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Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (2014): 'The persistent invisibility of gender in EU policy: Introduction', in: Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds): 'The persistent invisibility of gender in EU policy' *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, Special issue 1, Vol. 18, Article 3, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2014-003a.htm>, pp. 1-20.

DOI: 10.1695/2014003

The persistent invisibility of gender in EU policy: Introduction

Elaine Weiner

McGill University, Department of Sociology

Heather MacRae

York University, Department of Political Science

Abstract: In this special issue of the European Integration online Papers (*EIoP*), we reconsider the practicability of gender mainstreaming in the European Union (EU) and its traction in the European integration project more broadly. We follow the feminist institutionalist turn which seeks to bring contemporary feminist insights and new institutionalism's various schools of thought to bear on one another. Out of this synergy comes the recognition of gender as an inherent feature of institutions and the opening up of new avenues to interrogate the dynamics of power and change. Collectively, we argue that the EU is a battleground where gender equality concerns must struggle against a masculine stronghold. We question whether there are better means to bring about gender mainstreaming's transformative triumph.

Keywords: comparative public policy; gender policy; governance; institutions; neo-institutionalism; non-discrimination; political science.

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Introduction

*And then, in his painful torment, I saw Sisyphus striving with both hands to raise a massive rock. He'd brace his arms and feet, then strain to push it uphill to the top. But just as he was going to get that stone across the crest, its overpowering weight would make it change direction. The cruel rock would roll back down again onto the plain. Then he'd strain once more to push it up the slope. His limbs dripped sweat, and dust rose from his head. – from **The Odyssey** (Book 11)¹*

Sisyphus' story has long captured not only the imagination of poets such as Homer and Ovid but also philosophers like Lucretius and artists such as Tiziano Vercelli (known as 'Titian'). In this tragic tale, Sisyphus' maddening fate involves a futile laboring. His punishment, exacted by the gods, entails enduring a ceaseless and eternal struggle. In preparing this special issue of *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, Sisyphus' story repeatedly came to mind in our efforts – as feminist scholars and activists – to make sense of the interminable struggle to gender European Union (EU) policy, particularly via gender mainstreaming. Like Sisyphus, we were buoyed by the apparent successes that we, and others, found in a variety of cases. And yet, we also noticed that these successes have not cumulated to a gender equitable polity. We began to feel like Sisyphus, doomed to push a massive rock uphill to no avail – its peak never reachable.

Nearly a decade ago, Yvonne Benschop and Mieke Verloo (2006) used this same analogy. They, however, optimistically concluded that the effort to embed a gender equality perspective into the European integration project was not quite as futile as Sisyphus' labor. Rather, they believed it more accurate to read gender mainstreaming's trajectory as the accomplishment of Sisyphus' sisters who – 'smarter than their brother' – ascend from a 'slightly improved position each time' (Benschop and Verloo 2006: 31). They sanguinely implied that, unlike Sisyphus, his sisters will *eventually* 'get the stone across the crest' and thus their labor will not have been in vain. We, however, interpret gender mainstreaming's Sisyphean struggle slightly differently. We concede that there are small – often hard-won – gains in mainstreaming gender in EU policy. However, there are numerous instances, some evinced in our case studies, in which gender mainstreaming

¹ Excerpted from <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/odyssey11.htm>, accessed 08.04.2014.

makes no progress; gender mainstreaming rolls back out of policy, or alternatively, never rolls in at all.

In this special issue of *EIoP*, we reconsider the practicability of gender mainstreaming in the EU and its traction in the EU integration project more broadly. We follow the feminist institutionalist turn which seeks to synthesize feminist insights with new institutionalist theory (for example, see Kenny 2007; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010; Mackay and Meier 2003; Mackay and Waylen 2009; Waylen 2014). Gender has traditionally proven to be a blind spot for new institutionalists. This amalgam brings gender explicitly to the fore as a ‘crucial dimension’ of institutions and opens up new avenues to interrogate the dynamics of power and change (Kenny and Mackay 2009: 274). A feminist institutionalist lens enables an expansion of our field of vision in two key ways. First, it allows us to see the machinations of gendered power as both institutional – that is, playing out within institutions – and also institutionalized – i.e., incorporated into the very *structure* of institutions. Second, the possibilities (or lack thereof) for institutions’ refashioning, particularly in terms of realizing gender equity in their design, are made more apparent (Kenny and Mackay 2009).

