



*The political interests of gender  
revisited*

*Redoing theory and research with a feminist face*

Edited by

Anna G. Jónasdóttir & Kathleen B. Jones

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# The political interests of gender revisited: reconstructing feminist theory and political research

*Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Kathleen B. Jones*

## **Changed contexts/outmoded theories?**

In 1988, in the preface to *The Political Interests of Gender*, we wrote that our work had been prompted by ‘the desire to promote dialogue about the parameters of a truly international feminist theory and practice that represents the interests of gender in cross-cultural and historical perspective’ (Jones and Jónasdóttir 1988: ix). Much has transpired in the decades since that book’s publication, making dialogue about international feminist theory and practice both more difficult and more imperative. The terms ‘feminist theory and practice’ have undergone further fragmentation and contestation, as evidenced in the titles of several prominent collections of essays: *Coming to Terms, Conflicts in Feminism, Gender Trouble, Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, Feminisms: A Reader, Is There a Nordic Feminism?* And the idea of the international itself has been subjected to rigorous criticism (Rosenau 1990; Mackie 2001; Naples and Desai 2002). At the same time, the pervasive impact of political-economic and social processes represented by the shorthand ‘globalisation’ has put questions about the interests of gender into circulation around the world and led feminist scholars to stress the relevance of gender to understanding the impact of globalisation in different political systems (Walby 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Globalisation, or global restructuring, can be considered both an old and a new phenomenon. Although its roots extend as far back as the European expansion of the fifteenth century, or even earlier, as a contemporary concept globalisation most frequently refers to a ‘significant economic and political transformation [which] has been occurring since the 1970s’ (Marchand and Sisson Runyan 2000: 4; Kelly *et al.* 2001: 3). The transformation signalled by globalisation includes major changes in the social relations and spaces of production, a widened gap between the technological and economic resources of the relatively more industrialised

'North' and the relatively more impoverished 'South', environmental and ecological crises, increased population mobility, porous national borders and the undermining of national sovereignty, and the emergence of new supranational structures and ideological movements.

In the two decades since the publication of our last anthology two trends have characterised approaches to the concept of gender in political studies. On the one hand, feminist scholars in many fields including international studies, development studies, political economy, comparative political studies and social policy have made the political interests of gender central to their research and stressed the importance of gender to the study of topics such as the impact of new media and new technologies on gender relations; rights and citizenship; the restructuring of gendered roles, identities and relationships in different social contexts; political representation and governance; individual, family and household welfare; sexual trafficking; and the gendered dynamics of militarisation (Vishvanathan 1997; Walby 1997, 1999; Sassen 1998; Sainsbury 1999; Freeman 2000; Marchand and Sisson Runyan 2000; Green and Adam 2001; Kelly *et al.* 2001; Shade 2002; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Rai 2003; Banaszak *et al.* 2003; Lister 2003; Daly and Rake 2003; Enloe 2004, 2000). On the other hand, many of the most frequently cited texts of feminist theory, particularly those influenced by post-structuralism, have 'deconstructed' both the concept of 'gender' and the concept of 'interests' and urged researchers to discard one or both as 'essentialist'.<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1990s in particular, implicit tensions between these two approaches – the one strategically centring gender in social and political analysis and the other deconstructing gender – have become more explicit and pronounced. In our judgment, we have reached an impasse in the project of feminist political theory: the contention that the concept of gender is essential both to the adequate theorisation of politics and efforts to achieve a more egalitarian transformation of global power systems stands at odds with both the claim that gender is a suspect category and the argument that a more radical democratic project demands the overthrow of gender theory itself. Also, the claim that a sustainable democratic project on the local, national, regional, or global levels can be better articulated, investigated, and defended *with* an elaborated feminist interest theory stands against the rejection of the concept of 'interests' and interest theory.

