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Title: The significance of symbolic representation for gender issues in politics

Authors:

Emanuela Lombardo, Madrid Complutense University, Spain

Petra Meier, University of Antwerp, Belgium (corresponding author)

Abstract:

This article argues that many empirical studies in the field of gender and politics reduce symbolic representation to an effect of descriptive representation, which limits our understanding of the relevance of symbolic representation. We claim that we should understand symbolic representation as a dimension in itself, not merely as an effect of another dimension of political representation. In this article we develop this argument showing how symbolic representation presents constituents at the symbolic level, thereby generating dynamics of exclusion similar to the other dimensions of political representation. The relation between the different dimensions of symbolic representation is not unilateral in that symbolic representation is an effect of descriptive representation. The different dimensions are rather entangled in that they are mutually constitutive. We show how symbolic representation provides for a symbolic subtext enabling or constraining the political standing and acting for women – or other social groups. In order to develop our argument we return to Pitkin's (1967) definition of symbolic representation, and then elaborate upon it relying on Saward's (2010) more recent conceptualization of political representation, also considering the constructivist turn in representation studies.

Keywords: symbolic representation, gender, political representation, descriptive representation, substantive representation

Biographical notes:

Emanuela Lombardo is Senior lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Administration of Madrid Complutense University (Spain). She works on gender equality policies (European Union, Spain) and feminist approaches to political analysis. Her latest monographs are *Gender and Political Analysis* (with Johanna Kantola, Palgrave, 2017) and *The Symbolic Representation of Gender* (with Petra Meier, Ashgate, 2014). Her latest work can be found in European Journal of Political Research, Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, and Political Science and Politics.

Petra Meier is Professor in Politics at the Department of Political Science, University of Antwerp. Her research focuses on the representation of gender+ in politics and policies, looking into the role of formal and informal institutions in (re)producing and giving shape to (in)equality. She has extensively worked on the concept of representation, mainly descriptive and symbolic representation. Recent publications include the relevance of symbolic representation for role models (with Eline Severs), the relevance of inclusion as a quality criterion for good symbolic representation (with Emanuela Lombardo), and how to investigate symbolic representation (with Tania Verge).

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Empirical studies in the field of gender and politics have engaged with the concept of symbolic representation[1] by providing an operational definition of it that looks at the consequences of women's presence in politics on the beliefs of the electorate. These studies investigate whether such a presence shapes other women's political attitudes and behaviour, making them become politically more involved, and whether it affects the perceived legitimacy of political institutions (Bauer, 2016; Childs, 2008; Franceschet, Krook & Piscopo, 2012; Koning, 2009; Lawless, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Schwindt-Bayer & Mischler, 2005; Zetterberg, 2012).

We argue that this definition of symbolic representation, while providing helpful data about the impact of increasing the number of women politicians, reduces symbolic representation to an effect of descriptive representation. This limits the possibilities for understanding the concept itself and the mutual effects the different dimensions of political representation may have on each other. We claim that we should study symbolic representation as a dimension in itself, not merely as an effect of another dimension of political representation. First, addressing symbolic representation in itself will contribute to a better understanding of this dimension of political representation. Symbolic representation has been downplayed as compared to descriptive and substantive representation, not the least by Pitkin (1967) herself, whose work laid the ground for much empirical work on gender and political representation. Studying symbolic representation in itself brings existing power relations to the surface (Connell, 2002; Diehl, 2016, 2015), as, we argue, symbolic representation is the representation of existing power relations.

This brings us to the second reason of why we think it is useful to conceptualize symbolic representation as more than a derivate of descriptive representation: it improves our understanding of all dimensions of political representation. Symbolic representation allows to better understand the (gendered) boundaries of descriptive and substantive representation. A representative's position and action takes place within a context imbued with symbolic

representation that may constrain or enable the representative, without these constraints or opportunities being necessarily directly palpable. By not conceptualizing symbolic representation as a dimension in itself, we underestimate its role in political representation and reduce the potential to understand existing obstacles to representatives' presence and acting. Rather than looking at what consequences descriptive representation has for symbolic representation as the literature does, we suggest to study how symbolic, descriptive and substantive representation are entangled. Without aiming to put forward a causal relationship, we mainly focus on how symbolic representation can impact descriptive and substantive representation, as the relation the other way around has already been (partly) tackled. Our main point, though, is that descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation are all dimensions in themselves, not mere effects one of another, and that they all impact one another. It is only by conceptualizing each of them as a full dimension of political representation that we understand all of them.