Our contributors draw attention to some of the ways in which gendered dynamics manifest within the EU’s institutional machinery. More often than not, the various institutional and institutionalized power plays challenge this reform agenda, *filtering out* much, if not all, regard for gender equality. Collectively, we are compelled to reconsider gender mainstreaming’s prospects against the backdrop of the EU’s gendering. As such, the prevailing optimism of feminist scholars and activists for gender mainstreaming in the EU appears somewhat ill-founded. Put simply, we suggest that small, incremental changes will not necessarily lead to the big, transformative change *anytime soon* (Streek and Thelen 2005). Why not? For that answer, we need to assess how gender matters, institutionally, in the EU.

The four case studies in this collection offer a wide-range of analyses of how gender equality gets filtered out – intentionally and not – or alternatively, remains invisible in EU policy processes, despite a formally-espoused commitment. We use the Council of Europe’s 1998 characterization of gender mainstreaming as ‘[including] a gender equality perspective...in all policies, at all levels and at all stages’ (Council of Europe 1998: 5). Effectively, while we may not be able to look exhaustively everywhere, the ubiquitous bearing of gender mainstreaming means we ought to be able to look *anywhere* to see gender mainstreaming of EU policy. Thus, our cases span arenas that are well-recognized as gendered (e.g., development) as well as others that have predominately been construed as gender-neutral, such as climate change. Some contributors focus on a given policy at the formulation stage, others turn their attention towards its implementation. Virtually all move analytically between micro- and more macro-levels. They rely most heavily on policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews with various policy stakeholders to map the EU’s gendering. From this, it becomes increasingly apparent that it is not merely the labor itself or the commitment to the task that prove so defeating for Sisyphus, but also the rock and the terrain to be navigated that act as formidable barriers.

1. Achieving gender equality in the EU

In order to situate the ambitions of gender mainstreaming, we must return to its origins and, to a lesser extent, to the beginnings of the gender equality project in the EU. Feminist institutionalism powerfully reminds us of the importance of such foundational underpinnings towards making sense of contemporary triumphs and tribulations in gender mainstreaming. Below, we outline the evolution of the gender equality project, highlighting, in particular, the immateriality of gender equality during the EU's inception.

Teresa Rees (1998) describes the EU's gender equality project as comprising three approaches: equal treatment/opportunity, positive action and gender mainstreaming. She characterizes the evolution of these approaches as 'tinkering', 'tailoring' and 'transforming'. For Rees, the passing of the first equal treatment directive on equal pay for the same work or work of equal value in the 1970s represents the start of the 'tinkering' stage. Importantly, however, for our purposes, this principle of equal treatment had already been acknowledged in Article 119 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome², albeit with a somewhat more limited application (i.e., solely to same work). Accordingly, it stated '[e]ach Member State shall during the first stage ensure and subsequently maintain the application of the principle that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work'. In intent, Article 119 was designed primarily to deter unfair competition in the Common Market, with some states using women to lower wages (Hoskyns 1996). Reflecting back, indications that the Treaty framers were guided by any principle other than economic gain and equal competition are virtually non-existent. As Catherine Hoskyns (1996: 57) wrote, '[a]t no time are the interests of women considered even obliquely or the issues of social justice raised'. Effectively, any consideration for gender equality was absent when the structure of the EU was laid down. Despite a lack of gender equity supports, the EU has crafted its gender equality project on top of (and out of) this arguably skewed economic edifice. Consequently, the EU's economic aims have shaped and conceivably trumped gender equality measures. Even as the EU seeks to increase the scope and purview of its gender equality project, the focus remains on economic growth and competitiveness. The long-standing treatment of gender equality as sameness and the confinement of its remedies to the labor market – realized in numerous equal opportunity/treatment directives – are the upshots of trying to somehow secure gender equality to the EU's skewed structure. Subsequently, in the 1980s, the EU introduced an array of positive action measures such as women-only training and family-friendly tactics such as flexible working. These 'tailoring' measures were intended to fit women into a Common Market designed for men.

In 1996, the EU formally introduced gender mainstreaming. Mainstreaming was conceived of as a compliment to the aforementioned approaches. However, the conceptualization of gender mainstreaming by the EU and its member states supposedly connoted a major turning point involving a recognition of (and remedy to) the pervasiveness of gender inequality. Unlike equal opportunity/treatment and positive action which thus far had targeted specific inequities between

² Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), signed 25.3.1957, entry into force 1.1.1958.

