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Intersectionalizing European Politics: Bridging Gender and Ethnicity

Abstract: This *Dialogues* section brings together research from two hitherto separate, interdisciplinary strands of European scholarship on politics: Gender Studies, and Migration and Ethnic Studies. Combining theories, concepts, methods and findings, the papers demonstrate what each field can learn from the other. By exploring various forms of citizenship and representation of ethnic minorities in Western Europe this section addresses the key contributions of Gender Studies and Migration and Ethnic Studies: intersectionality and the critique of methodological nationalism, respectively. Intersectionality challenges scholars to cross gender with other categories such as ethnicity. Methodological nationalism refers to the naturalization of national categories; critics dispute the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of contemporary politics. Both approaches are far from mainstream in political science, and despite their potential they are rarely combined. This essay argues that central future challenges for political science are (1) to mainstream intersectional analysis; (2) to be critical of the construction of taken-for-granted categories and the way such ‘fixed’ categories result from our focus on nation-states; (3) to develop new mix-method toolkits to make this exercise feasible.

Keywords: gender, ethnicity, migration, intersectionality, methodological nationalism

Traditionally, most European political scientists with an interest in gender or ethnicity examine them in isolation from one another. The recent polemics surrounding gender equality and immigrant integration show how central contemporary political issues cannot be understood without considering the dimensions of gender and ethnicity together. As Razack states: “The policing of Muslim communities in the name of gender equality is now a globally organised

phenomenon and one that has become even more pronounced after the events of September 11, 2001” (2004, 129). The nexus of gender/sexuality and ethnicity/migration can be easily identified in times when integration into a ‘Leitkultur’ (a hegemonic national culture) with national values and norms, such as gender equality and gay rights, is promoted across various countries (Butler 2008). While ethnic minority women used to be ignored in policies and politics, nowadays Muslim women with a migration background have moved from the margins to the center of political attention in Europe as integration is increasingly equated with women emancipation (Fekete 2006; Prins and Saharso 2008; Ghorashi 2010; Roggebrand and Verloo 2007; Mepschen *et al.* 2010; Gouda 2007; Scott 2007). Consequently, the discursive construct of ‘Muslim woman’ has become a new category, which holds together a diverse group of Muslim women with various ethnic backgrounds (Brah 2001). Politically, there seems to be growing consensus in European anti-immigration discourses – to paraphrase Moller Okin (1999) – that Islam is bad for women. Or in more recent terms, a “femonationalism” can be detected bringing together ‘anti-Islam and anti-(male) immigrant concerns of nationalist parties, some feminists, and neoliberal governments under the idea of gender equality’ (Farris 2012, 187).

This *Dialogues* section argues that key questions in current European political science cannot be understood without considering the meaning and construction of gender and ethnicity *simultaneously*. It shows how the categories of gender and ethnicity work together, interacting to shape power relations between citizens and institutions in different geographical locations. The constructive effect of synthesizing gender and ethnicity in political research extends far beyond the more obvious topics such as the position of Muslim women. An intersectional analysis can be applied to positions that combine dominant and marginalized categories, while also questioning the assumption that certain categories have an *a priori* meaning or content. Hancock’s proposal to view intersectionality as a research paradigm incorporating causal

complexity of mutually constitutive categories including the individual and the institutional level rather than as a ‘content specialization’ focusing on a specific groups, is particularly relevant in this context (2007, 253). And, as the contributions in this *Dialogues* section show, an intersectional approach to research often yields unexpected insights in analyses of core political issues such as policy-making, integration, and citizenship regimes (cf. Benhabib and Resnik 2009; Nawyn 2010). By taking such an approach, we see the synergies between two hitherto separate strands of scholarship: Gender Studies on the one hand and Migration and Ethnic Studies on the other. By combining theories, concepts, methods and findings from both fields, a joint reading of the articles challenges political science to incorporate the central contributions of Gender Studies and Migration and Ethnic Studies: intersectionality and critique of methodological nationalism, respectively.

