

The many feminist voices of the radical right: An actor-oriented study of the Sweden Democrats' conception of equality

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The Sweden Democrats (SD) was the first radical right populist party (RRPP) to be elected to the Swedish Parliament in 2010, and today it is an established and important force in Swedish politics. The SD have the lowest proportion of female members of all parties in the Swedish Parliament, and also retain the view that there are biological and cognitive differences that affect men's and women's roles in society. There is, however, a growing tendency to emphasize the need for gender equality and even feminism in the party. Previous research (Mulinari & Neergaard 2013; Towns, Karlsson & Eyre 2014) has dismissed these attempts as rhetorical duplicity aiming at constructing immigrants as an out-group. In this paper we analyse interviews conducted with women representatives of the SD in local, regional and national assemblies. By mapping ideas about gender and equality and by identifying the ontological scales on which they exist, we paint a picture of a party with a dynamic and sometimes contradictory understanding of gender equality. Several gender equality discourses co-exist in SD ideology, but their inconsistency is caused by changes in context rather than by purposeful ambiguity.

Introduction

In 2010, the Swedish parliamentary party system saw for the first time the entrance of a radical right populist party (RRPP). The Sweden Democrats (SD), which had developed out of the neo-Nazi movement *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* ("Keep Sweden Swedish", see e.g. Ekman & Larsson 2001), became the sixth largest party in the Swedish Parliament by 2010. The party increased its share of the votes in the 2014 general elections, making it the third largest party and a serious challenge to the traditional parliamentary party line-up. This development is taking place in what is often seen as one of the most liberal countries in the world. Like many European RRPPs, the SD members have suited up in recent years to adopt a non-confrontational style, although the party is still said to "teeter on the edge of what is acceptable in the public debate" (Hellström, Nilsson & Stoltz 2012:203). The SD, like other Nordic RRPPs, have adopted a language that "enable[s] them to cross the threshold of credibility while still remaining underdogs in the public debate" (Hellström 2015:11). As pointed out by Hellström & Nilsson (2010:69), the SD initiated an internal process to make sure that "only the 'good guys' are welcome to join the party" prior to their entry into parliament in 2010.

Much of the academic and media focus has been on the party's immigration policies, which stand out when compared to the other parliamentary parties, but this is not the only

policy area in which the party stands out. The SD also retain a traditionalist view of gender roles and the belief that traditional biological sexual categories affect people's cognitive abilities and life choices (Sverigedemokraterna 2011:8). However, already in 2001, a heated and perhaps unexpected debate took place in the party's official news outlet, *SD-Kuriren*, between Jimmie Åkesson, the incumbent party leader, and Mattias Karlsson, the incumbent deputy party leader. Karlsson suggested that the party incorporate elements of feminist ideology in order to broaden its appeal to women voters. Åkesson, who was then leader of the SD youth branch until he took over the whole party in 2005, replied that feminism was the realm of "the establishment", not the SD. Despite Åkesson's resistance, a change in the understanding of gender was slowly taking place. The 2005 party programme stipulates that "men and women are not created equal and may therefore have different points of view and perform tasks differently" (Sverigedemokraterna 2005:8).¹ In 2011, this formulation was hedged and now reads: "there are biological differences between most women and most men, beyond what can be observed with the naked eye, and these differences will probably have different implications for preferences, behaviour and life choices" (Sverigedemokraterna 2011:8). This suggests that the party's conception of the complementary nature of men and women might be changing.

As the party has continued to grow and become an important player in Swedish politics, scholars have taken an interest in the party's views beyond their main preoccupation, i.e. immigration. One issue that has vexed scholars recently concerns female participation, or to be more precise, why women would want to become active in a party which has incorporated a belief in gender differences as part of its ideology.