This impasse constitutes a 'crisis' within contemporary feminist theory. While we borrow Butler and Scott's terminology of crisis (Butler and Scott 1992: xiii), we distinguish our meaning from theirs. Butler and Scott argued that the 'radical contestation' and destabilisation of fundamental concepts of feminist analysis, such as 'women', 'experience', 'subject',

‘agency’, etc. generated a productive ‘crisis’ in feminist theory (1992: xiv). Although ‘all fundamental conceptualizations of self, other, world are contestable . . . such conceptualizations are nevertheless necessary or unavoidable for an adequately reflective ethical and political life’ (White 2000: 8). Even though we agree that debates about the meaning of these concepts have been valuable, we contend that the crisis engendered by the current impasse in feminist theory is of a different order.

This crisis is not primarily about how to *think about what we can know* about gender, identity, or representation in the epistemological/linguistic sense. It is about how to *think about what we can do* about gender, identity, or representation in the ethical/political sense (Zerilli 1998). In other words, the contemporary crisis in feminist theory concerns how to think critically about conflicting action claims. Without both a historically and institutionally specific account of the ‘workings of power’ (Butler 1995: 137) and a substantive account of democratic projects and norms it becomes difficult to think, talk, and make judgments about broad strategies of collective and individual engagement and action.

What motivates us to assemble this anthology is to provide an account of the political interests of gender in theoretically coherent ways that push past this impasse and bridge the gap between discursive (post-structuralist, semiotic, philosophical, etc.) and socio-materialist accounts of gender relations and politics. How shall we conceptualise the key categories framing this project – ‘the political’, ‘interests’, and ‘gender’? Before proceeding to a substantive account of these concepts we must first distinguish between levels of analysis at which to articulate such concepts.

Between meta-theoretical premises about these concepts and empirical studies of their operation of power ‘on the ground’ exists a rich array of social theories and methods. Figure 1.1 illustrates these distinctions.

At the meta-theoretical level, we locate fundamental philosophical premises about the nature of human existence (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and methodological principles (methodology). At this level, theory postulates broad claims about social reality, historical change and human nature, as well as claims about what we can know and how. Using the concept of ‘research tradition’ derived from the work of Larry Laudan we can distinguish among meta-theoretical claims by viewing each set of claims as ‘a set of general assumptions made about the *ontological* entities and processes in a domain of study, and about appropriate methods [and epistemological criteria] to be used for investigating the problems and constructing the theories in that domain’ (Laudan 1977: 79).

Research traditions – such as historical materialism/realism, positivism, hermeneutics, semiotics, post-structuralism and post-humanism – provide a ‘set of guidelines for the development of specific theories belonging to

**Figure 1.1** Levels of analysis

Philosophy of science	<p>Research traditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ontological assumptions</li> <li>• Methodological principles</li> <li>• Epistemological criteria</li> </ul>
Empirical sciences	<p>Specific theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic</li> <li>• Middle range</li> </ul>
	<p>Empirical studies</p>

that tradition'. Yet, such philosophical assumptions are 'neither explanatory or predictive, nor directly testable' (Laudan 1977: 81–2). Instead, they are postulates from which specific theories, both abstract and concrete, can be elaborated and tested empirically. By 'empirical' we mean the full range of data collected through a variety of methods, including discourse analysis, and distinguish it from the narrow use of the term in logical positivist research traditions.

Rather than constructing an epistemology- or exclusively 'method-driven' social theory, our approach calls for grounding theory in ways that better enable political engagement with the world 'by calling into question the institutional structures [and discourses] that generate the observable regularities of everyday society' (Shapiro and Wendt 1992: 213, 218). We consider this approach 'realist' because it 'tolerates the persistent epistemic uncertainty' that developing social science and social theory as question- rather than method-driven entails (Shapiro and Wendt 1992: 217). In other words, it is 'realist' in the sense that it refuses to ground social and political theory in a set of epistemological premises or constraining philosophical principles that either unduly limit social inquiry to the elucidation of the meaning of actions or automatically reject efforts to identify and explain social contingencies.

