Power as a conceptual metaphor of gender inequality?

Comparing Dutch and Spanish politics

Petra Meier and Emanuela Lombardo

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the question of whether and how power is used as a conceptual metaphor in gender inequality in politics. We analyze to which extent a selection of Dutch and Spanish policy texts on the issue of 'gender inequality in politics' refer to power, and if they do so, what metaphors they employ for describing it. The central hypothesis is that the policy texts on gender equality in politics contain reflections on power that might constitute important gendered barriers in the access to power. We postulate that studying the conceptualizations of power underlying policy documents on the issue of gender inequality in politics will reveal important discursive and normative potential barriers to a gender equal distribution of power. In a previous study on gender inequality in politics (Meier et al, 2005), for example, we found that policy texts on the issue often contain a 'benchmarking fallacy'. This fallacy suggests that gender inequality can be dealt with in terms of numbers, without tackling underlying structural problems. In this chapter, we turn to the issue of whether the concept of 'power' is present with respect to gender inequality in policy texts, and further explore the extent to which these texts go beyond the 'benchmarking fallacy' of women in politics.

In order to analyze the policy documents on gender inequality in politics in search for power, we employ a critical frame analysis methodology. Critical frame analysis (Verloo, 2007) is based on written or recorded spoken discourse or language, not on non-verbal communication. As in theories of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), in critical frame analysis a language is examined to reveal a person's thoughts (Deignan, no date). It reveals how socio-political actors frame a policy problem (of gender inequality in politics, in our case) and the solutions they put forward in order to solve it. This analysis enables us to detect the way political actors think of power and how they present it. We analyze 14 Dutch and 12 Spanish policy texts on gender inequality in politics in the decade from 1995 until 2004. The year 1995 was selected because it was the year the United Nations World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. This conference represents a milestone in world governments' formal commitment toward gender equality. The cases we select, the Netherlands and Spain, allow for an interesting comparison due to the fact that the former used to be a forerunner in equality policies while Spain was considered a latecomer. The difference in the two cases leads us to expect a different representation of power in the policy documents.

The argument is developed in three sections. First, we sketch the context of the two cases studied, the Netherlands and Spain, over the last decade within our theoretical framework. Second, we discuss how we study theoretical conceptualizations of power with the help of critical frame analysis methodology and how we approach metaphors. Third, we study the conceptualization of power by political actors in the policy texts of the two countries selected. Finally, we come to a deeper reflection on the extent to which political actors consider power from a gendered perspective in policy documents on gender inequality in politics.

2. Gender inequality in politics: the Spanish and Dutch contexts

The Netherlands is often cited as an example of a country with a stable high number of women in politics. Having obtained the right to vote and to stand for elections in 1919, the number of women in parliament remained under 10 per cent until the 1970s. By the middle of the 1980s it had risen to 20 per cent. Since the 1990s women have made up slightly more than one third of Members of Parliament (MPs). During the 1990s this was exceptional among the European Union (EU) Member States, especially when leaving the Scandinavian countries out. Except for the 1987 elections, the share of female Senators has generally been slightly lower than that of their female colleagues in parliament.

Women's positions in political decision-making have not really been an issue since the middle of the 1990s. At the 1972 elections the main actor of the Dutch women's movement (Man-Vrouw-Maatschappij) first campaigned for more women (Oldersma, 2005). This encouraged parties for the next twenty years, particularly the larger ones, to pay attention to the issue. In this they were also pushed by electoral considerations and by their own women's groups (Leyenaar, 1998). Since the beginning of the 1990s most parties have measures to promote gender equality, such as setting a quota or target figures for positions within the parties or for electoral lists. In 1992, the government published a position paper (a measure repeated in 1996) and initiated a project to 'promote women in politics and in public governance'. But on the whole the topic of gender relations in political decision-making was not such a hot issue in the 1990s, with the exception of the annual progress reports on 'women in politics and public governance' published by the Ministry of Domestic Affairs (which were formally closed in 1999 and included in broader plans for equal opportunities' policies). In addition, advisory positions focusing on gender were abolished, because the government considered that a gender perspective would be

picked up within the advisory bodies. The abolishment of these positions did not raise much debate.

In fact, since the 1995 Beijing Conference, only two issues related to women's position in political decision-making have been debated in the Dutch parliament. They are highly interesting in that they go beyond the traditional issue of how to deal with women in politics. The first debate concerned the replacement of Members of Parliament on maternity leave. After a first bill was rejected in 1994, a new act was adopted in 2004, which opened the door for an adoption of the Dutch Constitution in order to put the replacement of MPs on maternity leave into practice. In this act, the grounds for replacement were extended from solely having to do with maternity and extended to illness and medical treatment for all MPs up to a maximum period of 16 weeks (which is the legal time period of maternity leave). The second debate was on the legitimacy of the conservative Christian party Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP) to exclude women from regular membership, and, hence, from the access to power. The issue was extensively debated in 1990 on the occasion of the act meant to adopt the UN Women's Treaty (CEDAW). Renewed attention was paid to the issue in 1993 when the equal treatment act was under debate. This debate flared up again in 2000 through CEDAW's subsequent critique of the Dutch government for not complying with the UN Women's Treaty. Complying would involve a sanctioning of the SGP and the Clara Wichmann Institute, a women's juridical ngo, started a procedure to prosecute the SGP. At the end of 2007 the court ruled that the SGP discriminates against women by not allowing them access to political functions (the party accepts women as members since 2006).[1]