In this article we develop these two arguments for considering symbolic representation as a dimension of political representation that stands by itself. We start with a brief overview of how current research addresses symbolic representation and what this work misses out according to us. In the subsequent section we define what symbolic representation is. For that purpose we return to Pitkin's (1967) definition, and then elaborate upon it relying on Saward's (2010) more recent conceptualization of political representation, thereby taking into consideration the constructivist turn in representation studies (Disch, 2015). The third section develops how symbolic representation is to be understood as a representation of existing power relations and why it should thus be addressed as a dimension of political representation per se, complementary not subordinated to the other dimensions. In sections four and five we illustrate how symbolic representation affects descriptive and substantive representation, makes political standing and acting easier when it is in line with the symbolic representation surrounding it.

We have chosen three examples to illustrate our argument: banknotes, minister positions, and maternity leave rights. The reasons for selecting those examples are that i) they are typical examples of gender in political representation (banknotes of symbolic representation, ministers of descriptive, and maternity leave rights of substantive); ii) around them contestation arose, the reasons of which would be difficult to understand without insights from symbolic representation; iii) they evoke the gendered nature of political institutions such as the nation, state, and army; and iv) they expose the existence of boundaries to descriptive and substantive representation set by symbolic representation.

For those examples we mainly rely on secondary literature, but also on sources such as newspapers (minister positions) or websites (banknotes). We do not pretend to conduct an exhaustive analysis of all material available, but mainly searched for good material allowing us to construct our argument and make our point. For instance, in the case of the minister position these were Spanish newspaper, as the minister was Spanish and her appointment led to a major debate in the Spanish press. The mere purpose of our examples is to illustrate our argument. As all illustrations, they have their limitations, as they are bound by time and place, and limited to the European context. They could be replaced by others, but since they deal with issues that are largely recognizable we are confident they serve their purpose. We rely on gender issues to illustrate our point. Firstly, gender scholars in politics have produced a prolific amount of research investigating the descriptive and substantive representation of women. Secondly, most of the empirical studies on symbolic representation, which are emerging more recently, come from the field of gender and politics. Our examples predominantly focus on women, as gender issues in politics still is on the underrepresentation of women. This is not to say that we reduce gender to women, or even to a binary construct of men and women. Gender, in this article, stands for the social construction of men and women, of masculinities and femininities. Our choice for illustrations from the field of gender and politics is also not to say that we reduce the

relevance of symbolic representation to gender issues. The more theoretical literature on the concept of representation is not specific to gender studies. Also, more recently some gender scholars investigating political representation embraced an intersectional approach (Brown & Allen, 2017; Mügge & Erzeel, 2016; Severs, Celis, & Erzeel, 2016), thus opening the field beyond the issue of gender. Hence, while mainly relying on examples from gender and politics, we hope to make a contribution on symbolic representation transcending that field.

The symbolic dimension: more than an effect of descriptive representation

Research on symbolic representation and gender has emerged in the last decade (for recent works see Lombardo & Meier, 2018; Verge & Pastor, 2018; Lombardo & Meier, 2014). Most of this research has been empirically focused and has commonly adopted a concept of symbolic representation that understands it as the symbolic effect that representatives have on the electorate, such as the effects that female politicians have on female voters (Childs, 2008; Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012; Koning, 2009; Lawless, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Zetterberg, 2012). Some of the studies start from the understanding of symbolic representation in terms of representatives being 'role models', and look at how women's increased presence in politics alters the beliefs of constituents – both men and women – about the nature of politics as a male domain (Childs, 2008; Lawless, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). The presence of women is supposed to shape other women's political attitudes and behaviour, to make them become politically more involved, and to make them feel politically more efficacious (Bauer, 2016; Burnett, 2012; Koning, 2009). Other studies address how women's presence affects the perceived legitimacy of political institutions, of the political system, of democracy, and what effect this has on their trust in political institutions (Hayes & Hibbing, 2017; Hinojosa, Fridkin, & Caul Kittilson, 2017).

Recent studies adopt more intersectional approaches to symbolic representation (Brown

& Allen, 2017; Murray, 2016; Evans, 2016) showing, for example, that the identification and political engagement of women voters with new female candidates works to attract younger female voters (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2017). The definition of symbolic representation as a derivative of descriptive representation, though less present, can also be found in empirical studies about racial and ethnic minoritized groups (Niven, 2017; Hayes &Hibbing, 2017).

These studies provide evidence of the effects of political representatives from underrepresented groups for other members of that group in positions formerly unavailable to them. However, this literature focuses on a broader audience of citizens rather than on the relation between the constituency and its representatives. It does not tend to address the symbolic representation *of* constituents *per se*. While the investigated effects of women's presence are undeniably an element of symbolic politics, they do not cover the whole story of symbolic representation. A mere focus on symbolic representation as derivative of descriptive representation limits our understanding of what symbolic representation is. We therefore suggest returning to Pitkin's broader understanding of symbolic representation, so as to more fully grasp its reach.

