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Same, Different or Diverse?

An Analysis of the European Union's Gender Mainstreaming
Policies- a Critical Comment

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Abstract

This paper examines the adoption of the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is to explore how gender equality has been constructed and what this implies in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation. By using discourse theory drawing mainly on Laclau and Mouffe, the policy document 'A Roadmap for Equality between women and men 2006-2010' is analyzed. In this respect the discourse theoretical framework functions as both theory and method. In order to structure the analysis, Laclau and Mouffe´s theoretical tools are combined with Judith Squire's theories on 'feminist political strategies'. Concepts such as *inclusion, reversal* and *displacement* are applied to the empirical material. The paper argues that the construction of gender equality is articulated around narrow representations of gender drawing upon notions of 'sameness' and 'difference' but concludes that there are elements aspiring to 'move beyond gender' too.

Key words: gender mainstreaming, the EU, gender equality, discourse theory, representations.

One is not born a woman but rather becomes one

Simone De Beauvoir 1949

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1 Introduction

"Gender mainstreaming is the (re) organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by actors normally involved in policy making" (Council of Europe 1998).

In the past decade, the concept of gender mainstreaming has emerged as a new equality strategy within the European Union (EU). The EU has introduced gender mainstreaming as the main strategy to "promote equality between men and women in all activities and policies at all levels" (COM (96) 650 final, 1997:12). This process of policy succession has been characterized by the emergence of a broader underlying 'equality policy frame', derived from a feminist critique of the failure to acknowledge gender inequalities beyond the workplace. Initially the concept of gender mainstreaming was embraced by both policymakers and scholars. It has been called a "revolutionary change in the international and domestic policy process" (Pollack & Hafner-Burton 2002:340) - as well as a "paradigm shift in thinking about gender" (Rees 2002:13). Thus, gender mainstreaming was supposed to be the strategy that would bring the Union further towards equality between men and women. However, within the feminist debate the concept of gender mainstreaming has been widely criticized. First of all, the concept itself is not unproblematic as such and it has encapsulated many of the tensions and dilemmas in feminist theory and practice. Here, discussions about the concept's transformative potentials come into the picture as well as discussions about whether gender mainstreaming can fulfill its goal as the revolutionary equality strategy it was set out to be.

1.1 Purpose and Problem

As an attempt to respond to current feminist debate, I turn to theory in order to critically examine how the concept of gender mainstreaming has been adopted within the EU's mainstreaming policies. More specifically, the purpose is to explore how gender equality has been constructed and what this implies in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation. The research questions guiding this study are:

How is gender equality constructed within the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies? What does this imply in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation?

A main argument here is that the impact gender mainstreaming might have on a more gender equal society depends on the way in which it is interpreted and in particular in the ways the notion of gender equality is interpreted. By following Verloo, I believe it is important to explore what gender equality means in policy, rather than assuming consensus about it (Verloo 2005:356).

A further argument is that an understanding of what gender mainstreaming might entail in a certain political context (e.g. in the context of the EU), opens up possibilities for discussions about the fundamental aims of the concept. That is, whether women are the subjects of change and the goal is to fit women into the status quo, rather than transforming it (see Rönnblom 2005). Since a foundational aim of gender mainstreaming is to deliver gender sensitive policy and above all *transform* gender relations, I found it essential to examine the EU´s representations of gender equality. In this respect the study could be viewed as a contribution to feminist debate concerning the concept's transformative potential.

Finally, by linking theory and practice, the study is also an attempt to respond to Iris Marion Young's call for feminists to take up on a more pragmatic direction by "categorizing, explaining, developing accounts and arguments that are tied to specific practical and political problems" (Young 1994:717*f*). Thus, to examine the construction of gender equality within the EU´s gender-mainstreaming policies is my response to that.

1.2   Material and Delimitation

Before commencing the study it is important to tease out what I mean with 'the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies'. Clearly, a decade of mainstreaming involves a vast number of policy initiatives, decisions and implementations and it would be impossible to cover them all. Therefore, I have decided to limit the scope of the study to the document: *A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010* (COM (2006) 92 final). Although 'the Roadmap' is not a blueprint in any sense (tied to any legal and binding documents for the member states), it still embodies the Union's official standpoint on gender equality. In this respect it functions as a framework for both existing and future mainstreaming strategies and as such the material should be considered representative for 'the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies'. As the Commissioner Vladimir Spidla, responsible for equal opportunities, points out in the foreword: "This Roadmap paves the way for new actions in combination with existing successful ones" (COM (2006) 92 final). Other material used in the study consists of secondary sources, such as scientific articles and books, as well as policy documents and material from the Internet.

1.3   Methodological Considerations

The study takes its starting point in the notion that research can never be objective or neutral. Rather, I view knowledge as theoretically and discursively laden- where the choice of method usually depends on the research question at stake (Marsh & Stoker 2002:26,202). This means that I reject the rationalist idea on objectivity. It also means that I am aware of my own personal bias (white educated woman), and how my methodological choices might affect the essence of the study. Nevertheless, by following Bacchi, my argument here is that it would be an impossibility to analyze any social condition without putting interpretations to the same (see Bacchi 1999:9). Rather, interpretations shape the perception of our social and political reality, which in the end produces discourses (forms of representations) of meanings and power.

My point is that we cannot talk about representation outside their representations (*Ibid.*). This means that I am aware of how I as a researcher, am part of the discourse or representation as well. Unable to "escape" in any objective sense, I see myself as an active participant in the analysis (see Lundquist 1993:104). In other words, representations are interlocked in a production of discourses. These shape the way political problems or policy fields- such as gender mainstreaming has been formulated. This in turn, is bound by the power to define "the right problems and solutions to those designing the policy" (Rönnblom 2005:166).

1.3.1   Policy as Discourse

For the arguments put forward above, I have chosen to do a discourse analysis. In the 'methodology chapter', I present this method further and explain how it is applied in the analysis. However, before doing that I would like to draw attention to some advantages of understanding policy fields as production of discourses. This is mainly done to emphasize the usefulness of discourse analysis to the study of policy fields and how this coincides with this particular study.

