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Diversity Mainstreaming: Moving Beyond Technocratic and Additive Approaches

JUDITH SQUIRES

Introduction

This article suggests that it no longer makes sense to conceive, or pursue, mainstreaming in relation to gender alone. If mainstreaming processes are to adequately address the full range of equality concerns of the European Union (EU) and its member states they will inevitably need to engage with multiple equalities and their intersections. Given the manner in which mainstreaming has generally been implemented to date the growing interest in applying it to other equality strands in addition to gender is currently conceived as an additive technical process rather than a more genuinely integrated participatory approach to intersectionality. This paper articulates a conception of diversity mainstreaming that draws on the insights of both gender mainstreaming and intersectionality debates. It proposes a participative-democratic rather than an expert-bureaucratic model of mainstreaming, and a transversal rather than an additive notion of intersectionality, and links these via practices of deliberative democratic exchange.

Gender Mainstreaming

Adopted by the United Nations at the 1995 conference on women in Beijing and then taken up by the European Union, its member states and international development agencies, gender mainstreaming is now "an international phenomenon" (see Walby 2004, 2; True 2003). Gender mainstreaming, best understood as a set of tools and processes which help to integrate a gender perspective into all policies at the planning stage, operates by requiring those involved in the policy process to consider the likely effects of policies on the respective situation of women and men, and then revising proposed policies if necessary such that they promote gender equality rather than reproduce gender inequality.

Mainstreaming, often presented as a "transformative" or "potentially revolutionary" concept (see Lombardo 2005; Verloo 2001), promises to address gender equality at a structural level, rather than focusing on ameliorating the specific symptoms of inequality. It therefore appears to address the limitations of previous gender equality policies, including anti-discrimination laws and positive action remedies. The limitation of anti-discrimination laws lies in the concept of equal treatment, where the measure against which women are evaluated is a male norm, meaning that the presumed impartiality of anti-discrimination laws masks an androcentric bias (see Fredman 2001). The limitation of positive action laws and strategies, by contrast, is that they

may essentialise women's experiences, ignoring the differences between women. In this way the presumed justice of positive action measures may reproduce gendered stereotypes, which marginalizes the diversity amongst women and men. Mainstreaming promises to avoid each of these limitations, by questioning the neutrality of the presumed "norm" against which women are judged, and by enquiring into the reality of people's lives via gender impact assessments, which should in principle be sensitive to the diversity amongst women and men. By focusing on the causes of inequality, it aims to anticipate the future consequences of existing inequalities and seeks to prevent their future reproduction. In this way mainstreaming questions the presumed neutrality of bureaucratic policymaking, highlighting the way in which apparently impartial policies might reproduce existing inequalities by failing to address their structural impact. Moreover, whilst anti-discrimination and positive action laws focus on gender inequality in isolation from other forms of inequality, mainstreaming has the potential to take a more holistic approach to inequalities.

While the theoretical potential of gender mainstreaming is therefore significant, evaluations of its practical implementation to date have been somewhat more circumspect (see Bacchi/Eveline 2004, Daly 2005, Rees 2005, Teghtsoonian 2004). Many scholars have noted that the transformative potential of mainstreaming frequently gets supplanted by more "integrationist" (Jahan 1995, 13), "expert/bureaucratic" or "technocratic" approaches (Beveridge/Nott 2002, 301) in practice, focusing on the use of "gender experts" and the establishment of mainstreaming "routines" within state bureaucracies. The "agenda-setting", "participatory/democratic" or "transformative" approaches to mainstreaming, which are argued to entail the participation of women in civil society setting new policy agendas, are less common in practice.

The complexities involved in taking gender as a frame of analysis, coupled with the linguistic difficulties inherent in translating "gender mainstreaming" into a wide range of languages, has meant that many organizations have adopted some of the mainstreaming tools in the absence of an overall gender framework (see Daly 2005, 436). As a result, evaluations of the success of gender mainstreaming tend to focus on the effective implementation of these specific techniques of policy praxis, bracketing larger questions about social transformation.

These techniques focus on bureaucratic mechanisms, tending to "strip away the political content of information of women's interests, and reduce it to a set of needs or gaps, amenable to administrative decisions about the allocation of resources" (Baden/Goetz 1997, quoted in Beveridge/Nott 2002, 304). By contrast, in the agenda-setting model a "gender perspective" is argued to be best grasped by listening to women's articulations of their policy concerns, focusing on deliberative and consultative input rather than on statistical quantitative data, requiring the creation of an advanced consultation exchange between non-governmental groups and the policy administration (Donaghy/Kelly 2001). The creation of such forums for consultation with civil society organizations have however, been few and far between to date.

