Intersectionality scope and multidimensional equality within the European Union: Traversing national boundaries of inequality?


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European Union
Non-Discrimination Law
Comparative perspectives on multidimensional equality law

Edited by Dagmar Schiek and Victoria Chege
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Part II

Theorising intersectionality from different disciplinary angles
5 Intersectionality scope and multidimensional equality within the European Union
Traversing national boundaries of inequality?

Ulrike M Vieten

5.1 Introduction
Directives 2000/43/EC, 2000/78/EC, 2002/73/EC and 2004/113/EC signify a policy strategy willing to create more cohesive and integrating working conditions and to combat discriminations of citizens within the EU. While initiating a broader implementation process of multidimensional equality law the EU framework aims to deepen national regulations and anti-discrimination practices in all EU Member States. This ambitious goal confronts solicitors and law scholars, but even more so feminist sociologists with theoretical and pragmatic concerns on how to evaluate, balance and generally relate different discriminatory grounds, individual claims and social systems of oppression to each other. It is proclaimed that ‘EC non-discrimination law needs to maintain an adequate balance between group-related and individualistic aims’. Hence, as we seek to enrich our understanding of multidimensional discrimination effects unfolding between and among different dimensions of social divisions it is necessary to go back to methodological questions: indeed, we are confronted with epistemological problems as the notion of individual differences as a matter of intersecting identities does not capture adequately the systematic impact of historically constructed group hierarchies. Besides, intersectional identities could be linked to ‘hybridity’ and, therefore, new configurations of discriminatory grounds might occur that diffuse even more the meaning of group clusters of, for example, class, ‘race’ and gender, as the most prominent categories of social inequality. As the phenomenon of intersecting identities will lead our interest in how to grasp research approaches to intersectionality, we have to ask: what does intersectionality mean and why did feminists start to focus on it? And further, in what ways can we make the most of an analytical understanding of overlapping social categories that keeps a political eye on the balance between individual subjectivity and social groupings?

In the following, I am going to sketch some characteristic conceptual aspects of the term ‘intersectionality’ confronting theoretical considerations with the distinctive logic of empirical demands that take into account the
overall scope of the EU Directives. Generally, there is a tension between an analytical approach to intersectionality which argues for anti-essentialism on the one hand, and a more pragmatic purpose defining discriminatory grounds according to certain group characteristics, on the other. In order to advance an interdisciplinary discussion on methodology, that is, to discuss the need to answer the question how to study intersectionality, I turn to the arguments of the US American sociologist, Leslie McCall, who put this question at the core of her concerns. McCall’s systematic overview of different research approaches to intersectionality underlines that we have to understand the purpose of specific (academic) knowledge before deciding what kind of intersectionality approach might be appropriate to use. Not by chance, we come across a more principled dilemma between research that challenges any fixity of classifications and more strategic approaches relying on defined categories. The latter, as McCall argues, does focus on existing hierarchical relationships, that is, the salient importance of social class, in order to map the impact of group subordination and individual discrimination.

In contrast to the rather marginalised attention that is given to social class, sometimes ‘invisibly’ encapsulated in other social categories, I argue in a further section that classed economic hierarchies underscore current political debates on cultural integration, equity and civic participation of individuals and minority communities in the EU and beyond. My neo-socialist-feminist insistence on the meaning of social class opposes those public and academic views that approach clusters such as ethnicity, religion and sexuality while neglecting the central impact of class on individual chances to secure those differences. Also, I argue that we have to take into account specific scopes of (European) policy that interfere in the regulating role of national societies while not handling fully the emergence of new social complexities. This contention brings me to a discussion of Sylvia Walby’s timely proposal in my final section who urges us to re-conceptualise social categories with reference to more flexible and less nested social systems. The notion of system has a central role to play in the way we interpret social categories and, finally, how we might understand the complex overlap (intersectionality) of social divisions. Hence, her intervention is particularly relevant as the transformation of national societies in and beyond single nation states pushes ahead new transgressive formations of what sociologists regard as social systems. My chapter will conclude while arguing that EU multidimensional equality law should privilege the intersections of particular discriminatory grounds due to its intentional policy character and its prospective wish to come to terms with historical totalitarianism and National Socialism: all in all, multidimensional anti-discrimination policy aims to strengthen the institutionalisation of the EU as a transnational (trans-nation state) community in its own right, but while constructing transnational equality parameters (de jure) more complex social layers and demands for social justice are generated that are stretching beyond the borders and boundaries of the EU.
5.2 Recognising differences: doing feminist research on intersectionality and social complexity

The term intersectionality indicates a commitment to analyse whether and to what extent certain socio-cultural hierarchies such as class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, ‘race’ and sexuality might intersect. Also, it includes in-depth studies of how social categories are constructed and in what ways these categories support one another while producing inclusion or exclusion. Therefore, the overall analytical scope reaches out for an understanding of multiple dimensions of oppressions in terms of socio-economic structures, but also its impact on the social positioning of individuals. But what kind of social consequences occur when ‘particular identities are lived in the modalities of other categories’? Do multiple identities erase social clusters nesting within nationally framed social systems of power or might they create new social groupings?