Developmental trajectories of Gender Studies and Migration and Ethnic Studies

Political scientists working on either migration and ethnicity or on gender address similar questions about inclusion and exclusion, but study these questions in relation to different social dimensions or groups (implicitly or explicitly). Studies tend to examine *either* women *or* immigrants and ethnic minorities in politics. They focus on power structures, participation, inequality and the politics of representation, and use similar concepts, such as political opportunity structures, identity politics, and discrimination. Both strands of research are concerned with the construction of categories such as ‘citizenship’, ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘gender’ in their analyses. Yet in spite of overlapping research agendas, a constructive dialogue between Gender Studies and Migration and Ethnic Studies is largely absent (Piper 2006).

Both fields expanded in the 1970s and 1980s. Feminist activists and scholars who created the field of women’s studies were aiming for radical social change (Polity 1994,

Bradley 2007). In the 1990s and 2000s women's studies mutated into gender studies 'embracing lesbian, gay and transgender studies amid controversy as to whether this would destroy its political edge' (Connell 2009, 41). According to Connell Women's Liberation movement activists rightly predicted that academic feminism would lose its political urgency: gender theory practically made no reference to policy questions with which feminists had been grappling (e.g. women's health, education, domestic violence). Although, the field as a whole became less radical over the years, gender scholars are generally more explicitly normative and self-reflexive than political scientists in many other fields. As Squires states in the introduction of her book *Gender in Political Theory*: 'explorations of gender in political theory have to date been undertaken primarily by those pursuing a feminist agenda' (1999, 2).

In contrast, the development of Migration and Ethnic studies aimed to examine the influx of labor migrants and post-colonial citizens to many West European countries; how to regulate immigration and integration effectively became one of the main policy-research themes. The relation between researchers and policy makers was strong and nationally oriented (Scholten 2011). Migration and Ethnic Studies as a whole generally did not embrace the type of research ethic feminist or critical race scholars incorporated – particularly the reflection on the multiple dimensions of the researcher's location and a normative commitment to transform the social order to promote social justice (cf. Ackerly and True 2010, 2). However, by responding to public and political debates Migration and Ethnic Studies scholars found themselves caught in a difficult position. In the words of Martiniello and Rath, that is true

especially if they take seriously the point that their role is to elaborate knowledge free from passions and fears. Their work is, in effect, running the risk of unwillingly reinforcing the excessive dramatisation surrounding migratory phenomena. Even when they assign themselves the precise opposite goal, they are not always immune from distorted interpretations of their work within the public sphere. (2010, 8)

In the 1990s and 2000s both fields have changed, demarginalized and have become increasingly recognized within academic disciplines (Messer-Davidow 2002; Martiniello and

Rath 2010). At the same time Gender Studies as well as Migration and Ethnic Studies developed as respected interdisciplinary fields, as major European research networks and a growing range of ISI-ranked journals devoted to these fields evidence.

In political science, research on women and politics has matured over the past decade (Childs and Krook 2006; Kenny 2007). The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) as well as the International Studies Association (ISA) and the American Political Science Association (APSA) feature thriving Gender sections (Dahlerup 2010). On a smaller scale, the same is true for Migration and Ethnic studies. The ECPR convenes frequent sessions on migrant and integration politics (see Bird *et al.* 2011; Halm and Sezgin, 2013); in 2012 APSA established a section on Migration and Citizenship. Special issues and symposiums of leading European political science journals have been dedicated to gender, for example by *Parliamentary Affairs*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* and *Representation* (Celis and Childs 2008; Randall and Lovenduski 2004; Squires and Weldes 2007; Lovenduski 1996; Celis *et al.* 2008) and to migration and ethnicity by the *European Journal of Political Research*, *West European Politics* and *European Political Science* (Layton-Henry 1988; Baldwin Edwards and Schain 1994, Schönwälder and Bloemraad 2013, Schönwälder and Bloemraad forthcoming).