As mentioned above, to view policy fields as discourses implicates a focus on the production of meanings (Bacchi 1999:39). This is especially important if one is set out to explore certain representations (such as gender and equality) and what they might imply. Moreover, a focus on discourses also involves an interest in the ways in which arguments are structured and in the ways subjects are constituted in the language (*Ibid.* 1999:41). As Maclure points out: "taking policy texts apart", interrogating them is one of the obvious uses of discourse analysis (Maclure 1994 in Bacchi 1999:42). At the same time discourse analysis offers a significant step away from traditional approaches to policy analysis by challenging notions of absolute knowledge or truth (*Ibid.* 1999:40). From a feminist perspective committed to transformations, and the rejection of naturalized power structures this is especially important. In this respect the policy field becomes an open space for discussions on representations. By doing that it is also possible to challenge

and above all *transform* representations that are taken as natural or given. That I would argue is the essence of any feminist political goal, hence the heart of gender mainstreaming. Consequently, by viewing 'policy as a discourse' paves the way for discussions about unequal social relations and the possibilities of transformation and social change.

1.4   Central Concepts

Just as important as it is to identify what I mean by 'the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies', it is equally important to clarify the notion of gender and feminism. Both feminism and gender are widely used concepts with varieties of meanings and definitions. This section seeks to address that. My main argument here is that a general understanding of feminism and gender is essential to any debates regarding gender mainstreaming.

1.4.1 Feminism

First of all it is important to point out that *feminism* is a highly contested concept surrounded by several understandings and interpretations. No definition is completely satisfactory because the term is ever changing and because there is so many schools of thought with extensively varying views (Arneil 1999:3). As such feminism could be understood as covering a wide variety of perspectives and practices. Feminism could both be characterized as a set of ideas as well as a social movement. For instance Millns & Whitty have described feminism through its: "[...] focus on gender as a central organizing principle of social life; an emphasis on the concept of power and the ways that it effects social relations; and a unwavering commitment to progressive social change" (Millns & Whitty 1999:1 in Shaw 2001:1). Arneil on the other hand understands feminism as: "The recognition that, virtually across time and space, men and women are unequal in the power they have, either in society or over their own lives, and the corollary belief that men and women should be equal [...] and the corollary belief that all schools of knowledge must be re-examined and understood to reveal the extent to which they ignore gender" (Arneil 1999:3*f*).

As one can observe, there is no unitary definition of feminism *per se*. Nevertheless, there are some important aspects that could be said framing the essence of feminism. That is the commitment to gender equality and the belief in social change. Likewise is the notion of 'politics as power, together with the rejection of the political as located only within the institutional arena of government. That is, the conception of politics as largely indistinguishable from anything else (Squires 1999:23). The claim that 'the personal is political' and the rejection of the dichotomies public/private, still encompasses much of feminist theory and practice today.

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1.4.2 Gender

"When 'gender' is understood to be constructed by 'culture' in the same way that 'sex' is constructed by 'nature', then not biology but culture becomes destiny"
(Butler 1990 in Yuval-Davis 1997:8).

Gender is an equally complex concept with varieties of conceptualizations. Considering the somewhat limited framework provided here, I have chosen to give a short but concise introduction to this category.

Gayle Rubin is usually considered a pioneer within the gender discourse through her classic article[1] where she coined the phrase *sex/gender system*. The *sex/gender system* seeks to explain female subordination, and more explicitly how biological differences are strengthen and maintained through sexual and reproductive relations and the division of labor (Ljung 1998:242*f,* Gothlin 1999:3). In everyday usage the terms 'gender' and 'sex' are often used synonymous. This is contradictive to the whole idea of gender since it does not refer to biology but to the ideological and material relations that exist between them. Or in other words, how biological differences are strongly linked to the socially constructed gender and how this has justified unequal social relations between women and men (Steans 1998:10*f*). As Stean has put it elsewhere "the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' do not describe natural characteristics, but are gendered terms" (*Ibid.*1998:10). The Swedish researcher Hirdman uses the same lines of arguments and points out that "gender creates a deeper understanding of what we talk about are symbols, ideas and stereotypes" (Hirdman 1998 in Gothlin 1993:12). In this respect gender is a useful tool to understand historical patterns of female subordination at the same time as it provides an exit from biological determinism and essentialism.

Despite its usefulness, it is important to point out that the term has not remained unchallenged within feminist research. Some have pointed out the dangers of the dichotomy sex/gender, by its reproduction of a naturalization of the socially constructed concepts of biology and culture (Gothlin 1998:9). Here, the question of biology comes into the picture and whether this is something that could in fact be distinguished from cultural constructions. However, this discussion brings us down on an ontological sidetrack, which is way beyond the scope of this study. Instead I stay with the assumption of gender as historically and culturally constructed differences based on the biological division of sex.

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[1] Rubin 1975: *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex*

1.5 Related Research

As noted previously, the concept of gender mainstreaming has gained great ascendance within the EU´s policy machinery. As such it has been subjected to several debates, research and discussions. There is a fair amount of literature available for the interested. Scholars have focused on everything from its conceptualization (see e.g. Woodward 2001); to its potential impact on the member state level (Mazey 2002, Rees 1998). The research hitherto could be characterized as a mixture of theoretical metaphysical reflections, together with more empirical analysis (it is my aim here to stay somewhere in between).

Furthermore, the somewhat "fuzziness" over the concept (e.g. confusions over its applicability to political practice and its ambiguity), together with the fact that its impact seems to be uneven at the member state level (see Booth & Bennett 2002), have resulted in a reluctance from some feminist scholars to contribute academically to the policy debate (Haninsky 2005:977). Feminist scholars have also critiqued gender mainstreaming for being insufficient. It has been called a symbolic political gesture- an *ad hoc* policy with no practical meanings for the way policies are being formulated (Rönnblom 2005, Woodward 2003). Others have called for an expansion on the framework of gender mainstreaming itself "to consistently and systematically reflect upon a deeper understanding of intersectionalties"[2] (Haninsky 2005:978). Some others have discussed whether the characteristic of gender mainstreaming of being a 'soft policy instrument', might have impacted on its uneven implementation at the member state level (see Mazey 2002). However, it is still early days in the era of gender mainstreaming and more research are welcomed to further expand and improve its analytical and practical framework.

1.6 Disposition

The paper starts with a presentation of the concept of gender mainstreaming and how it has been applied within the EU. This chapter also gives an introduction to the empirical material 'A Roadmap for Equality' and outlines the theories that are used in the analysis. In the following chapter discourse analysis as a theory and method is explored. Right after that follows the analysis of the policy document 'A Roadmap to Equality'. In the final chapter the paper is summarized and important conclusions highlighted.