women and men – for example, in remuneration – gender mainstreaming took a more general aim, seeking to fundamentally change ‘the status quo (the mainstream)’ (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2008: 11). Indeed, the title of the European Commission’s (1996) original communication to the member states, ‘Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into All Community Policies and Activities’ – highlights the all-encompassing reach of gender mainstreaming. Significantly, gender mainstreaming is primarily an approach – dependent on specific instruments to effect change. While, for instance, equal opportunity/treatment represents a legal tool to effect change, gender mainstreaming signifies a way of doing policy that brings a ‘gender equality perspective’ into all phases of a policy’s lifecycle (Council of Europe 1998: 5). Practically, gender mainstreaming entails ‘mobilizing all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account...their possible effects on the respective situations of men and women (gender perspective)’ (European Commission 1996: 2). The approach to such ‘mobilization’ was to be ‘simultaneous’ and ‘global’ – cross-cutting the EU’s Directorate-Generals – and required ‘commitment’, ‘consistency’ and ‘cooperation’ from the ‘various players’ (European Commission 1996: 5-6, 21). Gender mainstreaming sought to re-envision EU policy aims, to locate gender equality as a substantive goal and to widely promote a new *modus operandi* for its realization. Therein lies its ‘transforming’ intent.

Notably, several scholars augur the advent of another approach, albeit still quite nascent, that repositions gender to sit amid multiple discriminatory grounds (Krízan, Skjeie and Squires 2012). Article 13 of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty³ set in motion this widening of scope, sanctioning the Council to ‘combat discrimination’ on six bases including gender. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, created and ratified in 2000, reemphasized the principle of ‘non-discrimination’, adding eleven additional grounds. Importantly, although the inequalities recognized have grown, the EU has largely continued to treat them separately in terms of legal framework and institutional set-up (Burri and Schiek 2009; Kantola 2010; Kantola and Nousianen 2012). While recognition of discrimination’s intersectional potential – implying discrimination on more than one ground at once – has entered EU political discourse, the closing recommendation of the 2009 report on *Multiple Discrimination in EU Law: Opportunities for Legal Responses to Intersectional Gender Discrimination?* (commissioned by the European Commission) suggests that gender mainstreaming’s foothold remains quite secure in terms of the EU’s equality project. It reads, ‘...In particular, the concept of gender mainstreaming should be developed in order to respond to multiple discrimination’ (Burri and Schiek 2009: 24).

2. Gender mainstreaming: The Sisyphean struggle

Feminist scholars and activists generally concur that gender mainstreaming in the EU has not realized its promise. Its results are, at best, mixed. In many ways, their hopes and expectations for

³ Consolidated version of the Treaty establishing the European Community, OJ C 340/173-306, 10.11.1997.

gender mainstreaming remain unmet. This apparent letdown has inspired a substantial literature that seeks to make sense of this equalizing strategy's shortcomings. These scholars and activists have pointed to a variety of factors to account for gender mainstreaming's unfulfilled promise. Curiously, however, in spite of the enduring elusiveness of transformative change, many of them have rather doggedly maintained their faith in its potential, deeming it a partial success or salvageable failure (for example, see Benschop and Verloo 2006; Beveridge and Nott 2002; Rees 2005).⁴ In so doing, they seem to assume – largely implicitly – that the small, rather piecemeal reforms gender mainstreaming has engendered are a sufficient condition for the eventual realization of gender mainstreaming's broad impact. We question this optimistic supposition. A revisiting of gender and power, as feminist institutionalists envision, obliges us to question when such small changes will, in fact, beget the big transformation.

While there seems to be a general consensus in the literature on gender mainstreaming in the EU that barriers to its effective implementation abound, the obstacles emphasized vary. Such impediments can be roughly situated in three bases: 1) definitional 2) actor-related and 3) structural. Numerous accounts point to the lack of a clear definition of gender mainstreaming and related concepts (Rees 2005). As Sonia Mazey (2000: 343) recognized early on, gender mainstreaming is a '...deceptively simple concept that is likely to be extremely difficult to operationalize'. As a result, 'the definition is left to the policy actors in various policy domains' (Meier and Celis 2011: 4). The malleability of gender mainstreaming's meaning could, in theory, prove opportune – allowing policy actors to better 'adapt' it 'to the policy domain in which it takes shape' and to 'own' the issue (Meier and Celis 2011: 4). In practice, however, the demotion of gender mainstreaming in favor of other political and/or economic priorities (Elgström 2000; Stratigaki 2004) and a missing sense of proprietorship are more often the outcomes (Hoskyns 2004). Effectively, gender mainstreaming's ambiguity weighs it down. Many construe *how* EU policy actors grapple with mainstreaming gender as a compounding, if not central, impediment. Several have cited a lack of 'gender perspective' or expertise among EU policy actors as hampering gender mainstreaming's mobility, and, at times, rendering it completely immobile (Cavaghan 2012; Elman 2007; Lombardo and Meier 2006). Others regard the holding back of gender mainstreaming as more deliberate, citing a paucity of political will, weak cooperation among stakeholders, insufficient resources and an overreliance on 'soft' incentives (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2009; Mósesdóttir and Erlingsdóttir 2005; Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Verloo 2001; Woodward 2003). Despite stressing the vagueness of gender mainstreaming or the vigor to propel it forward, these explanations share a conviction that such *institutional* challenges are surmountable.

