

De voorgenoemen demonstratie der Kiesrechtvrouwen op het Binnenhof

WIJ EÏSCHEN: AEGEMEEN VROUWEN-KIESRECHT!"



Can Dutch Women Be Politicians?  
A Discourse Analysis of Parliamentary Debates  
on Women's Suffrage (1887 - 1916)



Universiteit Utrecht  
MA Gender Studies  
Faculty of Humanities

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First reader: Dr. Koen Leurs  
Second reader: Dr. Eva Midden  
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Cover Illustration: Kuijens, J.F. 1916. *De voorgenomen demonstratie der Kiesrechtvrouwen op het Binnenhof*. From Koninklijke Bibliotheek, <https://www.kb.nl/themas/bijzondere-vrouwen/vrouwen-hun-uiterlijk-en-de-politiek>.

## Foreword

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Koen Leurs for supervising me during the writing of this thesis. Thank you for the shared enthusiasm, your more than helpful suggestions, and most of all for always finding the time to point me in the right direction at moments where doubt prevailed. Your guidance has been indispensable.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the teachers of the Gender Studies programme and my fellow students for their inspiration and insights throughout my master's studies. I am especially grateful to Dr. Nirmal Puwar, who during a guest lecture at the beginning of the academic year unconsciously send me on the journey that has led to the creation of this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Eva Midden for being my second reader.

To my friends and family, I am grateful for your consisted encouragement and unwavering support. I could not have done it without you.

## Abstract

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Although women are since 1916 allowed to become politicians in the Netherlands, an assumed discrepancy between their maternity and the political body is still present in contemporary Dutch society. To understand this implied incoherence, this thesis focusses on the Dutch debates on women's suffrage from 1887 to 1916. It examines how the maternal body was historically constructed in the parliamentary debates to find out how this construction contradicts the Dutch somatic norm of the political body. First, a postmodernist epistemological framework with a feminist poststructuralist theoretical context is employed to create a solid theoretical understanding of the maternal and the political body. Drawing on existing literature in the field of sexual difference theory, somatic processes of in-and exclusion are identified and an understanding of the phallogentric notions that inform the political body is created. The theoretical insights are then brought into conversation with the findings of the critical discourse analysis that was conducted on the transcripts of the suffrage debates. The analysis shows that the maternal body is represented as man's unequal counterpart: 'irrational' and unable to transcend the influence of her feminine reproductive processes. She, therefore, does not fit into the masculine somatic norm of the political body. Furthermore, I argue that the maternal body and the political body were co-constructed from the beginning to exclude each other and that this constructed incoherence was accompanied by a demarcation between the public/private sphere, deeming the maternal body as matter out of place. The results show that a renegotiation of the political sphere itself is necessary if we want to establish a political space that is open for every(body).

Keywords: maternity, political body, maternal body, women's suffrage, critical discourse analysis, sexual difference theory, somatic processes, phallogentric constructions of space.

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## Introduction

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In 2019, a Dutch newspaper called *Trouw* wondered aloud in their headline of the day if ‘a mother could be a Prime Minister?’ (Trouw, 2019). They asked this question in response to the installation of Sophie Wilmés, who became the first female Prime Minister of Belgium. Apparently, there is something inherent to the concept of ‘motherhood’ that can get in the way of being a Prime Minister. It is important to understand that this is not a question every(body) gets asked while pursuing a political career. It is an issue only raised when it comes to a women’s body trying to do so; reducing her to the materiality of her body. It is also not a new question. On the contrary, it is an ongoing echo from the past. The maternity of women and whether or not they would fit in the political realm was the main question in the debates in the Netherlands on women’s suffrage. The maternal body functioned as the battleground upon which the Members of Parliament (MPs) made their plea. One of the main arguments made was that being a woman, a wife, a mother, was incoherent with the political body: “[T]he married woman is the appointed caretaker of the family, the educator of the children, and she cannot fulfill those sacred duties if she regularly moves outside the home and the family (Handelingen II 1892/93, December 9, 1892, 501).<sup>i</sup> An ontological anxiety informed their rendering of the normative political body. I want to find out what lay at the heart of this and why the maternal body is seen as not belonging in the political space. This thesis, therefore, answers the question how the notion of the maternal body is historically constructed in the parliamentary debates on women’s suffrage to find out how this construction contradicts the Dutch dominant somatic norm of the political body.

To answer this research question, I have decided to go back in time and place myself in the lion’s den of Dutch political history at the time when the debate about women’s suffrage peaked. I will conduct a discourse analysis of Dutch parliamentary debates that occurred between 1887 to 1916. It is in this timeframe that the then all-male House of Representatives spoke about women and their in- exclusion of Dutch political life. My focus will be on two specific debates that happened at the beginning and at the ending of this timeframe. Both debates revolved around the same word: ‘mannelijk’ (meaning ‘male’). In 1887 the Chamber decided to change the Constitution and insert the word ‘mannelijk’ in the article about suffrage, thereby permanently excluding women. In 1916 they reversed this decision and voted for universal suffrage. I am interested in finding out what lay at the heart of their arguments made—how the maternal body was made to function as the antithesis of the political somatic norm.

It is important to conduct this research for multiple reasons. First, because the ongoing echo from the past is gaining volume now that more women have been entering the political realm in the last couple of years. The assumed incoherence between the maternal and the political body is increasingly coming to light. When in June this year Dutch politician Sigrid Kaag from D66 (social liberal party) announced that she would be running for Prime Minister in the upcoming election of 2021, one of the headlines read: “Sigrid Kaag doubted becoming party leader: ‘What am I doing to my children?’” (Kuipers 2020; my translation).<sup>1</sup> The only news this newspaper could filter from the announcement that a more than capable woman would be running for Prime Minister, was that Kaag also wondered about the possible impact of her decision for her children. Again, the woman is being reduced to the materiality of her body through her maternity.

Nirmal Puwar (2004) argues in her book *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* that this over-determination of the woman’s body comes because their bodies are not seen as the dominant somatic norm in the political sphere. They are ‘space invaders’, Puwar argues—trespassers who are not seen as the ‘natural occupants’ of that space. This is because the political sphere is a historical and culturally created space that is specifically molded for one body; the male body. Or in the words of Nirmal Puwar: “Women are their bodies, but men are not” (2004, 16). This materialization of the women’s body that happens when a woman is ‘space-invading’ into the political sphere is also everything but harmless. According to political scientist Loes Aaldering (2018), such gender biased framings in the media are extremely problematic and can even cause electoral consequences, ‘thereby contributing to the underrepresentation of women in politics’. It is therefore of utmost importance to figure out what is at the root of this systematic bias that causes women to be reduced to the materiality of their bodies through their maternity, because the assumed discrepancy between their body and the masculine political sphere contributes to the underrepresentation of women in Dutch political positions.

At the time of writing, the representation of women in Dutch politics is already (or still is) not something to be enthusiastic about. The Netherlands has never had a female Prime Minister in the 172 years that the office exists and from the fifteen political parties that are currently

<sup>1</sup> “Sigrid Kaag twijfelde over lijsttrekkerschap: ‘Wat doe ik mijn kinderen aan.’”

represented in the House of Representatives, only three of them are led by a woman.<sup>2</sup> The average number of women in the city councils are around 30% and in the House of Representatives, the numbers are even declining. From 41 percent in 2010 to 31 percent in 2018. Kajsa Ollongren, the Dutch minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, has therefore announced a variety of measures to increase the numbers of women in politics and public administration. Her aim is that in the future, between 40 and 60% of the positions in politics and government will be held by women. This brings us to the second reason.

In response to the announcements of the measures, the University of Amsterdam and the BZK published an essay- and research collection that attempted to come up with remedies on how to tackle this underrepresentation (Mügge, Runderkamp, and Kranendonk 2019). They analyzed recent studies in search for a solution on how to reach the aim set by Ollongren. Measurements that will be taken are an active recruitment policy, a more inclusive selection of candidates, a training module for selectors, and network meetings set-up for women to meet each other (Rijksoverheid 2019). All these measurements are focused on increasing the number of women in government positions. The hypothesis that drives this way of thinking is that once we have more women, we shall have more equality. This philosophy would hold if the political realm would be an unmarked and neutral location. Then simply adding the ‘other’ would be enough to mix things up. But as noted earlier, the creation of the political space is highly entangled with phallogocentric notions (Irigaray 1985; Puwar 2004). The political body is actually *a masculine* body. Therefore, the sum of women does not equal diversity. This simple equation does not take into account the *space* itself that the bodies are perceived in. Nor does it focus on the *bodies* that enter the political realm, which are not unmarked either (Coole 2007). We therefore need to go beyond the act of counting bodies and conduct an analysis that looks closely at why some bodies are perceived as belonging and why others are not. That way a better understanding of the somatics of the processes of in-and exclusion at play can be created. Only then can we begin to understand why women are underrepresented in the political realm and what ways of deconstruction are possible. This research can, therefore, function as a stepping stone to create a vision that looks past the ‘numbers’.