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[2] 'Intersectionality' is a theoretical term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It focuses on the intersection of social categories; such as class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality- and the need to treat different social positions as relational.

2 Gender Mainstreaming

This chapter presents the concept of gender mainstreaming and its relation to the EU. The empirical material 'a Roadmap for Equality' is introduced and in the final section I outline the theories used in the analysis, drawing mainly on Judith Squires.

2.1 Gender Mainstreaming- What is it?

There are many different accounts for the seemingly "simple" question put forward above. One vision of gender mainstreaming is that it offers 'transformations'. Walby has characterized this as: "[...] neither the assimilation of women into men's ways, nor the maintenance of dualism between women and men, but rather something new, a positive form of melding, in which the outsiders, the feminists change the mainstream" (Walby 2005:323). The Council of Europe uses a more pragmatic definition and states that: "Gender mainstreaming is the (re) organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by actors normally involved in policy making" (Council of Europe 1998:15). Rees uses a similar conceptualization and concludes that:"Gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of gender equality into all systems and structures, policies, programs, processes and projects, into ways of seeing and doing, into cultures and their organizations" (Rees 2002:2).

Notably, there are many visions of what gender mainstreaming might entail and many versions seem to coexist. However, what could be said is that gender mainstreaming aims to enable the state to deliver gender sensitive policies and thereby transform gender relations (Woodward 2001:66). A further crucial aspect is that gender mainstreaming aims to acknowledge differences between men and women and more importantly how existing structures are not gender neutral (*Ibid*). In this respect gender mainstreaming could be understood as an "innovative policy machinery" since it allows social issues to escape from marginal policy ghettos (*Ibid*. 2001:68). At the same time it aims to transform the 'woman question' from a vertical policy issue to a horizontal widespread concern (*Ibid*.).

2.1.1 The Potential Dangers of Gender Mainstreaming

It is important to remember that the concept of gender mainstreaming also incorporates a lot of issues. I will briefly outline some of them in the following section.

First of all, the term itself is not unproblematic. I have already mentioned its somewhat "fuzzy" connotations. This has raised concern from feminists' strands of the dangers of misunderstandings. Considering the wide range of European approaches to gender mainstreaming, there is an anxiety that the vertical institutions for equal opportunities and women's policy machinery might altogether disappear. The argument here is that "the further away from the 'femocrat centre' the more frequent the misunderstanding of the term and its specific connotations" (Woodward 2001:69).

A further concern is the fact that gender issues have generally been the responsibility of special women's policy machinery in governments and organizations. Mazey points out that the most obvious risks here is that gender equality then becomes "everybody'- and nobody's – responsibility" (Mazey 2002:228). Moreover, some have also claimed that gender awareness needs knowledge and expertise and should be left to professionals, for instance certified in Women's study (Woodward 2001:69). However, here I want to point out a potential danger of such an approach. My main concern is that gender mainstreaming then could be perceived as something limited to a feminist elite. This in turn could have an opposite effect; a backlash to the gender mainstreaming philosophy altogether.

2.2 Gender Mainstreaming and the EU

The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and the Beijing Conference on Women are both important landmarks for the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies. First of all the EU participated in the formulation of the Beijing Declaration and thereby committed itself to make the principle of gender mainstreaming central to its equality strategies (EC 2000:4). Second, the Treaty of Amsterdam strengthened EU competence by making gender equality into a 'fundamental principle' throughout all Community activities (Mazey 2001:19, Pollack & Hafner-Burton 2000:10). In this respect the Amsterdam Treaty moved equal opportunities from focusing on equal pay to become a central objective of the EU (Booth & Bennett 2002:431). Thus, equal treatment between men and women now came to represent a fundamental right throughout the Union. More importantly, is that this has led to new legislative framework regarding equal pay, equal treatment, parental leave and maternity rights, as well as sexual harassment at work and protection of part-time and contracted work (*Ibid.*).

However, as Pollack & Hafner- Burton rightly point out, many of the articles from the Treaty are not directly effective in the sense that they do not create legally enforceable rights for European women (Pollack & Hafner-Burton

2000:10*f*). Furthermore, as some have claimed, they probably would not exist without a strong woman's lobbying activity (*Ibid*.). Nevertheless, they represent a (treaty based) political commitment to gender mainstreaming and should be acknowledged as such.

For additional references on the EU's gender mainstreaming commitment, I would like to refer to the 'Community Action Programmes on Equal opportunities'[3]. In the following section I present the most recent one: 'A Roadmap for Equality between women and men 2006-2010'. This is done to introduce the empirical material for the upcoming analysis.

2.2.1 Gender Mainstreaming and 'A Roadmap for Equality'

First of all, the current 'Roadmap' builds on the experience of the *'Framework Strategy for equality 2001-2005'* (COM (2000) 335 final). As such it boosts itself for being a "combination of both new actions and the reinforcement of successful existing actions" (COM 2006:92 final). It also offers a definition of what gender mainstreaming is and defines it as: "[…] the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas and activities" (*Ibid*). In this respect gender mainstreaming could be understood as a process with the aim of changing policy routines.

'The Roadmap' outlines six priority areas for the EU action on gender equality. Those are: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciliation of private and professional life; equal representation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender based violence; elimination of gender stereotypes and promotion of gender equality in external and development policies (*Ibid*.). For each area 'the Roadmap' identifies specific objectives and actions to be taken. For instance, within the priority area of equal economic independence a mayor task is to eliminate the gender gap between men and women. This is done by actions such as improved access to education and provision of "specific women's start ups" which is identified as a "better access to finance and development of entrepreneurial networks" (*Ibid*.).

As one can note, the concept of gender mainstreaming is clearly defined in terms of actions and activities. In my analysis I revisit one and each of the areas presented in 'the Roadmap'. This is done in order to explore how gender equality has been constructed and what this implies in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation. In my analysis I use Laclau and Mouffe´s analytical framework, which is combined with Squire's 'feminist political strategies'. In the next section I introduce these theories before moving on to Laclau and Mouffe´s analytical framework.

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[3] It is above all the 'Community Action Programmes' from 1996 and onwards that are committed to the principle of gender mainstreaming.