Comparatively fewer feminist scholars and activists *structurally* situate gender mainstreaming's deterrents in the EU. In other words, they cite the EU as an institution as problematic and underscore a theoretical and practical necessity to consider the (ir)reconcilability of gender equality goals with the European integration project. Some regard the EU as 'all about

⁴ There are a few, such as Éva Fodor (2006), who do not equivocate about gender mainstreaming, judging it an undeniable failure.

macroeconomic policy...distanced from the social consequences of policies being pursued' (Hoskyns 2004: 3). Several posit the capitalist logics, extant from the European integration project's inception, to be the main obstruction (Meier and Celis 2011; Walby 2004). A number of scholars point to the more recent development of a neoliberal rationale and 'technology' of EU governance as a challenge to gender mainstreaming's achievement (Kantola and Squires 2012; Wöhl 2008). Others suggest that the EU constitutes an agglomeration of largely self-perpetuating 'male power' and masculine interests (Kronsell 2005; Lombardo 2003: 171). Most question how the EU's gender equality project can ever overcome such deeply-entrenched *institutionalized* authority, whether economic and/or male. Regardless, they too are unwilling to give up on gender mainstreaming.

Despite nearly two decades of small changes at best, many feminist scholars and activists persist in believing that they bode revolutionary reform, with the EU coming to be, in the end, a gender-equal polity. Yet, with gender mainstreaming exacted in rather uneven fashion from its outset and often yielding uninspiring outcomes, we wonder whether we have sufficiently grasped where its challenges lie.

3. Gender and institutions

...GM [gender mainstreaming] has so far failed to affect core policy areas or radically transform policy processes within the European institutions....Feminist strategies may have to be revisited....They may have to rely more on the knowledge of how power, structures and individuals interact (Stratigaki 2005: 181-182).

In our reading of the abundant literature on gender mainstreaming in the EU, we find Maria Stratigaki's prompt – now nearly a decade old – to feminist scholars and activists to (re)turn to knowledge about the interplay of power and institutions in order to prevent gender mainstreaming from being a failed project rather premonitory, with feminist institutionalists now striving to encourage dialogue (and ultimately a synthesis) between feminism and new institutionalism (Kenny 2007: 95).

Notably, feminist scholars' *interest* in institutions – theoretically as well as more empirically – is far from a recent enterprise, although interchange with new institutionalism has been minimal.⁵ As of the late 1980s, the theoretical sensibilities of many feminist scholars and activists had moved beyond notions of gender as a social category, role and/or identity towards appreciating gender as a 'patterning of difference and domination through distinctions between men and women...integral to many societal processes' (Acker 1992: 554). Scholars such as Raewyn W. Connell (1987, 2002) delineated the 'patterning' and interplay of gender relations inside institutions and out – as the 'gender regime' and 'gender order', respectively. Others turned to

⁵ As Meryl Kenny (2007: 95) affirms, 'the majority of feminist political science is broadly institutional in focus, yet does not use new institutional theory'.

theorizing the institutional embeddedness of gender (Acker 1990; Lorber 1994). In Joan Acker's (1992: 567) terms, 'gendered institutions' connoted the presence of gender in 'the processes, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life'. Others have gone on to underscore the autonomy of gender, situating it on the same analytic plane as 'the economy and the polity' (Risman 2004: 446). Accordingly, gender is a 'social structure', with its processes construed as multi-dimensional – that is, institutional (playing out in interactions and individually internalized) and institutionalized – and interconnected (Risman 1998).⁶

This apprehension of gender as profoundly entangled in institutions has made possible critical insights from feminist scholars as to the workings of power in both formal and informal institutions with regard to origin, operation and outcome.⁷ In Georgina Waylen's (2014) terms, gendered power takes shape 'nominally' and 'substantively'. The gender asymmetry manifests in access to power (i.e., command over resources, privilege, opportunity), with men's numerical dominance of positions of power reflecting their stronghold (Chappell and Waylen 2013). However, even when the distribution shifts, either towards parity or wholly in women's favor, this does not ensure that institutions will 'operate differently' (Chappell and Waylen 2013: 601). Institutions' gendering, in substantive terms, signals the workings of 'gender bias' (Waylen 2014). Such bias is founded in 'social norms' that are 'based on accepted ideas about masculinity and femininity' – with the former typically privileged or valued over the latter – that permeate institutions' functioning (Waylen 2014: 215).