<sup>2</sup> The office exists from 1848. From 1848 till 1945, the position of Prime Minister was officially called ‘chairman of the council of ministers’ (voorzitter van de ministerraad; my translation). Since 1945, the official title is Prime Minister.



A third reason for conducting a discourse analysis of the parliamentary debates that revolved around women's suffrage through analyzing the arguments made by the MPs on why they thought the maternal body did not belong in the political sphere—and doing this with a somatic lens that focusses on the body and its in- exclusion in space—is because it has never been done. This is largely because the archives of the Dutch parliament were not available to a large audience before 2019.<sup>3</sup> Before the archives were digitalized by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (national library), the 2.400.000 pages of parliamentary pieces originating from 1814-1995 were only available at a physical location at the 'Binnenhof' in The Hague. There they were stored in books with paper that crumbled with every touch, dispersed among rows and rows of bookshelves that were inaccessible without ladders. And because these parliamentary documents were extremely inaccessible (and unsearchable) before the digitalization process, almost all of the literature regarding these debates are based on other sources such as newspapers. In the history book *Van moeder op dochter* (1948), which gives an overview of the women's rights movements, this becomes very clear.<sup>4</sup> They quote from parliamentary debates that occurred in 1889, but do not refer to them directly. Instead, they refer to newspapers of that time who would publish parts of the transcripts or the feminist magazine 'Evolutie' that was heavily focused on women's suffrage.<sup>5</sup>

Two scientific institutions are currently working with the newly published material of the archive: The 'Centrum voor Parlementaire Geschiedenis' (Centre for Parliamentary History) in Nijmegen and the 'Parlementair Documentatiecentrum' (Parliamentary Documentation Centre) of the University of Leiden. In their research, the body and its enclosure in/by political space is not taken into account. Instead, they are conducting historical research on the archives with a focus on gathering information about specific persons for biographical objectives or the studying of parliamentary activities such as cabinet formations. This is done from a solely historical, political, and anti-somatic perspective. They focus only on the activities that the politicians performed, but the political space itself and the construction of it, nor the bodies that have occupied it throughout history and their place in the processes of in-and exclusion, are being questioned. They perceive space and body as neutral entities and as noted before, they are everything but that.

<sup>3</sup> Especially with the upgrade that was added to the archive two months ago. It seems that the files were re-uploaded in a more readable format, making it now possible to search for specific words within the parliamentary documents itself.

<sup>4</sup> "From Mother to Daughter" (my translation)

<sup>5</sup> 'Evolutie' was founded by Wilhemina Drucker in 1983. The magazine existed until 1926.

The lack of research done on the historical construction of the Dutch political space and the under theorization of the somatic processes of in-and exclusion that causes the woman's body—the maternal body—to be encountered as a space invader in the political sphere, is as outlined above problematic. It is therefore all the more important to answer the question how the maternal body is constructed in the parliamentary debates to find out why it is deemed incoherent with the dominant somatic norm of the political body. As mentioned earlier regarding the work of Puwar (2004), one of the starting points in answering this question is that the political sphere is historically created for the male body. A theoretical approach is therefore necessary that not only allows for a critical analysis of the maternal body, but one that also takes into account how the phallogentric creation of the political sphere informs the masculine ideal somatic norm of the political body. Only then a solid theoretical basis is created upon which we can analyze the arguments made by the MPs in the debates on why they thought the maternal body did not belong in the political sphere.

In the first chapter, I explain my epistemology and theoretical framework. I use a feminist postmodernist epistemological framework that is built on the recognition that knowledge is constructed, contextual, and always intrinsically linked with power, and that questions binary and hierarchical oppositions with a focus on discourses (Baxter 2003; Bordo 1999; Foucault 1972; 1980). The theoretical context that follows from this is one that is poststructuralist. I see feminist post-structural theory as an ensemble of theoretical positions that employ discursive inquiry (Price and Shildrick 1999) in an attempt to deconstruct notions of 'femininity' and 'the experience of the woman's body within discourses and power relationships' (Baxter 2003, 33). In the theoretical framework, I first establish a solid understanding of the *maternal body*. I do this using the work of Luce Irigaray (1985) on sexual difference theory. I investigate how the binary femininity/masculinity actually employs a single standard that causes the woman's body to be materialized (Grosz 1994) and how the maternal body is related to this (Price and Shildrick 1999). Then I shift my focus onto the historical phallogentric construction of the political sphere to gain a better understanding of how the dominant masculine somatic norm of the *political body* is created. Here I use the work of Moira Gatens (1999) on the gendered nature of space. In the conclusion of the theoretical chapter, I bring both understandings of the maternal body and the masculine political body in conversation with each other to establish a basis upon which we can understand their contradictory relationship.

In the second chapter, I elaborate on my use and understanding of discourse analysis and how I bring this in interaction with the archive. I reflect on the chosen methodology, its shortcomings, and how it contributes to the research. In the third chapter, I bring the theoretical framework in conversation with the findings of the discourse analysis conducted on the parliamentary debates. The created theoretical understanding of the maternal body and the political body—and their assumed incoherence—functions here as a lens to look through while analyzing the arguments made by the MPs on why they thought the maternal body did not belong in the political sphere. This will then answer the research question how the maternal body is constructed in the debates to find out how it contradicts the dominant political body. In the final chapter, I reflect on my research and give suggestions for further academic inquiries.

Although the research revolves around women's bodies, they will not be considered as a unitary category. Bodies are always intersecting with other categories of identity markers such as ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion. A woman's body does not exist. It is always in interaction with other processes that have their own mechanisms of power. An intersectional perspective will, therefore, be employed in my analysis. Moreover, my own body will also be taken into account in this research. As a young female politician myself, I am aware that my positionality has influenced the perspective I use in this thesis, as well as the way I conduct the discourse analysis of the parliamentary debates. I will, therefore, give a reflection on my positionality at the beginning of chapter 1 and 2, to show how my own body and its position in society is entangled with the research I am conducting.

## Chapter 1: Epistemological and Theoretical Framework

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“Wallflower

Shrinking in a corner,  
Pressed into the wall;  
do they know I’m present,  
am I here at all?  
Is there a written rule book,  
that tells you how to be—  
all the right things to talk about—  
that everyone has but me?  
Slowly I am withering—  
a flower deprived of sun;  
longing to belong to,  
somewhere or someone.”

(Leav 2003, 31)

I have chosen this poem written by feminist novelist and poet Lang Leav to start my epistemological and theoretical framework, because for me it explains best how I as a female politician myself feel sometimes in the political realm being part of the processes of in- and exclusion. The poem brings me back to the memory of when I visited my first political congress. In 2018 I was elected into the City Council of my hometown at the age of twenty-one. As a young woman and a feminist, this position has challenged me in ways that I did not anticipate beforehand. At the congress, it did not took long too find out that I had accidentally placed myself in a boy’s club I did not know how to navigate through. For example, during that congress, I was denied a handshake eight times. They would introduce themselves to my male colleagues standing next to me, but skip me. I remember it made me feel invisible. An overwhelming feeling of not belonging in that space filled me up and then it shrank me down to a state of being close to nothing. I felt like a wallflower.

The research I am conducting and the questions I try to answer in this thesis are therefore not only guided by an academic quest but also a personal one. My own experiences in the political realm have led me on this inquiry to find out what drives this ontological anxiety when it comes to women entering the historically constructed male space that we call the political arena. I want to investigate the historical constructiveness of the political body to reveal the mechanisms of power that lie behind it and show how it functions in the interest of men dwelling in the system of patriarchy. I want to come to a better understanding of the processes of in-and exclusion that I myself have become a part of.

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I lay-out my epistemological and theoretical framework that forms the basis of the thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, my framework is guided by the need for an epistemological and theoretical basis that allows for a critical analysis of the maternal body and that takes into account the phallogentric creation of the political sphere that informs the ideal political body. This is necessary to create a lens that I can look through in the discourse analysis to help understand how the maternal body is created in the debates and why this contradicts the political somatic norm. Therefore, a framework is necessary that on the one hand, focusses strongly on the woman's body and its materiality in order to engage with the notion of the maternal body. On the other, it needs to engage with somatic processes of in-and exclusion to help understand how phallogentric notions influence the masculine somatic norm of the body politic and why this causes the maternal body to be seen as incoherent with the political sphere. For that reason, I have chosen to employ a feminist postmodernist epistemological framework with a poststructuralist theoretical context that engages itself with sexual difference theory and that focusses strongly on notions such as 'space', 'bodies', 'materiality', and 'power'.