The phenomenon of intermingling systems of social oppression was recognised before the term ‘intersectionality’ appeared: back in 1990, the historian Gerda Lerner argued that sex, class and ‘race’ dominance are interrelated and inseparable from the very beginning. According to Lerner ‘[t]he form which class first took historically was genderic and racist. The form that racism first took was genderic and classist. The form the state first took was patriarchal’. Without even using the term ‘intersectionality’, Lerner relates to ‘race’, gender and class, but also to patriarchy as reinforcing and backing each other. More recently, Irene Browne and Joya Misra argue:

Feminist sociologists call for an alternative theorizing that captures the combination of gender and race. Race is ‘gendered’ and gender is ‘racialized’, so that race and gender fuse to create unique experiences and opportunities for all groups – not just [for] women of color.

These different statements address the theme of overlapping gendered and racialised oppression, that is, gender and ‘race’ and therefore give us insights on how US feminists have approached intersecting social categories. Baukje Prins claims that the ‘US approach foregrounds the impact of system or structure upon the formation of identities, whereas British scholars focus on the dynamics and relational aspect of social identity’. In this regard a more systemic and a more constructionist interpretation of intersectionality could be identified, both of which are, nonetheless, as will be discussed later, significant to an Anglo-American research and broader public discourse context. What is of major interest here, is to find out which epistemic directions encompassing intersectionality might be more suitable to an EU framework as the impact of social divisions (systemic elements) and subjective and performative acts (constructivist elements) have developed in EU Member States unevenly and quite differently. In addition, these dissimilar legal and
cultural contexts are now undergoing mutual transformations that eventually might lead to a novel social space in Europe and beyond.

In principle, research agendas and for that reason, applied sociological empirical studies regarding individual discriminations and their linkages to group structures are embedded in 'national' (nation state) academic institutions. Methodological frameworks and socio-political conditions on how to explore and explain social hierarchies regarding gender, 'race' and ethnicity are for example connected to broader configurations of notions of citizenship, patterns of trans-border migration and racialised boundaries.

Diverse national histories indicate that the national community ('the people') addressed in a definition of the democratic body is a fluid rather than a fixed sovereign. Therefore, discourses on citizenship rights and participation in democracy relate directly to nationally framed membership which gives selective and exclusive entry to a community. As John Rundell argues:

[citizenship is the formal and trans-communal mechanism that draws an anonymous and even polymorphous population who inhabit the territory of a nation-state into its regulatory system. Or to put it another way, territorial-national citizenship... is a mechanism for the administrative control of the movement of a nation’s inhabitants within and across its borders.

Apart from the multiplicity of individual biographical experiences and subjective positions within state borders, 'national borders become a specific form, spatially bounded, of collectivity boundaries.' Currently, perceptions of legal citizenship, community boundaries and territorial borders are modified to more complex layers of national, nation-state and EU 'imagined communities' transforming the meaning of collective belonging, citizen rights and its reach in terms of territorial borders and socio-cultural boundaries. Thus, these social and ideological transformations are affecting notions of social divisions and, accordingly, academic approaches to intersectionality and multidimensional equality.

In the following, I am going to sketch some aspects of the tension between shifting academic research agendas and (feminist) political movements in their call for acknowledging different stages in understanding social complexity.

As far as the German feminist discourse on diversity is concerned Gudrun Axeli-Knapp, for instance, admits that either researchers with minority background or researchers working in the field of migration studies pushed forward a more critical perspective on gender studies in Germany. While rightly reflecting the importance of academic status regarding the public recognition of intellectual arguments her observation disregards feminist dialogues that took place in radical feminist journals back in the early 1990s. A controversial debate about naming differences among women developed after the critical interventions of Jessica Jacoby and Gotlinde Magiriba Lwanga in 1990. Jacoby and Magiriba Lwanga confronted the
dominant Christian and ‘white’ outlook of German feminists as a taken for granted hegemonic cultural lens; their publication was a reflection of controversial debates that shook the ‘feminist consensus’ at ‘women weeks’ (Frauenwochen) at the end of the 1980s. Knapp’s perception makes clear that the academic recognition of marginalised voices, that is, their relevance for the public discourse often unfolds in a delayed (academic) institutional frame and further, that the public articulation of social movements (that is, feminist movements) does not automatically match with the academic findings of its contemporaneous (feminist) research. In contrast to a rather late academic adaptation of ideological contestations about difference among feminists in Germany, British feminist and post-colonial scholars of transnational, bi-national and/or ethnic minority backgrounds challenged mainstream academia in Britain much earlier. Since the early 1980s, British feminist social theory analysed intersecting complexity30 and in the 1990s, translocational31 social positioning of women – though as Nira Yuval-Davis remarks, ‘[a]pparently, without noticeable effect on policy makers’.32