Recent research on the SD has focused on sex and gender as discursive strategies in political rhetoric and policy. To Mulinari & Neergaard (2013:53), the SD are part of a political phenomenon that "walks hand in hand with a reactionary and anti-feminist understanding of gender equality". Based on an analysis of interview data, Mulinari & Neergaard (2013) suggest that women representing the SD possess a worldview characterized by a dualistic care rhetoric. This rhetoric allows women to demarcate a Swedish in-group in need of protection, primarily from Muslims. At the same time, protection of Swedish values is also seen as a means of caring for non-Swedes and non-Swedish culture, giving the rhetoric an ethno-pluralist flavour. Gender equality is thus reconceptualized as a Swedish characteristic, which enables a gendered profiling of Swedish culture against Islam, the perceived out-group. This theme has been brought up in a later publication by Mulinari & Neergaard (2015), who list critique of feminism as one of the narratives in which ideas about gender equality emerge.

While Mulinari & Neergaard (2013) see this strategic use of gender equality as a characteristic of the Nordic RRPPs, Towns, Karlsson & Eyre (2014) see it as an instantiation of a European-wide phenomenon.² The SD, Towns, Karlsson & Eyre argue, have constructed gender equality as a quintessentially Swedish concept and employed it in relation to issues pertaining to immigration and integration. In all other policy areas, the authors argue, gender equality is "fiercely contested" (p. 245). Despite this claim, the authors acknowledge that

¹ All quotations originally given in Swedish have been translated by a native English speaker who is also a fluent speaker of Swedish.

² See Mudde (2016) for a history of RRPPs in Europe. For a comparison of Scandinavian RRPPs, see Hellström (2015).

there are “some points of contact between SD rhetoric and mainstream ideas about culture and gender equality” (*ibid.*). While these are reasonable arguments, they leave a few questions unanswered.

Towns, Karlsson & Eyre (2014) build their reasoning primarily on readings of manifestos and parliamentary bills. This yields a limited understanding of the party’s view of gender equality, mainly because only four of the party’s parliamentary representatives at the time were women. Moreover, it is one thing to construct gender equality as a value in prepared texts, such as bills or manifestos, where political issues are analytically disentangled and neatly ordered under rubrics. It is a completely different matter to have gender views incorporated into one’s ideology and proliferated.

A lack of methodological description in Mulinari & Neergaard (2013) makes it difficult to appreciate the actual salience of care rhetoric. The authors moreover suggest that finding instances of care rhetoric was an aim in itself. Since their data consists of twenty in-depth interviews, the question is what was left out of their analysis and whether it is in proportion to what was reported. Moreover, Mulinari & Neergaard are indeed political animals themselves with an outspoken agenda to exemplify how the SD constitute a form of cultural racism, making it extremely difficult to distinguish between their outspoken political aim and their findings.

This paper investigates how the SD relate to the competing gender equality and anti-equality discourses that are said to co-exist. Is there a plurality of gender equality discourses? What are the scopes of application of these discourses and what impact do they have on members’ lives? In order to answer these research questions we have conducted interviews with women representing the party in local, regional and national assemblies. The decision to focus on women’s experiences stems from the nature of our research project. At the start of this project we anticipated that the SD were capable of harbouring more complex conceptions of gender equality than previous research and popular opinion suggested. Previous research, not to say media coverage of the party, has framed female participation in the SD as an anomaly inside the anomaly that is the SD; while it is divergent to advocate nationalist ideology in the purportedly liberal setting that is Sweden, it is twice as divergent to do so as a woman. While it is a long-term objective of our project also to survey male representatives’ views on gender equality, the scholarly and media attention paid to women’s participation in the party made this a suitable starting point for the interviews.

Extrapolating from Coşeriu (1985), we see political discourse studies as a field encompassing not only language itself, but also actors’ actions and knowledge. Through the employment of an actor-oriented approach we can go beyond language products such as manifestos and bills, and instead elicit members’ own understanding of gender. By focusing on how issues relating to gender occur on different scales (Blommaert 2007, 2010; Blommaert, Leppänen & Westinen, 2015) we can paint a clearer picture of what different gender equality discourses exist in SD ideology.

Complexity in political discourse

An actor-oriented approach to political discourse

In order to account for the inherent complexity of (gender) discourse, we propose a broad understanding of political discourse studies drawing on the heuristic tabulation of the field of linguistics made by Coşeriu (1985). Coşeriu proposed an “integrative” view of linguistics that entails a reconceptualization of the field as the study of *action*, *knowledge* and *products* at a universal level (what is inherent to *language* itself rather than languages), a particular abstracted level (for example a group, a people, a country) and a situated level. The purpose of this model was not to construct firewalls between sub-disciplines, nor was it to suggest that all studies of language should account for all of these aspects at all levels. Rather, the point was to illustrate the interrelatedness of different foci of language studies, and to show how different fields can benefit from cross-fertilization. If we were to adapt Coşeriu’s model to account for political communication, a starting point could look like Table 1.