'Realism' is a term in wide use with controversial connotations in several fields. We consider realism to be a main research tradition, distinguishable from both logical positivism or empiricism and hermeneutics (or the interpretive tradition, which can include post-structuralism as one among a variety of ways to articulate meaning). Our conceptualisation of



realism bears little resemblance to the caricature of ‘realist theories’ represented in some post-structuralist constructions of modernist thought. In other words, by defending a realist paradigm we do not suggest that researchers gain unmediated access to a world, or that ‘facts’ present themselves as transparencies. We accept the principle that all knowledge is mediated by, among other things, philosophical presuppositions, language, or varying social, cultural, and historical circumstances and remains subject to interpretation. Yet, to say that social inquiry is ‘theory-laden does not mean that it need be theory-driven’ (Shapiro and Wendt 1992: 198; Jónasdóttir 1994: ch. 1).<sup>3</sup>

At the outset we referred to the term ‘globalisation’. Globalisation serves as the contemporary political horizon in the case studies and comparative political studies collected in this anthology. In order to identify, explain, and assess the impact of globalised forces and social relations on the possibilities for feminist democratic politics we need to sustain different levels of analysis in research about the political interests of gender in different contexts. The essays in this collection aim to model theoretical and empirical work that can elaborate, in detail, which particular structures and dynamics create and sustain ‘networks of power/discourse’ in which processes of linguistic ‘resignification’ and political representation and decision-making always occur. The first five chapters of the book provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of the key concepts anchoring this collection, while the following eight chapters shed light on one or more of these concepts through concrete case studies. Taken together, these studies document a variety of political responses to the changed context and shape of politics which globalisation signals.

### **Politics and the political**

Our conceptualisation of politics and the political links structural analysis of social relationships, activities and institutions to critical attention to narrative or discursive practices. Fundamental to such analysis is the conceptual or analytical distinction between discourse and social structure, and between linguistic resignification and political change, a distinction that resists reducing one to an epiphenomenon or mere by-product of the other.

To claim that ‘discourse’, as a system of meanings, ‘constitutes’ institutions or social structures in no way contradicts the materiality or relative durability and persistence of those institutions and structures. As Nicos Mouzelis (1988) noted in a critical review of Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* ‘all institutional arrangements . . . are discursively constructed. But *there is absolutely no reason why one should*

*link discursive construction with fragility and precariousness* – labelling any reference to institutional durability as essentialist. For the core institutions of a social formation often display such a resilience and continuity that their overall, extremely slow, transformation can be seen only in the very *longue durée*, needing to be assessed in terms of centuries rather than years or shorter timespans’ (113–14). In fact, the claim that discourse constitutes institutions and structures begs the questions of why and how particular meanings constitute specific structures in particular ways. At the same time, to argue that social institutions and relations shape discourse is not to deny the materiality of discourse. Discursive representations of gender can persist and continue to shape social relations and structure social activities.

Chapter 2 provides an account of the relationship between critical epistemology and social theory and offers a way past the impasse in the further development of feminist political theory, which we identified in this introduction. In particular, this chapter offers a close, detailed reading and critique of the idea of ‘the political’ in post-structuralist theory. First, we trace the outlines of the shift in direction in feminist political theory toward the ‘linguistic turn’ or what Scott (1988) called the ‘shift to literary paradigms among social scientists’ (41). Next, we identify several distinguishing criteria or themes in post-structuralist social theory – the critique of meta-narratives, the critique of essentialism, the critique of the unitary, autonomous subject, and the critique of generalised norms – and assess the impact of these defining criteria on conceptualisations of politics, interests and gender in feminist theory. Finally, the chapter offers a way beyond the impasse in its articulation of the outlines of a critical feminist-realist theory of politics.

As we suggest in chapter 2, a *critical feminist-realist theory of politics* provides an explanatory, yet non-deterministic account of social structures and power relations, and understands such structures and relations as the conditioning situations enabling and constraining political action. This approach tries to answer feminist questions about different social conditions and politics with both empirical research, using multiple methods of investigation, and interpretive analyses. It brings identification of social structures and institutions of power together with elucidation of the norms and rules of language or discourse, explaining how these norms and rules shape and are shaped by specific social structures and relationships ordering social life, and yet are subject to change.

