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Multiple Meanings
of Gender Equality
A Critical Frame Analysis
of Gender Policies in Europe

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Conclusions on Framing Gender Inequality as a Policy Problem in Europe

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The analysis carried out in this book shows how policy discourses construct the meanings of gender equality in different debates and developments that take place in different geographical contexts across Europe. The meaning of gender equality is shaped through a variety of discursive processes. In these, the concept of gender equality is fit into existing policy frames, being broadened, narrowed down, watered down, or even submitted to other goals than that of gender equality. As particularly discussions of the issues of domestic violence and family policies show, the issue of gender equality can undergo processes of “degendering,” where a gender equality focus that was previously present in the framing of an issue gets lost during the policy process by shifting the emphasis on other actors (e.g., children or families, rather than the relation between men and women) or other goals (e.g., shifting the meaning of family policies from the goal of sharing to that of reconciling work and family life, where the goal becomes an efficient and competitive labor market rather than challenging traditional gender roles).

Processes that shape the meaning of gender equality can be both intentional and unintentional. In the MAGEEQ analysis we have been especially interested in the analysis of the implicit framing of issues, as actors can be driven to shape an issue in a particular way due to unintentional biases of which they often are unaware. We also found evidence that actors intentionally frame issues for strategic reasons (e.g., the democracy frame in gender inequality in politics). However, we did not explore further the relation between unintentional and intentional framing, an aspect that deserves to be explored in future research (Bacchi 2005). The unintentional dimension of frames is also connected to the fact that the actors’ agency is enabled and, at the same time, is constrained by the existence of existing broader hegemonic discourses in a Foucauldian sense, or “master frames,” that may steer the actors’ conscious shaping of an issue in unintended directions (Bacchi 2005). Hegemonic discourses or master frames can be identified as the background where specific policy frames are articulated, by setting the borders within which frames can move. This is, for instance, the case of the labor market, which creates a horizon in which discourses

on reconciliation and family policies are inserted, opening but, at the same time, limiting the possibilities of framing the issue in other directions.

In the first chapter of this book we introduced three levels of analysis: the existence of different visions of gender equality; the way different political and theoretical debates crosscut these issues; and the geographical contexts in which these visions and debates take place. We now wish to come back to these three levels of analysis by bringing into the discussion elements that emerged in the different chapters. In particular, we will reflect on what our analysis told us with respect to the following: what is the relation of gender with other inequalities, who has voice in the definition of the issues, and how do policy discourses re-define the political. We then analyze the extent to which the geographical context mattered in the framing of the issues. Finally, we reflect on what lessons can be learnt for policy practice and on what our findings tell us about the theories or visions of equality that inform policy debates and practices.

Relation of Gender and Other Inequalities

We have argued in the first chapter that attention to other inequalities is still at an embryonic stage as far as theory is concerned. After having detailed the analysis for all issues studied, what can be our conclusion for the attention to intersectionality in the policy texts we analyzed? The analysis of policy texts and policy debates shows that gender equality policies, as well as policies that set out to address a wider range of equalities, equally fail to seriously address intersectionality. Moreover, in the few cases in which intersectionality is addressed, we found evidence of bias in the way in which equality policies treat intersections of gender and other inequalities.

We have analyzed three issues where attention to other inequalities is most often not center stage in political debates: gender inequality in politics, family policy, and domestic violence. Policy documents in these issues make some reference to other inequalities in the framing of both the diagnosis and prognosis. However, not only this reference is minimal in the texts, but also it is not always the kind of attention that furthers a wider sense of equality, as we will argue below.

For four issues, the attention for other inequalities is upfront. This is the case for migration and integration issues in the Netherlands, where a mix of ethnicity, country of origin, and religion marks the cleavage between autochthonous and allochthonous citizens. It is also the case for policies and policy debates on homosexual rights in Spain, where sexual orientation and sexual identity is at the core. Prostitution is another issue that is understood in Austria and Slovenia as being as much about ethnicity, class, or country of origin as about gender. Finally, in the policies and policy debates on anti-discrimination in Hungary, a whole range of inequalities is at stake,

even if the focus is on the prevention and sanctioning of discrimination, and not on equality policies as such. The location of these issues at the intersection of gender and other inequalities, however, does not always involve attention for wider equality either, and even reveals traces of stereotypes against different categories of people. Let us consider more carefully the two cases we have just mentioned: issues that are less and issues that are more directly related to at least one other axis of inequality.

What we have found for the issues that were not marked so clearly by intersectionality (i.e., family policies, gender inequality in politics, and domestic violence), is that there is an almost total absence of reference to gender intersecting other inequalities. This applies to all policy documents on gender equality that were analyzed in the six selected countries and in the European Union (Verloo and Lombardo 2006). Most policy documents on gender inequality in politics, family policy, and domestic violence present women (and, far more rarely, men) as a homogeneous group, and if there is differentiation of their socio-economic or family situation, there is hardly any articulation of what their differentiated problems and needs are, which in turn implies that measures proposed to solve the problem address all women in an undifferentiated way. The only presence of intersectionality we find is at best linked to an understanding of the problem of gender inequality as a problem of women lagging behind: either a problem of them being excluded from certain parts of society, or a problem of their vulnerability. For instance, references to intersectionality appear stronger in domestic violence than in gender inequality in politics, due to the particular attention that this issue devotes to victims, who are in some cases vulnerable groups of women. The vulnerability of certain groups is recognized in some cases, but there is a lack of prognosis that goes beyond the individual level. Similarly, in the few cases in which intersectionality is addressed in the issue of family policies, the reference is to economically poorer and needy families, and vulnerable groups such as single-parent families, large families, children, parents of handicapped children, Roma, or foreign families. However, when in these two issues other inequalities are mentioned in relation to particularly vulnerable groups, this is done at a descriptive level by simply mentioning specific social groups rather than at a deeper structural level of incorporating the analysis of intersectionality in the diagnosis of the problem and in the solutions proposed to the latter. While attention to the impact of class or ethnicity, even when only in a very superficial way, could potentially benefit certain groups of women, we have hardly found evidence of measures doing so, exactly because of the purely descriptive, almost purely symbolic way specific social groups are mentioned.

