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Lombardo, Emanuela, Universidad Complutense Madrid,
elombardo@cps.ucm.es

Meier, Petra, Universiteit Antwerpen, petra.meier@ua.ac.be

Studying power at work in symbolic representation

There are ‘particular kinds of power that men are able to exercise *over* women’ (Amy Allen)

‘[I]s it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by *shaping their perceptions*, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?’ (Steven Lukes)

‘[T]here are no relations of power without *resistances*’ (Michel Foucault)

Power-to is ‘the power that women can wield *to oppose* male domination’ (Amy Allen)

Power ‘springs up whenever people get together and *act in concert*’ (Hannah Arendt)

Political representation has been addressed in the literature on gender and politics mainly through analyses of the descriptive and substantive representation of women. Yet, symbolic representation is an interesting dimension to study because it goes beyond Pitkin’s (1972) understanding of it as a static standing of a symbol for a principal. The symbol or agent gets constructed, and symbolic representation thus involves activity and agency. Therefore, particularly when approached from a discursive perspective as we suggest here, symbolic representation allows us to explore how power is at work in processes of political representation. The aim of this paper consists in unpacking power and its mechanisms present in processes of political representation, more precisely symbolic representation. The paper starts with a discussion of the concept of power and from there develops a framework to study symbolic representation. Symbolic representation, the paper argues, fulfils a number of functions, such as constructing identity, creating legitimacy, and exercising political control, partly through the two former functions. Analyzing the different functions of symbolic representation, the paper unpacks how power and its mechanisms are present in processes of symbolic representation. In this, the paper adopts a discursive approach to symbolic representation, with the construction of gender as the principal, and discourse being the agent.

Power is always present, in one way or another, when thinking about political representation, though works can address the concept explicitly or simply mention it as an obstacle to women's political representation, or as the main relation that shapes gender in politics. In this chapter we aim at addressing the concept of power explicitly by unpacking power mechanisms that are present in symbolic representation. In this attempt to explicitly deal with the concept of power, we join scholars who wish to bring political theory on power closer to empirical analyses of – women's – political representation, since we think this encounter would benefit gender and other research on political representation.

Approached from the perspective of a discursive construction of agents as we suggest in this book, symbolic representation allows us to explore how power is at work in processes of political representation. The analysis of symbolic representation that we are developing here goes beyond Pitkin's (1972) understanding of it as a static standing of a symbol for a principal. The agent as we have discussed it along these pages – that is discourse – gets constructed, and the principal – gender – is part of this construction too. Therefore, symbolic representation involves activity and agency. Gender is constructed in policy discourses in many different ways by a variety of actors. Through these constructions women and men are meant to evoke particular feelings and beliefs, and these symbolic constructions of gender have in turn implications both for gender relations and for the political representation of both sexes.

Policies as discursive constructions constitute gender subjects in ways that reveal particular relations of power, of domination and conflict, of empowerment, or of solidarity (Allen 1999). Power can be exercised through policy discourses that shape people's perception of problems, making particular situations of conflict and inequality appear as if they were not problems at all, and not in need for change (Lukes 2005). Policy discourses can show how political power produces knowledge about how gender relations should be and, through discourses and practices, normalizes this knowledge about what legitimate gender relations are, and thereby controls gender subjects (Foucault 1995; 1980). But they can also show subjects' resistance to power (Foucault 1980) and people's capacity to act collectively to achieve particular aims (Arendt 1970).

We have developed how symbolic representation fulfils a number of functions, such as constructing identity, creating legitimacy, and exercising political control. We will now explore how power is at work in these functions. Power is visible in processes of symbolic representation when political discourses, for instance, construct particular roles for women and men that include or exclude them (as the analysis of employment related policies in Chapter four shows), legitimize or delegitimize some subjects as compared to others, thus authorizing or de-authorizing them (in Chapter's five study of intimate citizenship), and control and protect some subjects and behaviours rather than others, empowering or disempowering them (as in Chapter six with the analysis of gender based violence policies).

We will also reflect on what, in relation to power, makes symbolic representation different and relevant for understanding the political representation of gender. We will analyse where power is present, and what type of power, in the dimensions of representation considered, by going back to our discussion of descriptive representation in Chapter seven and substantive representation in Chapter

eight. The norms, meanings, and beliefs that characterize symbolic representation are especially relevant for understanding informal types of power that are present in processes of political representation.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the extent to which and how feminist political science works on the political representation of women have addressed the concept of power. It then introduces the theoretical works we draw on to study power in symbolic representation: Lukes, Allen, Arendt, and Foucault's conceptualisations of power will guide our thinking on the issue. We will draw on these theorizations with the aims of exploring how power is present in processes of symbolic representation analysed from a discursive politics perspective, and of connecting the discussion on power with the other dimensions of political representation. The mentioned theorizations of power will offer us lenses for searching where power is and how it intervenes both in the different functions of symbolic representation, and in the descriptive, substantive, and symbolic dimensions of political representation.

1. Feminist reflections on power and the political representation of women

Power has been to date an ambiguous guest in political science's works on the political representation of women. It is a key concept to understand gender inequality in politics – and gender inequality *per se* – and it is often mentioned, or present in one way or another, when discussing women's political representation. But it is rarely addressed explicitly or explored theoretically and empirically at the same time. Feminist literature on the descriptive and substantive representation of women mentions power, for example as part of the obstacles that male power in political institutions opposes both to women's access to political representation and to women's possibility to act for women. But the combination of theoretical analyses of power with empirical political science studies in this scholarship has been mostly unusual.