2.3   Theoretical Introduction

The section outlines the theoretical tools applied in empirical analysis. I draw mainly on theories by Judith Squires, building on her overview of gender and political theory: *Gender in Political Theory* (Squires 1999). However, I would like to point out that the theories presented here are theoretical ideal-types and as such not mutually exclusive. Rather, (as the analysis of the EU's gender mainstreaming policies shows) they are usually combined both in theory and practice. Nevertheless, Squires theories are useful tools as a mean of structuring the analysis in regard to the purpose of this paper.

2.3.1   Feminist Political Strategies

In short Squires argues that we can distinguish between three analytically different feminist political strategies. Those are: *the strategy of inclusion*, based on the principle of equality or 'sameness'; *the strategy of reversal*, based on the principle of difference; and the *strategy of displacement*, based on the principle of diversity (Squires 1999).

The strategy of inclusion, seeks to include women in the world as it is, that is, to include women into 'the political' sphere they are excluded from (Verloo 2005:346). Here, it is the exclusion of women that is problematized and this strategy is usually understood to be seeking gender neutrality. Or as Verloo points out: "that it wants to extend dominant values to all, irrespective of gender" (*Ibid.*). Those pursuing a *strategy of inclusion* usually aspire to objectivity where people are conceived as autonomous at the same time as they espouse 'a politics of equality'. They are often labeled as liberal feminists (Squires 2005:368). In my analysis, I refer to this perspective as building upon a notion of 'sameness'.

The strategy of reversal takes it starting point from the assumption of gender differences, thus encompasses the notion of a 'politics of difference'. Here, the male as a norm is problematized and the aim is to pursue a reconfiguration of existing politics so that it becomes more sensitive towards gendered specificities. Thus, this strategy could be understood as seeking recognition for a specific female gendered identity (*Ibid.*). Those pursuing a *strategy of reversal* often adopt an interpretive methodology and talk about 'women' as an analytically distinct category. Here it is often argued that politics ought to be reconstructed to encompass distinctive female perspectives (Squires 2005:368, Verloo 2005:346). Advocates of this strategy are often labeled radical feminists.

Finally *the strategy of displacement* aims to move 'beyond gender' and advocates a 'politics of diversity' (Verloo 2005:346). This strategy seeks to deconstruct those discursive practices that "engender the subject" and displace patriarchal gender hierarchies (Squires 2005:368, Verloo 2005:368). Here it is not only the exclusion of women or 'male as a norm' that is problematized. Rather it is the gendered world itself that is problematic (*Ibid.*). Those pursuing a *strategy of displacement* are often called postmodern or poststructuralist feminists.

Notably, the three feminist approaches or 'feminist political strategies' presented here, draw upon different notions of representations of gender and how to abolish gender inequalities. As noted above, *the strategy of inclusion* is fundamentally an integrationist approach, while the *strategies of reversal* and *displacement* may be considered transformative. Here, the *strategy of displacement* is closest to this study's poststructuralist approach. In the empirical analysis, these theoretical ideal-types are combined with Laclau and Mouffe´s analytical framework. That is done to explore the EU´s construction of gender equality and what this implies in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation. That is, whether women are the subjects of change and the goal is to fit women into the status quo rather than transforming it. In regards to my own feminist positioning, it is closest to the poststructuralist notion of displacement- i.e. the notion of 'move beyond gender' as a point of departure for political change.

3 Discourse as Theory and Method

In the discourse analysis theory and method are intertwined. There is not just one approach available; rather, discourse analysis is a series of interdisciplinary approaches with a lot of varieties and directions. In this paper I draw mainly on theories developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The main objective herein lies in their poststructuralist approach and their emphasis on the discursive struggle for meanings and definitions. The chapter starts with a general introduction of discourse theory, followed by a presentation of the methodological tools provided by Laclau and Mouffe. The chapter finishes with a discussion about potential weaknesses of the approach.

3.1 Discourse Theory

"Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in practice of doing so conceal their own invention" (Foucault 1977 in Bacchi 1999:40).

As put forward above, there is no single account for discourse theory or how it should be carried out. Nevertheless, despite the differences there are some common key elements important to identify. First of all, a starting point in all discursive approaches is the notion that our access to the reality always lies in the use of language (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2002:8). Here, Winther Jørgensen & Philips's definition of a discourse is a good start: "[...] a particular way of talking about and understand the world (or an aspect of the world)" (*Ibid*. 2002:1). Moreover, Laclau and Mouffe understand the language as consisting of different *signs* that gain their meanings in relation to other *signs* (*Ibid*: 2000:10). The language is not then understood in just simply linguistic terms. Rather, the language is a part of the discursive production of meanings that in the end constructs our social and political reality.

To clarify this further, Howarth *et al*. points out that the *discursive* can be defined as a theoretical horizon within which the objects of the reality is constituted (Howarth *et al* 2000:3). Here all objects are understood as objects of discourses since their meanings "depends upon a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:107). However, it is important to remember that this does not imply a rejection of the reality *per se*. Rather, the point is that physical objects do exist but it is only through the discourse they are given meanings (Jørgensen & Philips 2002:9). As Laclu and Mouffe point out elsewhere: "The fact that every object is constituted as an object

of discourses has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought […] what is denied is not that such objects exist […] but rather differentiated assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:108). In other words, the social and physical reality is constituted by discourses, but how individuals perceive it depends on the discourse he or she is situated within (Alvesson & Deetz 2000:119). Hence, there is no 'reality' outside the discourse, or as Bacchi points out elsewhere, "there is no representation outside the representation" (Bacchi 1999:9).

This takes us down to the functioning of discourses. The discursive construction always involves the exercise of power. To put it more explicitly, this means that their constitution always involves inclusion respectively exclusion of certain possibilities. As such they intend to structure the relations between different social agents. Ball has concluded this in a brilliant way stating that: "[...] discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (Ball 1990 in Bacchi 1999:41). Here, the concept of politics itself is an utterly example, since politics (as Laclau and Mouffe understand it) is an organizing principle of the society which exclude all other possible ways (Winther Jørgensen 2002:36). In regards to the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies, this means that representations of gender equality imply that certain issues are given priorities while others have been marginalized or excluded. Hence, by examining this particular discourse help us to identify how gender equality has been constructed, hence what has been included respectively excluded from the policy field.