Spain offers a different context from the Netherlands concerning the gender inequality in politics. It has been an EU Member State with a rather low number of women in political decision-making until the end of the 1990s. From the end of Franco regime in 1977 to the end of the 1980s women made up about six per cent of the MPs in the national parliament (Astelarra,

1990). During the 1990s their number rose to 15 per cent, and then reached 36 per cent in 2004 and 35.7% in 2008. Hence, over the last few years Spain joined countries with a high number of women in elected political positions, such as the Netherlands. However, the number of women remains lower in the Senate, making up 29 per cent in the 2008 general elections.

The position of women in political decision-making became an issue at the end of the 1980s. From then onwards, debates, fed by left wing parties, mainly focused on quotas. In 1988 the Socialists (PSOE) launched a debate on quotas and approved a 25 per cent minimum quota for women for party functions and for electoral lists. In reaction to this measure, the Leftist Party (IU) set a quota of 35 per cent and although the number of women elected did not rise to the quota set, it started its way upwards (Lombardo, 2008). In 1996 the Conservatives (PP) came to power and rejected quotas. Nonetheless, the third National Plan for Equal Opportunities (1997-2000) contained a section on 'power and decision-making' indicating that the issue had reached their agenda too.

In 2000, the Socialists, Leftists, and a mixed group of parliamentarians submitted bill proposals on an egalitarian access to electoral positions, but none of them passed. In 2002, regions such as the Baleares and Castilla-La Mancha, approved bills on the introduction of quotas in electoral lists. These were taken to the Constitutional Court by the conservative government (Bustelo et al, 2004; Bustelo and Lombardo, 2007). This led to a suspension on the part of the Spanish Constitutional Court of both quotas laws, a fact that also occurred for other regional bills introducing quotas in candidate lists, the Andalusia electoral parity law and the Basque equality law. In March 2004 the Socialist Party won the general elections and created the first parity government in Spain as concerns the appointment of an equal number of female and male Ministers (eight of each sex) and of a female Vice-President of Government.[2]

This account of the different development of the issue of gender inequality in politics in the two selected cases helps us to set the context in which the analyzed policy documents emerge. We would expect to find representations of the concept of power in the policy texts that would reflect this different development, with more elaborate conceptualizations of power in the more experienced Dutch context with regard to gender policies. We will study conceptualizations of power underlying Dutch and Spanish policy texts in subsequent sections.

3. Critical frame analysis and the study of power through conceptual metaphors

If power manifests itself in policy discourses, it should appear in some form in written policy texts on gender inequality in politics. To carry out our analysis of the representations of power reflected in the Dutch and Spanish policy documents on gender inequality in politics we employ the methodology of critical frame analysis. Critical frame analysis originated in social movements theory (Snow and Benford, 1988, 1992) and was further developed within the Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe (MAGEEQ) research project (www.mageeq.net) in that insights from public policy (Bacchi, 1999; Giddens, 1984) and gender theory (Walby, 1997; Verloo and Roggeband, 1996; Connell, 1987) were incorporated. Critical frame analysis aims at mapping how policy actors interpret a policy problem, either in implicit or explicit ways, and the solutions to the latter. The key concept of a frame is that, an unintentional conceptual schema that filters our understanding of reality by driving our attention towards certain aspects of reality (often related to where our socio-cultural bias mostly leads us), while at the same time they can make us neglect others (Goffmann, 1974).

When applied to policy discourse, a 'policy frame' is defined as an 'organizing principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem,

in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included' (Verloo, 2007, p. 33; 2005, p. 20). Policy frames that can make us problematize certain policy issues and leave others untouched are made of different dimensions. Critical frame analysis is particularly suited to the study of power in policy discourses on gender inequality in politics because it detects both visible and invisible dimensions of power thanks to a detailed and in-depth analysis of the different dimensions of a policy frame. In particular, it helps us to identify the representation of the problem or its diagnosis, the solution to the problem or its prognosis, and the balance existing between the two (for instance, by observing whether a policy document leaves a particular problem representation with no solution). It further reveals what roles are attributed to the groups considered (Who is considered to be the norm group and who the problematic group? Who is supposed to act to solve the problem? And who are the target groups of the proposed measures?). It also helps us identify the causes or roots of a problem, the means to solve it, and the mechanisms that reproduce and solve the problem. Other dimensions of a policy frame that enable us to analyze the less visible aspects of power concerning the legitimization of non-problems (is there something in the text that is considered as a non-problem?) and the legitimization of non-action (how is non-action legitimized in the texts?), and the normativity that is expressed in a text (what is seen as ideal/preferred and what is seen as bad/detrimental?). The dimension of voice, i.e. who is given a voice to speak in the document or is referred to in a text, is important to assess which actors have the power to set and control the agenda and which actors are excluded from the possibility of framing policy issues (see Verloo, 2007 for a list of these dimensions).

