

AREA OF RESEARCH:

Being interested in feminism and how the "women's question" is being dealt with in different countries (also in the context of the European Union's gender equality policy) the recurring emphasis in the literature placed on the difference between women in former post-communist countries ("east") and women in the rest of Europe and the US (mostly generally referred to as "western") came to my attention.

By occupying more and more with the feminist discourse of "east" and "west" I got the impression as if sometimes both "sides" put more effort in finding and stressing differences and in trying to prove the other side wrong (see for example Funk 1993 for this problem) than in looking for similarities and possibilities for co-operation and mutual inspiration, as could be expected among representatives within one movement. Moreover this debate is enforced by the often found "western" discussion if those forms of feminism that developed in the so called "eastern" countries could be called feminism or a women's movement at all (see for example Saxonberg 2003 for this problem).

Proceeding from these observations of "east/west" feminism this project intends to examine the basis and the development of these differences. Starting from Erving Goffman's frame analysis and using the notions of "frame" (a schemata of interpretation) as well as "framing" (defined as signifying work) in order to analyze how the differences of "west" and "east" came into being and are now observable within the feminist discourse and movement. The analysis focuses on Austria and the Czech Republic and aims to discuss the following questions:

- ❖ How have the differences been constructed and permanently reproduced in feminist discourse between "east" and "west"?
- ❖ How are the frames of scientific discourse reflected in the work of women's organisations?
- ❖ What kind of frames do women's organisations actually use on "both sides"?
- ❖ How do these organisations frame?

A synopsis of the two areas of analysis (scientific discourse and women's organisations) and comparison of the results opens up an alternative view on the "east/west differences" within feminism. This might lead to a reflection as well as questioning of the persisting views with the potential for a better understanding of the "opposite view". Especially now after the European Union's enlargement took place women's cross-national co-operation will be vital in order to be able to take part in politics on the European level. The findings of this project could promote and ease such co-operations.

¹ The terms „east“ and „west“ refer to the differentiation between countries of the former communist block located in Eastern and Southern Central Europe and other European countries – which were not part of the former communist bloc – as well as the United States.

² The project is based on a rather broad definition of feminism referring to the protest of women against their oppression, marginalization, discrimination, economic and sexual exploitation as well as women's strive for equality of sexes in all social and cultural areas.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The term frame originates with Erving Goffman (1974) describing “schemata of interpretation” (Snow et al. 1986, p. 464) which “ [...] allow to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences [...]” (Goffman 1974, p. 31) “within their life space and the world at large” (Snow et al. 1986, p. 464). Goffman’s theory refers mainly to the frame of “everyday experience”, which helps people to make sense of the things they see and experience in their everyday lives. This original version of Frame Analysis intends to identify “a meta level of categorization of the objects of experience, which affects the meaning which they have for agents and, consequently, the way in which they act towards them.” (Grossley 2002, p. 133).

As a result, two persons experiencing the same situation will perceive and interpret it different according to their personal frames they apply e.g. a young person begging on the street might be interpreted by one person as a failure of the capitalist system while another person understands it as individual failure. (Grossley 2002, p. 134) Therefore frames could also be described as “ [...] problem-solving schemata [...] for the interpretative task of making sense of presenting situations. They are based on past experiences of what worked in given situations, and on cultural templates of appropriate behavior.” (Johnston 1995, p. 217)

Through developing their concept of an “injustice frame” Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina (1982) firstly connected the theory of framing with the area of social movement research. (Johnston 1995, p. 217). Snow et al. (1986) further developed the notion of frame in social movement organisation literature and extended the concept in order to explain social movement participation as well as to analyze the “framing” done by social movement organisations in order to attract and sustain support. By the term framing they “conceptualize signifying work” carried out by so called “moral entrepreneurs – who may or may not be activists themselves. Journalists, ministers, community and associational leaders, politicians and writers attempt to define the issue, invent metaphor, attribute blame, define tactics” (Snow et al. 1986, p 464; Snow and Benford 1992, p. 136)

Goffman’s Frame Analysis as well as the adapted concept of Snow et al. follow a constructionist approach, by suggesting, “that our perceptions and knowledge of the world are at least in part a function of active processes of construction on our own behalf [...].” (Grossley 2002, p. 141). Or put in another way: “[...] Experiences are framed, but I frame my experiences.” (Crook and Taylor 1980, 246; cited as in Gamson 1992, p. 67). Consequently this approach is not restricted to movements only, but can also be used in order to analyze theories. As a result, it enables a discussion about deconstruction.