In fact, a broader European recognition of the theme of social complexity emerged only recently while acknowledging the research on intersectionality undertaken by US black feminists, most prominently Patricia Hill Collins33 and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.34 Black feminist scholars had challenged white middle-class feminism and male-centred anti-racism for ignoring the specific and different situation of black women. Crenshaw introduced the term ‘intersectionality’ stressing that single-axis discrimination (that is, gender) left black women outside the focus group ‘woman’. The ‘no responsibility’ in concrete situations of claims made it necessary to think about the combination of discriminatory grounds potentially overlapping in different social categories. Having said ‘claims’, this term signals an individual rights/interests nexus looking at, for example, the actual living conditions of women regarding employment, wage, violence or access to housing, social services and so forth. Susanne V Knudson argues that ‘approaches to intersectionality have mostly been used in qualitative field studies. The theoretical inspiration has developed the complexity of analysis from observations, interviews and questionnaires’.35 For example, Crenshaw based her critical argument on research focusing on violence against women of colour; that is, the non-reasonable accommodation they got in shelters for battered women.36 Accordingly, we have to bear in mind two decisive angles of the concept of intersectionality: first, its more prominent rooting in an US American context focusing on skin colour and its intersections with gender and class as the most important signifier of its racialising and discriminating systems.37 Second, and this is important to an overall inclusive political discourse, we have to understand the philosophical element of the concept of intersectionality. Naomi Zack38 proposes that intersectionality means that we cannot impose:

[l]imits on the numbers or kinds of possible intersected identities . . . there is no reason to stop at one dimension of oppression. To race can be
added class, age, physical ability, sexual preference, for starters. The only way to limit possible intersected identities is by counting only those whose proponents have managed to give recognized voice to what they are.39

The last remark about the ‘recognized voice’ brings in the explicit political dimension of public dispute and collective struggle, mentioned above. It stresses that legal, social and cultural spaces in which group representations can be articulated are contingent and open to contestation. Hence, the flux of categories as introduced above and connected to this, the historical embedding of group struggles, are at the core of feminist debates on how the concept of intersectionality engenders meaning. What I am proposing here is an ethically sensitive and reflexive understanding of the term ‘intersectionality’ that, in principle, offers various ways to generate emancipatory knowledge. Conceptualising and theorising social divisions evolves in a different academic sub-field than does the remedy of concrete cases of injustice or discriminations. Accordingly, there is no right or wrong in doing intersectional analysis; it rather matters to understand the range of methodological concerns on the one hand, and differing needs to find adequate research methods to solve the tension between structural (group) exclusions and concrete (individual) emanations of discriminations. Without any doubt the preference for specific approaches to intersectionality goes hand in hand with particular political or strategic objectives.

5.3 The meaning of social categories and subjective dimensions:
looking for research strategies that improve emancipation

Leslie McCall’s40 approach to intersectionality research brings back socio-economic aspects to the theory field of researching equality and justice while differentiating discriminatory dimensions of individual positioning within a constellation of group hierarchies. The central question to be answered when thinking of complex social reality and multiple discriminations might be: how can complexity be managed in concrete cases of discrimination? According to McCall:

Individuals usually share the characteristics of only one group or dimension of each category defining their social position. The intersection of identities in individuals takes place through the articulation with a single dimension of each category. Thus the ‘multiple’ in these intersectional analysis refers not to dimensions within categories but to dimensions across categories.41

Hence, McCall’s differentiation between ‘dimensions’ and ‘categories’ could help to clarify the limits of subjective identity aspects of individuals (dimension as the personal interpretation of an overlapping belonging to certain
groups) and social categories echoing systematic power relationships of historically constructed group hierarchies.