Table 1. Our adaptation of Coşeriu’s model, applied to political discourse.

	Action	Knowledge	Product
Universal politics	What is deemed to be political actions as opposed to other actions	What is deemed to be political knowledge as opposed to other forms of knowledge, knowledge needed to be political	Characteristics of political production; typology
Conventional (abstracted) politics	Political behaviour constrained by conventions, e.g. behaviour in an assembly	Knowledge needed to work within a group, including how a concept is understood within groups	Products arising from abstraction, e.g. edited texts such as manifestos
Situated politics	Situated, individual actions	The knowledge needed to express oneself politically, including how a concept is understood by an individual	Situated production, e.g. personal blogs or conversations.

We argue that the epistemological key to understanding a party is at the situated level of the actor (situated politics) and that an actor-oriented approach therefore should be employed. The actor perspective has not been given enough attention in the study of the formation of RRPP discourse. As pointed out by Goodwin (2008), there is a fairly good picture of who votes for RRPPs, but we know a great deal less about who joins them.³ According to Goodwin, researchers often focus on primary literature such as manifestos in order to “sidestep” the political and rhetorical complexity that characterizes RRPPs. In order to account for this complexity, or to “get into the black box” as Goodwin puts it, researchers need to collect empirical material by interacting with party members and activists.

This focus on actors’ experiences is thus only one possible approach that can contribute to our understanding of RRPPs, but it is an approach that is well fitted for this particular study. While manifesto analysis (i.e. conventional (abstracted) politics: product) undoubtedly tells

³ This claim was made in a British context but the picture is equally clear in Sweden, see e.g. Rydgren (2007), Rydgren & Ruth (2013) and Strömblad & Malmberg (in press). SD voters’ aversion towards gender equality has been noted by Oscarsson & Holmberg (2015). See also Esaiasson & Wängnerud (2015) for a discussion of SD MPs and voter policy agreement on certain key issues.

us a great deal about a party's position on certain issues, we have to keep in mind that manifestos typically leave very little room for nuances and ideological digressions. This is the case with the SD, where the important question of gender equality is brought up in manifestos, but only very briefly.

Ideological programmes are also typically expressed in an abstracted language used by organizations rather than in the embodied or personalized language used by individuals. An exclusive focus on the product itself also risks overlooking how the politicians, not to mention other members of the party, wanted or intended these policies to be implemented in wider society. This belief echoes Duverger's (1965:xvi) dictum that "[c]onstitutions and rules never give more than a partial idea of what happens, if indeed they describe reality at all, for they are rarely applied". The SD's understanding of gender roles is a case in point; a mere critical reading of their party programme could suggest that they envision a future job market modelled according to people's biological sex. Rather than taking that explanation at face value, based on our findings we argue that, in addition to discourse production, an actor's actions and knowledge have great explanatory power for a party's official ideological position.

Discourse and ontological scales

The actor-oriented approach outlined above opens up for analysis of dynamics in the act of communication. It allows us to analyse the contextually situated understanding of language and how a change in context affects the gender equality discourses. As already noted, manifestos and ideological programmes need to be couched in general terms in order to be politically implementable, especially in a consensus-driven democracy like Sweden. In contrast, an actor can shift between specific and general views more easily.

Within a sociolinguistic tradition, Blommaert (2007) has developed a conceptual framework where such shifts are conceptualized as spatial differences. Drawing on theories in social geography, he claims that shifts from the specific (micro level) to the general (macro level) invoke different images of society. These spatial differences are referred to as *scales*. Lower scales are associated with individual-based conceptions, informality and diversity, while higher scales are associated with stereotypes, collectives and homogeneity.