But what are feminist questions? In the wake of the epistemological emphasis on the ‘instability’ of categories such as ‘women’, ‘gender’ and ‘feminism’ one might hesitate to say that the most basic question feminists ask is ‘why, in just about all societies, are women disadvantaged, politically,

socially, [sexually], and economically relative to men?' And, more concretely, do 'hierarchical gendered structures of inequality' support the unequal distribution of prosperity in the global capitalist system (Tickner 2005: 6)? Naturally such questions beg others: What are the criteria for and indicators of 'disadvantage'? What are the criteria for and indicators of 'hierarchical structures'? Are women the only ones disadvantaged by hierarchical gendered structures of inequality?

Two chapters in this collection approach some of these questions through the lens of policy analysis, broadly defined. Exploring the relationship between gender and monetary policy in the European region, Brigitte Young (chapter 12) shows how certain macroeconomic strategies perpetuate gender systems and suggests strategies that might more effectively work toward achieving egalitarian goals. Stressing 'the active role of institutions in creating systems of beliefs and norms' she advocates a 'constructivist approach' to understanding 'how the European Monetary Union is involved in constructing identities and interests of member states and groups within them'. She specifically connects analysis of 'the discursive construction of globalisation and European integration' with assessment of 'the effects of the EMU's monetary policy on the creation of new norms and systems of beliefs . . . more commensurate with neoliberal practice and discourse' to identify what could be called the 'social relations' implicit in EMU macroeconomic policy. Then, she uses this linkage to consider how to make integrated monetary policy in the EU compatible with the goals of gender equality.

Gillian Youngs (chapter 13) provides an assessment of shifts in Amnesty International's strategy regarding violence against women, examining its expansion of definitions of public violence to include the state's failure to protect women from violence even in the 'private' sphere as a breach of women's human rights. She demonstrates how gender is a complex system of social relations of power institutionalised in civil society and the state, linking the domains of public and private. Her analysis of transnational efforts to broaden definitions of human rights to include violence against women in the so-called private sphere as state-supported structural violence raises important questions about the adequacy of state-based political strategies for redressing inequality without rejecting the state as a critical arena of change.

A theoretical analysis of democratic politics must account both for the potential for democratisation and identify the specific social forces and relations operating in historically concrete structures and institutions, which enable and constrain movements for democratic change. As the essays in this collection demonstrate, researchers can use a variety of theoretical approaches to differentiate analytically yet map connections

between social institutions of power and discourses. These allow us to consider both the concrete ways that discourses shape and are shaped by how individuals and groups are 'named' and rename themselves, and how different individuals and groups articulate material/practical programmes of social transformation aimed at, among other things, feminist democratic goals.

In this anthology, two chapters on very different subjects illustrate different approaches to the politics of democratisation. In chapter 7, Ingrid Pincus turns her attention to a study of the factors blocking the implementation of gender equality policy in Sweden. Through a detailed study of the administration of equality policy in Sweden, she demonstrates how such policy challenges a division of power between men and women and, in turn, leads to its opposition among men tasked with the job of implementing it. 'The implementation of gender equality policy is not only about focusing the norms, structures and practices in these organisations – the aim of this policy is to change them – to the advantage of women.' Given this strategic goal – to alter the balance of power in organisational norms, structures, and practices – Pincus documents how men, who are expected to change a system that would disempower men, create barriers to such change.

In 'Pragmatism, Feminism, and the Linguistic Turn', published in the mid-1990s, Nancy Fraser (1995) noted that 'one of the most important – and most difficult – tasks for feminist theorising is to connect discursive analyses of gender signification with structural analyses of institutions and political economy' (160). Shifting to the terrain of contemporary US politics, Jones and Dunlap (chapter 9) illustrate another way to 'link historical, systemic analysis with critical analysis of discursive processes' (Jónasdóttir and Jones). Through a case study of the discursive and institutional parameters of protest politics within the context of the 1996 Republican National Convention (RNC) in San Diego, California, the authors analyse queer politics as 'a complex, multiple set of practices of political resistance . . . mobilized before, in, and around the site of the RNC, as well as the strategic challenges to traditional practices of politics . . . represented by the efforts of different marginalized groups to gain access to public space'. Distinguishing between queer as an identity category and as a political category they argue that 'Queer citizenship confounds citizenship's national, sexual, racial, gendered, and class parameters in the name of a different citizenship. This different citizenship has as its purpose the building of a different kind of democratic community that would be genuinely constitutive of the plurality, and hence, the "queerness", of the concerns raised by new social movements.'