In critical frame analysis, conceptual metaphors are one of the signs that reveal a person's thought (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; 1999). However, we do not develop a detailed analysis of all of the metaphors that we encounter in the chosen policy texts, but rather select metaphors that express the representations of power. In this sense, our analysis differs from the tradition of

discourse analysis, which focuses more on the close analysis of language using a social psychological focus on patterns of speech and linguistic and rhetorical devices that are used in a text that is often an interview (see Bacchi, 2005). By contrast, our analysis is closer to an analysis of discourse, which is more interested in the meanings and interpretations of specific issues that emerge in written policy documents within particular political and social contexts and that produce particular understandings of such issues (see Bacchi, 2005; Verloo, 2007). Being aware of the dangers in discourse analysis of over-generalizing on limited linguistic evidence (Deignan, 2005), we wish to clarify from the beginning that we treat metaphors not as our only linguistic evidence, but rather as one of the ways that help us identify the representations of power that appear in the written discourse of policy actors. Through the use of keywords that refer to power without necessarily naming it, we have selected the metaphors that more explicitly refer to power in the context of the policy texts on gender inequality in politics, but do not necessarily cover all implicit and explicit metaphors of power in the texts. The aforementioned dimensions of a policy frame, such as among others, diagnosis and prognosis of a policy problem, are the main tools that enable us to grasp the meaning of power that appears in the texts and its relation to gender equality.

We will analyze the referred dimensions of a policy frame in the selection of Dutch and Spanish policy texts on gender inequality in politics, searching for ways in which power is represented through metaphors. The selection of texts includes primarily official documents declaring policies on gender equality elaborated by the main political and administrative institutions[3], such as legislative texts, political plans and programs, parliamentary debates, and political speeches and declarations.[4] Selected policy documents undergo an in-depth analysis, whose results are included in a systematic and detailed summary that has been called a supertext, on the basis of which the different dimensions of a policy frame are mapped.[5]

4. Power and conceptual metaphors in Dutch and Spanish policy texts on gender inequality in politics

In this chapter, our analysis explores whether, how, and through which metaphors, power is represented in the Spanish and Dutch texts on gender inequality in politics (see Bustelo et al, 2004; van Lamoen, Meier, and Jeuken, 2004). Notwithstanding the fact that we postulated differences between the Dutch and Spanish texts, we did not find any fundamental ones. Spanish texts contain no explicit definition of power and references to it are occasional, abstract, and vague. Of the 14 Dutch texts studied, only four contain an explicit reference to power in connection with issues of gender equality.[6]

In general, in both countries, the concept of power is employed as a synonym of the 'realm of power', a concept that indicates elective and decision-making political positions. For instance, in most Dutch and Spanish government equality plans, the section of the text that refers to elective and decision-making political positions is named 'power and decision-making'.[7] Power appears to be mainly understood as the presence in higher functions of (political) decision-making, referring to women's participation in these institutions. The note on behalf of the Dutch women's policy machinery from May 1999, underlines, for instance, that power concerns the 'presence of women in the formal political institutions and societal organizations' (N5, p. 3). This is the so-called 'quantitative' dimension of power. The document also mentions the 'qualitative' presence of women, referring to the structural attention for women's interests and needs, but in the rest of the document the author deliberately leaves this issue aside.

Furthermore, the concept of power tends to be closely interconnected with that of equality, the latter being defined in a traditional liberal way of an equal access to all spheres of

society (for instance N9). The inequality of women resides in the fact that they do not hold enough powerful positions as compared to men. Power, in this perspective, is reduced to a quantitative entity; it becomes a synonym for the number of women in political decision-making. Dutch policy documents underline for instance that the problem is the 'distribution of power' (for instance N1), meaning that positions of political decision-making are not equally distributed among men and women. The problem is to be understood as an under-representation of women in positions of political decision-making. Given this numerical focus, power is also conceived as a zero-sum game: whatever power women will manage to achieve is power they have taken from men. This notion of a zero-sum game can be found in a Dutch text underlining that 'a characteristic of the possession of power is that it is not easily nor voluntarily given away' (N5).