There is then a debate as to which model of gender mainstreaming best realizes the

transformative potential of mainstreaming theories, with a growing body of literature arguing that current practical implementation strategies are becoming increasingly technocratic. More recently, this debate has been complicated by the emergence of another set of concerns: namely whether and how one might extend mainstreaming practices to multiple inequalities.

From Gender to Diversity

Mainstreaming is most frequently understood as a policy "to promote equality between men and women" (European Commission 1996). In the context of the European Union's (EU) multiple strand anti-discrimination policy the specific techniques of a technocratic form of mainstreaming are now being applied to race, disability and age, though in a fairly limited way (see Shaw 2004). This extension of mainstreaming practices to other forms of inequality needs to be understood in the context of the move within the EU to move away from its earlier focus on gender equality to address multiple inequalities (see Verloo/Lombardo 2006, 1). The EU now recognizes, in Article 13 EC, six key characteristics as requiring measures to combat discrimination: sex, racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation.

It is in this context that one might argue that "diversity mainstreaming" is beginning to emerge. However, this still leaves the more challenging, but potentially more transformative, task of developing a "diversity" perspective – as opposed to a gender, race or disability equality perspective – as a frame of analysis. The promotion of diversity has emerged as a central political priority within Europe over the last few years. While the concept of equality has been central to the EU's legal order, with the Charter of Fundamental Rights enshrining a range of equality principles (see Shaw 2004), the concept of diversity has recently also been explicitly recognized in the EC Treaty: Article 149 EC protects the "cultural and linguistic diversity" of the educational systems of the Member States, whilst Article 151 EC calls upon the Union to respect the "national and regional diversity" of Member States (see Shaw 2004). Additionally, in 2003 the European Commission launched a five-year, EU-wide information campaign, "For Diversity – Against Discrimination", aiming to "promote the positive benefits of diversity for business and for society as a whole" (European Commission 2004, 13). These developments have led commentators to suggest that EU equality policies now comprise three strands: ensuring formal anti-discrimination, working towards substantive equality, and managing diversity (Bell 2003). The EU claims to be in favour of an integrated approach to combat "multiple discrimination" (European Commission 2004), and depicts itself as a learning institutions capable to transferring knowledge achieved in the area of gender to the treatment of other inequalities (see Verloo 2005). There ought therefore to be potential to take the lessons learnt from attempts to develop gender mainstreaming practices and to apply them to a newer agenda of diversity mainstreaming.

Many feminists have been rather sceptical about this shift from an exclusive focus on

gender to a more wide-ranging concern with diversity and multiple inequalities (see Woodward 2005). There are concerns that "diversity" is conceived primarily as a means of producing greater economic productivity, rather than social justice (see Wrench 2003); and that the creation of institutions and laws that address multiple inequalities via the establishment of equality commissions and policy agencies will erode many of the institutional gains made by feminists during the past decade. There are also fears that the recognition of multiple inequalities will generate a "hierarchy of oppression" in which different equality groups fight over scarce resources and institutional access. Moreover, there is a profound concern amongst many feminists that other equality strands may have demands that run counter to those of women's equality groups. For instance, many feminists have expressed concern that the recognition of ethnic minority and religious group rights may limit and erode the pursuit of gender equality (Okin 2000, Skjeie 2006), leading to anxieties that a multiple equalities agenda may undermine rather than facilitate gender justice. The extension of mainstreaming processes to fields other than gender has therefore been perceived by some feminists as a worrying development, signaling a diminution of concern with gender and a marginalization of feminist concerns in the policy agenda.

Yet it is hard to discern normatively persuasive grounds for refusing to extend equality considerations to other oppressed social groups, and in practice many feminists have been keen to benefit from the diversity agenda. For instance, the role of women's organizations in the creation of a single equality body in the United Kingdom suggests that how feminists respond to the diversity agenda will depend both on the status of the women's policy agencies relative to other equality strands and the dominant normative framing of gender equality in relation to questions of intersectionality. Where women's policy agencies have the greatest relative status and where gender equality has been conceived in a way that fails to consider issues of intersectionality, the diversity agenda is likely to be perceived primarily as a threat[1]. For these reasons, Nordic state feminist responses to the challenge of diversity are likely to differ from British state feminist responses as gender equality has such a privileged status in these countries while the Nordic equality discourse has tended to privilege a form of gender equality that is not well placed to deal with the challenge of multiculturalism (see Hobson et al. 2006; Siim 2006), frequently obscuring the experiences of immigrant and minority women (see Mulanari 2001; Towns 2002; Squires 2007). Where, as in the UK, other equality strands have achieved legal or institutional gains from which women may benefit, and where feminists have accepted the importance of intersectionality considerations, the diversity agenda is likely to be perceived primarily as an opportunity for advancement.