### Interests

By the concept of 'interests' we do not intend to signal that feminist political theory represents only another version of 'interest group liberalism'. Yet, we do not dismiss the political significance of interest group activities for changing the structure and substance of gender power. After all, the lobbying efforts of so-called marginalised groups have led to key policy gains and important changes in the law in the arenas of work, sexuality, literacy, reproduction, and political rights at the local, national and international level.

As Jónasdóttir has argued elsewhere, the concept of interests has both a 'formal' and a 'content' dimension, both of which are taken up in different ways in several chapters in this collection (Åberg, Jones and Dunlap, Ferguson, Pincus, Schreiber, Tripp). Its formal dimension connects most directly to the concept of political agency, which goes beyond the legal right to access, while its content aspect refers to agency's aims. The struggle for formal presence, or the right of members of an excluded group to be included among the participating and influencing members of a political community, has been a significant part of the history of democratic politics, of which feminism is a part. Formal representation of those who had been excluded from decision-making not only included *more* groups in the democratic process, but also challenged the substantive content and formal aspects of politics itself.

Women and men have had historically distinctive experiences and situations of living, been represented among 'different activities, [worked] with different things, [had] different responsibilities, [been] involved with people in different ways' (Jónasdóttir 1988: 43). Consequently, their demand for political standing, or group representation, has signalled, at least in part, the demand for recognition that gender matters to how we define the ends or purposes of public life. In this respect, the formal and the substantive, or content, aspects of the category of interests remain interconnected. At the same time, evidence from even the most 'women-friendly' states shows that women's struggle for what Jónasdóttir calls 'controlling presence' is even harder to win than the 'simple' right to access.<sup>4</sup>

Taking up the question of interests specifically in connection with the politics of empowerment in development studies, Ferguson (chapter 4) provides a concrete illustration of the usefulness of the concept of interest as what we might call a bridging concept between politics and gender. Using a post-structuralist critique 'as a way to open the conceptual and political space for interpretations of empowerment and other relevant concepts (e.g. needs, interests and rights) from a feminist materialist perspective' her

chapter demonstrates concretely how these theoretical paradigms can be combined usefully and applied fruitfully in the study of political interests.

Ronnee Schreiber (chapter 10) clarifies the distinction between formal and substantive interests in her analysis of conservative women's politics. Literature on the politics of the women's movement 'frequently conflates *women's* activism and policy issues with *feminism* [and] fails to explain the behavior of conservative women'. Using two US conservative women's organizations – Concerned Women for America (CWA) and Independent Women's Forum (IWF) in her case study, Schreiber demonstrates that there is no automatic link between identity and ideology, or between women's formal interest in politics and their substantive political interests. 'Conservative women are changing public discourse about women's interests; indeed one of the main goals of the IWF is to transform debates about "women's" issues by offering the viewpoints of conservative women.' By problematising the category of 'women's interests' through a study of non-feminist women, Schreiber provides a critical perspective on the concept of gender and the complexities of the politics of women's interests.

Aili Tripp (chapter 11) examines specific conditions which have motivated women's mobilisation and definition of their political interests in several African states. She compares two markedly different phases in women's political mobilisation in sub-Saharan Africa, which have taken place during the post-independence period, and fleshes out what is distinctive about women's collective action compared 'with other interest groups' in the African political landscape. She explains some of the main changes constituting the shift from the 'old model' of mass women's organisations, more or less closely tied to single-party states and claiming to represent the interests of all women, to a second generation of women organising and networking autonomously across the continent 'on an unprecedented scale'. Thus the main characteristics of women's mobilisation since the mid-1980s are heterogeneity of organisations, autonomy from both the state and traditional political institutions, and a new emphasis on political strategies and political participation, with women deciding on their own agenda and how to form a distinctive political presence. What is so fruitful in Tripp's chapter is that she combines an aim to 'identify a set of commonalities shared by a growing number of women's movements in Africa' with a clear emphasis on the plurality of interests and the internal disagreements and debates within the various organisations and institutions.

