6 Inequality, intersectionality and the politics of discourse

Framing feminist alliances

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Introduction

As critical frame analysis has shown, even when concepts are expressed in the same words, they may have different meanings (Verloo 2006). Intersectionality is itself one of these contested terms within feminist thought. In this chapter, I take up the challenge of considering the debate about what intersectionality means. Leslie McCall (2005) and Ange-Marie Hancock (2007) provide an overview of the debate, classifying ways of understanding intersectionality and arguing for expanding the concept from its frequent focus on groups and identities. Although each affirms the important contributions made by challenging the givenness of categories and by attending to the specific perspectives of women of colour and women in other marginalized locations, they argue that these approaches excessively privilege the individual level and describe static structural locations on 'axes' of oppression rather than in a 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 2001).

Nira Yuval-Davis suggests that 'what is at the heart of the debate is conflation or separation of the different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located, rather than just a debate on the relationship of the divisions themselves' (2006: 195). Intersectionality as a concept derives from the activist critiques that women of colour in the US and UK made in the 1970s and 1980s about overly homogeneous political discourse in which 'all the women are white and all the blacks are men' (Hull *et al.* 1982; Brah and Phoenix 2004). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) put the term 'intersectionality' into more international use, emphasizing structural intersections of inequalities as adding, multiplying and reinforcing particular hierarchies in specific locations. Using the metaphor of many intersecting streets called 'patriarchy', 'colonialism' and the like, Crenshaw (2001) attempted to direct attention to movement along these different axes, without actually giving up an emphasis on specific points of intersection and the people and groups found there (Prins 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006).

This meaning of intersectionality emphasizes it as a set of infinitely multiple substantive social locations, generates a long list of important intersectional locations to be studied and offers voice to the perspectives of many marginalized groups. However, this locational approach may also encourage what Martinez (1993) called the 'Oppression Olympics', in which each group contends for attention and respect

for the distinctiveness and importance of their unique location (Hancock 2007). I share the critical view of intersectionality as a static list of structural locations and as leading to a problematic form of identity politics, but still contend that only an intersectional analysis can do justice to the actual complexity of political power and social inequality.

In this chapter, I adopt a more dynamic and institutional understanding of intersectionality, following McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007). Rather than identifying *points* of intersection, this approach sees the dimensions of inequality themselves as dynamic and in changing, mutually constituted *relationships* with each other, from which they cannot be disentangled (Walby 2007). This gives historically realized social relations in any place or time an irreducible complexity in themselves, from which the abstraction of any dimension of comparison (such as 'race' or 'gender') is an imperfect but potentially useful conceptual achievement of simplification, not an inherent property of the world. Categories, and the dimensions along which they are ordered, are not therefore deemed 'false' or 'insignificant', even though they are imperfect and variable. Intersectionality is not a concept added on to an analysis formed on some other theoretical ground, but is part of basic explanation of the social order as such.

This version of intersectionality insists that it cannot be located at any one level of analysis, whether individual or institutional. The 'intersection of gender and race' is not any number of specific *locations* occupied by individuals or groups (such as black women) but a *process* through which 'race' takes on multiple 'gendered' meanings for particular women and men (and for those not neatly located in either of those categories) depending on whether, how and by whom race-gender is seen as relevant for their sexuality, reproduction, political authority, employment or housing. These domains (and others) are to be understood as *organizational fields* in which multidimensional forms of inequality are experienced, contested and reproduced in historically changing forms.

This is what Prins (2006) defines as a 'constructionist' rather than 'structural' understanding of intersectionality, but I prefer to call it 'interactive intersectionality' to emphasize its structuration as an ongoing multilevel process from which agency cannot be erased (Giddens 1990). Walby (2007) introduces complexity theory to develop further this idea of intersectionality as an active 'system' with both positive and negative feedback effects, non-linearity of relations and non-nested, non-hierarchical overlaps among institutions. In such a complex system, gender is not a dimension limited to the organization of reproduction or family, class is not a dimension equated with the economy, and race is not a category reduced to the primacy of ethnicities, nations and borders, but all the processes that systematically organize families, economies and nations are co-constructed along with the meanings of gender, race and class that are presented in and reinforced by these institutions separately and together. In other words, each institutional system serves as each other's environment to which it is adapting.