That said, migration and Ethnic Studies and Gender Studies exist largely in parallel universes. In gender-themed research in politics, attention to ethnicity is mostly absent, while within political studies on ethnicity and related themes, gender is almost completely ignored. Moreover, there is scant acknowledgement of conceptual and theoretical developments *across* fields.

Intersectionality and ‘methodological nationalism’ in political research

Now that both Gender Studies and Migration and Ethnic Studies are established in academia, the time is ripe to combine their conceptual, explanatory and interpretative frameworks and apply them within political science research. Both fields have developed a conceptual and methodological critique that would benefit broader political science research: namely, intersectionality and critique of methodological nationalism.

The term intersectionality was first coined by legal scholar Kimberley Crenshaw in the late 1980s (Crenshaw 1989). Crenshaw recognized that a uni-dimensional focus, *only* on gender *or* ethnicity, failed to capture the qualitatively distinct outcomes of policies for different groups of women. In contrast, an intersectional perspective recognizes the complex interplay between multiple axes, such as gender and ethnicity, and analyses the specific effects produced by their interaction. This approach deepened the critique by black feminists of both second wave feminism and of the civil rights movement in the US. The sexism and racism they experienced as *black women* in both of these movements was radically different from that of white women in the feminist movement and black men, respectively (hooks 1981; hooks 2000).

Intersectionality has become a buzzword in contemporary scholarship (Davis 2008). An increasing number of gender journals such as the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *Politics & Gender*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Gender & Society* (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Lawless 2007; Kantola and Nousiainen 2009; Misra 2012) and recently the Migration and Ethnic Studies outlet *Journal of Intercultural Studies* (Bilge and Denis 2010) have dedicated special issues to it. But despite recent attempts to introduce intersectional approaches to empirically-driven political science research, the approach is far from dominant in political science; thus far it has gained most ground in cultural and sociological studies (McCall 2005).

Intersectional studies of European politics apply a range of mainly qualitative methods varying from critical frame analysis to structured interviews to gain insight into ‘that which traditional methodological approaches (or statistical models) have typically rendered invisible by either isolating the effects of gender and controlling for race or isolating the effects of race and controlling for gender via large-N data sets’ (Simien 2007, 270). More recently, scholars have criticized some intersectional approaches for being a rigid ‘all-or-nothing affair’ in which ‘social relations are intersectional or they are not’ and have advocated a more flexible approach to intersectionality that recognizes that axes of political life (such as gender and ethnicity) can have additive, multiplicative and intersectional effects (Weldon 2008). Regardless of methodological angle, the common denominator within intersectional research is that the relationship between identities is not fixed: ‘what constitutes categories themselves is not predetermined but the result of historical processes’ (Lawless 2007, 231; cf. Farris and de Jong 2013).

In political science, there is a growing body of literature applying intersectional approaches to policy research. For example, scholars are trying to disentangle the effects of anti-discrimination and equality policies in cross-national comparative research. This scholarship notes that discrimination can take place on multiple grounds and criticizes a ‘one size fits all’ approach in European policy-making that does not do justice to variety within groups. Authors also argue that strategies of gender mainstreaming cannot simply be implemented when addressing discrimination on other grounds, such as ethnicity, since the underlying power dynamics and implications are distinctive (Koldinská 2009; Verloo 2006; Lombardo and Agustín, 2012). Verloo (2007) found that when the mechanisms for (re)producing inequality are predominantly situated at the discursive level (e.g. sexual orientation), the policy and political claims are framed around recognition, whereas when categories are seen to be produced on the material level (e.g. class), political claims focus on

redistribution. When looking at goals of political lobbying, differences can be identified with respect to gender and race/ethnicity. The political and policy activities connected to gender present multiple goals: sometimes gender equality, at other times recognition of difference or deconstruction of the category. Whether the goal of equality with regards to race/ethnicity should take the form of assimilation, integration or multiculturalism is still disputed (Verloo 2007).