For diversity has been subject to an 'extensive theoretical investigation' by feminist theorists (see Shaw 2004, 3), who have recognized the importance of understanding intersectionalities and multiple identities (see hooks 1981). For instance, intersectionality was central to debates in Britain at the end of the 1970s concerning the "triple oppression" of black, working class women (see Anthias/Yuval-Davis 1983). More

recently, a concern with "intersectionality" was central to feminist preparations for the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism (see Yuval-Davis 2005). As Patricia Hill Collins suggests: "viewing gender within a logic of intersectionality redefines it as a constellation of ideas and social practices that are historically situated within and that mutually construct multiple systems of oppression" (Hill Collins 1999, 263). This suggests that there are good feminist reasons for being concerned with intersectionality, and for considering the ways in which gender mainstreaming practices might take multiple inequalities and the intersections between them into account more systematically than has been the case to date.

However, the multiple inequalities agenda has largely taken the form of an anti-discrimination approach to date, and has not yet really echoed the developments in gender equality, which moved from anti-discrimination alone to embrace issues of equality of outcome and mainstreaming processes (see Rees 1999). There is still some way to go in terms of developing mainstreaming processes that address multiple inequalities (see Hankivsky 2005). My concern here is to argue that, given the plurality of equality agendas held by diverse groups and the difficulty of ascertaining these by bureaucratic mechanisms, the role of inclusive deliberation should be stressed. This transforms mainstreaming from a technocratic tool to an institutional manifestation of deliberative democracy.

Intersectionality: Additive and Transversal

Given the manner in which mainstreaming has tended to be implemented, the attempt to apply it to other equality strands in addition to gender becomes an additive technical process rather than a more genuinely integrated approach to intersectionality.

The theoretical challenge is to articulate a conception of diversity mainstreaming that draws on the best insights of gender mainstreaming and intersectionality debates. This, I would suggest, entails a participative-democratic rather than an expert-bureaucratic model of mainstreaming, and a transversal rather than an additive notion of intersectionality. Central to the articulation of both these elements is a form of deliberative democratic exchange, which encourages interaction between advocates of distinct equality strands and fosters the development of cross-cutting rather than competing goals.

One of the central dynamics in feminist debates about intersectionality has been whether to interpret intersectionality as an additive or a constitutive process, framed by identity or transversal politics (see Yuval-Davis 1997). An identity politics generates an additive model of intersectionality, in which each axis of discrimination is distinct. One of the dangers of this approach to multiple discriminations, popularized by American scholars (see Crenshaw 1991), is the tendency for each axis of discrimination to become isolated from each of the others (see Shaw 2004, 21). One of the strengths of the additive approach, however, is that it remains attentive to the distinctive nature of each inequality strand, avoiding an over-simplistic assumption that all

inequalities are of the same order and therefore amenable to the same sort of policy response. It allows one to differentiate between different kinds of differences (see Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). As the European Women's Lobby suggests, "different equality agendas have their specific dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and marginalization and consequently need specific analysis and actions in order to find the best strategies" (European Women's Lobby 2004)

Where a straight-forward anti-discrimination approach to multiple inequalities may tend towards an overly individualistic approach to inequalities (see Verloo 2006, 215), the use of mainstreaming practices to address multiple inequalities may allow policy-makers to develop policies that address structural and institutional inequality. As Verloo rightly notes, "the fact that inequalities are dissimilar means that such equality mainstreaming cannot be a simple adaptation of current tools of gender mainstreaming" (Verloo 2006, 222). Yet any attempt to develop mainstreaming processes based on an identity politics that generates an additive model of intersectionality will inevitably result – not in a coherent practice of diversity mainstreaming – but in a series of distinct, and frequently competing, mainstreaming processes taking each inequality as a separate consideration. The expert-bureaucratic model of diversity mainstreaming therefore appears to require the embedding of a series of parallel technical mainstreaming practices. However, it is entirely possible that these various processes be adopted in an additive manner, which does not directly engage with the issue of "diversity" but rather approaches its constituent elements in a piecemeal fashion.