3.1.1 Struggles and Reduction of Possibilities

At the heart of poststructuralist theory building lays the assumption that meanings can never be ultimately permanent or fixed. This means that discourses are always temporary fixation over certain meanings (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2002:25, 39). In this respect Laclau and Mouffe´s poststructuralist approach differ quite radically from both Marxism and many of the structuralist writers from whom they have taken their inspiration. Instead of the somewhat fixed understanding of the social, Laclau and Mouffe identify the discourse fixation of meanings within a particular domain (*Ibid*: 2002:26). For instance the meanings of equality or gender within the EU´s gender mainstreaming discourse are fruitful examples of the fixation of meanings within a specific domain.

As put forward above, there are always certain representations or meanings that become the dominating ones. Thus, there are always perspectives or reflections of the reality that is naturalized and becomes hegemonic (*Ibid*: 2000:8). Still, the dominating representations are never quite fixed and in this sense there is always a constant *discursive struggle* over meanings (Bergstöm & Boreus 2005:316 *f*, Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2002:25). The dominating representations are therefore always constituted in relation to what it excludes (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2002:27). Here, Laclau and Mouffe refer to

temporary *closures*. This means that the discourse is fixed but on the other hand, it does not mean that it is fixed permanently (*Ibid*: 2002:29). For instance, if one takes the dichotomy male/female. The female only becomes 'the Other' in relation to the norm, which is the male. In this respect discourse theory offers a way to challenge the hegemonic representation. By doing that it also provides a platform from which critique can be made which in the end opens up for possibilities of transformation. However, here I want to point out that these accounts are not exclusive to discourse theory, let alone Laclau and Mouffe. Rather, it is the essence of any constructionist theory within varieties of fields. For instance Edward Said elaborates on the same assumptions in his famous work *Orientalism* (1978). Here, he examines the unequal relationships between the Orient and the Occident, where the Orient becomes 'the Other', the abbreviation from the hegemonic West.

3.1.2 Analytical Tools

Laclau and Mouffe have not presented an explicit guide on how to use their framework in empirical analysis. Nevertheless, they have defined some important key concepts that I will use in my analysis of the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies. I have briefly touched some of them above. Here, I explain and outline them in a more explicit way.

As noted above, a discourse is a fixation of meanings within a particular domain consisting of different *signs* (for instance gender or equality within the discourse of gender mainstreaming). Their meanings are being fixed through their differences from one other (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:26). Moreover, the discourse is structures around what Laclau and Mouffe call *nodal points* (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:26). Nodal points are identified as a privileged sign or a *key signifier* from which other signs are organized. Here it is important to remember that the other signs also acquire their meanings from the relationship with the nodal point (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:26). For instance, within the EU´s gender mainstreaming discourse, the nodal point here could be identified as *gender equality* since all other signs obtain their meanings in relation to this privileged sign. In this respect it fixes the discourse (temporary), at the same time as it excludes other possible ways in which the sign could have been related to each other. Everything that is being excluded from the discourse is what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as *the field of discursivity* (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:111, Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:27). Hence, a dominant representation is always constituted in relation to the field of discursivity.

Since the fixation of the discourse is always temporary the stability is always threatened by the meanings of other signs. It is here the concept of *elements* come into the picture. An element is a sign whose meanings has not yet been fixed, thus illustrates the discursive struggle within a certain domain (Bergström & Boreus 2005:316, Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:28). Here, the concept of nodal points comes into the picture again. Even if they are privileged signs (the other signs acquire their meanings in relation to them), the nodal points are still empty

in themselves. For instance, gender equality does not mean anything until it is inserted into a specific discourse. Therefore this sign is also an element. It only obtains its meaning through other signs. This happen through what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as *articulation* (Bergstöm & Boreus 2005:318).

However, there is still according to Laclau and Mouffe, a *closure* of the discourse, which implies that there is a temporary stop in the meanings of the signs. This is what Laclau and Mouffe call *moments* (Bergström & Boreus 2005:317). To clarify this further: "The transition from the *elements* to the *moments* is never entirely fulfilled" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:110 in Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:28). Nevertheless, the discourse can never be that fixed so it cannot be threatened or undermined by other elements.

Now if we go back to the concept of nodal points. I have identified the key signifier gender equality as both an element and a nodal point within the discourse of mainstreaming. In this sense (the nodal point and element) gender equality is particular open for meanings. Laclau and Mouffe call those elements (particular open to different ascriptions of meanings) for *empty signifiers* (Bergström & Boreus 2005:316, Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:28). Gender equality then becomes an empty signifier since it belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourses to fix the meaning of this important sign (Jørgensen & Philips 2000:28).

In my analysis of the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies, I explore how gender equality has been constructed within this field. That is done by my identification of different key signifiers and how they are combined with each other. By examining the chains of meanings, or what Laclau and Mouffe call *chains of equivalence*; it is possible to identify what meanings and representations that have become the dominating ones. Hence, it is possible to identify the discursive struggle over meanings, at the same time as one can identify what this implies in terms of gender equality and representations of gender. In other words, the adoption of the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies.

3.1.3 Critique of Discourse Theory

There is of course a fair amount of critique that has been directed towards Laclau & Mouffe´s discourse theory. For instance, it has been critiqued for overlooking structural constraints through its emphasis on contingency[4]. Opponents have pointed out how everything seem to be in flux and that all possibilities are open (see Fairclough in Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:54). Here, I am willing to agree to a certain extent. The impact structural restraints have on the society and the individual should not be ignored in any sense. If that was the case I would not have been commencing this study.

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[4] Contingency in Lauclau and Mouffe´s theories refers to openness and possibilities- with an emphasis on how meanings are never permanent or fixed.

In defense for Laclau and Mouffe, it should be pointed out that even if everything in principle is contingent, this does not automatically mean that changes are made easily (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2000:55). There are long series of historical social patterns that are taken for granted and as such they are not easily changed. Moreover, Laclau & Mouffe understand actors (both groups and individuals), as determined by discursive subject positions, such as the category of gender. More importantly, they recognize how these effect possibilities for actions and for someone to get their voice heard (*Ibid.*). But again, this does not mean that they are easily deconstructed or abolished in any sense. In this respect their theory admits to permanence and constraints. On the other hand, as Winther & Jørgenssen rightly point out, their approach under theorizes this aspect of social practice to a certain extent (*Ibid.*).