In general, 'feminist conceptions of power' – says Allen (1999) – tend to be implicit in feminist writings'. Feminist studies reflecting on power can particularly be found in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Instead of feminist political scientists it was feminist sociologists such as Hartsock (1983), post-structuralist philosophers like Butler (1993; 1990), and political theorists and philosophers such as Fraser (1989; 1993), Brown (1995; 1988), and Allen (1999) who really studied power as a concept. Feminist political theorists have discussed the notion of power as a resource that needed to be more equally distributed (Okin 1989), as related to domination (Young 1990) through a dyadic relation in which women are secondary to men (Mackinnon 1987), or as a subordination that is maintained through cultural norms and social structures and practices (Fraser 1993). Feminist work on power has generally embraced the notion of 'power to' as opposed to that of 'power over', and has included Arendt's concept of 'power with', thus elaborating a triadic concept of power (see Allen 1999). Some scholars have expanded the dimensions of 'power to' and 'power with', developing an empowerment-based conception of power as a capacity for individual and collective transformation (Wartenberg 1990). Finally, a great part of feminist reflection on power has been inspired by Foucault, generating a variety of critical analyses of his work on power (Fraser 1989; Benhabib 1992), or employing Foucault's theory to explore, as Butler does (1993; 1990) how the subject of feminism is produced by heterosexist cultural norms and how it is simultaneously subjected to

power structures and ‘enabled to take up the position of a *subject* in and through them’ (Allen 1999: 73), in ways that can subvert the heterosexist norms.

Within political science, research on thresholds for women to positions of political decision-making or ‘power’ has been of a more technical nature. It focused on the present barriers, especially with regards to electoral politics, such as the type of electoral or party system, quotas, and recruitment, selection and nomination procedures (Ballington and Karam 2002; Dahlerup 2006; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Matland and Montgomery 2003; Rule and Zimmerman, 1994; Tremblay 2012), or with regards to women in state structures (Bergqvist et al 1999; Lovenduski 2005; McBride and Mazur 2010; Stetson and Mazur 1995; Watson 1990). Power has also been implicitly addressed in discussions of the political representation of women that have focused on the raced-gendered norms, informal practices, and rituals of institutions (Hawkesworth 2003; Rai 2010; Waylen 2010).

Some recent works have tried to combine theoretical approaches to power with empirical analyses of women’s political representation, making political theory talk to empirical political science. De la Fuente and Verge (2012) explore gender power relations within Spanish political parties by applying Allen’s triadic theoretical framework to analyse power that distinguishes between *power over* (domination), *power to* (resistance), and *power with* (solidarity). They argue that, despite party women’s efforts of ‘power to’, by resisting male dominance in parties, and of ‘power with’, by building alliances and initiating collective actions, men’s ‘power over’ still dominates in political parties. They contend that ‘real power’ is the most difficult to challenge for party women, because while ‘formal power’ can be more easily identified and questioned, by for instance counting representatives and introducing quotas, ‘real power’ depends on structural, relational and institutional mechanisms that are not transparent and palpable. They encourage gender and politics scholars to engage in studies that would unveil mechanisms of male formal and real power within parties and make visible women’s ‘critical acts’ of ‘power to’ and ‘power with’ to resist male domination.

We have ourselves engaged in a study on power that tried to bring theoretical and empirical perspectives on power close together by analysing the way in which policy documents frame the concept of power as a potential barrier for women in political decision-making (see Lombardo and Meier 2009). By drawing on theories of power by Lukes, Arendt, and Foucault, we have analysed what actors in Dutch and Spanish policy documents on political representation say about the concept of power, paying attention to power mechanisms implicit or explicit in the text. We found that policy documents on women’s political representation do not explicitly problematize power, but rather implicitly accept and reproduce existing gender power relations, leaving men all the more powerful in their unspoken hegemonic presence.

If we want to advance in the theorization of political representation from feminist perspectives, there is a need of further works that would address explicitly the concept of power and apply theoretical reflections on power to empirical analysis of the different dimensions of women’s political representation, which is what we attempt at in the remainder of this chapter.

2. Theorising power

Power is a contested concept that has been the object of a multiplicity of theories. The ones we have found particularly insightful for the analysis not only of the symbolic

representation of gender, but also of the descriptive and substantive dimensions, are the three-folded theory of power developed by Allen (1999; 1998), which in its comprehensive account includes Arendt's concept of power; the three-dimensional theory on the levels of manifestation of power by Lukes (2005); and Foucault's (1995; 1980) ideas about the normalization of power through everyday discourses and practices and the possibility of resistances that is inherent to power relations. All of them see power as a relation, but they stress different aspects of this relation, be they ways of exercising power, levels of manifestation, actions or practices.

Allen (1999) puts together and reflects on the three conceptualisations of power most discussed in the literature – 'power-over', 'power-to' and 'power-with' – looking at them with feminist lenses. Her aim is 'to offer an analysis of power that will prove useful for feminist theorists who seek to comprehend, critique, and contest the subordination of women' (p 121). This is why Allen develops a comprehensive framework to understand power, to be able to grasp the 'dynamic interplay between domination and empowerment, between power and counterpower' (p 18). This interplay is extremely important for feminist search for understanding not only 'the ways men dominate women' and 'how some women dominate others on the basis of their race, class, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation', but also the 'power that women do have' at an individual level 'that is empowerment', and the 'collective power' that brings diverse individuals together to pursue feminist aims, sometimes in alliance with other social movements (p 122).

