

Inequality, Intersectionality and the Politics of Discourse: Framing Feminist Alliances

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Introduction

Intersectionality has become a key concept in feminist discourse, traveling readily around the world to highlight the fact that gender relations are intertwined in complex ways with other forms of social inequality. Although race and class are the dimensions most typically named in discussing the intersectional nature of inequalities, sexuality, age, nationality and religion are other social relations frequently included in considering how gender relations vary within and across political contexts (Yuval-Davis 2006; Knapp 2005).

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) each classify different ways of understanding intersectionality, arguing for expanding the concept from its frequent focus on groups and identities. Although each affirms the important contributions made by intersectional challenges to the givenness of categories and by attending to the specific perspectives of women of color and women in other marginalized locations, they also suggest that these approaches excessively privilege the individual level and focus on static structural locations on “axes” of oppression in a “matrix of domination” (Hill Collins 2001; see also Braidotti 1994).

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 color 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, Scott and Smith 1982, Brah and Phoenix 2004). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) then put the term “intersectionality” into more international use, giving it a meaning that largely understood structural intersections as adding, multiplying and reinforcing particular hierarchies in specific locations. Using the metaphor of many intersecting streets called “patriarchy,” “colonialism,” 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 also may 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 this meaning 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 on 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 onto 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 multi-level 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 of 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 institutions that shape consciousness and practice, and identifies discourse as a crucial arena of political activity (Foucault 1977). Two of the central processes of discursive politics are categorizing and ordering. These human actions have political consequences in themselves because of the inherent reflexivity of the social world; that is, we use categories and ranks not only to understand but control the world, and feedback from the environment to the system comes in terms of such information about success and failure (Espeland and Sauder 2007). As lists, ranks, metaphors and distinctions proliferate, they guide our understanding of who we are and with whom we are more or less related. Thus, for example, when the dimension of “race” is constructed and “fixed” in national censuses, it generates meaningful and contestable categories (such as “Asian”) which can always be further decomposed, but which serve to distribute real resources and recognition in response to which identities and activities become oriented.

But in offering this interactive definition of intersectionality, I acknowledge that it still will not fully capture the complexity of reality. Like the concept of “gender equality,” which takes its meaning from the discursive and institutional contexts in which it appears, “intersectionality” is also an open and contested term. Across different political contexts, various social and political actors engage in trying to “shrink” the meaning of intersectionality and limit the areas in which it can be applied, to “bend” it to better fit with other issues on their agenda, and to “stretch” it to meet emergent needs.

Moreover, the understandings of both gender equality and other forms of inequality are mutually stretched and bent as they encounter each other. Like other forms of social reflexivity, framing intersectionality is being done in a social world that already incorporates intersectional relations in historically specific and yet contestable and changing ways. Rather than framing “gender equality” as intersectional in the locational sense by which “gender equality” means something different for people who are situated in diverse social positions along the axes of oppression, this paper argues that “gender” and “gender equality” are framed through processes of conceptual abstraction and simplification that are inherently and inevitably intersectional as well as imperfect and contested.

The rest of chapter will attempt to show how particular political histories of interpreting and institutionalizing class, race and gender as abstract dimensions of inequality continue to shape gender discourse in interactively intersectional ways. To do this, I take the politically constructed discourses of race and class as historically situated in the United States and Germany to discuss the framing of gender inequality in each country. The comparison of these two cases is designed to suggest some dimensions that might prove useful in other contexts, without obscuring the specificity of each example in its own right. In the next section, I argue that intersectionality as a dynamic process pervading political discourse is better understood as a web of meaning on a framework of opportunity than in terms of “master frames” in some single hierarchy. In the third section, I provide an example of contrasting discursive opportunity structures by comparing Germany and the United States as intersectional frameworks of meaning for gender, race and class. In the fourth section, I show how these different frameworks are dynamically important in for the active framing and accomplishments of institutional change of feminist politics in each context.

By examining how class and gender discourses relate more closely in Germany and race and gender in the US I try to explain both what feminists have found easy to win as well as what some of the more difficult and pressing challenges for thinking, and more importantly, working intersectionally are likely to be.

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 making links among people, concepts, practices and resources, frames allow for a coordination 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 by analogy 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, 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, 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 texts “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 in a wider system. A given law is a part of a wider legal culture in which “law” in the abstract and any law in particular is 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 frameworks that are historically constructed, path-dependent, opportunity structures for the discursive struggles of the present time. Changing the frameworks in which politics gets done is therefore simultaneously an end of social movement activity and the means by which social movement actors attempt to reach their other objectives.