The first part of the chapter focusses on the epistemology. Here I elaborate on the postmodernist tradition which informs my epistemology with the use of insights as put forth by Michel Foucault. In the second part of the chapter, I set forth my theoretical framework in depth by taking up the central arguments in the debate and analyzing the core concepts. This part is divided into three sections—following the outline as put forth in the introduction. First, a solid theoretical understanding of 'the maternal body' is created. I argue that the sexual difference theory, as put forth by Irigaray (1985), explains why the woman is being reduced to the materiality of her body through her maternity and how the maternal body is therefore seen as irrational—an embodiment of all that the masculine body is not. In the second section, I engage with 'the political body'. I argue that the imagined political body is actually a masculine body by looking at the historical phallogentric construction of the political sphere. At last, I bring both understandings of the maternal body and the masculine political body in 'a conversation' with each other to establish a basis upon which we can understand their contradictory relationship. I argue that the political body was constructed to exclude the maternal body from the beginning and that this demarcation is accompanied by a division between the public and the private sphere, causing the maternal body to be deemed as incoherent with the political body. A solid basis is then created to bring into interaction with the archive to see what lies at the core of the ontological anxiety of the MPs that caused them to see the maternal and the political body as incoherent entities.

## **Feminist Postmodernist Epistemologies**

To analyze how the maternal body is imagined and how somatic processes of in- and exclusion are entangled with the creation of the masculine political sphere, an epistemology is needed that looks at bodies and space as constructed entities instead of unmarked and neutral concepts. A postmodernist lens is best suited for this inquiry because a postmodernist framework focusses on the relationship between the body, power, and knowledge and its construction through discursive practices. A postmodernist perspective does not look at the world as a given entity from which knowledge can be extracted, it looks at the world as a constructed truth. It, therefore, emphasizes the constructiveness of the body and the spaces it is perceived in, which paves the way for an analysis that looks at why certain bodies are perceived as not belonging in certain spaces; such as the maternal body.

A postmodernist perspective offers then a much-needed epistemological shift in the feminist academic inquiry on the body, by focusing on its constructiveness. Throughout the decades the body as always been a site of debate. Some feminists have theorized the body has something a woman has to ‘overcome’ in order to free herself from her reproductive constraints that keep her hooked in patriarchal society. The work of Simone de Beauvoir is a good example of such an epistemology. Other scholars have argued for a reclaiming of the body and call that true feminism. What both views have in common is that they see a clear division between nature and culture, between sex and gender. These entities, which are cast in binary divisions, have then an existence separate from each other, thereby placing the body outside of culture and seeing it only as a product of nature. A postmodernist perspective offers an alternative. It does not encounter the body as a tabula rasa, but as a construction itself. It does not ask the question ‘How is the body taken up in culture?’, but “How does culture construct the body ...” (Gatens 1996, 52). And it is only with such an epistemology that we can come to an understanding of how the maternal body is created in the historical debates and how it contradicts the dominant somatic political norm. After all, if a body is nothing more than a blank slate, how can it misfit spaces and be identified as not belonging?

Another reason for employing a postmodernist framework is because it not only sees the body as a construction, but as a discursive construction. Michel Foucault, one of the most influential theorists on postmodernism, argued that knowledge “has the power to *make itself true*” through discursive practices (1977, 27). So not only is the ‘truth’ a construction, it gains its credibility from the construction process itself. Discourses then function as the sites where ‘reality’ is constituted. They do not reflect ‘truth’, but rather create them. In this line, the body can be understood as a *discursive construction* instead of an unmarked and neutral concept.

This is not to say that the body only exists in our imagination. The body does have a material reality, but I argue that our understanding of it—the way we apprehend it—is mediated by discursive practices. A postmodernist framework, therefore, offers a perspective “in which the very processes by which bodies are made become apparent” (Price and Shildrick 1999, 219). Such a perspective then functions as a guiding lens to see how the maternal body is constructed in the historical debates, by focusing on the discursive practices and by encountering the body as a “map of power and identity” (Rose 1999). The discourse analysis that follows from this will be further theorized in the methodology chapter.

Foucault also argued that discursive practices are also always entangled with power, another reason why I chose to employ a postmodernist perspective. He theorized that all knowledge ‘operates as a historically situated social practice’; meaning that knowledge is contextual and always intrinsically linked with power (Foucault 1980, 145). This is because knowledge never operates alone but is “always being applied to the regulation of social conduct” (Hall 2013, 29). It therefore not only sees the body and space as discursive constructions, but as constructions made to regulate society in the benefit of certain power systems. Such a perspective is then extremely helpful when trying to grasp processes of in-and exclusion—which are always fueled by power relationships—for example why some bodies are deemed as not ‘belonging’, as is the focus of this thesis. The chosen epistemology then offers a framework that allows for an understanding of the body and space as a discursive practices and it creates an understanding of how the body—the maternal and the political—can be part of processes of in-and exclusion.

### **The Maternal Body**

In this section, I explain my understanding of the notion of the maternal body that I use in the discourse analysis to analyze how the maternal body is created in the historical debates. I do this using the work of Luce Irigaray on sexual difference theory. She employs a theoretical point of view that focusses on women’s materiality and that understands bodies as discursive constructions. As outlined above, this is important to gain an understanding of how bodies can be rejected in and by spaces because they are incoherent with a dominant somatic (political) body. I argue that the maternal body functions as the embodiment of women’s materiality and that it, therefore, represents all that the masculine body discards. The image of the maternal body can therefore be conceptualized as a site where rationality does not exist.

*She is neither one nor two.* Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no "proper" name. And her sexual organ, which is not *one* organ, is counted as *none*. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ ... the penis.

(Irigaray 1985, 26)

Luce Irigaray her work revolves around trying to understand how 'femininity' is constructed and shaped. As other feminists who employ a poststructuralist framework (e.g. Cixous 1976; Gatens 1996; Grosz 1994), she does this by drawing on psycho-analytic theory. She has shown that the binary femininity/masculinity does not consist of two separate terms, but that it is only the semblance of a dualism. The binary actually employs a single standard, the masculine, where the devalued term of the equation, the feminine, is measured against: "The 'feminine' is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex" (Irigaray 1985, 69). So, within this binary structure, there is no woman, "only the formula of woman that would complement, supplement, and privilege masculinity" (Grosz 2001, 93). She is cast into the realms of invisibility by the domination of the masculine notion in the binary. Irigaray's premise then deconstructs the idea of sexual difference, which entails that there are two separate sexes. Instead, she offers a reading of the binary femininity/masculinity that creates the insight that the woman is only ever defined in terms of what she is not: a masculine body. She only exists for the creation of the male sex—causing her to have no 'proper' name of her own.

The creation of woman as man's fictitious counterpart causes women to be reduced to their materiality. This is because the male body is defined as the ideal human type and the ideal type embodies in the western culture the absence of a body. The post-Cartesian scheme is to blame for this. It idealized the rejection of the body because it saw the body as "an obstacle of pure rational thought" (Price and Shildrick 1999, 2) or "a neutral container of rationality" (Rose 1999, 361). This caused the masculine norm to embark on a transcending journey far away from the body into the notions of rationality, logic, culture, and science. The realm of 'having a body and being influenced by it' was thereby discarded to the lesser half of the binary, the woman. Causing her to become the 'living representation of all which men have expelled from their own self-representations to construct themselves beyond the merely material' (Grosz 1994, 26). In other words, she is reduced to her material body. A place where rationality is expelled from.

That women are seen as having a body that influences them—and that casts them out of all spheres that require rationality—is no coincidence. It is because of her specific body, which



is a *maternal body*. A body that is imagined as unpredictable, disruptive and that needs to be regulated, in contrast to the masculine body. This assumed unpredictability of the woman's body is derived from the female reproductive processes. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick describe this image of the maternal body and its connotations vividly in their reader *Feminist Theory and The Body* (1999). They argue that “[t]he very fact that women are able in general to menstruate, to develop another body unseen within their own, to give birth, and to lactate is enough to suggest a potentially dangerous volatility that marks the female body as out of control, beyond, and set against, the force of reason” (Price and Shildrick 1999, 3). The maternal body is therefore prohibited to transcend into the realms of rationality and reason; it is imagined as an impossible journey because the natural biological processes of her body restrain her for such an undertaking. That is to say, that female sexuality is used as grounds “for control and exclusion”, because of their ‘mythic instability and emotionality’ (Acker 1990, 152). This leads to the conclusion that the woman is not only reduced to the materiality of her body by finding herself on the wrong side of the binary, but she is also conceptualized as the antithesis of all that the masculine body embodies, *through* her maternal body.

### **The Political Body**

To see how this maternal body is made incoherent with the political body in the debates on women's suffrage, an understanding of that political body must first be created. As previously mentioned, the phallogocentric creation of the political sphere informs the ideal somatic norm of the political body, making it a *masculine* body. It is therefore of importance to precisely understand how this happens, so a profound understanding of the image of the masculine political body can be created. I argue that there is a built-in connection between the masculine body and the political sphere that creates an ideal political body that is imagined as disembodied and rational.