'Power-over' is broadly defined as 'the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way' (1999: 123). In this 'way of exercising power' (p 123), which is (in a variety of definitions) the most common reference to power that we encounter in political science, power is seen as a relationship between subordinated and dominant actors, in which someone is able to constrain the choices or behaviour of others in a way they would not have chosen. If to this definition of 'power-over' – Allen argues – we add the constraining of choices 'in a way that works to the other' disadvantage' (p 125) this corresponds to 'domination'. This means that for Allen domination is not synonymous with power over, but a specific form of it. From a feminist perspective, power as domination refers to the 'particular kinds of power that men are able to exercise *over* women' (1999: 123), so that they maintain women in a subordinate position. An example of power-over in political representation is the overrepresentation of men in parliaments of the world (around 80% of men and 20% of women, IPU 2013). In symbolic representation, seen from a discursive approach, the construction of women as subordinate or second class actors in politics (while they are constructed as main responsible for care in the private sphere), and of men as legitimate political leaders is a case of power-over, that contributes to perpetuate male domination in politics. This is strengthened even more by the argument that there are no thresholds to women, implying – implicitly or explicitly – that women are not interested (Meier 2008).

'Power-to' is for Allen 'the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends' (1999: 126). In this conceptualization – argues Lukes (2005: 34) – 'power indicates a 'capacity, a 'facility', an 'ability', not a relationship' – and certainly not a relationship between subordinated and dominant groups as in the case of 'power over'. From a feminist approach, power-to comes closer to the concept of individual 'empowerment', as it is the power that 'members of subordinated groups' retain to act 'despite their subordination' and, from the perspective of women, it refers to 'our ability to attain certain ends in spite of the subordination of women' (p 126). Empowerment or power-to – Allen puts it clearly – is 'the power that women can

wield to oppose male domination', or, as she also articulates it, is 'the power that women have *in spite* of the power that men exercise over us' (p 122). A 'particular way of exercising power-to' is resistance, which, according to Allen, includes individual actions 'that serve to challenge and/or subvert domination' (p 126). Resistance, from a feminist perspective, is then 'the power that women exercise specifically *as a response* to such [male] domination' (p 122). In this conceptualization, the interplay between domination and empowerment that characterizes Allen's concept of power, applied to feminist thinking, is particularly evident. In political representation this 'power that women have to act' would correspond, for instance, to the role of 'critical actors' that achieve, even in situations of numerical minority, to put women's issues on the political agenda. In symbolic representation, 'power to' would correspond to alternative framings in policy documents that for instance promote men's roles in the area of care, or empower women in the public sphere, or grant equal 'redistribution' and 'recognition' (Fraser 2005) of rights, benefits, and opportunities to women and men regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnic origin, ability, or age.

If power-to has a more individual dimension of empowerment, 'power-with' highlights the collective dimension of power or the 'ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of an agreed-upon end or series of ends' (Allen 1999: 127). Both conceptualizations of power as an ability or capacity to act, 'power to' and 'power with', derive from Arendt's theorization of power. But it is particularly Allen's conception of power-with that is inspired by Arendt's thinking. Power, in Arendt's view, is not conceived as control over others, it rather 'springs up whenever people get together and act in concert' (Arendt 1970: 52) for the purpose of discussing matters of public-political concern: a person has power because he or she is empowered by a group, thus this power emanates from the mutual action of a group (Arendt 1970). Sites of power are common actions coordinated through speech and persuasion. Arendt's idea of power inspires transformative notions of political power that involve processes of collective empowerment in acting to achieve a common political goal. Arendt's vision emphasizes the agency that comes from collective action: 'Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together' (Arendt 1970: 44).

Examples of Arendt's notion of power can be encountered when women feel more empowered in politics thanks to the strengthening of women's networks, solidarity and alliances. And indeed, Allen applies Arendt's notion of power-with to understand the collective power that feminists exercise when, to achieve feminist aims, they 'build coalitions with other social movements, such as the racial equality movement, the gay rights movement, and/or new labor movements' (p 123). Through her feminist articulation of power-with, Allen is interested in theorizing the concept of 'solidarity' to understand the 'collective power that can bridge the diversity of individuals who make up the feminist movement' (p 122), and that can move coalition-building among social movements. This concept of solidarity is not exclusionary or based on 'pregiven, fixed' (p 104) and essentialized identities, but rather based on the collective ability to act together with the aim of 'challenging, subverting, and, ultimately, overturning a system of domination' (p 127). Allen sees in Arendt's concept of power as concerted action the basis for potential intersectional alliance and solidarity: 'Arendt helps us to think about how members of oppositional social movements can be united in a way that, far from excluding or repressing difference, embraces and protects it' (p 104). Velvet triangles, alliances between women's MPs, feminist movement's and other equality activists, and academics to

advance gender and other equality policies (Woodward 200X) – and political discourses articulating such alliances – are an example of this collective empowerment expressed by the notion of power-with.

Lukes (2005; 1974) develops in his theory the aspect of ‘power over’, because for him power is not consensual as in Arendt, but rather conflictual. It is essentially a relationship of inequality between dominant and subordinates. Lukes distinguishes three levels at which power is manifested, going from more to less visible power, and puts forward a theory of power as manipulation of consensus (Lukes 2005: 28). In the one-dimensional view of power, which prevails among the pluralists, power is conceived as a conscious action that in some way influences the content of decisions. It presupposes a visible manifestation of power in a (hypothetical) political conflict over a given issue that is perceived as problematic in which all actors participate with their respective resources, needs, and proposals. For example, power would be visible in a parliamentary vote on a bill to introduce gender quotas, in which the majority of MPs voted against or in favour of the measure, and the winners would be those holding the power. As Lukes writes: ‘this first, one-dimensional, view of power involves a focus on *behaviour* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation’ (Lukes 2005: 19).