To make more explicit the difference between: (a) dimension; and (b) category we might construct a person at the intersections of various social axes, for example a Protestant, middle class, gay British woman living in Yorkshire is placed at the intersections of multiple categories, that is, religion, class, sexuality, nationality, and gender. Only one single dimension of different categories is relevant in her unique social location as the multiplying of discriminatory grounds also requires that we have to clarify in what ways the relationship, that is, the tension between majority and minority categories might unfold. In this case, we could assume that in particular her (homo-)sexuality might be an objective of structural vulnerability (asymmetry) as far as dominant patterns of heterosexuality are concerned. Does it make a difference when the concrete person we are talking about would be working class instead of middle class, or Jewish instead of Protestant, or Mexican instead of British? We might agree that her individual experience of homophobic discrimination in a hetero-normative environment probably might be the same independent of other layers of minoritised status, but intersecting dimensions of specific categories will increase her vulnerability to being targeted, perhaps, by anti-Semitism and homophobia; racism, classism and homophobia or xenophobia, homophobia and sexism. According to Gill Valentine, a spatial understanding of intersecting social identities refers to ‘varying levels of emotional investment in different subject positions at different temporal and spatial moments, as well as continuities and discontinuities’. Thus, from the individual’s perspective the ‘undoing of one identity by another’, is part and parcel of dealing with different power situations where ‘dominant spatial orderings’ exist. Therefore, intersecting subjective identities are embedded in a web of intersecting or overlapping social hierarchies. To come back to McCall’s approach, its purpose is to differentiate ‘dimensions’ and ‘categories’ following a research logic that is interested to measure relationships between discriminating factors. As McCall emphasises, ‘The concern is with the nature of the relationships among social groups and, importantly, how they are changing, rather than with the definition or representation of such groups per se’.

In Scheme 5.1, I have clustered the three main intersectionality approaches unearthed by McCall to make clear in what ways research methods and methodology are embedded in specific intellectual projects. The classified investigating strategies to intersectionality have to be regarded as models catching specifically designed scopes of (feminist) knowledge. Whereas the anti-categorial (I) and the inter-categorial complexity (III) approach express opposing views on the notion and accordingly, use of social categories, the intra-categorial complexity approach (II) attempts to mediate the deconstruction of classic holistic groups such as class, gender and ‘race’ while insisting on political strategies. The latter is based on the assertion that group identities could be mobilised against oppression. Nonetheless, this middle way
approach accentuates conflicting social dimensions that unfold as identity elements across group categories. What becomes very clear from the different approaches is that McCall’s own research, namely that of inter-categorial complexity, does focus on structural relationships that reflect social positions as an outcome of group hierarchies across different categories.

Accordingly, McCall’s own epistemic project is quite distinct from other approaches to intersectionality as she clearly stresses an ‘evaluating’ perspective regarding equality and difference. In her own phrasing, ‘meaningful inequalities’ matter and should be measured quantitatively. Thus, she focuses on the question of how to gather data with respect to multidimensional layers of social locations supporting distributive justice that prioritise, for example, group compensation strategies.

Further, McCall asserts that the earning gap between poor and rich
populations in the US rose in the late 1970s confronting feminist research with an urgent need to understand more closely wage differences between men and women, but also between women of various classed, ethnic and ‘race’ backgrounds. Her overall criticism that feminist research tended to focus on qualitative research neglecting methodological innovations of quantitative methods hits an ideological nail. Also, she complains that research using highly complex statistical material is difficult to publish in leading peer-journals. These allegations and concerns are serious and thus, we should ask ourselves, what kind of complexity are we able to measure and what are the limits to digest complexity? Given that global poverty is on the rise, although post-industrial economic transformations are diminishing the gap in wealth between the classic North and South of the Globe (First and Third World economies), McCall’s plea to focus on the meaning of social class is reinforced. But as the remedy of individual cases of discriminations depends on comparative data and therefore methodological parameters to measure inequalities, we also have to reflect on the normative directions of inquiries (scope of knowledge).

5.4 The disappearance and re-emergence of social class: the intersecting dimensions of gender, ethnicity, class and faith

Academic approaches on ethnicity and gender, and, as far as a general crisis in faith systems is concerned, gendered intersections with religion (Muslim faith, in particular) have had more attention in recent years. This is due to alarmed nation state governments in and beyond Europe trying to cope with ‘ethically’ framed social conflicts, fundamentalist threats and organised terrorist violence in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and 7 July 2005, as well as efforts to combat an increase of anti-Muslim racism. With reference to increasing global risk and security discourses, however, we should bear in mind that beneath the surface of these regional and local debates, economically and socially excluding cultural practices exist in all EU states, although perhaps varying in their scale of violent expressions and political consequences.

The Parisian banlieue riots in 2005 and the latest of 2007, give very good examples of spontaneous eruptions of anger and frustration due to social and economic segregation. The ‘criminal’ face of youth violence appears in a ‘cultural’ or ‘ethnic’ make up caused by long-lasting experiences of institutionalised racism. As Alana Lentin argues, the banlieue riots, not unlike the riots in urban black ghettos of the US in the 1960s–1970s, or the London-Brixton riots in 1981, articulate a protest against ‘heavy handed policing of the poor, non-white people in neighbourhood that have become no-man’s lands, severed from the centres of political, cultural and economic life.’ European nation states often only ‘tolerate’ non-Christian populations either as foreigners, as cheap labour, as temporary working cohorts or as second-class citizens, while not standing up to the social consequences of
failed integration politics and *classed* cultural exclusions. As John Rex\(^{58}\) (1996) puts it:

> Although it protests loudly about being against ‘Racism’ and ‘xenophobia’, the European Union has devised an institution in the Migrants Forum which classifies racial and cultural minorities who are citizens together with the *gastarbeiders* who are not. The problems of minorities are, in fact, to be marginalized and dealt with outside the normal democratic process.