The basic building blocks of political discourse are political concepts, and it is the specific configurations of these that construct meanings which we see as ideological (Freedon, 2003). Discourse in this view is thus contextual. As scale shifts change the context, they consequently change the meaning of concepts. A shift may be exemplified by an actor's reflections on her own female nature compared to the female nature in general. Such a comparison might give a more diverse account of the female nature when related to the individual herself and a more stereotypical description when generalized. Blommaert (2007) suggests that such intertextual asymmetry might trigger a scale shift, i.e. a move from one scale to another. Typically, higher levels out-scale lower ones. Consequently, two actors who recognize inequality between men and women on a lower scale might disagree completely on a higher scale. For instance, a radical feminist might be able to see that patriarchal oppression is not an issue in every male-female relation, while a more conservative or liberal might recognize that there may be gender inequality in society to a certain extent. However, if they are to discuss their views on affirmative action, they might shift their respective scales upwards as textual

understanding will be different. Hence, the more general scale will out-scale the heterogeneous view and thus they will strongly disagree.

The identification of scales and actors' scale shifts in political discourse are employed here to help shed light on the complexity of gender equality discourse in RRPPs and how competing gender equality discourses co-exist. In doing so, it complements our understanding of party policies gained from readings of manifestos and ideological programmes. Identification of scales does not only allow us to study implementation of policies, but also potentially map the dynamics shaping new policies.

Methodology and material

Interviews and other materials

In order to capture the SD politicians' views of equality between men and women, and thus be able to identify scale-related dynamics and shifts, we have conducted semi-structured interviews with women representing the SD in political assemblies. Semi-structured interviews allowed us to inquire into the interviewees' understanding of key concepts, such as gender and sex, and to ascertain whether these understandings had any importance for how our interviewees led their lives. We designed an interview guide that contains questions about socio-economic background, reasons for joining the party, questions about their roles in the party and questions about internal and external communication.⁴ Using the 2005 and 2011 party programmes as elicitation material, we asked questions about the interviewees' view on social and biological aspects of femininity and gender equality. It should be noted that although many questions presupposed a certain ontological level as point of departure (e.g. the individual-oriented question "Has it become more or less easy to act as a woman in the party?"), the interviewees were never asked to compare their views on different ontological scales. If they did so (for example by comparing to the role of women in politics globally), it was of their own accord.

The interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2015. The subjects were initially chosen from the population of municipal and regional councillors in the southernmost province of Skåne. Skåne is an SD stronghold and also the scene for most of the party's transformation (Baas 2014:78–80).⁵ After the 2014 general elections, the population was extended to include female members of the national parliament. The subject pool consisted of 19 interviewees. The average age was 58 and is thus close to the average age of the population. The profession of the subjects ranged from students, entrepreneurs and public employees (mainly in health care and welfare) to pensioners.

The first interviews were either conducted face to face (ten interviews) or by telephone (nine interviews). An additional five follow-up interviews were conducted around the time of the 2014 EU Parliament elections (three face to face, two by telephone). The interview set-up took into account the requirements suggested by Potter & Hepburn (2005), namely the information about reasons for inclusion in the project, the aim of the project, interviewee expect-

⁴ The interview guide is included in an extended version of this paper, available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robin_Engstroem.

⁵ Results from Swedish local, regional and national elections are available from the Swedish Election Authority (www.val.se).

ations and potential use of the interview material. The interviewees were informed that they had been selected because they are women politicians active in a male-dominated party. The interviews were of an explorative nature and conducted before the researchers made the decision to focus specifically on the role of gender equality discourses. As a consequence, the information about the nature of the project conveyed to the interviewees was couched in general terms. The interviewees were told that they would be asked questions about their engagement in the party and the political conditions for female participation. The interviewees were encouraged to talk about their own experiences and thoughts rather than those of the party. The interviewees were also informed that the interviews would form the basis for future publications, and that the interviews would be anonymized.

The interviews, which were recorded and later transcribed, ranged from twenty minutes to more than an hour, with an average of 40 minutes. This material was supplemented with field notes, visits to local branch meetings and publicly available data from the Swedish Tax Agency in order to verify statements made by the interviewees regarding marital status and statements of other socio-economic character.