Critical frame analysis of policy texts themselves – such as that offered in this volume and in influential studies by scholars such as Deborah Stone (1988) and Carol Bacchi (1999) – becomes more dynamic when it is complemented by studies of the political processes by which these texts were created, interpreted and used as resources for mobilization. Historical studies of policy development, such as Pedriana (2006) offers with regard to equal employment law in the US and Zippel (2006) provides for sexual harassment law in Germany, the US and the EU, provide an important window into these processes. They also indicate the reflexive impact of securing, institutionalizing and applying new ways of thinking about rights, making them real in their consequences.

Pedriana (2006) shows, for example, that the framework of “equal rights” provided in Title VI in the US had to be actively connected to a specific practical meaning in its interpretation, application and enforcement. Inclusion of “sex” as a category to be protected from discrimination, although a political accomplishment, did not itself mean that courts would understand this as disallowing protective legislation or even the “customary” segregation of jobs by sex. Only after contests in and out of court around the scope of meaning that the literal words of the law should carry, did the equal rights frame become the “self-evident” understanding of this language. Paradoxically, this stretching of meaning to protect women “like Blacks” from discrimination created a discursive connection to “de-segregation.” This allowed the opposition to frame the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution as threatening to abolish women’s restrooms and women’s colleges (Mathews and DeHart 1990) and blocked the continued expansion of women’s legal rights that had seemed “self-evident” only a decade before (Mansbridge 1986).

The relationality and fluidity of meaning carried in and to frames even in institutionalized text is what makes the idea of a “master frame” (Snow et al. 1986) problematic. Although there is a strong consensus among many scholars that “rights” is an exceptionally powerful idea in the United States, it is also clear that what “rights” means is contested on an ongoing basis in the courts, legislature and executive branch and shifts over time in its application. For example, “equal rights” claims made in the Civil Rights movement were “shrunk” over time to no longer imply any but the most formal legal rights, separated from the concept of “social justice” and tied instead to the idea of “diversity” which was in turn carefully restricted to imply that no “special rights” could be considered (Edelman, Fuller and Mara-Drita 2001). Because frames are not isolated concepts, but connections to other concepts that provide the meanings of words-in-use, framing is relational and intersectional. Frames are ideas captured in a web of meanings in which self-references and cross-references are inherently multiple.

Thus rather than thinking of US political discourse as providing “rights” as a singular “master frame” that exists outside of or above the web of meaning in which more particular frames are being constructed, I believe it is useful to consider rights as

one of the most centrally located and densely linked ideas in a network of political meanings. “Rights talk” draws on one or more of the particular connections available to the concept of rights and thus “stretches” it in some particular direction or another (e.g. to include gay marriage or not, Hull 1997). The density and stability of the cross-referencing system of meaning at the core of American thinking about “rights” offers a rich and diverse periphery of potential interpretations to actors in a variety of positions along its “edges.” Seeing rights discourse as a framework in which rights is centrally located highlights both how all the elements in it are shaped by the ways they are linked to each other and also how “rights” is itself defined by how it is linked to these other ideas. This is what I call a *rights discourse*. Rights discourse differs from rights as a master frame in the same way that a dynamically intersectional system differs from a locational understanding of intersectionality.

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

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

Each of these dynamic approaches specifically rejects the emphasis on generating long lists of diverse “frames” and of “axes of inequality” that has been part of the study of both intersectionality and framing (and critiqued by McCall 2005 and Benford 1997, respectively). Instead, both discourse and intersectionality can be more productively approached through the study of *configurations*, a term McCall (2005) uses to describe attention to patterns, interactions among elements that have paradoxical and conflicting meanings depending on the specific context as a whole. Such configurations – both of discourses and of intersectionality in this and other aspects of the social order – have stability but also change. It is an empirical matter in any given context to see what concepts are important to the configuration of inequalities in discourse and in practices by people in many different social positions, and locational studies of intersectionality can contribute to this discovery process.

In sum, “rights” is not a master frame that has a “real” meaning that could ever be fully known or “correctly” used, but is a more or less meaningful and discursively powerful way of speaking depending on the panoply of meanings attached to it. Unlike the way that Benford and Snow (2000) talk about “frame amplification” or “frame extension” as if it were an operation performed on a single conceptual claim, I contend that actors who make political claims that “stretch” the meaning of a concept are not “extending” their single ideas to apply to new groups or new elements that were simply missing before, but rather “stretching” their whole web of meaning to encompass people or practices that were connected in different patterns. They thereby change the shape and structure of the web as a whole. So, for example, to argue, as contemporary transnational feminist organizations do, that “women’s rights are human rights” is to stretch the concepts of *both* “human” and “rights” to mean something different than they did before, not just to extend their stably existing meanings to a “new” group, women.

Because “gender equality” is framed in the discursive structure of a political system through its relationships to other ideas, actors and actions, some actors’ frames for gender will embrace many of these existing connections (what I have called “resonant” frames, Ferree 2003), while other efforts will aim to transform the framework in which the idea of gender equality is embedded (what I have called “radical” framing). Framing gender transformationally has implications for what race and class also mean in the reconfigured structure of discourse.