To Walby's notion of system, I add an emphasis on discourse as a political process by which this co-creation occurs. My approach rests on understanding the co-formation of knowledge and power, stresses the historical development of

1   institutions that shape consciousness and practice and identifies discourse as a
2   crucial arena of political activity (Foucault 1977). Two of the central processes of
3   discursive politics are categorizing and ordering. These human actions have politi-
4   cal consequences in themselves because of the inherent reflexivity of the social
5   world; that is, we use categories and ranks not only to understand but to con-
6   trol the world, and feedback from the environment to the system comes in terms
7   of information about success and failure (Espeland and Sauder 2007). As lists,
8   ranks, metaphors and distinctions proliferate, they guide our understanding of who
9   we are and with whom we are more or less related. Thus, for example, when the
10 dimension of 'race' is constructed and 'fixed' in national censuses, it generates
11 meaningful and contestable categories (such as 'Asian') that can always be fur-
12 ther decomposed, but which serve to distribute real resources and recognition in
13 response to which identities and activities become oriented.
14   But in offering this interactive definition of intersectionality, I acknowledge
15 that it will still not fully capture the complexity of reality. Like the concept of
16 'gender equality', which takes its meaning from the discursive and institutional
17 contexts in which it appears, 'intersectionality' is also an open and contested
18 term. Across different political contexts, various social and political actors
19 engage in trying to 'shrink' the meaning of intersectionality and limit the areas
20 in which it can be applied, to 'bend' it to better fit with other issues on their
21 agenda and to 'stretch' it to meet emergent needs (see Lombardo and Verloo's
22 chapter in this book).
23   Moreover, the understandings of both gender equality and other forms of
24 inequality are mutually stretched and bent as they encounter each other. Like
25 other forms of social reflexivity, framing intersectionality is being done in a
26 social world that already incorporates intersectional relations in historically
27 specific and yet contestable and changing ways. Rather than framing 'gender
28 equality' as intersectional in the locational sense, by which 'gender equality'
29 means something different for people who are situated in diverse social posi-
30 tions along the axes of oppression, this chapter argues that 'gender' and 'gender
31 equality' are framed through processes of conceptual abstraction and simplifi-
32 cation that are inherently and inevitably intersectional as well as imperfect and
33 contested.
34   The rest of the chapter will attempt to show how particular political histories
35 of interpreting and institutionalizing class, race and gender as abstract dimen-
36 sions of inequality continue to shape gender discourse in interactively inter-
37 sectional ways. In the next section, I argue that intersectionality as a dynamic
38 process pervading political discourse is better understood as a web of meaning
39 on a framework of opportunity than in terms of 'master frames' in some single
40 hierarchy. In the second section, I provide an example of contrasting discursive
41 opportunity structures by comparing Germany and the United States as intersec-
42 tional frameworks of meaning for gender, race and class. In the third section, I
43 show how these different frameworks are dynamically important for the active
44 framing and accomplishments of institutional change in feminist politics in each
45 context.

Frameworks and framing work: A meeting of structure and agency

Framing means connecting beliefs about social actors and beliefs about social relations into more or less coherent packages that define what kinds of actions are necessary, possible and effective for particular actors. The point of frames is that they draw connections, identify relationships and create perceptions of social order out of the variety of possible mental representations of reality swirling around social actors. By actively linking people, concepts, practices and resources, frames allow for a co-ordination of activity for oneself that also is open to interpretation by others (Goffman 1974). The relationship or connection, not the individual element, is the key unit for framing work. Framing creates the known world: it actively gives concepts meaning by embedding them in networks of other more or less widely shared and practically relevant meanings, which are what I call *frameworks*.

Frameworks in politics can be understood in part as analogous to how systems of meaning work in other areas. For example, scientific disciplines have histories that privilege certain ways of knowing and direct those who would be productive within them to follow certain practices rather than others. Political entities such as nation-states and transnational organizations similarly institutionalize frameworks for politics in which particular issue debates and rivalries among the leading actors are embedded. Rather than by a disciplinary canon, the framework for political debate is given by *authoritative texts* such as constitutions, laws, judicial decisions, treaties and administrative regulations. Such texts never 'speak for themselves' but need to be interpreted, implemented and enforced. But they offer a discursive structure – an institutionalized framework of connections made among people, concepts and events – that shapes the opportunities of political actors by making some sorts of connections appear inevitable and making others conspicuously uncertain and so especially inviting for debate.

Such frameworks will be variably useful or constraining to speakers; thus it makes sense to speak of them as discursive *opportunity* structures (Ferree *et al.* 2002). As critical frame analysis emphasizes, the authoritative texts in any particular context have themselves been created by 'fixing' their meaning in a network of strong connections with other concepts, a process that always takes political work to accomplish and, once achieved, shapes future political work. A discursive opportunity structure is thus open, dynamic and imbued with power, not just something that exists passively as text 'on paper'.

Looking at a discursive opportunity structure as a set of authoritative texts (e.g. laws), in other words, should not obscure how the authority they hold fits into a wider system. A given law is part of a wider legal culture in which 'law' in the abstract and any law in particular are seen by actors within this system as more or less legitimate, as likely to be enforced by meaningful penalties or rewards and as narrowly or widely applicable. Each such text also provides a resource over which politically mobilized actors struggle by offering interpretations and drawing out implications for actions. By its very nature, law is a system of dispute; if there were no opposing interests, there would be no need for treaties, regulations or decisions. Laws, constitutions, treaties and directives thus form policy