Interview annotation

The annotation process consisted of two main stages: the application of an a priori set of ontological scales and an open annotation stage whereby discursive themes were identified. In order to analyse the large quantity of interview data, we employed the software program UAM Corpus Tool.⁶ By using this tool we could manually annotate scales and discursive themes as the software allowed us to design an annotation schema that can be extended and otherwise remodelled throughout the annotation process.

The first step in the annotation process consisted in identifying utterances in which the interviewees discussed their views on either sex or gender. These utterances were then annotated as operating on different scales. Four scales were used: individual, party, social and biological. These scales are differentiated by their degree of generalization. The individual scale encompasses utterances in which “people” concerns people treated as individuals, and these individuals are typically the interviewees themselves or members of their families. The party scale is applied to utterances in which “people” are not treated as individuals but as aggregates, in this case aggregates with a party label. In these utterances, the focus is typically on the SD as a party on a local and national level. The social scale also account for aggregates that can be conceived of as social in a wide sense of the word: socio-economic or ethnic groups, or organizations and corporations. The biological scale accounts for utterances where generalizations are made about human nature. If an utterance contained propositions operating on separate scales, the utterance would be broken down into its respective scalar-bound constituents.

The second step of the annotation process, the thematic analysis, consisted of an open annotation process (Gray 2013 refers to this as “open coding”). Those segments of text that had been annotated for ontological scales were recursively compared in order to identify discursive themes, i.e. narratives orbiting around a number of core concepts, e.g. segregation, competence and affirmative action. At an aggregated level, it was possible to identify fre-

⁶ Available as a free download from <http://www.wagsoft.com/CorpusTool/download.html>.

quently occurring themes containing frequently co-occurring concepts, e.g. narratives about affirmative action tended to tie in with narratives about competence, but not with segregation. Such themes were consequently grouped together into three different discourses, i.e. ideologically thematic clusters, which are described in more detail in the next section. The combination of scale analysis and thematic analysis thus not only allows us to study the ideological content of SD gender equality discourses, but the dynamics of discursive deployment.

Findings – gender equality discourses

In this section we exemplify the different types of discourses pertaining to the relationship between men and women that emerged from our annotation of the interview data. Three broad discourses were identified: a complementarity discourse, a meritocratic discourse and a structural discourse. This classification is the result of what emerged from our interviews, but can naturally be linked to wider political traditions. In this section we outline how these terms are used in the present paper before exemplifying the discourses themselves.

The *complementarity discourse* has at its core the belief that men and women are the two complementary sides of the same coin. Like many attempts to classify ideology, this distinction is actually more of a scale than a dichotomy proper. The man may be seen as the breadwinner and the woman as the domestic goddess, but the complementarity does not have to be of a socio-economic nature. The exact nature of this relationship varies from person to person, but a common feature is the emphasis on biological and cognitive differences between men and women, particularly on the woman's role as mother, and extrapolating from that argument, her caring nature. Some of the core concepts of the complementarity discourse thus draw on what the literature sometimes discusses as *difference feminism*, dating back to late twentieth-century debates on the necessity to consider sexual belonging in relation to gender equality (Scott 1988:38). Difference feminism (*särartsfeminism* in Swedish) is also the form of feminism espoused by part of the SD elite. The centrality of gender differences is clear when Paula Bieler, the party's spokesperson for equality, integration and family issues, explains her reason for embracing the concept: "I am not scared of differences, but I am scared of politics leading to unequal opportunities based on sex" (Bieler 2014).

The *meritocratic discourse* gravitates around the notions of competence and suitability. It makes no definite essentialist or ontological claims in general – men and women may share certain biological or cognitive characteristics, but these are of little or no importance. Instead, society should be modelled to account for people's competence and interests. As a direct consequence, affirmative action is frowned upon and seen as undemocratic. In response to claims about negative structures, the meritocratic discourse emphasizes intra-group variation rather than inter-group variation, i.e. there are greater differences between individual men and between individual women than between all men and women. Our use of the term meritocratic corresponds largely to premises and goals associated with the strand of *liberal feminism* (Chambers 2013; Tong 2014). The discourse theme identified here is not of a liberal nature, however, but draws on liberal traditions through its emphasis on the individual as the key to equality.