Symbolic representation

Symbolic representation needs further theorization as a dimension per se because it allows seeing and analysing a more comprehensive spectrum of expressions of power relations present in processes of political representation, than when we exclude the symbolic dimension. The definition that allows to more fully grasping the concept of symbolic representation draws especially on Pitkin's (1967) original and Saward's (2010) later conceptualizations of political representation. In this section we first define what symbolic representation is by delving into Pitkin's and Saward's conceptualizations, to then explain in the next section why it is important to address the symbolic as a dimension of political representation per se.

We define symbolic representation as the representation of a constituency through a symbol that presents this constituency in a particular way and thus constructs meanings about it. This definition is first and foremost based on Pitkin's (1967) conceptualization of symbolic representation as an agent symbolically 'standing for' a principal, that is, the representation of a constituency through a representative that suggests or evokes feelings, values, and beliefs. Pitkin's definition is part of her framework of the fourfold dimension of political representation, that is formalistic (the formal rules of representation), descriptive (the physical 'standing for'), substantive ('acting for') and symbolic. Pitkin defines symbolic representation as a dimension in itself, complementary to but not derivative from descriptive representation. She does so by outlining conceptual distinctions of the different dimensions of political representation through the agent-principal relation and the identification of the role of an agent as standing (physically or symbolically) and acting (substantially) for a principal or constituency. Symbolic representation in particular is seen by Pitkin as a process in which symbols, by association or convention, represent something else beyond themselves, as a flag represents a country.

While creating a space for defining symbolic representation as a self-standing dimension, Pitkin mainly attributed it to authoritarian regimes and devalued it for two reasons: the supposed lack of activity in symbolic representation and its irrational components. In line with other scholarly debates in political representation such as Saward (2010, 2006) and Disch (2012), we rather argue that, first, there is activity in symbolic representation, the activity of constructing the symbol, and, second, the irrational element of symbols is not a valid reason for not giving symbolic representation as much attention as the other dimensions, since emotions and beliefs are present in all processes of political representation.

Compared to descriptive and substantive representation, symbolic representation has not been paid much attention in the literature. Most scholarly work has addressed political symbolism, for example in relation to the use that authoritarian or democratic regimes make of

symbols in processes of everyday construction of political identity, legitimacy gaining, or nation branding (Lombardo & Meier, 2014; Pitkin, 1967; Marat, 2010). Political symbols can take different forms, be they visual such as national flags or statues, acoustic such as national anthems, or discursive, for example a constitutional text (Cerulo, 1993). While studies have analysed the way symbols such as national flags, by standing for a principal, embody the nation or the state (Kertzer, 1988), gender and politics studies have placed the focus on how political symbols reflect and shape power relations by for example presenting men in more authoritative and socially acknowledged positions than women (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Puwar, 2004). Pitkin (1967) argues that symbols achieve the effect of provoking particular responses to the evoked principal through training social habits and practices that make people associate a symbol such as the national flag with feelings of attachment to the nation, which explains why stepping on or burning a national flag can be morally or legally condemned in some countries.

The constructed component of political representation, that has emerged in the more recent constructivist turn in representation studies (Disch, 2015; Saward, 2010, 2006), is an essential feature in the definition of symbolic representation we put forward. Saward (2010) argues that political representation is about making claims that construct or depict ideas about the constituency. The focus on the constructed component, that Saward theorizes for political representation in general, is especially apt to cast symbolic representation. Symbols are a construct not only because they are created through the choice of a certain visual or acoustic representative (a flag, a statue, a national anthem) and the selection of specific colours and images, but also because their meaning is shaped, and associated to a particular constituency that is therefore presented in a particular way. As Kertzer (1988, p. 7) states: ‘a flag is not simply a decorated cloth, but the embodiment of a nation’. The meaning of a flag is constructed throughout the years in different social practices so that it becomes attached to a particular nation. Above all, the flag constructs the meaning of the nation in specific ways, by *presenting*

the nation in a particular way, for instance, as united, diverse, or progressive. Symbolic representation is therefore a *presentation* of a constituency in specific ways, which expresses certain meanings, norms and values. It is not a mere representation (see also Disch, 2012).