## Gender

A key argument put forth in this anthology is that it is possible to explore the production of gender differences without assigning gender

an ontological or 'naturalised' status. In fact, the 'naturalisation' of the unequal power and status of different socio-sexual groups makes the historically varying material production of socio-sexual inequalities invisible. This naturalisation is the result of a political process manifest in both civil society and the state (Watson-Franke, chapter 5 in this collection). We may want to resist making 'gender a "women's issue"', and avoid limiting 'feminist analysis to soliciting the "women's perspective"'. But if we want to identify and explain the particular social institutions and structures of power and privilege that sustain socially constituted differences it becomes incoherent to talk about feminist politics without at least conceptually 'positing "difference" as its basis' (Disch 1999: 546).

We doubt that 'difference' is *the* most fundamental category of feminist theory (Jónasdóttir 1994: 196–9; Jónasdóttir and von den Fehr 1998; Carlsson Wetterberg 1998). Yet, to assert as an imperative that feminist theorists make 'difference a target of [feminism's] critique of power' (Disch 1999: 546) collapses distinctions between levels of social analysis. In other words, it confuses the theoretical utility of 'gender difference' as a social category in political analyses of inequality (such as in research on differences between women's and men's economic opportunities) with assigning gender an ontological or 'naturalised' status (such as in claims made that women are inherently more peaceful than men).<sup>5</sup>

In her exploration of 'the point where gender analysis meets . . . public policy and everyday life' in Commonwealth Caribbean societies Eudine Barriteau (chapter 6) criticises what she calls 'the abuse of the concept' of gender. Not taking feminist scholarship on gender inequalities seriously, Caribbean public policy fails to comprehend fundamental differences in the living conditions of women and men. Policy-makers argue that any focus on women's situation specifically, or even on the social relations of women and men, is ideologically biased. Instead, utilising an abstract concept of gender (instead of women or social relations of gender) in theory as well as public policy debates has led to two clear results: the promotion of 'knowledge without power' and a privileged focus on men.

Building on the insights that 'gender is produced as a specific social system of structural difference or inequality', in chapter 3, Anna G. Jónasdóttir reconstructs Marx's methodology in feminist terms to provide an account of the social process of the production and appropriation of 'love power'. She argues that Marx's variant of historical materialism can 'serve feminist theory' and that feminist theory can also make a major contribution to the more general debate on Marx and the adequacy of his method. This chapter builds on the theory of gender offered in Chapter 2.

Several chapters in this anthology contribute directly and indirectly to analysis of how different social organisations of activities constitute gender as a social system of difference and, under particular conditions, sometimes a structural system of inequality. In chapter 5, Barbara Watson-Franke shows how nation-state formation altered, or attempted to alter, social relationships of ethnicity and gender extant in three matrilineal systems – the Asante from West Africa, the Mosuo from Southwest China and the Minangkabau from Indonesia. In her counter-examples of societies where the ‘politics of birth’ and kinship relations are not male dominated, she provides indirect evidence for Jónasdóttir’s thesis that the appropriation of women’s love power by men sustains gender inequities in formally equal state-based societies.