The *structural discourse* refers to (projections of) large-scale ideological alignment among individuals in society. As it is used in a clear right-wing context, it offers no Marxist expla-

nations for the existence of structures. The term structural is used here rather to refer to statements where structural utterances are used. These consist in delimiting groups of people or profiling groups of people against other groups in order to make generalizations about these. To the extent that the interviewees offer explanations as to why groups of people diverge from one another, these explanations draw on the notion of nurture.

The complementarity discourse

The party labels itself as social conservative so, unsurprisingly, it harbours strong traditional ideas. Sex and gender are often the loci of manifestation of traditional ideals. The distinct yet complementary nature of men and women is clearly outlined in the party programme, but this is not necessarily a part of the programme that all our interviewees were aware of prior to our interviews. Upon being presented with quotations from the party programme, however, all but a very small minority aligned with the party line. Examples 1 and 2 illustrate two interviewees' view of the complementary nature of men and women. The first extract shows one interviewee's reaction to an ongoing trend of replacing gendered language.

(1) I feel that, actually, I'll say it like this... If we talk about the church, we are born as man and woman. There is a she and a he - God did not create a "hen". I'm referring to religion here because there can only be a he and a she because we are created in different ways. Then how we are in the head, well that's another discussion.

The interviewee in (1) rejects any complexity regarding attribution of biological sex, and clearly states that there are only two biological sexes. Her claim that "God did not create a 'hen'" should not be construed as an anti-zoological statement but rather refers to the use of a relatively new Swedish (synthetic) third person pronoun. The pronoun is a compromise between the gendered *han* ('he') and *hon* ('she') and can be used as an alternative to the awkward construction *hon eller han* ('he or she'). As it does not reveal a person's biological sex, the pronoun has also been championed by people who do not believe in a binary categorization of sex, and to whom this is a political issue. The interviewee sees the pronoun as an attack on what she considers as the natural order. Several of our interviewees declare similar standpoints on this issue and see the pronoun as symptomatic of an unhealthy political climate where the political elite is imposing a worldview on people which is de-sexualized and therefore disconnected from reality. "It's like they're not respecting people by inventing a new pronoun", she explains later when asked if she could imagine any situation when a gender-neutral pronoun could be used.

The interviewee quoted above, who has a minor political function in the Church of Sweden, grounds her argument in Christianity explicitly, although religion vis-à-vis gender is not a theme permeating the rest of our interviews with her. Nor is it a theme common in the rest of the interviews. In fact, many of the interviewees do not live in a traditional man-and-wife relationship, several of them being divorced or never having married. Christianity in this case is more likely a source of legitimacy than a political principle that they live by. While this interviewee leaves the question of cognitive differences hanging, another representative gives a very clear answer to the question "do you agree with the description of men's and women's complementary biological and cognitive roles outlined in the party programme?"

(2) Well, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to understand that, if you take away a boy's tractor, the one that he [the interviewee imitates noises made when children play with a tractor] and give him a doll that he then throws in the corner because that's not the way he wants to play. So you just have to have your hormones, and you do have all that within you. If you try to suppress that behaviour, then you have future patients in the psych ward. That's as simple as it gets. It's obvious.

This interviewee agrees with the party's description of the complementary nature of men and women and thus establishes that there are biological differences, and thus cognitive differences. The differences are presented as obvious facts, and the interviewee warns about the consequences of suppressing one's true nature. She exemplifies her standpoint by referring to the act of a child playing. Her conception of childhood is akin to a state of nature where children, like animals, get to exemplify our true nature. Children's play is invoked by several interviewees when they exemplify how men differ from women. Here, and this applies to most of our interviewees, the interviewee does not mention the impact of upbringing on children's behaviour.

The meritocratic discourse

While the "complementarity discourse" contains views on gender and equality, it is not strictly speaking a feminist discourse. However, it does often tie in with another discourse emphasizing values such as independence and competence, values which are central in liberal feminist thought. We named this discourse "the meritocratic discourse". The interviewees themselves do not use the term meritocracy but seem to prefer terms like competence and suitability.