Saward's theory of political representation as claim-making is especially relevant for the conceptualization of symbolic representation due to its articulation of a) a maker of representation, and b) the idea of a referent or constituency. According to Saward (2006), a maker of representation puts forward a symbol, which stands for an idea that is related to a constituency and is offered to an audience. The identification of a 'maker' is relevant to further conceptualize symbolic representation because symbolic representation always involves an actor constructing the symbol, since the symbol will not create itself. The meaning constructed through symbols, then, differs according to different makers. Makers can construct symbols in more traditional or progressive, more exclusive or inclusive ways, as we will discuss in the next sections. While Saward's makers exist beyond electoral politics, that is civil society, lobbying groups or media are involved in claim-making, we are mainly interested in political representation. Saward's (2006) distinction between the constituency and the *idea* of a constituency is also relevant as it shows that what gets represented in a symbol is not the constituency as such but the representative's *idea* about the constituency. This distinction between the constituency and the idea of it captures the fact that a symbol, such as a flag, provides a constituency such as the nation, with meaning. A flag presents the nation through particular features or ideas about the nation.

In sum, Saward's work is important as it pays attention to the fact that a) political representation is a construct; and b) political representation can be conceptualized through an encompassing definition that outlines makers of representation and ideas of a constituency as not being the constituency itself. Yet, his general conceptualization of political representation does not allow drawing analytical distinctions among the dimensions, as Pitkin's work does.

Therefore, while the distinctions between the different dimensions are not necessarily neat, and while they are all part of the same process, it is still helpful to maintain each of the different dimensions when looking at political representation. Firstly, they allow looking at political representation from different angles, each of which offers particular insights on this political process. Secondly, looking into symbolic representation allows for understanding what power dynamics are at play within processes of political representation, enabling and constraining representatives' standing and acting for.

Symbolic representation codifies existing power relations enabling and constraining the 'standing for' and 'acting for' women

In this section we discuss what makes symbolic representation in politics so relevant, what it entails, and the tensions it generates, with reference to visual forms of symbolic representation such as banknotes. As argued in the previous section, symbols present a constituency – or an 'idea of' the constituency (Saward, 2006) – in a particular way, rather than simply representing it. Symbolic representation thus constructs a constituency and what it stands for, that is its social identity (Cummings, 2010; Kertzer, 1988; Parel, 1969; Diehl, 2016, 2015). This construction crafts a particular presentation of the constituency through the selectivity of symbols. There are two reasons why symbols are necessarily selective. First, it is difficult to achieve comprehensiveness, to capture a constituency in all its facets, in one single symbol. Consequently, each individual symbol can only present certain facets of a constituency. Second, a particular presentation of the constituency through symbols is generally intended for, especially when it is targeted to a specific 'audience' (Cerulo, 1993; Edelman, 1971; Kertzer, 1988). This implies that certain aspects are put centre stage and others are left out. This process of leaving out exposes tensions generated by symbolic representation in that it sets boundaries to a constituency. It sets boundaries to what is included, how and to what extent, and what is

not. The presentation of a constituency in symbolic representation contributes to shaping social identities, such as the national. Banknotes, for instance, play a role in constructing a state-sponsored vision of social identity. As Hawkins (2010) demonstrates for Tunisia, banknotes were designed to promote a discourse about national identity that frames Tunisia as an open cosmopolitan nation, yet rooted in its history.

This process of leaving out and thereby setting boundaries also applies to human beings and entails defining who is included, how and to what extent, and who is not. Let us continue using the example of banknotes. In 2013 a petition circulated on the web to reverse the announced decision of the Governor of the Bank of England to replace social reformer Elizabeth Fry, whose face adorns the £5 note, with Winston Churchill. This decision – argued the petition – might leave no other woman on English banknotes than the Queen, who appears on them because she was born into her position, not because of what she has achieved, as is the case for the men pictured on the other British banknotes, such as Charles Darwin, James Watt, Adam Smith, and Matthew Boulton. The petition criticized the message conveyed by an all-male appearance on English banknotes that 'no woman has done anything important enough to appear'. First because it undervalues what women have achieved, even in the face of the historic denial of women's public voice and their relegation to the private sphere. Second, it also criticizes the announced decision because of the consequences that the daily circulation of such banknotes from hand to hand might suggest: 'women do not belong in public life – they never have, and they never will', as the text of the petition states. As a result of the campaign, the Bank of England finally agreed that women – and the diversity of society – need to be present on its banknotes. The picture of Jane Austen appears in the new £10 note from 2017 onwards.[2]

The dispute about who is and who should be depicted on the British banknotes is about the boundaries symbolic representation sets and the roles and representations of women and men in the construction of the state and or nation. Studies on gender, nation and state have

shown that in representations of the nation and state men have tended to play the main roles as its legitimate defenders and representatives, whereas women were assigned more metaphoric, nurturing and reproductive roles. Overall, men have been attributed the public sphere and women been predominantly confined to the private sphere (for a recent overview see Kantola, 2016). The possibly all-male cast of faces on the British banknotes – with the exception of the Queen – being contested in the aforementioned petition would thus be a symbol of a state legitimately occupied and represented by men, not women. By doing so, symbolic representation includes some social groups and not others. Similar particular usages can be found when social groups are included but presented in different ways, reflecting different social positions and hierarchy. French colonial banknotes played out colonial and colonialized women against each other. Being a symbol of imperialist civilisation, women were held to the standards of ladylike behaviour. This incarnation of civilisation is shown in the juxtaposition of neatly dressed Western women with unclothed native women amidst 'tropical fruits and lush vegetation' (Puwar, 2004, 27).