When we look at national reports on racist violence for example, we are confronted with information deficits of EU Member States regarding criminal records and coherent data collections. The RAXEN NFP Reports of 2005\(^{59}\) for example made clear that Greece, Italy and Portugal have no public official criminal justice data on racist crimes and violence.\(^{60}\) Other countries hold good or excellent data collection mechanisms, but the focus swings between ‘general discrimination’ and ‘activities of extreme right-wing groups/hate speech’.\(^{61}\) Thus, the overall EU report concludes that ‘Member States have different official systems in place for collecting data on racist crimes and violence’;\(^{62}\) this appears as significant and fairly typical\(^{63}\) for federal policy structures undermining more coherent attempts to combat racism, that is, discrimination of religious or ethnic minorities in the EU.

Consequently, looking at the incongruence of national reports on racist violence we should act with reservations against research agendas that focus on the collection of sensitive data regarding gendered religious membership. Moreover, the current policy agenda in different European countries seems to concentrate on axes of ‘gender, religion and ethnicity’ while widely neglecting the central impact of (deprived) social class status and complex notions of transnational belonging. It seems that prejudiced perceptions of collective cultural competence have become central to an ideological discourse about minority ethnic group rights against female individual right claims.\(^{64}\) Symptomatically, a British mainstream public discourse, for example, shifted its attention from ‘race’ and gender intersections to signifiers of culturalised regimes of ‘female oppression’: policy discourses on minority ethnic communities, for example, connected the theme of immigration and citizenship with bogus and forced marriages.\(^{65}\) Hence, national state authorities which prioritise information on the potential of minorities to engage with political extremism and violent culture rather than encouraging co-ordinated EU studies on how to change patterns of prejudices and structural social exclusions underscore they do not traverse boundaries of inequality.

Hence, we should keep a critical distance from any formalised application of social categories as they only work as *approximations of constructed relationships*; they have to be read, after all, in concordance with shifting ideological implications of intersecting social categories.

Avtar Brah and Anne Phoenix\(^{66}\) argue that the social category ‘class’ nearly
passed away in sociological research over the last 20 years, but also in ‘governance policy tackling, for example, child poverty, obesity or scandalising poor achievements in education’.\textsuperscript{67} The disappearance of class as the dominant social category of subordination addressed by critical (Marxist) research, however, has to be read in concordance with advancing research on class and its other intersecting social divisions. According to Floya Anthias\textsuperscript{68} social stratification theory focused on class only while talking about economic inequalities without reconsidering in what ways ethnicity and gender might shape concrete class positions. It seems that this trend of neglected ‘class analysis’ is slightly reversed in British sociology more recently, as a series of publications with the journal \textit{Sociology} makes clear.\textsuperscript{69} Now, we could intervene and argue that ‘race’, nationality, religion, citizenship, sexuality and physical ability shape concrete class positions similar to ethnicity and gender, insisting that notions of working or working-poor class appear as multidimensional when embedded in continuously problematic and precarious living conditions. Emphasising this link means arguing that intersecting identity layers nurture notions of \textit{class} while pinpointing individual departures in distinctive ways. All in all, social class frames individual access to economic wealth, cultural goods influencing political and public participations; and this classism is wrapped in intersected layers of different cultural, ethnic, religious and gendered economic performances.

More fracturing categories such as ‘ethnicity’ or ‘sexuality’, for example, have complicated the original scope of anti-discrimination and sex equality law. Nonetheless the contestation about income, working conditions and equal payment for women and minoritized groups underscores the policy framework of all EU Directives.