In times of election it is common practice for Swedish political parties to compile ballot papers consisting of 50% women and 50% men. The SD did this for the first time in the 2014 European Parliament elections, but abandoned the practice in the Swedish general elections the same year. Extract (3) is one interviewee's response when we ask her if a gender-balanced ballot list is a goal worth working for.

(3) I don't put much weight on it. Yes, yes, I really don't do that. When I look at the list I see them as competent persons, not as gender specific persons. I really don't make a big deal of it. [...] It's nothing that empowers me, like "oh great a 50-50 list for the sake of women!"

The interviewee is not impressed by the 50–50 male-to-female ratio and reiterates that a 50–50 list is of no interest to her (the ratio was 67–33 when the interviewee stood for office in her municipality). She sees gender as irrelevant when compared to what she contends is the overarching principle of governance, namely competence. The people on the ballot paper have been selected, not because of their gender but because of their competence. Yet competence, just like qualification, is not an apolitical concept, as we will see when we consider excerpt (4).

(4) If a woman is qualified to be Prime Minister then she should be able to become Prime Minister. So if she's qualified, the most qualified, then that's that. So quite often the struggle for equality goes too far with gender quotas and this and that. But I reiterate that the person who is most qualified shall take care of that which they are qualified to do.

The interviewee is asked if a woman prime minister is a goal worth working towards. The interviewee responds by underlining the importance of qualifications and expresses her wish for a state where there is a direct correlation between power and competence; gender quotas risk preventing this order from developing. Competence and the negative view of gender quotas are common concepts in our interviews, and issues which the interviewees are passionate about. The use of the concept of competence is the use of a discursive strategy that serves to background the need for equality in absolute numbers and to foreground the complementary nature not just of men vis-à-vis women but in a more general interpersonal sense. As one Member of Parliament explains: “What matters in politics is that no perspectives are lost. But to complement each other, it’s not like every task requires ‘equal parts’.”

The structural discourse

We previously defined the term structural as being concerned with (projections of) large-scale ideological alignment among individuals. The use of parentheses acknowledges the dual nature of structural explanations employed by the party, i.e. structures within and outside. The outside structure concerns representation of “the other’s” view on gender. Perhaps more surprising is the presence of a structural critique of the in-group. The excerpts in this section are two interviewees’ responses when they were asked if there are views on women’s role in society which they find problematic.

(5) There is this view that women are inferior to men. They’re oppressed by wearing hijab, they’re not allowed to do what they want to do. It’s very obvious when you’ve gone to school with girls wearing hijab that they haven’t even told their parents that there are boys in their class. Equality should apply to everyone.

In excerpt (5), the interviewee implicitly identifies Islam as a culture that oppresses women. This might be understood as a structural division between Muslim men and women; a situation where women are victimized by men. However, Muslim girls wearing hijab are also implicitly contrasted with Swedish girls, to whom, according to the interviewee, mixed classrooms are seen as the norm. The overarching goal thus seems to be to stress the incompatibility of Islam with Swedish norms rather than just singling out the structural inequality between men and women.

The structural discourse is the least frequent but perhaps most salient in the material. This is partly because of its ethnic framing, but also because it appears in order to explain negative trends within the Swedish in-group, which is perhaps not expected from a party using Swedish norms as a benchmark for gender equality.

(6) There are men with these derogatory views that have grown up amongst women who are quiet, or who don’t have a will of their own or who are, I don’t know, compliant. Because they’re products of their environment.

Several of our interviewees acknowledge that there are Swedish men who treat women as second class citizens; although they are eager to point out that this practice cannot be seen in the party itself. In excerpt (6), one interviewee identifies what appears to be a structural problem, men’s negative treatment of women, but then offers a more individualistic explanation that puts the blame not only on the “men with these derogatory views” but on the women surrounding them. Putting the blame on men alone would lead to a parallel discourse

analogical to the Islam discourse, whilst equal blame conceptualizes men who mistreat women as anomalies within an otherwise well-functioning society.

Findings – generalizations across scales

The previous section exemplified the three main discourses found in the material. This section will cover the scale-bound dynamics when an interviewee moves from a micro to a macro perspective. During the interviews, the interviewees jump between scales when talking about equality and gender attributes. It seems that such shifts change the gender equality discourses themselves. Moreover, the complementarity discourse is more common on higher scales, while the meritocratic discourse is more common on lower scales. Statements connected to the structural discourse are less common.