In constructing an image of the constituency, symbolic representation thus includes some – but not all – social groups – and does so in particular ways. It thereby sets boundaries to who is included, to what extent and how, and in what role or position. If the constituency is composed of citizens from different ethnic origin, class, age, sex, sexuality, or ability, and its symbols associate it with only some of them, or in particular ways that reproduce existing power relations, the symbolic representation of the constituency then contributes to shaping and replicating privileged and marginalized positions. While in the case of the British contemporary banknotes it is an issue of women being excluded altogether, in the case of the French colonial banknotes women were included, but confined to specific – and normatively different – roles depending on whether they were born in France or from the colonies. While the examples mainly focused on the social position of men and women, the case of French colonial banknotes

also shows how the intersection of gender and ethnicity or race plays out. Similarly, gay men, original communities, or disabled people might be used to illustrate the cultural heritage of a constituency, but do not tend to be used for symbolising the power of the state or nation (Parkinson, 2009). In many societies sexual minorities are not even considered to exist, which implies their exclusion not only from citizenship rights but also from the possibility of standing as symbols of the nation or state. Such issues go beyond the struggle about who is to figure on banknotes, decorate public buildings and squares or serve for naming streets. Symbolic representation tends to reproduce patterns of domination and inequality (Connell, 2002, pp. 57–68). It tends to codify existing power relations (Diehl, 2016, 2015). This is not an exclusive feature of symbolic representation. Descriptive and substantive representation also tend to reflect existing power relations and perpetuate the power of the privileged (Dovi, 2007).

Why, then, should we pay attention to symbolic representation? The point is that by codifying existing power relations symbolic representation influences the other dimensions of political representation, an aspect that tends to be overlooked in the literature. It constitutes part of the broader context in which descriptive and substantive representation take place. Symbolic representation expresses who is included as a member of a political constituency and to what extent. It shapes roles and positions in processes of political representation, and the legitimacy of the political claims that they are allowed to make within a particular political system. Considering symbolic representation helps us to understand the opportunities of women and minoritized political representatives to 'stand' and 'act' for those they represent. As these may clash with the symbolic representation predominating, symbolic representation is more than a derivate of other dimensions of political representation. Also, by looking at processes of political representation from the angle of symbolic representation allows for revealing the tensions created by the clash between processes of descriptive or substantive representation and the symbolic subtext underlying them. Therefore, it is interesting, at least analytically speaking,

to consider symbolic representation as a dimension of political representation *per se*, so as to grasp its effects on people's political presence and acts. How this gets articulated in descriptive and substantive representation is illustrated in the next two sections.

How descriptive representation is entangled with symbolic representation

To explain how symbolic and descriptive representation are entangled, we rely on the case of Carme Chacón, minister in the second Spanish socialist cabinet of President Rodríguez Zapatero (2008-2011). When the Socialists first won the elections in 2004, Zapatero made a point of putting together a cabinet containing – a first in Spain – an equal number of men and women. This parity in numbers was maintained in the second Zapatero government (2008-2011) in which Carme Chacón was appointed minister of defence. On 14 April 2008 she inspected the Spanish troops for the first time. This was a first both for her and for Spain. Not only was she the first female minister of defence in Spain. She was also seven-months pregnant.

The image of Minister Chacón inspecting the troops with her rounded belly covered by a white maternity blouse was on the front page of national and international newspapers. What attracted media attention, was that the image turned upside down conceptualizations of women and men, but also of the army. The picture – uncharacteristic for Spanish society – showed on the one hand a mother-to-be, a symbol of womanhood, in a position of leadership and command, and, on the other hand, just as uncharacteristically, the army, a symbol of masculinity, as associated with strength and defence, in a state of subordination and obedience towards a female authority. The pregnant defence minister was *invading a space* (Puwar, 2004) that tends to be associated with men. She, in her role as minister of defence, and pregnant on top of it, clashed with common ideas about women's roles and those of the army.