Most policy discourses further seem to assume that, to be equal, women simply need to be integrated in power structures, the same structures that may actually be reproducing women's subordination. Achieving equality is not necessarily presented as a question of changing existing power structures but of offering women the possibility to enter them. Dutch and Spanish texts frequently refer to the need to 'promote equal access and participation of women in power and decision-making structures in all spheres' (S2)[8]. Some of the keywords searched in Spanish texts were 'acceso al poder' (access to power), 'comparto del poder' (sharing power), 'participación en el poder' (participation in power), 'representación política' (political representation), 'igualdad en el poder' (equality in power), 'igualdad en la toma de decisiones' (equality in decision-making), 'presencia' (presence), 'paridad' (parity). Some of the keywords found in Dutch texts were 'verdeling van macht en invloed' (distribution of power and influence), 'verdeling van (politieke) hulpbronnen' (distribution of (political) resources), 'deel uitmaken' (participate in), 'aanwezigheid van vrouwen' (presence of women), 'doorbraak van vrouwen in hogere functies' (breakthrough of women in higher positions). One of the metaphors most commonly used is that

of 'access' to positions of political power (i.e. representative and decision-making positions). This gives us the idea that power is something that is behind a closed door that needs to be opened for women to enter this sphere. The barrier to women's access is often described as 'glass ceiling'[9], where the image of the glass shows the gap between the formal and the substantive opportunities to access political positions. While formally nothing hinders women to access positions of political decision-making, there still are invisible barriers.

In Spain, demands for sharing power and achieving a more balanced share of power come in particular from actors belonging to the PSOE and IU. Quotas for women in political institutions are part of the solutions proposed to overcome the obstacles that hinder women's access to power structures on (numerically) equal terms with men. Whatever the obstacles may be, quotas are meant to bypass them.[10] The type of quotas that is proposed by the Socialist Party, the main supporter of this measure, requires that 'candidatures of electoral lists will have a balanced presence of men and women so that their composition does not exceed 60 per cent and is not inferior to 40 per cent of either sex'.[11] What is interesting as well is that the main metaphors used in these texts refer to weight and numbers, and they appear in all Spanish texts with keywords such as 'balanced presence', 'balanced participation', 'balanced representation', 'share'.[12] For example, the rationale behind the introduction of quotas in politics is often described through the metaphor of a 'balanced presence', that suggests the image of a scale where women and men have the same weight on the plates. The language of mathematics often returns in the mentioning of a numerical 'proportion' of 60/40 for each sex's possibility to be elected or appointed in political positions (S8). Using the language of mathematics can be a strategic device that female politicians employ, deliberately or not, to legitimate the issue of gender inequality in politics vis-à-vis their male colleagues. And it is a language that can more easily be understood by men.

In the Dutch policy documents, the focus is rather on the extent to which the target figures for women in positions of political decision-making are met. The language used is that of an economic trend, describing the evolution in the numbers of women in decision-making in terms of 'growth', 'substantive growth', 'stagnation', and 'decline' (N10, N11).

A couple of Dutch policy texts focus more extensively on the obstacles themselves, distinguishing for instance between individual, structural, and cultural factors. The individual factors refer to the level of education, professional experience, time available, personal ambition and motivation, but they are recognized to have become less important. Institutional factors are defined as those involving the distribution of power and refer to the gender bias contained in electoral systems or the selection criteria for candidates in politics. Cultural factors refer to gender rules and regimes, mainly unwritten rules, values, norms and social practices, all of which are institutions influencing how much power women 'manage to gather'. Notwithstanding the more extensive focus on obstacles to a balanced distribution of power positions in the Dutch case, solutions are similar to those presented in Spanish documents. A redistribution of power is thought not to come by itself but rather needs steering through stimulating measures such as quotas or target figures, as can be found in a gender impact assessment of the electoral system. But the obstacles themselves are not tackled, the existing structures and institutions producing and perpetuating power relations are left untouched – if any solution is suggested at all.

A couple of texts refer to power in a different way. A linguistic example used in one Spanish text presents 'power' as a 'cake' to 'share'. Power is perceived as the capacity to make things happen that would otherwise not happen. The metaphor of the 'cake' enables female politicians, who were the authors of the speech, to suggest to their male colleagues an image that they can easily perceive, as it speaks in the traditional language of power as a tempting capacity to possess, but that at the same time fits the purpose of proposing a redistribution of 'the cake'

between the sexes. The underlying suggestion of the text, however, goes in the opposite direction to the traditional idea of power in order to dominate someone else, since it states that, by sharing the 'cake of power', women might be able to construct a new world order. In the words of a Socialist female MP: 'we women want to share the cake of power, not because we are crazy about it [...] because we want to participate in the construction of a new world order' [13]. In this sense, the concept of power that emerges is one of 'power over' in order to come to 'power to', and female policymakers are presented as actors who will transform the world.

The aforementioned Dutch paper on the position of women in decision-making, produced by a feminist scholar on behalf of the women's policy machinery, underlines not only the deficient distribution of power but also that of influence. Here, power is defined as the ability to decide on the organization of society (see N5, p. 1). The argument goes that there is both too little quantitative and qualitative presence of women in decision-making, the latter referring to a lack of structural consideration of women's issues or gendered interests and needs. But no further explanation is provided for how the quantitative and the qualitative aspect of women's representation relate to each other, and how more women in the realm of power would involve both different decisions from those generally taken and a re-organization of society. But the fact that power can be the capacity to transform something, as it is understood by Arendt (1969), is clearly underlined, even though it is not stated as such let alone developed any further.