A less visible manifestation of power is Lukes’ two-dimensional view, which consists of the power to set and control the political agenda not only by making decisions, but also by making ‘nondecisions’ (Lukes 2005: 22). Issues that would not benefit the values or interests of decision-makers are not placed on the agenda. This prevents a potential decision from being made, which will have consequences for the issue at stake. For example, when politicians argue that quotas for women are not necessary because changes in gender roles will come ‘naturally,’ this nondecision affects women’s chances to be present in political institutions. In the author’s words, the two-dimensional view ‘allows for consideration of the ways in which *decisions* are prevented from being taken on *potential issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as embodied in express policy preferences and sub-political grievances’ (Lukes 2005: 25).

Lukes’ even more invisible three-dimensional view of power consists of the ability to influence another by shaping what s/he thinks and wants. As he writes: ‘is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?’ (Lukes 2005: 28). Through this third form of power, actors accomplish that a situation of inequality or conflict is not perceived as a problem. The result of this exercise of political power is to legitimize, or present as socially acceptable, relations of inequality, such as those between women and men in the sphere of politics, to the point that these inequalities are no longer questioned and are not even perceived as social and policy problems. In terms of symbolic representation, the three-dimensional view of power would operate when, for example, male’s political power and privileged position in politics is not even discussed as a problem and questioned in political debates, as it is perceived as ‘obvious’ and has been ‘legitimated’ through processes that symbolically construct male’s leadership roles and female’s subordinate or marginal roles in politics.

Foucault (1980: 39) pays attention to the structures of power that constrain and enable individual agency. He analyses power ‘in its capillary forms of existence’, in its ability to ‘insert itself into their [individuals’] actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’. Being everywhere, power is thus normalized in people’s lives through a variety of social mechanisms and institutions (prisons, hospitals, schools) that not only constrain and prohibit, but also, most importantly, persuade people to act in a certain way by producing particular types of knowledge (Foucault 1995; 1980). Through social mechanisms, discourses, and practices, power has the effect of normalizing certain values, norms, relations, and behaviours. The fact that, through such mechanisms, certain issues can be normalized in people’s perceptions as if they were ‘non problems’ reveals mechanisms of power that are hidden by the implicit legitimization offered by normalization processes. For example, the problem of gender inequality in politics is often symbolically constructed as one of ‘women’s under-representation’ in political institutions rather than ‘men’s over-representation’ (Meier et al 2005). Here, power mechanisms operate by implicitly legitimizing as the norm what is not considered to be a problem, i.e. men’s over-representation, in this way implicitly reinstating the ‘legitimate’ dominant status of male political power (Lombardo and Meier 2009).

Foucault’s relational concept of power pervades people’s lives, but it is not limited to domination (‘power over’). It also includes the possibility of ‘resistance’ (‘power to’) and strategic usage of power relations (Foucault 1980: 141-142). As he states: ‘To say that one can never be ‘outside’ power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what’ since ‘there are no relations of power without resistances’ (1980: 141-142). This suggests that women’s strategies of resistance (‘power to’ and power with’) to male’s hegemonic power in political institutions – through actions and discourses – can arise from within the very political structures where power (‘over’) is exercised.

The theorizations of Allen, Arendt, Lukes, and Foucault will help us to clarify what type of power we encounter throughout the functions of symbolic representation and the different dimensions of political representation.

3. Power and the functions of symbolic representation

Power is particularly present in the construction of gender, which is the principal of symbolic representation we are dealing with. As we will analyse in this section, power operates in the function of identity when it discursively constructs roles for women and men that create hierarchies, privileges, and disadvantages (‘power over’), and, in the conceptualization of ‘power to’, when it empowers women and other disadvantaged subjects by granting them access to equal rights. Power is present in the function of legitimacy when it legitimizes heterosexual women and men, and delegitimizes homosexuals. ‘Power over’ is also operating in the function of political control, when public policies protect male hegemonic subjects, even when they perpetrate violence against women, and leave women insufficiently protected from violence, while ‘power to’ can be present in policy discourses that empower women and penalize male violent behaviours. See Table 1 below for a summary of the concepts of power encountered in the policy documents analysed for each of the three functions of symbolic representation explored.

Table 1: Concepts of power in the functions of symbolic representation

Function	Concepts of power
Identity	Power over; Lukes' two- and three-dimensional views of power over; Foucault (normalization); Power to (Allen)
Legitimacy	Power over; Lukes' one-dimensional view of power; Power to (Allen)
Political control	Power over; Lukes' one- and three-dimensional views of power over; Foucault (normalization); power to (Allen); power with (Arendt)