Intersectional frameworks in Germany and the US.

Germany and the US provide two quite different discursive frameworks for the intersectional discussion of race, class and gender. Germany’s discursive opportunity structure has been shaped far more by class struggle than by racial privilege, while the reverse has been true of the US (Ferree 2008). Each of these histories offers conceptual opportunities for making the web of meaning for gender inequality intersectional, but each also does so in very distinctive ways. By outlining a few of the aspects of discursive opportunity structure in each case, this section lays the groundwork for exploring actively intersectional feminist framing in the following section.

The class-centric meaning of inequality in Germany is evident in several ways. First, it is a general example of the contested global relations around capitalism. The conflict between capital and labor in Germany made it the home of the world’s strongest socialist party at the end of the nineteenth century, the center of socialist internationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century and the world’s earliest welfare state. The Bismarckian institutionalization of maternity benefits, protections for men as primary earners, and emphasis on motherhood as a service to the state is today strongly anchored in the framework of a “social welfare state” in the twenty-first century in much of the world, with the important exception of the US.

Second, German connections between class and gender reflect its particular history of authoritarian governments. The political power of the working class (defined as male) was linked with that of women by the Prussian state before World War I, which outlawed both socialism and all political associations of women. It continued in struggles over voting and abortion rights in the Weimar Republic (Allen 1991). As the struggle against social injustice became tied to the struggle against political repression, gender

relations became framed as “like class” in demanding voice for the disenfranchised (Gerhard 1990). When working class organizations gained political voice, they succeeded in making economic support for the “socially vulnerable” a shared premise for politically responsible actors. By contrast, race in Germany 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. Since 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 good 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 of the West and the heroic worker-mother of the East. This institutional framework is currently changing globally, under challenge from actors with quite different agendas on all sides (Jenson and Saint-Martin 2003).

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 socioeconomic 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 2, Article 3, as it was not 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, since 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 socioeconomic 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 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 and gender interests allows resonant claims to be made on the state to address profoundly *social* relations, which both class and gender are understood to be.

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

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

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

Third, the relative weakness of the working class in American politics has left dependency and difference to be packaged together with “merit” as defining a “natural” hierarchy in the competitive relations of capitalist production. Both women and racial minorities are framed as competitively “disadvantaged” by their group membership, and as less able to achieve in what is framed as an inherently fair and yet hierarchical system. Thus, state intervention is understood as helping those who cannot help themselves and becomes connected to the idea of “disability,” most positively as an intrinsic physical or mental incapacity and most negatively as moral failure. In a framework in which “competition” and “merit” are connected to positive evaluations of the political-economic

system, open acknowledgement of state assistance carries an implication of competitive dis-ability (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 "underrepresented 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 color from the start (Hull, Scott and Smith 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, Orloff and Shaver (1999) note. Since 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; it offers different opportunities for intersectional challenges to be articulated. In each context, the gender claims that are easy to conceptualize and can find sponsors who have institutional power to advocate for them are "resonant." These are good choices for pragmatic actors whose goal is to "make

a difference” in the particular institutional structure, while these same claims, in a different opportunity structure, are experienced as radical challenges to the status quo as a whole and will be hard to articulate, sponsor or achieve, especially in the short-term. The national contexts of Germany and the US therefore offer contrasting stories of what proves easy or challenging to feminists. In this section, I offer a few examples of how this contextual contingency directs feminist intersectional politics into different paths (and dead-ends).

The framework for gender institutionalized in the US privileges seeing both gender and race as forms of second-class citizenship. Thus it is resonant to challenge both gender and race subordinations with framing that denies the extent and natural basis of any difference from the normative (white male) citizen. An effective, pragmatic American politics of gender is one that undercuts the importance of group membership and attempts to help “disadvantaged” individuals achieve their (presumably biologically given) full potential. “Liberal feminism” is often simply “feminism” in the US.

Already in the 1970s and 1980s the type of feminism that was understood as simply “feminism” in Germany was defined in the US as “radical feminism” (Ferree 1987). The “radical” label fit appropriately to these ideas in the US in the 1970s, but would have been a misnomer in Germany. The emphasis given to women’s differences from men and the structural organization of reproduction as a demanding attention to mothers that characterized most German feminist groups in the 1970s and 1980s was certainly not unknown in the US. Despite the historical roots of “maternalist” feminism and the gains made by Progressive era feminists allied with labor unions in the early twentieth century (Vogel 1993), discursive opportunities had shifted in another direction by the late 1960s.