Berit Åberg’s study of the Swedish police in a local district (chapter 8) provides a case study of the reproduction of gender divisions in a work setting, despite formal equality of opportunity. She explores the production of gender as a system of social relationships through an analysis of how women and men are produced as gendered workers in the police interacting with social and organisational gender power structures. Her study offers an important illustration of the linkage between discursive representations of gender and social-structural dimensions through a study of workplace power hierarchies. Using the concept of gender structure ‘as *an historically variable system of gendered relations among gendered practices* which produce gender relationships in societies and in organisations under specific conditions’ she shows ‘how certain apparently neutral organisational conditions within the police, such as the bureaucratic nature of the organisation and its mode of the professionalisation, support . . . masculinised gender practices to a greater extent than feminised gender practices’ leading to ‘internal sex segregation.’ Her analysis connects meanings and practices, representations and roles, to articulate how gender power is reproduced in police work in Sweden, despite conditions of formal gender equality.

Taken together, then, this anthology is intended to provide richly concrete illustrations of how to formulate feminist political questions and elaborate feminist political theory, engaging with many of the political ‘interests’ of gender to which feminism variously responds. While its opening five chapters examine different dimensions of what we call a *feminist critical realist theory of politics*, articulating a theory of gender and politics linking historical materialist analysis with discursive analysis, the following eight chapters attend to the specificity involved in applying this theory to study the construction and transformation of the political interests of gender in specific contexts.



### Notes

- 1 For an overview of various contributions to the globalisation debate and an assessment of different theoretical approaches to globalisation, see for instance Ian Bruff (2005).
- 2 There are of course important distinctions among social theories of sexuality and gender, such as sexual difference feminism (Braidotti, Gatens, Grosz, Kristeva), post-humanist feminism (Haraway), queerfeminism (Sedgwick) and post-colonial studies (Spivak), which we cannot explore in this essay. For instance, sexual difference feminism conceives 'difference' in relation to 'the symbolic', i.e., as a 'relationship to power, language, and meaning' (Kristeva) while at the same time adhering to the epistemological principle that sexual difference is an identifiable, politically necessary and strategically useful analytical category. (Grosz 1989; Spivak). A close reading of several post-structuralist theorists is a focus of chapter 2.
- 3 There seems to be a growing interest among feminist scholars for the realist research tradition. See, for instance, Alison Assiter (1996) and Leslie McCall (2005).
- 4 Calling attention to ways that women have struggled for political standing does not mean gender interests are synonymous with women's interests. Yet we do claim the theoretical utility of 'gender' as a social category in political analyses of inequality (such as in research on differences between women's and men's economic opportunities).
- 5 The collapse of distinctions is evident in Joan Scott's analysis of nineteenth-century French feminist activists, whom Scott takes to task for their 'mistaken' view that they felt 'a sense of common experience' or had articulated a 'shared vision' (Scott 1996: 14). Her assumption seems to be that these feminists assigned 'women' and 'interests' an ontologically singular status. On a different reading, such feminists worked to detach women's political status from any arguments about 'women's proper place' based on ontology. That they argued against women's exclusion from citizenship, for instance, by calling attention to 'sexual difference' may be epistemologically paradoxical but it is hardly politically naïve.

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# The Political Interests of Gender Revisited: Redoing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face

Edited by Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Kathleen B. Jones

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"In the last two decades," Jónasdóttir and Jones write in their introduction to this important new anthology, "two trends have characterised approaches to the concept of gender in political studies ... one strategically centering gender in social and political analysis and the other deconstructing gender." Tensions between these trends led to an impasse in feminist theory, generating a "crisis in how to think about what we can do about gender, identity, or representation in the ethical/political sense." In this unique collection of theoretical and empirical research on gender and politics, the editors push past this impasse, assembling contributions from an impressive group of international scholars providing varied accounts of the political interests of gender. Investigating different institutional structures and discourses, contributors to this multidisciplinary collection illustrate concretely how to bridge the gap between discursive (post-structuralist, semiotic, philosophical, etc.) and socio-materialist accounts of gender relations and politics.

Structured around three conceptual guideposts—"politics," "interests," and "gender"—this anthology demonstrates the continued relevance of these concepts in the context of a theoretical and material landscape in flux. Offering fresh models for theoretical and empirical research, the first five chapters of the book provide a theoretical framework for the collection, while the following eight chapters shed light on key concepts through concrete case studies of such topics as human rights, women's movements, gendered labor markets, international monetary policy, equality policy, and queer politics.

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