1 frameworks that are historically constructed, path-dependent opportunity struc-
2 tures for the discursive struggles of the present time. Changing the frameworks in
3 which politics gets done is therefore simultaneously an end of social movement
4 activity and the means by which social movement actors attempt to reach their
5 other objectives.
6   Critical frame analysis of policy texts themselves – such as that offered in this
7 volume and in influential studies by scholars such as Deborah Stone (1988) and
8 Carol Bacchi (1999) – becomes more dynamic when it is complemented by stud-
9 ies of the political processes through which these texts were created, interpreted
10 and used as resources for mobilization. Historical studies of policy development,
11 such as Pedriana (2006) offers with regard to equal employment law in the US and
12 Zippel (2006) provides for sexual harassment law in Germany, the US and the EU,
13 provide an important window into these processes. They also indicate the reflexive
14 impact of securing, institutionalizing and applying new ways of thinking about
15 rights, making them real in their consequences.
16   The relationality and fluidity of meaning carried in and to frames even in institu-
17 tionalized text is what makes the idea of a 'master frame' (Snow *et al*. 1986) prob-
18 lematic. Although there is a strong consensus among many scholars that 'rights' is
19 an exceptionally powerful idea in the United States, it is also clear that what 'rights'
20 means is contested on an ongoing basis in the courts, legislature and executive
21 branch and shifts over time in its application. For example, 'equal rights' claims
22 made in the civil rights movement were 'shrunk' over time to no longer imply any
23 but the most formal legal rights, separated from the concept of 'social justice'
24 and tied instead to the idea of 'diversity', which was in turn carefully restricted to
25 imply that no 'special rights' could be considered (Edelman *et al.* 2001). Because
26 frames are not isolated concepts, but connections to other concepts that provide
27 the meanings of words-in-use, framing is relational and intersectional. Frames are
28 ideas captured in a web of meanings in which self-references and cross-references
29 are inherently multiple.
30   Thus, rather than thinking of US political discourse as providing 'rights' as
31 a singular 'master frame' that exists outside of or above the web of meaning in
32 which more particular frames are being constructed, I believe it is useful to con-
33 sider rights as one of the most centrally located and densely linked ideas in a
34 network of political meanings. 'Rights talk' draws on one or more of the particular
35 connections available to the concept of rights and thus 'stretches' it in some par-
36 ticular direction (e.g. to include gay marriage or not; Hull 1997). The density and
37 stability of the cross-referencing system of meaning at the core of American think-
38 ing about 'rights' offers a rich and diverse periphery of potential interpretations
39 to actors in a variety of positions along its 'edges'. Seeing rights discourse as a
40 framework in which rights is centrally located highlights both how all the elements
41 in it are shaped by the ways they are linked to each other and also how 'rights' is
42 itself defined by how it is linked to these other ideas. This is what I call a *rights
43 discourse*. Rights discourse differs from rights as a master frame in the same way
44 that a dynamically intersectional system differs from a locational understanding
45 of intersectionality.

Rights as a framework pervades and shapes the meanings of all the concepts in   1
its web and is reflexively understood in relation to that web of meaning; 'rights' as   2
a concept is one of the terms being shaped by the discourse as a whole and chang-   3
ing its meaning over time and space. In contrast, rights as a master frame would be   4
the one most important element and carry a single fixed definition. It would then   5
connect hierarchically to a range of abstract and interchangeable elements such   6
as 'equality', 'difference' or 'protection'. These 'subordinate' concepts would be   7
thought to have stable definitions regardless of the local framework in which they   8
are found, and vary only in how likely they are to be embraced, rather than taking   9
their meaning from the discourse in which they are used.   10

In the interactional definition of intersectionality, 'race' takes its operational   11
meaning in any given situation in part from the multiple institutions in play (such   12
as family or nation) and in part from the other dimensions of inequality that are   13
also engaged in giving meaning to each other and to the institutional context. This   14
is what Walby (2007) means by avoiding the 'segregationary reductionism' that   15
places class, race and gender each into just one key institutional 'system' (econ-   16
omy, state or family) and instead looks for the interpenetration of meaning and   17
action in systems that are not 'saturated' by one concept alone. Similarly, in the   18
dynamic definition of discourse, there is an equally complex (i.e. non-nested and   19
non-saturated) system of meanings being referenced when we speak of 'rights' in   20
the US or the 'rule of law' (Rechtsstaat) in Germany. These terms reach across a   21
variety of institutional contexts but can neither fully determine nor be determined   22
by them.   23

Each of these dynamic approaches specifically rejects the emphasis on generat-   24
ing long lists of diverse 'frames' and of 'axes of inequality' that has been part of   25
the study of both intersectionality and framing (and critiqued by McCall 2005 and   26
Benford 1997 respectively). Instead, both discourse and intersectionality can be   27
more productively approached through the study of *configurations*, a term McCall   28
(2005) uses to describe attention to patterns, interactions among elements that have   29
paradoxical and conflicting meanings depending on the specific context as a whole.   30
Such configurations – both of discourses and of intersectionality in this and other   31
aspects of the social order – are stable but also change. It is an empirical matter   32
in any given context to see which concepts are important to the configuration of   33
inequalities in discourse and in practice by people in many different social posi-   34
tions, and locational studies of intersectionality can contribute to this discovery   35
process.   36