For the four other issues that are directly located at the intersection of gender and other axes of inequality, the results are alarming. In some cases we found evidence of ethnocentric or gender bias against specific subjects, and in one case we found evidence that attention for inequalities other than gender has led to the disappearance

of gender tout court. The latter occurs with anti-discrimination policy in Hungary, which tells the story of a move in which both the EU and the national agenda converged and that went from a more focused agenda where gender was specifically addressed to a general equal opportunity agenda that tackled different inequalities, but in which gender inequality was blurred. A similar process also takes place in an issue less explicitly related to other inequalities, such as family policies, where in some texts the introduction of intersectionality, in the form of reference to class inequalities, translates into the disappearance of reference to gender inequalities.

For the issues of migration and integration, homosexual rights and prostitution, rather than an absence of intersectionality, in our analysis we have found evidence of an ethnocentric bias in texts that deal with the emancipation of ethnic minority groups (the Netherlands), of gender bias in texts on homosexual rights (Spain), and of ethnocentric/nationalistic bias in texts on prostitution (Austria and Slovenia). For instance, the Dutch policy texts on migration and integration offer negative representations of migrant women as traditional, backwards, and potential victims, thus blaming women for their problematic position and essentializing that part of their identity. The Slovenian, and, though less explicitly, the Austrian policy texts on prostitution normatively differentiate between the “national” type of prostitution, positively presented as “high-rank,” “unproblematic,” “legal,” and “voluntary,” and the “foreign” type of prostitution, that is negatively described as one that is exercised by women who are “involuntarily trafficked” from South Eastern European countries, and that is “low-rank,” “criminalized,” and “problematic” as compared to the national form of prostitution. Finally, Spanish equality policies do not tend to acknowledge a common or intersecting source of discrimination against women and homosexuals, and, in this way, they contribute to make lesbian’s sexuality invisible.

What does this treatment of intersectionality in equality policies tell us? What is the problem with political intersectionality? Why does policymakers’ attention to one axis of inequality lead to blindness or bias to other inequalities? The search for these reasons opens a whole set of questions concerning the material or discursive causes that hinder political attention to the intersection of different inequalities (Verloo and Lombardo 2006). As concerns material reasons, when policymakers dealing with gender or women’s NGOs are asked to pay attention to multiple inequalities in the articulation of their policies and demands, they can be de-motivated in carrying out the task by the limitation of economic and political resources. If resources are still the same but they have to be shared among different groups, existing gender equality organizations worry that they might deprive women from the funds they need to combat existing gender inequalities. This is especially the case if resources are insufficient for completing the complex task of addressing multiple inequalities. Material reasons hence are connected to competition.

Political resistance to change is often rooted in competition too, and linked to the different power positions that actors hold in the access to and influence on policy-making. When existing groups or institutions have understood the interests of “women” to be mainly the interests of middle-class heterosexual women with children, and have a parallel constituency, they will be reluctant to change and represent other particular axes of inequality as it could shift the power balance within these groups and institutions. In this sense, demands for attention to other axes of inequality can trigger territorial reflexes. In relation to both the material and political causes, institutional mechanisms that deal with the issue of inequality have a key role in promoting solidarity or competition between groups representing different axes of inequality.

Finally, there could be a limitation due to the lack of complexity of thinking about the point at which the various inequalities of race, gender, class, etc., intersect with each other (Crenshaw 1989), rather than employing a simple bipolar logic of analysis that treats one type of inequality as compared to another, taking what appears as dominant as the norm for comparison. Here is where it is detrimental to the quality of gender equality policies that theories on intersectionality are still in full development, and that, as our analysis shows, there is a severe lack of political articulation of intersectionality as well. In the absence of operational forms of intersectional analysis, policymakers apparently choose the easier road of dealing with a few homogenous and largely salient target groups instead of considering all the intersectional sub-groups, the relevance of which is not always well developed and understood.

Who Has Voice, And What Does That Mean?

The debate on voice in gender equality policies deals with the risk that gender equality policies lose their political focus and sharpness. The participation and standing of civil society in policymaking are seen as important contributions to more encompassing deliberation and political debate. In this, a stronger engagement by either feminist civil society or feminist experts are seen as channels through which more radical frames are introduced and defended in the policymaking process, to the benefit of the potential contribution of policies to a transformation of unequal gender relations. Also, using consultation in policymaking formats that allow for the expression of diverse feminist ideas is seen as having a higher chance of contributing to empowerment, and to the ability of gender equality policies to address the different problematic life experiences that different categories of women face.