An alternative conceptualization of power in a more (normative) transformative sense emerges in the Basque Plan on gender equality (S3). The key concepts developed in this document are 'empowerment' and 'power to'. Measures are oriented to achieving women's empowerment in its double aspect: of acknowledging their capacities to exercise influence, power and leadership, and of promoting the effective exercise of influence, power and leadership. It is a matter of strengthening women's social, economic and political position on the basis of the

conception of 'power to' rather than 'power over', which would imply the elimination of existing gender power relations. The expression 'power to' includes a metaphorical movement toward potential capacity, change, and future action. Power, in the Basque Plan, is conceived as capacity ('power to') rather than as control ('power over'), opening the way to the transformative potential of an alternative conceptualization of power. Moreover, unlike the other analyzed texts for Spain on gender inequality in politics, gender relations in the Basque Plan are explicitly defined as power relations, although there is no mentioning of the patriarchal structures in which power relations are situated. Women's empowerment and increased autonomy are represented as possible solutions to the problem of gender inequalities in politics. Empowerment is explicitly connected to the importance of strengthening the women's movement, giving feminist actors voice in the political debate.[14] In this normative discourse, women's empowerment should take its point of departure in the concept of 'power to'. The plan argues about the need to strengthen women's capacities, both at the individual and collective levels, in view of a 'new model of leadership' that would supposedly be more transformative. The text recognizes the presence of obstacles to women's exercise of 'power to', as existing political structures are excessively hierarchical in order to enable women - and men - to exercise 'power to'. Neither the concept of women's 'power to' nor the way in which such a radical change of structures should occur is extensively developed in the Basque Plan. Besides, in spite of its progressive aspects, this discourse is not immune to the influence of the implicit male norm: while women's roles and contributions in the transformation of society are underlined in a way that creates the idea of women's responsibility, references to men's roles in this transformation are absent.

A concept of power as something related to setting and controlling the agenda by taking non-decisions that would not benefit dominant groups (Lukes, 2005) is reflected in most Dutch policy documents as well as in the discourse of the Spanish Popular Party (PP). The latter shows

a liberal emphasis on the individual, together with a denial of the problem of unequal power between the sexes. In this discourse, women's under-representation is considered not a problem in itself, because equal opportunities supposedly enable capable individuals (men and women) to compete for power, and let the best individuals achieve power positions. Not only is unequal gender power (interpreted as women's under-representation) legitimized as a 'non problem', but also 'non action' is the solution proposed in the discourse of the PP: '(…) the debate you [MPs proposing quotas] bring here today is an *old* debate (…). We defend a feminism of *opportunities*, *not of imposition*. (…) Against your quotas, we want responsibilities that respond to our *efforts*, *capacity* and *value*. We do not want to be a *number imposed* in a list'.[15]

Different rhetorical resources are employed in this Spanish policy document. The Socialist Party's demand for quotas is discredited by the Popular Party with the label of 'old feminism'. The label 'old fashioned' attached to quotas promoters would supposedly consist in the 'imposition' that quotas would exercise on parties, while the progress is rather conceived in terms of minimal state intervention. Furthermore, by defining women who oppose quotas as capable, competent, and worthy, the PP speaker implicitly suggests a negative association of women who are in favor of quotas and who would be elected due to quotas as incompetent, incapable, and unworthy. The argument is that there is no need for legal 'intervention' (i.e. quotas), the boundaries set to action being the voluntary will of individuals. Change, in this view, will simply come 'naturally' since men and women are equal in dignity and capacities: 'In my view such a strong interventionism of having to make parity by law must not exist, since this [equality] should be *natural*, given that we, men and women, are equal in *dignity* (…) and *capacity*, under equal conditions, to compete with men'.[16] Most Dutch documents, even those analyzing gendered obstacles when it comes to having or getting power, contain subtle

legitimizations of non-action by not formulating any concrete suggestions to solve the problem depicted and by postponing concrete action.

All in all, we detected very little explicit reference to the concept of power in the analyzed texts on gender inequality in politics. Moreover, explicit references to male domination in politics are extremely rare in the diagnosis of the problem. Neither Spanish nor Dutch texts explicitly mention men as part of the problem of women's under-representation. The Dutch text closest to such a statement mentions that institutional advantages for men have to be erased, thus recognizing a gender differentiated access to power, and the Spanish Basque Plan (S3) refers to incentives for men to take paternity and parental leave. But the focus is on the design and impact of institutions, not on men. Policy documents underline the unequal distribution of power between the sexes, but focus on how women lag behind or need to catch up. Issues of causality and responsibility never address men. Women hold the problem of not having much power and they should move so as to attain it. This appears in the tendency in the Spanish and Dutch texts to frame the problem of gender inequality in politics as 'women's under-representation' rather than 'men's over-representation'. The issue is a larger participation of women: increasing women's inflow, increasing their mobility, and preventing their exit.