In sum, 'rights' is not a master frame that has a 'real' meaning that could ever be   37
fully known or 'correctly' used, but is a more or less meaningful and discursively   38
powerful way of speaking depending on the panoply of meanings attached to it.   39
Unlike the way that Benford and Snow (2000) talk about 'frame amplification'   40
or 'frame extension' as if it were an operation performed on a single conceptual   41
claim, I contend that actors who make political claims that 'stretch' the meaning of   42
a concept do not 'extend' their single ideas to apply to new groups or new elements   43
that were simply missing before, but rather 'stretch' their whole web of meaning   44
to encompass people or practices that were connected in different patterns. They   45

1   thereby change the shape and structure of the web as a whole. So, for example,
2   to argue, as contemporary transnational feminist organizations do, that 'women's
3   rights are human rights' is to stretch the concepts of *both* 'human' and 'rights' to
4   mean something different from what they did before, not just to extend their stably
5   existing meanings to a 'new' group, women.
6   Because 'gender equality' is framed in the discursive structure of a political
7   system through its relationships to other ideas, actors and actions, some actors'
8   frames for gender will embrace many of these existing connections (what I have
9   called 'resonant' frames; Ferree 2003), while other efforts will aim to transform
10 the framework in which the idea of gender equality is embedded (what I have
11 called 'radical' framing). Framing gender transformationally has implications for
12 what race and class also mean in the reconfigured structure of discourse.
13
14 **Intersectional frameworks in Germany and the US**
15
16 Germany and the US provide two quite different discursive frameworks for the
17 intersectional discussion of race, class and gender. Germany's discursive opportu-
18 nity structure has been shaped far more by class struggle than by racial privilege,
19 while the reverse has been true of the US (Ferree 2008). Each of these histo-
20 ries offers conceptual opportunities for making the web of meaning for gender
21 inequality intersectional, but each also does so in very distinctive ways. By out-
22 lining a few of the aspects of discursive opportunity structure in each case, this
23 section lays the groundwork for exploring intersectional feminist framing in the
24 following section.
25   The class-centric meaning of inequality in Germany is evident in several ways.
26 First, it is a general example of contested global relations around capitalism. The
27 conflict between capital and labour in Germany made it the home of the world's
28 strongest socialist party at the end of the nineteenth century, the centre of socialist
29 internationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century and the world's earliest
30 welfare state. The Bismarckian institutionalization of maternity benefits, protec-
31 tion for men as primary earners and emphasis on motherhood as a service to the
32 state are today strongly anchored in the framework of a 'social welfare state' in
33 much of the twenty-first-century world, with the important exception of the US.
34   Second, German connections between class and gender reflect its particular his-
35 tory of authoritarian governments. The political power of the working class (defined
36 as male) was linked with that of women by the Prussian state before World War I,
37 which outlawed both socialism and all political associations of women. The class
38 and gender connection was also a key but contested element in mobilizations for
39 the vote and abortion rights in the Weimar Republic (Allen 1991). As the struggle
40 against social injustice became tied to the struggle against political repression,
41 gender relations became framed as 'like class' in demanding voice for the dis-
42 enfranchised (Gerhard 1990). When working-class organizations gained political
43 voice, they succeeded in making economic support for the 'socially vulnerable'
44 a shared premise for politically responsible actors. In contrast, race in Germany
45 reflected a definition of the polity in ethnic terms, as representing a single 'nation'

or people. When the Nazi definition of Jewish 'otherness' led, in shocking fashion, to the extreme of genocide, 'nationalism' itself became a suspect category for most Germans. As race discourse invokes the Holocaust, not subordination within the nation, the ability to see gender as in any way like race is limited (Lutz 2006).

Third, class relations gave two different shapes to the Cold War states formed after World War II (Moeller 1993). The 'system competition' between East and West Germany often invoked gender relations to legitimate their political arrangements (Ferree 1993). The ideal worker, the 'natural' family and beneficial work–family politics were framed in diametrically opposing visions of ideal state–citizenship relations in East and West (Ferree 1995a). German class politics reflects a wider Cold War politics which aligned national state–family–market relations into the housewife–breadwinner couple of the West and the heroic worker–mother of the East.

Fourth, within its posited framework of 'modern' political development, socialist theory identifies the working class as a social collectivity defined by its relation to production, not by the biological or personality characteristics of individual members. 'Class' as a theoretical concept is strongly linked to many other ideas and actors in Germany (and in much of the world) in ways that are largely alien to US political discourse. Moreover, the German working class had also, through struggle, won entitlement to have the state respond to needs expressed by a political party on its behalf. At least since World War II, inequalities among citizens were normatively defined as socio-economic class relations, rather than racialized as biological.