Feminist philosopher Moira Gatens (1996) argues in her book *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* that the political sphere is constituted by using the ‘human body’ as its metaphor. She uses a passage from the seventeenth century written by Thomas Hobbes to show how in political theory different parts of the body are being related to different components of the political realm. Many feminist political theorists, including Gatens herself, have problematized this image that the political sphere is constructed after a unified human body (Gatens 1996; Okin 1992; Ortner 1972). This is because the post-Cartesian scheme did not only embark the ideal human type on a journey of disembodiment in the pursuit of

rationality, it also simultaneously constructed the political sphere to embrace this mind/body split—thereby making the political sphere ‘a place of rationality, reason, logic, and masculinity, since only men could be fully rational individuals’ (Rose 1999, 363). For this reason, Gatens argues that the political sphere was only created to “enhance and intensify the powers and capacities of specifically male bodies” (1999, 230). The political sphere is then not fashioned after a coherent human body, but after a masculine body and the fantasy of all that it embodies—making the political body actually a *masculine* body. This masculine somatic norm of the political body is, however, undeclared because the man’s body passes as unmarked and unnoticed due to his imagined transcending processes that leave him with an invisible body. Therefore, the political sphere is a phallogocentric construction, because this masculine body passes as a ‘human body’ that can represent both sexes. So, although the political sphere is constructed after one ‘human body’, the political body is perceived as disembodied.

Moreover, it is important to note that the ideal political body is not only portrayed as masculine but also as ‘white’ (Mills 1997). So not only does the political sphere uphold a gender-blind perspective, it also erases ‘race’. This is because, as previously argued, the ideal human is imagined as not influenced by their body and bodies of color ‘are considered to be marked and highly visible’—in contrast to the white body, that signifies an ‘absence of color’ (Ahmed 2007; Dyer 1997; Puwar 2004;). Therefore, the privilege of bodily invisibility is not only denied to the maternal body due to its feminine reproductive aspects, but also to those who do not match the somatic ideal color of whiteness. The bodily invisibility is only granted to particular bodies who are seen as not being influenced by their sexual- or racial difference; e.g. white men.

Having said this, I want to embark further on the statement that the ideal masculine human type was simultaneously created with the political sphere. It is important to understand this argument properly, because it highlights an important aspect of how I conceptualize the political body. What I mean to say, is that I see a built-in connection between the masculine body and the political space. Here I follow the insight on the body/space relation as put forth by Puwar who states that “[b]odies do not simply move through spaces but constitute and are constituted by them” (2004, 32). The creation of the image of the male sex is therefore intertwined with the creation of the political body. They are not two independent analytical structures; they are interwoven—an intersectional construction. Meaning that when the ideal masculine type embarked on the transcending journey away from the body into the realms of rationality and reason, the political sphere left on the same day in the same boat. Together, they then co-created a political body ideally suited for the male body only.

## **A Conversation**

In this section, I bring the created conceptualization of the maternal and the political body in conversation with each other to establish a basis upon which we can understand their contradictory relationship. This understanding is necessary in order to understand how the maternal body was made incoherent with the political body by the MPs in the debates. I argue that the political body was constructed to exclude the maternal body from the beginning and that this demarcation is accompanied by a division between the public and the private sphere, causing the maternal body to be deemed as incoherent with the political body.

## Somatic Exclusion

I have conceptualized the maternal body as the antithesis of all that is granted to the masculine body; that is rationality, reason, logic, etc. The assumption is that her natural biological processes restrain her from such notions. Regarding the political body, I have argued that there is a built-in connection between the masculine body and the political sphere—together creating a political body driven by the same notions that the maternal body has an imagined incoherency with. What follows from this, is that the exclusion of the maternal body through its reproductive organs was then historically constructed as a feature of the political subject from the very beginning. The political sphere is, in the words of Carol Pateman, “constructed through the exclusion of women and all that we symbolize” (1995, 52). This is because the maternal body is defined as irrational, emotional, unstable, and unable to transcend itself; everything the masculine political body seeks to exclude from its own identity. Therefore, the image of the maternal body occupies a special place in the heart of the political subject—it forms the antithesis upon which the political body can construct its own identity to enhance the imagined capacities of men. In other words, the political body was constructed to exclude the maternal body from the beginning. Therefore, I understand the political body as a discursive construction in the way that Foucault (1980) theorized them and that I elaborated on at the beginning of this chapter. This is because the inbuilt aversion against the maternal body makes the political body a site where processes of in-an exclusion are actively present. It deliberately rejects the maternal body for its own enlightenment practices.

It is for this reason that Moira Gatens (1996) describes the political body as a ‘dream of men’ because it is only men that gain from this image. Women, on the other hand, would even indulge in ‘self-cannibalism’ when trying to join this fantasy, she argues. It is worth exploring this statement because it specifies how the political body—with at its core the maternal body upon which it can discard everything it does not want to represent—is created and operates.

Gatens argues that the woman would indulge in ‘self-cannibalism’ because (keeping in mind Irigaray’s conceptualization of the femininity/masculinity binary) there is only one body instead of two, the feminine is only defined in terms of what the masculine is not. So, if the maternal body takes up the role of the politician, it can only do that by indulging itself in masculine notions such as rationalism, thereby removing oneself even more away from an identity, a voice of its own. Trying to include women in a masculine space is therefore counterproductive: “The most this will achieve is that we would succeed in throwing off the persona of Echo, who speaks but is not heard, only to join Narcissus at the pool” (Gatens 1996, 27). In other words, the maternal body can only be included in the political realm by taking up the required qualities of that space, and by doing so, she would diminish herself. So not only is the political body a masculine body that is imagined incoherent with the maternal body; it also robs the maternal body of the possibility to create an identity of its own—keeping the sex-indifferent binary intact.

#### Public/Private Sphere

The demarcation between the political body and maternal body is accompanied by a division between the public and the private sphere and its designated social roles. This is because the assumed incoherency between the political body and the maternal body has caused ‘a restriction on the spaces that women can occupy’ (Price and Shildrick 1999, 338). The woman’s body is imagined as lacking the capacities needed to practice politics, so she is given a place of her own: the private sphere. Of course, this is not *literally* a place of her own, because the woman’s attributed social role in the private sphere has only meaning in relation to men—she is either imagined as a wife, a mother or a daughter. Carole Pateman argues that the designation of the woman into the domestic sphere is not only due to her lack of qualities. She argues that it is also because ‘she poses a threat to the political space and she must, therefore, be excluded from it’ (1995, 4). After all, the woman is imagined to connote all that the political subject seeks to exclude: emotion, nature, unpredictability, and most of all, having a body. Henceforth there is a fear that the woman’s body is capable of contaminating the political sphere—the holy place of reason, truth, and objectivity. Pateman describes this fear then as the ‘disorder of women’.

As noted in the section ‘The Maternal Body’, this exclusion of the woman’s body from all that is rational happened on the grounds of her ‘biological nature’. She is deemed incapable of making the transition “from the mythical ‘state of nature’” to the body politic due to her specific female reproductive organs (Gatens 1996, 51). Therefore, she is cast into to private sphere where she can stay in the role of the masculine antithesis to make the functioning of the

public sphere, the political space, possible. After all, without some(body) to occupy the private sphere, there would be no public sphere.<sup>6</sup> Gillian Rose has historicized this somatic process of exclusion based on the female reproductive organs in her article “Women and Everyday Spaces”. Here she mentions that the dominant medical discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century specifically argued that “women’s spontaneous ovulation meant that they were dominated by their reproductive system” (Rose 1999, 360). What is to say that women were imagined as being pure ‘natural creatures forced to remain in the private domestic sphere by their natural maternal instinct’ (Rose 1999, 360). And the private sphere, on its turn, was represented as the ideal space for the women to use their maternal instincts. It is after all the place where the reproductive organs can be most effective, there they can produce and raise a family.

When speaking about women and their designated place in the private sphere, it is important to keep in mind that throughout history not *all* women were constantly excluded from the public sphere. Gender is indeed an important marker through which we can conceptualize the demarcations of the public/private sphere, but it is not the only one. From a class perspective, for example, one can see that some women indeed entered the public realm, but in a non-privileged position such as low-class workers. Anne McClintock (1995) adds another important insight to this when stating that it was namely women of color that entered the public realm and that this public realm was most of the time the private space of high-class women. It is therefore of importance to keep in mind that my analysis of the private and the political sphere is by no means a complete story—it only paints an essentializing picture in order to understand the bigger theoretical picture.

<sup>6</sup> See Okin (1998) for an elaborate discussion on the private/public distinction. She problematizes the assumption, often made by political theorists, that the private and the public sphere are distinct categories that can be discussed in isolation from each other.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have created a solid theoretical understanding of the maternal and the political body and I conceptualized their assumed incoherence. The maternal body functions as man's fictitious counterpart. She, therefore, represents all that the masculine body is not, e.g. having a reasonable mind. This image is created through a particular understanding of her reproductive organs that causes her to be encountered as unable to transcend her body. The maternal body is therefore seen as unsuited to function in the political sphere—a space constructed on phallogentric notions that imagines a political body with a masculine somatic norm. Henceforth that the woman is seen as an unwelcome intrusion, she embodies everything that the political body tries to discard from its own representation. We can then understand this political body as a discursive construction that has eliminated the maternal body from the beginning. This demarcation was also accompanied by a clear division of the public and the private sphere. The latter functions as the ideal place to keep the maternal body in check. There she has 'a place of her own' where she can fulfill her true natural calling in a social role beneficial to men: a wife, a mother, a daughter.