4. Conclusions: gender and the implicit dimensions of power

In this chapter we studied a particular potential barrier for women in political decision-making, more precisely the framing of power in policy documents on gender inequality in politics and the conceptual metaphors employed to describe power. Contrary to our expectations, Dutch and Spanish policy documents on gender inequality in politics do not differ profoundly with respect to the conceptualization of power, notwithstanding the historical differences between these

countries when it comes to the position of women in politics. Dutch texts do not contain qualitatively more references to power. Gender equality policies might have introduced target figures way before the Spanish requests on gender quotas and focus on subtle barriers such as the lack of maternity leave for women politicians, but with respect to power, the discourses are similar in both countries.

When considering the representations of power and the related metaphors that are reflected in the analyzed policy documents on gender inequality in politics, we have to conclude that definitions of power are rare, vague, and limited. Only a small minority of policy documents speaks of power, and if they do, they tend to be brief on the issue. The concept of power is closely interconnected with a liberal understanding of equality, limiting the concept of power to a quantitative entity that reflects the number of women in politics. Power is the observable and measurable 'access' of women to positions of political decision-making that is hindered by obstacles metaphorically summarized in the conventionalized expression of 'glass ceiling'. Power, in this respect, is mainly considered to be a form of control over, in this case, positions of decision-making. Power is also seen as a zero-sum game: whatever certain actors have, others do not have it. But it is not seen as a relational concept. Of the current relational definition of power only B (women) is addressed, not A (men). This finding suggests that it is precisely the absence of mentioning of the male subject in the power relation that reveals the presence of implicit dimensions of power even in policy documents that are supposedly written to promote gender equality in politics.

In his recently revised theory of power, Lukes (2005) argues that one of the levels at which power operates is a situation in which an issue is unquestioned to the extent that it is not even formulated in the actors' minds nor is it openly discussed in political debates. In this case, the taboo seems to be male power over women. The problem of men's power is not explicitly

formulated in the documents precisely because it is so dominant that it exercises hegemony over all discourses and, consequently, the situation simply does not appear as problematic to the political actors involved, including female policymakers who advocate for gender equality. Male political power is revealed and confirmed by its invisibility as a problem, by it being normalized by the majority of the texts, even those of feminist actors. Still, men's presence as the invisible unstated norm suggests the unquestioned (even 'obvious') perpetuation of their power over the subordinated female subjects. In this sense, the maintenance in power of the male group is protected against possible changes by continuous processes of normalization of hegemonic discourses (Foucault, 1995; 1980). In sum, the Dutch and Spanish policy documents on the issue of gender inequality in politics might not explicitly mention power, but they speak for themselves with respect to the existing power relations. They subscribe to and reproduce the existing imbalanced gender relations in political decision-making as the norm, which might produce an important barrier for women to such positions.

However, findings also indicate that, though isolated, texts on gender inequality in politics develop some alternative conceptualizations of power as 'power to' that embed a transformative potential for politics through a metaphorical movement from 'power over' to 'power to'. One of them is the concept of individual and collective empowerment that was found in the Basque Plan, that has some relation to Arendt's notion of power as capacity to 'act in concert' (Arendt, 1972, p. 151) for a political purpose. Power in the Basque text is conceived as capacity that stems from both women's individual empowerment through training programs for improving their political skills and the strengthening of women's associative movement through training, promotion of exchanges, funds and coordination programs. These measures go in the direction of promoting women's capacity to act together with the common political purpose of achieving a more gender equal society. Other alternative conceptualizations of power use the classical and familiar

metaphor of the 'cake of power', but to promote a different idea from that of 'power over', that is the one that women would use power for transforming the world. This suggests new models of female leadership, where the concept of power as capacity replaces that of power as domination. But again, in none of these alternative cases the relational dimension of power is addressed as the focus is on women only.

Still, the difficulties for female politicians to carve out a space in male dominated political institutions for expressing their voices in favor of greater gender equality in politics transpire in the rhetorical devices they adopt to legitimate their demands. One example that we mentioned is the female politicians' use of the language of mathematics (quotas, percentages, targets) as a legitimating and easy-to-grasp rhetoric for their male colleagues. Another is the recurrent use of the term 'balance', a concept that, by suggesting the picture of a scale, evokes ancestral images of justice. This is to say that although we criticize the lack of a relational dimension of power in policy texts on gender inequality in politics, we must be aware of the sometimes patriarchal environment of female politicians and policymakers. The alternative conceptualizations of power suggest that there are attempts in policy texts on gender inequality in politics to propose different models of transformative political leadership and there is evidence that gender advocates in the analyzed texts employ a variety of rhetorical strategies for promoting gender equality, win supporters and ward off opponents. At the same time, though, the male power in the political sphere appears so strong that it seems to silence any direct challenges to it even in those documents where one would expect to find them.