Identity, in the symbolic representation of gender, has the function of constructing and maintaining particular gender roles, through a variety of norms, beliefs and cultural codes that are associated with women and men. In the EU documents analysed on employment-related and care policies in Chapter four we can recognise different conceptualisations of power. 'Power over' is present in policy discourses that construct traditional unequal gender roles in the public and private spheres, as when women are constructed as actors whose main role is that of being mothers and carers at home, and men are constructed as actors whose main role is in the labour market and in politics. Men's main role in the public sphere of the labour market and marginal role in caring can be implicitly deduced from policy discourses that completely silence their role as fathers and carers¹, thus taking us close to Lukes' two-dimensional (taking nondecisions on issues that do benefit those in power) and three-dimensional views of 'power over' (making male's absenteeism from care a non problem), as well as Foucault's normalization of power in everyday life. For example, EU policy documents discuss the need for 'formalised care for the elderly and disabled' and see the cause of this need only in the 'increased female labour market participation', rather than also in men's absence from care responsibilities². Lukes' two-dimensional view of power over is also present when institutions take nondecisions about the labour rights of domestic workers in Europe, leaving domestic work insufficiently protected and thus implicitly promoting employer-worker relations that strengthen the power of the employer over the employee³. EU policy discourses show also traces of Allen's 'power to' through discourses that construct women's roles by empowering them. This is the case of discourses that demand the recognition of women's unpaid work of care in national GDP, quality public care services for children, elderly and dependent people, and policies to promote the role of men in care and family responsibilities by implementing longer and fully paid parental leaves⁴. Empowering discourses are also those that ask for equal rights in partnerships and reconciliation measures for homosexual women and men⁵.

¹ European Parliament debate on childcare (Chapter four, document 2.3 in the Annex).

² Joint Report of the Council of 23 February 2007 on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Chapter four, document 1.2 in Annex X).

³ European Parliament Report 2000 (Chapter four, document 2.1 in Annex X).

⁴ Social Platform's report on the Midterm review of the Lisbon Strategy from a Gender Perspective (Chapter four, document 1.4 in Annex X); European Women's Lobby position paper on care issues (see document 2.4 in Annex X).

⁵ European Women's Lobby, 'Maternity, Paternity and Reconciliation of Professional and Family Life' (Chapter four, document 3.4 in Annex X).

Through the function of legitimacy, symbolic representation tries to make certain institutions, practices, or subjects as accepted or legitimate among the people, and others as non legitimate or accepted. This process of legitimisation has implications for the symbolic representation of gender, as women and other subjects can be disempowered by political discourses that construct them as not legitimated to enjoy, for example, sexual and reproductive rights. Both examples of ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ can be found in the policy documents on intimate citizenship analysed in Chapter five, offering us a picture of the type of family institution, partnership, and citizen that actors with power legitimize or condemn. ‘Power over’ appears when public policies legitimate some subjects to have access to reproductive and partnership rights, and exclude others from this access, thus establishing a hierarchy of normative or legitimated subjects and deviant or illegitimate subjects. The Italian law on assisted reproduction 40/2004 is an example of this conceptualization of ‘power over’ (and Lukes’ one-dimensional view), because it establishes a hierarchy of subjects that are recognized as legitimate: the rights of the embryo are considered more legitimate than the rights of a woman, and the only legitimate partnership that is legally allowed to receive assisted reproduction is the heterosexual stable couple, excluding – and thus considering illegitimate – homosexual stable and unstable couples and heterosexual non stable couples. The aspect of ‘power over’ is particularly noticeable also in the fact that the right-wing government – with support of the Vatican’s long term influence to recognize the rights of the embryo – approved Law 40/2004 on assisted reproduction despite strong feminist mobilisations against the law (Calloni 2001). Another example of ‘power over’ (Lukes’ one-dimensional view) is the intervention of the Italian catholic hierarchy, through the institution of the Italian Episcopal Conference, that effectively avoided the adoption of a bill, known as ‘Dico’, that would have extended to unmarried couples, including same-sex couples, the rights to healthcare and inheritance that married couples already enjoy⁶. In this case, ‘power over’ operated by denying legitimacy to all forms of partnerships, except for the heterosexual marriage. The ‘Dico’ bill itself, as well as parliamentary speeches in favour of recognizing equal rights of partnerships for both heterosexual and homosexual people, are instead examples of ‘power to’, since these discourses empower homosexual and heterosexual women and men who want to create civil unions alternative to the normative heterosexual marriage.

The state has political control when it is able both to make the members of a political community respect the norms and to discourage actions that deviate from the established norms. In the case of policies on gender based violence analysed in Chapter six, political control is a relevant function of symbolic representation in that women’s empowerment in politics is related to the state’s capacity to effectively control and delegitimize male violence against women at the institutional and social levels. A variety of conceptualisations of power are operating in the policy documents analysed in Italy and Spain on gender based violence. ‘Power over’ – in Lukes’ one-dimensional view – is present in the Italian ‘jeans sentence’ of 1998 that legitimated sexual violence against women by granting extenuation to the male perpetrator because the victim was wearing a pair of jeans, and thus according to the Court she was consenting the violence⁷. ‘Power over’ – in Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power and Foucault’s idea of normalisation – is present in several cases. One of these is when policy debates frame the problem of gender based violence as one that only

⁶ ‘Dico’ bill on ‘Rights and duties of people living together on stable basis’, 19/02/2007 (see Chapter five).

⁷ Sentence 163/1998 of the Italian Court of Cassation (see Chapter six).

concerns Muslim migrants, constructing Muslim women as submissive victims and men as perpetrators, stereotyping Muslim culture as a violent one, and presenting Italian native women as emancipated and not suffering from violence⁸. In this case violence would supposedly be a non problem for native women, which discharges institutions from the responsibility to solve the problem by effectively protecting native and migrant victims and criminalising perpetrators of violence.