Hence, as argued here, we have to break down complex power regimes into active political perspectives in Europe: following Crenshaw, Mieke Verloo\textsuperscript{70} underlines that the analytical model ‘intersectionality’ has to be approached from a structural and a political angle. Whereas the structural dimension refers to complex experiences of individual discriminations shaped by intersecting social divisions, the political realm hints at a broader collective frame embedded in policy and ideological strategies. This differentiation echoes to a certain degree McCall’s advocacy for an inter-categorial approach to intersectionality that focuses on the implications of \textit{relationships} as an outcome of asymmetrically organised social categories. However, \textit{social categories} as unfolding in particular hierarchies have to be regarded as inflicted by historical configurations of the social realm. Gudrun Axeli-Knapp’s discussion of travelling theories,\textsuperscript{71} that is, the problematic meaning of the Anglo-American triad ‘gender, race, class’ in a German academic context, for example, highlights some of the theoretical shortcomings of a non-reflexive adoption of historically laden social categories. Thus, the ‘specific constellation of interdependent structures’\textsuperscript{72} on the background of European integration and global transformation requires tools for a complex social analysis that takes into account different historiographies of individual oppression and group
exclusions. Accordingly, we have to discuss to what extent specific social categories such as class, gender, religion and ethnicity have similar or varying grounds in discussions on intersecting social locations in European societies. Therefore, aiming to traverse national boundaries of inequality among and between 27 EU Member States requires a more fundamental revision of the ontological base of social divisions such as class, gender, ethnicity or sexuality as these social categories were analysed and understood sociologically in national (nation state) frames. In this regard, the transformation of different European, but also non-European nation states is going to restructure the classic division of the public and private sphere that encircled the boundaries of economic, political and intimate relationships between men and women, between national citizens and non-citizens, between ethnic majorities and minorities. Only to remind us, feminists challenged the binary construction of a public and private sphere in its gendered and restrictive function. As Rebecca Johnson asserts, this ‘[d]ivide is an important part of the background scenery against which intersectional theory has unfolded’. Consequently, a critical debate on the chances of multidimensional equality and intersectionality in the EU also has to look at the becoming of social categories as well as at the becoming of social identities.

5.5 European socialisation and intersecting social categories

Walby suggests a new concept of ‘societalisation’ that might be more adequate to capture the ‘different temporal and spatial reach’ of social systems (that is, gender, class, ethnicity, UM V). According to her:

This is a process in which there is a tendency for these systems to be brought into alignment . . . For example, the societalization project of the European Union introduces new principles of organizations of class, gender, ethnicity, and nation that interrupt previous projects to societalize around would-be nation states.

But what would be different about the construction of social categories, that is, social systems and what does ‘alignment’ mean in this regard?

Nira Yuval Davis argues that ‘gender’, ‘ethnicity’ or ‘class’ operate and are constructed in distinctive realms. According to Yuval-Davis:

[the ontological basis of each of these divisions is autonomous, and each prioritises different spheres of social relations (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; 1992). For example class divisions are grounded in relation to the economic processes of production and consumption; gender should be understood not as a ‘real’ social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse that relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference while sexuality is yet another related discourse, relating to constructions of the body,
sexual pleasures and sexual intercourse. Ethnic and racial divisions relate to discourses of collectivities are constructed around exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries. Walby criticises this approach of specifying separate ontological bases as ‘segregationary reductionist’ as ‘each strand is identified with and reduced to a single and separate base’. However, Yuval-Davis’s (and Anthias’s) definition of class, for example, crosses the classic notion of economy while stressing that it refers to ‘production and consumption’ taking place in different social spheres. Nonetheless, what is interesting about Walby’s take is that she likes to advance the overall idea of intersecting social realms that are engendering new notions of social categories. Thus gender, for example, is constructed in economic interactions as well as in the process of symbolic boundary constructions of specific national or cultural groups. In this advanced complexity model each system is approached as having the other as an environment thinking of a ‘more fluid conception of the mutual impact of systems’. In contrast to the single base model, she proposes ‘institutionalized domains of economy, polity, violence, and civil society’ and ‘multiple sets of social relations such as class, gender and ethnicity’. Hence, each domain and each set of social relations has to be understood as interrelated, but not saturated in terms of spatially and temporally fixed meanings. While arguing against nested constellations her approach could analyse more complex overlaps between social categories that transgress the public versus private divide. As a conceptual approach of theorising multiple intersecting social inequalities, Walby’s model favours flexible combinations of institutionalised systems (that is, economy) and sets of social relations (that is, ethnicity). It pays attention to the current transformation of social, economic and political space in Europe affecting the way we have to understand social categories. While saying that ‘polity includes not only states, but also the European Union, organized religions that govern areas of life (such as personal life) and some nations (those with developed institutions, such as Scotland)’, Walby stresses the yet interwoven institutional layers that shape perspectives on multidimensional equality law and intersecting social divisions in all 27 EU Member States. But what tends to be lost in this proposal of complex and simultaneously operating social systems refers to the meaning of distinctive historiographies underlying any interpretation of ‘domains’ as institutionalised systems and also as sets of social systems. But this contextualising is most important when reflecting various regimes and different regional histories of group oppressions or even genocides.

While analysing Canadian and South African jurisdiction, Jewel Amoah discusses in what ways the purpose of a legally framed equality analysis could remedy a situation where discrimination or unequal treatment is experienced. The US American approach (explained above), the British colonial legacy as well as the Canadian and the South African contexts are all very different in terms of how issues of equality rights claims are conveyed.
Despite these differences, all these cultures actually share the prominence of ‘colour’ as a signifier of gendered and classed differences. ‘Colour’ signifies legacies of the white trade of black people as slaves, of organised exploitation of indigenous populations and as far as South Africa is concerned the persistence of post-Apartheid-racism. As Amoah emphasises, ‘Consideration of context is not restricted to the current state of events, but also relates to instances of historical disadvantage (versus historical privilege)’.91

Agreeing with this perspective, we could argue that taking lessons from history means to advance the contemporary debate on intersectionality and multiple equality law while re-politicising the historically specific embeddings of group recognitions and group exclusions. This could mean to privilege certain categories on the background of specific historical configurations, but also to ask for a re-contextualising of social categories according to transformed social realities. Clearly, this would require contextualised evaluations that take both group divisions, but also individual positioning within and across social categories into account.