However, in regard to the purpose of this paper, I do not consider that the critique put forward above explicitly relate to representations of gender equality within the EU´s gender mainstreaming policies. Therefore, I suggest that these potentially theoretical weaknesses are overlooked in this particular study.

4   'A Roadmap for Equality'

"Gender Equality is a fundamental right […] Failure to acknowledge gender equality threatens the EU´s political and economic role" (A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010).

In this chapter the policy document 'A Roadmap for equality between men and women 2006-2010' is analyzed. Here, I treat gender and gender equality as empty signifiers that can be filled with meanings. As a mean of structuring the analysis, Squire's 'feminist political strategies' are combined with Laclau and Mouffe´s analytical framework. In my analysis I revisit the different priority areas set out in 'the Roadmap'. That is done to explore how gender equality has been constructed and what this implies in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation.

4.1   Equal Economic Independence

The first gender mainstreaming strategy presented in 'the Roadmap' focuses on equal economic independence for women and men. Gender equality is here articulated around the nodal point economic independence. Through a chain of equivalence, economic independence obtains its meanings through signs such as employment, eliminations of pay gaps and women entrepreneurs (Roadmap 2006:10). Here employment has been given a central position which temporary fixes the construction of gender equality.

 "Gender equality has been a key element of the European Employment Strategy…The Strategy aims at boosting women's employment" (Roadmap 2006:11).

The aim is to reach the Lisbon employment targets [5] through strengthening of structural funds (e.g. training), education and entrepreneurship for women. Actions such as promoting specific "women start-ups", as well as developing entrepreneurial networks (through finance) are further proposed actions. Here, gender equality equivalences with a strategy of inclusion. In regards to employment the main goal seems to be to 'fit women in', to include women in the labour market rather than challenging and questioning the hierarchical order it is

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[5] Lisbon employment target calls for a 60% employment rates for women by 2010 (Roadmap 2006:10).

situated upon (Squires 2005:368). In this respect gender equality is articulated through a notion of 'sameness'. The dichotomy male/female and women's subject position as 'the Other' are not fully problematized or reflected upon. Furthermore, one can also trace a strategy of reversal and a notion of 'difference'. Gender equality is constructed as the need to support women; to help women to get employment and to start their own businesses. This on the other hand, reproduces the construction of women as 'the Other', the one who is in need of help but without taking the 'male as a norm' into account.

What could be said here is that there is a clear aim to transform unequal social relations based on gender. Nevertheless, the actions proposed builds upon the dichotomy male and female, which is not problematized or questioned as such. Furthermore, in this respect there appears to be a temporary closure and fixation of the discourse, drawing upon notions of 'difference' and 'sameness'. Here, a narrow representation of gender equality is at stake. Gender equality is constructed as a support for women through employment and specific investments, whereas gender and women becomes more or less synonymous.

"Gender equality is a necessary condition for employment […] structural funds (e.g. training, entrepreneurship measures) can help increase women's employment" (Roadmap 2006:7*f*).

In 'the Roadmap' social protection is also linked to the chain of economic independence, hence the construction of gender equality. Here social protection is mainly articulated through incentives for women to enter and remain on the labour market.

"Social protection systems should remove disincentives for women and men to enter on the labour market" (Roadmap 2006:10).

Again, employment is linked to the nodal point economic independence and thus constructed as the key to gender equality. Here, strategies of inclusion rather than transformations are at stake. The aim is to enhance social protection through entrance on the labour market. That is, to include women but without any incentives or propositions to transform or displace the patriarchal order or the gendered world as such (Squires 2005:368, Verloo 2005:368). This in turn constructs a representation of gender equality that merely consists of employment creation and economic growth.

Having said that, there are elements linked to equal economic independence (thus the construction of gender equality), that are more connected to a transformative approach. For instance in regards to research and education within the Lisbon Strategy, it is proposed that these strategies are not fully reflected upon women's position in the labour market (Roadmap 2006:7). Rather than just trying to 'fit women in' there seem to be a call for a displacement and transformation. Here, gender equality appears to be especially empty which also illustrates the ongoing discursive struggle for meanings and the way discourses are never entirely permanent or fixed (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2002:25).

4.2 Work, Private and Family Life

The second priority area in 'the Roadmap' focuses more explicitly on gender equality on the labour market. This is done through mainstreaming gender into what is called "reconciliation of work, private and family life" (Roadmap 2006:14). Gender equality is structured around the nodal point reconciliation policies, which equivalences with signs such as flexible working arrangements, increased child care facilities, shared family responsibilities and care of the older and disabled (Roadmap 2006:9). Better work-life balanced arrangements i.e. reconciliation, is further linked to productivity and of course entrance and stay on the labour market. Here, gender equality appears to be especially open to ascriptions of meanings. On the one hand, it equivalences with a feminist transformative perspective such as shared family responsibilities.

"Men should be take up family responsibilities, in particular through incentives to take parental leaves and to share leave entitlements with women" (Roadmap 2006:14).

On the other hand, gender equality is being fixed through purely market orientated objectives, where the transformation of unequal gendered relationships (e.g. shared family responsibilities for both women and men) only obtains its meaning through the chain of productivity and growth. In this respect gender equality is once again framed upon a notion of 'sameness' (Squires 2005:368). That is, to include and integrate women into the hegemonic patriarchic order (here the labour market) but without any real aims or incentives of transforming it as such. In this respect the notion of the dichotomy male/female is naturalized, thus not questioned or probmematized as such.

"Reconciliation policies help create flexible economy […] Flexible working arrangements boost productivity […] they help women enter and stay on the labour market, using the full potential of the workforce" (Roadmap 2006:14).

Moreover, in regards to the reconciliation policies such as increased care services for children[6], elderly and disabled, there seem to be a dominating representation of reversal and a notion 'difference'. Obviously, these services are linked to the notion of gender equality. However, that is beyond the point here. Rather, the point is that women's subject position as care-takers are not fully taken into consideration. What is proposed is to increase these services and provide training for involved staff but without any real incitements to transform the gendered nature of this specific work field. Here, I would argue that the Union reproduces a representation of gender, where women are subjected to specific tasks, such as caring for the elderly and sick.

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[6] The aim is to reach the Barcelona targets, and provide for childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 years of age and mandatory school age, and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age (Roadmap 2006:14).