These aspects of the political framework shape German discourse around gender. A resonant framing of women is as 'mothers', but in this web of meanings, motherhood is understood as a *social relation* (in the relations of reproduction rather than production) rather than as a difference among individuals. For example, in the West German Basic Law of 1949, the principle that women and men are politically equal was explicitly affirmed in Paragraph two, Article three, still has not been in the US Constitution. But this German constitutional provision was consistently interpreted as allowing unequal pay, gender-exclusive opportunities and family authority based on a supposedly 'functional' difference between men and women in their 'reproductive roles' in the family.

Historically and today, both the German left and right find little to like in an 'equal rights' version of feminism, as they agree that women, as mothers, are entitled to the active protection and support of the state, just as workers and employers were entitled to be treated as groups for the purposes of state-led social policy (Moeller 1993). Moreover, by framing citizenship in the context of socio-economic relations based on both class and gender, the state actively draws a line between the 'public' matters of production and the 'private' relations of family and reproduction; this provides feminists with an important point of entry in criticizing social policy that is largely absent in the US (Gerhard 2001). In unified Germany today, the analogy to class politics as a mobilization to make the state responsible for its citizens, rather than leaving them to the mercy of 'private' exploitation, offers a framework in which feminist claims for rights to political representation and to protection from male violence in the home resonate with the institutional protections afforded to 'workers'. The successful institutionalization of a discourse of intersectional class

1   and gender interests allows resonant claims to be made on the state to address
2   profoundly *social* relations, which both class and gender are understood to be.

3   In contrast, the United States is well known as a polity institutionalized along
4   lines of liberal individualism and lacking any socialist movement or class-based
5   political party. Socio-economic relations are thereby obscured as political issues.
6   But although the claims of classical political liberalism – individualism, self-
7   determination, independence – were incorporated in the founding documents of
8   the US, these same documents institutionalized racist slavery and permitted the
9   virtual extermination of native peoples. Race has therefore dominated the frame-
10 work of American debates over rights and citizenship (Glenn 2002). The actors
11 who both justify and challenge racialized differences in status can appeal to the
12 founding documents and their histories of interpretation to find resonance for their
13 claims (Hill Collins 1998). The race analogy enters into American thinking about
14 gender and citizenship in four different ways.

15   First, there is the narrowly political struggle over who within the nation is actu-
16 ally a citizen with rights. Because the strong claims to freedom and self-determi-
17 nation in America's founding documents co-existed with interpretations justifying
18 slavery and subordination, the framework of rights created contradictions. This
19 'American dilemma' (Myrdal 1944) was negotiated through framing women and
20 members of racialized groups similarly as 'dependents' and thus not fully rights-
21 bearing individuals (Fraser and Gordon 1994). Dependency, unlike its meaning
22 in the German class struggle, is not connected to legitimating the claim for state
23 concern but is framed as a marker of personal insufficiency.

24   Second, because the Declaration of Independence claims that it is 'self-evident'
25 and 'natural' in how people are 'endowed by their Creator' that they should have
26 rights, American movements for social justice struggle with the idea of 'nature'
27 and 'natural difference' as justifications for inequality. Were it not for their 'differ-
28 ence', construed as biological, women and racialized minorities would have equal
29 rights, and so equality and difference are placed in opposition: to claim equality
30 is to deny difference and vice versa (Vogel 1993; Gamson 1995). The discourse
31 closely connects concepts of difference and stereotype with those of 'discrimina-
32 tion' and 'inequality' and thereby encourages a deliberate 'blindness' to gender
33 and to race.

34   Third, the relative weakness of the working class in American politics has left
35 dependency and difference to be packaged together with 'merit' as defining a
36 'natural' hierarchy in the competitive relations of capitalist production. Both
37 women and racial minorities are framed as competitively 'disadvantaged' by their
38 group membership, and as less able to achieve in what is framed as an inher-
39 ently fair and yet hierarchical system. Thus, state intervention is understood as
40 helping those who cannot help themselves and becomes connected to the idea
41 of 'disability', most positively as an intrinsic physical or mental incapacity and
42 most negatively as moral failure. In a framework in which 'competition' and
43 'merit' are connected to positive evaluations of the political–economic system,
44 open acknowledgement of state assistance carries an implication of competitive
45 disability (Bacchi 1996).

Finally, of course, American women and members of racialized groups have long worked together for their rights and have been joint beneficiaries of equal rights politics (Skrentny 1996). Not only were the struggles for women's rights and for the abolition of slavery interwoven in the nineteenth century, the policy shifts of the twentieth century also institutionalize race and gender as similar inequalities to which the state can and should respond in parallel. State action frames gender and race in the same discursive structure from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to various executive orders promoting the increase of 'under-represented groups' in science, sports and education in general, to court decisions that are slowly making gender into a 'suspect classification' like race (Lens 2003). The 'likeness' of gender and race is also open to challenge, with speakers arguing that one or the other is more socially significant, based on any or all of the above criteria for judging political deservingness. The very 'likenesses' affirmed by analogy also tend to define each as a 'separate' dimension of inequality, and thus can be seen as spurring the critiques by feminists of colour from the start (Hull *et al.* 1982).