While there are different positions taken as to the degree that experts are seen to be part of the “democratic community,” the opposition between “technocratic” and “democratic” approaches can be deconstructed (Walby 2005) not only because of

the strong overlap between political positions taken by gender experts and feminist activists, but also in cases where civil society groups and experts engage in coalitions, as is the case in the “velvet triangles.” Next to this issue of the relationship between experts and civil society groups, there is a second concern. The debate is centered not only on the overall opportunities for women’s and feminist voices to be present in gender equality policymaking, but especially the chances for “excluded,” “subaltern,” and “non-hegemonic” voices to make themselves heard.

As the debates are predominantly normative, the gender equality policy texts analyzed in this book offer a chance for some empirical analysis contributing to the debate. While this section will use our analysis to provide inputs for the debate on voice, it is clear that our contribution is modest. What we could analyze is mainly whether we found texts clarifying the position taken in a debate by gender experts or feminist organizations, and whether there is evidence in governmental texts that civil society voices or expert voices have been incorporated in policy documents. It could be that the suggestions that come from these voices are used but they are not referred to in the texts; it can also be that they are referred to but that this is largely cosmetic. Yet giving direct reference to civil society actors in a text also gives them “standing” in the Marx Ferree sense (Marx Ferree et al. 2002), and we think it is significant to the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of policies.

Our analysis of the extent to which there is reference to either civil society voices or feminist experts enables us to answer the question if policymaking does refer to them or not. If we find no trace of reference to them, then we do not know what the reasons are for this is or whether these actors have been consulted but the texts do not reflect this consultation process. We can check, however, whether texts originating from feminist actors or texts that refer to feminist voices from civil society present more radical frames. The greater or lesser presence of some voices in the debates also depends on methodological limitations that are due to the definition of issues and, strictly related to it, to the selection of texts, both of which can affect the type of actors and voices found in the analysis. This consideration is simply a reminder that helps us to put in perspective our conclusions on the voices who are speaking in the debates, knowing that some expert or civil society texts that exist were not taken into account due to the criteria we employed for sampling texts and defining issues. For instance, a number of expert texts that exist on the issue of gender and employment in the EU (such as the reports of the European Commission’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment—EGGE) were not included in the selection of texts due to the definition of the issue as family policies/reconciliation, thus limiting the presence in the analysis of a number of expert texts.

What then did we find? Our analysis of policymaking at the EU level on gender inequality in politics, on family policy, and on domestic violence shows a clear pat-

tern: in spite of the limited presence of the voice of civil society actors in the analyzed texts, when they do appear, these actors have a crucial role in tipping the balance in the content and meaning of policies. On family-related matters, it is the social partners that have been most important (even bringing forward a process where there was a stalemate in the regular actors), while femocrats had a more marginal role in introducing a feminist reading of family related matters (This volume: 61–62). This difference between the role of the social partners and feminist actors suggests a difference in the influence of both civil society actors that resonates with other research (Mosesdottir, Remery, and Serrano Pascual 2006). When it comes to addressing gender inequality in politics or domestic violence, the role of both feminist experts and feminist civil society is stronger. Both cases illustrate how velvet triangles of expert networks, politicians active in the Committee on Women’s Rights in the European Parliament and feminist organizations such as EWL or WAVE have been successful in the introduction of new gender equality frames in the European agenda. While they gave a strong imprint to the framing of policies, however, changing the character of policies from soft law to hard law was beyond their capacities, as it would have involved a necessary change to the competences of the EU.

Our analysis of policies addressing gender inequality in politics shows first that, in debates on this issue, there is a predominance of female politicians and policymakers speaking, which in itself seems to support the argument for increasing the number of women in politics, otherwise the issue of gender inequality in politics might never be raised. Our analysis also shows that there is less reference to gender experts and civil society actors in texts that contain the most widespread “quantitative representation of women” frame, whereas the much smaller group of frames that pay a greater attention to power structures or the majority electoral system, or that focus on the need to build velvet triangles between state feminists, party women, and women’s movements in order to empower women’s political action, are expressed through the voice of gender experts, activists, and left-wing politicians (This volume: 88). While we can see an effect here that supports the thesis that a stronger presence of feminist voices leads to more radical frames, this effect is only found in a very limited number of texts. The chapter that analyzes how family policy addresses gender issues reveals the same patterns: attention for social construction of gender inequality in families is quite rare and weakly articulated, and seems to depend strongly on feminist actors or on actors affiliated with the feminist movement. This is illustrated by the finding that only feminist voices pay attention to the role of men in the unequal gender relations in the private sphere.

It is no surprise then that the analysis of domestic violence texts also concludes that “gender inequality is rarely seen as a cause, especially by mainstream policy voices” (This volume: 164). Additionally, this chapter shows that there is also a prognosis that

can be more radical. This is connected to those texts that do refer to feminist NGOs. The “gender equality” prognostic frame in the field of domestic violence includes some empowerment of women, which is sadly lacking in all other issues.

In policies on prostitution in Slovenia and Austria, it is remarkable that prostitutes have no voice at all, and that this lack of voice is not seen as a problem that needs to be solved. “In this sense, prostitutes definitely are not at the center of prostitution policies,” and “they seem to have to rely on other actors to ‘take voice on their behalf’ in order to be heard in the policymaking process” (This volume: 198–199). It also is not unexpected that the voices of clients of prostitution are absent. In both countries frames that put prostitutes’ problems and needs at the center of attention are found mostly in texts from NGOs working with prostitutes.