The excerpt used here to illustrate the scalar dynamics is one cohesive utterance by a national representative, but it has been broken down into smaller sections for the sake of readability.

(7.1) To talk about typical men and typical women, I'd rather avoid mixing up categories and individuals on a general level because it will always be the case that there is greater variance within the group of men and within the group of women than there is between the two groups.

She begins by explaining that the differences between men and women should not be exaggerated as the intra-group variance is larger than the inter-group variance. She considers individuals in each group and compares those to each other. Men and women are to be compared individually and categorization should be avoided in line with the meritocratic discourse. However, as she continues, she generalizes and shifts to a biological scale.

(7.2) But at the same time I think it's important to remember that it is by no means strange that there are more women working in nursing care because they have the hormones and the bodily functions that make us feel good when we nurse. There is no escaping that we're built biologically to bear children and care for people in other ways. So it's not strange, there probably is something in our hormonal balance. Then you're at the macro level.

This shift is made explicit at the end of the excerpt, but is also shown as she talks about women in general. A woman's ability is determined by biological hormones. Her role as a caretaker is taken as evidence for a natural order. This is inescapable. Such reasoning can be associated with the complementarity discourse.

(7.3) It's dangerous to talk about individual men and women and say that "this is how a man is supposed to be and this is how a woman is supposed to be" because that's not the way it is, there are all kinds of mixes.

She continues with an ontological shift downwards again and states the danger of attributing predetermined abilities to individuals. She says that there are all kinds of mixes and that how one ought to be is not to be defined across gender lines. This is thus a noteworthy move away from the complementary views that she expressed in 7.2.

This shows that moves across the spatial scales suggested by Blommaert (2007, 2010; Blommaert, Leppänen & Westinen, 2015) result in dynamic and complex use of gender equality discourses. Trying to connect the nationalist women's view on gender and gender

equality to one specific discourse used across all ontological scales might thus hide the existence of other discourses. A more general spatial level seems to overrule micro levels, which allows for diversity, according to Blommaert (2007, 2010). A more complementary discourse might therefore be more likely to be chosen to represent the view of these women by an outside observer.

Conclusions

The title of this paper is provocative not only because it suggests that an RRPP can embrace gender equality, but that it could also have a feminist outlook. We reiterate that this has been an investigation into one party's conception of gender equality, and that even when these notions are invoked, they might deviate from how the terms are sometimes understood in wider society. The SD have an organic understanding of gender. Ideas about the nature of men and women are, however, latent rather than a top priority for the party. This leads to complex, and at times, contradictory understandings of sex and gender and concomitant social implications. It is this complexity we have brought to light in this paper.

By focusing on female SD representatives' understanding of gender equality we have identified three broad discourses: complementary, meritocratic and structural. While the complementarity discourse operates primarily on higher and more general scales, the meritocratic discourse is found mainly on lower and more concrete scales. There were relatively few instances of the structural discourse, but they were evenly distributed across scales. Our initial findings suggest not only the presence of competing discourses between actors, but also that single actors may express competing and thus contradictory discourses depending on the ontological scale they operate upon at the time. Our systematic categorization allows for a mapping of the gender equality discourses and the interaction with the ontological context. The complexity of discourse practice can shed light on the dynamics of ideology formation, not only in relation to RRPPs but in politics in general.

Previous research (Mulinari & Neergaard 2013, 2015; Towns, Karlsson & Eyre 2014) has treated the SD's conception of gender equality as stable and clear-cut. The purpose of this paper was to map and exemplify the complexity that actually surrounds these conceptions in the party ideology. This entails that the focus has been qualitative rather than quantitative. While we have hinted at both a symmetrical and an asymmetrical distribution of discourses across scales, we have not actually provided any statistics to back this up. Doing so constitutes the next step in our ambition to survey the ideological development of the SD. Future analyses will thus broaden our material and analytical scope. Swedish politics is undergoing rapid transformation and there is little to suggest that the ideological impact of RRPPs will wane away in the near future, making the next phase feasible and socially relevant.

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