Little European political science scholarship has taken an intersectional approach to the study of immigrants or ethnic minorities. Intersectional approaches to political representation have been more common in the USA, with research exploring dynamics of both gender and race, much of it informed by the experience of and writing by African American women (Hawkesworth 2003; Jordan-Zachery 2007; Krook and Childs 2010; Htun 2004; Hancock 2007). According Griffin and Braidotti ‘race and ethnicity in Europe is less about the “visibly other”; as black American and subaltern feminist perspectives often imply, but are [...] about the “stranger in our midst” whom we cannot [...] discern as a stranger unless we brand her as such ...’ (2002, 21). Since the construction of ethnicity in Europe is strongly bound to nation states (e.g. immigrants’ sending and receiving countries) we expect that the experience of African American women in the USA differs substantially from the experience of ethnic minorities in Western Europe due to differences in migration history, length of stay, language, integration, citizenship, religion and the way in which minorities are accommodated by society. The transatlantic challenge for future research then is to study to what extent intersectional outcomes differ for ethnic minorities with a recent migratory background (migrants and their descendants in Europe) with African Americans in the USA in comparable spheres such as political representation or policy-making. The variation in different context will provide more in-depth knowledge on the interaction between categories and establish whether under particular conditions one identity is more decisive than the other.

In taking stock of European research on migration and ethnic relations Martiniello and Rath (2010) argue that the major challenge is the absence of any epistemological paradigm. As a result of intellectual emergency when responding to actual problems too quickly as a whole the field ‘theoretically stagnated’ (ibid., 10). The implementation of intersectionality may be a suitable part of the solution to take this scholarship to a higher theoretical level. We believe, however, that the main contribution of Migration and Ethnic Studies for other fields is a critique on so-called methodological nationalism (cf. Beck and Sznaider 2006). Methodological nationalism is the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world. Within social scientific research this leads to the naturalization of national categories (cf. Amelina et.al 2012). A critique of methodological nationalism was first articulated as such by the anthropologists Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002). According to them many scholars ‘assume that countries are the natural units for comparative studies, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interests with the purposes of social science’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 572, cf. Jeffery 2008).

In the pre-war, post WWII and cold-war eras, migration scholarship was strongly tied to nation-states. The 1990s marked a new period in migration studies; ‘transnationalism’ became the rage, with scholars studying migrants’ ties and activities across and between nation-states (Basch *et al.* 1994; Vertovec 2009). This strand of research challenged scholars to study immigrant activities – such as political campaigning, lobbying in exile and external voting – beyond the dominant paradigm of integration (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Bauböck 1994; Fibbi *et al.* 2008; Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Mügge 2010). Even though transnational migrant politics is conspicuously male-dominated, studies on these phenomena rarely pay attention to gender (Mügge 2013). This underlines the potential of integrating intersectionality in research designs that supersede methodological nationalism, not least since both approaches criticize the naturalization of social categories and units of analysis for essentializing differences.

The critique of methodological nationalism should not be seen as implying acceptance of the thesis that contemporary politics has been deterritorialized by globalization, transnational movements and corporations; the influence of nation-states is enduring. Nevertheless, those scholars who reject methodological nationalism do claim that we should study whether and how nation-states are important instead of assuming that they are. In addition, these scholars contend, transnational processes matter and their influence on nation-states should be studied more thoroughly. This means, for example, that researchers need to become more attentive to the influence of national state institutions on the production of data (see Font and Méndez 2013; Yanow and Van der Haar, 2013). For the sake of comparative counting, states as well as supranational institutions rely on categories that are ‘frozen in time’ (Yanow 2003). Researchers using data provided by state institutions are thus confronted with static and often national definitions of ethnic identities that may or may not map onto populations with more fluid or complex identities and social ties.

Combining critique of methodological nationalism and taking an intersectional approach directs us to revisit the historical origins of our categories, to rethink how they are produced and maintained in research, and to examine political institutions and mechanisms at the local, federal, transnational and global levels.