The necessary perspective is then created of the maternal body and its contradictory relationship with the political body. These conceptualizations will be used as a lens to look through in the discourse analysis to analyze the arguments made by the MPs to answer the question how they constructed the maternal body and why they thought it did not belong in the political sphere. In the next chapter, I explain my methodology and elaborate on how I intend to employ these created understandings in the discourse analysis.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

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In this chapter, I elaborate on my use and understanding of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the method I have selected to analyze the archive with. First, I position myself in relation to the discourse analysis and the archive. I explain how I have chosen to translate the Dutch parliamentary documents into English. Then I elaborate on the archive itself, the material it provides, and what it leaves out. In the third section of the chapter, I discuss my use of CDA through the insights of Michel Foucault (1977) and Stuart Hall (2013) and argue how this method contributes to answering the research question. I also elaborate on how I use the created understanding of the maternal body and its assumed incoherence with the political body in the CDA, to analyze the arguments made by the MPs.

### Positionality

The reading of the archives will be done from my positionality as a young female politician, but also from my place in society as a white Dutch woman who is in the privileged position of being part of a university that allows her to conduct feminist research. Therefore, I do not promise that my analysis of the archive will be a universal one. It is only one reading done from a certain positionality. Other standpoints can produce different meanings and outcomes. In my view, this does not limit the credibility of the research conducted. On the contrary, it can provide the debate with new insights that can contribute to an altogether better understanding of the constructiveness of the maternal body and the places it is deemed (not) belonging.

Considering my positionality, it is especially of importance to stress that my analysis will not be done solely from a feminist researcher perspective, but also of a politician. I have participated in debates myself at a local level and use the political language in my daily vocabulary. On the one hand, this positionality gives me a familiarity with the words used in the historical debates and the various tools that a politician can use. It allows for an easier analysis because I am already familiar with the space and the (often implicit) corresponding rules that the politicians are obliged to. On the other hand, this attentiveness to some aspects can cause me to be inattentive to others. During the analysis, I have therefore tried to be in constant awareness of my positionality and the possible oversight it might create.

Another part of my positionality that is important to highlight regards the politics of translation. My Dutch national and cultural background has influenced my capability to read and translate the historical parliamentary documents. The documents are written in ‘Nieuwsnederlands’, an older version of the Dutch language that was very much prescriptive.

There was still a large gap between the spoken and the written language, meaning that the way a word was pronounced was different from the way it was written down. As a Dutch native speaker, I am in a position to understand the meaning of the words, although most of them are written differently. A privilege that has helped me in a great way while conducting the analysis. Because of the older version of the Dutch language that is upheld in the documents, the translations will be ‘target language-oriented’. This means that I do not translate in an ‘idiolect’ way—staying as close to the original language as possible—but instead focus on the meaning of the word or the passage and search for an English equivalent that best matches this meaning.

### **The Archive**

The entire corpus of the archive consists of over two million pages. I have chosen to focus on the debates that happened between 1887 and 1916. Specifically, the debates that occurred at the beginning and at the ending of this timeframe. It was then that the MPs in the House of Representatives spoke about women’s suitability to fit into the Dutch political body during the discussion whether or not they should change the constitution to include women in the political sphere. It, therefore, offers a great opportunity to explore their notion of the maternal body to find out what lay at the heart of their assumed incoherency between the women’s body and the political body.

In order to gather the passages where the MPs spoke about women and their suitability for the political space in the selected timeframe, I first ‘scanned’ through various transcripts to see which words were used. This was important because in the Dutch language there are different words to describe ‘suffrage’ and ‘woman’. I decided to use the word ‘vrouw’ (woman) and the word ‘kiesrecht’ (suffrage) in the search engine.<sup>7</sup> With these selected words, I then conducted a search between 1885 and 1917 to make sure I covered the beginning and the ending of the nearly thirty years ongoing debate about whether or not the constitution should include the word ‘male’ in the section on suffrage. This search gave 345 hits. I then read all the documents to see where the two words would ‘cross’ and selected these passages.<sup>8</sup> This resulted in a collection of suitable passages where the MPs spoke about women’s possible in-exclusion to conduct the CDA on.

<sup>7</sup> In the Dutch language, the word for ‘woman’ is ‘vrouw’ and the word for ‘women’ is ‘vrouwen’. By searching on the singular form, the engine would then also filter the plural; a welcome convenience

<sup>8</sup> Meaning that sometimes they talked only about male suffrage and mentioned the word ‘woman’ in an unrelated passage.



My engagement with the archive has two shortcomings. First, the archive only contains *words* that are unaccompanied by sound and image. It is therefore difficult to ‘grasp’ the moment the words were spoken in. Although I make use of historical information to contextualize the debates, the scope of this thesis does not allow for a fully conducted media analysis to determine the sphere of the debates. What I do know, however, is that the debating style of Dutch politicians at that time was very polite. No heavy body gestures, no sounds from the benches, and no personal comments. They believed that the parliamentary debate should be purely built on rational argumentation—which is no surprise when one remembers that the masculine political body is a big believer of such notions.<sup>9</sup> These insights were then helpful to keep in mind throughout the analysis to get the best contextualization possible.

The second shortcoming is that the debates were solely executed by men. The analysis of the transcripts then revolves primarily around their voices and opinions. This does not mean that there were no other voices when the discussion on women’s suffrage was happening. On the contrary, many women of that time fought for the inclusion of their bodies into the political sphere.<sup>10</sup> I will make sure to include their voices too. Therefore, I reference to their contributions in the footnotes and state explicitly in the contextualization of the debates when their actions or voices were of influence. Specifically, I elaborate on a protest organized in 1916 by the ‘Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht’ (VvVK).<sup>11</sup>

### **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

In the chapter on my epistemological and theoretical framework, I already touched upon my understanding of discourses as productive sites where ‘reality’ is constituted and the necessity to examine them, because it is there where ‘the processes by which the maternal body is constructed become apparent’ (Foucault 1977; Price and Shildrick 1999). This is because a discourse is ‘a group of statements which provide a language for talking about and constructing a topic in a particular way’ (Foucault 2004; Hall 2013). In the words of Stuart Hall, “discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (2013, 29). The transcripts of the parliamentary debates are therefore extremely suited to investigate how the maternal body was constructed in the historical debates, because it creates the possibility to critically look at the language that was used in order to see why they perceived the maternal body as the antithesis

<sup>9</sup> See Hoetink and Tanja (2008) for a critical investigation of the Dutch debating culture. They focus specifically on the House of Representatives and the implicit/explicit code of conduct from 1800 onwards.

<sup>10</sup> See Bleijenbergh and Bussemaker (2012) for a historical overview of the women’s rights movements in the Netherlands and their efforts.

<sup>11</sup> “Association for Women’s Suffrage” (my translation).

of the political body. Elisabeth Grosz her metaphor of texts as ‘thieves in the night’ helps to explain this. She states that a text can be thought of as a kind of thief in the night:

Furtive, clandestine, and always complex, it steals ideas from all around, from its own milieu and history, and better still from its outside, and disseminates them elsewhere. ... A text is not simply a tool or an instrument ... Rather, it is explosive, dangerous, volatile. Like concepts, texts are the products of the intermingling of old and new, a complexity of internal coherences or consistencies and external referents, of in-tension and extension, of thresholds and becomings. Texts, like concepts, do things, make things, perform connections, bring about new alignments.

(Grosz 2001, 56/57)

Grosz’s explanation of texts then underlines the importance of seeing them as sites where imagines are actively produced and not merely reflected. The analysis of the language used in the debates can therefore really grasp how a specific image of the maternal body is created.

I analyze the passages of the transcripts with the use of CDA as put forth by Stuart Hall (2013) because it allows me to not only analyze the text based on its linguistic aspects, but it helps to connect the analysis to relevant power relations and ideologies. This is of great importance because as emphasized earlier, knowledge produced in the discourse ‘never operates alone but is always historically situated and applied to regulate social conduct’ (Foucault 1980; Hall 2013). In my analysis, I therefore bring the language used in the debates by the MPs in relation to the somatic processes of in-and exclusion that I have put forth in the theoretical framework. This then not only allows me to look at the constructiveness of the image of the maternal body, but also helps to gain an understanding of how it is seen as incoherent with the Dutch somatic norm of the body politic.

Hall (2013) composed a list of reflective questions that can help to guide the CDA in a fruitful direction. For example, one of the directions proposed is that one looks at statements made about a phenomenon that generate ‘knowledge’ about it (Hall 2013, 30). I used this list as inspiration to compose my own ‘analysis guide’ to help create a focus in the passages that I selected from the archive. I looked for phrases where a representation of women is given. Specifically, I focused on phrases that describe a mother or a wife—the embodiments of the maternal body. What do they say about her? What kind of characteristics are described to her? What kind of social roles is she allowed to take on? I then identified three major themes in the passages: 1) Women’s assumed biological deficiencies; 2) Women’s ‘inability’ to transcend their bodies; 3) Women’s assigned natural place in society.