Having said that, it is important to point out that the EU does in fact recognize how gendered stereotypes play a great part in the segregation on the labour market. In the action area called "Eliminating Gender Stereotypes in Society" (which will be discussed in more detail later) it is acknowledged how women continue to be employed in traditional less valued sectors. However, this aspect is not integrated into the reconciliation policies. Rather it has got its own space in the document as if it was separated from the reconciliation of work, private and family life. Here I would have wanted a more explicit link between gendered stereotypes and women's subject positioning on the labour market.

4.3   Equal Participation

The third area in 'the Roadmap' focuses on mainstreaming gender into equal participation in decision-making. This is divided into a political respectively an economic sphere. In regards to political decision-making gender equality is articulated through participation in politics, public administration and senior management. A strategy of inclusion is at play, but how to include women into the decision-making process is not explained in any further detail (see Roadmap 2006:16). In this respect 'the Roadmap' needs to be developed much further. Here, the construction of gender equality more or less becomes an empty statement, an *ad hoc*- policy with no real incentives for how the transformation towards gender equality should be carried out. The political goal of gender equality is emphasized but without clearly stating what this goal should entail.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that gender equality in political decision-making does not equivalence with any possibilities of increased productivity or economic growth. One could then not help but wonder, whether this might be the reason for the lack of explicit strategies to mainstreaming gender into this sphere. Furthermore, it is also notable the way women are constructed as the "fault line" in regards to concern about the democratic deficit. Here, women´s lack of participation is constructed as the problem, rather than problematizing the gendered discourse itself. In this respect, women are constructed as 'the Other', the deviant, the one who is lacking something.

"Women's persistent under-representation in political decision-making is a democratic deficit" (Roadmap 2006:16).

When it comes to mainstreaming gender into economic decision-making, gender equality is articulated around signs such as better economic performance and an innovative working culture. Again, gender equality is articulated through purely market orientated objectivities. In comparison to political decision-making, there are clear incentives and strategies on how to achieve this goal. Flexible working hours and increased child-care facilities are proposed (which as put forward in a previous section are linked to the mayor objective of economic growth). Here, there appears to be a fixation of the discourse, where strategies that are not

explicitly related to economic growth have been excluded. Furthermore, a notion of 'sameness' is at play, positioning women as the ones who needs to be included without questioning the power structures involved in economic decision-making, hence positioning this sphere as somewhat gender neutral.

4.4   Violence and Trafficking

In the action area involving gender-based violence and trafficking, there appears to be a change in the fixation of the discourse of mainstreaming. That is, from being more or less explicitly articulated through a market economic agenda- based on the notion of 'difference' and 'sameness' (where economic independence, reconciliation and participation mainly seem to function as tools to achieve economic growth), towards a normative approach, a goal in itself.   Here, the eradication of gender based violence and trafficking equivalences with freedom, safety and dignity (rather than being articulated through the EU´s economic objectives).

"Women are the victims of gender-based violence […] this is a breach of the fundamental right to life, safety, freedom, dignity and physical and emotional integrity" (Roadmap 2006:18).

Moreover, this shift is also noticeable in regards to proposed strategies. Instead of linking strategies of gender mainstreaming to increased access to the labour market (e.g. the chain of equivalence between social protection and the labour market), actions such as awareness rising is proposed. However, despite the strong commitment to combat gender-based violence and trafficking, there are some aspects that could be considered somewhat gender blind. For instance, violent practices such as female genital mutilation, honor crimes etc. equivalences with culture and tradition rather than being recognized as expressions for unequal gendered relationships.

"Urgent action is needed to eliminate customary or traditional harmful attitudes and practices, including female genital mutilation, early forced marriages and honor crimes" (Roadmap 2006:18)

In this respect the EU reproduces a representation of certain gendered practices, as if they were merely cultural expressions. This I would argue is an utterly example of how the discursive production, simultaneously includes respectively excludes certain meanings or "truths", that in the end constitute and shape our perception of the reality. By the strong emphasis on tradition rather than gender, the EU position itself in a fairly gender blind position.

    The same goes for trafficking. One the one hand trafficking equivalences with crime against individual human rights. It is acknowledged as form of "modern slavery" to which women and children and "in particular girls" are especially exposed (Roadmap 2006:18). On the other hand it is mainly poverty rather than gendered social relations that is put forward as mayor risk of being trafficked. In

this respect trafficking is reproduced as being more or less a production of poverty rather than an expression for hierarchical gendered social relations. Thus, the gendered dimension in these crimes is not articulated fully enough.

"Human trafficking is a crime against individuals […] it is a form of modern slavery to which poverty-stricken women and children, in particular girls, are more vulnerable" (Roadmap 2006:18)

As one can note, this position puts forward anything but a transformative approach. Here one cannot help but wonder how there would be any possibilities for social change if certain aspects (e.g. the gender dimension in regards to trafficking and forced marriages etc.) are not being fully recognized or problematized. In order to put forward a more transformative approach I would have wanted to include discussions and strategies regarding hegemonic gendered social relations such as the male right to the female body.

4.5   Gender Stereotypes

The fifth action area presented in 'the Roadmap' focuses on the elimination of gender stereotypes. Here, gender equality is articulated around the commitment to combat gender stereotypes in education, culture and on the labour market (Roadmap 2006:20). The strategies proposed are mainly "awareness raising to teachers and students" and funding of awareness rising in cultural programmes and sport (*Ibid*. 2006:20*f*). Just as in the previous section, gender equality is not explicitly articulated around market economic objectives. Rather, gender equality is put forward as normatively good *per se* and a goal in it self.

   Furthermore, the 'elimination of gender stereotypes' could naturally be characterized as a transformative approach moving "beyond gender" (Verloo 2005:346). In other words, the essence of the poststructuralist approach favored in this study. However, that is beyond the point here. Rather, my point is (which was also mentioned in regards to mainstreaming gender into work, family and private life) that the EU constructs an image of 'eliminations of gendered stereotypes', as being a separate policy aim. Rather than integrating this perspective into the previous four policy areas, it has got its own space at the end of the entire document. This is rather confusing since the whole idea with gender mainstreaming is to integrate "gender equality in all policy areas and activities" (Roadmap 2006:7). From a transformative standpoint this means that "elimination of gendered stereotypes" should be a point of departure for all proposed actions and strategies regarding gender equality. Not something to add on at the end of a document. Again, this is an utterly illustration on the complexity and the discursive struggle over definitions and meanings. Hence, how a discourse could never be permanently fixed or closed. On the one hand, gender equality is articulated through market economic objectives where proposed strategies mainly seek to 'fit women in'. On the other hand, the EU puts forward a transformative approach favoring a position to "move beyond gender".

