

Special Issue: Feminist Alliances: The Ideas, Practices and Politics of Intersectional Solidarity

EDITORIAL

Feminist alliances: the ideas, practices and politics of intersectional solidarity

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Feminist movements have a long history of building alliances across social divisions both within the movement itself and with other social movements. These alliances have taken different forms, including the adoption of intersectional strategies within organisations, the staging of coordinated campaigns and the creation of local and international networks and political coalitions. At the same time, feminist alliances are constantly endangered by the possible exclusion of less powerful constituencies, as well by ideological differences and dynamics of competition among groups (Roth, 2004). Recently, interest in feminist alliances is resurging, spurred both by the need to find new collective responses to emerging threats and backlashes against gender equality (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Ahrens et al, 2018; Verloo, 2018), and by the proliferation of intersectionality in activists' frames and practices (Evans and Lépinard, 2019; Irvine et al, 2019; Luna et al, 2020).

Solidarity has long been recognised for its power to produce transformative political visions, enhance the political influence of feminist actors and advance the fight against all forms of oppression. However, this is true only if naive conceptions of a universal sisterhood emphasising the unity and common experience of women are replaced by an attention to power differences within and among the various communities of women (Mohanty, 2003). We conceptualise intersectional solidarity as a radical form of feminist politics that constitutively integrates concerns for other social inequalities, interrogates its own privilege and biases, and acknowledges as

its own struggles for women's rights that take place under a different name. Since solidarity requires difference, it necessitates an ongoing commitment to engage in and address conflict, as well as creating spaces for dissent and rigorous critique (hooks, 1986).

Our own interest in feminist alliances and intersectional solidarity originates from the belief that they have the potential to breed inclusive political projects and strengthen the fight against all inequalities. Given that social justice struggles are inevitably connected by the presence of interlocking systems of domination, several questions arise. Why do we not observe greater solidarity across dimensions of inequality than we currently do? How does intersectional solidarity substantiate the construction of alliances within and across mobilisations? When do groups support policies that do not benefit them directly? What range of factors promote or hinder alliances across inequalities? What shapes have these alliances taken, and what outcomes have they produced?

The desire to address these questions motivated our interest to start a conversation that culminated in this special issue. Bridging social movement and feminist studies, political intersectionality offered us a framework to interrogate these issues from a twofold perspective: (1) looking at the ideas, practices and repertoires of actions adopted *internally* by feminist movements and their organizations to counter the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups and (2) turning our gaze towards the characteristics of *cross-movement* alliances that connect feminist and other social justice struggles and goals (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991; Townsend-Bell, 2011; Verloo, 2013). The construction of feminist alliances that reflect notions of intersectional solidarity requires activists and movements to work on both aspects, though concrete instances of cooperation often show uneven progress across these dimensions. Therefore, we define intersectional solidarity as an ongoing political process of building cooperation by altering power asymmetries within and between organisations and groups located at different intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion and able-bodiedness, and across geographical boundaries.

The contributions to this special issue offer rich theoretical and empirical material on the characteristics, processes and outcomes of feminist alliances and intersectional solidarity. Covering Europe, Asia and both North and Latin America, they explore successful and failed instances of collaboration that developed around gender identity, Romani women's transnational activism, domestic workers' rights, abortion, equal marriage, democracy and austerity. Despite their differences in approach and emphasis, these contributions highlight a number of common themes, particularly around the factors fostering feminist alliances reflecting advanced forms of intersectional solidarity. Three elements appear to be transversally important:

- the use of frames that value difference and plurality both as constitutive of social life and as a normative good;
- the presence of organisational structures and modes of deliberation that comprise inclusive spaces for participation, empower participants and leave space for bottom-up initiatives, the expression of dissent and practices of mediation; and
- the development of organisational practices for sharing a wide range of resources, including funding, institutional access, expertise, networks and organisational know-how.

The construction of intersectional alliances requires time and trust, and is favoured by the presence of actors that work as translators, brokers and bridge builders between organisations. Nonetheless, the rewards of these alliances often remain unequally distributed, showing that intersectional solidarity is not an end point, but, rather, an ongoing process of interrogation and transformation of power differences between participants.

The special issue opens with [Rossella Ciccia and Conny Roggeband's \(2021\)](#) effort to conceptualise intersectional feminist solidarity and the way power works in coalitions to produce different types of solidarity. [Myra Marx Ferree's \(2021\)](#) contribution highlights the importance of considering the macro-level intersectional context in which social movements are embedded. Her article illustrates how the declining hegemony of breadwinner-brotherhood norms has intensified polarisation between the Republican and Democratic parties in the US, and placed movements mobilised around gender and race relations under duelling umbrellas. [Serena D'Agostino \(2021\)](#) investigates the case of Romani women's activism in the European Union and shows that political interactions and claims-making processes are particularly complex when transnational mobilisation combines with 'multilevel and intersectional' demands. Her article fosters a broader academic discussion on the democratic quality of contemporary European transnational political spaces. The articles by [Erica Townsend-Bell \(2021\)](#) and [Angelika von Wahl \(2021\)](#) focus on the issue of cross-movement alliances and policy outcomes. Their contributions highlight the important role played by brokers and bridge actors, as well as organisational structures and framing processes, in enhancing the political effectiveness of intersectional coalitions. The article by [Giulia Garofalo Geymonat, Daniela Cherubini and Sabrina Marchetti \(2021\)](#) recounts the difficult relation between feminist and domestic workers' movements, and points to the intersectional expansion of classic feminist frames as an important resource to bridge the gap between movements. Finally, [Daniela Chironi and Martin Portos' \(2021\)](#) study of the Italian and Spanish feminist movements during the economic crisis bridges these dimensions to investigate the role played by socio-economic grievances in fostering coalition-building processes both within and across those movements.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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