

Loughborough University Institutional Repository

Gender equality, intersectionality and gender diversity in Europe [review]

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Citation: NYHAGEN. L., 2016. Gender equality, intersectionality and gender diversity in Europe [review]. NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 24 (4), pp. 288-291.

Additional Information:

- This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research on 20 Feb 2017, available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2016.1276474>

Metadata Record: <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/23472>

Version: Accepted for publication

Publisher: Taylor and Francis © Line Nyhagen

Rights: This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Please cite the published version.

Gender Equality, Intersectionality, and Gender Diversity in Europe. Lise Rolandsen Augustín
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp 220, ISBN 978-1-137-02808-2

In this excellent book, Rolandsen Augustín examines processes of institutionalization and mobilisation related to gender equality policies at the European level. Through the analysis of institutional and organisational policy documents, as well as interviews with EU institutional stakeholders and representatives of civil society organizations, Rolandsen Augustín studies how transnational policy discourses about gender equality, and specifically discourses about gender-based violence, evolve, are negotiated and contested, and change over time. The main aim is to analyse how EU institutions and transnational women's organisations frame the issue of gender-based violence. The book thus combines a top-down perspective (processes of institutionalization within EU institutions) with a bottom-up perspective (mobilization and claims-making by civil society organisations). One of the central questions posed by Roland Augustín concerns the extent to which (and how) an intersectional lens, reflecting women's diverse interests, is being forwarded by institutional and civil society actors (labelled "transnational intersectionality"). Another important question is whether a "degendering" of gender equality concerns has taken place since article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty from 1997 introduced a multiple discrimination perspective on the grounds of sex (gender), racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation. Historically, gender has been the "most significant inequality category" (p. 9) in EU equality policies, and after the introduction of the multiple discrimination approach some women's organisations raised concerns that gender would become marginalised.

Roland Augustín reminds us that the EU is not a unitary and necessarily coherent institution, but rather a complex set of institutions where the different parts engage in multiple discourses and forward their own interests. Her analysis focuses on three EU institutions: the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. The empirical data from these institutions include a large number of policy documents on gender equality and gender-based violence as well as fourteen interviews with officials of the Council and the Commission and six interviews with Parliamentary members. In terms of civil society actors, the main empirical data include policy statements by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and interviews with eight transnational European women's organisations representing ethnic majority and minority women: EWL, European Women Lawyers Association, Women Against Violence Europe, Black European Women's Council, New Women for Europe, Women Citizens of Europe Network and Young Women from Minorities. As a reader, I would have liked to see more detailed information about the interviews, including descriptions of the universe of relevant organisations, sampling, the type of interviews conducted and their structure, as well as the actual interview questions. Nevertheless, the pairing of document analysis with interviews allows for a comprehensive and detailed analysis that enables an in-depth understanding of how different actors position themselves strategically in policy making, of processes of inclusion and exclusion (including resources

and power relations) that have a bearing upon who is being heard (or not) and their potential influence, and the resonance (or lack thereof) between different frames that are being forwarded, negotiated and contested.

The analysis of document and interview data is grounded in discourse analysis and specifically in critical frame analysis, thus placing the study within a now established tradition within feminist policy analysis (see, e.g., Verloo 2007). Rolandsen Augustín writes that frames are used strategically by stakeholders to forward their particular problem representations and policy ideas, and that the frames are forwarded within larger socio-political discourses that “limit the possibilities of frame articulation within a given context” (p. 15). The author thus not only examines how the different actors frame their policy ideas and select strategic policy frames in order to influence policy-making processes, but also which frames are more successful than others in that they become adopted by policy makers. A key to success is “frame resonance” or fit between a specific frame and the policy context it seeks to influence. A context is “created by the political and discursive opportunity structures of the EU as well as its civil society interface”, and the context “is marked by processes of inclusion and exclusion” (p. 11). In order to grasp these central aspects of the context, Rolandsen Augustín engages with different policy stakeholders by critically interrogating their discursive positioning as well as paying attention to power differentials between them.