Acknowledgements

Appendix: List of analysed texts

N1.   Emancipation under Execution, Short Term Policy Plan Emancipation in Execution, 22 November 1995

N2.   Gender Impact Assessment on the proposition for a mixed electoral system, July 1996

N3.   Cabinet Standpoint on Women in Politics and Public Governance 1996/Letter from the Minister of the Interior (22777, no. 8), 13 November 1996

N4.   Women in Politics and Public Governance (KS 22777-11), Minutes of general meeting of the Parliamentarian Committee for Social Affairs and Employment debating the position of women in politics and public administration, 20 January 1999

N5.   Power and Decision-Making: on emancipation and participation. Exploration of the field on behalf of the Dutch women's policy machinery, May 1999

N6.   Mid Term Policy Plan on Emancipation 2000, 15 November 2000

N7.   A world to gain. TECENA'S final report on the advisory system with conclusions and recommendations, December 2000

N8.   Letter from the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations informing the Second Chamber of Parliament about the cabinet's resolutions concerning possible arrangements for pregnancy & delivery leave for politicians, 6 April 2001

N9.   Minutes of the General Meeting of the Parliamentarian Committee for Social Affairs and Employment consulting the Secretary of State on Social Affairs and Employment A. Verstand on the cabinet's reaction (letter 01-10-2001) to the CEDAW's reaction to the 2nd and 3rd national report, (28009-7), 28 November 2001

N10.   Minutes of Plenary Parliamentary Debate on an arrangement proposal for the replacement of political representatives during sickness and pregnancy, 7 February 2002

N11. Answers to parliamentary questions on women elected in municipal councils, 28 March 2002

N12. Questions members of second chamber to Minister of the Interior on the number of women in the new cabinet and answers provided by the Minister, 13 September 2002

N13. Policy article 12, annual presentation of emancipation policy resolutions, September 2003

N14. Bill amendment Constitution on amendment regulations regarding de election of the Lower and Upper House, the provincial and the local councils on a temporary replacement of their members due to pregnancy, delivery or illness. Report of the permanent Committee of the Interior, 25 March 2003

S1. III Plan for Equal Opportunities between women and men 1997-2000

S2. IV Plan for Equal Opportunities between women and men 2003-2006

S3. III Equality Plan Basque Country 1999-2000

S4. IV Governmental Action by the *Catalonia Generalitat* in Equal Opportunities for Women (2001-2003)

S5. IV Equal Opportunities Plan for Women and Men in the region of Madrid 2002-2005

S6. The Socialist Party's (PSOE) Equality Plan, 26 April 2002

S7. Parliamentary debate on Women's rights, 22 April 1997

S8. Law proposal 16 November 2001 on a reform of the electoral law 5/1985, 19 June

S9. Law 11/2002 June 27 for modifying the Castilla-La Mancha electoral law 5/1986 23 December

S10. Debate on three law proposals on guaranteeing equality among men and women in their access to electoral positions, 8 April 2003

S11. Electoral program of the Socialist Party PSOE 2004

S12. Electoral program of the Leftist Party IU 2004

References

Arendt, H. *On Violence* (NY: Harcourt: Brace and World, 1969).

Arendt, H. *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

Astelarra, J. (ed.) *Participación política de las mujeres* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1990).

Bacchi, C. *Women Politics and Policies. The Construction of Policy Problems* (London: Sage, 1999).

Bacchi, C. 'Discourse, Discourse Everywhere: Subject 'Agency' in Feminist Discourse Methodology', *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 13.3, (2005) 198-209.

Bustelo, M., E. Lombardo, E. Peterson and R. Platero *Country Study Spain. Political Participation* (Vienna: IWM, 2004).

Bustelo, M. and E. Lombardo (eds.) *Políticas de igualdad en España y en Europa* (Madrid: Catedra, 2007).

Connell, R. W. *Gender and Power: Society, the person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

Deignan, A. *Metaphor and Corpus Linguistics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005).

Deignan, A. (no date) 'Conceptual Metaphor Theory', http://creet.open.ac.uk/projects/metaphor-analysis/theories.cfm?paper=cmt (homepage), date accessed 7 December 2007.

Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. (New Cork: Vintage, 1995).

Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Panteon Books, 1980).

Fraser, N. *Unruly practices: power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

Giddens, A. *The constitution of society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984).

Goffmann, E. *Frame analysis. An essay on the organisation of experience* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1974).

Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1980).

Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

Lamoen van, I., P. Meier, and Y. Jeuken *Update preliminary country study. The Netherlands. Political participation and representation* (Vienna: IWM, 2004).

Leyenaar, M. 'Vom demokratischen Feigenblatt zur Parität. Politische Partizipation von Frauen in den Niederlanden' in B. Hoecker (ed.) *Handbuch politische Partizipation von Frauen in Europa* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1998).