These identified themes form the framework upon which I conduct the CDA. In the analysis, I therefore examine with the use of the themes—divided into different paragraphs—how the image of the maternal body is constructed in the debates and why it was argued that she did not belong in the political sphere. The created conceptualization of the maternal body and the theoretical understanding of its contradictory relationship with the masculine somatic norm of the political body, established in the second chapter, will function as a background to analyze the arguments made by the MPs upon. The insights of the paragraphs combined then create a full understanding of how the maternal body is constructed in the debates and how this construction is perceived as the antithesis of the dominant somatic norm of the political body. An answer to the research question can then be formulated.

## Chapter 3: Analysis

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In this chapter, I represent my findings of the CDA that I conducted on the passages selected from the Dutch historical parliamentary debates on women's suffrage. Before diving into the analysis section, I first introduce the debates by contextualizing them. The analysis section itself is divided into three parts, following the identified themes as put forth in the methodology chapter: 'Her Biological Deficiencies', 'Her Un-Transcendancy', 'Her Natural Place'. The created theoretical background will function here as a background to analyze the arguments upon. The insights of the paragraphs combined then establish a solid ground where the answer to the research question can be formulated upon.

### Parliamentary Debates 1887-1916

In the Dutch Constitution of 1848, there was no specific gender designation in the suffrage article.<sup>12</sup> In that time, it was so self-evident that women did not have suffrage, that they did not bother to mention it. Therefore, according to the letter of the law, women were not excluded from participating in political life. Aletta Jacobs, who would become the figurehead of the fight for women's suffrage in the Netherlands, therefore requested to be on the electoral roll.<sup>13</sup> Her request was denied. They argued that although it was not stated in the letter of the law, it was indeed undesirable in the 'spirit of the law' (Algemeen Handelsblad 1883). It was then that the government decided they had to change the constitution in order to prevent more women from coming to knock on 'their' door. The first debate on the insertion of the word 'male' into the suffrage section took place in 1887. The decision was made to permanently exclude women. This was then the first time the MPs gave their opinion on the idea of including women into the political realm. The debate flared up again in 1892 and 1896 when a bill had to be passed in order to change the Electoral Law in accordance with the revised Constitution. They decided to follow to Constitution and also make the same alterations there. Only a new Constitutional amendment could then create a new possibility for women to gain suffrage.

In 1916, this opportunity arose when the Constitution was revised again. This was then the second moment the MPs spoke extensively about women and their suitability to be included in the political space. The discussion took place from that September till November. During the

<sup>12</sup> This article consists of *passive* suffrage (right to be elected) and *active* suffrage (right to vote). Meaning that when I say *suffrage*, I refer to them both.

<sup>13</sup> See Jacobs and Oppenheim (1978) for an autobiographical account of Aletta Jacobs her life and contributions to the women's rights movements.

debates, the VvVK decided to hold a silent protest at the ‘Binnenhof’, the place where the debates took place (the image on the front page is part of a caricature drawing made of this protest in 1916). They literally placed themselves on the doorstep of the political space they were excluded from, to confront the men inside of the masculinity of the political body (and its fragility). During the debates, the MPs also addressed the women standing outside and they included them in their arguments. I embark on this further in the analysis section. Eventually, they decided to grant women only passive suffrage by removing the word ‘male’ from that section in the Constitution. Active suffrage was not granted until 1919, thereby establishing equal suffrage for men and women.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Maternal Body as Battleground**

The MPs used the maternal body as a battleground to formulate their arguments upon whether or not they deemed women fit enough to become part of the political sphere. In the first section, I analyze passages from the transcripts that argue that this women’s unfitness was due to their ‘biological deficiencies’. In the second section, I engage with the passages that use women’s assumed inability to transcend their bodies as reasons to exclude her from the political space. In the last section, I analyze the passages that argue that women’s natural place was in the private sphere.

#### Her Biological Deficiencies

The argument that the woman did not belong in the political sphere due to her alleged underdevelopment was one of the main arguments made in the debates of 1916. Brummelkamp MP from the Anti Revolutionary Party (ARP)<sup>15</sup> argued, for example, the following:

Woman is different from man, physically, intellectually, and morally. This inequality is grounded in nature; is wanted by nature; she cannot be denied, and it is the rape of nature, the defeminization of a woman, when one tries it.<sup>ii</sup>

(Handelingen II 1916/17, October 31, 1916, 314)

<sup>14</sup> Active suffrage was only granted to white Dutch women. It was not until decades later that women in the Dutch colonies also gained the right to vote. The women in the Dutch East Indies gained the right to vote in 1945. The women in The Dutch Antilles and in Suriname in 1948 (Nationaal Archief, n.d.). See the work of Locher-Scholten (2001) for a detailed account on women’s suffrage in the colonial context.

<sup>15</sup> “Anti Revolutionaire Partij” (my translation)

In this passage, the woman is represented as physically, intellectually, and morally unequal to the man. It is she who is ‘different’, and therefore less than men. The masculine is then portrayed as the standard where the feminine is measured against, causing her to be described in terms of her deficiencies (Grosz 1994). She is therefore given no ‘proper’ name of her own (Irigaray 1985). The passage also emphasizes that this difference is a biological given because it would be ‘rape of nature’ if one wished it differently. Brummelkamp MP elaborates on these biological differences as follows:

The man with his born muscle and mental powers, the rough, hard, sustained labor, the submission of the earth. The woman, with her predominant state of mind, her softness, sensitivity, helpfulness, and mercy, caring for the perdition in the family, for the child, for the education in the tender youth, for the suffering humanity. iii

(Handelingen II 1916/17, October 31, 1916, 314)

Besides again contextualizing the woman in relation to man, here he also attributes specific qualities to a woman’s body, which he understands as a natural given. What stands out is that he deduces these qualities from her maternity by referring to the concept of motherhood. He describes her as ‘soft’, ‘sensitive’, and ‘caring’, but overall with a mind filled with these characteristics that dominate her whole being: ‘her *predominant* state of mind’. In other words, she is reduced to her body through her materiality and therefore seen as unable to transcend her biological self. This is in sharp contrast with the man and ‘his born mental powers’, which can be interpreted in notions such as rationality and logic due to the influence of the Cartesian mind/body split on the ideal western masculine body (Price and Shildrick 1999). He is therefore represented as able to transcend his body, as opposed to the maternal body that is seen as fragile, unstable, and emotional. She can therefore not transcend into these realms of rationality, because her maternal body is imagined too heavy a burden.

In the second chapter, I argued that the maternal body is granted these characteristics due to her reproductive organs (Price and Shildrick 1999). The focus on these reproductive organs that leads her into this place of irrationality and inferiority becomes clear in an argument given by Van Nispen tot Sevenaer MP from the Roman Catholics (RK).<sup>16</sup> He explains that a woman “has a much greater influence on progeny than men; if she had as many intellectual gifts as the man, then there would be no question of equivalence ...” (Handelingen II 1916/17, November 9, 1916, 471).<sup>iv</sup> In other words, he argues that because women are able to grow,

<sup>16</sup> “Rooms Katholiek” (my translation)

carry, and bear children, nature has decided to give her a dose of irrationality and a clouded mind to maintain the balance. Otherwise, she would become man's superior and that is not how nature intended it. The antithesis between the rational masculine body and the maternal body is then once again brought to the fore in the debate.

As a result of this representation of the woman as incapable, emotional, and unable to be rational, the MPs that were against women's suffrage argued that it was therefore not a good idea to include her in the political sphere. Beumer MP from the ARP argued that if a woman was granted suffrage, she would become "unfaithful to her instincts and unnatural tendencies would prevail" (Handelingen II 1916/17, October 25, 1916, 249).<sup>v</sup> That is to say, if she were to become politically active, the MPs were scared that she would no longer fulfill the duties that they described to her maternal body: having children and looking after the family—her by nature granted fate. Moreover, Beumer's fellow party member Scheurer MP also referred to the protest outside to explain why it would not be desirable. He stated that it would be a way of degenerating women: "We only have to look around for this, the way in which women's suffrage demonstrates itself on the street" (Handelingen II 1916/17, September 28, 1916, 28).<sup>vi</sup> Hereby he meant that the women outside the building were not at home taking care of the children; already neglecting their maternal duties. The caricature on the front page was also drawn with this idea in mind. A young girl is depicted tugging her mother's arm, asking for attention. In the full image, a text can be found at the bottom that contains a short dialogue between this girl and her mother. She begs her mother to come home because her brother fell down the stairs. The mother replies that she will be there in two hours: "Duty above all else!", she shouts (Kuijens 1916).<sup>17</sup> The women outside were then used by the MPs as living representations of all that could go wrong if she was to gain suffrage.