While the *hows* and *whys* of gender's institutional entrenchment have informed a vast swath of feminist work for several decades, Stratigaki's prod urges feminist scholars to revisit their theoretical wherewithal in order to grapple with *what* disrupts gender and, in due course, inspires its reform. Indeed, this latter query is part and parcel of the feminist mission. The desire to inform about the gendered status quo – past and present – and reform it towards an egalitarian future, distinguishes the feminist mandate. Such 'big questions' have compelled feminist scholars to turn to new institutionalism in an effort to enhance their 'analytic leverage,' particularly with regard to understanding 'continuity and change' in institutions (Kenny and Mackay 2009: 272-273).

While theoretical and methodological propensities vary among the new institutionalisms, queries around the 'key themes' of 'formal and informal institutions, institutional creation, continuity and change, structure and agency, and power' sit at their collective analytic core (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010: 573). Moreover, across the variants, institutions are typically treated as 'relatively enduring features of political and social life (rules, norms, procedures) that structure behavior' (Mahoney and Thelen 2010: 4). These features are not easily or immediately alterable. Notably, for a long time, new institutionalists deemed institutional change to be dependent on external shocks that incurred sudden reform. Without such disruption, a path-dependent institutional

⁶ 'If gender were primarily inside us as personalities, or primarily based in interactional stereotypes, or primarily a structure of economic inequality, we could choose one level to attach and hope for dramatic changes' (Risman 1998: 162).

⁷ For an extensive list of such scholarship, see Fiona Mackay and Petra Meier (2003).

inertia presumably predominated (Krasner 1984; Pierson 2004). Increasingly, however, new institutionalists are coalescing around a more continuous conception of institutional remodelling that emphasizes the subtle and ‘organic’ nature of institutional evolution and its impetuses as endogenous and/or exogenous (Grief and Laitin 2004; Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Streeck and Thelen 2005).

With rare exception (Skocpol 1992), however, new institutionalists’ to-date have remained predominately gender-blind.⁸ Although new institutionalists, particularly proponents of its historical and sociological strands, concede that hidden norms and values undergird institutional processes, the *gendered* concealments have been largely neglected. In Joni Lovenduski’s terms, ‘...any good institutionalist should realise the importance of gender relations to the configuration of institutions. *But they do not*’ (2011: vii, *our emphasis*). For feminists, this deficit further means that new institutionalists fall short in their apprehension of the (re)construction of power. While some frame feminist institutionalism as a ‘reminder’ to new institutionalists that gender matters for institutions, we think it also a resounding exhortation that institutions themselves matter greatly (Lovenduski 2011: vii). This recasting of new institutionalism taps into unmet potential, particularly in terms of: 1) removing new institutionalists’ gender blinders, permitting them a better view of power and 2) availing feminists of new conceptual tools in order to better analyze the bounds of change ‘in pursuit of gender justice’ (MacKay, Munro and Waylen: 2009: 254).

In their efforts to mark out feminist institutionalism, some scholars have characterized it as a ‘new’ or emerging variant of new institutionalist approaches (Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 31; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010: 573). In our interpretation, however, feminist institutionalism is not a supplement to the existing spectrum of new institutionalist approaches. Rather, it sets out a new research agenda that encourages a synergy between feminist and new institutionalist theories to forge a better understanding of the ‘gendered dynamics of political life’ (Krook and MacKay 2011: 14). There is no new feminist school of new institutionalism here intended; rather, the aim is to bring feminist insights and new institutionalism’s various schools of thought to bear on one another.

This invitation for exchange is opportune. Since the early 2000s, an interest in learning, conceptually and theoretically, from each other has typified the new institutionalisms. We, along with our feminist contributors, view this ‘rapprochement’ as opening up opportunity for further give and take (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010: 576). The ensuing ‘borrowing’ and ‘sharing’ among new institutionalism’s various schools has substantially blurred the boundaries such that the ‘labels’ (e.g., historical, sociological) are not nearly as telling – as they arguably once were – about scholars’ theoretical and methodological proclivities (Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 40-41). In this special issue of *EIoP*, we encourage more boundary crossing.⁹ At this point, we see the

⁸ As Georgina Waylen (2014: 214) also points out, ‘in the few cases where gender is mentioned, it is often treated as a static background variable’.