A lesson to be learned from the analysis of the homosexual rights debates in Spain is that the most radical and transformative frames originate in civil society groups, but that the more successful civil society groups active in these debates are not the most radical ones. This analysis also suggests that the regional and local levels in Spain have been more accessible for civil society groups active in promoting LGBT rights than the national level, and that it is through breakthroughs at the regional level that LGBT rights as a political problem have been put on the national agenda.

Also in anti-discrimination laws and debates in Hungary, the phenomenon that gender equality frames in their most comprehensive form are found mainly in NGO documents is present, although fragments of this frame can be found in various legal texts and debates. Discrimination in the “gender equality frame” is seen to be “deeply rooted in social, economic, and legal inequalities reproduced not only by traditional institutions and social-economic customs, but also by discriminatory laws and discriminatory practices of the judiciary” (This volume: 242). The frame pays special attention to doubly disadvantaged women: Roma women, lesbians, and women living in small settlements. The frame is only found in a comprehensive form in an NGO document, and fragments are present in some MP interventions in a parliamentary debate. Interestingly, these actors all explicitly identify themselves as women, in that they frame their arguments as “the law is important for us, women” (This volume: 243). It is remarkable that the frame with the most explicit vision about gender relations that is placed outside the “gender equality frame” is the “full-time motherhood frame,” stressing that full-time motherhood is the most desirable behavior for women. This frame is advocated by a male politician.

The analysis of gender equality and migration in the Netherlands highlights a different point that has to do with the discursive space that various frames offer to women. This analysis shows that a frame—in this case the “individual responsibility frame”—can be disempowering in that it puts the full responsibility for changing unequal gender relations on the shoulders of a group—in this case Muslim women—

who have an extremely disadvantaged position in both gender and ethnic relations. This analysis also shows the shortcomings of the older “multicultural diversity” frame, that could have created much more discursive empowerment for migrant women, were it not for its ambivalence and internal contradictions in which the undertones of seeing migrant backgrounds as a source of problems were quite strong.

Our findings allow for two comments on the debate on the tension between participatory and technocratic approaches to gender mainstreaming. As we have seen, this opposition is partly a problematic one, where feminist experts and feminist organizations end up in opposing sections. When interpreted as belonging to the feminist movement—as far as they are committed to similar goals and using their position to make it happen—there is indeed no opposition there, and consequently the opposition between technocratic approaches driven by feminist experts (and femocrats?) and participatory approaches involving feminist groups does not hold. They are not so much opposing approaches as approaches that differ in the sense that they give space and voice to different groups of actors of the wider feminist movement. One could distinguish between feminist-technocratic types of policymaking that, while not based upon the principle of participation, involve the (limited) participation of feminist experts in the design or evaluation of policies. An example here could be some policy developments at the EU level, especially on issues that are about or are connected to labor market issues, and that show the presence of specially created “groups of gender experts” (as in the case of the group on “Women and decision making,” or the EGGE group on gender and employment).

This does not mean that the distinction is redundant altogether. As our findings on family policy show, there is little reference to feminist NGOs and most policies are of a technocratic nature rather than giving voice to civil society. Feminist experts have a similar low presence in these policies and their voices are often not taken on board. We conclude therefore that the technocratic type of policies that is most frequent in all the analyzed policy texts and debates on gender equality is especially problematic, because it is not feminist-technocratic, but mainstream technocratic. In our opinion, it would be better to distinguish between policy texts and policy practices that are inclusive of feminist voices (be it experts, or grass-roots or institutionalized organizations) and policy texts and practices where feminist voices are absent. Many questions open up here that we did not investigate so far, and some of them will be hard to investigate given the low presence of feminist voices in these texts. Whose voice is it exactly, and what feminist position are they articulating? What are the reasons for the presence or absence, and what are the consequences of it? Why are their voices not heard?

Our findings also allow comments on the debate on participatory versus technocratic approaches in another way. In this debate the distinction between participatory

and technocratic approaches has been highlighted as especially relevant to gender mainstreaming practices. There are some implicit suggestions there that especially gender mainstreaming has a problematic relationship to participatory approaches. Our findings, however, show that—in the period 1995–2004—it is altogether rare to find participatory or inclusive practices in a wider set of gender equality policies. This does not seem to be specific to gender mainstreaming. We do see differences across issues, where texts on domestic violence are more “inclusive” than texts on family policies. While our findings show the high salience of the issue of domestic violence in feminism and in the feminist movement, in contrast to the very weak articulation of feminist frames in family policy, further research will be needed to explore the reasons of this variation across issues.

The Definition of the Political

In the debate on the definition of the political that is strictly connected to the public/private division and the main structures of gender inequality, the organization of labor, intimacy, and citizenship, our analysis in the different chapters raises a number of questions. Do family policies promote the sharing of gender tasks in work and family, or do they perpetuate traditional gender roles in the public/private spheres? Is domestic violence framed as a private or public matter? To what extent do equality policies target men’s roles in the private sphere? To what extent do equality policies target women’s roles in the public sphere? To what extent do findings show that equality policies promote a more gender equal division of labor, intimacy, and citizenship? To what extent are policies on gender inequality in politics framed in such a way that it tackles the unequal gender organization of citizenship? And, more generally, to what extent are the borders of the political redefined as to challenge traditional gender roles in the private and public domains?