This fear of women defeminizing themselves by neglecting what their maternal bodies are assumed to do if they were to gain access into the political realm was not the only worry present in the 'rational' minds of the MPs. There was a great fear, also in 1887, that the presence of women would contaminate the political space. Beumer MP argued for example that the 'instinctual insight' of women "would prevent the use of logical inferences"<sup>vii</sup> and Conservative liberal Beaufort MP stated that "undeveloped persons will be the easiest to get carried away and indulge in all kinds of promises of people"<sup>viii</sup> (Handelingen II 1886/87, March 16, 1887, 1169; Handelingen II 1916/17, October 25, 1916, 249). This fear can be understood as what

<sup>17</sup> "Plicht vóór alles!" (my translation)

Carole Pateman (1995) conceptualized as the ‘disorder of women’ and that I elaborated on in the theoretical framework. Because the political sphere is created after the fantasy of all that the masculine body represents—the spitting image of the Cartesian mind/body split—it is imagined as a place of rationality and reason (Rose 1999). The woman’s body, however, then represents everything the political space seeks to exclude: emotion, softness, irrationality—she will get herself ‘carried away’. This then causes the fear that if she was to be included, she could contaminate this place of ‘logical inferences’. She is, after all, imagined as the evil twin of the dominant somatic norm of the masculine political body. Its construction is built upon this assumed incoherence, henceforth her presence is encountered as a threat.

### Her Un-Transcendancy

As I have argued in the theoretical framework, the masculine somatic norm of the political body is not only imagined as rational, but also as disembodied. Its masculinity is undeclared because the man’s body can pass as unmarked. His body is an invisible body, but it is portrayed as able to represent all of humanity. This is done at the expense of women who are materialized through their maternity. She is imagined as *only* her body, while men argue to be bodiless. This assumed incapability of the woman to transcend her body was used as an argument to not grant her suffrage. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye MP from the ARP argued for example that “taking into account the normal natural aptitude of the woman—her interests in public life are generally better defended on her behalf than by the woman herself” (Kamerstuk II 1893/94, 30, nr. 1, August 28, 1893, 2).<sup>ix</sup> This shows that her ‘natural aptitude’, her maternity, was imagined as such a restriction that she was seen as not capable to represent herself.

And why was it even necessary? The MPs wondered. They argued that the men themselves were capable enough to represent both sexes because every woman has a connection with a man: “The women will find representatives and advocates in the Chamber through a husband, or father, or others blood relative ...” (Kamerstuk II 1893/94, 30, nr. 1, August 28, 1893, 2).<sup>x</sup> The MPs then saw no restriction in their own materiality or their assumed ability to represent every(body). On the contrary, they argued that even if the woman had some interesting points to bring into the political sphere, the men were already aware of it. In the words of Savornin Lohman MP from the Christian Historical Union (CHU)<sup>18</sup>: “[T]he things that women could communicate to us, we all already know, because most of us are married and so we know the interests of women” (Handelingen II 1916/17, November 10, 1916, 557).<sup>xi</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> “Christelijke-Historische Uni” (my translation)



masculine somatic norm of the political body remained therefore unproblematized in the debates.

So far, I have only used passages from opponents of women's suffrage to construct my argument. That is not to say, however, that the advocates of women's suffrage in the debates did not build their arguments on the same harmful premises that I have outlined so far in this analysis. They just gave it a different spin. For them, women's specific maternal characteristics were the very reason they argued for women's suffrage. I have not encountered a single argument in all the transcripts that stated otherwise. Koster MP from the Liberal Democratic Union (VDB)<sup>19</sup> argued, for example, the following:

[T]housands of mothers are increasingly waking up to the realization that precisely for her family, for her children, for the fulfillment of her natural function, they need the right to vote, necessary to be able to bring forward in the Parliament what they feel as right for themselves or for their wronged sisters: maternity insurance, child protection, aid for the weak, and so much more. Oh sure, men feel for that too, political parties work for it, but not with such deep conviction, such an all-encompassing power, precisely because we men are different from women, feel different, see much different.

(Handelingen II 1916/17, October 27, 1916, 286)<sup>xii</sup>

There are a couple of things that stand out from this passage. First of all, the women are again represented through their materiality: 'mothers are waking up'. Then the by nature granted fate of the maternal body, caring for the family, is mentioned to argue that it is precisely for these maternal duties that the woman needs suffrage. Not because she too is a rational being, not because she is no longer held back by her reproductive processes, but precisely because it is these reproductive processes that drive her as a human being: 'an all-encompassing power'. She is also not represented as being able to transcend her maternal body. For if she is to gain suffrage, it is only imagined that she uses this right for matters that concern *maternal* issues: e.g. 'child protection'. Her opinion is then imagined superfluous in all matters pertaining to things other than maternity—she is not to speak for every(body). So, although the proponents of women's suffrage welcome the maternal body (partly) into their political sphere, her maternal body is still seen as incoherent with the dominant somatic norm of the body politic. They simply do not attribute harmful consequences to women engaging in political activities, but that does that mean that the assumed antithesis has dissolved.

<sup>19</sup> "Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond" (my translation)

## Her Natural Place

By virtue of her aptitude and inner predisposition, the inalienable domain of the woman is the house and the household, all the labor and all the duties that await her as wife and mother. This creates her own sphere, a calling of its own, with which she fulfills her destiny.<sup>xiii</sup>

(Handelingen II 1916/17, October 31, 1916, 314)

The demarcation between the maternal and the political body is accompanied by a division between the public and the private sphere. The woman's body is imagined as lacking the relevant qualities to fit into the somatic norm of the political body due to her maternity, therefore she is given a place of her own: the private sphere (Rose 1999). A place where 'she can fulfill her destiny', as argued above in passage by Brummelkamp MP. He describes the private sphere as the ultimate place for the maternal body to reside because it is there where her maternal instinct is most required for 'all the duties that await her as wife and mother'.

To make sure that the woman stayed in her role as the masculine political antithesis, the MPs represented her as the safekeeper of the family. This attributed social role was then used as an argument to deny her suffrage. In both crucial years, 1887 and 1916, the MPs elaborated on what they thought could go wrong if she was to keep away from her 'inalienable domain'. Savornin Lohman MP saw in 1916, for example, a great danger in the 'political bacteria' that could spread into a woman's mind if she was to engage in political activities. He asked the following rhetoric question:

What then remains of the housewife, the mother, whose natural, indestructible, and high duty it is to keep busy with all kinds over everyday things from morning to evening, which cannot be neglected without ruining the family itself?<sup>xiv</sup>

(Handelingen II 1916/17, October 18, 1916, 142)

The premise of his argument is the same as the passage that I included in the introduction. If a woman is made unable to perform her by nature granted maternal duties, through allowing her access into the political space, then the family itself becomes 'ruined'. De Heldt MP, an independent Liberal, added another remarkable thought to the debate when he expressed his worry in 1887 that if women were granted suffrage, the ballot paper could become "a source of displeasure in the family" if the husband and wife were not unanimous (Handelingen II 1886/87, March 16, 1887, 1177/1178).<sup>xv</sup> Overall, the maternal body's 'important' position in the private sphere was then used as confirmation that granting her suffrage was undesirable.

Women's attributed place in the private sphere was not only due to the need to keep her in her place as the antithesis of the masculine political body. The MPs also placed great emphasis on the belief that it was the position God had imagined for her. This argument was made in all the years the debates took place and by almost all parties. Travaglino MP from the RK plead for example that women's suffrage would be an "attack against the elevated position, which belongs to a Christian woman in a Christian household" (Handelingen II 1895-1896, June 19, 1896, 1190).<sup>xvi</sup> And Brummelkamp MP described the place of the woman in the private sphere as "the uncrowned queen of the house conceived by the Creator" (Handelingen II 1916/17, October 31, 1916, 314).<sup>xvii</sup>

The theoretical framework that I have put forth does not account for these arguments. There I argued that the woman is cast into the private sphere due to her incapability to transcend into the realms of rationality, because the created image of the maternal body restrains her from such an undertaking (Gatens 1996; Rose 1999). This argument is built upon an understanding of sexual difference theory as put forth by Irigaray (1985). It does not take into account, however, the historical situatedness of the Dutch creation of the maternal body and its corresponding distinction between the private/public sphere, which was highly influenced by Christianity, as can be deduced from the arguments made. An intersectional perspective can help to reconcile these two different perspectives. I argue that although the maternal body—and its assumed incoherency with the political body—can be conceptualized through sexual difference theory, this does not rule out an analysis through a different 'marker', such as a spiritual or religious perspective. They can complement each other, as I have already shown in the second chapter by including 'race' into the sex difference theory while describing that the ideal political body is also imagined as 'white'. The conclusion can then be made that the Dutch somatic norm of the political body is not only influence by phallogentric notions, but also by a deeply rooted historical situated understanding of Christianity.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have analyzed passages of the parliamentary debates to see how the notion of the maternal body was constructed by the MPs, to find out why they perceived it as the antithesis of the political body. I argued that an image of the woman is created in the debates as man's unequal counterpart through her maternity—she is reduced to her maternal body with its belonging feminine reproductive processes. This causes the maternal body to be conceptualized as fragile, unstable, emotional, and above all incapable of transcending her biological self. This created image of the maternal body is then seen as incoherent with the Dutch somatic norm of the political body for different reasons.