In sum, for both countries, the webs of meaning in which class, race and gender are framed implicate all three terms as well as shape the opportunity structures for changing how other forms of intersectional inequalities (age, sexuality, religion) are related to them. It is not only the framework for thinking about class in Germany that matters for framing gender inequality, but the cognitive distance that race, religion and nationality have from these two concepts. American discourse makes it much easier to ignore class relations as such, precisely the opposite problem to that confronting German feminist speakers.

Dynamic intersectionality understands the structure of institutionalized discourse as shaping the meaning of all these types of inequalities together across multiple institutions. Similarly, the relatively long 'stretch' needed to connect the concept of class to the race-and-gender dyad in the US affects all three of these conceptualizations as well as the nature of the institutions that have and have not developed, from the weak welfare system for poor families to the strong protection of women's self-determination in reproductive choices (not only abortion but surrogacy and in vitro fertilization), as O'Connor *et al.* (1999) note. As it is the concept 'race' that is laden with taboos in Germany and 'class' is the concept that evokes negative echoes in the US, each web of meaning in which the terms are articulated has a different structure, making the use of race or class language not merely encounter a lack of resonance but become actually disturbing.

Implications of intersectional frameworks for feminist gender framing

The different institutionalized relationships among gender, race and class in the frameworks of the US and Germany offer opportunities for pragmatic victories and prospects of radicalization in different discursive dimensions. Because each framework makes very different feminist issues radical or resonant, each offers different opportunities for intersectional challenges to be articulated. In each context, the gender claims that are easy to conceptualize and can find sponsors

1 who have institutional power to advocate for them are 'resonant'. These are good
2 choices for pragmatic actors whose goal is to 'make a difference' in the particular
3 institutional structure, while these same claims, in a different opportunity struc-
4 ture, are experienced as radical challenges to the status quo as a whole and will
5 be hard to articulate, sponsor or achieve, especially in the short term. The national
6 contexts of Germany and the US therefore offer contrasting stories of what proves
7 easy or challenging to feminists. In this section, I offer a few examples of how this
8 contextual contingency directs feminist intersectional politics into different paths
9 (and dead-ends).
10 The framework for gender institutionalized in the US privileges seeing both
11 gender and race as forms of second-class citizenship. Thus, it is resonant to chal-
12 lenge both gender and race subordinations with framing that denies the extent and
13 natural basis of any difference from the normative (white male) citizen. An effec-
14 tive, pragmatic American politics of gender is one that undercuts the importance
15 of group membership and attempts to help 'disadvantaged' individuals achieve
16 their (presumably biologically given) full potential. 'Liberal feminism' is often
17 simply 'feminism' in the US.
18 Already in the 1970s and 1980s, the type of feminism that was understood as
19 simply 'feminism' in Germany was defined in the US as 'radical feminism' (Ferree
20 1987). The 'radical' label fitted appropriately to these ideas in the US in the 1970s,
21 but would have been a misnomer in Germany. The emphasis given to women's dif-
22 ferences from men and the structural organization of reproduction as demanding
23 attention to mothers that characterized most German feminist groups in the 1970s
24 and 1980s was certainly not unknown in the US. Such 'maternalist' feminism has
25 roots going back to the beginning of the twentieth century in the US, when Progres-
26 sive era feminists allied with labour unions made significant gains (Vogel 1993).
27 But by the late 1960s, discursive opportunities had shifted in another direction.
28 As 'second-wave' feminism was developing in the US in the late 1960s, class-
29 centred frames were challenged by feminists as inadequate for understanding the
30 intersections of gender and race. American labour unions were seen as on the
31 wrong side of the controversy over the continuation of the Vietnam War, racial
32 justice was the leading cause of protest, and American feminists were actively
33 allied with civil rights movements in challenging union seniority rules and other
34 workplace exclusions. The resonance of seeing gender as like race facilitated this
35 alliance and helped win significant legal victories for women's rights in employ-
36 ment, marriage and civil contracts (Skrentny 2006). This web of meaning mobi-
37 lized a backlash that also connected religious conservatives who opposed school
38 integration and abortion into a movement that framed 'the decline of the family' in
39 terms of black women's single parenthood, welfare entitlements and black men's
40 moral turpitude (Hancock 2007; Mayer 2008).
41 Nonetheless, seeing gender as like race in the US has been quite fruitful in
42 terms of generating a broad, strong, anti-discrimination regime in American social
43 policy (von Wahl 1999). The resonance of anti-discrimination claims within this
44 institutional framework allowed sexual harassment to be brought relatively easily
45 under this umbrella and has encouraged courts to impose significant penalties in a

small number of highly publicized cases (Zippel 2006). The 'anti-discrimination' framing for equality also resonated with hierarchical structures based on competitive high-stakes testing and was an effective tool for opening up college and university admissions, male-dominated professions and competitive sports to women and racialized minorities.