When we consider the issue of domestic violence, it is striking that policy frames almost always see violence as a public matter. In the case of texts that deal with domestic violence therefore, there seems to be a successful transfer of feminist frames to policymaking. Equality policies on violence have crossed the border of what was previously considered as a private issue to be solved within the household and in which the state was given neither responsibility nor legitimacy to interfere in the intimate sphere of relations between men and women. In this sense, the political has been redefined along the terms of the long-term feminist demand for making private issues public. This has contributed to break the silence protecting perpetrators from legal sanctions to their violent behavior and giving women rights and institutional backing.

For the other issues, the redefinition of the boundaries of the political has been a more partial success than in the case of domestic violence, and there are still substantial issues to be solved. Policies on gender inequality in politics are framed in such a way to encourage women's public role, but do not devote similar efforts to address men's role in the private sphere (see chapter 3). Here, current frames apparently disconnect the links between gender inequalities in politics and in the public sphere in general, and gender inequalities in private relationships. And even in the promotion of women's public presence, there is little focus on eliminating material obstacles to women's political equality such as the time needed for care and the pressure on women to be responsible for it, male political networks, and the sexism of institutions that rely on many traditional understandings of women and men's roles in social relationships. In fact, policies place greater emphasis on the promotion of women's political representation than on the targeting of male-dominant positions in politics, or on training directed to changing sexist attitudes of male politicians, or on the introduction of measures to enable women's political participation. A certain type of prognosis is almost absent, such as proposals on the reorganization of the sphere of intimacy by reducing working times for both sexes and making men more responsible for care, measures for the reorganization of institutional spaces to create services for children and dependent relatives, and for the restructuring of politics in general to make it more compatible with the times for care and personal life.

In family policy, we see many cases of a classic omission of addressing gender inequality in dealing with care labor within families (see chapter 4). Moreover, we have found evidence that some texts, under the name of gender equality and a model that comes closest to a reversal, namely equal valuation of different contributions, actively (re)organize care labor as women's labor, leaving men almost uninvolved in the task. This framing of family policies contributes to perpetuate traditional gender roles of primarily public men, who additionally may do some care work, but are neither obliged nor encouraged to do so, and primarily private women who, on top of dealing with care, must also have a role in the labor market. As the discussion on family policies has shown, policies seem more concerned with promoting women's incorporation in the labor market with the aim of satisfying productive needs rather than of transforming gender relations in a more equal way. As a result, women are thus the main subjects asked to solve the problem of both caring for children, household, and dependent family members, and being productive in the labor market. Paradoxically, while the gendered problem of caring is acknowledged to be a public problem, the attribution of responsibility to women for solving this functions as another way to make this problem a "private" one again.

Burdening women with the task of solving the problem is also the case of migration and integration policies in the Netherlands (see chapter 7). The shift towards

“culturalization” suggests that it is not the structural conditions of Dutch society that hinder participation of migrants in socio-political life, but rather a migrants’ backward culture that privileges men, subordinates women, and legitimates violence. In this, the migrant “culture” is less “public” and more a matter of private choices. Migrant women are then attributed primary responsibility for solving their “private” cultural problem of the gendered organization of the sphere of intimacy within migrant communities as a first step towards a more equal participation in the Dutch society. This framing of the issue reproduces a traditional conceptualization of the role of the state as not interfering in “private” issues of the sphere of intimacy, and at the same time, using women as problem solvers by charging them with the responsibility of educating migrant men and children and changing the whole of migrant (Muslim) culture before they can access public life on an equal basis with autochthonous women. The concept of the political here seems to reproduce Rousseau’s philosophical conceptions of women as moral educators with a role in the private sphere of the family. At the same time, though, a high value is attributed to an increase in women’s participation in the public sphere, that women themselves are supposed to bring about as a result of their changed “private” choices, while both the state and migrant men have little role in it.

As the discussion on migration shows, the state has a crucial role in redefining the borders of the political. European states are influenced by different international, supranational, national, and sub-national actors and pressures, one of the most important being the European Union itself through Europeanization processes. The way in which the EU frames policy issues is thus extremely relevant for the impact it has on member states’ policies. Since the EU has mainly the competence for public issues such as employment and the labor market, the definition of the political that can emerge within the limits of the EU competence is inevitably bounded to issues that are less related to the private and intimate sphere. When having an impact on the national level, the EU framing of the issue then affects the maintenance, within equality policies, of the focus on the public rather than on the private sphere. This lack of competence in the issues of the private sphere also means that, in spite of its attempts to stretch the limits of its competence to include equality issues beyond the labor market, the EU can hardly play a more innovative role as concerns the redefinition of the borders of the political, because it cannot challenge gender relations in the intimate sphere. This might explain why in policy texts from the EU level, families increasingly become the sphere of personal life, or why issues of family policies and domestic violence focus on children more than on gender.

In general, considering the roles that the analyzed equality policies have attributed to men and women in the diagnosis and prognosis of policy texts across all issues, we found that women emerge as the main subjects holding the problem of gender

inequality (women as victims of violence, as underrepresented in politics, as working mothers, etc.), while men are hardly ever mentioned as problem holders. Women appear again in the role of problem solvers (they must care and produce, they must achieve male's numbers in politics, they must denounce their perpetrators, they must educate their communities), while men are not targeted at all.