Lombardo, E. 'Gender Inequality in Politics: Policy Frames in Spain and the European Union', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10.1 (2008) 78-96.

Lukes, S. *Power. A Radical View*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Meier, P. Lombardo, E., Bustelo, M. and M. Pantelidou Maloutas 'Gender mainstreaming and the bench marking fallacy of women in political decision-making', *The Greek Review of Social Research*, B1.117 (2005) 35-62.

Oldersma, J. 'High tides in a low country: gendering political representation in the Netherlands' in J. Lovenduski et al. (eds.) *State Feminism and Political Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Snow, D. and R. Benford 'Master frames and cycles of protest' in A. D. Morris and C. McClurg-Mueller (eds.) *Frontiers in social movement theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Snow, D., and R. Benford 'Ideology, frame resonance and participant mobilization'. *International Social Movement Research*, 1 (1988) 197-217.

Verloo, M. (ed.) *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality in Europe. A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe* (Budapest: CPS Books, 2007).

Verloo, M. 'Mainstreaming gender equality in Europe. A critical frame analysis, *The Greek Review of Social Research*, B1. 117 (2005) 11-32.

Verloo, M. and C. Roggeband 'Gender Impact Assessment: the development of a new instrument in the Netherlands' *Impact Assessment*, 14.1 (1996) 3-20.

Walby, S. *Gender Transformations* (London: Routledge, 1997).

---

[1] These last events have not been included in the analysis because it deals with documents prior to 2006.

[2] In March 2007 an *Equality law between women and men* was approved (Law 3/2007) that obliges political parties to respect a share of no more than 60 per cent and no less than 40 per cent of each sex in candidate lists.

[3] For the list of analyzed texts see the appendix. The selection of documents was based on the construction of a time-line that identified key moments of debate among different socio-political actors throughout the period of study. Starting from these key moments, texts were added until they did not include new information. We also analyzed secondary sources (texts produced by the written press, the feminist movement and gender experts), but here we focus on official policy documents.

[4] More precisely, the texts include policy plans (3 Dutch and 5 Spanish texts), positions of the cabinet on particular issues (1 Dutch text), letter from a minister to Parliament (1 Dutch text), minutes of meetings of parliamentary committees (3 Dutch texts), minutes of plenary parliamentary debates (1 Dutch and 2 Spanish texts), questions by MPs and Ministerial answers (2 Dutch texts), legislation (2 Spanish texts), political party's electoral programs (2 Spanish texts) and policy program (1 Spanish text). Dutch texts are between 1 and 55 pages long, the total corpus size is 170 pages. Spanish texts are between 3 and 52 pages long, the total corpus size is 134 pages.

[5] A 'supertext' enables the hidden significance of a text to be made explicit through a list of 'sensitizing questions' (Verloo 2007).

[6] Keywords searched in Spanish related to 'igualdad en el poder' (equal power) and 'comparto del poder en la toma de decisiones' (sharing decision-making power); in Dutch to 'macht en besluitvorming' (power and decision-making), 'verdeling van macht en invloed' (distribution of power and influence), 'macht en besluitvorming over emancipatie en participatie' (power and decision-making on emancipation and participation).

[7] See N1 or S1 Equality plans in Appendix, but this is common also to other Dutch and Spanish documents.

[8] Similar quotations can be found in all Spanish texts analyzed.

[9] The quotation of the 'glass ceiling' is from S2 Equality plan but can also be found in N4 Parliamentarian Committee meeting, N5 Note for women's policy machinery, N6 Emancipation plan; N11 Parliamentary questions and answers and N13 Equality policies' resolutions speak of the need for women to break through without mentioning the glass ceiling itself.

[10] Quotas as a means to promote women's access to power structures can be found in the following Spanish policy texts: S2 Equality plan; S7 Parliamentary debate; S8 Law proposal; S9 Law; S10 Parliamentary debate; S11 and S12, Electoral programs.

[11] The quotation is from S8 (Law proposal), but it is similarly phrased in policy documents from the PSOE and IU.

[12] The frequency of this type of metaphors varies in Spanish texts, but for instance the reference to a 'balanced' representation, participation or presence of women in politics can be found at least three times in a text, and sometimes five, seven, or more times.

[13] While the concept of sharing power can be found in several texts analyzed from the left parties, the quotation of the 'cake of power' comes from a Socialist female MP in S10 (Parliamentary debate).

[14] 'Measures proposed aim at raising society awareness of the importance of a more balanced participation of women and men in the different spheres and levels of decision-making, at better preparing women for their participation in the public sphere and at the strengthening of women's associative movement' (S3, Basque Equality Plan).

[15] The PP MP continues by presenting the PP as a role model that has already solved the problem within the party by putting more women in decision-making positions (S10, Parliamentary debate).

[16] PP speaker, S10 (Parliamentary debate).