Yet, the embrace of a participative-democratic mainstreaming model does not in and of itself ensure that diversity would be addressed in a more integrated manner than this. For here mainstreaming would require a broadening out of the range of actors involved in the policymaking process, via a visible increase in social dialogue through the institutionalization of consultation practices, the creation or consolidation of advisory bodies representing a series of distinct social groups or an increase in government investment with a view to equipping their respective representatives with the necessary skills to participate in policy-making (see Daly 2005, 442f.; Donaghy/Kelly 2001; Mazey 2000; Beveridge et al. 2000; Mackay/Bilton 2003; Squires/Wickham-Jones 2002). The difficulty with these attempts to extend mainstreaming to equality considerations other than gender is that they remain additive and fail to engage with the issue of intersectionality as long of they concentrate on separate consultations with existing social groups.

Fragmentation inevitably arises from this additive approach given the emphasis placed on identity politics, whereby political judgements were held to develop from one's own standpoint. These standpoints are generally held to attach to groups rather than individuals, meaning that any member of that group could speak for all other members of that category. However, marginalized voices within identity groups have repeatedly challenged the representativeness of the representative voice thereby leading to the multiplication of representative voices (see Yuval-Davis 2004, 7), which ultimately renders this approach unworkable.

By contrast, an alternative epistemological approach, which unsettles standpoint arguments by introducing a more dialogical approach to the diversity (see Benhabib 1992), advocates the creation of strategic alliances based on a transversal points (see Cockburn 1991; Eschle 2001; Yuval-Davis 1997). Transversal politics were developed in contradistinction to both universalistic and identity politics. Challenging both the false neutrality of the integrationist approach of universalistic politics and the essentialising reification of identity politics that adopted a strategy of reversal, this approach emphasizes the importance of communication – both horizontally and vertically – needed to construct a radical political collective (Guattari 1974). Where the additive model of identity politics leads to fragmentation, the dynamic model of transversal politics allows for a more integrated approach. From the transversal perspective, any attempt to essentialize "blackness", "womanhood" or "working class" as a specific form of concrete oppression "conflates identity politics narratives with descriptions of positionality" (Yuval-Davis 2005).

Transversal politics entails three key features (see Yuval-Davis 2004, 16): firstly, a dialogical standpoint epistemology, which recognizes that as the world is seen differently from different standpoints any one standpoint will be "unfinished" and dialogue between those with different standpoints will produce a fuller knowledge (see Hill-Collins 1999, 236); secondly, the principle of encompassment, in which differences are recognized as important but encompassed by a broader commitment to equality (see Yuval-Davis/Werbner 1999); thirdly, a distinction between positioning, identity and values, whereby people who identify themselves with a social category can be positioned differently in relation to a range of social locations and can also have very different social and political values (see Yuval-Davis 1997). Together these three principles make an interactive universalism possible (see Benhabib 1992, 227), as participants engage in dialogue to negotiate a common political position, mutually reconstructing themselves and others in the process. What follows from this transversal approach has profound implications for the conceptualization of diversity mainstreaming. Rather than attempting to develop gender, race, disability, sexuality and age mainstreaming as discreet processes, it offers the potential for developing a more cohesive diversity approach.

Diversity Mainstreaming

In relation to mainstreaming practices, the additive model of intersectionality suggests that series of discreet impact assessments are needed (assuming a technocratic mainstreaming model), possibly supplemented with consultation with a range of spokespeople for the various inequality strands (allowing for a more participative-democratic rendering of mainstreaming). However, neither of these processes promises to address issues of transversal intersectionality: for this a more deliberative approach to mainstreaming is required. The transversal approach to intersectionality suggests that mainstreaming processes should be concerned with equalizing participation within

decision-making institutions and processes in order to allow people an equal capacity to shape the social and physical world in which they live. Given that equality of power is not a present-day reality, strategies need to be engaged to pursue this ideal, notwithstanding the likelihood that this ideal will never be fully realized (see Cooper 2004, 83). Gender, like class as well as race, sexuality "et cetera", should not remain as a meaningful form of difference beyond its pernicious manifestation as an organizing principle of inequality.