⁹ Some of feminist institutionalism’s advocates, drawing on lessons learned from the gendered welfare state scholarship, see a more a more ‘ecumenical’ approach to the new institutionalisms as strategically necessary in order to achieve mainstream impact (Mackay 2011: 182).

most productive and apparent yields as founded in the amalgam between feminism and three of the four main new institutionalist approaches – historical, sociological and discursive.¹⁰ The reconcilability of feminism and rational choice new institutionalist theories is less obvious due to epistemological discord (Driscoll and Krook 2009; Kenny and Mackay 2009: 273).¹¹ Some are quite skeptical about its prospects, deeming its conceptual tools to ‘contain a high degree of gender bias’; others posit that rational choice scholars’ earnest efforts to theoretically accommodate ‘identity and expression’ may offer a way in for a *gendered* actor (Calvert 2002; Driscoll and Krook 2009: 239; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010: 573; Mackay and Meier 2003: 15).

Of the three new institutionalist approaches we consider especially promising in terms of fruitful dialogue, the historical version represents the most elaborated strand (Pierson 2004). Historical institutionalists view institutions as the product of ‘largely contingent events and political struggles’, subscribing to a logic of path dependency that heavily prescribes the *whats* and *whens* of institutions’ reform (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010: 575). Focused principally on the meso-level and relying on ‘structured comparison and historical process tracing,’ historical institutionalists’ central goal is to make out the causal mechanisms underlying institutions’ development over time (Waylen 2009: 246). New institutionalists of a sociological bent conceive of institutions as ‘systems of meaning’ that dictate their behavior (i.e., as an institution) and the actions of the individual actors functioning within them (Peters 2012: 133; Powell and DiMaggio 1991). Sociological institutionalists move between macro- (structure) and micro- (agency) dynamics, emphasizing their co-constitutive character. Sociologist institutionalists construe the culture of institutions – that is, their norms (formal and not) and rules – as integral in shaping institutional actors’ notions of appropriate conduct. Among the newest of the new institutionalisms is discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2010). Ideas, in terms of their content, communication and (institutional) context, define discursive institutionalists’ preoccupations. They engage a broad span in terms of analytic focus – from micro to macro. Discursive institutionalism diverges, however, from older institutionalisms in its treatment of institutions as internalized in actors whose “background ideational abilities” explain how they create and maintain institutions and whose “foreground discursive abilities” enable them to communicate critically...to change (or maintain them)’ (Schmidt 2008, 2010: 4).

In essence, feminist scholars open up new institutionalists’ eyes to see power relations as gendered. New institutionalism, in turn, offers a variety of adaptable means to ‘map gendered processes’ towards better understanding creation, stasis and change in institutions (Lovenduski 2011: x). Bringing, for instance, feminist insights together with those of new institutionalists could involve shedding light on the culture of an institution, appreciating, in particular, its mutually-reinforcing gendered origins and effects. Feminist institutionalism’s scope extends quite

¹⁰ The position of discursive new institutionalism as a fourth school is a more recent classification (Hall and Taylor 1996; Schmidt 2010). Several scholars also point to other – albeit less dominant – modes of new institutionalist thought such as ‘international’ and ‘empirical’ (Lowndes and Roberts 2013; Peters 2012).

broadly to understanding how gender is implicated in ‘wider political processes’ (Mackay 2011: 195). In this special issue, however, our feminist institutionalist interventions focus on a single institution – that is, the EU. We investigate how gender mainstreaming in the EU is shifting (and not) the gendered balance of power towards the ultimate realization of a ‘gender just’ polity (Waylen 2011, 2013: 5).

4. Gendered power plays in EU policy

Meryl Kenny’s (2007) question, ‘If a gendered approach is incorporated into new institutionalist analysis what will change?’ underscores the theoretical indistinctness of this encounter (Kenny 2007: 95).¹² As Kenny (2007: 97) explains, “‘Gendering’ new institutionalism may go so far as to change and transform existing new institutional concepts or may even generate new ones’. In this special issue of *EIoP*, our contributors enthusiastically partake in the feminist institutionalist theory-building project to (re)interrogate gender mainstreaming’s trajectory in the EU.

The four case studies to follow deploy feminist institutionalism as a theoretical catalyst towards better understanding gender mainstreaming’s path in the EU. Some are more devout, following a particular school of new institutionalism, recasting it through a feminist lens. Others, more agnostically, mix and merge theoretical concepts from the different types of new institutionalism and, at times, other theoretical traditions – refashioning them to accommodate gender. All the contributions investigate policy development, using a variety of methodological ‘tools’ to discern course. Together, they trace gender mainstreaming’s erratic trajectory in and out of a multiplicity of EU policy domains, making visible how gendered power relations within the EU’s institutional machinery help and hinder gender mainstreaming. The policy realms under investigation cross the gamut, from those that fundamentally are for and about women *and* men (e.g., multiple discrimination) and to others that ostensibly have nothing to do with people, whether women or men, at all (e.g., climate change). All reaffirm the Sisyphean struggle of gender mainstreaming, with gender equality considerations largely filtered out in *all* of these policy arenas, despite its obligatory stature.