On this background looking at Europe, or to be more precise at Continental Europe, post-Holocaust societies struggle with the legacies of the genocide directed by state racism (that is, institutionalised anti-Semitism) unfolding as legal (that is, criminalising) exclusion first, and second, as the systematic mass murder of Jews, Sinti and Roma, communists, disabled people and homosexuals, Jewish and non-Jewish, men and women, children and old people likewise. It is important to acknowledge this specific historical context as it situates the debate on intersecting social divisions with reference to continental Europe where minority faith and ethnic groups were outlawed before they were exterminated, collectively. In the beginning of the new millennium, the EU92 adopted the memory of the Holocaust as the ‘founding moment of European civilisation’.93 On the background of this statement, gendered dimensions of minoritised ethnicity, religious, health, sexual and political belonging have to be regarded as central to legal endeavours to balance intersecting group categories and individual identities.

According to the law scholar Elisabeth Holzleithner,94 looking for the marginalised position within a category implies the quest for those who are most excluded. And here, we are clearly confronted with political evaluations that underly the different approaches to intersectionality as argued above. Although the different nation states in Europe are transforming rapidly into states that have joined the EU and those who, either willingly keep their distance or are held ideologically in distance, the real challenge to EU multidimensional equality law has to be seen in the eventual crossing of its legal borders. Hence, the logic of intersectional social categories and intersecting individual identities means actual transgressions and what Walby only takes on board with respect to the European societalisations, it will happen not by being ‘congruent in the same territory’.95
5.6 Conclusion

While assessing critically various streams of intersectionality research, I intended to make clear that intersectionality, indeed, helps to identify analytically complex layers of individual subordination. However, systematic positions constructed in classed, gendered, ethnic, hetero-normative and ‘racialised’ terms monitor individual access to privileges, cultural power and social economic inclusion in each of the, by now, 27 EU Member States differently. Despite an overarching anti-discriminatory scope of multidimensional equality law, differently situated nation state legacies confront us with specific forms of prejudices, varying standards of equity and, consequently, uneven terms of (minority) recognition and rights. Although the Anglo-Dutch influence on the EU non-discrimination law packages is acknowledged widely, the ‘kingmaking’ significance of previous political protests on the basis of political citizenship rights as a salient, but less elaborated, precondition is less acknowledged. But as underlined here, the political protest of Black Britons was essential to the legal and administrative response of what passed later as the first Race Relations Act in 1965. In this regard an ongoing complexity of social reality is inherent in the idea of intersectionality. This complexity might fabricate counter-ideological tensions in and between different EU Member States engendering new transnational political actions. Hence, the overall idea of the EU framework to harmonise different legal standards also gives way to new intersecting social and political identities that are going to boost equality efforts transcending the yet achieved EU framework. As made clear above, we should demand that our lesson from history means to advance the contemporary debate on intersectionality and multiple equality law while re-politicising the historically specific embeddings of group recognition and support those who are disadvantaged to air their voices, collectively.

Alain Touraine argues that what is most characteristic of Europe or rather European societies at large is its political form of social organisation. He writes:

Europe is the part of the world where the problem of the social distribution of costs and advantages among social categories which are defined in hierarchical terms play a central role and acts as a link between mass consumption and cultural identities which, on the contrary, are separated in the USA or merged in Japan. Europe is the political continent; it is defined by the central role of social political processes.

We will see what the people of Europe make out of the ideological project of EU societalisation.
Notes

1 This Directive aims at equality irrespective of race and ethnic origin in employment and occupation, social advantages, education and provision of goods and services.

2 This Directive intends to establish a framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, covering discrimination on grounds of religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation.

3 These Directives deal with gender equality in employment and occupation and provision of goods and services respectively.


6 Unlike most of the other contributors to this book I concentrate on sociological and political considerations regarding multidimensional discriminations, equality and intersectional dimensions of social categories (i.e. class, gender, ethnicity, ‘race’, nationality, sexuality, etc).


9 I am referring predominantly to an Anglo-American sociological discourse context.


13 In a background paper to a ENAR Policy Seminar in Brussels, 6–7 October 2006, intersectional discrimination is defined as implying ‘a specific cumulative form of discrimination as a unique, specific synergistic situation’ (p 11). Besides, multiple discrimination is regarded as covering additive and intersectional dimensions, ibid, available at www.enar-eu.org/en/events/directives/background-paper_EN.pdf (accessed 9 January 2008).