As a contribution to methodological debates, Rolandsen Augustín convincingly argues that critical frame analysis (CFA) must pay attention to the specific contexts in which stakeholders forward claims and interact with each other, and that this enables negotiations, contestations and silences to be detected. She thus proposes that CFA should “move beyond the analysis of the frames ‘at face value’, that is, as they appear in policy documents” (p, 19). The analysis of policy documents is insufficient, Rolandsen Augustín suggests, as “it does not tell us much about what is going on outside the text, in the political and institutional context” (p. 19). By adding interview data to the analysis, a revised CFA is capable of producing a more comprehensive understanding of policy-making processes including power relations, conflicts and silences.

European women’s organisations have mobilized to influence the EU since the 1970s, and from the 1990s the number of women’s organisations actively lobbying the EU has increased significantly, writes Rolandsen Augustín. The organisational landscape is divided in that ethnic majority (white) women and ethnic minority women largely mobilise apart rather than together, thus mirroring patterns of women’s movement mobilisation in individual European countries (see Nyhagen Predelli and Halsaa 2012). At the transnational EU level, this ethnic divide was expressed in the founding of the EWL in 1990 as an organisation for white middle class working women where ethnic minority and migrant women were absent. One of the arguments that Rolandsen Augustín puts forward is that the EWL has sought to include minority *issues* on its agenda, but it has not sought to

operate in more inclusive ways by inviting ethnic minority *women* into the organisation (see also Bygnes 2013). The EWL has thus failed to give recognition and voice to ethnic minority women in Europe (p. 80). This has led to ethnic minority women establishing their own organisations, including the Black European Women’s Council (BEWC; founded in 2007). At the same time, the EU itself has not operated in inclusive ways, argues Rolandsen Augustín, as it has given priority to the voice of the EWL whilst excluding ethnic minority women’s groups from consultations. The EWL, which lacks legitimacy among ethnic minority women’s groups, thus inhabits a privileged position in terms of access to and influence on EU policies relating to women in Europe. This is partly due to a mismatch between the European Commission’s “preference for a single voice and representation of interests through one organization exclusively” and the actually diverse landscape of women’s organisations and interests (p. 85). A possible response is for the EWL to develop as a genuinely multi-ethnic, inclusive organisation capable of representing women’s diverse interests in legitimate ways; alternatively the EWL can lobby for the inclusion of a broader range of women’s organisations in EU policy consultations. Another phenomenon raised by Rolandsen Augustín is the emergence and increasing strength of conservative transnational women’s organisations (e.g., New Women for Europe) that lobby the EU in attempts to promote “a more traditional understanding of gender roles” (p. 166). Interesting questions for further study include whether these conservative organisations mobilise both ethnic majority and minority women, and whether they promote inclusionary or exclusionary forms of intersectionality.

Rolandsen Augustín approaches the question of whether EU policies have been “degendered” over time by examining the framing of policies on gender-based violence by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council in the period 1980-2010. As noted above, the analysis covers policy documents originating from EU institutions and European women’s organisations and qualitative interviews with stakeholders, thus moving beyond a text-based analysis in order to obtain knowledge about policy processes, strategies, conflicts and silences. The frame analysis is constructed via a mapping of a range of codes including “actors (responsible actors and target groups), problem representation, policy action, policy goals, underlying norms and causalities” (p. 98). The book pays particular attention to the EC’s three DAPHNE programmes from the 2000s, which funded “European projects within the field of violence against children, young people and women” (p. 97), but it also looks at policy documents from the 1980s and 1990s. In terms of policy documents issued by the European Parliament, these three policy phases are associated with different policy frames: while documents from the 1980s largely applied a “structural gender inequality” frame, those from the 1990s used a “women’s rights as human rights” frame, and the ones from the 2000s promoted a ‘public health’ frame. In other words, the public health frame gained prominence within the DAPHNE programmes, while the gendered frame became less important. However, Rolandsen Augustín asserts that gendered framings of the issue of violence against women have continued to play an

important role in policy documents stemming from other EU institutions, including those issued by the Council presidency, where the public health framing has instead been absent (p. 113). Rather than representing a unified and consistent framing of a particular policy issue (in this case violence against women), EU institutions thus seem to operate with multiple framings that may align and resonate with its various strategic interests. This insight is very useful for scholars seeking to understand policy processes at the European level.