Some feminist political actors interpreted the minister as showing that women are starting to break through the glass ceiling, setting the foot into typically masculine political

institutions such as the Ministry of Defence. For them, it 'is an important image precisely because it conveys normality', as the president of the Spanish feminist organization *Fundación Mujeres* Marisa Soleto said. 'It serves a pedagogic function: it shows that women can be and are everywhere' (Abend, 2008). Moreover, the picture challenges the traditionally ingrained idea that women and defence are a contradiction in terms, as protecting the country has culturally been considered to be a man's task and masculinity mainly associated with strength, and – metonymically – with defence. Finally, the image of a pregnant minister inspecting the troops can also illustrate the changing role of the army, which now not only includes military combat but also humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, roles here associated with women. Former Secretary of State for Equality Maribel Montaño suggests this latter meaning when she says that the pregnant Minister of Defence 'shows that the army does not just have to fulfil this masculine role of force, it can be more feminine, more humanitarian' (Abend, 2008).

For others, the image of a pregnant Minister of Defence raised all sorts of concerns. Newspapers such as *El Mundo* expressed scepticism about the capacity of a pregnant minister – soon to be a mother – to manage the portfolio of defence, and questioned whether she should take the full 16-week maternity leave guaranteed by Spanish law or shorten the leave given her new political responsibilities (García, 2008). Right-wing newspapers such as *ABC* and *La Razón* worried that, due to the socialist Prime Minister Zapatero's 'political correctness' in appointing women, many talented men would be excluded from top jobs in Spanish public administration to the benefit of incompetent female politicians (Sanz, 2008; J.A., 2008). To these voices pregnancy was a sign of her incompetence and incapacity to deal with the political task that awaited her. The minister's critics also feared she might redirect the army to aid missions rather than military duties because of the supposedly pacifist ideas that her pregnancy suggested. In this respect, the critics' concern is not only related to the fact that she is a woman,

but also to the fact that she is pregnant, which might entail that she has pacifist ideas supposedly not to be associated with the tasks of a minister of defence.

While a typical case of descriptive representation, the example of the Spanish pregnant Minister of Defence shows that descriptive representation takes place within a broader normative context that is a decisive factor to understand what descriptive representation of women – and other groups – is considered to be acceptable. Symbolic representation sets the stage for what descriptive representation is considered to be legitimate given the codified expression of power relations it presents. In this case, the descriptive representation of women clashes with prevailing – amongst others – symbolic representations of women and of the army. The political space is imbued with such symbolic subtexts that tend to associate women with spaces other than the political, and that affect interpretations and reactions to women's presence in political institutions. As Puwar makes clear through her territorial metaphors, 'over time specific bodies are associated with specific *spaces*', such as political institutions or the nation, and 'these spaces become marked as territories belonging to particular bodies' (Puwar, 2004, p. 141; emphasis ours). For instance, when women and people of colour enter spaces which have been associated with white men, it is against this norm that they are measured, and for this reason they are considered to be 'space invaders', invaders of a space they are not associated with, because the 'somatic norm', as Puwar names it, for political leadership has in people's imagery been associated with white male bodies. Similarly, the presentation of specific constructions of gender, that for instance associate women with inferior positions in society or less presence in the public sphere, have implications for the portfolios they may hold. In Puwar's words: 'women are granted portfolios associated with the familial private sphere. Those women MPs who then enter heavily masculinized roles, such as defence or agriculture, are easily labelled as lacking. They are after all the inappropriate bearers of this specific sort of authority' (Puwar, 2004, p. 146).

The image and position of Minister Chacón rose so much debate because it turned upside down and challenged the predominant constructions of gender in Spain at that time. We cannot prove it but it is likely to assume that there would not have been the same debate in case the minister of defence had been a man, or in case Carme Chacón would have been given the portfolio of Family or Equal Opportunities. It is mainly when social constructions and the power relations they represent get challenged, as was the case with Minister Chacón, that they become palpable. The example also showed, in this particular case, that the different dimensions of political representation are actually mutually constituent. By challenging the construction of women and of the army, Minister Chacón also set the scene for a possible new symbolic construction of women and of the army. While symbolic representation sets the stage for descriptive representation, it can also be challenged by the latter.