Our findings tell us that equality policies have only to some extent redefined the borders of the “political” in line with feminist demands both for a broader definition that would include issues considered “private” in the political and for taking into consideration the close interrelation between the public and private spheres. Equality policies do contribute to redefine the political in more gender equal ways, going one step further so as to acknowledge the public dimension of private issues such as domestic violence, and to promote the public role of women in politics. However, they do not go so far as to discharge women from being the main responsible group, not only for care but also for bringing about the political change needed for achieving a gender equal society. Besides, equality policies still place few demands on men so that they assume their responsibilities in the private sphere and in solving the problem of gender inequality.

The Geographical Contexts in Which These Visions and Debates Take Place

To what extent does the geographical context matter in the framing of gender equality issues? Is it possible to identify North/South and East/West divides across Europe? What is the role of the EU in the framing of the issues across countries? Do patterns of similarities/variations change per issue?

Although we did not set out to explain differences across European countries, our sample of countries allows us to describe some remarkable patterns in the location of visions and debates that we have found and analyzed for the period studied. The most remarkable aspect of this is that we can hardly point to patterns that follow a classical East/West or North/South division. Nor did we find evidence of an ongoing vanguard position of countries such as the Netherlands that often are seen as pioneers in gender equality. The head start that the Netherlands might have had in the 1980s or 1990s, does not seem to be prolonged in the late 1990s and early 21st century. While the Netherlands showed patterns of degendering in domestic violence that endanger further progress in policies preventing this problem or addressing it, in the late 1990s Austria took the lead in innovative new legislation, and later Spain also added some new aspects to domestic violence policies.

The EU plays not a large but certainly a distinct role in the articulation of the issues in the different countries, not only by setting some trends in the framing of particular issues (sometimes by promoting a more gender equality approach, other

times by discouraging it) but also by acting as a symbol for progress. The analysis shows clearly that the EU has a role as a symbol of modernization, a frame that can be found in Greece and in eastern countries, which tells us something about the positive association of the EU with progress and modernization in the area of equality, and the way its frames can strengthen political goals and policy actors who want to move in the same direction. The fact that we can find the “Europeanization/modernization” frame in Slovenia, Hungary, and Greece, but not in Spain, at the same time deconstructs and reconstructs the East/West divide, and shows that date of entry into the EU is not the only explanatory factor (Spain became a member of the EU in 1986 and Greece in 1981). The trendsetting role of the European Union is visible in its strengthening of a trend across countries to frame the issue of family policies as reconciliation in relation to the labor market, which might influence the fact that the problem of gender inequality is not at the heart of family policy in the analyzed countries. At other times the EU acts as a forerunner in framing an issue within a more gender equality approach, as in the case of domestic violence, even if this frame can only be found in a few countries, Spain and Austria, which means that the national framing is less directly linked to the EU role.

The absence of obvious politico-geographical patterns should not be understood as a reduction in the relevance of political factors for the development or success of gender equality policies. For Spain, the relevance of the new social-democratic government led by Zapatero for the new *élan* in gender equality policies is clear. However, the Austrian case is harder to fit into the old “left is good for gender equality” paradigm, as the innovative legislation to send perpetrators of domestic violence away, with its surrounding set of policies to support victims and to train police and health professionals, was implemented in the same Schuessel-Haider regime that some other European states had wanted to isolate. This means that it is not necessarily the color of the party or coalition in government that matters but rather the present and previous political opportunities that have been seized by some political actors, and different reasons, among which are the influential role of civil society, pressure from some (women) party members, the national and international context, or political will. The analysis of the variety of existing frames competing among each other at the same time helped us to understand that changes in the framing of an issue in a particular national context are not as sudden as they might appear, because they in fact build on frames that were already preexisting and that became dominant at a particular moment, as the example of equality policies in Zapatero’s Spain and the case of gender and migration policies in the Netherlands shows.

If the geographical context is not so determinant in the understanding of similarities and differences across countries, the specificity of an issue can perhaps be another explanatory factor, together with the political, for helping in the understanding of

patterns of similarities and variations across countries. The issue that presents the highest degree of uniformity in the framing of the issue across countries is “gender inequality in politics,” with the predominance of the quantitative representation frame in all countries and the EU. Family policies presents a medium-level situation of frame variations across countries, with labor market orientation as a constant across all countries and a reconciliation framing present in all countries, except for the Eastern European ones. Domestic violence offers perhaps the greatest spectrum of variations across countries, with the EU and Spain taking a more clear position that represents domestic violence as a problem of gender inequality, Austria mixing a gender equality and a degendered approach, and the other countries taking a more distant position from the gender equality perspective. Our analysis did not give any further material to explain the different range of variations in different issues, but this definitely is something that would merit more research.

Can Lessons from our Frame Analysis Be Drawn for Policy Practice?

This book has set out to show that gender inequality as a policy problem is a deeply political problem for which there are a multitude of existing diagnoses and prognoses to be found, all of which suggest, or in fact organize, different understandings of responsibility for its existence or disappearance. If gender inequality is a policy problem for which there are a multitude of problem representations and solutions, what then does this mean for policy practice? Can any lessons at all be drawn from our previous analysis of current gender equality policy texts in Europe? What then should be the criteria for judging the quality of gender equality policies on the basis of our analysis? How can policies that are understood as “constructions” be evaluated at all?