In terms of whether changes over time indicate a degendering of the issue of violence against women, Rolandsen Augustín argues that a “nongendering” has taken place through the increasing use of the public health framing of this issue (p. 124). At the same time, however, the author argues that there has been “no clear processes of degendering” (p. 118), because EU institutions continue to articulate the problem of violence against women as a gender-based issue *as well as* a public health issue in various policy documents. Women’s organisations such as the EWL and others play an important role in pushing the “women’s rights as human rights” frame and insisting that the EU applies a gender-based approach to violence against women. Interestingly, Rolandsen Augustín also suggests that stakeholders such as the EWL and other women’s organisations may opt to use alternative and less gendered framings (e.g. framing gender inequality as an economic problem) in an attempt to secure policy action via “strategic bargaining” (pp. 126-129). Similarly, European institutions themselves, such as the European Parliament, actively use “degendering for strategic reasons in order to maximize its influence” (p. 134). The analysis thus illustrates the existence of multiple, contested and competing framings as well as the “strategic (de)gendering” that both European institutions and civil society organisations have made use of in order to further their own policy goals. Importantly, Rolandsen Augustín argues that “processes of degendering can be both positive and negative” in terms of whether or not they promote “gender equality goals in EU policies” (p. 135). Careful empirical studies are thus needed in order to assess whether a degendering of a policy issue has taken place and the eventual outcome of such degendering.

In terms of power differentials and issues of inclusion or exclusion, the author suggests that “constant discursive struggles” take place between stakeholders who promote dominant frames “in the foreground” and those who forward more marginal frames “in the background” (p. 138). Although the EWL might struggle to convince EU institutions to always adopt a “structural gender inequality frame”, other women’s organisations, and in particular those that represent ethnic minority women, are likely to struggle even more to persuade the EU as well as the EWL to adopt what Rolandsen Augustín labels an “inclusionary intersectionality” approach: “the recognition of the interplay between different inequality creating categories and the potentially negative effects of this interplay” (p. 142). In contrast, “exclusionary intersectionality” is “the recognition and saliency of one kind of inequality at the expense of a negative accentuation of other categories” (ibid.). Whether European institutions and civil society organisations choose to develop their intersectionality agendas

via the inclusionary or exclusionary routes remains to be studied in detail. Rolandsen Augustín's contribution is first and foremost an analysis of the strategic positioning of gender in policy documents and elite interviews, with a view to how gender relates to ethnic minority status and positioning. Her book skilfully advances academic scholarship on transnational women's organisations that represent ethnic majority and ethnic minority women's interests and how they engage (or not) with each other and with powerful European policy-making institutions. The book also provides a valuable and insightful analysis of degendering as a bargaining strategy that may have positive as well as negative effects on gender equality policies.

Dr Line Nyhagen, Reader in Sociology
Loughborough University
Loughborough, LE11 3TU, United Kingdom
L.Nyhagen@lboro.ac.uk

References

Bygnes, Susanne (2013). 'We are in Complete Agreement': The Diversity Issue, Disagreement and Change in the European Women's Lobby'. *Social Movement Studies* 12 (2): 199-213.

Nyhagen Predelli, Line and Beatrice Halsaa (2012). *Majority-Minority Relations in Contemporary Women's Movements: Strategic Sisterhood*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Verloo, Mieke, ed. (2007). *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality: A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press.