As “second wave” feminism was developing in the US in the late 1960s, class-centered frames were challenged by feminists as inadequate for understanding the intersections of gender and race. American labor unions were seen as on the wrong side of the controversy over the continuation of the Vietnam War, racial justice was the leading cause of protest, and American feminists were allied actively with civil rights movements in challenging union seniority rules and other workplace exclusions. The resonance of seeing gender as like race facilitated this alliance, and helped win significant legal victories for women’s rights in employment, marriage, and civil contracts (Skrentny 2006). This web of meaning mobilized a backlash that also connected religious conservatives who opposed school integration and abortion into a movement that framed “the decline of the family” in terms of black women’s single parenthood, welfare entitlements, and black men’s moral turpitude (Hancock 2007; Mayer 2008).

Nonetheless, seeing gender as like race in the US has been quite fruitful in terms of generating a broad, strong anti-discrimination regime in American social policy (von Wahl 1999). The resonance of anti-discrimination claims with this institutional framework allowed sexual harassment to be brought relatively easily 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 who could compete successfully on the terms already set.

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 on-going 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 color, 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 favor of economic redistribution, government regulation of markets, and investments in public goods. But their interpretations of what “rights” mean 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 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 for demanding more rights for women citizens.

The widening and deepening of the EU changed the discursive opportunity structure for German gender politics. The 1982 entry of a Green party into the EU parliament awoke attention to the dimensions of politics neglected by both left and right, including environmentalism, feminism and personal autonomy. The resultant “ping-pong” game between national level and transnational mobilization among feminists and power-holders began to open up spaces in which women had more voice, both as elected officials and in administration (Ferree 1995b, Zippel 2006). But the formal structure of government offices and networks for women’s affairs that emerged in the 1980s was completely separated from that concerned with immigrant/foreigner affairs. This placed

these groups into competition for funding in the 1990s, while separating both concerns from the more routine operations of the welfare state. In this context, “gender mainstreaming” became a discursive as well as practical challenge to the operation of politics-as-usual by bringing consideration of gender into the “ordinary decision-making” of the responsible policy makers. The European Union’s integration of gender policy in the “mainstream” of politics is a way to hold states accountable for meeting women’s needs, and fits into the framework of “social rights” as an aspect of welfare state citizenship where women have legitimate, unmet claims (Verloo 2007).

But this framing does not speak directly to the needs of non-citizen women or consider the gendered implications of migration for both women and men. Attention to these concerns appears to be increasing with the pressure for redefining citizenship in multi-ethnic terms in Europe (Snow and Corigall-Brown 2005, and Hellgren and Hobson 2008). Both racist and anti-racist mobilizations in Europe have made the symbolic salience of women’s rights within this discourse difficult to overlook any longer (Cichowski 2007). Higher levels of mobilization by immigrants and their second and even third generation descendants have brought loosening of restrictive citizenship rules and limited grants of political power to non-citizens (Williams 2003). EU-level attention to labor mobility and market harmonization has also brought increased attention to anti-discrimination measures in both employment and civil contracts like housing and credit. The gradual and grudging compliance by German parliament and constitutional court have provided a set of new authoritative texts in the form of anti-discrimination laws and decisions with which claims for institutional action can resonate (Zippel 2006).

Not only the state, but also feminist structures of alliance are affected by the web of meaning in which intersectional rights claims are made. German feminist groups have been intensely engaged in debate about whether or not Muslim women in Germany should be allowed to wear a headscarf when “representing the state” (as teachers or bureaucrats). However, they were remarkably restrained in their attention to German legislation bringing the country into compliance with EU directives prohibiting discrimination in civil as well as employment matters, framing the latter as being “about immigrants,” and thereby making the discrimination against Muslim women in employment invisible and ironically supporting the residential ghettoization of immigrant communities that are then deplored as reinforcing patriarchal customs (Ferree and Rottmann 2008).

The framing of gender as something quite distinctively anchored in the reproductive sphere makes a politics of maternity support resonant and allows even a conservative woman chancellor to advance this goal (Ferree 1995a). But it also creates problems for women in the labor market, since a frame that “all the workers are men” and “all women are mothers” leaves non-mothers in paid employment under-recognized and leaves employment on the margins of feminism. For example, the strike by daycare workers on the city payroll in Berlin in 1989 drew little support from either the feminists in leadership positions in city government (who considered this a labor issue on which they represented the employer side) or from the unions of city workers (who were mostly men and did not 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, since “women” are like “workers” in being understood as positions in social relations, not so much 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 (or “voice”) in government. 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 lead 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 neo-liberal 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 neo-liberalism 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 than 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 analytic model of framing as process that actively connects 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 nor 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” politics 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 it to the particular intersectional configuration that exists 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 are 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.

Feminists today, as in the past, have no monopoly on insight or ability to find the one correct analysis. Feminist actors can never predict how their actions will ultimately be understood or how the process of struggle will unfold, since 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 at all. 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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