How substantive representation is entangled with symbolic representation Symbolic representation has very much the same enabling or constraining effect upon substantive representation as it has upon descriptive representation. Substantive representation puts the representation of the needs and interests of the constituency centre stage, or, since the turn to claims in representation studies that Saward (2010, 2006) and other scholars (Celis and Childs, 2012; Celis et al., 2014) pursue, the making of substantive claims on behalf of the represented. Symbolic representation, again, sets the symbolic boundaries allowing for some substantive claims to be made more easily than others. It, thus, again, helps us grasp how ingrained societal structures that reproduce continuing patterns of domination and inequality allow for or undermine the feasibility and acceptance of – in this case – particular claims over others. Again, similar to the effects of symbolic on descriptive representation, the existence of social relations of domination in acts of political representation becomes more visible when the codified expression of power relations gets challenged through the claims put on the table. Making a

substantive claim within symbolic boundaries that challenge or contradict that claim will create obstacles for the claim – and its maker – since the claim in question might be considered illegitimate within the borders set by symbolic representation. When looked from a symbolic representation perspective, a claim is not simply about the substance of the claim made. It evokes symbolic subtexts. These symbolic subtexts, which can be about the state, the nation, women, men, the army, and so on, are not necessarily explicitly included in the content of the claim, but they shape the type of substantive claims that can be made within a particular context and time.

The example that illustrates how symbolic representation impacts upon substantive representation is about maternity leave rights. Claims to maternity leave evoke conceptualizations about the type of state, the role of the state, of women, men, and of the family. Symbolic representation sets the boundaries to what substantive claims can be made. Myra Marx Ferree (2012, p. 16) puts it nicely when she asks: 'Why do American women not demand paid parental leave as Germans have?'. Her answer to this question is that in the United States dominant norms and values about free choice and liberal market principles, which are constructed and evoked through symbols, might undermine the possibility to make a substantive claim to paid maternity leave. This is because the latter is associated with state intervention in individual freedoms that, within the US predominant minimal-state culture, is not welcomed by public opinion and policymakers. By contrast, in Germany, a normative setting constructed around the state's responsibility in social welfare and the social role of mothers makes it easier for advocates of state paid maternity leave to claim such a right. In either case, the context affects what type of substantive claims actors are able to make for women. It influences what is considered illegitimate, too 'radical', or even unthinkable in a given context, even though the very same issue is seen as mainstream or 'common sense' in another.

Symbolic representation sets the stage for what substantive representation is considered to be legitimate given the codified expression of power relations it presents. In this case, the substantive representation of women's claims to maternity leave clashes with prevailing symbolic representations of women and of the role of the state and of the family, the type of state (welfare, minimal) in a given context and time. To be successful, the framing of substantive gender claims or political reforms needs to be adapted to the context, argues Ferree (2012, 2009). It would, for instance, be unrealistic to frame women's equality and family welfare reforms in the liberal US context by importing the European social security system model that talks about 'mothers and families' (Ferree, 2009). Instead, it would be more realistic, and thus have a greater potential, to frame such reforms in terms of 'individual citizens' rights' in the US. The latter fall under the traditional US values and norms and would more easily resonate with legislators and with public opinion. This is not to say that committed collective or individual agency cannot put – or succeed in putting – hegemonic conceptualizations of gender, ethnicity or sexuality relations into question, even in the presence of oppositional symbolic contexts. However, substantive representation claims that question the status quo as such clash with the existing setting of symbolic representation, and therefore encounter more difficulties in being pursued and succeeded than claims that would follow the hegemonic symbolic subtext. Similar to what we have seen in the example of descriptive representation, they will face a lot of criticism putting the legitimacy of their claims into question.

The example of claims to state paid maternity leave Ferree (2012) offered shows that political claims are articulated within symbolic boundaries that are a deciding factor in the acceptance of what substantive representation of women is considered to be acceptable. Similar examples can be found when other social groups are at stake, such as immigrants, disabled people, the poor, or LGBT people. Which groups face particular difficulties to get substantive claims accepted and which types of substantive claims are accepted, depends on the symbolic

subtexts that their claims evoke about prevailing conceptualizations of the state, the nation, family, women, men, and so on. Symbolic representation is entangled with women's substantive representation because it shapes the symbolic boundaries in which substantive claims are made and thus which claims can be made. Looking at the symbolic subtext wherein political actors make substantive claims shows that particular spaces, such as political institutions, are shaped by – and keep reproducing conceptualizations that perpetuate certain hierarchical relations and privilege certain groups over others; this in turn affects the possibilities for less privileged groups to advance their claims and to have them recognized as being legitimate.

Conclusions

In this article we have argued that symbolic representation needs to be conceptualized as a dimension of political representation in itself, as this will allow scholars to grasp the phenomenon of political representation in all its reach. Existing studies on symbolic representation in – especially – the field of gender and politics have mostly approached it from empirical perspectives that treat the symbolic dimension as a derivative of the descriptive one, exploring the effect of women in politics on the electorate's attitudes. Whilst providing helpful data on the relation between descriptive and symbolic representation, these studies show limitations for addressing the concept of symbolic representation as a dimension in itself.