The first article highlights a policy realm that, on the surface, appears quite open to ‘gender equality considerations’. Yet, on closer examination, the lack of support for gender mainstreaming is disquieting. The following article takes us a step further as its authors scrutinize (and theorize) ‘resistance’ to gender mainstreaming ‘change’, using EU research policy as their empirical base. The third article contemplates how the challenges to mainstreaming gender intensify when an issue such as climate change necessarily involves a concerted response from disparate policy realms. The final contribution presages the coming complications as the EU’s ‘multiple discrimination’ approach destabilizes gender equality’s primacy. Across the EU, power

¹² The very recent feminist institutionalist turn – not yet a decade old – means that its currency in terms of use is still limited, albeit growing (for example, see Bjarnegård and Kenny 2014; Borbíró 2011; Gains and Lowndes 2014; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay 2009).

remains heavily masculinized, with male interests largely dictating the goings on – formally and informally – within its institutions and built-in to its foundational edifice. The novelty – and more powerfully, the illustrative force – of this collection lies in our collective consensus on gender’s authority *in* and its intrinsicness *to* the EU as an *institution*. Woefully, the great transformation gender mainstreaming promised appears nowhere in sight.

Petra Debusscher aims her analytic lens at the EU policy arena considered to be ‘particularly amenable’ to gender mainstreaming – i.e., development policy (Debusscher 2014). Indeed, the EU’s first attempts to reconcile the goal of gender equality with its development policy began in the mid-1970s, nearly two decades prior to gender mainstreaming’s formalization. As Debusscher rightly posits, this longevity should denote a considerable accumulation of experience and expertise among the EU’s various development policy protagonists. As she shows, however, in a case study of EU development aid to Rwanda – a developing country quite receptive to promoting gender equality – the EU’s professed commitment to gender mainstreaming does not necessarily insure its actual practice. Debusscher, taking a feminist sociological institutionalist approach, locates the culpability for this breakdown in the EU as *an institution* where competing aims (e.g., economic versus social) yield ‘decoupling’ in the ‘system’ and any regard for gender only factors in when construed as economically ‘instrumental’. Institutionalized *modus operandi* within the EU’s external services bolster this disconnect, with power asymmetries acutely gendered. Substantively, ‘apathy’ for gender equality issues prevails in the EU’s Delegations. In nominative terms, those staff in EU Delegations charged with mainstreaming gender are very often low-ranking females, lacking much, if any, decision-making authority or capacity to mobilize resources. Ultimately, gendered power inequities in EU development policy that are mutually reinforcing – institutional and institutionalized as well as formal and informal – mean the filtering out of gender mainstreaming in EU development policy.

Lut Mergaert and Emanuela Lombardo, like Debusscher, highlight the gap between rhetoric and reality in their investigation of gender mainstreaming in EU research policy, focusing specifically on the Directorate-General (DG) for Research and Innovation’s Framework Program 6 which ran from 2002 to 2006 (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014). Mergaert and Lombardo – taking advantage of the theory-building prospects inherent in feminist institutionalism – seek to theorize manifestations of ‘resistance’. Drawing on participant observation, official policy documents from DG Research and Innovation and interviews with European Commission officials and consultants, they discover multiple occasions of resistance that aim to preserve the status quo, hindering gender mainstreaming’s implementation in EU research policy,. They develop a typology of ‘resistances’, distinguishing them in terms of their individual versus institutional and explicit or implicit workings. The reasons underlying such opposition vary. They identify incapacity with regard to expertise, time and/or resources/tools and patriarchal norms as key barriers to gender mainstreaming among civil servants employed in DG Research and Innovation. Such resistances, as Mergaert and Lombardo point out, *institutionalized* in this DG, are buttressed by a wider *institution* – that is, the EU – that pays lip service to gender equality but continues, quite systematically, to endorse men’s privilege. In naming ‘resistances’, Mergaert and

Lombardo shed new light on the hurdles involved in institutional transformation, particularly when male authority is so entrenched *and* the change sought *is* a ‘gender change’.

