreaming (Disability KaR 2006).

Critics of the emergence of an general equalities mainstreaming view it as an encouraging shift away from a focus on "women's issues and a reduction in specific programmes targeted at women" (True 2003: 369). Yet this approach allows for the recognition of cross-cutting diversity in a manner that neither the equal treatment nor positive discrimination models is able to do (Rees 2002: 54). Indeed, Beveridge and Nott argue that there is a logical tension within gender mainstreaming, for it is impossible to focus on 'the real lives of people' and to see only gender. They therefore conclude that the mainstreaming concept calls into question the privileged position of gender, as opposed to other equality strands such as race, disability, age, sexuality, and religious belief (Beveridge and Nott 2002: 311).

Following this insight some theorists have expressly advocated a more committed embrace of diversity mainstreaming, arguing that gender mainstreaming is inherently limited and flawed "because it always prioritizes gender as *the* axis of discrimination", and should be replaced by an alternative and broader strategy of diversity mainstreaming (Hankivsky 2005: 978). What is needed, Hankivsky suggests, is "a broader approach to mainstreaming, one that is able to consistently and systematically reflect a deeper understanding of intersectionalities" (Hankivsky 2005: 978). Similarly, Shaw suggests that mainstreaming is the appropriate policy mechanism for implementing a diversity perspective (Shaw 2004: 23). However, to date "there has been limited progress with mainstreaming techniques away from the field of gender" and "no comprehensive programme of equality mainstreaming cutting across various equality grounds" (Shaw 2004: 6) at the EU level. Similarly, other commentators note that where diversity is considered it is frequently listed as a factor 'in addition to gender' (CIDA 1999: 6), and while attention is sometimes drawn to multiply

marginalized women the focus of mainstreaming remains on 'gender-in-general' (Teghtsoonian 2004).

The process of extending mainstreaming from gender to other equality strands, and of creating 'diversity mainstreaming' practices, demands that the nature of mainstreaming be rethought. As Verloo rightly notes, "the fact that inequalities are dissimilar means that such equality mainstreaming cannot be a simple adaptation of current tools of gender mainstreaming" (Verloo 2006: 222). There is still some way to go in terms of developing mainstreaming processes that address multiple inequalities (Hankivsky 2005). Given the ways in which mainstreaming has tended to be implemented; the attempt to apply it to other equality strands in addition to gender has generally been conceived as an additive rather than a transversal process.

The theoretical challenge then, is to articulate a conception of diversity mainstreaming that draws on the best insights of gender mainstreaming and intersectionality debates, drawing on the participative-democratic approach to the former and the transversal approach to the latter. Central to the articulation of both these elements is a form of deliberative democratic exchange, which encourages interaction between advocates of distinct equality strands and fosters the development of cross-cutting rather than competing goals. Given the plurality of equality agendas held by diverse groups and the difficulty of ascertaining the nature of these by bureaucratic mechanisms alone, the role of inclusive deliberation should be stressed when attempting to develop mainstreaming practices in relation to diversity rather than just gender. This would potentially transform mainstreaming from a technocratic tool to an institutional manifestation of deliberative democracy.

Attempts to develop mainstreaming processes based on an identity politics that generates an additive model of intersectionality will inevitably result not in a coherent

practice of diversity mainstreaming – but in a series of distinct, and frequently competing, mainstreaming processes taking each inequality as a separate consideration. The expert-bureaucratic model of diversity mainstreaming therefore appears to require the embedding of a series of parallel technical mainstreaming practices. These practices would inevitably tend to treat each equality strand separately: seeking statistics disaggregated by a series of classifications (age, gender, religion and so on), and carrying out serial impact assessments with respect of these categories. Yet such an approach to mainstreaming does not engage directly with the issue of 'diversity': rather it approaches its constituent elements in a piecemeal fashion.

Although, at a theoretical level, diversity mainstreaming requires a "truly integrated analysis, one that systematically captures the interstices of all factors of oppression" (Hankivsky 2005: 993), there have been limited attempts to pursue this challenge to date, with various forms of mainstreaming generally being undertaken in isolation (Daly 2005). The difficulty with many current attempts to extend mainstreaming to equality considerations other than gender is that they remain additive, concentrating on separate consultations with existing social groups. Fragmentation inevitably arises from this approach given the emphasis placed on identity politics, whereby political judgements are held to develop from standpoints that are generally attached to groups rather than individuals, meaning that any member of that group could speak for all other members of that category. However, marginalized voices within identity groups have repeatedly challenged who represents whom; whether the representative voice is representative of the whole group. This has led to the multiplication of representative voices, which ultimately renders this approach unworkable (Yuval-Davis 2004:7).

PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

Mainstreaming needs to be located in relation to democratic theory in order to facilitate its engagement with diversity. This requires a participative-democratic approach to mainstreaming rather than an expert-bureaucratic one, precisely because it uses both disaggregated data and democratic dialogue as its central tools of analysis. Disaggregated data in order to establish where inequality of outcome indicates that existing norms result in structural discrimination and democratic dialogue in order to negotiate new equality norms that are more inclusive and therefore genuinely impartial.

Rees argues that there are three key principles in mainstreaming: treating the individual as a whole person; democracy; and justice, fairness and equity (Rees 2005: 564). Treating the individual as a whole person entails challenging stereotypical assumptions and embracing difference while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of biological essentialism. One of the tools she pinpoints as pursuing this principle is the modernization of human resource management (Rees 2005: 565). This leads Rees to suggest that “many of the tools invoked to mainstream equality and to manage diversity are the same or similar” (Rees 2005: 568), though she maintains that the former is motivated by social justice and the latter by a business case. In relation to democracy, which might perhaps distinguish diversity mainstreaming from diversity management, Rees details the following as key tools: transparency in government; legislation on gender balance; consultative procedures; and national machineries for women (Rees 2005: 566). Interestingly, although she discusses issues relating to gender balance, she does not elaborate on consultation and national machineries for women. Yet it is precisely here that more theoretical and empirical work needs to be undertaken.

The democratic tools appropriate to diversity mainstreaming will vary depending on one’s understanding of intersectionality.

The additive model might require a series of discrete impact assessments, possibly supplemented with consultation with a range of spokespeople for the various inequality strands. However, neither of these processes promises to address issues of transversal intersectionality for which a more deliberative approach to mainstreaming is required. From a transversal approach to intersectionality, 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. The shift from identity to transversal politics therefore demands that we direct our attention away from the idea that people represent groups by virtue of a shared identity, 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.

Of course, while transversal feminist politics depend on a dialogic approach as comprehensive as possible (Yuval-Davis 2004: 35), opportunities for dialogue are inevitably constrained by existing structural inequalities and social norms. In practice the dialogues that have taken place between femocrats and women in civil society have generally been conversations with feminist NGOs, which are directly accountable only to their founders. The professionalization of feminist politics, whereby a business network of trained gender experts has largely replaced social movement activism, means that the nature of the dialogue has become increasingly bound by the conventions of rationalist epistemologies and the predetermined strategic goals. The values that emerge from this dialogue, the feminist values advocated by femocrats and gender experts, are delimited by the horizons of the participants. A wider dialogue, encompassing a greater diversity of participants, would no doubt produce dif-

ferent – more democratic and inclusive – values. This suggests that the elitism of professional feminist NGOs and the expertise of those engaged in evidence-based policymaking may need to be countered by other, more deliberative, devices.

Significantly, Yuval-Davis's commitment to a transversal rather than additive conception of intersectionality leads her to emphasize democratic dialogue rather than group consultation as central to mainstreaming processes. The fact that transversal intersectionality requires contextual analysis makes deliberation particularly central, for as Yuval-Davis suggests: "The differential positionings of the participants in such a dialogue from which they gaze at the situation should be acknowledged while they should not be considered representatives of any fixed social groupings" (Yuval-Davis 2005). The transversal approach to intersectionality therefore lends weight to the importance of using deliberative rather than statistical mechanisms, for here the complexity of intersectional analysis can be accommodated more readily.

Where the mainstreaming tool appropriate to the additive model is the collection and analysis of disaggregated data by experts, the tool appropriate to the transversal model is closer to the dialogue facilitated by citizen's juries and deliberative forums currently being explored in various forms of democratic innovation, not widely associated with mainstreaming practices (Smith 2009). One might therefore look to a participative-democratic model of mainstreaming as the basis for developing a more transversal intersectionality, requiring a broadening of the range of actors involved in the policy-making process via a visible increase in social dialogue through the institutionalization of dialogic practices. If mainstreaming is to become a central tool for institutionalising intersectionality, its advocates should explore these forms of democratic innovation rather more closely than they have done to date.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that recent political and legislative developments have raised the profile of multiple inequalities, increasing the interest in intersectionality. While many feminists have been anxious about the impact of this turn to diversity on the pursuit of gender equality, there is a strong feminist tradition of advocating intersectionality in order to better reflect the complexity of social identifications. However, initial analyses of the legislative and institutional reforms underway across Europe suggest that these have done little to facilitate the recognition of intersectionality as yet (Lombardo and Verloo 2009, Skjeie 2008, Squires 2009).

This article suggests that greater recognition of intersectional discrimination, understood as qualitatively distinct from the sum of its discriminatory parts, requires the adoption of a transversal rather than an additive approach to intersectionality and of mainstreaming tools in addition to anti-discrimination measures alone. In addition, it suggests that a participative-democratic form of mainstreaming offers the best resources for realising this transversal approach in practice.

NOTES

1. This is a recent version of the last chapter of *The New Politics of Gender Equality* (Palgrave 2009).

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