We can find Allen's 'power to' in Spanish policy documents on gender based violence that frame the problem as one of structural gender inequality, since women would, in principle, be empowered by the Spanish law against violence 1/2004 that offers a comprehensive diagnosis of the problem of violence as rooted in unequal social structures, and a comprehensive prognosis of the problem through measures to criminalise perpetrators and prevent violence by raising society awareness of the problem. The same Spanish law is also an example of Allen's and Arendt's 'power with', because the feminist movement has acted 'in concert' with the socialist party, in government in 2004, to achieve the goal of a comprehensive law against gender based violence. Also the two Italian laws against gender violence, the 66/1996 law and the 154/2001 law were the result of concerted action of the Italian women's movement through the years, international UN pressure to frame women's rights as human rights, women MPs, and women from civil society.

Overall, it seems that 'power over' is the concept that we mostly encountered in the Critical Frame Analysis we conducted for exploring the functions of symbolic representation. Symbolic representation deals with meanings and norms, which can be expressed implicitly or explicitly. Thus, it is not so surprising that overt (Lukes' one-dimensional view) but especially covert (Lukes' three-dimensional view; Foucault's normalization) forms of 'power over' were identified as particularly present in the analysed policy documents. Power as empowerment ('power to') was also found, though it appears less in the frames than power as domination. And 'power with', or 'concerted action' to resist domination and promote gender equal measures is present in the function of political control. This is probably due to the selection of the issue of gender based violence, in which there have been strong mobilizations of the women's movements in the cases we have analysed, and around which it was easier to find agreement within broader coalitions of civil society and policymakers.

4. Power and the dimensions of political representation

Having highlighted what characterizes power in symbolic representation, it is interesting to analyze power in the descriptive and substantive dimensions of political representation. Exploring how power manifests itself in the three dimensions of representation, will help us to connect power with the political representation of gender and will improve our understanding of processes of political representation.

Symbolic representation provides the normative setting of values, meanings, and beliefs that are associated with gender, or that women and men as principal suggest or evoke. Power in symbolic representation is thus connected with the construction of meanings, norms, and gender roles. Depending on what frames and norms on gender are available in particular contexts –for instance more friendly or hostile to instruments to promote women's descriptive representation such as gender quotas- political representatives will have an easier or a more difficult access to

⁸ Italian parliamentary debate on gender violence, 2001 (see Chapter six).

positions of power. Also, norms shape in a powerful way the political context in which representatives act, thus moving actors to frame their claims by engaging with the dominant symbolic and normative context, both in the case in which they decide to challenge the prevailing norms or in the case in which they choose to reframe their claims according to them. As in the analysis of the functions of symbolic representation, theorisations of power by Lukes, Allen, Arendt, and Foucault will guide us also in this journey through the dimensions of political representation. Table 2 below summarises the concepts of power that we think can be identified in the dimensions of political representation as discussed in Chapters seven and eight.

Table 2: Concepts of power in the dimensions of political representation

Dimension	Concepts of power
Descriptive representation	Power over; Lukes' one-dimensional view of power over; Lukes' bi- and three-dimensional view of power over; Foucault (resistance); Power to (Allen)
Substantive representation	Power to (Allen); power with; Lukes' three-dimensional view of power; Foucault (resistance; normalization)
Symbolic representation	Power over; Lukes' three-dimensional view of power over; Foucault (normalization); power to (Allen); power with (Arendt)

In descriptive representation power has to do with access to political positions, with who gets elected – and thus represented – or not. In this respect, descriptive representation clearly shows ‘power over’, that is power as numerical domination of a group, normally men, over another, usually women (this would also correspond to Lukes’ one-dimensional view of power). Gender quotas, as means to achieve an increase in women’s numerical representation, are a symbol of descriptive representation. Actors that would not be benefited by the adoption of gender quotas, such as male politicians, can choose to take nondecisions, thus exercising the two-dimensional form of power over that Lukes puts forward. The normative power that we have identified in symbolic representation reappears in descriptive representation when we consider how female and male politicians perceive gender quotas (see Chapter seven), as a means to achieve equality for the former (Allen’s and Arendt’s power to, Foucault’s resistance), or as a measure of unfair treatment for the latter (power over, in this case male politicians perception is of women’s power over men, through gender quotas).

Substantive representation has to do with acting on behalf of women, and thus, in discursive terms, it refers to who has a voice in framing which women’s issues and how (see Chapter eight). Power appears here in the space particular voices have or not to frame policy issues, in the role of ‘critical actors’ to produce alternative framing of issues (‘power to’ or empowerment in Allen’s and Arendt’s terms), and in what the content of frames reflect, as when alternative frames discuss women’s political representation as a matter of building alliances among gender advocates in civil society, political institutions, and academia (‘power with’ or solidarity in Allen and Arendt’s conceptualisations). Normative power as operating in symbolic representation has a significant role also in substantive representation, because the possibility of making ‘substantive claims’ is enabled and constrained by a normative

context largely shaped by symbolic representation, that, for instance allows for claims about maternity leave to be made and considered normal for German women, while they are seen as taboo for US women (Ferree 2012; see Chapter eight). Power, in relation to the capacity of making substantive claims, shows different features. It can be constraining the possibility of some groups for making a substantive claim on gender equality because policy discourses and practices have shaped ways of thinking so that particular claims appear unthinkable and unchallengeable in a given context, as Ferree's (2012) argument shows (Lukes' three-dimensional view), or because unspoken biases put some people in a subordinate position. Concerning the latter, Hawkesworth's (2003) account of racing-gendering practices in the US Congress, including 'silencing, stereotyping, enforced invisibility, exclusion, marginalization, challenges to epistemic authority' (p 546) of African American Congresswomen, shows that racist and sexist norms limited the 'possibility of substantive representation of minority interests' in the Congress (p 547). But power can also be enabling, because some actors can decide to *make* particular substantive claims, even if these are not seen as legitimately accepted in particular contexts (Foucault's idea of resistance; Allen's power-to). And the constraining or enabling aspect of discourses is related to how certain meanings of gender roles and relations are normalized and others are treated as illegitimate (Foucault's idea of normalization).