15 Cited in P Rothenberg (2003) ‘Learning to see the interrelation of race, class and
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18 Ibid, p 279.
19 Ibid.
26 [d]aughters of migrants’, ibid, p 256.
27 Ibid.
28 See for example the radical feminist lesbian journal Ihrsinn, in particular issue 3, 1991 (‘Das Verlorene Wir’) and issue, 5 1992 (‘Die Qual der Moral’). The journal was founded in 1989 as an initiative of intellectual political lesbians in Bochum intending to establish a forum for debate outside established circles of German universities. It was published until 2004; edited by G Büchner and U Janz (Ihrsinn eV), Bochum. For further information see also www.ihrsinn.auszeiten-frauenarchiv.de/englisch/self.html.
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37 As far as the debate in Europe is concerned we have to acknowledge that there are significant similarities as far as Britain is concerned in terms of the cultural, social and civic legacy of the exposed meaning of skin colour as a marker of difference. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the complexity of differently situated nation-state histories that shape the notion of the other, racist discourses and approaches to differences.
39 Ibid, p 199.
41 Ibid, p 1781.
42 McCall speaks of the model of an Arab-American, middle class and heterosexual woman, ibid.
44 Ibid, p 18.
47 This is not to say that in praxis different approaches could merge: McCall makes clear that feminist research in this field tends to be a mixture of different approaches.
48 Ibid.
52 L Blackwell (2003) ‘Gender and ethnicity at work: Occupational segregation and disadvantage in the 1991 British census’, Sociology, 37: 713–31. Blackwell’s research stresses that gender and ethnicity do not combine to create double disadvantage for minority women in the labour force’ (p 713). Women of various ethnic groups, for example Indian, Sikh, white English women and Muslim Bangladeshi women obtain occupations that do not match with a general ascription of gendered and ethnic discrimination. Thus occupational performance is very distinctive.
I use the term ‘faith’ as a symbolic container for themes of national belonging, religious belief and otherwise emotional identifications with particular communities.


60 Ibid, p 10.

61 Ibid, p 11.

62 Ibid.


64 O Reitman looks at the controversial debates on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. Frequently, single axes of inequality, for example ‘sex equality’ or ‘sexuality’ are defended against ‘ethnic and religious minority rights’ and thus introduced as competing layers of discrimination. Reitman differentiates minority and majority patriarchy while talking about the conflicts of cultural group rights and individual (gendered) rights. What is important to the broader theme of intersectionality is her criticism of arguments that try to balance dissimilar struggles against oppression. In contrast, she reminds us that a group-differentiated-rights discourse should be sensitive to a range of differences taking into account the situation of minorities within minorities, but also the asymmetric tension between hegemonic and marginal patriarchy. For details see O Reitman (2005) ‘Multiculturalism and feminism – incompatibility or synonymity?’, Ethnicities, 5: 216–47, at pp 230 and 236.


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72 Ibid, p 263.
73 Recently, Ulrich Beck became renown for his alternative vision of a cosmopolitan methodology. Although I agree with his argument concerning the limited perspectives of national methodologies, I do hold strong reservations towards his and other mainstream sociologists more recent attempts to reserve this proclaimed non-national methodology as decent research to strengthen Europeanisation. For details on Beck’s proposal, see U Beck (2000) ‘The cosmopolitan perspective: sociology of the second age of modernity’, British Journal of Sociology, 51: 79–105.
78 Ibid, p 462.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid, p 453.
This indicates that gender is not confined to the sphere of family and culture, for example, and class not determined only by economic locations and achievements.


In 2002, Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznainer analysed the cosmopolitanisation of the Holocaust memory and argue that ‘[t]ransnational memory cultures . . . have the potential to become the cultural formation for global rights politics’. D Levy and N Sznainer (2002) ‘Memory unbound – The holocaust and the formation of cosmopolitan memory’, European Journal of Social Theory, 5: 87–106, citation at p 88. In this text, they also critically discuss the Stockholm Forum while stating that “culture” offered “politics” a template for how a unified Europe, the site of the historical Holocaust, could imagine itself as a community of shared values (p 100). During this forum the Holocaust was officially declared as a European memory.

Levy and Sznainer, ibid, p 102.


Situating means that a generalised pattern or a supposedly taken for granted discourse has to be approached more concretely while detecting complex and contradictory positioning(s) within particular historical, nationally specific and biographical locations. See for details on this methodological term U Viiten (2007) ‘Situatied Cosmopolitanisms: Notions of the Other in Discourses on Cosmopolitanism in Britain and Germany’, PhD thesis, University of East London (unpublished).


A Tourain, ibid, pp 255–6.