Gill Allwood tackles the question of how gender equality is regarded, and later addressed, when policy issues are cross-cutting – that is, their address implicates multiple policy domains (Allwood 2014). She builds her theoretical framework via ‘gendering’ select emphases drawn from across the new institutionalisms – discursive, historical and sociological – to consider the problem of gender mainstreaming in EU climate change policy. She shows how, in EU discourse on climate action, ‘women’ and ‘men’ are largely extraneous. While gender mainstreaming necessitates thinking about ‘people’ in policy, the discursive supremacy here of ‘markets, technology and security’ displaces people and, consequently, closes off visibility of climate change’s gendered nature. While some of the EU’s institutional actors such as the European Parliament are not necessarily so gender-blind, they lack the fortitude to overturn a ‘logic of appropriateness’ – to which more powerful actors (e.g., Council of the European Union) subscribe – that dictates disregarding gender. A further complexity entails bringing gender equality considerations to bear in a scenario where, in order to affect a desired end, several policy arenas must cohere to address such a cross-cutting challenge. For policymakers, typically tasked with one policy ‘sector’, this is an unfamiliar undertaking.

Johanna Kantola, lastly, turns our attention to the EU’s very current efforts to resituate gender inequality among several discriminatory grounds in its new ‘multiple discrimination’ approach (Kantola 2014). This shift, says Kantola, portends a ‘new politics of equality’ across Europe, where gender, in theory, no longer occupies its privileged position. Relying on a theoretical intermingling of feminist discursive institutionalism and soft Europeanization, Kantola illuminates the powerful ideational sway of the EU in Nordic countries’ articulation of similar discourses on multiple or ‘multidimensional’ discrimination. The ‘soft law’ tactics of the EU’s multiple discrimination approach, however, mean that such discursive commonalities do not necessarily connote into parallel institutional ‘architectures’. For instance, Denmark’s ‘Equality and Discrimination Ombud and the Equality Tribunal’ reflects a unification of institutional recourses for discrimination – gender and otherwise. The Danes have not sought, however, like the Swedes and Norwegians, to consolidate their anti-discrimination legislation. In Finland, by contrast, gender is likely to remain set apart from other discriminatory bases, with a distinct oversight body and law. Here, tremendous flux in ‘politics and power’ around the ‘meaning’ of inequality, transnationally and nationally, works to destabilize its institutional ‘solutions’ – in the Nordic states – in varied ways. In a broader sense, Kantola signals a new complexity added to the struggle to mainstream gender.

Conclusion

For many feminists and activists, gender mainstreaming represents a ‘radical approach,’ involving a ‘wholesale redesign of systems and structures’ such that inequalities between women and men – whether individually-felt or group-based – are eradicated (Rees 2000: 3; Verloo 2001).

This *EIoP* special issue, titled, ‘The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy’, illuminates a polity still wanting in terms of reaching this goal. Collectively, our contributors underscore a multitude of ways in which the workings of gendered power in the EU in various policy arenas filter out, if not wholly disregard, the obligatory goal of gender equality. While we do find some evidence of change, the changes are more often localized and difficult to sustain, thereby thwarting gender mainstreaming’s more expansive target. Indeed, Louise Chappell’s (2011: 179) contention that such changes risk being ‘quickly forgotten’ if not ‘constantly monitored and vigilantly enforced,’ signals the intractability of the EU’s gender regime – and that of institutions more generally – to reform.

The EU is a battleground where gender equality concerns struggle against a masculine stronghold. Are there better weapons with which to wage – and eventually win – this fight? We do not purport to have the answer to this challenge. Our hope is that this special issue will serve as a moment to take stock of gender mainstreaming’s course in the EU. New institutionalists say that change can come incrementally. However, with gender mainstreaming lapsing over and over again, can we necessarily conclude that we are truly gaining ground? And, if so, how long must we wait for these smaller strides to cumulate to the big change?

Condemned by the gods, Sisyphus was never able to alter his fate or the nature of his task, for all eternity. Therein lies the fundamental difference between our endeavors. Unlike Sisyphus, we have the opportunity to determine our own fate. We can set a new course. Perhaps, we need not help push this rock over the hill but rather, we must work to find an alternative path that enables us to reach the end point.

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Contact

Elaine Weiner: Associate Professor in Sociology at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Professor Elaine Weiner
McGill University
Department of Sociology
855 Sherbrooke Street West
712 Leacock Building
Montreal, QC H3A 2T7
CANADA
E-mail: elaine.weiner@mcgill.ca

Heather MacRae: Jean Monnet Chair and an Associate Professor in Political Science at York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Professor Heather MacRae
York University
Department of Political Science
S672 Ross Building
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
CANDADA
E-mail: hmacrae@yorku.ca