Symbolic representation has to do with norms, beliefs, feelings, meanings, and values. These can be expressed more openly and formally – in laws, political debates, speeches, and institutional practices – but they can be and are often also implicitly expressed by institutional actors. Thus, all concepts of power that we have discussed (power over, to, with, in the view of the different authors considered) can operate in symbolic representation, though conceptualizations that particularly help to grasp the normative aspects that are more covertly articulated are Lukes' three-dimensional view of power as manipulation of consensus and Foucault's reflection on the normalization of power in everyday life.

When discussing power in the political representation of gender, be it descriptive, substantive or symbolic, the role of institutions needs to be considered due to the discursive and material power they offer or deny to feminist actors. Institutions are, according to Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 727; quoted in Waylen 2010), 'rules and procedures (both formal and informal) that structure social interaction by constraining and enabling actors' behaviour'. Through their daily practices of 'doing gender', institutions construct particular norms and behaviours that privilege some subjects in their access and enjoyment of rights and opportunities, and exclude others (Connell 1987; Kenny 2007; Krook and Mackay 2011). Male groups within political parties can for example exercise power over women by excluding or marginalizing them from decision-making, through formal norms that do not promote women's access (for example by not introducing gender quotas) and through informal norms that de facto perpetuate male's privileges in the party, such as the attribution of what are considered less important portfolios to women and a division of work, and distribution of power, that assigns women more subordinate roles of organization, while men higher up in the party's hierarchy take decisions over issues (De la Fuente and Verge 2012). Also the use of racial and gender stereotypes by members of parliament can serve to maintain and strengthen institutional power hierarchies, as Hawkesworth (2003) argues in her analysis of the US Congress. Indeed, as stereotyping practices show, the informal nature of norms that promote male's political power makes it particularly difficult for women to change the rules of the game, because 'their very informality makes them less visible and therefore not

open to public scrutiny' (Franceschet 2010: 405). This is why the symbolic dimension of political representation is especially complex to address for gender equality advocates.

Power is also normalized in institutions through rituals and ceremony that symbolize relations of domination and subordination (see Chapter eight). Rituals – argues Lukes (1975) – are a rule-governed activity of a symbolic nature, used to reinforce dominant definitions of politics. Observed from a gender perspective, as Rai (2010) does, institutional ceremony and ritual are for analysts an open window on the sedimentation of power in contemporary parliamentary democracies. 'Codes of dress, speech and deportment, modes of participative actions, norms, and behaviours all provide clues to the social hierarchies that are played out in politics and political institutions' writes Rai (2010:288). Ceremony and ritual are defined as the casting of spectacles through which the formal-judicial power of the state is operationalised. But at the same time, Rai underlines, ceremony and ritual are also performed by bodies – male and female – and these spectacles leave traces, which mark degrees of inclusion and exclusion. Seating arrangements in parliament are not so much an issue of functionality, but of body politics: 'image of *who* embodies political power and *where* it is embodied' (Manow 2010:32, italics in original). Certain ceremonies and rituals, and through them the underlying norms, are normalised and others are deemed deviant, which also renders those to be seen as the 'others' marginal within the institution, making them 'space invaders' in case they manage to break in (Puwar 2004). Celis and Wauters (2010) describe how MPs from marginalised groups, such as women, blue collar, and ethnic minority MPs feel the need to adapt and conform themselves to certain norms and roles, formal and informal rules, institutional practice, in parliament, including their way of dressing and of using their voice. Franceschet (2010) analyses the power dynamic embedded in routine activities of MPs and uncovers how formal rules, rituals and norms have profoundly gendered effects to the extent that they encourage 'minority groups' such as women to perform their roles according to the rules and behavioural styles of the dominant group – which includes boundaries to their possibility to substantively represent women citizens.

Institutions, however, are not monolithically opposed to gender equality, but rather –considered from a post-structural perspective (Foucault 1980) – they are the site of power relations in which gender equality is simultaneously produced and contested (Kantola and Dahl 2005). Thus, 'institutions can also provide unintended opportunities for marginal groups to exercise power' (Kenny 2007: 92). 'Critical actors' within institutions can also find some room for maneuver to put gender equality on the agenda (Celis 2006; Childs and Krook 2006), so that, as Eyben (2010) argues, femocrats can be 'subversively accomodating' by strategically framing issues to fit dominant norms though slowly conquering spaces for gender equality in institutional contexts. In this respect, there are margins for empowerment ('power to') of female representatives in male dominated political institutions, as there are possibilities of creating networks of solidarity among women, and more generally among less privileged groups in politics ('power with'). Also Rai underlines that the reflection of power in ceremony and ritual is constantly shifting and evolving: 'they [norms] are also internally fragile and need repeated shoring up because of the challenges that new actors bring to the stage' (Rai 2010:292).