4.6   Equality outside the EU

The last action area I turn to focuses on the EU´s commitment to mainstreaming "gender equality outside the EU" (Roadmap 2006:22). Again, gender equality is put forward as a fundamental human right and a goal in it self rather than being articulated through market economic objectives. Once again this illustrates the discursive struggle and moreover the need to treat gender equality as an empty signifier ascribed with different meanings. Here, gender equality is articulated around the mission of promoting gender equality to future and potentially new member states as well as to developing countries. There are varieties of actions at stake e.g. equal participation, gender awareness raising to new member states and promotion of increased access to education (Roadmap 2006:22).

However, what is interesting is not mainly the proposed action or the possibilities of transformation. Rather, what is central is the way 'the Other', (i.e. potentially new member states and developing countries) fixes the discourse of mainstreaming through its 'otherness'. As pointed out previously, a dominating representation is always constituted in relation to what it excludes (Winther Jørgensen & Philips 2002:27). In this respect 'the Other' helps to reproduce the EU´s mainstreaming policies as the legitimate and dominating ones. Simultaneously, 'the Other' defines what gender equality is. That is, everything 'the Other' is not i.e. equal participation, gender awareness raising and increased access to education etc. However, my point here is not to object to the promotion of equal participation, increased access to education etc. outside the EU (quite the opposite). Rather, my point here is to illustrate how the discursive production establishes certain representation as the dominating ones- such as the construction of gender equality within the EU´s mainstreaming policies.

5 Conclusion

The starting point in this study was to explore the EU´s adoption of the concept of gender mainstreaming and more explicitly, how gender equality is constructed and what this implies in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation. In order to do that I did a discourse analysis of the policy document 'A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010'. Here, I treated gender equality and gender as empathy signifiers ascribed with different meanings. In my analysis I show that depending on the action area different notions of gender equality and representations of gender are at stake- struggling to fill the discourse of mainstreaming with meanings. The same goes for the concept's transformative potentials. Depending on the action area different strategies are employed that in the end construct the conceptualization of gender equality and representations of gender. This illustrates the discursive production of meanings at the same time as it shows how the construction of gender equality can never be entirely permanent or fixed.

How is gender equality then constructed and what does this imply in terms of representations of gender and possibilities of transformation? First of all, gender equality is articulated around economic independence between women and men. Here, employment function as the key to equality and the goal is to remove disincentives for women's participation on the labour market. A strategy of inclusion and a notion of 'sameness' is at stake. The aim is to 'fit women in' but without any ambitions to question or transform the patriarchic order it is situated upon. At the same time a notion of 'difference' is at play. Gender equality is constructed as the need to help women to get employment, which constructs women as 'the Other' without taking the 'male as a norm' into account. In this respect the EU reproduces a narrow representation of gender where women and gender becomes more or less synonymous.

Moreover, gender equality is further constructed around the incentives to reconcile work, private and family life- which equivalences with equality on the labour market. Here, gender equality appears to be especially open for ascriptions of meanings. On the one hand, a transformative approached is employed calling for transformations of shared family responsibilities etc. On the other hand, the mayor objective for reconciliation appears to be to 'fit women in' but without questioning the gendered discourse of the labour market as such. This leaves us with a representation of gender equality which is mainly articulated around the EU´s objectives for employment and economic growth. However, what is remarkable here is the way women's subject positions in traditional occupations are not fully taken into consideration. The mayor objective appears to be to increase care services rather than developing strategies to transform the gendered

occupational field. Sadly, the EU´s commitment to eliminate gendered stereotypes is not fully integrated into the strategy of reconciliation.

In the third action area presented in 'the Roadmap' gender equality is articulated around equal participation in political and economic decision-making. Again a strategy of inclusion is at play reproducing a notion of 'sameness'. What is notable here is that the aim of gender equality is clearly stated but without any real incentives for how to achieve this goal. In comparison to equal participation in economic decision-making this area needs to be developed much further. The lack of strategies has left me wondering whether this has something to do with the fact that political decision-making not explicitly relate to the EU's economic market orientated objectives. In this respect there appears to be a closure of the discourse where strategies that are not explicitly linked to economic growth have been excluded.

Having said that, gender equality is not only articulated through market economic objectives that seek to 'fit women in'. In the action area committed to combat gender based violence and trafficking, gender equality is articulated through a normative approach and goal in itself. Nevertheless, there appears to be a somewhat gender blind fixation of the discourse here. For instance, certain gendered practices such as female genital mutilation and honor crimes equivalences with culture and traditions, rather being recognized as expressions of gendered social power relations. In this respect the EU puts forward anything but a transformative approach aiming to move 'beyond gender'.

However, there are further strategies in 'the Roadmap' challenging the dichotomy male/female and as such aiming to move 'beyond gender'. In the action area "elimination of gender stereotypes" there are clear incentives of such an approach. The problem is that these goals are not fully integrated into the other four policy areas. In this respect the EU reproduces a notion of this mainstreaming strategy as being a separate policy aim. From a transformative standpoint this policy goal should have been integrated in all policy areas and activities and not integrated as an (empty) statement at the end of a document. Nevertheless, this is an utterly example on the ambivalence within the EU's gender mainstreaming policies and the constant and ongoing struggle of meanings.

The last action area in 'the Roadmap' focuses on mainstreaming gender outside the EU, i.e. to potentially new member states and developing countries. This area is interesting because it helps to construct and legitimize what gender equality is within the EU. That is, everything 'the Others' are not e.g. equal participation, increased access to education etc.

Lastly, what I hope is clear by now is how the construction of gender equality within the EU could be characterized as a mix of potentially transformative elements- together with narrow representations of gender drawing upon 'sameness' and 'difference'. On the one hand the EU puts forward clear goals aiming at transforming hegemonic gendered relations. On the other hand, gender equality is articulated around market economic objectives reproducing narrow representations of gender that seek to 'fit women in'. However, it is still early days in the era of mainstreaming and that leaves me with hope of a European gender equality frame that might 'move beyond gender'.

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