But competitive high-stakes testing also legitimated the backlash against 'affirmative action', allowing it to be framed as 'discrimination' against meritorious whites (and Asians). Moreover, the centrality of 'anti-discrimination' as the framing for gender equality created little resonance for the ongoing feminist critiques of American social policy as giving employed women no time for having children and creating systematic poverty for families supported by mothers (e.g. Gornick and Meyers 2003). This affected practical alliance strategies for feminist activists and organizations.

Feminists who emphasized family poverty and care work issues were increasingly found in welfare rights and child welfare movements; women's movement groups were engaged instead in defending reproductive rights from the assault on them by social conservatives. The leading feminist organizations in this struggle adopted a framing of reproductive 'choice' as 'the one that works' (Ferree *et al.* 2002). Social conservatives strategically confounded 'poor women', 'black women', 'welfare' and 'the destruction of the family' to mobilize racism against all women's citizenship rights (Roberts 1997; Hancock 2004; Mayer 2008). Across the board, it was difficult for feminists, even feminists of colour, to challenge increasing economic inequalities in the United States. Both 'white privilege' and 'male privilege' can be acknowledged as individual advantages without providing a resonant discourse to contest the limited American framing of 'gender equality' as being about non-discrimination, individual opportunities and a 'level playing field' (Browne and Misra 2003).

The 'tilt' given to the gender equality discursive terrain by the institutionalization of capitalism and the discursive advantage held by concepts of ownership, competition and merit in the US does not mean that American feminists do not speak out in favour of economic redistribution, government regulation of markets and investments in public goods. But their interpretations of what 'rights' means in practice are far less authoritative than those already embedded in the framework of American institutions.

The story of feminist alliances and the power of intersectionality is quite different in Germany. Throughout the twentieth century, justice for women was seen as having little to do with anti-racism (Gerhard 1990). In recent decades, 'race' itself has gradually been shifting meaning. In the 1970s, the idea of race was strongly connected to the highly charged history of the Nazi period, so analogies between the Holocaust and women's status (e.g. by emphasizing the persecutions of witches in early modern Europe) were more scandalous than effective. As immigration of 'guest workers' in the 1960s and 1970s grew, concern with 'otherness' shifted to focus on ethnicity, nationality and religion. But the lack of citizenship rights among 'guest workers' made analogies with Turkish or other immigrant groups worse than useless as a means of demanding more rights for women citizens.

1   The widening and deepening of the EU changed the discursive opportunity
2   structure for German gender politics. The 1982 entry of a Green party into the
3   EU parliament brought attention to the dimensions of politics neglected by both
4   left and right, including environmentalism, feminism and personal autonomy. The
5   resultant 'ping-pong' game between national level and transnational mobilization
6   among feminists and power-holders began to open up spaces in which women had
7   more voice, both as elected officials and in administration (Ferree 1995b; Zippel
8   2006). But the formal structure of government offices and networks for women's
9   affairs that emerged in the 1980s was completely separated from that concerned
10   with immigrant/foreigner affairs. This placed these groups in competition for fund-
11   ing in the 1990s, while separating both concerns from the more routine operations
12   of the welfare state. In this context, 'gender mainstreaming' became a discursive as
13   well as a practical challenge to the operation of politics-as-usual by bringing con-
14   sideration of gender into the 'ordinary decision-making' of the responsible poli-
15   cymakers. The European Union's integration of gender policy in the 'mainstream'
16   of politics is a way to hold states accountable for meeting women's needs, and fits
17   into the framework of 'social rights' as an aspect of welfare state citizenship where
18   women have legitimate, unmet claims (Verloo 2007).
19   But this framing does not speak directly to the needs of non-citizen women
20   or consider the gendered implications of migration for both women and men.
21   Attention to these concerns appears to be increasing with the pressure for redefin-
22   ing citizenship in multiethnic terms in Europe (Snow and Corigall-Brown 2005;
23   Hellgren and Hobson 2008). Both racist and anti-racist mobilizations in Europe
24   have made the symbolic salience of women's rights within this discourse diffi-
25   cult to overlook any longer (Cichowski 2007). Higher levels of mobilization by
26   immigrants and their second- and even third-generation descendants have brought
27   loosening of restrictive citizenship rules and limited grants of political power to
28   non-citizens (Williams 2003). EU-level attention to labour mobility and market
29   harmonization has also brought increased attention to anti-discrimination mea-
30   sures in both employment and civil contracts such as housing and credit. The grad-
31   ual and grudging compliance by the German parliament and constitutional court
32   has provided a set of new authoritative texts in the form of anti-discrimination
33   laws and decisions with which claims for institutional action can resonate
34   (Zippel 2006).
35   The framing of gender as something quite distinctively anchored in the repro-
36   ductive sphere makes a politics of maternity support resonant and allows even a
37   conservative woman chancellor to advance this goal (Ferree 1995a). But it also
38   creates problems for women in the labour market, as a frame in which 'normally,
39   men are the breadwinners' and 'all women are mothers' leaves non-mothers in
40   paid employment under-recognized and leaves employment issues on the margins
41   of feminism. For example, the strike by daycare workers on the Berlin payroll in
42   1989 drew little support from either the feminists in leadership positions in city
43   government (who considered this a labour issue on which they represented the
44   employer side) or the unions of city workers (who were mostly men and did not
45   see daycare work as comparable to their own jobs) (Ferree and Roth 1998).

