Gender mainstreaming and neo-freedom. How gender equality policies are stretched and bent and what that can possibly mean.
Gender equality and gender mainstreaming

- There are many visions of gender equality, and many strategies

- Gender mainstreaming is a strategy towards gender equality that in itself theoretically is impartial to vision

- Yet in practice some visions are more probable or potentially successful than others
Gender mainstreaming: plural

- Most commonly distinguished visions of gender equality are related to whether a vision of equality, difference or deconstruction of gender is applied.

- These visions translate into gender mainstreaming as a strategy of inclusion, of reversal (or equal valuation of different contributions of women and men) and displacement.
Gender mainstreaming: dynamic

- Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that aims to change all policies and policy processes so that they incorporate a vision of gender equality.

- This means that gender mainstreaming inevitably interacts with ‘normal’ or previously established policies and policy processes.

- In this interaction, gender equality visions can become fixed, shrunk, stretched or bent.
Discursive dynamics in gender mainstreaming I

- **Fixing**: nailing down or freezing a specific meaning of gender equality.
  - Example: parity democracy and quota

- **Shrinking**: reducing its meaning to something that is confined to a particular policy area or a specific interpretation of an issue.
  - Example: non-discrimination
Discursive dynamics in gender mainstreaming II

- **Stretching**: broadening of the concept of gender equality by developing a larger meaning that expands on its previous understanding in a given context.
  - Example: gender+ equality policies

- **Bending**: the concept of gender equality is adjusted to make it fit some other goal than the achievement of gender equality itself
  - Example: excellence in science / quality of policy making
Understanding the fate of gender mainstreaming

- Keep in mind that gender equality is plural and dynamic

- And that this plurality and dynamism interacts with specific elements of the context in which these policies are trying to intervene

- Today: focus on one aspect of this context: neoliberalism
Neoliberalism

- Is a political discourse and practice that pushes towards deregulation and political disengagement from the economy to the point that political entities (governments) and actions might be subordinated to the logic of market discipline.

- Prioritizes the freedom of investors, shareholders and owners over the freedom of workers, tenants or citizens.

- Therefore is at odds with discourses and practices that prioritize equality of citizens, solidarity, care and even to some degree human rights.
Janusface of the EU and EU Member States

- EU and EU Member States to various degrees embrace and adopt:
  - Gender equality and a range of antidiscrimination policies (about many different inequalities, yet hardly ever class)
  - Neoliberalism as the best way to economic growth
Gender equality interacting with neoliberalism

- The case of ‘reconciliation of work and family life’
- Bending the goal of sharing work and care to economic growth
- Bending the goal of gender equality to the goal of having more children
- Bending the goal of gender equality to the goal of privileging the ‘native’, ‘white’ citizens.
### Feminism playing into neoliberalism (Fraser 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminism</th>
<th>Neoliberalism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-economism, call for attention for recognition</td>
<td>Less attention for redistribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-androcentrism: critique of the family wage</td>
<td>Harnessing women’s ambitions to capitalist accumulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-etatism: less state, empowered citizens</td>
<td>Less state…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-Westphalianism</td>
<td>NGO-ification of feminist politics</td>
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What can all this possibly mean? I

- Need to continuously articulate feminist visions as a political goal in their own right to counteract processes of bending and shrinking
- Need to try to ‘fix’ articulated feminist visions
- Need to stretch feminist visions wherever possible to the most radical ones
What can all this possibly mean?
II (Fraser 2009)

- Need to reconnect feminist critique to a critique of capitalism
- Need to revalue care work
- Need to strengthen public power
- Need to strengthen global democracy, participation and empowerment
Thinking Big is important!

- Thank you all
- Looking forward to discussions

- see Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009 The discursive dynamics of gender equality: stretching, bending and policy making. Routledge
- See Fraser 2009 Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History, New Left Review