Intersectionalizing and Denationalizing Political Analysis

The first two contributions in this dialogues section approach ‘citizenship’ in novel ways. Maas and De Jong use the intersectional perspective of gender studies to examine how citizenship among immigrants and natives is both gendered and ‘ethnicized’ – both before the creation and beyond the borders of the nation-state. Maas and De Jong stress that citizens’ notions of belonging are not necessarily bound to nation-states. Criticizing narrow conceptions of

citizenship that conflate citizenship with nationality, they plead for more diverse approaches. In his historical analysis of citizenship, Maas finds that religious and linguistic differences before the creation of the Dutch nation-state did not prevent a shared sense of belonging. De Jong focuses on the normative aspects of global citizenship under the influence of present-day globalization. In this perspective, citizenship is an attitude, an outlook on the world and a feeling of global connection rather than a set of legal and political rights and duties tied to nation-states. The authors demonstrate how citizenship in the sixteenth as well as the early twenty-first centuries was and is gendered. The intersectional perspective indicates that access to citizenship depends on locale as well as on ethnicity and gender. In Orwellian (1945) terminology: as citizens all women are unequal, but some are more unequal than others.

Van der Haar and Verloo take this intersectional perspective to the European level and to policy making by asking what kind of categorizations are present in recent important policy and civil society texts on gender equality from the 27 EU member state countries as well as from the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey. Their critical frame analysis shows that gender equality policy and civil society texts most frequently refer to a generic gender category – mostly women – without further differentiation along other axes. The authors demonstrate that the few occurrences of minoritized women in policy documents reveal a narrow focus on issues of violence, which might stem from the aforementioned surge in political interest concerning Muslim women at the integration/emancipation nexus.

Political representation stands central in the two contributions that follow. Severs, Celis and Meier study the intersections between gender and religion, while Eelbode, Celis, Devos and Wauters complete our endeavor by applying gender theories to the political representation of ethnic minorities. Severs et al. have a relational understanding of representation and focus on the interests of women (substantive representation) rather than on their number (descriptive representation). The authors examine the mutual responsiveness of political representatives and

ethnic minority women's organizations in the Flemish headscarf debate. The intersectional analysis underscores that gender and political ideology tend to be more influential in claims making than ethnicity and religion.

Eelbode et al. focus on descriptive representation at the local level. The authors start with the common assumption that women are descriptively better represented in leftist parties. Women tend to support leftist parties; these parties in turn develop strategies to enhance the numbers of female candidates. They ask whether this also holds for ethnic minorities but find no significant differences in the number of ethnic candidates among parties. The cross-fertilization of Gender Studies and Migration and Ethnic Studies in the contribution of Eelbode et al. indicates that party ideologies are less important than is generally assumed. The authors also touch upon the problem of legitimacy in the descriptive representation of both women and ethnic minorities. Due to institutional, electoral or societal pressures, parties benefit from diversity. As Severs et al. recall, defining what is in the interest of women, or of ethnic minorities for that matter, is a delicate matter. Parties generally want candidates to attract votes on the basis of their gender and/or ethnicity. Once elected, however, they are asked to act for the whole constituency.

This *Dialogues* section reveals the merits of synthesizing intersectionality and the critique of methodological nationalism raises new questions for the study of political and social categories. From it flow three future challenges for political science in particular: (1) to incorporate intersectional analysis in political research; (2) to be critical of the construction of taken-for-granted categories and the way such fixed and naturalized categories are influenced by nation-states; (3) to develop new mixed method toolkits to make this exercise feasible. In this *Dialogues* section political scientists who previously worked in either Gender Studies or Migration and Ethnic Studies leave their trenches and cross this unfamiliar terrain. We hope

that this *Dialogues* section inspires readers to take up this challenge and to investigate the merits of synthesizing insights from Ethnic and Migration studies and Gender Studies.

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