Despite these limitations, the class–gender analogy has been extremely fruitful in Germany and in most European states with traditions of social democracy. Organizing women to be a group *for* themselves as well as *in* themselves in relations of production and reproduction is a logical strategy that raises little concern about essentializing natural difference, as 'women' are like 'workers' in being understood as positions in social relations, not so much as types of persons (Allen 2005). Overall, German women's mobilization as a group, when perceived as like 'earlier' class conflict, offers a model of group mobilization that legitimates women's political action within and through representation in government (that is 'voice'). The institutionalized framework for understanding gender as a form of social inequality 'like class' affirms the active role of the state in regulating and reshaping family relations. Attention to gender relations in the form of reproductive relations leads to childcare leaves and subsidies, abortion and contraception laws, and affirmative action policies directed at mothers. But women's lives outside the institutional context of family and reproduction are much harder to describe critically in ways that will generate a strong response from either the state or civil society.

Looking at both Germany and the US reveals new challenges emerging in different forms in each context. The global re-orientation from a competition between 'East and West' has both encouraged neoliberal frames for 'structural reform' of economic policies around the world and also highlighted a new competition between 'secular modern' nations and frameworks and those of 'religious fundamentalist' ones. While the rise of economic inequalities stimulated by neoliberalism is a challenge to US feminist intersectional thinking, the redefinition of immigration as intertwined with gender relations offers a new challenge to European feminist movements. This dual re-orientation provides a shift in discursive opportunity structure at the transnational level. Feminists framing gender justice will be making their intersectional choices of alliances on a terrain that is remarkably different from that of the previous decades, and yet one on which the legacies of the past remain visible.

Conclusion: Intersectionality and political transformation

Full citizenship for women remains a goal rather than an achievement in both Germany and the US, but the available discursive tools for the necessary activist framing work that movements in both contexts pursue differ. By beginning from an analysis of social inequality that is already understood to be intersectional in a dynamic sense, the frameworks that connect race, class and gender with rights and citizenship can be examined for *how* they empower and disempower people in different structural locations. Rather than lists of intersectional positions or frames, we can begin to develop an analytical model of framing as processes that actively connect concepts. These connective processes will systematically push some ways of thinking into the definitional background and foreground different concerns in specific cases while remaining comprehensible as comparable systems. The meaning of gender inequality is not simply different across countries or contexts but is anchored in a history in which the boundaries and entitlements of racialized

nationhood, the power of organized class interests to use the state and the intersection of both of these with the definition of women as reproducers has been part of politics all along (Yuval Davis 1990).

Seeing a system of inequality that is not hierarchically nested inside particular institutions or able to be simplified into a competition to identify the most important oppression reveals the reflexively institutionalized understandings that enable political practice. We make categories to understand the world, and do so from the standpoints that we occupy, but the point of our understanding this world of inequality and injustice is to change it. Descriptions of inequalities feed back in both positive and negative ways into the continued existence of these configurations of inequality. Positive feedback reinforces the status quo in the classic 'vicious circle' identified with the analysis of path-dependencies in systems, but the institutionalization of certain patterns with their inherent contradictions also allows for negative feedback, in which small changes multiply and drive a system further and further from its previous, precarious equilibrium. This instability – whether noted as the 'dialectic' of class, the 'dilemma' of racial exclusions or the 'paradox' of gender difference and equality – affects all forms of inequality and gives mobilizations to transform frameworks of inequality their hope for success.

But 'transformatory' goals will not be identifiable by some list of their particular characteristics, any more than politically significant frames or social inequalities can be captured in a list, however long. The underlying understanding of feminist transformation offered here relates change strategies in each case to the particular intersectional configuration there to be challenged. This relational understanding of radicalism also recognizes the inherent potential of reforms, however modest, to be the 'butterfly wings' that begin a longer process of change that is difficult for even its advocates to foresee. Politics is – as Linda Zerilli (2005) reminds us – the action of taking risks in a future that is unknowable because it is being co-determined by all the other actors with whom one must necessarily struggle. Political struggles as a form of self-making are inherently intersectional; they are 'identity politics', but understood as an indeterminate project extending into the future rather than a static reflection of the locations of the past. They also actively construct the meaning of 'feminism' by the choices of with and against whom feminists engage politically.

Feminist actors can never predict how their actions will ultimately be understood or how the process of struggle will unfold, as they are not the only actors engaged in contests over meanings, resources and power. Yet, uncertain as the ends of a framing process must be, framing cannot be avoided if action is to be taken. A modest claim to limited, fallible, but strategically useful framing might open the door to dialogue with others, who have developed their own frames from their own circumstances, allowing a reflexive approach to finding alliances with which we can more broadly challenge the frameworks of inequality that enmesh us all.

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