The difficulty faced by mainstreaming strategies aiming to eliminate oppressive classifications is that demographic data and disaggregated statistics can be important in order to highlight the need for reform, yet the production of statistics highlighting the effects of the social dynamics of inequality, and classifications that they require, may serve to police people's identities and ironically enable further discrimination to occur (see Cooper 2004, 88). For instance, without gender-disaggregated data one cannot establish that inequalities exist, which is precisely why the strategy of gender mainstreaming calls for the adoption of a "gender perspective" and the production of gender disaggregated statistics in all policy-making processes. Whether this is compatible with "undoing" gender in the long run, or whether it entrenches a group identity approach within all decision-making processes is as yet unclear. However, one obvious way of negotiating this difficulty is to complement the role of "objective" empirical indicators of inequality, which inevitably require group classification, with more deliberative processes, which do not demand that a person's identity be categorized in advance in order for their inequality to be depicted.

The shift from identity to transversal politics therefore demands that we shift our attention away from the idea that people represent groups by virtue of a shared identity, and towards the idea that advocates can broaden their horizons by engaging in dialogue with others. The claim to speak for others cannot be based on identity alone; it must be a product of a dialogic process. Transversal feminist politics depend on as comprehensive a dialogic approach as possible (see Yuval-Davis 2004, 35), which suggests that the elitism of professional NGOs and the expertise of those engaged in evidence-based policy-making may need to be countered by other, more deliberative, devices.

It therefore makes sense for theories of mainstreaming to engage with theories of deliberative democracy, which have attempted to explore "discursive mechanisms for the transmission of public opinion to the state" (Dryzek 2000, 162). Advocates of deliberative democracy – in a move akin to that made by advocates of mainstreaming – suggest that the idea of democracy revolves around the transformation, rather than simply the aggregation, of preferences. The point of democratic participation is to manufacture, rather than to discover and aggregate, the common good. A deliberative decision will have taken all relevant evidence, perspectives and persons into account, and will not favour some over others on morally arbitrary grounds (see Williams 2000). Legitimacy here requires not only a lack of bias but also inclusivity.

In other words, both deliberative democracy and mainstreaming literatures focus on

the rule-formation process and aim at impartiality through inclusivity. It is for this reason that it makes sense to think about mainstreaming in relation to deliberative democracy. This recommendation needs to be tempered by the significant feminist critiques of communicative rationality (see Meehan 1995): including in particular the gender-blindness of Habermas's work (see Benhabib 1992); his lack of attention to aesthetic-expressive rationality (see Squires 1998) and his restrictive formulation of the public sphere (see Fraser 1996). Accepting the gravity of these critiques, an appeal to deliberative democracy would ideally be grounded in a non-Habermassian dialogical ethics, in which consensus presupposes communication, not vice versa. What deliberative democrats offer theorists of diversity mainstreaming is a concern with the quality and form of engagement between citizens and participatory forums, stressing in particular the importance of political equality and inclusivity, and of unconstrained dialogue (see Smith 2005, 39).

The emphasis that deliberative democrats place on inclusion and dialogue offer rich resources to counter the technocratic tendency in the integrationist model of mainstreaming. Where the integrationist model emphasizes the importance of expertise and creates an elite body of professional experts, a deliberative rendering of diversity mainstreaming would emphasize the importance of dialogue with diverse social groups. Deliberative innovations such as citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polls and deliberative mapping are growing in number and significance (see Smith 2005, 39-55). Evidence suggests that these mechanisms do indeed facilitate the capacity to produce recommendations on complex public policy issues that are informed by a wide variety of experiences and viewpoints (see Smith 2005, 55). For this reason, mainstreaming theorists have much to gain from exploring the possible synergies between deliberative innovations and their own equality strategies.

An exploration of the potential for integrating deliberative transmission mechanisms into a transformative model of mainstreaming may generate a model of mainstreaming that is deliberative, rather than bureaucratic or consultative; that aims primarily to denaturalize and thereby politicize policy norms, rather than to pursue neutral policy-making or to recognize marginalized voices. The strengths of this potential model are that it would be sensitive to diverse citizen perspectives without reifying group identities, and would allow multiple inequalities to be considered in the policymaking process without hierarchies of oppression being perpetuated.

Notes

1 For these reasons, Nordic state feminist responses to the challenges of diversity are likely to differ from British state feminist responses as gender equality has such a privileged status in these countries while the Nordic equality discourse has tended to privilege a form of gender equality that is not well placed to deal with the challenge of multiculturalism (see Hobson et al. 2007; Siim 2007), frequently obscuring the experiences of immigrant and minority women (see Mulinari 2001; Towns 2002).

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