Even if gender equality policies already exist for decades, assessing its successes, dangers, potentials, or weaknesses, and drawing lessons for the future of gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming, is not an easy task. The most crucial problem is that it is quite difficult, in general, to assess the specific contribution of policies and the specific impact policies have on societies. Societies are in a never-ending flux of change and it is very hard to attribute changes to one particular policy. Nevertheless, policies matter. They have material consequences whenever they (re)distribute resources (being a key for who receives what), and they are a major factor in representing social problems, that is, in constituting truths about citizens, citizen behavior, and citizen interaction at the individual and collective level. In the framework of this book, most importantly, they constitute truths about the extent to which gender relations are problematic, and about how gendered identities, gendered life experiences,

gender norms, and gendered or gender-biased policies or institutions are part of this problem.

This book, because of its focus on framing, highlights mostly the discursive consequences of policies. What kind of gendered realities do they construct? What is the meaning of gender equality as a goal in those texts? Recent studies identifying the success and failure of strategies of gender equality policies prioritize the importance of the depth of the gender analysis (structural approach), and the significance of the inclusion of women's voices in the gender mainstreaming process (empowerment) (Verloo 2005). The first criterion means they should address the genderedness of systems and processes. Gender equality policies should go further than a strategy of inclusion, which seeks gender neutrality, and aim at the inclusion of women in the world as it is, in a political from which they are currently excluded. They should rather aim to be a strategy of "displacement" (Squires 1999), aspiring to move "beyond gender," seeking to displace patriarchal gender hierarchies and deconstructing discursive regimes that engender the subject. What needs to be problematized here is not (only) the exclusion of women, or men as a norm, but the gendered world in itself. Therefore gender equality policies should address the level of structures, be it in societal organizations or in behavior, and one criterion for their success can be whether or not it manages to address this level. They should also be aware of intersectionality, and take into account differences within the category of women (and men), displacing the unitary category of women (and men).

Even more, gender equality policies should also be strategies of empowerment by organizing space for (non-hegemonic) civil society. This is linked not only to the participation of women as decision-makers, as one way that women's voices are steering the transformation (Jahan 1995), but also to the space for different political positions taken by women and for "subaltern or non-hegemonic counterpublics" counterbalancing hegemonic dynamics within feminism (Fraser 1997).

Next to elements highlighted in the previous sections, such as the attention to intersectionality, the voice given to distinct actors, and the definition of the political, our analysis highlights three indicators of a structural approach. These are not the quintessential elements of a structural approach, but a result of a closer analysis of the most articulated "gender equality" frames. These indicators are: attention for the role of men in changing gender relations; attention for the interconnected character of the different structures of gender relations (citizenship, labor, intimacy); and comprehensiveness of the frame: addressing multiple actors, levels, and mechanisms both in diagnosis and prognosis.

A good example of the first indicator mentioned—attention to the role of men changing gender relations—is the "equal opportunity frame" in family policy, and in particular the "gender equality" focus within this frame that refers to men as problem

holders, as target groups, or as the ones who should do something about gender inequality in families. In doing this, it goes beyond considering women the main and almost exclusive problem holders and solvers. This sub-frame, which stems from the feminist movement, pays attention to socially constructed roles of men and women as part of the problem and solution to gender equality. This sub-frame, however, is not a strong or frequent one. Men as problem holders are found only in some texts in Spain (Basque Action Plans); in all other countries and the EU they are rarely referred to or are absent completely. All over, male interests are not often challenged and male privileges are not often threatened.

Regarding the second indicator—attention for the interconnected character of the different structures of citizenship, labor, and intimacy—we can mention the small set of frames which present a broader approach to gender inequality in politics. Departing from the causes of quantitative and qualitative underrepresentation of women in politics, these frames draw a representation of the problem that takes into account the three structures of gender relations. They mention the *women unfriendliness of the polity* and political structures; they include reference to the gender bias of existing electoral systems and to a *poor or weak policy of affirmative action* in politics; and they refer to unequal *social structures* as well, either describing them as male dominance in society or as patriarchy. The gendered division of labor and discrimination of women in the labor market are also seen as causes for political inequality, as are the gender unequal relations of power within the family that result in more difficulties for female politicians to reconcile political and family life. However, as we have seen in our analysis, these frames are rarely found in official policy documents, being only present through the voice of gender experts (in the case of EU, the European Parliament's Committee of Women's Rights), activists, and left-wing politicians.

As an example of the third indicator—comprehensiveness of the frame in terms of addressing multiple actors, levels, and mechanisms both in diagnosis and prognosis—we want to mention the gender equality frame in domestic violence, which was highly present in the analyzed texts from the EU and Spain (with this frame present in approximately two-thirds of the texts analyzed for these two cases). This frame is the most comprehensive one, and it defines domestic violence as a problem related to gender inequality and as a form of gender discrimination. It interprets the phenomenon as a reflection of unequal power relations within the family and more broadly within society, viewing it as a universal problem of all social classes and groups regardless of economic situation, education, or ethnicity. Also the solutions proposed by this frame in the prognosis are as complex as the problem is represented in the diagnosis. Complex coordinated action is needed and all stakeholders are given their role, including judicial actions to sanction and punish domestic violence considered as a crime. In the solutions proposed, not only support and care for victims might be

found, but also a focus on empowerment of women and on actions aimed at society at large by awareness raising and education, with an emphasis on gender equality norms.