In short, power is present and operates in different ways in descriptive, substantive, and symbolic dimensions of representation. It can appear in the form of explicit 'power over', manifesting itself through male domination of political

positions or obstacles to substantive equality claims. It can manifest itself in the power of privileged groups to take nondecisions, as in Lukes' two-dimensional view. It can more subtly and covertly influence norms and beliefs about political representation, as in Lukes' three-dimensional view of power over and in Foucault's point that power gets normalized and integrated in people's lives. But, following Allen and Arendt's suggestions, we also notice that individual and collective actors, both within and outside institutions, have the 'power to' promote alternative agendas, and to resist and challenge the domination of more powerful individuals and groups by creating alliances with other unprivileged actors.

5. Conclusions

Power is a concept that pervades feminist thinking, though it is still often implicitly addressed in this scholarship. Yet, political theory on power offers insightful lenses for exploring the political representation of gender, and the dimension of symbolic representation within it. Allen's triadic framework for conceptualizing power-over, power-to, and power-with, has helped us to unpack in what way power can be exercised in the functions of symbolic representation, and in the dimensions of political representation, revealing key aspects of power such as domination, empowerment, and solidarity. Arendt has inspired feminist and other social movements' conceptualizations of power as an ability or capacity to act collectively, the notion of 'power-with' that Allen has further developed to name practices of coalition-building and solidarity within the diverse feminist movements and between different social movements, which we could identify in some of the analyses of functions of symbolic representation. Lukes' conceptualization has enabled us to explore more in-depth, in our analyses of functions and dimensions of political representation, the manifestations of 'power over' particularly the most covert ones, when nondecisions are taken (two-dimensional power) or when people's perceptions are shaped so that potentially problematic issues become non problems (three-dimensional power). Foucault has provided us with lenses to observe that power is not only normalized in daily, widespread, practices of 'power over', but can also be resisted (power-to).

The theorizations of power we draw from show – as Allen would say – that power in feminist analyses is never just domination, or just empowerment, but always a mix of domination and empowerment. Grasping empirically this interplay that is inherent in the concept of power is relevant for feminist analyses of political representation. This is a field in which hegemonic men – whose gender domination is intersected with their social class, race, or sexual orientation – exercise power as domination over women – whose subordination is also intersected along similar lines, but in which women have also been able to act, despite this domination, and sometimes to resist this domination. Women in politics have given example of individual power-to or 'ability to empower and transform oneself, others, and the world' (Allen 1999: 18), by making substantive feminist claims in numerical and cultural male majority institutions. Feminists have also revealed capacity to act collectively by building alliances with other social movements to attain particular equality goals, such as adopting legislation on substantive equality issues in political institutions such as parliaments and governments where sexist, ethnocentric, and heteronormative norms and values are present, implicitly or explicitly. Symbolic representation allows for scrutinizing such cultural meanings, beliefs, norms, and

values on gender power relations, placing the focus on unspoken cultural codes that – through discourses and social practices – construct femininity and masculinity in ways that can maintain hegemonic male domination over women or empower women in politics. Political institutions also contribute to support particular power relations between women and men, through the legitimacy they give to particular constructions of gender, and the political control they exercise over people’s behaviour, by for instance sanctioning violence against women and empowering victims of this violence or by legitimizing such violence and leaving perpetrators immune.

The discursive analysis of the functions of symbolic representation putting on the theoretical lenses of power, has allowed us to uncover a proximity between symbolic constructions of politics and symbolic constructions of masculinity, which evoke in people’s minds the belief that men are more suitable for politics and women more deficient for the task. This symbolic ‘fit’ not only could be detected between hegemonic masculinity and politics, but also between heterosexuality and whiteness, and politics, thus making members of the minoritised gender, sexuality, and ethnicity less legitimated in politics as hegemonic men are. In particular, we have found that in the function of identity, power operates through more covert and subtle manifestations (that recall Lukes two- and three-dimensional concepts of power and Foucault’s normalizing power) to construct and maintain traditional gender roles. When it comes to the function of legitimacy, power shows more overtly the domination of some actors over others, through the definition of socially and politically legitimated and deviant subjects. This, we think, could depend on the issue we have chosen for exploring legitimacy, which is intimate citizenship, a policy issue where stronger powers oppose equality in sexual, reproductive, and partnership rights, as the case of the Vatican and conservative political power in Italy shows. In the function of political control, we observe that all kinds of power are operating: power over (Lukes’s one- and three-dimensional power, Foucault’s normalization), power to, and power with. We interpret the finding about ‘power with’ being present only in the function of political control as a case that depends on the specific features and history of the policy issue that we have chosen: the issue of gender based violence that we have analysed in political control has attracted particular ‘concerted action’ between the women’s movement and politicians in the cases we have studied (similarly to how intimate citizenship attracts particular opposition by anti-equality actors).

In the analysis of dimensions of political representation through the power lenses we found that ‘power over’ manifests itself in the most visible way in descriptive representation, where the numerical domination of men over women in politics is directly visible. ‘Power to’ is particularly relevant for substantive representation, as ‘critical actors’ have the capacity to make a claim over substantive women’s issues and to develop strategies of resistance to male domination in politics. Symbolic representation is particularly relevant for understanding the dynamics of informal power, the implicit elements of power that are difficult to spell out and thus hard to challenge for the dominated subjects, all the unspoken feelings, beliefs, and norms that make male ‘power over’ women especially ‘insidious’, as Lukes would say, and extended in ‘capillary’ ways – in Foucault’s words – in individual’s lives and practices.

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