First and foremost, because the political body is constructed to exclude the maternal body from the beginning. It is constructed on phallogentric notions and a historically situated understanding of Christianity that renders the political body as masculine and a social position in society that can only be fulfilled by a man. It is imagined as a place of rationality where the body is invisible. Therefore, the maternal body is seen as a misfit on all possible grounds. After all, her body is seen as an irrational burden that she cannot transcend from. She is even encountered as a threat that can 'contaminate' the political sphere with her ascribed characteristics. Even if she was to be included through the granting of suffrage, her maternal body and its un-transendency would prohibit her to represent every(body), which is a prerequisite to match the somatic norm of the political body. Moreover, the MPs also imagined the private sphere as the ideal place for the maternal body to fulfill her by nature or God granted destiny: producing and maintaining a family. They then used this assigned social role as a reason to deny her excess into the political realm and argued that this 'very important task' was incoherent with her taking on the role of the political body in the public sphere.

Having combined the insights of the paragraphs, an answer to the research question of how the maternal body is historically constructed in the parliamentary debates on women's suffrage and how this construction contradicts the Dutch dominant somatic norm of the political body is then formulated.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

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In this thesis, I have demonstrated how the notion of the maternal body is historically constructed in the parliamentary debates on women's suffrage and how this construction contradicts the Dutch dominant somatic norm of the political body. I have done this by conducting a critical discourse analysis on passages from the House of Representative's archive. I used a postmodernist epistemological framework with a poststructuralist theoretical context to explore how women are materialized through their maternal body and how phallogentric notions influence the creation of the political sphere, making the political body a *masculine* body. I argued that the political body excluded the maternal body from its conception and that this constructed incoherence was accompanied by a demarcation between the public and the private sphere, deeming the maternal body as matter out of place. I then used this established theoretical framework as a lens to look through while analyzing the passages from the debates. It allowed me to bring the findings of the CDA in relation to somatic processes of in-and exclusion to find out what lay at the heart of the ontological anxiety of the MPs that caused them to see the maternal body and the political body as incoherent entities. An answer to the research question was then formulated.

As noted earlier, the transcripts do not contain sound and/or image, so the analysis of the archive only allowed me to look at the language used in the debates. The transcripts are also not accompanied by a contextualization of outside forces that may or may not have influenced the MP's rendering of the maternal body. In 1916, for example, there was a lot more going on in Dutch political life besides the debates on women's suffrage. The confessional parties of that time wanted to persuade the government to also fund Christian education. In exchange for their vote for the suffrage bill, the funding was granted. It would be interesting to investigate how this 'deal' influenced their arguments on women's suffrage in the debates and if it changed their representation of the maternal body. This would require a full historical contextualization and analysis of the Dutch political context that can then be brought into conversation with the archive. This thesis did not allow for such an undertaking, but future research may.

In the analysis chapter, I also embarked shortly on one of the protests that were organized by a women's rights movements, the VvVK. This particular union was established in 1894 and was one of many unions active in that time. Having established a solid understanding of how the maternal body was created in the parliamentary debates in this thesis, it would be worth analyzing how the women's right movements of that time deconstructed or maintained this problematic conceptualization. In the same line, a similar analysis could be

conducted on the first women 'space invaders' (Puwar 2004) that entered the political realm. In 1918, Suze Groeneweg became the first woman in the House of Representatives, and six more were elected in following the election of 1922. How did they engage with this masculine political space? Did they address the male MP's rendering of the maternal body? Where they excluded/targeted because of their own maternity? These questions could be a great starting point for an analysis of the somatic processes of in-and exclusion that were (still) present in the Dutch parliament after the first women 'transcended' themselves into the political body. Feminist scholars have already conducted a wide range of studies on the inclusion of women in relation to the British Parliament (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Puwar 2004; Vallance 1979). Their analysis, when brought in dialogue with the Dutch situatedness, could produce interesting insights.

I have introduced this thesis with an example of a newspaper headline to illustrate how the maternal body is still seen as the antithesis of the somatic norm of the political body in contemporary Dutch society. The attentive reader, however, has noticed that a question was asked first: "Can Dutch Women be Politicians?". I posed this question in the title to cast doubt on the generally accepted assumption that the legal acceptance of women in the political sphere means that they are now seen as 'fitting' into the dominant somatic norm of a political body. But as illustrated, the entering of women into the political space has brought the assumed antithesis between the maternal and the political body even more to the fore. Trying to add more women into this masculine political domain, as proposed by the minister, does not counter this problematic development. Especially when keeping in mind that the political body and the maternal body were co-constructed from the beginning to exclude each other, as I have argued in this thesis. What is necessary, is a renegotiation of the political space itself that deconstructs the somatic processes of in-and exclusion that currently govern it. The political body has to be conceived in notions other than masculine, rational, and bodily transcending if we really want to establish a political space that is open for every(body). It is not clear to me how this can be done, for it would call for a whole reconstruction of our contemporary democratic system. The words of Elisabeth Grosz, however, may function as an inspiration while searching for a place to start: "Until men respect spaces and places that are not theirs, entering only when invited and accepting this as a gift, men cannot share in the contributions that women may have to offer in reconceiving space and place" (1994, 27).

## Translations

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- i “[D]e gehuwde vrouw is de aangewezen verzorgster van het gezin, de opvoedster der kinderen en die heilige plichten kan zij niet vervullen, wanneer zij zich geregeld buiten de woning en het gezin beweegt.”
- ii “De vrouw is een andere dan de man, fysiek, intellectueel en moreel. De ongelijkheid is in de natuur gegrond; is door de natuur gewild; zij kan niet worden geloofend, en het is verkrachting der natuur, ontvrouwelijking der vrouw wanneer men het beproeft.”
- iii “Aan den man met zijn aangeboren spier- en geesteskrachten de ruwe, harde, volgehouden arbeid, de onderwerping der aarde. Aan de vrouw, met haar overwegende gemoedswereld, haar zachtheid, gevoelsinnigheid, hulpvaardigheid en barmhartigheid, de zorg voor de verpoizing in het gezin, voor het kind, voor de opvoeding in de teedere jeugd, voor de lijdende menschheid.”
- iv “veel grooter invloed uitoefent op de progenituur dan de man; stond zij gelijk in de intellectuele gaven met den man en was zij ook de meerdere bij de voortplanting, dan zou van equivalentie geen sprake zijn ... ”
- v “ontrouw zou worden aan haar instincten en onnatuurlijke neigingen zou bot vieren.”
- vi “Wij behoeven maar rondom ons te zien de wijze waar- op het vrouwenkiesrecht zich demonstreert op de straat.”
- vii “dat het instinctmatig inzicht de toepassing van logische gevolgtrekkingen zou tegenhouden”
- viii “omdat onontwikkelde menschen zich het gemakkelijkst zullen laten meeslepen en zich zullen laten paaien door allerlei beloften van personen.”
- ix “de normale natuurlijke aanleg der vrouw in aanmerking genomen — hare belangen in het openbare leven doorgaans beter *namens* haar dan *door* haar verdedigd zullen worden.”
- x “De vrouwen zullen alsdan in een echtgenoot, of vader, of anderen bloedverwant, vertegenwoordigers en pleitbezorgers in de Kamer vinden; ... ”
- xi “[D]e dingen die de vrouwen ons zouden kunnen mededeelen kennen wij allen reeds, omdat de meesten van ons gehuwd zijn en de belangen van de vrouw dus nabij kennen.”
- xii “Maar wel wordt in duizenden moeders met den dag sterker het besef wakker, dat juist voor haar gezin, voor haar kinderen, voor het goed vervullen harer natuurlijke functie dus, zij het stemrecht noodig hebben, noodig om wat zij voelen als recht voor zich zelf of voor haar misdeelde zusters in de Volksvertegenwoordiging naar voren te kunnen doen brengen: moederschapsverzekering, kinder bescherming, zwakkenhulp en zooveel meer. O zeker, ook mannen voelen daarvoor, politieke partijen werken daarvoor, maar met niet zoo diepe overtuiging, zoo alomvattende kracht, juist omdat wij mannen anders zijn dan de vrouwen, anders voelen, veel anders zien.”

xiii “Krachtens haar aanleg en innerlijke gesteldheid is het onvervreemdbaar domein der vrouw het huis en het huisgezin, al de arbeid en al de plichten die haar als vrouw en moeder wachten. Dit scheidt voor haar een eigen sfeer, een eigen roeping, waarmee zij haar bestemming vervult.”

xiv “Maar wat blijft er dan over van de huisvrouw, van de moeder, wier natuurlijke, onafwijsbare en hooge plicht het is zich van den morgen tot den avond bezig te houden met allerlei dagelijksche dingen, die niet kunnen worden verzuimd zonder het gezin zelf te gronde te richten?”

xv “bron van ongenoegen kunnen worden in het gezin”

xvi “aanslag tegen de verheven positie, welke aan eene Christelijke vrouw in een Christelijk huisgezin, in *het Christelijk Nederland van natuurswege*, toekomt.”

xvii “ongekroonde vorstin van het huis door den Schepper toegedacht”



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