For this reason, we returned to Pitkin (1967), and drew on the constructivist turn in representation studies (Disch, 2015) and on Saward's (2010, 2006) conceptualisation of the concept of representation. Pitkin's conceptualisation contributes to draw analytical distinctions between the different dimensions of political representation and provides a framework that most empirical research on political representation employs. However, we find that the symbolic, rather than a mere representation, is a specific presentation of the constituency, that constructs

the latter according to particular features. We therefore draw on Saward (2010, 2006) as he provides an encompassing definition of political representation, treats it as a construct, outlines makers of representation and differentiates a constituency from the idea of a constituency. These conceptualizations are relevant, in our view, for understanding symbolic representation as a dimension in itself.

Considering symbolic representation as a self-standing dimension of political representation has first allowed us to show that it is more than an issue of flags, coins, and statues, depicting a state or nation. Symbolic representation is the representation of constituents at the symbolic level, as Pitkin (1967) actually argued, as the other two dimensions do at the descriptive respective substantive level. And by doing this, symbolic representation is or can be as partial, and thus selective and exclusive as descriptive and substantive representation may be. This then allowed us secondly to demonstrate that the relation between the different dimensions of symbolic representation is not unilateral in that symbolic representation is an effect of descriptive representation, but that the different dimensions are entangled in that they are mutually constitutive. Without hinting at a causal relation between the different dimensions of political representation, we show how symbolic representation provides for a symbolic subtext enabling or constraining the political standing and acting for women – or other social groups. Whenever the different dimensions of political representation fit in who they represent and how, they mutually enable each other: descriptive representatives do not look out of space and acts of substantive or symbolic representation are not put into question. It is when they do not match that tensions arise. Symbolic representation then sets boundaries to the presence and acts of descriptive or substantive representation, and these are put into question, may even be considered not to be legitimate. Similarly, descriptive representatives and acts of substantive representation not in line with the prevailing symbolic representation, display the boundaries

of symbolic representation and may put them into question as well, as the examples of Minister Chacón and the claims for maternity rights have shown.

More empirical studies would be needed to examine the entangled dimensions of political representation in different cases, developing specific methodologies for putting the concept of symbolic representation into operation in a variety of symbols and for empirically studying this dimension in interaction with descriptive and substantive representation. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, symbolic representation is or can be as partial, and thus selective and exclusive as descriptive and substantive representation may be. Much further research would be required to study the exact extent to which current processes of symbolic representation are exclusive in different contexts and what criteria would be required to make them more inclusive. By revealing dynamics of exclusion and inclusion enacted in processes of political representation, symbolic representation also draws scholarly attention to issues of intersectionality. In itself, symbolic representation makes visible intersectional exclusions, as when statues present only able-bodied people, or streets are predominantly named after men from the dominant group. Symbolic subtexts further contribute to expose intersectional dynamics in descriptive representation, for example when representatives, by their sheer presence as members of minoritized ethnicities, are perceived as out of place. And it helps to understand why claims about maternity leave rights for lesbian women – or parental leave rights for gay men – are commonly not prioritised in political debates. More research is needed to reflect on what symbolic representation would be from an intersectional approach, and how a more inclusive symbolic presentation of the nation and state could be put forward. Such research could help analysts to detect the informal gender, race, class, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness and intersectional norms and practices that are displayed during institutional acts, and assess their constraining and enabling effects on political representatives' presence and acting.

Finally, symbolic representation can and should bring attention to the role of emotions in processes of political representation. While the irrational component of symbolic representation is the reason why Pitkin dismissed this dimension, we think this is a good reason for dedicating further attention to it and thereby connecting to other research in this field. Emotions are important in politics. Symbols evoke particular emotions about the state, the nation, women and men. Understanding why representatives and their claims are perceived as less legitimate when they clash with prevailing ideas about the role of women and men in society implies digging into what emotions representatives, who embody particular gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality, evoke. This can be another step towards research on more inclusive symbolic representation.

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[1] We use symbolic representation, drawing on Pitkin's (1967) work, as the representation of a political constituency through a symbol. The symbol 'stands for' this constituency much the same as a representative 'stands for' a constituency in descriptive representation by sharing socio-demographic features (such as sex, class, age or ethnic background) with members of that constituency. Both descriptive and symbolic representation differ from substantive representation, which is understood as the 'acting for' the constituency, defending its interests and needs.

[2] See the change.org petition on 'Bank of England: keep a woman on English banknotes' [20 Nov 2017] https://www.change.org/petitions/bank-of-england-keep-a-woman-on-english-banknotes?utm_source=action_alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=27909&alert_id=jpytGNwxxZ_NzOSyEfBnM

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