In our analysis of gender equality policies across Europe, we have found that policy proposals articulated in policy texts are not always consistent. As it is reflected throughout the chapters of this book, several inconsistencies are identified. A major inconsistency is that the articulation of a problem in a policy document does not “fit” with the solutions or measures that are proposed. To recall an given example: while the diagnosis may identify electoral systems as the problem causing gender inequality in politics, the measures proposed are mentoring of women, and further training for them. At first sight, inconsistencies might be seen as “bad,” and one would expect consistency to be a good practice in all policies, including gender equality policies. Nevertheless, inconsistencies may also play a certain function in policymaking. Actually, it is perhaps not realistic to expect that “new” policies are consistent, especially when they also need to be transformative, inclusive of other inequalities, and empowering, and maybe this is why we frequently find fragments of frames in policy proposals (more than complete ones) and inconsistencies. As total consistency is rare and it can be stated that almost every text or policy proposal always shows some kind of inconsistency, the function of these inconsistencies might be to serve different constituencies of actors involved in the development of the policies and might give way to the expression of alternative and weak frames. For instance, we found that the weak diagnostic frame on the existence of male domination in politics has no prognostic frame challenging such dominance. Were this frame totally consistent with the prognosis, we would not see any sign of it. Inconsistency, in some cases, may allow for a progressive introduction of new policy frames (Meier and Lombardo 2006). In this, the fragments present are just as many opportunities for actors to grasp later chances when they can amplify or shrink diagnoses and prognoses to better fit their interests. In an interpretation that builds less on intentionality, inconsistencies might also show the inability of actors to control the outcome of policymaking completely. Either way, we can then recognize that a certain degree of inconsistency is part of the regular dynamics of the policymaking process. The existence of these discursive opportunities remind us of the dynamic and evolutionary nature of the policymaking process.

What then can be the lessons learned from this somehow inevitable inconsistency? What are the implications for policymakers? We contend that, in the interest of democracy and the efficiency of public services, consistency and coherence is and should be a legitimate goal to be aimed at in public policies. Policymakers should be aware of this and should pursue this consistency. Being aware of it and taking time for the careful analysis of those inconsistencies is one way of improving policy proposals. On the other hand, as inconsistencies can be also discursive opportunities for trans-

formation, we need to question which inconsistent policies work to open discursive spaces for further development and which ones not. The cases where the diagnosis is strongly framed as gender inequality in an inclusive and structural analysis but where the prognosis is individualistic or strengthening mainly a mainstream non-gender equality goal, then seem to be a very interesting category, in that they can offer opportunities for more consistent future policies that keep the diagnosis, and expand on the prognosis. If, on the contrary, the diagnosis is absent or does not address the structural character of gender inequality and intersectionality, but the prognosis is transformative in a structural sense, and comprehensive, giving attention to the role of men (as in the case of some frames in gender inequality in politics and domestic violence), this inconsistency is maybe less of a problem, because the results of the policy will most probably work towards more gender equality.

Concluding Reflections

The analysis in this book points to a necessity to broaden and deepen not only gender equality policies, but also theoretical and academic debates. As our analysis of gender inequality in politics shows, the quantitative representation is not only the dominant overall frame on gender inequality in politics, but also a dominant frame in political sciences. While theory could contribute to new innovative frames, it can also look in the mirror of policy practice and learn from it.

Our analysis questions the theoretical three-fold typology of inclusion, reversal, and displacement in terms of its occurrence in policy practice. While inclusion is a dominant perspective in gender inequality in politics, in migration, and in family policies, reversal is merely present as a subtext, but never a strong frame. And if present, it is rather present as equal valuation of different contributions than in its stronger form as reversal. Displacement as a type of gender equality policy is radically absent altogether. The dominance of inclusion-type frames can be understood as an expression of neo-liberal values, and as a sign of the deep entrenchment of gender inequality in our societies. However, the lack of attention in more academic texts to the frequent absence of reversal and displacement frames in practice results in a lack of understanding about what exactly is blocking such perspectives from being translated into real policy frames.

The relative absence of conventional patterns between countries is difficult to understand without a specific gender equality policy regime typology. A first hypothesis could be that the current theories are so northwestern-based and oriented that they fail to see how similar the countries in south, central, and east Europe are. There are other lines of argument as well. In the case of domestic violence it could be argued

that classical typologies are so much focused on the labor market and welfare that they do not fit easily with issues that are about the different set of structures of gender inequality, that is, not so much about the gendered division of labor as about the gendered use of violence, and the gendered organization of intimacy. Understood in this way, the relative absence of conventional patterns between countries could be linked to the different definition of the political that gender equality policies entail.

The attention that we paid in this book to the different dimensions of a policy frame provided us with insights for better understanding how gender politics is discursively constructed in existing policy debates. Findings such as the relevance of civil society participation and standing in policymaking, the poor articulation of political intersectionality in equality policies, and the hesitant progress of the latter in challenging the private/public divide have important implications for both theory and policy practice. This does nothing but reinforce the need for mutual learning and fruitful collaboration between political theorists, activists, and practitioners in gender equality policies.

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