In order to analyze the “east/west differences” observed in feminism the presented theory will be employed to examine frames of social movement participants, concentrating on activists that are already part of the movement – through theoretical contributions to discourse and/or work with a women’s organisation. The analysis is focused on the role frames of participants play within one movement: on one hand, how such “individual” frames influence the presentation of a movement as well as the development and on the other hand how these frames develop and possibly change over time.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Drawing on the theoretical assumption that we all carry our individual frames and use them to interpret the world around us I conclude that these frames also determine (or frame) written texts and are therefore inherent in these texts. Consequently, in order to answer the question how the “east/west differences” have been constructed and reproduced in feminist discourse documents produced since 1989 will be analyzed. This period of time is considered relevant, as it was after the fall of the communist regimes when feminist discourse between “east and west” developed. Concerning the selection of the texts, the main emphasis is put on documents dealing with feminism, “east/west differences” and the work of the women’s movement.

The next research step focuses on the work of selected women’s organisations in Austria and the Czech Republic as well as international co-operations between them. In this context the material for the analyses mainly consists of information material issued by the organisations in question. The analysis is also concentrated on the identification of frames used by movement activists and in movement documents.

The main part of the analysis is concentrated on the examination of documents. Depending on the results and insights provided by this kind of analysis interviews among activists of women’s organizations and among feminist theorists could be conducted in Austria and the Czech Republic in order to complete the results of the document analysis.

When it comes to a suitable methodology for frame analysis, the literature is quite vague. Goffman’s book remains on the theoretical side without giving hints how to detect frames systematically. Although the main part of social movement literature shows similar methodological shortcomings, there are exceptions: Johnston (1995) provides “A methodology for Frame Analysis”, focusing on the identification of frames of social movement participants. The methods presented in this paper could also be used to discuss the questions of this present study.

Moreover Johnston suggests methods that are also used in qualitative content analysis (Mayring 1990). Mayring calls them “content structuring” (inhaltliche Strukturierung) and “explication” (Explikation) [or “narrow and wide context analysis” (enge und weite Kontextanalyse)]. These techniques allow to identify and summarize the basic assumptions and schemata of interpretation inherent in the analyzed texts. They provide a rather structured approach in order to make it possible to compare conclusions drawn from different documents – what is particularly necessary in order to compare different authors and to analyze a development over time – and further provide possibilities to include information in the analysis, which is not explicitly included in the text but influences the text and helps understanding it. These techniques are applicable for written texts as well as for transcribed interviews.

The conclusion of the study consists of a synoptical presentation of the findings drawn from the analysis of the work of women’s organizations and feminist discourse. Emphasis is placed on the analysis of similarities and differences between the frames detected in theory and those found with women’s organisations as well as of differences referring to “east/west differences”.

SCHEDULE FOR PROJECT REALISATION

- ❖ Concretisation of the topic and the research goals
 - ✓ In depth literature research – broad overview of the topic
 - ✓ Detailed development of the research goals in accordance with the findings

- ❖ Elaborating the theoretical basis
 - ✓ Feminism, its currents and definitions – feminism as a global movement
 - ✓ Feminist discourse of “east” and “west”
 - ✓ Theory of frame analysis
 - ➔ these two stages influence each other and overlap – approx. 10 months

- ❖ Analysing the “east/west” discourse approx. 5 months
 - ✓ Determining criteria for the selection of texts – selection
 - ✓ Methodology for frame analysis
 - ✓ Analysing the selected texts
 - ✓ Documentation of the findings

- ❖ Manifestations of feminism in CR and A approx. 5 months
 - ✓ Researching organisations and their agendas
 - ✓ Selecting and contacting organisations
 - ✓ Documentation of the findings

- ❖ Conducting interviews approx. 5 months
 - ✓ Defining interview goals
 - ✓ Developing an interview structure
 - ✓ Selecting and contacting interview partners in CR and A
 - ✓ Interpretation and analysis of the conducted interviews

- ❖ Documentation of the findings
Synopsis, analysing and interpreting the findings approx. 8 months

- ❖ Creating the thesis approx. 4 months

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